

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

Los Angeles

Substitute Teachers

as Effective Classroom Instructors

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Doctor of Education

by

Andrew Gary Glatfelter

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The dissertation of Andrew Gary Glatfelter is approved.

Robert Cooper

Yasmin B. Kafai

Jorja Leap

Tyrone C. Howard, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2006

DEDICATION

For my dad

Gary M. Glatfelter

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VITA

1977 Born, Detroit, Michigan

1999 Bachelor of Arts, Biblical Studies:
Missions & Biblical Languages
The Master's College
Santa Clarita, CA

1999-2000 5th Grade Teacher
Antelope Valley Christian School
Lancaster, CA

2000-2006 4th Grade Teacher
Desert View School
Lancaster School District
Lancaster, CA

2001 Professional Clear Multiple Subject Teaching Credential
California State University, Bakersfield

2002 Master of Arts, Education: Curriculum & Instruction
California State University, Bakersfield

2006 Assistant Principal
Piute Middle School
Lancaster School District
Lancaster, CA

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Substitute Teachers
as Effective Classroom Instructors

by

Andrew Gary Glatfelter

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Professor Tyrone C. Howard, Chair

Over the course of their kindergarten through twelfth grade education, children in American public schools will spend the equivalent of one school year under the guidance of a substitute teacher. Yet in most districts, substitutes are given the keys to the classroom without a day's training. While requirements vary by state, some may hold advanced degrees, while others may have earned only a high school diploma or G.E.D.

This mixed methods study examines the perceptions of substitute teachers, permanent teachers, and school administrators toward professional development for substitutes. I interviewed five administrators, five substitute teachers, and five classroom teachers. The data I collected from these interviews informed two surveys: one sent to a

sample of 176 permanent teachers and the other to the entire population of 151 substitute teachers in the Deerfield School District¹. I then conducted follow-up interviews with five different classroom teachers and five substitute teachers.

I found that classroom teachers believed that substitute teachers did not do a good job at classroom management, did not know how to teach the curriculum well, and were not competent with instructional strategies. The data also demonstrated that substitute teachers did not believe they did particularly well in each of these areas, but that they were eager to learn about them. Although a common method used for offering such professional development is a class or workshop, and while this was the most popular method requested by substitute teachers, more than half of all substitute teachers in the study reported they were interested in classroom observations, mentoring, networking, and in attending the same professional development as permanent teachers.

The recommendations of this study, based on input from the stakeholders themselves, hold promise for growing substitute teachers into what children need in the absence of their permanent teacher: an effective classroom instructor.

¹ For reasons of confidentiality, I refer to the district and all participants by pseudonyms.

CHAPTER 1

Problem Statement

Introduction to the Problem

While recent legislation mandates that all classroom teachers become “highly qualified” in the subjects they teach, no such requirements apply to substitute teachers. Permanent teachers must take graduate level courses in reading instruction, math curriculum, classroom management, learning theories, and practice their craft under the guidance of a master teacher. Substitute teachers, however, can teach with no educational training or experience at all. Any training or support given to substitute teachers is left up to financially strapped school districts. As a consequence, many of these educators are given little or no preparation and may be ill-equipped to handle the wide range of instructional situations they face.

Impact of Teacher Absenteeism on Substitute Teachers

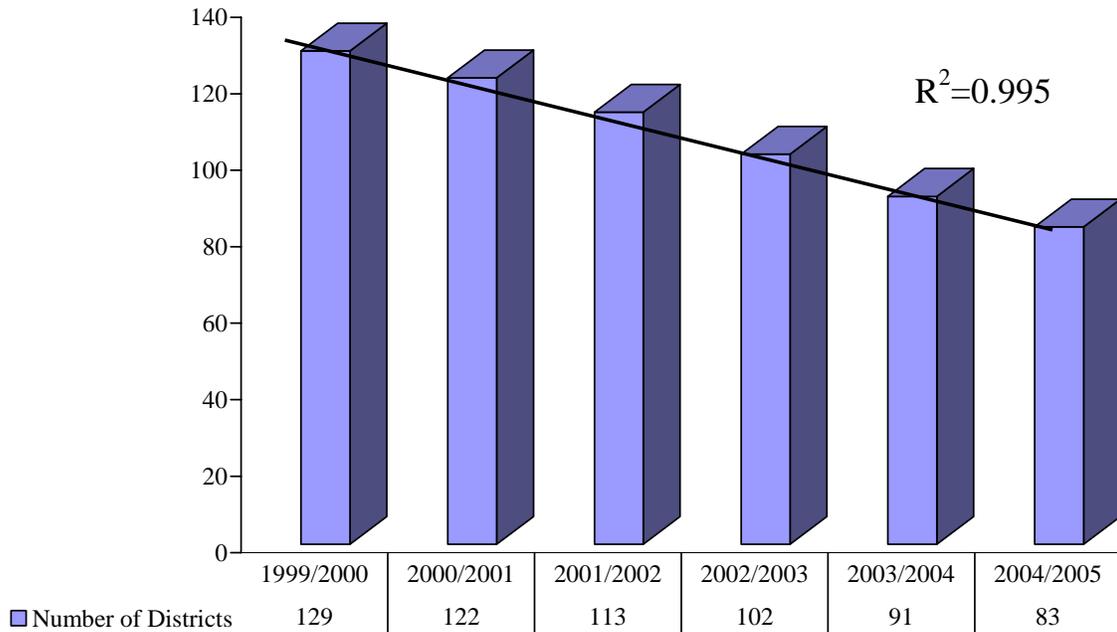
One of the factors contributing to the demand for substitute teachers has been a rise in the absentee rate among classroom teachers. Research in the early 1980s found that children spent from five to eight percent of a school year being taught by substitute teachers, and the percentage was rising (Ostapczuk, 1994). More recent work from the Substitute Teaching Institute at Utah State University places this figure at 10 percent nationally (Sykes, 2002). Therefore, over the course of their kindergarten to twelfth grade educational careers, children may spend the equivalent of one full year of school under the guidance of substitute teachers.

In addition to absences due to illness, jury duty, and personal necessity, teachers are increasingly leaving the classroom to receive professional development. The No Child Left Behind Act requires that schools spend five percent of their Title I budgets on professional development to ensure that all teachers meet the standard of becoming “highly qualified.” Schools that fail to meet federal objectives for Adequate Yearly Progress must spend 10 percent of their Title I budgets on professional development. Nationwide, 22 percent of all schools failed to make these targets, placing them under this regulation (Paulson, 2004). Although the number of schools labeled “in need of improvement” has declined in many areas, most educators expect the number of failing schools to climb sharply in the next few years as the number of students required to reach proficiency increases dramatically. Since much of the professional development required under this law is offered during the regular school day, even schools with traditionally low absenteeism will see an increase in the number days off for “school business.”

Permanent Teachers as Substitutes

In multitrack districts, regular teachers augment the substitute teacher pool by covering classes while they are off-track, often induced by a higher rate of pay than other substitutes. Teachers in these schools may also have the option to trade days with off-track teachers. For example, Mr. Collins needs a day off. He asks another permanent teacher, Mr. Schwartz, to substitute for him. Mr. Schwartz is off-track, but agrees to serve as the substitute for no pay. Later, when Mr. Collins is off-track, he will substitute teach for Mr. Schwartz when he needs a day off. This trading of days does not decrease

Figure 1. Number of California districts with multitrack calendars



the number of sick days a teacher has accumulated and does not require the district to pay for a substitute. Because qualified teachers serve as the substitute many principals encourage the use of trade days. The frequency with which this alternative to hiring a substitute occurs is not well documented, as only the site principal—not the district—is usually ever notified.

In California, this portion of the substitute pool is shrinking at an alarming rate. Since 1999, the number of school districts on a multitrack calendar has declined from 129 in 1999 to 83 in 2004 ($R^2=0.995^2$, see Figure 1) ("Year-Round Education Program Guide", 2005). This decline prevents some 4,800 teachers from substitute teaching during their off-track time.

² This R^2 value shows that there is a statistically significant longitudinal trend. An R^2 value of .60 or higher is generally considered significant. The correlation is higher as the R^2 value approaches 1.

The next few years will see a more severe decline in multitrack schools. Assembly Bill 1550, passed in California in 2004 in response to the *Williams* Case, will eliminate all multitrack Concept 6 calendars by the year 2012. Currently over 345,000 students across 165 schools in California follow this three-track schedule. Given these numbers, over 11,000 teachers could be pulled from the list of available substitutes in just the next few years, if their schools adopt a traditional calendar. With such a rapid decline in the population of substitutes with the highest qualifications, training, and expertise, districts must develop plans for recruiting and developing a trained workforce of substitute teachers.

Problems Faced by Substitute Teachers

Myriad problems face substitute teachers, most of whom receive no training for the job. Few substitute teachers are taught how to manage their classrooms and handle student discipline, opening the district to legal liability and, perhaps most importantly, to a decline in the quality of the educational program. One substitute, frustrated with a student's incessant talking, forced a nine-year-old to stand with his arms outstretched and hold four heavy dictionaries.³ Another showed an R-rated movie in a high school class without parent permission. A seventh grade student cursed at a substitute teacher, and the substitute replied with a foul epithet of his own. Yet another attempted to manage his class by blowing a shrill whistle. "Animals!" he shouted at fifth graders. "You are all animals!" While stories like these are common among teachers, there are many other less

obvious instances of a lack of classroom control that limit the effectiveness of substitute teachers. One substitute threw up his hands when he could not get a group of rowdy eighth grade math students to quiet down enough to start a lesson. Another took a fourth grade class to the field to play soccer, but allowed half of the class to play unsupervised on the swings 200 yards away. In this case, two children got in a fight resulting in a suspension.

A teacher's lesson plans can be problematic for a substitute teacher. Sometimes teachers' lesson plans contain jargon that is clear to teachers familiar with the curriculum yet indecipherable to substitute teachers. Acronyms that teachers take for granted, such as IEP, SDC, or RSP⁴, are often left undefined in lesson plans. This is not simply a matter of inconvenience for the substitute. A special education student's Individualized Education Plan, or IEP, is a legal document and its contents must be followed to the letter. Any breach may open a teacher, substitute or otherwise, to personal legal liability.

Classroom teachers often create lesson plans for substitutes that require less academic rigor. Many teachers report they "dumb down" the educational content of their lesson plans with worksheets, games, and videos they believe are easier for substitutes to manage. Because substitute teachers lack a background in many of the programs a district offers, teachers are often hesitant to include these in their plans. One first grade teacher reported that when she does not know who will fill in for her, she does not leave reading in the lesson plans. She feels that a substitute who is unfamiliar with the program

³ All of the examples listed were communicated to the author by permanent teachers. For reasons of confidentiality no names are given.

⁴ SDC = Special Day Class, a class designed for students with disabilities, RSP = Resource Specialist Program, referring to services received by students with disabilities either as a part of a regular class or in a pull-out program.

used in the district will not deliver the content effectively. Instead, she gives students seat work that is a review of previously covered material. The result is that both teachers and substitutes often feel that days are wasted and substitute teachers become what one Los Angeles Unified School District administrator called “high-priced babysitters.”

Teachers sometimes contribute to the substitute’s inability to teach. Many substitutes report finding no lesson plans when they arrive for a job. They are forced to try to find neighboring teachers to help them, to ask the children where they left off in the textbook, or make up plans for the day on the spot. At other times lesson plans are left, but materials are missing or incomplete. Again, the substitute is forced to improvise. Even when complete plans are given they may not be clear enough to allow a substitute to follow them. One teacher left as a part of her plans, “SM 42.” This was not enough information to allow even an experienced credentialed teacher to lead the lesson that had been intended for the students. In order to effectively address the problems associated with substitute teacher training, permanent teachers must also learn how to effectively and efficiently prepare lesson plans so that a substitute will have no difficulty interpreting and implementing them.

For over twenty years the literature has consistently suggested ways of solving the problem. Studies have recommended offering training in classroom management and discipline, evaluating and giving helpful feedback to substitute teachers; and improving the way substitute teachers are recruited and selected (Ostapczuk, 1994). While the literature consistently suggests that substitutes should be better trained and provided with feedback about their performance, it rarely happens. In 1983 Koelling conducted a

survey which found that 73.1 percent of responding districts offered no in-service training; 71.6 percent did not offer evaluation of, and feedback to, substitute teachers; and 65.2 percent offered no handbook on school rules and policies (Koelling, 1983). There is no indication that the situation, in all but the largest school districts, has improved. The lack of progress in improving substitute teachers' qualifications and the conditions under which they work makes it clear that there is much work still to be done.

Purpose of the Study

The Deerfield School District⁵, a mid-sized district located on an urban fringe, is a prime example of a district without a program for the development of its substitute teachers. Mr. Conner, the assistant superintendent of human resources, meets with candidates and discusses some helpful tips during substitute teacher interviews. These teachers then get a manual that offers the names, locations, and phone numbers of the district's 18 schools. This handbook also includes some advice for substitute teaching. However, the district does not offer any professional development opportunities to its substitute teachers.

This study examines the need for professional development from the perspective of participants themselves. Twenty-five Deerfield employees were interviewed, and surveys were mailed to 176 classroom teachers and all 151 of its substitute teachers. The interviews and surveys were designed to address the following research questions:

⁵ For reasons of confidentiality, the district and all participants will be referred to by pseudonyms.

1. What do permanent teachers believe that substitute teachers should know about curriculum, instruction, and classroom management to improve the quality of instruction when the teacher is absent?
2. What knowledge and skills do substitute teachers believe would help them improve the quality of instruction when they assume the responsibilities of the classroom teacher?
3. In the substitute teacher's perception, what kinds of preparations can the classroom teacher make to support the most effective use of the students' time when the teacher is absent (for example: classroom procedures, daily schedules, lesson plans, etc.) ?
4. What, in the perception of the substitute teachers and classroom teachers, are the training delivery strategies for permanent and substitute teacher training that result in improved teaching by substitutes?

Upon employment at McDonald's restaurants, each new hire must attend an orientation, followed by computer-based training. Then, the new employee receives two to three hours of on-the-job training for three days, a total of 10 to 13 hours of preparation. Yet every year we entrust millions of American children to substitute teachers, many of whom are given the keys to the classroom doors without any preparation, hoping they will succeed.

The purpose of this study is to learn the best methods for supporting substitute teachers as effective classroom instructors through a careful analysis of the points of view

of administrators, classroom teachers, and substitute teachers themselves. My goal is that the data I collect might be used by the Deerfield School District and others like it to better prepare and assist substitute teachers in successfully continuing the curriculum, even in the absence of the permanent teacher.

CHAPTER 2

Review of the Literature

Introduction

Schoolchildren in the United States will spend a significant portion of their educational careers with a substitute teacher. Yet, while the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 promises that every classroom will be filled by a “highly qualified” teacher, the statute does not apply to substitutes. Teaching skills and preparation for the classroom varies widely among substitute teachers. Students might find the highest degree earned by their substitute teacher ranges from a high school diploma to a doctorate. While substitute teachers’ preparation for teaching is not uniform, there is even more inconsistency in the readiness of students to learn from a substitute teacher and the quality of lesson plans left by the regular teacher. Often the substitute’s day runs smoothly, and students learn as the regular teacher intended. At other times substitute teachers supervise classes that press their skills as a classroom manager and find lesson plans that are ambiguous or, at worst, missing.

Research suggests that substitutes may negatively impact students’ learning. A study conducted in 2004 by the *Orlando Sentinel* attempted to establish a relationship between student performance on standardized tests and substitute teaching (Associated-Press, 2004). The report, which tracked students in 62 Orange County, Florida schools across “language arts, English, and reading,” found that children who spent four or more weeks with a substitute teacher scored 11 points lower on the reading portion of the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test than their peers in the same schools. While the

results of this study were not subjected to tests of statistical reliability, they must cause us to consider what steps we might take to improve the instruction a child receives from a substitute teacher.

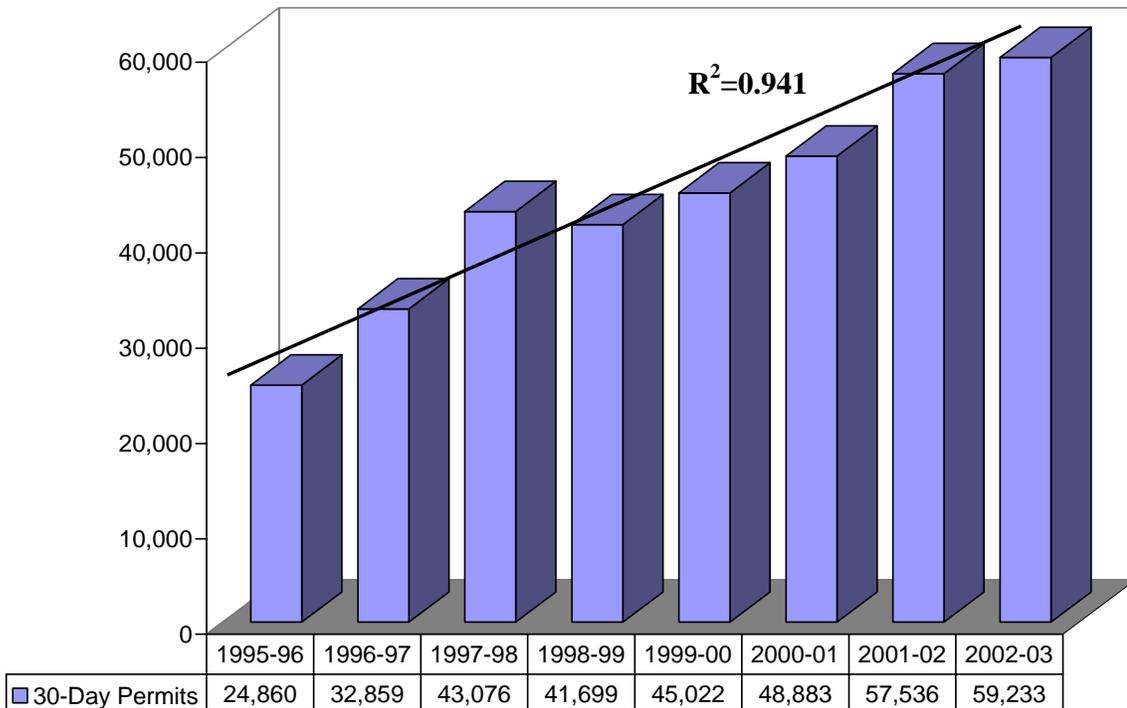
This review of the literature will first examine the demand for substitute teachers in California. Next, I will examine studies of how substitute teachers and our schools are impacted by the absence of a substitute teachers' association, low substitute teacher self-esteem, and factors that contribute to high attrition rates. Because school districts commonly rely on training to ameliorate problems associated with the classroom, we will examine research on teaching strategies used by effective teachers and research-based approaches to creating, implementing, and evaluating professional development. I will compare this body of research to the current availability of professional development for substitute teachers. Finally, I will examine the research on motivation to change as it applies both to organizations and the individual.

The Demand for Substitute Teachers in California

In California, individuals who do not hold a teaching credential but would like to substitute teach may apply for one of four emergency permits. The first of these, the Emergency 30-Day Substitute Teaching Permit, is by far the most common. According to a 2002-2003 state report, the number of these permits granted was 59,223. By way of comparison, this figure is higher than the entire permanent teaching force of Kern, Riverside, San Bernardino, and Ventura Counties combined. In the last decade, the number of emergency substitute permits has steadily increased ($R^2=0.94$, see *Figure 2*),

reflecting a heightened statewide demand for substitute teachers ("2002-03 annual report: Emergency permits and credential waivers", 2004).

Figure 2. Emergency 30-Day Substitute Permits Issued in California from 1995 to 2003



In order to receive the emergency permit, an applicant must hold a bachelor's degree from an accredited institution and have passed the California Basic Educational Skills Test (CBEST). The increased demand for substitutes in the late 1990s led the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CCTC), the board responsible for granting these permits, to issue waivers for individuals who did not hold a bachelor's degree, did not pass the CBEST, or on rare occasions, had neither (Burke, 2002). In 2002 the number of substitutes on waiver was 2,973. By 2003 it had declined to 1,560.

Another permit available to substitute teachers is the Emergency Career Substitute Teaching Permit. This permit also requires that the applicant possess a bachelor's degree and pass the CBEST. In addition, the applicant must have served as a substitute teacher for at least 90 days per year for three consecutive years. The holder of this permit may substitute in the same classroom for up to 60 consecutive days, double the limit of the Emergency 30-Day Substitute Teaching Permit. The district has the added responsibility of making professional development opportunities available to these substitute teachers.

A third type of permit issued by the CCTC is the Emergency Substitute Teaching Permit for Prospective Teachers. This permit is offered to students enrolled in four-year colleges who have completed at least 90 semester hours of course work. These substitutes are permitted to work for 30 consecutive days for any one teacher, and are limited to 90 days of teaching during the year. It may be renewed once, if the applicant has completed 15 semester hours of course work during the prior year.

The fourth type of substitute permit is the Emergency Designated Subjects Vocational Education Permit for 30-Day Substitute Teaching Service. This permit allows districts who have a statement of need on file with the CCTC to allow those with a high school diploma and five years' experience to serve as the teacher of a technical, trade, or vocational education program. Service is limited to 30 consecutive days for any one teacher, and may be renewed if the applicant completes 15 hours of professional growth.

Lack of Union Representation as It Impacts Substitute Teaching

A lack of a union or association to represent substitute teachers creates two problems. While permanent teachers enjoy membership in a teachers' union to negotiate salary and benefits and to improve working conditions, substitute teachers rarely have the opportunity to sit at the collective bargaining table.

Recently the Hawaii State Teachers Association and the State Board of Education negotiated a cut in substitute teachers' pay, in spite of the fact that the substitutes are not represented by the union (Curtis, 2005). Nearly 9,000 substitute teachers filed a class action lawsuit, but Judge Karen Ahn ruled in favor of the teachers' association and the board. Another pending lawsuit in Hawaii accuses the board of denying substitute teachers some \$15 million in pay owed since 1996. While lawyers are advocating for the substitutes, they lack the bargaining power of teachers' unions and their congressional lobbyists.

John Hoff, a Kauai substitute, founded the Substitute Teachers Professional Alliance, (STPAL) to end the state's "abusive management practices and fiscal policies" (Hoff, 2004). In order to be recognized as a collective bargaining unit and receive the rights of a union, STPAL must collect the signatures of 30 percent of registered substitute teachers. While spirited, these attempts have met with limited success.

In Denver, the school board and teachers' union agreed to cut substitute teachers' daily rate of pay from \$120 to \$81. According to the Denver Post, the move was made to give raises to full-time teachers. Unfilled absences, once at just one percent, shot up to nine percent. In order to fill classrooms principals called on literacy coaches, gym

instructors, and even security guards. With no long term fix in sight, then-Superintendent Jerry Wartgow sent letters to parents asking them to teach (Sherry & Rouse, 2005).

One group, the National Substitute Teachers' Association, attempts to create for substitutes what permanent teachers have in the California Teachers' Association and the National Education Association. It provides substitutes with discounted health benefits, but has met with only limited success. Their 2002 national conference in Las Vegas made headlines when just 20 substitute teachers attended (Richmond, 2002).

A second problem for substitutes is the lack of systematic data collection. It is often difficult to know who comprises our substitute teacher pools because we lack nationwide data on the backgrounds and these individuals. Instead, we must turn to data collected within across a few select regions. While the generalizeability of these studies is limited, they offer us insight into critical factors related to substitute teaching.

Self-Efficacy of Substitute Teachers

A recent study conducted by Trull (2004) analyzed feelings of self-efficacy before and after a training workshop in West Virginia. Substitute teachers reported they became significantly more assured in their ability to manage a classroom successfully following the seminar. After spending time in the classroom, however, self-efficacy levels declined. In other words, substitutes felt confident immediately after attending a one-day training session, but felt less confident after having taught.

Kevin R. Jones's study in a Nevada school district corroborates these findings. He found that after a training on substitute teaching, participants felt much better

prepared for their job and believed the district valued their service, even though they reported that the training would not change their teaching practice (Jones, 2004). Since this study did not follow participants after the training, it is uncertain what may have happened to their self-reported levels of confidence over time.

High Attrition Rates of Substitute Teachers

Research studies confirm that factors in the workplace play a key role in an individual's decision to enter, remain in, and leave teaching (Bobbitt, 1991; Sclan, 1993). Insofar as substitute teaching is concerned, these factors can be manipulated to reduce attrition in the substitute teacher pool. According to research by Pelsma (1989), the quality of a teacher's classroom instruction rises as her level of job satisfaction increases. In other words, job satisfaction and effective teaching are closely linked. Given the historically negative view of the substitute teacher as a "warm body" (Abdal-Hagg, 1997; Conners, 1927), many districts have decided to prepare substitute teachers for the numerous challenges they will inevitably face. When districts successfully improve levels of job satisfaction, research tells us they stand a good chance of helping the substitute teacher perform at a higher level.

Student behavior contributes to high attrition rates of substitute teachers. A 2002 study by Gonzales showed that poor student behavior can have a harmful effect on substitute teacher retention (Gonzales, 2002). Twenty-four percent of her sample listed "inappropriate student behavior" as a reason to leave substitute teaching.

Effective Teaching

It is the job of the substitute teacher to provide continuity in the instructional program of the regular teacher. Thus the issue of effective teaching from the angle of the substitute will differ from what the literature describes as effective teaching for permanent teachers. The domains of lesson design and assessment, for example, are not the responsibility of the substitute teacher. However, turning to what research has proven are effective lesson delivery strategies for permanent teachers may apply equally well to the substitute. A permanent teacher may expect the substitute to be familiar with these strategies, or the strategies may be used at the discretion of the substitute teacher when lesson plans do not specify with great detail how a lesson is to be covered.

The term “effective” can take on different meanings in various contexts. Teacher effectiveness has been described in terms of student achievement; comments gathered from students, teachers, and parents; and positive evaluations from principals (Stronge, 2002). While earlier research from Florida demonstrated that students who were taught by substitute teachers for four or more weeks scored less well on a standardized assessment than students instructed by their regular classroom teacher for the same amount of time, it is difficult to use achievement tests to measure the effect of one day of a substitute’s teaching. Given the brief time the substitute teacher is at a site, accounts from parents, students, and teachers will not contribute to our understanding of a substitute’s teaching effectiveness. They may warn us of a serious problem with a substitute teacher, such as the use of derogatory language, but they are not likely to accurately gauge one day’s instructional effectiveness. The goal of the substitute teacher

is to create the best approximation of the teaching that would have taken place had the regular teacher been present. Therefore, our definition of “effectiveness” will relate to those aspects of teaching which fall under the responsibilities of the day-to-day substitute.

A number of studies tried to identify the attributes of permanent teachers that are positively correlated with student achievement. As early as the 1940s, Hellfritsch (1945), LaDuke (1945), Rostker (1945), and Skinner (1947) discovered positive links between a teacher’s general intelligence and student achievement, though these correlations are small and not generally accepted as statistically significant (Darling-Hammond, 2000).

In an analysis of school inputs, Hanushek (1986) found that a teacher’s education and years of experience have a very weak relationship with student success. Those holding a master’s degree did not have a statistically higher impact on student achievement than those without one, and teachers with 20 years’ experience fared only slightly better than teachers with five or more years’ experience. The only relationship that seems to hold significance is a teacher’s verbal ability (Hanushek, 1971). Murnane (1985) believes that verbal ability may be a way in which we are measuring a teacher’s ability to communicate ideas with clarity. There are limitations for Murnane’s study with regard to substitute teachers. As previously stated, substitute teachers possess a wide range of qualifications, including just a high school diploma. This study did not attempt to differentiate between those who held a college degree and those who did not.

Cardon (2002), in a study of perception on substitute teacher quality, found that many principals did not expect substitutes who only held a high school diploma to be

well-prepared for the job. This issue is not uncommon, as 28 states allow those with just a high school diploma to substitute teach (Sorenson, 2001). Others have a different opinion. Emma Newton, deputy superintendent for Orange County, Florida Schools believes “high school graduates might come in and do a very good job” (Associated-Press, 2004) Minthorn, another Florida school administrator, decided that substitute teachers with only a high school diploma would receive a ten day training class instead of the three day program required of those with a college diploma. He reported that the number of unsatisfactory performance reports among the highly trained high school graduates was half that of those with less training and a higher degree (Minthorn, 2000). As with much of the literature on substitute teaching, this was not subjected to tests of statistical reliability. Nevertheless, this finding appears to be consonant with research on the educational background of permanent teachers and is strong evidence that training, rather than educational experience, plays a key role in the success of the substitute teacher.

Robert Marzano (Marzano, 2001), in *Classroom Instruction That Works*, presents a meta-analysis of effective teaching strategies. Ranked by effect size, he lists the most important categories of instructional strategies that affect student achievement as: identifying similarities and differences; summarizing and note taking; reinforcing effort and providing recognition; homework and practice; nonlinguistic representations; cooperative learning; setting objectives and providing feedback; generating and testing hypotheses; and questions, cues, and advance organizers. Of these, some are not germane to the task of the substitute teacher. Homework and practice, cooperative

learning, and setting objectives are part of lesson design, and as such are the responsibility of the permanent teacher. While the others may not be listed explicitly in a teacher's lesson plan, they can often be included under a teacher's broad request that the substitute "check for understanding" or "discuss" the material presented.

Ranking number one on Marzano's list is identifying similarities and differences. Its effect size in the meta-analysis is 1.61 (standard deviation=0.31), much higher than any other strategy. This can be accomplished in a number of different ways. The teacher may simply bring to the students' attention similarities or differences within a text or activity by stating the relationships explicitly. Students can create these relationships themselves through graphic representations such as a Venn diagram, as the use of graphic or symbolic forms have been proven to increase students' understanding of the material (Cole & McLeod, 1999; Glynn & Takahashi, 1998). Marzano suggests four ways to identify similarities and differences: by comparing, classifying, creating metaphors, and creating analogies. The substitute who has these tools at her disposal will be able to integrate a highly effective strategy for appropriately checking for students' understanding of the concept or skill presented.

Another effective strategy identified by Marzano is summarizing and note taking. While teachers may ask students to summarize events they read in a chapter, viewed in a film, or observed during an experiment, it cannot be assumed that students understand how to synthesize what they saw and extract the most important details (Marzano, 2001). The explicit skills of summarizing and note taking can and should be taught, as the effect sizes reported across a number of empirical studies demonstrate that student achievement

rises significantly (Crismore, 1985; Hattie, Biggs, & Purdie, 1996; Marzano, 2001; Pflaum, Walberg, Karegianes, & Rasher, 1980; Rosenshine & Meister, 1994; Rosenshine, Meister, & Chapman, 1996). Based on the work of Walter Kintsch and Teun van Dijk, Marzano tells us that when we read to summarize, we focus on deletion of information, substituting words for others, and keeping some things the same. Although many of Marzano's strategies would involve teaching students the techniques of summarizing, which lie beyond the scope of the substitute teacher's duties, he details the use of summary frames that teachers can implement in a variety of circumstances. A narrative frame, for instance, leads students through a series of questions based on the elements of a story, forcing them to address the main ideas of a passage (Marzano, 2001).

Researchers have also found a high correlation between certain kinds of note taking and high achievement on examinations. Not surprisingly, Bretzing and Kulhary (1979) found that verbatim note taking was not particularly helpful. Since so much of the mind is focused on capturing what is being said, little focus is left to process the information. Notes should be considered a work in progress, and they can be elaborated upon (Marzano, 2001). Researchers have found that few students take advantage of notes as a tool for test preparation. Marzano also discusses a common misconception about note taking: the myth that "less is more." Nye et al. (1984) found that there is a strong relationship between the amount of information processed by students and contained in students' notes and their performance on tests. It is therefore the cognitive exercise of deciding what is important to keep and what can be deleted that positively impacts students' learning.

Another element of successful classroom instruction is providing students recognition. Alfie Kohn (1999) argues that providing students with extrinsic rewards is damaging; children who perform an activity solely for a reward will find little intrinsic motivation for the activity. Marzano's analysis of the literature found that the way a reward is dispensed makes all the difference.

Rewarding students for simply performing a task does not enhance intrinsic motivation and might even decrease it. This is probably so because it conveys the message that students must be "paid off" to engage in the activity. Providing rewards for the successful attainment of specific performance goals, however, enhances intrinsic motivation. (Marzano, 2001)

In other words, when students are given a reasonable goal to achieve, and make that goal, the reward enhances intrinsic motivation. A distinction can be made between tangible rewards, such as candy or money, and praise, in which the teacher tells her students how well they understand the content of the lesson. Cameron and Pierce (1994) found that providing symbolic recognition had a substantially stronger impact on student attitudes and free time application of the behavior than tangible rewards.

Science has found that using what Marzano calls nonlinguistic representations can positively impact student achievement. In a study by Gerlic and Jausovec (1999), the EEG tests of subjects learning from text was compared to that of subjects learning who had the additional support of either audio and video or audio and pictures. The groups who had the multimedia presentations in their learning sessions had higher brain activity

as measured by the EEGs. The authors surmised that the participants who watched the video and viewed pictures used visualization strategies as part of their learning.

It is possible to create a number of mental models that students can use in order to sort and understand information. David Hyerle, co-founder of Innovative Learning Group and the mind behind Thinking Maps, created a number of frames in which students can organize new information (Hyerle, 1996). He offers graphic organizers for description, time-sequence, process/cause-effect patterns, episode patterns, generalization/principle patterns, and concept patterns. These concept maps, used in over 3,000 schools worldwide, provide children a way to create visual representations of what they learned or of their brainstorms in preparation for discussion or writing. Other simple visualization models include creating physical models, drawing pictures, and engaging students in kinesthetic activity (Marzano, 2001).

These physical representations help scaffold students' learning, offering the teacher a way to take an abstract concept and allowing a student to perceive it visually. The average effect size from studies that tested these nonlinguistic representations was 0.75 (standard deviation=0.40), demonstrating they are an effective tool for improving student achievement (Marzano, 2003).

Another effective strategy used by educators is the implementation of cues, questions, and advance organizers (Marzano, 2001). Cues consist of messages that help students activate their prior knowledge on a topic, and create a starting point for organizing new information. A simple cue at the start of the lesson may consist of a

teacher telling students that the section they are going to read has to do with the cause and effect relationship they studied the previous day.

While teachers ask questions routinely, research has proven that asking higher level questions leads to deeper understanding of the subject matter (Redfield & Rousseau, 1981). When students are asked to reframe information in a summary or analysis, rather than a simple recall of facts, they learn better.

David Ausubel is well-known for bringing advance organizers into the mainstream of pedagogy. An advance organizer is the presentation of the objective of a lesson, given before the lesson and offered at a higher level of abstraction than the information presented after it (Ausubel, 1968). Marzano (2001) presents four types of advance organizers. The first, maintaining the highest effect size of the four, is an expository advance organizer. Here, the teacher simply tells students what will be discussed during the lesson. The narrative advance organizer presents information in the form of a story. Skimming the text in advance of its reading is another form of the advance organizer. Finally, graphics, one of the nonlinguistic representations mentioned earlier, can serve as an effective advance organizer.

Few of the effective teaching strategies can be implemented in an undisciplined classroom. A lack of discipline in schools has long been among the top concerns expressed by the American public about its schools (Rose & Gallup, 2004). If we can assume that the permanent teacher has developed some sort of discipline plan, the literature that addresses the organization of these plans is not relevant to the substitute teacher. In order to maintain continuity, it is not reasonable to ask the substitute teacher

to implement an entirely new discipline structure. Even experienced teachers take many days at the start of the school year to develop these plans and routines. Effective disciplinary techniques, though, are used daily by the substitute.

In *Creating Effective Schools*, Brookover et al. (1982) made the distinction between the time allotted to a lesson and Academic Engaged Time, or the time actually spent by students engaged in the material. While the experienced teacher maximizes allotted time by creating procedures for rapid transitions between subjects and providing cues to keep students on task, the substitute teacher suffers in two ways. First, substitute teachers are usually unfamiliar with classroom procedures, as these vary both within and across schools. Second, a substitute teacher will sometimes lose the class's attention as he or she is forced to read the lesson plans in order to prepare for the next activity. It follows that if a teacher explicitly shares the class's procedures, and enables the substitute teacher to move quickly from one task to the next by leaving succinct plans, that students' attention would remain on the academic content, thereby decreasing opportunities for off-task behavior.

Stage and Quiroz (1997), in a meta-analysis of 99 studies, found four major types of effective disciplinary techniques: reinforcement, punishment, no immediate consequence (reminders of proper behavior in advance of any infractions), and the combination of punishment and reinforcement. Of these, the largest effect size occurred among teachers who used punishment and reinforcement in combination. Echoing this finding, Miller, Ferguson, and Simpson found in their review of the literature that "these

studies should permit schools to strike a ‘healthy balance’ between rewards and punishments” (Miller, Ferguson, & Simpson, 1998 in (Marzano, 2003).

Relationships between teachers and students also have an impact on a teacher’s ability to maintain order. Theo Wubbles et al. (1999) describe a continuum ranging from the highly cooperative teacher to the highly oppositional. Highly cooperative teachers, they assert, work as part of a team and have concern for the opinions and needs of others. These teachers find leading difficult, however. At the other end of the spectrum are teachers with highly oppositional traits. These are often veteran teachers who have become skilled in dominant behaviors. Wubbels’ findings tell us that over time teachers tend to lose their cooperative focus and become increasingly oppositional. The substitute who relies solely on reward, such as giving out candy, or solely on punishment, such as pulling a student’s behavior card on a wall chart, will likely be less effective than the substitute who implements a balance between rewards and punishment. On the one hand, substitute teachers must avoid appealing to students as peers, and on the other hand attempt to avoid maintaining order by authoritarian rule.

Martin Haberman, famous for his work on teaching in areas of low socioeconomic status, makes a distinction between the “pedagogy of poverty” and “good teaching” (Haberman, n.d.). Teaching that does little more than drill basic skills into students using directive teaching produces disappointing results, Haberman contends. Instead, he suggests that students become actively involved in their own education. For example, students should be encouraged to actively discuss issues they regard as vital concerns. They should create models and perform experiments. Students should be

taught to compare, to question, and to generalize. In other words, they should be involved in higher order thinking skills; not simply memorization of facts in isolation. For the substitute teacher, the application of Huberman's principles may be difficult. The substitute teacher is expected to follow the plans left for him or her, so if all that is left is seat work, the substitute may have few options. Nevertheless, the teachers who leave lesson plans must consider what is in the best interest of the children. It is possible to infer from Haberman that if students are given tasks that they find both challenging and engaging, that the time spent with a substitute teacher will be both easier to manage and more productive.

Models of Professional Development

It is clear from the research that substitute teachers do not enter the classroom with an automatic understanding of how to maintain order and effectively deliver instruction. While training has been the classic *modus operandi* of districts when it comes to substitute teacher preparation, it is important to note that this is not the only form available to us. Guskey (2000) offers seven distinct models of professional development. These include training, observation/assessment, involvement in a development/improvement process, study groups, inquiry/action research, individually guided activities, and mentoring. In order to understand the best way in which professional development for substitutes should be presented, the pros and cons of each of these methods must be evaluated.

When teachers think of professional development, often what comes to mind is training (Guskey, 2000). A presenter or group of presenters shares information through a

variety of formats, such as discussions, seminars, demonstrations, or simulations. The goal of a training can be left up to the presenter, or it can be developed collaboratively with the participants. The goal of training often includes “awareness, knowledge, and skill development” (Guskey, 2000). Training is a cost-effective method for helping substitute teachers learn their craft. Since many are just entering the field, it can lay a foundation for norms.

The observation/assessment model asks a less experienced teacher to watch a teacher with some area or areas of expertise in order to glean successful teaching strategies. This model may not be successful as a starting place for substitute professional development, as novices may not understand enough about what is going on in the classroom to understand the rationale for the decisions made by the permanent teacher. If this method was offered to teachers who already had some experience in the classroom, however, it would serve as a strong supplement to what was learned from presenters at a training. Another drawback is cost. It may be too costly for districts to pay substitute teachers to watch more experienced teachers, even if it would benefit substitutes. One possible solution applies to substitute teachers who serve in schools that offer their teachers “prep periods.” Normally, these allow the permanent teachers to make lesson plans or grade papers. Day-to-day substitutes, who usually spend the period by themselves in the classroom, could be assigned to a “master teacher” in the school who would provide an excellent model.

The next method, involvement in an improvement process, is difficult to apply to the substitute teacher. Typically, this professional development requires teachers to

evaluate a new program or curriculum. Teachers investigate the research claims of a product, or discuss the merits of a particular program. While this design is well-suited to the experienced teacher, it does not transfer well to substitute teachers, many of whom need an understanding of foundational characteristics of successful teaching.

A fourth method, study groups, requires that an entire school site break into learning groups to find solutions to common problems. It may be possible for teachers to create many solutions to the problems discussed earlier. For example, teachers may conclude that instead of holding training during the year they should conduct their own professional development after school or during the summer months, thus decreasing a school's dependence upon substitute teacher coverage. It is beyond the scope of this study, however, to analyze methods for decreasing teacher absenteeism as a means to academic improvement. While substitute teachers are widely distributed during the day and cannot meet together regularly as teachers do during staff meetings, the Internet may offer a solution. Substitute teachers who would like to discuss challenges with their peers have formed web-based discussion groups for the purpose of having a common platform for conversation. In addition to offering substitutes a chance to vent frustrations, a listserv, chat room, or bulletin board can become a place where more experienced substitute teachers offer advice to those with less training. Substitutes who fear asking questions may be more comfortable with the anonymity provided in this online format.

The inquiry/action research approach is probably not appropriate professional development for the substitute teacher. Substitute teachers cannot be expected to devote substantial time to formulate questions and collect and analyze data.

The “individually guided activities” method described by Guskey (2000) assumes that teachers know enough about their craft to articulate an area of need, develop a plan to meet that need, learn the information necessary to meet that need, and evaluate whether the learning was effective in meeting the need. Without core knowledge of pedagogy, many substitute teachers may lack enough information to know what kinds of questions to ask. This, like the inquiry/action research method, is time intensive and therefore cost prohibitive for substitute teachers.

The last of Guskey’s models is mentoring. Here a substitute teacher is paired up with an experienced teacher to “discuss professional goals, the sharing of ideas and strategies on effective practice, reflection on current methods, on-the-job observations, and tactics for improvement” (Guskey, 2000). The method may be of particular interest to the substitute who may be considering taking a permanent position. As districts often have a coordinator for professional development, this person might coordinate relationships between teacher-mentors and substitute-protégés. While cost is again a factor, districts must thoughtfully consider how they might support and develop this pool of potential employees.

Of course, we are not forced to choose just one of these models. The best model might be a combination of the positive features of a variety of these models (Guskey, 1996). Districts must consider that while their resources are limited, some of the methods discussed above could provide tremendous payoff for a small cost. Offering a substitute teacher training in district curriculum, developing skills through observation and mentoring, and offering a forum for sharing advice could lead to a more informed

decision regarding whom to hire for the permanent teaching force. An improvement in that decision would have a payoff that would last for years.

Evaluation of Professional Development

Guskey (2000) organizes the evaluation of professional development into five distinct levels: participants' reactions, participants' learning, organization support and change, participants' use of new knowledge and skills, and student learning outcomes.

The simplest, cheapest, and fastest way to evaluate professional development—and therefore the most commonly used method—is to determine what participants thought of the professional development experience. Some deride this method as simply gauging how much the participants were entertained by the experience, as a favorable report could be obtained by a training that is enjoyable but unprofitable. Such “empty calorie” trainings may indeed give false impressions of success, but a survey following a professional development experience can help the training designers understand what was most helpful for teachers and what modifications could be made to enhance the event.

The second level is that of participants' learning. Just as effective teachers check for their students' understanding of a new concept, developers of trainings hope that substitute teachers will gain knowledge from the time spent together. Often a pre- and post-test is utilized to determine whether the participants understood the concepts they are required to know and use. A post-test given some time after the training would also determine to what extent substitute teachers retained the information to which they were exposed.

Guskey's third level is concerned with traditions of organizations that inhibit learning. Substitute teachers may find, for example, that while they enjoyed learning about graphic organizers as a pedagogical tool, teachers give them worksheets and videos to kill time. With regard to the substitute, information gathered through surveys, interviews, and focus groups would help permanent teachers and the administration understand how they can allow substitute teachers to use effectively the skills they have acquired.

Substitute teachers may report that they enjoyed an in-service, they may demonstrate their understanding of the content of the meeting through a short exam, and organizations may streamline themselves to accommodate the practices learned by the substitute teachers, and still the training may not be effective. The fourth level of the evaluation of professional development is concerned with the implementation of acquired skills. We should know whether substitutes are using what they have learned. When the professional development manager finds what was used and what was not, he or she will be able to thoughtfully modify the in-service content.

Level five, Guskey's highest level, focuses on student learning outcomes. The growth of students is the ultimate goal of all professional development, and the goal of education in general, so finding that a professional development led to significantly higher student achievement would determine the efficacy of the training. As stated earlier, the same cannot be said for the substitute teacher. One day's teaching is significant, but it cannot lead to measurable growth using existing instruments. It is reasonable to believe that the implementation of successful strategies may contribute to

higher achievement test scores, though the extent to which this may be true is difficult to ascertain.

Motivation for Change

Given the literature on the substitute teacher shortage and our knowledge base on effective teaching strategies, one might guess that districts commonly offer training that addresses these issues, especially for substitute teachers who walk straight from the university halls to elementary school doors. This is not the case. We must turn next to the factors that motivate school districts and personnel to change.

Common sense tells us that in weighing a decision people generally use a cost-benefit analysis. If the benefit is greater than the cost, people will generally move forward. If the cost is greater the action will be avoided. But Nobel laureate Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky (2000) found that this assumption is false. People will drive across town to save five dollars on a \$15 calculator, but will not drive across town to save five dollars on a \$120 coat, although the benefit is identical.

In one study, Tversky and Kahneman told people to assume that a disease was affecting 600 people, and they had two choices. They could implement Program A, in which 200 of the 600 people will be saved, or Program B, in which there is a 33 percent chance that all 600 people will be saved and a 66 percent chance that no one will be saved. Framed this way, a majority of respondents chose Program A. The subjects were then given another set of choices. In Program C, 400 of those 600 people will die. In Program D there is a 33 percent chance that no one will die and a 66 percent chance that

all 600 people will die. This time people chose Program D. The two sets of questions, however, are exactly the same. Programs A and C are identical, as are choices B and D. The difference lies only in the way in which the choices are framed (Tversky & Kahneman, 1981). Tversky and Kahneman found that, in general, people are more reluctant to take risks with gains than they are with losses.

Applied to education, this research tells us that when a school district believes that failing to train substitute teachers may pose a slight risk to students, there is little motivation to change. A district that is convinced that substitute training offers a benefit for students is much more likely to make substitute training an integral part of its professional development program. Demonstrating the benefits of substitute training, then, is more likely to influence behavior than threats that students will not succeed if no action is taken.

While the motivations of a district to implement training are important, it is equally critical to identify what motivates substitute teachers to seek opportunities for growth. Abraham Maslow (1970) described a hierarchy of human needs. Each of his five levels builds upon the next, with one level a prerequisite for attaining the next. The first level is physiological needs, and includes the most basic requirements for survival, such as food and water. The second level consists of safety needs: the desire to feel safe and secure. Applied to education, one could make the claim that substitute teaching, a job with little security, could inherently prevent individuals from ascending the ladder of fulfillment. The third need is social. People need friendship and belonging. In schools, this could mean that we must make substitute teachers feel like a part of the team.

Preventing substitute teachers from feeling isolated by making them a part of a team could decrease attrition. Level four covers esteem needs. People need to feel self-respect and receive praise from others. According to this belief, celebrating the success of substitute teachers would help them meet an inner need. The fifth and highest level is self-actualization. This is the need for self-fulfillment and reaching one's full potential. Applied to substitute teaching, this would imply that we should challenge substitutes, calling their expertise into play in a meaningful way. And, as stated earlier, when a substitute teacher enjoys their work, they become more effective (Pelsma, 1989).

While this theory is widely read and resonates with many in the field of psychology, it does not always play out in reality. Maslow's premise that needs at one level must be met before going on to the next falls apart in light of a few examples. The indigent may have their social needs met (level three) while not always successfully finding dinner (lacking level one). In another case, a soldier may have a feeling of self-fulfillment (level five) even in the face of battle (lacking level two).

Frederick Herzberg offers another way to look at motivation. According to his theory, needs can be described in terms of satisfaction and dissatisfaction (Herzberg, 1966). Herzberg uses the term "hygiene" to refer to those factors that prevent job dissatisfaction. These may include title, office parties, lunch facilities, and room temperature. These comforts make our jobs nicer, but only work to prevent dissatisfaction. In other words, a great parking spot may keep employees from becoming disgruntled, but it will not keep a person in their occupation.

Herzberg names the factors that can improve morale “motivators.” These needs make employees feel happy about their jobs and increase workers’ performance. These factors include problem solving, access to information, and an atmosphere of approval. As much as a hygiene factor such as fresh coffee might keep workers from grumbling, it can never create the change that is possible when we offer employees responsibility or recognition.

One of the most interesting claims made by Herzberg is that pay is generally a hygiene need. That is, offering substitute teachers more money for the job they perform will not necessarily lead to increased productivity. It may keep them from being less dissatisfied with their job—and it may also draw others into the profession—but it does not follow that increased wages will cause substitutes to work harder or more effectively. Instead, according to Herzberg, we must feed their motivational needs: growth, achievement, responsibility, and recognition.

In a Utah study conducted by P. W. Cardon in 2002, substitutes explained, “If we were used in more instructional ways, I believe students would be less likely to be disruptive and willing to do what we ask them to do.” Another added, “The discipline problems happen when there is nothing for the students to keep busy with. They really can’t enjoy constant videos and crossword puzzles” (Cardon, 2002). When we offer substitute teachers respect by requiring them to serve as teachers rather than “warm bodies” we will help them realize their highest levels of job satisfaction. As one substitute said, “My time is too valuable to be a babysitter” (Cardon, 2002).

Summary

The number of substitute teachers in California is on the rise, though no faster than the increasing need for their services. In spite of the valuable assistance they provide in continuing our children's education, they are often slighted by the districts they work for. Their pay has been decreased, hurting the morale of a group of professionals traditionally stigmatized as "warm bodies." As research has shown, a decrease in job satisfaction will lead to increased attrition, worsening the problem. In order to offer assistance, training substitutes in effective teaching strategies will help them become more successful and decrease turnover. While it is difficult to measure the academic achievement of a single school day, substitute teachers may contribute to the overall success of students by using research-proven instructional strategies. Classroom management must aim for a balance between rewards and punishments, and teachers must show they care without trying to become peers with students. There are a variety of methods available for delivering substitute teacher professional development, and districts must consider how a small monetary investment now may lead to an overall increase in achievement and improvement of the teaching force in the future. I concluded with methods for evaluating professional development. Training should not be given and then forgotten; substitute teachers should receive ongoing development, encouragement, and support.

CHAPTER 3

Methodology

Introduction

In the first two chapters I demonstrated that while students spend a significant portion of their educational careers with a substitute teacher, these educators may have limited or no experience in a classroom and are frequently offered no preparation for the tasks they are expected to accomplish. At the same time, they are criticized by teachers and administrators as “warm bodies” who serve only a babysitting function. Because research identifies effective teaching strategies, it is vital that we begin to explore how we might improve the effectiveness of substitute teachers by developing their pedagogical skills. The research questions addressed in this mixed methods study are:

1. What do permanent teachers believe that substitute teachers should know about curriculum, instruction, and classroom management to improve the quality of instruction when the teacher is absent?
2. What knowledge and skills do substitute teachers believe would help them improve the quality of instruction when they assume the responsibilities of the classroom teacher?
3. In the substitute teacher’s perception, what kinds of preparations can the classroom teacher make to support the most effective use of the students’ time when the teacher is absent (for example: classroom procedures, daily schedules, lesson plans, etc.) ?

4. What, in the perception of the substitute teachers and classroom teachers, are the training delivery strategies for permanent and substitute teacher training that result in improved teaching by substitutes?

Chapter 3 will discuss the research design; site selection; sample selection; data collection methods; data analysis; validity, reliability, and credibility; limitations; and public engagement.

Research Design

The best approach to answer the research questions above is to employ a mixed-methods design. This type of research employs the collection of both qualitative (e.g. interview) and quantitative (e.g. survey) data. An important question for a mixed-methods study is whether to conduct interviews prior to, or after the surveys. I selected both approaches by beginning with interviews, administering two surveys, then conducting follow-up interviews.

The initial interviews employed a grounded theory⁶ approach, bringing to light a variety of concerns and opinions with regard to substitute teaching. These issues were then presented to classroom teachers and substitute teachers in the surveys, enabling me to understand to what extent the views expressed in the interviews were held among the population of classroom teachers and substitutes.

⁶ That is, I did not have a theory to test. I wanted to know which issues were most important to the participants, so I allowed the themes to emerge from the interviews, rather than confirming or rejecting my own hypotheses.

Surveying permanent teachers allowed me to understand their backgrounds with regard to substitute teaching, their expectations of substitute teachers, the types of materials they leave for their substitutes, and, for those who believe that training substitutes is important, which areas of the curriculum they think substitutes should know.

A survey of substitute teachers shed light on their backgrounds, the grade levels in which they taught and which they prefer to teach, their expectations for work, the kinds of materials that are left for them, and what kinds of professional development they might be interested in, if any. Follow-up interviews, conducted after the surveys, allowed me to ask questions of teachers regarding some of the findings, and provided me with the reasons that classroom and substitute teachers responded as they did.

Each method, if used in isolation, would not have given a full picture of substitute teaching in the Deerfield School District. Interview data, with a relatively small sample size, cannot be generalized to the entire teaching force since the opinions of the teachers I selected to be interviewed may not have accurately reflected the opinions of the teachers who were not interviewed. Survey data, which can tell us what teachers believe, cannot tell us why they believe what they do, and thus may not lead to an understanding of the root causes of the problems or successes reported.

This mixed methods approach successfully uncovered the issues germane to substitute teaching in the district through initial interviews, found the wider scope of opinions through surveys of classroom teachers and substitutes, and dug deeper to answer the “why” questions during the final round of follow-up interviews.

This movement from the broad (quantitative) approach to a narrower (qualitative) design is consonant with Creswell’s (2003) description of a mixed methods approach. Since I am gathering data on both levels, this is the design that best answers my research questions.

<i>Qualitative Methods</i>	<u>Indepth Personal Interviews</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Substitute Teachers (5) ▪ Permanent Teachers (5) ▪ Administrators (5)
<i>Quantitative Methods</i>	<u>Surveys</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Substitute Teachers (all 151) ▪ Permanent teachers (stratified random sample of 176 teachers from a population of over 700 teachers)
<i>Qualitative Methods</i>	<u>Indepth Follow-Up Interviews</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Substitute Teachers (5) ▪ Permanent Teachers (5)

Table 1. Sequence of the Methodology

Site Selection

Since the largest California districts already offer some form of professional development for substitute teachers, the selection of a mid-sized district is ideal. These districts seem to have the highest need for substitute coverage, often without any training program in place. The Deerfield School District offers these typical traits: a high demand for substitutes and almost no preparation. There are approximately 16,000 students in the district among 18 schools. Twelve are elementary, five are middle schools, and one is a K-8 alternative education school. More than 700 teachers serve in the district. Mr. Conner, the assistant superintendent responsible for the hiring of substitute teachers,

currently spends about 45 minutes with each new hire during the initial interview, discussing lesson plans and classroom management strategies. He finds this process helpful, but far from adequate. At the time of this study, the pool of substitute teachers in the district numbered 151, though Mr. Conner believes only a fraction of these worked on a full-time basis. The district expressed interest in this study and would like to consider how they could develop the recommendations of this research into an intervention program. Because the Deerfield School District serves students in kindergarten through eighth grade, this study will include substitutes who work within this grade range.

Sample Selection

Substitute teachers: Since the number of substitute teachers was relatively low at 151 (compared to approximately 5,000 in the Los Angeles Unified School District), I mailed questionnaires to the entire population. These included everyone from new hires with no educational background to retired teachers with over 30 years of teaching experience. Surveys were mailed along with a cover letter in 9 x 11 inch manila envelopes so they would not get lost amongst junk mail. Self-addressed stamped envelopes were provided. I used Microsoft Excel and the mail merge feature of Microsoft Word to code each of the surveys with a unique identifier. This code was inserted as a footnote at the bottom of each questionnaire, and allowed me to track who had responded to the survey. This allowed me to avoid mailing a second letter to any of the participants who had already returned their questionnaire, and it also allowed me to

provide an added sense of confidentiality, since participants did not write their names on the form.

To choose interview participants I entered the names of all of the substitute teachers into a column in a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet. In a second column I entered random numbers beside the name of each teacher using Excel's random number generator. I then sorted the second column from least to greatest, thereby randomizing my list of substitute teachers. The first 12 on the list were mailed requests for the first round of interviews. Exactly five substitute teachers responded, and this group was interviewed. The interviews were taped using a digital recorder and personally transcribed.

For the final round of follow-up interviews I used the same list and mailed letters to substitute teachers numbered 13 through 24. Six substitute teachers responded, and the first five who wrote or called back were interviewed. These interviews took place at the location most convenient to the substitute, which was usually a school site where they worked. Some substitute teachers traveled to my school for the interview, one invited me into her home, and another met with me at a coffee shop. Interviews lasted between 40 and 55 minutes.

Permanent teachers: I believed there may have been more variation in opinion across schools than within them. Therefore, I ensured that my survey sample elicited responses evenly from all of the district's 18 schools. I used a stratified random sample of ten teachers from each site, and all six of the teachers from the alternative education school, for a total of 176 teachers.

For each school site, I entered teacher names into a column in a Microsoft Excel document. I then used the process described above for substitute teachers to create a random list of teachers. Teachers numbered one through ten in the new order were sent questionnaires via Deerfield's intradistrict mail system. Teachers received these letters in their boxes at school, and returned them in sealed envelopes using the same service. In all, about one-fifth of the district faculty received a questionnaire.

Administrators: In order to most closely reflect the district proportion of five middle schools to 12 elementary schools, I chose to interview two middle school principals and three elementary school principals. Since the administrator in charge of substitute teachers at each of these schools is the principal, I did not interview assistant principals. Due to its small size, I chose not to include the principal of the alternative day school as one of my five administrator interviewees. Using the method described above, I created a list in Excel of middle and elementary schools. The first two middle school principals were selected, as well as the first three elementary school principals.

Data Collection

In conformity with the request of the Internal Review Board at UCLA, letters of compliance were signed by the principals of all Deerfield schools before the study began. An initial mailing of these letters resulted in ten signed and returned letters of compliance. A follow-up email one week later resulted in another three responses. The final five responses were gathered after a second mailing.

The study itself began with interviews of five district administrators in December 2005. Principals were on campus the week before Christmas break, but students were already on vacation, making this an ideal time for interviews. Four of the principals were able to give interviews at this time; the fifth principal had already gone on vacation, but agreed to be interviewed before students returned to school, shortly after the new year. I met principals in their offices, and the length of the interviews ranged from 35 to 75 minutes.

When teachers returned from their breaks, I mailed invitations to those classroom teachers who had been randomly chosen to be interviewed. Of ten letters that were sent, three teachers responded. I sent a follow-up email to the participants who had not responded. This led to one more interview. I then sent five more requests for interviews, and received two responses. The first teacher to respond was interviewed. Four of the interviews took place in that teacher's classroom; the last teacher was off-track, but was willing to meet me in my classroom for the interview. Most lasted for about 40 minutes.

Substitute teachers were mailed requests for interviews via USPS at this time also. I included my home and cell phone numbers, my home address, my email address, and a self-addressed stamped envelope (SASE), to provide substitute teachers with the response method they preferred best. Twelve requests for interviews were mailed. Two substitute teachers replied with their preferred meeting time and location using the SASE, and I called them to confirm the time and place. Two more called me directly. I sent a second mailing to these 12 substitute teachers, resulting in two more responses. One of these said he would not be able to meet for almost a month, so I did not interview him. Four of

these teachers wanted to come to my school for the interview. Three of these chose to do this on a day when they substitute taught at my school. I met the fifth participant at the school where she was on a long-term substitute teaching assignment. These interviews lasted between 45 and 50 minutes.

I used a digital MP3 player with an internal mic to record the interviews. I then uploaded the interview to my computer, and transcribed them myself using Dragon Naturally Speaking. I played back the interviews at a reduced rate, using Express Scribe, and spoke the entire interview into an external mic. This resulted in the collection, including all 25 interviews, of 322 single-spaced pages of interview transcripts.

For the survey of classroom teachers I used the method described above to create my sample. I then added a form field at the bottom of each questionnaire corresponding to a four digit code I gave to each teacher. The first two digits corresponded to a site, and the second two digits to the particular teacher. This way I would be able to track who had returned the survey, in order to avoid sending a second mailing to anyone who had already completed the questionnaire.

Two days after the surveys were mailed, I sent an email to each of the 176 participants, using the district's email program. After two weeks I sent a second mailing to everyone in the sample who had not yet responded. I finished with a final email to the entire 176, thanking those who had participated, and giving those who had not yet replied one more week to return their questionnaire.

The district provided me the complete list of substitute teachers with their addresses and number of days worked. I used this list to mail every substitute teacher a

questionnaire, along with a cover letter and contact information. Two substitute teachers emailed me, and two more met with me at my school to discuss the project. All were very supportive of the project. One teacher called me with a question about a particular survey question, and this was quickly resolved. Due to time restraints and cost I did not send out a second mailing, nor was I able to follow up as I had with classroom teachers via email.

The second round of interviews was very similar to the first in terms of data collection. I sent 12 invitations to classroom teachers, from which I received three responses. I sent a second invitation to the nine who had not responded and received no reply. I then sent five additional invitations from the original Excel list, and received two more responses. I was then able to complete the teacher interviews successfully.

At the same time, I sent out invitations to 12 substitute teachers. I received six replies, selected the first five, and successfully completed the interviews.

Data Analysis

Qualitative: In all, I conducted 25 personal interviews. Ten were with classroom teachers, ten were with substitute teachers, and five came from administrators. I gained a more thorough understanding of this data by personally transcribing every interview. Since I had already recorded the interviews on an MP3 player, I listened to the interviews again to become more familiar with the topics that were discussed. Since my interview protocols centered around my four research questions, this is how I initially began to organize the data. When a quotation from an interview fit a research question, I copied

and pasted that quotation to the appropriate section of an outline. If a response fit more than one research question, it was added in both places. Since interviewees' initials were included along with their quotation, I was able to determine which comments had come from which participant. I also made a short observer's comment as to the topic of the quote. When I completed sorting quotations from all 25 interviews, I then began to look at similarities and differences within each response to a research question. I read back through the entire outline to ensure that each of the quotations with each section addressed the research question. I was then able to determine what administrators, classroom teachers, and substitute teachers had to say about each research question. I then grouped similar comments together so that I could identify the themes brought up in the interviews. I then added open-response answers from the survey and other correspondence, including emails sent to the address I included on my cover letters.

Quantitative: I hand-coded the data from the surveys into SPSS 14.0 for Windows. I began with a list of questions generated from my qualitative analysis, and sought to understand some of the numbers behind the questions. I also explored the data by running descriptive statistics, frequency tables, and crosstabs for relationships I believed important to answering the research questions.

Validity, Reliability and Credibility

Maxwell suggests a few strategies to improve the validity of a qualitative research study (Maxwell, 2005). Interviews would be subject to much more researcher bias if the author were to record only what were considered the most salient points of the

conversation. By making transcriptions of all interviews, a rich data source is made available.

Respondent validation is another safeguard against bias. During interviews I frequently asked interpretive questions. If I felt that the participant offered something unique or new, I repeated in my own words what I felt was intended. This offered me the chance to confirm my interpretation of what was said, limiting my bias in the interview.

Another method I used to bolster validity was a search for discrepant cases. I carefully examined those who offered minority opinions or opinions that appear to contradict my findings. I attempted to find whether these cases were an anomaly, flawed opinions, or well-conceived counterpoints.

Maxwell (2005) describes triangulation as a strategy which reduces the risk of making conclusions that are based on a biased data source. By seeking multiple sources of data I was much less likely to make erroneous conclusions. Survey data and interviews helped me avoid the biases or misconceptions that might have arisen from only using one of these choices.

Limitations

While this study makes recommendations regarding the support and development of substitute teachers, it would be highly valuable to monitor the effects of any professional development opportunities that the Deerfield School District should decide to implement. It would be helpful to understand if these interventions are successful in changing the substitute teachers' feelings of self-confidence in their ability to lead a class.

Do they believe they know the curriculum better? Do they report they are better able to lead classes? It would be helpful to know whether, and to what extent, the perceptions of classroom teachers toward substitute teachers change as a result of the implementation of the recommendations.

Another limitation was a direct consequence of the relationship of the classroom teacher to his or her substitute: usually the substitute teacher and classroom teacher never meet. This means that the perceptions of teachers toward the substitute teaching profession were informed by the cleanliness of the room upon a teacher's return, the note left for the teacher, the input of students, and feedback from other teachers who may have seen the substitute teacher with the class outside of the classroom, perhaps walking the children to recess or lunch. Due to the limited contact between these groups, teachers' perceptions were based largely on a small amount of information. It is possible that if teachers had been able to observe substitute teachers in action, that their responses may have differed from those given in this study.

It is possible that those who did not respond to the surveys had a different opinion toward substitute teaching than those who took the time to reply. It may stand to reason that teachers who are apathetic toward substitute teachers in general may also have chosen not to respond to the survey or the interview invitation.

The substitute teacher population of the Deerfield School District may be unique. It does not necessarily follow that substitute teachers in other districts would hold the same beliefs toward the profession as those reported in this study. Therefore, any district seeking to improve the quality of substitute teaching should attempt to understand the

perceptions of their own substitute teachers regarding their skills and knowledge, and design interventions that directly address those needs. I do not believe that any type of intervention should be formulaic. The kind of professional development that is used must meet the unique needs of each school district and substitute teacher population.

Another limitation is that I exclusively studied a K-8 school system. Districts that serve high school age young people would have to first consider the strengths and obstacles inherent to those grade levels.

It is important to note that I worked as a teacher in the same district in which this research was conducted. This presented a number of advantages, though it would be unfair to claim it went without risk. For example, the day before I was to interview Paula Nielson, a substitute teacher, I had to be out of the classroom. It was Mrs. Nelson who took the job from the automated SubFinder system. While I believe that this could have changed the way in which she responded, her candid interview gave me no hesitation. When I wrote letters to substitute teachers, I identified myself as a teacher in the district. While I am left to speculate, this may have actually contributed to the high response rate that came as a result of a single mailing. In every cover letter and before every interview, I assured teachers of complete confidentiality in order to limit this risk.

Public Engagement

After my dissertation is filed I plan to write an article for *SubJournal*, a publication of Utah State University's Substitute Teacher Institute. This journal is read by about 150 district-level managers of substitute teachers, and is an ideal audience for

the presentation of my findings. I also hope to submit an article to *EdCal*, the official newspaper of the Association of California School Administrators. This would allow me to reach many more members of my audience: the managers of substitute teachers.

Summary

This study built upon prior research that clearly states that training helps improve substitute teachers' feelings of self-efficacy. It addressed the weaknesses of previous research in two major ways. First, no other substitute teaching study to date has been based both on the literature on effective teaching and a mixed-methods needs analysis. Jones, in his dissertation work in a rural Nevada school district, found that substitute teachers felt more valued after receiving training, though the participants largely felt that the in-service would not impact the way they taught their classes. Trull, in her doctoral dissertation, found that teachers felt more prepared to substitute teach after having attended a training. In a follow-up survey, however, she found that the level of self-efficacy declined after having gone back into the classroom. By listening to what substitute teachers need, and by understanding what classroom teachers want, we can make an informed decision on how to mold substitute teachers into effective classroom instructors.

CHAPTER 4

Findings

Overview

The purpose of this study was to learn the best methods for supporting substitute teachers, from the perspective of principals, classroom teachers, and the substitutes themselves. In order to assess the current strengths and weaknesses of the substitute teaching program in the Deerfield School District I interviewed five principals, five classroom teachers, and five substitute teachers. Then, to determine to what degree the opinions expressed in these interviews were representative of their respective populations, I surveyed a sample of 176 classroom teachers and all of the district's 151 substitute teachers. I completed data collection with a final round of personal interviews with five classroom and five substitute teachers. This second set of interviews offered me a better understanding of the survey data, as the participants themselves were given the opportunity to interpret and explain some of the findings, based on their experiences and perceptions.

Response rates for both surveys were high. Among the sample of classroom teachers, 66.5 percent returned a questionnaire. Of these, 68.4 percent were elementary teachers, 28.2 percent taught middle school, and 3.4 percent worked in an alternative education setting. Their median length of their teaching experience was 11 years. Half of the respondents reported having substitute teaching experience. While this varied in duration from one day to six years, the median time spent substitute teaching was one year. These classroom teachers possessed a combined total of 82 years of substitute

teaching experience, and just under a quarter continue to substitute teach when they are off-track. Their combined classroom teaching experience totaled 1,511 years.

In one mailing 52.3 percent of all substitute teachers returned a questionnaire. Their experience ranged from one day to 25 years, with a median of 4.8 years. Eighty-seven percent said they worked as often as they wished, and the average days worked per week was 3.5. Respondents possessed a combined 374 years of substitute teaching experience.

Primary Findings

Quantitative data from the surveys and qualitative data from personal interviews point to three primary foci for the development of substitute teachers into effective instructors. These include establishing relationships between substitute teachers and the school staff; the knowledge and skills required of substitute teachers in the areas of classroom management, curriculum, and instruction; and the methods for offering professional development.

By developing relationships with substitute teachers, trust is forged and constructive feedback can be exchanged. While this was not common practice in Deerfield, a number of teachers discussed how their experience in building rapport helped them support substitute teachers, and how this in turn led to improved student success in their absence.

Second, while classroom teachers reported they did not believe that substitute teachers were effective with classroom management, instruction, or curriculum, and

while substitute teachers admitted this was the most difficult aspect of their job, substitutes said they were eager to learn about each of these. Substitute teachers described the types of lesson plans they find, ways in which these might be improved, and the ways in which teachers and administrators might offer support.

Third, retired teachers aside, every substitute teacher reported they were interested in receiving some form of professional development. While the traditional method of offering a class or workshop was most popular, more than half of all respondents were interested in observations, networking, mentoring, and attending the same professional development available to permanent teachers.

Developing Rapport

While many substitute teachers had extensive experience, reported they were motivated to learn more about their work, and believed they were well-prepared for their job, classroom teachers rarely articulated these assets and described the current system as one in which substitute teachers are treated as babysitters. The classroom teachers who did develop relationships with their substitutes, however, were more inclined to trust them, to leave instructional content that was more closely aligned to what they would have taught, and were more likely to say that substitute teachers were able to manage classroom behavior.

In this section I will describe the assets substitute teachers reported bringing to the table. These qualities, such as full-time teaching experience, exposure to a wide variety of grade levels, diverse professional backgrounds, a love for children, and a dedication to

professionalism lay the foundation for rapport, since they serve as a starting point for establishing trust. I will then describe how classroom teachers selected specific substitute teachers to cover their classes, and how this affected their perspectives on substitute teaching. Next, I will report how classroom and substitute teachers believed that rapport might be developed so that teachers can learn the strengths of substitute teachers and take the greatest advantage of their knowledge and skills.

Substitute teachers reported they bring many skills and talents to the table. Ninety-two percent of the substitute teachers in the sample said they believed that they were well-prepared for their job. Only 18 percent said they had not taken any formal training in education. Thirty-four percent possessed a teaching credential, and 33 percent held a bachelor's degree in a teaching-related field.⁷ Twelve percent of the substitute teachers were retired teachers. Retired teachers aside, one-third of the sample had previous full-time teaching experience. Their classroom experience averaged 8.6 years, for a cumulative total of 199 years of full-time teaching experience. Thirty percent stated they were considering a career in teaching, and another 12 percent said they would seek employment in a teaching-related field, such as speech pathology⁸.

I found that another substitute teacher strength was their broad experience across grade levels. Only one substitute teacher reported having substitute teaching experience at just one grade level; 42 percent had taught in every grade, from Kindergarten to eighth. While some substitute teachers said in interviews they were averse to teaching in the middle schools, 79 percent of substitute teachers had taught sixth grade, 68 percent had

taught seventh, and 65 percent had taught eighth grade. When asked their grade level preference, 43 percent said they liked K-2 best, 30 percent preferred 3-5 grades, and 18 percent favored 6-8. While I did not give “high school” as a choice on the survey, since Deerfield is a K-8 district, two substitute teachers wrote this in as their preference. Only five percent had no preference, and one substitute teacher reported not knowing which he or she liked best. One middle school teacher explained during an interview that working in middle schools presents unique challenges for substitute teachers. Her comments indicated she did not know that any substitute teachers preferred middle school. The reservations she expressed about substitute teachers, then, may have been allayed by requesting substitutes who prefer working at that level, paving the road to trust and rapport.

Interview data indicated that substitute teachers view their diverse backgrounds as strengths in the classroom setting. Their previous occupations included preschool teacher, social worker, homemaker, and civil service engineer. One participant, a graduate student studying speech pathology, said that she was able to apply what she had learned about education and child development when she taught, and that this experience with children would in turn make her a better-prepared speech pathologist. Two interviewees said they learned how to manage a class through previous volunteer experience in their children’s classrooms.

Substitute teachers repeatedly described how a love for children and for teaching brought them into the profession. Danielle Roman, a homemaker and part-time substitute

⁷ In the questionnaire the term “teaching-related field” was not defined, so the identification was made by the substitute

teacher, described the fulfillment she experiences in her job: “I can enjoy the day with them, even the kids that aren’t behaving that well. I try to just love them, because they need that.” Another remarked, “It has always been my goal to become a teacher. I got detoured having babies, but I knew I would go back, because it’s what I’ve always wanted to do.” While these teachers also described the difficulties they encountered in the job, their reaction was to ask about opportunities to learn how to improve their practice and talked about a commitment to helping children.

Substitute teachers frequently and openly disparaged others in the same post whom they considered neither competent nor qualified. One substitute teacher recounted how a substitute in another district “took the whole class out on the playground, put out his carpet, and prayed east toward Mecca.” Another was “crawling in [her] skin” when she was a helper in another substitute teacher’s Kindergarten classroom and watched her teach. “Or you see a substitute teacher taking kids from one area to another,” Tom Hahne told me, “and scream their head off. You can tell there’s chaos there.” The substitute teachers I interviewed were amazed that substitute teachers would not follow the plans left for them. “Why would they want to do that?” Jane Summers wondered. “That’s just asking for trouble.” Kris Levins was annoyed by a lack of professionalism in substitute teaching. “I don’t like the fact that some substitutes don’t leave messages or notes,” she said of her colleagues. While administrators and classroom teachers commented similarly regarding substitute teachers, the data indicated that the offenders are few in number. Their affects are felt repeatedly, however, as they are not fired, retrained, or

teachers themselves.

even counseled, according to administrators. “I had a sub using profanity in class,” Principal Mitch Metheny recounted. “I made sure [he] was taken off the [Washington Elementary] list.” When asked if that substitute was removed from the district, Mr. Metheny said he did not have the authority to fire the substitute, and assumed that employee was not fired. “It’s very uncomfortable. If I have to dismiss a person from my school, it’s serious. If I have evidence of [inappropriate behavior on the part of the substitute teacher], I think they should not substitute in our district.”

Classroom teachers in the Deerfield School District use SubFinder, an automated program, to call in absences. If a teacher would like to request a specific substitute to replace them, a teacher may enter that substitute teacher’s identification number and either ask SubFinder to call that substitute teacher, or that teacher could tell the SubFinder system that the absence has been prearranged, and ask it not to place a call.

I found that teachers who selected specific substitutes to replace them, as opposed to allowing SubFinder to find them, trusted their substitutes less, were actually more likely to say their substitute teacher was not well-prepared, and were less likely to leave the same content that they would have taught had they not been absent. Of the classroom teachers in the sample, 77 percent said they chose a specific substitute teacher. Teachers who had been substitute teachers prior to working full-time were less likely to select a specific substitute teacher. Of those who never substitute taught prior to teaching full-

⁸ These figures exclude retired teachers.

time, 86 percent said they chose a specific substitute teacher; among those who had substitute teaching experience, 68 percent said they chose a specific substitute teacher.⁹

Table 2 compares the opinions of teachers who select specific substitutes against issues regarding trust and quality of the substitute teachers. I conducted Chi-squared tests across these relationships to determine to what extent selecting specific substitute teachers played a role in changing their view on these topics. The smaller the Chi-square, the less likely the difference between the percentages could have occurred randomly. While none of the comparisons resulted in a statistically significant difference, survey data showed that selecting a specific substitute teacher did not mean that classroom teachers were more likely to trust them, that they believed their plans would be followed, or that they left plans more closely aligned to what they would have taught had they not been absent.

	Teachers who choose a specific substitute	Teachers who allow SubFinder to select their substitute	Chi-square
Substitute teachers are well-prepared for their job.	43.3	40.0	.766
Substitute teachers follow my lesson plans.	80.0	84.6	.597
The content I leave for a substitute teacher is nearly identical to what I would have taught had I not been absent.	67.4	77.8	.304
I prefer that substitute teachers present mainly review material, as opposed to teaching	65.2	81.5	.109

⁹ Chi-squared: .018

something new.			
I trust substitute teachers with my class.	66.7	77.8	.273
Substitute teachers in the district do a good job.	57.5	72.0	.190

Table 2. Classroom teachers’ perceptions of the relation of choosing a specific substitute teacher to other issues affecting substitute teachers
Percent of teachers responding “Agree” or “Strongly Agree”

In the second round of interviews, I asked classroom teachers to explain why, if specific substitute teachers were utilized by classroom teachers, they were no more trusted than a teacher picked randomly from the SubFinder system. Interview data suggested that classroom teachers actually know little about the specific substitute teachers they choose to replace them. When one classroom teacher explained how she selected her substitute teacher she said, “When they come in from break, or at lunchtime, if they sit down I’ll talk with them, and then I’ll get a card from them, or I’ll get their name or their number.” She also told me that she did not really know their level of experience, background, or training. Another teacher told me she would stop other substitute teachers on her campus and ask them if they would be available on a day she knew she had to miss. Again, she did not know what kind of knowledge or skill possessed by this substitute teacher. I also spoke with a classroom teacher who represented the smaller proportion of teachers who allow the SubFinder system to select their substitute. He put it this way: “I just call the SubFinder. I’m the 20 percent. I don’t care who it says.”

Classroom teachers offered creative solutions, however, for learning the strengths of substitute teachers in terms of their skills, background, and experience that would in turn help them build trust by placing the best-matched substitute teacher in their room. Every teacher in the second round of interviews expressed interest in utilizing this information in selecting a substitute teacher. In general, their comments supported a matrix that would allow teachers to look at a list of all substitute teachers and select their replacement based on attributes in that database. Greg Varner, a middle school teacher, wished that SubFinder could ask substitutes their top three subjects. Then the system “could categorize those people. If you have an English opening, it would hit the English people first.” He was concerned that this method would rely on the self-reporting of substitutes, as opposed to an objective measure of their skills, but believed there was promise in this type of process. Another had this idea: “If we had a sub list that named all of the substitutes, maybe even talked about how long they’ve been subbing. I’d like to know what their background is.” If she had some “key information,” such as what kind of training the substitute teacher has had, “I can make my decision based on that.” Casey Laviano, an elementary teacher, said she is often on the computer, so something web-based would be helpful. She would like to be able to go to the district website, see which substitute teachers had taken which training, and select her substitute teacher based on whether that person had been through district inservices that were important to her. While no such inservices are currently available to substitute teachers, Mrs. Wills believed that her proposed solution would not only help teachers select a substitute, but would serve as an added incentive for substitute teachers to take trainings. Although she

currently selects specific substitute teachers, she feels that knowing the specific instructional methods with which substitute teachers are trained and experienced would help her to maximize instructional effectiveness when she has to be away from her class. “I tend to worry about the sub, if it’s somebody I don’t know,” said Mr. Ouchi, an elementary school teacher. He then described that knowing about his substitute teachers, a starting place for the building of trust and rapport—would make him feel more comfortable leaving his students with them.

Feedback was another way that the participants in the study believed relationships could be formed and rapport developed between teachers and their substitutes. When I asked classroom teachers how they might give substitute teachers feedback on their performance, many had trouble answering. Although all of the classroom teachers I interviewed believed that giving feedback would be helpful to the substitute teacher, they did not know how it could be done. After substitute teachers leave, unless they give their phone number or substitute identification number—sometimes offered so the teacher can request that substitute again—there is usually no way to contact them. One teacher said:

As far as feedback goes, I’d love to. I’d love to give kudos, because a lot of the times I come in and I read the note and I see what they’ve done and I’m thinking, great! Thank you very much. I’d love to be able to give positive feedback.

Some teachers expressed a concern that constructive criticism is sometimes difficult to deliver, and even when done tactfully can be misinterpreted or misunderstood by the recipient. “Most people can’t give constructive criticism,” John Rizer said. “Too many people are willing to criticize, but making it constructive is more of a skill. And a lot of

people don't have that skill." Interview data also indicated that giving feedback is difficult simply because the teacher was not there, and is left to base his or her opinions upon the note that was left, the condition of the room, reports from students, the work completed by students during the day, and any assessment that might be conducted of the learning that took place during the time with the substitute teacher.

Nevertheless, both classroom and substitute teachers believed feedback would help them improve. One classroom teacher, a former substitute teacher herself, sympathized with substitute teachers who experienced difficulties in the classroom.

It might not be the sub, and the sub thinks it is. It might just have been that group of students. Because sometimes you go home and you go, "What the heck is wrong with me?" As a sub, you're going, "How come I couldn't handle that class?" And it's a little bit discouraging. I think if I got a bad note, or something that concerned me, I would want to talk to that [substitute] teacher to see what it was that happened.

I also found that classroom teachers wanted substitute teachers to be able to give them feedback. Four of the five classroom teachers in the second round of interviews, when asked about feedback from substitute teachers, mentioned a brief survey or form that the substitute teacher could fill out at the end of the day "so that the substitute could quickly fill it out, and focus on what the teacher wanted to know about." Although classroom teachers spent a great deal of time preparing for a substitute teacher—the mean length of preparation was 1.7 hours—some substitute teachers found teachers' lesson plans, or part of the plans, confusing. By asking substitute teachers specifically which

sections caused the most trouble, substitute teachers said that classroom teachers would be able to make appropriate adjustments.

Substitute teachers agreed that this might be difficult. “It’s hard, because of course they don’t see you. I don’t get a lot [of feedback],” one substitute teacher told me.

Another recounted:

I know that through my experience when I’ve developed a relationship with someone, it’s usually a teacher that sees me subbing for another class. I think from a few glimpses they’ve seen throughout the day they can tell whether they want me to sub for their class.

Two classroom teachers pointed out that feedback could easily be exchanged with teachers at the same grade level during common break and lunch times. However, while 88 percent of classroom teachers said they believed their staffs welcomed substitute teachers, 31 percent of substitutes reporting not feeling welcomed. One classroom teacher described the isolation felt by substitute teachers this way: “Even in the lunchroom, when there’s a substitute teacher, like everyone will be here and the sub will be over there, and people don’t really include them in the conversation.” This story was repeated often during classroom and substitute teacher interviews. Lisa DeSpain, a substitute teacher, told me

As a substitute you walk in and you don’t really know anybody and you come in and you sit there by yourself. It feels a little bit unwelcoming. And there are some schools where I won’t bring my lunch. I’ll go off-campus for lunch just so I don’t have to sit in the staff room. It’s just weird. You’re the outsider.

Repeatedly I was told that substitute teachers are ignored. “My biggest concern,” one substitute teacher wrote on her questionnaire, “is that teachers treat subs like equals, especially in the lunchroom, instead of outcasts.” Another classroom teacher said, “I remember sitting at schools [as a substitute teacher] and no one talks to you. And you just feel very isolated.” At the same time, every teacher I spoke with described the same simple way to solve the problem. “Honestly,” Mark Cavallo told me, “I think you just need to make people aware of it.” He believed that by discussing this issue with extroverted teachers, and by encouraging them to make contact with substitute teachers, that the rest of the faculty would follow suit. In an open-ended question on the survey, many teachers pointed out this problem and offered their advice. “Talk to them” and “introduce yourself” was repeated frequently. The answer could be as simple as what one teacher wrote: “Be nice. ☺” Two teachers suggested that the secretary send an email or post in the teachers’ lounge the names of that day’s substitute teachers, so that everyone would know who they are and where they could be found. While teachers admitted that feeling unwelcome could be a barrier to promoting rapport and developing the relationships between teachers and substitutes, they also believed that simple steps like offering support to substitute teachers—whether it be walking them to their room, offering to take students who present behavioral challenges, or simply saying hello—can help the substitute teacher do a better job, develop the kind of relationship that allows substitute teachers the safety of asking for constructive feedback, and find possible replacements for their own classrooms when they are absent.

Classroom management, instruction, and curriculum.

I found that administrators, classroom teachers, and substitute teachers believe that classroom management is the key to their success, and that effective instruction and knowledge of the curriculum are not just secondary and tertiary; rather, a mastery of these strategies strengthens classroom management. While I found evidence that substitute teachers often struggle with classroom management—something they are often criticized for—classroom teachers and even administrators who themselves have substitute taught articulated the difficulties often associated with substitute teaching and empathized with them. Classroom teachers had much to say on the topic, and offered their advice on how to improve the management of classes when they have to be out. The data also showed that teachers held a diverse set of expectations for substitute teachers regarding instruction. Finally, I learned which elements of the curriculum gave substitute teachers the most difficulty, and I gathered advice from the stakeholders on ways to improve substitutes' understanding of the district's programs.

Classroom Management

Survey data showed that classroom teachers believed substitute teachers were not effective with classroom management. Overall, 65 percent of classroom teachers said that substitutes were not effective with classroom management. I analyzed the data by grade level and found that elementary and middle school teachers had about the same level of response: 63 percent of elementary teachers did not believe substitute teachers

effectively managed their classes, compared to 69 percent of middle school teachers. Even 67 percent of Kindergarten teachers did not believe they were effective in this area.

Next, I compared classroom teachers' responses regarding effectiveness in classroom management to whether that teacher left a behavior plan, extra academics, or a seating chart. None of these responses were related to teachers' beliefs about substitutes' abilities to manage a classroom.

When I compared attitudes toward classroom management with whether or not teachers leave content that is nearly identical to what they would have taught, there was a statistically significant difference. Among teachers who change the content for their substitute teacher, 86 percent say substitute teachers are not effective with classroom management. Fifty-seven percent of teachers who do leave the same content believe that substitute teachers are not effective with classroom management.¹⁰

This begs the question whether it is a belief that substitute teachers lack classroom management skills that causes teachers to change the plans, whether changing the plans leads to more difficulty in classroom management, or perhaps both working simultaneously. For example, some teachers I interviewed said they showed videos in class, in some cases because they could not get their preferred substitute teacher, since they believed these would make the time pass more easily for the substitute teacher. I learned, however, that showing a video can present difficulties for the substitute teacher. One substitute teacher put it this way: "I don't like showing videos as a sub. I really don't. Because I always have behavior [problems]. Because it's dark and I can't see all

¹⁰ Chi-square: .003

their names when they're not at their seats.” While I will discuss curriculum in more detail in the next section, interview data demonstrated that changing the students’ routine can present behavioral challenges. Qualitative data showed that substitute teachers preferred to teach and saw the need to maintain continuity in the students’ day.

Survey data also pointed to a tight relationship between classroom management and effective teaching of the curriculum. Among teachers who believe that substitute teachers are not effective with classroom management, 72 percent believe they are also not effective in teaching the school’s curriculum. Of those teachers who think substitutes are effective with management, only 43 percent say they are not effective at teaching the curriculum.¹¹ Substitute teachers freely admitted that they could not teach the same content in the same way as the classroom teacher. However, interview data revealed that the closer they are able to emulate the classroom’s daily routine, and the better they can use the curriculum to keep students engaged, the easier classroom management became. Since many did not know the district’s curriculum, however, and were not invited to learn it, some said that classroom management “can be a problem.”

There was also a close relationship between effectiveness with classroom management and effectiveness with instructional techniques. Among teachers who did not think substitute teachers were effective managing a class, 23 percent said they were effective with instructional techniques. Fifty-eight percent of teachers who reported that substitute teachers were effective with classroom management also believed they were effective with instructional techniques.

¹¹ Chi-square: .002

All 75 teachers who reported that substitute teachers were not effective with classroom management reported that training them in classroom management techniques would make them more effective. Substitute teachers agreed. Eighty-seven percent reported that if they learned more about classroom management they would do a better job in the classroom. While that figure excludes retired teachers, even they stated that they would like to learn more about classroom management. Forty-four percent of retired teachers reported they would like to learn more about classroom management techniques.

When it comes to leaving a behavior plan, a majority of substitute teachers say that one is left. However, 31 percent said teachers generally do not explain these procedures. Generally substitute teachers said these were easy to understand, although 21 percent of substitute teachers said the behavior plans they find need some explaining. Interview data showed the wide variety of expectations regarding classroom management and behavior plans. One middle school teacher showed me his “behavior plan” posted on the wall:

- Find your assigned seat.
- Take out a pencil and your notebook.
- Backpack goes under your desk.
- No gum chewing or sunflower seeds.
- Raise your hand to ask a question.
- Stay in your assigned seat.

“Basically that’s it,” he said. He then explained that he gives students a warning first, then “I give [substitute teachers] a pile of these,” showing me the demerit forms. He said that he did not explain the rules or the warning to a substitute; rather, a substitute would

see the rules posted on his wall and infer from the stack of demerits how to handle misbehavior. Another middle school teacher, meanwhile, told me:

I think demerits and substitutes don't mix well, because number one, the substitute will rely on that as their form of discipline. Number two, when the kids get back they are going to lie through their teeth about what happened. And they're going to. I mean, I can't tell you how many times [that has happened].

One substitute teacher, frustrated with a student's defiance, gave that student demerits on the school form. Upon returning to substitute teach, however, she saw that the teacher had lowered the number of demerits for that infraction.

There comes a point when you say, what should I spend my time doing? Why should I fill out the demerit form if I give five demerits and you break it down to two demerits? And I've been specific about the infractions that they performed. I don't mind doing them, but I do mind doing them if you're not going to follow them. That's a lot of my time. I mean, sometimes, they're 30, 45 minutes after school filling out demerit forms because if I say they will get them, they will get them.

She was concerned that this would send the wrong message to students as well. If they can misbehave and get away with only a slight consequence—while undermining the authority of the substitute teacher—then they would be able to get away with the same behavior the next time a substitute teacher arrived.

Survey and interview data described the tepid support that substitute teachers received from administrators. Although every administrator interviewed said that he or

she tries to greet every new substitute teacher, 62 percent of substitute teachers said that principals do not introduce themselves or offer support. “I started doing this in 2001,” one substitute teacher told me, “So in the five years that I’ve been doing this, I probably have had, maybe five administrators come in and just take a peek in the classroom.” Just 13 percent strongly agreed that principals introduce themselves or offer support. When I asked whether principals should do these things, 93 percent of substitute teachers said they should. The interviews revealed why. One classroom teacher, recounting her days as a substitute, said:

This group of kids came in. The girl sat on top of her desk and just starts giving me a tough time. And I said to her, “You don’t know me well enough yet to hate me. Give me a chance. At least give me a chance, and then you can. But come on.” In that case, it would have been nice to get on the phone and say, “This girl needs to go.”

Many substitute teachers mentioned sending students to the office, only to have them return. One substitute teacher was cursed to her face with the foulest of epithets, sent the child to the office, only to have the child to return half-way through her day. “How could I handle the class after she was sent back?” she asked. Substitute teachers need the support of administration when things aren’t going well.

A substitute teacher needs to know that if [he or she is] having problems with this class, or these particular students, that [he or she] can call this person and say, “If you want me to remain here for the rest of the day, these kids who are giving me

this horrendous amount of trouble need to go. Someone has to come in and remove those students.”

This comment, from a classroom teacher, sums up the kind of support that substitute teachers would like to see. And sometimes they do. One substitute teacher told me about Mr. Taylor, the principal of John Adams Elementary. He would come in for a few minutes, ask the students how their weekend was, and pull select students aside. According to this substitute teacher, he would “talk a little bit about life and respect. He doesn’t berate them or anything. Maybe they came to school with a little baggage.” While this process took only a few moments, and while this substitute teacher did not need to call the office for support, she said she knew she would get help if she needed it.

On the other end of the spectrum, some administrators expect substitute teachers to be fully adept at classroom management. One administrator told me “[substitute teachers] need to understand that not every little thing comes to the principal. At my school, we don’t do that here. So she was wasting my time. The [misbehaving students] she sent to me weren’t suspendable.” This principal described how the substitute teacher had sent her students who may have had AD/HD or other behaviors “outside the norm.” She did not call the substitute teacher or offer advice. Her response: “I asked her not to return to my campus. I did that through my secretary and barred her from [Polk Elementary]. We just let HR know that this person is no longer permitted to respond to [Polk’s] substitute needs. Because it’s not worth my time.” This same principal described how she would respond if a substitute teacher told her that there were no plans prepared for him or her:

I can also say if a one-day person comes in to fifth grade or fourth grade and says, “Mr. [Drake] had nothing ready.” I’ll kind of shrug my shoulders and go, “Oh, okay.” But, maybe they just don’t like that fifth grade class. Is it really about Mr. [Drake]? I have no trust. See, I have to have trust with those people from the outside.

Substitute teachers reported that the level of support they feel from administrators affects where they choose to take positions. “I won’t go back there,” one substitute teacher said of a school where she felt there was no support from the principal. By reaching out to substitutes and finding ways to support them, schools may be able to address the substitute teacher shortages some of them find.

Instruction

Survey results showed that substitute teachers’ effectiveness with instructional techniques, such as direct instruction or lecture, questioning strategies, or cooperative teaching strategies was weak. Sixty-five percent of teachers reported that substitutes were not effective with instructional techniques. Success in this area was highly correlated with other elements of a successful substitute teaching program. Classroom teachers who believed that substitute teachers were effective with instructional techniques were much more inclined to say they trusted substitutes, did a better job overall, were well-prepared for the job, follow their plans, were effective with the curriculum, and were effective with classroom management (see *Table 3*).

	Effective with instructional techniques	Not effective with instructional techniques	Chi-square
I trust substitute teachers with my class	92.5	56.0	.000
Substitute teachers do a good job overall	92.5	43.1	.000
Substitute teachers are well-prepared for the job	77.5	23.0	.000
Substitute teachers follow my plans	92.5	75.7	.027
Substitute teachers are effective with teaching my school's curriculum	75.0	20.3	.000
Substitute teachers are effective with classroom management	57.5	23.0	.000

Table 3. Classroom teachers' perceptions of the relation of effectiveness in instructional techniques to other issues affecting substitute teachers
Percent of Teachers Responding "Agree" or "Strongly Agree"

When I asked classroom teachers about instructional effectiveness, one of the themes that was repeated was how closely substitute teachers follow the plans left for them. Eighty-one percent of classroom teachers said they believed that substitute teachers do follow their plans. However, not following plans is a deep frustration, given the amount of time teachers spend preparing. One classroom teacher, who said she spent two hours putting together the day's agenda, returned to find that her class had been shown a Disney video that the substitute teacher had brought. Another teacher showed me the plan she had left for a substitute teacher. He followed the first three items, but completely skipped one of the tests she had asked him to give. He left no reason for skipping the test, which she found untouched in the pile of work she had left. An

elementary school teacher related her experience when a substitute teacher ignored her plans:

My brother has subbed for me and he's an idiot. Five days and he got nothing done. It was laid out, and he didn't use it. I lay it out for a reason, because if I'm gone, I can't just afford to skip a day and my kids don't do anything for a day. So I leave everything there that they possibly could need to get through everything, because I don't want to have to go back and reteach the stuff and do it again.

She, like other teachers I spoke with, could not explain why her plans were not followed. Survey results showed that 98 percent of substitute teachers who responded said they closely follow the plans left for them. All of the substitute teachers I interviewed told me they follow the plans that are left to them. A few of them mentioned that if there was something that was clearly not working—such as a lesson that was taking too long—they would make adjustments and move on. They would then leave a note for the teacher describing what they did and why they felt they should make the change. While this did not lead me to the reason that substitute teachers make drastic changes or ignore the plans, the feedback systems that teachers described, such as the rating sheet, would allow them to find whether the problem might have been with the clarity of lesson plans, a misunderstanding of the expectations regarding the responsibilities of the substitute teacher, or perhaps something else.

Both classroom teachers and substitute teachers agree that lesson plans are generally clear, and both agree that plans are generally followed. All teachers said the plans they left were clear, while 70 percent of substitute teachers agreed and another 18

percent strongly agreed. Eighty-one percent of classroom teachers said substitute teachers closely follow their plans, while 98 percent of substitute teachers who responded said they closely follow the lesson plans.

The substitute teacher survey revealed that they believed teachers did not generally tell them how a lesson was to be taught. “Usually they pretty much just give you the lesson plan and it’s up to you to choose what style of learning you want,” Troy Bonebright told me. “Sometimes they’ll say just page 93. Do questions one to five together as a class, and then assign six to twenty for them to do independently and 21-40 for homework.” Although he had not taken classes in instructional strategies, he was able to describe how he would model the process, give students practice, and then allow them to work independently. Interview data from classroom teachers, however, indicated that they were concerned that leaving only pages numbers would generally not be enough. They identified two ways to solve the problem. First, teachers could provide brief descriptions of how they normally teach each subject. An elementary teacher showed me a paper that she had created at the beginning of the school year. On it were all of the procedures in her classroom, her behavior plan, and, in general terms, how she teaches each subject. She now leaves this with her lesson plan book for emergencies so that a substitute teacher could look at the page numbers, see the procedures, and successfully guide the class. Other teachers believed that the method for teaching the lesson should be included in the plan. By changing “read page five” to “popcorn¹² read page five.” The second intervention proposed by classroom teachers was to teach some instructional

techniques, such as direct instruction or different methods for reading a passage, so that substitute teachers could cover the same content in various ways, even within the same lesson, to increase student engagement.

I found that expectations for substitute teachers varied widely. While some expected substitute teachers to closely emulate the classroom teacher, others openly dismissed substitutes who want to teach. One middle school teacher described her annoyance this way:

Okay, this sounds bad, but I get irritated when you get overzealous kind of substitute teachers, where they like really want to teach and do all this stuff, and they're upset that you left simple lesson plans for them to follow. And so that kind of irritates me, because, I'm like, "You're just here for a day, and they're not going to learn. They're going to choose not to learn from you. Not because of who you are, but just because it's a free day for them." So, that's kind of irritated me.

This teacher said she expected "them to be able to survive. I don't really expect major learning to be happening that day." This opinion was in the minority, however. Many teachers said the district's pacing guides give an impetus to continue with instruction, even when the teacher is out. "I feel like with state testing I don't want to miss a day," said one classroom teacher. "It's crazy with these pacing guides, so for me the priority is to get a sub that I can continue with all my lessons." Substitute teachers largely agreed.

¹² Popcorn reading is a technique wherein one student reads part of a passage, then chooses another student to succeed him or her, and so on, until the story is completed.

“I know many substitutes who feel classroom management is the only thing we substitutes can accomplish. –How sad for the kids!”¹³

Survey data showed that 69 percent of classroom teachers preferred leaving review material, while 58 percent of substitute teachers preferred teaching mainly concepts that have been previously introduced. While this at first seemed to contradict survey data that showed that 70 percent of teachers left content that was nearly identical to that which they would have taught had they not been absent, interview data clarified the issue. While one elementary teacher told me that the lessons he left for substitute teachers were “mainly review or reinforcement of what I covered the day before,” he explained that it usually takes more than one day for students to master a concept. Therefore, he will make sure that he covers the first lesson on a topic; subsequent lessons on the same topic—lessons he himself would have taught—he then feels comfortable leaving with a substitute teacher.

Survey data showed that substitute teachers believe that the lesson plans they find are generally very good. Substitute teachers reported finding ideal lesson plans an average of 37 percent of the time, and another 43 percent were adequate. They were less than adequate 13 percent of the time, and missing or indecipherable 6 percent of the time. When asked what separated an adequate plan from one that is ideal, substitute teachers reported that it was the level of detail that made an ideal plan. They wanted everything in one place, rather than having to search throughout the room for books or supplies. In fact, three substitute teachers said that one stack in chronological order, with books and

¹³ Underlining is in the original.

materials for the beginning of the day on top and things for the end of the day on the bottom, lessened any confusion. Many substitutes were quick to point out that they did not want long lesson plans, either. “I think the most helpful thing is a bulleted list,” said one substitute teacher. She wanted any “extra explanation off to the side,” since she didn’t want to have to read through entire paragraphs to get the gist of what she had to do next. One substitute teacher said that if she had to read a lengthy note about the next activity, that students could quickly get out of control during the transition time.

Curriculum

Survey data showed that both classroom and substitute teachers believed that training substitute teachers in the district’s adopted curricula would improve student outcomes. When asked whether substitute teachers should be trained in various elements of the curriculum, from the math and reading series to site-specific phonics programs, among others, 80 percent of teachers believed they should. Of those who did not, many wrote on their questionnaires that classroom management should be a priority, and that we should not expect substitute teachers to learn the curriculum until they jump that hurdle. When I asked substitute teachers if they were interested in learning about the curriculum, 81 percent said they would. Seventy-five percent of all substitute teachers reported that they believed that learning about the district’s curriculum would improve their teaching.

Retired teachers also wanted to be counted in: 89 percent of them wanted to learn about the curriculum. Interview data explained why. One retired teacher told me

excitedly, “Oh gosh! It’s changed! It’s changed since I left! Oh my gosh, I can’t tell you how it’s changed!” She went on to say that the reading series the district had recently adopted was confusing and that organizing a lesson around the teacher’s edition was almost impossible without some background knowledge in the structure of the book.

During the first round of interviews I asked teachers what areas of the curriculum might be important for substitute teachers to know. The most common answers I received were reading and math. Teachers explained that these were the areas teachers focused upon the most, and would therefore be the most valuable to the substitute teacher also. In the survey I asked classroom teachers about all of the different programs brought up during the interviews: Thinking Maps¹⁴, Write from the Beginning / Write for the Future¹⁵, direct instruction strategies¹⁶, SIPPS¹⁷, ExCEL¹⁸, an overview of the state standards, an overview of the reading series¹⁹, Saxon Math²⁰, and Ruby Paine²¹. I asked substitute teachers to tell me whether or not substitutes should learn each of these strategies, and among those that they thought should be taught, to rank them in order of importance. *Table 4* shows these survey results.

Curricular Program	Percent of teachers who believe this should be taught	Mean ranking	Number of #1 votes
The Reading Series	89	2.21	29
State Standards	71	3.14	27
Saxon Math	77	3.41	4
Thinking Maps	78	4.10	9

¹⁴ A set of graphic organizers for visually presenting information, somewhat similar to Venn diagrams.

¹⁵ These are the district’s adopted writing programs for elementary and middle school, respectively.

¹⁶ The district has focused on Explicit Direct Instruction as a model they want all teachers to follow.

¹⁷ A program in phonics. There are a number of different levels covering Kindergarten through fifth grade.

¹⁸ This is a model in which students move from one class to another. Some schools use it, while others do not.

¹⁹ The adopted reading series in elementary school is Houghton Mifflin. In middle school it is McDougal Littell.

²⁰ The district’s adopted math series in Kindergarten through eighth grade.

²¹ This was a training in understanding how to meet the unique needs of students living in poverty.

Direct Instruction	67	4.50	2
Writing Program	70	4.59	0
SIPPS	51	4.88	3
Ruby Paine	57	5.54	6
ExCEL	40	5.95	2

Table 4. Areas of the district’s curriculum teachers believe substitute teachers should know

Many teachers in the Deerfield School District attended a five-day workshop on how to teach the Houghton Mifflin and McDougal Littell reading series. Both teachers and substitute teachers agreed that the program can easily confuse someone who has not had that training. “When you open the teacher manual, the first time I had to use that, I was just overwhelmed,” one substitute teacher said in an interview. “I didn’t even know where to start looking on the page. I didn’t understand how it was set up.” A classroom teacher understood how difficult it could be to a substitute teacher:

I would love if they could be trained on how to teach the Houghton Mifflin, or even to read a teacher’s edition. Because I know when I started subbing I had no idea. They had all this stuff in the margins, and it’s overwhelming.

While classroom teachers stated that explaining how to teach a lesson could generally be done in their lesson plans, they said that this would be much more difficult with the Houghton Mifflin series. Some even said the unusual page numbering can throw off a substitute teacher, as it did to them before they were trained.

One teacher offered a unique solution. With the teacher’s edition filled with so much information that it is difficult to determine what needs to be done, she copied the pages of the teacher’s edition and highlighted what she wanted the substitute teacher to do. This way she did not have to mark in her book, and the substitute teacher would

know exactly where to look.. The three teachers I interviewed after this stated that this method would work. One even said she would try it with a substitute teacher the following week.

Some teachers told me that their schools were participating in the national Reading First grants. One of the requirements is that teachers spend two and one-half hours a day teaching language arts. With such a long time dedicated to the curriculum, they said, in addition to the confusing nature of the setup of the program, an overview of the reading series would be an ideal place to start.

Methods of Professional Development

Retired teachers aside, 100 percent of the substitute teachers stated that they were interested in some form of professional development. While some form of professional development classes made up the highest percentage at 83 percent of respondents, more than half of the substitute teachers who returned a questionnaire were also interested in observations, mentoring, networking, and attending the same professional development as classroom teachers. Substitute teachers wanted professional development to about the same degree, regardless of whether or not they reported they had any previous educational training, or whether they want to enter the teaching profession or not.

I selected the class/workshop as one choice because of its universal popularity for professional development. Attending the same professional development as classroom teachers was discussed by two substitute teachers in initial interviews, so this was also

included. The other three: observations, and mentoring, networking, came from Thomas Guskey's *Evaluating Professional Development* (Guskey, 2000).

Substitute and classroom teachers described the current process for learning how to substitute teach as one of "trial by fire." "Most jobs you go into, you have an interview and you have some kind of training," said one substitute. "This, they just throw you in there." Another put it this way: "You get thrown in the den and you survive or you don't survive. I know for the first couple of weeks kids ran all over me, because I had to learn how to survive." Another substitute teacher nearly quit after his first day:

My very first job I was assigned to [Fillmore] Middle School, and it was a mess. There were no lesson plans of any kind, and I just had no control of the kids when they came in. I had no role sheets, and they just came in yelling and screaming and pinching each other on the bottom, and one boy took a ball away from a girl and had it in his pants and she said, "Eew! He had it in his pants!" and that kind of. First time I subbed I almost said, heck with this noise! I wouldn't do that again.

While he told me he found elementary a different experience, he has not returned to middle school, now several years later. Substitute teachers described how a class would help them improve their classroom management, and that they would be able to ask questions about parts of the curriculum that are most troublesome. They asked that the class include hands-on material, role playing, and skits. Administrators frequently suggested that substitute teachers watch videos by Harry Wong on classroom management. One substitute teacher I interviewed described how another small local

school district had offered an orientation. “They provided lunch for us! I’m thinking, ‘This is such a small district, and they’re providing lunch for us?’ I mean, wow!” Three substitute teachers described how they had searched for classes on their own. One took an online course and read books on substitute teaching, while another said that the cost of a course she saw advertised would have cost her a half-day’s pay.

Those who were interested in attending classes were asked in the survey to note how long they would like the inservice to last. Substitute teachers chose among a one, three, or six hour block. While teachers in the Deerfield School District often attend classes either three or six hours in length, the six hour timeframe was favored by only 3 percent of substitute teachers. One hour blocks were next with 39 percent, and the three hour block was most popular at 58 percent.

Administrators were interested in an orientation that would acquaint substitute teachers with the district. “You can’t just have one orientation at the beginning of the year, and then have it each year after that,” one principal told me. “If you’re hiring new subs, they each have to go through an orientation.” The orientation or classes, then, would have to be held throughout the school year. The content, principals suggested, should cover education law, appropriate and inappropriate behaviors with students, and should provide an overview of the district’s programs. Some principals suggested that a distinction be made for those substitute teachers who passed an orientation or set of workshops, such as a certificate. Classroom teachers and substitutes proposed that a pay scale could be developed for rewarding teachers who attended this training. “Pay them \$10 more a day if they go,” recommended one substitute teacher.

Survey data showed that 64 percent of substitute teachers were interested in observing classroom teachers teaching their classes. The group with the highest interest was prospective teachers. Eighty-nine percent of those who reported they were interested in becoming full-time teachers said they would like to observe classes. One substitute teacher told me that as a part of her credentialing program she observed a Deerfield elementary teacher. “How do I maintain the transition from one thing to the next?” she asked. “Transitions are hard! As a sub you have no idea. But if you see other people doing it, how they handle it, you have a bag of tricks that you can pull out and use in different situations.” Classroom teachers also described the benefits of observations. They said that it would be helpful to see a variety of classrooms, both “good and bad classroom management,” to be able to make comparisons. They also suggested that substitute teachers meet with an experienced classroom teacher before and after the observations to discuss what to look for, and to talk about what it was they saw. One middle school teacher summed up the advantage of observations when she said, “You can sit in a classroom and you can listen to all the methodologies and the lectures, but I don’t think you can really understand it until you see it.”

Overall, 58 percent of substitute teachers were interested in mentoring opportunities. This varied slightly by grade level: 45 percent of substitute teachers who preferred teaching K-2 wanted a mentorship, 57 percent of substitutes who like teaching 3-5, and 69 percent of those who taught 6-8 were interested.²² Classroom teachers showed their concern by offering to mentor in substitute teachers: in the classroom

²² Chi-square .320. This is not a statistically significant relationship.

teacher questionnaire, 73 percent of teachers said they might be interested in mentoring a substitute teacher.

One principal compared mentoring to the strategy teachers often employ to welcome new students. “I don’t want to say ‘mentor.’ It’s like a new kid shows up. Don’t we give them a buddy? Show them where the library is? Show them where the playground is?” She suggested there could be a “buddy” for Kindergarten through second grade, and another for third through fifth, to introduce the substitute teacher to the teachers’ lounge, the restroom, the mailboxes, and their classroom. “That would be something off the charts!” she thought. Some substitute teachers reported they had already found these relationships. “I had [a mentor] at [Grant] Elementary. I subbed for her all the time and she would call me every evening and we’d talk on the phone, and we’re friends now.” The two would discuss how the day went. This substitute would describe what she found difficult, and her mentor would tell her how she kept a certain student on task or how she would provide motivation. Another described her relationship with a teacher she had met at Roosevelt Elementary. “Jeanie Davis is the main reason I signed a contract at Roosevelt. Because she reached out and helped me no matter what I needed. She would call me at home. ‘How’s it going?’ She really took me under her wing.” Substitute teachers were concerned about how the mentor would be paid, and they expressed concern that they could not miss work to meet with a mentor, but they believed that there was a great deal of promise in meeting with someone who could answer their questions confidentially.

Survey data showed that 58 percent of classroom teachers were interested in networking. Seventy-one percent of those who were interested in a teaching career were more likely to want to network.²³ Substitute teachers mentioned this happening in two places: a district orientation and in schools. Substitute teachers believed that it would be helpful to get to know one another so they could share experiences and exchange advice. Others were more cynical. One substitute teacher said that too often teachers gripe to one another, especially in the lunchroom, and that she wanted no part of it. A classroom teacher suggested that an online bulletin board would be a useful networking tool, so long as norms were clearly delineated and followed so that it did not become a forum for complaints.

When classroom teachers were given an open-ended question that asked them to describe the kinds of support that would best help substitute teachers, many raised the issue of pay. Responses like “paid training” or “offer them a day’s pay” were repeated often. When I asked classroom teachers about this during the follow-up interviews, four of the five said that it would not be fair to ask substitute teachers to attend training without also offering compensation. The fifth said that the substitute would be motivated because the training would help substitute teachers become more effective in the classroom. The other classroom teachers pointed out that the district had as much to gain through training, and that even though there would be a benefit to substitutes, they should be paid.

²³ Chi-square .157

Substitute teachers did not dwell on this issue of payment in return for training. Rather, they discussed what they perceived was a low daily rate of pay. They pointed out that the local high school district, where 14 percent of them currently work, pays more. Three substitute teachers also complained that the low wage would not be as bad if they could afford health care. One substitute teacher, a single mother, said that without benefits her children do not have adequate health care. She loved substitute teaching, she said, but questioned how long she could go on working while trying to support her young girls.

The data showed that substitute teachers are very interested in attending the same professional development that is offered to classroom teachers. Seventy-eight percent of substitute teachers said they would want to take advantage of that training. “I called the district office to ask if I could attend classes given by the district (on my own time),” wrote one substitute teacher on her questionnaire, “and they said, ‘NO!’ Can you believe that?” While they currently cannot attend district-led inservices, classroom teachers, substitute teachers, and administrators all saw value in allowing them to attend. One principal said:

I think that if we were really looking at building up the expertise of our subs with the understanding that at some point they would probably matriculate into becoming permanent teachers on campus, you’d want to avail them of all of the staff development that we give to permanent teachers.

Substitute teachers described a number of reasons for wanting to attend. “It would be great to learn about new programs so I can be more effective,” said one. “It would keep

us up-to-date on new methods and curriculum being used in the district,” added another. “Training for permanent teachers would be great because my goal is to teach full-time,” Mike Vick wrote. One substitute teacher believed that just the invitation to attend workshops or inservices would make them feel more welcome. “It is the district that makes subs feel unappreciated,” Sue Brainerd wrote in her questionnaire. “We are never invited to anything the other district employees are invited to.”

The one objection I found to allowing substitute teachers to attend this training, raised by one principal and one teacher, was that they assumed a high level of turnover called into question the return on investment spent on substitute teacher training. I did not have access to turnover rates in the district, so I was not able to test this perception against district-level data. Nevertheless, both of these individuals did believe that substitute teachers should be able to attend the same training as permanent teacher if they so chose.

Summary

The data I collected in this mixed methods study pointed to three primary findings. Principals, classroom teachers, and substitute teachers believed that by developing relationships with one another and by building trust, the substitute teacher will be supported, to the benefit of the students they teach. While classroom teachers reported that substitute teachers were not effective with classroom management, instruction, and curriculum, the obstacles that prevent substitutes from succeeding in these domains were identified and strategies for improvement were articulated by the

participants. Finally, the data delineated the kinds of professional development that the participants said would help them most, and described the participants' perceptions of the strengths and weaknesses of each of these methods.

CHAPTER 5

Discussion and Recommendations

Introduction

The aim of this mixed-methods study was to learn the best methods for supporting and developing substitute teachers as effective classroom instructors, from the perspective of principals, classroom teachers, and the substitute teachers themselves. Through indepth personal interviews and surveys I sought to understand what each of these stakeholders believed was important that substitute teachers know and be able to do, and what they believed were the most effective methods to deliver that content. Since the Deerfield School District currently does not offer professional development opportunities to substitute teachers, I also wanted to understand what each of these groups perceived were the barriers to implementing such a program.

While children in American public schools will spend the equivalent of one full school year under the guidance of a substitute teacher over the course of their K-12 education, most substitute teachers receive less training and support from school districts than the local McDonald's gives its employees. The recommendations that follow may serve as a starting point not only for district-level administrators in charge of substitute teachers, but also for the principals, classroom teachers, and policy-makers whose decisions may lead, directly or indirectly, to the success or failure of this segment of the teaching population.

In this chapter I will begin by summarizing the findings of this study. I will then use the data I collected to recommend a course of action that takes into account the

perceptions of the three stakeholder groups I studied. I will also suggest a direction for future research on substitute teaching. Finally, I will reflect on the personal insights I developed over the course of this project.

Summary of Findings

Establishing Personal Relationships

Interview data showed that establishing personal relationships between substitute teachers and other stakeholders holds promise for changing the perception of substitute teachers from “placeholders” or “babysitters” to capable instructors. Three of the substitute teachers I interviewed described how mentorships had developed from questions asked in the teacher’s lounge or over lunch. Gail Vick, a substitute teacher, had a number of questions regarding her assignment. A teacher in a nearby classroom talked with her and helped explain how to teach what had been written in the plan. Because of this connection, Mrs. Vick returned to that school repeatedly. While she reported having worked for less than a year, she said she developed rapport with students and felt she was trusted by the teachers with whom she had made relationships. When describing the kinds of plans left for her, she said that she believed she was teaching exactly what the teacher would have taught if he or she had not been absent. She assumed this was because she knew the teachers for whom she taught, and had their trust.

Interview data provided an indepth view of the strengths of many of the substitute teachers. Michelle Jones is a substitute teacher on hiatus while she stays at home with her newborn baby girl. She welcomed me into her home and introduced me to her

family. She was self-effacing, sincere, and expressed an earnest desire to do what is best for children. She told me that her heart often broke over the children she worked with, and explicitly articulated a concern to offer children love. Mrs. Jones wanted to be treated as a professional in her capacities as a substitute teacher, something she was doubtful could happen. While she lacked formal training, she said she would be very interested in receiving it, should it become available.

Survey data also revealed the strengths of substitute teachers. They have served in the position for a relatively long period of time²⁴, many had previous full-time teaching experience, most have served in a wide variety of grade levels, and—excluding retired teachers—every substitute teacher who returned a questionnaire was interested receiving some form of professional development.

Neither classroom teachers nor administrators, however, generally were able to identify these characteristics about the substitute teaching pool. When asked to list the strengths of substitute teachers in the Deerfield School District, most administrators and teachers alike gave answers such as “I don’t know,” and “no comment.” While one administrator stated that the quality of substitute teachers was a strength, this was the only such interview response. When asked to identify the characteristics of an ideal substitute teacher, however, the answers of administrators and classroom teachers were closely aligned to the strengths attributed above to substitute teachers. During interviews, classroom teachers stated that a love for children was perhaps as important as any other attribute. A characteristic identified often by teachers during interviews was “flexibility.”

²⁴ Mean length of service as a substitute teacher was 4.8 years.

This would seem to match the wide range of experience reported by teachers in terms of professional background, grade level experience, and even experience in a variety of school districts.

While survey data indicated that most classroom teachers chose a specific substitute teacher to replace them, interview data revealed that teachers did not generally know the education, background, training, or experience of their substitutes. This information, teachers said, would help them make the most effective use of a substitute teacher's strengths. While one teacher said that she would leave the same plan whether the substitute was brand new or an accomplished classroom teacher, many teachers said that an understanding of the substitute teacher's knowledge base would allow them to play to that substitute teacher's strength. One of the interviewees was an algebra teacher. Since she did not know whether her substitutes would be able to teach the content, she usually left review activities or non-academic work in her absence. If she was able to find a substitute teacher, however, who was competent in the content, she stated she would have left her substitute with lesson plans that helped continue the curriculum.

During the interviews, classroom teachers explained that the substitute teachers they usually called back for future assignments were those who had followed their lesson plans, left detailed notes, and kept the class in order. However, teachers identified a "matrix" or list of qualifications and trainings as a tool that would help them identify the specific strengths of substitute teachers and to match these assets to their needs in the classroom. An algebra teacher could contact someone with a mathematical background,

and a kindergarten teacher could request a substitute teacher who prefers teaching the primary grades, for example.

One of the barriers I found in developing this relationship was the stigma of substitute teaching, caused by the very poor performance of a few substitute teachers. Every classroom teacher and every administrator described egregious mistakes made by substitute teachers, from implementing corporeal punishment on students, to a lack of supervision, to cursing in class. However, I was intrigued that substitute teachers had the same stories to tell, with the same disdain in their voices. These substitute teachers were surprised that such substitute teachers remained in the classroom after exhibiting such behaviors. Classroom teachers and principals agreed. They assumed that a shortage of substitute teachers, however, prevented the assistant superintendent in charge of substitute teachers from firing them.

Substitute Teacher Interest in a Variety of Professional Development Opportunities

School districts that do offer professional development opportunities usually give substitute teachers an orientation or workshop. This was the format that substitute teachers identified most often on the survey as the type of professional development they desired most. However, over half of the substitute teachers who returned a questionnaire were also interested in observations, mentorships, networking, and in attending the same professional development as classroom teachers.

Substitute teachers reported in interviews and on an open-ended survey question that they were eager to see how classroom teachers teach, since they are unable to

compare the quality of their instruction against an objective measure. Some second-guessed their teaching since their only frame of reference was their own experience as students in the classroom. Often substitute teachers wondered if they handled a situation well. By offering a mentorship system whereby substitute teachers could get confidential advice, they stated they would be able to learn how an experienced teacher might have handled a given situation or instructional component. The value of networking, according to substitute teachers, would be the opportunity to ask advice of one another regarding teaching, schools, and teachers.

Substitute teachers are not currently permitted to attend the same professional development as classroom teachers. This training, according to substitute teacher interview data and an open-ended survey question, would allow them to maintain continuity in the curriculum and help them grow as teachers. Administrators agreed that for those who were committed to the district, long-term substitutes who are often asked to write lesson plans, and those interested in a career in education, this training could ensure a smoother transition into a permanent position.

Isolation

Stories of being ignored in the lunchroom were ubiquitous in classroom and substitute teacher interviews. While two classroom teachers told me that it is tough to break into the established culture (or “cliques” in the words of substitute teachers), this revealed that substitute teachers are “outsiders,” as one administrator framed it. I found that there are many opportunities that might otherwise flow out of lunchroom

conversation. Substitute teachers, with a dearth of understanding of curriculum, instruction and classroom management, but who said they crave it, sit in the same room as veteran teachers with the experience to alleviate some of the problems that substitute teachers experience. And yet they do not talk. An open response section of the survey was filled repeatedly with the suggestion to “talk to them” or “introduce yourself.” Teachers believed that this would help substitute teachers feel more welcome, more appreciated, and could give them support exactly when it is needed. Qualitative data indicated that teachers did not intentionally ignore substitute teachers; rather, they have so much going on before school and during breaks that they do not consider the nearby substitute teacher who may need support. One classroom teacher wrote on her questionnaire that this study itself, by asking questions regarding substitute teaching, might improve relationships by causing teachers to think about opportunities to offer just-in-time assistance.

Few Opportunities for Feedback

Classroom teachers reported in interviews that when they require the services of a substitute teacher, those substitutes frequently leave them notes. Ideally, according to teachers, these notes tell them how the day went, what was covered, what was left undone, and any specific behavioral issues that may have arisen. Substitute teachers may also leave their phone number or substitute teacher identification number, usually so that they can be called back by that teacher for another assignment.

Classroom and substitute teacher interview data revealed two weaknesses in this process. First, teachers have no way to easily provide feedback to a substitute teacher. This feedback could dispel the insecurities expressed by many substitute teachers. “Maybe I’m not that good,” said one. “Maybe they call me back because I’m not as bad as everybody else they’ve had.” If a teacher has a concern—whether it was a part of the plan that was not completed or a question about a behavioral incident, for instance—these also could be answered with feedback. Second, classroom teacher interviews showed that substitute teachers do not usually offer comments about the clarity of lesson plans, what was most helpful, and what could have made the day go more smoothly. Teachers stated they could use this feedback to tweak their lesson plans to accommodate the needs of their substitutes. Many teachers made the suggestion that a form be distributed to substitute teachers requesting information to address the specific areas most important to teachers.

Recommendations for Schools and Public Policy

There are a number of recommendations that flow as a corollary from the data. These include suggestions for district-level support as well as policy changes that might occur as a result of state or national level legislation.

Ninety-eight percent of all substitute teachers requested professional development opportunities, and teachers believed that training substitute teachers in classroom management, curriculum, and instruction would make those substitutes more effective.

This data suggests that schools should provide a variety of professional development activities to support the growth of substitute teachers.

When asked what such professional development should cover, survey and interview data showed that training substitute teachers in classroom management, strategies related to the curriculum, and instructional methods would make them more effective instructors. Teaching the curriculum and instructional strategies do not have to be supplemental to classroom management. According to interview data, all three stakeholder groups stated that substitute teachers who are well-equipped with teaching strategies and an understanding of the curriculum may be able to engage students in their lessons, thereby decreasing the amount of time spent on discipline.

Many of the administrators and classroom teachers discussed what substitute teachers should do if there are no lesson plans, with the covert assumption that not leaving a lesson plans is an acceptable practice in the schoolhouse. While substitute teachers reported in the survey that lesson plans were usually either ideal or adequate, they also said that their plans were “missing or indecipherable” about six percent of the time. District-wide, this figure translates into about two substitute teachers every day who are teaching a class without a plan. While some administrators said they ask teachers to keep emergency lesson plans on hand in the event they should be absent, and while they stated they tried to make contact with substitute teachers as often as could, survey and interview data showed that substitute teachers believed they were not often offered this level of support from principals. One suggestion proposed by administrators and classroom teachers during interviews was that a site might provide a “buddy” or

contact person for the substitute teacher in the event that a part of the plans are missing, unclear, or if the substitute teacher has a question about student behavior or the curriculum. According to one elementary teacher, another way to solve the problem of missing plans would be to require classroom teachers to leave a generic list of procedures for each subject area on their desk. In the event of an emergency, a substitute could see how to teach each subject. With this guide and the page numbers, the substitute teacher could turn a day without plans into one that is relatively successful.

The data also suggests that a feedback loop is necessary to tell teachers and schools how they can support substitute teachers. A feedback loop would be useful in letting substitute teachers know what they did well, and in what areas they might improve. Teachers suggested leaving feedback forms or phone numbers for their substitutes. Another idea suggested by substitute teachers in both interviews and an open-response survey question was to offer them district email accounts. This system could be used after the day of the assignment so that a teacher could send a thank-you note or ask questions about what happened on the day of his or her absence. This would not only allow substitute teachers to give and receive feedback, but it would furnish classroom teachers with a means to foster long-term relationships.

When I asked classroom teachers which areas of the curriculum would be most important to know, the highest response went to the reading series. Classroom and substitute teachers alike agreed during interviews that these textbooks can often be very confusing. A day's activities are not all located in one place, they stated, and page numbers like "452G" are not easily found. Just one page of the teacher's edition may

hold half a dozen sections, not all of which are to be taught on a particular day. One classroom teacher suggested in an interview that pages from the teacher's edition could be copied and the day's activities highlighted. This would allow substitute teachers to understand what it is they need to teach and would enable them to focus only on the components that should be covered that day. According to survey data, classroom teachers also want their substitutes to become familiar with the state standards. While substitute teachers follow lesson plans, and are not usually responsible for creating plans aligned to these standards, teachers discussed in interviews that substitute teachers should understand that in Deerfield, a mastery of the California state standards is the basis for the instructional program.

Teachers believed that substitute teachers should be compensated for their time. Although I had not asked teachers in their survey whether a substitute teacher should be paid for attending professional development, a number of teachers wrote in that substitute teachers should receive remuneration. Most classroom teachers concurred in their interviews. Others, however, expressed a concern that since they assumed there to be a high turnover rate among substitute teachers, money invested in their training is perhaps not wisely spent. One suggestion offered by classroom and substitute teachers addressed this point. By paying substitute teachers for completing a set number of days following the training, no money would go into teachers who then did not spend time in the classroom. For example, substitute teachers who attended a class would make \$10 extra per day once they had completed 20 days of substitute teaching in Deerfield. Substitute teachers suggested during interviews that pay should be linked to time served in the

district, much like teachers move up on the pay scale each year. That is, substitute pay could be increased after teaching 20, 40, and 60 days. This would be less expensive than a raise for all substitute teachers and would provide substitute teachers with an incentive to remain within the district.

State and national policy has the potential to benefit substitute teachers. The purpose of this study, as stated earlier, was to find the best methods for supporting and developing substitute teachers as effective classroom instructors. I believe that while the most qualified and prepared substitute teachers can run a classroom successfully, they usually cannot surpass the quality of instruction that many permanent teachers provide. Therefore, policies that discourage teachers from taking excessive leave would improve the overall program. While this topic did not relate directly to the research questions I originally proposed, this topic was repeated during interviews. One administrator said that she had left 56 days of vacation time in one state and 98 days in another. Currently, if teachers save their vacation days within the same district until retirement, these can be counted toward early retirement or cashed out. Until that time, however, they cannot be used for anything but days off. Therefore, teachers who know they will not remain in a district until retirement have no reason to save these days. “If sick days were worth some financial benefit,” that principal told me, “then maybe people wouldn’t burn them.” Policy makers should consider whether having teachers take a considerable number of sick days²⁵ serves students’ best interests.

²⁵ In the Deerfield School District, “sick days” are the same as “vacation days.” A teacher may take off as many days as he or she wishes for personal necessity without having to give a reason. The only caveat is that, according to the contract, the district may ask for a doctor’s note after three consecutive days’ absence. If the teacher does not take the

Personal Insights

The No Child Left Behind Act holds school districts accountable to hire highly qualified teachers. Even paraprofessionals are now required to hold an associate's degree, rather than a high school diploma only. However, in some states, substitute teachers can teach with just a G.E.D. Although California requires its substitute teachers to hold a bachelor's degree and pass a test of basic skills, this does not mean that they are competent in classroom management, curriculum, or instruction. Federal policy requires that districts in "program improvement" status for failing to meet their growth targets spend ten percent of their budgets on professional development. Given the amount of time that substitute teachers spend in the classroom, requiring that these districts include substitute teachers in their professional development plan would offer substitutes exactly what this study showed they are asking for: training that would increase the chances of making them more effective.

While conducting this study, I interviewed Ron Grant, the assistant superintendent of a large school district adjacent to Deerfield. Since it was the perception of some principals that substitute teachers in Deerfield drop assignments at the last moment because Dr. Grant's district pays more, I wanted to find out if this was the case. In fact, most substitute teachers are paid at the same rate in both districts. Substitute teachers who hold a full teaching credential, I found, are paid \$40 more a day for elementary assignments in Dr. Grant's district. More interesting to me, however, was Mr. Grant's

days consecutively, he or she may theoretically use as many days as he or she has accumulated. Sick days in the

description of his interview process. “We do not hire everyone who comes to us,” he said. When prospective substitute teachers arrive, he said they are given a drug test. “You would be surprised how many people just walk out the door.” Even though this amounted to only a handful of candidates, Mr. Grant was proud that his district did not allow drug users to teach.

I was surprised by the simplicity of most of the recommendations put forward by the participants in this study. “Be nice,” a recommendation written by a teacher, should not be so hard for teachers, whose job is to educate the young. While simple, this answer is not simplistic. Welcoming substitute teachers may help them feel like a part of the team, and offering them the training they desire may foster support, collegiality, and professionalism.

Directions for Future Research

It is my hope that this study offers something new to the literature on substitute teaching in that it asks substitute teachers themselves what they perceive their needs to be, and focuses attention on how deliver this content. The next step, then, would be to offer this training and to observe how filling their perceived needs changes the way in which they see themselves as educators, and how ongoing professional development in the areas suggested above—such as classes, observations, mentoring, networking, and attending the same professional development as permanent teachers—prepares them to teach. It would also be important to monitor how the development of substitute teachers

district are accumulated at a rate of ten per school year.

might change the ways in which teachers use them or the kinds of plans they leave. Since substitute teachers described feeling unwelcome, it would be important to also observe how training substitute teachers and discussing the issue of rapport with classroom teachers might change the ways in which substitute teachers are able to establish relationships at school sites.

Many teachers and some administrators held the perception that there was a high turnover rate among substitute teachers. However, since substitute teachers reported working an average of 4.8 years²⁶, it would be interesting to track this turnover, and to learn why substitute teachers leave the field. If turnover is lower than some teachers and administrators assume, this would bolster the argument that an investment in training would have a long-term impact.

The pool of substitute teachers is diverse. While some substitutes are brand new to teaching, others are retired teachers who have spent an entire career in the classroom. It would be helpful to understand whether, and to what extent, the amount of a substitute teacher's experience in the classroom—either as a substitute or classroom teacher—impacts that substitute teacher's effectiveness, either in terms of teacher perception or some objective measure of success.

Much of the data regarding the substitute teachers is based upon the perceptions of classroom teachers and administrators, most of whom reported spending little time observing these teachers at work. Since these perceptions do not necessarily correlate to the successful transfer of knowledge in the classroom, it would be helpful to develop an

²⁶ Mean: 4.8 years, median: 3.2 years.

objective measure of the success of the substitute teacher. This instrument could then be used to compare the instructional effectiveness of substitute teachers, and to determine which of their attributes are most closely correlated with student success.

Final Reflections

Current research has shown that school culture is difficult to change (DuFour, 1998). However, the recommendations presented in this study are relatively straightforward. Classroom teachers do not believe that substitute teachers are well-prepared for their job, and usually give them review materials to cover in their absence. In spite of the vast amount of time that students spend with substitute teachers, they are not trained and often feel unsupported or even unwelcome at schools. They are highly interested in expanding their capacities and would like the opportunity to become trained in classroom management, curriculum, and instructional methods. Teachers would be more comfortable with more well-trained substitute teachers, the substitutes would become more confident in their skills, and students would benefit from improving the continuity of instruction. While this issue has sat on the backburner of the minds of many managers of substitute teachers, providing substitutes the support they need holds the potential to make a powerful impact upon the students they serve.

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