Teacher hiring and selection processes in Iowa schools

Michael C. Fisher
University of Northern Iowa

Recommended Citation
Fisher, Michael C., "Teacher hiring and selection processes in Iowa schools" (2022). Dissertations and Theses @ UNI. 1208.
https://scholarworks.uni.edu/etd/1208

This Open Access Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Work at UNI ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Dissertations and Theses @ UNI by an authorized administrator of UNI ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact scholarworks@uni.edu.
TEACHER HIRING AND SELECTION PROCESSES IN IOWA SCHOOLS

An Abstract of a Dissertation

Submitted

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

Approved:

Dr. Timothy Gilson, Committee Chair

Dr. Jennifer Waldron
Dean of the Graduate College

Michael C. Fisher

University of Northern Iowa

May 2022
ABSTRACT

Relatively little is known regarding how Iowa public school principals conduct hiring and selection of their teachers. While there is national research that has a focus on these areas, this research is generally conducted in large urban settings outside of the context of smaller rural schools. It is widely accepted and empirically backed that classroom teachers have the biggest impact on student achievement (Boyd et al., 2007; Cranston, 2012; DeStefano, 2002; Gordon et al., 2006; Ingebrand, 2012). Yet there is a gap in the research identifying why and how Iowa public school principals hire and select while assessing this most important variable for student success.

The purpose of this study was to examine the criteria and qualities principals look for in teachers, why these are important to them, selection and hiring practices utilized, and bias and vagaries that may exist in the current system. This study utilized a mixed methods approach that incorporated both quantitative survey data as well as qualitative interviews of selected participants. The population of this study was Iowa public school principals in districts with less than 1000 students.

The study utilized two data sets from the sample principal population. The quantitative data set was gathered through a survey of thirty items that focused on qualities and criteria of teacher hiring and practices and strategies used in the process. The qualitative data was obtained through ten principal interviews from the sample population that gave context and further depth to the survey data through their authentic lived experiences. The two sets of data were then analyzed through triangulation to develop conclusions and recommendations for practice.
The conclusions of this study found that principals in the sample group are hiring teachers aligned with person-organization fit and caring student relationships. The principals are making decisions using traditional hiring practices such as paper material review, interviews, and references. The current practices would also suggest that innovation in hiring around research practice is limited and there exists several areas where bias and vagaries are reducing the validity and reliability of the teacher hiring processes. Overall, principal hiring practices did show positive and effective strategies being used but not maximized. Relationships with students and colleagues are valued in hiring, but ability to raise student achievement is largely ignored. The results of the study provided a wealth of additional ideas for improved practice and future research.
TEACHER HIRING AND SELECTION PROCESSES IN IOWA SCHOOLS

A Dissertation

Submitted

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

Approved:

Dr. Timothy Gilson, Committee Chair

Dr. Robert Boody, Committee Member

Dr. Mary Donegan-Ritter, Committee Member

Dr. Kenneth Hayes, Committee Member

Michael C. Fisher

University of Northern Iowa

May 2022
DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my wife Sarah and son Joshua. Thank you for being patient, graceful, and loving learning as much as I do.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It has always been a privilege and blessing to learn something new each day. It is especially rewarding when that learning requires effort and discomfort. I am so thankful for this opportunity to personally learn and also hopefully provide something useful to the people that matter most in education, the students and teachers.

Just as the proverb states “It takes a village to raise a child” I felt that same love and support on this journey of learning. I am so indebted to all the University of Northern Iowa professors who have invested in me from the first day I started my administrative endorsement in 2009. Thank you to Christopher Neuhaus who was always so patient and quick to help me with research and formatting. I am so blessed by my committee members for dedicating their time, talents, and energy into this journey and helping me become the best version of myself. Dr. Boody, Dr. Donegan-Ritter, and Dr. Hayes are some of the best people in the world and I am so appreciative for their time and wisdom. Finally, I want to especially thank Dr. Tim Gilson. His wisdom, encouragement, nudging, and patience made this all possible. He has been such a great professor, colleague, and mentor to me for so many years. Words are not nearly enough to communicate the positive impact he has had on my life.

I also want to thank all the people in my life that helped from the sidelines. Dr. Dana Schon, Dr. Stacey Cole, Dr. Jared Smith, Dr. Charles McNulty, Dr. Dan Cox, and Mr. Josh Morgan for all their support. Special thanks to Mr. Derek Philips who was always a text message away to keep my spirits up even when things seemed impossible.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

**PAGE**

**CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION** .............................................................................................................. 1  
Background of the Problem ................................................................................................................. 2  
Definition of Terms ............................................................................................................................ 5  
  Teacher Quality .................................................................................................................................. 6  
  Administrator Effectiveness .............................................................................................................. 7  
  Hiring Practices ................................................................................................................................. 7  
  Bias .................................................................................................................................................. 9  
Underlying Principles .......................................................................................................................... 10  
Statement of the Problem and Research Questions .......................................................................... 11  
Significance .......................................................................................................................................... 12  

**CHAPTER 2 REVIEW OF LITERATURE** ......................................................................................... 14  
Introduction ......................................................................................................................................... 14  
  Theoretical Framework .................................................................................................................. 14  
What Criteria and Qualities do Principals Look for when Hiring Teachers? ............................ 23  
Why do they Look for these Criteria and Qualities? ........................................................................ 29  
What are the Processes and Systems that Principals use to Determine which  
Candidate they Select? ..................................................................................................................... 37  
What Bias and Vagaries Exist in the Criteria, Processes, and Systems that Principals  
use to Determine the Candidates they Select? ............................................................................... 42  
  Bias .................................................................................................................................................. 43
Why do they Look for these Criteria and Qualities? ........................................77

Foundational Knowledge and Job Descriptions ........................................... 77

Teacher Shortage ............................................................................................... 79

Summary ............................................................................................................ 80

What are the Processes and Systems that Principals use to Determine which
Candidates they Select? .................................................................................... 81

Popular and Unpopular Teacher Selection Strategies ..................................... 81

What Hiring Practices Principals Do Not Value .............................................. 84

Teacher Candidate Recruitment ....................................................................... 86

Decision Rights .................................................................................................. 87

Summary ............................................................................................................ 88

What Bias and Vagaries Exist in the Criteria, Processes, and Systems that Principals
Use to Determine the Candidates they Select? ................................................. 89

Bias .................................................................................................................... 89

Summary ............................................................................................................ 91

Vagaries ............................................................................................................. 92

Summary ............................................................................................................ 97

Chapter Summary ............................................................................................. 98

CHAPTER 5 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS .............................................. 99

What Criteria and Qualities do Principals Look for when Hiring Teachers? ..........100

Person-Organization Fit ................................................................................... 100

Caring Student Relationships ........................................................................... 104
Low Priority Criteria and Qualities ................................................................. 106
Implications ..................................................................................................... 109
Summary ......................................................................................................... 112
Why do they Look for these Criteria and Qualities? .................................... 113
Implications ..................................................................................................... 117
Summary ......................................................................................................... 117
What are the Processes and Systems that Principals use to Determine Which
Candidates They Select? .................................................................................. 118
Popular Teacher Selection Strategies ............................................................ 119
Popular Strategies Implications ................................................................. 124
Popular Strategies Summary ........................................................................ 125
Unpopular Teacher Selection Strategies ......................................................... 125
Unpopular Strategies Implications ............................................................... 128
Unpopular Strategies Summary ................................................................. 129
What Bias and Vagaries Exist in the Criteria, Processes, and Systems that Principals
Use to Determine the Candidates they Select? .............................................. 130
Bias .................................................................................................................. 131
Vagaries ......................................................................................................... 134
Implications ..................................................................................................... 138
Summary ......................................................................................................... 139
Generalizability ............................................................................................... 139
Chapter Summary .......................................................................................... 142
Conclusion .................................................................................................................. 142

REFERENCES ............................................................................................................. 144

APPENDIX A PRINCIPAL INTERVIEW AND FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL........ 158

APPENDIX B SURVEY INFORMED CONSENT AND QUESTIONS ................. 161

APPENDIX C SURVEY TABLE DATA QUALITIES AND CRITERIA SURVEY

TABLE ........................................................................................................................... 164

APPENDIX D INFORMED CONSENT FORM .......................................................... 166

APPENDIX E SURVEY INITIAL EMAIL INVITATION AND FOLLOW UP ........ 169

APPENDIX F INTERVIEW REQUEST EMAIL .......................................................... 171
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

After six years of classroom teaching as a music instructor, I accepted my first administrative position as an assistant principal of a large middle school in a diverse urban Midwest city. The incredible gap in my knowledge needed to be competent in the position was clear to me within the first few weeks. While my pre-service degree did a wonderful job of preparing me as best it could, the reality of the complexity of school administration colliding with a young and relatively immature leader was astonishing. Yet, among all the confusion and lack of clarity that came with my new position, one self-evident truth became apparent within the first week: the success for the children at the school hinged completely on the effectiveness of the classroom teachers. Clearly, the biggest influence and control I had upon this was the hiring and selection of the teaching staff. For our most effective staff I silently cheered and applauded the administrators who were wise in their hiring. For the staff that were ineffective or toxic to the culture, I had daggers of spite and cursing for the previous leaders who either were ignorant, lazy, or incompetent that they would saddle our students and I with people who had no business standing in a classroom.

Within my first month, I took it upon myself to coach and then subsequently remove a teacher that was clearly ineffective. Indeed, by all measures of effective teaching, as researched by James Stronge (2018), this instructor was struggling. After a brutal year of crucial conversations, the teacher eventually exited the profession.
However, this entire process was messy, toxic, and emotionally draining for the staff member, students, leadership, and colleagues that worked daily with this teacher.

After working through this very challenging teacher removal, one question continued to reemerge: how was this teacher ever hired? Review of evaluations and anecdotes of the teacher’s performance indicated patterns and trends in practice that had existed throughout their entire career. While there is considerable research on how highly effective classroom teachers are central to student achievement (Ash, 1992; Boyd et al., 2007; Cranston, 2012; Darling-Hammond & Berry, 1999; DeStefano, 2002; Gordon et al., 2006; Ingebrand, 2012), there is a gap in the research on the practices of how teachers are ultimately selected for hire within a school (Boyd et al., 2007; Braun et al., 1987; Harris et al., 2010; Kersten, 2008; Nicholson & Mcinerney, 1988; Place & Vail, 2013; Rockoff, 2004). After personally experiencing the pain of a teacher separation and watching its effects on school culture and the results it produced, it became clear the importance and impact that teacher selection has upon the classroom experience, and presence or absence of effective outcomes for students.

Background of the Problem

Multiple studies have been conducted that demonstrate the importance and overwhelming influence that teachers have upon the success of students and their classroom achievement (Ingersoll, 1999; Jacob & Lefgren, 2008; Jensen, 1986; Rockoff, 2004; Staiger & Rockoff, 2010; Stronge, 2018). This is so well documented that it has become less a research point than common sense that is acknowledged both inside and out of educational circles. Less celebrated, but also extensively studied, is the impact that
school principals have upon student achievement, specifically through the hiring and selection of teachers (Baker & Cooper, 2005; Merritt, 1971; Mertz, 2010; Pounder & Merrill, 2001; Slosson, 1999). It is clearly suggested through studies that school site-based administrators have the primary responsibility of the hiring and selection of teachers and the direct impact this has upon student achievement (Merritt, 1971; Slosson, 1999). What is less known is what qualities school principals seek in determining what types of teachers to hire, preferences, and the process they utilize to make these decisions of ultimately who ends up in classrooms with students (Engel, 2013).

This study attempted to repeat the work of Engel’s (2013) work entitled “Problematic Preferences? A Mixed Method Examination of Principals’ Preferences for Teacher Characteristics in Chicago.” This study replicated the work with Iowa principals classified as “small school.” Small schools in Iowa were defined in this study as public districts that have a K-12 certified enrollment of less than 1000 students. Based on the parameters of this study and the 2021 Iowa Basic Educational Data, the sample participant size for this study was 216 school districts and 438 principals. For the purpose of this study principal was defined by Iowa Code 272.1:

Principal means a licensed member of a school’s instructional staff who serves as an instructional leader, coordinates the process and substance of educational and instructional programs, coordinates the budget of the school, provides formative evaluation for all practitioners and other persons in the school, recommends or has effective authority to appoint, assign, promote, or transfer personnel in a school building, implements the local school board’s policy in a manner consistent with professional practice and ethics, and assists in the development and supervision of a school’s student activities program.
In Iowa, school districts with a certified enrollment of less than 1000 students typically utilize a decentralized process that relies on building site principals for the hiring and selection of teachers. This process leads to maximum autonomy for school principals to make hiring and selection decisions with lowered amounts of accountability, which research has shown is a pervasive practice across the United States (Boyd et al., 2007; Engel & Curran, 2016; Liu & Johnson, 2006). In addition, teacher release and termination has been shown to be rare due to a culture shaped by lengthy due process rights through union accountability in a litigious society (Gordon et al., 2006). In the rare instances of teacher termination for ineffective practice, this is often clearly documented in legal case studies and the press due to school board open meeting laws. What is less clear is the existence of systemic accountability for school administrators that make ineffective hires that lead to messy and expensive teacher separations.

As Engel (2013) discovered within her Chicago research, the characteristics and qualities of teacher candidates being sought by school principals were varied and inconsistent. This was also true of the strategies and methods that were being utilized to assess and determine the qualities of the candidates within the hiring and selection processes (Ballou, 1996; Supon & Ryland, 2010). There is substantial research to suggest that unaligned or unidentified teacher qualities and characteristics coupled with invalid and unreliable hiring and selection processes is a formula that will consistently produce inconsistent results for effective student outcomes within the classroom.
Definition of Terms

In Iowa as well as the United States, research shows that the hiring and selection of classroom teachers is clearly the responsibility of the school principal (Engel & Curran, 2016; Liu & Johnson, 2006). However, the culture of this work throughout the last 50 years has led to a perfect storm of characteristics that ultimately undermine the effectiveness of this system (Baker & Cooper, 2005). School principals are traditionally former classroom teachers that have little or no background in human resource management and other than a general class in their principal certification program they often have little formal training in the science and research of hiring and selection of staff (Cranston, 2012; Kersten, 2010; Slosson, 1999). In rural Iowa schools, this is exacerbated by the lack of a dedicated human resource leadership or management system. Typically, in these splintered systems, the leadership is the superintendent or often a non-certified administrative assistant who is tasked with human resource concerns. These generally are areas where capacity and knowledge around hiring and selection practices are underdeveloped. Finally, with all of the other immense tasks and responsibilities that face school principals each day, hiring and selection can easily be lumped into the whirlwind of the daily operations of a campus where its importance is deemphasized. This leaves an environment that is ripe for vagaries that can negatively impact student achievement. This is due to the fact that the qualities of highly effective teachers are not defined ahead of time and the process lacks a strategic and systematic method to identify and hire the candidates that best meet these needed characteristics to accelerate student achievement. Additionally, the fit of the organization and cultural values also drive the decision making
as well. In addition to the qualities desired, the organizational fit is also an important context that drives the decision-making process (Kristof, 1996). The research also discusses how fit is always a part of the hiring process, however, often it is unstructured and subconscious. Hiring and selection processes that are highly effective will intentionally design methods to legally and ethically determine quality of fit of the candidate and the organization’s established culture, values, and beliefs.

Teacher Quality

Overwhelming evidence continues to point out that the classroom teacher is the most important variable in the success of students (Ash, 1992; Boyd et al., 2007; Cranston, 2012; Darling-Hammond & Berry, 1999; DeStefano, 2002; Gordon et al., 2006; Ingebrand, 2012). Stronge (2018) has built a strong basis and foundation for better articulating and identifying teacher quality and these characteristics. Specifically, Stronge (2018) has stated that characteristics of highly effective teachers “requires teachers to possess a substantial knowledge base, which encompasses subject matter knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, curricular knowledge, learner knowledge, and cultural and community knowledge” (p. 15). What is less known is how school principals operationalize these key research concepts. Some schools use set job descriptions and tools to concisely identify what they are looking for. Other schools have not set criteria on how they are making decisions. Furthermore, there is a gap in research to understand how principals choose to operationalize this knowledge of teacher quality to better clarify what types of educators are being recruited and selected for open teaching vacancies.
Administrator Effectiveness

Additional research strongly concludes that the school principal is the second most critical factor in student achievement (Ballou, 1996; DeStefano, 2002; Ellis et al., 2017; Kersten, 2008; Peterson & Deal, 1998; Supon & Ryland, 2010). Emley and Ebmeier (1997) state, “The selection of staff members is one of the most important decisions made by an administrator. Indeed, no other single activity is as critical to operating an efficient and effective school” (p. 39). Administrator effectiveness is highly linked to the principal’s ability to embrace the responsibility for hiring the classroom teachers in their schools (Merritt, 1971). DeStefano (2002) states, “Principals…. (are) the front-line managers needed to make schools excel: the good school owes much of what makes it successful to the principal who leads it” (p. 1). This also leads to the essential characteristic that principals will need to continue to equip, invest, and build their capacity as leaders. As DeStefano (2002) writes, “Likewise, groups all over the country are rethinking the role of the principal, starting principal academies, reconsidering principals’ certifications requirements, and making principals more directly accountable for the success of their schools” (p. 6). It is easy to infer this must include the art and science of how teacher selection is conducted in schools by principals. This is likely the principal’s most readily available high leverage strategy to accelerate and improve student achievement.

Hiring Practices

School principals are the key gatekeepers to the hiring and selection of classroom teachers. They are gatekeepers by either making the final hiring decisions themselves, or
utilizing a group strategy that they organize that may engage multiple stakeholder parties such as staff, students, and parents which is known as a group hiring process (Kersten, 2008). The strategies, procedures, and policies used by the principals in the selection are called “hiring practices.” Hiring practices is a broad and all-encompassing term that covers all aspects of selection including:

- Development of desired characteristics and responsibilities for the job position
- Recruitment of candidates
- Screening of candidates’ paper/digital materials
- Selection processes and exercises
- References

This list is neither exhaustive nor the minimum that is utilized by all interviewers. Rather, it is a baseline of what is typically observed across a majority of American schools (Nicholson & McInerney, 1988; Slosson, 1999). Hiring practices is where most inconsistency and invalidity can occur in the selection of teachers (Ballou, 1996; Burns et al., 2014; Cohen & Gump, 1984; Cranston, 2012; Dipboye et al., 1984; Horstman, 2019; Kersten, 2008; Pettersen & Durivage, 2008; Smither et al., 1993). Environmental and leadership factors often complicate or pollute the validity and reliability of the hiring practices (Cranston, 2012). Slosson (1999) states, “Most principals lack even rudimentary training in personnel selection, and often there is extra stress of time limitations” (p. 27). Research suggests that hiring practices across schools in the United States are full of idiosyncratic criteria, variable standards, and cumbersome procedures that are barriers to hiring the best candidates (Darling-Hammond, 2000). Internal school district organizational issues exacerbate this problem through lack of clear job descriptions, poor
hiring timing windows, inability for clear information sharing between candidates and the organization, rushed processes, invalid procedures that do not identify the strongest candidates, and shallow candidate pools (Ellis et al., 2017; Liu & Johnson, 2006; Staiger & Rockoff, 2010; Wise et al., 1988).

However, research would suggest that the single biggest challenge and barrier that continues to corrupt and infuse hiring practices with invalidity is bias. This study will work to provide clarity around how bias interacts within the hiring and selection of teachers and its ubiquity that is socialized into school organizational structures and the primary actors such as principals that are making key decisions.

**Bias**

Bias in the hiring and selection process has been widely acknowledged both in research and litigation. Generally, this is characterized in the manner of overt discrimination through disparate treatment where people or candidates are intentionally discriminated against with unequal behavior due to a protected characteristic (Essary, 1993). Young and Fox (2002) go on to clarify even further the intent of employment law in the United States in regards to bias stating, “Intent of legislation passed by federal and state governments is crystal clear relative to the employment process. That is, individuals seeking to obtain gainful employment should not be discriminated against….,” (p. 531).

While the law is very clear in this area around protected characteristics and unlawful discriminatory practices through disparate treatment, what is ambiguous and imprecise is the role that implicit bias plays within the hiring and selection of teachers. Implicit bias is defined as the unconscious attitudes or perceptions of people that are
often held by people making the hiring and selection decisions (Derous et al., 2017). Speaking to bias and vagaries in the hiring process, Emley and Ebmeier (1997) state, “Errors made in the selection process have direct impact on the school and have far-reaching consequences for students, administrators, other teachers, and the functioning of the school as a whole” (p. 39). Some of these more subtle, yet powerful cues within the hiring process include attractiveness, likeability, perceived expertness, and similarity (Delli & Vera, 2003). It is also hypothesized that environmental characteristics such as limited staff allocation and extra-curricular demands also bias and influence the hiring of teachers (Darling-Hammond & Berry, 1999). This study will work to uncover and provide additional clarity on how these legal, yet subtle socialized behaviors are persistently influencing and controlling the processes and strategies leading to the teacher selection process. This study will research actual principal practices to determine if there are actively utilized strategies that mitigate these issues. Finally, solutions and strategies grounded in empirical research will be offered that could provide remedies to the identified issues.

**Underlying Principles**

Within this study will be underlying principles that are empirically backed by ample research. The first underlying principle is that the classroom teacher has the highest effect and impact on student achievement (Ash, 1992; Boyd et al., 2007; Cranston, 2012; Darling-Hammond & Berry, 1999; DeStefano, 2002; Gordon et al., 2006; Ingebrand, 2012). The second underlying principle is that the school administrator has the second highest effect on student achievement primarily through their traditional
responsibility for hiring and selection of classroom teachers (Natter & Kuder, 1983; Papa & Baxter, 2008; Peterson & Deal, 1998; Rockoff et al., 2011). Third, the underlying principle is established that current mainstream and accepted hiring processes and strategies utilized for classroom teacher selection have flaws and vagaries that are ubiquitous and are barriers to selecting the highest qualified and deepest potential candidates (Drake et al., 1972; Macan, 2009; Marlowe et al., 1996; Wiesner & Cronshaw, 1988). Finally, it is accepted as an underlying principle that bias beyond disparate treatment in the form of implicit beliefs and behaviors are deeply embedded in the hiring and selection of teachers (Derous et al., 2015; Derous et al., 2017; Dipboye et al., 1984; Einhorn, 1981; Essary, 1993; Gifford et al., 1985).

**Statement of the Problem and Research Questions**

Hanushek et al. (2004) make a bold proclamation in regards to the status of teacher hiring and selection by stating, “Perhaps most important, the authors raise doubts that schools systematically hire the most well-qualified applicants” (p. 331). This study will strive to analyze the overall literature that exists in how bias impacts the selection and hiring of classroom teachers and then research the impact it is currently having upon small school Iowa principals and the students under their care. Specifically, it will research the evidence around teacher hiring criteria and processes while framing through the empirical evidence in general human resource practices across North America. Using the theoretical framework of Bolman and Deal’s *Reframing Organizations* (2017/1984), this study will analyze through the lens of the human resource frame how this discipline
is essential for the success of all organizations. The study will utilize the work of Engel (2013) that will surface four key research questions:

• What criteria and qualities do principals look for when hiring teachers?
• Why do they look for these criteria and qualities?
• What are the processes and systems that principals use to determine which candidates they select?
• What bias and vagaries exist in the criteria, processes, and systems that principals use to determine the candidate they select?

**Significance**

Empirical research demonstrates that there is significance in this study and area of research. Various studies have concluded that teachers have the largest impact on student achievement in the classroom (Ingersoll, 1999; Jacob & Lefgren, 2008; Jensen, 1986; Rockoff, 2004; Staiger & Rockoff, 2010; Stronge, 2018). Connected with the research that hiring and selection systems may have adverse limitations to ensuring each classroom has the most effective teacher, there is a strong case that additional study is needed (Ballou, 1996; Boyd et al., 2007; Braun et al., 1987; Harris et al., 2010; Kersten, 2008; Nicholson & McInerney, 1988; Place & Vail, 2013; Rockoff, 2004; Smither et al., 1993). Within the research, there is minimal evidence of specific study of the practice of Iowa school principals and their behaviors and perceptions of how they hire and select teachers (Ballou, 1996; Braun et al., 1987; Harris et al., 2010; Kersten, 2008; Rockoff, 2004). This research would likely add to the literature base for rural schools across the nation that share these characteristics. The study will attempt to address these gaps in research and practice.

This study was conducted through a mixed methods approach that utilized a concurrent triangulation strategy (Creswell, 2003). The study utilized survey instruments
and processes to gather information from practicing administrators within the identified sample group of small Iowa schools while also studying their lived experiences in the processes through focus groups and interviews. Chapter 2 presents a thorough and comprehensive overview of literature as framed around the research questions. This chapter provided clarity on how empirical research backs the relevance and importance of the research questions. Chapter 3 details the methods, theoretical frameworks, participant populations, and geographical regions that are being engaged in the study. Chapters 4 shares the results of the study. Chapter 5 analyzes the evidences for through delimitations and limitations and interpreted the findings of the study in light of the literature. The goal of this study was to replicate and extend Engel’s previous work in different conditions to add weight to the findings while also filling a gap of research that is deeply relevant to practicing Iowa school administrators.
CHAPTER 2
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

The main purpose of this study was to examine the actions and phenomenon that exist in the hiring of teachers by principals within Iowa schools with enrollment under 1000 students. This chapter provides an overview of the literature, theoretical frameworks, and research around the statement of problem of this study. Hiring and selection of teachers for vacancies within different schools is the natural and routine work of principals and building leadership. The review of this literature will be viewed through the frame of Bolman and Deal’s Reframing Organizations (2017/1984) human resource framework and these four research questions:

- What criteria and qualities do principals look for when hiring teachers?
- Why do they look for these criteria and qualities?
- What are the processes and systems that principals use to determine which candidates they select?
- What bias and vagaries exist in the processes and systems that principals use to determine the candidate they select?

Theoretical Framework

In order to understand the importance of hiring and selecting highly effective teachers, it is essential to understand a framework that underpins the essential nature of human resources within the context of all organizations. Human resources and its management have been widely researched as vital to excellent schools and effective learning (DeStefano, 2002).

Generalized theory is also applicable in the human resources framework. Polarity management is one generalized theory that gives context to the importance of the human
resources framework (Johnson, 1992). Johnson (1992) argues that most conflicts and dilemmas are not problems to be solved, but rather polarities of idiosyncratic conflicts that must be managed. To this end, human resource management falls within this theory. There are many conflicting aspects of human resources that are paradoxical and inherently natural conflicts. They are impossible to resolve and must be managed. Examples of this are efficiency versus effectiveness, profit maximization versus human needs, and centralized versus decentralized.

Lee Bolman and Terrence Deal (2017/1984) developed “Reframing Organizations” that created a model where one can utilize “a set of ideas and assumptions that you carry in your head to help you understand and negotiate a particular territory.” Frames in organizations are vital to provide context, direction, and patterns. This theory of practice can also provide needed lenses in which one can view different situations and actors. The ability to provide mental maps and match them to circumstances are all part of how the framing model works. Bolman and Deal (2017/1984) created multiple frames in which to navigate organizations. These include the structural frame, political frame, symbolic frame, and human resources frame. This study will access the human resources frame as a theoretical framework in order to better provide context and relief on how to understand the vital role human capital plays within an organization. Specifically, the human resources frame will provide a theoretical framework in order to understand how the hiring and selection of teachers within a school system is an essential driver to all functions of the organization.
Bolman and Deal (2017/1984) state that organizations generally hope for a cadre of talented, highly motivated employees who give their best. Based upon this, the human resource frame has seven assumptions:

- Organizations exist to serve human need
- People and organizations need each other
- Organizations need ideas, energy, and talent while people need careers, salaries, and opportunities
- When the fit between individual and system is poor, one or both suffer
- If individuals are exploited or exploit the organization, both become victims
- Good fit benefits both the people and the organization
- Individuals find meaningful and satisfying work while organizations get the talent and energy they need to succeed

These assumptions reinforce the fact that human resources and capital are fundamental in the healthy and effective outcomes within any organization. This has been consistently confirmed by research that finds schools specifically depend on effective human resources management to generate effective outcomes for students (Balter & Duncombe, 2006; Battelle for Kids, 2017; DeStefano, 2002; Feistritzer, 1994; Goldhaber, 2007; Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009; Ingersoll & Smith, 2003; Stronge et al., 2007).

Bolman and Deal (2017/1984) argue that organizations exist to serve human needs and that they “generally hope for a cadre of talented and highly motivated employees who give their best.” This work evolved early from Mary Parker Follett and Elton Mayo in 1918 and 1933 respectively. Before the work of Follett and Mayo, there were deeply held assumptions that workers had no rights beyond their own paycheck. Follett and Mayo’s work has been affirmed through research in self-determination theory that states autonomy, mastery, and purpose are primary drivers of human behavior (Ryan & Deci, 2000).
Studies of intrinsic motivation also affirm that concepts of material and external rewards are poor motivators for the behavior of people and employees (Bolman & Deal, 2017/1984). Bolman and Deal (2017/1984) also point to the fact that from infancy into adulthood, people advance from dependence to independence and from a narrow to a broader range of skills and interest. Traditionally, most industrial organizations have not been attuned to these characteristics of human motivation and continue to treat human capital simply as a raw material and that the firm’s message is clear; abuse workers and treat them like infants (Bolman & Deal, 2017/1984).

From these underlying assumptions and innate behaviors of organizations and their management, it was natural that organized labor unions rapidly expanded during the expansion of the industrial revolution. It was not surprising to see the rise in organized labor unions as intense and highly organized to allow employees who had felt that basic human needs were not being met, to fight and advocate for fair wages and labor (Bolman & Deal, 2017/1984). However, the plight of labor was more complex and nuanced than just basic living wages. The life and work of Cesar Chavez through his organization of migrant Latino farm labor in California and the United Farm Workers demonstrated that wages and benefits were just a small part of the oppression felt by labor (Pawel, 2014). As Chavez and the UFW demonstrated, the work of labor and advocacy was often centered around human dignity and basic needs that were most vital (Pawel, 2014). As the rise of unionized labor increased in the first half of the 20th century, it was clear that workers had a desire to have a more equal footing with management in not only wages, but decision making, autonomy, and ownership of the success of the outcomes.
In a traditional industrial organized system, bosses and management generally direct and control subordinates which naturally encourages passivity and dependence (Bolman & Deal, 2017/1984). The conflict worsens at lower levels of the hierarchy and more mechanized jobs, that generally result in more directives, and tighter controls.

McGregor and Cutcher-Gershenfeld (1960) developed the concept of X and Y theory. X has the assumption that subordinates are passive and lazy. They have little ambition to be led and will ultimately resist change. Y argues that essential task management is to arrange conditions so that people can achieve their own goals by directing efforts towards organizational reward. McGregor and Cutcher-Gershenfeld (1960) theories reinforced that intrinsic motivation of people, when fostered by environment and habitat, naturally increases the productivity of organizations further reinforcing the inherent value and importance of human capital as more than expendable raw material. When there is exploitation of the system by either the organization or its labor, the fit is poor, or there is little trust, ultimately everybody will suffer and become victims (Bolman & Deal, 2017/1984). This fact belies the more powerful underlying truth; people and organizations need each other. Organizations need ideas, energy, and talent while people need careers, salaries, and opportunities (Bolman & Deal, 2017/1984).

Bolman and Deal (2017/1984) go on and connect the human resource frame to adolescent development and education. They point out that the research shows that from infancy to adulthood, people advance from dependence to independence and from a narrow to a broader range of skills and interests. This directly interplays with the paradox of human capital. When self-determination theory is embraced by employers, there is the
mutual benefit of fit and effectiveness for both the employee and management. However, much of the traditional industrial model directly conflicts with the natural development of human beings. This in turn creates a situation that disempowers employers, enables them, and ultimately creates a culture where even adults teach their children to believe that work is unrewarding and hopes for advancement are slim (Bolman & Deal, 2017/1984). In education this has led to public scorn such as AT & T CEO Randall Stephens blaming public schools for putting out a “defective product” and teachers and parents frustrated with the emphasis of high stakes testing that has created a culture of unskilled labor (Bolman & Deal, 2017/1984; Darling-Hammond, 2000). This cycle continues to perpetuate the culture of dehumanized labor and talent through an industrial model. It is becoming increasingly clear the need for well trained and loyal human capital that is innovative and productive while thriving in an emotionally healthy egalitarian environment.

Self Determination Theory and the Human Resource Framework demonstrate a strong need for an egalitarian work environment to transform human capital beyond historic industrial notions. This egalitarian approach manages the tension of the complex relationship between people and organizations (Bolman & Deal, 2017/1984; Johnson, 1992). In an egalitarian environment, management sees talent and motivation as business necessities while balancing the tension of the natural tendency to become more “lean and mean” in productivity. Bolman and Deal (2017/1984) have found some different aspects that support Self Determination Theory within egalitarian organizations. This includes:
• Empower employees
• Create work that inherently provides opportunities for autonomy, influence, and intrinsic rewards
• Investing in employee development
• Share the wealth
• Reward well
• Promote from within
• Protect jobs
• Provide information and support

When created and cultivated in an organization, a motivated and loyal workforce can be a powerful strategic advantage. While creating this type of organization has clear risks, costs, and often conflicts with traditional notions from the industrial model, there is historical precedent in the success and effectiveness of the egalitarian workplace (Kristof, 1996; Moore, 2017; Murnane & Steele, 2007; Schmidt & Hunter, 1998).

With continued academic research around intrinsic motivation, the findings have been clear on the importance of the proper position of human capital and how it needs to be strategically equipped and invested for effective outcomes (Balter & Duncombe, 2006; Barnes et al., 2007; Bolman & Deal, 2017/1984; Coleman, 1968; Hakel & Schuh, 1971). Bolman and Deal (2017/1984) continue to argue through the human resource lens that “People and organizations need each other. Organizations need ideas, energy, and talent; people need careers, salaries, and opportunities” (pg. 122). When there is an effective fit for both, individuals find meaning in the work and organizations receive the talent and energy to advance institutional goals. This speaks to the research that would indicate that human capital is not a back-room proposition for the organization; rather, it is clearly front of house work that permeates and has direct return on investment for all aspects of
the organization’s success and highlights the relationship between the intrinsic connection and contribution to success that exists (Bolman & Deal, 2017/1984).

The risk to organizations of neglecting the human resources frame is high. Bolman and Deal (2017/1984) describe a society where “Organizations struggle to find people who bring the skills and qualities needed, while individuals with yesterday's skills face dismal job prospects” (pg. 127).

This continues to strain the relationship between people and the organization. As globalization has pushed in conflicting directions of automation, downsizing, and rationalization, this creates the tension of autonomy and mastery for the employees that often leads to innovation and problem solving (Bolman & Deal, 2017/1984). Organizations have the obligation and opportunity to focus on the importance of human capital and crafting a highly trained, motivated, and nimble workforce that can be responsive to changing needs in society and business. Yet this often creates the paradox where the same highly trained workforce creates innovation that leads to additional rationalization and efficiencies that lead to downsizing and need for less human capital (Bolman & Deal, 2017/1984). This paradox is unable to be achieved through the traditional viewpoint of human capital being nothing more than disposable raw material that provides physical labor. This leads to what Bolman and Deal (2017/1984) call “dumbsizing”. Downsizing can be productive when the efficacy and effectiveness of human capital is fostered, invested, and equipped and can produce improved outcomes. Without this culture, it again treats employees as something less than human. The risk for a negative outcome is real and Bolman and Deal (2017/1984) succinctly state,
“Organizations struggle to find people who bring the skills and qualities needed, while individuals with yesterday's skills face dismal job prospects” (pg. 132). The battle of lean and mean versus investing in people continues in rationalization and economy; often organizations and leadership still tend to underestimate the return on investment that comes from the focus on human capital.

Bolman and Deal’s framework and lens for human resources can be important for organizations to grow and thrive. As research has grown around the human condition of motivation, it has been abundantly clear that a theory of practice for human resources is not only appropriate, but essential in the work. When human capital is provided autonomy, mastery, and connectedness, the organization creates a habitat that moves toward growing a dependence on well trained, loyal, human capital (Bolman & Deal, 2017/1984). This can eventually foster a culture that is described as where talented, motivated, and innovative employees drive success throughout the entire organization. This study will frame its research through Bolman and Deal’s (2017/1984) strategic framework under the empirically validated theory that human resources are essential and vital to the success of all organizations. Bolman and Deal (2017/1984) use the human resource frame to passionately argue that investing in a motivated workforce is a powerful strategic advantage. Effective leaders and organizations see talent and employee motivation as necessities in their business models and progressive organizations work to diffuse power to the employees and invest and equip in their development.

Human need and socialization are part of the human condition. Within the human resource framework highlights the natural mission for organizations to serve the needs of
humans. However, at their worst, organizations often create systems of oppression that are designed to exclude and minimize human beings. As human beings generally move from dependence to independence and gain maturity and broad skills, it is essential that organizations embrace this to meet the needs of their employees and customers. When this human need is met at high levels it leads to mature self-actualization that can create innovation, advancement of people and organizations that lead to continued autonomy, mastery, and purpose that foster improved democratic ideals that perpetuate freedom and human joy. If not fostered in a healthy frame this human need can also create adaptive systems of oppression that exclude and maintain inequalities.

**What Criteria and Qualities do Principals Look for when Hiring Teachers?**

Teacher effectiveness and its attributes has become commonly known as “teacher quality”. This has continually been affirmed by overwhelming research as the top factor in driving positive student achievement. There is considerable research on how highly effective classroom teachers are central to student achievement (Aaronson et al., 2007; Ash, 1992; Boyd et al., 2007; Cranston, 2012; Darling-Hammond & Berry, 1999; DeStefano, 2002; Gordon et al., 2006; Ingebrand, 2012). In Find, Deploy, Support, and Keep the Best Teachers and School Leaders, DeStefano (2002) stated, “Research has shown that, all other things being equal, children with less qualified, less able teachers fare worse in school. Their language gains are smaller compared to students with higher quality teachers and, over time, their ultimate success or failure in school is determined by the sequence of teachers to who they are assigned” (p. 5). Cranston (2012) states, “For decades, educational researchers have confirmed what parents already know: children’s
academic progress depends heavily on the talent and skills of the teacher leading their classroom” (p. 1). This was also described by Stronge and Hindman (2003),

“Administrators, other teachers, parents, and students know what it feels like to work with an effective teacher. The classroom has routines and procedures that ensure that it runs smoothly. The students know that the teacher genuinely cares about them, not only as a class but also as individuals. The teachers possess a command of the curriculum content, matches strategies and resources to learners’ needs, and creates a motivating learning environment built on trust and respect” (p. 48).

Positive attributes to student achievement and effectiveness such as policy, leadership, culture, teaching, learning, and curriculum are all inherently tied back to the effectiveness and qualities of the teacher in the classroom (Ballou, 1996; Barnes et al., 2007; Campbell et al., 2003; Cranston, 2012; Darling-Hammond & Berry, 1999; DeStefano, 2002; Stronge, 2018). In fact, teacher quality is also strongly tied to equity for traditionally oppressed students when viewed through the Bolman and Deal human resource frame. As Darling-Hammond (2000) states, “Qualified teachers are not only a major determinant of student achievement but also one of the most equitably distributed educational resources. Poor and minority children are routinely exposed to poorer quality curricula and teaching, which account for much of the achievement gap” (p. 47).

There is important context to this as well. Darling-Hammond (2000) argues that in addition to effectiveness of instructional staff, students will continue to need exposure and engagement of teachers of color and diversity. This has been indicated as a major detriment and deficit for achievement when there are less qualified teachers that do not
meet the needs of a diverse student body. DeStefano (2002) states, “Research has shown
that, all other things being equal, children with less qualified, less able teachers fare
worse in school. Their learning gains are smaller compared to students with higher
quality teachers, and over time, their ultimate success or failure in school is determined
by the sequence of teachers to whom they are assigned” (p. 1). Jacob and Lefgren (2005)
stated, “The differences in teacher quality are dramatic. For example, recent estimates
suggest that the benefit of moving a student from an average teacher to one of at the 85th
percentile is comparable to a 33% reduction in class size” (pg. 102). There continues to
be a preponderance of evidence that teachers with stronger academic backgrounds
produce improved student outcomes (Ballou, 1996; Baker & Cooper, 2005; Ehrenberg &
Brewer, 1994; Goldhaber, 2007). In some more controversial studies, value added
measures have been determined to improve student achievement testing scores as well
(Stronge et al., 2007). This continues to stoke the controversial issue of what measures
teacher quality and if it is ethical or effective to quantify this through standardized test
scores.

While there is little argument that effective teachers are imperative to student
achievement and success, there still must be a granular definition of what constitutes
these criteria and qualities. Many researchers have developed robust and specific criteria
to help clarify what are the attributes and specific characteristics of effective teachers. In
his landmark 2002 research, James Stronge (2018) identified the various characteristics
that are demonstrated by effective teachers. Specifically, he identified the following key
characteristics.
• Professional knowledge
• Instructional planning
• Instructional delivery
• Assessment
• Learning environment
• Professionalism

Stronge’s framework helps to create a framework to observe the specific criteria and qualities that research suggests is vital to effective teachers and improved outcomes for students. While it is universally accepted the importance and impact of the classroom teacher for student achievement and school performance, what is less widely discussed is the nuance and complexity of the effectiveness of classroom teachers even though there is substantial research around the importance of the cognitive ability of effective teachers (Ingersoll, 1999; Jensen, 1986; Kimbrel, 2019; Murnane & Steele, 2007).

What are the structures that are controlling and assessing teacher cognitive abilities? Along with school principals that ultimately make hiring decisions, college and university teacher preparation programs in conjunction with state licensure continue to be the gatekeepers on assessing teacher quality and cognitive abilities. This leads to the question of these organizations' effectiveness of screening and controlling the quality of the cognitive ability of the candidates entering the teaching profession (Rockoff et al., 2011). Without quality control at the teacher preparation and state certification levels, the burden of selecting teachers with adequate cognitive ability lies heavily back on the school systems and their hiring processes which research has shown are not generally robust enough to do so (Smith, 2014).
Research also questions what is the appropriate level of cognitive ability for future teaching candidates. There is some indication that there is even an “anti-intellectualism” bias towards some candidates (Milanowski & Odden, 2007; Natter & Kuder, 1983). The argument continues that highly academic focused teachers may not have the social skills to work with students and colleagues and there should be less focus on cognitive and content knowledge as much as pedagogical training. This has led to the focus in the research showing that principals are often looking less at cognitive ability and content knowledge as much as they are interpersonal skills that are directly tied to classroom management of the students.

While the research shows that there is a gap in understanding the importance of teachers’ cognitive abilities in being effective, it is still a tension that must be managed and balanced with other important qualities that are fundamental. Another important factor in Stronge’s research of the qualities of effective teachers is that they must possess the ability to manage complex activity that utilizes substantial cognitive skills based on foundational knowledge. This includes subject matter, pedagogy, curriculum, knowledge of the learners as well as social and cultural capital of the community they are serving. All of this must be substantially connected and utilized in interdisciplinary methods to best reach students. This would demonstrate that while cognitive abilities are fundamental, they continue to be a foundation on which other vital concepts and behaviors are based.

Research has shown that neglecting this balance and scaffolding of cognitive abilities and behavioral tools in teacher preparation programs is less effective. Teaching
must not just focus on content but has to balance the need of pedagogical tools to articulate it effectively (Stronge, 2018). In summary, while cognitive abilities are an essential quality in an effective teacher, in isolation they are not enough. It must be the foundation that other essential qualities are built upon in order to create the conditions for effective teaching. Principals must be attuned to the complexity of these different qualities and factors when assessing teachers in hiring and selection.

In reviewing the research question of what criteria and qualities principals are looking for in hiring teachers, it also is important to better understand what role they have in student achievement through the human resource lens. Research about principal impact on student achievement is compelling, specifically in the context of teacher selection (Natter & Kuder, 1983; Papa & Baxter, 2008; Peterson & Deal, 1998; Rockoff et al., 2011). Many researchers have found that the selection of teachers is arguably the most important decision a principal will make (Ellis et al., 2017; Papa & Baxter, 2008). Principals are clearly the frontline managers that are needed to make schools excel (DeStefano, 2002; Supon & Ryland, 2010). Traditionally, principals in a school were viewed as managers that were only responsible for the efficient operation of the organization. However, with the advancement of the No Child Left Behind legislation in 2001 and subsequent laws that built upon this foundation of high stakes accountability, school principals have continually felt a higher pressure of responsibility for student achievement success that has dramatically transformed their roles. This shift in principals’ philosophy is backed by compelling research that has found connections that indicate their role in student achievement might have the strongest connection through
the selection of teachers (Brewer, 1993; Strauss, 2003). Organizational effectiveness around the hiring of personnel has been strongly connected to success (Grissom & Loeb, 2011; Hom et al., 1998). While the research indicates the importance of hiring and selection in teachers in both theoretical frameworks and student achievement outcomes, it has been noted by research that often hiring and personnel decisions for principals get moved to lower priority within all the contexts of the duties that principals hold (Kersten, 2010). DeStefano (2002) declares that there continues to be a systemic teacher selection problem of schools, “In fact, the problem in large urban school districts is that the system does not encourage or support principals in assembling the best possible teams of teachers, nor does it help principals put in place ideal work environments and conditions in their schools” (p. 6). This is a contradiction of the power of school principals on student achievement through hiring teachers and the actual conditions that oppress it as a serious tool of positive change.

**Why do they Look for these Criteria and Qualities?**

There is vast research that establishes data through both qualitative and quantitative research on what principals are looking for in teacher candidates. There does appear to be a disconnect and gap between what practitioners say they value and look for in teacher criteria and qualities versus what their behaviors are actually communicating in their selection decisions. What is consistently clear across research is that the principals, regardless of the size of the district, are key decision makers when it comes to hiring teachers (Balter & Duncombe, 2006; Cannata et al., 2017; Kimbrel, 2019; Papa & Baxter, 2008).
Aspirationally and documented through their own voice, principals are stating they prefer candidates with strong content academic backgrounds, passion for children, strong work ethic, healthy relationships with peers, reflective mindset, and people from diverse backgrounds (Ballou & Podgursky, 1995; Berg & Brimm, 1978; Bourke & Brown, 2014). Principals also prefer candidates with enthusiasm, strong communication skills, student centered philosophies, and strong classroom management skills (Harris et al., 2010; Kimbrel, 2019; Trimble, 2001). These characteristics have been well documented through research as they generally demonstrate a strong symmetry between what is defined as teacher effectiveness by Stronge (2018) and what principals are consistently saying in research surveys and interviews.

However, the research also demonstrates a considerable gap between what principals are saying they value and the decisions they are actually making in the hiring processes. There appears to be two major gaps that contribute to this phenomenon that include contextual needs of the school and vagaries within the hiring and selection process.

The need for the effective attributes that Stronge (2018) lists is affirmed through many different sources of empirical research and studies (Clotfelter et al., 2007; Hanna & Gimbert, 2011; Leithwood et al., 2004; Stronge et al., 2007). Often, the myth exists that many of these attributes exist at a competent level due to teachers’ requirement to possess a college degree and state regulated licensure (Gordon et al., 2006; Perry, 1981). Yet, with teacher shortages prevalent throughout the nation, many states have continued to lower the rigor and expectations for teacher licensure (Gordon et al., 2006). In addition,
there is considerable debate across education of the ability of colleges and universities to regulate and protect the quality of teacher candidates graduating, even when factoring in there is extreme variability in the quality of the colleges of education producing the practitioners (Chingos & Peterson, 2011). This research would affirm that while it is universally accepted Stronge’s (2018) attributes are what are desired in teachers, the ability for candidates to possess these criteria and qualities is varied and inconsistent in the candidate pool which leads to the factor for school principals of “buyer beware”.

In reviewing the research, the question develops why there is inconsistency among candidates to possess these fundamental qualities of effective teachers which is leading to variability in hiring for principals. Research has shown many factors that are driving this issue. Chingos and Peterson (2011) found an interesting phenomenon in their research:

We find no difference in the classroom effectiveness of those with an education major and those with a major in another subject (which in the absence of a master's degree means the person is not certified or has alternative certification). We do find that teachers that are certified in education, but outside the field of elementary education, are less effective as teachers of students in the elementary grades, but that finding should be interpreted cautiously as only 4% of the teachers at those grade levels with available data had an education degree other than one in elementary education (pg. 451).

This would indicate that the focus of teacher education may have comparable value of content specific majors. While there has traditionally been a focus on
pedagogical education within teacher preparation programs, there is evidence to demonstrate that key content knowledge may have equal or higher values (Harris et al., 2010). More generally, this speaks to the idea that higher intellect and cognitive abilities are determining factors in teacher effectiveness as well (Ballou & Podgursky, 1995; Jacob, 2016; Jensen, 1986).

There continues to be the paradox that higher cognitive candidates tend to not enter the teaching field. Goldhaber (2007) stated, “College graduates with high test scores are less likely to take teaching jobs, employed teachers with high test scores are less likely to stay, and former teachers with high test scores are less likely to return” (pg. 50). This leads to the continued issue that the candidates with the highest cognitive potential to positively impact students are often not choosing to serve in classrooms. This issue is even more acute within the highest need schools. Schools that are high poverty, high minority, or have low performing student populations tend to lose the highest quality staff at the largest rate (Barnes et al., 2007; Boyd et al., 2007; Gordon et al., 2006).

Knowing that research would indicate that the qualities of effective teachers is not a universal given for all teacher candidates and that the ability of higher education institutions producing practitioners is varied at best, this puts the onus of understanding these attributes back on principals that are making the decisions for hiring and selecting teachers. This leads back to the research question of, regardless of what the empirical research states are the criteria and qualities of effective teachers, what are principals actually looking for?
While the research shows that principals value the holistic ideas of the criteria and qualities of teachers that Stronge has developed, contextual factors continue to impact the actual decision-making processes (Engel, 2013; Harris et al., 2010; Jacob, 2007; Jacob & Lefgren, 2005; Johnson, 1976; Liu & Johnson, 2006; Papa & Baxter, 2008; Strauss et al., 2000; Strauss, 2003). One major contextual factor that puts pressure on school principal for hiring and selection is the ubiquitous teacher shortage, especially in high-risk schools and hard to staff specialty areas. Loss of teachers through attrition and migration, especially for at-risk students of color in urban and low-income areas has a direct impact on student achievement and school performance which leads to constant transition that must be managed by principals on challenging timelines (Hanushek et al., 2004; Ingersoll & Smith, 2003; Wise et al., 1988).

Another concerning factor for the teacher shortage is the high turnover of staff with less than 5 years of experience. For many years policy makers have decried that there is a teacher shortage due to mass retirements and increasing student enrollment. Yet research would note that much of the shortage stems more from teacher attrition, especially for practitioners with less than 5 years of experience (Ingersoll & Smith, 2003). Interestingly, policy makers have focused more resources on recruitment of additional new teachers to the profession. This seems to ignore the key issue is the attrition of current staff and the inability to retain human capital that has a high investment in education through training. This issue is deeply personified in low income and schools that are a minority majority. This constant turnover of new staff is a high cost
in time and resources and puts additional strain and pressure on the school principal to lower the turnover rate and also replace the lost personnel.

Other factors impact the environment that principals are making hiring and selection of teachers is the timelines. Often, principals are rushed due to bureaucratic pressures. This can be from financial and budgeting delays that slow the hiring process, union contract expectations for transfers and timelines, and other central office factors (Liu & Johnson, 2006). When coupled with a finite pool of effective teachers to draw from, the bureaucratic concerns can become a serious detriment. This often leads to late hiring that is much closer to the start of school than is reasonable. This phenomenon has led to issues of lowered expectations and rationalizing risky hires by principals as they work to have a functioning school the first day of class (Liu & Johnson, 2006; Smith, 2014; Trimble, 2001)

All of these environmental factors lead to less than ideal conditions for school principals to make decisions that are grounded in research when looking to find effective teachers with the criteria and qualities that would indicate high effect in the classroom. As Engel (2013) stated, “Results indicate that principals focus on behavior and skills rather than qualifications. Principals report looking for teachers who care about students, have content knowledge, are willing to go beyond contractual obligations, and have classroom management skills” (pg. 52). Consistent research has shown that principals tend to look for teachers that have clear classroom management skills and strong work ethic (Cranston, 2012; DeStefano, 2002; Dunton, 2001; Engel, 2013; Goldhaber & Hansen, 2010; Grove, 2008; Hanna & Gimbert, 2011). This has led to the observation
that principals are often not looking at what research would state drives positive student
achievement when hiring teachers, rather, they are focusing on qualities and criteria that
would lead to the smooth operation of the actual school. Whether this phenomenon is
based on environmental factors, lack of training/education, or belief systems is still not
clear.

The research shows that contextual factors in a community often contribute to
characteristics that principals look for in their teacher candidates. This can include the
need for extra duties to be covered such as athletic coaching, activity sponsorships,
budget concerns, or political pressure to hire internal or local candidates (Cannata et al.,
2017; Wise et al., 1988). Often timing and constrained budgets can create issues for the
principal that may override some of their idealistic aspirations for their candidates.

Another contextual factor is school leadership in a time of reduced educational
budgets. There is continued downsizing of educational positions that results in sharing of
staff with other schools or relying on specific “unicorn” endorsements to try and fill two
fractional positions. Examples of this might include half time music paired with half time
math. This results in a much tighter candidate pool that will restrict the options for the
principal in candidate selection based on the teacher endorsements and criteria rather than
their qualities (Cannata et al., 2017; Smith, 2014; Wise et al., 1988).

The other factor impacting “why” principals look for qualities will be covered at
depth later in the paper, but will be discussed briefly here. The research continues to
show vagaries within the hiring process impact the lens in which principals look at
candidates. When asked in isolation what they aspirationally look for in candidates, they
can easily name their ideal criteria and qualities. However, the research shows that when the hiring process moves into the phase of actual execution many factors impact the principals’ decisions. 

Hiring processes for teachers have consistently shown, regardless of the size of schools, to be rushed and have poor clarity for the principal and candidate (Cannata et al., 2017; Liu & Johnson, 2006). Dysfunctional personnel offices, decentralized processes that utilize questionable practices, rushed selection processes that do not gather enough evidence, and refusal to provide clarity to candidates on the position are create conditions where it is nearly impossible for the principal to evaluate prospective teachers against their preferred criteria and qualities (Cole et al., 2009; Cannata et al., 2017; Dipboye, 1982; Dipboye et al., 1984; Liu & Johnson, 2006; Strauss et al., 2000; Smith, 2014; Trimble, 2001). In fact, in their Pennsylvania study, Strauss et al. (2000) found that written hiring procedures were absent in half of the studied districts, subject knowledge was not a priority in hiring, and most districts spent less than two hours with teacher candidates before making their final decision, and given that most hires are at least a $300,000-500,000 investment, highlighted the immense risk that is being taken. Effective teacher selection must involve practices that involve criteria and practices that are clear, objective, consistent, and fair (Grove, 2008).

In summary, the research demonstrates that principals have high aspirations for their teacher candidates they would prefer to hire that has symmetry to the research on what is considered an effective teacher. This includes strong content academic backgrounds, passion for children, strong work ethic, healthy relationships with peers,
reflective mindset, and people from diverse backgrounds as well as enthusiasm, strong communication skills, student centered philosophies, and strong classroom management skills. However, the research also demonstrates that the environment and contextual factors within the schools and communities often create a gap between the aspirations of the principals and the actual hires being made. As Dunton (2001) stated, “School principals are responsible for selecting classroom teachers, but according to Jensen (1986), often do not select the most promising teachers. Possible reasons offered included the complexities of the teaching function, inadequate attention to hiring, and insufficient selection techniques” (pg. 15).

**What are the Processes and Systems that Principals use to Determine which Candidate they Select?**

There continues to be a large body of empirical evidence that identifies types of processes and systems principals use to select the teachers for the open vacancies. Within the hiring processes and systems, there are two underlying principles that are pervasive and strongly backed by empirical research. First, research strongly indicates that principals, regardless of size, demographics, or geography, generally have broad autonomy and direct decision making when deciding who to hire for their schools (Balter & Duncombe, 2006; Cannata et al., 2017; Kimbrel, 2019; Papa & Baxter, 2008; Trimble, 2001; Young & Delli, 2002; Young et al., 1997). Second, the personal job interview continues to be a process so normally used in the teacher hiring process it not only ubiquitous, it is socialized as an expected normalized behavior (Baker & Cooper, 2005; Baker & Spier, 1990; Ballou, 1996; Balter & Duncombe, 2006; Braun et al., 1987;
Buckley et al., 2000; Cohen & Gump, 1984; Dipboye & Gaugler, 1993; Wiesner & Cronshaw, 1988).

While the context between large and small districts as well as urban and rural continue to have differences in the centralized human resources systems, the common pattern among all districts is that the principal makes the final decision for teacher hiring and selection (Young et al., 1997). In many larger school districts, there does tend to be a centralized human resources system however, often they take a laissez faire approach to the actual teacher hiring process. As Engel (2013) found in Chicago Public schools, while the central office was willing to provide support and resources, ultimately principals have autonomy in decision for teacher hiring. They are able to choose which candidates they would interview and make offers to. They also have autonomy in the recruitment and selection process of the candidates.

This actually compares symmetrically with what much smaller rural school systems experience as well with autonomy and independence in selecting teacher candidates. Even though the demographics are generally vastly different from urban to rural America, there is the consistent theme on how teacher hiring is approached and executed by central office and the school principals. Regardless of if there is a human resources department other than the superintendent in smaller rural districts, they still rely on principals to make the final hiring decisions for their schools (Wise et al., 1988).

The job interview continues to be a fascinating phenomenon in the process and hiring of candidates for positions. Research would show that while its genesis is generally lost to history, it can be documented in research as being utilized as early as 1918.
(Follett, 1998). Obviously, it was likely used much earlier than this documentation. The interview continues to be the most widely accepted process in the hiring and selection of teachers and the most controversial. As Buckley et al., (2000) states:

Negative findings about the predictive power, reliability, or validity of the interview have little meaning to the employers and interviewers that depend on the interview as their primary selection tool. The interview provides the personal, face to face contact that humans seek and desire (pg. 25).

Research continues to show the validity and power of the interview in collecting the data and evidence for principals to make educated and informed decisions for teacher selection to be poor (Ash, 1992; Ballou, 1996; Buckley et al., 2000; Cable & Gilovich, 1998; Cohen & Gump, 1984; Kimbrel, 2019; Macan, 2009; Meglino et al., 2000; O’Hair, 1989). Concerns in the interview process center around the variability, lack of structure, implicit bias of the interview teams, and lack of alignment in what is being assessed (Ballou, 1996; Buckley et al., 2000; Macan, 2009). Furthermore, research has shown that the employment interview is subject to candidate “faking” where they construct an artificial projected image to the team (Levashina et al., 2014). Also, there is considerable evidence that interviewers make employment decision minutes within the initiation of the interview and that the data and evidence is not objectively collected (Kimbrel, 2019; Emley & Ebmeier, 1997).

While the interview does have redeeming traits, they tend to be very specific. This includes assessing applicant interest, motivation, and affinity for a job, as well as personality of the candidates and cultural assimilation (Levashina et al., 2014; Marchese
& Muchinsky, 1993). When structured, interviews can collect information in non-biased ways that aid in alignment to the actual criteria being used to hire the candidate (Delli & Vera, 2003; Levashina et al., 2014). However, teacher interviews continue to pervasively utilize unstructured formats, lack alignment to job descriptions and criteria, and little focus on objective data collection. This flawed process leaves vagaries inherently within the process that research has shown consistently create a flawed situation to maximize principals’ abilities to hire candidates according to their aspirational criteria and qualities.

There is little evidence, despite the overwhelming research base that demonstrates the natural flaw in the employment interview, that it will ever be abandoned. Buckley et al., (2000) states, “Even if the interview were thoroughly repudiated, it probably would not be abandoned; there seems to be a certain human curiosity which can be satisfied in no other way than by seeing the man in the flesh” (pg. 54).

Another phenomenon in the hiring and selection process continues to be the use of paper credentials. The pervasive use of cover letters and resumes in the pre-employment screening of candidates continues to create the concept of “paper people” which can lead to stereotypical images of the candidates based on predisposed bias (Burns et al., 2014; Cable & Gilovich, 1998; Dipboye et al., 1975; Derous et al., 2017; Derous et al., 2015; Purkiss et al., 2006; Young & Fox, 2002). Paper people exist when the staff and interviewers review application materials and create a mental image of the candidate (Schmidt & Hunter, 1998). This may or may not be an accurate perception of the candidate based on the paper materials and predisposed bias of the reviewers. Despite its inherent flaws, review of paper materials continues to be ubiquitous in the hiring and
selection of teachers and has even been streamlined through the use of electronic application and clearinghouse databases (Derous et al., 2015).

While the employment interview and review of paper credentials continues to be ubiquitous and expected across teacher selection processes, there is ample evidence that other practices are continuing to be investigated and employed. Structured interviews, where the questions are valid and aligned towards set job description criteria are now being found more commonly in the teacher hiring process (Dipboye, 1994; Fink, 2011; Kimbrel, 2019; Levashina et al., 2014; Pettersen & Durivage, 2008; Strauss et al., 2000.) As a recent study showed, simple proactive structures such as creating set questions aligned to the job description and adhering to them in the process, increases the validity of the interview (Kimbrel, 2019; Hamdani et al., 2014).

Other processes that have been found to show value in teacher hiring and selection have included authentic job preview exercises (Cohen & Gump, 1984; Horstman, 2019; Kimbrel, 2019). While these vary in form and flavor, they all use components of authentic job performance previews and simulations. In education and teacher interviews, they tend to be demonstration lessons, shadowing a class, or some other simulated exercise to mimic the actual job responsibilities. By employing these types of techniques, they offer additional evidence to the interview team, enrich the sharing of information between the organization and candidates on actual job conditions, and lower the influence on the interview component around social desirability of the candidates. Other processes that have been used in authentic job previews include cognitive assessments that measure abilities and personality assessments that quantify...
organizational and cultural fit (Battelle for Kids, 2017; Buckley et al., 2000). Finally, some organizations have begun using writing samples to assess cognitive ability, communication skills, and behavioral dispositions (Battelle for Kids, 2017).

Another practice that has shown promise in improving teacher hiring is using a group interview process (Kersten, 2008). Many selection processes often only utilize a minimal amount of interviewers. At the minimum, this is often the principal interviewing candidates alone in an unstructured setting. However, when using multiple interviewers across varied positions within the school with robust training and utilization of structured interview questions, there is increased validity and reliability in the entire process (Joyce, 2008; Kersten, 2008; Konoske-Graf et al., 2016). By adding additional interviewers, this inherently lowers bias of the selection team, provides greater ownership of the eventual hiring decision among multiple stakeholders, and brings a variety of viewpoints to the selection process (Kersten, 2008).

What Bias and Vagaries Exist in the Criteria, Processes, and Systems that Principals use to Determine the Candidates they Select?

It has been widely documented that across all organizations and disciplines, the screening of paper credentials and the employment interview are the ubiquitous methods for hiring and selecting personnel (Drake et al., 1972; Macan, 2009; Marlowe et al., 1996; Wiesner & Cronshaw, 1988). Empirical research also strongly suggests that socially accepted practices of paper credential review and personal interviews are deeply flawed with bias and vagaries that cause unintended outcomes; at their best it leads to wrong fit for the organization and at their worst discrimination of candidates. For the
purpose of this study, unstructured interviews will refer to processes where paper credentials are reviewed and personal interviews are conducted without any standards, structures, or other systems to rate and collect evidence beyond the reviewer's own opinions. Generally, this also refers to personal interviews where there are no set questions; the questions are generally not pre-planned, and may vary from candidate to candidate in the same search (Ash, 1992; Baker & Spier, 1990; Burns et al., 2014; Cohen & Gump, 1984; Dipboye et al., 1984; Horstman, 2019; Kersten, 2008; Pettersen & Durivage, 2008; Smither et al., 1993).

Bias

Research continues to demonstrate biased and discriminatory characteristics have impacts on the strategies used in hiring and selection systems when utilized in a generalized format. It has been well studied that women, diverse candidates, and even overweight people are disproportionately oppressed within the traditional paper review and in-person interview (Derous et al., 2015; Derous et al., 2017; Dipboye et al., 1984; Einhorn, 1981; Essary, 1993; Gifford et al., 1985). In Derous et al. (2015), the research showed that people with ethnic sounding names were hired at fewer rates than names that are more mainstream to western culture. In Marlowe et al. (1996), the researchers found that gender and perceived attractiveness impacted hiring decisions of managers across many different organizations and disciplines. Pingitore et al. (1994) found pervasive discrimination and bias towards overweight applicants in simulated interview processes across various organizations and disciplines. This research has consistently demonstrated that when there is review of paper credentials and the use of interview formats and
structures that do not account and mitigate natural bias, discrimination behaviors often naturally occur within the hiring decisions.

Bias within the hiring process generally brings about strong feelings in people especially in regards to sexism, ableism, and racism. While these are examples of bias, there are also more subtle cues and issues that pervasively impact the hiring and selection process. Often, organizations that are operating without disparate treatment are still systematically causing disparate impact. Disparate treatment is the intentional discrimination of protected classes in the hiring process while disparate impact is unintentional discrimination of a protected class that gives an advantage to people not in a protected class (Essary, 1993). Disparate impact has been shown to be an issue in many hiring processes and practices, especially when there is less structure to the system (Derous et al., 2015; Fink, 2011; Highhouse, 2008). Too often, gut feelings, intuition, and subjectivity have driven the hiring process in screening and interviews (Highhouse, 2008). When you consider natural bias that exist as human beings, such as demonstrated in the list below, the research shows that there must be intentional structures to mitigate and improve the process (Highhouse, 2008; Battelle for Kids, 2017):

- **Halo Effect**: When a positive impression of a single characteristic interferes with objectively
- **Horn Effect**: When a negative impression of a single characteristic interferes with assessing other areas.
- **Primacy Effect**: Giving too much weight to past events and discounting more recent information.
- **Recency Effect**: Giving too much weight to short-term events and discounting past information.
- **Central Tendency**: Failing to differentiate by routinely giving an average rating.
- **Extreme Responding**: Failing to differentiate by consistently giving very high or
very low ratings.

- **Personal Bias**: Allowing values, beliefs, assumptions, or prejudices to affect ratings.
- **Similar-to-Me Effect**: Giving preference to individuals perceived as having a similar background, interests, or personality.
- **Contrast**: Basing an assessment of performance on how well an individual performs relative to another employee.

While commonly known bias such as ableism, sexism, and racism are aligned to disparate treatment, it is often much more subtle cues such as the above bias that can lead to disparate impact. These more subtle biases can unintentionally lead into bigger legal issues of ableism, sexism, and racism (Byrne, 1961; Derous et al., 2015; Derous et al., 2017). Studies consistently show that similar to me effect and personal bias are woven throughout hiring processes and the dispositions of people making decisions on future employees at both the initial screening of paper credentials and the personal interviews (Byrne, 1961; Cole et al., 2009; Cable & Gilovich, 1998; Cann et al., 1981; Dipboye et al., 1975; Fink, 2011; Hakel & Schuh, 1971; Hedricks, 2016; Place & Vail, 2013). For example, in the teacher hiring processes, principals that might have a background in social studies, athletics, small schools, and extroversion will have a natural tendency to hire people similar to that construct if the hiring and selection processes does not have structure to mitigate these natural biases (Battelle for Kids, 2017; Dipboye et al., 1975; Fink, 2011; Hakel & Schuh, 1971; Hedricks, 2016; Place & Vail, 2013; Trimble, 2001; Young et al., 1997;). These practices by themselves might not be legally discriminatory, however, they can easily lead to disparate impact in the event there are protected classes in the hiring pool. There is empirical evidence that natural human sociological bias exists in the hiring and selection processes in the absence of intentional structure. Studies also
continue to show that organizations across all disciplines including schools continue to utilize unstructured hiring and selection processes that contain opportunities for vagaries, unintended outcomes, and possible illegal discrimination embedded within the process (Baker & Spier, 1990; Ballou, 1996; Balter & Duncombe, 2005; Berg & Brimm, 1978; Cann et al., 1981; Cohen & Gump, 1984; Delli & Vera, 2003; Hanna & Gimbert, 2011; Joyce, 2008; Kristof-Brown, 2000; Merritt, 1971; Young & Delli, 2002).

Much research exists on how interpersonal similarity and hegemony of the prevailing society drives decisions in the hiring process, especially when there is lack of structure or process to mitigate it. Specifically, studies have shown that people with ethnic sounding names, are perceived to be overweight compared to societal norms, or do not fit the prevailing expectations for attractiveness are hired at less rates than others that do (Cann et al., 1981; Derous et al., 2015; Derous et al., 2017; Dipboye, 1982). This is connected back to like me similarity and attitude similarity bias where people are expected to fit the prevailing culture of the organization (Battelle for Kids, 2017; Byrne, 1961). In the hiring process this can start very early. When reviewing applications and paper materials, interviewers begin to create a “paper person” mentally in their minds that will be used later to compare during the in-person processes (Burns et al., 2014). This phenomenon has led to the unintentional bias within the selection process especially around perceived strengths and weaknesses of the candidates, personality, cultural fit in the organization, or even physical and ethnic attributes (Burns et al., 2014; Cann et al., 1981; Dipboye, 1982; Keenan, 1977; Purkiss et al., 2006).
Within unstructured hiring processes that may rely heavily on paper credential reviews and interviews only, the natural prevailing bias of the reviewers leads to self-fulfilling prophecies. Self-fulfilling prophecies are phenomenon where the reviewers will continue to find evidence that supports a preconceived notion about an applicant (Dipboye, 1982). For example, if a reviewer has a preconceived notion that an overweight person is generally lazy or unmotivated, they will find evidence within the hiring and selection process to support this hypothesis that is grounded in bias (Cann et al., 1981; Dipboye, 1982; Gifford et al., 1985; Keenan, 1977; Pingitore et al., 1994). This has the reverse effect as well. If the candidate has attributes that are positively perceived by the reviewers, then evidence will be collected that supports their perception of future success. Self-fulfilling prophecies connected with natural bias in a hiring process are powerful forces that can drive the decision making on which candidates will be selected.

There continues to be research around the concept of “gut feeling” in hiring which is a metaphor for using intuition and personal opinion to make decisions (Fink, 2011). Fink’s (2011) research continues to show that many employers use their “gut” through unstructured hiring processes that allow them to “read between the lines” about candidates. Fink (2011) found the reviewers were often attracted to personality styles and types that most closely resembled their own and they were tempted to hire accordingly. When connected to unstructured hiring processes, the subjectivity of “gut” feelings and intuition will often lead reviewers to hire candidates based on free floating and deeply personal opinions that may or may not align to the actual criteria of what is being desired in the job position (Fink, 2011; Highhouse, 2008; Kristof-Brown, 2000; Moore, 2017).
In summary, bias is naturally a part of the disposition of the reviewers in a hiring and selection process. Many reviewers have good intentions, but without proper training and structures, their natural tendencies and bias may lead to unintentional outcomes in the hiring and selection processes. At best, this may lead to an ineffective hire; at its worst, it could lead to illegal discrimination. The research is clear that if unaccounted for, bias within the hiring of candidates will have an outsized impact on the final decisions being made about candidate selection.

**Vagaries**

The research is also clear that vagaries are persistent in the hiring processes across all organizations and disciplines including business, government, non-profit, and public schools. For the purpose of this study, vagaries will be defined as erratic or unpredictable outcomes based on the system being used in hiring and selection of candidates that lowers validity and reliability. Max Weber described rationality as a theory where reason, reasoning, calculability, and the rational pursuit of one’s interest can be applied to the social sphere (Gingrich, 1999). Yet the research clearly shows that rationality is not always applied to the hiring and selection of candidates where vagaries are often pervasive that decrease validity and reliability in decision making.

The research shows that two contextual factors often create a habitat where vagaries in the hiring and selection process can become prevalent. Rushed hiring processes often lead to mistakes, missteps, and skipping of important factors that can improve the hiring process and remove vagaries. Rushed hiring often comes from contextual factors such as internal employee movement, contractual obligations for job
postings, budget processes, and the whirlwind of the daily management duties of principals that lowers hiring as a priority (Ballou, 1996; Ballou & Podgursky, 1995; Barnes et al., 2007; Bourke & Brown, 2014; Liu & Johnson, 2006; Perry, 1981) In their study New Teachers’ Experience of Hiring: Late, Rushed, and Information Poor, Liu and Johnson (2006) describe a process that is application material heavy, utilizes unstructured processes, lacks engaging important key personnel in the process, and does not make use of research based practices that could improve their outcomes. They go on to describe factors where candidates are not given adequate information on what the job entails which leads often to poor fit and low retention (Liu & Johnson, 2006). Even though the in-person interview shows low validity when used in an unstructured format, schools and other organizations continue to rely on it as their primary strategy for hiring while ignoring other promising and research backed processes that may yield more valid and reliable results (Marchese & Muchinsky, 1993; Nicholson & McInerney, 1988; Pettersen & Durivage, 2008; Rockoff et al., 2011).

The other factor that contributes to the primary vagary in the hiring and selection process of teachers is the lack of investment in principals to be effective in human capital management. It is widely noted that across the United States, regardless of geography and size of school district, the hiring and selection of teachers is decentralized with wide autonomy of the principal to make the final decision on who is hired to be in the classroom (Baker & Cooper, 2005; Ballou, 1996; Berg & Brimm, 1978; Cranston, 2012; Engel, 2013; Engel & Curran, 2016; Harris et al., 2010; Liu & Johnson, 2006; Natter & Kuder, 1983; Trimble, 2001). However, it is widely noted that principals are offered very
little training around research-based practices for effective hiring of teachers beyond their pre-service university schooling (Cranston, 2012; Harris et al., 2010; Natter & Kuder, 1983; Rockoff et al., 2011). This is leading to an environment where principals are being given maximum responsibility for hiring and selection of teachers with the minimal amount of education on best-practice and researched based methods. Combine this with the widely noted research of the importance of classroom teachers on effective outcomes for students, and there exists an environment that leads to inconsistency and vagaries for successful schools.

However, the research also shows hope for optimism. There are many practices in the hiring and selection process that are showing high validity and reliability in removing vagaries from the system. This includes developing strong job descriptions, structured screening processes of paper credentials, performance activities in the process, structured group interviews, and pre-referencing of candidates.

The research has demonstrated without set job descriptions it is nearly impossible to mitigate reviewer bias on the selection team (Battelle for Kids, 2017). Without a strong guide and structure for what is specifically being sought in a candidate based on the values of the organization and the bonafide knowledge, skills, responsibilities, and abilities, reviewers will often retreat to their own personal biases when making decisions (Battelle for Kids, 2017; Delli & Vera, 2003; Fink, 2011; Harris et al., 2010; Highhouse, 2008; Purkiss et al., 2006). When the organization creates clear job descriptions with alignment to their hiring and selection systems, the validity and reliability of the process
immediately improves (Balter & Duncombe, 2005; Battelle for Kids, 2017; Dunton, 2001; Jacob, 2016; Moore, 2017).

Initial screening processes of paper credentials and materials continue to invite vagaries in the hiring and selection process if not controlled for bias (Berg & Brimm, 1978; Battelle for Kids, 2017; Cole et al., 2009). Cole et al. (2009), in their study, “Recruiters’ Inferences of Applicant Personality Based on Resume Screening: Do Paper People Have a Personality?” states “If recruiters form inaccurate inferences that subsequently serve as a basis for evaluating and comparing job applicants, recruiters’ recommendations may in fact sub-optimize the applicant pool” (pg. 6). The research study also suggests that recruiters form impressions of applicants’ subjective attributes on resume content and use these inferences when evaluating employability (Cole et al., 2009). To summarize, if there is not rigorous alignment of the screening of paper credentials with the established skills, knowledge, and abilities needed for a particular position with a set job description and a system to evaluate, then inaccurate bias may unintentionally lower the chances of making an effective hiring decision.

Research has shown that lowering bias and creating high reliability and validity in hiring and selection processes can be achieved through increased structure and large volumes of evidence through an information rich environment (Battelle for Kids, 2017; Jacob, 2007; Grove, 2008; Kersten, 2010; Levashina et al., 2014; Liu & Johnson, 2006; Pettersen & Durivage, 2008; Rockoff et al., 2011; Stronge & Hindman, 2003). Liu and Johnson (2006) found that when there is more information shared between the organization and candidates, then both can make informed decisions on if there is a high
probability of success. Processes that engage this high amount of information sharing engages robust hiring teams to give candidates a clearer picture of the organization. It also gathers a higher volume of information and evidence that can be analyzed about the candidate and potential for success (Cohen & Gump, 1984; Kersten, 2010; Liu & Johnson, 2006). Systems to increase the amount of information sharing go well beyond the traditional interview. Research has shown that realistic job previews help candidates and organizations observe what the actual daily experience will be and determine if there is a high-quality fit for success (Meglino et al., 2000). In education, these realistic job previews can range from simple to complex. Some simpler versions have included writing activities that simulate communication, demonstration lessons with students, or even full day internship type activities where a candidate may shadow a teacher all day to immerse themselves in the position (Joyce, 2008; Kersten, 2008; Konoske-Graf et al., 2016; Kristof-Brown et al., 2005; Liu & Johnson, 2006; Meglino et al., 2000).

One of the most important factors in the research to increase reliability and validity in the hiring and selection of teachers will continue to be alignment of the process and the job description. The hiring and selection processes must have exercises and procedures that are actively gathering evidence to prove/disprove why the candidate would fit the listed qualifications (Battelle for Kids, 2017). Often the word fit is used more as a cultural indicator in the organization; however, at the more granular level, it actually refers to the congruence of the candidates’ skills, knowledge, abilities, and values to the organization through the job description (Baker & Spier, 1990; Battelle for Kids, 2017; Kristof-Brown et al., 2005).
Referencing of candidates continues to be a ubiquitous process in teacher hiring and selection, though it is generally conducted after a hiring decision has been made (Hedricks, 2016). Typically, the purpose of the reference at the conclusion of the hiring process is to do final checks on any issues that might be considered moral turpitude that would disqualify the candidate from being hired. This is aligned with the purpose of legal background checks and are generally conducted by schools at the same time (Battelle for Kids, 2017). However, research would suggest this might be a missed opportunity for additional screening of candidates. When conducted at the end of a process, references often engage in confirmation bias aligned with self-fulfilling prophecies (Battelle for Kids, 2017; Dipboye, 1982). Yet, when conducted at the beginning of the screening process with paper materials, it can be a powerful tool to gather information on a candidate and their potential for success before more costly and time-consuming processes for hiring begin (Battelle for Kids, 2017; Dipboye, 1982; Hedricks, 2016; Horstman, 2019; Jacob, 2016).

**Summary**

School principals are expected to embrace the role and responsibility of hiring teachers for their schools. This high autonomy and decentralized process has been ubiquitous throughout the United States for at least the last 50 years. Combined with the research that shows teachers are the most important factor in student success, this puts immense pressure on school principals to effectively drive student achievement, especially in the generation of high stakes testing and results. Yet, the research clearly
suggests that principals are often not equipped with the skills, knowledge or research needed for this important aspect of their responsibilities.

The research continues to have gaps in understanding what are the criteria and qualities principals look for in teacher candidates and why they prioritize them, process and procedures for hiring teachers, and bias and vagaries that may exist. There is an even larger gap in this research in context to Iowa small public school principals. The purpose of this study was to continue to gather information and data to add to the accumulated body of research to foster additional study and support improvements in the practice of Iowa school principals.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Review of the Problem

The purpose of this study was to investigate the two primary areas of teacher qualities and hiring/selection methods and systems in public school districts with less than 1000 K-12 students. The study was conducted utilizing the following research questions.

Research Questions

- What criteria and qualities do principals look for when hiring teachers?
- Why do they look for these criteria and qualities?
- What are the processes, and systems that principals use to determine which candidates they select?
- What bias and vagaries exist in the criteria, processes, and systems that principals use to determine the candidate they select?

This study was conducted through a mixed methods approach that implemented a concurrent triangulation strategy where quantitative data and qualitative evidence was collected simultaneously (Creswell, 2003). The quantitative data gave a holistic picture of the characteristics and strategies being used across the sample population of Iowa schools and their administrators. The qualitative methods of this study gave context and investigated the lived experience using a sample of the participants. There has been substantial research conducted nationally in both urban and rural settings that has investigated the complexities and phenomenon of teacher hiring. However, there exists a gap in the research within the context of the state of Iowa. This study attempted to replicate much of the work of Dr. Mimi Engel and her study entitled "Problematic Preferences? A Mixed Method Examination of Principals’ Preferences for Teacher
Characteristics in Chicago." (2013) which was a mixed methods study of Chicago principals and their hiring practices.

Within the literature review of Chapter 2, there is substantial evidence and data to develop a theoretical framework for approaching this study. Bolman and Deal’s Reframing Organizations (2017/1984) develops and clarifies the vital nature of human resources within all organizations. Significant research shows the importance of effective teachers on student achievement and how administrators' role in selecting staff has direct implications for high quality schools. Finally, bias and vagaries have been found to exist in all phases of human resource hiring systems and without conscious efforts to control and mitigate these can have unintended outcomes.

Setting and Participants

This study was conducted within the scope of “small” public school principals within the state of Iowa. “Small” Iowa public school principals were classified as districts with a K-12 certified enrollment of less than 1000 students as of the 2020 Iowa Association of School Boards dataset (2020) and under the authority of a duly elected school board. To be a participant, the school principal had to currently be under contract and a working member of an eligible school and meet the Iowa code definition for their position:

Iowa Code 272.1

Principal means a licensed member of a school’s instructional staff who serves as an instructional leader, coordinates the process and substance of educational and instructional programs, coordinates the budget of the school, provides formative evaluation for all practitioners and other persons in the school, recommends or has effective authority to appoint, assign, promote, or transfer personnel in a
school building, implements the local school board’s policy in a manner consistent with professional practice and ethics, and assists in the development and supervision of a school’s student activities program.

The following information for both identification of setting and participants was accessed from the 2020 Conditions of Education report issued by the Iowa Department of Education and disaggregated staffing data from the Iowa Association of School Boards (2020). Some schools within the sample also had a smaller scope of enrollment depending on whole grade sharing, mergers, or other extenuating circumstances where the top end of the grade span may be limited (i.e. no high school). Having less than a K-12 grade span did not disqualify a school or principal from participating within the study. In addition, some of the population of principals within this study held diverse job duties. Some principals in Iowa continue to have traditional roles and responsibilities. However, with the merging and rationalizing of resources across the state, many principals were in expanded or hybrid roles. This included expanded secondary duties (6-12 or 7-12), merged elementary duties (PK-8) or even PK-12 responsibilities in some districts. Based on the parameters of the study and the 2020 Iowa Basic Educational Data, the sample participant size for this study was 216 school districts and 438 principals (Iowa Department of Education, 2020b).

As of the 2019-2020 academic year, the state of Iowa, which is represented in this study, had 327 public school districts which was a trend of steady decline since 2000-2001 when there were 374 districts (Iowa Association of School Boards, 2020). As of 2019-2020 there were a total of 215 districts with less than 1000 students (Iowa Department of Education, 2020b). This is in contrast to 2000-2001 when there were 258
districts within the defined parameter (Iowa Department of Education, 2020b). As of 2019-2020, there were 25 school districts that did not have public high schools (Iowa Department of Education, 2020a). While there were fewer school districts, student enrollment steadily increased with nine straight years of increase across the state, with 490,094 students projected to be served in 2019-2020 (Iowa Department of Education, 2020b). With the increase in student population there has been a rise in students from diversity which in this study would be defined as non-white. Minority students made up 25.7% of the public school enrollment and 42.5% of Iowa students were eligible for Free and Reduced Lunch (Iowa Department of Education, 2020b).

The staffing of public Iowa schools has also increased over time. From 2000-2001 to 2019-2020 there has been an 11.8 percent increase in the number of full-time teachers for a total of 37,567 (Iowa Association of School Boards, 2020). Iowa continued to be in the middle of the national average of teacher salary at $58,110 which ranked it 23rd in the nation (Iowa Department of Education, 2020a). The teaching staff in Iowa continued to skew female and white. In 2019-2020, 76% of teachers were female. At the same time, only 2.7% of Iowa teachers were from diversity and considered non-white (Iowa Department of Education, 2020a).

The principal population of Iowa was 1146 for the 2019-2020 school year which was an increase from 1124 the previous year. (Iowa Department of Education, 2020a). In 2019-2020, the average age of a public school principal was 46.2, 42% were female, and only 4% were from diversity (Iowa Department of Education, 2020a). In Iowa public school, 81% of principals had advanced degrees and the average total years of experience
was 19.6 years (Iowa Association of School Boards, 2020). Within the population of school districts with less than 1000 K-12 students in 2019-2020, there were 424 full time principals (Iowa Department of Education, 2020b).

Research Design

The investigator of this study recruited and accessed all participants through electronic correspondence seeking participation (Appendix B). To increase sampling size, some candidates were personally requested for participation in the study. If they chose to participate in the interviews, they were asked to provide informed consent (Appendix D). As schools with less than 1000 students are generally homogenous in system and structure and are governed by similar policy and hegemony, there was not a need for geographical randomization. All interview participants were provided a handwritten thank you for their work.

The initial design of the study was comprised of a plan to email all of the sample principal population and invite them to volunteer to participate in the interview process. As an additional component of the design the investigator individually invited eligible candidates to increase the probability of an effective sample size. The 10 interview candidates recruited through email by the investigator all responded affirmatively they would volunteer to participate. While the recruited principals all had a casual connection to the investigator, none of the relationships were of a close and personal nature that would be a limitation to the study. The investigator made a decision to alter the study design and proceed with the interviews of the 10 volunteers rather than put another electronic correspondence into the field to the sample principal group. This was to respect
the workload and time of the principal population by reducing the amount of contact that was made through mass electronic emails. The investigator choosing the principal interview candidates was a purposeful strategy that was designed to lead to higher candor and honesty in the answers and reduce social desirability variance. The principal interviews were not designed to be a representative sample of the entire state of Iowa or all rural schools. Instead, the interviews were intended to provide transparent and candid observations of the principals’ actual lived experience when hiring and selecting teachers.

This study employed a mixed methods approach which Creswell et al., (2003) defined as a study that utilizes both quantitative and qualitative data that is collected simultaneously or sequentially and uses the data with equal importance. Specifically, this study employed a concurrent triangulation strategy that obtained quantitative and qualitative data simultaneously (Creswell, 2003). The data was compiled in a way that integrates the information to develop final results through analysis (Yin, 1994).

This research study explored and studied factors that impacted Iowa student achievement and classroom effectiveness through Bolman and Deal’s human resources frame (2017/1984). Specifically, it studied what criteria and qualities Iowa small school principals were looking for in teacher candidates and the processes and systems that were being utilized to make final decisions about who to ultimately select to teach in their schools. The final research question then explored and investigated what bias and vagaries existed in the hiring process and systems and what impacts that could have on student achievement and teacher/classroom effectiveness.
Quantitative Design

The quantitative data collected for this study came from a survey instrument administered electronically through a secure and confidential method using Qualtrics and the University of Northern Iowa system. The survey was presented to the eligible participants electronically (Appendix B). The list of eligible small school Iowa principals was determined through directory access from the Iowa Department of Education. The survey instrument asked respondents to identify the frequency that they assessed teacher candidates for hire from a list of 15 criteria and qualities using a Likert-type scale. The 15 criteria and qualities were created by Mimi Engel in her study “Problematic Preferences? A Mixed Methods Examination for Teacher Characteristics in Chicago” (2013). Respondents were asked to identify the frequency that they utilized 15 listed processes and systems for teacher selection using a Likert-type scale. This list was created by the investigator of the study using the research base. All of the survey items were piloted with a group of non-sample eligible Iowa principals and administrators for feedback on design, accessibility, and validity. Appropriate changes and adjustments were made based on the pilot study feedback. Data and evidence collected was only kept until the completion and publication of the study. Upon completion and defense of the dissertation the data was destroyed.

Qualitative Design

The qualitative research of this study was developed through principal interviews from the eligible participant pool. The interview process was conducted simultaneously as the quantitative survey component following the process in the concurrent
triangulation strategy (Creswell, 2003). The principal interview sample was selected by contacting eligible candidates through personal electronic invitation by the researcher. These candidates were selected based on prior established relationships with the investigator. The interviews used a semi-structured qualitative process and inquired about the teacher selection systems utilized and focused around the four research questions engaged in set questions and follow up prompts (Appendix A).

Principal interviews were transcribed verbatim and full interview transcripts were analyzed to develop and uncover themes and patterns in responses. Patterns and themes were investigated for characteristics of teachers, hiring processes, and perceived biases. These responses were then sorted topically into broad categories. The goal of the interviews was to engage in detailed information that gives insight into the lived experiences of the practitioners in their natural settings and gave context and insight to the quantitative survey results. Data and evidence collected was only kept until the completion and publication of the study.

Research Design Adjustment

When this study was first created, the original design was to utilize a sequential explanatory strategy (Creswell, 2003). This design is when quantitative data is collected first and qualitative data second in order to provide a sequence for analysis. The original design planned to share the survey data with the interview participants and ask for insights to assist with analysis. When survey data collection began, a simultaneous test pilot of two principal interviews was conducted to finalize and streamline the process. The pilot interviews were not originally planned to be part of the study, however the
Evidence gathered was rich in potential for analysis. In addition, the interview data was discovered to be robust enough on its own that survey evidence was not necessary to tease out additional information with the principals. The decision was made by the investigator to switch the framework to a concurrent triangulation strategy (Creswell, 2003) and simultaneously collect survey and interview evidence. This led to increased accuracy and depth to the findings through real time interrater reliability analysis.

**Advantages and Limitations of Methodology**

An advantage of this mixed methods approach was the ability to develop simultaneous data sets of both quantitative and qualitative evidence for analysis. This data was then analyzed for comparison and contextual implications. Both datasets had equal importance and provided insight into the other. The quantitative data sets gave a broad sample size of Iowa public school principals' perceptions in districts with less than 1000 students. The qualitative interview data gave context, color, and complexity of the larger survey evidence. They assisted in identifying and addressing phenomenon within the larger study. Greene et al. (1989) described this mixed methods approach as complementary, where the qualitative and quantitative methods “are used to measure overlapping but also different facets of a phenomenon, yielding an enriched, elaborated, understanding of the phenomenon” (p. 258).

Other advantages of the study included the scope of Iowa public school principals. This research provided additional basis of information by replicating other national studies that have either been larger in scope nationally/regionally or limited to a particular school system. This study was unique in that it encompassed public schools
within the state of Iowa with less than 1000 K-12 students in a state governed by similar policy, structures, and hegemony.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to investigate and analyze, within small public schools in the state of Iowa, teacher criteria and qualities that principals were assessing in their hiring decision making. The study also determined what processes and systems are being utilized by the principals in their teacher hiring and selection decisions. This was analyzed through the lens of bias and vagaries that existed and impacted the decisions of the principals in the teacher selection process. When viewed through the human resources frame of Bolman and Deal (2017/1984), it became clear the importance hiring and selection of teachers has on student achievement and the mission of public education. The next chapter will discuss and examine the comprehensive results of the study.
CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to investigate and study teacher hiring and selection methods and systems in Iowa public school districts with less than 1000 K-12 students.

The study was conducted utilizing the following research questions.

- What criteria and qualities do principals look for when hiring teachers?
- Why do they look for these criteria and qualities?
- What are the processes and systems that principals use to determine which candidates they select?
- What bias and vagaries exist in the criteria, processes, and systems that principals use to determine the candidate they select?

To examine these research questions the study utilized a mixed methods approach. It engaged in analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data that was collected through a concurrent triangulation strategy (Creswell, 2003). The collected data was treated as of equal importance and analyzed simultaneously to confirm, cross-validate, and corroborate findings. The study partially replicated the work of Dr. Mimi Engel entitled "Problematic Preferences? A Mixed Method Examination of Principals’ Preferences for Teacher Characteristics in Chicago (2013)". Engel’s work was a mixed methods study of Chicago principals and their hiring practices. This investigator collected quantitative data through a Likert type scale from the research sample population. Qualitative data was collected through selected interviews with principals from the sample population. Open ended questions with additional prompts were used to generate more data and evidence that gave context of the lived experience. The investigator then triangulated the results for a more powerful interpretation of the two data sets. All school and employee names are pseudonyms to protect the privacy and confidentiality of the research participants.
Overview of Method

This study was conducted within the scope of “small” public schools within the state of Iowa. This demographic was chosen due to a gap in teacher hiring research in smaller rural schools as most of the existing studies are focused on larger urban and suburban districts. The researcher defined “small” Iowa public schools as districts with a K-12 certified enrollment of less than 1000 students as of the 2020 BEDS (Basic Educational Data Survey) from the Iowa Department of Education and had to be under the authority of a duly elected school board. This used as a defining characteristic due to the fact this sample population of schools represents a specific gap in research. In order to be a participant, the principal was required to be currently under contract and a working member of an eligible school as defined in the sample and meet the Iowa code definition for their position. For reference, the total principal population of Iowa was 1146 for the 2019-2020 school year (Iowa Department of Education, 2020a). In 2019-2020, the average age of a public school principal was 46.2, 4% were minorities, and 42% female (Iowa Department of Education, 2020a). In the sample, 80% of Iowa public school principals had advanced degrees and the average total years of experience was 19.6 years (Iowa Department of Education, 2020a). Within the population of school districts with less than 1000 K-12 students in 2019-2020, there were 424 full time principals which were all contacted as potential participants of the study (Iowa Association of School Boards, 2020).

Participation in the study was based on participants’ willingness to agree to the terms of the letter of invitation to participate (Appendix B). The investigator utilized
electronic invitations to increase participation in both the survey and interviews (Appendix E). The first contact with the participant pool was on November 24, 2021. Additional contact was made with the participant pool on December 11, 2021. The design and execution of the study was reviewed, approved, and monitored by the University of Northern Iowa Institutional Review Board.

**Instrumentation**

The quantitative data collected for this study came from a survey instrument administered electronically through a secure and confidential method using Qualtrics and the University of Northern Iowa system. The survey was presented to the eligible participants electronically and interview data was collected simultaneously following the concurrent triangulation strategy used for this mixed methods study (Creswell, 2003). The list of eligible small school Iowa principals was determined through directory access from the Iowa Department of Education. The survey instrument asked respondents to identify the frequency that they assess teacher candidates for hire from a list of 15 criteria and qualities using a Likert-type scale. The 15 criteria and qualities were established and created by Engel in her study “Problematic Preferences? A Mixed Methods Examination for Teacher Characteristics in Chicago” (2013). Respondents were asked to identify the frequency they utilize the 15 listed processes and systems for teacher selection using a Likert-type scale. This list was created by the investigator of the study using the research base. All of the survey items were piloted with a group of non-sample eligible Iowa principals and administrators for feedback on design, accessibility, and validity. The preponderance of the feedback from the pilot group were small adjustments to wording
for survey readability, changes to clarify interview question stems, and checking on the
time principals would need to take the survey.

Return Rate

On December 11, 2021, an electronic message requesting the sample group to participate in the teacher hiring and selection survey was sent through email on a listserv created from the Iowa Department of Education principal directory. The sample included 424 principals that were eligible based on the parameters of the survey. After one week, there were 75 responses which constituted a 18% response rate. On December 18, 2021, a second correspondence, a reminder email, was sent to the sample group again requesting participation in the survey. After the second correspondence, the return increased to 106 responses which constituted a 25% response rate.

The qualitative research of this study was developed through principal interviews from the eligible participant pool. These principals were chosen based on their prior relationship with the researcher. The interview process was conducted simultaneously with the quantitative survey component following the concurrent triangulation strategy (Creswell, 2003). The principal interview sample was selected by recruiting participants from the eligible pool through electronic invitation that were personally known to the researcher. This method provided both a limitation and delimitation. The limitation is that all of the interviews were recruited based on prior knowledge and relationships of the researcher and principals. The delimitation and strength were that the interviews demonstrated increased candor and lower social desirability in the answers. The
interviews were designed as semi-structured with a focus on teacher selection processes and centered around the four research questions using base and follow-up prompts.

The qualitative data collection methods utilized for this research study were Zoom electronic interviews with practicing Iowa principals from the study population. The interviews were provided an electronic copy of the Informed Consent Form which they completed and returned to the investigator before data collection began (Appendix D). In the interviews, the investigator utilized a semi-structured process. Introductory statements were made followed by three primary questions. Fourteen additional follow-up questions were available for use by the investigator as needed. It was estimated that the interviews would be between 30 and 40 minutes in length. No interviews exceeded 35 minutes in length.

Principal interviews were transcribed verbatim and the full transcripts analyzed to develop and uncover themes and patterns in responses. Themes and patterns were developed for characteristics of teachers, hiring processes, and perceived biases. These responses were then sorted topically into specific themes. The goal of the interviews was to discover detailed information that gave insight into the lived experiences of the practitioners in their natural settings and establish context to the quantitative survey results.

Following each interview, a transcript was generated through a transcription service contracted by the investigator. Before leaving the interview, the participant was informed they would be sent a copy of the transcripts and the opportunity to make corrections, edits, or additions. None of the participants requested any edits, corrections,
or additions to the transcripts after receiving a copy for review. The participants were also informed they would be provided a copy of the final study upon its completion.

**Results**

The results and data collected for this study revealed many different pictures of dispositions and practices of Iowa small school principals in the area of teacher hiring. Specifically, the results suggested that principals have clearly defined some criteria and qualities they seek in hiring teachers, but often have not defined “why”. The data showed that principals have implemented many set hiring and selection systems aligned with empirically supported best-practice. In contrast, study evidence also suggests that principals are ignoring and have inaccurate opinions of hiring and selection practices that are shown effective by research. Finally, the study evidence showed that bias and vagaries are still prevalent in teacher hiring practices in Iowa but not as pervasive as national research might suggest.

**What Criteria and Qualities do Principals Look for when Hiring Teachers?**

From the survey and interview data, a clear picture started to emerge which criteria and qualities that principals are looking for when hiring teachers. The evidence strongly suggests there are a clear set of criteria and qualities of the highest importance to principals. There appears to be agreement on many of the broad themes of what principals are looking for in teacher criteria and qualities. However, when analyzing disaggregated responses, there are diverging underlying reasons why principals value these broad themes.
Personality and Fit

One clear and compelling result in both survey and interviews was the desire of principals to hire candidates with a personable disposition who naturally demonstrate care for children. Both of these broad themes demonstrated alignment with a concept called person-organization fit (Cranston, 2012). In 100% of the interviews principals identified this as a priority criteria and quality that was desired in the teaching candidates. In addition, 93% of the principals chose often/always when considering the candidate’s ability to relate well with colleagues (i.e. other teachers, administrators, and staff in the schools). It was clear in the survey results that teacher fit in the prevailing person-organization culture and adult relationships were as important as other direct classroom factors. While other criteria such as candidate’s enthusiasm of teaching were shown to be high value at 97% often/always responses, interview data would suggest this is an underlying theme connecting them to the broader concepts of person-organization fit and caring student relationships. Also aligned was the candidate’s ability to create an engaging and stimulating classroom environment with 93% often/always response rate. This was also indicated in the qualitative results as well. The code “organization fit/alignment” was mentioned by 100% of the interview respondents as important for hiring the best teaching candidates.

Principals communicated in the interviews that desired candidates needed to assimilate well to the prevailing culture which aligned with the concept of person-organization fit. There was some mention of the new candidates “making the organization better”, but the overwhelming evidence suggested that ideal candidates
would fit the established culture. Jim Lindenmeyer, an elementary principal stated, “One of the things we were really looking for was somebody who worked well with other… the fact that she’s cordial with others, she gets along with others. That was what we were looking for.” Jim Ralphy, a secondary principal shared, “The first thing is that I want to make sure, because based on my experience with teaching you can be the best teacher in the world, but if it’s a bad fit, it’s like trying to put a great Apple program into a PC computer. It doesn’t work.”

The other theme with organization fit was the concept of “build your own”. This was the idea of hiring newer and more inexperienced teachers and have them assimilate to the prevailing culture and learn as they go. As Marcus Johnson, a high school principal stated, “If I can hire somebody who’s a little more green, a little more raw, they might be like, ‘I’m looking for feedback’….I’m working for ways to build that.” Dan Michaels, a secondary principal, when asked about what he is looking for in teachers said, “Definitely adaptability and being able to fit into our school is a big thing.” When asked the same question, Betty Jasper, a secondary principal shared, “What I am looking for is a person that will fit into our culture.” These themes were prevalent through the interview data; however, there lacked a specificity on how this was being evaluated. This will be discussed further in the later research questions.

Clearly, the person-organization fit of the school culture was important in the search and selection of teachers. It also generated anxiety for principals as they thought of a poor cultural fit. Jim Plainfield summarized, “Especially when it comes to the culture of your building because anybody can talk the talk when it comes to being a team player
and collaboration, getting along with others, but then you put them in that setting, and you wait and see.”

In the sub code of “community and cultural fit” 90% of the interviews made mention of the importance of this in hiring. As Jim Lindenmeyer stated in an interview, he felt that community connection was important and factors such as commuting can impact person-organization fit. “If you’re going to drive an hour and half each way to work each day, how long are you going to do that.” He went on to say, “You’ve got to be active, and you’ve got to be at all the events and if you’re living an hour away, is that going to be possible?” Being connected to the community was also a factor that was mentioned by the principals regularly. Justin Stocker, an elementary principal said, “If we get somebody that’s local, that has ties to the community, it’s pretty much an open and shut deal.” Jay Dales, a secondary principal, was even more candid and succinct about community fit. “So being very intentional about looking for people who are wanting to stay in this community, live a river life, understand that we shut down October to February [this community is a seasonal tourist destination that is geographically remote from most urban areas] People need to understand what we are before they pull the trigger to be here.”

Beyond the person-organization fit of the school and community the ability to create strong relationships with students, classroom engagement, and being a positive role model had strong indications of importance to principals in the hiring process. When asked the importance of the candidate’s ability to create an engaging and stimulating classroom environment in looking at teaching candidates, 93% of principals stated they
often/always consider this a factor. Related to this question, 88% of principals chose often/always when asked if they looked for the candidate’s classroom management skills when evaluating teacher hires. When asked if they evaluated the extent to which the candidate’s philosophy of learning is a good fit with the school, 91% of principals stated they often/always look at this criterion. This demonstrated a connection between the earlier survey responses in school and cultural fit. Finally, 93% of principals said they often/always evaluate the candidate’s ability to serve as a positive role model in the community.

**Student Relationships**

The qualitative responses showed the lived experience of principals aligned with much of the data in the survey. In the interviews, 80% of the principals discussed how caring student relationships were important qualities they desired and looked for in teacher candidates. Katie Hartford, an elementary principal shared, “Someone that cares, or you can tell cares about kids, and cares about helping kids become the best they can be.” Jay Dales said, “I want them to love kids above their content….hire somebody who is going to be part of their life, they want somebody who’s going to invest in them.” Marcus Johnson shared, “Say that a student is crying in your classroom, what do you do next? And I’m just looking for how they are going to respond from a human connection standpoint, not whether there actually is a process that they do, but really more of a do you ask them? Do you listen to them?”
**Instructional Skills and Content Knowledge**

Criteria and qualities that were rated as having demonstrated a smaller importance in the selection of teachers were related to content and instruction as shown in the survey results. While the extent to which the candidate’s philosophy of learning is a good fit with the school had a response rate of 91% stating often/always, based on the qualitative data this was more aligned to person-organization fit and willingness to assimilate into the prevailing social norms and less about instructional outcomes. As Jay Dales stated, “Obviously, content knowledge is important, but personality and willingness to improve is something that I think is very important.”

What reinforced this observation was the survey data for the stem “The candidate’s ability to increase student achievement in a way that will not necessarily show up on standardized test scores” which had an often/always percentage of 57%. The candidate’s ability to raise student test scores had an often/always percentage response of 30%. The principals clearly did not communicate they value instructional priorities in the qualities and criteria when hiring teachers as much as other areas such as student relationship, engagement, and person-organization fit. This was affirmed in the interviews as well. As Keith Plainfield shared, “I can’t remember the name of the book, you probably know what it is, where it talks about you hire for good character versus skills….” Even when discussing the growth mindset and ability to improve, principals in the interviews connected this more to person-organization fit such as collaboration and working on a team. Keith Plainfield went on to say, “Team player, someone who’s open to constructive feedback, someone who puts kids first versus what’s easiest for them, just
a willingness to learn and be part of the team.” Throughout the interviews there was almost no mention of content expertise or instructional effectiveness as criteria for what was being evaluated in the hiring process. The only comments related to this were in specialized content areas such as choir and industrial technology.

While there were a few isolated comments about observing college transcripts to assess work ethic, there was no mention of the quality of the applicant’s undergraduate experience in relation to preparing them for instructional effectiveness. There was a clear omission in the interviews of principals discussing the quality of the candidate’s individual experience at their undergraduate institution. There was also no mention of the quality of the college or institution of higher learning when evaluating a teaching candidate for hire. These criteria and qualities clearly did not impact or drive decision making for the principals.

**Summary**

In summary, the results for research question one had a significant amount of qualitative and quantitative data that would suggest principals value personality, organization/community fit, growth mindset, ethic of care for students, and people of strong character. What did not show a strong connection to the principal’s decisions were demographic information, content expertise, instructional effectiveness, experience, or collegiate background. Generally, the principals were looking for candidates that would conform to the prevailing culture with some abilities to provide nuance and change within the perceived acceptable limits.
Why do they Look for these Criteria and Qualities?

One of the important aspects of researching how Iowa principals hire was having clarity on why they look for and evaluate particular criteria and qualities. Research has shown that defining why principals choose the criteria and qualities for teacher selection has an impact on their final decision making (Ballou & Podgursky, 1995; Berg & Brimm, 1978; Bourke & Brown, 2014). The evidence was clear in both data sets that cultural and person-organization fit as well as caring student relationships was highly valued. The interview data allowed the researcher to develop deeper insight of what was most important to principals. It also researched criteria and qualities that were identified as not as important in their decision-making.

Foundational Knowledge and Job Descriptions

The survey and interview data showed there was a pervasive theme in why principals looked at different criteria and qualities of teachers. Principals assessed in this study overwhelmingly did not demonstrate foundational grounding of why different teacher criteria and qualities are important to them. In the interviews, only 20% of the principals had a cursory knowledge and understanding of this area. The survey data supported that person-organization fit and relationships dominate principal decision making, but when asked in interviews, they demonstrated little depth of knowledge of why they value these criteria and qualities. When asked if they utilized job descriptions only 59% indicated often/always while 20% said occasionally/never.

The clear theme with the interview data was principals do not use set job descriptions. The most typical answer about job descriptions was they are not used.
Occasionally some principals used brief conversations with the interview/leadership team before the process begins to discuss “what they are looking for” in the candidates. The survey also indicated only 29% of principals often/always used candidate scoring for decision making while 48% stated occasionally/never. With the absence of scoring, this would strongly suggest that identified criteria and qualities are likely lacking. These two data points support each other.

The qualitative data also supported the survey evidence. In the coding of “skills, knowledge, and abilities”, of 985 total codes, respondents only mentioned this topic 21 times. Occasionally, a principal would mention the informal process of discussing with the interview/leadership team a casual list of criteria and qualities they would look for. This was generally occurring in close proximity to the actual interview or immediately after the vacancy was posted. Justin Stocker explained when discussing a recent hiring, “One of the first things that we did with our instructional team, was create essentially a list of qualities or skills that we were hopeful that the next person in that role would have.” He went on to say, “I do think there’s a ton of value in the initial process of having a conversation about the things that we’re looking for in our next hire.”

Conversely, when asked about the use of job descriptions, Lynn Smith shared, “Haven’t had to mess with that much. Haven’t really touched it.” Katie Hartford stated their process had some criteria but indicated that she wasn’t familiar with it or found it useful. “We do use one for our teaching jobs. It’s very brief. You’re teaching this, this, and this. That’s really about it.” Jim Lindenmeyer shared, “If there’s an opening, it
always seems to be something we put together real quick and kind of rush through….it kind of sounds bad, but it’s hard to pinpoint exactly what the description involves…."

The data and evidence suggest that an empirically supported best-practice strategy of utilizing job descriptions was not commonly utilized by the principal sample. Some principals indicated in the interviews they had no knowledge of what job descriptions were or how to use them. Some principals described a hurried and informal conversation before interviewing to give a broad idea of what they were looking for in the teacher. This connected to the data that strongly indicated cultural and person-organization fit as well as student ethic of care as the most important criteria and qualities being assessed. The evidence would also suggest that these areas are likely being evaluated by the principals through natural disposition, bias, or perceived connection to daily school operations. There appears to be a clear lack of thought-out and intentionally created job descriptions and scoring rubric systems.

Teacher Shortage

During the completion and writing of this study, the teacher shortage across the United States had become an urgent and pervasive issue in all schools. Much of this was due to a phenomenon known as the “great resignation” where much of the national workforce either changed jobs or did not return to active employment after the COVID 19 pandemic (Cook, 2021). It had been widely known that a teacher shortage was prevalent across the United States for many years (Aragon, 2016). The pandemic was now clearly exacerbating an already small teacher candidate pool. Across the United States and Iowa, limited pools of teacher candidates became even smaller with the
expected shortages in specialty areas such as content specific high school positions and electives (Carpenter, 2022). What was a new issue was the prevalence of limited candidates in areas that normally showed abundance such as lower elementary and physical education (Carpenter, 2022). This theme was present in every interview (100%) conducted in this study.

The teacher shortage showed relevance in the qualitative data. The general message that was conveyed in the interviews was there was a very real teacher shortage. However, all of the comments in the interviews were anecdotal based on their personal experiences rather than research based. For example, Lynn Smith said, “We just haven’t been in a position where we’ve been able to be very picky. We’ve kind of just had to take what we can get.” This was in reference to questions about using screening tools. He was not in support of using these tools because he felt it would lower the depth of the already low candidate pool. However, he also indicated they do very little marketing for teacher candidates beyond the Iowa Department of Education job posting website. Katie Hartford shared how she felt the applicant pools continued to shrink. “I’ll be honest with you….I’m not going to take two of them because of some test they didn’t do well on?” This was in response to the request for opinions on prescreen candidate assessments. She felt that this continued to squeeze an already small applicant pool so she did not support its application.

**Summary**

Overall, this area of evidence did not yield many specific results. The general themes and patterns were that principals are clearly articulating desired criteria and
qualities of teachers; however, why principals are prioritizing and choosing the selected
criteria and qualities is still vague. Also clear was that principals are not expending time
and resources exploring why they value specific teacher criteria and qualities, nor are
they investing margin in operationalizing and optimizing this area through tools such as a
job description system. This is all occurring in a specific context that was relevant to
2022 and following a global pandemic where principals were all navigating a pervasive
local and national teacher shortage. The context of this environment and absence of skills
of the principals combined to create a situation where the results from the data show the
“why” is not valued as much as the “what”.

**What are the Processes and Systems that Principals use to Determine which Candidates they Select?**

When determining how teachers are selected and hired by principals, there were
clear results in the survey and interview data. Two selection strategies were prevalent at a
high rate that also matched the national research. Several other strategies had strong
application in actual practice and others showed little use with the Iowa principal sample.
The interview data supported what was discovered in the survey.

**Popular and Unpopular Teacher Selection Strategies**

From the survey results, the question of using formal interviews (set questions for
the candidates) and candidate reference check had the strongest results. In the survey
results 98% of principals stated they often/always use formal interviews. In addition,
100% of the principals surveyed stated they often/always use reference checks. Even
more compelling in the results is that both categories had a 0% for occasionally/never.
Other strategies that had strong usage by the principals were teachers and/or classified staff as selection team members with 87% stating often/always and assessment of paper materials such as resume, cover letters, and college transcripts with an 84% always/often response.

Conversely, there were several results that demonstrated there are particular strategies not being implemented in the sample population of principals. Applicant cognitive assessments was the lowest with 92% stating they never/occasionally used this strategy. Casual interview (no set questions for the candidate) was also in low usage with 82% responding never/occasionally and portfolio reviews or presentations by the candidates was 71% never/occasionally. Students as selection team members were also of low utilization at 68% never/occasionally and writing samples from the candidates was also at 68% never/occasionally. Finally, interviews and selection conducted by phone or electronically was 55% never/occasionally.

There continued to be connection and agreement of the survey data with the qualitative interviews. Interviews and committee hiring was a prevalent topic in the data and suggests that this was a common practice. Justin Stocker stated, “Usually a team of four [staff] and we’ll use the questions we created.” Lynn Smith shared that they typically involve any other employees that work directly with the position being hired to participate in the interview process. Katie Hartford said selection processes for them generally involve 4-8 different staff members for the interview as well. Jim Lindenmeyer affirmed that he feels committee hiring is essential. “That’s huge, getting other folks at the table.”
Tied to the committee and group hiring processes was the use of established questions that are created before the interview. Overwhelmingly, in both datasets, the use of established questions was the norm. Some of the principals used set questions consistently such as Justin Stocker who referred to them at times as cookie cutter. Yet he was firm in saying that he knows that scripted questions are vital to keep people legal. He shared, “I think some administrative coaching in advance [principals coaching the interview team on legal issues] about what kinds of questions legally cannot be asked in an interview.”

Another phenomenon within the interview process was the use of “follow up questions.” This was not something that was specifically surveyed; however, it was consistently mentioned in the qualitative interviews. The pattern of comments centered around how the interviews used established prompts and the principals were comfortable and often eager to utilize unscripted follow-up questions. The principals stated this generally led to more organic conversations. Jim Ralphy said, “I like to be kind of informal in a sense that we have predetermined questions to get at. But I like using [follow up questions] as talking points to have more of a conversation to go more in depth.” Marcus Johnson shared, “While I have set established questions, I am willing to go outside of them if there’s a good follow up question that needs to be asked.” Dan Michael shared his feelings about follow up questions by stating, “If somebody goes off topic and goes into something I want to know more about, I can dig into that. I’d say that works well for us.”
Another phenomenon that was noted extensively throughout the interview data was the use of the “school building tour.” This practice was identified by 90% of the principals interviewed with several mentioning it multiple times. The pattern from the principals is that the building tour is where they get to see candidates in an informal setting with their “guard” down. The principals identified they felt this was often the most important and accurate measure of the person-organization fit of a teaching candidate. The principals perceived that more authentic conversations and emotions came from these interactions which gave them better information to make hiring decisions. In regards to the building tour, Justin Stocker said, “That’s my favorite part of an interview, is the tour and the small talk because some of the things that come through in terms of just what’s important to a person, where their values lay, what gets them going, what gets them excited…” Katie Hartford shared, “Honestly, I get the most out of just walking around and talking to the individual as we give the building tour.” Dan Michaels summarized by saying “I like to walk around with them and show them our building. Just get a feel for them there.”

What Hiring Practices Principals Do Not Value

What was compelling in the qualitative interview data were strong feelings on what strategies that principals did not utilize or find value in. Aligned with the quantitative data, writing samples, portfolios, and cognitive assessments were frequently identified in interviews as not utilized or without particular usefulness in the process. The findings presented here from the sample do contradict much of what the empirical research would suggest is effective and best-practice.
Writing samples, where a candidate would do some sort of exercise to demonstrate competency in written communication, had little data to show it was being utilized by the sample group. In the survey, 67% of the principals stated they occasionally/never utilized this strategy, and 80% indicated they did not use or find value in it. Katie Hartford shared her opinion as it might be helpful for somebody teaching English language arts, but otherwise she would not even know what to assess. Jim Lindenymeyer shared that candidate writing samples were occasionally automatically sent to him through an online system they were using. In regards to this he stated, “I’ve never spent time looking at those to be honest with you, and other than that I’ve never had a written response from applicants.”

Contrasted to the tepid use and enthusiasm for candidate writing samples and activities was the high concern for grammar within a candidate’s resume and cover letter. Within the interview samples, the response from the principals was that grammatical errors in a resume or cover letter would get you immediately eliminated from consideration. Katie Hartford shared, “Well, I think obviously, if somebody butchers their resume or butchers their cover letter, it’s probably a sign that they’re probably not the best person to hire for the job.” Betty Jasper felt a similar opinion. “One of the things for me, right or wrong, is any typo errors, I’m just done with it for the most part. Anything that looks messy or it’s just not professional then we’re done…. While this created a paradox with the evidence on writing samples, the interview data would suggest that resumes and cover letters are utilized as de facto writing samples and leveraged regularly as a disqualifier of candidates.
Portfolios generated a very strong response from the interviews and survey data. Seventy percent of the principals stated they occasionally/never reviewed candidate portfolios while 90% stated they felt that they had no value and were a waste of time to even assess. Strong responses included, “Personally, I’ve never gotten super excited about portfolios”, and “I hate them. I don’t want to see your scrapbook.” The principals in the sample clearly articulated that they found little value in the teacher work portfolios as a selection strategy. There was also research that would show the prevailing thoughts and opinions expressed in the interviews aligned with the broader national population of principals (Boody, 2009; Boody & Montecinos, 1997).

Applicant cognitive assessments also received strong opinions in both sets of data. In the survey, 92% of principals stated they occasionally/never utilized this strategy. The interview data supported what the survey was indicating. In the interviews 70% of the principals discussed cognitive assessments and were in consensus they do not utilize them and feel they have little value. The biggest concern among principals was the small pool of candidates would shrink even more if there was another process used for screening. Lynn Smith said, “But man, I do not like those personally. I feel like sometimes you’re going to weed out some candidates that could potentially be really, really good.” There were 20% of principals in the interviews who stated they did not currently use this strategy but might be interested in learning more.

**Teacher Candidate Recruitment**

Advertising and marketing, while not a primary question stem utilized in the surveys or interviews, surfaced as a topic and pattern in the evidence. Prevalent in the
Interview data were principals indicating they felt there is a severe teacher candidate shortage. In the interviews 90% of principals indicated they had concerns and were feeling the impacts of the teacher candidate shortage. This was aligned with national education and workforce trends following the 20-21 pandemic. Closely connected was marketing and recruiting of candidates where 60% of the principals indicated they felt a concern with the lack of advertising and marketing, but did not have strategies or a vision on how to resolve it. Generally, principals talked about utilizing the Teach Iowa system, which was a state website for job vacancies that must legally be used, as well as local word of mouth. Lynn Smith shared how in their community they stumbled into some accidental social media marketing. “It’s kind of funny, we accidentally made a [social media] post. Our PreK-8 principal went to put something on the website and she accidently created a post. When she did that, we actually got candidates that were applying for jobs on the [social media site].”

Dan Michaels shared that he tried to build strong relationships with a local college to attract candidates. “For [university name], I go down and talk to their classes at least once a semester and try to make connections with some of those kids”. What was notably absent was any clear and established strategy by the principals for targeted marketing, recruitment, and discovery of candidates outside of the legally required channels or casual relationships built in the community.

**Decision Rights**

Another interesting finding from the interviews that contrasts with the national research was final decision-making rights on recommendations for hire. The national
research clearly indicates that principals are the decision makers in final recommendations to the school board for hiring teachers. However, within the sample group of Iowa principals, the majority indicated that the superintendent made the final decision, was highly involved in the hiring process, and actively utilized veto rights.

While different than the national research, this had common sense application within the Iowa sample group. The schools interviewed were often very small with three or fewer administrators and the hiring of teachers is generally uncommon and non-routine event. The connection with the central office and field principals was more cohesive due to size and literal physical proximity of the administration. One school did indicate in the interview process that she had “trained” the superintendent to follow the committee recommendation but that it was a struggle at times. Other principals indicated that they were given recommendation-for-hire rights, but it was very clear that the superintendent retained veto power and was willing to use it. It was shared this often affected the principal’s final decision-making process. Lynn Smith summarized with, “So that’s typically how we’ve done it, and the superintendent does all of the hiring and the decision making, rather than the principals. That is probably more unique to being a small school.”

**Summary**

In summary, when the results of the strategies being used and valued in the principal sample were compared to the research base, they often showed alignment. Interviews with set questions, reference checks, and paper material review continued to be the ubiquitous strategies used in the sample group’s hiring and selection processes and matched what the research indicated as prevalent across teacher hiring in the United
States. One difference from the research base is the use of structured interviews and questions. Much of the national research base suggests that conversational and unstructured interviews are very common. The evidence here contradicts the claim with both the qualitative and quantitative data. There was also evidence that many research backed practices are still absent from small Iowa school hiring processes. Principals in the sample reported having little knowledge, background, training, or capacity in many of the research supported best-practice strategies for hiring. This is relevant to the extent that principals in the sample group are likely making opinions and determination of utilization about different teacher hiring processes in the absence of accurate information on actual validity and reliability.

What Bias and Vagaries Exist in the Criteria, Processes, and Systems that Principals Use to Determine the Candidates they Select?

The final research question was to identify bias and vagaries in the criteria, processes, and systems used by the sample group principals. Bias is generally defined as subconscious thoughts that influence action (Highhouse, 2008). Vagaries describe strategies or processes that have dubious validity, reliability, and create possible legal liabilities (Derous et al., 2015; Essary, 1993). The goal of the study was to identify information that might suggest issues and/or challenges that Iowa principals are facing in this area of hiring and selection.

Bias

In general, the interviews indicated there were often opportunities for bias to develop due to various vagaries in hiring and selection of teachers. While candidates did
not explicitly state this during interviews likely due to social desirability, politeness, and unconsciousness, several patterns did become apparent. The likeliest areas for bias often came in opportunities where principals were making decisions on character and personality of a candidate without any valid or reliable method. This was typically in the absence of any listed criteria or qualities aligned to the hiring and selection strategy.

Often, the observations always leaned towards the principal’s own natural dispositions, personality, and unconscious desired conditions. Principals specifically mentioned this in their use of unstructured building tours, follow-up interview questions that led to informal conversations, and reference checking.

Bias with the building tours was noted in the results of the principal interviews. Numerous participants in the study mentioned how they felt this was the most powerful and useful part of the selection process in accurately judging candidate character, fit, personality, and dispositions. However, it was clear there was no use of objective criteria to observe and assess these areas. The interview data also showed that neither job descriptions or rubrics to assess candidates were regularly in use at any level of the hiring and selection process. As Katie Hartford said in a very candid moment, “And right now, we go by that whole gut feeling…..what’s our gut on this person? Is this person better than that person?” Justin Stocker shared his feelings about the building tour as well. “I think it’s super valuable just from the perspective that it maybe gives you a little bit more insight of what somebody's personality might be….” From the interview data, it was clear that principals find value in casual social interactions with candidates to help decision making, however, there was a high probability of bias due to lack of structure.
Another bias that was uncovered in the selection process was the idea of fit. Fit was mentioned numerous times in all of the interviews. Throughout the interviews, 100% of the principals discussed the concept of fit 29 times. Yet the concept of fit was either undefined or misaligned to clinical definitions during the interview discussions. Some interviews discussed fit for the culture of the school, community and staff. Others defined fit as the idea of assimilating to the instructional expectations. Finally, several principals defined fit as how the candidates’ personality would need to match the school’s culture.

The overarching theme from the interviews was the new person should fit the prevailing hegemony rather than have it adapt to them.

Within the concept of fit, the majority of respondents specifically talked about how it impacted the school culture. The expectation was that candidates would have the personality that best aligns to the school culture, especially in regards to interactions with other staff. When talking about candidate fit, Keith Plainfield shared, “Especially when it comes to the culture of your building, because anybody can talk the talk when it comes to being a team player and collaboration, getting along with others, but then you put them in that setting…. ” Jim Lindenmeyer was even more succinct about personality when he shared, “We were looking for somebody who has the right personality, the right fit for the job.”

**Summary**

To summarize the data, bias had the highest probability of interacting pervasively in the selection process when there was a lack of structure. Through the interview and qualitative data that was gathered, it was clear the strategy of using unstructured social
time through building tours heavily impacted decision making. Corresponding to that, the idea of fit was generally a concept driving principal decision making in hiring while there were few objective structures to define and assess this broad idea. Finally, personality and organization fit were mentioned repeatedly as an area that principals are using to assess candidates. The interview data would suggest these areas are subjective, fluid, and connected to the principal’s disposition and natural bias rather than any objective standards that had been previously developed.

**Vagaries**

In discussing vagaries, the study data demonstrated several hiring and selection strategies that likely invited inaccurate results through lack of validity and reliability. The interviews and survey data also crafted a picture of different practices that are occurring regularly in the sample principal schools that *are* aligned to best practice according to empirical research. Together, this helped to provide understanding and visualization of the lived experience of principals engaged in teacher hiring in Iowa schools.

There appeared to be a variety of practices reported as occurring consistently in Iowa schools for teacher hiring and aligned to best practice as supported by empirical research. Some examples of this included committee hiring, established interview questions, and use of extensive referencing of candidates beyond the listed contacts. All of these practices have overwhelming research that can speak to validity and reliability in connection to hiring of personnel.

When asked in the survey about committee hiring, 87% of the principals stated they utilized this strategy often/always. This encompassed the concept of using teachers
and other staff on the hiring teams. This was also mentioned frequently in the interview data. Of the interviewed principals, 100% indicated they used a group process of employees in committee to conduct interviews with candidates. Some of the quotes on the desire to use committee hiring included “I like including a diverse group of people on the interview committee” and “that’s huge, getting other folks at the table.” Keith Plainfield shared succinctly how he thought the committee interview concept was best practice based on his own personal experience. “I guess I’ve been interviewed where it’s just the principal and one other person, or just the principal. I don’t think that’s effective.”

Established interview questions and referencing were two strategies identified as valued and utilized by Iowa principals. In the data 98% of principals stated they used set questions often/always and 100% did referencing often/always. Referencing was an especially important topic among the principals in the interviews. They identified they put little or no value in references listed by the candidates. Principals stated how they used listed references as a springboard to find other people to engage. The interviews also indicated they heavily relied on their own networking to find out more about the candidates. Justin Stocker said, “[References are] highly important to me, especially if the references are coming from people that I’m professionally familiar with and respect.”

Vagaries in the teacher hiring and selection processes in Iowa schools also became clear through the evidence and data. Areas that were identified in both surveys and interviews was the lack of set job descriptions, missing standards/benchmarks for hiring criteria, small number of applicants, desperation, and hiring speed. These were all
areas the empirical research would suggest are either vagaries themselves or invite behaviors that undermine validity and reliability.

The data shows the use of job descriptions was not a common practice among Iowa principals. Only 59% of principals stated they often/always use set job descriptions, while 20% stated they occasionally/never use them. From the interview data, it was clear that the lack of set job descriptions ensured there was ambiguity in what was desired in a hire and how it would be assessed. Several of the interviewees shared they did not use job descriptions and were not even familiar with the concept. Some of the comments by principals about the lack of job descriptions included, “Haven’t had to mess with that much. Haven’t really touched it.” Another interview shared, “We don’t use one for our teaching jobs….I hate writing job descriptions.” There also appeared to be a lack of understanding and connection between the job description and assessment of candidates in the actual hiring process. None of the interviews made mention of how this would influence grading and assessment of candidate hiring process performance.

While 0% of the principals in the interviews discussed a formal job description system, 20% of the pool did talk about an informal process. In each of their processes, there would be a brief casual meeting of the hiring/leadership team a few days before the selection process starts. During this time, the team would begin listing out the criteria and qualities they were personally looking for in the candidates. While there was an existing process, there appeared to be little objective structure on how these criteria and qualities were created. Also, the randomness of the team assembled lower validity and reliability in the hiring and selection process.
Inadequate or missing job rubrics were also a vagary that was a pattern in the data and evidence. In the survey data only 36% of principals stated they used scoring for decision making. In contrast, 48% stated they occasionally/never utilized the strategy. This evidence corresponds well to the other data points. The lack of job descriptions would have a clear connection to the absence of using an objective scoring tool. However, there was some principal comments mentioning rubrics being valuable. There was discussion by two principals of rudimentary rubric systems they had implemented. Justin Stocker shared he used an informal rubric process, “It’s not super scientific, and it’s pretty subjective, but it does give us something to discuss…..” Other interviewees did state they used informal documents with their teams to discuss candidate scoring and help guide decision making. Several mentioned how this had been something they have recently begun to do and it seemed to help. Jim Lindenmeyer said, “Recently, when we’ve been doing that [using rubrics], it helps. It usually separates the candidates a lot and makes the decision a lot easier…..” However, without set job descriptions aligned to the desired criteria and qualities to be evaluated in candidates, rubrics and scoring likely had little effectiveness being used in isolation.

Three connected vagaries that were clear and persistent in the interview data were small candidate pools, desperation, and speed of the hiring process. Coming out of the 20-21 pandemic, it had been widely noted there existed a shortage of talent in all sectors of the economy. Schools were not isolated from this issue. This came out in interview discussions on how principals were disappointed with the small pool of candidates compared to previous years. Connected to that, the principals indicated there was often a
sense of “desperation” because positions needed to be filled and there was a pervasive
fear of beginning the school year missing a staff member. This led to instances of fast
hiring timelines where many processes were skipped in order to secure a “yes” from the
candidate. Naturally this created conditions that introduced different vagaries into the
selection process. Some of the comments from the principals included, “We just haven’t
been in a position where we’ve been able to be very picky. We’ve kind of just had to take
what we’ve been given.” Another principal shared, “If you only have two or three show
up, you get what you get….” Finally, Jim Lindenmeyer stated, “I’ve had situations where
for a job opening, we’ve had two, three applicants total, and you know what? Everybody
gets an interview.”

The principals often stated they were aware of different best-practice strategies
for hiring such as demonstration lessons and screening interviews. However, the
prevailing theme was this was not a valuable use of time or resources because of the
small candidate pools. The teacher shortage was a pervasive theme throughout the
interviews and was connected to a consistent emotion of anxiety. This appeared to be
driving a desperate mindset which resulted in principals moving through hiring processes
quickly.

One phenomenon that is not a vagary but is a researched-based practice that had
inconsistent use among the sample principals was the implementation of demonstration
lessons with students. In the survey, 29% of principals stated they often/always used this
strategy compared to 48% who said occasionally/never. Interconnected was the question
of using students as selection team members. In the survey 12% of principals stated they
used this strategy often/always while 68% stated occasionally/never. Only 30% of principals interviewed stated they often/always used a demonstration lesson for teacher hiring. Of the interviewed principals, 70% indicated they perceived value in the strategy, but did not utilize it. Finally, 20% of the interviewed principals indicated they do not use demonstration lessons and perceived it as a low value strategy.

There was also variety among the supporters of why they perceived value in the demonstration lesson process. Some principals described the instructional practices assessment while others valued seeing the relationship interaction with students and teachers. Marcus Johnson shared how the demonstration lesson with a choir director candidate built ownership of the candidate with the team as well as showed them valuable information for the hire. “It worked out really well, and the kids loved it and it really created buy-in, so that was the good part.” Bet§y Jasper also shared, “I feel like when we didn’t see them teach, we missed some pieces that we wish we could have picked up.” Contrasting this was Katie Hartford who felt the idea did not have high value due to the artificiality, “It does make sense to have teachers show you how they can teach. But then it goes back to the whole putting on a show for one day.”

Summary

In summary, the research showed that principals have been using many different best-practice strategies to positively impact and reduce bias and vagaries in the teacher hiring and selection process. This included using set interview questions, group selection processes, and informally defining criteria and qualities desired in candidates. In contrast, there appeared to be many opportunities for vagaries to create unnecessary bias in the
teacher hiring and selection process. This included lack of defined criteria and qualities articulated in formal job descriptions, overreliance on fit for decision making, unstructured processes that drive decision-making, and absence of tools to counteract normal bias and dispositions of the principals and/or hiring teams.

Chapter Summary

In summary, the data and evidence collected through this mixed methods study provided ample information to develop a clear picture of current principal practices in the hiring and selection of teachers. The study uncovered underlying themes that underpin principal dispositions that drives behaviors in the teacher hiring process. The survey data crafted compelling pictures of practice while the interview evidence gave greater insight and detail into context and motivation. This gathered data and evidence will assist in filling research gaps centered on principal hiring practices in smaller rural settings. The next chapter will conduct a deeper analysis of the findings through triangulation and develop ideas for discussion, implications, further research, and development of principal practices.
CHAPTER 5
DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this study was to investigate and examine the two primary areas of teacher qualities and hiring/selection methods systems in Iowa public school districts with less than 1000 K-12 students. The study was conducted utilizing the following research questions.

● What criteria and qualities do principals look for when hiring teachers?
● Why do they look for these criteria and qualities?
● What are the processes and systems that principals use to determine which candidates they select?
● What bias and vagaries exist in the criteria, processes, and systems that principals use to determine the candidate they select?

To examine these research questions, the study utilized a mixed methods approach. It engaged in analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data that was collected through a concurrent triangulation strategy (Creswell, 2003). The collected data were treated as of equal importance and analyzed simultaneously to confirm, cross-validate, and corroborate findings.

In chapter four, the investigator reported the results of each of the research questions individually. In this chapter, the investigator will combine all of the qualitative and quantitative data collected and discuss the overall results. In addition, the investigator will discuss impact on practice in the field as well as implications for further research. This final level of analysis will use the concurrent triangulation strategy to develop an expanded view of the practices of Iowa principals in the area of teacher hiring and selection (Creswell, 2003). This analysis will provide discussion and implications in the field that could include sustainment, improvement, and additional research on
current/future practices. The data was collected concurrently and simultaneously to give equal weight and importance to all of the information from the survey and interviews.

**What Criteria and Qualities do Principals Look for when Hiring Teachers?**

The first research question focused on “what criteria and qualities do principals look for when hiring teachers?” Within the study evidence, several themes became apparent immediately in both what principals prioritized and what they did not value. In both the survey and interviews, principals clearly were looking for specific criteria and qualities that centered around what they described as a quality fit in the school and community. The principals also prioritized caring relationships with students as essential. After the survey data was then triangulated with the interview evidence other identified important criteria and qualities were discovered that were supportively aligned to these two broad themes.

**Person-Organization Fit**

Using the interview data, it was possible to develop a deeper understanding of these concepts which were being shared through the survey evidence. Within the empirical research, fit is a broad topic and area that encompasses many different attributes of employment in an organization. Often the word fit is used more as a cultural indicator in the organization; however, at the more granular level, it actually refers to the congruence of the candidates’ skills, knowledge, abilities, and values to the organization through the job description (Baker & Spier, 1990; Battelle for Kids, 2017; Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). Within the context of this study, fit was described by the principals as their ability to assimilate to the prevailing culture of the school and community.
The principals in the study often used the term fit when describing what criteria and qualities they were looking for when hiring teachers. Within the research base, the concept of fit is very broad with several specific subcategories. What was uncovered from the study data was that principals were specifically valuing what is known as person-organization fit (Cranston, 2012). When viewed through the specific person-organization criteria and qualities, there was compelling data from the principals that supported this as a priority area of teacher hiring.

A common theme and discussion in the Iowa principal interviews were how important person-organization fit is in the hiring of teachers and that it is one of the most evaluated criteria and qualities they look for. Specifically, the ability to connect and interact with adults in the expected manner was a priority criteria and quality being assessed in teacher selection through the lens of person-organization fit. The survey data showed that 92% of the principals stated they always/often evaluated the candidate’s ability to relate well with colleagues (i.e., other teachers, administrators, and staff in the schools). Ninety one percent of the principals surveyed said always/often to the extent to which the candidate’s philosophy of learning is a good fit with the school.

The interview data strongly suggested that organization-job fit is crucially important to the principals. Lynn Smith stated, “So we really need them to fit into that culture and make sure they’re not going to come in here and just try to do their own thing and step on toes.” Jim Lindenmeyer described fit as “Team player and again, someone who’s cordial, gets along with their peers….best for the team.” When triangulating the interview data with the survey question the extent to which the candidate’s philosophy of
learning is a good fit with the school this was clearly aligned to the concept of caring student relationships. It was also connected to positive role model and character. These attributes showed higher priority and values than any academic knowledge or content philosophies. While fit has many dimensions, the evidence from the sample crafted a picture that highlighted a specific area being prioritized by principals in the teacher hiring process.

The person-organization fit speaks to the unspoken social contract of the new staff to conform to the prevailing hegemony and normative culture. This can be defined behaviorally as “what most of the people do most of the time.” The data from both the survey and interviews suggested that person-organization fit is a driving factor in principal decision making around teacher hiring. It is suggested there is an implicit expectation that new staff joining a school conform to the prevailing social culture for a compliant person-organization fit. There was little evidence from the study that would suggest there is a desire of the principals to have new teachers shift and mold the social culture in any measurable way through new hires. Generally, comments in the interviews focused on teamwork with peers, compliance with assigned tasks, and effective classroom management all of which would inherently make the work of the principal easier.

Closely related was the idea that teacher candidates must be a good fit for the community. Understanding and conforming to the expectations of the larger community beyond the school was something clearly communicated in the study evidence. Within the survey, 93% of the principals stated they always/often looked at a candidate's ability
to serve as a positive role model and 67% the candidate’s ability to relate well with parents. When triangulated to the interview data, it was evident that principals value the person-organization fit not just within the schools, but the greater community.

With community fit, there was a common theme among the principals of what could be described as “rural values.” The interview data showed that these rural values encompassed ideas such as visibility, community involvement, understanding of power structures, and personal relationships with students and parents. It was also an explicit expectation that teachers would contribute their personal time beyond the contract to fit within the greater community. The common pattern among principals was candidates must have a prior understanding of rural values in order to be successful in their schools. Jay Dales said, “We’ve really looked at that a lot and looking for some background in working specifically with kids…in a rural area.” He went on to say, “You know as well as I do that in our small schools it’s super important for these people to be involved in our kids’ lives 24/7….” Jim Ralphy shared that it was important candidates understood the cultural expectations of living in a rural area by sharing, “I want to make sure that candidate sees the entire picture of what comes with the job….it’s the school building, the community, all aspects of it….I want to honor the history and traditions of the school.” Dan Michaels shared,

[Understanding] our community needs is something I try to be cognizant of every single time we make a hire. Is this person going to fit in? Are they going to be able to volunteer, are they going to do those things, or are they going to fit into the feel of our community?
Caring Student Relationships

The other criteria and qualities that showed strong favor within the evidence was the candidate’s ability to build strong and caring relationships with students. In the data, there appeared to be multiple angles to the principal reasoning for the importance of these criteria and qualities. This appeared to be aligned with the prevailing hegemony of the school, principals’ personal beliefs, and general philosophy of education. In the survey data, principals identified that criteria and qualities aligned with caring student relationships was something they deeply value in evaluating future hires. The principals identified at a rate of 93% they often/always evaluated the candidate’s ability to create an engaging and stimulating classroom environment and 93% the candidate’s ability to serve as a positive role model. Principals said they often/always evaluate the candidate’s enthusiasm for teaching at a rate of 97% and the candidate’s classroom management skills at 88%. When this data was triangulated through the interview evidence, the common theme and connection of the data was centered around caring student relationships.

Triangulating the caring student relationship theme with survey and interview data was productive. The evidence showed an alignment and agreement to this theme and pattern. Consistently in the interview evidence collected, strong caring relationships with students was described as very important in the criteria and qualities desired by principals in teachers. As Katie Hartford, a middle school principal shared, “[We are looking for] someone that cares, or you can tell cares about kids, and cares about helping kids become
the best they can be.” This quote around caring student relationships as important to teacher hiring was a common theme in the principal interview data.

What was less clear was a specific understanding of what foundationally underpinned these answers. When describing caring student relationships, the interviews consistently remained at a high balcony view level in their explanations. There was little description of what caring student relationships consisted of other than “loving students.” This was often described in different terms, but always broadly. Principals would describe the concept of caring student relationships in grandiose statements like “being involved in kids’ lives”, “invest in students” and “relate to students by having a good rapport.”

One specific nuance of reasoning uncovered about principals' desire for teachers to have caring student relationships was tied closely to their expectation of strong classroom management skills. Interview conversations about caring student relationships often pivoted to comments about classroom management and teachers’ ability to command a group of students. This would suggest that caring student relationship comments by the principals might be more about discipline, structure, and ease of school management. Lynn Smith shared in the same conversation, “First thing that I’m looking for is just that I’m going to feel confident putting them in front of kids, and the kids aren’t going to run the room.” Marcus Johnson shared, “Can you [Teacher candidates] instantly or at least partially command the respect of the kids?”

The phenomenon of a principal’s desire to find candidates with skill in caring student relationships likely had multiple motivations. In the conversations during the
principal interviews, John Dewey’s influence through his epistemology was on display in many of the responses when describing caring student relationships. As Dewey (1902) explained, civil society and ethical ideas are fundamental to education. This underlining school of philosophy and thought that underpins education in the United States begins to explain the interview responses from principals. In addition, there is strong evidence in the data to suggest that caring student relationships has a deep practical implication on daily school operations and classroom management. Principals are generally the primary manager of student discipline issues that rise above the classroom levels. The schools in this study have student populations under 100 students. Therefore, they often lacked resources such as assistant principals, behavior interventionists, and deans of students. This put the majority of student behavior issues directly on the principal’s list of management responsibilities. Having teachers with strong classroom management skills either through student relationships or even compliance inherently lowers the amount of work and responsibility for the principal in daily school operations. It could be inferred from the evidence that principals focus on the importance of caring student relationships in teacher hiring is connected to both natural dispositions of education being responsible for developing better citizens as well as creating an environment that naturally makes their own jobs easier by lowering behavior management responsibilities.

Low Priority Criteria and Qualities

Also demonstrated in the study evidence was criteria and qualities principals do not value in their teacher hiring and selection. A specific theme uncovered was that principals typically do not prioritize evaluating teacher criteria and qualities that have
direct connections to content teaching expertise and student achievement as measured by traditional academic measures. This was apparent in the survey data as the principals stated low “often/always” percentages of criteria and qualities directly connected to student achievement. Most compelling in the survey data was the 30% often/always percentages uncovered when principals were asked if they evaluate the candidate’s ability to raise student test scores. Other supporting factors around content expertise also had low survey scores. Principals chose always/often in their candidate criteria evaluation with advanced degrees at 9%, the effectiveness of the college or graduate program the candidate attended at 29%, and the candidate’s ability to increase student achievement in a way that will not necessarily show up on standardized test scores at 57%.

When this data was triangulated with interview evidence it reinforced the idea that content expertise, educational background, and ability to raise student achievement through testing were low priorities when compared to person-organization fit and caring student relationships. Marcus Johnson stated, “I can help somebody be a better teacher of social studies content, but having them connect with a student or connect with another human being is a little bit more difficult to teach.” Dan Michaels said, “Obviously, content knowledge is important, but personality and willingness to improve themselves is something that I think is very important.” Connected to the idea of caring student relationships was Keith Plainfield who stated, “Classroom management is huge…you know that classroom management isn’t built by reading a book….” Throughout the evidence and data, the principals interviewed would give minor acknowledgment of content expertise, but then immediately prioritize areas around person-organization fit.
and caring student relationships. Throughout the data, the only time that content knowledge was expressly mentioned was in specific specialized areas such as industrial technology and vocal music.

The other area of criteria and qualities of teachers that principals consistently stated they are not evaluating is demographic backgrounds. When asked about demographics, the survey showed very low rates of principals choosing always/often around the candidate’s gender (3%), candidate ethnicity (3%), and how far the candidate lives from the school (6%). It should be mentioned that these evaluative areas could be considered discriminatory if used in illegal or unethical determinations on teacher hiring. However, when triangulated to the interview data, legality was not cited as a reason for not evaluating these areas. This could be due to the fact the principals did not consider this a priority or also because of social desirability in their interview responses for the study.

In the interviews, demographic data did surface in various ways, especially in what principals were seeking. While it was never explicitly stated that candidates would be disqualified because of gender, race, or familial status, criteria principals identified they were looking for clearly shaped a lens that likely could be exclusionary due to the demographics of the schools. The Iowa sample schools are predominantly white, Christian socialized, and female teacher majority which drives the composition of the teacher candidate pool. When the pool of candidates is so similar and aligned to community demographics, the odds of selecting an outlier with a diverse background decreases. Jim Lindenmeyer stated, “If you don’t live in town, we’re not going to hire
you. I understand we can’t base a decision on that….if you’re living [in another town], well that doesn’t work for me. You’ve got to live in the community.” Jay Dales said, “So we’re of the philosophy that we can certainly do a lot of teaching to our new teachers if they are passionate about working in a rural school that really has some traditional meanings.” This triangulated with the concept of person-organization fit that principals identified as essential criteria and qualities. Principals clearly valued the concept of organization-fit in the demographically white majority, Christian hegemony dominated schools they served. The implication suggests an implicit bias and exclusion of candidates of color, diversity, and differing familial status compared to the school and community’s dominant culture. Whether this is driven by implicit bias, systemic oppression, or the natural outcome of a teacher workforce that has been shaped by generations of paternalism and racism is not clear. However, the evidence suggests that diversity in the sample pool is not prevalent, nor a priority of the principals in the hiring process. These small rural school results showed generalized agreement and alignment with Engel’s (2013) work that was conducted in an urban school environment.

Implications

There are numerous implications that were uncovered in the study for current and future teacher hiring practices. The evidence casts a compelling picture that principals are consistently hiring teachers based on person-organization fit and caring student relationships. This leads to many different implications in sustaining highly effective practices and improving other less valid and reliable methods.
With the priority focus of Iowa principals and their teacher hiring centered around candidate fit and assimilation to the values of the organization, there are several areas that can be improved and aligned for increased validity and reliability through professional learning and training. Since person-organization fit is a hiring priority, there is a need to identify and clarify the organization’s values, articulate them, and then align hiring processes. The study evidence also suggests that even though principals are prioritizing person-organization fit, there is a large void in properly identifying and evaluating this area.

Another implication was that caring student relationships was heavily weighted in Iowa principal decision making on teacher hiring. This was identified in a variety of survey results and interviews. However, this remained a broad concept with the principals that lacks specificity and definition. The study evidence would suggest there are varying and competing reasons why principals are prioritizing caring student relationships as a criteria and quality they evaluate in teacher hiring. Some principals identified this as showing an alignment to their own philosophical values of the purpose of education. With these principals, the evidence suggests they value the idea of education being the system to drive student character development and expected socialized behaviors valued by society. This would be aligned to Dewey’s (1902) underlying epistemology that underpins much of basic teacher education in the United States.

The counterpoint was the idea that caring student relationships might be a proxy and code phrase connected to effective classroom management and student compliance. While principals were identifying caring student relationships in their interviews, deeper
discovery suggested this was connected to effective classroom management expectations for student compliance. Classroom management can often cause the biggest level of organizational management responsibilities for a principal. Therefore, when a teacher possesses effective classroom management skills, the workload on principals inherently decreases. This also led to observations that principals have an ambiguous definition of effective classroom management skills when assessing teacher candidates. In the interviews it was often generalized and given in broad terms. The evidence suggested that principals were typically inferring that effective classroom management is tied to student compliance. The survey data showed that principals selected always/often at 97% when asked if they prioritized the candidate's ability to create an engaging and stimulating classroom environment. They also chose often/always at 97% when surveyed about candidate’s enthusiasm for teaching. However, the interview data suggested the survey results was actually communicating the principal’s desire for strong classroom management outcomes from teachers to create a culture of compliance that eased the administrative burden of student behavior management.

Interconnected from these two implications is the low value that principals put on criteria and qualities of teacher hiring supporting student achievement. It was apparent through the survey data and interview evidence these were not areas that were being consistently evaluated or valued by the principals. The compelling survey point was principals had a low 30% often/always response rate when asked about a candidate’s ability to raise student test scores. Triangulated interview and survey data suggested candidates’ expertise and ability to improve student academic achievement is generally
not evaluated by the sample Iowa principals. This has strong implications for principals and teachers. With public schools across the United States being held deeply accountable to standardized test scores and other high-stakes and objective student achievement measures, the phenomenon of principals not evaluating these criteria and qualities in future teachers is concerning. There appeared to be a consistent misalignment between the inherent personal values of the principals and the societal and political focus on high-stakes test scores when it was related to the criteria and qualities of hiring teachers.

Summary

To summarize this section, the evidence collected through this study on research question one strongly suggested that principals prioritized person-organization fit and caring student relationships in hiring teachers. The counterpoint is the little emphasis in the hiring and selection process that principals put on the teacher's ability to raise student test scores. This creates a phenomenon where principals continue to value the importance of caring student relationships and its connection to effective outcomes more than a teacher’s capacity to increase student standardized test scores (Ravitch, 2016; Zhao, 2012). Research still strongly suggests that effective relationships are essential for student success both socially and academically (Bryk, 2010; Ravitch, 2016; Zhao, 2012). The principals in this study are maintaining their focus on criteria and qualities of teacher hiring centered on person-organization fit and student relationships despite the overwhelming pressure of politics and modern society on increasing standardized test scores (Bryk, 2010; Payne, 2008; Ripley, 2013; Ravitch, 2016). What principals were stating they valued in candidates and actively assessed in hiring and selection processes
demonstrated the likelihood of misalignment to the national movement of high stakes testing, but harmony with John Dewey’s (1902) classical philosophical vision of American education.

**Why do they Look for these Criteria and Qualities?**

The second research question focused on why principals evaluated and prioritized particular criteria and qualities when hiring teachers. Within the study evidence, several themes became apparent as to why principals valued some criteria and qualities while dismissing others. The phenomenon that surfaced in this research question was most of the reasons and behaviors for the principals’ decisions were based on implicit knowledge driving their determinations as well as responding to the current teacher hiring environment.

The survey and interview data showed there was a pervasive theme in why principals looked at different criteria and qualities of teachers. Based on the evidence, principals were generally spending little or no intentional time or resources to actively decide and discuss why they prioritized particular teacher criteria and qualities. Instead, it appeared that many principals were “behaving their way” into their decisions. Principals in the study showed they often engaged in cursory and low-effort processes to discuss teacher criteria and qualities. Even more prevalent in the data were principals not engaged in any processes at all.

Principals assessed in this study openly shared they did not have foundational grounding in understanding why choosing teacher criteria and qualities was important. Only 20% of the interviewed principals communicated any knowledge in this area. In
addition, the survey data supported that cultural fit and relationships dominated decision making. But when asked in interviews there was little knowledge or additional insight as to why principals felt these areas were important. When surveyed if they utilized job descriptions only 59% of the principals indicated often/always while 20% said occasionally/never. While not technically a violation of employment law, this environmental reality puts schools and principals in a situation of extreme liability for legal action by candidates.

Within the interview data, the area of job descriptions demonstrated the clearest insight into this research question. The principals in the interviews demonstrated very little knowledge of what job descriptions were or how they might be implemented for best-practice. Within the interview groups, only 10% of principals stated they used any form of a job description. This was described as a casual list of what the instructional and interview teams were looking for. The principal stated this was something new they had begun to implement and referred to it as the “initial conversation” the team would have to describe what they were looking for in teacher hires. At the beginning of the process, it was clear from the interview this was still informal and not always consistently applied to all teacher hiring processes. The evidence collected in the study strongly suggested job descriptions are not being utilized as common practice across Iowa schools under 1000 K-12 students in the hiring of teachers. Without robust structures, there are little systems or avenues for principals to explore and expand on “why” they have selected certain teacher criteria and qualities in their hiring processes.
Contrast this current hiring environment with formal job description systems that are shown in the research to be best-practice, and there was a considerable gap in principal hiring and selection systems (Battelle for Kids, 2017). Job descriptions are vital for clarifying the values of an organization as well as the bonafide skills, knowledge, and abilities needed to perform in the position effectively. It was also important to provide procedures to implement real-time employee feedback and ensure job descriptions remain accurate and relevant (Battelle for Kids, 2017). With job descriptions generally not being utilized in hiring processes, it was inferred that many decisions being made by principals are based on implicit and free-floating priorities as well as inaccurate data from the hiring teams. Hiring processes that lacked foundational grounding in job descriptions inherently have lower validity (Battelle for Kids, 2017). This reality had an impact on principal decision-making as it increased the risk of ineffective hires which had broad implications on successful outcomes for students.

Connected was the lack of using scoring and/or rubrics for assessing candidate performance in hiring and selection exercises. In the interview data it became clear that the use of scoring and/or rubrics to assess candidates in the hiring and selection process was not a common practice. The survey indicated only 29% of principals chose often/always when asked if they used scoring for decision making while 48% stated occasionally/never. In the interview data 10% of the principals indicated they used both rubrics and scoring while 10% stated they used only scoring. This evidence closely aligned to the information gathered around job descriptions. Without a strong basis of standards for skills, knowledge, and abilities that was established and considered reliable,
there would be little or no reason to create rubrics or scoring. Rubrics and scoring in hiring processes are almost always derived from the creation of job descriptions as a natural evolution. In the outlier, interviewed principals who were using rubrics and scoring for their answers indicated they had learned in principal professional development of this being “best-practice” so they implemented it into their systems. However, they articulated no knowledge of job descriptions. It appeared there was a gap in learning of the inherent connection scoring and rubrics have with job descriptions in order to be effective.

What the principal interviews also suggested is the teacher hiring shortage was impacting and influencing their decision making. The teacher shortage showed relevance in the qualitative data. The general message conveyed in the interviews was the teacher shortage is very real. Lynn Smith said, “We just haven’t been in a position where we’ve been able to be very picky. We’ve kind of just had to take what we can get.” This was the prevailing feeling among the principals when asked in the interviews about why certain criteria and qualities were important and specifically about using screening tools to evaluate these areas. The principals shared their concern about using any strategies that would lower their applicant pools in light of the teacher shortage. The evidence suggested this prevailing disposition had an impact on the principals and their answers; they did not feel they had the luxury or margin to give time and resources to better understand why certain criteria and qualities were important to them. The generalized feeling was the candidate pool was as good as it was going to get and it had to be accepted at face value.
Implications

The implications derived from the study of this research question is that this is an area that could use additional resources and effort to improve practices of current principals. Helping principals understand that investing adequate effort towards the understanding of why certain criteria and qualities of teachers are being valued and evaluated for hiring decisions could provide high return on investment for successful school outcomes. Principals also need robust training and learning on how job descriptions aligned with rubrics and scoring systems could improve validity and reliability of teacher hiring processes. Without improved principal learning and professional training, decision making for teacher hiring will continue to suffer from bias, unaccounted environmental factors, free-floating priorities, and unstructured influence from the hiring teams. In addition, this phenomenon is being heavily influenced by a prevailing teacher shortage that is lowering principal expectations when hiring. With lowered expectations and unstructured priorities in criteria and qualities, this creates a hiring ecosystem that has low validity and reliability. Principals need continued professional learning on how to improve high validity and reliability decision-making in teacher hiring while also being responsive to navigate the national labor shortage.

Summary

It is clear this research question is worthy of additional academic study and focus to improve practice. There is considerable evidence in this study to suggest that the sample principals are using unstructured and free-floating priorities when hiring teachers. Evidence also suggested principals are using little effort to better clarify what are the
prioritized criteria and qualities of hiring teachers. There exists ample research to show best-practice strategies to improve this area of principal capacity. There is a need for intentional effort to invest and equip leaders to have a basis in this information to improve outcomes for students when hiring and selecting new teachers. While the teacher shortage is not a new issue facing schools across the United States, it continues to become more pervasive in its impact on local schools. It will still be imperative that principals continue to define why criteria and qualities of teachers are important to their schools and make decisions grounded in that knowledge. The phenomenon of principal fear and desperation due to the national teacher shortage driving decision making and resulting in lowered expectations for hiring is a real risk to students and their future success.

**What are the Processes and Systems that Principals use to Determine Which Candidates They Select?**

When studying the processes and procedures principals utilized to make decisions on which teachers to hire, the analysis crafted a clear picture. Several of the selection strategies prevalent in the practice of sample principals were present at a high rate. In contrast, there were several selection strategies that had little or no application with the principals. Several of the highly utilized strategies matched the empirical research on effectiveness. There was also several promising research supported practices that had little application in the current work of the sample principals. The interview data supported what was discovered in the survey and gave greater context and insight to reasons, decision-making, and motivation in principal hiring decisions.
Popular Teacher Selection Strategies

The triangulated evidence suggests there are many teacher hiring and selection practices that are commonly utilized by the sample population of Iowa schools. This included using formal interviews, reference checks, group/committee hiring teams, and assessment of candidate paper materials. Specifically, the survey results showed 98% of principals stated they often/always use formal interviews and 100% of the principals stated they often/always use reference checks. Other strategies that had strong usage by the principals were teachers and/or classified staff as selection team members with 87% stating often/always and assessment of paper materials such as resume, cover letters, and college transcripts with an 84% always/often response.

When triangulated to the interview evidence, there was a natural alignment occurring between the data sets. The use of interviews, references, and paper material checks was a consistent theme with 100% of the interviews sharing they utilized these strategies. This agrees with national empirical research that suggests these three strategies are not only routine and expected, but even socialized as a cultural expectation in hiring (Baker & Cooper, 2005; Ballou, 1996; Balter & Duncombe, 2006; Buckley et al., 2000). What contradicted national research was the use of group processes in hiring. National research suggests many teacher hiring processes are being completed in isolation with the principal or an extremely small team of people (Joyce, 2008; Kersten, 2008; Konsoske-Graf et al., 2016; Liu & Johnson, 2006).

In this study, 100% of the interviewed principals stated they always use a group process with a variety of employees in the hiring and selection process. Lynn Smith
stated, “[The hiring team] we typically involve anybody else who would be directly working with that individual….” Katie Hartford shared, “We have a committee of about anywhere from four to eight typically…we have administration, staff, and depending on the job, some people from the community.” Triangulated to the survey data 87% of interviewed principals stated they use teachers/classified staff members as selection team members. The study evidence would indicate that group interviewing is becoming a standard practice among the sample principals. This is a practice which research has shown to lower bias and increase reliability/validity in the hiring of teachers (Battelle for Kids, 2017; Kersten, 2008).

In the use of these different strategies, it became evident that principals often lack grounding in the reasons why they used and valued particular hiring methods. The interview evidence suggested that many of the processes being used by principals were in place based on cultural expectations and traditions of the organization. It also appeared that principals were often meeting the unspoken cultural norms and legal obligations through the processes they chose for hiring and selection while finding avenues in the margins to push in strategies they valued more.

Principals made comments that suggested the formal structured interview was an expectation but there were other processes they valued more. Katie Hartford stated, “[In the interview] Yes, we get off into some conversations that are way off the questions. But we also tell our candidates that too, when they come in, that we want this to be a conversation more that just a serious step-by-step interview.” Jim Ralphy said, “So I think it has to be, it can’t be too structured, but it can’t be a free for all, you know what I
mean? So it just has to be, I usually have a set of between 10-15 questions.” The phenomenon which became apparent was principals felt a cultural expectation to have structured interviews with set questions. This was also attributed by some of the interviewed principals as “staying legal.” Even in this context, principals could not specifically identify what “staying legal” meant other than a broad notion that structured interviews were best-practice. The second part of the phenomenon was principals identified in the evidence they preferred unstructured conversations with candidates to get a better sense and understanding of who they were as people. The principal interview data consistently stated that follow up questions off the interview script and informal social time on building tours was deeply valued. The paradox was that principals felt the expectation to have structured interviews due to unnamed socialized demands but value other informal tools to evaluate candidates. This appeared to create unnecessary tension, wasted effort, and confusion for the principals as they balanced these competing external demands with their own priorities.

Another tension that was clear from the results was the screening of candidate paper materials. In the survey, 88% of principals stated they often/always screened the paper materials such as resume and cover letters. This was also prevalent in the interview data with 100% of the principals stating they used some sort of candidate paper material review. While principals stated they used this strategy, the comments showed they perceived low value in it. Jim Lindenmeyer said, “[The] resume could hurt you definitely, but it’s not going to get you the job….” He went on to say he generally only found value in the resume when there was a large group of candidates, “I’ve had 50-60 applicants and
that’s where I think it becomes more important to look through the resume.” When asked about paper materials, Jim Raphly stated, [They’re] data points. I think they are important, but not the deciding factor.” Most succinct was Marcus Johnson who shared his disdain for the whole process when he said, “I rarely, if ever, look at a college transcript, only to the bare minimum extent to make sure they have completed college. [Paper materials] the process is dumb. Cover letters and resumes are very useless.” This raised the greater question of why principals are investing time, resources, and energy into processes they perceive to have little value. The unspoken socialized cultural norms of hiring expectations for principals seemed to have a deep impact on the strategies and decisions they made in the teacher hiring process.

The one process principals commonly used and communicated value in was the use of references. In the survey 100% of principals stated they always/often did reference checks on teacher candidates. Even more compelling was that 0% of the principals stated they never/occasionally reference teacher candidates. This was also confirmed and supported by the interview data with 100% of principals stating they conducted reference checks on teacher candidates. Principals put high importance on reference checks that were not listed by candidates and how much they relied on their personal peer networks for validity. Specifically, principals identified they felt references listed by candidates were useless and they preferred to talk to people they knew personally and respected professionally. Justin Stocker said, “[References are] highly important to me, especially if they are coming from people that I’m professionally familiar with and respect….I do put a lot of stock into what respected administrators and teachers have to say….” Jay Dales
stated, “References are crucial, but so are those that aren’t on the list. It’s so easy to have references who are going to say glowing and fabulous things about you.” Dan Michaels summed up his feelings about on-page references with “You’re not going to put somebody on a reference list if they’re not going to say good things about you.”

Principals also generally used references as a tool to discover negative attributes about candidates rather than positive information. Principals specifically explained how they used reference checks to uncover deficit information about candidates including risks, weaknesses, and personality flaws. The principals rarely spoke of how they were looking for positives and strengths of the candidates. This was especially clear when principals stated they had no value in listed references who would only say “nice things.”

The phenomenon of references being routinely used contrasts with the evidence that principals have minimal training, capacity, and knowledge in how to effectively employ this strategy. The interview evidence suggested that references are being casually conducted at random times in the selection process. For example, some principals indicated they would do reference checks before bringing candidates in for a formal selection process. Others shared they generally only conducted reference checks after a hiring decision had been made for legal purposes. There appeared to be a lack of structured system or scripts for principals to use when conducting reference checks.

Despite their popularity with principals, the variability in timing, structure, and process, likely introduces the opportunity for vagaries to develop in the process. Reference checks in the sample principal group show a need for implementation of greater consistency through research and training to maximize validity and reliability.
**Popular Strategies Implications**

There are several implications for practice and research around popular strategies principals engage in when selecting teachers for hire. The amount of unaligned and squandered energy being expended by principals to employ strategies that have questionable effectiveness and they feel have little value is an area that needs further study and suggestions for improvement. It is evident that attention to this area could improve effectiveness and efficiency for teacher hiring through research, training, and investing in principal practice.

It is also suggested that practices such as reference checks which were identified as common operating procedures and deeply valued by principals will require additional research and capacity building to maximize effectiveness. The evidence of the study shows even though reference checks are a common and valued strategy, the knowledge and capacity of the principals in applying it effectively is generally low. The persuasive observation within this theme was that many common hiring and selection strategies being implemented in practice by principals are occurring in a knowledge and capacity vacuum. The principals are unable to articulate the specific reasons or research why a hiring practice is being implemented and its value to validity and reliability. Much of what is occurring appears to be based on organizational tradition, cultural norms, and socialized expectations. More research and improvements in field practice could benefit this area of hiring and selection for principals.
Popular Strategies Summary

The study evidence for popular selection strategies showed structured interviews, group hiring processes, review of paper materials, and reference checks were common practices across principals in the sample population. Many of the strategies being utilized by principals are occurring based on socialized expectations rather than their perceived value. Inherently connected were principals finding avenues to meet the cultural hiring expectations while also embedding practices they find more valuable and effective. This was also occurring in the context of an environment where the desired practices for hiring and selection may have questionable validity and reliability. It is curious the amount of energy principals are investing in strategies they clearly do not value or perceive as effective. This is an area of further research for understanding and practice improvement.

Unpopular Teacher Selection Strategies

Principals in the survey and interviews were transparent on the strategies for hiring and selection they did not utilize and/or value. Specifically, the survey showed results that demonstrated particular methods not being implemented in the sample population of principals. Applicant cognitive assessments had the lowest response with 92% stating they never/occasionally used this strategy. Casual interview (no set questions for the candidate) was also low in usage with 82% responding never/occasionally. Portfolio reviews/presentations by the candidates was identified by principals as 71% never/occasionally. Students as selection team members was also of low utilization at 68% never/occasionally. Writing samples from the candidates was at a 68% response rate.
of never/occasionally. Finally, interviews and selection conducted by phone or electronically was 55% never/occasionally.

Interview responses triangulated and connected with much of the survey data. Common among the unpopular strategies with little or no utilization were often strong negative feelings associated with the practices. Specifically, teacher work sample portfolios and cognitive screening tools elicited strong negative reactions from the principal interviews despite empirical research suggesting both of these tools do have value in validity and reliability (Boody & Montecinos, 1997; Dipboye & Gaugler, 1993; Smith, 2014). Other strategies had a more neutral feeling from the principals. Using students as members of the selection team was a process that was not utilized by 90% of the interviewed principals. However, when asked in interviews the principals generally had neutral or positive reactions to the concept. Using electronic screening interviews also had low utilization even though it has shown value in the research base. The consistent reasoning from interview principals of not using this strategy was due to low numbers of applicants making it redundant rather than any negative feelings or dispositions.

When the principals discussed underutilized strategies such as applicant cognitive assessments and teacher portfolios that elicited strong negative responses, there was evidence they did not possess strong background knowledge or experience in the methods. The principals in the interviews consistently presented anecdotal evidence and personal reasons for not finding value in the strategies. They did not present evidence of extensive experience, research base knowledge, or other similar reasons for their distaste.
Lynn Smith shared a compelling example of the phenomenon of professional opinions on hiring practices without knowledge or direct experience when he discussed personality screener tools. He admitted he didn’t have any personal experience or knowledge with the tool yet still had a very strong opinion regardless. “I do not like those, personally. I feel like sometimes you’re going to weed out some candidates that could potentially be really really good.” Smith’s comments followed a pattern of the principals interviewed. They often had strong professional perceptions on a hiring method, but demonstrated no actual training, knowledge, or experience that was underpinning their opinions. Only 10% of the interviews showed any desire to learn more about personality assessments. Betty Jasper admitted she did not have any prior experience, but thought there could be value in learning more. “We don’t use something like that but that’s something that we were definitely interested in looking at with candidates, like trying to tease out what their personality is….”. Even with this outlier observation on personality assessments, her opinions were not grounded in research or experience.

This pattern of strong negative opinions was even more apparent with teacher work portfolios. Of the principals interviewed 100% communicated negative feelings with this hiring tool. Most of the principals interviewed did have some direct experience with the teacher portfolios either as administrators or as teacher candidates. However, none of the principals interviewed demonstrated knowledge or training on how to effectively utilize this strategy. The developed conclusions were generally from personal experience that lacked professional background knowledge or training on how to engage
the strategy for effective outcomes. Most of the opinions were derived from direct personal experience. Jim Lindenmeyer said, “I remember when we used to have teachers bring their teaching portfolios from college….Well ok, I’m probably not going to look at that though. I’m not going to spend three hours looking at your college assignments. I’d say that’s probably one thing I’ve never really seen much value in.” Other interviews were more succinct with Marcus Johnson saying, “I never look at them.” Jay Dales was most passionate with “I hate them. I don’t want to see your scrapbook.” The most consistent observation was principals often developed strong professional opinions about strategy value based on observational data that was often incomplete or lacked validity.

An unexpected phenomenon in the study evidence was principals avoiding some strategies that are high risk and show low effectiveness. All 100% of the interviewed principals stated they did not engage in unstructured interviews alone with candidates. This technique has been shown to have highly ineffective results for validity and reliability as it is one of the most fertile environments for bias and vagaries to develop. It also has strong implications for exposing schools and principals to legal liability. In the interviews principals consistently stated they felt this was not best-practice and also seemed legally questionable. However, the interviewed principals were not able to articulate why they felt this way or what training had occurred in the past to drive this avoidance of the practice.

**Unpopular Strategies Implications**

An implication for principals was the need to build more capacity for professional learning to improve practice grounded in research. This data showed that principals are
consistent in the teacher hiring practices they report utilizing and avoiding. Much of their
decision making on practices is aligned to national empirical research. Overall, most
hiring strategies being utilized can be categorized as “traditional” to what prevailing
practice has been over the last 50 years. The only deviation noted was the use of group
and committee interview teams which was a counterpoint to previous national research.

The bigger implication was principals needing to build their own capacity to
understand hiring strategies that may have strong value in improving validity and
reliability. To build capacity in this area there is a need for intentional effort to bring
additional training and professional learning to principals. One key goal will be to realign
unenlightened opinions that principals possessed about a particular practice. Another
purpose would be to intentionally invest in principals to learn about strategies and
techniques in teacher hiring practices that could be utilized effectively to improve
practice and outcomes. These two steps could build strong competence and confidence
for principals to expand their repertoire of tools in teacher hiring and selection. Continued
improvement in these areas will ultimately benefit students and schools with more
effective hiring outcomes.

**Unpopular Strategies Summary**

When analyzing the study evidence on what principals are not utilizing as hiring
and selection strategies due to low perceived value, a clear picture emerges. Principals
are avoiding strategies where they possess little knowledge and experience. This is a
common-sense observation as people typically do not express confidence or competence
in areas they have little knowledge in. The curious phenomenon is that the sample
principals are developing and applying strong emotional opinions to their professional practice based on scant knowledge or experience. Consistent in the interviews were principals sharing professional opinions about hiring strategies they perceive as useless while unable to cite research or experience that would justify their feelings and decisions. It also appeared that principals are making broad opinions on different hiring strategies and techniques based on scant evidence and data. Instead, they are relying on their own intuition and dispositions to make final decisions on how teacher candidates will be hired and selected.

**What Bias and Vagaries Exist in the Criteria, Processes, and Systems that Principals Use to Determine the Candidates they Select?**

The last research question focused on identifying bias and vagaries in the criteria, processes, and systems used by the sample group principals in the hiring and selection of teachers. Bias is defined as subconscious thoughts that influence action (Highhouse, 2008). Vagaries describe strategies or processes that have dubious validity, reliability, and create possible legal liabilities (Derous et al., 2015; Essary, 1993). The goal of the study was to identify information that might suggest issues and/or challenges that Iowa principals are facing in this area of hiring and selection.

In order to maintain accurate and objective information for this research question, much of the evidence was collected through interviews rather than survey data. A limitation of the survey would be inaccurate answers due to social desirability. There are some inferences that can be drawn from the survey data; however, the principal interviews provided the richest and most robust evidence for this research question.
Survey questions that give context for bias and vagaries were part of the hiring and selection strategies questions. Specifically, question stems around particular hiring topics provided some information and context. When asked if principals use casual interviews (no set questions for the candidates) an 82% majority stated never/occasionally. When surveyed about using scoring for decision making the evidence was less clear as 49% of the principals stated never/occasionally and 30% often/always. The former question, which is known to have broad validity and reliability issues seemed to have little use with the sample principals. The latter, which is known to improve validity and reliability in hiring and selection received a lukewarm reception as a methodology. The survey data showed that to better answer the research question, the interviews of the principals would provide the preponderance of evidence.

**Bias**

Evident in the bias interview evidence was the principals’ overreliance on making teacher hiring decisions based on person-organization fit. These decisions appeared to be made based on principal evaluation of the candidates’ personality, character, and interpersonal interactions. These decisions were generally being evaluated and made in a context that lacked concrete identification of the ideal values and behaviors desired. Principals consistently communicated in the interviews there was a level of “feeling” they were using to assess candidate viability in regards to personality and character. Coupled with a lack of formal job descriptions, the evidence suggested that bias was being naturally infused in principal decision-making. As Katie Hartford bluntly stated, “And
right now, we go by that whole gut feeling…..what’s our gut on this person? Is this person better than that person?”

Principals also demonstrated their own personal values and dispositions were often driving their decisions. In the absence of systems such as job descriptions and identified school values, person-organization fit becomes challenging to assess with candidates without personal opinions becoming a driving decision factor. Jay Dales shared an example of this when he stated, “[Emotions] I wear mine right on my sleeve and I’ve always looked for the candidate who also wears theirs on their sleeve.” This answer demonstrated an infusion of a similarity bias where people naturally gravitate towards people that resemble them (Battelle for Kids, 2017). Marcus Johnson even mentioned how he would train the secretary to assess candidate personality attributes for him. “[I ask the secretary] when they came in, how did they approach you? What kind of questions did they ask? Was it a good collegial conversation? Or were they quiet and reserved and they wouldn’t talk to you at all?” This served as another example where natural disposition, in this case extroversion, was driving decision-making for the principal and even influencing how he trained others to assess candidates.

One of the biggest driving factors of principal bias in the hiring and selection process was the incomplete and vague notion of “fit”. Principals consistently stated in the interviews that fit was important to them. Less clear was principals showing capacity and understanding of the research and how to assess and apply concepts of fit effectively. Fit was often spoken in broad terms. The research base shows there are a variety of specific identified concepts that define fit. Cranston (2012) identifies different strands of fit such
as person-vocation, person-job, person-organization, and person-group. After analyzing the interview data, the researcher was able to triangulate the principal’s responses and inferred they are aligning their broad concept of fit to the specific strand called person-organization. Person-organization fit aligns with the principals’ desiring teacher candidates who will conform to the prevailing culture of the school and community while also possessing personality attributes that best support them in their new roles. This was a consistent theme in the interviews as principals discussed personality fit, organization fit, community fit, and cultural fit as important in their hiring decisions. Examples of this in the interviews included Jim Lindenmeyer who stated, “We were looking for somebody that had the right personality….just the fact that she’s cordial with others; she gets along with others, that was really what we were looking for.” Lynn Smith shared how interpersonal relationships with staff in the culture was important when he stated, “So we’ll ask them a question about the last time they had a disagreement with a colleague because with us being a really small school, you can’t do anything without impacting the person down the hall…."

In isolation, the idea of person-organization fit as a driving factor in teacher hiring and selection is not inherently negative. The challenge demonstrated was the criteria and qualities for person-organization fit were not clearly defined, articulated, and operationalized for assessment. This was leading to an environment where principals and the hiring teams were making assessments and decisions about candidates absent clarity that fostered gaps in interrater reliability. When broad concepts such as person-organization fit were being determined by a variety of people without proper definition of
criteria and lack training on how to assess, it was natural for personal dispositions and bias to impact the validity and reliability of the process.

As stated in previous chapters, bias is pervasive and underpins almost all decision-making by human beings. While the word bias often conjures overt negative feelings such as racism, sexism, and ableism, most educational professionals engage in this behavior in more subtle methods. Without systems to properly mitigate bias, seemingly minor subconscious thoughts such as recency effect, similarity effect, and conforming to socialized norms will have deep impacts on teacher hiring outcomes.

**Vagaries**

In discussing vagaries, the study evidence identified teacher hiring and selection strategies being implemented by the sample population that could likely invite lower validity and reliability. The interviews and survey data also suggested several strategies being utilized by the sample principal schools that were aligned to best practice methods that empirical research indicates improves validity and reliability. The following section will discuss and analyze this evidence at a deeper level.

The survey data and interviews suggested several best-practice hiring strategies are being utilized across the principal sample. Some examples of this included committee hiring, established interview questions, and use of extensive referencing of candidates beyond the listed contacts. These are practices with overwhelming research that support high validity and reliability in connection to hiring of personnel. These were also hiring and selection practices generally considered common socialized expectations in human resources management. While there appeared to be an application of many best-practice
methods, the evidence would also suggest there was a conservative approach in looking at lesser-known strategies that could improve results through innovation.

In the study, a foundational vagary was uncovered that had the potential to be a systemic issue lowering validity and reliability across the entire hiring process. The absence of a formal job description system to intentionally and accurately develop and identify the values, skills, knowledge, and abilities for employee effectiveness appeared to be a pervasive problem among the principal sample. The data of the survey suggested that job descriptions were not a common practice among Iowa principals. Only 59% of surveyed principals stated they often/always use set job descriptions while 20% stated they occasionally/never use them. From the interview data, it was evident that the lack of set job descriptions reinforced ambiguity of desired and assessed criteria and qualities. This likely led to an infusion of implicit bias by the principals and hiring team. In the principal sample, 80% shared that they did not use any form of job descriptions. Even more telling was that 70% of the principals in the interviews did not possess a foundational knowledge of the purpose and function of job descriptions. Some of the comments by principals about the lack of job descriptions included, “Haven’t had to mess with that much. Haven’t really touched it.” Another interview shared, “We don’t use one for our teaching jobs….I hate writing job descriptions.”

None of the principals interviewed identified the use of a formal job description system. However, 20% of the interviewed principals mentioned an informal process they had implemented. In these informal and casual processes there was a brief meeting of the hiring/leadership team a few days before the selection process started. The team then
generated a list of qualities they were looking for in the teacher candidates. While this represented a process, there appeared to be little objective structure on how these criteria and qualities were created due to the randomness of the team assembled, little external structure to control for bias, and the fast pace of development. This was still a promising first step practice to aid in the improvement of validity, reliability and control of bias. These casual systems represented the beginning of a job description process that could dramatically improve hiring outcomes.

Intrinsically aligned to the lack of job descriptions as a vagary was the absence of objective scoring and rubrics in the hiring/selection process. In the survey data, only 36% of principals stated they often/always used scoring for decision making. In contrast 48% of principals stated they occasionally/never utilized the strategy. In the absence of rubrics there was the high probability of candidate assessment by hiring teams to be conducted with inherent bias of personal preference and free-floating priorities. This situation also ensured low interrater reliability of interview teams when assessing and selecting candidates for hire. This was a natural consequence of job description systems being rarely applied in the hiring processes. Without a strong established base of standards desired in candidates, there would be little practicality in creating rubrics. Curiously, this was occurring in some small pockets of the sample principal group. Justin Stocker shared that he used an informal rubric process, “It’s not super scientific, and it’s pretty subjective, but it does give us something to discuss….” Several other interviewees did state they used very informal documents with their teams to discuss candidate scoring and help guide their decision making. Lindenmeyer went on to say, “Recently, when
we’ve been doing that [using rubrics], it helps. It usually separates the candidates a lot and makes the decision a lot easier.…” This was an interesting phenomenon that demonstrated principals are sometimes learning about innovative practices in hiring and selection, but then implemented them in a method that did not increase validity and reliability.

Finally, the evidence in the interviews indicated there were environmental vagaries that are developing in teacher hiring processes. Within the interview evidence, three interconnected vagaries impacted principals and their hiring practices: small candidate pools, feelings of desperation, and speed in hiring. Due to the 20-21 pandemic, there was a widespread shortage of human capital in all sectors of the economy. Public schools were not immune from this issue. Within the interviews, principals consistently shared their disappointment with low numbers of applicants for teaching positions. From this, a sense of desperation often developed for the principals as the idea of beginning a school year with missing staff cultivated anxiety. Connected to this was a phenomenon described as a “reckless” pace for hiring. Principals with small hiring pools and tight timelines continued to skip steps in their hiring process and expedited the final decision. In one interview a principal described a situation where an offer for hire was made to a candidate immediately after a single 30 minute zoom interview with two only administrators present and no deliberation. The principal admitted this was not best-practice and risky, but the thought of having a vacant position drove his decision-making in the process. Small applicant pools and tight timelines are contributing to principal decisions that are artificially infusing additional vagaries in the hiring process. Principals
seemed aware of the risk they assumed when hiring using these types of methods and also relatively comfortable with it. One principal shared, “We just haven’t been in a position where we’ve been able to be very picky. We’ve kind of just had to take what we’ve been given.” Another principal commented, “If you only have two or three show up, you get what you get…” Finally, Jim Lindenmeyer stated, “I’ve had situations where for a job opening, we’ve had two, three applicants total, and you know what? Everybody gets an interview.”

Implications

There are multiple implications from this research. The biggest implication is the need for additional professional capacity and learning for principals in high validity and reliability hiring strategies. The evidence from research question four shows a large gap in principals’ knowledge around effective hiring methods and their own practice. The evidence strongly suggested many of the principals’ fundamental knowledge of hiring practices has been passed to them casually and professional opinions have been cultivated in isolation based on their own bias, opinions, and anecdotal personal experiences. This gap in principal capacity and learning has led to an environment where principals are making flawed inferences about hiring practices based on incomplete information and biased opinions. Improving common knowledge of the research base in teacher hiring at both the pre-service principal training level and with practicing administrators would be a valuable first step. Using knowledge to break myths and uninformed opinions on hiring practices would assist in improving practice in the field. Finally, after investing in principals with improved knowledge of best-practice hiring practices, they must also be
equipped with the courage to innovate. An implication in both the research and the study evidence is a lack of continued growth in practice. Like any discipline, hiring and selection research grows and expands each day with new innovations for better results. As school administrators, there must be a system to encourage and cultivate this type of mindset with teacher hiring.

**Summary**

In summary, the study evidence would suggest principals have been using many different best-practice strategies that often impact and reduce bias and vagaries in their hiring process and decisions. Some examples of this included using set interview questions, group selection processes, and informally defining criteria and qualities desired in candidates. The counterpoint shows principals in the sample group also engaged in practices that have problematic implications for validity and reliability in hiring. Practices that had natural vagaries are some of the largest contributors of the bias that is occurring in principal hiring decisions. Some of these vagaries have included lack of defined criteria and qualities articulated in formal job descriptions, overreliance on fit for decision making, unstructured processes that drive decision-making, and absence of tools to counteract normal bias and dispositions of the principals and/or hiring teams.

**Generalizability**

This study has specific areas where generalizability can be applied most effectively. The design of this study was to fill a research gap in teacher hiring practices in smaller rural schools. Specifically, schools with less than 1000 students were studied due to the similar and homogenous nature of structure, systems, demographics, and
financial resources. While this study was geographically focused on Iowa, it has the highest potential for generalizability across smaller rural schools throughout the United States. It should be noted, there is less potential for generalizability across Iowa schools with student populations over 1000 students. Schools in Iowa with more than 1000 students have many variances in how they implement human capital practices. This is in large part due to availability of additional resources and capacity in systems. Therefore, the recommendation for generalizability of this study would be with rural schools with small student populations within the United States.

As with any study, there were inherent limitations that need to be addressed. The first limitation of this study includes the diversity of structures within the different public school districts in the Iowa sample. In the sample there is a variance of structures. This includes whole grade sharing, lack of high schools, operational sharing of personnel within independent districts, and transitions for future district mergers. This causes a limitation by creating additional variance in the composition of the sample schools.

An additional limitation was the sporadic use of human resource directors in the school sample pool. Generally, only larger Iowa school systems have a district human resource office. However, with the creation of operational sharing by the Iowa Legislature, some smaller school districts utilize a human resources director. In Iowa, operational sharing provides school districts funding incentives to share certain identified school personnel (Iowa Association of School Boards, 2020). This leads to subsidies from the state to staff positions that might not normally be available to smaller districts such as human resource directors. With this relatively new operational sharing model,
there are some school districts with less than 1000 students who have a dedicated human resource district level leader. This is a limitation and differential within this study due to the fact that some school districts have advantages in additional human resource capacity and knowledge than other peer districts which could cause data variance.

The final limitation of the study is the inevitable principal turnover within the sample school pool. The directory information from the Iowa Department of Education (2020b) with the names and contact of the principals within the eligible participant pool was created using 2020 BEDS data. However, with the lag of 12 months since the data was collected and the beginning of the study, there was natural turnover in the participant pool. This led to some invitations unable to reach their intended recipients as they were no longer in their positions. In addition, some newly hired principals that were eligible to participate may not have received invitations due to the lack of contact information being available within the Iowa Department of Education directory.

The delimitation and strength of the study was the use of a large group of sample principals to participate in interviews. Ten principals were selected from the sample pool and they agreed to participate in the 30 minute interview process. The principals were all purposefully selected based on casual relationships with the investigator. This improved the response rate as all 10 that were contacted volunteered to participate. Due to the nature of the existing relationship with the investigator, the principals demonstrated increased candor in the responses which lowered social desirability variance. The interviews provided robust evidence that gave greater power for analysis.
Chapter Summary

This chapter focused on taking the results of the evidence from the survey and interviews and developing a deeper analysis and understanding through triangulation. The purpose was to better understand the quantitative evidence and give context to it through the lived experience of principals in the sample group. The four research questions allowed for deeper analysis while also lending to understanding of implications that exist for current and future principal practice as well as opportunities for more research.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study reaffirmed the importance teacher hiring has for student success. The research clearly articulates that classroom teachers have the greatest impact on student achievement (Cranston, 2012; Darling-Hammond & Berry, 1999; DeStefano, 2002; Gordon et al., 2006). Thus, teacher hiring continues to be one of the most impactful and important responsibilities for school principals to sustain the success of their students.

The evidence from this study suggests that principals have specific criteria and qualities they are looking for in hiring teachers. Principals clearly prioritized person-organization fit and caring student relationships in their hiring decisions. This phenomenon suggests that principals continue to align their perceived value of teachers with the work of Dewey (1902) rather than the national political movement of focusing on high stakes testing (Bryk, 2010; Payne, 2008; Ravitch, 2016; Ripley, 2013). Why certain criteria and qualities of teachers are valued more than others continues to be
vague, but the evidence would suggest this is generally aligned with the natural dispositions of the principals. Principals continue to use traditional and conservative hiring and selection practices, although this study suggests that some widely discredited processes are not commonly utilized. Finally, bias continues to be pervasive in the hiring and selection of teachers. This is connected to dispositions of the principals, the hegemony of the organization/community, systemic socialized oppression, and lack of systems and processes that increase validity and reliability of the decision making.

In an ideal world, school leaders would have the margin and capacity to implement high validity and reliability systems in the hiring and selection of teachers. This would better ensure the most effective teachers are in the classroom teaching students. Optimistically, this study and future research will continue to advance the important work of continuous improvement in the hiring and selection process to ensure all students have the most effective teachers serving in their classroom.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A

PRINCIPAL INTERVIEW AND FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL

Principal Interview and Focus Group Protocol

School District Name_________________________________

Participant’s Name___________________________________

Participant(s) Current Position__________________________

Thank you very much for taking time from your very busy day to participate in this interview. I know as a school principal you are very busy, so I’m thankful for your time and energy.

Introduction: As the consent form mentioned, we are trying to learn more about how principals go about hiring teachers. We want to understand what criteria and qualities you are looking for in teachers, why you look for these criteria and qualities, and what are the processes and systems you use to determine which candidates you select. Feel free to stop me at any time if you have questions. Also, if I don’t ask you something that you believe is important regarding this issue, please let me know. Do you have any questions before we get started?

Teacher criteria and qualities main prompt:

Tell me about a recent teacher hire you have made. What qualities of the candidate you selected made them the most desirable person to hire?

Optional prompts to be used by the researcher as needed:

More generally, in your opinion, what are the characteristics of a quality teacher?

What qualities are most important in helping someone achieve the status of a “good teacher?”

What specific qualities do you look for in a new teacher?
Which of the characteristics you just described are most important to you when you’re hiring a new teacher?

Does this vary by the subject or grade level or other things? If so, how?

How do you view experience? (i.e. who do you tend to hire, newer or more experienced teachers?)

What about candidates who just graduated and have never taught? Is cost (your budget) a factor in this?

How can you tell if a job candidate has the qualities you’re looking for?

Are some of these qualities more difficult to spot than others?

_Hiring processes and systems main question prompt:_

Think about a recent teacher hire you have made. Tell me about some of the processes and systems you used to determine who you hired.

_Optional prompts to be used by the researcher as needed:_

What are some of the processes and procedures for hiring that you feel are the most valuable or effective?

What are processes and procedures that you feel have little value or effectiveness?

What types of school and community contextual factors impact your hiring decisions (i.e. budget, community factors, hiring needs such as extra-curricular positions)?

Who is responsible for making the final teacher hiring decision at your school?
**Hiring processes and systems main question prompt:**

What are your experiences and opinions on the following hiring process and procedures?

- Interview with set questions
- Interview with no set questions
- Resume, cover letter, and transcript review
- References
- Writing samples
- Portfolios
- Demonstration or practice lessons
- Personality Assessments
- Informal candidate social time
- Job descriptions

**Final question prompt:**
Anything else you would like to share that you think might be helpful or important?

Thank you again so much for your time. Once I finalize the transcripts, I will send you a copy so you can look over and verify that you feel they are accurate. Once the study is complete and published, I will personally send you a copy of the results. Thanks again for taking time for this study in service of Iowa principals.
Hello and welcome! My name is Mike Fisher, and I’m currently the superintendent of schools at Charles City, Iowa. I’m also a doctoral candidate and researcher at the University of Northern Iowa. I deeply appreciate your time and effort to help in my study that is intended to provide insight into Iowa principal practices and to give basis for more research and methods to improve our practices as leaders.

The following survey is being conducted as part of a study regarding the hiring and selection of teachers by Iowa public school principals. The purpose of the study is to gather feedback from Iowa public school principals regarding information about how they currently hire teachers. You will be presented with information relevant to the criteria and qualities of teachers as well as processes and procedures for hiring. Please be assured that your responses will be kept completely confidential.

The survey should take you around 5-10 minutes to complete. Your participation in this research is voluntary. You have the right to withdraw at any point during the study, for any reason, and without any prejudice.

By clicking the button below, you acknowledge that your participation in the study is voluntary, you are 18 years of age, and that you are aware that you may choose to terminate your participation in the study at any time and for any reason. If you would like to contact the Principal Investigator in the study to discuss this research, please email mfisher@charlescityschools.org

Please note that this survey will be best displayed on a laptop or desktop computer. Some features may be less compatible for use on a mobile device.

I consent, begin the survey (by selecting this option, you will be taken directly to the survey through a new browser page)
I do not consent, I do not wish to participate (if you select this option, your participation in this exercise will end)
Prompt:
When I have conducted teacher hiring and selection processes in the past, I have evaluated and assessed the following teacher criteria and qualities to make my decision.....

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Criteria and Qualities of Teachers that Principals Desire</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Occasionally</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Often</th>
<th>Always</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>The candidate’s classroom management skills</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>The candidate’s ability to relate well with parents</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>The extent to which the candidate’s philosophy of learning is a good fit with the school’s</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>The candidate’s ability to raise student test scores</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>The candidate’s gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>The candidate’s ability to create an engaging and stimulating classroom environment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>The candidate’s prior teaching experience</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>The candidate’s ability to relate well with colleagues (i.e., other teachers and administrators in the schools)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>The candidate’s ability to serve a positive role model</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>The effectiveness of the college or graduate program the candidate attended</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Whether the candidate has an MA or other advanced degree in education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>The candidate’s ability to increase student achievement in a way that will not necessarily show up on a standardized test scores</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>The candidate’s ethnicity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>How far the candidate lives from the school</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>The candidate’s enthusiasm for teaching</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Prompt:
When I have conducted recent hiring and selection processes for teachers, I consistently utilize the following systems and processes to make my decision.…

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Processes and Systems for Teacher Selection</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Occasionally</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Often</th>
<th>Always</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Casual Interview (no set questions for the candidates)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Formal interviews (set questions for the candidates)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Teachers and/or classified staff as selection team members</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Students as selection team members</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Applicant cognitive assessment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Interviews and selection conducted by phone or electronically</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Assessment of paper materials such as resume, cover letters, and college transcripts</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Candidate reference check</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Use of scoring for decision making</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Teaching lessons and/or other performance tasks related to the job</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Writing samples from the candidate</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Portfolio reviews or presentations by the candidates</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Marketing and publicity to attract candidates</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Development of set job descriptions with set criteria</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Active recruitment of candidates from other schools/colleges</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## APPENDIX C

### SURVEY TABLE DATA QUALITIES AND CRITERIA SURVEY TABLE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Occasionally</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Often</th>
<th>Always</th>
<th>Never/Occasionally</th>
<th>Always/Often</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Casual Interview (no set questions for the candidates)</td>
<td>67.33%</td>
<td>14.85%</td>
<td>7.92%</td>
<td>2.97%</td>
<td>6.93%</td>
<td>82.18%</td>
<td>9.90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Formal interviews (set questions for the candidates)</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>2.00%</td>
<td>18.00%</td>
<td>80.00%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>98.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Teachers and/or classified staff as selection team members</td>
<td>2.00%</td>
<td>4.00%</td>
<td>7.00%</td>
<td>29.00%</td>
<td>58.00%</td>
<td>6.00%</td>
<td>87.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Students as selection team members</td>
<td>55.56%</td>
<td>12.12%</td>
<td>20.20%</td>
<td>10.10%</td>
<td>2.02%</td>
<td>67.68%</td>
<td>12.12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Applicant cognitive assessment</td>
<td>77.55%</td>
<td>14.29%</td>
<td>6.12%</td>
<td>1.02%</td>
<td>1.02%</td>
<td>91.84%</td>
<td>2.04%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Interviews and selection conducted by phone or electronically</td>
<td>16.16%</td>
<td>38.38%</td>
<td>29.29%</td>
<td>8.08%</td>
<td>8.08%</td>
<td>54.54%</td>
<td>16.16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Assessment of paper materials such as resume, cover letters, and college transcripts</td>
<td>3.03%</td>
<td>4.04%</td>
<td>9.09%</td>
<td>28.28%</td>
<td>55.56%</td>
<td>7.07%</td>
<td>83.84%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Candidate reference check</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>18.37%</td>
<td>81.63%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Use of scoring for decision making</td>
<td>26.26%</td>
<td>19.19%</td>
<td>18.18%</td>
<td>21.21%</td>
<td>15.15%</td>
<td>45.45%</td>
<td>36.36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Teaching lessons and/or other performance tasks related to the job</td>
<td>26.26%</td>
<td>22.22%</td>
<td>22.22%</td>
<td>18.18%</td>
<td>11.11%</td>
<td>48.48%</td>
<td>29.29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Writing samples from the candidate</td>
<td>51.52%</td>
<td>16.16%</td>
<td>22.22%</td>
<td>8.08%</td>
<td>2.02%</td>
<td>67.68%</td>
<td>10.10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Portfolio reviews or presentations by the candidates</td>
<td>39.39%</td>
<td>31.31%</td>
<td>19.19%</td>
<td>8.08%</td>
<td>2.02%</td>
<td>70.70%</td>
<td>10.10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Marketing and publicity to attract candidates</td>
<td>17.00%</td>
<td>18.00%</td>
<td>23.00%</td>
<td>25.00%</td>
<td>17.00%</td>
<td>35.00%</td>
<td>42.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Development of set job descriptions with set criteria</td>
<td>6.06%</td>
<td>14.14%</td>
<td>21.21%</td>
<td>35.35%</td>
<td>23.23%</td>
<td>20.20%</td>
<td>58.58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Active recruitment of candidates from other schools/colleges</td>
<td>9.09%</td>
<td>18.18%</td>
<td>31.31%</td>
<td>26.26%</td>
<td>15.15%</td>
<td>27.27%</td>
<td>41.41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#</td>
<td>Question</td>
<td>Never</td>
<td>Occasionally</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>Often</td>
<td>Always</td>
<td>Never/Occasionally</td>
<td>Always/Often</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>---------------------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>The candidate's classroom management skills</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>1.98%</td>
<td>9.90%</td>
<td>32.67%</td>
<td>55.45%</td>
<td>1.98%</td>
<td>88.12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>The candidate's ability to relate well with parents</td>
<td>4.00%</td>
<td>6.00%</td>
<td>23.00%</td>
<td>37.00%</td>
<td>30.00%</td>
<td>10.00%</td>
<td>67.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>The extent to which the candidate's philosophy of learning is a good fit with the school</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>2.97%</td>
<td>5.94%</td>
<td>35.64%</td>
<td>55.45%</td>
<td>2.97%</td>
<td>91.09%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>The candidate's ability to raise student test scores</td>
<td>18.18%</td>
<td>10.10%</td>
<td>41.41%</td>
<td>22.22%</td>
<td>8.08%</td>
<td>28.28%</td>
<td>30.30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>The candidate's gender</td>
<td>76.00%</td>
<td>20.00%</td>
<td>1.00%</td>
<td>1.00%</td>
<td>2.00%</td>
<td>96.00%</td>
<td>3.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>The candidate's ability to create an engaging and stimulating classroom environment</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>2.02%</td>
<td>5.05%</td>
<td>32.32%</td>
<td>60.61%</td>
<td>2.02%</td>
<td>92.93%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>The candidate's prior teaching experience</td>
<td>1.01%</td>
<td>10.10%</td>
<td>29.29%</td>
<td>34.34%</td>
<td>25.25%</td>
<td>11.11%</td>
<td>59.59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>The candidate's ability to relate well with colleagues (i.e., other teachers, administrators, and staff in the schools)</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>7.07%</td>
<td>41.41%</td>
<td>51.52%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>92.93%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>The candidate's ability to serve as a positive role model</td>
<td>1.02%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>6.12%</td>
<td>24.49%</td>
<td>68.37%</td>
<td>1.02%</td>
<td>92.86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>The effectiveness of the college or graduate program the candidate attended</td>
<td>15.15%</td>
<td>32.32%</td>
<td>23.23%</td>
<td>22.22%</td>
<td>7.07%</td>
<td>47.47%</td>
<td>29.29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Whether the candidate has an MA or other advanced degree in education</td>
<td>27.00%</td>
<td>42.00%</td>
<td>22.00%</td>
<td>4.00%</td>
<td>5.00%</td>
<td>69.00%</td>
<td>9.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>The candidate's ability to increase student achievement in a way that will not necessarily show up on standardized test scores</td>
<td>7.07%</td>
<td>8.08%</td>
<td>28.28%</td>
<td>44.44%</td>
<td>12.12%</td>
<td>15.15%</td>
<td>56.56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>The candidate’s ethnicity</td>
<td>87.76%</td>
<td>8.16%</td>
<td>1.02%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>3.06%</td>
<td>95.92%</td>
<td>3.06%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>How far the candidate lives from the school</td>
<td>65.66%</td>
<td>20.20%</td>
<td>8.08%</td>
<td>3.03%</td>
<td>3.03%</td>
<td>85.86%</td>
<td>6.06%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>The candidate’s enthusiasm for teaching</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>1.01%</td>
<td>2.02%</td>
<td>15.15%</td>
<td>81.82%</td>
<td>1.01%</td>
<td>96.97%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX D

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Informed Consent Statement

Title of Study: Teacher Hiring Processes in Iowa Schools

Investigator: Mike Fisher, Superintendent, Charles City, Iowa

This is a research study. Please take your time in deciding if you would like to participate. Please feel free to ask questions at any time.

INTRODUCTION

I am a doctoral candidate at the University of Northern Iowa conducting research. The purpose of this study is to learn more about how Iowa public school principals hire teachers. You are being invited to participate because you are a current Iowa public school principal that serves in a school district with a certified enrollment less than 1000 students.

DESCRIPTION OF PROCEDURES

If you agree to participate in this study, your participation will consist of this interview and a possible follow up focus group interview conducted electronically over the Zoom platform. The interview will last between 30-45 minutes. If necessary, the follow up focus group interview will not last longer than 30 minutes. The interviews will be recorded and transcribed by a third-party service. You will be given a copy of the transcript for your review. This will be delivered via email or through the postal system. After that, your participation will conclude. When the dissertation research concludes, you will be provided a written copy of the findings from this study. Direct quotes of participants may be used within the study without any identifying information.

RISKS

The risks to participants in this study are not greater than those of day-to-day life. The only foreseeable risk would be inconvenience.
BENEFITS

Although your participation may not provide a direct benefit to you, it is hoped that the information gained in this study will add to the body of knowledge about how Iowa public school principals hire teachers and improve their practice.

COST AND COMPENSATION

You will not have any costs from participation in this study other than the time you spend during the interview and reviewing the interview transcript. You will not be compensated for participating in this study.

PARTICIPANT RIGHTS

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you may refuse to participate or stop participation in the study at any time. If you decide to not participate in the study or leave the study early, it will not result in a penalty or detrimentally affect your relationship with the researcher or the University of Northern Iowa. There are also no foreseeable circumstances where the researcher would terminate your participation involuntarily.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Your confidentiality will be maintained to the degree permitted by law and the technology used. No guarantees can be made regarding the interception of data transmitted electronically. Records identifying participants will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by applicable laws and regulations and will not be made publicly available. The researcher conducting the interviews is a mandatory reporter and would be compelled by law to disclose information about abuse, neglect, or harm to self or others. Federal regulatory agencies, auditing departments of the University of Northern Iowa, and the Institutional Review Board (a committee that reviews and approves human subject research studies) may inspect and/or copy records for quality assurance and data analysis. These records may contain private information. Finally, in focus group research, the confidentiality of the other group members cannot be guaranteed.
To ensure confidentiality to the extent permitted by law, the following measures will be taken:

1. Your interview will be recorded and transcribed with no direct identifiers.
2. The data will be stored in a password-protected computer in a locked room at all times.
3. The data only will be kept until the completion and publication of the study. The data will be destroyed 30 days after completion of the study. If the results are published, your identity will remain confidential. In publications related to this study, your school district and participants will be referred to by their pseudonyms.

QUESTIONS OR PROBLEMS

You are encouraged to ask questions at any time during this study.

1. For further information about the study, contact primary investigator Mike Fisher at (319) 415-3426 or Dr. Tim Gilson at (319) 273-2636.
2. If you have any questions about the rights of research subjects or research-related injury, please contact the IRB Interim Administrator, Rebecca Rinehart (319) 273-6482, rebecca.rinehart@uni.edu

CONSENT

To give consent, please reply to the principal investigator in this email with the words “I agree to participate”. This will constitute your consent to participate in the study. The email reply will be the official record of your participation and consent. Your copy of the email will be your personal record.

INVESTIGATOR STATEMENT

I certify that the participant has been given adequate time to read and learn about the study and all of his/her questions have been answered. It is my opinion that the participant understands the purpose, risks, benefits and the procedures that will be followed in this study and has voluntarily agreed to participate.
APPENDIX E

SURVEY INITIAL EMAIL INVITATION AND FOLLOW UP

INITIAL SURVEY EMAIL

Hello and welcome! My name is Mike Fisher, and I’m currently the superintendent of schools at Charles City, Iowa. I’m also a doctoral candidate and researcher at the University of Northern Iowa. I deeply appreciate your time and effort to help in my study that is intended to provide insight into Iowa principal practices and to give basis for more research and methods to improve our practices as leaders.

The following survey is being conducted as part of a study regarding the hiring and selection of teachers by Iowa public school principals. The purpose of the study is to gather feedback from Iowa public school principals regarding information about how they currently hire teachers. You will be presented with information relevant to the criteria and qualities of teachers as well as processes and procedures for hiring. Please be assured that your responses will be kept completely confidential.

The survey should take you around 5-10 minutes to complete. Your participation in this research is voluntary. You have the right to withdraw at any point during the study, for any reason, and without any prejudice.

By clicking the button below, you acknowledge that your participation in the study is voluntary, you are 18 years of age, and that you are aware that you may choose to terminate your participation in the study at any time and for any reason. If you would like to contact the Principal Investigator in the study to discuss this research, please email superintendent@charlescityschools.org

Please note that this survey will be best displayed on a laptop or desktop computer. Some features may be less compatible for use on a mobile device.
I consent, begin the survey (by selecting this option, you will be taken directly to the survey through a new browser page)
I do not consent, I do not wish to participate (if you select this option, your participation in this exercise will end)

Thanks for your time and consideration,

Mike Fisher
University of Northern Iowa Doctoral Candidate and Researcher
Superintendent, Charles City Community Schools

FOLLOW UP EMAIL FOR SURVEY

Dear______:

I hope this message finds you well during this busy season. Recently I sent a survey link to you as I am studying teacher hiring and selection practices in Iowa schools for my dissertation. I plan to use this information to better understand and make recommendations on how we can improve future practice for Iowa principals. I would be deeply appreciative if you would take approximately 5 minutes to complete the survey. Thank you again for your consideration. Do not hesitate to contact me with any questions you may have. The link to the consent form and survey is attached at the bottom of this email.

Mike Fisher
University of Northern Iowa Doctoral Candidate and Researcher
Superintendent, Charles City Community Schools
APPENDIX F
INTERVIEW REQUEST EMAIL

Dear____,

My name is Mike Fisher and I am a doctoral student at the University of Northern Iowa working on my dissertation under the direction of Dr. Tim Gilson. I am studying teacher hiring practices of Iowa public school principals. Since you are a current Iowa public school principal, I am particularly interested in learning more about your experiences.

Would you be willing to take part in an electronic Zoom interview of approximately 30 minutes to share your thoughts and experiences? Your identity and school will be kept confidential.

I would like to conduct the interview on any of these dates that you might be available:

December 4, 3pm or 4pm  
December 11, 3pm or 4pm  
December 18, 3pm or 4pm  
January 8, 3pm or 4pm  
January 15, 3pm or 4pm

I’m also flexible to meet any other time that works best for you.

If you are willing to contribute to this study, please contact me at your earliest convenience to arrange a day and time that works best for your schedule.

Thank you very much for your time and consideration.

Mike Fisher  
University of Northern Iowa Doctoral Candidate and Researcher  
Superintendent, Charles City Community Schools