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Introduction

Rewards of substitute teaching

This is the true joy in life, the being used for a purpose recognized by yourself as a mighty one.

George Bernard Shaw
(Lincoln & Suid, 1986, p. 60)

Substitute teachers are a special breed. Called in, often on a moment's notice, they teach students they may never have worked with, until that day. Then, the next day, they tackle another group, at another year level, at another school. Substitutes constantly shift their attention and activities to bring quality teaching to a changing population of students.

Despite its transient manner and frequent shifts of focus, there are rewards to be had for this profession.

1. Substituting allows for a flexible schedule. If a person chooses not to work on a particular day, that's okay.
2. Substituting invites a person to 'get a foot in the door'. Principals have the opportunity to see the teacher in action. That first-hand view can make the difference when a position opens in the building.

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3. While substituting, a person gains valuable experience that can be used in future substituting dates or a future full-time classroom position. Substitute teachers have an advantage over many teachers, because they see so many students in so many classrooms and so many settings. Some even have teaching experiences from preschool to year 12 before they leave the substitute life. What a valuable vantage point.
4. Substituting allows people to practise their learned skills until such time as a teaching job opens for them. Many people graduate from university with teaching certificates but are unable to gain full-time employment in the classroom. Newly certified people can get an edge on others by making themselves available to substitute.

But, not everyone is a candidate for the monumental tasks associated with the job of being a substitute teacher. Are you? As you read the book, reflect on the issues brought out by examining the life of a substitute teacher, and decide if it's something you might want to do.



Chapter 1

Qualifying to be a substitute teacher: The right stuff

*First say to yourself what you would be;
and then do what you have to do.*

Epictetus
(Lincoln & Suid, 1986, p. 57)

Not everyone can be a substitute teacher. All schools require a certain set of qualifications to be approved for substitute duty. As Manera (1996) wrote, substitutes need 'teaching skills, professional attributes, and personal characteristics...' (p. 2). Effective teaching requires the substitute to know and be able to impart the content of the lesson in such a way that students will be able to learn and remember. To accomplish that monumental task, the substitute needs to present themselves as a competent, organised, professional adult. While filling the role of a substitute, a person must demonstrate the highest standards of morality and legality. As this book describes, these are cornerstone qualities to a positive substituting experience.

In addition to these core qualities, to be successful, substitutes need management techniques, an ability to work with students and knowledge of the subject matter. That isn't to say that a substitute must have the same level

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of content knowledge as the teacher, however, because substitutes may be in five different classes in any given week, it's often best if they have a wide range of content knowledge. Yet, having at least some background knowledge in the content area sends an immediate message to the students of the substitute's competence.

**... substitutes are
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high demand ...**

In addition to having content knowledge and student management techniques, a substitute must also behave professionally. When in a teacher's classroom, the substitute becomes the teacher for the day and must act in professional ways. They must preserve information confidentiality, interact honourably and tactfully with other staff and parents, dress suitably and comport themselves with integrity and decorum. Although substitutes are in short supply and high demand, schools insist that their substitutes be respectable adults who can positively influence their students.

Substitutes need a storehouse of energy to meet the demands of each new classroom. Even as their proficiency is being tested, they have opportunities to hone their skills – both high-energy undertakings that call on interpersonal traits, such as initiative, flexibility and adaptability, key characteristics of successful substitutes.

Yet, one barrier to successful substituting is the stereotypical misperception of substitute teachers as merely babysitters. Many teachers have busy work to be completed in their absence, and students view that absence as a 'free day'. Most parents want certified teachers in front of the classroom and feel substitutes don't stack up in this respect. The easiest way to combat this



misperception is to actively build rapport with faculty, students, administration and community members.

One good way to build that rapport is to be visible in the community – shop in the local supermarket, fill up at the nearby petrol station, and order pizza from the pizza place across from the school. Become a familiar face with a smile. When the misperception is disproved, the barrier easily dissolves. Then, enhance the positive perception by maintaining a positive reputation as a caring adult. Get involved in community activities, make connections with teacher leaders, read the local newspaper for positive news about students and their families and yes, attend a soccer game or a concert or two. Be visible, become involved, demonstrate interest – and stereotypes disappear.



Chapter 2

Choosing a career: Life as a professional substitute teacher

Every calling is great when greatly pursued.

Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr.
(Lincoln & Suid, 1986, p. 14)

Substitute teachers provide an essential service for schools. However, being a substitute teacher is a difficult role to fill. On the one hand, substituting can provide an incredible amount of experience; on the other hand, it is not like having one's own classroom. Classroom teachers develop connections with the same students in day-after-day interactions; substitute teachers develop connections with different students in one day of interaction. Still, some people like the diversity that substituting provides. They choose to make it a temporary or permanent career. That's great, because schools always need quality substitutes.

Each school has its own set of procedures and criteria for substitute teachers. Legally all schools require their substitutes to have a four-year teaching qualification. Because student safety is paramount, schools also require police checks of all people who work with students. This includes teachers, tuck-shop workers, aides and assistants, parent helpers and yes, substitutes. So, don't be alarmed if you're asked to provide a police check.



Each school also has its own application process. Usually, a person needs to visit the school to obtain an application. The application requires background information and a list of references. After completing the application, the potential substitute delivers the papers to the appropriate person. After a check on references, each potential substitute must be officially registered as a teacher before being added to the substitute list. After this vetting process has been completed, the approved substitute is added to the approved substitutes' call list.

And, of course, each school has its own pay policy. Usually, per diem substitutes do not receive benefit packages from the school. Long service leave, holiday pay, sick days and so forth, which are part and parcel of a teacher's contract, are generally not provided for day-to-day substitutes. They usually do not receive tenure appointments.

After being added to the substitute list, the teacher sits back and waits for a call from the school. The person who arranges the substitute requests may be a secretary, a principal, an assistant or a person hired specifically for that purpose.

Substitutes receive three basic kinds of calls: pre-planned, early morning and emergency. If the date has been pre-planned, it is always a good idea to call a couple of days ahead to confirm. Sometimes, workshops are cancelled or appointments change, and the substitutes request is no longer needed. Checking ahead of the scheduled day saves some confusion.