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Interviewing for a Teacher Leader Position: Maximizing Personal Characteristics to Project Your Best

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Four facets related to personal characteristics that influence interviewers' perceptions of an applicant are discussed along with how applicants can turn the facet into an asset.

Research to Practice: Reflect on Past Performance and Experience to Present Your Very Best in an Interview

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Strategically thinking about an interview enhances the effectiveness of the interview. For interviewees, consider the questions that may be asked and reflect on professional experiences related to the question. For instructional leaders, phrase questions so that interviewees are encouraged to talk about past performance.

Just Released Studies

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Two studies are summarized. The first found that when teachers are invested in student success and learning, then students perform better. The second study examined the effectiveness of phonics-only instruction versus phonics in literature.

Interviewing for a Teacher Leader Position: Maximizing Personal Characteristics to Project Your Best

Jackie has worked as an English teacher for several years. She recently decided that she would like to make a move out of the classroom where she supported students to a position where she would be supporting teachers.

It so happened that a reading specialist position had just come available in a neighboring school. The reading specialist is based in the school and provides direct support to teachers to enhance reading instruction. As part of the job, Jackie would provide inservices and demonstration lessons, assist teachers in disaggregating assessment data, and monitor the school's progress on meeting reading-related objectives on the comprehensive school plan. In other words, Jackie would be a teacher leader.

In order to apply for the position, Jackie completed an application packet, which included letters of recommendation from her principal and others. She is one of three finalists for the position. Jackie knows the interview will be a major deciding factor for the hiring committee, and she wants to be ready.

Jackie's situation is not unique; teachers routinely interview for teacher-leader positions that entail additional responsibilities such as department chair, instructional coach, lead teacher, grade level chair, etc. Much of the interview process is beyond the applicant's control, such as the format of the interview, interviewer training and knowledge of the subject matter, and how responses are evaluated. Yet, there are ways that a teacher can present herself as the best candidate for a position. The table on page 2 contains suggestions for each of the bulleted items below.

- **Make a Good First Impression** – three-quarters of interviewers in a study indicated that they had made their initial decision about an applicant within the first five minutes.¹ Similarly, in hiring workshops, participants consistently say they know within five minutes if the interviewee is a possible new hire.²
- **Be Cognizant of Personal Behaviors** – studies on personal interactions have found that both verbal and nonverbal actions impact interviewer ratings.
- **Anticipate Questions** – this issue's *Research to Practice* section discusses how an interviewee can prepare for an interview by thinking about questions that may be asked based on the posted job description.
- **Provide STAR Answers** – STAR (Situation, Task, Action, Result) is a common acronym for how to answer questions well. The approach works particularly well when responding to questions asking for an example of how a candidate has performed in the past. Responding this way may seem like a stretch for a question such as, "What was the last professional book you read?" But think about how the question may

Article continues on page 2

Article continued from front page

be turned around: The book may have been an article on “X” because you had a student with a similar concern, so you tried an intervention suggested in the article and it worked – resulting in a much better answer than merely giving the title/topic of the book, which is all the question really asked. The interview process can be nerve-racking, but keeping these simple tips in mind can help you ace the interview as you present yourself in the best possible light.

Facet Impacting the Interview	Suggestions for How to Turn the Facet into an Asset
Make a Good First Impression	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dress for the job you want – look professional. • Use titles when addressing the interview team, even if you are on a first-name basis with members of the team. Let the lead interviewer say that first names are permissible. • Choose words carefully – in five minutes how one speaks and the words used contribute to the initial impression.³
Be Cognizant of Personal Behaviors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain eye contact.⁴ Even in an interview with multiple interviewers, try to look at each person while answering the question. • Monitor nonverbal behaviors – distracting hand movements and crossed arms convey a very different impression than deliberate, explanatory hand motions and a more open posture. Nonverbal behaviors influence perceived competence.⁵ • Be on the offense, not the defense, when answering questions – it is better to be assertive than defensive.⁶ • Use ingratiation techniques carefully. Interview studies have found that interviewer ratings are typically higher when applicants try to gain favor with the committee through techniques such as flattery or praising,⁷ but overuse or inappropriate use of such behavior can result in listeners thinking the speaker is insincere.⁸
Anticipate Questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read the job posting. • Know how you meet or exceed each of the required job criteria. • Think of examples of your past performance that highlight your knowledge, skills, and attributes related to job requirements. • Practice answering the questions you anticipate.
Provide STAR Answers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • S Situation Provide the context • T Task Tell what needed to be addressed • A Action Explain what was done • R Result Tell the outcome(s)

References

¹Springbett, B. M. (1958). Factors affecting the final decision in the employment interview. *Canadian Journal of Psychology*, 12(1), 13-22.

²Anecdotal findings from workshops conducted by Dr. James Stronge and Dr. Jennifer Hindman between 2003 and 2007.

³Hindle, T. (1998). *Interviewing skills*. New York: DK Publishing.

⁴Burnett, J. R., & Motowidlo, S. J. (1998). Relations between different sources of information in the structured selection interview (electronic version). *Personnel Psychology*, 51(4). Retrieved January 14, 2004, from <http://80-web7.infotrac.galegroup.com.proxy.wm.edu>

⁵Howard, J. L., & Ferris, G. R. (1996). The employment interview context: Social and situational influences on interviewer decisions [Electronic version]. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 26(2), 112-136.

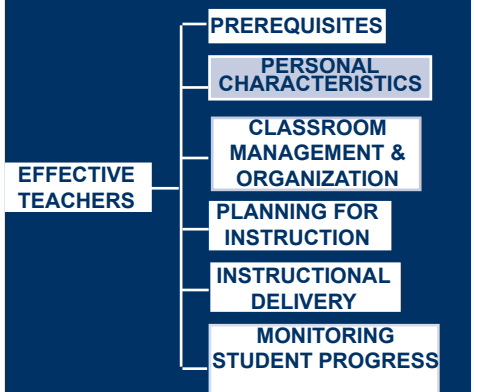
⁶Ellis, A. P., West, B. J., Ryan, A. M., & DeShon, R. P. (2002). The use of impression management tactics in structured interviews: A function of question type? *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 87(6), 1200-1208.

⁷Ellis, et al., 2002; McFarland, L. A., Ryan, A. M., & Kriska, S. D. (2002). Field study investigation of applicant use of influence tactics in a selection interview. *The Journal of Psychology*, 136(4), 383-398.

⁸De Haan, C., Andeweg, B., & Blokzijl, W. (n.d.). *Who's the best? Effectiveness of ingratiation techniques in speeches for different target groups*. Retrieved January 21, 2007, from http://www.tbm.tudelft.nl/webstaf/wimbl/dehaan_andeweg_blokzijl_who's%20the%20best_effectiveness%20of%20ingra.pdf

Conceptually Speaking

This issue of *Teacher Quality Digest* examines interviewing from two perspectives: the teacher’s and the instructional leader’s. Teacher leaders are needed to fulfill many vital functions within the school from department chairs to organizing particular programs. Typically, an interview is one component of getting the new and/or additional job responsibilities. Teachers can prepare for the interview by reflecting on their past professional practice. This reflective activity fits within the quality area of personal characteristics. Instructional leaders may use this issue to enhance the quality of the interview.



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Research to Practice:

Reflect on Past Performance and Experience to Present Your Very Best in an Interview

Interviews are the second most frequent tool used in the hiring process – applications are first. This makes sense, as the application is typically the gatekeeper that opens the possibility for the interview. So going in prepared to “wow” an interviewer or interview team is important. Many articles have been written on questions to ask in teacher interviews, but little is written about how to ensure the quality of those questions. One article in the *Research* section deals with interview practices in education. The remaining research presented comes from other disciplines in which studies on interviewing have been funded.

Read *The Teacher Quality Index* by James Stronge and Jennifer Hindman (ASCD, 2006) for more about interviewing.

In the *Practice* section, two ways of preparing for interviews are offered. The first is targeted for interviewees preparing for an interview. The second is the black-line master provided to assist administrators in developing valid and reliable questions based on the research.

Research

Enhancing the Quality of the Teacher Interview

The findings from a national survey of U.S. public school principals provided the context for three recommendations (see below) related to improving teacher interviews. The study found that 73% of administrators had never been trained in how to conduct fair, legal, and valid interviews by their current school systems. This finding implies that principals independently determine how they will conduct interviews, from the questions asked to how responses are evaluated.

The principals reported using several research-based practices such as:

- Identifying qualified applicants' knowledge, skills, and attributes
- Preparing questions in advance
- Asking all applicants for the same position the same series of questions
- Phrasing questions as situational (What would you do?) or experienced-based (What have you done?)

The author recommended that principals consider the following three areas to enhance the quality of the interview:

Question Quality

- Ask a range of questions that focus on all major areas of teaching responsibility (planning, learning environment, instructional delivery, assessment, and professionalism).
- Examine questions to ensure that they solicit the information necessary to make the deci-

sion; for example, if one wants to know how assessment feedback informs instructional planning, ask about it.

- Phrase questions so that applicants tell what they have done.

Response Quality

- Define in advance the attributes of a good versus a poor response.
- Use a behaviorally anchored rubric that is written individually for each question; the author suggests four levels (two for acceptable responses and two for poor responses).
- Consider using rubrics from the teacher evaluation system used within the school that relate to a particular question to save time in developing rubrics.

Pitfalls to Avoid

- Ensure the interview process is not rushed; schedule interviews so the interview team has time to review the process, preview the candidate's resume, and debrief.
- Do not be driven by first impressions; focus on the response to each question and rate it after each response to help counter the subconscious act of trying to validate the initial impression.

Want to read the article?

Hindman, J. (2006). Teacher selection savvy: Increasing the quality of the interview. *Virginia Educational Leadership*, 4(1), 42-44.

Research

Asking Questions About Past Behavior Is More Effective Than Asking What an Applicant Would Do: Consistent Finding from Studies Dating from 1995

This study investigated whether situational questions (i.e., asking applicants what they would do in a given situation) are more predictive of subsequent job performance than past-behavior questions (i.e., asking applicants what they have done in a similar situation). One hundred and fifty-seven job applicants were interviewed and rated in six areas. Applicants either received an interview consisting of a series of situational questions or a series of past-behavior questions. Regardless of the series, the same information was sought. The results showed that asking about past behavior was more predictive of job performance than asking situational questions.

Want to read the study?

Krajewski, H. T., Goffin, R. D., McCarthy, J. M., Rothstein, M. G., & Johnston, N. (2006). Comparing the validity of structured interviews for managerial-level employees: Should we look to the past or focus on the future? *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, 79, 411-432. Retrieved January 24, 2007, from <http://find.galegroup.com.proxy.wm.edu>

Based on an analysis of the findings of 28 studies, the authors concluded that when behavior-based questions were paired with behavior-based anchored rubrics to assess response quality, they were more valid than situational question/rubric counterparts. Additionally, when the behavior-based question was aligned with a specific rubric as opposed to a general rubric, interrater reliability (i.e., different interviewers were more likely to give the same rating) was increased.

Want to read the study?

Taylor, P. J., & Small, B. (2002). Asking applicants what they would do versus what they did do: A meta-analytic comparison of situational and past behaviour employment interview questions. *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, 75, 277-294.

Interview questions seeking examples of an interviewee's previous performance go by many different names, including,

- Behavior-based questions
- Behavior-description interview questions
- Experienced-based questions
- Past-behavior questions

This study compared supervisors' evaluation ratings with interview ratings of employees. Ninety-three current employees were interviewed using situational questions or behavior-description interview questions. The researchers found that ratings from the behavior-description interview were highly correlated with supervisors' ratings. However, the ratings from situational interviews

did not correlate with the evaluation ratings. The implication is that if interviewers want to know about performance, they must ask for specific examples as opposed to what the applicant would do in a hypothetical situation.

Want to read the study?

Huffcutt, A. I., Weekley, J. A., Wiesner, W. H., Degroot, T. G., & Jones, C. (2001). A comparison of situational and behavior description interview questions for higher-level positions. *Personnel Psychology*, 54(3), 619-644.

An early study comparing situational and experienced-based questions found that experience-based questions were more predictive of supervisors' ratings of interviewees' performance than situational questions; these findings were based on the responses of 216 participants.

Want to read the study?

Pulakos, E. D., & Schmitt, N. (1995). Experience-based and situational interview questions: Studies of validity. *Personnel Psychology*, 48(2), 289-308.

Practice: Mining Job Descriptions for Questions

This *Practice* section focuses on both the interviewee and interviewer perspectives. Note the section headings for the appropriate application. The Blackline master on page 6 is primarily for interviewer (e.g., administrator) use, but could be used by an interviewee thinking of possible interview questions.

For the Interviewee

Web postings, newspaper ads, job fairs, and word-of-mouth are just a few of the ways teacher applicants find out about position vacancies. For space reasons job postings like the sample are rarely printed in a newspaper ad, but are available online, posted internally, or made available by request. Further, they are deliberately broad, often containing a line about “other duties as assigned.”

Even if somewhat vague, such a job description posting does yield valuable information about the essentials for the position. Some school districts have very short descriptions that indicate minimum qualifications, salary range, and where to apply for a specific position. More districts list essential duties, and a few include desired knowledge, skills, and abilities. The difference between “essential” and “desired” simply is what one must have versus what the school system would like an “ideal” applicant to demonstrate. When a job description goes to this level of detail, the applicant has a better idea of what kind of candidate the school system is seeking to fill a particular position.

Mining the job posting for information is one way to prepare yourself for the job interview. In reading the job responsibilities, think of an experience you have had that addresses the responsibility. To prepare for the interview have someone ask you questions, or ask yourself questions made up from

the job posting (see table on page 7). When answering the question, consider using the STAR approach introduced in the front page article of this issue.

For the Interviewer

Administrators may examine the job posting to ensure their questions align with the posted responsibilities. The questions (see table on page 7) all are written as experience-based; therefore, applicants give examples of what they actually did. In a real interview, multiple questions would be asked about the job responsibilities. While the best predictor of future performance is past performance, an applicant may not have had a related experience, in which case the applicant should be asked to share what he or she would do.

The blackline master on page 6 of this issue supports the writing of

experience-based questions as well as the evaluation of the responses. Use the notes section of the form to write responses to each of the steps. By strategically considering the questions, writing

Job Posting for Phantom School District

Position Title: Classroom Teacher (All Grades)
Department: Human Resources

Description: Classroom teachers holding a valid teacher certificate with appropriate endorsement for the posted teaching position are sought for the 2007-2008 school year. The salary range for a 10-month contract position is competitive with that of surrounding school districts, and a fringe benefit program is also provided. Teachers are supervised by the building principal in accordance with school board policies.

Required Education

- Minimum of a bachelor’s degree from an accredited college or university
- Valid teaching certificate on file for this state

Required Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities

- Facilitate a program of effective instruction, including planning, instructional delivery, and assessment
- Communicate effectively with stakeholders (students, families, colleagues)
- Provide a safe and organized learning environment conducive to learning
- Engage in ongoing professional development related to teaching assignment/population
- Comply with school board, state, and federal guidelines, policies, and laws
- Must be able to work in a dynamic and noisy environment
- Perform other duties as assigned

Desired Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities

- Possesses multiple endorsement areas
- Uses technology on a regular basis as part of instruction and in the performance of other teaching duties

Applications: Interested persons should contact the Department of Human Resources or visit our website (www.phantom-schooldistrict.net) for an application.

Close Date: Applications are accepted year round.

Article continues on page 7

Writing Experienced-Based Questions

Step	Action	Notes
1	Determine what type of information you want to gain from the applicant. Examples: <i>content knowledge, relationship-building, student discipline</i>	
2	Identify the teacher quality to which the topic relates	<input type="checkbox"/> Prerequisites/Credentials <input type="checkbox"/> Personal Characteristics <input type="checkbox"/> Learning Environment <input type="checkbox"/> Planning <input type="checkbox"/> Instructional Delivery <input type="checkbox"/> Assessment
3	Start with a stem that encourages the applicant to talk about past experiences. Examples: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Tell me about ...</i> • <i>How do you ...</i> • <i>Describe how you ...</i> • <i>Give me an example of when you ...</i> • <i>Share with me ...</i> • <i>Explain how you ...</i> 	
4	Write the question incorporating the stem.	
5	Consider what the <i>great</i> versus <i>unsatisfactory</i> responses would be*	Great Good Okay Unsatisfactory

* If an interviewee is using this form, think of how to answer the question using the STAR approach.

them so as to solicit feedback about actual performance, and thinking about the quality of responses in advance, an administrator is more likely to go into an interview with a game plan. Additionally, in a panel interview situation, sharing the questions and what responses are considered as *great, good, okay, and unsatisfactory* with fellow interviewers is a way to get everyone on the same "page." Furthermore, by identifying the teacher quality associated with each question, an interviewer can compile a series of interview questions that represent the various responsibilities associated with effective teaching. Often prerequisites/credential-related questions are not necessary, as that information is available on resumes or applications. Interestingly, learning environment and personal characteristics (e.g., respect, fairness) tend to be overrepresented in interviews, yet administrators are seeking teachers who can provide effective instructional delivery and assess student learning -- areas that are often underrepresented in questions asked during an interview. Seek a balance in the questions asked to ensure that the information necessary to make a hiring decision is obtained.

Sample Questions Drawn From a Job Description

Job Description Item	Sample Query
Facilitate a program of effective instruction, including planning, instructional delivery, and assessment	Tell me how you plan an instructional unit that fits within the assigned curriculum and meets students' needs.
Communicate effectively with stakeholders (students, families, colleagues)	Give me an example of a time when you experienced difficulty with a student and needed to involve the parents and colleagues in communicating and addressing the situation.
Provide a safe and organized learning environment conducive to learning	Describe to me how you establish a safe and organized classroom environment conducive to learning.
Engages in ongoing professional development related to teaching assignment/population	Think about a recent professional development session you attended; what was the topic and how did you use the information to enhance student learning?
Uses technology on a regular basis as part of instruction and in the performance of other teaching duties	Explain to me how you integrate technology into your instruction.
Perform other duties as assigned	Share with me any additional information that would inform me of your professional qualifications and abilities for this position.

Study summary continued from back page

The researchers made the following conclusions:

- The group that received phonics instruction through spelling performed significantly better on reading and spelling tasks than the group that received phonics instruction through literature.
- Students in the low early literacy skills group performed better in the spelling phonics instruction group than those in the embedded literature group. However, children who entered first grade with low early literacy skills were likely to remain low regardless of the type of instruction they received.

The researchers recommend that teachers strongly consider the benefits of phonics instruction through spelling, especially when working with students who are at risk.

Want to read the study?

Roberts, T. A., & Meiring, A. (2006). Teaching phonics in the context of children's literature or spelling: Influences on first-grade reading, spelling, and writing and fifth grade comprehension. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 98*(4), 690-713.

Just Released Studies

Students Perform Better When Teachers Are Invested

A national sample of first graders and their teachers in the United States found that when teachers assume personal responsibility for student learning, student achievement increases. An examination of data from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study – Kindergarten Cohort found that approximately 10% of the difference between teachers in first-grade reading achievement could be explained by teacher characteristics such as having a master's degree or more years of experience. Of that 10%, as much as 4% was attributed to teachers taking responsibility for student learning. Further, teachers who were more satisfied with their jobs were more likely to assume responsibility for student learning. Additionally, the school environment contributed to whether a teacher took personal responsibility for student achievement; specifically, teachers in schools with fewer than 300 students and with less than 50% minority enrollment were more likely to assume more responsibility. School leadership also contributed to teachers' attitudes: "if a school's teachers think that school leaders set and support clear goals for teachers and have the ability to protect and encourage staff, individual teacher's responsibility scores tend to be higher" (p. 73).

Want to read the study?

Logerfo, L. (2006). Climb every mountain. *Education Next*, 6(3), 68-75.

Phonics in Isolation or Phonics in Literature: What's the Best Approach?

The researchers in this study set out to explore this important question. Specifically, the study examined whether differences existed between children who developed their own spellings for words and children who received embedded phonics instruction. The embedded phonics instruction occurred through literature-based instruction. Fifty-five children in two first-grade classrooms were included in the study. The children were administered a pretest measuring letter name and letter sound recognition. Based on the pretest results, the students were classified into three groups on early literacy skills: high, medium, and low.

Students were randomly assigned to a group in which phonics was taught through spelling or a group in which phonics was taught through literature. During the school year, the students were administered reading, spelling, and writing tasks three times. Each group participated in daily lessons. The spelling group received instruction from the *Spelling Through Phonics* program. The phonics-through-literature group received instruction on the same letter-sound correspondences as the spelling group using picture books.

The *Spelling Through Phonics* program teaches correspondences between letters and sounds and teaches children how to analyze words for sound sequences, rather than how to use usual spelling patterns. McCracken, M. J., & McCracken, R. A. (1982). *Spelling through phonics*. Manitoba, Canada: Peguis.

Study summary continues on page 7

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