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PRINCIPAL SELECTION BY BOARDS OF TRUSTEES  
PERCEPTION AND PROCESS

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G. Ross Murray

Department of Education

Massey University

1988

MASSEY UNIVERSITY



1061195091

## Abstract

This research study examines three regional primary school Boards of Trustees in New Zealand leading up to the appointment of their new teaching principal. It focusses on trustee perceptions of educational leadership and on each Board's principal selection procedures. The conceptual and research framework identifies three areas for investigation: trustees' new employer role as a result of devolved educational control and their future training needs; the principal's dichotomous role as leader and manager of the school; and the efficacy of the principal selection process taking into account trustees' knowledge of the job, core principal qualities necessary for the position, identification of selection criteria, subjective factors and gender considerations.

A qualitative case study approach was used to illuminate the selection process which involved a total of 17 trustees. The research design was based around four information sources: documentary analysis, questionnaire, observational recording of meeting discussions, and a focussed interview with each trustee. Results of the study showed that trustees' predominant perceptions of principal qualities lay in the area of personal relationships and practical teaching experiences, with a preference for leadership rather than managerial skills. Trustees were not yet comfortable in their employer role, and selection processes displayed weaknesses in assessment methodologies and their consistent application. Results also revealed the impact on trustees' decision-making of subjective factors such as selector impressionism, and of the concept of 'best fit' involving dual processes of job and person perceptions.

As a consequence, the study recommends that future trustee selection training should be directed towards an understanding of employment legislation and of school leadership and management issues, and a greater proficiency in the use of valid assessment methods. These research findings have implications not only for trustee personnel training but for the expectations of a principal's role in today's schools, and for a broader definition of the principle of merit selection.

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