

ELEMENTARY TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVES: A QUALITATIVE EXPLORATION OF
THE ROLE OF ELEMENTARY TEACHERS ON THE HIRING TEAM

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by

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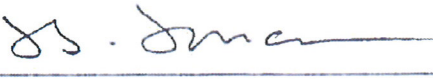
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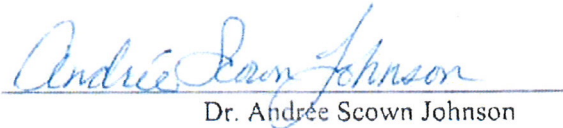
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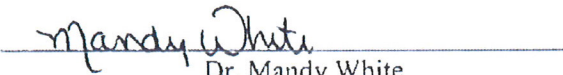
AUTHORIZATION TO SUBMIT

DISSERTATION

This dissertation of **Khristine Bair**, submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Education with a major in Educational Leadership and titled **ELEMENTARY TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVES: A QUALITATIVE EXPLORATION OF THE ROLE OF ELEMENTARY TEACHERS ON THE HIRING TEAM** has been reviewed in final form. Permission, as indicated by the signatures and dates given below, is now granted to submit final copies.

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Lastly, I would like to express my gratitude to the elementary teachers who participated in this research study. Your comments and conversations have helped me to grow as a professional and I so appreciate your honesty, patience, and interest in this topic.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the memory of my father, James (Ted) Molder, who throughout his life demonstrated a strong work ethic, a passion for learning, and a servant's heart to his community. My father's greatest gift to me was a positive example to live by.

ABSTRACT

In this era of educational accountability, educators, parents, and patrons are interested in finding the most efficient and effective route toward increasing student achievement. Research has shown a highly effective teacher in the classroom as the central component on this path to improved student learning. As school districts restructure their hiring practices to ask teachers to join the principal in selecting the best teacher candidate to hire, new questions arise as to their role on the hiring team. This qualitative research study used an online survey to gather 146 elementary teachers' perspectives from both a large and small school district in the Pacific Northwest. The study also included four consecutive focus groups, one group consisting of three elementary teachers from the small school district and three groups consisting of a total of 10 elementary teachers from the larger school district, to dig deeper into the practice of distributed leadership as it pertains to the hiring process. This study is based on the theoretical framework of distributed leadership and an extensive study of distributed leadership as a practice of educational reform. It contributes to literature regarding teachers' perspectives pertaining to their experience and role in the hiring process using a distributed leadership practice in selection of a high quality teacher. The results of this study extend previous findings regarding the degree in which teachers and administrators are involved in the hiring process, and the findings of former studies indicating the relationship between school-based hiring and an effective teacher selection. The outcomes of this study explore teachers' views as to their role on a hiring team. Additionally, findings offer principals and district hiring personnel insight into elementary teachers' experiences as a part of the hiring team and explore teachers' perceptions regarding the practice of distributed leadership in hiring a quality teacher.

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Chapter I

Introduction

The quality of a classroom teacher in any given year was noted to have positive effects on student achievement (Rivkin, Hanushek, & Kain, 2005; Rockoff, 2004; Stronge & Hindman, 2003; Stronge, Ward, Tucker, & Hindman, 2007). Jacob (2007) suggests the term “quality teacher” is difficult to define. Furthermore, Clotfelter, Ladd, and Vigdor (2007) asserted teacher quality is hard to measure. Depending upon the variable used in a given study, a high quality teacher is defined by state certification scores and experience (Boyd, Grossman, Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2005; Clotfelter et al., 2007), personal attributes (Engel, 2013), or completion of National Board Certification (Goldhaber & Anthony, 2005). Many researchers in the field of education struggle to agree on characteristics common to high quality teachers (Cruickshank & Haefele, 2001; Goldhaber & Anthony, 2005). Yet, the definition of a high quality teacher has changed over time as subjective characteristics have moved to objective ones, including effects on student achievement (Clotfelter et al., 2007; Cruickshank & Haefele, 2001). An expectation of positive student achievement as an outcome of a high quality teacher makes sense, but labeling a teacher by common characteristics or educational attainment would be more accurately described as highly qualified, whereas a high quality teacher is one who is able to positively impact academic knowledge and growth of their students (Jacob, 2007). A quality teacher plays a role in improved student achievement, and even the addition of that qualifier may not be enough. Hattie (2009) reports students in New Zealand, ages 4-13, will reap rewards of an average .35 effect size gain in academic achievement. Therefore, teachers should not judge their effectiveness by student gains in achievement, but by gains with a larger than .35 effect size. In the United States (U.S.) kindergarten through third grade longitudinal study, teacher effect

contributed to student achievement by one-third to nearly one-half of a standard deviation in reading and math, respectively (Nye, Konstantopoulos, & Hedges, 2004). Researchers argued teachers vary in their effectiveness, abilities, and influence, but the evaluation of a quality teacher should be in relationship to the extent of their effect on student achievement (Hattie, 2009; Jacob, 2007). Even in an historical literature review nearly 20 years old, an effective teacher was defined, at least in part, by student achievement (Haycock, 1998a). Newer quantitative studies suggested significant differences in teacher effects harvest student achievement and reap greater student outcomes as measured by standardized tests (Nye et al., 2004). More recently, researchers have expanded the definition, suggesting a skillful educator “employs both successful teaching, which realizes intended outcomes, and good teaching, which is morally worthwhile” (Schussler, Stooksberry, & Bercaw, 2010, p. 351). Educators understand use of this moral thermometer to measure teacher quality, which is so crucial to the overall educational experience of a young student. Therefore, for the purpose of this study, a high quality teacher is able to “promote the learning and development of their students” (Jacob, 2007, p. 137).

Effective staffing decisions are reported to be based on performance measures (Ryan & Tippins, 2004). Due to the importance of teacher quality as it directly impacts student achievement, researchers have recommended educational policy reforms to recruit and retain effective teachers (Balter & Duncombe, 2006; 2008; Engel, Jacob, & Curran, 2013). Researchers identified significance in relationships between district population and geographic location in the recruitment of quality teachers (Boyd, Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2013; Jacob, 2007). Concerns have led researchers to study the selection process involved in educational hiring practices (Ballou, 1996; Strauss, Bowes, Marks, & Plesko, 1999). Research findings indicated

little demonstration of common factors within teacher hiring practices, and recognized teacher quality discrepancies within school districts (Jacob, 2007; Strauss et al., 1999). Therefore, school districts have embarked on major reforms in hiring practice to improve the likelihood that a quality teacher is hired (Donaldson, 2011).

Principals are still the primary persons responsible for hiring teachers (Ingersoll, 2003; Kersten, 2008). Hiring the best candidate adds value to a school culture, and inversely, a poor hiring decision can wreak havoc on a school climate (Jacob, 2010; Mason & Schroeder, 2010). One of the greatest financial investments authorized by a school district is the hiring of a professional staff member (Curci, 2012; Ingersoll, 2003). For example, just over 83% of the State of Idaho's educational budget was spent on teachers' salaries and benefits (Richert, 2013). According to the National Center for Education Statistics from 2011-2012 data, teacher salaries and benefits in the U.S. accounted for 80% of total educational expenditures (NCES, 2015). When selecting a candidate, knowledge of best practices helped principals in hiring a quality teacher (Papa & Baxter, 2008). However, principals do not necessarily utilize best practices, as Rutledge, Harris, Thompson, and Ingle (2008) discovered personnel decisions made by principals during the selection process were based on subjective factors. Engel (2013) found variation among principals as to the desired qualities of an effective teacher candidate, even within the same school district. Due to issues with recruitment and hiring practices, a quality teacher is not always the end result of the selection process and researchers suggest reform in the area of hiring practices (Balter & Duncombe, 2008; DeArmond, Gross, & Goldhaber, 2008; Donaldson, 2011).

The approach to hiring teachers is changing as school hiring trends move from a centralized (district level) to a decentralized (school level) approach (Liu & Johnson, 2006;

Boyd, Lankford, Loeb, Ronfeldt & Wyckoff, 2010). A decentralized approach may use a multi-dimensional team comprised of principals, district officials, and teachers, however, a multi-dimensional model alone has not improved the process, and hiring committees are in need of reform (Liu & Johnson, 2006; Mason & Schroeder, 2010). Research in hiring practices has targeted the principal as the main player in hiring decisions, but the trend has changed to include other school personnel (Balter & Duncombe, 2006; DeArmond et al., 2008; Liu & Johnson, 2006; Mason & Schroeder, 2010; White, Brown, Hunt, & Klostermann, 2011). As principals at the school level share leadership roles with teachers as part of the hiring team, the need to explore the role of teachers as members of the hiring team grows in value.

Statement of the Problem

Our nation espouses a philosophical and legal position that each and every student has a right to a free and appropriate public education. Yet, the disparity in the quality of this accessible education within schools is of great concern. A quality teacher has both immediate and longitudinal effects on student learning (Sanders, 2000). In the past, the principal held the responsibility for placing a quality teacher in the classroom. However, that individual duty has changed as other players have been added to the hiring team. Increasing student outcomes through new teacher hires builds individual capacity, but at a rate seen as “inherently slow” for systemic change (Harris, 2014). Therefore, this new shared role generates questions concerning teachers’ participation in the activity of the teacher hiring process.

First, authors note the reality of challenges in the teacher hiring process and bring forth the problem of limited research in the area of hiring practices and their effectiveness in selecting a quality teacher (Balter & Duncombe, 2008; DeArmond et al., 2008; Engel, Finch & Huff, 2015; Evans, 2016; Rutledge et al., 2008). The exact definition of a quality teacher has been

elusive, although researchers have attempted to describe the term as a topic of many professional studies (Ballou, 1996; Hanushek, 2009; Kersten, 2008; Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2002).

Despite unclear definitions, educators in general recognize that hiring an effective or quality teacher is the desired outcome of the hiring process (Evans, 2016; Haycock, 1998a).

The second problem pertains to a lack of research in the area of shared leadership roles from the perspective of the teacher. Rutledge et al. (2008) studied district and school administrators, to find when screening and hiring teachers that roughly 70% of school districts still place the principal as the key decision maker in the teacher selection process. Involving teachers in shared leadership roles is an educational reform that has been suggested for over 30 years (Wahlstrom & Louis, 2008). Researchers revealed in their studies a new focus in school leadership due to educational reforms involving leadership roles beyond those of the principal to include teachers and other educational forces (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009; Timperley, 2005). This shared pattern of leadership responsibilities across a variety of participants has developed into a new concept guiding research—"distributed leadership" (Camburn, Rowan, & Taylor, 2003; Harris, 2013; Heikka, Waniganayake, & Hujala, 2012; Lizotte, 2013; Spillane, 2005). Authors provide closely related definitions for distributed and shared leadership, noting the two terms are often used interchangeably (Dretzke & Wahlstrom, 2010; Heikka et al., 2012; Kamish, 2010; Spillane, 2005). Shared leadership is defined as "teachers' influence over and participation in schoolwide decisions" (Wahlstrom & Louis, 2008, p. 461). A current view suggests "distributed leadership means more than shared leadership" (Spillane, 2006, p. 3). Distributed leadership is clarified as a practice where a leader (not necessarily the principal) works alongside others within situational interactions (Spillane, 2006). However, authors indicate a principal's guidance and support is influential toward teacher participation in a school leadership role

(Harris, 2006; Lizotte, 2013). As researchers note, teacher leadership situations increase a teacher's feelings of value and sense of benefit to their school community (Bonduris, 2011; Lizotte, 2013). This study brings to light teachers' views and attitudes of the current use of distributed leadership during the hiring process as an important first step in improving teacher leadership situations.

The third problem involves a lack of academic studies which directly examine the practice of distributed leadership (Harris, 2014). Research is available that demonstrates a variety of positive benefits for students and staff in schools wherein teachers are empowered to make decisions that affect their work (Ingersoll, 2003). However, Engel et al. (2015) are perhaps one of the first to identify the degree to which administrators and other members of the hiring team work together during the hiring process. Researchers studied the views of committee members involved in hiring at a local authority level to offer future policy suggestions in the area of hiring reforms. With only ten schools participating in the study, DeArmond et al. (2008) suggest a larger sample size for future research. This study will address deficiencies noted in research as recommended by Creswell (2015), as little empirical evidence exists regarding the effects of the practice of distributed leadership and its impact on hiring a quality teacher.

Background to the Study

By tradition, the principal has held the prime responsibility for hiring teachers (Abernathy, Forsyth, & Mitchell, 2001; Kersten, 2008). This tradition has changed, according to Mason and Schroeder (2010) based on survey results involving 60 principals from Wisconsin, which found more than half of the hiring teams involved regular education teachers in the hiring process. Although regular education teachers, special education teachers, and assistant principals are utilized during the interview process, the final hiring decision still falls to the principal

(Engel et al., 2015). Results from a recent qualitative study involving 31 principals from an urban school district showed 93% of principals interviewed used a hiring committee in the selection process, but only 55% of those principals engaged faculty in the final hiring decision, and only a third of those respondents truly hired using a joint decision (Engel et al., 2015). Robinson, Lloyd, and Rowe (2008) stated unclear findings in their meta-analysis of a variety of leadership styles across school contexts in the area of staffing and recruitment. Student outcome results were mixed when recruitment and staffing decisions made by principals alone were compared to decisions formed by principals and others who share the leadership role. Robinson et al. (2008) suggested “more needs to be known about the knowledge and skills needed by school leadership to link resource recruitment and allocation to specific pedagogical goals” (p. 661). Engel et al. (2015) obtained principal input in their research concerning the recruitment and selection process but recognized that little to no research exists in regards to the perspectives of other members of the hiring committee.

As the number of teachers engaged in educational roles outside of the classroom has increased, roles typically assigned to principals have expanded to include teachers in what were previously thought of as administrative tasks. Therefore, questions concerning the role of a teacher on the hiring team may arise. Principals are required to complete educational courses to study policies and legalities of the teacher hiring process, but teachers who are not required to complete these courses may find themselves feeling unprepared to fully participate as members of the hiring team. Other questions concerning the role of a teacher on the hiring team may arise. For example, do teachers know why they are selected to be on the hiring team? In the topic of distributed roles of leadership, Lumby (2013) suggested teachers are merely helping to shoulder a principal’s burden by “freely undertaking” duties that should be performed by the principal. Do

teachers feel like they are sharing a role with the principal as a part of the hiring process, or is their view more consistent with performing an assigned duty? Finally, do teachers influence the final hiring outcome? These questions bring the topic of this research study to the forefront and help to guide the following research questions for this qualitative study.

Research Questions

Creswell (2015) stated key ideas addressed in a research project are intended to establish markers to guide the study. These essential queries establish building blocks for the collection of the data that will speak to the questions (Creswell, 2015). Research questions for this study include the following:

1. What has been the experience of elementary teachers as members of the hiring team?
2. What are the views of elementary teachers concerning their role as members of the hiring team?
3. What are teachers' attitudes toward the use of distributed leadership in identifying and hiring an effective teacher?

Description of Terms

A variety of terms in this study, when acknowledged in literature, are imprecise depending upon each author's educational approach. As researchers choose words to describe abstract ideas and actions in education, clarity becomes necessary in this study to define key vocabulary through focused and intentional descriptors:

Centralized hiring process. Organized hiring at the district level (Liu & Johnson, 2006).

Decentralized hiring process. Organized hiring at the school level (Liu & Johnson, 2006).

Distributed Leadership. "...A product of the joint interactions of school *leaders*, *followers*, and aspects of their *situation* such as tools and routines" (Spillane, 2006, p. 3).

Highly Qualified Teacher. A teacher who possesses a professional certification and demonstrates high verbal skills and curriculum content knowledge (Darling-Hammond & Youngs, 2002).

Leadership. "A relationship of social influence" (Spillane, 2006, p. 10).

Quality Teacher. One who is able to "promote the learning and development of their students" (Jacob, 2007, p. 137).

Recruitment Process. The practices and tools utilized in searching and encouraging potential candidates to apply to the school (Balter & Duncombe, 2008).

Selection Process. "The process of collecting and evaluating information about an individual in order to extend an offer of employment" (Gatewood, Feild, & Barrick, 2008, p. 3).

Shared Leadership. "Teachers' influence over and participation in school-wide decisions" (Louis, Dretzke, & Wahlstrom, 2010, p. 318).

Significance of the Study

Engel et al. (2015) reported little to no research has been conducted regarding perspectives of elementary teachers as members of the hiring team. Therefore, the following dissertation contributes to the research by identifying views of teachers as members of the hiring team. In addition, this study seeks to examine perspectives of teachers involved in the hiring process to better understand the use of distributed leadership during the selection process. Engel et al. (2015) suggested with an increase in teacher involvement during the selection process, an examination of the teacher hiring process and further study of the distribution of leadership during the hiring process within schools is needed. Few studies have researched the topic of

distributed leadership and future research is required to explore relationships and interactions of more than one leader on organizational performance measures (Yukl, 2008).

The practice of distributed leadership has resulted in more teachers taking part in the most important part of the hiring process—the interview (Caldwell, 1993; Rutledge et al., 2008). This study looks to examine this new shared leadership role, and help principals and teachers to examine the practice of school distributed leadership as it relates to hiring potential teachers (Lambert, 2002). Results of studies on principals' perspectives indicated particular qualities they look for during the interview, which influenced their hiring decision (Abernathy et al., 2001; Bourke & Brown, 2014; DeArmond et al., 2008; Engel, 2013; Kersten, 2008). Teacher candidates' knowledge of best practices and current educational trends are identified by 22.3% of nearly 400 Illinois K-12 principals as important during the teacher selection process, with self-motivation and hard work being rated by 13.7% as desirable (Kersten, 2008). Principals looked for specific qualities when interviewing teacher candidates and they also hoped to avoid hiring candidates who demonstrated negative qualities (Mason & Schroeder, 2010). Distribution of leadership and engaging in collaboration during hiring may allow principals more insight into differing perspectives on candidates, resulting in a more effective candidate selection (Engel et al., 2015).

Principals are feeling increased pressures due to high performance accountability and a continual onslaught of educational initiatives (Harris, 2013; 2014). The educational system is in need of a capacity-building transformation. Harris (2013) stated, "To maximise leadership capacity schools need to be operating and performing at the level of the best schools. To achieve this requires a radical shift in leadership practice" (p. 8). Administrators and teachers recognize the importance of time and trust to create a distributed model of leadership (Curci, 2012). No one

person can wear all the hats in their district to accomplish the myriad of professional expectations *and* meet the needs of students. Studies in leadership from an individual perspective have focused on the personal characteristics of a leader and how the influence of this person can impact a group, but researchers Mehra, Smith, Dixon and Robertson (2006) showed the positive effects that broad-based decision-making can have on team performance outcomes. In addition, Curci (2012) stated, “When principals and teachers can draw from the strengths of one another, and those best qualified to lead are given the platform to do so, the leadership capacity of the organization will increase” (p. 128).

A distributed perspective of leadership provided the theoretical framework on which this study was built. Although the school principal has important influence on the direction and culture of their school, a distributed perspective of leadership asserts other players formally and informally engage in the activities of any given situation and these very interactions constitute the practice of leadership (Spillane, 2006). “Distributed leadership refers to both what people do (agency) and the organizational conditions in which they do it (structural aspects)” (Harris, 2014). Hiring practices have changed to include teachers and other staff members beyond the principal as members of the hiring team. Within this hiring activity, the interactions of the principal and teachers constitute the practice of distributed leadership.

The hiring process is one of interacting components between the principal, the teachers on the hiring team, teacher candidates, and the interview process. Although the practice of distributed leadership has been studied by Harris (2014) as it relates to student outcomes, authors caution against defining leadership by outcomes as the interactions that constitute leadership practice still occur, even if no change or decision is made from the action (Spillane & Coldren, 2011). In other words, whether or not the practice of distributed leadership positively

impacts hiring an effective teacher, this dissertation recognizes value in exploring teachers' perspectives, including their role and experience as a member of the hiring team, regardless of the hiring outcome. Figure 1 provides a visual representation of an early theory of distributed leadership developed by suggesting an integrative conceptual model to explore the “interaction of leaders, followers, and their situation in the execution of particular leadership tasks” (Spillane et al., 2004, p. 10).

Figure 1

Constituting Elements of Leadership Practice

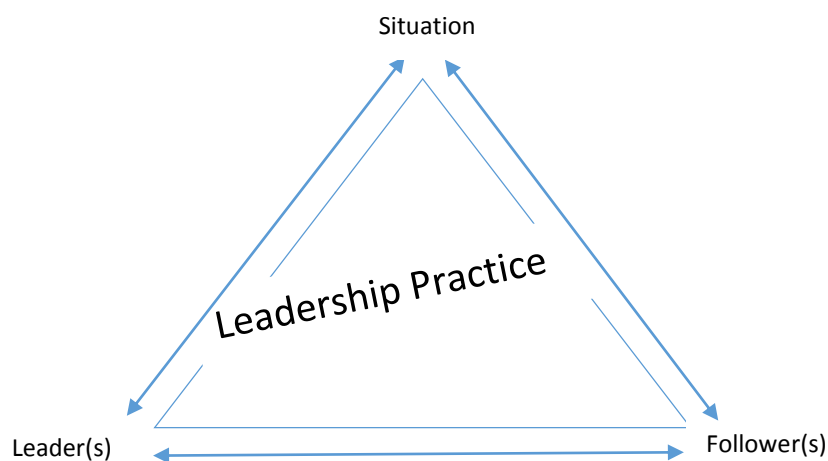


Figure 1. Constituting elements of leadership practice. Reproduced from “towards a theory of leadership practice: a distributed perspective” by J.P. Spillane, R. Halverson & J.B. Diamond, 2004, *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 36, p. 11. Reprinted with permission. (See Appendix G.)

Overview of Research Methods

Qualitative methods were selected for this study, so the voice of teachers could be added to the literature regarding the teacher hiring process. Studying social interactions between teachers and analyzing the meanings that teachers ascribe to these interactions is often studied through the use of qualitative methods (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). A qualitative analysis was used to interpret the emergent conversations of teachers involved with school hiring teams by

looking through the lens of distributed leadership. According to Marshall and Rossman (2016), interpretation of themes is a common value found in qualitative research.

Initially, data collection occurred through an anonymous survey with open-ended questions, distributed as a maximum variation sampling of elementary teachers in both a small and a large school district in the Pacific Northwest. This type of sampling allows for variations and similarities with regard to hiring and distributed leadership themes to be explored (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Online questions for the survey were adapted from interview protocol utilized in a previous study by DeArmond et al. (2008) with permission (see Appendix E). The online survey consisted of a variety of questions regarding a teacher's role in, experience with, and knowledge of the practice of distributed leadership as it is used to hire potential teacher candidates (see Appendix A). Online survey question results were used to help create semi-structured interview questions for later use in a focus group. Online survey question results were reported in the final research findings showing the focus group question that was developed from initial online survey responses. A final question in the online survey invited online survey participants to continue with the study as part of a follow-up focus group discussion. By choosing to continue participation, participants were offered informed consent acknowledging the lack of anonymity as members of an in-person focus group.

Four focus groups, comprised of up to five teachers in each group, were formed to obtain a comprehensive exchange of ideas regarding the practice of distributed leadership from teachers who have been a part of a hiring team. A criterion sampling of participants who have been a member of a hiring team were chosen from those who opted for future participation in the focus group. The criteria was based on the creation of as diverse a group of participants as possible, taking into consideration age, race, ethnicity, gender, school location, and teaching experience.

Focus group interviews offered insight into teachers' perspectives regarding not only their role on the hiring team but also their insights into distributed leadership as it is utilized in making an effective hiring decision. Semi-structured interviews were held lasting approximately 60 minutes in length.

This qualitative study utilized a four-stage process for collecting data (Morgan & Krueger, 1998):

- 1) Participant conversations were transcribed by the researcher with use of transcription software.
- 2) Transcribed interview responses utilized open coding as patterns in responses occurred and were placed in various categories.
- 3) Categories were identified by literature review, survey responses, and focus group responses (Marshall & Rossman, 2016).
- 4) Data from categories were grouped to recognize total themes.

A minimum of four focus groups, comprised of a total of 13 elementary teachers with prior experience on a hiring team, were convened from each school district. These groups were given semi-structured, open-ended questions to obtain information regarding perspectives of their role as a part of the hiring team. Questions and conversations ascertained teachers' prior experiences as members of the hiring team, especially their perspectives regarding the practice of distributed leadership and its effectiveness towards making a positive hiring decision. Additional questions arose following the focus group discussion, and follow up questions were asked of individual participants during phone interviews or emails when clarity of data was needed. The focus group process was designed using guidelines from *The Focus Group Kit* (Morgan & Krueger, 1998).

Chapter II

Review of Literature

Introduction

Educational researchers studied hiring practices to identify strategies for recruitment and selection of an effective teacher with mixed results (Ballou, 1996; Balter & Duncombe, 2006; 2008; Donaldson, 2011; Liu & Johnson, 2006). The recruitment and retention of a high-quality teacher is the most crucial factor a principal can control toward school improvement (Fuller et al., 2007). The job of placing a quality teacher into each child's classroom is crucial to student outcomes: "A well-constructed selection process helps schools hire teachers who have the qualities that enhance student achievement, and by selecting the best teacher candidates, schools take the first crucial step in ensuring an effective teacher for every classroom" (Stronge & Hindman, 2003, p. 50). In this chapter, a review of literature provides a better understanding of the hiring process and the role principals and other members of the hiring team play in ensuring a quality teacher is represented in each classroom. Five subtopics within this chapter are discussed: (a) importance of hiring a quality teacher, (b) recruitment practices, (c) selection practices, (d) perspectives of the principal, and (e) the trend toward the practice of distributed leadership. Prior to the discussion of these aforementioned subtopics, a theoretical framework of distributed leadership grounded in organizational and activity theory is presented as the foundation for this research study.

Theoretical Framework: Distributed Leadership

Distributed leadership was chosen as the theoretical framework for this study. The topic of this study pertained to hiring practices and looked to explore teachers' perspectives of their role as a member of the hiring team. This study encompassed three educational areas, which are

quite broad in nature: the literature on hiring a quality teacher, how a teacher impacts a student's achievement, and what constitutes student achievement. Using distributed leadership as a framework is similar to identifying research questions as a necessary tool to direct and guide this particular study. Research questions help to focus a researcher toward the discovery of particular answers. For the purpose of this study, the practice of distributed leadership will help narrow the focus of the aforementioned broad topics in education. Using a theoretical framework focuses the study in regards to particular areas and disregards other aspects to make the study directed and "doable" (Marshall & Rossman, 2016).

Distributed leadership is not concerned with any specific attribute held by a particular individual but rather defined as a practice where the end result occurs following the interactions to all members involved (Spillane, 2005). For the purpose of this study, the practice of distributed leadership occurs whenever more than one person in the educational community is influenced by another person. The ability of influence or interaction to be dispersed holds four significant implications for organizational impact (Gronn, 2000). First, if leadership can be defined as moments of influence, then the actions or inactions of one individual or group has effects on every other individual or group given certain circumstances within the organization. Second, leadership influences are reciprocal. The completion of organizational tasks is often accomplished by two or more individuals or groups. These tasks in and of themselves would seem disjointed and without purpose were it not for an organizational outcome as the goal. Third, the length of time to which the influence of leadership endures can be recognized on a continuum from momentary influences to enduring effects. Finally, these influences can emerge as motivations of individuals to initiate actions within the organization, thereby triggering another response or multiple interactions among other members of the organization. Authors describe the

the practice of distributed leadership in educational environments according to *how* the leadership is distributed, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Frameworks of Distributed Leadership

Gronn (2002)	Spillane (2006)
<p><i>Spontaneous collaboration:</i> Where groups of individuals with differing skills, knowledge and/or capabilities come together to complete a particular task/project and then disband.</p> <p><i>Intuitive working relations:</i> Where two or more individuals develop close working relations over time until “leadership is manifest in the shared role space encompassed by their relationship” (p. 657).</p> <p><i>Institutionalized practice:</i> Where enduring organizational structures (e.g. committees and teams) are put in place to facilitate collaboration between individuals.</p>	<p><i>Collaborated distribution:</i> Where two or more individuals work together in time and place to execute the same leadership routine.</p> <p><i>Collective distribution:</i> Where two or more individuals work separately but interdependently to enact a leadership routine.</p> <p><i>Coordinated distribution:</i> Where two or more individuals work in sequence in order to complete a leadership routine.</p>

Note: Adapted from “Distributed leadership in organizations: a review of theory and research” by R. Bolden, 2011, *International Journal of Management Reviews*, 13, p. 258. Reprinted with permission. (See Appendix F.)

Researchers demonstrated mixed opinions in specifically defining ‘distributed leadership’ with “competing and sometimes conflicting interpretations of the term” (Harris, 2008, p. 33). Mayrowetz (2008) examined four different views that researchers use to define and explain the theory of distributed leadership. The first lens as Spillane, Halverson, and Diamond suggested

defines distributed leadership through the interactions among multiple leaders in given situations not by a given role but through the activity being distributed over various people, (as cited in Mayrowetz, 2008, p. 425). The *activity* being distributed and the *interaction* between members of the group are important conceptual differences separating this first view from the others.

The second view provided insight into defining distributed leadership through a lens for a more democratic, lateral management approach to leadership (Mayrowetz, 2008). However, the beneficiary of a lateral management approach is a topic of debate, as adding more responsibilities to a teacher's plate in the name of school reform may be seen as more desirable by upper management than the practice of distributed leadership ever intended. Harris (2014) noted the underlying concern with distributing leadership roles, in that some educational professionals imply a distribution of leadership is a "conspiratorial plot" to give more work to teachers, which allows principals to persuade teachers into thinking the extra work is for their benefit.

A third definition of distributed leadership is described as a practice efficiently utilizing various personnel, besides an administrator to improve overall organizational effectiveness (Mayrowetz, 2008). Camburn, Rowan, and Taylor (2003) used this definition in studying elementary schools and the effects on school reform in relationship to leadership configurations and leadership functions accomplished. Distributed leadership was defined in conceptual terms of organizational roles and the identification of personnel taking on the role (Camburn et al., 2003). For purposes of their study the distribution of leadership was described through *who* (role) and *what* (leadership activity).

The fourth and final view of distributed leadership took into consideration the collaboration of individuals and teams within an organization working toward organizational

improvement to act as a change agent to encourage growth of leadership capacity within individuals and the organization itself (Mayrowetz, 2008). In *The Fourth Way*, Hargreaves & Shirley (2009) described this view of distributed leadership as professional networking. This “collective responsibility” for the success of students helped overcome the educational barriers of lack of supply and reduced attraction of leadership candidates to job positions in at-risk school locations. Distributed leadership allows for a community of experts to be accessed and potentially offers internal promotion. Compelling evidence of system-wide reforms was provided through educational stories of success in schools in Finland as the practice of distribution of leadership provides future opportunities for “sustainable leadership” (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009).

For the purpose of this study, the first viewpoint most accurately defines the term distributed leadership. Mayrowetz (2008) suggested defining the term distributed leadership using one of the aforementioned views to articulate the organizational theory to which a future study will be grounded. In this way, leadership is not defined by particular participants, outcomes, formal structure, or consensus of the group (Spillane & Coldren, 2011). Distributed leadership is described as “stretching leadership” across a given situation by examining the practice of leadership over situational context as it moves across a network of relationships between others in the organization and environment (Spillane et al., 2004). Distributed leadership as a theory has developed to include more than just the components of the three parts of the theoretical triangle; it is the practice of leadership that has become essential. Spillane (2006) provides a newer model of distributed leadership as the original depiction looked at the distribution of leadership as a form of shared empowerment and did not demonstrate the practice of leadership as it developed over time. Spillane (2006) adjusted his earlier visual representation

and theory of distributed leadership to focus attention on three key elements to understand the practice of distributed leadership including; leadership practice as a central component, the particular situation defining and being defined by the practice and “collective *interactions* among leaders, followers, and their situation...” (p. 4), as shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2

Leadership Practice from a Distributed Perspective

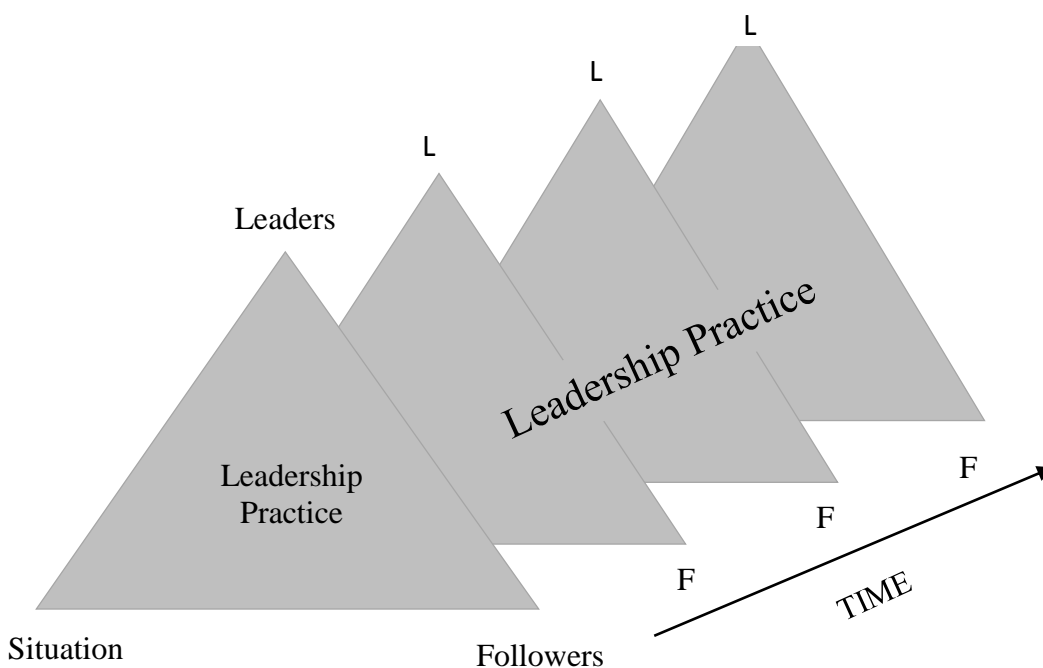


Figure 2. Visual representation showing important elements from a distributed perspective of leadership by J. Spillane, 2006, *Distributed Leadership*, p. 3. Copyright 2006 by John Wiley & Sons, Inc. Reprinted with permission. (See Appendix D.)

Therefore, the hiring process (situation) from recruitment to selection, involving interactions (leadership practice) of principals and teachers (leaders and followers) as members of the hiring team over time, constitute a framework of distributed leadership to guide this study.

Importance of Hiring a Quality Teacher

The quality of a classroom teacher in any given year has long-lasting effects on student learning (Balter & Duncombe, 2008; Cruickshank & Haefele, 2001; Rivkin et al., 2005; Sanders, 2000). Rockoff (2004) indicates teacher quality has a noted positive effect on student test scores, and a more experienced teacher has a positive effect on student test scores, especially in subjects focused on reading. A large-scale study involving one-half million students in Texas schools offered valid indication that the quality of an elementary teacher is an important influence in student achievement, and the difference between teacher qualities within a school is significant (Rivkin et al., 2005). Lankford et al. (2002) found uneven distribution in the quality of teachers between different schools located within the same school district in the state of New York. Findings in the Lankford study recognized a variance of 35% between schools within the same district. Differing views noted research has proven difficult in identifying a high quality teacher based on student outcomes, as measurements can be skewed due to the teacher selection process (Hanushek, 2009). Parents had a tendency to seek out high-achieving schools for their high-performing students, and teachers followed a similar pattern as noted by Hanushek, Kain, and Rivkin, 2004 (as cited in Hanushek, 2009). However, when this selection pattern was factored out, researchers found significant annual academic growth for students taught by a good teacher as compared to students receiving instruction from an average one (Rivkin et al., 2005). Inversely, students taught by the lowest quality teachers (as noted by student achievement) made only half the academic gain as their peers assigned to a quality teacher's classroom (Hanushek, 2009). Teacher quality demonstrates longitudinal effects, as being placed into a quality teacher's classroom year after year is suggested as a possibility to close peer achievement gaps (Rivkin et al., 2005).

Authors discussed the relationship between teacher and student achievement with regard to desired student outcomes and identified difficulties faced when trying to define attributes that quality teachers have in common (Cruickshank & Haefele, 2001). A variety of factors can influence attributes of a quality teacher including geographic location, retention, and experience. Using data from the Texas Education Agency (TEA) and Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS), researchers found teachers hired in schools with the lowest achieving students are more likely to be new to the profession or to the school (Hanushek et al., 1999). Teacher qualifications impacted student outcomes, as the more urban the location of the school and greater the at-risk student potential, the greater the likelihood that less qualified teachers are working there (Lankford et al., 2002). In an additional study using TEA and TAAS data, a semiparametric approach was used to identify the variance between different teachers' success as measured by student outcomes (Rivkin et al., 2005). A positive correlation was found between student achievement and teacher retention, as schools with higher retention rates reported higher student achievement in both reading and math scores of elementary students. Similar results indicated higher turnover rates negatively impact reading and math scores were recorded in a more recent large longitudinal study of fourth and fifth grade students in New York City (Ronfeldt, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2013). Teacher experience matters, as students' scores in both reading and math are lower than those students of more experienced teachers, at least during the first three years of their career (Rivkin et al., 2005).

Other characteristics and situations showed little reflection of teacher quality. Researchers found no empirical support for the notion that a higher educational degree relates to increased teacher ability, very small effects were found by class size differences (especially after the first few years of schooling), and little of the discrepancy in teacher quality was found by

observable teacher differences in characteristics (Rivkin et al., 2005). More research regarding how schools can consistently provide high quality teachers in each classroom is needed, and ensuring a quality teacher is found in each classroom starts with the use of effective recruitment, hiring, and other human resource practices (Rivkin et al., 2005).

Recruitment Practices

Fuller, Baker, and Young (2007) propose that recruitment of a high-quality teacher is one of the most important decisions a principal can control with respect to school improvement. However, recruiting a quality teacher can be more difficult than it would first appear. Obstacles to effective recruitment practices include a lack of applicant supply due to a teacher's desire to live in a particular geographic location (Boyd et al., 2005; Engel, Jacob, & Curran, 2014; Reininger, 2011). Utilizing data collected from three large job fairs located within Chicago Public Schools, findings indicated that "teacher sorting" (reduction of potential candidates due to teacher preferences) occurred earlier than the job interview selection process (Engel et al., 2014). The location of the school had a strong relationship with the number of applicants interested in the teaching position, even after other variables including school characteristics were taken into consideration (Engel et al., 2014). In New York State, the teacher labor market was analyzed to discover if teachers are employed at schools in close proximity to their former high schools (Boyd et al., 2005). The aforementioned study was later substantiated by a large, twelve-year longitudinal study which established that working in close proximity to the community in which one is raised is a geographic preference common to teachers, not only in New York State, but throughout the U.S. (Reininger, 2011). Unfortunately, more college graduates come from advantaged high schools than at-risk high schools, making it difficult to fill positions in disadvantaged areas, such as urban, high minority, and low economic areas. This desire to live

closer to one's hometown perpetuates teacher inequality, as findings indicated that schools with a highly advantaged student population have larger teacher applicant pools from which to choose when selecting teacher candidates (Donaldson, 2011; Engel et al., 2014).

According to Donaldson (2011), the obvious financial disparity between urban and suburban school districts suggest an increase in salary would recruit a higher quality candidate, but other researchers disagree (Hanushek, Kain & Rivkin, 1999). Overall results using matched panel data from students and teachers in Texas schools demonstrated the relationship between teacher salary and teacher quality is not a positive or significant one. Although the idea that financial incentives will help recruit better candidates has been expressed by Donaldson (2011), this theory is not supported, as Ballou (1996) and Hanushek et al. (1999) found that offering higher wages is not indicative of a better-qualified candidate. Offering a higher salary to incoming teacher candidates may sound like a logical idea, but this change in hiring practice requires more research. Hanushek (2009) proposed teacher turnover could be reduced with increases in teacher salary reducing the number of new hires, thus allowing lower quality teachers to remain longer in their current positions. Furthermore, salary may play a part in the transfer of better quality teachers from lower socioeconomic areas to suburban schools (Lankford et al., 2002). Ballou (1996) noted that if financial incentives are provided to obtain stronger teaching candidates, but they are not selected for the job, then "drawing more applicants into a recruitment process that does not screen well may only make matters worse" (p. 99).

Recruitment challenges exist in selecting a quality teacher and school districts use a limited number of strategies to recruit candidates (Ballou, 1996; Balter & Duncombe, 2006; Donaldson, 2011). Recruitment practices, especially innovative strategies, are positively related to district size, with fiscal capacity and a larger hiring base presented as positive potential factors

affecting this relationship (Balter & Duncombe, 2008). In opposition, in a study of thirty principals from two northeastern districts, Donaldson (2011) found fewer barriers to effective hiring in smaller elementary schools with less centralized hiring methods. Use of the internet was seen as having positive effects on recruiting a higher quality applicant, but a recruitment message that doesn't accurately depict the school or job position may actually prevent the best-fit candidate from being recruited (Liu & Johnson, 2006). A common theme that emerged from personal interviews with principals indicated finding the best fit for a given school is important during selection of a teacher candidate (Donaldson, 2011).

In a qualitative study three variables were noted to account for the differences in recruitment outcomes: proactive versus passive methods, individual school appeal, and consistency in hiring priorities (DeArmond et al., 2008). Engel et al. (2015) suggested that principals in high-achieving schools utilized the strategies of networking and collaboration to find teacher applicants more than administrators in lower-achieving schools, and extensive networking may lead to a more qualified pool of candidates for selection. However, in a recent collection of teacher applicants at three large Chicago Public Schools job fairs, it was noted that teacher choice occurs during recruitment. This trend is noted as potential candidates apply to higher socioeconomic, less minority-populated schools, which also experience greater student achievement, but when factors are controlled, geographic location is the strongest predictor of applicant preference (Engel et al., 2014). District policies will need to address the recruitment difficulties for urban areas with less advantaged students if they hope to increase the teacher applicant pool (Engel et al., 2014).

A quantitative analysis using data from the National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988 (NELS:88/00) and the Common Core of Data (CCD) ascertained high school students'

preferences toward future careers that will either be located close to home, encourage greater financial reward, or serve others in their community (Reininger, 2011). Ordinal scale data was obtained with Likert-scale statements to note variables that may motivate high school graduates to choose teaching as a career. Results of the study found other teacher preferences beyond mobility contribute to the recruitment efforts of schools and districts including; gender of a teacher candidate, those who do not indicate preference for making large sums of money, and students whose parents were teachers before them. However, overall findings concluded that more students become teachers from advantaged schools than from at-risk schools. Although the percentage of graduates who become teachers from an advantaged and at-risk school is similar, a significantly higher number of students from advantaged high schools complete their college degree (Reininger, 2011). Teachers prefer to live close to their hometowns, even more so than other college graduates, and students who graduate from an at-risk school are more likely to find a teaching job close to home than teachers who come from advantaged high schools. Therefore, increasing the number of students who graduate from disadvantaged high schools is a reasonable focus to help decrease the unequal distribution of quality teachers in schools across the nation (Reininger, 2011). Since the 1980s, initiatives to recruit more minority high school graduates into the field of teaching have been successful. More recent data suggested the minority applicant pool had increased, particularly among male minority teachers (Ingersoll & May, 2011). However, increasing the pool of candidates alone, a strategy more often used by urban school districts, was negatively associated with better teacher qualification and minority males demonstrated lower numbers in staff retention, through transfers or exiting the profession (Balter & Duncombe, 2006; Boyd et al., 2010; Ingersoll & May, 2011).

An exploratory analysis of recruitment practices as they related to the quality of teachers selected for teaching positions in New York State school districts was conducted, and conclusions indicated that urban school districts are more likely than their rural counterparts to use newer methods of recruitment--specifically, by using the internet to post job openings, by offering additional monetary incentives for participating in extracurricular activity positions, or by offering credit for years of experience outside of a school district (Balter & Duncombe, 2006). Of the three recruitment strategies, only the use of the internet was seen as having positive effects on a higher quality applicant, and in fact, increasing the pool of candidates (a strategy more often used by urban school districts) was negatively associated with better teacher qualification (Balter & Duncombe, 2006).

Engel et al. (2015) conducted a study of recruitment strategies and their effectiveness in finding a quality candidate and concluded Chicago Public School principals in high-achieving schools utilized the strategies of informal networking and in-district as well as out-of-district administrator collaboration more than principals from lower-achieving schools. The use of social connections may be more prevalent among higher-achieving schools due to higher unsolicited pursuits from candidates. Rockoff (2004) noted little attention was given to district recruitment practices and their effectiveness toward hiring a quality teacher and suggests research continue in the area of teacher recruitment practices. Districts need to offer schools an earlier and greater part in the selection process, and principals and teachers need to be cheerleaders for recruitment (Levin & Quinn, 2003). The results of these few studies indicated districts participate in “fairly limited” recruitment practices (Balter & Duncombe, 2008). However, recruitment is only the initial portion of the hiring process. Following recruitment of potential candidates, the decision of candidate selection proposes its own set of complexities.

Selection Practices

The hiring decision impacts children enrolled in school more than any other decision (Pillsbury, 2005). In turn, this decision impacts our nation, as a more highly educated population has dramatic positive implications for the U.S. economy (Hanushek, 2009). Reforms in teacher hiring practices are needed, as researchers found that current practices are not indicative of a quality teacher selection (Ballou, 1996; DeArmond et al., 2008; Kersten, 2008; Rockoff, 2004). For example, Ballou (1996) suggested that teacher candidates are often selected from the academically weaker members of the college-educated community. Engel et al. (2015) reported administrators from lower-achieving schools tend to hire from within their districts, including filling job openings with substitute teachers or applicants just completing their student teaching. Furthermore, Papa and Baxter (2008) noted principals hiring effective teachers in any year of employment continue to do so throughout their administrative career, and the inverse is true for those hiring less effective teachers.

Trimble (2001) stated additional obstacles to quality teacher selection included less controllable factors such as lack of full teacher certification and lack of experience in an actual classroom situation, teacher preference based on socioeconomic factors, test scores, and racial demographics of the student population (Hanushek et al., 1999; Jacob, 2007) or, as stated earlier, proximity of job offer to current residence (Boyd, Grossman, Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2006). Furthermore, human resource department budgets may be an obstacle to hiring the best candidate, even though hiring a quality teacher is clearly worth the investment (Pillsbury, 2005).

Defining a quality teacher by the fact that they are credentialed is too narrow of a measure (Pillsbury, 2005). Pillsbury (2005) proposed that a teacher's educational beliefs are as important as their credentials. In identifying perspectives of teacher candidates through journal

entries, an effective teacher was defined as one who can successfully utilize their skills to positively affect student learning *and* offer instruction which is morally meaningful to teach to the whole child (Schussler, et al., 2010). Likewise, Rivkin et al. (2005) do not believe raising standards for teacher certification or requiring graduate level degrees will affect teacher quality in a way that will raise student achievement. However, in an extensive literature review, Wayne and Youngs (2003) found a positive relationship between student learning and teacher characteristics, specifically with college rankings and teacher standardized exam scores. Surprising to some, Hanushek et al. (1999) found that increasing teacher salary does not explain the variation in teacher quality. Stated simply, better pay does not likely constitute higher student achievement. Instead, the variance in teacher quality is more highly impacted by effective hiring and other human resource actions (Hanushek et al., 1999).

Principals are still the primary persons responsible for hiring teachers (Donaldson, 2011; Kersten, 2008). However, Papa and Baxter (2008) note the majority of principals utilize a hiring committee to make their selections. District officials or teachers comprise these committees, and this practice increases the possibility of an effective hire. Knowledge of best practices when selecting a candidate also helps principals in hiring an effective teacher (Papa & Baxter, 2008). Previous studies showed better screening of teacher candidates with a focus on the college attended may play a positive role in student outcomes (Wayne & Youngs, 2003). Unfortunately, research indicates that best practices are not always utilized (Ballou, 1996; Liu & Johnson, 2006), and when proposed changes in hiring policies have been attempted, no noted improvement was realized in student outcomes (Hanushek, 2009).

In some districts, urban schools looking to hire difficult-to-fill teaching positions have resorted to hiring teachers prior to the fulfillment of coursework, with more on-the-job training

following employment (Boyd et al., 2006). The inequalities begin as new teachers with less experience are more likely to be hired in larger at-risk populations, and gaps continue to grow as higher quality teachers are more likely to leave lower achieving schools (Hanushek et al., 1999; Boyd et al., 2005). Recognizing the positive relationship between specific teacher characteristics (specifically in the area of standard math certification, college rating, and teacher scores on national exams) and student outcomes may have significant impact on teacher selection, especially for teacher candidates hired to teach at-risk or minority populations (Wayne & Youngs, 2003). Raising standards for teacher certification or only hiring teachers who hold graduate degrees may not raise teacher quality in a way that will affect student achievement (Rivkin, et al., 2005). The National Board Certification for Teaching Standards (NBCTS) is a volunteer program, designed in the era of accountability, to demonstrate an educator's mastery of teaching. Despite research indicating higher quality applicants apply to NBCTS, a longitudinal study of elementary teachers in North Carolina did not find actually completing the NBCTS program increased teacher effectiveness as measured by improvements in student outcomes (Goldhaber & Anthony, 2005). Instead, Rivkin et al. (2005) found the variance in teacher quality is more highly impacted by effective hiring and other human resource activities. Wayne and Youngs (2003) completed a literature review of 21 studies noting teacher characteristics, including strength of college attended and test score on a standardized teacher examination, which confirmed a positive effect on student learning. Additionally, student achievement, particularly in the area of mathematics, is positively impacted by a teacher's degree and coursework in the subject area. However, findings indicated quantifiable teacher characteristics vary only slightly and may not be as crucial in the teacher selection process as a movement

toward decentralized hiring practices, which enables those involved in the hiring process to look for unseen qualities (Wayne & Youngs, 2003).

Liu & Johnson (2006) suggested the characteristics of the hiring process itself can affect the potential candidates' perception of the attractiveness of the job. Therefore, first impressions of the school and hiring team may affect the candidate's decision to accept a position. In addition, consideration of hiring practices is important in matching new teachers to the best school and job position (Liu & Johnson, 2006). The hiring process involves two decisions: first, the decision to offer a position to an applicant, and next, the candidate's decision to accept the offer. The closer the match within this two-way process, the more likely the teacher will be satisfied with their position and the less likely they will be to leave (Liu & Johnson, 2006).

Authors indicate the interview process allows the principal and the candidate to interact, unlike many other parts of the hiring process (Liu & Johnson, 2006). Interviews help principals assess each candidate's judgment, and each applicant's questions can provide subtle clues to their philosophical priorities (Trimble, 2001). However, more than two decades ago, Caldwell (1993) warned administrators of the low reliability of an interview, suggesting other objective measures be used as hiring tools. In contradiction, Kogan, Wolff, and Russell (1995) noted an interview is the most crucial tool in the candidate selection process. More recently, Liu and Johnson (2006) found the addition of members to the hiring team did not add to the reliability of a teacher candidate hire when they discovered less than half of new teachers in a qualitative study actually engaged in an interview with colleagues from the school during the hiring process. However, interviews as a selection practice may have a positive effect on teacher quality, particularly if there is a second or third interview required and the candidate is expected to demonstrate competence through a portfolio or perform a sample lesson (Balter & Duncombe,

2006). Yet, focus group conversations from human resource directors and principals indicated that principals lack the time needed to review teacher candidate portfolios (Painter & Wetzel, 2005).

A descriptive analysis of the interview process completed more than twenty years ago revealed three problems with the interview process: including only one interviewer, having an unskilled interviewer, and having a biased interviewer (Caldwell, 1993). At times, candidates were hired to a teaching position based on one interview conducted by a sole person, which made the interview more susceptible to bias error. The validity of an interview can also be affected by the experience of the interviewer. Ineffective listening skills, interviewer bias, inadequate or inappropriate questioning, and relying too heavily on one's intuition or first impression can cause the interviewer to select a less desirable candidate. Social psychology plays a role during the interview process, as interviewers typically form an impression during the first five minutes of an interview and then spend the rest of the interview trying to gather evidence in support of their initial impression (Caldwell, 1993). Therefore, having more than one interviewer may reduce interviewer bias and improve the hiring decision. Liu and Johnson (2006) suggested that teachers participate in the hiring process, even if substitutes are required during the school day for them to attend (Liu & Johnson, 2006).

Administrator preference may play a larger part in the selection of a teacher candidate than academic achievement (Ballou, 1996; Balter & Duncombe, 2006; Rutledge et al., 2008). Students involved in educational undergraduate programs give their Grade Point Average (GPA) more importance than principals do in making a hiring decision (Abernathy et al., 2001). Hiring outcomes are not consistent, as Hanushek (2009) confirmed hiring for particular academic characteristics such as years of experience and graduate degrees have not caused a positive effect

on student outcomes. In Texas, more than 650 principals participated in a qualitative study, noting that those principals who have been unsuccessful on at least one attempt to pass a certification exam were more likely to hire a teacher candidate who has failed a teacher certification, which correlates to lower student outcomes (Fuller et al., 2007). Heneman and Milanowski (2011) proposed that science theory of hiring practice and organizational application have a gap. In their case study involving a large southwestern school district, vertical alignment between teacher performance measures of competency and centralized recruitment practices was minimal. Even in the private sector, a hiring success is often attributed to subjective factors such as feelings or gut instinct. Outside influences can negatively impact the hiring process, which may result in a poor hiring decision. Some of these outside influences may include, pressure to hire a friend or relative, a recommendation from a colleague, or inexperience in hiring practices (Nowicki & Rosse, 2002).

Other influences may negatively impact the teacher hiring decision. Pillsbury (2005) proposed that human resource department budgets may be an obstacle to hiring the best candidate. Additional obstacles to the teacher selection process include the cost of hiring tools, such as interview screening or psychological tests (Rutledge et al., 2008). However, the cost is well worth it, as additional money spent on hiring a highly qualified teacher is confirmed, through a fifty-state survey, to improve a teacher's effectiveness, showing more influence on student growth than use of the funds spent on other school resources (Darling-Hammond, 2000). In mid- to large-size school districts across the U.S., central hiring policies negatively impact a selection team's ability to hire the best candidate (Levin & Quinn, 2003). In New York, hiring strategies may be a factor in disparities among school districts within the state, as the more urban the location of the school, the greater the likelihood that less qualified teachers are working there

(Lankford et al., 2002). Principals in a qualitative study identified four obstacles to hiring the best candidate including lack of supply, centralized practices that restricted their decision-making freedom, both informal and formal job seniority practices, and lack of appropriate certification (specifically for out-of-state licensure issues) for available positions (Donaldson, 2011).

Late hiring practices may also negatively impact the hiring process. Late hiring practices such as waiting for in-district transfer requests, waiting for summer vacancy postings, and waiting for budgetary timelines to release teaching units to the schools negatively affect the hiring process. Late hiring practices cause teachers with a higher GPA, a certification in their field, and more educational coursework to decide to seek and take jobs elsewhere (Levin & Quinn, 2003). A third of new teachers in four U.S. states involving 468 first- and second-year teachers reported they were hired after school had started. A total of 63% were hired a month before or after the school year had started (Liu & Johnson, 2006). Discovering practices that can overcome obstacles to effective recruitment and hiring of a quality teacher are topics of educational study (Liu & Johnson, 2006; Donaldson, 2011). In addition, examining the process from the lens of the principal continues to be a focus of research (Bourke & Brown, 2014; Kersten, 2008).

Perspectives of the Principal

A lack of qualitative research available regarding principals' thoughts on recruitment and selection of teachers during the hiring process is evident (Bourke & Brown, 2014; Engel et al., 2015). In earlier studies, Trimble (2001) suggested principals discern potential in teacher candidates during interviews and then help provide them training and mentoring to grow and develop into a quality teacher. Subjective characteristics noted by principals to be commonly

shared among quality teachers included hard work, interpersonal skills, and the ability to communicate in a professional manner (Trimble, 2001). In interviews with 30 principals involving schools ranging from rural to suburban locations from two states in the U.S., a majority of administrators agreed that the most important teacher characteristic was a candidate who genuinely cared about children (Donaldson, 2011). In a small study of 75 principals, administrators reported a past history of successful teaching as the most crucial factor in evaluating an applicant (Abernathy et al., 2001). Additional qualitative findings confirmed this earlier study, as teacher qualities reported to be important to principals when hiring include teacher experience and previous opportunities to work with the candidate in a teaching role as a student or substitute teacher (Donaldson, 2011). Abernathy et al. (2001) concluded university students gave their G.P.A. more importance than principals or teacher education faculty did in making a hiring decision. Also, hard-working, energetic candidates with good interpersonal skills who demonstrated a sense of humor and a student focus were more likely to be hired by administrators. Kersten (2008) found commitment to students and student demonstration of learner qualities also surfaced as important candidate characteristics during an Illinois survey of principals.

In a study involving principals and district officials in Florida, members of the selection committee made personnel decisions during the selection process based on key factors that had little to do with anything other than subjective characteristics (Rutledge et al., 2008). An actual demonstration of a candidate's teaching ability was expected as part of the hiring process by only 8% of the 142 principals participating in the study (Kersten, 2008). In a quantitative analysis comparing views of undergraduate education students, teacher education faculty, and elementary and secondary level principals, findings indicated principals value a candidate's ability to

demonstrate classroom management (Abernathy et al., 2001). Interestingly, principals stated a teacher's ability to work with diverse learners ranks in the top five factors of importance to the hiring decision, yet principals do not choose to watch video of candidates demonstrating these skills: "It is peculiar that in the hiring process, principals do not value the opportunity to watch an applicant's teaching sample prior to making a job offer" (Abernathy et al., 2001, p. 118). Finding a lack of commonalities between principals' preferences for teacher candidates makes it obvious that adding more people to the hiring committee may further challenge the hiring process, as more participants need to come to consensus on what constitutes a quality teacher candidate.

Principals' perspectives as they perform their leadership role in the recruitment and selection of teachers is recognized in literature. Pillsbury (2005) found agreement among administrators as to what makes an effective teacher, and additional authors support this belief (DeArmond et al., 2008). In a recent mixed method study involving 368 principals from Chicago Public Schools, findings indicated different teacher characteristics are preferred between principals, even within the same school district (Engel, 2013). Rutledge et al. (2008) suggested that principals choose candidates on qualities that have less to do with standards and more to do with personal bias. Furthermore, surveys of principals from Chicago Public Schools showed variation in desired teacher candidate qualities, even within one district. Principals from high-achieving schools gave greater weight to teacher credentials and content knowledge, while principals from low-achieving schools were more concerned with hiring a candidate who cares for students, controls the classroom, and demonstrates a willingness to go the extra mile (Engel, 2013). In fact, survey findings indicated *classroom management skills* were the only skills found in the top five most important teacher characteristics by the majority of principals. Inversely, the

least important characteristics noted were objective in nature, such as *gender* or *teaching experience* (Engel, 2013). Abernathy et al. (2001) surveyed 75 principals and noted the most significant factors in evaluating a teaching applicant were found to be previous success in a teaching position and the cooperating teacher's evaluation. In a qualitative study regarding the process used by principals for teacher candidate identification and selection, "principals in high achieving schools were more likely (18 percentage points) to report collaborating across all three phases of the hiring process" (Engel et al., 2015, p. 26). Although, principals agree on characteristics of an effective teacher more research is needed to identify how members of a hiring team account for the differences in personal bias during the selection process.

Trend Toward Distributed Leadership

Since the mid-1980s, research has shown a new focus in school leadership due to educational reforms involving leadership roles beyond those of the principal to include teachers and other educational forces (internal and external). Researchers in the new millennium noted little research existed on the topic of shared or distributed leadership, but reported interest in the subject was growing, especially in the field of education (Day, Gronn, & Salas, 2004). Just a few years later, distributed leadership is a current central leadership concept—particularly in the field of education (Harris, 2012).

Using a distribution of leadership during the hiring process may allow principals more insight into differing perspectives on candidates, resulting in a more effective candidate selection (Donaldson, 2011; Engel et al., 2015). Distributed leadership practice does not constitute action on the part of the leader, action done to a follower, or actions of individuals. Instead, distributed leadership is defined by the interactions among the leaders and followers when handed a particular situation (Spillane, 2005). In a small qualitative study examining contextual and social

properties of distributed leadership recognized through conversations occurring between members of an educational team, this “interaction analysis” was under investigation (Scribner, Sawyer, Watson, & Meyers, 2007). The definition of leadership has changed from one of an individual of authority, to one of a process of interaction, and a principal’s role is moving from one at the top of the leadership pyramid to one of skill, of developing trust as administrators negotiate the network of interconnections between responsible parties involved in decision-making (Harris, 2012).

Wahlstrom and Louis (2008) found a relationship exists between shared leadership and trust. Notably, increasing teachers’ trust through lateral decision-making activities is recommended by researchers utilizing a 109-item survey completed by K-12 teachers from 39 school districts in the U.S. for the national research project. The authors suggested that educational instruction is positively impacted when the power barrier between administrators and teachers is taken down due to implementation of distributed decision-making practices. It is worth noting that increasing teachers’ trust through lateral decision-making activities is recommended from the study as a way administrators can indirectly impact instruction in the classroom (Wahlstrom & Louis, 2008).

Distributed leadership has developed from a theoretical base grounded in organizational theory, but since the 21st century, educational research has produced a greater interest in the leadership concept than other establishments (Bolden, 2011). The author provides an extensive overview of the origins of distributed leadership theory, citing numerous authors regarding key concepts of early theories in leadership functions, distribution of power, and shared leadership. Bolden (2011) completed an extensive literature review to offer the reader a historical background from which distributed leadership theory has been derived. “The key message here is

that for many principals a personal transformation in leadership needs to occur so that efforts to nurture the growth of other leaders can succeed” (Harris, 2012, p. 8). Therefore, distributed leadership as a theoretical framework to this study provides the connection by which the need to examine teachers’ views as part of the decision-making process in the recruitment and selection of teachers is based.

The approach to hiring teachers has changed, as past studies noted shifts in hiring trends were due to “increasing tensions between the centralized and decentralized aspects of the selection process” (Wise et al., 1987, p. 8). Liu and Johnson (2006) explained a centralized process relies on less personal, more standardized procedures to process larger numbers of applicants. Fuller et al. (2007) noted initial teacher candidate screenings typically consist of objective measures. However, principals are often involved at the decentralized hiring phase where more subjective teacher qualities are measured (Fuller et al., 2007). This created difficulties between the decentralized and centralized processes, as findings indicated cognitive components of screening (typically performed at the district level), such as GPA, are less important than a candidate’s willingness to be involved in extracurricular positions, which constituted a school-level concern (Balter & Duncombe, 2006).

Liu and Johnson (2006) reported a decentralized approach often uses a multi-dimensional team comprised of principals, district officials, and teachers, and this process provides more interactions with personnel at the school level. In smaller districts, an interview team may consist of the superintendent, principal, teachers, and administrative assistants or school specialists (Balter and Duncombe, 2006). Both principals and staff within the school realized benefits to using a decentralized approach to educational decision-making. Years ago, Mohrman and Cooke (1978) proposed that participation in different decision opportunities within the education system

were differentially related to teacher-reported satisfaction. The author confirmed that use of a multi-level, wider lateral distribution of leadership can have positive effects for an organization (Harris, 2012). Increased accountability and job demands on the role of the principal have opened the door to replace the traditional one-person leadership role with that of shared leadership (Rutherford, 2006). Engel et al. (2015) found use of a distributed leadership process throughout collaboration during the hiring process allowed principals more insight into characteristics of teacher candidates, resulting in a more effective candidate selection. Lambert (2002) proposed “the old model of formal, one-person leadership leaves the substantial talents of teachers largely untapped” (p. 37). Perhaps exploring teachers’ perspectives of the hiring process will help to substantiate both researcher’s claims.

Researchers reported variation across schools as to the extent administrators collaborate with their staff and the role that staff members play in the hiring process (Engel et al., 2015). Elementary teachers in an U.S. urban school reported positive feelings toward their involvement in instructional leadership at their school, which included hiring decisions (Printy & Marks, 2006). Engel et al. (2015) gathered results from a qualitative study of 31 principals in Illinois, to find 93% of principals interviewed used a hiring committee in the selection process. In this urban area, when choosing committee members, teachers were reported as participative members of the hiring team 65% of the time. A large majority (82%) of principals reported using a specialized faculty member to help in the hiring process due to their specific expertise (Engel et al., 2015). Findings indicated only one-third of principals working in urban schools have autonomy in the hiring of a teacher candidate, which is considerably less than their rural counterparts (Papa & Baxter, 2008). This discrepancy between urban and rural schools with use of teacher input during

the hiring process supports the statement by Kersten (2008) that increased use of teacher participation on the hiring team is “a trend that warrants additional monitoring” (p. 361).

Liu and Johnson (2006) argued a multi-dimensional model alone has not improved the process, and hiring committees are in need of reform. Although the idea of school-based hiring practices sounds like a promising reform idea, obstacles such as lack of best practice knowledge and effective hiring procedures can result in a less-than-quality teacher selection (Nowicki & Rosse, 2002). As principals are expected to complete graduate level courses to learn professional and legal requirements necessary for effective hiring practices, concerns regarding teacher preparation to step into this hiring role are reasonable.

As early as 1954, Gibb noted that leadership was comprised of functions that were distributed in varying amounts to members of a group (as cited in Gronn, 2000). In this early exploration of distributed leadership, the function of the organization was based on an individual's or small group's part on the team. The term distributed leadership is “one lens for conceptualizing and studying leadership as a team (or organizational) phenomenon, and not just as an individual attribute or behavior that is brought to a team” (Day et al., 2004, p. 875). Rather than looking at distributed leadership as an organizational structure, research recognizes leadership as a fluid interaction exchanged among employees, affecting all members of the organization (Gronn, 2000).

Current literature demonstrates an organizational shift in educational leadership from a one-person position of authority to a process of interaction requiring a principal to further a network of trust among teachers to navigate the course of shared decision-making and responsibilities (Harris, 2012). Previously, Lambert (2002) suggested schools involved in the practice of distributed leadership had several commonalities:

- Administrators, teachers, parents, and students are learners and leaders.
- Core values and vision are shared.
- Data is collected and used to make decisions.
- Roles reflect collaborative responsibilities.
- Reflection and improvement is continuous.
- Student outcomes are positive and continually improving.

Although, positive outcomes are not necessary for the practice of distributed leadership to take place, educators acknowledge that positive outcomes through the use of distributed leadership practice are desired.

The practice of distributed leadership can be accomplished through leadership teams. Leadership teams are comprised of various members of the school staff and other members of the school community, with open membership and fluidity in design. These teams can be formed to accomplish a variety of school-related tasks including collecting and analyzing data, making school-wide decisions, and implementing various initiatives toward school improvement (Lambert, 2002). Day et al. (2004) claimed, “Teamwork is a set of interrelated and flexible cognitions, behaviors, and attitudes that are used to achieve desired mutual goals (p. 863). Teams leave behind their individual identities to form a group identity, and this team identity is an important reserve that can be accessed to help socially fund future team situations. Principals play an important role in accessing the talents of their educational staff. “How school principals engage their teachers in school initiatives and concerns is critical in distributed leadership” (Printy & Marks, 2006, p.128). Principals control many factors and resources to facilitate the practice of distributed leadership in a professional community. The authors suggested these

factors can include making committee appointments, scheduling planning time, and delegating decision-making (Printy & Marks, 2006).

Researchers and practitioners have access to extensive literature reviews as a reminder that the practice of distributed leadership does not diminish the role of the principal (Harris, 2012). On the contrary, “principals occupy the critical space in the teacher leadership equation...to bring distributed leadership to life in schools” (Harris, 2012, p. 8). Many schools are trying to build leadership capacity within their school systems to engage in a distribution of leadership, hoping to produce improvements in student outcomes (Lambert, 2002). However, Spillane (2006) proposed a distributed perspective of leadership extends beyond the roles and purposes of the members of the team to address the practice of leadership itself.

Researchers explained the design of teams with the concept of communities of practice. These communities are groups of people comprised of individuals themselves who exist within an organization to produce knowledge that will add value to the organization (Wenger & Snyder, 2000). Additionally, communities of practice promote vision, create business, make decisions to solve problems, help disseminate good practices, and improve the talent of its members, while also seeking and maintaining community talent (Wenger & Snyder, 2000). Obstacles to the effectiveness of a community of practice can include difficulty in sustainability and integration with other parts of the organization. In addition, leaders may find these fluid groups hard to supervise or affect, because communities of practice differ from other organizational forms such as; formal work groups, project teams, and informal networks. A community of practice is a self-selected group of people with a shared passion whose purpose is to develop members’ capabilities through sustained interest by its members (Wenger & Snyder, 2000). A community of practice differs from the distributed leadership framework as it is a group and not a “way” of

doing business. Wenger and Snyder (2000) provide the reader with a comparison of four organizational practices including community of practice, formal work group, project team, and informal network. Unlike the other three organizational practices, a project team most closely resembles the structure of a hiring team, as there is a specific task to be accomplished, members of the team are often assigned to the hiring committee, and the team disbands following a teacher selection (Wenger & Snyder, 2000). For the purpose of this study, the difference between distributed leadership and an organizational project team is noted. Beyond a project or hiring team, this study will explore the perspectives of teachers involved in the hiring process and examine the practice of distributed leadership as it pertains to interactions between the principal, the teacher, and the hiring situation, including how the hiring activity occurs.

Administrators recognize that sharing the task or responsibility of selecting a teacher with other members of the staff makes sense. After all, the teachers in the school will be highly impacted by the teacher who is chosen to work alongside them in the future. Unfortunately, teachers are often placed on the team as a part of sharing the administrative task, rather than being involved in prior meetings to participate in the process as a true participant of distributed leadership practice. The flattening of the pyramid of leadership hierarchy, where teachers along with administrators provide leadership for the school, is still the objective of shared leadership (Lindahl, 2008). Lindahl (2008) aptly confirmed this belief with the following statement: “Because administrators have so readily fallen into the trap of involving teachers in shared administrative roles rather than in shared leadership, they have promulgated retrospectively predictable models of failure” (p. 300). Unlike these misguided attempts at shared leadership, distributed leadership requires deliberate planning and arrangement (Harris, 2014). Spillane reminds educators the practice of distributed leadership is not simple; it includes process and

interaction, "...the situation does not simply affect what school leaders do; in interaction with leaders and followers, the situation defines leadership practice." (2006, p. 22).

Barriers to distributed leadership as a practice include resistance to change, less accountability, and time (Lindahl, 2008). Regarding resistance, the literature notes that schools with established cultures can be reluctant to accept changes in the organizational system. Yukl and Epsinger noted two potential barriers to the practice of distributed leadership (as cited in Lindahl, 2008). First, more people involved in the process can make agreement difficult. Next, an increase in the number of leaders responsible for a decision can result in a decrease in accountability for all. Overall, an increase in communication and interactions of members of a committee or organization can require more time from administrators' already hectic schedules (Lindahl, 2008). Earlier attempts at shared leadership by widely distributing leadership roles and studying its effects on school reform initiatives did not find difficulties with creating positions or a lack of willing participants to rise to the roles. But, initiatives encountered the following constraints to school reform success: lack of role specification, training, and time to connect with related personnel crucial to success in the role (Camburn et al., 2003). In this study, exploring teachers' perspectives regarding some of the aforementioned barriers to shared leadership roles will add to the literature regarding the supports and constraints of the practice of distributed leadership during the hiring process.

Conclusion

In this chapter, research was presented to identify the complexity of the hiring process, through an analysis of recruitment and selection practices (Balter & Duncombe, 2006; Liu & Johnson, 2006; Rutledge et al., 2008). Next, five topics were examined in the literature: (1) importance of teacher quality for student achievement, (2) recruitment practices, (3) selection

practices, (4) perspectives of the principal, and (5) the trend toward use of distributed leadership. Then, the use of distributed leadership was presented to provide a theoretical framework as a practice to be explored during the recruitment and selection of teacher candidates. In conclusion of this chapter, a summary of each of the five topics is provided.

First, the importance of teacher quality on student achievement was discussed (Boyd et al., 2005; Rivkin et al., 2005; Rockoff, 2004; Stronge et al., 2007). An effective teacher is defined through educational interviews and surveys collected by Schussler et al. (2010) as one who “employs both successful teaching, which realizes intended outcomes, and good teaching, which is morally worthwhile” (p. 351). The positive effects on student outcomes as a result of hiring a quality teacher is supported by numerous studies (Cruickshank & Haefele, 2001; Darling-Hammond, 2000; Rivkin, Hanushek, & Kain, 2005; Rockoff, 2004; Stronge et al., 2007). DeArmond et al. (2008) suggested teachers and principals agree on characteristics of an effective teacher, but most “expressed skepticism about their ability to assess candidates during the interview process” (p. 9). Principals recognize difficulties inherent in the teacher candidate interview process, including lack of actual demonstration of teaching strategies or classroom management abilities, and candidates who provide all the right answers, but who do not actually perform up to their initial interview responses (DeArmond, et al., 2008). Principals and teachers both demonstrate a lack of certainty that the candidate with the best interview will indeed be the best teacher selection. This uncertainty suggests that personal decisions made during the selection process are based on factors subjective in nature (Rutledge et al., 2008).

Second, the recruitment process for potential teacher candidates was discussed, and obstacles affecting the recruitment of a quality teacher were explored (Caldwell, 1993; Balter & Duncombe, 2008). Recruitment issues include differences in potential teachers in the applicant

pool between schools (Engel et al., 2014), proximity to school (Boyd et al., 2005), use of limited tools for the search (Balter & Duncombe, 2008), and navigating state and local policies (Papa & Baxter, 2008).

Third, various schools were studied in an effort to gain insight into selection practices (Tooms & Crowe, 2004). The need for reforms in selection practices has been suggested, and issues that hiring teams face have been discussed, including the hiring of less-experienced teachers to work in at-risk schools (Boyd et al., 2005), quality of teacher selection (Papa & Baxter, 2008), lack of submission of necessary materials and late hiring practices (Liu & Johnson, 2006), principal attributes (Fuller et al., 2007), and higher quality teachers choosing to leave low-achieving schools (Boyd et al., 2005). Authors note selection practices have targeted the principal as the main player in hiring decisions, but the trend has changed. One of the two suggestions for future research is to obtain self-reports of members of the hiring team (Engel et al., 2015). A motivating element for this dissertation is the need to discover teacher perspectives as members of the selection committee. The qualitative component, using interviews and focus group discussion, becomes relevant as researchers seek to understand the reasoning behind the hiring process and the identification of more effective selection practices (Rutledge et al., 2008).

Fourth, principals were interviewed to gain their perspectives regarding teacher candidates and the hiring process (Engel, 2013). Principals in Chicago Public Schools sought candidate traits such as caring and possessing classroom management skills more than content knowledge or pedagogical expertise, probably due to administrators' lack of knowledge of curriculum content and difficulty in assessing it (Engel, 2013). If teachers are utilized in the hiring process, they can provide that missing connection to the expertise in these areas and

perhaps change the focus of the hiring process to more strongly encourage hiring based on content knowledge and effective instructional practices.

Finally, research into the hiring process itself was examined with an explanation of the current trend toward a practice of distributed leadership model was presented by Spillane (2005). The transfer of decision-making from higher levels of an organization to lower levels (described as a decentralization of schools) was explored to answer questions regarding teacher control versus administrator control in relation to educational tasks, including hiring personnel (Ingersoll, 2003). From results of their study, Engel et al. (2015) supported use of a more collaborative model. Gronn (2000) suggested a single person may exert influence, but distributed leadership denotes distribution of influence, not the differentiation of authority or power: “distributed leadership is an idea whose time has come” (p. 333). The direction for future research, according to Engel et al. (2015) includes obtaining reports of other members of the hiring team and comparing them to earlier principal conversations. Further validating the need for this current dissertation, a lack of research exists based on organizational structure in regards to schools, districts, and teacher hiring practices (Liu and Johnson, 2006). In addition, Gronn (2000) recommends further research in the area of organizational labor with leadership noted as a contributing role. Spillane (2006) declares, “Relatively little is known about how leadership practice is stretched over formal leaders and teacher leaders” (p. 21). In response to the recommendations from researchers in the field of education, this study looks to further explore the topic of distributed leadership through the lens of the teacher as a member of the hiring team.

Chapter III

Design and Methodology

Introduction

The focus of this qualitative study is to uncover teachers' experiences and views as members of hiring teams and fill the gap in the literature regarding the practice of distributed leadership and its impact on hiring an effective teacher. This chapter explains the qualitative design and focus group methodology utilized in researching elementary teachers' perspectives as members of the hiring team. Surveys and interviews from recent studies provided insight into *principals'* perspectives regarding the recruitment and selection of teachers (Balter & Duncombe, 2008; DeArmond et al., 2008; Engel et al., 2015; Kersten, 2008). Limited research provides evidence that additional research is needed to gain insight into *teachers'* perspectives. Administrators empower teachers to take on the role of hiring teacher candidates, but limited research is available concerning teachers' perspectives of hiring teams in general, and specifically, of each member's role in using the practice of distributed leadership for teacher selection (Engel et al., 2015).

Data regarding elementary teachers' perspectives as members of the hiring team was collected for this current study from both a small and a large school district in the Pacific Northwest. Of particular importance to this study were elementary teachers' views toward the practice of distributed leadership during the hiring process. The practice of distributed leadership draws from the talents, skills, and experiences of educational staff to maximize leadership capacity (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009). The practice of distributed leadership is based on the quality of interactions within an organization (Harris, 2014). This study used a distributed

leadership model of interactions between leaders, followers, and the situation of hiring teachers to explore elementary teachers' perspectives of their role as members of the hiring team.

The purpose of this qualitative investigation was to find answers to the following research questions:

1. What has been the experience of elementary teachers as members of the hiring team?
2. What are the views of elementary teachers concerning their role as members of the hiring team?
3. What are teachers' attitudes toward the use of distributed leadership in identifying and hiring an effective teacher?

This chapter provides the research design and the methods used in the study to gather perspectives of teachers involved as members of the hiring team. Next, information regarding the role of the researcher and factors used to determine the location for data collection and how elementary teachers were selected to participate in the study will be provided. Then, data collection and analytical methods will be explained in detail. Finally, the reflections of ethical considerations and limitations to the study will be shared. Instruments for use in the study include open-ended questions in an online survey, a protocol used to explore focus group conversations, and completion of a consensus matrix. In addition, the informed consent form provided to participants can be found in Appendix K.

Research Design

The completed qualitative study provided research data needed to complete the picture of the teacher selection process by making sure the voices of each of the participants on the hiring team was heard. As Marshall and Rossman noted (2016), "Qualitative research, then, is a broad approach to the study of social phenomena" (p. 3). The social phenomenon involved in this study

was focused on hiring practices, particularly from elementary teachers' perspectives as members of the hiring team. As a qualitative research genre, phenomenology is described as the discovery of evidence or using the evidence discovered to further a hypothesis of the human experience through collaboration with participants or interpretation by an onlooker of the activity (Walsh, 2012). In this study, a qualitative survey was used to *discover* evidence of general knowledge and thoughts pertaining to the hiring process, and focus groups were used to *collaborate* with teachers to gain insight into the conceptual framework with regard to the practice of distributed leadership in the hiring process. A unique characteristic of a phenomenological study is data obtained in context of the participants' lives (Marshall & Rossman, 2015). Therefore, teachers who have been involved in the hiring process participated in the focus group conversations, and use of a local public library site was offered to reflect a familiar location to all participants involved in the study.

A focus group is a popular form of a qualitative design. The open-ended response format allows the participant to provide detailed information, express opinions, and describe experiences (Turner, 2010). Through conversations and exposure to new thoughts, potential shifts occur in participants' understandings (Walsh, 2012). This collection of unanticipated data is a noted strength of a qualitative design (Galleta, 2013). The researcher asked clarifying questions to ensure participants' comments were accurately understood. Participants were encouraged to review the researcher's transcription and regularly provide feedback to the researcher to ensure accurate interpretation. This "member checking," according to Cho and Trent (2006), can strengthen the reliability and validity of a qualitative research study. Evidence collected in this manner is different from evidence obtained to strengthen one's own study or argument, as participants are asked to provide reactions or corrections to the researcher's

proposed findings (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Facilitating a qualitative study with open-ended questions was enhanced as new questions arose from the conversations themselves (Walsh, 2012). A qualitative design allowed for the researcher to describe human thoughts and actions as they pertained to an unknown or less-researched topic (Morgan & Krueger, 1998).

Participants

This study consisted of elementary teachers selected from a small and a large school district in the Pacific Northwest. The large school district involved in the study employs 820 elementary teachers and is comprised of 25 elementary schools. A total of 129 elementary teachers completed questions 1-11 on a Qualtrics online survey received via district email, which represented a 17.8% response rate. The small school district involved in the study employs 76 elementary teachers and is comprised of five elementary schools. In the small school district, teachers received a district email notification and 17 elementary teachers completed questions 1-11 on the Qualtrics online survey. This represented a 22% response rate. Survey recipients then self-selected to answer additional questions in the survey, as only those who had been involved in the hiring process as an elementary teacher were chosen to complete all portions of the survey. Subsequently, participants again self-selected to continue participation in the study as part of a focus group. Anonymity of focus group participants was maintained in the study through the use of pseudonyms. Teachers participating in the focus group sessions were representative of both school districts' populations, with teachers from both low and high socioeconomic schools. The study sought elementary teachers who have prior experience as members of a teacher hiring team as they were likely to have high interest and be vested in the description of the findings of this study. Morgan & Krueger (1998) noted participants are more willing to participate and engage in conversations that directly impact their environment.

Data Collection

Data obtained for this study originated from an online survey of teachers with a follow-up focus group discussion completed for this qualitative analysis. Online surveys were conducted in September of 2016. Surveys consisted of open-ended questions administered through use of a national survey instrument, Qualtrics. Responses to the online survey questions, along with survey responses gathered from earlier research by DeArmond et al. (2008) regarding principal perspectives of the teacher hiring process, were utilized to form the focus group questions used later in this study. Following survey results, teachers participated in a focus group discussion to elaborate on survey answers. Self-selected respondents received an informational letter regarding the purpose of the study, procedures, and methods to protect rights of all participants, and informed consents were obtained prior to continuation in the study (see Appendix K).

Focus groups are notably recognized as a method for gathering data for four main purposes across a variety of fields, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2

Four Basic Uses for Focus Groups

	Academic	Product	Evaluation	Quality
Problem Identification	Generating Research Questions	Generating New Product Ideas	Needs Assessment	Identifying Opportunities
Planning	Research Design	Developing New Products	Program Development	Planning Interventions
Implementation	Data Collection	Monitoring Customer Response	Process Evaluation	Implementing Interventions
Assessment	Data Analysis	Refining Product or Marketing	Outcome Evaluation	Assessment Redesign

Note. Academic use of focus group for research. Adapted from *The Focus Group Kit* by D.L. Morgan and R.A. Krueger, 1998, p.14. Thousand Oaks: Sage. Copyright 1998 by Sage Publications. Reprinted with permission. (See Appendix H.)

Participants of the four focus groups included elementary teachers in both school districts who had previously been on one or more hiring teams. All focus group participants shared this common characteristic, although they may not have shared any other knowledge of one another, which is typical of a focus group conversation (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). The focus group was selected as the best tool for gathering data for this study for many reasons. First, focus groups allowed hiring team members to share and compare different experiences encountered during the hiring process (Morgan & Krueger, 1998). Unlike structured interview questions, semi-structured focus group conversations offered some questioning guidelines but achieved a more in-depth outcome by allowing participants to elaborate on their responses and utilize follow-up questions to seek out additional information as needed (Gill, Stewart, Treasure, & Chadwick, 2008). Second, focus groups helped the researcher gain insight into teachers' perspectives of their role on the hiring team. Marshall & Rossman (2016) argued that a focus group allows for larger breadth to a topic versus a single interview. Third, a semi-structured open-ended question format allowed teachers to share thoughts on their knowledge and the use of the practice of distributed leadership during the process of teacher selection. This study utilized a hybrid method of questioning with structured inquiries directed toward answering the research questions, while also allowing fully open-ended questions to emerge as a natural part of the conversation in gathering data from a teacher's lived experience (Galleta, 2013). Data collection typically found in a qualitative study includes open-ended questions where the speaker is willing to be open and the researcher is "openly present" (Finlay, 2006). Fourth, to capture a variety of teachers' opinions regarding the hiring process within the time constraints of a dissertation, focus group conversations rather than individual interviews were deemed more

feasible for this study. This approach increased the likelihood that the study could be completed within a realistic time frame (Galleta, 2013; Marshall & Rossman, 2016).

A pilot online survey was conducted using four retired teachers from the Pacific Northwest to strengthen and clarify survey questions. A focus group pilot rehearsal was practiced with the research assistant to provide the researcher with initial feedback which assisted in adapting the environment, checking functionality of recording instruments, and practicing focus group techniques toward clarity and comfort for future participants. Researchers recommend pilot testing questioning procedures prior to actual research participant interviews (Turner, 2010; Marshall & Rossman, 2016).

Focus groups were conducted using semi-structured, open-ended questions. Open-ended questions are typically found in a qualitative study (McNamara, 2009). Conversations were conducted around a given topic, and with semi-structured conversations the researcher naturally tended to lead the respondents. Davis and Dodd (2002) advocate showing interest and connecting to a participant is valuable in meeting standards of rigor and reliability in qualitative research by producing an accurate account of a participant's story. Initially, participants were asked general background questions that were easy to answer with neutral responses. Next, transition questions were asked to connect introductory questions with focused questions. Then, key questions needed to explore the topic were asked, and new questions arose as a result of participants' responses (Morgan & Krueger, 1998). As the researcher began to ask for participants' opinions, it was important to avoid any questions that asked participants to validate or justify their responses. Neutral questions helped keep trust high and maintained the flow and engagement of the focus group process (McNamara, 2009). Sample questions asked (see Appendix C) included

“In what ways do you see interviewing a teacher candidate as a two-way process” and “How did you come to be a member of the hiring team”?

The researcher utilized focus group techniques during the focus group sessions to facilitate open communication and appropriate sharing of ideas and feelings. Parameters for a collaborative group process were explained to all members of the focus group prior to the start of the group conversation (see Appendix B). The researcher offered a free-flowing open environment, which encouraged honest contributions by all members so that rich descriptions and details could be obtained. Morgan and Krueger (1998) along with Marshall and Rossman (2016) recommend a researcher allow everyone a voice to keep any one member from dominating the conversation, help participants stay focused on the topic at hand, and avoid a need to reach consensus to set the stage for a successful focus group.

Focus group conversations offered a unique data-collection process, as participant conversations occurred in natural settings (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Focus groups were held in a comfortable conference room at a local community library. This setting provided a relaxed atmosphere and a familiar setting for participants, as all elementary schools in both school districts maintain both a library and a conference room. The room was arranged such that all participants had a visual view of each other and could engage in conversations easily. Conversations were recorded through use of a digital recording device, digital video recording (to capture nonverbal nuances), and a microphone with frequent checks to ensure all equipment was working properly (McNamara, 2009). Note-taking was used throughout the process to record non-verbal interactions and capture feelings throughout the focus group conversations. Following the focus group conversations, the researcher transcribed conversations that were sent via email to participants for corrections or insight. In support of validity, Marshall and Rossman

(2016) asserted in-depth conversations and a triangulation method of data collection provided trustworthiness to findings collected from a study. Turner (2010) proposed focus group questions similar to interview questions provide a researcher with a more comprehensive collection of participant response. Cho and Trent (2006) affirmed “triangulation” refers to an examination of data collected through multiple methods to strengthen the reliability of the qualitative study.

In a phenomenological study, Hopkins, Regehr, and Pratt (2016) advised researchers to search for meaning of an experience by investigating it through lived experiences of others. The authors suggest when researchers “shed our usual inattentiveness, our natural attitude, and stop to consciously reflect on what we normally take for granted we are taking on a phenomenological attitude” (p. 2). Hopkins, Regehr, and Pratt describe “bracketing” as the term used to describe the goal of objectivity in a phenomenological qualitative study. “Bracketing is an attempt to objectify research findings and increase scientific rigor, positioning the researcher as a detached observer” (Hopkins, Regehr, & Pratt, 2016).

For the purpose of this study, the researcher took on a phenomenological attitude, which Finlay (2006) describes as bracketing, or examining experiences of the researcher to put them aside and experience the focus group conversations as an objective observer. Personal bias is examined prior to the study, a step which allows the researcher to be open to whatever findings emerged from participant discussions. Following the focus group conversations, reflections of the experience were examined through an empathetic lens by thinking about the researcher's own experiences as well as placing oneself in the shoes of participants to see the experience through their lens, too (Finlay, 2006). In this dissertation, the researcher's biography is given brief reference here as it was crucial to both the origin of this research topic and to the theoretical framework adopted. As a teacher in the 1990s, the researcher was not asked to be a member of a

hiring team and did not recognize other colleagues being asked to participate in the hiring process. In 1999, as an administrator candidate, the researcher participated in interviews where teachers were involved in the final hiring decision. Early in the researcher's administrative career at the secondary level, soliciting other staff members to participate on the hiring team was inconsistent at best, and at times, nonexistent. More recently, as an elementary principal, inviting teachers to play a role as members of an elementary hiring team has become more commonplace in the current school district in which the researcher is employed. The lack of the researcher's own consistency in the practice of distributed leadership to include teachers in the hiring process led to a desire for answers to the research questions. The researcher examined personal career background as a teacher, her current position as an elementary principal, and previous experiences as part of a hiring team to recognize pre-existing ideas and opinions that could constitute bias on the part of the researcher. The researcher stated during the focus group introduction that the researcher would be asking the questions but not be a participant in the conversation. At times, the researcher was asked questions by focus group participants, but questions were redirected back to focus group participants. In addition, the use of open-ended questions reduced researcher bias (McNamara, 2009).

Analytical Methods

At the conclusion of the focus group, data was analyzed to assist principals and human resource personnel in answering the three research questions and thereby strengthen the hiring process: first, by describing the experience of elementary teachers as members of the selection process with an emphasis toward understanding; second, by recognizing points of view from the perspective of an elementary teacher concerning their role as a member of the hiring team; and third, by discovering attitudes of teachers toward use of a distributed leadership model in

identifying and hiring an effective teacher. Morgan and Krueger (1998) recommend focus group conversations contain relevant information to all participants and confirm focus groups are more successful when answers to the questions posed are pertinent to members of the group. Table 3 provides the link between the first original research study question and the corresponding online survey and in-person focus group questions.

Table 3

Link Between Online Survey Questions (OSQ) and Focus Group Questions (FSQ) to Research Question (RQ)1

RQ #1: What has been the experience of elementary teachers as members of the hiring team?

<u>Online Survey Question</u>	<u>Focus Group Question</u>
OSQ #3 In your school building, how is someone selected to be a member of the hiring team?	FGQ #4 How are people selected to be on the hiring team at your school?
OSQ #4 In your school building, what qualifications are necessary to be involved on the hiring team?	FGQ #14 What process do you use to decide who will be hired?
OSQ #9 Describe any hiring policy instruction you received prior to being a member of a hiring team.	FGQ #15 How did you come to be a member of a hiring team?
OSQ #10 What questions were used during the teacher hiring interview to differentiate between a quality (ex. skills and ability) and qualified (ex. G.P.A. or college attended) candidate?	FGQ #16 What interests you about being a member of a hiring team?
OSQ #11 As a member of a teacher hiring team, what input did you have regarding the final hiring decision?	FCG #5 What type of training do members of the hiring team receive?
	FGQ #6 Does the team meet before they interview applicants to discuss what they are looking for in candidates; can you describe that process?
	FGQ #12 How do you score or rate the candidates?

Note. OSQ = online survey question; FCQ = focus group question. Adapted from “A qualitative analysis of distributed leadership and teacher perspective of principal leadership effectiveness” by J.O. Lizotte, 2013, *doctoral dissertation*, p. 62. Adapted with permission. (See Appendix K.)

Table 4 and Table 5 point out the connection between the second original research study question and the corresponding online survey and in-person focus group questions.

Table 4

Link Between Online Survey Questions (OSQ) and Focus Group Questions (FGQ) to Answer Research Question (RQ)2

RQ #2: What are the views of elementary teachers concerning their role as members of the hiring team?

<u>Online Survey Question</u>	<u>Focus Group Question</u>
OSQ #5 In your opinion, what is the role of a teacher as a member of the hiring team?	FGQ #7 Do team members have specific roles during the hiring process?
OSQ #6 In your opinion, what should be the role of a teacher as a member of the hiring team?	FGQ #8 If you were in charge, what change would you make to the role?

Note. OSQ = online survey question; FCQ = focus group question. Adapted from “A qualitative analysis of distributed leadership and teacher perspective of principal leadership effectiveness” by J.O. Lizotte, 2013, *doctoral dissertation*, p. 62. Adapted with permission. (See Appendix K.)

Table 5

Link between online survey questions (OSQ) and focus group questions (FGQ) to answer Research Question (RQ)3

RQ #3: What are teachers’ attitudes toward the use of distributed leadership in identifying and hiring an effective teacher?

<u>Online Survey Question</u>	<u>Focus Group Question</u>
OSQ #7 What is your definition of distributed leadership?	FGQ #20 Is the general quality of the teacher hired different due to use of distributed leadership? FGQ #23 Do you feel your most recent hiring team utilized the practice of distributed leadership? FGQ #24 How does the use of distributed leadership impact the hiring decision? FGQ #25 What is your attitude toward use of distributed leadership in hiring a quality teacher?

Note. OSQ = online survey question; FCQ = focus group question. Adapted from “A qualitative analysis of distributed leadership and teacher perspective of principal leadership effectiveness” by J.O. Lizotte, 2013, *doctoral dissertation*, p. 62. Adapted with permission. (See Appendix K.)

Creswell (2015) suggested a criterion sampling approach be used when study participants need to share certain characteristics. This study utilized a criterion sampling approach, as the subgroup of elementary teachers who had participated on a hiring committee were identified from the online survey for further study participation. Triangulation of data occurred through the following three components: online survey responses compared to focus group conversations, member checking by focus group participants to affirm study findings and themes, and note-taking. In addition, this dissertation utilized a matrix which provided further data checking by collecting agreement and dissent data from both verbal and nonverbal responses of participants (Onwuegbuzie, Dickinson, Leech, & Zoran, 2009). The researcher personally moderated focus group conversations and a research assistant videotaped group discussions to obtain data related to participants' prior experiences and perspectives. Analysis of data occurred through a four-stage process of obtaining transcripts of participant conversations (the researcher personally transcribed the focus group conversations), axial coding to highlight commonalities and identify categories (by hand and through use of NVivo software), identification of themes, and allowing participants to review the final draft of both the transcription and common themes (referred to as member checking) (Morgan & Krueger, 1998). At the end of the research process, an email was delivered to each focus group participant sharing the emergent themes, including paraphrases and illustrative direct quotes, which ensured their voices were represented accurately (see Appendix J). As recommended, some questions were prepared in advance, and other questions arose as focus group participants shared and discussed their beliefs and experiences. Participant responses did not always follow the exact structure of the focus group conversation. Davies and Dodd (2002) noted flexibility or practicing reflexivity allows for an accurate story to unfold, even if it does not form an expected design. Findings that are not expected or do not follow the

pattern of conversation are exciting discoveries, and where researchers could deem them contradictions, “aberrations become redescribed as revelations” (Davies & Dodd, 2002, p. 286). In this dissertation, findings that explored the use of distributed leadership as a practice during the hiring process were identified and examined. Members of the focus group interpreted the questions in different ways based on their varied backgrounds and experiences, and this variation in interpretation led to new questions as themes were discussed. The difficulty with gathering such rich and varied information came into play when sorting and categorizing the information into like themes or codes. During conversations, teachers presented views and scenarios from principal hiring teams that had been a part of their past experiences. Although these experiences were captured in conversations, the researcher only noted and categorized teacher’s views, opinions, and attitudes concerning the process of teacher hiring to answer the proposed research questions.

The topic of teachers’ perspectives as members of the hiring team is not found in the literature (Engel et al., 2015). Only members of the hiring team can provide realistic insight into their perspectives of their role on the team. Due to the topic of study, little research can be accomplished in an actual teacher candidate setting, since it could distract from the actual hiring outcome, which in turn may jeopardize a teacher candidate’s potential for hire (Gill et al., 2008). Therefore, conversations like interviews are an appropriate choice as a data collection method where “little is already known about the study phenomenon or where detailed insights are required from individual participants” (Gill et al., 2008, p. 292).

Analysis of triangulated data included the following: online survey responses, focus group discussions, and note-taking, along with completion of a consensus matrix (Minor, Onwuegbuzie, Witcher, & James, 2002; Turner, 2010). A consensus matrix allowed the

researcher to recognize both verbal and nonverbal gestures. Use of the matrix found in Figure 3, provided a more detailed final report to recognize participants' statements, including frequency and level of consensus, and to note focus group participants who provided no response.

Participants challenged the comments of other participants, which caused some participants to change their opinions and group dynamics lead participants to challenge their own comments, too. The researcher in this study analyzed those changed opinions during data analysis. Gill et al. (2008) suggested group dynamics should be noted.

Figure 3

Matrix for Assessing Level of Consensus in Focus Group

Focus Group Question	Member 1	Member 2	Member 3	Member 4	Member 5	Member 6
1						
2						
3						
.....						

The following notations can be entered in the cells:

A= Indicated agreement (i.e., verbal or nonverbal)

D= Indicated dissent (i.e., verbal or nonverbal)

SE= Provided significant statement or example suggesting agreement

SD= Provided significant statement or example suggesting dissent

NR= Did not indicate agreement or dissent

Figure 3. A matrix used during focus group conversations to capture verbal and nonverbal consensus or dissent of focus group members. Adapted from "A qualitative framework for collecting and analyzing data in focus group research," by A. Onwuegbuzie, W. Dickinson, N. Leech, and A. Zoran, 2009, *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 8, p.8. Reprinted with permission. (See Appendix I.)

Davies and Dodd (2012) recognized that a study can find discrepancy between theoretical framework and research methods. A researcher should expect the unexpected and be willing to adjust personal predictions in support of, or in disagreement with, the theoretical framework as the need arises. At times, researcher bias may be exposed, and honesty with oneself in this situation will lend to rigor in an accurate depiction of the story (Davies & Dodd, 2002). The style of final presentation of discovered accounts will be one of new understanding. This dissertation did not look to affirm or disconfirm distributed leadership as a theory but adds to the literature as additional conversation on “how” the distribution of leadership occurs during the situation of hiring. This study recognized the experiences of elementary teachers as members of the hiring team, sought to understand the complex phenomena of the hiring experience from a teacher’s perspective, and explored the use of distributed leadership as it related to a positive teacher hiring outcome.

Creswell (2015) advocated for employing ethical conduct throughout a research study. In support of ethical behaviors, permission was granted by the superintendents of both school districts in which participants were obtained (see Appendix K). In addition, informed consent was obtained from each teacher regarding procedures, including the assurance of moral obligations from the researcher to each participant in the study (see Appendix K). Ethical considerations were identified, which included providing participants information regarding the purpose of the study, protecting confidentiality of participants, and identifying the researcher’s role in the study (Creswell, 2015). Risks to participants in this qualitative study were minimal. A National Institutes of Health Office of Extramural Research course certificate has been provided as a confirmation of completion, identifying knowledge of protection of human rights for participants involved in a research study (see Appendix L). Basic procedural guidelines for

addressing ethics in a study includes the consideration of potential risks to participants such as weighing the benefits of the study against the backdrop of potential risks, maintaining confidentiality of participant information and data, and providing informed consent (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004). At times, differences are noted between procedural ethics and ethics in practice, but the use of reflexivity can connect the two (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004). Therefore, in addition to general procedural ethics, participants' rights were further respected by connecting the questions and purpose of the study to participants' thoughts that arose from the original survey questions. When participants joined the study in a joint fashion with the researcher, "they become *participants* in the research rather than *subjects*" (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004, p. 271). Furthermore, participants were provided results of the study for use in their own schools and career development (see Appendix Q). The researcher made efforts to reflect on more than methodology and data collection and instead looked at the overall purpose of the study in fostering improvements in education, too. Guillemin and Gillam (2004) noted a researcher can demonstrate reflexivity as a vital tool to ensure ethical behaviors beyond that of participant consent. Davie and Dodd (2002) reminded researchers that ethics are ongoing principles during qualitative research. Demonstrating rigor as it relates to ethics is shown by the researcher's skills in reacting in a sensitive manner to changes in a given situation or context. Identifying with participants, sharing commonalities, and producing an honest and accurate depiction of participants' stories supplies rigor and subjectivity to qualitative research (Davies & Dodd, 2002).

Limitations

Common to all research studies, certain limitations were identified during the focus group conversations (Creswell, 2015). Although the sampling size of the initial online survey was 146

respondents, participants self-selected for continued participation in the study. Possibly, teachers who chose to continue participation in the focus groups had particular characteristics in common which played a part in their self-selection.

As an elementary principal of a school located within the school district where one of the focus groups was held, certain self-reporting issues may have occurred, as teachers familiar with the researcher's position within the district may have been hesitant to provide a full disclosure of their thoughts or opinions. To reduce this potential for self-reporting bias, participants were provided statements explaining the purpose of the focus group and offering the assurance that no details would be reported with the actual names of participants. No descriptive information about any of the participants was provided in final presentation form in order to maintain the confidentiality of both the participants and the school districts.

The voices of *secondary* teachers as members of a hiring team were not captured in this study. This study focused exclusively on *elementary* teachers' participation on hiring teams. Elementary schools are less likely than secondary schools to maintain assistant principals to assist in the hiring process, and therefore, the need for teachers to participate on the hiring team as a practice of distributed leadership appeared more likely at the elementary level.

Following the transcription, participants were able to check the transcripts to ensure precision of recorded data. In analyzing transcripts, the researcher recognized that time constraints may have limited some conversations from becoming as in-depth as they may have otherwise. In addition, as with any focus group, unknown outcomes occurred, as topics arose during the conversations themselves and lead to new subject exploration and questioning outside the research topic (Creswell, 2015).

Although, this dissertation utilized qualitative analysis, Hairon and Goh (2015) recommended quantitative analysis be conducted when studying distributed leadership, to more tightly define the term distributed leadership as it pertains to a conceptual construct. While the authors noted qualitative studies can be used to investigate distributed leadership theory, the authors proposed quantitative methods allow for reduction of the phenomena into more specific factors to make distributed leadership “distinguishable from other leadership models or types” (Hairon & Goh, 2015, p. 695).

Finally, the researcher in this qualitative study sought to identify teachers’ attitudes toward the use of distributed leadership in identifying and hiring an effective teacher. Unfortunately, but not exclusive to this study, the term “effective” has been difficult for educational researchers to define. This study sought to describe a “best fit” teacher candidate, in the words of elementary teachers, on the hiring team. Yet, a synthesis of educational studies showed little commonality among researchers with regard to which personal characteristics of teachers and their instructional practices significantly impact teacher effectiveness (Goe, 2007).

Chapter IV

Results

Introduction

The quality of a classroom teacher has a positive influence on student achievement (Rivkin, Hanushek, & Kain, 2005; Rockoff, 2004; Sanders, 2000; Stronge & Hindman, 2003; Stronge, Ward, Tucker, & Hindman, 2007). Due to the importance of teacher quality as it impacts student achievement, recommendations and educational policy reforms have been initiated to improve teacher hiring practices (Balter & Duncombe, 2006; 2008; Engel, Jacob, & Curran, 2014). Although, the principal may still be the primary influence in hiring decisions, the structure of hiring teams has changed to include teachers and other school personnel (Balter & Duncombe, 2006; DeArmond et al., 2008; Liu & Johnson, 2006; Mason & Schroeder, 2010; White, Brown, Hunt, & Klostermann, 2011). As the practice of distributed leadership in hiring situations continues to expand, the need to explore teachers' perspectives regarding their role as members of the hiring team grows in value. This study seeks to fill a missing gap in the literature as noted by Engel (2013) by gathering teachers' perspectives regarding the view of their role as a member of a hiring team. Ingersoll (2003) researched a variety of positive benefits for students and staff in schools where teachers are empowered to make decisions that affect their work. However, Harris (2014) noted there is a lack of academic research which directly examines the practice of distributed leadership in education. As an author of recent leadership research, Lizotte (2013) mentioned how little empirical evidence exists regarding the effects of the practice of distributed leadership and its impact on the teacher hiring process.

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to allow the voice of elementary teachers involved as members of hiring teams to be heard. This chapter provides overall findings, gathered from online surveys and focus group conversations, to be presented as emerging

themes, followed by more specific online survey results and narrative statements that were analyzed to answer each of the following research questions:

1. What has been the experience of elementary teachers as members of the hiring team?
2. What are the views of elementary teachers concerning their role as members of the hiring team?
3. What are teachers' attitudes toward the use of distributed leadership in identifying and hiring an effective teacher?

In Chapter 4, the researcher presents the findings pertinent to each of the three research questions. Findings were obtained utilizing qualitative data gathered through Qualtrics, an online survey instrument and four focus group sessions comprised of 13 elementary teachers in both a small and large school district in two U.S. states in the Pacific Northwest. Survey results from 146 elementary teachers were analyzed by sorting responses using an Excel spreadsheet, coding commonalities by hand, and categorizing responses into emerging themes. Themes that were revealed from the surveys were used to create semi-structured interview questions asked in later focus group sessions. From focus group conversations, analysis of data occurred through a four-stage process of obtaining transcripts of participant conversations (the researcher personally transcribed the focus group conversations), axial coding to highlight commonalities and identify categories (by hand and through use of NVivo software), identification of themes, and allowing participants to review the final draft of both the transcription and common themes (referred to as member checking) (Morgan & Krueger, 1998).

Research Question 1

In this qualitative study, the researcher sought to gain insight into elementary teachers' perspectives regarding their role as members of the hiring team. Therefore, the first research

question presented in this study asked, what has been the experience of elementary teachers as members of the hiring team? Figure 4 provides a visual representation of overall themes that emerged from qualitative data through online surveys and focus group conversations to describe the experience of an elementary teacher as a member of the hiring team.

Figure 4

Themes from Qualitative Data Regarding Teachers' Experience on Hiring Teams

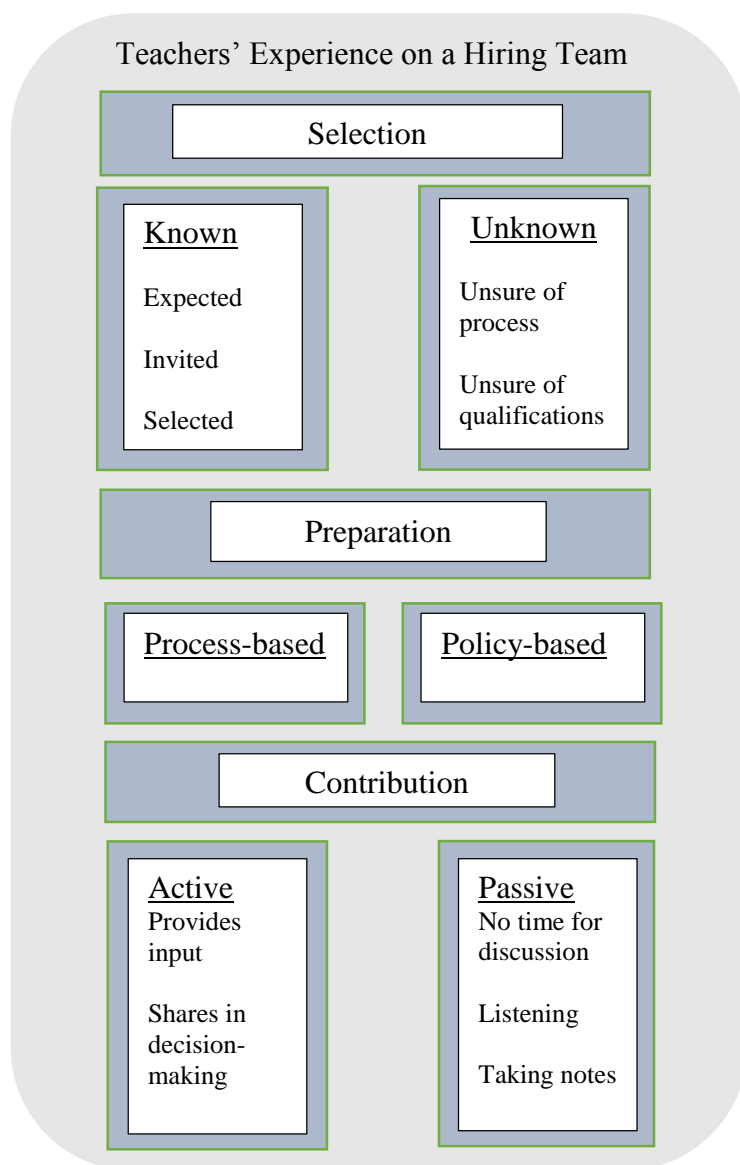


Figure 4. A visual description of themes as described by teachers' perspectives from selection to contribution as members of a teacher hiring team.

Three themes emerged to describe the experiences of teachers as members of the hiring team in each part of the hiring process (1) selection, (2) preparation, and (3) contribution. The first theme shows a need for transparency in the selection process. Findings indicate grade level teachers and the principal make up the majority of hiring teams and are chosen due to the effect the hire will have on the grade level team. But a lack of transparency is noted as teachers report they are unsure of how they are selected, as well as uncertain as to the qualifications needed (if any) to be a member of the hiring team. Following selection to the team, the second theme relates to preparation for participation on the hiring team. Training as a member of the hiring team is reported to be non-existent or minimal. When training does occur, it involves an explanation of the interview process versus hiring policy or purpose. An explanation of the interview process may include a hiring team discussion regarding which question will be asked by each member of the hiring team, and the team may take note of the time allotted for each candidate interview. A discussion of each district's hiring policy or particular characteristics that the hiring team is looking for in a teacher candidate is not typically a part of hiring team preparation. The third theme relates to the contribution each member brings to the hiring team. The contribution can be active, as a teacher provides input to the principal or helps to make a candidate selection, or the contribution can be passive. A passive contribution offers little to no time for discussion, with listening or taking notes as the main role on the hiring team. Taking notes is viewed as a passive role by teachers, as notes are often collected and unused, with no time for discussion following a candidate interview.

All 146 survey respondents reported hiring teams typically involve an administrator at the school level. Furthermore, more than two-thirds of the respondents noted one or more teachers participate in the teacher hiring team, too. For example, "the principal and grade level team" was

a typical survey response. Survey participants noted centralized hiring is still in existence to fill administrative positions, but only 10 teachers reported a district interview occurred as a part of the teacher hiring process among both school districts. Beyond grade level teachers, survey respondents reported the hiring team is comprised of many different staff members including vice-principals, principal interns, instructional coaches, special education teachers, classified personnel, the school psychologist or the school secretary supporting earlier research which suggests schools are representing different educational roles on hiring teams (Balter and Duncombe, 2006; DeArmond et al., 2008; Liu & Johnson, 2006; Mason & Schroeder, 2010; White, Brown, Hunt, & Klostermann, 2011). When interpreting the data obtained from survey results, it is important to note, survey respondents could provide multiple answers to each question. A frequency of responses is shown in Figure 5 as a visual representation of the 146 respondents who provided 298 total answers.

Figure 5

Teachers' Perspectives Regarding Hiring Team Participants

n=298 total responses

- Principal
- Grade Level Teachers / Teachers
- Specialists
- Instructional / Academic coach
- HR personnel
- Asst. Principal / Principal Intern

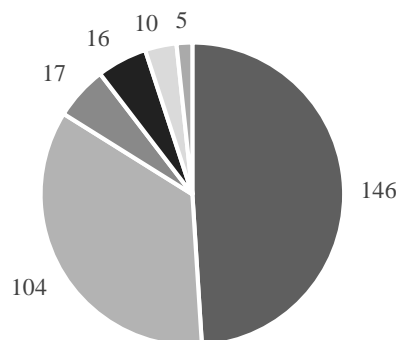


Figure 5. A chart representing 298 online survey responses from elementary teachers regarding participants found on hiring teams. Respondents could provide multiple answers.

During focus group sessions, teachers were asked to discuss who actually participates or is selected to be on the interview team. Throughout this chapter, pseudonyms were given to protect the privacy of focus group participants, as shown in Table 6.

Table 6

Focus Group Participants

Pseudonym	Gender	Years of Experience	School District
Allison	Female	13	Large
Dawn	Female	28	Large
Jane	Female	6	Small
Kathy	Female	18	Large
Kelly	Female	14	Small
Leslie	Female	10	Large
Lindsay	Female	11	Large
Margaret	Female	21	Large
Monica	Female	28	Large
Nora	Female	6	Large
Patricia	Female	22	Large
Ronald	Male	10	Large
Tina	Female	17	Large

Teachers from both school districts noted the principal and grade level team members are prevalent members of the hiring team, but in smaller school districts, teachers on special assignment (TOSAs), instructional assistants, and teachers from different grade levels may be

asked to sit in on an interview due to fewer teachers in any given grade level. *Patricia* noted, "...whenever there was a grade level opening, I was a part of those interviews." In a small school district, teacher participation was typical as *Allison* acknowledged, "...we all kind of got to be a part of it." Of interest may be online survey responses such as "...and sometimes the school secretary," "teachers and administrators and sometimes IAs [instructional assistants]," or "principal and sometimes a committee of teachers," which showed a lack of any real set arrangement as to who comprises the teacher hiring team.

The researcher in this study sought to better understand how a person is selected to be a member of the teacher hiring team. Although none of the personnel listed previously as participating on the hiring team may be surprising in and of themselves, neither school district appeared to have a set pattern for determining who is involved as a member of the teacher hiring team. According to survey respondents, grade level teachers are expected to be a part of the hiring team due to the impact that hiring the new candidate will have on the current teacher team. Teachers reported being invited or asked to be a part of the hiring team, being picked or recruited by the principal, being given an opportunity to volunteer, or being selected specifically for their experience or qualification. Perhaps surprising to principals, elementary teachers seemed unaware of how teachers were selected to be on the hiring team. Twenty-eight online responses provided answers such as "[I] couldn't tell you," "I am not sure," or "It's a mystery." Responses such as volunteering to be on the hiring team or being chosen by the principal were similar in number to the responses provided in the category of "unknown." However, some online survey respondents provided more than one response to the question posed. Focus groups explored how the selection process occurs as well as the lack of knowledge pertaining to the selection process

in more detail. The following graphical representation in Figure 6 is provided as a frequency of the 168 total responses.

Figure 6

Teachers' Perspectives of Hiring Team Selection Process

n=168 responses

- expectation
- unknown
- invitation
- selected/chosen
- volunteer
- experience/leadership abilities
- availability
- other

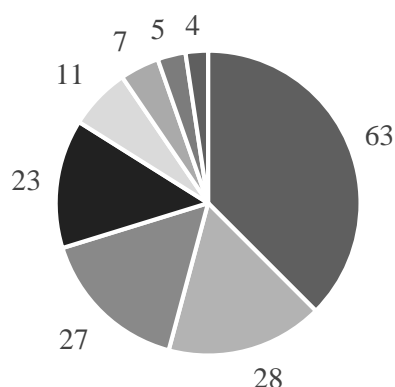


Figure 6. A chart of 168 online survey responses from 146 elementary teachers regarding the selection process for teacher participation on a teacher hiring team. Respondents could provide multiple answers.

Teachers reported the selection process differed between school districts as well as within each school district, and teacher focus group conversations reinforced online survey statements by indicating variability in how teachers have experienced the selection process. Survey results support earlier studies indicating few commonalities in hiring practices within school districts (Jacob, 2007; Strauss et al., 1999). The following transcribed conversations help to describe the different situations elementary teachers have experienced regarding the selection of teachers to the hiring team. As *Allison* explained,

Well, at my school it can vary from year to year and it varies from the position.

Sometimes I have been invited or requested (voluntold) to participate on a hiring committee. At other times there are just emails sent out saying, “Hey, we need teacher representatives to participate in an interview committee.”

Teachers from the large school district noted an expectation of teacher participation as *Lindsay* recalled,

Ours, it was just an expectation. I don't recall being asked, it was, "Oh, first grade has an interview Friday at four." We would all be there. So, it wasn't either asked or told. It was just the way it's always been, so that was the expectation and we would all show up.

When asking teachers in focus group sessions specifically about the term "voluntold," participants suggested a reader may view the term in a more negative manner, than perhaps it was originally intended. Although teachers felt the term was accurate as a part of the selection process in that a teacher is asked to help out wherever they are needed (even off contract time), teachers laughed following the use of the term, and stated they were able to say "no" to the request and they saw being asked by the principal to participate as more of a positive expectation. As *Kathy* described,

I think I was voluntold [or] asked, and I probably could have said "no", but I didn't want to either because I wanted to know who the candidates were.... I'm sure I could have said "No, I'm busy that day", or whatever and that would have been fine, but I wanted to be on it anyway....

The general expectation of teacher participation was reiterated by *Lindsay*, "Ours, it was just an expectation. I don't recall being asked, it was... Oh, first grade has an interview Friday at four. We would all be there." Focus groups conversations supported online survey results by suggesting members of the teacher hiring team are usually made up of grade level teachers who are hiring to fill a grade level vacancy. Focus group participants also indicated that how teachers are selected for the hiring team is unknown, supporting a large percentage of the online survey responses, which provided similar information. Supporting emerging themes, the following

quotations shared during focus group conversations are provided to demonstrate the lack of transparency in the selection process. This lack of transparency may be worth noting for administrators and HR personnel who may want to better understand the process from a teacher's perspective. For example, *Leslie* commented, "I don't think we were told how they (teachers on the hiring team) were selected." Further supporting a need for transparency in the process, *Margaret* stated, "I'm not sure how we were selected." Focus group participants also discussed that selection of hiring teams can be formed arbitrarily depending upon the situation. *Monica* from the large school district recalled being "summoned" by her principal to join her administrator for an interview during the school day because the candidate happened to be in town. Additionally, teachers from different focus groups agreed that hiring teams can be arbitrarily created based on external factors such as staff availability (particularly in the summer). Focus group sessions further explored the question of who participates on the hiring team to better understand this lack of arrangement to the team. A teacher candidate's accessibility and the time of year may dictate participation on the hiring team, as *Monica* elaborated,

When I was on a team, the principal was interviewing the candidate right in her office, and I think it was not a lot of notice, but she (the safe school aide) appeared in my room and said "You are needed down in the office." [...] I think he was in town and there was an opportunity for an interview and so it was quick.

Dawn described another issue surrounding teacher participation on the hiring team were described. As *Dawn* shared, "...if it is interviewing during the summer then not all of us can come so it might be [only] two or three [teachers who participate]." The previous responses from *Monica* and *Dawn*,

were supported by other focus group participants and may help to understand the differences within and between school districts in who makes up the teacher hiring team.

Upon further examination of the experience of elementary teachers as members of the hiring team, teachers were asked to report the qualifications, if any, necessary to become a member of the hiring team. Survey respondents, shown in Figure 7, reported the following 161 responses with “don’t know” or “unsure” being the largest response provided.

Figure 7

Teachers’ Perspectives on Hiring Team Qualifications

n=161 responses

- don't know/unsure
- member of grade level with vacancy
- experience/leader qualities
- certified teacher
- none
- current employee
- expertise
- willingness
- other

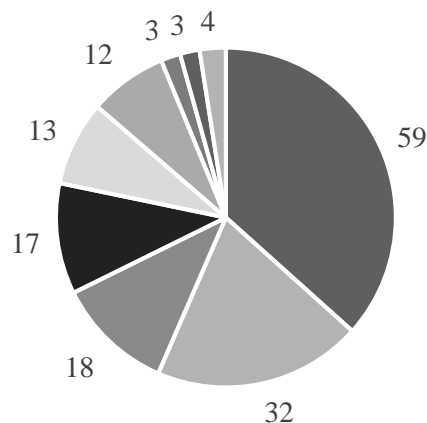


Figure 7. A chart of 161 online survey responses from 146 elementary teachers regarding hiring team qualifications. Respondents could provide multiple answers.

A variety of responses indicated differences between schools and between school districts in qualifications of those participating on the hiring team. The researcher sought to better understand the differences noted during focus group conversations, and in particular, to explore the uncertainty regarding qualifications from a teacher’s perspective. Focus group participants discussed qualifications, but these conversations uncovered no set criteria or qualifications for participation; even parents (with no employee status) can be found on hiring teams. However, grade level teachers were typically chosen to participate due to the impact that the decision will

have on their grade level team. Perhaps a different definition for qualification is needed, since a teacher's willingness and availability were described as possible qualifications, too. The online survey responses described hiring policy instructions received prior to being a member of a hiring team and uncovered that most teachers received no instruction prior to interviewing teacher candidates. Since the online survey only asked teachers to continue to Question 9 if they had been a part of a hiring team, fewer respondents answered Questions 9, 10, and 11. In total, 125 responses were reported. Figure 8 provides the following chart to show frequency in responses. Teachers reported covering basic interview procedures and mentioned steps taken to review confidentiality in the process.

Figure 8

Teachers' Perspectives of Hiring Team Instruction

n=125 responses

- none
- discussion of interview questions
- explanation of general interview procedures
- instruction in need for confidentiality
- reminder to stick to scripted questions
- opportunity to develop questions for interview
- other

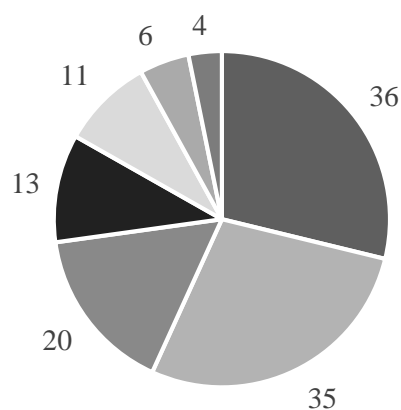


Figure 8. A chart of 125 online survey responses regarding instructions provided to members of hiring teams. Respondents could provide multiple answers.

Teachers reported being given a list of questions to ask as a part of their “hiring policy instruction” although the questions were typically scripted. One teacher surveyed reported, “I LOVE when I’m given a rubric with preferred answers and am asked to contribute a question...” This positive response to use of a rubric was further explored in later focus group

discussions. Also, the mention of a non-disclosure form was specifically addressed during focus group conversations to try to identify how typical the use of such a form was in the hiring process. Focus group discussions spent time discussing the training that was provided to hiring team participants and conversations fell into three main categories: no training provided, pre-interview question protocol, and hiring process explanation. All 13 focus group participants reported no particular training is provided prior to the candidate interview. At times, pre-generated lists of interview questions were given to hiring team participants for hiring teams to decide which questions to ask, while also discussing the importance of asking the same questions of each candidate to keep the interview fair for all participants. Finally, teacher conversations mentioned general instructions that occurred regarding the hiring process including a need for confidentiality during teacher candidate interviews and the use of a rubric for scoring each candidate. As *Kelly* shared, “I don’t know that there is any really any training. You sign...read through a page of instructions and then you sign your confidentiality agreement.” *Dawn* agreed, “Sometimes there is a list of questions that we’ll ask and we can take turns asking the questions. But, not really any training.”

Focus group participants further explored their personal interests in being a member of the hiring team. Teachers discussed being a part of the selection and their interest in selecting the candidate whom they would be working alongside. *Allison* described the desire a teacher has to be involved in the hiring process. As *Allison* emphasized,

I wanted to be part of it, because I knew I would be working close[ly] with them.... I wanted to have a voice in who we would be hiring. Whether my choice was right or wrong, at least I had a chance to participate....

Kelly had similar feelings about wanting to take part in the process. *Kelly* echoed, “I wanted to make sure that we got somebody that I felt like was going to be a member and go in the same direction....” It appeared selection to the hiring team is viewed as a positive experience, depending upon the way in which the teacher perceives their part in the process. Note the positive feelings, albeit for different reasons, exuded by these three participants who were asked to participate in the hiring process. A teacher from each of three different schools within the same large school district is represented. First, *Dawn* commented,

It’s an opportunity you know and that is how we’ve always felt. An offer is an opportunity to be a part of the process, not “told.” Because we have options, because they are not usually done during your contract time.

Second, *Lindsay* admitted, “It’s flattering to me, because it means that the principal respects your opinion and wants you to help make the decision.” Third, humor was brought into the conversation as *Ronald* exclaimed,

I can remember our principal talking in a staff meeting saying, “The ball is rolling, you can be a part of it, or not. [It] doesn’t matter, but if you want to be a part of it--jump in on it.” So, for me that’s the way it is, I don’t want to miss this. If something blows up, I want to be there and see what it looks like!

The final online survey response explored the experience of elementary teachers as members of the hiring team and focused on the types of questions asked during candidate interviews. Teachers were asked to respond to what questions were used during the teacher interview to differentiate between a quality (skills and ability) and a qualified (GPA or college attended) candidate. Of the 121 responses provided, 72 responses suggested interview questions identifying qualities such as skills and ability were utilized during interviews, versus 18

responses which reported interview questions regarding a teacher's qualifications were solicited. Of the 72 recorded responses questioning candidates to find a quality teacher, 26 responses reported using a scenario-based situation to identify a teacher candidate's skills or abilities. Seventeen respondents indicated that they could not recall the questions that were asked during their most recent hiring team experience, and four respondents specifically stated "no qualification" questions were asked during the interview. The following are survey statements provided as examples of questions asked during interviews to find a high quality candidate: "Describe how you integrate the arts"?, "What strengths will you bring to our team"?, "Do you know if a student is learning"?, and "What do you do if he/she is not"? However, some respondents indicated it is an expectation of the hiring team that a teacher candidate is indeed qualified, or they would not be receiving an interview in the first place: "It is assumed that you need to be qualified to be in an interview" and "Every candidate should be qualified." Later in focus group sessions, teachers indicated that there is an assumption prior to a candidate interview that the potential hire is qualified for the position. The questions being asked during interviews suggested teachers are looking for a quality teacher who can positively impact student outcomes. These findings support earlier research by Darling-Hammond (2000), which indicated hiring a prepared and qualified teacher is important to the hiring process in relation to a positive prediction of future student achievement.

Focus group sessions delved into the qualities that hiring teams seek in teacher candidates as further exploration into understanding the experience of elementary teachers as members of the hiring team. Focus group participants were asked to describe the process that occurs prior to interviewing candidates, specifically as it relates to discussion with other team members in reference to what they seek in a candidate. All of the focus groups agreed that little to no time

was given to discussion beforehand regarding the qualifications or qualities sought in a teacher candidate. When time could be reserved for the hiring team members to meet, it was typically informal, and the brief meeting was held right before the interviews themselves. The quick conversations that occurred during this meeting were directed toward a review of the questions that each hiring team member was going to ask. As evidence, *Kelly* stated, "...but as far as the actual interview, we would usually meet five to ten minutes [to discuss] before the candidate came in to interview."

Whether or not the questions were supposed to be directed toward gleaning specific information from the candidate was an assumption brought up by a teacher, but a fellow focus group participant questioned if that message was ever formally conveyed, and the first teacher acknowledged it was not. Teachers in one focus group within the large school district agreed that when educators have worked together as a grade level on a hiring team, there is an unspoken understanding regarding candidate qualities or qualifications. However, the variety of answers provided later in focus group discussions defining the best candidate for a position would not support the assumption that teachers agreed on what qualities a "best fit" for the position would possess. As *Lindsay* commented, "...we just know what we are looking for. We could answer for each other what we are looking for in a team." *Kelly* was more specific in her description of a "best fit" candidate. As *Kelly* articulated,

I want somebody that believes that the kids can succeed and that we are going to push them to succeed versus somebody that is more, "They'll get it when they get it." I just want someone who is going to match my philosophy and match my preps, style--my same passion.

Nora also specified certain traits she was looking for in a candidate. *Nora* shared, “I think someone who is willing to collaborate is just huge for us--that was our best fit. It was recognized that different hiring teams may be looking for different characteristics. As *Kathy* commented, “I guess depending on your team [it could be different] for us, you have to have a sense of humor.” *Dawn* described some of the more subjective traits that members of a hiring team try to identify during an interview. As *Dawn* explained, “...it is very subjective. How they made you feel [during the interview].” This subjectivity was further described as *Patricia* continued, “I loved it when we would have a candidate come and they were passionate, not only highly qualified.... They have to be highly qualified, but when they were passionate. [I wanted to know] do you love it like I do?” Elementary teachers agreed with each other that they were looking for a “best fit” candidate, but statements indicated there is great variety in what characteristics constitute a best fit.

Finally, in exploring the experience of elementary teachers as members of the hiring team, teachers with experience on a hiring team responded to the survey question regarding the input each had in the final hiring decision. Out of the 115 total responses provided by survey respondents who had been a part of a teacher hiring team, more than half reported having a good deal of input and felt influential in the selection process. An additional 30 responses indicated teachers provide valuable input more as a recommendation to the principal, who makes the final decision. Responses included, “I felt I had an equal voice along with the other grade level teachers and the principal” and “I was able to say ‘yes’ or ‘no’ I would/wouldn’t hire this person.” In contrast, only 10% reported their input had not been valued or they had little or no input in the hiring decision; e.g., “I felt free to express my opinion, but did not necessarily feel it meant anything.” Outlier respondents reported inconsistency in the amount of input teachers

have had as members of a hiring team, and three teachers reported feeling the hiring decision had already been made, which was explored in greater detail during focus group sessions. Overall, survey results implied teachers feel their input is of value to the hiring team in both assisting the principal and participating equally to help select a candidate, results are shown in Figure 9.

Figure 9

Teachers' Perspectives on Teacher Input in the Hiring Decision

n=115 responses

- valued input/equal member of process
- input given as recommendation to principal
- input not valued/no input
- inconsistent
- decision already made

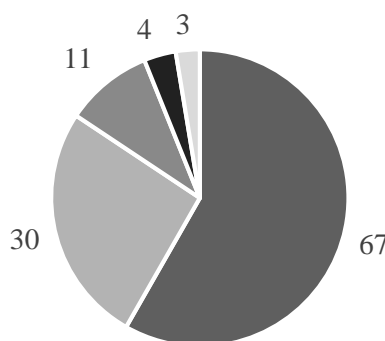


Figure 9. A chart of 115 online survey responses regarding instructions provided to members of hiring teams. Respondents could provide multiple answers.

Principals should note the bottom three categories, since principals wield influence to reduce or eliminate each of the three issues mentioned. During focus group sessions, elementary teachers further explored input they provided to the team in recommending or making a final hiring decision. Teachers discussed how they scored or rated candidates as well as the typical process of candidate selection. The selection process included asking interview questions and taking notes following all of the interviews, and finally, through consensus or a team leader, offering input to the principal in the form of a candidate recommendation. In both the small and large school districts, teachers used either consensus through discussion or a rubric with a Likert-scale score to identify the strongest candidate. As *Dawn* shared, "...we would talk among ourselves and then we usually had a leader, a grade level leader, who would take our recommendation to

the principal...and then we'd have our candidate selected.” A rubric or Likert-scale score was used at times, as *Patricia* described, “...everybody had a list of the questions on a scale of 1 to 5, how did you feel about this candidate....” In both school districts, at least one teacher from each school had experienced a situation wherein they believed that even though a hiring team was created, the hiring decision was already made. As *Kelly* described, “I’ve noticed too, sometimes that if they [principals] are not sure who they are going to hire, it looks different than if when it is pretty much a done deal and they are just going through the formalities.”

Research Question 2

The second research question in this study asked elementary teachers to share their views regarding their role in the hiring process. Figure 10 provides a visual representation of the two themes revealed from the study regarding views of elementary teachers concerning their role as members of the hiring team.

Figure 10

Themes Regarding a Teacher’s Role on a Hiring Team

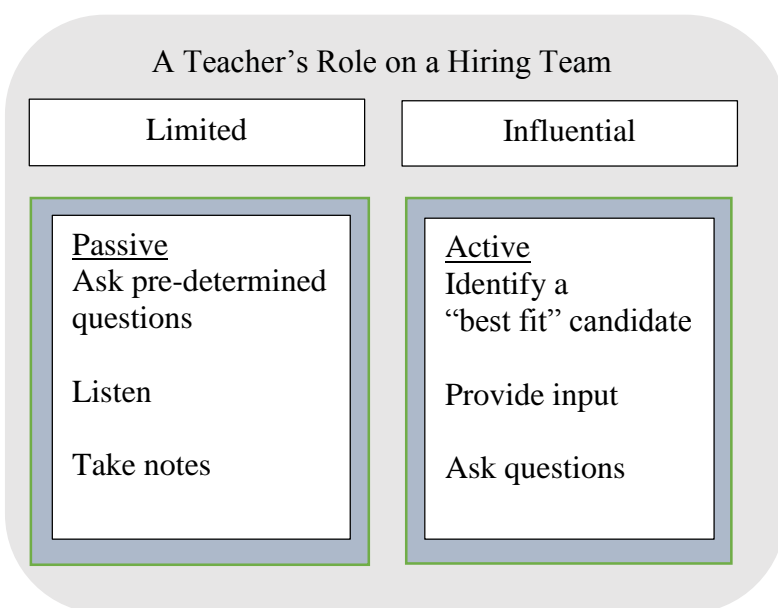


Figure 10. A visual description of themes describing a teacher’s role on a hiring team.

Overall, two themes emerged from the second study question. First, the role can be a limited one with passive participation on the hiring team, consisting of asking pre-determined questions, listening, and taking notes. Second, the role can be an influential one, where teachers are active in the hiring decision by providing input to the administrator. Members of the hiring team can also be influential in choosing the candidate who will best fit the grade level team and school community. At times, this “best fit” candidate went beyond connecting with the teaching team to include school culture and the community as a whole. When defining “best fit” teachers used a variety of positive quality descriptors such as “works well with others,” “demonstrating an agreeable personality,” and “one who helps to balance the strengths of the team.” Even though general consensus among teachers was to hire a candidate who fit well with the grade level team, the actual qualities each were looking for may fit their own personal definition. The data gathered from online surveys and focus group conversations is presented to help develop the aforementioned themes. Shown in Figure 11, just over 60 online survey respondents noted the role of a teacher as one in which they were helping the principal choose a “best fit” candidate.

Figure 11

Teachers’ Perspectives of Current Role of a Teacher on the Hiring Team

n=60 responses

- identify a 'best fit' (quality) teacher
- provide input/opinion
- ask questions during the interview
- identify a qualified candidate
- select/hire the candidate

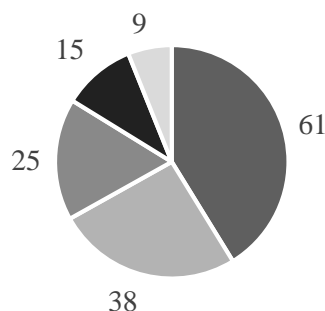


Figure 11. A chart of 60 online survey responses regarding perspectives of the current role of teachers on hiring teams. Respondents could provide multiple answers.

This type of personal bias affirms earlier research which found variation among principals as to quality preferences desired in teacher candidates, even within the same school district (Engel, 2013). Although Darling-Hammond (2000) suggested a correlation between a highly qualified teacher and positive effects on student achievement, notably only 15 respondents in this study answered that the role of the hiring team was to help find the most qualified candidate for the position. Thirty-eight respondents acknowledged the role of a member of the hiring team as giving feedback to their administrator. More specifically, feedback was described as offering opinions and providing input to the principal and other members of the teacher hiring team. Elementary teachers gave specific details regarding the kind of input members provided to the hiring team with statements such as “a grasp of the curriculum,” “teaching philosophy,” and “knowledge of specific grade level skills.” Some respondents reported teachers are able to more intuitively recognize a candidate’s “authenticity and passion” for teaching. Twenty-five elementary teachers, surveyed from both school districts, recognized their role on the hiring team involved asking the candidate interview questions. Additionally, nine respondents expanded the role alongside the principal to include hiring a candidate. However, overall teacher responses from this study, compared to principal responses in earlier research, supported findings which indicate the principal ultimately makes the final hiring decision (DeArmond et al., 2008).

Elementary teachers recognized the important contribution involving teachers on the hiring team can make to the hiring process such as to “offer questions from the mindset of a practicing classroom teacher” as well as engage in a “two-way role.” Specific statements made in the survey further explained this two-way role as one that enhances elementary teachers’ feelings of “accountability, belonging, confidence, trust,” while helping the candidate to understand a full

perspective of the grade level teams' needs. This two-way role was further explored during focus group sessions with a teacher from the small school district who suggested improvements in this two-way process are needed as members of the hiring team do not do a very good job of presenting themselves to teacher candidates. As *Jane* explained,

I don't think we do a really good job of making our interviewee candidates feel welcome or that they get to know us very well. If it is a principal they do, because we give them a tour before they interview. We kind of try to sell them [principals] on our district, but I never get the impression that we do that for any other position."

Online survey respondents commented with a negative tone to illustrate their views as to the role of a teacher on the hiring team, with responses including a "token person" on the hiring team, "simply to repeat prepared questions and fill a seat," and "sometimes we are not asked to say anything, but are expected to listen and take notes." In contradiction, a respondent indicated the role of a teacher on the hiring team was a positive one, as teachers were reported to be a "valuable member of the hiring team because they provide insight into the position that others may not know." Overall, descriptions of the type of input a teacher provides to the hiring team varied widely. Survey respondents suggested teachers should provide input to the hiring team to help identify a prospective teacher's potential collaborative energy and ability to do the following: engage students, plan and run school activities, adapt to scheduling, interact with kids, utilize discipline strategies, and demonstrate teaching style. Additionally, in their survey responses, some teachers even noted neutral feelings toward their role on the hiring team, describing their role as a "sounding board," "unknown," or "no role." Ultimately, elementary teachers offered differing views concerning their role as members of the hiring team. However, focus group participants reported, similarly to the survey respondents, that finding the candidate

who was best for the grade level team was an important role of a teacher on the hiring team, and that other roles included sitting in on the interviews, asking questions, and providing input to the administrator.

Upon delving into the responses for more details, focus group participants questioned their views regarding the interview process. When asked to state what they felt their role was on the hiring team, focus group participants originally recognized that asking questions was a general role. However, teachers from all of the focus groups noted a lack of participation in generating interview questions, although teachers often asked additional follow-up questions during the interviews. Participants acknowledged that providing input was helpful to the principal, but as in earlier studies by Ingersoll (2003) and Kersten (2008), elementary teachers in the focus groups noted the administrator ultimately upheld the final hiring decision. As *Kelly* reflected, “I think we offer input and the principal makes the final decision.” At times, the principal’s decision was at odds with that of the hiring team. *Dawn* stated, “Sometimes it was the one [candidate] the grade level chose, and sometimes it wasn’t....” Elementary teachers appear to see the hiring team as one that is still hierarchal in structure. However, as findings from the next survey question showed, teachers on the hiring committee preferred to see their role on the hiring team move to a more lateral position.

Survey respondents were asked to give an opinion as to what the current role is of a teacher on the hiring team and describe what respondents believe the role *should* be as a teacher on the hiring team. Teachers provided 146 total answers to what the current role should be, and 166 total answers to what the current role should be, respectively which fell into the following five categories for both questions: identify the candidate who is the best fit for the educational team, listen and provide input to the hiring team, ask questions during the interview, identify a

quality or qualified candidate, and help make the hiring decision as an equal member of the hiring team. Many similarities are noted in teacher online responses between the current role of teachers on the hiring team and what teachers feel *should* be their role as members of the teacher hiring team. Teachers noted identifying a “best fit” candidate and providing input to the principal as current role expectations and these roles were recognized by teachers as roles they *should* be involved in. However, survey respondents reported three times more frequently than noted in current role expectations that teachers *should* have an “equal say” in the teacher selection process. The 166 survey responses provided in the online survey are noted in Figure 12.

Figure 12

Teachers’ Perspectives as to Preferred Role of a Teacher on the Hiring Team

n=166 responses

- identify if candidate is 'best fit'
- provide input/feedback to principal
- select/hire candidate
- craft and ask questions/interview candidate
- identify quality or qualified candidate

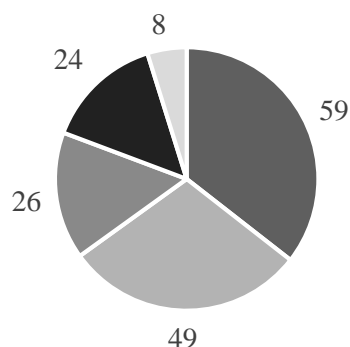


Figure 12. A chart of 166 online survey responses regarding teacher perspectives as to the preferred role of teachers on hiring teams. Respondents could provide multiple answers.

Responses included statements such as “the decision should be a team decision,” “they [teacher] should play a vital role,” and “[be an] equal team member” alongside the administrator on the hiring team. A survey respondent noted that teachers should have input as to who becomes the new member on their grade level team because it “ensures successful placement if [the] team is on board with [the] hire.” This question was later explored during the focus group sessions when teachers were asked specifically to address the effect the practice of distributed leadership, which

included teacher involvement in the hiring process had on the relationship between the new hire and the team, versus situations whereby the principal hired the teacher alone. Although a number of respondents felt the role *is* and *should include* asking questions during interviews, teachers suggested the role *should* also include participation in crafting interview questions or asking additional questions as an emphasis toward improving the role. As *Leslie* suggested, “I would have liked to have seen the questions before [the interview] and maybe tweaked them a little bit or maybe have [had] an opportunity to ask our own questions.” Additional improvements to the role were offered, which suggested teachers prefer a more influential role. As *Lindsay* commented,

Maybe if we could meet beforehand to discuss...what we are looking for in a candidate, then maybe formulate questions that were important to us as a team of what we were looking for, then we would have more of a role, rather than just someone who is reading a question off of a paper.

Although teachers indicated they would like to help develop the interview questions, it was acknowledged in focus group conversations that asking similar interview questions of each interviewee was necessary in order to provide a fair opportunity to each candidate.

Focus group participants uncovered an interesting fact that uncertainty regarding where the interview questions had originated was shared by all of the teachers from each of the schools represented in the large school district. *Monica* presumed, “I was under the impression that those [interview questions] were already created by the district, I guess. I don’t know, I never knew where they came from.” *Dawn*, who teaches at a different school within the same school district was also curious about the origination of the interview questions. *Dawn* asked, “That is a good question, because where did they [the interview questions] come from?” This lack of

transparency in some of the basic details of the hiring process was revealed during honest focus group conversations.

Research Question 3

The third and final research question in the study explored teachers' attitudes toward the use of distributed leadership in identifying and hiring an effective teacher. Overall, elementary teachers' perspectives revealed two themes regarding teachers' attitudes toward the practice of distributed leadership in the hiring of an effective teacher. The practice of distributed leadership was noted as either authentic or artificial, as shown in Figure 13.

Figure 13

Teachers' Attitudes Toward Distributed Leadership in Hiring Practices

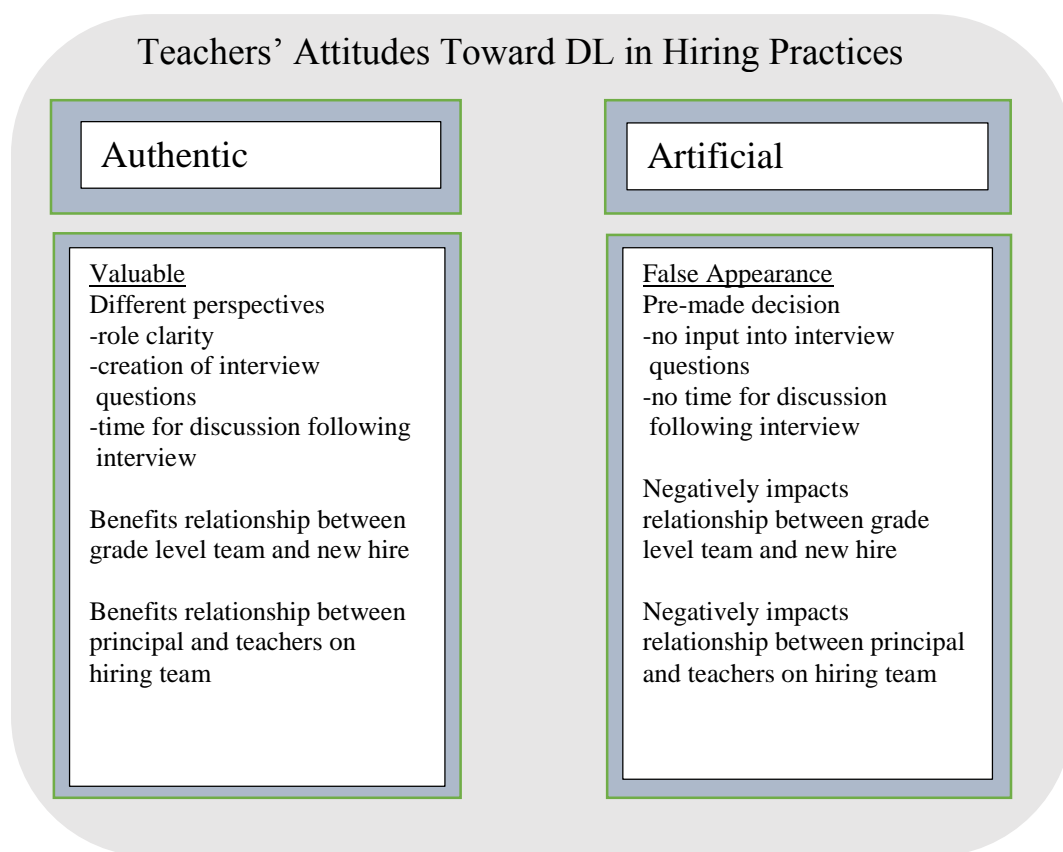


Figure 13. A visual description of themes regarding teachers' attitudes and the use of distributed leadership practice in hiring a quality teacher.

Authentic distributed leadership in the hiring process includes clarification of the role of members of the hiring team. Teachers exhibit a positive attitude toward providing input to the principal in a less active role, but want this role clarified early on during the hiring process. If teachers are asked to have a more active role in the hiring process, then the role should include a principal (leader) meeting with the hiring team (followers) before candidate interviews to determine “best fit” qualities and teacher candidate qualifications the team is seeking to discover during the teacher hiring process (interaction). Authentic distributed leadership practice also encourages elementary teacher input into the creation of the interview questions and provides enough time between candidate interviews to discuss each candidate to make the best team decision. When these components were missing from the hiring process, teachers identified distributed leadership as artificial.

Teachers recognized artificial distributed leadership practice as a one-sided show of collaboration rather than as a true interaction between the principal and teachers in the hiring process. Although, elementary teachers indicated from online survey results, that the term “distributed leadership” may hold different meanings among teachers, participants in both survey responses and focus group conversations used similar terms in describing an artificial practice of leadership in the hiring process. *Jane* and *Allison* held a conversation that helped describe the “real” or authentic practice of distributed leadership versus artificial or “gold seal” leadership. They agreed the practice of distributed leadership must be honored and can be if as *Jane* noted, “...you are not just going through the motions”.

Respondents noted that shared leadership roles including job responsibilities, and decision-making were seen as important to defining the term “distributed leadership” which provided 67.5% of the total responses. Defining distributed leadership by utilizing the expertise

of each group member was recognized in 12.5% of the total responses, while delegating responsibilities was reported in 11.25% of the responses. Nine teachers reported being unsure or unfamiliar with the term, with three teachers distinctly defining distributed leadership as a situation wherein “the principal does not have to micromanage the school and employees” as shown in Figure 14.

Figure 14

Teachers' Definition of Distributed Leadership

n=160

- shared leadership roles
- shared job responsibilities
- shared decision-making
- utilizing expertise of group
- delegating
- unfamiliar with term/unsure
- not micromanaging

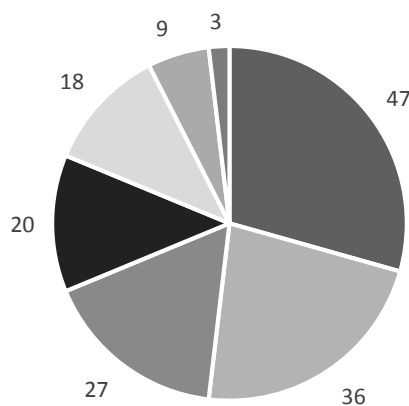


Figure 14. A chart of 160 online survey responses defining the term “distributed leadership.” Respondents could provide multiple answers.

For the purpose of this study, the term “distributed leadership” was defined for each focus group as a practice consisting of interactions between leader roles, follower roles, and the situation (Spillane, 2006). Teachers in each of the focus groups were asked to speak to the general quality of the teacher hired and to how the candidate hired may have been better or different due to the practice of distributed leadership in the hiring process. Focus group participants reported mixed experiences. But overall, responses fell into three main categories. One category described situations wherein the candidate hired would have been the same regardless of teacher participation in the interview process. The second category reported the

principal had already decided who they were going to hire, and the third category stated the candidate hired is positively affected due to the different perspectives the addition of teachers on the hiring team can bring to the interview process. Through online survey responses and focus group conversations, it was evident that teachers' found value in the use of distributed leadership in identifying and hiring an effective teacher due to the different perspective it brings to the hiring team. Including teachers as members of the hiring team can offer administrators a different perspective. As *Leslie* explained, "...you get more perspectives and more opportunities to hear the strengths of the candidates. Because, other people can point out things that maybe one person wouldn't see." With mixed experiences, *Kathy* expounded,

I think it gave him [the principal] a couple of different perspectives on a couple of them [teacher candidates]. We hired so many in a short period of time, I think on some he may have had his mind made up and it didn't matter what we said. But, I think with some of them it gave him a different perspective.

Beyond a different perspective, focus group participants questioned if a teacher's participation on the hiring team impacted the final hiring decision. As *Allison* described,

In some of my cases, no [candidate hired wasn't different]. But someone who interviews really well, or can be very professional in there [during the interview], if you start asking specific questions that are related to the teaching [you may get different answers]. The principal is not necessarily going to ask the same questions that a fellow teacher would ask....

Kelly added,

Yeah, I think a lot of times it [the candidate hired] would have been the same one, but there was once where they were all set on this applicant...and I just remember getting a bad

feeling. You know, just the red flag.... You just get the feeling there is something weird and then you bring that up and somebody else across the table says, “Yeah. What was that?”

In both the small and large school district, focus group participants specifically addressed their most recent hiring experience and if they felt their hiring team had utilized the practice of distributed leadership in selecting a teacher candidate. *Tina* clarified,

I think if it would have been *true* distributed leadership we would have had to meet beforehand and help write the questions. Then, after the interview, have a little more time for input and discussion. That would have made it more *true* distributed leadership.

A teacher’s role on the hiring team was recognized as having little impact on the hiring decision if teachers did not take part in creating the interview questions and if following the interview no discussion took place due to time constraints, or the organizational structure of the interview.

During the small school focus group sessions, teachers recognized the importance of contributing to the development of the interview questions, as teachers reported in earlier responses that the candidate selected would have been different if the hiring decision was left to the principal alone.

A participant suggested a candidate can present themselves well in the interview, but specific questions that a teacher would choose to ask regarding teaching can best reveal their true skills.

As *Tina* noted,

Sometimes [by] having more people together someone might pick up on something that someone else might not pick up [on]. Maybe a positive that wasn’t noticed. On the other hand too, maybe a red flag up on something you didn’t pick up on.

Allison reaffirmed, “The principal is not necessarily going to ask the same questions that a fellow teacher would ask.”

Each focus group participant was asked to describe their attitude toward the use of distributed leadership in identifying and hiring an effective teacher. Teachers in the study supported earlier research by Liu and Johnson (2006) who found that a positive match in the “two-way” process between new teachers and a school is an important consideration in hiring practices. Building a relationship between the teacher candidate and members of the hiring team begins during the interview. *Monica* illustrates,

A few times, the candidate was interviewed during the school day, and so the principal might take them on a tour of the school. So it would give them some idea of what we were like, too. There was a time in the interviews for them to ask us questions also.... It was interesting to hear their questions and their quick perception of our school and what it was like from their quick tour of our school, so, I think that was helpful.

In addition, teachers in focus group sessions explored their attitude toward use of distributed leadership in more depth via two main categories that arose from focus group conversations: first, how engaging teachers in the distributed leadership practice strengthened relationships between the principal and teachers as it demonstrated that teachers are valuable to the process; and second, how teachers’ attitudes between the actual candidate hired and members of the hiring team were positively affected by use of a team hiring decision versus a principal interview alone. *Ronald*, a teacher from the large school district, relayed a noteworthy experience by describing his hiring team’s feelings of doubt that the principal would select the team’s preferred candidate. During our focus group conversation, *Ronald* reflected on his feelings toward this situation and when he put his feelings into words for the first time, he was recognized that he had felt happy about his principal accepting the team’s decision, even though he had originally felt that the principal had a particular candidate in mind. Teachers also explored their

attitudes regarding improved relationships that occurred as a consequence of having a grade level representative participate on the hiring team. Teachers felt more confident regarding the teacher hire when they had been a part of the teacher hiring decision, and a more cohesive relationship between both the new hire and the grade level team emerged as a noted benefit by including teachers on the hiring team. As *Patricia* shared, “But, I think when grade level teams participate...and you have buy-in, I felt that we were valued, as a team we were valued, and maybe as individuals, too. Our opinion was valued and the decision wasn’t already made.” *Nora* experienced the reduced tension that occurred between a new hire and herself, when she participated on the hiring team. As *Nora* explained,

So, having a part in the interview process you get to know the person a little bit. So, that first day they come, “Okay, I really agreed with this and so you know what, let’s go off of that.” I trust them on this, because I’ve heard from them a little bit. But, when they walk in the door [and] you haven’t heard anything about them--there is a bit of skepticism...

Kathy added, “...maybe in reality you do buy into it [the decision to hire a candidate] a bit more and it makes the team more cohesive when you’ve had a little input.” The discussion led to the alternative situation where relationships can be negatively impacted by a lack of teacher participation on the hiring team. As *Lindsay* described,

We’ve had both situations where we have hired as a grade level team and then where the principal has just hired somebody. Yes. It feels different. It feels like you are just given somebody and told, “Make it work.” It’s kind of rough.

Patricia explained further,

In our building, there was kind of a little animosity maybe because we had several forced transfers come. Two of them we could interview and one was placed. There were a lot of questions like “Why?” There was that skepticism and non-acceptance.

Focus group conversations allowed for honest reflection regarding teachers’ perspectives on hiring outcomes and how participation can directly impact the relationship between the new hire and grade level team members.

In Chapter V, the researcher provides a summary of the findings as an overall picture revealed from qualitative data gathered in this study. The researcher will offers recommendations for future research concerning the topic of teacher perspectives and their role as members of the hiring team as well as implications for professional practice.

Chapter V

Discussion

Introduction

The purpose of this research study was to allow the voices of elementary teachers to be heard through a qualitative exploration of the role of elementary teachers on the hiring team. Jacob (2007) implied particular characteristics that comprise a “quality teacher” are difficult to isolate. Although the definition of a quality teacher may be difficult to define, researchers and educators agree the classroom teacher is an influential factor in student achievement (Rivkin, Hanushek, & Kain, 2005; Rockoff, 2004; Stronge & Hindman, 2003; Stronge, Ward, Tucker, & Hindman, 2007). Finding a quality teacher for each classroom has led researchers to examine the teacher selection process. The role of selecting a teacher, which was once held almost exclusively by the principal, now includes teachers as members of the hiring team. Yet, few researchers have explored the extent to which teachers are engaged in this practice of distributed leadership as it pertains to the hiring process.

In this qualitative study, the researcher utilized the theory of distributed leadership as it sought to explore the practice of hiring as an interaction between the principal and teachers on the hiring team in selection of a new teacher hire. As teachers expand their role in the selection of teacher candidates, findings from this study will offer teachers, principals, and human resource personnel additional insight into teachers’ perspectives of the role and their views regarding the use of distributed leadership practice as it pertains to the hiring process. In this chapter, the researcher provides a summary of the findings revealed in this study, concluding statements regarding findings, recommendations for further research, and proposed implications for professional practice.

Summary of the Results

The researcher provides overall findings in this study that were obtained by analyzing qualitative data gathered from elementary teachers from both a large and a small school district located in the Pacific Northwest. Data was collected via 146 online survey responses along with 13 transcribed focus group conversations. Both online survey and focus group questions were created to answer three main research questions:

1. What has been the experience of elementary teachers as members of the hiring team?
2. What are the views of elementary teachers concerning their role as members of the hiring team?
3. What are teachers' attitudes toward the use of distributed leadership in identifying and hiring an effective teacher?

The researcher asked the first research question to allow better understanding of the experience of an elementary teacher as a member of the hiring team. Following an analysis of data, three themes emerged to best describe the experience of elementary teachers: (1) selection, (2) participation, and (3) contribution. Elementary teachers reported grade level teachers and the principal make up the majority of hiring teams, and teachers are expected to participate on a hiring team as a representative of their grade level. Study participants reported elementary grade level teachers are typically selected as members of the hiring team due to the effect the new hire will have on the grade level team. However, the selection process differed between school districts, as well as within each school district, indicating variability in how teachers have experienced the selection process.

The first theme shows a need for transparency in the selection process. Although the majority of survey respondents recognized that a teacher is expected or selected to be a member

of a teacher hiring team, survey and focus group findings showed teacher uncertainty as to how members of the hiring team are selected. Transparency in the selection process plays a role in the way teachers described their experience as members of the hiring team. Teachers reported their experience in positive terms of value and respect when their principal selected or invited them to participate on the hiring team. Inversely, when the selection process was unknown or a teacher was arbitrarily placed onto a hiring team, teachers used words such as “voluntold” or “summoned” to describe their experience. Furthermore, participants of focus group conversations supported survey responses by indicating neither school district has a known process for determining who is involved as a member of the teacher hiring team.

The second theme relates to training, which was reported to be non-existent or minimal. All 13 focus group participants reported no particular training is provided prior to the candidate interview. Teachers described their preparation experience as minimal, such as a quick discussion on which interview question to ask or a basic reminder of confidentiality. Elementary teachers in the study desired to meet as a hiring team prior to teacher candidate interviews to create interview questions, discuss and develop a scoring method, and reach some level of consensus regarding a “best fit” candidate.

The third theme relates to the contribution each member brings to the hiring team. Findings revealed the contribution can be active or passive. An active contribution is one in which the teacher provides input during the selection process, through general discussion or a scoring system, or shares fully in the decision-making process of teacher selection. A passive contribution is one that offers little to no time for discussion, with listening or taking notes as the teachers’ main role on the hiring team. Although listening and taking notes during an interview may appear to be an active contribution, teachers in focus group conversations identified these

activities as being passive when principals do not seek teacher feedback or provide time for members of the hiring team to discuss candidates' strengths following an interview. Teachers described a negative experience when their input is not valued or is inconsistently valued, or when the principal had already made the decision to hire and teacher input was seen as merely a collaborative formality.

The second research question seeks to allow better understanding of the views of elementary teachers concerning their role as members of the hiring team. Overall, two themes emerged from this portion of the study: (1) limited, and (2) influential. First, the role was a limited one when it consisted of asking pre-determined questions, listening, and taking notes. Participants in the study indicated elementary teachers experienced neutral or even negative feelings toward their role on the hiring team if their role was limited. New discoveries arose from focus group conversations as teachers changed their opinions during the session when the topic of asking pre-determined questions was discussed. Originally, teachers appeared to be neutral in their feelings toward asking pre-determined questions, but as they spoke with one another, opinions changed to reflect disappointment and a desire to improve the teacher's role on the hiring team by allowing for more time to create interview questions and discuss the candidates' strengths following each interview.

Second, the role can be an influential one where teachers engage in the hiring decision by providing input to the administrator and other members of the team in choosing the candidate the team feels will best fit the grade level team and school community. Teachers gave a variety of responses regarding specific input that an elementary teacher should provide to the hiring team. There was general consensus among teachers that hiring a candidate who fits well with the grade level team is crucial, although the actual qualities each are looking for may not fit a particular

personal definition. Survey responses as to what *is* the current role of a teacher as a member of the hiring team, as opposed to what *should be* the role, were similar. However, survey respondents reported three times more frequently than noted in current role expectations that teachers *should* have an “equal say” in the teacher selection process. Overall, survey respondents indicated the role of a teacher on the hiring team was a positive one as teachers were reported to be of value to the hiring team due to specific knowledge of the teaching position.

The third and final research question in the study explored teachers’ attitudes toward the use of distributed leadership in identifying and hiring an effective teacher. Overall, two themes emerged from the study: (1) authentic, and (2) artificial. First, elementary teachers exhibited a positive attitude toward the use of distributed leadership with regard to the hiring process when the interaction between the principal and hiring team is authentic. During the hiring process, distributed leadership was seen as authentic when elementary teachers’ roles are clarified, when they helped create interview questions, and when teachers were given time between interviews to discuss each candidate in making the best team decision. Authentic practice in distributed leadership is recognized by elementary teachers as valuable in identifying and hiring an effective teacher due to the different perspectives it brought to the hiring team. Additional benefits included a more cohesive relationship between both the new hire and the grade level team and the principal and the members of the hiring team.

Second, elementary teachers exhibit a neutral or negative attitude toward the use of distributed leadership with regard to the hiring process when the interaction between the principal and hiring team is artificial. During the hiring process, distributed leadership is seen as artificial when elementary teachers felt that their participation had little impact in the hiring

decision or when members of the hiring team felt the hiring decision was already made by the principal; members of the hiring team appeared to clearly recognize both situations.

Conclusion

The researcher in this study sought to explore elementary teachers' perspectives regarding their role on the teacher hiring team. The study was anchored to the theory of distributed leadership as it explored teachers' attitudes toward the practice of distributed leadership in the hiring process. Findings allowed the voice of elementary teachers to be heard as it related to their experience and role as members of the hiring team. Overall, the researcher noted elementary teachers perceive value in the use of distributed leadership in identifying and hiring an effective teacher due to the different perspectives it brings to the hiring team. This data supports findings from an earlier qualitative study of middle school principals that revealed teachers and the school community can benefit from opportunities to practice distributed leadership (Lizotte, 2013). Study findings also support research showing the majority of principals utilized a hiring committee comprised of district officials or teachers to make their selection and thereby felt this practice increased the possibility of an effective hire (Donaldson, 2011).

Elementary teachers believe their main role on the teacher hiring team is to find the candidate who best fits their grade level team and school community. This finding substantiates earlier findings from principals' responses, which indicated finding the "best fit" for a given school is important when selecting the right teacher candidate (Donaldson, 2011). However, findings in this study showed elementary teachers hold differing opinions as to what constitutes a "best fit" candidate. In a qualitative study using semi-structured interviews of secondary principals, administrators suggested a school fit was important to a teacher's overall success at

their new school (Bourke & Brown, 2014). Exploring elementary teachers' perspectives in both online surveys and focus group sessions indicated, similarly, a potential candidate's "fit" within the elementary school community is positively affected by teacher participation on the hiring team.

Elementary teachers in this study described their experience as members of the hiring team as positive when they were invited or selected to participate as a member of a teacher hiring team. However, teachers noted a lack of transparency in aspects of the hiring process from the perspective of a teacher on the hiring team. Participants from both school districts suggested teachers are unaware of any set process for determining who is involved as a member of the teacher hiring team. Participants in this study found elementary teachers received little training prior to teacher interviews and that providing time for a general explanation of the interview process would be preferred. Tooms and Crowe (2004) suggested interviews are often hurried and not given the priority they deserve as an important selection tool. A new finding revealed by participants in this study noted elementary teachers from the large school district were unaware of how the interview questions were derived. This new finding supports a recent study which proposed principals believe a more structured interview process results in a better candidate hire (Bourke & Brown, 2014).

Participants in the study reported elementary teachers' contributions to the hiring team can be active or passive. Teachers in the study indicated neutral feelings toward passive participation if this limited participatory role is explicitly stated from the start of the hiring process. Teachers reported positive feelings when their contribution to the hiring team was an active one and teachers influenced the hiring decision through their input and/or decision-making during the selection process.

Finally, new findings from this study reveal elementary teachers recognize when the practice of distributed leadership is authentic or artificial. Teachers reported a positive attitude toward an authentic practice of distributed leadership regarding the teacher hiring process. With regard to the teacher hiring process, authentic distributed leadership occurred when teachers helped to create the interview questions, when they discussed the characteristics they are looking for in a teacher candidate that will best fit their grade level team or school, and when they were given time to discuss each candidate's strengths. Findings in this study support research on the practice of distributed leadership in schools by suggesting principals have to be purposeful in creating an atmosphere that cultivates distributed leadership (Harris, 2013).

Recommendations for Further Research

The researcher in this study sought to discover the perceptions of elementary teachers as members of the hiring team. Initial findings from online surveys, later supported by focus group conversations conducted in this study, indicated other educational personnel or parent volunteers can be representative as members of hiring teams. Therefore, further research should be conducted to capture the perspectives of all members of the hiring team.

Elementary teachers from both online survey results and focus group discussions reported a positive attitude toward the use of authentic practice in distributed leadership. Elementary teachers in the study suggested creating interview questions and allowing more time to discuss candidates' strengths as ways to authenticate the process. Future qualitative studies could explore teacher perceptions as to the best questions to ask teacher candidates in determining a "best fit" for their grade level team.

Although this study sought to obtain elementary teachers' perspectives from two school districts in the Pacific Northwest, additional qualitative studies could be conducted with a larger

sample size to compare teacher perspectives in other regions of the United States. Additionally, questions from the online survey could be adjusted to Likert-scale items to accommodate a quantitative analysis of survey results.

Research in the area of teachers' perceptions as members of the hiring team is inadequate, particularly as it pertains to a more effective teacher hire. Although the qualitative findings in this study suggest the interaction of elementary teachers as members of the teacher hiring team may be beneficial to an effective teacher hire, additional longitudinal studies could be conducted comparing student achievement scores from candidates selected using hiring teams versus an individual principal hire.

Implications for Professional Practice

Findings of this study revealed the following implications for three distinct groups: human resource personnel, elementary principals, and teachers. Human resource personnel should be aware that 66% of all 146 online survey respondents in this study reported hiring teams are comprised of both a principal and a grade level teacher, and smaller school districts included an even greater variety of other staff members as a part of the hiring team. Teachers are asked to participate as members of the hiring selection process, and as such, desire more transparency in the hiring process. Teachers from the same large school district were under the assumption that interview questions were district-generated, which showed an additional need for transparency to correct inaccurate information within the school district. In both school districts, to become more transparent, hiring personnel should offer an overview of the internal hiring process for teachers and possibly provide training in hiring policy, too. This study finds elementary teachers received little training prior to teacher interviews and that teachers preferred a general explanation of the interview process prior to participating on a hiring team. In addition,

hiring personnel should note findings indicate elementary teachers assume teacher candidates are qualified prior to an interview. This assumption may be another component to training, since researchers suggested a percentage of candidates are hired each year that do not hold a teacher certification (Darling-Hammond, Holtzman, Gatlin, & Heilig, 2005).

Findings from the study imply the following suggestions for principals. First, the researcher recommends that elementary principals continue to utilize teachers as influential members of the hiring team. Concerning their role as members of the hiring team, elementary teachers in the study reported teachers on the hiring team provided different perspectives to the interview process versus a principal alone. Findings agreed with earlier studies that engaging in collaboration is beneficial to finding an effective candidate who fits the school (Bourke & Brown, 2014; Engel et al., 2015). Second, it is recommended that teachers participate in creating interview questions. If given opportunities to participate in the development of the interview questions, teachers can ask pertinent questions that more directly impact teacher fit. Similar to earlier research findings by Liu and Johnson (2006), elementary teachers in the study recognized the important contribution involving teachers on the hiring team can make to the “two-way” hiring process by enhancing elementary teachers’ feelings of team connection and trust while also helping the candidate to understand a full perspective of the grade level teams’ needs. Third, principals can influence the role of the elementary teacher on the hiring team by being transparent as to the expected role of the teacher as one of input or equal participation in making the hiring decision. Interestingly, teachers revealed positive feelings toward either role as long as they enter the interview process aware of their expected role on the hiring team. Fourth, principals should recognize that although teachers may define distributed leadership with some differentiation in definition, elementary teachers clearly note the difference between artificial and

authentic distributed leadership practice regarding the process of hiring. If principals do not allow teachers input into the interview questions or offer time for teachers to discuss candidates following each interview, then elementary teachers recognize that their role has been limited. If a principal hires a candidate different from the one the team selected, or the principal already has in mind who they will hire prior to the interview process, then the value and purpose of the practice of distributed leadership is seen as artificial versus authentic; members of the hiring team recognize the difference. Findings in this study show elementary teachers support the practice of distributed leadership in identifying and hiring an effective teacher due to the different perspectives teachers brings to the hiring team. Fifth, principals should continue to value teachers' input as members of the hiring team to positively affect the hiring outcome. Findings indicate active participation on the hiring team can positively impact the relationship between the principal and the elementary teachers on the hiring team. In addition, a more cohesive relationship between both the new hire and teachers on the current grade level team emerged as a noted benefit of including teachers on the hiring team.

Findings from this study imply the following suggestions for elementary teachers. First, teachers could work within their school to help find consensus regarding a common definition. Elementary teachers in the study mainly defined distributed leadership through sharing leadership roles, job responsibilities, and decision-making. Second, elementary teachers should further examine their own views and experiences regarding their role as members of the hiring team, and work toward greater transparency in the hiring process. Third, teachers should feel comfortable asking questions of district and school administrative personnel regarding the process of hiring to clarify their role as members of the hiring team. Teachers should be aware of how they are selected to participate on a hiring team. Fourth, as influential members of a hiring

team, teachers should work alongside the principal to overcome the obstacle of time to provide opportunities for teachers to have a more active role in the hiring process. This participation includes a principal (leader) meeting with the hiring team (followers) before candidate interviews to determine “best fit” qualities and qualifications they are seeking in the hiring process (interaction). Teachers should advocate for input into the creation of the interview questions as well as time between interviews to discuss each candidate in making the best team decision. Fifth, teachers should continue to pursue participation as members of the hiring team. The benefits of their participation not only positively impacts the quality of the teacher candidate hired due to the unique perspectives teachers bring to the team but also builds a more trusting relationship with the newly hired member of their grade level team. Teachers reported both feeling positive about being asked to be a member of the hiring team and feeling valued when the principal and team is respectful of their input into the hiring selection.

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Appendix A

Online Survey Questions

Introduction to Online Survey:

CONSENT FORM FOR HUMAN PARTICIPANTS IN RESEARCH FOR NORTHWEST NAZARENE UNIVERSITY

Project Title: Elementary teachers' perspectives: A qualitative exploration of the role of elementary teachers on the hiring team

Researcher: Khristine Y. Bair

e-mail: khbair@nnu.edu

Hello! My name is Khristine Y. Bair and I have been involved in education for over 20 years. I am currently enrolled in a doctoral program at Northwest Nazarene University. The purpose of this study is to gather teachers' perspectives as members of the hiring team, and explore their influence on the selection of an effective teacher.

If you choose to participate in this study, you will be asked to complete the following short survey which will take approximately five minutes. This is not a test, and there are no 'right' or 'wrong' answers. Please answer as honestly and thoroughly as you can. Your answers will not be shared with anyone other than the researcher and all information will be kept confidential.

Names will not be attached to answers so all responses are anonymous. The information you provide will be saved on a secure, digital device that will have an encrypted password to which only the researcher will have access.

Risks of participation are minimal. You may experience some emotions related to the questions and your answers about physical activity opportunities and programs. Nonparticipation, or withdrawal from the survey will not affect your job status or standing within any organization associated with distribution of this survey opportunity.

Your participation should benefit teachers, administrators and ultimately students as information obtained may help the formation of hiring teams to best support effective hiring decisions for the future.

Please click on the link provided to participate in the short survey. Please feel free to make a copy of this letter for your own reference.



Appendix B

Focus Group Welcome Guide

Project Title: Elementary teachers' perspectives: A qualitative exploration of the role of elementary teachers on the hiring team

- Hello everyone, welcome to our session. My name is Khristie Bair, and this is my research assistant, [REDACTED]. There are refreshments available for each participant and please make yourself comfortable.
- Thank you for taking the time to participate in this focus group.
- Your conversations will help teachers, principals and school district officials to hear the voice of teachers' perspectives on being a member of a hiring team.
- You were selected to participate in this focus group session, because you are elementary teachers from a small or large school district in the Pacific Northwest who have participated on a hiring team.
- You self-selected following an online survey, to continue participation in this study through the focus group session here today.
- This research study focuses on exploring the role of elementary teachers and the use of distributed leadership practices as members of the hiring team.
- The results of these conversations will be used to complete the research portion of the research study through Northwest Nazarene University.
- We are interested in your views because you have had experience working on hiring teams, and we want to draw on those experiences.
- As a reminder, distributed leadership is a practice consisting of interactions between leader roles, follower roles, and the situation. "By creating more leadership opportunities and by increasing the surge of information between and across organizations, there is greater potential for knowledge creation and system transformation" (Harris, 2008)
- Today you will be sharing thoughts and opinions about your experiences as members of a hiring team. We want to know what you perceive as your role on the hiring team and how the use of distributed leadership effects the hiring process.
- There are no right or wrong answers. Please feel free to share your thoughts as we are interested in all points of view. Both positive and negative comments and feelings can be helpful in exploring teacher perspectives.
- Our discussion will be no more than 90 minutes in length.
- Before we start, here are some suggestions to make our conversation time efficient and productive.
- Only one person should talk at a time so all voices can be heard clearly.
- Please speak up so the microphone can capture your thoughts.
- Although we will talk using a first name basis here, for the purpose of this study, pseudonyms will be used in place of each participant's name to ensure confidentiality, so please speak freely.
- I will be facilitating the conversations, and my role will be to ask questions and listen, but I will not be participating in the conversations. As a principal in one of the school

districts participating in the study, I want to assure you that your position or standing in the district will not be affected by your participation. I will be asking about twenty open-ended questions, moving from one conversation to the next. As necessary, probing questions and follow-up questions will also be used.

- There is a tendency in a group for some people to feel more comfortable to speak than others, but it is important that I hear from all members of this group. So if one person is sharing more than others, I may ask to hear the voice of someone who isn't speaking as much.
- Everyone has read and signed the consent form, but at this time, if you are not in agreement you can be excused with no consequence to you.
- Let's begin.

Appendix C

Focus Group Conversation Protocol

Before we talk about what it's like to hire teachers, we hope you can begin by telling us a little about yourselves?

1. How long have you been a teacher at your current school?
2. What grade level do you teach at your current school?
3. How long have you been a member of the interview team there?

Questions about the Interview Team

4. How are people selected to be on the hiring team at your school?
5. What type of training do members of the hiring team receive? Is it sufficient?
6. Does the team meet before they interview applicants to discuss what they are looking for in a candidate, can you describe that process?
7. Do team members have specific roles during the hiring process?
8. If you were in charge, what change would you make to the role?

Questions about the Interview Process

9. How long is a typical interview?
10. What materials do you ask the candidates to bring to the interview?
11. In what ways do you see interviewing a teacher candidate as a two-way process?
12. How do you score or rate the candidates? How would you improve the process?
13. What happens after the interview is over?
14. What process do you use to decide who will be hired?

Questions about Experiences as Members of the Hiring Team

15. How did you come to be a member of a hiring team?
16. What interests you about being a member of a hiring team?

17. Can you tell me some positives about being a member of the hiring team?
18. Can you tell me some drawbacks from being a member of the hiring team?
19. How have past hiring experiences differed from your most recent hiring experience?
20. Is the general quality of the teacher hired different due to use of distributed leadership?

Questions about Use of Distributed Leadership in Making an Effective Hiring Decision

21. What other questions do you have regarding the practice of 'distributed leadership' as it is being defined for this study?
22. What are your thoughts regarding the practice of distributed leadership in hiring practices at your current school?
23. Do you feel your most recent hiring team utilized the practice of distributed leadership?
24. How does the use of distributed leadership impact the hiring decision?
25. What is your attitude toward use of distributed leadership in hiring a quality teacher?
26. Is there anything that gets in your way of being able to hire teachers effectively?

Final Questions

27. If you were asking the next question, what would you like to ask the group?
28. Is there anything else you would like to talk about that we haven't covered on this topic?

Appendix D

Obtaining Permission

Khristie Bair <khbair@nnu.edu>

Hello Tracy,

My name is Khristie Bair and I am currently enrolled as a doctoral student at Northwest Nazarene University. The following was sent to Dr. Spillane, and I received his reply regarding academic leave with your contact information.

'I am writing to request permission to use a reproduction of the visual representation in figure 1, describing elements of leadership practice found in the article entitled, "Towards a theory of leadership practice: a distributed perspective" and figure 1.1 found on page 3 from "Distributed Leadership" copyright 2006. The topic of my study will explore elementary teachers' perspectives as a member of the hiring team using distributed leadership as a framework. Your research and writings in this area have been an invaluable guide in examining this topic. I thank you in advance for permission consideration.'

I have since forwarded and received confirmation back from one of the co-authors from "Towards a theory of leadership practice: a distributed perspective", Dr. Halverson kindly responded back in agreement of the request, but also making mention that he would 'cc' Dr. Spillane and Dr. Diamond as well.

Would it be possible due to time constraints for my thesis to obtain permission rights from Dr. Spillane regarding the newer figure from his 2006 book?
If possible, it would be greatly appreciated.

I have until January 1, 2016 to provide my dissertation to the committee chairs for review. However, it will not be HRRC reviewed until March 1, 2016. Therefore, I will just ask you to make the best call in obtaining his reply and to what urgency the request could be processed.

Thank you. -KB

--

Khristie Bair
NNU Graduate Student
[REDACTED]

Hi Khristie,

I spoke to Dr. Spillane, and he said that it would be fine if you use that figure. Good luck on finishing up your dissertation!

Best,

Tracy Barbera
Research Project Coordinator
Northwestern University
School of Education & Social Policy
[REDACTED]

Appendix E

Obtaining Permission

Khristie Bair <khbair@nnu.edu>

to

dearmond

Hello Dr. DeArmond,

My name is Khristie Bair, and I am employed as an elementary principal, while currently enrolled in a doctoral program at Northwest Nazarene University. The topic of my study is entitled, "Elementary Teacher Perspectives: A Qualitative Study Regarding the Role of Elementary Teachers as Part of the Hiring Team." I am hoping to utilize portions of your interview protocol found in the May, 2008 paper "Is it Better to be Good or Lucky?" My study will explore elementary teachers' views as a member of the hiring committee in various schools located in a large school district in [REDACTED]. The research questions will involve an initial survey and from the survey results, focus groups will be formed to obtain teachers' views and identification of their roles, specifically with use of a distributed leadership process in the hiring selection. Your paper has been of great value to me during my literature review, and I thank you, in advance for your response to this request.

Sincerely,

Khristie Bair
NNU Graduate Student, Educational Leadership



Michael DeArmond [REDACTED]

Hi Khristie

Thanks for reaching out about this -- and so sorry it's taken me a while to respond. It's been a busy two weeks.

Please feel free to use any portions of our interview protocol that you find useful. Best of luck with your project.

Cheers,

Mike

Appendix F

Obtaining Permission

Khristie Bair [REDACTED]

to

Richard.Bolden

Hello Dr. Bolden,

I'd like to introduce myself. My name is Khristine Bair, and I am currently a doctoral student at Northwest Nazarene University in the U.S. The topic for my research project will include the theory of distributed leadership as an anchor for my theoretical framework. I am hoping to obtain your permission to adapt (with proper citations) Table 2 (Frameworks of DL, p. 258), from your article in the International Journal of Management Reviews in 2011.

Thank you in advance for your time.

Sincerely,
Khristine Bair
NNU Graduate Student
[REDACTED]

[Reply](#) [Forward](#)



Richard Bolden

Sep 27

Dear Khristine
Thanks for your message. That should be fine as long as it's appropriately cited.
Good luck with the doctorate.
All the best

Appendix G
Obtaining Permission

RICHARD R HALVERSON <rich.halverson@wisc.edu>

to **Jim**, **JOHN**, me

Hi Khristie - thanks for your note! Your request sounds good to me....I'm glad that you find the work helpful! I'm going to cc Jim & John Diamond on my reply, to keep them in the loop. Good luck in your work! Rich

> On Nov 27, 2015, at 11:59 PM, Khristie Bair <khbair@nnu.edu> wrote:

>

>

> My name is Khristie Bair and I am currently enrolled as a doctoral student at Northwest Nazarene University. I am writing to request permission to use a reproduction of the visual representation in figure 1, describing elements of leadership practice found in the article entitled, "Towards a theory of leadership practice: a distributed perspective". The topic of my study will explore elementary teachers' perspectives as a member of the hiring team using distributed leadership as a framework. I have attempted to contact James Spillane, but Dr. Spillane is away on a research project at this time until January 1, 2016. Due to time constraints in my project, I am hoping to obtain permission as soon as possible. Your research and writings in this area have been an invaluable guide in examining this topic. I thank you in advance for permission consideration.

> --

> Khristie Bair

> NNU Graduate Student

Appendix H

Obtaining Permission



RightsLink®

[Account Info](#)
[Help](#)

Title: Focus group kit
Article ID: To be determined
Publication: Publication1
Publisher: CCC Reproduction
Date: Jan 1, 1997
 Copyright © 1997, CCC Reproduction

Logged in as:

Khristie Bair

 Account #:
 3000979088

Last Comment

Michelle Binur:

Dec 1, 2015 4:50:39 PM

You may use the material in your dissertation as long as you credit the original source. You do not need a license/agreement for this type of use. If you wish to republish the material in a published work (i.e. book, journal article, etc...), then you would need to obtain further permission. This permission doesn't cover 3rd party material. You need to properly credit the original source.

Khristie Bair

Nov 29

Dr. Morgan,

As a graduate student at Northwest Nazarene University, I am asking permission to use Table 2.1 located in the first book from The Focus Group Kit, (Morgan & Krueger, 1998) as a table in my dissertation. I have found the kit extremely helpful in planning for an upcoming qualitative study using focus group methodology.
 Thank you in advance for your response.

--

Khristie Bair
 NNU Graduate Student

David Morgan

Nov 30

I believe that you need to contact Sage Publications, since they hold the copyright.

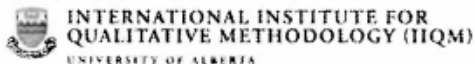
If it makes any difference, you have my permission.

David Morgan
 Professor, Department of Sociology

Portland State University

Appendix I

Obtaining Permission



Article

A Qualitative Framework for Collecting and Analyzing Data in Focus Group Research

Anthony J. Onwuegbuzie, PhD
Sam Houston State University
Huntsville, Texas

Wendy B. Dickinson, PhD
Ringling College-of Art and Design
City, State

Nancy L. Leech, PhD
University of Colorado Denver

Annmarie G. Zoran, PhD
Higher Education Centre Novo mesto
and University of South Florida

© 2009 Onwuegbuzie. This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

Appendix J

Obtaining Permission

Khristie Bair <khbair@nnu.edu>

to rmi

Hello Dr. Ingersoll,

I am writing to express my appreciation for your research in the area of teachers' work and the control of it. I am currently enrolled in a doctorate program at Northwest Nazarene University in Idaho completing a research study on the use of distributed leadership practice in the hiring process. I am interested in exploring teachers' perspectives of their role as a part of the hiring team. I would be grateful if I could obtain permission to use Figure 2 in my dissertation showing teacher influence in school decisions from *Who Controls Teachers' Work*, published in 2003.

Appreciatively,

Khristie

--

Khristie Bair
NNU Graduate Student

Richard Ingersoll

Khristie:

Thank you for the kinds words.
yes, you have permission to use that figure, of course with proper attribution.

Richard M. Ingersoll
Board of Overseers Professor of Education and Sociology
University of Pennsylvania
3700 Walnut St.
Philadelphia, PA 19104-6216

P

Appendix K

Obtaining Permission

2/1/2017

Northwest Nazarene University Mail - Re: Request to use format of table in my dissertation



Christie Bair <kbair@nnu.edu>

Re: Request to use format of table in my dissertation

2 messages

Christie Bair <kbair@nnu.edu>
 To: jlizotte@shrewsbury.k12.ma.us

Sun, Jan 29, 2017 at 3:45 PM

Hello Dr. Lizotte,

My name is **Christie Bair** and I am enrolled as a doctoral student at Northwest Nazarene University in Idaho. I am writing to request permission to use the format showing the relationship between survey questions and focus group questions in tables found on pages 62 and 78, of your dissertation as a template for reporting results in my study entitled, "Elementary teachers' perspectives: A qualitative exploration of the role of elementary teachers on the hiring team". Although the questions will be different, I found your table to be helpful and clear in providing the reader with results of your study. I look forward to your reply.

Appreciatively,
 Christie Bair
 NNU Graduate Student

Jane Lizotte <jlizotte@shrewsbury.k12.ma.us>
 To: Christie Bair <kbair@nnu.edu>

Sun, Jan 29, 2017 at 3:53 PM

Hi Christie,

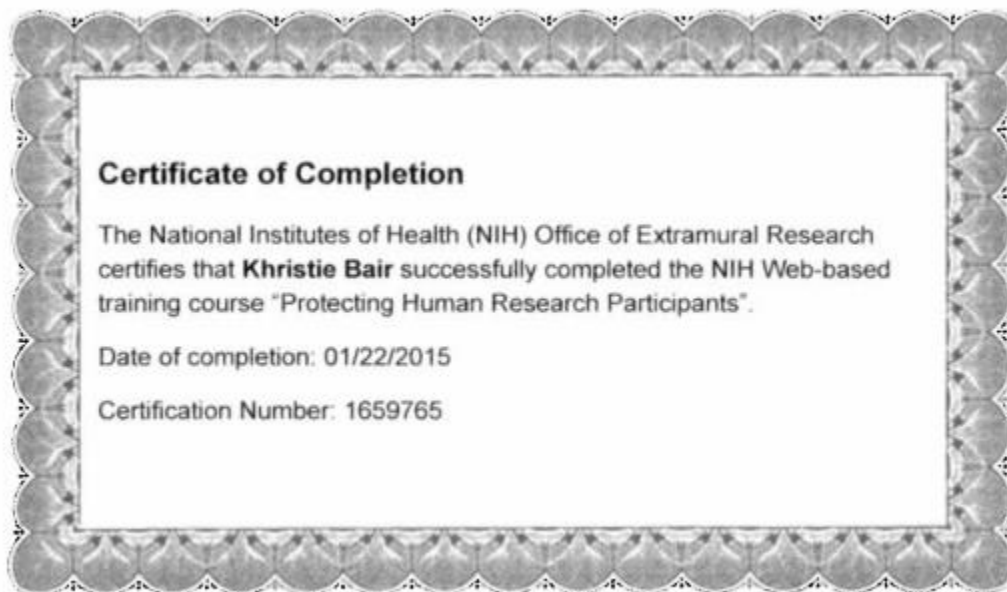
Yes, absolutely! I am happy to know that you have found the format to be helpful. Your study sounds very interesting. I wish you all the best with your work ahead.

Respectfully,

Jane
 [Quoted text hidden]

Appendix L

National Institutes of Health Certification



Appendix M

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Northwest Nazarene University, Department of Graduate Education at Northwest Nazarene

Name of Investigator: Khristine Y. Bair

Title of Project: Elementary Teachers' Perspectives: A Qualitative Exploration of the Role of Elementary Teachers on the Hiring Team

Request to Participate in Research

You are being invited to participate in this study because you are an elementary teacher in a school district in the Pacific Northwest. The purpose of this research is to explore elementary teachers' views and experiences as members of the hiring team. This study will gain insight into teachers' attitudes in regards to use of a distributed leadership process to hire teacher candidates.

We are asking your consent to take part in the second portion of this study because you stated in the online survey that you were interested in participating in a follow-up focus group. You must be over the age of 18 to participate in this research study.

The focus group will take place in the conference room at the Ontario or Meridian Library and will last approximately one hour. During the focus group, you will be asked questions concerning your experiences and role as a member of a hiring team. In addition, conversations will be recorded and transcribed to identify common themes regarding teacher attitudes in using a distributed leadership process to hire an effective teacher. You will be asked to assist in the study by viewing the transcript of the focus group to ensure clarity of record.

If you agree to be in the study, the following will occur:

1. You will be asked to sign an Informed Consent Form, volunteering to participate in the study.
2. You will answer focus group questions and engage in a discussion on distributed leadership and its use during the hiring process. This discussion will be videotaped and is expected to last approximately 45-60 minutes.
3. You will be asked to reply to an email at the conclusion of the study asking you to confirm the data that was gathered during the research process.

There are minimal risks that may be associated through participation in this study. The main researcher in the study is currently employed as a principal in one of the school districts participating in the study. As a research study, with your participation, there is an assurance that there will be no effect on your standing as an employee of the district, nor will any of the information obtained be connected in any way to your evaluation instrument. Some of the discussion questions may make you uncomfortable or upset, but you are free to decline to answer any questions you do not wish to answer or to stop participation at any time. If you not

participate, or choose to quit, you will not lose any rights or benefits or services that you would otherwise have as an employee of the school.

Confidentiality will be upheld throughout the study. Only the primary researcher and the research supervisor will be privy to data from this study. As researchers, both parties are bound to keep data as secure and confidential as possible. Due to the open forum of a focus group, you will be aware of other teachers' attitudes and opinions in the room. No individual identities will be used in any reports or publications that may result from this study. In compliance with the Federalwide Assurance Code, data from this study will be kept for three years, after which all data from the study will be destroyed (45 CFR 46.117).

There will be no direct benefits to you from participation in this study. However, your answers may allow teachers' voices to be heard as they share thoughts on the use of distributed leadership and the influence teachers have on decisions made by the hiring team.

A small remuneration may be offered to focus group participants involved in the study. Volunteers who participate in the online survey will not receive any remuneration for their participation. However, refreshments will be available to focus group participants, and if less than six teachers volunteer to participate in any focus group session from either school district, a small remuneration of no more than \$25 will be offered to encourage teacher participation.

If you have questions or concerns about participation in this study, you should first talk with the investigator. Khristie Bair can be contacted via email at [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] The Committee Chair for this dissertation Dr. Joshua Jensen can be reached at joshuajensen@nnu.edu or via telephone [REDACTED]

You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep.

PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH IS VOLUNTARY. You are free to decline to be in this study, or to withdraw from it at any point. Your decision as to whether or not to participate in this study will have no influence on your present or future status as a student at Northwest Nazarene University.

I give my consent to participate in this study:

Signature of Study Participant

Date

I give my consent for the focus group conversation to be videotaped in this study:

Signature of Study Participant

Date

I give my consent for direct quotes to be used in this study:

Signature of Study Participant

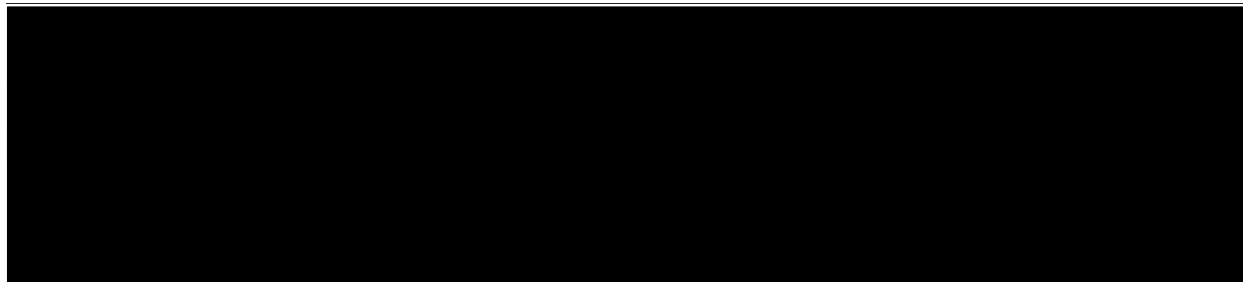
Date

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent

Date

**THE NORTHWEST NAZARENE UNIVERSITY HUMAN RESEARCH REVIEW
COMMITTEE HAS REVIEWED THIS PROJECT FOR THE PROTECTION OF HUMAN
PARTICIPANTS IN RESEARCH.**

Appendix N
Letter for District Approval



January 17, 2016

Northwest Nazarene University
Attention: HRRC Committee
Helstrom Business Center 1st floor
623 S. University Boulevard
Nampa, ID 83686

RE: Research Proposal Site Access for Mrs. Khristie Y. Bair

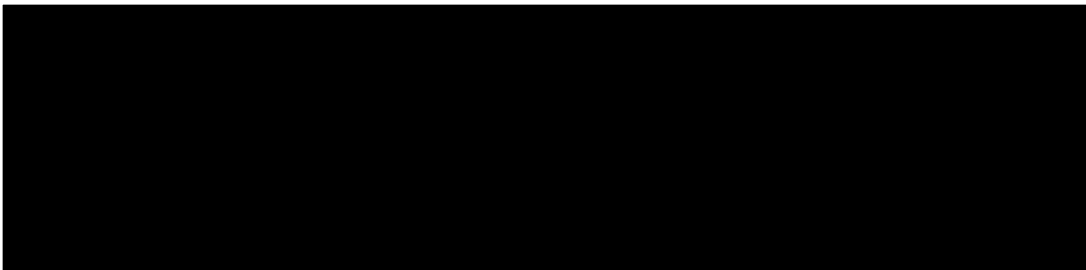
Dear HRRC Members:

This letter is to inform the HRRC that Administration at [REDACTED] has reviewed and approved the proposed dissertation research plan entitled, "Elementary Teachers' Perspectives: A Qualitative Exploration of the Role of Elementary Teachers on the Hiring Team". Approval has been granted to conduct research including subjects, protocols, assessment procedures, proposed data and collection procedures, data analysis, and purpose of the study. Permission is hereby afforded to Mrs. Bair to conduct her research with staff of the [REDACTED] School District. The authorization dates for this research are July 2016 to April 2017.

Respectfully,

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Appendix O
Letter for District Approval



January 17, 2016

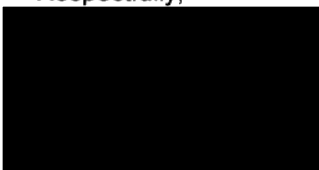
Northwest Nazarene University
Attention: HRRC Committee
Helstrom Business Center 1st floor
623 S. University Boulevard
Nampa, ID 83686

RE: Research Proposal Site Access for Mrs. Khristie Y. Bair

Dear HRRC Members:

This letter is to inform the HRRC that I have reviewed and approved the proposed dissertation research plan entitled, "Elementary Teachers' Perspectives: A Qualitative Exploration of the Role of Elementary Teachers on the Hiring Team" submitted by Mrs. Khristie Bair. Approval has been granted to conduct research including subjects, protocols, assessment procedures, proposed data and collection procedures, data analysis, and purpose of the study. Permission is hereby afforded to Mrs. Bair to conduct her research with staff of the [REDACTED]. The authorization dates for this research are July 2016 to April 2017.

Respectfully,



Appendix P
Participant Follow-up Statement

I just wanted to take the opportunity to thank you for your participation.

Following data analysis, we will email you with discoveries from your conversations and ask you to review the statements to check that the meanings of your conversations were adequately captured from your discussion. The study results will be completed by February 6, 2017.

Until that time, if you have any further questions, Khristie Bair can be contacted via email khbair@nnu.edu or cell phone at [REDACTED]

Thank you again for participating in this research study!

Khristie Bair

Appendix Q

Member Checking Email

February 6, 2017

Dear Focus Group Participant,

I hope this email finds you and your students well. Thank you for your participation in a research study entitled Elementary Teachers' Perspectives: A Qualitative Exploration of the Role of Elementary Teachers on the Hiring Team. I wanted to make you aware of the themes that resulted from the online teacher survey and focus group sessions in this particular study (see below). Please let me know if these accurately depicted our conversations. If you have any suggestions, modifications, or questions, please let me know by Friday, February 24, 2017.

The purpose of this study was to explore the perspectives of elementary teachers regarding their role as a member of a hiring team.

The guiding research questions in this study included:

1. What has been the experience of elementary teachers as members of the hiring team?
2. What are the views of elementary teachers concerning their role as members of the hiring team?
3. What are teachers' attitudes toward the use of distributed leadership in identifying and hiring an effective teacher?

There was a total of seven themes that emerged following results of the online survey and our focus group conversations. After reading, transcribing, and coding the data as well as using NVivo software to check for relationships and categorize data, the results showed three themes emerged to describe the experience of elementary teachers as members of the hiring team: (1) transparency, (2) training, and (3) contribution.

Transparency in the selection process plays a role in the way teachers describe their experience as members of the hiring team. Teachers reported their experience in positive terms of value and respect when their principal selected or invited them to participate on the hiring team. Inversely, when the selection process was unknown or a teacher was arbitrarily placed onto a hiring team, comments were reported in a neutral or negative tone.

Preparation is reported to be non-existent or minimal. All thirteen focus group participants reported no particular training is provided prior to the candidate interview. Teachers describe their preparation experience as minimal such as, choosing which interview question to ask, or a basic reminder of confidentiality.

Contributions to the hiring team can be active, or passive. An active contribution is one in which the teacher provides input during the selection process through general discussion or a scoring system or shares in the decision-making process of teacher selection. A passive contribution is one that offers little to no time for discussion following a teacher candidate interview, with listening or taking notes as the main role on the hiring team.

Survey and focus group conversations showed two themes emerged to describe the views of elementary teachers concerning their role as members of the hiring team: (1) limited, and (2) influential.

A limited role consists of asking pre-determined questions, listening and taking notes. Teachers report neutral or even negative feelings toward their role on the hiring team if their role is limited or seen as a perfunctory role. Teachers report a desire to improve the teacher's role on the hiring team by allowing for more time to create interview questions and discuss the candidates' strengths following each interview.

An influential role is one in which teachers engage in the hiring decision by providing input to the administrator in choosing the candidate the team feels will best fit the grade level team and school community. Findings show there is general consensus among teachers to hire a candidate who fits well with the grade level team, although the actual qualities each are looking for may fit his own personal definition. Overall, surveys indicated the role of a teacher on the hiring team was a positive one as teachers were reported to be of value to the hiring team due to specific knowledge of the teaching position.

The third, and final research question in the study explored teachers' attitudes toward the use of distributed leadership in identifying and hiring an effective teacher. Overall, two themes emerged from the study: (1) authentic, and (2) artificial.

Elementary teachers exhibit a positive attitude toward the use of distributed leadership in regards to the hiring process, when the interaction between the principal and hiring team is authentic. During the hiring process, distributed leadership is seen as an authentic when elementary teachers' roles are clarified, they help create interview questions, and teachers are given time between interviews to discuss each candidate in making the best team decision. Authentic practice in distributed leadership is recognized by elementary teachers as valuable in identifying and hiring an effective teacher due to the different perspective it brings to the hiring team. Additional benefits include a more cohesive relationship between both the new hire and the grade level team and the principal and members of the hiring team.

Elementary teachers exhibit a neutral or negative attitude toward the use of distributed leadership in regards to the hiring process, when the interaction between the principal and hiring team is artificial. Distributed leadership is seen as artificial when elementary teachers feel their participation had little impact in the hiring decision or the hiring decision was already made by the principal; members of the hiring team appeared to clearly recognize both situations.

If these findings do not reflect your experience or you would like to comment further, please respond to this email or contact me at the number below. Thanks again for participating in my dissertation study. It would not have been possible without you.

Khristie Y. Bair
Doctoral Student
Northwest Nazarene University
khbair@nnu.edu [REDACTED]