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# Literacy and the Substitute Teacher

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# Literacy and the Substitute Teacher

by

Lindsay Christine Helen Gaylor

August 2009

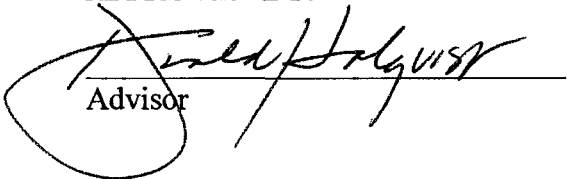
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requirements for the degree of Master of Science in Education

Literacy and the Substitute Teacher

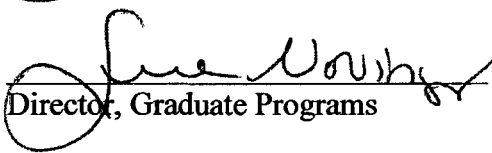
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## Chapter One: Introduction

Around 8 o'clock in the morning, I receive a phone call to be at a school by 8:30 a.m. for a sixth grade science class. Receiving such a call is unusual because the school day at this particular school starts at 7:25 a.m. Upon arriving at the school, albeit five minutes late, I am informed by the secretary that the substitute who filled in for the teacher the previous day, unexpectedly, did not show up today. The secretary also mentions that there will be a school assembly in the middle of second period. I enter the science classroom, just as second period is commencing and as a consequent, most of the students are already in the room, gathered in groups talking to friends. Initially, I feel panic rising in me: the students are already there and I can't find any substitute teaching plans. What am I going to do? Fortunately, the students continue to talk amongst themselves at their seats while I rustle through the stacks of papers on the teacher's desk. After what seems like an eternity but in reality is probably no more than five minutes, I find the teacher's plan book which indicates that the students are supposed to watch a *Bill Nye: The Science Guy* video. I provide the students with a brief introduction and start the video. I continue to rifle through the papers on the top of the teacher's desk, in order to plan ahead for additional class activities. Unfortunately, after the video has been playing for ten minutes, I find the worksheet that the students are to complete while watching it. I pause the video, distribute the worksheet and then resume the video. Consequently, the students may have missed some



answers to the questions that were addressed in the video prior to my distributing the worksheet. To add to the chaos and confusion, there is an assembly schedule for the middle of the period. At the designated time, I stop the video and ask the students to line up. Students frequently ask, “Why are we having an assembly?” Unfortunately, I am not able to tell them why because I have not been informed of the assembly’s content. After the assembly, the students and I return to the classroom and the students finish watching the video for the remainder of the period. I use the additional time to plan for the remaining periods of the school day.

### **Problem Statement**

Every day as a substitute teacher, I am faced with a variety of challenges and differing expectations from classroom teachers. The above vignette is typical of situations I often experience. I am frequently confronted with different and unclear expectations as to what instructional techniques and strategies the classroom teachers plan for me to carry out in their classroom. After a day of substitute teaching, I may have gone through a range of different emotions such as frustration, anxiety, joy and a sense of accomplishment, often depending on the materials, lesson plans and student behavior I have encountered.

As a substitute teacher, it is my responsibility to provide the best possible education even in the brief time that I am in a particular classroom. However, during the course of my work, I have found it difficult, at times, to provide quality

instruction to students due to poorly prepared lesson plans, and my unfamiliarity with classroom routines and/or my inability to locate classroom materials. Generally, if I am requested back to substitute teach in the same classroom, I find that, as I gradually become more familiar with the classroom, I am able to devote more of my attention toward quality instruction.

### **Significance of Problem**

During the course of their kindergarten through grade 12 careers, American students spend approximately 5-10 percent of their classroom time with substitute teachers (Nidds & McGerald, 1994). This statistic demonstrates the important and significant role that substitute teachers play in the education of children in the United States. In order to provide quality education to children and to help ensure that they meet educational standards, school personnel and administrators cannot dismiss the importance of substitute teachers.

### **Study Approach**

This study was a qualitative self-study; as such, I was the only participant. The data and observations gathered were based on the substitute teaching placements I was assigned to over the course of four months. According to LaBoskey (2004), there are five characteristics of self-study methodology: self-initiated and focused, improvement aimed, interactive, primarily qualitative methods, and exemplar-based validation. In this qualitative self-study, I constantly worked to ensure that all five

characteristics were achieved. The study was self-initiated, focused and improvement aimed because through the course of the study my aim was to improve my practices as a substitute teacher and as a future classroom teacher. Additionally, the study was interactive because I met regularly with my graduate student colleagues to discuss my data collection and analysis processes and shared my tentative findings. Through thoughtful reflections related to the practice of substitute teaching, I garnered data pertaining to my experiences in a variety of classrooms working with an array of students. Through the reflections, I also captured the varied expectations of classroom teachers for literacy instruction by substitute teachers.

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this self-study was to analyze my own substitute teaching, especially with regard to literacy instruction. In this study, I analyzed how the expectations of classroom teachers informed my current work as a substitute teacher and my future work as a classroom teacher. Throughout the self-study, I explored the following research questions: (a) How do I, as a substitute teacher, negotiate classroom teachers' expectations related to literacy instruction? and (b) As a substitute teacher, how do I use the classroom environment to support my literacy instruction?

To answer these questions, I recorded my observations of the classroom literacy environment and reflected on my own literacy instruction during each substitute teaching experience. In addition, I collected or photocopied the lesson

plans left for me by the classroom teachers and any literacy-related worksheets that the students used during the course of the day. Through this study, I examined the different literacy instruction expectations that classroom teachers prescribed for me, and how I, negotiated the teacher's plans and unexpected events to the best of my ability and delivered quality literacy instruction.

### **Rationale**

Providing quality and effective instruction, even in the absence of the regular classroom teacher, is in the interest of all parties involved. Through this study, I investigated the literacy expectations classroom teachers place on substitute teachers. It is important to note that little research has been conducted regarding substitute teachers, especially from the perspective of substitute teachers. There are even fewer studies that address classroom teachers' literacy instruction expectations of substitute teachers. Conducting this study helped me generate data regarding what classroom teachers expect of substitutes in their absence and how substitute teachers might navigate these expectations and the literacy environment to provide quality instruction to students.

### **Summary**

Substitute teachers are an essential component of a child's education. All children, in the course of their schooling will be under the responsibility of a substitute teacher at some point. Therefore, because substitute teachers play a central

role in student success, it is important to study classroom teachers' expectations of substitute teachers. Different classroom teachers hold varying expectations for substitute teachers, therefore, it is necessary to examine how I, as substitute teacher, negotiated their expectations and came to understand what these experiences mean for my future work as a classroom teacher.

## **Chapter Two: Literature Review**

On any given school day in the United States, approximately 274,000 people go to work as substitute teachers (Vitello, 2007). This figure reflects the central and significant role substitute teachers play in maintaining continuity in students' education. The main purpose of a substitute teacher is to ensure that learning and regular classroom activities continue in the absence of the regular teacher (Dugglebury & Badali, 2007). Over the course of their 13 years in school, students spend a considerable amount of time with adults who are not their regular classroom teachers.

Though it could be argued that substitute teaching goes largely unnoticed, schools would not be able to successfully operate without the assistance of substitute teachers and, yet, little research has been conducted pertaining to the work of substitute teachers. In this chapter, I examine common challenges that substitute teachers often face in their day to day work—poor perceptions, difficulty with classroom management and inadequate lesson plans left by the regular classroom teacher. Once having discussed substitute teachers, I share what I consider to be the main components of an effective literacy instruction program. I conclude the chapter by discussing common literacy instruction present in western New York.

## **General Challenges Encountered by Substitute Teachers**

### ***Common Perceptions Substitute Teachers Hold of Themselves***

Because of the poor perceptions of substitute teachers commonly held by administrators, teachers and students, substitute teachers may experience difficulty viewing themselves as professionals (Ostapczuk, 1994). A Canadian study titled, *Substitute Teaching: Survival in a Marginal Situation*, Clifton and Rambaran (1987) made the argument that substitute teaching is a marginal occupation and “that substitute teachers cannot legitimate themselves because they do not have the authority in the school and they do not know the rituals of the classroom” (p. 311).

In order to collect evidence from a variety of perspectives and sources, Clifton and Rambaran (1987) conducted observations, interviews, and collected essays written by students. One of the researchers acted in the role of a participant-observer and observed nine substitute teachers in seven different schools. Two of the seven schools were visited twice, once to observe when a substitute teacher was teaching and then to observe the regular classroom teacher teaching. Observations were conducted in elementary, junior high and high schools. While recording the observations, the researcher sat in the back of the classroom and took detailed notes. It is important to note, that the researcher often interviewed the substitute teachers immediately after an observation period. The researchers interviewed 30 substitute teachers, 4 superintendents, 5 assistant superintendents, 10 principals, 4 vice principals and 20 regular classroom teachers. The researchers collected student-

written essays regarding substitute teachers, “from one grade 3 class in an elementary school, three grade 7 classes in a junior high school and two grade 9 classes in another junior high school” (Clifton & Rambaran, 1987, p. 312).

With regard as to how substitute teachers perceive themselves, Clifton and Rambaran (1987) reported that substitutes often experienced anxiety, did not feel satisfied, competent or recognized as a member of the educational community. Substitute teachers viewed themselves as holding low status and prestige in school and felt their efforts in classrooms were often unacknowledged. Furthermore, the substitute teachers reported that they rarely received positive feedback regarding their substitute teaching from either the classroom teacher or an administrator. Clifton and Rambaran (1987) stated that the substitute teachers often held the opinion that administrators and building staff perceived them as one-day employees, not worth much time and effort.

Low pay and lack of benefits also emphasize the low status of a substitute teacher. The pay of substitute teachers can vary greatly from district to district. According to Rundall and Terrell (2001), substitutes receive approximately half the pay of what the regular classroom teacher receives for the same day’s work. Rundall and Terrell also stated that if substitute teachers received pay commensurate to their responsibilities and appropriate benefits that likely “a better group of professionals would be lured out to compete in the sub market” (p. 184). Another factor which contributes to the phenomenon of substitute teachers not viewing themselves as professionals is the lack of support they receive in the school setting (Lassmann,



2001). Lack of support may be demonstrated by the lack of information such as incomplete or absent lesson plans, seating charts, building orientation and daily operating procedures that take place in a particular school presented to substitute teachers (Lassmann).

### ***Classroom Management***

Researchers have described classroom management as one of the greatest challenges confronted by substitute teachers (Nidds & McGerald, 1994; Ostapczuk, 1994). According to Abdal-Haqq (1997), some students may view a substitute teacher's presence as a signal to misbehave. One contributing factor regarding students' misbehavior in a substitute's presence is in what the students perceive as the substitute teacher's lack of legitimacy. Clifton and Ramabaran (1987) described substitute teachers as marginalized school employees. That is to say, as people who are not "integrated into the formal structure of an institution, and consequently cannot contribute meaningfully to the successful achievement of the desired goals of the institution" (p. 314). Clifton and Rambaran claimed that because substitute teachers do not possess the same authority as that of regular classroom teachers and because they do not have the knowledge of classroom routines, they appear to lack legitimacy in the view of regular teachers, administrators and students.

Classroom management will suffer if the substitute teacher is not aware of the classroom teacher's regular routine (Javernick, 2005). Even with highly detailed lesson plans, a gap in a substitute's perception of assignments and understanding of

students' needs is inevitable (Benedict, 1987). Often, as a result, students may resent the substitute's "intrusion into the continuity of the curriculum and into the personal relationship between them and their regular teacher" (Benedict, 1987, p. 27). This phenomenon is illustrated by a student who was quoted in Clifton and Rambaran's (1987) study:

If they try to explain something, they do it differently. Like, in math they tell you to do a problem this way. When the regular teacher comes back, she tells you to do it differently, and this happens quite a few times. It confuses you, and you don't know what to do. Then you get frustrated, and you just don't do it. You sit there, look around at everybody, wondering should I do it this way or should I do it that way? (pp. 323-324).

Another factor that may contribute to the misbehavior of students in the presence of a substitute teacher is related to the non-instructional lessons that the classroom teacher may leave for the substitute. According to Cardon (2002), students react to non-instructional lesson plans, such as videos and activity sheets like word searches, with more behavioral problems. One substitute teacher in Cardon's study explained that "discipline problems happen when there is nothing for the students to keep busy with. They really can't enjoy constant videos and crossword puzzles" (p. 38).

### ***Inadequate Lesson Plans***

As mentioned previously, a common challenge experienced by substitute teachers is inadequate plans left by the classroom teacher. Sometimes when substitute teachers arrive in a classroom in the morning, all that is left by the

classroom teachers is a “poor” lesson plan (Anderson & Gardner, 1995) that may create many questions for the substitute teacher such as how does the teacher usually do “calendar,” where would I locate a particular book, does the classroom teacher usually conduct this activity at the carpeted area or with the students seated at their desks, does the teacher want me to collect the worksheets, or should the students work independently or in groups. Anderson and Gardner (1995, p. 368) contend that when substitute teachers are left “no lesson plans or poor lesson plans,” it is often a major cause of apprehension in substitute teachers.

In her article, *A Hand to Substitutes*, first grade teacher, Javernick (2005) described ways in which she helps prepare her classroom for a substitute teacher. For example, she indicated that a substitute teacher’s stress level has a tendency to decrease when she has left a lesson plan in which the substitute teacher knows exactly what she wants to have accomplished on that particular day. Javernick argues that substitutes lose credibility in the eyes of children “when students are able to announce triumphantly, ‘We did that yesterday!’” (p. 47). Unclear lesson plans generate frustration in substitute teachers and thus likely reduces the amount of classroom control that the substitute can assume (Purvis & Garvey, 1993).

Mr. Ferrara, a school administrator, stated, “When we plan our lessons in such a way that substitutes do not teach ‘real’ lessons, we model this belief to our students” (Ferrara & Ferrara, 1993, p. 14). Ferrara’s words highlights the concept that when classroom teachers perceive a substitute teacher as not capable of productive, interesting and academically orientated lessons, the message is conveyed to students

that the substitute teacher is less capable and does not deserve the same respect as the classroom teacher. It is important to note that the classroom teacher's methods of classroom management and well-designed lessons are highly related (Ferrara & Ferrara, 1993). Generally, the clearer and more explicit the lesson plans, the easier it is for the substitute teacher to manage the students' behavior successfully (Ferrara & Ferrara, 1993). This is due to the fact that the substitute teacher has a clear understanding of the classroom teacher's expectations and the classroom routines, and as a result, is better able to act in a consistent manner similar to that of the classroom teacher.

### **Recommendations for Classroom Teachers to Prepare the Substitute Teacher**

A classroom teacher, in preparation for his or her absenteeism from school, can do a multitude of tasks to help prepare for a substitute teacher. Gorrow, Muller and Parsons (2007) recommended that a classroom teacher prepare "detailed, meaningful substitute plans" (p. 14). The authors stated that a classroom teacher should presume that the substitute teacher will know nothing regarding the classroom teacher's particular subject area and that writing a lesson in a script-form will help a substitute teacher successfully carry out the proposed lesson. Gorrow et al. also emphasized the necessity to provide substitute teachers with additional information regarding class schedule, seating charts, the classroom discipline plans, students who may be trusted and the names and locations of other teachers who will be willing to

help. Providing this additional information helps close the gap of knowledge and thus facilitates a smooth transition from the classroom teacher to the substitute teacher.

Often classroom teachers are aware ahead of time when they will absent from schools. Fox (1988) noted that it would be helpful if classroom teachers notified their students that they will be absent from school. It would be beneficial if the classroom teacher discussed with the class what behaviors are expected in the presence of a substitute teacher and that students clearly understand the consequence, positive or negative, for their behavior (Fox, 1988). Doing this would allow students to anticipate a teacher's absence, so it not quite a shock to see a substitute teacher in the classroom the next morning.

### **Requirements/Preparation of Substitute Teachers in New York State**

Substitute teaching qualifications may vary considerably among school districts and across state lines. In order to substitute teach, a person may need to provide a variety of credentials including, but not limited to, teacher certification, criminal background checks, college transcripts, health certificates, and confirmation of first aid training (Abdal-Haqq, 1997). Wyld (1995) noted that certification is not required in most states or districts; in fact, a high school diploma is often the only academic credential required.

Specifically, in New York state, there is no certificate specially offered for substitute teaching; however, employment as a substitute teacher is controlled by a specific set of regulations. A person may substitute in New York state if he/she holds

a New York state teaching certificate. An individual who holds a valid teaching certificate may be employed in any capacity for any length of time, in any number of school districts. An individual may also substitute in New York if he/she does not hold a valid teaching certificate, but is working toward it at a rate of no less than six semester hours per year. Similar to an individual with a certificate, the individual may work in any capacity for any length of time, in any number of school districts. If a person does not hold a New York state certificate and is not working toward a certificate, the individual may be employed in any capacity in any number of school districts but is limited to only 40 days in a given school district in a school per year. It is important to note that a school may impose additional local requirements on individuals who are employed as substitute teachers (New York State Education Department, 2009).

### **Recommendations for Substitute Teacher Preparation**

A frequent topic found in the current literature regarding substitute teaching pertains to the structuring of effective substitute teacher preparation. The findings from a study conducted by St. Michel (1995) indicated that difficulties regarding substitute teacher preparation and orientation by school districts often resulted more from non-management than from mismanagement. St. Michel conducted a two year study analyzing the role of substitute teachers in the Phoenix Urban High School District. The study focused on “(a) accurately describing substitutes - their roles and expectations, professional and personal experiences and backgrounds, and working

conditions; and (b) offering recommendations for improving the hiring, training, evaluating, and retaining practices of substitutes” (p. 60). St. Michel’s findings correlated to a similar theme addressed by Ostapczuk (1994) in his literature review regarding effective substitute teaching. Ostapczuk stated that school districts typically place low priority on substitute teacher development compared to other problems that face school districts.

Taking this into account, then, there are several recommendations that may be gleaned from the literature regarding effective substitute teacher preparation. One recommendation commonly discussed in the literature suggested that school districts compile a district manual and building handbook to help substitutes become familiar with the different protocols prior to subbing. Lassmann (2001) recommended that a substitute teacher should have knowledge of a school district’s calendar, district policies, and the phone numbers of each school’s main office. Therefore, in order to supply substitute teachers with the above stated pertinent information such as district expectations, policies, and procedures, each school district should provide substitute teachers with a hand book. Doing so would allow substitute teachers to become familiar with specific routines, class schedules and specific expectations and responsibilities of substitute teachers that are unique to each school district (Lassmann, 2001).

A second recommendation, put forth by Lassmann (2001), is that school districts include substitute teachers at staff meetings as a way to foster a sense of community among teachers and substitute teachers and discontinue the sense of being

an outsider that substitutes sometimes feel. Inviting substitute teachers to staff meetings when relevant in-service topics are being presented would benefit substitute teachers' instruction. Not only would this technique allow substitute teachers to feel integrated into the school community, but it would also serve as way to enhance their performance in the classroom (Lassmann, 2001).

Further, Lassmann (2001) described how a systematic feedback system would help substitute teachers understand what is specifically expected of them during their teaching assignments. Lassmann addressed two ways in which feedback may be rendered. First, administrators might check in with substitute teachers at some point during the school day. This action conveys the message to the substitute teachers that "their job is important enough for an administrator to be checking in...[and] it lets the teachers know that their classroom will be monitored from time to time" (p. 627). Lassman also suggested that classroom teachers report on the extent to which the substitute teacher carried out their lesson plans and in what condition the room was left. Having a feedback system in place would help identify which substitutes perform well in particular situations (Lassmann, 2001).

Another aspect to consider when preparing and orienting substitute teachers (by school districts) would be for schools to have more permanent substitutes assigned to each school (Rundall & Terrell, 2001). This would enable substitute teachers to become familiar with the students, school procedures and the school building. As a result, students would likely view the substitute teacher as part of the



school community, less like a temporary visitor and more as someone who has authority (Rundall & Terrell, 2001).

### **Principles of Effective Literacy Instruction**

As a teacher, I believe that there are certain principles that I must strive to incorporate into my teaching in order for my students to develop and grow as readers and writers and for me to teach literacy effectively. The principles are the incorporation of prior knowledge to guide learning, the design and use of an efficient and organized classroom literacy environment, the use of explicit modeling and the gradual release of responsibility, and the implementation of a balanced approach to literacy.

#### ***Prior Knowledge Enhances Learning***

In terms of literacy, prior knowledge or background knowledge refers to the information and past experiences a student brings with him or her to a text (Harvey & Goudvis, 2000). If a teacher begins a lesson by activating the student's prior knowledge, it will help the student retain and make connections with the new information he or she will experience during the lesson. For instance, if a teacher is starting a unit on weather, it would be in the students' best interest if the teacher first helped them activate their prior knowledge by asking them "what are some things we already know about weather?" Another possible way a teacher may activate students' prior knowledge is through the use of a pre-reading strategy such as an anticipation

guide (Allen, 2004). An anticipation guide has a series of approximately three to eight statements that the students read and respond to prior to reading (i.e., agree or disagree). Once the students have completed the “before reading” column of the anticipation guide, the teacher facilitates a discussion regarding the anticipation guide, encouraging students to explain the reasoning behind their answers. As students read, they come across information that either: “verifies previously shared beliefs/knowledge, or encourages alteration of the beliefs/knowledge, or encourages comparison/contrast of beliefs and the new information” (Merkley, 1999, p. 366). When finished reading, the students respond to the same statements in the “after reading” column. The last step of the anticipation guide involves the teacher leading a discussion among students regarding how their responses and, thus, their understanding has changed and why it changed (Allen, 2004).

The concept of incorporating students’ prior knowledge into instruction is reflected in Vygotsky’s (1978) theory of “zone of proximal development.” Vygotsky’s “zone of proximal development,” proposes that “optimal learning occurs when teachers determine students’ current level of understanding and teach new ideas, skills, and strategies that are at an appropriate level of challenge” (Mazzoni & Gambrell, 2003, p. 14). Therefore, effective teachers ascertain students’ prior knowledge and then develop instruction that best meets the individual needs of their students.

## ***Classroom Literacy Environment***

A classroom literacy environment refers to all the aspects of a classroom such as the physical structure of a classroom and materials that work together to support students' literacy development. Soderman, Gregory and McCarty (2005) discussed four primary factors that contribute to a supportive literacy environment for students. First, a flexible layout is required in order to adapt to a wide variety of instructional practices such as whole group instruction, small group work or centers. Additionally, the materials in a classroom need to be interactive so that students are able to "manipulate, construct, and experiment while building on prior experiences" (Soderman et al., 2005, p, 53). A third element required of a supportive literacy environment is an adaptable time component. This refers to arranging the classroom so that students are free to learn at their own individual pace, "expanding for in-depth exploration and shrinking if learners are frustrated or ready to move ahead" (Soderman et al., 2005, p, 52). Lastly, and possibly most important, a classroom teacher needs to demonstrate a positive attitude. In order demonstrate a positive attitude, teachers need to embrace the different learning styles in the classroom, focus on meeting the individual needs of each student and show enthusiasm in all aspects of literacy instruction (Soderman et al., 2005).

The arrangement of the classroom literacy environment is a critical component of effective literacy practices. The classroom literacy environment should be arranged in such a way that it synchronizes with teacher instruction and helps students access pertinent literacy materials (Miller, 2002). Miller (2002) states that

“creating classroom environments that are literate, organized, purposeful, and accessible nurture literacy and foster independence” (p. 98).

A classroom literacy environment that is organized helps support the learning process, and provides teachers and students with materials that are easily accessible. Fountas and Pinnell (1996) state that an “organized environment supports the learning process” because the “materials are readily at hand, and children know how to use them” (p. 43). An organized classroom has specified locations where various materials such as books, paper, glue, crayons, clipboards, games and other pertinent classroom materials are stored. Setting up a classroom in this fashion, enables the learning environment to be easily accessible to both the classroom teacher and students and thus encourages students to gradually become more independent.

Fountas and Pinnell (1996) also emphasize that learning is a social process and, as such, the learning environment needs to be arranged so there is space for students to work in large groups, small groups or with a partner. As Fountas and Pinnell suggest, providing students with opportunities to talk with their peers while learning will “contribute to the rate and depth of understanding” (p. 43). On a similar note, Miller (2002) believes that for students to feel comfortable in the classroom environment, they need space within the classroom to work in pairs, small groups and independently.

It is also essential that a classroom teacher provide students with the opportunity to display and share their work with others (Soderman et al., 2005). Doing so provides a purpose for activities and instills a sense of pride in one’s work..

In conclusion, as a teacher sets up and organizes a classroom's literacy environment, it is important for him or her to keep in mind that the environment should be flexible so that both the teacher and students can make use of it for a variety of purposes.

### ***Classroom Library***

The classroom library is one of the most central areas in a classroom (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996). An inviting and enticing classroom library should endow students with books representing a variety of genres displayed in an orderly and inviting fashion so that students can easily locate particular books. The books should be organized in a systematic method that enables students to quickly and easily locate appropriate books. For instance, a classroom teacher may organize the books by genre such as non-fiction, mystery, adventure, suspense, holidays, and historical fiction. A classroom library should include a carpeted seating area with comfortable, relaxing chairs and pillows that students can use while reading (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996). Having comfortable seating allows students to relax while reading and thus helps students perceive reading as a pleasurable activity.

### ***Explicit Modeling and Gradual Release of Responsibility***

Explicit modeling and gradual release of responsibility can be applied to all subject areas, although I find both techniques particularly valuable with effective literacy instruction. Miller (2002) discussed four stages that help guide students towards independence with regards to literacy instruction. Stage one is teacher

modeling and explanation of a strategy. Modeling is a process that occurs when a more capable other (usually a teacher) demonstrates a new strategy, skill or concept. Teacher modeling includes “explaining the strategy, thinking aloud about the mental processes used to construct meaning and demonstrating when and why it is most effective” (Miller, 2002, p. 10). When teachers read and conduct think alouds, they model the cognitive processes involved when constructing meaning for their students.

Stage two refers to guided practice in which the teacher gradually gives students greater responsibility to complete a task. During guided practice, sometimes referred to as scaffolding, the teacher increasingly turns over more responsibility for students to complete authentic tasks. During this stage, as the students are practicing the new skill, the teacher is available to provide any needed assistance. Miller describes this stage of guided practice as when students are “invited to practice a strategy during whole-class discussion, asked to apply it in collaboration with their peers in pairs and small groups, and supported by honest feedback that honors both the child and the task” (2002, pp. 10-11). For instance, if a class were working on a poetry unit, the teacher would have already fully described and modeled the process of writing poems. During guided practice, the students would likely create a poem as a class with the teacher’s assistance and/or work in small groups to create poems.

The third stage involves teachers giving students time to independently practice a new skill or strategy while receiving feedback. At this stage, the teacher releases responsibility by having students work independently. This allows the students to begin to apply the recently taught strategy to their own reading and

writing. Miller (2002) argues that it is essential for teachers to provide feedback in order to inform students how they used a strategy or technique correctly and to help students reflect on how a particular strategy may have helped them. For example, a teacher may say, "I liked how you brainstormed words using your graphic organizer before you started to write your poem." Lastly, the fourth stage is the independent application of a strategy or technique by a student. At this stage, it is evident that the students understand the concept or newly taught strategy and are thus able to autonomously apply the strategy to different types of texts or novel situations without the assistance of a teacher (Miller, 2002). Classroom teachers can apply explicit modeling and gradual release of responsibility to a variety grouping situations such as whole-class lessons, small-group teaching, or individual interactions (Johnson, 2006).

### ***A Balanced Approach to Literacy***

As a classroom teacher, I believe that it is necessary to provide a balanced approach to literacy in order to help children grow and develop into successful readers and writers and eventually literacy competent adults. Below are the components of a balanced literacy program.

## ***Reading***

***Read Alouds.*** I believe an effective teacher needs to spend time every day reading aloud to the class. When a classroom teacher conducts a read aloud, he or she demonstrates the joy of reading, and models correct phrasing and expressive, fluent reading (Coleman, 2001). While reading aloud, Harvey and Goudvis (2000) suggest that teachers conduct think alouds as a way to model the mental processes the teacher uses while he or she reads. For example, a teacher may demonstrate the process of making a connection to the reading by saying aloud, “When I read the part about the little boy who was excited to get a new puppy, it reminded me of when I got a new dog two years ago. I understand how the little boy feels because I could hardly wait until I could go and pick the new puppy.”

While conducting a reading aloud, it is essential that the teacher and students engage in a meaningful conversation addressing the main ideas and issues raised in the book. This may be done by having students generate predictions about a story and discussing the characters and main events. As students listen to read alouds, they have opportunities to develop their vocabulary and listening comprehension (Coleman, 2001). There is a well documented relationship between reading comprehension and vocabulary development. Many students, for instance, often make the comment that they do not comprehend what they are reading because they do not know many of the words. According to Vacca et al. (2006), literacy researchers “have consistently identified vocabulary knowledge as an important factor in reading comprehension” (p. 254). As students listen to others, such as the



teacher, it helps increase their listening vocabularies. Research also indicates that “children increase their vocabularies by merely listening to stories read aloud, even without teacher explanation of word meanings” (Opitz & Rasinski, 1998, p. 4). When a child possesses a large listening vocabulary, it supports his or her reading development by providing the child with “the sounds and meanings of words that can be read” (Opitz & Rasinski, 1998, p. 4).

***Shared Reading.*** Shared reading starts with a high degree of teacher modeling and direction. Soderman (et al., 2005) stated that “gradually, as the child grows in his or her awareness and understanding of literacy, the interaction will become more shared” (p. 92). During shared reading, students are encouraged to participate in the reading when they are able to do so. Through the use of teacher modeling, students are empowered to read a text of greater difficulty than they would normally be able to read independently. Shared reading enables students to develop skills of prediction when reading, and it creates opportunities for teachers to informally introduce print conventions and teach sight vocabulary to students. Shared reading may be conducted with whole group, small group or individually with students. During shared reading, it is imperative that the text be accessible to all students so that all students are able to participate equally. Therefore, in order to make the text accessible to all students in a whole group setting, a classroom teacher may use reading materials in large print such as big books, posters, charts, overhead transparencies, and sentence strips in a pocket chart (Coleman, 2001).

***Guided Reading.*** Fountas and Pinnell (1996) define guided reading as a “context in which a teacher supports each reader’s development of effective strategies for processing novel texts at increasingly challenging levels of difficulty” (p. 2). During guided reading, the teacher works with a small group of students who use similar reading processes and who have a similar instructional reading level. The teacher, with the use of an appropriately selected text, works with the small group of students to help foster their strategy development and promote reading comprehension (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996). In guided reading, the teacher shows students how to read and supports them with strategies and techniques to help them become successful readers (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996). While the teacher meets with a guided reading group, he or she encourages students to talk, think and develop questions as they read (Coleman, 2001). The primary goal of guided reading is to enable students to use and develop reading strategies as they read.

When establishing guided reading groups, a classroom teacher needs to understand the notion of flexible grouping. Flexible grouping enables the teacher to regularly change the configuration of students and the purposes within small groups (Routman, 2000). In other words, when a teacher is using flexible grouping, the students will not likely stay in the same group for an extended period of time. Depending on the purpose or aim of the teacher, there are a variety of ways in which to group students. Students may be grouped based on needs, reading level, interests, strengths, personality (which students work well with each other and which do not),

the cultural/linguistic background and prior reading assessment of students (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996).

***Independent Reading.*** Independent reading is when a student selects an appropriate text to read individually (Coleman, 2001). One way a teacher might incorporate independent reading into the classroom routine is through the use of a daily, sustained silent reading time (SSR) of approximately fifteen minutes. During this time, all students are reading by themselves, the classroom is as quiet as possible and free of potential distractions. The aim of independent reading is to promote a sense of enjoyment through reading as students need to experience reading a book just for pleasure and not for completing a book report (Coleman).

### ***Writing***

In order for students to develop into proficient writers, they need to write on a daily basis. As with reading, a teacher should undertake writing instruction with a balanced approach.

***Modeled and Shared Writing.*** The aim of modeled/shared writing is to provide students the opportunity to practice the new skills and strategies introduced in class under the guidance of the classroom teacher. Modeled writing takes place when the teacher demonstrates the writing process and decisions a writer makes to the entire class. For instance, a teacher could model how to brainstorm possible topics to write about or how to develop an outline prior to writing. Once the teacher has fully modeled how to complete various parts of the writing process, he or she could then

utilize shared writing. Shared writing is an interactive process that occurs when a teacher incorporates students' suggestions and input into a piece of writing (Coleman, 2001). For example, as a teacher introduces a new style of poetry to her students, she could explain the format or structure of the poem and then model, without student input, how she would generate ideas and write a poem. Next, during the shared writing portion of the lesson, the teacher could write a poem with the help and guidance of the students' suggestions.

***Guided and Independent Writing.*** During guided writing, the teacher serves as a facilitator and directs a student or a small group of students to articulately express what they want to communicate in their writing. It is essential that the teacher encourage students to work as independently as possible, yet still provide help when appropriate. The goal of guided writing is for students to understand the process of writing and thus begin to write independently. Often the work completed during guided writing is related to reading or an activity initially introduced to the class as a large group activity. During guided writing, the teacher could also conduct a mini-lesson of specific writing skills on which he or she has noticed the students need to work (Coleman, 2001). For instance, the teacher may conduct a mini-lesson on how to replace over used verbs or the process involved in editing students' work.

During independent writing, as the name suggests, students work on writing assignments independently with little assistance from the teacher. Students generate their own messages and stories and use outside references such as dictionaries, words walls, posters hanging in the room or the computer to provide additional information

that they may need. During independent writing, students have the opportunity to apply new strategies that they have been introduced to through teacher instruction (Coleman, 2001). It is important that during independent writing that the students, although they are writing independently, receive regular feedback from the classroom teacher and their peers. (Harvey & Goudvis, 2000). Feedback helps students reflect on their writing and enables them to continue to develop as writers. The aim of independent writing is to give students the chance to develop independence with regard to writing assignments.

### **Common Literacy Instruction in Western New York**

Several western New York school districts embrace and implement common literacy instructional practices in an effort to provide quality instruction to all students. Below, I provide a description of the programs in place at the schools involved in the study.

#### ***Reading First***

The Reading First program was authorized as part of Elementary and Secondary Education Act through the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (McCallion, 2007). The program was designed to incorporate scientifically-based research (SBR) on effective reading instruction as a way to augment and expand the reading progress of students in kindergarten through grade three with the hopes of addressing concerns pertaining to student achievement and reach students at younger ages (McCallion,

2007). Through Reading First, states and school districts receive funding to apply scientifically-based instructional literacy practices and assessment tools to help guarantee that all students learn to “read well” by completion of third grade (ED.gov, 2009). Reading First requires that schools use a core reading series, provide frequent monitoring of students’ progress, ninety minutes of uninterrupted reading daily and development of what Morrisport Central Schools describes as the “Big Five Ideas” – phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency and comprehension.

One of the two schools in this study, Morrisport Central Schools, qualified to receive funding through a Reading First grant based on the number of students eligible for free and reduced lunches and student achievement on the New York State Elementary English Language Arts exam for students with disabilities (Morrisport Central Schools, 2009). At Morrisport Central Schools, Reading First helps by providing literacy coaches to assist classroom teachers, on-site professional development and a ninety minute block of uninterrupted reading time for instruction and reinforcement of skills. Additionally, Reading First offers Morrisport Central Schools a “consistent and continuity of literacy instruction in grades K-3” (Morrisport Central Schools, 2009).

### ***Reading Academic Intervention Services (AIS)***

Academic intervention services, or AIS for English Language Arts, is a state mandated program (Victoria Valley Central School District, 2009). AIS provides support services to students who have not met the school district’s benchmarks or the

New York State standards in ELA, Social Studies, and/or Science, in addition to the regular classroom instruction. Generally, students in this program receive small group instruction customized to meet their individual learning needs. Specific factors such as a student's daily class work, report card grades, and state/individual tests help establish a student's eligibility for AIS. Together, the regular classroom teacher and AIS staff work to review a student's academic progress, in the form of the above stated criteria, in order to determine if it is in the student's best interest to receive AIS.

At Victoria Valley Central School District, a school district involved in the study, a literacy specialist and teaching assistants works closely with the classroom teacher to craft instruction that best meets the various learning needs of students who are receiving AIS services. A literacy specialist carefully selects instruction that will provide students with the strategies and skills to independently and successfully complete a variety of reading and writing tasks in all subject areas (Victoria Valley Central School District, 2009).

At Victoria Valley Central School District, students in kindergarten through grade two who qualify AIS services in literacy, receive intense, daily support through services in the school's literacy lab. The literacy lab is a one hour pull-out support for each of the three grade levels. During the one hour literacy lab, students rotate among three learning stations. Each station provides small groups of students with a 20 minute mini-lesson. In station one, kindergarten students focus on phonics while students in grades one and two focus on phonemic awareness. In station two,

students concentrate on sight words, vocabulary and writing. Lastly, in station three, a reading specialist provides reading instruction.

### **Summary**

A common theme contained in much of the literature is that substitute teachers face many challenges related to common perceptions substitute teachers hold of themselves, difficulty with classroom management and inadequate lessons left by the regular classroom teacher. During the course of a student's academic career, he or she spends a significant amount of time in the presence of a substitute teacher. Therefore, it is in the best interest of students, classroom teachers, administrators and substitute teachers for substitute teachers to reach a more professional position to accomplish their educational objectives than they currently hold. In the second portion of the literature review, I highlighted effective literacy practices that provide a foundation for a balanced literacy program, and concluded with a brief discussion of the literacy practices in place at that the school districts involved in the self-study.



## **Chapter Three: Study Design**

I designed this self-study to examine how, I, as a substitute teacher, negotiated classroom teachers' expectations related to literacy instruction. I also explored how, in my role and work as a substitute teacher, I used the classroom environment to support my literacy instruction and to meet teachers' expectations. I investigated direct literacy instruction and content area literacy instruction as well as issues of classroom management throughout the course of my study.

### ***Research Questions***

- How do I, as a substitute teacher, negotiate classroom teachers' expectations related to literacy instruction?
- As a substitute teacher, how do I use the classroom environment to support my literacy instruction?

### ***Participant and Context***

As this was a self-study, I was the lone participant. I have an educational and professional background in childhood education. In May of 2007, I graduated *summa cum laude* from the College at Geneseo, State University of New York and received a bachelor's degree in Childhood Education. In order to successfully earn my bachelor's degree, I completed two successful teaching placements in the 2007 spring semester. My first placement took place in fourth grade classroom located in a

suburban school district. My second student teaching placement occurred in a third grade classroom situated at a “high-needs” urban elementary school. Since finishing my bachelor’s degree, I have been working part-time towards my master’s degree in Childhood Literacy at The College at Brockport, State University of New York. While working on my master’s degree, I have also worked for about a year and half as a substitute teacher (commencing in September 2007).

As a substitute teacher, I was called to work in two suburban districts, often in kindergarten through sixth grade classrooms (see Appendix A). The data for the study originated from the classrooms in which I substitute taught. Both school districts are similar in demographics, serve approximately 4,300 students, employ over 800 individuals and have a budget of about 60 million dollars. Furthermore, both districts have an average class size of 20 students and an elementary student-teacher ratio of 14:1.

### **Personality of the Researcher**

As mentioned previously, I collected data from the classrooms in which I substitute taught. Therefore, for the vast majority of the assignments in which I was given to substitute, I was considered as an outsider from the perspective of the students I taught. Usually, the students did not know me and my expectations prior to my arrival. However, in some instances, I was not necessarily deemed an outsider by the students. For instance, there were some teachers who regularly requested me as

their substitute every time they were absent. Therefore, as a result, I knew the students by name and the students knew me and my expectations as their teacher.

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

I used four methods of data collection techniques to examine how I, as a substitute teacher, navigated the expectations of classroom teachers with regard to literacy instruction: recorded observations of the classroom's literacy environment and student literacy practices, kept a journal of my reflections, collected lesson plans left by the regular classroom teacher, and gathered artifacts such as class worksheets. I observed and recorded observations of each classroom's literacy environment and the students' literacy practices. I recorded my observations of the classroom literacy environment on a pre-made observation sheet (see Appendix B). Additionally, in each journal entry, I documented how I negotiated the classroom teacher's expectations related to literacy instruction. I used the same series of prompts to guide my reflective practice—what went well, what was challenging, and what conditions may have influenced my success. As well as recording observations on the classroom literacy environment and reflecting on my teaching practice, I also collected or photocopied the substitute lesson plans the classroom teachers asked me to carry out while in their classroom. Collecting the lesson plans supplied me with explicit evidence of the expectations of each regular classroom teacher.

My typical expectations of a class involved the students following directions, being prepared for class and adhering the regular teacher's routines. Lastly, I

collected copies of all class worksheets that related to the instruction of English language arts and areas of content literacy. The worksheets helped provide evidence of the regular classroom teachers' literacy expectations.

I started recording my reflections and gathering artifacts in early February 2009 and continued through May 2009. As I collected data, I engaged in a recursive process of analysis where I noted possible patterns. When analyzing new data, I read and reread the data, coded for patterns, and then compared the tentative, emerging patterns to previously established categories, creating new categories as needed. I continued this process until all data was collected. At that point, I subsumed similar categories into themes, which formed the basis of the study's findings. When coding my data, I developed the following system to represent data from various sources. I labeled data that originated from my reflection journal with an RJ, lesson plan data with an LP and observation data with an O. In addition, I used this code in conjunction with the date of the data and the page number if the document was more than one page.

### ***Procedures of Study***

During this self-study I followed a series of steps:

1. I went to substitute at a classroom to which I was assigned.
2. At some point during the day, usually when the students were at a special, I recorded my observations of the classroom's literacy environment, how I used the literacy environment in my teaching, and how the students had used the

classroom's literacy environment. In each classroom observation, I noted how books and other literacy materials were arranged, and the types of posters and other visuals that were displayed.

3. In addition to recording observations, I also wrote in my research journal about my reactions regarding the literacy events that took place during the course of the day. In my reflections, I responded to three specific prompts: what went well, what was challenging and what conditions may have influenced my success.
4. At the conclusion of each teaching day, I collected the teacher's lesson plan (or a photocopy if the teacher's original plans were provided) and any pertinent artifacts such as literacy-related and content literacy worksheets.
5. I repeated steps one through four each day that I substituted.
6. At the conclusion of each week, I read through all the data that I had collected.

As I read, I coded the data and searched for possible emerging patterns and themes. As this process continued, I became more aware of potential patterns and/or themes. I was then able to pay attention to these particular patterns during subsequent substitute teaching assignments.

## **Criteria for Validity**

In order to help verify the validity of my observations, I made every effort to record the notes as objectively as possible without any interpretations. I recorded my observations on the teacher-researcher generated observation form and I recorded my reflections with the guidance of specific prompts. I ensured dependability in the study through my detailed description of the steps utilized in the research process. I followed the steps described in the procedures section for each substitute teaching assignment. My consistent data collection techniques—observation of the room, my own teachings and thoughts and any artifacts—enabled me to triangulate the data I obtained throughout the study and thus helped validate the study's findings. With regard to utility, the findings and conclusions yielded from this study may serve as way to help inform classroom teachers and substitute teachers how to craft potential lesson plans and establish a literacy environment to help facilitate effective instruction.

## **Limitations**

The study has several limitations. One limitation is the time frame through which I completed my research. I collected data between February and May. This four month period limited my exposure to a variety of classrooms and ultimately to a variety of teachers' expectations. The four month period also limited my ability to gather multiple artifacts from a number of teachers. Another limitation was the location of this study. This study only collected data from schools in western New

York and did not take into consideration locations outside this region. This was due in large part to my portability as a substitute teacher. A third limitation of this study was that that I, as the researcher, focused on literacy instruction and not other curricular areas. I excluded other areas of the curriculum because literacy is my certification area and as such, holds interest. A fourth limitation was the study's setting. All of the data was collected from elementary teachers and in public school classrooms. By doing this, I did not collect data that reflected the expectations of secondary or private school classroom teachers.

## **Chapter Four: Findings**

The purpose of this study was to analyze how I, as a substitute teacher, navigated classroom teachers' expectations related to literacy instruction. Additionally, I explored how I used and incorporated the classroom literacy environment in my teaching as a substitute teacher. I conducted the study with the intention of being able to use the newly gathered data to reflect and improve upon my own teachings as a substitute teacher and inform my future work as a classroom teacher. The data for the study originated from my thirty days as a substitute teacher in suburban elementary schools located in western New York. In order to reflect on my teaching, with respect to classroom teachers' expectations and the classroom literacy environment, I took field notes in a daily research journal, collected teachers' lesson plans and recorded my observations pertaining to each classroom's environment.

In the this chapter, I highlighted the classroom teachers' expectations of substitute teachers and how some expectations may influence the lack of authority or respect that students have for substitute teachers. I also examined common features of the lesson plans that I encountered and discussed how I utilized and supplemented information the classroom teachers provided in their lesson plans. Lastly, I analyzed my own instruction with regard to literacy and how I incorporated a classroom's literacy environment into my teaching.



## **Classroom Teacher Expectations**

### ***Babysitter Perception***

By analyzing the classroom teachers' substitute lesson plans and their comments, I developed the impression that some classroom teachers may perceive substitute teachers as babysitters and not as teachers who are capable of moving classroom learning forward in their absence. Upon reflection, it appeared that classroom teachers' expectations of substitute teachers are that they are there to simply monitor their students rather than act in the role of a teacher. I felt as if I were babysitting instead of teaching when lesson plans prepared by the regular classroom teacher assigned "busy work," simply to occupy the students' time. Of the 22 teachers for whom I substituted, 10, or almost one half, provided data that perpetuated the babysitter perception of substitute teachers. The teachers demonstrated this perception by expecting me to conduct activities that they would not normally do with students, such as watching a video, not meeting with guided reading groups, reading an entire *National Geographic Explorer* with the class during the course of a day or having the class working quietly on a review packet during an entire subject period. One sixth grade science teacher orally commented to me, "I was originally going to have you do a hard lesson involving air pressure" (RJ, 02/03/09, p. 3). However, he changed his mind and decided that it would be "easier" (RJ, 02/03/09, p. 3) if I just showed a video accompanied with a worksheet on air pressure. A third grade classroom teacher made a similar comment to me saying, "I usually don't have

literature instruction done in small groups when a substitute is present. It's easier for you to do it in large groups" (RJ, 03/09/09, p. 24). This quote suggests that she would normally meet with individual guided reading groups. However, "to make it easier for me," the teacher planned a whole group lesson.

When a classroom teacher alters the activities from what he or she would normally do, I, as the substitute teacher, have a minimal amount of time, if any, in which to teach to students. Therefore, during these situations, my role for the day mainly involved monitoring the students' behavior. Perhaps the babysitter perception that I sensed some teachers possessed was best illustrated in the words of a third grade teacher who verbally commented to me:

Thank you so much for coming in on such short notice. You could have done anything and that would have been fine. All I want is a really good babysitter to make sure the room is in good condition and no one gets killed (RJ, 03/31/09, p. 39).

The third grade teacher's comment indicated that it would not have mattered what I did with the students, as long as the room was clean, that the students were not out of control and no one got hurt. The quote suggests that this particular classroom teacher did not plan for me to teach and thus continue students' learning, she simply expected me to monitor the students' behavior in her absence.

In his study, *A Qualitative Study of the Perceptions of Substitute Teaching Quality*, Cardon (2002) analyzed the perceptions and images of substitute teachers. The study was originally part of a larger study on the management of substitute teachers in Utah during the 2001-2002 school year. In 2001, the Utah legislature

mandated that a study addressing the management of substitute teachers be conducted by the Substitute Teaching Institute at Utah State University. While conducting the interviews and surveys for the study, Cardon soon discovered what he described as “glaringly apparent” issues and perceptions of substitute teachers (p. 30). He collected data through opened-ended interviews and survey questions from 263 substitute teachers, 68 teachers, 86 substitute managers, and 18 principals.

Cardon (2002) found that the perceptions of substitute teachers were almost consistently negative, and noted that it is a common practice for substitute teachers to be labeled in response to the poor perceptions that others hold. He stated that substitutes are often labeled as “warm bodies,” “babysitters,” or “people off the street” (p. 33). This “babysitter” perception of substitutes, which may be frequently held by students, parents and classroom teachers implies that substitute teachers are responsible for “maintaining the class at its current position by simply watching over the students as they perform tasks not relevant to learning” (Fielder, 1991, p. 376) and, as a result, do not move academic learning forward. Lassmann (2001) concurred by stating if “administrators see substitutes as babysitters and law enforcers, students will lose valuable instructional time” (p. 626).

Clifton and Rambaran (1987) found that classroom teachers did not perceive substitutes as professionals. For instance, lesson plans prepared by classroom teachers frequently instructed substitute teachers to assign “busy work” to students or merely had the substitute teacher re-teach previously taught material. When substitute teachers are expected to fulfill the role of a “babysitter,” students are often

given seatwork or a video to watch. When this happens, according to Clifton and Rambaran, a substitute teacher is perceived by students as an incompetent teacher who cannot do anything else other than supervise. Similarly, Cardon (2002) described that as a result of low expectations for student achievement when under the direction of a substitute teacher, classroom teachers frequently left non-instructional plans. Cardon quoted one classroom teacher as saying, “I have resorted to just leaving videos for the subs to show...subs in our district lack every skill of judgment” (p. 38). These negative perceptions threaten the potential success of substitute teachers.

### ***Lack of Authority***

I interpreted, based on my reflections and observations that the perception of substitute teachers as mere “babysitters” contributed to my lack of authority in the eyes of students at all grade levels. When students observed that I was going to do an activity or lesson that differed from their regular routine, I believed that they viewed me as lacking authority and, in some situations, used it as an opportunity to misbehave. On several occasions, I recorded quotes from students who indicated I was carrying out an activity that was not commonly done by their classroom teacher. One third grader said, “Aaawwhhh. We never have health with Mr. B. We only read this when there is a sub” (RJ, 03/23/09, p. 34). Similarly, a fourth grader exclaimed, “That’s boring. We only read *National Geographic Explorer* as a class when we have a sub” (RJ, 03/11/09, p. 28). The students’ comments drew attention to the fact

that they were aware that the classroom teacher planned activities or lessons that he/she would not normally implement in their day-to-day work with students.

Interestingly, I observed that when the classroom teachers did assign “busy work” such as videos, review packets, and large amounts of seatwork, that it was sometimes harder for me to manage the class than if I were teaching a lesson. When students were seated at their desks working on worksheets or reading, they often became restless, which, in turn, caused them to talk with their peers and not complete the assigned work. One fourth grader pleaded with me, “Can we please get out our seats? We have been sitting for a while” (RJ, 03/11/09, p.28). When the child posed the question, the class had been quietly working or reading at their seats for approximately two hours and forty minutes. Expecting students to sit for an extended period of time and work in a focused manner is unrealistic. It is inherent that the students will become fidgety during such a task. One way I learned to combat the restlessness was to give the students brief breaks in which they could stand up, stretch and talk to their friends for a few minutes.

As mentioned earlier, when students observed that I was implementing an activity or lesson that differed from the regular routine, I felt that they perceived that I was lacking authority and took this as an opportunity to misbehave. This seemed to be true more with older elementary students, especially with sixth graders. In four different sixth grade classes in which I substituted, some students initially appeared to disregard the assignment at hand and instead socialized with peers. As a result, I had to give reminders to the students to remain focused and work quietly. In one sixth

grade math class, the classroom teacher instructed me to have the students work on a review math packet (RJ, 02/24/09). At first, some of the students appeared to disregard the assignment and started to socialize with their friends. Once I reminded the class that their teacher told me to collect their packets at the end of class so it could be graded, those students who had not been working then quickly completed the packet and turned it in before the end of the period (RJ, 02/24/09). When the classroom teachers instructed me to inform the class that a particular assignment would be collected and graded, it provided a way to motivate students to put forth their best effort and complete the required task. Therefore, at times, upper elementary students were less likely to disregard the particular assignment or work that the classroom teacher had left for students to complete.

In addition to having me conduct activities and lessons that they would perhaps not normally do, the classroom teachers did not always fully inform me of the classroom routines. I felt that this may have contributed to my perceived lack of authority when interacting with students. For instance, when teachers told me how to conduct “calendar,” line-up for lunch, or when it was appropriate for students to get out of the seats for bathroom breaks, it helped me provide a smoother transition for students during the absence of their classroom teacher. According to my reflections and observations, my lack of knowledge of classroom routines and student experiences often arose because they were not articulated in the lesson plans or substitute teacher folder, and frequently resulted in students making comments

indicating that I lacked authority and knowledge compared to that of their regular classroom teacher.

I frequently encountered situations in which I was unsure of the procedure that the classroom teacher would normally follow. When I changed the routine in some way, even slightly, students were not hesitant to bring it to my attention by stating that “our teacher lets us do it!” (RJ, 04/14/09, p. 53). For example, when I instructed a class of third grade students to sit at the carpet during the read aloud, several students exclaimed, “Why? Ms. D lets us stay at our seats!” (RJ, 03/17/09, p.29). When this situation arose, I often asked students to calmly raise their hands to explain what their teacher would normally do. I would then call on a volunteer, a student who appeared to be a reliable, trustworthy student (sometimes indicated on the teacher’s notes), to explain what the classroom teacher would normally do in such as situation. Whenever it was possible, I tried to follow the same routine that the students were accustomed to in order to help minimize distractions and provide a bit of continuity. It was helpful when the teacher provided such information in lesson plans or the substitute folder so that I could avoid disruptions.

On occasion, the classroom teacher would intentionally have me do something, such as not collecting a worksheet or meet with guided reading groups, simply because I was a substitute teacher. One fourth grade teacher, for example, instructed me in the lesson plans to collect the spelling packet even though, he stated that “Normally, I never have substitutes collect, they [the students] may bring that up!” (LP, 05/15/09, p. 1). When the classroom teacher did this, it may have

reinforced the concept to the children that I did not possess the same influence as their teacher because there was a different procedure to follow when the substitute was present. As a result, I believe that children may arrive at the understanding that if the class follows a different procedure when there is a substitute, the work given to them by the substitute is not as important as their regular classroom teacher's assignments. The fourth grade teacher, mentioned previously, stated in his substitute teacher lesson plan that, "The last time they [the students] were a bit unruly. Remind them that they must and can do better, and that a good showing [*sic*] will mean extended recess from me" (LP, 05/15/09, p. 1). By declaring this in his lesson plan, the teacher was trying to support me by providing leverage to assist with maintaining student behavior. However, the statement seemed to reinforced the notion that as the substitute teacher, I did not have the authority to limit the students' recess and that I needed to leave that responsibility with the classroom teacher. This teacher's statement also indicated that I, or any substitute teacher, did not have the ability to manage students, so a threat and/or reward was often necessary. This comment also suggested a slight distrust and manipulation of the students on the part of the classroom teacher. The classroom teacher implied that his students probably would not behave respectfully unless the substitute teacher exhorted some verbal control.

In my work as a substitute teacher, I often interpreted the students' misbehavior and verbal comments as a sign that they did not respect me or that I lacked authority. One fifth grader, who refused to follow directions by working on the assigned work and disrupting other students, frankly commented, "I don't have to



listen to you, you're not my real teacher" (RJ, 02/26/09, p. 19). Similarly, in other classrooms, I often had students at all grade levels ask me "Are you a real teacher?" (RJ, 03/11/09, p. 27). Comments such as these drew attention to the fact that some students viewed me as a person without the same authority or credentials of a "real" classroom teacher. When asked this question by students, I always responded with an answer affirming my status as a teacher. I often replied, "Yes, I am a real teacher, I substitute for other classroom teachers" (RJ, 03/11/09, p. 27).

### **Lesson Plans**

Lesson plans often play a pivotal role in a substitute teacher's success. While conducting this self-study, I made multiple observations concerning classroom teachers' prepared lesson plans. In this section, I describe different layouts of lesson plans, features of detailed and helpful lesson plans, teachers' expectations, terminology used in the plans, and how teachers organized classroom materials.

#### ***Layout of Lesson Plans***

By examining the lessons plans that I amassed over the course of this study, I noticed that there were primarily two different layouts of lesson plans prepared by classroom teachers: narrative or bulleted.

In the narrative layout, the classroom teacher usually described the day's events and activities as if it were a story usually with activities or subjects area designated by the start of a new paragraph. I found reading lesson plans presented in

the narrative layout difficult to follow as I taught the lessons during the course of the day. For instance, if I were teaching a lesson and needed to refer back to lesson plan to remind myself of the classroom teacher's directions, I would frequently lose my place, which would, in turn, interrupt the flow of the lesson. In order to help remedy this, I highlighted, underlined and/or wrote notes in the margins to help me remember important details.

In contrast, some classroom teachers created lesson plans using a bulleted layout in which the day's lessons or class periods were organized by numbered or bulleted lists. These lesson plans often read like a series of steps or directions for me to follow. In the example below, a third grade teacher described reading by providing a series of numbered steps for me to follow (see figure 4.1). I, personally, found bulleted or numbered lesson plans easier to read than lesson plans written in a narrative layout. While I was in the middle of teaching a lesson, a bulleted lesson made it easier to quickly read the lesson to confirm and follow the classroom teacher's directions.

Figure 4.1: Bulleted or Numbered Lesson Plan

**9:40-11:10 Reading (Have kids come on the rug)**

1. Play background CD for Good-Bye 382 Shin Dang Dong
2. Have Table captains pass out Reading books and read Good-Bye 382 Shin Dang Dong to the class as they follow along in their books.
3. Vocabulary- Have table captains pass out mini white boards and markers and erasers. Have each kid pick one of the vocabulary words and write a sentence with at least 10 words in it. When everyone is done, have them share their sentences with a buddy next to them. Do this at least three times.

### ***Features of Detailed and Helpful Lesson Plans***

Before starting the day with students, I always read through the lesson plan in its entirety whenever possible. Doing so allowed me to anticipate the various activities the teacher had planned throughout the day, and to make sure that I had all the necessary materials ready to go. Through my frequent use of lesson plans prepared by classroom teachers, I noticed certain features of highly detailed lesson plans. First, detailed lesson plans often included important class routines that the classroom teacher implemented on a daily basis. Class routines included student arrival and morning/seatwork, calendar, work centers, lunch procedures, recess and dismissal procedures. Often classroom teachers have their classroom set up so that when students arrive in the morning, there are specific tasks the students are supposed to complete. These tasks may include, but are not limited to, sharpening pencils, turning in homework, making a lunch choice, signing in (for attendance) and working on morning/seatwork.

In my role as a substitute teacher, I realized that it was absolutely imperative that I familiarize myself with the morning routine so that I could effectively monitor students and carry out any responsibilities that were required of me. Even attendance was done differently depending on the school in which I substituted. For instance, some schools had substitutes send a paper list of students who were marked absent while other schools had substitutes submit the attendance electronically on the computer, which required a log-in and password procedure.

In one second grade classroom, the classroom teacher prepared a highly detailed, easy to follow lesson plan (RJ, 03/30/09). In the plan, the teacher effectively communicated what the students were supposed to do upon arrival, how I should take attendance, and where I should check for students' notes that needed to go to the office. In addition, the classroom teacher articulated the regular routine used to do "calendar" (see figure 4.2). Often teachers simply stated "calendar," and did not provide any further guidelines for me to follow. Additionally, what also made "calendar" easy with this particular class was that, as the teacher indicated, the students were "pretty familiar with this process" (LP, 03/30/09, p. 1). During calendar, I only needed to provide minimal guidance because the students knew exactly what was expected of them.

Figure 4.2: Calendar Routine

Date: 3/30/09	B Day	# of the Day 123
9:00 Arrival, breakfast, check supplies, bathroom, unpack backpack		
-Reading from your book bags (in their desks), jobs, lunch count Have students do the next page in their handwriting books. You will have to do the lunch count for the day. The office should give the sub info to order lunch on powerschool. If you are not sure how to it, please just call the office.		
*Check the apple basket, student put notes to the office in there. If it looks like something that needs to go to the office, please send it down.		
<b>9:15-9:20 Calendar</b>		
Have the student update the calendar. You call on individuals to come up and fill in the date, number of the day, straws, and money. They are pretty familiar with this process.		

It is interesting to note that some schools in which I substitute taught did not require classroom teachers to conduct a lunch count. Some schools only required those classroom teachers whose class had a late lunch period to submit a lunch count, while other schools required every teacher in the building to submit a lunch count. Therefore, due to the variety lunch counting procedures, it was extremely helpful for me when the classroom teacher addressed this in the lesson plans. As noted in the above example, the second grade teacher addressed the lunch count procedure. The classroom teacher indicated that I needed to submit the day's lunch count electronically via powerschool. Fortunately, I was familiar with the process involved when using powerschool. However, had I been unfamiliar with the school and its procedures, I would likely have been confused and not known how to conduct the stated procedure.

In addition to providing details regarding whether or not to conduct a lunch count, it was also helpful when the classroom teacher included the lining up procedures for lunch. As a result of substituting in a variety of classrooms during the course of this study, I have observed a wide assortment of procedures with regard to lining up for lunch. Some teachers line students by lunch choice, usually having those students who bring their lunch from home line up first. Other teacher have the students wash their hands with soap and water or use an alcohol based hand sanitizer before going to lunch, while in other schools hand sanitizers are not permitted.

One particular school had individual lunch cards that were to be distributed to students beforehand. At the end of each day, the cards are returned to the teacher's

mailbox where she picked them up in the morning for the next day's use. When I was substituting in a third grade classroom, I was not aware of this procedure (RJ, 03/09/09). I started to line up the students five minutes ahead of time in order to get ready for lunch; however, I did not realize that I was supposed to pick up the lunch cards from the teacher's mailbox in the morning, perhaps because the teacher did not indicate this procedure in the day's lesson plans. As a result, I had to send a student down to the office to pick up the cards. Consequently, due to my lack of knowledge of this routine and with no instruction informing of this procedure in the lesson plan, the students were late for lunch (RJ, 03/09/09).

According to a review of the lesson plans and my reflections, those that were more detailed also often described the recess procedures. Most schools request that the teacher inform the main office when the class is going outside for recess and yet this protocol was frequently not indicated in the lesson plans (RJ, 04/14/09). Each specific school building, however, has different procedures in place for recess. Some schools have the teacher call the office with the phone located in the classroom while other schools instruct the teacher to use a school's walkie talkie (RJ, 03/09/09; RJ, 03/11/09). Locating a walkie talkie was sometimes not easy to do because not every teacher had one, although usually each hallway did. As a result, before taking students outside for recess, I would often have to go to several classrooms to locate a walkie talkie. I found it extremely helpful when the teacher included such information on whom to contact during recess and, if necessary, where to locate the walkie talkie in the lesson plan.

Additionally, I observed that when a class had indoor recess, due to the weather conditions, the students' use of the classroom computers was a frequent source of conflict. Unless otherwise indicated by the classroom teacher, I would tackle this problem by asking students to raise their hands if they wanted to play at the computer. I would then list the students' names on the white board. The students on the list would then take turns using the computers. I would stop them after a specified amount of time to ensure that other children also had the opportunity to play. Detailed lesson plans also included what activities the students were allowed to partake in if recess was inside. One third grade teacher included in her lesson plan that it was the girls' turn to play with the blocks and that the other children could play with stamps, white boards, free writing/reading and use the computer (LP, 03/30/09). This teacher also instructed me to ask two girls about the computer rotation schedule (See figure 4.3).

Figure 4.3: Recess Instructions

**12:10-12:25- Inside Recess-**

The children choose between blocks (I think it's the girls' turn to use blocks), stamps, whiteboards, free reading/writing and computer. Have Mary or Sarah check the computer rotation. They know where the list is and how it works.

I also observed that the more detailed lesson plans often incorporated information relating to the classroom's dismissal and end of day procedures. Usually the classroom teacher had specific end-of-the-day routines, such as involving the students recording their homework in their planners, getting their backpacks and cleaning the room. When classroom teachers described such routines, it enabled me

to facilitate a smoother and less chaotic transition to getting the students ready to go home (RJ, 03/11/09; RJ, 03/30/09; RJ, 04/09/09). Furthermore, it seemed that each school in which I substituted had a different protocol to follow with regard to dismissing students at the end of the day. One school had a secretary distribute a sheet to each classroom teacher that indicated which students were to be picked up (RJ, 02/02/09). Another school required teachers to pick up a dismissal sheet that was placed in the teachers' mailboxes after lunch (RJ, 03/11/09). At another school, office personnel called each classroom to inform the teacher which student(s) were to be picked up (RJ, 04/03/09). When the classroom teacher clearly stated in the lesson plan how students were to be dismissed at the end of the day, it helped me remember what I was supposed to do. In some instances, I completely neglected to pick up the dismissal sheet left in the teacher's mailbox because it was not mentioned in the lesson plan and I was not familiar with the school's procedures (RJ, 05/15/09). In the example provided below (see figure 4.4), the classroom teacher clearly articulated what I needed to have the students do to get ready to go home. The teacher stated that the students must retrieve any papers from their mailboxes (LP, 03/30/09, p. 4). The classroom teacher also reminded me to get the dismissal sheet from her mailbox. The classroom teacher's short yet thorough and clear directions enabled me to follow the school's dismissal procedures accurately and smoothly.



Figure 4.4: Dismissal Procedures

3:10-3:15- Pack Up

Have the students put any papers in their mailboxes in their purple folders. Please have them clean up their work area as well. The dismissal sheet will be in my mailbox in the office. They have been calling students for dismissal at 3:20. Then they will call 2<sup>nd</sup> grade. Please walk the students out the main door to the buses.

The more detailed lesson plans also included, when appropriate, any important medical information with which I needed to be aware. In one fourth grade classroom in which I substituted, there was a student who had diabetes (LP, 05/15/09). In the lesson plan, the teacher informed me to send the student to the nurse's office at specific times and any time she felt "low" (LP, 05/15/09, p. 1). I also taught in classrooms in which a student had a severe food allergy (RJ, 04/03/09). Because such allergies can be life threatening, I needed to be alerted to classroom procedures. In one fourth grade classroom, where a student had a severe allergy to peanuts, I checked each snack as it came into the room to make sure the snack was on the approved food list left by the teacher (RJ, 04/03/09). Similarly, in another classroom, where a student had a severe allergy to peanuts, tree nuts, wheat and soy, the class did not eat a snack during the day and every student had to wash his/her hands before entering the classroom after lunch (RJ, 03/09/09). In a second grade classroom, there was a student who had a tracheotomy (LP, 03/30/09). The classroom teacher described in great detail where I could find his medical plan, how often the boy needed to go to the nurse's office to get suctioned, and when or where he was allowed to eat food (LP, 03/30/09, p. 5). Figure 4.5 is an excerpt of the classroom teacher's

lesson plan. If the classroom teacher had not included such vital medical information in the day's lesson plans there very could have potentially been a medical emergency.

Figure 4.5: Important Medical Information

**Kevin**

\*He has a tracheotomy that helps him breathe; here's some info: (his medical plan is in the blue sub folder.)

- He needs to be sent down to the nurse for suction at the following times: 10:15/12:25/2:15/3:15.
- He may not eat or drink in the classroom. When he goes down to the nurse's office at 12:25, she will give him a snack.
- I call down to the nurse using the walkie talkie every time I send him down. I also give the walkie talkie to any other adult that takes him out of the room, including specials teachers. (Walkie is on the charger next to the filing cabinet. All the students know where it is. Throughout the day, we leave it in the red apple basket on top of the students' mailboxes.)
- If he asks to be suctioned at any time, you may send him down. He will sound very "phlegmy".

Lastly, in the more detailed lesson plans, classroom teachers commonly noted the names of helpful students and other teachers to contact for further assistance should I need it during the day (LP, 02/09/09; LP, 02/24/09; LP, 02/26/09; LP, 03/06/09; LP, 03/09/09; LP, 03/11/09; LP 03/17/09; LP, 03/23-24/09; LP, 03/30/09). I found it extremely helpful when classroom teachers included this information in the lesson plans. Often during the course of the day, I would think of questions regarding how the classroom teacher would usually do an activity or routine. Many times I wondered, "Does the teacher have the students come to the carpet during the read aloud?" or "Do the students already have snack at their desks or in their lockers?" or "Where does the teacher have the students turn completed assignments in?" When this information was included in the lesson plan, I would use it whenever necessary.

If I had a question that I thought a student would be able to answer, I would discreetly ask a teacher-identified student a specific question while the rest of the students were working quietly (RJ, 03/11/09; RJ, 03/30/09; RJ, 04/14/09). In one fourth grade classroom, I took the opportunity during silent reading to ask a student, previously identified by the classroom teacher in the lesson plan as a “helpful” student, to explain work centers (RJ, 03/11/09). Doing this prevented a potential disruption to pacing and sequence of the day by having to pose a question to the entire class. As mentioned previously, when the classroom teacher provided information concerning classroom routines and procedures, I was able to minimize that transition from classroom teacher to substitute teacher for the students, which helped me gain more authority in the classroom.

### ***Ambiguous Teacher Expectations***

I perceived that when teachers provided ambiguous expectations in the lesson plans, it contributed to the students’ misconception that the substitute teacher lacked the authority of their regular classroom or “real” teachers. When I use the term ambiguous expectations, I am referring to how the classroom teachers did not clearly and specifically articulate what they wanted me to do or provide me with pertinent information in the lesson plan. For instance, a teacher may have stated that while I met with the guided reading groups, “all other students should be reading independently at their seats and/or writing in their notebooks” (LP, 04/03/09, p. 1). Similarly, during guided reading groups, a second grade teacher indicated that, “As

you are working with each group, the kids have activities on the board to complete. Please rotate the activities after you meet with each group” (LP, 02/27/09, p. 3). The above examples made it difficult for me to know exactly what students were supposed to be working on and how I might redirect students should they go off task.

In order to help me remain consistent with the classroom teacher’s expectations, I found it helpful when a teacher clearly stated whether or not there was homework for a particular class. This was especially true when I substituted for sixth grade content area teachers. Students frequently asked, “Do we have homework tonight?” (RJ, 02/03/09; RJ, 03/04/09). However, the lesson plans often did not clearly state whether or not there was homework. I frequently asked myself if the class did not finish the assigned class work should the students finish it for homework. In one sixth grade classroom, the teacher did not indicate if there was homework to be assigned (RJ, 02/02/09). Fortunately, several honest students reported that they “always take the response sheet to finish for homework, if they did not get it done in class” (RJ, 02/09/09, p. 12). Classroom teachers could clarify their expectations by clearly stating whether or not I was to assign homework. Doing so would have enabled me to provide a clear, concise and accurate response to students.

In addition to center activities instructions and homework assignments, classroom teachers often neglected to inform me of the students’ past experiences, which would have been helpful for me to know prior to teaching a lesson. In other words, was a topic I was going to teach a lesson around, recently introduced or would our work together be a review for the students? Knowing this vital piece of

information would have influenced my instruction. If I knew a topic had been recently introduced, I would take longer to introduce the topic and activate students' prior knowledge than I would if students were reviewing a familiar topic. Or if the class was reading a story, was it the first time or a review? If I knew it was the students first time reading a particular story, I would spend more time at the beginning introducing the story. Depending on the age of the students and the text being used, I may have had students make predictions of what the story would be about, take a picture walk or discuss important vocabulary. In contrast, if the story had already been read or was in the process (i.e., a novel), I would more likely spend time reviewing what has happened thus far in the story with students prior to continuing the reading. At times it appeared that classroom teachers forgot that this may be my first time in their classroom or even the school, and as a result, I was not familiar with the various procedures unique to each school or classroom (RJ, 02/09/09; RJ, 03/04/09; RJ, 04/14/09).

### ***Terminology***

I observed that the classroom teachers' expectations of substitute teachers were also reflected in the terminology that they incorporated into their lesson plans. I noticed that at times the classroom teachers would use terms or acronyms without providing any further explanation. However, despite my knowledge of terms used in the education field, I was often unsure to what the classroom teacher was referring to and would have to seek the assistance of students. Figure 4.6 is a summary of some

terms or acronyms that I encountered while substitute teaching. In one sixth grade class, for example, the classroom teacher instructed me to “correct the homework question together as a class and to collect WLP” (LP, 04/06/09, p. 1). At first, I had no idea what the teacher meant by “WLP.” I thought the teacher was referring to a specific worksheet that I could not locate. After trying to determine what it meant, I asked a student who replied, “It stands for white lined paper” (RJ, 04/06/09).

Another similar example occurred in a sixth grade science class. The classroom teacher provided a science article for the students to read independently with the letter, “FQR” written next to it on the lesson plan (LP, 02/09/09, p. 1). It wasn’t until half way through the lesson that I realized the classroom teacher wanted the students to write a fact, a questions and response/reaction based on the assigned science article. As a result, some students did not finish this task because they did not have enough time to complete it due to my lack of understanding. In all of the examples illustrated in figure 4.6, it would have been easier to implement the classroom teacher’s lesson plan if the teacher had clearly communicated the meaning of the acronyms or terms. If the teacher had done this, I would not have had to ask students for clarity or have given the wrong directions for an assignment.

Figure 4.6: Terminology

Acronym	Meaning of Term/Acronym
WLP	White Lined Paper
LLP	Loose Leaf Paper
TFK	<i>Time for Kids</i>
CW	Class Work
STQ	Stop, Think, Question
FQR	Fact, Question, Response/Reaction
Better Answer Formula	A format that students have to use to help them write a well-written paragraph.

### ***Materials***

In addition to reading through the entire lesson plan in the morning before the school day started, I also took time to make sure I had all of the day's materials ready and available. This task was made infinitely easier if the classroom teacher had neatly laid out all the materials or instructed me as to where the materials were stored so that I could easily access them. In one second grade class, the teacher instructed me to conduct a read aloud and to continue discussing the week's theme of helping others (LP, 03/18/09). However, the teacher forgot to give the name of the book and when I looked through the teacher's collection of big books; I was unable to find a book that matched the teacher's description. In order to resolve the situation I sought the help of the neighboring teacher, who told me what book she thought the teacher intended for me to use.

As well as experiencing difficulty locating all of the day's materials, I also experienced not having enough materials for all the students. When I substituted in a fourth grade class, I met with guided reading groups while the other students worked

independently at their seats (RJ, 04/03/09). The main obstacle I faced was that I did not have enough guided reading books for everyone to have their own book. This made it difficult as it was not always convenient for students to share depending on the number of students and seating arrangement. Moreover, I did not have a book in which I could follow along and use with the students. This made it difficult for me to pose appropriate questions and to check for students' reading comprehension. According to my reflections, days in which I had all of the day's necessary materials were generally more successful than the substituting days in which I lacked the necessary materials (RJ, 04/03/09).

### **Strategies that I Frequently Used Regardless of Lesson Plan**

As a substitute teacher, there are certain strategies that I used on regular basis regardless of the directions indicated in the classroom teacher's lesson plans. I often incorporated these strategies into my teaching because they facilitated my ability to teach effectively and successfully manage student behavior. Every day, before the students arrived, I wrote the schedule on the white/chalk board so that it was clearly visible to all students (RJ, 04/01/09). At the beginning of every day, I introduced myself as Miss Gaylor, clearly articulated my expectations for the day to the students and reviewed the day's schedule. Usually, while communicating my expectations to the class, I introduced my behavior management technique that pertained to recess. I often said to the students:

You may have noticed the number fifteen on the board. That number refers to the number of minutes the class has for recess today. If the class listens, follows



directions and works really hard today, the class will have the opportunity to earn additional minutes to your recess. However, if the class does not listen or follow directions and I have to give frequent reminders for the class to keep working, then the class may lose time from recess. I really hope that doesn't happen because I like to go outside for recess just like you. Does anyone have any questions about how it works?

I discovered that explaining this behavior management device helped start the day on a positive note. The students tried to work hard because they had a goal to work toward such as additional recess time. Unlike many behavior management systems in which the students only lose privileges for misbehaving, this device provided children with the opportunity to work towards a reward (RJ, 03/23/09). It is interesting to note that I first started to use this strategy after I observed a classroom teacher use it with her students. Upon reflection, I thought it would be a good technique to incorporate into my teaching because it was a behavior management strategy that could be explained to students and implemented easily at any grade level.

Another strategy that I sometimes used with a class if there were extra time and I needed an activity to serve as a "filler" was the game "hangman." Students appeared to enjoy playing this game and it helped me maintain positive student behavior when they had finished their work or activities. During the game, I only acknowledged students who were sitting quietly with their hands calmly raised. I used "hangman" with wide range of grade levels from second grade up until sixth grade. I did vary the word or phrase used in the game in an effort to ensure that it was developmentally appropriate for all students.

As a substitute teacher, I have experienced situations in which the students were expected to wait quietly in the hallway. This occurred for many reasons, such as the special's teacher was not yet ready or in her classroom, or perhaps the lunch line was running behind. In such situations, the students would have to wait quietly and not interrupt surrounding classrooms. When this happened, I often initiated the "I'm thinking of..." game in which I provided two to three clues and the students raised their hands to guess what I was thinking. For instance, one day I was walking a third grade class to music when the music teacher said to me, "I'll be right back, I have to take care of something." As a result, I had to wait with the class for approximately five minutes in the hallway outside the music room. In an effort to prevent the class from becoming restless, I started the "I thinking of..." game by saying to children, "I'm thinking of a fruit that is green on the outside and red on the inside" (RJ, 03/18/09, p. 32). As with the game "hangman," I also modified the contents depending on the age of the students with whom I was working.

Similarly, when students completed regular routines such as lining up or individual seatwork, I often created a game for the students. For instance, if the seats were organized into groups, I often had the students play a game to see which "team" or group was the quietest or most efficient. I would say to the students, "By the count of five, we need to have our desks cleared off, showing me that you are ready. I wonder which group will be ready first?" (RJ, 03/31/09, p. 39; RJ, 04/03/09, p. 44). At times, instead of making it a competition among the students, I directed them to follow a silly direction such as, "Students who are wearing shorts, please line up" or

“Students who are wearing green on their clothes, please line up” (RJ, 04/14/09, p. 53). Based on my reflections, using such behavior management strategies enabled me to focus on providing quality instruction to the students. These games also helped generate an attitude of cooperation among the students and maintained student motivation to work effectively.

Lastly, as a teacher I think it is imperative to use positive reinforcement as often as possible and I incorporated this philosophy into my substitute teaching on a daily basis. Whenever I noticed a student or students following directions, listening or working in a focused manner, I praised the student(s) appropriately. For example, while the class was in the hallway and I was waiting for the students to get ready by being quiet, facing forward with their hands at their side, I would point out one or two students who were behaving in an exemplary manner and say, “Thank you, I like how Mary is showing me she is ready in line” or “I see that Michael is showing me that he is ready, thank you” (RJ, 02/26/09; RJ, 03/09/09; RJ, 04/14/09). I observed that often by simply praising one or two students for following directions other students in the class followed their lead and adjusted their behavior accordingly (RJ, 03/09/09; RJ, 04/14/09).

### **Literacy Instruction**

During the course of this self-study, teachers frequently instructed me to conduct read alouds, guided reading groups and large group literacy instruction. It is important to note that while I always strived to follow the classroom teachers’

instructions as closely as possible, there were certain instructional techniques that I incorporated into my literacy instruction, not specified by the classroom teacher, in an effort to provide meaningful experience for the students. In this section, I describe the various strategies and techniques I used throughout my substitute teaching experiences.

### ***Read Alouds***

Commonly, when a classroom teacher indicated that he/she wanted me to conduct a read aloud he/she would simply state, “read aloud [certain title] to the students” and not elaborate any further (LP, 03/17/09; LP, 03/23/09; LP, 03/30/09; LP, 04/14/09). Before I started the read aloud, I would make sure I had the attention of all the students by checking that students were not playing with a toy at their desk or talking to a neighbor. Once I attained the students’ attention, I usually started a read aloud by reviewing with the students what had happened in the story thus far if it were a longer book such as a novel (RJ, 02/09/09; RJ, 02/24/09; RJ, 02/25/09; RJ, 03/23/09; RJ, 04/01/09; RJ, 04/03/09; RJ, 04/06/09; RJ, 04/09/09). Doing this benefited me, as I was often unfamiliar with the books used with the students, and more importantly the students because it would help them remember the main events and details of the story thus far.

After calling on volunteers to describe the main events of the story, I would invite students to make logical predictions of what they thought would happen next, making sure to encourage students to incorporate the main details of the story into

their guesses. If the teacher instructed me to read a short picture book aloud to the class, I would usually have the students generate predictions of what they thought the story was going to be about (RJ, 02/26/09; RJ, 03/09/09; RJ, 03/17/09; RJ, 03/30/09). I would prompt the students to use the book's title, and text illustrations from which to base their predictions. After reviewing and predicting what would happen next in the story, I would start to read the book aloud in an animated fashion with much expression and enthusiasm. I made sure to stop at appropriate times during the reading in order to discuss the story. I usually accomplished this by posing questions to the students in an effort to initiate student dialogue. I also used this time to have students confirm or disconfirm their predictions and to generate new predictions. Lastly, once I finished reading the story or the assigned chapter(s) from a novel, I facilitated discussion among the students, providing varying degrees of support to the students in order to be developmentally appropriate. I would often initiate discussion by posing comprehension questions, encouraging students to make connections to the reading or simply to have students share their thoughts.

### ***Guided Reading Groups***

I conducted guided reading groups whenever the classroom instructed me to do so in the lesson plan. I had the opportunity to lead guided reading groups in a variety of grade levels, usually ranging from second grade to fifth grade. I observed that sixth grade teachers generally did not plan for me to manage guided reading groups. Similar to read alouds, when I met with guided reading groups I would

usually have the students take a picture walk through the story and generate predictions of what they thought was going to happen or what they would learn about in the text (RJ, 02/02/09; RJ, 02/26/09; RJ, 03/30/09; RJ, 03/31/09; RJ, 04/09/09).

This technique seemed to help students to anticipate what they would be reading.

After having the students predict by looking at the pictures in text, I also introduced any new vocabulary words that may be unfamiliar to the students. Often, depending on the book used, vocabulary words are located in the front or back of the text. As a group we would look up the meaning of the word, often located in the guided reading text, and put the vocabulary words correctly into sentences. Again, as when conducting a read aloud, upon the conclusion of a guided reading text, I would initiate a discussion of the story with the small group of students. When available, I would use the questions provided by the teacher edition text, otherwise I would do my best to pose thought provoking questions that helped facilitate student reflection and a deeper understanding of the text.

### ***Large Group Instruction***

Typically the classroom teacher had me implement a lesson with the entire class when he or she wanted me to introduce a new skill or strategy that would assist the students with their literacy development (RJ, 02/02/09; RJ, 02/04/09; RJ, 02/09/09; RJ, 03/09/09; RJ, 03/30/09; RJ, 03/31/09; RJ, 04/01/09). First, in large group instruction, I would fully explain the new strategy or skill to the students. After providing students with an explanation, I would pose questions to the class in

order to quickly assess if the class, in general, understood the topic or needed further explanation. When doing this, I made sure to supply the students with enough wait time for them to fully process both the new content and questions posed to them. Once it appeared that students had developed an appropriate understanding, I modeled the strategy or skill to the class, often receiving student input along the way. I used a think aloud or simply demonstrated how to incorporate the strategy through a mini-lesson. After I had the opportunity to explain and demonstrate the new strategy to the class, I took time to have students to practice independently. During that time, as students worked quietly, I circulated among the students to provide additional assistance whenever necessary.

### **Classroom Literacy Environment**

In this section, I describe the various literacy features common among the various elementary classrooms in which I conducted the study. I also describe the features of the literacy environment that I regularly incorporated into my instruction.

#### ***Common Literacy Environment Features of Elementary Classrooms***

My observations of the classroom environments indicated that there are certain features commonly found in elementary classrooms. For instance, most classrooms had a front board, whether it was a chalk or white board, which the teacher could use during instruction and to post important messages such as the daily schedule or “morning message” (O, 02/02/09; O, 02/03/09; O, 02/04/09; O, 02/05/09;

O, 02/09/09; O, 02/12/09; O, 02/24/09; O, 02/26/09; O, 03/04/09; O, 03/09/09; O, 03/11/09; O, 03/17/09; O, 03/18/09; O, 03/31/09; O, 04/03/09; O, 04/08/09; O, 04/09/09). Furthermore, 19 out of 22 classrooms had overhead projectors. In some classrooms, the projector was front and center making it easily accessible. In other classrooms, the projector was located in a corner with papers and other materials piled on top of it. This suggested that it was rarely used by the classroom teacher and made it difficult for me, the substitute teacher, to access it (O, 04/01/09).

Most kindergarten through fifth grade classrooms (excluding sixth grade) had a carpeted area for whole group instruction. While substituting, I found that having the students meet at the carpet instead of staying at their desks, helped them stay focused because they were not being distracted by any toys or school supplies (i.e., pencils, scissors, erasers). In addition to a large carpet area for instruction, most classrooms provided areas for small group instruction. Often small group instruction was accommodated by a small kidney shaped table located at the back of the classroom. Most classrooms in which I taught in had two to three computers per room for the students to use (O, 02/02/09; O, 02/26/09; O, 03/09/09; O, 03/11/09; O, 03/17/09; O, 03/23/09; O, 03/30/09; O, 04/03/09; O, 04/08/09; O, 04/09/09; O, 04/14/09; O, 05/15/09).

Additionally, almost every classroom in which I substituted had a classroom library (O, 02/02/09; O, 02/03/09; O, 02/04/09; O, 02/09/09; O, 02/26/09; O, 03/09/09; O, 03/11/09; O, 03/17/09; O, 03/23/09; O, 03/30/09; O, 04/01/09; O, 04/03/09; O, 04/08/09; O, 04/09/09; O, 04/14/09). I observed that some classroom



libraries housed a wide variety of books neatly organized by genre or reading level. Often these classroom libraries had carpet squares or bean bags to help children be comfortable and relaxed while reading. However, other classroom libraries were small and poorly organized. The shelves accommodated books that appeared to be in no particular order. According to my observations notes, the classrooms that had smaller classroom libraries with poorly organized books had a tendency to be associated sixth grade classrooms (O, 02/03/09; O, 02/04/09; O, 02/09/09; O, 04/01/09). Perhaps sixth grade teachers expect students to make more use of the school's library instead of the classroom's library.

### ***Features I Incorporated into My Instruction***

I incorporated certain features commonly found in classrooms into my substitute teaching on a regular basis.

#### ***Helpful Features of the Classroom Literacy Environment***

The white/chalk board was invaluable to my teaching as I used it in every aspect of the day. In the morning, I usually wrote my name, schedule and morning routine on the board. When teaching any lesson, whether it was math, English Language Arts, or an arts and craft project I would use the board to write directions/steps and to demonstrate how to complete a task. Another aspect of the classroom literacy environment that proved to be useful to me in my work as a substitute teacher was the classroom library. If I or the students finished an activity with additional time remaining, I sometimes selected a book from the classroom

library and read aloud to the students. Doing this helped keep the students engaged and helped fill the remaining time with a meaningful experience. Additionally, I had students use the classroom library when they had finished their allocated work and there was nothing formally assigned to occupy their time. If students did not have books in their desks ready to read, I invited them to select books from the classroom library.

### ***Posters Displayed in Classrooms***

Classrooms commonly had various posters on display. I referred to the posters during instruction if they were applicable to the lesson. For instance, while reviewing long division with a class, I noticed a teacher-made poster hanging at the front of the room (RJ, 05/15/09). The poster illustrated the various steps involved in long division through the use of a teacher created acronym. After observing this, I referred to the poster during the review lesson on math division. I recognized that doing this provided me with a visual to use in the lesson and enabled me to remain consistent with the classroom teacher's terminology. Doing this enabled the students to be less confused than if I introduced a math term with which they were not familiar.

At times, posters were helpful with regard to classroom management. I observed teacher made posters that stated the classroom rules or "constitution." When I was substituting in a fourth grade classroom, I noticed that there were posters that had different "voice levels" posted (O, 02/03/09). When I attained the class's attention to remind them to work quietly, I referred to the classroom teacher's poster

and said, “Remember we need to be using level two voice because we are working quietly with partners” (O, 02/03/09). Again, by having the classroom teacher’s poster available provided me with a source to refer back to with the students and enabled me to act in consistent manner as the regular classroom teacher. By doing this, the students were familiar with the terms I used and, therefore, could concentrate completely on the task at hand.

### ***SMART Board Availability and Usage***

SMART boards were installed in 7 out of the 22 classrooms in which I substituted. The arrangement and set up of the SMART board by the classroom teacher, influenced whether or not I was able to use the SMART board during my time in the classroom. One third grade teacher provided me with a separate set of detailed plans specifically for the SMART board (LP, 02/02/09). The plans, which were easy to read and follow, enabled me to incorporate the SMART board into every aspect of the day’s events. I observed that when I used the SMART board to supplement my instruction, the students appeared to be engaged (RJ, 02/02/09; RJ, 03/31/09; RJ, 04/08/09). Other teachers, on the other hand, specifically instructed me not use the SMART board in their absence (LP, 03/17/09). Sometimes, if the teacher instructed me not to use the SMART board, it made my ability to provide quality instruction to the students more challenging. This occurred because I often had little to no white/chalk board space to use during instruction because the SMART board took up the majority of the space available in the front of the room. In some cases, I had only had a narrow section of white board to use for demonstrations or

instructions. Overall, I found it helpful when the classroom teacher allowed me to use the SMART to supplement the material, but not become overly reliant on the SMART board for instruction (in case there was a complication with the technology).

### **Patterns**

While coding and analyzing the data, I recognized two contrasting patterns emerged between the primary and intermediate grade level, which I highlight below.

#### ***Behavior Management Strategies***

One pattern that emerged was that the lesson plans for primary classrooms—kindergarten through third grade—were more likely to provide behavior management strategies that the students were familiar with than the lesson plans for intermediate classrooms—fourth through sixth grade. If the regular classroom teacher supplied me with appropriate behavior management techniques that the students responded well to, I was able to stay consistent with the classroom teacher's rules and expectations (RJ, 02/02/09; RJ, 03/11/09; RJ, 03/30/09). Doing this helped to make a smoother transition for the students from the classroom teacher to me, the substitute teacher.

One second grade teacher described in the lesson plan her system of behavior management in the following way:

This is a wonderful group of students. I don't think you will have any problems. If there are any issues with behavior, I use a clothespin stoplight system on the front board. If I have to give more than one warning, I move a child to yellow. If the behavior continues, the child will move to red. Feel free to use that system and let me know of any children who need to move their pins (LP, 03/30/09, p. 4).

This excerpt effectively communicated to me that the classroom teacher uses a “traffic light” system to help manage student behavior. Similarly, a third grade teacher informed me of her established behavior management system by stating:

Great group of kids!! They respond REALLY WELL to praise and rewards. They can earn a handful of marbles if they do something well as a class. If they do something well as a group, someone from the group can put a penny in their cup. They know the procedure. If they do something well as an individual, they can earn a bee. You give them a bee, they write their name on the bee and put it in the bee hive (LP, 04/14/09, p. 3).

Both examples described behavior management systems unique to each particular classroom that I would not have been able to incorporate into my teaching if the classroom teacher had not informed me. In contrast, intermediate elementary classrooms, fourth grade through sixth grade, had a tendency not to provide techniques or describe established behavior management systems. Generally, as the students became older, the less information the classroom teacher provided.

### ***Independent Seatwork***

Another pattern I observed was that in the intermediate elementary grades, especially sixth grade, the classroom teacher tended to assign a greater amount of independent seatwork than the primary elementary grades. Sixth grade classroom teachers commonly assigned videos with worksheets, review packets, text book worksheets that students were expected to complete individually. When the classroom teachers planned lessons in this way, it minimized the amount of instruction that I delivered to students. Often in sixth grade classes, the classroom

teacher provided directions in the lesson plan such as specific page numbers and questions or chapters for the students to complete, but did not indicate if he/she wanted me, the substitute, to introduce or discuss the content with the class. In contrast, the primary grade classroom teachers generally expected me to deliver instruction to their specifications and then provide the students with time to practice the recently introduced skill.

### **Five Characteristics of a Self-Study Methodology**

According to LaBoskey (2004), there are five characteristics that are essential to self-studies. Below, I address each characteristic and describe how I successfully incorporated each characteristic.

#### ***Self-Initiated and Focused***

The first characteristic of a self-study described by LaBoskey (2004) pertains to how the self-study needs to be self-initiated and focused. The following is a description of a self-initiated and focused study articulated by LaBoskey:

In self-study of practice then the answer to the questions “who” is doing the research and “who” is being studied is the self. However, since it is always the study of practice, the self is not the only thing being studied. In being self-initiated and self-focused the study should also include the others(s) in the practice being studied (p.1).

My study of my work as a substitute teacher was self-initiated and focused on and by me. As LaBoskey (2004) highlighted, the self-study should not solely address just the research. In my study, I studied my own actions and responses but I also

examined and reflected on the actions of the classroom teachers and students, with whom I interacted on a daily basis. In order to accomplish this, I incorporated the classroom teachers' and students' voices in the study's findings through the use of quotes and artifacts.

### ***Improvement Aimed***

"Improvement aimed," refers to the notion that the researcher conducts a study in order to improve his or her practice (LaBoskey, 2004, p. 1). In chapter four, I described my observations and new understandings with regard to my own teaching practices. It is my goal to incorporate these new understandings in an effort to improve the effectiveness of my interactions as a teacher. The reflective nature of this study and my intention to inform my own teaching practices fulfilled this characteristic of a self-study. It was also my intention that this study informs others so that substitute teachers are perceived as respected and valued as integral members of the school community and not as persons who lack authority.

### ***Interactive***

The third characteristic, interactive, refers to the collaboration that is required to take place with others in the practice, with other researchers and with data sets produced (LaBoskey, 2004). For the entire duration of this self-study I met and collaborated with my advisor, who is an experienced teacher and researcher in the field of education. When meeting with my advisor, we discussed the work I had

completed thus far, ways to improve my research with regard to data collection, reflection and analysis and what tasks to accomplish in the future. In addition to my advisor, I also regularly collaborated with my colleague or “research partner.” While meeting with my research partner, we conversed about the difficulties we experienced during our research studies and provided each other possible suggestions to assist overcoming the challenges. My collaboration with my research partner afforded me a fresh perspective. In addition, during the course of this self-study, I frequently collaborated with various texts in the field of substitute teaching. By consulting with professional, peer reviewed texts it enabled me to “expand and re-frame interpretations, challenge assumptions reveal biases and triangulate findings” (LaBoskey, 2004, p. 1).

### ***Multiple, Primarily Qualitative, Methods***

LaBoskey (2004) emphasized the importance of a researcher who is conducting a self-study to employ a variety of methods such as observations, interviews, surveys, artistic methods, journaling, field notes, ethnography, and autobiography, in order to provide the necessary evidence and context to better understand their field of study. As a researcher, I utilized a variety of data collection methods in an effort to triangulate my findings, including the use of consistent data collection—observation of the classrooms’ literacy environment, ongoing reflection of my own teachings through the use of specific prompts and the collection of artifacts such as lesson plans, and worksheets — enabled me to garner data from a



variety of sources necessary for triangulation and for creating a rich and inclusive representation of my experience as possible.

### ***Exemplar-Based Validation***

Lastly, LaBoskey (2004) discussed how the “reader” is the ultimate authority who determines the validity of the research. According to LaBoskey (2004), “readers make that decision based on their judgment about the rigor of the research piece they are reading” (p. 1). Therefore, in order to demonstrate the validity of collected data and its corresponding interpretations, it is necessary to make “visible our data, our methods for transforming data into findings, and the linkages between data, findings, and interpretations” (LaBoskey, 2004, p. 1). When I discussed my findings and interpretations of the data collected, I made a concerted effort to fully explain to the reader the reasoning behind my conclusions through the use of multiple examples, quotes and figures.

### **Summary**

By analyzing and coding the data obtained during the course of this self-study, I was able to develop a deeper understanding of my own teaching and the factors that contribute to the success of my substitute teaching. I first articulated classroom teachers’ commonly held perceptions of substitute teachers as babysitters and how this perception contributed to the lack of authority that substitutes possess. Furthermore, through the accumulation of classroom teachers’ generated lesson plans

intended for the substitute teacher and reflection, I vividly described the common features and layout of highly detailed lesson plans. The quality and thoroughness of the lesson plans prepared for me influenced my ability to perform the various duties of a substitute teacher. Often, due to the classroom teachers' phrasing, terminology and lack of details, the classroom teachers' expectations of the substitute appeared to be ambiguous. Upon reflection, I noted that I possessed a certain repertoire of strategies that I commonly used to successfully manage a classroom of students, regardless of the instructions left by the classroom teacher. Such strategies included having the students earn or lose time for recess, playing hangman and making a game out of regular tasks such as lining up or working quietly. As with behavior management, I also used consistent techniques and strategies with regard to my literacy instruction. Lastly, I described the five characteristics of a self-study methodology and how I fulfilled each of the characteristics.

## **Chapter Five: Conclusions and Recommendations**

This self-study focused primarily on how I, in my work as a substitute teacher, negotiated the expectations of the elementary classroom teachers in whose classrooms I substitute taught. Over the course of the four month study, I recorded notes regarding the classrooms' literacy environment, reflected on my own teaching practices and experiences, and collected lesson plans and worksheets. Although the focus of this study concerned literacy instruction and the substitute teacher, I also addressed topics such as classroom management devices and common lesson plan characteristics, which are all influential factors of literacy instruction. The two key research questions were: "How do I, as a substitute teacher, negotiate classroom teachers' expectations related to literacy instruction?" and "As a substitute teacher, how do I use the classroom environment to support my literacy instruction?"

In order to answer the research questions, I recorded my thoughts and reflections of each substituting assignment. In an effort to remain consistent with my reflections, I used the same series of prompts to direct my reflective practice—what went well, what was challenging, and what conditions may have influenced my success. Reflecting on each day's events in such a way allowed me to develop a greater insight into my own teaching practices and determined what factors contributed to my successes and what areas needed improvement. I also recorded observations pertaining to each classroom's literacy environment, noting information such as the materials available, organization of literacy materials, accessibility of materials to students and literacy environment features that I routinely incorporated

into my teaching. Lastly, I collected any lesson plans and worksheets assigned by the classroom teacher. At the conclusion of each week, I read through the all of the data. Doing this enabled me to code the data and identify potential emerging patterns and themes. Once I recognized possible themes, I was then able to heighten my attention to these particular patterns during the following substitute teaching assignments. This ongoing process of analyzing data continued throughout the entire four month study.

In this chapter, I present several conclusions to the research questions based on the themes and ideas presented in the previous chapter. I also offer several suggestions for future researchers to consider in relationship to self-study methodology and substitute teachers.

## **Conclusions**

### ***Adhered to Classroom Teacher's Instructions***

When I look across my experiences as a substitute teacher during this study, I realize that in order to best accommodate classroom teachers' literacy expectations, I always made a concerted effort to adhere to the classroom teacher's instructions as closely as possible. For instance, if a teacher described a specific way to conduct "calendar" or certain questions to incorporate in a book introduction I made sure to do so. I believe that following the suggested protocol facilitated an easier transition for the students from the classroom teacher to me. Sometimes, as a result of closely adhering to the activities designated in the lesson plan, I felt pressured to complete all

of the day's lessons or activities. At times, I may have sacrificed the quality of my instruction in order to remain on the teacher's itinerary. There were instances when I felt limited or constrained by time and had to make a decision about how long to stay with an activity. There were times when I, perhaps, should have stayed longer with a particular topic that either the students were having difficulty with or that they found particularly interesting.

### ***Dealt with Outside the Classroom Factors***

I have come to the realization that my ability to negotiate the classroom teachers' expectations for teaching in general, and literacy instruction, specifically, was influenced by a series of factors, some of which I had control over, others I did not. There were, for example, always a series of factors that shaped, influenced, determined and even dictated my work as a substitute teacher prior to my entrance into the classroom. I call these factors "outside the classroom factors" as they relate to decisions made, not by me, but someone outside the classroom, most often the classroom teacher for whom I was substituting. The decisions a teacher made while writing his or her lesson plan, is an example of an "outside the classroom factor."

One outside factor that I encountered while substituting was limited classroom teacher expectations for me and for the students. Limited expectations of me often resulted in me feeling as though I was fulfilling the role of a babysitter. In addition to the limited expectations, I also experienced limited direction and lack of clarity in the lesson plans prepared for the substitute teacher. The decisions a teacher made about

what to include or what to leave out of her plan, as I have shown in the previous chapter, significantly impacted, either positively or negatively, my work with students.

Another outside factor or limitation was a lack of necessary materials or resources to conduct proposed activities. Often classroom teachers did not provide answer keys for various assignments planned for instruction. Not having answer keys for the class assignments also contributed to my inability to provide appropriate and meaningful feedback to students. An answer key for class assignments afforded me the ability to efficiently scan a student's work and quickly identify areas where a student was having difficulty or was confused about a concept. It was time consuming to solve each math problem or read each multiple choice question every time I checked students' work.

### ***Dealt with Inside the Classroom Factors***

The other type of factor occurred in the classroom during my work with students. I call these factors, "inside the classroom factors," and to some degree I had the ability to manage most, but not all of them. Throughout this self-study, student behavior was a central inside factor. In fact, the students were the unknown and most significant quantity in this equation. They impacted my ability to execute even the most detailed and specific of lesson plans. So, in a sense, I was negotiating both the lesson plan and the students in each classroom. Through the use of effective management strategies, I was able to manage student behavior. In the event that a

student misbehaved or displayed off task behavior, I redirected the student by calmly giving him/her one warning and reminded the student that he/she needed to working on his journal writing. Usually, upon reminding the student, he/she would return to work. In contrast, when students behaved in a cooperative manner it enabled me to focus my attention of the lesson at hand. In order to recognize positive behavior, I would praise students as often as possible.

It is important to note that often in a substitute teaching assignment it was my first time in the particular classroom. Therefore, another inside factor that I encountered was directly related to my lack of knowledge of a classroom's arrangement, the teacher's normal schedule and practices and the individual names and/or characteristics of each child. Often, when working with children, I would have them say their name to me before they posed a question or commented. Doing this accelerated the process of becoming familiar with the students.

### ***Sought Assistance from More Knowledgeable Others***

Frequently, I had to seek the assistance from more knowledgeable others such as teachers or students. Often, irrespective of how thorough the teacher's lesson plan may have been, I found myself unfamiliar with classroom routines, protocols or the location of materials. In order to remedy this and limit potential disruptions to the students' day, I would ask neighboring teachers or helpful students how to locate certain materials or how the classroom teacher would normally go about a particular task.

### ***Drew on My Knowledge of Teaching and Learning***

As a result of conducting this self-study, I am aware that there were certain devices or teaching strategies that I used consistently as a substitute teacher in an effort to meaningful instruction, regardless of the directions prepared by the classroom teacher. Such strategies included making sure I had all of the students' attention before commencing with a lesson, reviewing a topic or story with the class, stopping at appropriate times to discuss content, providing the students with sufficient wait time to answer questions and modeling or providing guided practice when introducing a new topic.

### ***Classroom Management***

A pattern that I observed during the course of this study was that as I worked in familiar situations or repeated placements, it enabled me to gradually become more comfortable, confident and successful in my teaching. I noticed that managing a classroom of students was easier for me or I was more successful with classrooms in which I had substituted previously. In other words, revisiting a classroom led to familiarity, which in turn led to success and comfort. This likely happened for a variety of reasons, many of which involve familiarity. First, I was already familiar with the teacher's day to day routines such as lining up for lunch, walking in the hallway, snack and dismissal as well as the classroom's layout. I also already knew students' names and their personalities. If there were a student in the class who could pose a behavior challenge, I was already alerted what student(s) to pay particular attention to. Knowing students' names made it significantly easier to give directions



and to redirect students' attention. Instead of saying for example, "Boys in the back need to stop talking," I was able to state, "John and Tyler, you need to stop talking and look up here." Knowing students' names also allowed me to deliver positive reinforcement by identifying a specific student who was following directions. For example, while walking in the hallway I might have said, "I like how Mary is not talking and facing forward. Thank you."

In addition to familiarity of the teacher's routine and the students' names and personalities when I was in a classroom in which substituted previously, I also had knowledge of the school building's layout (location of copiers, bathrooms, main office) and procedures. It appeared that each building in which I substituted, even within the same school district, had different procedures concerning student pick-ups, recess protocol and emergency procedures. After being in a building a few times, I became familiar with its unique procedures and thus developed a sense of comfort in knowing what to anticipate.

Another pattern that I recognized was that classroom management seemed to be the most challenging for me when I was working with guided reading groups and the rest of the class was working independently at centers (RJ, 2/26/09). This likely happened because I was trying to monitor the students' behavior and teach the small reading group simultaneously. When classroom teachers had me meet with guided reading groups they often stated that the students who were working independently, were to be "reading at their seats and/or writing" (LP, 04/03/09, p. 1). Not knowing specifically what students are supposed to be working on made it difficult to redirect

students. Before starting centers and guided reading, I always tried to give clear and explicit directions to the students as to what they were supposed to be working on. When appropriate, I would also write the directions on the white/chalk board so that students could refer to the directions.

When students were well behaved, I was able to focus my attention on providing quality literacy instruction. Instead of having to constantly monitor the children by reminding them to face forward, “with ears listening and eyes watching,” I could concentrate on the task at hand, such as a read aloud or a mini-lesson. When students were behaving appropriately, I was able to read a story or text in an animated fashion, to stop at certain points the main ideas and events and to probe deeper into students’ responses.

### ***Literacy Strategies***

Often, regardless of whether or not I was provided a detailed or inadequate lesson plan, I used my knowledge, background and experiences as a teacher and literacy specialist to supplement a teacher’s lesson plans with effective literacy instruction strategies. The teacher may have indicated for me to do a “read aloud to class” or “meet with guided reading groups” with little additional instructions. In such situations, with the intention of delivering effective and meaningful instruction and to best meet the needs of the students, I implemented effective strategies that were not specifically articulated by the classroom teacher. Such literacy strategies included: activating prior knowledge, confirming/disconfirming predications, and

probing deeper to elicit thoughtful responses from students. In this section, I describe my process in each area of literacy instruction and how students responded.

***Read Alouds.*** Prior to commencing a read aloud, whether I was reading a novel or a short picture book, I called on students to review what had happened so far in the text or predict what the thought was going to happen in the text. Often, students were initially hesitant to volunteer their thoughts and ideas. In order to act as a facilitator and encourage student participation, I made a concerted effort to leave a sufficient amount of wait time for the students. Doing this provided the students with time to digest the question posed to them and to generate a response. When students did participate in class discussion, I made sure to provide positive comments and not dismiss incorrect responses. I did this with the expectation of encouraging additional student participation. I observed that, often, once the first few students shared their thoughts and opinions regarding a particular text that this helped to motivate other students to comment and thus start a discussion.

***Guided Reading.*** When I met with guided reading groups, I often employed similar strategies as those described during read alouds. Reviewing important vocabulary or generating predictions regarding the text appeared to help students anticipate the content of the selected book. One important difference between large group instruction and guided reading concerned student involvement and participation. Students appeared to be more at ease and, thus, willing to engage in text discussion in guided reading. The informal, conversation-like atmosphere appeared to relax students who were quiet during large group instruction.

***Large Group Instruction.*** During large group instruction, it was important for me to remember to informally assess the students during the lesson in order to ascertain their understanding. I accomplished this by introducing an interactive component to the lesson with students putting their thumbs up or down to indicate if they agreed or disagreed with a particular answer or simply monitoring the expressions on their faces. Often, I could tell if a student was confused by his puzzled facial expression. In such cases, I worked one-on-one to alleviate any confusion.

After I delivered instruction, students usually had the opportunity to practice independently or in a small group. During this time, I would circulate among the students and assist those who had any questions or concerns. If I observed that several students had a common question or area of difficulty, I would then provide a whole group mini lesson to address the particular need.

### ***Utilized Features of the Classroom Literacy Environment***

When substituting, I attempted to use as many features of the classroom environment as possible. For instance, I regularly incorporated the white/chalk board to write the day's schedule or directions, the classroom library to have students select a book to read during silent reading, and posters on the wall whenever applicable to the lesson that was taught. Fountas and Pinnell (1996) stated that, "The library is one of the most important areas of the classroom" (p. 46). This proved to be true in my self-study. I often had students select a book to read during silent reading, or I would

use the classroom library to select a book to read aloud to the class in the event that I had extra time to spare.

To conclude, as I have shown in this chapter and in chapter four, time and time again in my work as a substitute teacher, I engaged in series of problem solving activities. Upon my arrival at a substitute teacher placement, I read through the lesson plan and materials trying to foresee any potential problems that may arise during the day and then generate possible remedies for them beforehand. Once the students arrived, I had to be flexible and resourceful in order to maintain smooth transitions between activities. My work as a substitute teacher required me to make decisions, sometimes multiple decisions, in the moment. In order to meet the expectations of the classroom teachers and deal with the outside and inside classroom factors, I had to problem solve: monitor and adjust my directions, instructions and activities, consult with a neighboring teacher, borrow books from the school library, create an answer key for a worksheet or familiarize myself with a chapter in a book before the students arrived or while they were at lunch. While the problem solving tasks varied in complexity from placement to placement, they were, nonetheless, always present. In all problem solving situations, I trusted my intuition as a teacher and drew on my knowledge of effective literacy strategies. As a problem solver, I was always cognizant of the individual needs of the students who were in front of me and I strived to best meet their needs.

## **Recommendations for Future Research**

There are several recommendations that I can make to future researchers who may be considering a self-study related to aspects of substitute teachers.

### ***Methods for a Self-Study Approach***

I would recommend that with any future self-study that considers and examines the role and expectations of a substitute teacher, that the research use a research journal to record reflections and observations. I found it most advantageous when the reflections were written during the teaching day or at the conclusion of the teaching day. This practice allowed me to reflect when my memories and thoughts were still fresh.

I would also recommend that with any future self-studies of this nature that the researcher gather the lesson plans and any worksheets that the classroom teacher leaves. Collecting the lesson plans and worksheet allowed me to revisit the data and analyze classroom teachers' expectations and specific instructions for a substitute teacher.

I would also recommend reading through all the collected data at the conclusion of each week. Doing this enabled me to monitor the data for possible themes or patterns that I was able to pay closer attention to in the following weeks. As discussed in chapter three, the study lasted for the duration of four months. This time frame may have limited my exposure to variety of classrooms and teachers'

expectations. Therefore, I would recommend that future studies, if possible, collect data for a period longer than four months.

### ***Perceptions of Substitute Teachers***

Upon reflection, there are also additional recommendations that I can make regarding future research related substitute teaching. One recommendation is to interview substitute teachers to gain their perspective on their own work. In other words, to find out how do substitute teachers perceive their profession and how do they believe they are perceived by others in the education field. A second recommendation is to conduct a study on classroom teachers' perspective of substitute teachers. In this study, the researcher could explore classroom teachers' perspectives by asking them questions related to their expectations of and for substitutes, the types of plans they leave for substitute teachers, how they prepare their students for a substitute teacher and their past experiences with substitutes. Interviewing both substitute teachers and classroom teachers could provide researchers with pertinent data regarding the classroom teachers' perceptions of substitute teachers and build upon my own findings.

### **Considerations for Administrators, Teachers and Substitute Teachers**

There are also several considerations and recommendations that I would like to suggest to teachers, administrators and substitute teachers. First, in order to maximize the efficiency and quality of substitute teachers, they must feel that they are

an integral part of the school community. It is necessary that substitute teachers be treated with same respect and authority as regular classroom teachers. Substitute teachers must be expected to fulfill the role of the classroom teacher in regular teacher's absence, and not as a "babysitter." This elevated status would help substitute teachers deliver quality instruction to the students. One way in which to accomplish this is by having substitute teachers being included in faculty meetings. On a similar note, Clifton and Rambaran (1987) stated that, "in order to improve the situation for substitute teachers, principals and school board administrators must be committed to integrating them into the educational system" and to "treat substitute teachers as professional members of staff" (p. 325).

Woods and Woods (1974) stated that,

At one extreme, substitutes are expected to serve a custodial function, to babysit. At the other extreme, substitutes are viewed as professional colleagues. We assume that the more administrators, teachers and substitutes can work as colleagues, the more continuity there will be in the pupils' education. (p. 167).

I believe that the goal of all educators is to provide children with the highest quality education possible that meets their individual needs. Therefore, in order to realize this goal, administrators, teachers and substitute teachers must work together to provide a meaningful education experience for all children.



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## Appendix A: Substitute Teaching Grade and School Schedule

Date	School	Grade	Length of Day
February 2, 2009	Morrisport Central School District	3	Half
February 3, 2009	Morrisport Central School District	6	Full
February 4, 2009	Morrisport Central School District	6	Full
February 5, 2009	Morrisport Central School District	6	Full
February 6, 2009	Morrisport Central School District	6	Full
February 9, 2009	Victoria Valley Central School District	6	Full
February 12, 2009	Morrisport Central School District	6	Full
February 24, 2009*	Morrisport Central School District	6	Full
February 25, 2009	Morrisport Central School District	6	Full
February 26, 2009*	Morrisport Central School District	2	Full
February 27, 2009	Morrisport Central School District	2	Full
March 4, 2009	Morrisport Central School District	6	Full
March 5, 2009	Morrisport Central School District	6	Full
March 6, 2009	Morrisport Central School District	2	Full
March 9, 2009	Morrisport Central School District	3	Full
March 11, 2009	Victoria Valley Central School District	4	Full
March 17, 2009	Morrisport Central School District	3	Full
March 18, 2009	Morrisport Central School District	kindergarten	Full
March 23, 2009*	Morrisport Central School District	3	Full
March 24, 2009	Morrisport Central School District	3	Full
March 30, 2009	Victoria Valley Central School District	2	Full
March 31, 2009	Morrisport Central School District	3	Full
April 1, 2009 *	Morrisport Central School District	6	Full
April 2, 2009	Morrisport Central School District	6	Full
April 3, 2009	Morrisport Central School District	4	Half
April 6, 2009	Victoria Valley Central School District	6	Half
April 8, 2009	Morrisport Central School District	5	Half
April 9, 2009	Victoria Valley Central School District	4	Full
April 14, 2009	Victoria Valley Central School District	3	Full
May 15, 2009	Victoria Valley Central School District	4	Full

\* This indicates consecutive placement days.

## **Appendix B: Classroom Literacy Environment Observations**

Grade level:

Number of students:

Length of time to engage in literacy activities:

Classroom Literacy Environment:

--

How did I use the literacy environment in my literacy instruction?

--

How did the students make use of the literacy environment?

--

**What was most successful about today's experience?**

**What was challenging?**