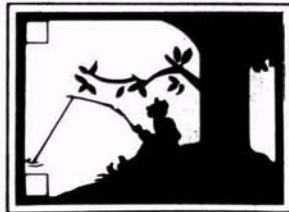


Do you like to fish?



Very much!

Improving Teacher Selection with the Structured Interview

LEONARD O. PELLICER

I remember vividly my first interview for a teaching position. The principal of a small rural high school had called me to come and interview for a job as an English teacher. Although I sported a shiny new B.A. in English Education from a major state university, I recognized that I knew very little about teaching. The mere thought of the complex questions the principal might ask was enough to bring on a case of the hives. But my fears were unfounded. The interview went something like this:

Principal: Come on in. Pull up a chair.

Applicant: Thank you, sir.

Principal: Are you from around here?

Applicant: I was born over in St. Augustine.

Principal: Oh, hey. My wife and I love to visit over there.

Applicant: Yes, it's a nice town.

Principal: Do you like to fish?

Applicant: Very much!

Principal: You know, the fishing is really good around here. We have a lot of lakes and they're loaded with bass and bream.

Applicant: Yes, I've fished some around here, but I prefer salt water to fresh water fishing.

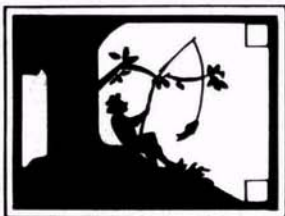
Throughout the interview, I kept waiting for the bombshell to hit, waiting for those substantive questions that would reveal my ignorance as a teacher of English, but they never came. We spoke of the weather and a host of other completely irrelevant topics. Never was I asked to express an opinion, however humble, on any topic relating to my reason for being there. I was hired for the position,

and it wasn't until years later that I realized that the interview conducted by the principal that day was the rule rather than the exception.

The importance of the personal interview is universally acknowledged. Criscuolo (1977) declares, "Emphasis should be on the personal interview even though teaching credentials and college records receive attention." Zanella (1977) says, "A mistake made during this process may have severe implications that can haunt an administrator and a school district for years."

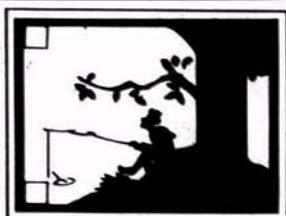
A good way to improve the selection process is to use a structured interview—a series of predetermined questions arranged in such a way that the administrator is able to gather information about a prospective teacher in areas deemed to be essential to successful performance. Selection Research, Inc. (1976) has been selling the Teacher Perceiver Interview to assist administrators in selecting teachers and administrators since the early 1970s. The interview consists of 60 open-ended questions divided into 12 theme areas. Studies indicate that an administrator trained to use the instrument can use the results to predict quite accurately how well or how poorly a prospective teacher may perform (Selection Research, Inc., 1976).

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You know, the fishing is really good around here.

**Personal interviews for
selecting teachers can be made
more reliable by using a structured
approach.**



Yes, I've fished some around here. . . .

Any administrator can develop a similar instrument. Several years ago, John Danner, the coordinator of secondary personnel for the school district of Greenville County, South Carolina, became concerned about the ineffectiveness of principals' interviews with prospective teachers. Danner formed a committee composed of himself and six principals (two each from the elementary, middle, and high school levels) to address the problem. The group took the following steps:

1. They sent a memorandum to all principals in the district asking for questions they considered important to ask prospective teachers.

2. They discussed the questions and grouped them into categories: (a) Teacher's relationships with children, (b) Teacher's relationships with colleagues, (c) Teacher's relationships with parents, (d) Teacher's relationships in the community, and (e) Instructional techniques.

3. They chose five questions representative of each category to be included in the initial interview instrument. Questions were selected on the basis of the amount and quality of information they were likely to glean from the interviewee and the relationship of each question to needs of the district. For example, under "Teacher's relationships with children," one of the questions was: *If a student came to you after class with a problem and asked your advice, saying "You can't tell anyone, not even my parents," how would you react?*

4. They tested the resulting instrument in their schools with teachers they considered outstanding and with

those they considered poor or marginal. They recorded the interviews and shared them with each other. As they listened to the tapes, they tried to establish patterns in the teachers' responses to the questions. This provided a measure of concurrent validity.

5. As a result of step four, they modified the instrument and reproduced it for principals who wished to use it as part of the interview process.

The structured interview has several advantages. It assures the interviewer of solid evidence on which to base a decision to hire or not to hire. The nature of the questions requires the interviewee to think and respond with substance. With practice, the interviewer becomes more confident and relaxed, knowing the questions well and the general responses to look for.

Finally, prospective teachers are impressed because the interview process is organized. Teachers I had interviewed using the structured instrument later said they felt the school had a sense of purpose and the staff knew the kind of teachers they were looking for. ■

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- Criscuolo, Nicholas. "How to Size Up a Prospective Reading Teacher." *American School Board Journal* 164 (July 1977): 27.
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- Zanella, Richard. "The Art of Interviewing." *NASSP Bulletin* 61 (January 1977): 66.

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