

Training: A Little Different Approach

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Research shows as much as ten percent of a child's educational time is spent with them. They aren't necessarily familiar with the content area they are teaching or taken a single education course. Yet, everyone expects them to be professional, masters of discipline, knowledgeable of the legal aspects of being in a classroom as well as the school rules and regulations, and follow and complete the teacher's lesson plan. Who are they? Super Persons? Yes! **They are Substitute Teachers.**

In greater Chicagoland, the need for Substitute Teachers is as significant as it is elsewhere. This need is not recent: it has been ongoing for several years. As there was not an adequate Substitute Teacher work force, the "put a warm body in a classroom" practice prevailed. School systems often employed, as Substitute Teachers, anyone who walked through the door with a valid substitute license and was able to pass the mandated criminal background check.

Toward the end of the 2000-2001 school year, the edge-city schools located just west of Chicago experienced a change in finding qualified Substitute Teachers due to the efforts of West 40 Intermediate Service Center, a regional service agency. Inspired by a presentation at the 2000 National Staff Development Council convention, West 40 consultants planned and prepared a Substitute Teacher recruitment and training program to be offered to all potential Substitute Teachers in the West 40 region. By appealing to a regional market for Substitute Teachers, the West 40 effort was cost effective and presented the beginning of a professional development program for Substitute Teachers.

The benefit to individual school districts was identifying and training candidates for substitute teaching positions with little or no cost. The Substitute Teachers benefit from the streamlined application process and confidence gained by learning necessary skills and what to expect.

Superintendents in the West 40 region needed 1) a larger pool of licensed substitute Teachers, and 2) well-informed, knowledgeable Substitute Teachers who could be effective in the classroom. The Executive Director of West 40, Gretchen Alexander, asked if I would be willing to develop a training program for Substitute Teachers. She had attended a workshop presented by Utah State University's Substitute Teaching Institute and was anxious to establish a recruitment and training program. Alexander handed me the materials from Utah State and invited me to look through them for inclusion in the program. I could use the materials as they were, develop new materials, or find other existing materials.

My work began by talking to six local administrators regarding what qualities they needed in Substitute Teachers and what skills they thought Substitute Teachers needed. The comments of these administrators were remarkably similar.

A substitute Teacher should be a person who:

- acts and dresses professionally,
- likes young people and/or children,
- knows how to work with students,
- has an idea of what it means to teach (presentation skills), and
- can follow a lesson plan.

With that information in hand, I began to outline a course, which, upon comparison, was a remarkable match to the materials from Utah State University.

However, being a firm believer that a textbook is not the curriculum, I developed a program that integrated and digressed from USU's program. I also drew upon the recruitment program offered by West 40's sister agency, the South Cook Intermediate Service Center. That program was designed to take people through the licensing process and answer general questions about how to go about applying for substitute teaching positions.

Initially, the West 40 program was designed as a three-day course concentrating on the skills needed to be a Substitute Teacher. An hour long session about the licensing process was advertised; the plan was to share information about substitute training at that session. Ninety people attended the first session on the licensing process. This program was an hour long presentation offered at three different times:

morning, afternoon, and evening. All three sessions were attended by almost an equal number of people. Information, application forms, and a walk through the application process were included in the session. A representative from the Suburban Cook County Regional Office of Education, which has authority to issue the licenses, was present to answer questions and to collect completed applications. The Substitute Teacher training program was talked about at the session and sign-up forms made available. Over time, this initial information session has been pared down to one half-hour and is presented just before a training session. Often, people attending the half-hour introduction remain for the training session.

From the onset, no one showed interest in the three-day training program. A modified two-day course was presented once. Feedback from that session and talking with licensing information meeting attendees indicated that a one-day, eight-hour session would be well received. No one negated the need for training.

Substitute Teacher training was redesigned and presented as a 1 day, 8 hour course. This shortened program has been given four times to date at West 40 and three times at other regional agencies. Interestingly enough, almost half the participants at each session remarked that the course should really be a two-day course. Marketing the two-day course differently is now under construction. This entire program is an ongoing work in progress.

It would be ideal if each school could present a training program for Substitute Teachers who will work in the school; however, it is not feasible or economically sound to do so. Illinois has over 900 separate school districts and 4,000 schools. Individual schools usually do not have the time or personnel to offer the programs. Second, it is not time efficient for Substitute Teachers because they request to work with several schools or districts to ensure continuous employment and they would be required to attend several training programs. (Illinois law limits school districts to employing a Substitute Teacher for no more than 90 days per school year. If a Certified Teacher is acting as a Substitute Teacher, the limit is 120 days per district.) Providing the service through a regional agency (Intermediate Service

Centers or Regional Offices of Education in Illinois) is a cost and time effective delivery system.

Once the Substitute Teacher training curriculum was developed and agreed upon, Sarah Urycki, special programs consultant for West 40, took on the tasks of coordinating the program, including program promotion, ordering of textbooks, the logistics of the training day, food catering, and securing the evaluations. Without her coordination, energy, and enthusiasm, the program would not have been well attended or run as smoothly. Having been a Substitute Teacher at one time in her career, Ms. Urycki added much to the discussion and sometimes presented part of the instruction.

Ms. Urycki's first step was recruiting new Substitute Teachers and encouraging them to take part in the training. Her advertising approaches included the traditional newspaper advertisements, flyers sent home with students' "book bags" or "back packs", and plugging the training program at the license information sessions. For the initial information sessions and training programs, the majority of attendees came from the "book bag" advertising. Flyers explaining the need for Substitute Teachers were sent to each principal. The principals were asked to duplicate the flyers and distribute them to each student.

Parents of students responded. Surprisingly, though, the attendees were not the anticipated "stay-at-home" moms who wanted or needed some type of employment. The attendees were the professionals who had recently been laid off and believed that substitute teaching might provide the income they needed until employment was found. Other participants were people who had been trained as teachers but entered the business world. These people now found themselves out of a job or dissatisfied with their current positions and they wanted a way to enter teaching. A few participants had recently graduated from college and wanted work until they could find full-time employment. Less than a quarter of the initial respondents were stay-at-home moms. The respondents were a surprise because school systems long had been lamenting that no professionals could be found to fill Substitute Teacher positions.

The Substitute Teacher training sessions have been successful, with those in attendance remarking that if the course had not been offered, they probably would never have considered substitute teaching because they did not feel prepared. We came to the following conclusions: 1) we needed to target marketing efforts toward professionals; 2) professionals want to come to a job well prepared; 3) the current slump in the job market benefits the substitute pool and we should capitalize on people's need for employment.

The Current Model

The one-day training for Substitute Teachers is the current model being offered. Sole reliance on newspaper ads has been replaced by a combination of paid advertisements, posting notices at schools, and "book bag" flyers. Substitute Teacher training sessions are limited to 20 to 25 people to allow for adequate interactions and role playing. The Substitute Training Program has also reached out to other parts of Illinois. Sister regional agencies across the state have offered the course. Attendees' remarks about the need for the class were consistent across the geographical areas.

The one-day session has the following outcomes:

- to prepare persons to be professional Substitute Teachers,
- to familiarize persons with appropriate behavior management,
- to familiarize persons with some of the Illinois laws regarding teaching,
- to allow time for persons to practice presenting parts of lessons.

Much more time is spent on the preparing of persons to be professional Substitute Teachers than had ever been anticipated. Very specific questions were asked regarding the application process and expectations. Information regarding some very basic topics such as, "What do I do for lunch when substitute teaching in an elementary school?" was provided. Because the sessions usually had people who are already substituting, intra class conversations were specific and rich. Attendees ranked this portion of the program as one of the most valuable experiences and the one that met everyone's needs.

The area considered second most valuable is the behavior management instruction. Most people have heard the horror stories of behavior management for Substitute Teachers. Consequently, significant time is spent on this topic, too. Participants share some stories and try brainstormed ideas of how the problems could have been approached. Quick presentations (5-10 minutes) on one or two actual discipline systems that work were given. Attendees left with five basic discipline concepts: individual, respectful, courteous, fair, and consistent. The participants also left with two other significant thoughts: 1) It is all right to call a parent even though you are a Substitute Teacher, and 2) if you lose control of a classroom, you can almost never gain it back, so never lose control.

Attendees reported working with a lesson plan (i.e. modifying a lesson plan to fit a specific amount of time and certain grade level) and presentation time are a valuable part of the training sessions. Participants who have substitute taught prior to taking the training usually remark, "I wish I had known this before I started substitute teaching." The lesson plans used in the program are from a participant's experience with a problematic lesson, a lesson the instructor has made up, or the scenarios in the *Substitute Teacher Handbook*.

A portion of the instructional time is used to show current and future Substitute Teachers how to work with video or audio presentations, a rather common assignment given to Substitute Teachers. The *Substitute Teacher Handbook* includes information about showing a video, film or filmstrip, but the demonstrations relate to using any video or audio presentation as an instrument of learning. This means stopping the video or audio to ask questions appropriate for the class. "Will I have time to view the video or listen to the audio prior to student instruction?" is always a question asked in class. Participants are never quite comfortable with the answer, "You need to watch or listen at the same time the students do but think of questions while you are viewing or listening. Stop the video or audio and pose questions in line with the reason for showing the video." However, by the end of this segment of the class, participants understand how they can practice the skill of stopping a video and posing

questions by trying this technique at home when viewing a video.

Administering or proctoring a test is another topic discussed because many Substitute Teachers think that when students are engaged in writing or taking a test, the substitute has “free time” as long as he/she monitors (often from the desk) the class. The concepts of “management by walking around” and “assistance by walking around” are focal points of the training session. This concept is not only repeated but also modeled and somewhat “drilled” into the heads of participants.

The opening thirty seconds of class is brought up several times during instruction. The training program models the opening thirty seconds and has participants reflect on what occurred during that time and how teachers can take control of a class or lose control of a class in just thirty seconds.

Participants make use of the K-W-L (which stands for “What do I Know”, “What do I Want to know”, “What have I Learned”) also provided in the *Substitute Teacher Handbook*. Many other current instructional techniques are modeled and referenced during the course of the day’s training program. Consequently, whether participants are teachers who want a “refresher,” persons who have substitute taught a few times, or persons new to substitute teaching, they have all indicated they learned more in the one-day training than they had anticipated.

The legal background presented in the substitute orientation video is used to present some general information. Additional information about special education laws in the State of Illinois and stressing the concept of supervision at all times are usually sufficient to answer participant questions about legal issues. Many questions surface about human needs and problem students if supervision is required at all times. Attendance as a legal document is stressed. Regarding administration of medicines, the rule is “Don’t!”

Because all participants receive a *Substitute Teacher Handbook*, they are encouraged to read the chapter devoted to legal issues at their own convenience. In each class, questions surface about insurance coverage for Substitute Teachers. In Illinois, Substitute Teachers are covered by the same

insurance as full time teachers while they are engaged in the act of teaching or other required duties in the work place. The majority of participants find comfort in learning about insurance coverage because of anxiety about possible litigation.

By the close of the training session, both participants and instructors are tired, but a sense of accomplishment and “now I am better prepared” prevails. Typically participants would like to have more time to learn instruction techniques, lesson plan modification, and behavioral management. The day is fast paced and packed with information. Participants have indicated the time goes by very quickly.

Of the close to 140 participants who have evaluated the class, all but one said the class fit his/her needs. More than one-quarter of the trainees responded that the training session should be mandatory for all Substitute Teachers. Approximately ten percent have indicated that the session should be more than one day. Several people felt it important to comment that although they ranked the importance of each section, the last place ranking does not mean that portion was unimportant or should be eliminated.

Substitute Teacher training is a must if educators expect to work with a professional cadre of Substitute Teachers. The program offered in the edge-city school districts of suburban Chicago is beginning to meet that need, and is a work in progress. However, this approach to training substitute teachers is having a positive impact on student learning by assuring well prepared Substitute Teachers are in the classroom.

The next step in West 40s continuum of programs to improve substitute teaching will be programs for administrators and other staff who manage and support Substitute Teachers at the district and school level. This program will emphasize creating policies and the environment that treats Substitute Teachers as professionals and giving them the information and support they need to succeed.

AGENDA – One-Day Program

The day begins with a half-hour session on how to apply for a substitute license.

- I. Introductions, Overview
- II. Stop, Think, Write – 30 seconds to start; modeling of good teaching
- III. Name tag – four representations
 - A. Introduce self – teacher interaction & comment on presentation style
 - B. Other ways of getting to know students
- IV. Textbook scavenger hunt
- V. Professional Substitute – use video to model stopping to ask questions
- VI. Classroom management
 - A. K-W-L
 - B. Table share
 - C. Remaining questions
 - D. Four skills of behavior management – model preparing a worksheet
 - E. Fill out L portion
- VII. Expanding/modifying lesson plans and using a rubric
 - A. Text as examples
 - B. Assign topic, grade level to table groups
 - C. Students Prepare presentation, present opening 5 minutes, tell rest of plan
 - D. Group and teacher critique
- VIII. Legal Issues – use video, talk more about specific topics
- IX. Familiarization with remainder of Chapter 5 and answer other questions
- X. Evaluation, distribution of training certificates, good-bye's

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