

# Substitute Teachers Need Supervisory Help

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**T**HE professional development, situation, and problems of the substitute teacher have not been a topic of vital concern for researchers and practitioners in the field of educational administration. Therefore, the supervisory efforts of school systems have been concentrated for the most part on the professional growth of its full-time teaching staff, while the substitute teaching staff has been virtually neglected.

Substitute teachers generally fall into one of the following categories: (a) those persons who have recently graduated from college, but are unable to find a regular full-time teaching position; (b) those persons, especially women, who are raising a family and for that and other reasons do not necessarily want a permanent assignment, or college teacher-trained men and women who hold nonteaching positions, but wish to supplement their family income by substituting in the schools on an irregular basis; (c) those persons who hold a college degree, but are lacking in certain education courses required to become fully or permanently certificated; and (d) those permanently certificated teachers who have retired and wish to supplement their income by substituting, but are limited in the number of days they can work and in the amount of income they are permitted to earn according to the provisions of their retirement and age.

Unfortunately, the regular full-time

school staff, collectively, tends to perceive the substitute teacher as an incompetent, unqualified professional—someone who does not have the necessary credentials to become a regular full-time teacher. The substitute teacher is regarded as a fill-in, second-best, second-rate teacher, and in some cases as a mercenary soldier—one who comes to fill in only because it is a profitable venture. Teachers, also, tend to feel that the pupils are shortchanged whenever they have had a substitute teacher; that the day or days spent with him or her have been lost or wasted; and that the unfortunate consequences of this circumstance will be heaped upon the regular full-time teacher when he returns.

## A "Fill-In"

Principals and supervisors have been accused of expecting, primarily, a responsible "warm body" to fill in and keep order or to "baby-sit" with the children whenever the regular full-time teacher is absent. Typically, principals and supervisors are concerned with how well the substitute teacher maintains classroom control, follows school regulations and procedures, and completes the necessary attendance forms and other

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office reports. The substitute teacher who maintains control over the classroom—one who does not send pupils to the office for disciplinary reasons too often—is commissioned into service on a frequent basis.

The regular full-time teacher, on the other hand, typically expects the substitute teacher to leave his room intact, just as he had it before he was absent. In addition, if the full-time teacher has left a lesson plan, he expects it to be followed regardless of how impossible this task may be. Also, regular full-time teachers are concerned about being saddled upon their return with reams of "busy-work" papers to grade that they feel the substitute teacher may have given to the pupils in order to keep them quiet and in their seats, or as punishment.

Periodically, a newspaper article will appear in which a reporter working as a substitute teacher reveals many of the problems he faced on a particular day in school. Apparently well-documented claims are made that the substitute teacher is called on the

morning that he is needed much too late to get to the particular school for the beginning of the school day. This seemingly unavoidable situation complicates the problems and duties of the substitute teacher. The exact nature of the substitute teacher's assignment and duties is not known until he arrives at the particular school. He faces the problem of finding the school through a maze of unfamiliar streets, an adequate or legal parking space at or near the school, and in some cases the front door of the school or even the principal's office. Once at the school's office, more than likely, he is not there at the beginning of the school day; without doubt, he senses the negative perceptions and expectations a principal tends to have for substitute teachers, which is also in evidence among the teachers once he enters their lounge and/or lunchroom.

The trials and tribulations of the substitute teacher accelerate as he attempts to absorb the contents of the mammoth school handbook—if he is given one—and eventu-

ally to decipher the hieroglyphics of the regular full-time teacher's lesson plans—if they are available. Finding supplies, equipment, seating charts, books, and so forth in the classroom may seem as difficult as finding his way in and around the school. Once before the class, he is reminded that he has a similar lack of authority and prestige among the pupils that he has among the teachers and administrative staff.

The lunchroom, typically, is filled with coolness—no one to talk to, and a search for someone to reassure him that he will make it through the day. Once back on the job in the afternoon with his "bag of tricks" running low, he somehow seems to maneuver through the rest of the day. As he scurries toward the principal's office to get his daily pay voucher signed, hardly anyone seems concerned with how or what he did during the day. It seems to be assumed that he put in a typical substitute teaching day and he in turn will get a day of substitute pay. He cannot help but feel that his "ears will burn" the next day—his presence in the classroom that day will be the first item on the regular full-time teacher's agenda for tomorrow with the pupils, in addition to being the topic of the day in the teachers lounge with the rest of the faculty.

## **A Shift in Policy**

What then is needed, initially, is a shift in policy such that school systems will provide a budget for each school in its district to recruit a regular corps of substitute teachers (preferably from as close to the community as possible), teachers who will become participating and contributing members of the regular full-time teaching staff. This would mean that the substitute teacher would be expected to attend and to participate in scheduled teachers meetings, in-service programs, and parent/teacher meetings and functions.

Schools, administrators, supervisors, teachers, and pupils would benefit from such a policy implementation. Substitute teachers would acquire status and prestige similar to that possessed by full-time regular teachers.

They would also benefit by being connected professionally with a particular school, and would be provided with an opportunity to acquire closer identities with the school, pupils, and staff. Also, they would have an opportunity to grow professionally along with the rest of the full-time staff. In essence, when they have been given a stake in the development of school policy, they in turn acquire an obligation and responsibility to see that it is implemented.

Full-time teachers would benefit from knowing that a qualified teacher, one they know on a professional and personal basis, is going to take over their classes in their absence. It would seem to be quite reassuring to know that your pupils and classroom have been left in competent hands. Friendships and associations, also, can be formed such that many of the unfounded perceptions and nonprofessional expectations held for substitute teachers by teachers and administrators can be dispelled.

The pupils in the schools would benefit from being exposed whenever their regular full-time teacher is absent, to a substitute teacher who is considered a regular member of the faculty team. It is reasonable to expect less serious disruption in the regular continuous developmental school program to occur under such an arrangement. The school benefits to the degree that it will have access to a qualified teacher who is familiar with the community and the school, its policies, procedures, pupils, and staff in the absence of the regular full-time teacher.

Also, it is possible that the school will be placed in a better position to give the substitute teacher adequate notification that his services for a particular day or number of days are needed, so that it may be feasible to have a replacement for the absent regular full-time teacher closer to the beginning of the school day. Administrators and supervisors are placed in a favored position to provide adequate on-the-job supervision for the substitute teacher without arousing fear and/or apprehensions in the substitute teacher, such as: (a) making periodic classroom visits and holding end-of-the-day conferences, (b) assisting the substitute teacher

to acquire materials and supplies if needed or requested, and (c) conducting evaluations of the substitute teacher's services and of the existing supervisory services.

School systems, reasonably, seem to operate on the assumption that for various reasons substitute teachers are less experienced; are not as knowledgeable of school routines, rules, procedures; and are not as well-acquainted with the pupils and community as are regularly assigned full-time teachers in the schools. The ameliorative approach that is needed is for the school system and its schools to provide supervisory services of a quality at least equivalent to that provided for the regular full-time teaching staff, and preferably in conjunction with them. When this happens the school system, its schools, administrators, supervisors, and teachers deservedly can expect a higher quality of professional service from their substitute teachers.

## To Improve Instruction

Supervision, specifically, should be directed toward the improvement of instruction. Its ultimate purposes should be to support and to promote pupil growth, learning, and leadership; and cooperatively to promote and develop optimum conditions for teaching, learning, and living. The supervisor's responsibilities should include building

and promoting attitudes and relationships conducive to constructive action-oriented goal achievement.

Other necessary and important supervisory services should be provided that emphasize: (a) greater proficiency and dedication in assuming the obligations of teaching; (b) cooperative group planning and activities expressly aimed at building mutual respect between teachers, upgrading morale, and stimulating professional and personal growth among/between faculty members; (c) understanding policies regarding pupil grouping, marking, and reporting to parents, and the preparation and completion of school forms and reports; (d) knowing the procedures a teacher should follow when he expects to be absent, what to expect of the substitute teacher who takes over his classroom, and what the substitute teacher can realistically expect from the regular full-time teacher when substituting in the classroom; (e) understanding the procedures for acquiring books, supplies, and equipment, and for using special school facilities such as the library, gymnasium, and lunchroom; (f) understanding the overall philosophy, policies, and objectives of the school and the community, its structure and its culture; and (g) discussing and explaining the purposes and functions of supervision and evaluation as well as the role of the supervisor. It seems reasonable to expect these services to be made available to the entire faculty team.

The research vacuum in this area needs to be filled. Substitute teachers are here to stay, unless some other means is obtained for ensuring perfect attendance from the regular full-time teacher staff. Therefore, we need to learn more about the concerns, problems, and situation of the substitute teacher. Specific research needs include studies of innovative plans for substitute teacher utilization, their supervisory needs, their problems, and the impact/effects of their utilization on pupils' learning, growth, and development. After all, a substitute teacher is a person who functions with children, and his performance and needs should concern us all. □

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