Substitute Teachers: Making Lost Days Count[*]

Charlene True

Kyle Butler

Rachel Sefton

This work is produced by The Connexions Project and licensed under the
Creative Commons Attribution License [†]

Abstract

As K-12 teachers and administrators grow increasingly concerned with issues of accountability, research-based methods, and intervention strategies, little discussion exists on the impact of substitute teachers in the classroom. In the rush to analyze test scores, are the days covered by substitute teachers even considered? Though districts are implementing policies and strategies to limit teacher absences from the classroom, substitute teachers are still an integral part of our educational system. And yet, at times, they are the most neglected. The purpose of this article is to discuss four attributes of a quality substitute teacher program: (a) selection, (b) induction, (c) development, and (d) evaluation. A theoretical framework from the literature is used to both define the attributes of a quality substitute teacher program and explore specific strategies that can be used to improve substitute teacher programs. Finally, additional surveys are provided to help facilitate the evaluation of any substitute teacher program.

1 *The International Journal of Educational Leadership Preparation*, Volume 6, Number 1, January - March, 2011, ISSN 2155-9635

---

[*]Version 1.3: Jan 10, 2011 8:14 am US/Central

[†]http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/

[1]http://www.ncpeapublications.org

2 Sumario en espanol

Como K-12 maestros y los administradores crecen cada vez más preocupado con asuntos de responsabilidad, de los métodos investigación-basados, y de estrategias de intervención, discusión pequeña existe en el impacto de maestros suplentes en el aula. ¿En el apuro para analizar puntuaciones, son cubiertos los días por maestros suplentes aún considerado? Aunque distritos aplican las políticas y las estrategias para limitar a maestro ausencias del aula, maestros suplentes son todavía una parte esencial de nuestro sistema de enseñanza. Y todavía, a veces, ellos son el más descuidado. El propósito de este artículo es de discutir cuatro atributos de una calidad programa suplente de maestro: (Un) selección, (B) inducción, (C) el desarrollo, y (D) evaluación. Una armazón teórica de la literatura es utilizada definir los atributos de una calidad programa suplente de maestro y explorar estrategias específicas que pueden ser utilizadas para mejorar programas suplentes de maestro. Por último, inspecciones adicionales son proporcionadas para ayudar a facilitar la evaluación de programa suplente de maestro.

> NOTE: Esta es una traducción por computadora de la página web original. Se suministra como información general y no debe considerarse completa ni exacta.

3 Introduction

It is estimated that on any given school day, 8-13% of America's schoolchildren are being taught by substitute teachers (Glass, 2001). And although it would be nice to think that all substitutes have at least a baccalaureate degree, this is often not the case. Gresham, Donihoo, and Cox (2007) note that many school systems require only 30 hours of accredited postsecondary hours. And school districts in 21 US states require only a high school diploma (The Substitute Teaching Institute at Utah State University, 2010a). Across the country, only about 42% of substitute teachers go through an orientation, and less than 10% get any skills training (Delisio, 2008). If schools and teachers are going to be judged by students' test scores ("No Child Left Behind Law of 2001," 2002; Stewart, 2010), and if substitute teachers are going to continue to be an integral part of the educational process, then we must ensure that substitutes are adequately prepared for the classroom. According to Richard G. Welsch (2001), "this is done by hiring quality substitutes, maintaining ongoing professional development, performing routine evaluations, furnishing resources and support, [. . .] and valuing substitutes as staff members" (p.374).

4 Selection

High expectations for excellence should be set at the beginning of the hiring process with a professional application and interview (Welsch, 2001). The application process should be designed so that prospective substitutes are required to demonstrate adequate knowledge of active teaching and learning, appropriate student interaction, and effective classroom management (Welsch, 2001). This can be accomplished by using questions in the interview that would typically be asked of classroom teachers. Below are some suggested questions adapted from the National Middle School Association website (2009):

- Why do you want to be a substitute teacher?
- What makes you well-suited to be a substitute teacher?
- What experience have you had in educational settings?
- What experience have you had with special education or English-as-a-second-language students?
- Describe some characteristics of elementary (or middle or secondary) students.
- What are some ways that kids learn?
- What are some different teaching strategies for meeting the learning needs of all students?
- How would you describe your instructional style?
- How do you motivate students to get engaged in the learning process?
- Are you comfortable with using technology?

- How do you begin class?
- What is your personal discipline plan?
- How have you handled a student who was repeatedly disruptive in class?
- Describe the toughest student you have dealt with and how you resolved the situation.

Answers to such questions can provide insight on substitute candidates' beliefs about best practice and/or their professional expertise based on any prior training and experience. In addition to application documentation and professional references, problem-based or situational questions on past behavior and current beliefs are the best predictor of future performance (Clement, 2006).

5 Induction

School personnel should take the opportunity, before a substitute teacher's first assignment, to welcome the substitute and emphasize the important role of the substitute teachers in the success of the school and its students (Welsch, 2001; O'Connor, 2009). This can, perhaps, be accomplished at a regular faculty meeting, where the classroom teachers can meet the substitutes face-to-face and exchange contact information. This experience should be intentional and help develop positive dispositions toward the school and students; if not, a lack of "partnership" creates low confidence in substitute teachers, substitute teachers become frustrated, discipline problems rise, and there is a valuable loss in teaching time (Tomlinson, 1997).

Therefore, based on feedback from past substitutes, school districts are inducting substitutes using strategies such as:

- The creation of a substitute teaching handbook for training and orientation.
- Implementing an orientation for all substitutes including: pay issues, health issues, legal requirements, harassment legislation.
- The implementation of substitute coordinators (site personnel responsible for contacting and contracting substitutes) and providing an opportunity for relationship building between substitutes and respective coordinators.
- A rotating system of two assistant principals – one elementary, the other representing secondary schools – to help provide training on classroom discipline and management.
- Training sessions on the implementation of classroom activities and instructional strategies, which include video training of best practice by veteran substitutes and teachers.
- Training sessions with social workers on child abuse and suicide prevention.
- Training sessions on non-confrontational confrontation. (Ballard, 2005)

No matter what initial training exists, substitute teachers should be treated as professionals and given as much information as possible for them to do their jobs well. Therefore, in an effort to provide an immediate source of information to substitute teachers, individual schools should provide their substitutes with a handbook that contains information about the school district and that particular school; relevant policies, legal information, and crisis plans; contact information for the school personnel; schedules; and lesson plans (Welsch, 2001; Provencio, 2003; Gresham et al., 2007).

6 Development

With respect to pedagogical knowledge and skills, it is imperative that substitute teachers understand that (a) student engagement comes from implementing effective teaching strategies; (b) effective classroom management, while maintaining consistency and fairness, is tailored to the needs of the students; and (c) effective teachers are teacher-learners who discuss previous experiences with each other, share their expertise, and formulate questions (Welsch, 2001). According to Glatfelter (2006), both teachers and substitutes feel that substitute teachers do a poor job at classroom management, do not know how to teach the curriculum well, and are not competent with instructional strategies; however, substitute teachers are eager to learn

about them. If this motivation is ignored, "principals and superintendents are missing opportunities to increase the potential of learning for students at their schools" (O'Connor, 2009, p. 34).

Therefore, in addition to an initial training, some school districts are (a) creating multiple days of mandatory school visits where substitutes are given the opportunity to meet school administrators and substitute coordinators, visit classrooms to observe teachers, as well as be briefed on the school's organization and procedures; and (b) creating a substitute teaching webpage on the district's website, which includes information on substitute teacher training, additional resources, and a quarterly newsletter (Ballard, 2005). The Substitute Teaching Institute at Utah State University also offers a wealth of resources not only for initial training but also for refresher courses, most of which is available online through the Substitute Teaching Division website http://stedi.org (STI/USU, 2010b).

If possible, it is recommended that a substitute teaching practicum be developed with classroom observations, mentoring, networking, and the same professional development as permanent teachers (Glatfelter, 2006). Welsch (2001) claims that "staff development is no longer viewed as something that is needed only for teachers. All individuals who affect student learning [...] must continually improve their knowledge and skills" (p.374). Therefore, it is crucial that substitute teachers be included in staff development, which include being involved in school improvement initiatives and engaging with local teachers in professional learning communities.

7 Evaluation

In order to improve the effectiveness of substitute teachers and the school/classroom environment in which they work, it is vital that evaluative information be collected from the principal, the classroom teacher, and the substitute teacher. Feedback should include information from the principal about the substitute teacher's general attributes and information from the classroom teacher about how well the substitute carried out the plans. The substitute teachers should report on how well the school and the classroom teacher prepared for the substitute teacher, including the availability of resources and the completeness of lesson plans. Feedback forms should either be included in the handbook for substitute teachers (Welsch, 2001) or made available online. To help facilitate time and effort concerns, the authors recommend an online version of these forms, which can be completed quickly and submitted to the central office for analysis.

For the principal rating, it is recommended that each substitute teacher be evaluated in six categories: (a) punctuality, (b) cooperation, (c) professionalism, (d) appearance, (e) classroom management, and (f) an overall rating (See Table 1).

Principal's Report

Substitute Teacher Appraisal: Principal's Report				
1. Please list Today's Date, Substitute Teacher, School, Dates of Service, Teacher/Class:				
	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor
2. Punctuality				
			continued on next page	

3. Cooperation				
4. Professional-ism				
5. Appearance				
6. Classroom Management				
7. General Rating				
8. Suggestions for Improvement:				
9. Principal:				

Table 1

For the classroom teacher's report, the emphasis should be focused on the substitute's ability to follow directions, leave the classroom environment as they found it, and provide the necessary feedback to the classroom teacher. An example of this form can be seen in Table 2.

Classroom Teacher's Report

Substitute Teacher Appraisal: Classroom Teacher's Report
1. Please list Today's Date, Substitute Teacher, School, Dates of Service, Teacher/Class:
continued on next page

	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor
2. The lesson plans were followed				
3. The directed schedule was followed				
4. The equipment and supplies were used as instructed				
5. The equipment and supplies were left in order				
6. A summary of the substitute teaching day(s) was present				
			continued on next page	

	Yes	No
7. Would you request this substitute teacher again?		
8. Suggestions for Improvement:		
9. Classroom Teacher:		

Table 2

Another reason for online surveys is to help facilitate input from substitute teachers after the experience is completed. Districts may want to require substitutes to complete the survey before compensation is given. Questions for the substitute will focus on both the classroom teacher's directions/preparedness and on rating the school climate of the faculty and staff (See Table 3).

Substitute Teacher's Report

Substitute Teacher's Report				
1. Please list Today's Date, Substitute Teacher, School, Classroom Teacher, Dates of Service:				
	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor
2. Lesson plans were easy to find				
				continued on next page

3. Lesson plans were easy to understand			
4. Equipment and supplies were present and easily accessible			
5. The teacher explained any extra duties or irregularity of the schedule			
6. The faculty and the staff at the school were friendly and helpful			
			continued on next page

	Yes	No
7. Would you want to substitute for this teacher again?		
8. Would you want to substitute at this school again?		
9. What could the school or school system do to help you be more effective in your job? Additional Comments?		
10. Substitute Teacher:		

Table 3

This information, with data from the principal and classroom teacher, can be triangulated to help inform school improvement initiatives. It has the potential to empower school administration to make data-driven decisions related to substitute teaching improvement. Some of these are:

- Do we need more training for our teachers on how to prepare for a substitute?
- Are certain teachers not giving substitutes the tools and information they need to be successful?
- Is there an issue with school climate that we need to address?
- Is this substitute a good candidate for a long-term substitute position?
- Is this substitute a good candidate to recommend to other principals for substitute positions?
- Is this substitute best suited for particular classrooms, all classrooms, or specialty areas?
- Is this substitute a candidate that should only be considered on a limited basis?
- Should this substitute no longer be considered for a substitute teaching position. (O'Connor, 2009)

8 Conclusion

Schools are facing challenges of the highest proportion, so amid the mountains of paperwork and politics, it is easy to overlook the individuals who replace teachers on a regular basis. However, thousands of students are impacted every day by classrooms staffed by substitute teachers. Ensuring that substitute teachers receive

a clear and discernable message regarding high expectations for excellence, quality staff development, and thorough evaluation may be a way that school districts can decrease the need for additional interventions and credit recovery programs. Being intentional about a quality substitute teacher program can help strengthen the cultural climate of the school and, in regard to student performance, has great potential in helping to make the lost days count.

9 References

Ballard, M. B. (2005). One district's experience in creating an effective substitute training program. *Sub-Journal, 6*(1), 40-47. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 491887)

Delisio, E. R. (2008). Setting new "sub" standards. *Education World.* Retrieved from http://www.education-world.com/a_admin/admin/admin429.shtml

Clement, M. C. (2006). The game has changed: Tips for finding a new teaching position. *Kappa Delta Pi Record, 42*(3), 115-119. Retrieved from http://www.kdp.org/publications/kdprecord/archives.php

Glass, R. S. (2001). Subs looking for a little R-E-S-P-E-C-T. *American Teacher, 85*(8), 8. Retrieved from http://www.aft.org/pubs-reports/american_teacher/may_jun01/subs.html

Glatfelter, A. G. (2006). *Substitute teachers as effective classroom teachers.* Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of California, Los Angeles. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED494940)

Gresham, J., Donihoo, J., & Cox, T. (2007). 5 strategies to enhance your substitute teaching. *Kappa Delta Pi Record, 44*(1), 28-32. Retrieved from http://www.kdp.org/publications/[2] kdprecord/archives.php

National Middle School Association (2009). Sample interview questions and approaches- Teacher and administrator positions at the middle level. Retrieved from https://www.docstoc.com/pass/40780066

No Child Left Behind Law of 2001, PL 107-110, 107th Congress, 115 Stat. 1425 (2002) (enacted). Retrieved from http://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/esea02/107-110.pdf

O'Connor, K. O. (2009). No substitute left behind. *Principal, (Sept/Oct),* 32-36.

Provencio, D. (2003). *Standing in your shoes: A checklist for classroom and substitute teachers.* Washington, D.C.: National Education Association.

Stewart, B. (2010). Why all the fuss over value-added teacher data? *The Hechinger Report.* Retrieved from http://hechingerreport.org/content/why-all-the-fuss-over-value-added-teacher-data_4436/

The Substitute Teaching Institute at Utah State University (2010). Subskills part 1 - How to become a substitute teacher. Retrieved from http://stedi.org/subs/subskills/How-To-Become-A-Substitute-Teacher.aspx

The Substitute Teaching Institute at Utah State University (2010). Guided training for substitute teachers. Retrieved from http://stedi.org/subs/training

Tomlinson, S. B. (1997). *A substitute teacher training program to improve skills and confidence in substitute teachers at the middle school level.* Unpublished Masters Theses, Nova Southeastern University. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED417162)

Welsch, R. G. (2001). Substitutes with significance: Increasing the impact of substitute teachers in special education. *Teacher Education and Special Education, 24*(4), 373-382. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. EJ639122)

---

[2]http://www.kdp.org/publications/