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2012

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Vorell, Matthew S. and Steimel, Sarah, "Socializing the Nomad: Problematizing the Socialization of Profession-Specific Temporary Workers" (2012). *Papers in Communication Studies*. 40.

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# Socializing the Nomad: Problematizing the Socialization of Profession-Specific Temporary Workers

Matthew S. Vorell  
Sarah Steimel

*While growth in the majority of economic areas has slowed greatly over the past few years, the percentage of individuals moving into temporary labor has seen double-digit expansion. However, the understanding of how temporary workers switch from organizational outsiders to insiders has remained largely unexplored as traditional socialization scholarship has focused primarily on linear and sequential steps. This study challenged the nature of the socialization process by analyzing how substitute teachers, as profession-specific temporary workers, assimilated in their work arrangement. We concluded that instead of the linear model dedicated to organizational members with long-term contracts, socialization models encompassing substitute teachers would best be described as cyclical.*

With uncertainty being the only thing that has been certain, organizations have adapted by relying more on contingent and alternative work arrangements with their employees. Traditionally, the largest category of temporary workers in the United States has been temporary clerical and administrative workers (i.e., administrative work), comprising around forty percent of the temporary workers in the United States. However, there has been a second, growing category of temporary workers in the United States. These workers have trained in a particular professional field or craft (bookkeepers, legal and medical secretaries, industrial workers, information technology engineers, etc.), but have often contracted with different organizations on part-time or temporary bases to provide their professional services (Melchionno, 1999). Gossett (2006) explained that the number of temporary laborers has grown in these “specialized” professions (i.e., medicine, law, and education).

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Additionally, the Bureau of Labor Statistics reported that the average job tenure for U.S. employees at their current employer dropped from 10 years in 1983 (Sehgal, 1983) to just under 4.1 years in January 2008 (Berchem, 2010). As job tenure decreased across a wide variety of occupations, the “non-temporary” segment of the work force was increasingly characterized by the instability endemic to temporary labor. As more individuals became contract laborers (either explicitly or implicitly), the number of people wearing the mantle of temporary worker increased. Many career professionals, including lawyers, engineers, educators, doctors and others have worked in the field of their training over most of their career, but they have provided these services for a number of different organizations. Given that between 10 to 42 million Americans could already be considered temporary workers (Kruse, 2012) and the likely increase in temporary workers in the near future, there is a practical need for an understanding of how temporary workers integrate into their work environments.

### Organizational Socialization

Socialization is widely articulated as “the process by which an individual acquires the social knowledge and skills necessary to assume an organizational role” (van Maanen & Schein, 1979, p. 211). At the heart of any socialization process lays the communicative transaction and manifestation of what new organizational members must know and do to eventually be perceived as seasoned colleagues by established organizational members. Thus, while numerous disciplines (from business to psychology) have investigated this phenomenon in different arenas, communication remains fundamental to any socialization process regardless of contextual factors.

Current organizational research in general, however, has largely assumed those individuals being socialized into new jobs are long-term permanent employees of the socializing organization. Virtually no consideration has been given to the unique struggles faced by those who must “learn the ropes” (Allen, 2000, p. 179) of many different organizations without the benefit of a long or consistent tenure at any one in particular. This study was interested in the socialization experiences of those temporary workers who belonged to a pre-defined profession, but who contracted with different organizations to work short-term, temporary contracts. By doing so, this study hoped to problematize key areas in which the traditional organizational socialization model may be reconceptualized to account for the unique experiences of the growing ranks of temporary workers in the modern economy.

As research in this area abounds, and other scholars have offered detailed, comprehensive reviews (e.g. Jablin, 2001; Waldeck & Myers, 2008), we did not attempt a comprehensive review. Rather, we highlight the work that explicitly relates to this study. Jablin (2001) offered an overview of organizational socialization literature that focused on communication. He presented socialization as a linear, rational process comprised of three stages: anticipatory socialization, assimilation and exit. Jablin divided the first stage, anticipatory socialization, into two parts: vocational and organizational. According to Jablin, vocational anticipatory socialization is the process of learning about work and work life that occurred before an individual entered the work force, typically in childhood and young adulthood. Vocational anticipatory socialization messages came from a variety of sources, including parents, peers, part-time work and the media; organizational anticipatory socialization, on the other hand, begins right before the beginning of a new organizational position and involves recruitment and interviewing (Levine & Hoffner, 2006).

The second stage of socialization, according to Jablin (2001), is assimilation, or the process by which individuals are integrated into the culture of a specific organization. Assimilation consists of two parts, encounter and metamorphosis. The encounter stage transpires when individuals first enter an organization or a new organizational role. During encounter, the new members receive both intentional (explicit and direct) and implicit (indirect) socialization messages about job-related skills as well as organizational norms and values (see Jablin, 2001; Louis, 1980; Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). New organizational members are not, however, simply passive recipients of socialization messages. Instead, the newcomer simultaneously seeks information regarding the organization and his or her role in it (Miller & Jablin, 1991; Morrison, 2002). The newcomer might encounter surprises and/or role ambiguity (Louis, 1980), which might also increase his or her desire to reduce uncertainty by seeking out socialization messages. Metamorphosis occurs, then, when the newcomer transforms into a contributing component of the organization (Jablin, 2001). Jablin's (2001) final stage, organizational exit, manifests when an individual leaves the organization, transitions out of his or her socialized role, and/or simultaneously slips into another role.

This traditional model of organizational socialization, however, has been criticized. Critics note that the organizational socialization literature frequently assumed a universal experience of organizational socialization. Many scholars note that the linear, stage model presumed

that all individuals move through socialization “steps” in the same sequential order at roughly the same time (Bullis & Stout, 2000; Smith & Turner, 1995; Waldeck & Myers, 2007). Individual variances and non-linear progressions received less focus. Temporary workers, given their contingent and alternative working arrangements, might be one segment of the workforce for whom the linear model might not appropriately grasp their socialization experiences.

### *Temporary Workers' Barriers to Socialization*

No research to date has investigated temporary workers' organizational socialization (A near exception to this trend was Kramer's (2011) socialization model geared to voluntary workers). Research on socialization has identified a few barriers that are likely to impact temporary workers. First, temporary workers are less likely than traditional workers to be socialized through formal, institutionalized socialization practices. According to Jones (1986), institutionalized socialization practices included collective, organized, fixed and sequential socialization practices. These institutionalized practices often took the form of collective, planned training of new organizational members. However, Wiens-Tuers and Hill (2002) found that temporary workers were less likely to be put through formal training exercises than full-time employees (and the shorter their likely duration, the less likely they were to be formally trained). As a result, temporary workers might be less likely to experience institutionalized socialization practices than their peers who worked for the company long-term. This might be problematic for temporary workers, because as Jones (1986) found, “the more institutionalized the form of socialization was, the greater were expressed job satisfaction and commitment, and the lower was intention to quit” (p. 272).

Second, while one of the goals of organizational socialization from the perspective of employers was typically increased organizational commitment on behalf of the employees, Galais and Moser (2009) argued that temporary workers often saw organizational commitment as an undesirable outcome. For workers who knew they would soon leave an organization, becoming invested (emotionally, financially, etc.) in an organization seemed to be a nonstrategic career practice. While commitment towards the employing organization had a positive effect on workers' well-being while they worked there, Galais and Moser claimed that the commitment to the employing organization had a detrimental effect on workers' well-being when they were reassigned to another employer. Therefore, the very desirability of organizational

commitment as a goal of organizational socialization was suspect for temporary workers.

Finally, Gossett (2006) argued that temporary workers often had to be socialized into more than one organizational structure, including the temporary workers' staffing agencies and the client agency, which contracted his or her labor for a specified amount of time. Vorell (2007) similarly demonstrated how substitute teachers must be integrated both into the overarching organization of the school district and into each of the teachers' constituent schools. Thus, the process of socializing temporary workers is complicated by the multiple organizations into which the worker must be socialized.

Subsequently, this study asked substitute teachers to share how they had been socialized into their professions and workplaces. Analyzing these perspectives provides a greater understanding of how organizational socialization occurs for the profession-specific temporary worker and the organizations for which they work.

This line of analysis prompted the following research questions:

R1: What are the means by which the socialization of substitute teachers occurs?

R2: What obstacles impede the socialization of substitute teachers?

## Method

### *Participants*

This study centered on allowing participants to freely discuss their work experience. In total, the primary investigator interviewed 37 substitute teachers (12 men, 25 women; see Table 1). At the time of this study, participants on average had substitute taught for four years (with a range of one to ten years). Also, the vast majority of participants (81%) reported that they were only registered with the participating school district (11% reported registering with two districts, 5% with three districts, and 3% with four districts; see Table 1). While not asked explicitly during the interview, it seemed possible that the occupational background of participants might provide some insight into their socializing experience within the school district. For instance, if one came to substitute teaching from being a retired full-time teacher, this familiarity with the occupation might facilitate his or

her socialization process. Through a close analysis of the interview transcripts, the following trends emerged regarding occupational background: Of the 37 participants, 19 reported having come from an education-related career (i.e., teacher, superintendent, recent college graduate seeking first full-time teaching job). Fourteen participants indicated they came to substitute teaching via another occupation (see Table 2). In four interviews, past occupational experience could not be established.

Table 1. *Substitute Teacher Demographics*

	n	%
Gender		
Male	12	32.4
Female	25	67.6
Number of years as a substitute teacher		
1	10	27.0
2	2	5.4
3	2	5.4
4	1	2.7
5	2	5.4
6	3	8.1
7	3	8.1
8	3	8.1
9	6	16.2
10	5	13.5
Total number of school districts with which substitute teachers were registered		
1	30	81
2	4	11
3	2	5
4	1	3
Background		
Education-related	19	51.3
Non-education-related	14	37.8
Could not determine	4	10.8

*N* = 37. Percentages do not sum to 100% due to rounding.

Table 2. *Substitute Teachers' Prior Work Experience*

	n	%
Education-related (n = 19)		
Teachers	10	52.6
Career substitute teachers	7	36.8
Superintendents	2	10.5
Non-education-related (n = 14)		
Housewife	3	21.4
Secretary	3	21.4
Counselor	2	14.3
Insurance adjuster	1	7.1
Retail sales associate	1	7.1
Biologist	1	7.1
Federal employee	1	7.1
Company worker	1	7.1
Flight attendant	1	7.1

*N* = 37. Percentages do not sum to 100% due to rounding.

The information for this study was obtained through both one-on-one interviews (the average interview lasted around 30 minutes; see Appendix for interview questions) and direct observation (which totaled 110 hours). The substitute coordinator for the district placed the primary investigator in contact with 37 substitute teachers willing to participate in the study. Of these 37 substitute teachers, 14 consented to be shadowed on the job. The interviews and observations produced over 53 hours of digital audio recordings, which were then transcribed for over 1,000 pages of single-spaced text. All identifying information was changed or removed.

### *Data Analysis*

This study utilized a thematic analysis as a way to analyze the socialization experiences of substitute teachers. Sun and Starosta (2001) described the nature of thematic analysis as valuing the categorization of rich textual units in order to identify the larger levels of meaning presented in the data. Open coding was used as a means to shed light on the research questions. During the coding process of this thematic analysis, the primary author viewed the responses to the survey questions independently several times. He carefully surveyed notations to identify potential categories, patterns, and themes along the way. Hence, codes emerged from the transcripts rather than from prior studies or theories.



Rigorous qualitative research demanded verification, which this study achieved in two ways. First, four substitute teachers (not counted as participants in this study) were asked to critique the initial themes against their own lived experiences. Their commentary was utilized to refine this study's final conclusions. Next, we included highly detailed responses from substitute teachers, which provided an amount of face validity whereby readers could assess the integrity of our themes.

Results

Research Question 1

Two major themes were identified during the process to answer Research Question 1, "What are the means by which the socialization of substitute teachers occurs?" In total, 144 happenings were identified as means of socialization. Once identified, these instances were categorized. The themes that emerged were: (i) *sharing relevant organizational knowledge* and (ii) *offering support structures*. We operationalized each of these categories to differentiate them from each other (see Table 3), and each had several subthemes (see Table 4).

Table 3. Frequency and Definitions of Means of Socializing Substitute Teachers

Socialization means	# (and %) of thematic occurrences	Thematic conceptualization
Sharing relevant organizational knowledge	83 (57.6%)	Making readily available to substitute teachers information integral to successful completion of work-related duties
Offering support structures	61 (42.4%)	Organizationally related arrangements through which substitute teachers received encouragement and a sense of inclusion

Note: Total number of socializing attempts identified across all respondents = 144.

*Sharing relevant organizational knowledge.* Our thematic analysis led to define *sharing relevant organizational knowledge* as the organizational practice of making readily available to substitutes teachers information integral to the successful completion of their work-related duties. Our data analysis revealed 83 unique instances of socializing means that matched this description, accounting for 57.6% of all socializing means identified. Subthemes supporting this overarching category included *centering the knowledge* and *supporting roots organizing* (see Table 4).

Table 4. *Frequency of Submeans of Socializing Substitute Teachers*

Socialization means (total frequency)	Constituting submeans	Frequency of occurrence (followed by % as part of larger sequence)
Sharing relevant organizational knowledge (83)	Centering the knowledge	47 (56.7%)
	Supporting grassroots organizing	36 (43.4%)
Offering support structures (61)	Breaking the ice	33 (54.1%)
	Providing back-up	28 (45.9%)

*Note.* Total number of individual socialization means identified across all respondents = 144.

Centering the knowledge. For this analysis, we qualified *centering the knowledge* as the process of identifying and concentrating information relevant to substitute teaching in one, easily accessible location. Of the 83 socializing means themed as *sharing relevant organizational knowledge*, *centering the knowledge* accounted for 47 (56.7%) of the larger theme. Renee, a female substitute teacher with six years in the district, remarked how she felt the school district centered what substitute teachers benefitted from knowing:

I'm just grateful for [the substitute coordinator for the district]. Believe it or not, I have worked for other school districts where there was no such person and it was impossible. Probably the best thing [she] did was have what I think she called 'suborientations.' It was a one-time meeting where we were told how to work the phone system, how to get paid, and other things like that. It made getting started in the district much easier. I only wish she had gone over a little more about how to win over the students. I mean for me it's not so much an issue because I've done this for awhile now, but it might have helped the first-year substitute teachers.

Renee's comments demonstrated an appreciation for the substitute coordinator's work on centering what might be labeled the bureaucratic paperwork; however her efforts seemed to neglect issues related to classroom management.

Supporting grassroots organizing. For our study, we delineated *supporting grassroots organizing* as the school district's endorsement (both in advertising and material support) of substitute teachers who collectivized with their peers in order to develop their teaching skills. Of the 83 socializing means themed as *sharing relevant organizational knowledge, supporting grassroots organizing* accounted for 36 (43.4%) of the larger theme.

The primary researcher's field notes of the suborientation meetings revealed how the substitute coordinator, as a school district representative, supported the peer-to-peer support efforts of the substitute teachers.

[She] made sure to highlight the Professional Substitute Teacher Association (PSTA) in her presentation. [She] described the PSTA as a "non-union, non-dues support group of substitute teachers for substitute teachers where veteran substitute teachers (substitutes with more than one year experience working in a district) shared their experiences with new substitute teachers."

Jenna, veteran substitute teacher with a non-education background, commented how she and two other substitute teachers started PSTA:

Two other gals and I got together to start PSTA, because we didn't want other substitute teachers to make the mistakes we did. So we talked to [the substitute coordinator] and asked her if she thought it would fly and she said she would run it up the flagpole and see what happened. Two weeks later she told us the administration loved the idea and asked us how they could help. Since then, they've given us a place to have our monthly meetings and even had people like the assistant superintendent serve as guest speakers.

In Jenna's account, we saw more clearly some of the ways the district supported the substitute teachers self-organizing to enhance their own skills

*Offering support structures.* Our thematic analysis defined *offering support structures* as organizationally related arrangements through which substitute teachers received encouragement and a sense of inclusion. Our data analysis revealed 61 unique instances of socializing means that matched this description, accounting for 42.4% of all socializing means identified. Subthemes supporting this overarching category included *breaking the ice* and *providing back-up*.

Breaking the ice. For this investigation, we conceptualized *breaking the ice* as actions taken by full time school district members to introduce substitute teachers to other school district members, thereby setting the tone for their relationships. Of the 61 socializing means themed as *offering support structures*, *breaking the ice* accounted for 33 (54.1%) of the larger category. Megan, a new substitute teacher commented when a full time teacher introduced her to his class:

The fellow I substituted for yesterday wrote me just the most wonderful introduction to his class and everything. Then he said ‘Please give me a name of anybody who gets out of hand and they will get the wrath,’ with capital letters for wrath. So I think it has a lot to do with the teacher preparing their students.

Megan’s experience witnessed an important arena wherein an introduction from a full-time teacher facilitated her experience in front of the students. Not only did the full-time teacher’s introduction validate her role as the interim teacher, but he also showed his respect for her and his expectation that the class respect her as well.

Providing back-up. We operationalized *providing back-up* as the actions taken by full-time school district members that validated the presence of substitute teachers by enforcing and supporting their decisions. Of the 61 socializing means themed as *offering support structures*, *providing back up* accounted for 28 (45.9%) of the larger theme. When asked how schools had supported them, numerous substitutes like Kayleigh relayed how secretaries encouraged them to “call with any questions or student-related problems.” Other teachers offered support by just welcoming the substitute upon meeting them and offering to take any troublemaking students off their hands. For example, when asked what schools do to encourage substitutes to feel welcome, Kennedy, a first-year substitute, relayed:

If the teachers know that there’s going to be a substitute, they will come to me before I even have a chance to introduce myself and tell me where their room is and if I have trouble with some kid, I can send them to them.

*Research Question 2*

Three major themes were identified during the process to answer Research Question 2, "What obstacles impede the socialization of substitute teachers?". In total, 192 happenings were categorized as obstacles to socialization. Once identified, these instances were categorized. The themes were: (i) *lack of a formal feedback structure*; (ii) *denial of organizational resources and knowledge*; (iii) and *multiple organizational layers* (see Table 5). We operationalized each of these categories to clearly delineate the obstacles from each other, and each had several subthemes (see Table 6).

Table 5. *Frequency and Definitions of Obstacles to the Socialization of Substitute Teachers*

Obstacles	# (%) of thematic occurrences	Thematic conceptualization
Lack of formal feedback structure	79 (41.1%)	Absence of channel through which individuals received feedback on their organizationally related performance
Denial of organizational resources and knowledge	63 (32.8%)	Withholding necessary materials and information from substitute teachers by the organization
Multiple organizational layers	50 (26%)	The condition of having to work simultaneously under several sets of unique rules and procedures

*Note.* Total number of individual socialization obstacles identified across all respondents = 192.

Table 6. *Frequency of Subobstacles to the Socialization Substitute Teachers*

Socialization obstacles (total frequency)	Constituting subobstacles	Frequency of occurrence (followed by % as part of larger sequence)
Lack of a formal feedback structure (79)	Enigma	48 (60.8%)
	How to adapt	31 (39.2%)
Denial of organizational resources and knowledge (63)	Subordinated	44 (69.8%)
	Dilemma	19 (30.2%)
Multiple organizational layers (50)	Rearview mirror effect	36 (72%)
	Information overload	14 (28%)

Note. Total number of socialization obstacles identified across all respondents = 192.

*Lack of a formal feedback structure.* Our thematic analysis defined *lack of a formal feedback structure* as the absence of a communicative configuration through which individuals received commentary on the level of their organizationally related performance. Our data analysis revealed 79 unique instances of socialization obstacles that matched this description, accounting for 41.1% of all socializing obstacles identified. Subthemes supporting this overarching category included *enigma* and *how to adapt*.

*Enigma.* We described *enigma* as a lack of clarity regarding how substitute teachers should interpret the feedback they receive from school district members. Of the 79 socialization obstacles themed as *lack of a formal feedback structure*, *enigma* accounted for 48 (or 60.8%) of the overarching theme. When the primary researcher asked substitute teachers how they knew if they had done their jobs well, 22 of the 37 (59.4%) substitutes responded with “you get called back.” Getting called back referred to the practice of a specific full time teacher explicitly requesting that a specific substitute teacher cover his or her classroom during an absence.

While being requested back by an individual teacher might be interpreted as a positive review for one’s performance, not getting requested back did not necessarily equate to a negative performance, as teachers might not need to request any substitute for quite some time. Vanna, a substitute teacher with one year of experience, commented on her frustration with only having callbacks upon which to rely:

I take my job seriously. I mean I might get called back because the students raved about me to the teacher or I might get called back because my name works through the rotation of the substitute teacher list. Who knows?

How to adapt. We qualified *how to adapt* as the state of uncertainty in which substitute teachers found themselves regarding how to improve their performance based on the absence of feedback from full-time school district members. Of the 79 socialization obstacles themed as *lack of a formal feedback structure*, *how to adapt* accounted for 31 (or 39.2%) of the overarching theme.

*Denial of organizational resources and knowledge.* This study qualified this obstacle as the withholding of the necessary materials and information from substitute teachers by the organization. Our data analysis revealed 63 unique instances of socialization obstacles that matched this description accounting for 32.8% of all socializing obstacles identified. Subthemes supporting this overarching category included *subordinated* and *dilemma*.

*Subordinated.* This thematic analysis detailed *subordinated* as the state of being denied the same materials and information made available to full time school district members. Of the 63 socialization obstacles themed as *denial of organizational resources and knowledge*, *subordinated* accounted for 44 (or 69.8%) of the larger theme. When asked, "How do schools make you not feel welcome?" Lisa, a substitute teacher with two years of experience in the district said:

They don't give me what I need to get the job done. Take just last week, I asked for the key to the classroom and she just said that she would send a student helper with the key down to open the door for me. They trusted a student helper more with the keys to the classroom than they trusted me!

Lisa's outrage at being denied the same privileges entrusted to a student indicated that such neglect negatively impacted her experience at that school. Such a gesture on the part of the organization reflected that substitute teachers occupied a position on the school's hierarchy below that of the students.

Serafina, a first-year substitute teacher, who had recently graduated with her degree in elementary education, shared the following scenario:

Most of the time, I don't mind substitute teaching, though I can't wait until a full time position opens up. One thing that

really irritated me happened just last week. I was in the office and I needed to make some copies for class, which started in like five minutes. The copier took a code and the school didn't give me one. A friend of mine who graduated a year before me had landed a position in the school ended up being a teacher in this school. She happened to be in the office and we were just chatting when I asked if I could use her code. Now here's the weird part, I had known this girl all through undergrad and we were tight friends. She looks at me and says, 'Oh, that's okay, I'll just punch it in for you. I didn't say anything because I didn't want to cause a fuss with my friend, but I was kind of irritated and like "Um, what's going on here?"'

Serafina's friend's refusal to share the copy code with her caused confusion and irritation. Regardless of her past relationship with her friend, it appeared that in a school setting, Serafina's subordinate role as a substitute teacher made her unworthy of certain organizational resources.

**Dilemma.** We defined *dilemma* as the condition substitute teachers experience when faced with a work-related situation with no desirable solution due to being refused the necessary job materials. Of the 63 socialization obstacles themed as *denial of organizational resources and knowledge*, *dilemma* accounted for 19 (30.2%) of the larger theme. Charles, a first-year substitute teacher, explained how the denial of organizational resources placed him in a dilemma regarding the safety of students:

One day last month I was subbing and I had to do recess duty for the first time. I didn't think it would be a big deal; I'd just stand outside on the playground to making sure nothing bad happened. Fifteen minutes before we were to go outside, I went to the office to pick up a walkie-talkie so I could report any situations. The secretary told me that the school didn't give substitute teachers walkie-talkies. I asked 'Why not?' and she responded 'It's just policy.' I got a little irritated and asked what was I supposed to do if a student got hurt and needed medical attention. She replied 'Come in and get help.' Then I asked, am I just supposed to leave the rest of the students outside unattended?' and she said 'No.' I asked what I was supposed to do in case that happened, and she said she didn't know.



Charles' situation demonstrated how a lack of organizational resources placed him in a dilemma for which even a regular organizational member did not have an answer.

*Multiple organizational layers.* Our analysis delineated *multiple organizational layers* as the condition of having to work under several different sets of unique rules and procedures simultaneously. Our data analysis revealed 50 unique instances of socialization obstacles that matched this description, accounting for 26% of all socializing obstacles identified. Subthemes within this overarching category included *the rearview mirror effect* and *information overload*.

The rearview mirror effect. Our thematic analysis termed *the rearview mirror effect* as the occurrence of substitute teachers having greater familiarity with the rules and regulations of the school district-related organization with which they have the most frequent interaction. Of the 50 socialization obstacles themed as *multiple organizational layers*, *the rearview mirror effect* accounted for 36 (or 72%) of the larger theme. Substitute teachers operated under numerous sets of rules and expectations. These layers included state rules, district rules, and those of the individual school assignments. As part of the interview protocol, the primary investigator asked the participants of any rules they were aware of at the state, district, and individual school levels that dictated their behaviors.

When asked about behavioral rules at the state level, Ben, a first-year substitute teacher explained:

Oh, I'm not really sure. You know the basics of don't touch students inappropriately, keep them safe. Oh, now that you mention it there is that NCLB [No Child Left Behind] law but I'm not really sure what that's about.

At the district level, substitutes' knowledge about rules remained uncertain. For instance, Barbara said "The only rule I know is to be there 30 minutes early, before the start time." The familiarity with rules for substitute teachers at individual schools was a bit clearer. For example, Emily, a substitute teacher with three-years of experience, explained:

Well, each school has its own set of rules, but there are some common things. I get there 30 minutes early, get the key, pick up the subfolder, look over the lesson plans, get anything prepared I need to, turn the key back in at the end of the day, and leave a note on how things went.

Through these responses, our thematic analysis revealed that when multiple layers of rules were placed on substitute teachers, they focused on those which had the most immediate impact in their day-to-day functioning.

Information overload. Our investigation operationalized *information overload* as a state of confusion regarding which set of school district-related rules or policies substitute teachers should follow when and if different rules appeared to contradict each other. Of the 50 socialization obstacles themed as *multiple organizational layers*, *information overload* accounted for 14 or (28%) of the larger theme. Nils, a substitute teacher with 10 years in the district, commented:

I am a very detail-oriented kind of guy, so when I first start subbing, I wanted to know as much as possible. So I attended the suborientation, read the manual front to back. I actually made it a point to contact all of the schools in the district to see if they had a subpacket that I could get a copy of. I even contacted the state Board of Education to see what rules there were on substitute teaching. It seemed like a good idea at the time because I thought I knew everything I was getting into. But I focused so much on having the technical rules down, I forgot to have fun while subbing, and I nearly got burned out in my first year. Luckily, a couple of friends talked me off the ledge and pulled me out of the quagmire of policies and procedure.

Nils' example clearly demonstrated that the more rules placed on an individual, the greater the possibility for them to be inundated by minute details.

### Discussion

This project seeks to understand the socialization experiences of profession-specific temporary workers, namely substitute teachers. Traditional socialization models, like Jablin's (2001), assume a linearity of stages through which individuals mature from organizational outsiders to organizational insiders. However, these models were developed with organizational members who assumed a long-term work contract. This research demonstrates that while some socialization facets apply to all organizational members, certain

modifications must be made to account for the experiences of profession-specific temporary workers like substitute teachers.

This thematic analysis identifies areas of modification by breaking the socialization process into two key areas: means of organizational socialization and obstacles to the socialization process. Two main categories for socializing substitute teachers emerged from the data: *sharing relevant organizational information* and *offering support structures*. While both sets contain notable amounts of thematic units, *sharing relevant organizational information* occurs to a greater degree than offering support systems. One possible interpretation of this trend is that the school district values disseminating vital information to its substitute teachers over making them feel welcomed. However, the substantial frequency of both these topics indicates that an organization dealing with profession-specific temporary workers cannot ignore either, but instead must find its own unique balance between them.

On a micro-level, our analysis details more carefully how the *sharing of relevant organizational knowledge* and *offering support structures* transpire. Regarding the former, the schools in the school district seek to center the knowledge for substitute teachers as well as supporting the peer-to-peer organizing in which some substitute teachers engage. In regards to the number of occurrences of these two substrategies, the former outranks the latter by a respectable margin. One possible interpretation of the greater frequency of *centralizing important information* for substitute teachers is that the school district may be hesitant to leave anything to chance given the importance of the matters in which substitute teachers deal, namely the safety of the students. At the same time, the school district may rationalize that if substitute teachers establish some type of peer-to-peer support group, they would do it with or without the district's formalized support.

However, the high frequency of school district *support of grassroots organizing* indicates that perhaps the school district wishes to encourage commingling among its substitute teachers. A further analysis of *offering support structures* again brings forth two substrategies: *breaking the ice* and *providing backup*. As with the former set of socialization strategies, the difference in frequency between this set is prominent, but not large. In other words, our thematic analysis reveals that full-time school district members introduce substitute teachers to other school district members more than validating their authority. The near split between these thematic units, however, may reflect the belief among teachers, school administrators, office secretaries, that substitute teachers need both of these elements to be effective.

Understandably, multiple obstacles to the socialization of substitute teachers also emerge in this study. Our thematic analysis trifurcates the topic of socialization obstacles into the following: *lack of formal feedback structure*; *denial of organizational resources and knowledge*; and multiple *organizational layering* (these topics are listed in order of greatest frequency to least). The unpredictable amount of time substitute teachers spend at any one school provides a plausible explanation for why the development and maintenance of a formalized feedback system for them would prove very complex (and costly). Nevertheless, without clear feedback, substitute teachers lack a distinct sense of how to develop into more of an organizational insider. Our analysis reveals that the obstacle of no formal feedback structure consists of two thematic patterns (listed in order of greater to lesser frequency): *enigma* and *how to adapt*. We see both of these elements clearly in the fact that with no clear direction for their development, substitute teachers remain stymied in how to grow in their organizational roles.

Denial of organizational resources and knowledge also consists of two thematic patterns (listed in order of frequency): *subordinated* and *dilemma*. Being denied the same material readily available to full time organizational members serves as a daily reminder to substitute teachers of their subordinated status. At the same time, lacking the same resources and information available to full-time school district members limits the possibilities available to substitute teachers when they encounter consequential decisions.

Finally, substitute teachers find their effective socialization compounded by the presence of *multiple organizational layers*. Referring to the layers of bureaucracy under which substitute teachers operate, substitute teachers in our analysis respond to questions about rules placed on them by individual schools, the school district, and even the state. The *rearview mirror effect* and *information overload* comprise this obstacle (listed in order of frequency). Substitute teachers report being most familiar with the rules of the individual schools they frequent the most. When our participants returned to a school they had not worked at in quite awhile, their ability to call to mind rules and practices (both the important and the minute) floundered. When we attempted to access their knowledge of the rules farther up the hierarchy, their recall also greatly wavered. Closely tied to this was the trend of *information overload*. The multitude of rules of individual schools, the school district(s) (if the substitute teacher registered with more than one) and the state can overburden a

substitute teacher to the point that important things easily escape their minds.

These trends in the data problematize many of the fundamental underpinnings of the traditional socialization model. In order to establish a more accurate theoretical understanding of the substitute teacher socialization experience, scholars must firmly grasp these areas of discontinuity. Specifically, these areas of adjustment include the ephemeral nature of being a substitute teacher, simultaneous multi-socialization experiences, and the role of prior organizational knowledge/experience.

### *The Ephemeral Nature of Substitute Teaching*

By nature, substitute teachers, like all temporary workers, fulfill a specific need for an organization for a specific amount of time. The time of any assignment varies from job to job, and at best could be described as unpredictable. The substitute coordinator for the district noted that substitute teachers can expect their work assignments to be short in duration. She estimates that for the average substitute teacher about "90-95%" of assignments are short-term (lasting a single day), thus leaving only 5-10% to be long-term (lasting more than one day). Therefore, for substitute teachers, a constant in their work experience is a continuous coming and going to new organizations, which problematizes a sequential approach to the socialization process.

*Anticipatory stage.* In Jablin's (2001) anticipatory stage, through parents, peers, or media portrayal, one learns about organizational life even before attaining membership. No participant in the study indicated a desire to be a substitute teacher prior to actually becoming one. Some people recall their own experiences as students when encountering a substitute teacher in school; however, rarely do such accounts illustrate the occupation in a positive light. Similarly, individuals in general often target a specific organization or industry during the anticipatory stage. Current substitute teachers accept the fact that often times they do not know at which school they work until the day ahead. Such a facet of the job does not allow for much anticipatory socialization to occur.

*Encounter stage.* A key stage in Jablin's socialization model transpires when organizational members "encounter" the physical organization for the first time. Traditionally, this occurrence is understood in singular terms (e.g., one enters the organization once, thus "encountering" the organization once), whereas substitute teachers mention of encountering new organizations on every one or two-day assignment. As a result, traditional organizational socialization tactics

(e.g., organization-specific training programs) are replaced with more broad and generalized tactics on behalf of the school district. For instance, while substitute teachers describe a single day of school district training, they note the lack of training at any one specific school.

*Metamorphosis stage.* Jablin's metamorphosis, or becoming an organizational—"insider,"—also looks a bit different when applied to a substitute teacher. For many substitute teachers, they simply do not spend enough time at any one school to establish the relational ties through which substantial organizational membership occurs. Nevertheless, it should be noted that while the metamorphosis stage does not occur for most substitute teachers on the organizational level, it may occur more on the professional level. In this study, the substitute teachers who began the Professional Substitute Teacher Association see themselves as veteran substitute teachers who could use their resources to help new substitute teachers develop professionally.

*Exit stage.* Lastly, substitute teachers exit an organization every time a particular work assignment has run its course. Thus, substitute teachers encounter the stressors associated with the exit stage on a daily basis. A long-term, traditional organizational member ideally brings with him or her a wealth of experience and skills forged over time through the successes and mistakes at a particular organization. Also, exiting an organization is a process and not an event. Full-time individuals often anticipate/prepare for their departure for some time, except in the case of abrupt withdrawals. The nature of substitute teaching makes exiting an organization a frequent occurrence. Thus, substitute teachers prepare themselves to not form any long-term attachments to students, colleagues, or resources. Along with the brief nature of their job assignments, the current socialization model does not take into consideration the simultaneous multiple socialization processes substitute teachers may experience at any given moment.

### *Simultaneous/Multiple Socialization*

Substitute teachers operate under multiple socialization processes: one under a specific school district and one for each school at which they substitute. Thus, substitute teachers encounter the knowledge and responsibilities (new relationships, rules, expectations, values, etc.) that accompany being socialized at each of these sites. Operating under multiple socialization processes brings with it many issues. For instance, scenarios where the sets of information substitute teachers

have learned through their socialization contradict each other (e.g., a substitute teacher must enforce safety rules while on assignment but they are not given the resources to do so) place substitute teachers in a dilemma. In such situations, substitute teachers face a number of potential consequences. The ambiguity that accompanies working for two organizations may overwhelm some substitute teachers and leave them feeling powerless. Other substitute teachers may attempt to benefit from the organizational disarray and work only in their self-interest. Other substitute teachers might fall into the middle and choose to comply with the socialization process, which enables them to avoid undesirable interactions (Gossett, 2006).

At the same time, Mulgan (1991) argues that traditional hierarchy in organizations privileges vertical communication models to facilitate management. As organizational models become more complex (i.e., the relationship between a school district and its constituent schools), the greater the deviation from a vertical communication model. Consequently, with more complexity comes a greater risk for communication breakdowns. The school district's efforts to socialize substitute teachers, in its own way with different rules, procedures and expectations, make their socialization even trickier to navigate. This study reflects this trend in the experiences of substitute teachers whose organizational knowledge remains most solid with the organizational entities they encountered most frequently (i.e. the schools). The fewer encounters they have with an organizational entity (e.g., the school district, the state Board of Education) the fainter their socialization knowledge becomes.

### *Prior Organizational Knowledge/Experience*

The final important factor, which problematizes a cookie-cutter approach to the socialization experience when applied to profession-specific temporary workers, is that substitute teachers differ in the experiences they bring with them to the jobs. As mentioned earlier, the participants in this study separated nearly equally into a group with prior exposure to the education profession and a group without such exposure. Due to their prior organizational knowledge and experiences, the former experienced a different socialization process than the latter. For instance, former teachers and former superintendents bring with them an understanding of many useful things, such as a school district's organizational structure, lesson plan development, classroom management, etc. with them to the classroom. Thus, they may experience a less complicated socialization process since they only need to acclimate to the school district (given that they are starting in

one/s different from their prior educational position) and not the education profession. Insurance adjusters, sales associates, housewives, etc. who become substitute teachers often lack this cache of related organizational information and thus have to pick it up along the way.

### Conclusion

This project does not argue for the abandonment of the linear socialization model, as it still provides foundational bedrock upon which to understand the transition from organizational outsider to insider. At its core, this project merely attempts to draw attention to a vastly underserved (yet rapidly growing) segment of the workforce: profession-specific temporary workers. By continuing scholarship along these lines, researchers should be better able to understand how temporary workers in general and substitute teachers in particular negotiate their socialization as organizational members. The more that can be learned about the challenges that temporary workers face in navigating their organizational and career socialization, the better organizations and workers will be able to adapt to the new contingent realities of the labor force.

This study presents practical guidance as well as expands the theoretical understanding of socialization experiences of profession specific temporary workers. As with any investigation, this study leaves unanswered questions for future research to examine. While the final product of this study includes two authors, the primary investigator analyzed and developed the categories of coping strategies alone. While he engaged in a rigorous method of constant comparison, the presence of another researcher with which to negotiate the aforementioned results would have lent an extra (though not essential) level of stringent review.

Similarly, this investigation draws from a specific sample within the overall population of temporary workers: substitute teachers. This group differs from the mainstream population of temporary workers on a number of levels. Substitute teachers are engaging in a specific profession, whereas other temporary workers are placed in positions regardless of profession. The professional field of education requires substitute teachers to have certain qualifications (such as college degree, special skills, or special licensure) not placed on traditional temporary workers. The absence of these factors may indeed impact the socialization experiences encountered by the larger population of the temporary workforce. Other factors distinguish substitute teachers



from temporary workers. For instance, the duration of employment for other temporary workers typically surpasses that of substitute teachers. Similarly, substitute teachers replace regular teachers due to illness, a need to attend a conference, or maternity leave. Temporary workers, on the other hand, are contracted to meet the short-term demands placed on a specific business. All of these differences may confound the generalization of the trends in this study to other areas of temporary work.

This study demonstrates that some individuals actively choose to substitute teach, and do not have the choice thrust upon them. An extension of this study for future investigations would seek to understand the relationship between an individual's reason for engaging in substitute teaching and what socialization methods he or she responded to most strongly.

This study looks at a vastly understudied, yet valuable population in the education field: substitute teachers. As long as teachers become ill, attend conferences for professional development, go on maternity leave, and so forth, schools and school districts will need a strong pool of substitute teachers to fill their vacancies.

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