

**THE ROOKIE TEACHER: A DESCRIPTION OF THE  
OCCASIONAL TEACHING EXPERIENCE AS SEEN THROUGH  
THE EYES OF NEW SUPPLY TEACHERS**

by

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this project was to generate a set of actionable recommendations to assist school districts and school administrators and staff to support new occasional teachers during the early stages of their professional careers. This was done by giving voice to six elementary occasional teachers who were working at the Kindergarten to Grade 6 level in a single school board in southeastern Ontario who reported their shared “entry to the profession” experiences. This project describes the challenges faced by novice supply teachers, and the nature of support systems currently available to new occasional teachers (including their ease of access) and articulates practical suggestions to improve the unique induction to the teaching profession experienced by entry-level Ontario teachers.

Phenomenology was used as a framework for this project’s research design which included six semi-structured interviews with participants who had at least one, but not more than five, years of experience as an occasional teacher. Qualitative inductive analysis was used for the interview transcripts to discover patterns, themes, and categories. The six participants in this study described how they approach managing student behaviour in their classrooms, the extent to which they see themselves as professionals, and their overall perspectives regarding occasional teaching in elementary education. Findings suggest that communication could be established or improved in the following areas: mentor/mentee programs, document accessibility, clear expectations for procedures and day plan formats and contents. The participants of this study suggested 11

different practical recommendations for the improvement of the occasional teacher experience.

This research offers three main implications for practice in the field of elementary education. First, teacher preparation programs must work to ensure that prospective occasional teachers are aware of both the challenges that they may face in the field as occasional teachers and approaches for addressing those challenges. Second, supervisors such as principals, vice-principals, and lead teachers in the field of elementary education should be made aware of the challenges faced by occasional teachers. Lastly, schools and school districts should consider establishing formal or informal mentorship opportunities for occasional teachers who are entering the profession or encountering difficulties associated with being a new occasional teacher.

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## Chapter 1 Introduction

As a newly qualified teacher, I began my career as an educator, as do many of my peers, as an occasional teacher. My personal experiences with occasional teaching have been diverse, and, throughout these experiences, I have continued to ask myself and others many of the same, recurring questions.

I began my first day of occasional teaching with excitement but ended the day with a less confident attitude. After a full day of teaching, I felt something was missing from my experience. After some reflection later that day, my thoughts turned to issues of support and belonging. Given no resources by the school board to prepare me for my first day, other than the Collective Agreement and a chart detailing the payment schedule, I started the day with little preparation. Upon arrival at the school, I signed in at the front office and informed the secretary that I was a new occasional teacher who was not familiar with the building. The secretary gave me a set of keys to the classroom and pointed in four different directions, each time describing a different important area in the school. Leaving the office, I walked alone around the school until I found the correct classroom: located by identifying the teacher's name on the door. On finding the teacher's desk, I noticed, with dismay, that there were no teaching plans left for me. Ten minutes before the bell rang, the teacher ran into the classroom, dropped the plans on the desk, told me that I would have to photocopy some work before school started, and wished me good luck. By lunch time, I was embarrassed to go searching for the staff room because I did not know who anyone was. If I had passed the principal in the hallway, I would not have known. As a result of my unfamiliarity with the school's layout and personnel and the lack of communication between myself and the staff, I ate

lunch at the teacher's desk in the classroom and made myself look busy. To end the day, I dropped the keys off at the office and said goodbye to the secretary.

Following many more days similar to the one described, I started reaching out to fellow occasional teachers and learned I was not the only one who was having experiences that could impact my feelings of self-worth as a professional and cause me to question my career choice. Before beginning my contract as an occasional teacher, I could not imagine that my days would consist of my feeling completely invisible. I felt alone in the school on my first day of occasional teaching and wished that there was someone to whom or something to which I could have turned for support. As an occasional teacher, I expected to teach, experiment with exciting lessons and learn new teaching techniques from the challenges of a broad range of students. I expected to be challenged professionally and add strategies and practices to my instructional repertoire for future classroom implementation. Upon reflection about my personal "terrible, horrible, no-good, very bad day" (Viorst, 1972), I made a decision: if I wanted to fulfill the expectations I had for occasional teaching, then I must create opportunities to achieve my professional vision by advocating for myself.

On the day of my next occasional teaching assignment, I walked into the school with a different attitude. I introduced myself to the secretary and shook hands with the principal. Next, I asked about the locations of and directions to the restrooms, staff room and assigned classroom. Once in the classroom, I found day plans left by the classroom teacher and created opportunities to add some of my own ideas to the lesson plan.

What I learned about being a novice teacher through my Bachelor of Education Program was not focused on being a rookie occasional teacher but rather on how one

might feel and behave as an early-career teacher with a full time job in a regular classroom. I quickly realized that the life of an occasional teacher and a regular classroom teacher bear little resemblance to one another. Without specific information and support from the school board and most regular classroom teachers, I quickly learned that it was up to me to create my own positive, valuable learning experience as a “supply teacher.”

Reflection on my personal experiences has fostered many questions about the current culture of occasional teaching and concerns about the ways in which new occasional teachers are introduced and welcomed into the teaching profession. Reflection has also led me to understand the enormous impact that the “entry experience” plays as a first step in a continuum of development for teachers and the foundation on which a teacher builds her career. Reflection has also led me to recognize the fact that occasional teachers could play more meaningful roles and make more substantive contributions to a school community with the appropriate supports and opportunities. These reflections led me to complete this project.

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this project was to generate a set of actionable recommendations to assist school districts and school administrators and staff to support new occasional teachers during the early stages of their professional careers. This was done by giving voice to six elementary occasional teachers who were working at the Kindergarten to Grade 6 level in a single school board in southeastern Ontario who reported their shared “entry to the profession” experiences. This project describes the challenges faced by novice supply teachers, and the nature of support systems currently available to new

occasional teachers (including their ease of access) and articulates practical suggestions to improve the unique induction to the teaching profession experienced by entry-level Ontario teachers.

### **Definitions of Key Terms**

In Canada, a person who teaches a school class when the regular teacher is unavailable is often formally called an “occasional teacher;” however, the colloquial synonym, which is more frequently used is “supply teacher.” In some jurisdictions, including provinces such as Alberta, an educator who is an “occasional teacher” is often referred to as a “substitute teacher.” The terminology varies similarly in research about occasional teachers. This study uses the terms supply teacher and occasional teacher interchangeably.

### **Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework for this project is based on the perspective of communities of practice, situated learning and phenomenology. Lave and Wenger (1991) first used the term “communities of practice” to describe learning through practice and participation, which they named situated learning. The term community of practice, as described by Lave and Wenger (1991), refers to a group who share a common interest and a desire to learn from and contribute to the community with their variety of experiences. Using this framework, occasional teachers are a group of people who are defining their identity by interacting regularly in schools and learning about their profession from each other. Lave and Wenger (1991) describe learning within a social practice as a part of all activity where understanding and experience are in constant interaction. Over time and constant interaction, the group will develop a collection of

resources. These shared resources can be experiences, stories, tools, or ways of addressing recurring problems and this shared collection becomes their shared practice (Wenger, 2006). There are several communities of practice in this project: the school community, the teaching profession, and the more loosely organized community of occasional teachers. Using the framework of community of practice, the occasional teacher may be understood as part of a larger community in which their learning experiences come together to develop rituals and traditions that become their community of practice.

Phenomenology is the study of the ways in which individuals make meaning of and describe the objects of direct experience and thus has as its focus an understanding of the experience from the perspective of the individual (Creswell, 2007). Phenomenology is used in qualitative research to gather a deep understanding of an individual's experience with certain phenomena. The goal of phenomenology is to distill the experience that individuals have had with the same phenomenon and then arrive at a shared essence in an attempt to "grasp the very nature of the thing" (van Manen, 1997, p. 177).

There are two methods of phenomenological research; hermeneutic and transcendental (Moustakas, 1994). Both methods represent philosophical assumptions about experience and ways to organize and analyze phenomenological data (Creswell, 2007). Hermeneutics requires reflective interpretation of a text or a study in history to achieve a meaningful understanding (Moustakas, 1994). Transcendental phenomenology is less focused on the researcher's interpretation of the participant's experience but more so on describing the participant's experiences to get a fresh perspective on the

phenomenon. In accordance with the procedures of transcendental phenomenology, this project: (a) identified a phenomenon, (b) collected data from several persons who had experienced the phenomenon and, (c) described the essence of the occasional teaching experience as seen through the eyes of occasional teachers (Moustakas, 1994). Some researchers argue that it is not possible to bracket or eliminate the researcher's own experiences, nor is it desirable (Sword, 1999; Tillmann-Healey & Kiesinger, 2001). As a result, I have acknowledged my own "being-in-the-world" by including myself as an interview participant in this project.

### **Rationale**

Over the last decade, job queues for full-time teaching positions have increased because there is a growing surplus of qualified teachers relative to the number of available jobs in Ontario (Ontario College of Teachers [OCT], 2012, p. 1). Occasional teaching now comprises the early months (or even years) of teaching careers for most new Ontario teachers. When new teachers cannot gain permanent employment, the route through and process by which they are inducted into the profession is quintessential because it has implications for teacher effectiveness, job satisfaction and career length (McCormack & Thomas, 2003, p. 125): 51% of recent BEd graduates are hired for daily supply work as their first teaching job and more than one in five continue to supply teach at the end of the third, fourth and even fifth years of their professional careers as educators (OCT, 2012, p. 1).

In 2007, teachers were absent an average of 12 days per year as a result of illness, disability, and personal or family responsibilities in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2007). In addition to absences due to illness and family responsibilities, teachers are also regularly

absent from the classroom in order to pursue professional development opportunities.

These ancillary absences place increased demand on the non-permanent teacher workforce. In spite of increased absences for multiple reasons, there is growing competition among occasional teachers to log days in classrooms for any reason, because of changing provincial policies.

On September 11, 2012, Ontario Regulation 274/12, “Hiring Practices” came into effect. This new legislation, under The Education Act, prescribes steps that all publicly funded school boards must follow when hiring for long term occasional positions (LTO) and new permanent teacher positions. The new provincial hiring practice means that in Ontario, no teacher can be hired without occasional teaching experience and that in order to fill LTO positions, school boards must first create an LTO roster. Only those who have been working as an OT for a minimum of 10 months and who have worked no less than 20 days of casual OT work within that 10 month period are qualified to apply to be on the LTO roster. Placement on the roster is not an automatic function of days worked—boards will interview occasional teachers for a position on the LTO roster. When all of these factors are taken into consideration, it becomes clear that occasional teaching is now the sole entry point to the teaching profession; therefore, steps must be taken to ensure that this entry experience is a positive and professional growth-focused process. Moreover, given the increasing presence in classrooms by occasional teachers, their role under these circumstances should be taken into consideration from multiple perspectives.

It is important for teaching and learning to continue when students’ regular classroom teacher is absent considering that, on average, a student will spend five to ten percent of her school year (10 to 20 days) with an occasional teacher (Duggleby &

Badali, 2007). The way a new occasional teacher understands her purpose and value within a classroom and school community will affect the learning of the students with whom she works on a daily basis (Clotfelter, C. F., Ladd, H., & Vigdor, J., 2009). The high daily demand for occasional teachers and their potential for impact, both negative and positive, underscores the need for them to be well prepared and supported in their new and demanding jobs. However, research suggests that novice occasional teachers are not receiving the same supports as long-term occasional teachers or new teachers with contracts, and negative reports about the experience of daily supply teaching are far more common than positive reports (OCT, 2012, p. 42). With only 17% of occasional teachers in 2011 reporting that they had support from a mentor, one can extrapolate to the complete corps of provincial supply teachers and hypothesize that the group as a whole is not receiving adequate professional support (OCT, 2012, p. 43).

Beginning with the 2009-10 school year, new long-term occasional (LTO) teachers in Ontario have been included in the induction processes that comprise the New Teacher Induction Program (NTIP): a suite of orientation, mentoring and professional development activities for new teachers. For the purposes of NTIP, a beginning LTO teacher is defined as a certified occasional teacher who is in his or her first long-term assignment of 97 or more consecutive school days as a substitute for the same teacher (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010). Since only new full-time and first-time LTOs are included in the parameters established by the Ontario Ministry of Education to define a “new teacher,” regular supply teachers are not eligible to receive either NTIP designation or support (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010). Beginning occasional teachers are thus left without the resources they need to negotiate their new role as an employee of any

school board. For the new occasional teacher, this translates into “a significant gap between their in-school professional development and support and what is available to their more fortunate colleagues who secure regular or long-term occasional positions” (OCT, 2012, p. 42). Without readily accessible and tangible supports, new occasional teachers are likely to face unique challenges that could constrain their ability to remain motivated and do their best teaching.

Duggleby (2007) suggests that a marginalized person is someone who lacks power due to the fact that they are not integrated into a community enough to be able to contribute in a meaningful way. In order to progress professionally, most occasional teachers “see networking as key to successfully landing a teaching job” (OCT, 2012, p. 4). Reflecting on my personal experiences with supply teaching, challenges to establish a network that includes school principals and classroom teachers to further one’s career are present. Occasional teachers might lack the authority and knowledge of rituals of the regular classroom teacher because they are not yet members of a community; thus their authority as a teacher is minimal. Without authority in a classroom or school, or access to mentors and professional development opportunities, it is difficult for an occasional teacher to be considered as a contributing member to the educational community, at either a micro- or macro-level.

Research into the lived experiences of new occasional teachers is a necessary step towards understanding the typical entry experiences of new teachers. Given the continuing increase of teachers who leave the profession after their first experiences supply teaching and the overwhelmingly negative reports about the experience of daily supply teaching (Ontario College of Teachers, p. 31, 2014), knowledge of the challenges

they face is critical to the formulation of a positive professional experience and effective retention strategies. The dissemination of research findings of studies pertaining to the experiences of occasional teachers may serve as an impetus for both formal and informal dialogue about the position of occasional teachers in the education of children and youth and the articulation of a set of widely-applicable recommendations.

### **Overview of the Project**

In this chapter, I introduced the topic and outlined the purpose of the project. In Chapter 2, I present a review of the literature that examines the resources available to occasional teachers in Ontario, professional development opportunities and support, the way other professionals view occasional teachers and the notion of occasional teachers as marginal actors. In Chapter 3, I provide the methods of the project, detailing the research design, data collection and analysis of data. Chapters 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8 present the results of the interviews with each of my participants. Chapter 4 presents an introduction to each of the interview participants. Chapter 5, 6 and 7, present the expectations of the interviewees before beginning their occasional teaching careers, their initial experiences and how they responded and acted as a result of these experiences. Chapter 8 presents the participants' recommendations to improve the occasional teaching experience based on their own experience. The final chapter connects the findings with previous literature by reflecting on the key recommendations to enhance the occasional teaching experience. I conclude this project by reflecting on my own experiences and my key learnings.

## **Chapter 2 Literature Review**

### **Introduction**

Despite the important and expanding role that supply teachers play in education, very few studies have explored the experiences of supply teachers, and fewer still have investigated their experiences in Canadian contexts (Duggleby & Badali, 2007). Galloway (1993) suggests that the non-reference to supply teaching issues "should alert us to deep seated assumptions in the educational system and those who comment on it" (p.167). The occasional teaching experience is unique and far different than that of the contract classroom teacher; and, therefore, it is imperative that the findings of studies about full-time teachers are not generalized to occasional teachers. Dating back almost 40 years, much of the research about occasional teachers is still relevant today because so many of the issues identified by empirical study still exist. This chapter provides an overview of the literature about occasional teacher experiences; their lack of professional development opportunities (Crittenden, 1994; Lunay & Lock, 2006); how they are viewed by classroom teachers and principals (Clifton & Rambaran, 1987; Galloway & Morrision, 1994; Weems, 2003); and how they are often marginal actors in the educational system (Cornwall, 2004; Coverdill & Oulevey, 2007; Duggleby & Badali, 2007; Lunay & Lock, 2006; Weems, 2003). This chapter then provides an overview of resources to support the occasional teaching experience in Ontario and resources for occasional teachers available in select Canadian provinces.

### **Lack of Professional Development Opportunities**

Research by Crittenden (1994) sought to examine which aspects of a supply teaching program could be improved. Although this research took place in Western

Australia, the issues raised may be relevant to Canadian contexts. This qualitative study used an initial oral survey with the principals of four primary schools and five primary school teachers from different schools to identify specific points of concern related to occasional teaching. The data obtained from these interviews formed the basis of three separate qualitative questionnaires: one for principals, one for teachers and one for occasional teachers (Crittenden, 1994). In total, six principals, 21 teachers and 15 supply teachers completed the role-specific questionnaires. The analysis of the questionnaire data indicated that there were five key issues: (1) the induction of new teachers into a school; (2) the expectations held between principals, teachers and supply teachers; (3) the relationships between supply teachers and teaching staff; (4) the ongoing professional development of supply teachers; and (5) employment issues.

A challenge to Crittenden's (1994) research is that he used data from principals and regular classroom teachers to identify issues of concern by supply teachers. Had supply teachers been included in the initial exploration of issues for study, the research would have been a first-hand reflection of the issues of concern to them. Instead, the research presupposed that administrators and full time teachers understood the depth and breadth of the issues of importance to occasional teachers. Without the initial perspective of occasional teachers, important recommendations informing the nature of supply teaching could have been missed.

As a result of the qualitative open-ended questionnaires, one issue identified by all respondents was the need for continued development of the supply teacher's professional skills as a teacher. Much supply work is, in fact, due to regular staff attending in-service courses to implement new curriculum, teaching strategies, or

programs. Occasional teachers questioned how, when and where they will acquire this knowledge, if they are not included in these professional development (PD) days.

In a study that also explored the experiences of occasional teachers, Lunay and Lock (2006) sought to determine sources of alienation among occasional teachers and to explicate the support strategies that are actually offered to supply teachers. To do this, 20 supply teachers working in Western Australian at primary schools were interviewed using semi-structured interviews.

As a result of this study, Lunay and Lock (2006) suggest that the lack of professional development opportunities available to occasional teachers can be viewed as an expression of the lack of respect for their job. With the growing importance and presence of occasional teachers in schools, in addition to the teaching field becoming more professionalized, “ongoing access to quality PD is absolutely essential to all educators” (Lunay & Lock, 2006, p.190).

These studies informed my selection of research participants and helped to identify questions to ask in interviews. Research by Lunay and Lock (2006) and Crittenden (1994) suggests that a lack of professional development opportunities affects the lived experience of occasional teachers; thus, it is essential that future research involving occasional teachers include the discussion of professional development. This study will include interview questions that generate data about the lived experiences of occasional teachers, some of which will be directed to issues of professional development. Since the purpose of qualitative research is to understand how people give meaning to or interpret their own experiences (Newman & Benz, 1998), the only participants in this proposed research are occasional teachers.

### **How Occasional Teachers are seen by other Professionals**

In a seminal Canadian study, Clifton and Rambaran (1987) set out to explore why so many educators are dissatisfied with substitute teaching. Data from a variety of qualitative methods including observations of regular classroom teachers and supply teachers; interviews with supply teachers, superintendents, assistant superintendents, principals, vice principals and regular classroom teachers; and essays written by students about occasional teachers were used to achieve the goals of the study. Two schools participated in the research and both were visited twice for observations: once when a supply teacher was teaching and once when the regular classroom teacher was teaching. Interview participants included 30 supply teachers, 4 superintendents, 5 assistant superintendents, 10 principals, 4 vice principals, and 20 regular classroom teachers. The occasional teachers who participated in this study were obtained through the use of snowball sampling while others were randomly selected from a list filed by the school board (Clifton & Rambaran, 1987). Principals and vice principals were chosen randomly while the superintendents and vice superintendents came from seven of the eight school divisions in the city (city is unknown to the reader) (Clifton & Rambaran, 1987). Supply teachers were interviewed immediately after the observation of their teaching by the researchers. Most of the other interviews were conducted over the telephone and audio recorded but some were conducted face-to-face and recorded via hand-written notes only. Interviews ranged in length from 20 minutes to one and one half hours (Clifton & Rambaran, 1987). In addition, three teachers volunteered to have their Grades 3, 7 and 9 students write essays about substitute teachers.

Clifton and Rambaran (1987) suggest that occasional teaching is a marginal position in which supply teachers do not fill roles that allow them properly to legitimize their behaviour. The data suggest that regular classroom teachers and students do not see occasional teachers as having authority in the school or in the classroom and that it is rarely possible for occasional teachers to know the rituals of the class. As a result, supply teachers are seen by themselves and others as peripheral players who do not contribute to the successful achievement of desired learning goals in a meaningful way.

A challenge in the implementation of the study by Clifton and Rambaran (1987) is that some interviews lasted 20 minutes, while others were one and one half hours in length. There were a number of different participants in this study, including superintendents, assistant superintendents, principals, vice principals, regular classroom teachers and substitute teachers. The study did not distinguish among those categories of participants who had interviews that were one and one half hours long and those who had interviews that were 20 minutes long. The results of the study could be skewed depending on how long and with whom the interviews were conducted. For example: if, on average, supply teachers were interviewed for 20 minutes and principals were interviewed for one and one half hours, the results of the study may represent the views of principals more than the views of supply teachers. In addition, if a participant who has a mostly negative experience was interviewed for one and one half hours, whereas a participant who had mostly positive experiences was interviewed for 20 minutes, the resulting data could be skewed.

Additionally, some of the interviews were audio recorded and transcribed and some were recorded using only handwritten notes. This methodological limitation will

directly affect the trustworthiness of the data presented. It is important to question why all of the interviews were not audio-recorded, or why the method was not consistent throughout the interviewing process. In comparison to an audio-recording, hand-written notes taken during an interview could result in important information being missed and create a more stressful atmosphere for both interviewer and interviewee.

Future research should identify a time range for interviews that is more consistent to ensure that each participant is allotted approximately the same time to share their experiences. Keeping the length of interviews approximately the same length will ensure that the experiences of one occasional teacher do not overshadow the experiences of another when the data are analyzed and presented. In addition, research aimed at investigating the lived experiences of occasional teachers should use an audio recorder for all interviews to ensure that important information is not missed. The researcher should aim to use an audio recorder, as well as hand written notes, during the interview to highlight the important, interesting, or thought-provoking experiences that a participant might communicate. The limitations of this study were “take-aways” that were incorporated into this project’s methodology. This study will have the interviewer using both an audio-recorder and hand-written notes.

### **Occasional Teachers as Marginal Actors**

In a Canadian study, Duggleby and Badali (2007) investigated how occasional teachers frame their professional experiences and construct their roles in complex contexts. Participants were recruited through e-mail using a public electronic newsletter list sponsored by a local substitute teacher group. The email was initially distributed to 99 prospective participants. All volunteers were accepted and ultimately, the study consisted

of seven supply teachers who had differing years of teaching experience and who were trained as elementary, middle, secondary, and K-12 arts education teachers. Five of the seven participants had worked as an LTO for one to four years and one participant had previously taught for 11 years in a private secondary school. Data was collected through in-depth, semi-structured interviews that were conversational in nature and ranged in duration from 60 to 90 minutes. The interviews were coded by both Duggleby and Badali and the meaning attached to each code depended on both researchers' interpretations of the supply teachers' comments.

The results suggest that while professional teacher associations, at least in theory, acknowledge the professional membership of supply teachers, they do not include them in professional activities (Duggleby & Badali, 2007). In addition, occasional teachers did not develop secure identities as teachers due to the uneven support of school personnel and inability to gain access into school cultures. Duggleby and Badali (2007) suggest that occasional teaching is a very isolating experience, since full-time teachers keep to themselves and supply teachers generally stray from situations in which they feel isolated. For example, supply teachers are likely to avoid going to the staff room because (1) regular teachers are engaging in conversations amongst themselves and do not invite supply teachers to participate; (2) there are not enough chairs for them to join the lunch table; or, (3) they do not know where it is located and feel too embarrassed to ask.

Both Clifton and Ramberan (1987) and Duggleby and Badali (2007) present results that are based on data obtained by interviewing participants who were supply teachers in elementary, middle and secondary school settings. Duggleby and Badali (2007) also interviewed two teachers from a K-12 arts education program. A

heterogeneous group of supply teachers could result in the data being misrepresentative for one sub-group within the larger population. Secondary school protocols and experiences when one is supply teaching could be vastly different from those in an elementary school. For example, in secondary schools, teachers often have a specialized subject area for which they are qualified, but a supply teacher may be called upon to supervise classes in subject areas about which they lack expertise. In contrast, elementary school teachers receive pre-service instruction in all curriculum areas which could result in a more curriculum familiarity and account for a greater sense of preparedness for teaching on a daily basis. The studies by Ramberan (1987) and Duggleby and Badali (2007) inform the proposed research as future research should aim to describe the unique supply teaching experience of a homogeneous group of elementary occasional teachers, as opposed to multiple groups.

### **Overview of Occasional Teaching in a Canadian Context**

Data drawn from documents can be used to suggest some of the questions that need to be asked and/or situations that need to be observed through additional qualitative research methodologies (Bowen, 2009). Document analysis is generally used to provide supplementary research data. Information and insights derived from documents can be valuable additions to the data collected through other means such as observation or qualitative interviewing (Bowen, 2009).

### **Resources available to Occasional Teachers in Ontario**

Currently there are four major resources available to occasional teachers in Ontario. These four resources vary from very detailed practical suggestions about occasional teaching to documents that outline the current employment rates of new

teachers in Ontario. Two of the resources, *The Occasion To Lead: A Resource Guide for Occasional Teachers* (Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario, 2002) and the *Daily Occasional Teacher Survival Guide* (Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association, 2010) are created by supply teachers and teachers and are intended for occasional teachers.

***The occasion to lead: A resource for occasional teachers.***

This document was published by The Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario (ETFO) in 2002. *The Occasion to Lead: A Resource Guide for Occasional Teachers* (ETFO, 2002) was "written by occasional teachers for occasional teachers" (ETFO, 2002). It is intended for use by "recent graduates, seasoned occasional teachers, and recently retired permanent teachers who have begun 'supply' teaching" (ETFO, 2002). *The Occasion to Lead: A Resource Guide for Occasional Teachers* has three sections: (1) "Governance overview," which includes topics such as occasional teachers' rights and responsibilities, teachers' federations and organizations and workplace issues; (2) "Professionalism," which includes an introduction to the ETFO professional code of conduct, professional development information, job search information, contact information for Faculties of Education, and a list of useful websites; and (3) "Head of the class: making it work," which is intended to be a "carry-along guide that offers practical information, ideas and activities" (ETFO, 2002). It includes topics such as classroom management, creating a positive environment, effective discipline, learning styles, learning opportunities, emergency lesson plans and activities, and lessons specific to Media, Physical Education, French and Music curriculum. There are 22 pages of reproducible activities in this document, four of which support French education.

***Daily Occasional Teacher Survival Guide.***

The *Daily Occasional Teacher Survival Guide* was published by The Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association (OECTA) in 2010. *The Daily Occasional Teacher Survival Guide* was written by occasional teachers and regular classroom teachers and is intended as a resource for all occasional teachers to provide "useful knowledge, hands-on techniques for classroom management, and answers to some of the most common problems that arise for the occasional teacher" (OECTA, 2010). There are nine sections in this document: (1) "Preparing for your teaching day," which includes many tips about how to be successful as a daily occasional teacher; (2) "Creating a positive atmosphere," which includes classroom management strategies; (3) "Other individuals in the classroom," which includes information about how to treat parents and student helpers in your classroom; (4) "Managing the classroom environment," which includes conflict resolution strategies and a checklist of ways to keep order in the classroom (5) "Special situations," which includes topics such as, how to manage students when attending assemblies and masses; (6) "Managing the day plan delivery," which includes a sample of what a lesson plan might look like in both elementary and secondary schools; (7) "Communicating with the absent teacher," which includes examples of information to leave in your note at the close of each day and a template for occasional teachers to use; (8) "Scenarios from the field," which includes eight samples of issues that could arise and the suggested way to deal with them; and (9) "On-the-job resources," which includes 26 pages of activities and icebreakers to use in the classroom.

***Essential Information for Occasional Teachers: Practical Advice and Support to Occasional Teachers and the Teachers they are Replacing.***

*Essential Information for Occasional Teachers: Practical Advice and Support to Occasional Teachers and the Teachers They Are Replacing* was a second document published by OECTA in 2010. This document was written by classroom teachers and occasional teachers and is “intended to give practical advice and support to occasional teachers and the teachers they are replacing” (OECTA, 2010). This document has seven sections: (1) “Occasional teaching: the basics,” which includes definitions of “occasional teacher,” OECTA and OCT, and information about rates of pay, benefits and sick leave; (2) “Professional boundaries,” which includes a list of unacceptable behaviours with students, parents and colleagues; (3) “Occasional teachers seeking full-time employment,” which includes a list of tips to secure a full-time teaching contract; (4) “Daily to-do list,” which includes a list of what to do upon arrival at the school, advice about following the day plan, tips for managing the class and guidelines to have a positive end to the day; (5) “Teacher-to-teacher: communicating for success,” this section is for classroom teachers and outlines suggestions to communicate to occasional teachers when they are absent and provides a blank template for teachers to use; (6) “Useful websites for occasional teachers,” which includes a list of resources accessible online.

***Survival Skills for Occasional Teachers.***

*Survival Skills for Occasional Teachers*, published by The Ontario Secondary Schools Teachers’ Federation (OSSTF) in 2005, was written by occasional teachers who are members of The Occasional Teachers’ Committee. The Occasional Teachers’ Committee is mandated to “collective bargaining, contract maintenance,

communications, and professional development” (OFFST, 2005). Although this document focuses on occasional teachers who are qualified in elementary education, *Survival Skills for Occasional Teachers* (2005) is written for occasional teachers with any qualifications. This document intends to

offer suggestions to classroom teachers, members who hold positions of added responsibility, administrators and school boards on how they can best help the occasional teacher to become more effective and provide survival skills that will help the occasional teacher not only meet the challenge but also enjoy the experience. (OSSTF, 2005)

There are nine sections in this document: (1) “Introduction,” which summarizes what it might feel like to be an occasional teacher; (2) “How this booklet can help you,” which outlines how the booklet might help each audience that it targets, including the classroom teacher and occasional teacher. For example, the occasional teacher should use *Survival Skills for the Occasional Teacher* as “a life-line...to get in touch with others facing similar problems...and to highlight problems [occasional teachers] might encounter” (OSSTF, 2005); (3) “Who are occasional teachers,” which includes definitions of classroom teachers and occasional teachers; (4) “How students view occasional teachers,” which includes a list of how students describe effective occasional teachers and a list of things they hate that occasional teachers do; (5) “The advantages of occasional teaching,” which includes a list of why people choose to be occasional teachers over full-time teachers; (6) “Getting hired,” which includes contact information for the Ontario College of Teachers (OCT) and the logistics of getting a full-time job; (7) “Classroom management and discipline,” which includes a successful behavior plan in the form of a list; (8) “Establishing rapport with students,” which includes suggestions to handle negative behavior and building rapport in situations such as, going to the library,

doing group work etc.; and (9) “You and the law,” which includes information about criminal record checks, declarations of offences and the Safe Schools Act.

### **Summary of Resources Available to Support Occasional Teachers in Ontario**

The two most recently published documents in Ontario that support the occasional teacher experience were published by OECTA in 2010. As shown in Table 1, these documents were both written by occasional teachers and classroom teachers together, whereas the less recent documents published by OSSTF (2005) and by ETFO (2002,) were written by occasional teachers alone. Both of the OECTA documents include blank templates that occasional teachers and full-time teachers can utilize to improve the experiences of new occasional teachers. All three organizations’ resources, ETFO’s *The Occasion to Lead: A Resource Guide for Occasional Teachers* , OSSTF’s *Survival Skills for Occasional Teachers*, and OECTA’s *Essential Information for Occasional Teachers: Practical Advice and Support to Occasional Teachers and the Teachers They are Replacing*, define what an occasional teacher is in their resources and outline tips to securing a full-time teaching position. Both the *Daily Occasional Teacher Survival Guide* (OECTA, 2010), and the final section of *The Occasion to Lead: A Resource Guide for Occasional Teachers* (ETFO, 2002) entitled, “Head of the Class: Making it work,” are practical documents for occasional teachers to use during their daily occasional teaching assignments. Both documents include topics such as, classroom management techniques, how to build rapport with students and pages of reproducible lessons and activities to use with students.

Table 1

*Summary of Resources Available to Support Occasional Teachers in Ontario*

Title	Publisher	Contributors	Topics covered			
			Governance	Workplace Issues	Professional Resources	Practical Tips
<i>The Occasion To Lead: A Resource Guide for Occasional Teachers</i> (ETFO, 2014)	The Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario	Occasional teachers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teacher Federations</li> <li>• Important Organizations</li> <li>• Rights and Responsibilities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Code of Professional Conduct</li> <li>• Duty to Report</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Professional Development</li> <li>• The Job Search</li> <li>• Ontario faculties of Education</li> <li>• Classroom Websites</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Classroom Management</li> <li>• Discipline</li> <li>• Emergency Lesson Plans</li> </ul>
<i>Survival Skills for Occasional Teachers</i> (OSSTF, 2005)	Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation	Occasional teachers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Definition of OT</li> <li>• How students view OT's</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Entitlements and Obligations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Getting Hired</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Classroom Management</li> <li>• Discipline</li> <li>• Establishing Rapport</li> </ul>
<i>Daily Occasional Teacher Survival Guide</i> (OECTA, 2010)	Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association	Occasional teachers and classroom teachers	N/A	N/A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• On-The-Job Resources</li> <li>• Blank templates</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Preparing for the Teaching Day</li> <li>• Creating a Positive Environment</li> <li>• Classroom Management</li> <li>• Special Activities</li> <li>• Managing the Day Plan</li> <li>• Communicating with the Absent Teacher</li> </ul>
<i>Essential Information for Occasional Teachers: Practical Advice and Support to Occasional Teachers and the Teachers They are Replacing</i> (OECTA, 2010)	Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association	Occasional teachers and classroom teachers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Definition of an OT</li> <li>• Collective Agreement</li> <li>• Contacting OECTA</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Professional Boundaries</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Seeking Full-Time Employment</li> <li>• Blank templates</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Scenarios from the field</li> <li>• Daily To-Do List</li> <li>• Communicating For Success</li> <li>• Useful Websites</li> </ul>

## **Resources to Support Occasional Teachers in Canadian Provinces Outside of Ontario**

In Canada there are two provinces, British Columbia and Alberta, and one territory, the Yukon, which provide resources to support occasional teachers. Although Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Quebec, New Brunswick and Nova Scotia all have “New Teacher Handbooks,” they have not published a resource intended for use by occasional teachers. Many of the provinces’ Teachers’ Unions have cited each other’s handbooks as inspiration for their own. For example, The Nova Scotia Teachers’ Union acknowledged the British Columbia Teachers’ Federation for permission to reprint material from their publication, entitled *Beginning Teachers Handbook* (2014), and ETFO for permission to reprint material from their publication *The Occasion to Lead: A Resource Guide for Occasional Teachers* (2002). A common table of contents for a “Beginning Teacher Handbook” is divided into sections that focus on: preparation for the school year, the first day of school, getting-to-know-you activities, general classroom management, student motivation, assessment, establishing positive parent relationships, survival (tips for preventing stress), and making a successful and effective conclusion to the school year.

In addition, most “Beginning Teacher Handbooks” include a section entitled “Preparing for supply teachers” or “Preparing for Substitutes.” This section is intended to inform the full-time teacher of what they should leave for the occasional teacher when they are going to be absent from their classroom. In these sections there is often a website address that teachers can go to in order to print worksheets for students to complete while they are away. The Nova Scotia Teachers’ Union in their resource, *Handbook for*

*Beginning Teachers: Helping you to Survive and Thrive* (2001), included a blank template for a day plan that is intended to be filled out by classroom teachers and left for the occasional teacher when they are away. British Columbia, Alberta and the Yukon have published resources with multiple chapters specifically designed to support the occasional teacher experience.

**British Columbia: *The Practice of Teaching: A Handbook for New Teachers and TTOCs.***

*The Practice of Teaching: A Handbook for New Teachers and TTOCs* was published by The British Columbia Teachers' Federation (BCTF) in 2014. The document was written by members of the BCTF. This document intends to offer "teachers on call (TTOC)<sup>1</sup> assistance, support, and encouragement" (*The Practice of Teaching: A Handbook for New Teachers and TTOCs*, 2014, p. 20). There are 27 sections in this document, six of which are dedicated to supporting the TTOC. These six chapters include: (1) "The job search," which includes information about how to prepare to attain a TTOC job; for example, practice interview skills; (2) "Job interviews," which includes a list of common questions interviewers ask and advice about what not to do in an interview; (3) "Professional responsibility and BCTF code of ethics," which includes a list of the Standards of Education, Competence and Professional Conduct of Educators in BC (BCTF, 2014); (4) "Beginning your career as a TTOC," which includes a definition of a TTOC, the six most important issues for TTOCs', for example, TTOC status among non-TTOC teachers, the advantages of being a TTOC, suggestions for the improvement

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<sup>1</sup> In British Columbia occasional teachers are called Teachers on Call (TTOC). TTOCs are certified, qualified teachers who replace a contract classroom teacher for the purpose of continuing the instructional program, maintaining discipline, and generally promoting the educational welfare of the students (BCTF, 2014).

of the TTOC experience, and a list of sources of support, including information about TTOC workshops; (5) “Your assignment as a Teacher-On-Call,” which includes advice about what to do upon arrival at school, duties and responsibilities, health and safety, what to do if there is no lesson plan, and advice about reporting back to the classroom teacher and template to use; (6) “Tips for success,” which includes a list of activities for the students to do, should a TTOC need more time to read over the teacher’s plan, and lessons plans to use if the classroom teacher has not left any.

### ***Alberta: Substitute Teachers: Professional Replacements***

*Substitute Teachers: Professional Replacements* was published by the Alberta Teachers’ Association in 2013. The document was written by the Substitute Teachers Committee comprised of occasional teachers. The document intends to “to be a source of relevant information for substitute teachers and to facilitate their integration into the profession” (*Substitute Teachers: Professional Replacements*, 2013, p. 2). *Substitute Teachers: Professional Replacements* consists of six chapters: (1) “Professional replacements,” which includes a definition of substitute teachers and highlights why substitute teacher are important; (2) “Within the profession,” which includes information about services, membership fees and certification; (3) “Within the bargaining unit,” which includes the collective agreement, suggestions for school board policies to include occasional teachers, benefits and professional development conventions; (4) “Legal liability,” which includes a definition of negligence, explains how insurance works, explains the occasional teachers’ responsibility to supervise yard duties, how to become familiar with the school discipline policy, definitions of type of assaults, and explains liability; (5) “Definitions of roles,” which includes the definitions and differences

between the duties of a teacher and of a substitute teacher, substitute teachers right to a performance evaluation and a definition of student conduct; (6) “Specific association services,” which includes information about the Substitute Teachers’ Committee and an annual conference held every year for occasional teachers. At the end of this document, there is a template for a suggested “*policies and procedures handbook*” (*Substitute Teachers: Professional Replacements*, p. 34) to leave for occasional teachers upon arrival to the school. In addition, there is a list of suggested items that classroom teachers could leave and/or do to prepare for an occasional teacher and a “self evaluation criteria checklist” (*Substitute Teachers: Professional Replacements*, p. 37) that occasional teachers can use to ensure they fulfilled their duties in the classroom.

***The Yukon: Stepping In: A Handbook for Yukon Substitute Teachers.***

*Stepping In: A Handbook for Yukon Substitute Teachers* was published by the Yukon Teachers’ Association in 2008. The document was written by members of the Department of Education. *Stepping In: A Handbook for Yukon Substitute Teachers* intends to provide occasional teachers “with useful information, tips and ideas to make the experience in the classroom an enjoyable and successful time for both [the occasional teacher] and the students” (*Stepping In: A Handbook for Yukon Substitute Teachers*, 2008, p. 2). The handbook consists of 25 pages with the following headings: (1) “What is a substitute teacher,” which provides a definition of substitute teacher and the advantages of being one; (2) “Becoming known as a substitute teacher,” which describes who to introduce yourself to in order to become visible in a school; (3) “When you get a call,” which lists information you should gather about the school before you leave home; (4) “Before you leave home,” which includes information about what to wear, what to bring

and what to do if there is no lessons plan left at the school; (5) “Arriving at the school,” which gives information about when to arrive at the school and what to do when you get there; (6) “When you get to class,” which includes list of important things to remember at the beginning, middle and end of your day and a template for what the occasional teacher should leave for the teacher; (7) “Classroom management,” which gives tips and strategies to having a successful day; (8) “Your super sub kit,” which describes a kit that each occasional teacher should bring to work with them to make their day run smoothly and provides ideas of what to include in the kit; such as, different types of books, story writing ideas, thinking activities, discovery activities, and seven pages of different activities to use with all different ages of students.

### **Summary**

This chapter has outlined the research that has explored the experiences of occasional teachers. Although the body of literature is limited, research highlights the occasional teaching experience as lacking professional development opportunities and suggests that many occasional teachers do not feel as if they are contributing to student learning. Additionally, research suggests that occasional teachers feel under supported by teaching staff in schools. While the limited amount of research in Canada and the findings of research about occasional teachers might paint a negative picture for the occasional teaching experience, current occasional teaching resources have been developed to support and improve the experiences of new occasional teachers in Ontario and in provinces across Canada.

By asking occasional teachers at the beginning of their career what they need to improve their experiences and to grow professionally, I hope to add to the utility of the

documents available in Ontario that aim to support occasional teachers. Upon my entry to the occasional teaching profession, the school board did not provide me with any of the four documents currently available. It is clear that there have been resources created to support the occasional teaching experience; however, only once in my career as an occasional teacher was I introduced to *The Occasion To Lead: A Resource Guide for Occasional Teachers* which was one of the sections in a binder left for me by a classroom teacher. When interviewing occasional teachers, I questioned whether or not the four resources that are available to occasional teachers in Ontario are being disseminated by individual schools or by the school board.

The following chapter describes the methods used to conduct this study. I begin by explaining the qualitative research method used to collect data, how phenomenology guided the project design, and why I choose to include myself as a participant. I then review the process of data collection and conclude this chapter by discussing the process involved in data analysis and outlining the approaches used to increase the trustworthiness of the project.

## **Chapter 3 Methodology**

This chapter provides an overview of the methods used in conducting the present research study. Through individual interviews, data was collected from new occasional teachers in response to questions about their entry experiences, perceptions about their role as an occasional teacher, and recommendations for transition to “member status” within the teaching profession. Through the analysis of transcripts of participants’ description of entry experiences as occasional teachers, supports and barriers to role fulfillment and recommendations to improve early occasional teaching experiences, this study aimed to add to the limited research on occasional teaching experiences, thereby potentially informing current occasional teaching policies and procedures.

I begin this chapter by explaining why I chose to use a qualitative research method to collect my data, how phenomenology guided the project design, and my choice to include myself as a participant. My section on data collection reviews the procedures required to obtain ethics clearance from the university research ethics board. The process of data collection is then discussed, including the interview process and participant selection. A brief description of the participants and how they came to be a part of the research are noted. To conclude this chapter, I discuss the process involved in data analysis and outline the approaches used to increase the trustworthiness of the study.

### **Choice of Research Method**

#### **A Phenomenological Approach**

Qualitative research is a method of inquiry which seeks to interpret and understand social or cultural phenomenon (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The qualitative approach investigates an individual’s or group’s perception of reality as they

understand it; thus, this study, aimed at describing the entry experiences of new occasional teachers from their own perspectives, required a qualitative methodology. Used as an exploratory tool, a qualitative research method will help to better understand the particular situation of new occasional teachers.

Phenomenology was used as the methodological framework for this project's research design. A phenomenological perspective emphasizes the essence of individual experiences and identifies phenomena through the ways they are perceived by the actors in a situation (Patton, 2002). A phenomenological approach to understanding the occasional teacher's experiences framed the design of this research as the project describes what new occasional teachers experience and how they experience it (Patton, 2002). Collectively, experiences from multiple individuals can form shared essences and contribute to common meanings of lived experiences (Patton, 2002). A phenomenological approach allowed me to gain a deeper understanding of the essence of the occasional teachers' entry experience. Occasional teachers experience teaching differently than contract classroom teachers (Jennings, 2001); so we must ask: what does it mean to be in the world as an occasional teacher?

Researchers' experiences have gained recognition as unique sources of insight to be valued, examined and featured within research (Bourne, 1998; Hubbard, Backett-Milburn, & Kemmer, 2001; Mitchell & Irvine, 2008; Sword, 1999; van Heughten, 2004). Phenomenology requires the researcher, as well as the participant, to explore and acknowledge their own "being-in-the-world," and, as a result, acknowledges the researcher as an intricate part of the research (Wimpenny & Gass, 2000). Heideggerian phenomenology does not require the researcher to bracket out past experiences. Instead,

through a process of self-reflection, knowledge and experience are included in the research process and are viewed as crucial to the interpretive research process (Johnson, 2009). The researcher is expected to give considerable thought to her own experiences and to reflect explicitly upon the ways in which position and experiences relate to the experience being researched. Arguably, researchers who do not draw upon and discuss their own personal experiences within the telling of the research story are in some ways being dishonest (Watts, 2008).

## **Data Collection**

### **Procedure**

To ensure that my research followed ethical guidelines, I was required to receive ethical clearance to abide by Queen's University's policy with respect to research on human subjects. The Educational Research Ethics Board (EREB) and the General Research Ethics Board at Queen's were satisfied by the protective measures that were included in my research. I provided participants with a Letter of Information, which clearly indicated the purpose and process of my research and the voluntary nature of their participation (Appendix A). I also provided a Consent Form that was signed by each participant prior to the interviews (Appendix B). The Consent form ensured that all participants had read and understood how they would participate in the project, how their confidentiality would be ensured, and how they could withdraw from the project with no consequence. The names of the participants, as well as schools, cities, and other identifiable features were given pseudonyms or omitted from this report.

## Participant Collection

To understand a phenomenon, data must be collected from those participants who have experienced it first-hand. Participants for this project were selected using “purposive sampling” (Patton, 2002, p. 40). Participants were selected because they shared these common characteristics: they were in their first to fifth year of supply teaching; currently worked in a local school board in southeastern Ontario; and were certified as elementary school teachers. A purposeful, convenience sample of six occasional teachers was obtained. Occasional teachers who were willing, able and accessible to the researcher were recruited personally using convenience sampling. In addition to convenience sampling, snowball sampling (Patton, 2002), of individuals known to the researcher provided the names of other occasional teachers who met the criteria for participation and could be the source of rich data. In total, I contacted six participants: three were individuals whom I met in schools where we were both supply teaching. In each case, we began a conversation in the staffroom which led to a discussion about our own supply teaching experiences. After a brief conversation, we exchanged phone numbers. I contacted each of these participants by telephone using a recruitment script (see Appendix C) to ensure consistency of approach. The remaining three participants were suggested as possible interviewees by the confirmed participants and were contacted via telephone. One of the candidates who initially agreed to be a part of this project was not eligible because he had previous experience as a full-time teacher working abroad and therefore was eliminated from the project. After this participant was deemed ineligible, I added myself to the sample which meant that there were six participants altogether. After verbally indicating if they would like to participate in an interview, participants were

provided with a Letter of Information one week prior to the interview and were asked to sign a Consent Form on the day of the interview.

When selecting participants for interviews, diverse perspectives and experiences of occasional teaching were sought: the aim was to include both male and female participants who had taught in urban and rural schools, small and large schools, and Kindergarten to Grade 8 classrooms in the interview sample. The range of people whom I asked to participate in this project worked for a school board that was made up of urban and rural schools, small and large schools, and schools with classrooms from Kindergarten to Grade 8 and thus represented the diversity that I wanted to achieve.

### **Field Test**

Due to the nature of the standardized open-ended interview approach, careful consideration was given to the wording of each question prior to gathering data. In order to refine the protocol for the interviews, the interview questions were reviewed using a think-aloud protocol with a group of three graduate students and one personal contact prior to the first interview. Field testing interview questions provided an opportunity to trial potential questions to assess their efficacy with respect to wording, response time, clarity and sequence.

### **Research Interviews**

Primary data for this project were obtained through individual semi-structured interviews. A qualitative project that seeks to “gather experiential data more than measurements” (Stake, 2010, p. 19) is appropriate when the researcher’s goal is to investigate the lived experiences of new occasional teachers. Individual interviews were the selected qualitative method since they are an effective way of obtaining data about

how participants understand the world and make sense of important events (McMillan & Schumacher, 2000). Specifically, this project included six semi-structured interviews with participants who had at least one, but not more than five, year of experience as an occasional teacher.

A lived experience cannot be grasped until it is reflected upon by the individual as a past experience (Van Manen, 1997). To explore the lived experience of occasional teachers, they must be given this opportunity to reflect. The essence of the experience of new occasional teachers emerged from interview data as participants described in detail the occasional teaching experience they had lived. The purpose of interviewing was to explore people's experiences and their inner perceptions, attitudes, and feelings of reality (Fontana & Frey, 2000). For this project, semi-structured interviews provided a flexible interview guide that allowed room to explore topical trajectories that added further detail to participant experiences.

Patton (2002) identified three types of open-ended interviews as basic approaches to collecting qualitative data: the informal conversational interview, the general interview guide approach, and the standardized, open-ended interview. This project used a standardized, open-ended interview approach (See Appendix D) in combination with an interview guide approach (Patton, 2002). An interview protocol outlined the same set of specific open-ended questions for each participant preceded by an introduction stating the purpose of the research. Open-ended questions were structured around the participants' own emic issues giving them freedom to respond in their own words and tell stories (Stake, 2010). In addition, the interview guide approach was used to provide the interviewer "flexibility in probing, and in determining when it is appropriate to explore

certain subjects in greater depth, or even to pose questions about new areas of inquiry that were not originally anticipated” (Patton, 2002, p. 347). Interviewer probes aided in exploring participant responses and in identifying and defining participants’ perceptions, opinions and feelings about occasional teaching.

Semi-structured interviews with six participants were conducted in order to elicit further memories and experiences related to occasional teaching. Interviews ranged from approximately eighty-five to ninety minutes in length and took place at a location that was mutually convenient and where privacy and confidentiality were considered. Alyssa felt most comfortable in her own home, Mike and Maureen opted for a local library, while I met Katlynn and Brittney in empty classrooms at Queen’s University. My own interview was conducted in a fellow graduate student’s home. Prior to conducting the interview, I collected the signed Consent Forms, explained the structure of the interview, and reminded each participant that, if they felt uncomfortable answering a particular question, they were not required to do so and could withdraw from the study at any point. All interviews took place during the school year. The interviews were audio-recorded and later transcribed for analysis. At the time of the interview, I made hand-written notes to supplement the audio recordings; these notes aided in the data analysis.

The audio-recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim and emailed to each participant, who was then asked to add or remove any information s/he felt necessary to ensure their interview was authentic.

### **Data Analysis**

When using a phenomenological approach in research, data must be given opportunity to speak for themselves and so qualitative inductive analysis with coding was

used for the interview transcripts to discover patterns, themes, and categories (Patton, 2002). I began the data analysis by reading the interview transcripts several times, until they became familiar. Given the structure of predetermined questions, each interview generally progressed in the same way. First, participants provided personal demographic data, and described the ways in which they envisioned their role as an occasional teacher. Next, they gave their own opinion about how they are perceived by others. Participants then moved the discussion toward self-identified supports and barriers. Lastly, they gave suggestions on how to improve early occasional teaching experiences. I arranged each participant's profile to follow these general categories.

After the transcripts were read and I was comfortable with the data, I began to code. Using an inductive approach, I organized the data derived from the transcripts of each participant into codes. I looked for statements about how the individuals experienced the phenomenon and I marked statements that stood out and which I found interesting, as suggested by Seidman (2006). In this initial stage, all of the statements were treated as having equal worth and were compiled into a list, individually. This process gave me an opportunity to immerse myself in the data and to "get a sense of the whole" (Patton, 2002, p. 440).

I highlighted these statements and transferred them into colour coded units of information called meaning units or themes. Although no codes and themes were set in advance, themes from the literature such as, occasional teachers' lack of professional development, viewing themselves as marginal actors and feeling alienated, allowed me to have general categories into which results might be sorted. These categories proved to be useful, but I also remained open to emerging themes that the research presented. While

analyzing the data, I considered these etic codes, or themes and, as I continued to analyze the data, I added more themes and subthemes that arose from participant's experiences (emic codes). Next the individual interview transcripts were examined together, comparing similar codes, which led to the development of like themes throughout the entire data set.

### **Trustworthiness**

To improve the trustworthiness of this project, possible interview questions were field tested with graduate students educated in qualitative research to ensure that questions were directly related to the purpose of the project and comprehensible.

Patton (2002) has provided a useful set of categories of reflexive questions for triangulated reflexive inquiry throughout the research process. These categories are: self-reflexivity, reflexivity about those studied and reflexivity about the audience. Every researcher brings her own bias and interpretations to a situation (Stake, 2010). The researcher's personal bias is important for the audience to consider as it may influence how s/he makes sense of the research findings. Using an autobiographical signature to situate the research and including my own interview into this project made potential bias very clear. Self-reflexivity about personal biases allowed me to be aware of what I knew about the experience and the ways in which I had come to understand the experience.

Reflexivity about those being studied involves checking to confirm the degree to which the interpretations of the researcher match those of the participants. To enhance internal validity, the participants checked my interpretations of the data to confirm their understandings (McMillan & Schumacher, 2000). Participants were asked to read over

their own transcript to ensure shared meanings between the researcher and the participant.

The use of a recording device during interviewing was used to allow time to jot notes about what I was thinking at the time of the interview or thoughts requiring follow-up when coding the data. These notes provided yet another opportunity to reflect on personal bias and shared meanings.

### **Limitations**

One of the main limitations of this project was the use of only one data source. The project used interviews to explore the lived experiences of occasional teachers. While interviews are the best qualitative method to capture the essence of an occasional teacher's lived experience, using another data source such as an artifact may have enhanced the validity of the findings. A study of phenomenology requires that the researcher describe the essence of an experience by committing much time and thought to analysis. Given the limited timeframe of this research and only one primary researcher, multiple data sources could negatively influence the researcher's ability to thoroughly analyze the interview data.

The sample size chosen for this project may be another limiting factor. This particular project investigated the essence of the entry experience of six occasional teachers and thus its small sample size may have aided in the researcher's ability to think and analyze each participant's experience deeply. However, a larger sample size may have been more representative of the population and offered insights into the lived experience of occasional teachers that this project may not have been capable of finding. Although the timeframe of this research did not allow for a larger sample size and thus

additional analysis, with more time to analyze and collect data, future research could benefit from interviewing a larger sample size.

In spite of these limitations, the participants in this study offered unique perspectives on occasional teaching. An introduction to each of the six participants forms the basis of the next chapter.

## **Chapter 4 An Introduction to the Participants**

This chapter presents an introduction to each participant who was interviewed for this project. First, I describe the occasional teacher's age and educational background, followed by a description of the context in which the interview took place.

### **Participants**

I have included six data sets in this project, including data from my own interview. I was interviewed by a fellow graduate student and this data is presented as the first data set in this chapter. Five females, including myself, and one male were chosen to participate in this project. Their ages ranged from early 20s to mid 50s, and their years of experience as an occasional teacher varied from two to five years. Five participants in this project have been given pseudonyms: Mike, Maureen, Katlyne, Brittney, and Alyssa. I have self-identified. Each participant is currently working in a local school board as an occasional teacher.

#### **Colleen**

I am a young occasional teacher in my early 20s, at the beginning of my teaching career. After completing my Bachelor of Arts degree at a small university in Peterborough in 2010, I returned home to complete my Bachelor of Education degree in Kingston and moved back into my parent's house. After completing my Bachelor of Education with qualifications in primary and junior education in 2011, I began my professional career as an occasional teacher while concurrently beginning a Master's of Education at Queen's University. I began teaching as an occasional teacher in November 2011. I am often mistaken for a student by teaching staff and support staff because of my stature: I stand at four foot, eleven inches. Despite my diminutive height, I believe that I

have a big personality and sense of humour—both of which I use to my advantage to capture my student’s attention and manage my classrooms. I have worked in approximately 23 schools, most frequently in Kindergarten to Grade 6. Typical assignments are one day in duration.

My interview took place in a fellow graduate student’s house, located in my hometown, not far from my parent’s house and was approximately 85 minutes long. There was a relaxed and comfortable feeling surrounding this interview since the interviewer and I had informally known each other for some time.

### **Mike**

Mike is a young occasional teacher in his late 20s. After graduating from small university in Peterborough in 2007, Mike completed his Bachelor of Education degree in Kingston, Ontario. After completing his pre-service teacher education program, qualifying as an elementary school teacher (Kindergarten to Grade 6) in 2008, Mike began his career as an OT. He commenced teaching as an OT in 2009, after travelling in Korea for one year. He has worked as an occasional teacher for almost four years and has worked in over 20 schools, most frequently in Kindergarten to Grade 6.

Mike’s interview took place (in a quiet corner) at a local library and was approximately 90 minutes in length. This interview was very relaxed because Mike and I had become acquainted through shared supply teaching assignments. When Mike arrived, he walked towards me with a bounce in his step while swinging a bag of candies around his hand. After making a joke about how much he loved candy, he offered a piece to me, and we began the interview.

**Maureen**

Maureen is 46 years old and the mother of three children. Maureen began her undergraduate studies in 1999 at a university in Ottawa while she raised her three children who were two, four and six years old at the time. She graduated in 2006 and received her Bachelor of Education with qualifications in the Primary/Junior Education option at another university in Ottawa in 2007. In 2009, Maureen began supply teaching and has worked for the past four years in approximately 20 schools, most frequently supplying in Kindergarten to Grade 6 classes.

I interviewed Maureen in a local library for approximately 80 minutes. We used a quiet room inside the library to conduct our interview. I had met Maureen previously on a supplying assignment which created a relaxed, comfortable atmosphere. Maureen had just completed a supply assignment when she arrived at the library. She admitted that she was exhausted but anxious to talk about her experiences and was a very enthusiastic storyteller.

**Alyssa**

Alyssa is in her late 20s. After completing her undergraduate degree at a university in Kingston, Ontario in 2008, she went on to receive her Bachelor of Education with qualifications in Primary/Junior education divisions at the same university in 2011. In November 2011, Alyssa began supply teaching in approximately 20 schools, most frequently in Kindergarten to Grade 8 classrooms.

Alyssa invited me to conduct our interview in her home. The interview was approximately 85 minutes. She was a very friendly individual but seemed slightly nervous during the interview. When prompted to elaborate throughout the interview,

Alyssa became more reflective about her experiences and was able to provide anecdotes to illustrate various points. Her mother cooked dinner throughout the duration of our interview and invited me to stay for dinner when our interview was complete.

### **Brittney**

Brittney is in her late 20s and has been an occasional teacher for three years. She attended an American university and became an OT in September, 2009. Brittney is qualified to teach Kindergarten to Grade 6 and has taught in over 20 schools. She most frequently teaches in Kindergarten to Grade 8.

At Brittney's request, we conducted our interview at Queen's University in an open classroom. The interview lasted for approximately 90 minutes. After rescheduling our interview due to bad road conditions, we were both eager to conduct this interview when we met. Brittney was friendly and clearly interested in the subject matter under discussion. While she could not be described as an overly talkative person, Brittney seemed to be at ease throughout the interview. She listened attentively as I asked my questions and usually paused briefly to formulate her responses before delivering them. Brittney's answers were detailed yet succinct.

### **Katlynn**

Katlynn is in her early 30s, a mother of one, and has been an occasional teacher since November 2011. She graduated from an American university in 2011 and is qualified to teach Kindergarten to Grade 8. Katlynn has taught in over 25 schools, most frequently in classrooms from Kindergarten to Grade 8.

At Katlynn's request, we conducted our interview at Queen's University in an open classroom. The interview was approximately 95 minutes. Katlynn had a very keen

sense of humour and was very relaxed throughout the duration of the interview.

Katlyne had no reservations about sharing her occasional teaching experiences with me and frequently elaborated on her responses by giving examples. Often, Katlyne found herself telling more than one story as she elaborated and did not hesitate to seek clarification when she was uncertain about whether or not she had strayed “off topic.”

Although each participant differed in age and offered different experiences before becoming a teacher, each had built expectations about the occasional teaching experience before beginning their careers. The participants’ expectations of the occasional teaching experience form the basis of the next chapter.

## **Chapter 5 Expectations of Occasional Teaching Before Hiring**

The next four chapters present the data gathered from the interviews of six participants. The interviews took place in a variety of settings and locations in Kingston, Ontario, over the span of three months. The interview data have been used to describe each interviewee's experiences of occasional teaching. First, participants describe what they expected the occasional teaching experience to be; second, they describe their early experiences; and, lastly, they describe their own reactions, actions and supports based on these experiences. Also included are the participants' ideas and recommendations to improve the experiences of new occasional teachers. Quotes are cited using 'I' to indicate the interview and the participant's pseudonym initial. For example, excerpts from my own interview are cited as, IC. The presentation of data begins with my own experiences of occasional teaching.

### **Colleen**

When I first began my journey as an occasional teacher, I had expectations about what the experience would be like. This vision was constructed from both experiences I had when I was an elementary school student and from my time as a teacher candidate.

From my time as a student in elementary school, I have memories of how my peers and I treated supply teachers and felt about them. I remember that when I saw a supply teacher in the classroom I automatically thought, "Oh, it's a free day! It's going to be a fun day today" (IC, p. 5). Having a supply teacher in elementary school meant that it was a chance for our classroom to get away with things we did not get to do with our regular classroom teacher, such as going outside early for recess or doodling instead of reading.

When I was a pre-service teacher working towards my BEd degree and professional certification, I did not picture the next step after graduation as being employed as a supply teacher. Throughout the program,

I always had my mind on becoming a good teacher. When I was thinking of myself teaching, I was imagining every single day in the same classroom with the same students. I saw myself in the role of a regular classroom teacher. (IC, p. 11)

My mental image reflected the goals of my teacher preparation program: to become a professional educator.

Near the end of the BEd program, I “went to one large conference during which teacher candidates had an option to attend a half hour session on occasional teaching” (IC, p. 14), which was the “only professional development that dealt with occasional teaching that I remember having in university” (IC, p. 14). As I neared graduation from the B.Ed program, I became acutely aware of the limited employment opportunities available for full-time teaching positions in Ontario and realized that my first formal position in education was likely to be that of an occasional teacher. This prospect left me hungry for more information about what occasional teaching entailed, and I remained optimistic that I would receive detailed information and specific training for supply teaching from my school board or school administration and have sources of support for the challenges of the role.

Overall, I did not feel that there was enough support from the school board to support my transition to the teaching profession. My transition to occasional teaching involved an interview, a short meeting and a phone call. I graduated from Queen’s University on April 30<sup>th</sup>, 2011 and by November of the same year I was working as an occasional

teacher. Two days after a successful interview in October, I was asked to meet at the school board offices for an orientation meeting. This orientation overview consisted of my signing a contract, choosing geographical locations within a convenient commuting distance and providing financial information. The same night, I received the first phone call requesting my availability and found myself working the next day. The time between graduation and my first day as an occasional teacher was a whirlwind experience.

Based on what I had gleaned from the “short, voluntary workshop about occasional teaching, I expected that when I became an official occasional teacher I would be treated as a fully-certified member of the teaching staff” (IC, p. 12) and as a professional educator at the schools I visited. When I was a “pre-service teacher completing my practicum, I felt like a member of the staff and I expected that this would carry over to supply teaching. For example, I thought I would be talking professionally with other teachers everyday” (IC, p. 9). Furthermore, I believed when I became an occasional teacher that I would be able to hone my skills by becoming involved in “school-level professional development events, parent workshops and extracurricular activities” (IC, p. 12).

While I expected to have comprehensive lesson plans left for me by the regular classroom teacher, I also believed that I would “be engaged in meaningful teaching and learning activities with the students” (IC, p. 15) whom I was supervising every day. Similarly, I expected to be able to apply what I had learned during my post-secondary education about teaching and “I thought I would be able to grow professionally” (IC, p. 20) because of the rich opportunity to meet children of many ages, many socioeconomic backgrounds and demographic settings.

## Mike

Before Mike became an occasional teacher he had expectations about what the experience would be like, based on the experiences he had “in Grade 12 doing [his] Co-op<sup>2</sup> in an elementary school and [his practicum] placements throughout teachers college” (IM, p. 4). Additionally, Mike formed expectations about the supply teaching experience from his experiences as a student in elementary school. He remembered thinking “that it was just crazy whenever a supply teacher came in” (IM, p. 4). Although Mike admitted that he was not sure “exactly how [he] was going to handle [supply teaching, he] knew that when [he] got out of teacher’s college [he] was going to be supply teaching for awhile” (IM, p.4).

When Mike was a pre-service teacher working towards his BEd degree and professional certification, he did not picture the first career step after graduation as a supply teaching contract. Throughout his program, he did not “think about supply teaching very much because there is not much in [the BEd program] that prepared [him] for occasional teaching” (IM, p. 13). Mike explained that “there should have been something designed to teach us about the supply teaching experience” (IM, p. 13) because “all that [the program] is focused on is when someone is a full-time teacher and long range planning and [full time] teaching” (IM, p. 13).

Mike was interviewed for an occasional teaching position in the month of November, 7 months post-graduation, and, within one week of the interview, he was informed that he was a successful applicant. Two weeks later, Mike began supply teaching in classrooms. He explained that “there was no orientation from the board office. [He] got the call from

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<sup>2</sup> A Co-op, or Cooperative Education, is a ministry-approved program that allows students to earn secondary school credits while completing a work placement (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014).

the dispatcher and got right down to it” (IM, p. 15). He continued by explaining that he “was nervous to hear from the dispatcher but as it turns out she is the nicest woman [he] knows and has probably talked to so many nervous rookies” (IM, p. 15).

Upon hearing that he had secured an occasional teacher position with the school board, Mike spoke with his sister and a group of his friends who also were supply teachers about their experiences as occasional teachers in order to gain insight and a “heads up” (IM, p. 13). However, he did not feel that “there [had been] too much to prepare [him]” (IM, p. 13) for the day-to-day duties and responsibilities of supply teaching before he formally began his first formal position in education as an occasional teacher.

Mike anticipated that because he was a young male that his occasional teaching experience would stand apart from others, in part because he recalled that having a male supply teacher “was a unique experience for the students” (IM, p. 4). He explained that “when [he] had supply teachers, it was usually an older, retired, female teacher and so [he] thought that being a younger male would be different for the kids and more exciting” (IM, p. 4).

Mike predicted that this “little bit of power” (IM, p. 5), which he expected to have in the classroom because he was a “big guy, which was different” (IM, p. 5) than the average female supply teacher, would allow him to teach the students with fewer discipline problems. He expected, because of his age and interests, to be able to relate to the students because he would be able to “understand the video games and the sports that the kids are playing” (IM, p. 5) and use this to his “advantage to get the kids interested in what [he] was teaching” (IM, p. 5). Mike explained that he expected supply teaching to

be what he made of it. He explained that he “could either go in there and make it very interesting for the kids by taking the material and presenting it in a fun way [which he expected would] make the kids really want [him] to be their supply teacher, or [he] could just focus on getting through the day” (IM, p. 13). To present materials in a fun way, Mike expected that he would have to entertain students every day. He explained that “the more interested [the students] are, the less likely they are going to act out” (IM, p. 5) and to keep them interested “[he has] to entertain them with jokes and stories” (IM, p. 6).

### **Maureen**

Maureen’s expectations of supply teaching were formed through her experience of working as an Educational Assistant (EA) in schools, her experience of working as an emergency supply teacher for another school board while completing her undergraduate degree, and her student teaching experience while completing her Bachelor of Education. She describes learning about the occasional teaching experience from occasional teachers themselves while she was an EA, as she saw “a lot of supply teachers come and go and [she] would ask questions as to what to expect” (IMA, p. 2). She admitted thinking to herself that “it seemed like a pretty good and pretty easy job” (IMA, p. 2).

Maureen explained that she expected to be an occasional teacher after graduating from university and that she “gave [herself] five years before [she] would have a full time job and [she] is nowhere near that after 5 years” (IMA, p. 2). She continues by explaining that she expected good teachers to be getting jobs but that “it breaks [her] heart that [the school board] is going to lose them because they know what the system has become” (IMA, p. 3). Now that she is aware that the time new teachers are waiting to become fulltime educators is increasing and is now approximately 3 years (*Transition to*

*Teaching*, 2014), Maureen admits that she is “thankful that [she] does not need to have a full time paycheck to support her family” (IMA, p. 3).

Throughout her pre-service education, Maureen describes feeling that what she was doing, in terms of lesson planning and teaching, would “carry over” (IMA, p. 8) into her teaching career. Maureen explained that she expected the lessons she was going to be asked to deliver as a supply teacher would compare to the lessons she was creating as a student teacher. She expected the lessons to be “thorough...laid out...and easy to follow” (IMA, p. 8). Upon reflection, Maureen explains that, “other than one exceptionality course...and resources from gym” (IMA, p. 10), her pre-service education “did not prepare [her] at all for supply teaching” (IMA, p. 11). Additionally, she explains that the school board she is currently working for offered “nothing” (IMA, p. 10) in terms of preparation for her work as an occasional teacher.

During her practice teaching as a teacher candidate, Maureen was treated with respect. She felt that the principal at her host school, as well as classroom teachers, communicated with her as if she was a professional educator. When Maureen became an occasional teacher, she expected to receive the same degree of respect as she had in her year as a teacher candidate. She described this expectation of respect as “more than just a supply teacher” (IMA, p. 8).

### **Alyssa**

Alyssa formed expectations of the occasional teaching experience through her experience as a teacher candidate. Alyssa explained that she expected to be teaching using an absent teacher’s lessons plans but that she expected the students to be more respectful of her as a teacher and “less unruly” (IA, p. 4).

Alyssa admitted that she did expect occasional teaching to be stressful but that she finds herself surprised by “how tired [she] can get from the day...sometimes [she] can’t wait to get home because [she has] such a major headache because the kids can just be crazy” (IA, p. 4). Alyssa attended a two hour information session at the school board, which she described as “teaching us about the payroll process and WHIMIS training but had nothing to do with what occasional teaching might be like” (IA, p. 14).

On her first occasional teaching assignment, Alyssa was placed in the classroom for a half day with the absent teacher present in the school. She had the opportunity to meet with him before her day started and she explained to him that it was her first day to which he replied by “making [her] feel very comfortable and at ease as he told [her] about the students in his class and walked [her] through the day” (IA, p. 6). Alyssa explained that she understood this was an uncommon way to experience the first occasional teaching assignment and admitted that she was “lucky” (IA, p. 6).

Alyssa explained that she “expected to have a closer connection or friendship with the principal and staff members” (IA, p. 4). When reflecting on her teacher candidate experience, Alyssa assumed that, when she became an occasional teacher, she would feel “included in conversations that other teaching professionals were having” (IA, p 4) like she did when she was a teacher candidate. Alyssa explained that “what prepared [her] most was [her] teaching placement...[she] did not feel like the courses [she] took in university impacted [her] supply teaching skills” (IA, p. 13).

### **Katlynne**

Katlynne was informed on a Friday that she had had a successful interview for an occasional teaching position. The following Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday she was

booked for work. Katlynne was offered a teacher training seminar from the school board but “it was not mandatory...and the feedback [she] got was that it was not even informational” (IK, p. 13). After explaining that she had expectations of the school board to help prepare her for occasional teaching, Katlynne added that she thought “the school board had a resource for occasional teachers because [she had] seen one sitting on a table in a staff room with a planter on top of it” (IK, p. 30) and she questioned why she had never heard of the resource or received one from the school board.

Katlynne had expectations of occasional teaching that were built from her experiences of being a teacher candidate. Katlynne expected occasional teaching to be more than “just babysitting” (IK, p. 2). She expected occasional teaching to mimic the respect from students and teachers and the organization of the program that she experienced as a teacher candidate. Katlynne explains that she “didn’t pay \$60,000 to go back to school to be treated disrespectfully” but that she expected staff and students to understand that she does “care about [their] education” and that she, as a supply teacher, “can make a difference in their education” (IK, p. 3). Additionally she expected to have the opportunity to build rapport with students and staff as she expected to be in the same schools frequently.

When delivering lessons, Katlynne expected to “take the teachers’ ideas and interpret them in [her] own way” (IK, p. 2) in order to engage in “meaningful conversations and creative thinking” (IK, p. 2). Katlynne expected that she was going to be able to use the “skills that [she] worked on for so long in university” as a supply teacher in the classrooms that she worked in. Katlynne admitted that she expected occasional teaching to be an easy job but was finding that “there are some days when you

just make sure nobody gets hurt, and that is all you can accomplish in the day” (IK, p.29).

Katlynnne expected to be called in to work either the night before or morning of an occasional teaching job; however, she did not expect it to be so “exhausting to be on call from 6pm until 10pm and then again from 6am until 10am...that should not be your life” (IK, p. 30).

### **Brittney**

Brittney built expectations about what the occasional teaching experience would be like through her teaching candidate experience and experience as an elementary school student. As a student Brittney remembers “goofing off and doing whatever [the class] wanted when there was a supply teacher” (IB, p. 14). When she began her pre-service education, Brittney admits that she did not expect to be a supply teacher for very long after graduating. Her focus during her university education was on the “ultimate goal” (IB, p. 15): becoming a full time teacher. She explained that she

did not really look at it as it being a career for 5 years.  
[She] looked at supply teaching as a stepping stone to get to teaching fulltime which [she] honestly thought was going to happen pretty quickly. (IB, p. 14)

Brittney admitted that she did not expect the job to be as competitive as she felt it was and explained that “if [she] does not accept a call for a certain job, there are eighty other supply teachers who will take it” (IB, p. 5).

After graduating from university, Brittney received an interview for an occasional teaching position. After hearing that she was successful, she was asked to return to the board office and was given “a piece of paper with my email address and staff number on it” (IB, p. 22). The board office “asked if [she] had any questions but at that point [she]

did not know what questions to ask” (IB, p. 23). Brittney received a phone call for her first occasional teaching assignment the next day. She described this experience by explaining that she expected that the board office would have “given [her] some guidelines as to what is expected of [her] as a supply teacher” (IB, p. 19). She expected to know more about her responsibilities, such as, “arrival time...communicating with the absent teacher...and when it was okay to leave for the day” (IB, p. 19) before beginning her first teaching assignment.

Brittney expected to be appreciated by the principal and teachers of schools she worked in “because [supply teachers] are important to schools” (IB, p. 5). She explained that she expected to feel a “sense of belonging because [she] was going to be part of a team of educators” (IB, p. 5). Brittney expected that she would be “communicating with principals and teachers” (IB, p. 5) throughout the day in the schools she was called to. She assumed that this daily interaction with other professionals would make her feel welcome in the school community. In the classroom Brittney expected that she would be “carrying out other teacher’s plans” (IB, p. 5) on a daily basis and she expected that these plans would be organized. Additionally, Brittney expected the day plans to be legible and to include information about the students in her classes.

When asked about what ultimately prepared Brittney for occasional teaching, she explained that it was her “own experiences and [herself] because [She] treats each day like a new adventure” (IB, p. 20).

### **Summary**

This chapter includes each participant’s different expectations about what the occasional teaching experience might entail. All of the participants expected to be an

occasional teacher after graduating from their education program and their expectations of what the occasional teaching experience had many similarities. Participants formed their expectations about occasional teaching from their experiences as a pre-service teacher and their experiences as a student. Before they became occasional teachers, participants expected that they would use most of the teaching skills that they had worked on in university. Many of the participants expected the support they had from principals and teacher during their practice teaching year would carry over into their first year as an occasional teacher. In addition, participants expected that the school board for which they currently work would help to prepare them for the occasional teaching experience. The participants' initial experiences of occasional teaching forms the basis of the next chapter.

## Chapter 6 Initial Experiences

This chapter presents the participants' early experiences of occasional teaching. First, the participants describe how they experienced ever-changing teaching assignments. Next, the participants describe who or what they turned to for professional support and how they handled school and classroom program information. Then the participants described their experiences enacting the day plans and coming to terms with a record-keeping focus. Lastly, they describe how they experienced less authority than other teaching staff in the school.

### Colleen

My goal as a professional occasional teacher going into any classroom is for the students in my charge to “behave, have a positive experience, and learn something during the day” (IC, p. 7) which aligns with what I believe are the typical goals of regular classroom teachers for their students. However, since formally assuming the role of occasional teacher, it has become apparent that my expectations of supply teaching “were very different compared to the reality of it” (IC, p. 7). The information session held by the school board for new occasional teachers was not mandatory and I was scheduled to supply teach on the day that it was held, making it impossible for me to attend. I had so many questions in advance of my first day “on-the job” that went unanswered; such as, Do I get the time sheet signed every day? How early do I have to be at the school? What should I expect this experience to be like? and How can I prepare for my first day? Asking the main contact person at the school board often took days of waiting for responses to emails or returned phone calls. Within one day of beginning my professional career as an educator, I started to feel alone and unsupported. I began to realize that it

would have been most helpful if I could have asked an occasional teacher who was currently working for the school board my list of questions to get first-hand information and to “get some tips from someone who had lived [the occasional experience]” (IC, p. 14).

### **Ever-changeable teaching assignments**

I was rarely asked to teach at the same school twice over the span of two weeks. This made it hard to get to know students, teaching faculty and support staff, which in turn rendered it difficult to understand where I fit into the education system. Similarly, not having a set of schools that I visited consistently meant that “I didn’t get to see the impact I was having on my students or if I was having one at all because I would see them for a short time and then maybe never again” (IC, p. 5).

Often I was only at a school for a day or half a day and then would not be called back for weeks, sometimes even months. As a result, it was only natural that I felt like an outsider in most of the schools I visited. In the school board I work for, frequenting the same school for consecutive days was not common practice because occasional teachers were called in order of seniority and offered a job from a list that was compiled in order as classroom teachers called to request occasional teachers. Thus, it was rare to feel “at home” in any school or to feel a sense of belonging to the school’s staff or a connection with students. As an occasional teacher, I saw attitudes reminiscent of my past coming from the students in my classrooms.

When [students] saw [me], a supply teacher, the first thing I would hear is ‘a supply teacher, yes!’ and I don’t think they were excited because it was me, because they did not know me, I think they thought it was going to be a day filled with free time. (IC, p. 11)

Consistently, in my experiences as an occasional teacher, I find that students “try to pull fast ones on me all day” (IC, p. 11) because they may not connect with me on the first, and maybe last, day.

### **Sources of support**

Due to the lack of on-going placements in one school and limited familiarity with the personnel and students at the schools in which I worked, it was difficult to find sources of support or to feel supported. Regular classroom teachers were very busy almost all of the time and so “sometimes I felt a little awkward going to teachers to ask them questions because they just didn’t have time to answer me. I had to [find my own sources] of support and welcoming” (IC, p. 3). To my surprise, I discovered that my biggest supporter was the dispatcher who called me at night to recruit me for the next day. Since she made me feel comfortable, I was able to ask her questions about the school to which I was assigned and the teacher for whom I was providing supply services. If I was assigned to a difficult classroom, the dispatcher gave advance warning by informing me of what other occasional teachers had told her. In spite of this preparatory conversation, I started to realize that each morning I had several additional questions that arose due to missing information in the day plan; such as, where learning resources (e.g., textbooks, construction paper, textbooks) were located in the school and classroom and where first aid information and emergency phone numbers were to be found.

### **School and classroom program information**

I had a different experience in each school and in each classroom I visited as an occasional teacher. Each school to which I was called had a different protocol for the degree of detail that the regular teacher must provide for the supply teacher; for example,

the inclusion of student behaviour plans varied greatly among schools. As a result, some teachers left thorough day plans, maps of the school with important and relevant areas highlighted and a behaviour plan specific to individual students. In contrast, some teachers did not leave day plans at all, omitted key information; such as, the time when a teacher “forgot to mention in her day plan that there was a school wide Terry Fox Run that afternoon” (IC, p. 18).

There was a similar disparity regarding how I was introduced to the school. Some schools that I visited had the secretary give me a quick tour of the school and broadcast that I was visiting over the announcements; while in other schools, the secretary “just pointed to the hallway where I needed to go without even looking up” (IC, p. 1).

### **Enacting day plans**

My yearning to be treated as a professional teacher was harder to achieve than initially expected. Although I believed that I had the same skills as the regular classroom teacher, I lacked the autonomy afforded by the designation of “teacher” solely (in my opinion) because I was not a full time teacher. These opinions were formed on the basis of my experiences, given that I had few opportunities to make professional decisions or apply my own skills and knowledge.

The first subtle sign of this lack of autonomy would always begin as soon as I would enter the school and the secretary would ask me: “Who are you today?” and “my first thought every time was to say, “I’m Colleen everyday but I am filling in for Mr. Smith today”” (IC, p. 1). It was as if I was physically myself in appearance but that I was just a body being used to make it seem as if Mrs. Smith had never left. Once in the classroom, there was sometimes more room to add my own style to the daily lessons;

however, these opportunities were rare because I “always wanted to make sure the lessons left by the teacher were completed” (IC, p. 3).

### **Coming to terms with a record-keeping focus**

In my experience, occasional teaching has never felt like “real” teaching. Instead, I felt as if my main objective was to manage a group of students and report back to a group of professionals to whom I did not belong. In every classroom that I work in, I always leave an “honest note about how the day went” (IC, p. 4). It is important for me to be very honest because I believe that “some supply teachers might sugar coat their notes...to make it appear like the supply teacher had control over the class” (IC, p. 4). I have heard stories in staff rooms from classroom teachers who report that “students [say] that they misbehaved when the supply teacher was in which totally negates the supply teacher’s note and makes the supply look bad” (IC, p. 4). Additionally, I am careful to be specific about situations, so “I write my notes as I go through the day if I have time” (IC, p. 5).

### **Less authority than others**

In addition to having inconsistent policies about how to introduce occasional teachers to each school and what is to be included in day plans, I also observed that my presence was sometimes the reason for negative behaviour from students. In this way, I was creating inconsistency in routine which, in turn, caused students to misbehave. I would often hear EAs talk about students having bad days because I was “*just* a supply teacher” (IC, p. 8). That often made me feel as if I needed to focus solely on classroom management rather than the lessons that needed to be taught to the students.

## Mike

Mike described each day of supply teaching as “going in very different directions” (IM, p.5). He explained that life in the day of an occasional teacher can “be an absolute write off where [he] feels like [he] did not do a very good job” (IM, p. 5) or it can be a day where he felt that “even though [he] is a supply teacher the students were able to cover what they needed to cover...and they accomplished what they would have accomplished with their regular teacher” (IM. p. 5). In the next section, Mike’s initial occasional teaching experiences are described.

### **Ever-changeable teaching assignments**

Mike wishes that he could be assigned to work at the same school more often than he is currently. He thinks that students “respond differently when they see the same supply teachers on a consistent basis. If they see [supply teachers] on a monthly basis, [students] don’t treat [supply teachers] like they belong” (IM, p. 10). Often Mike feels that the students are taking advantage of his lack of experience and non-permanent status. He explained that “as soon as they [spot] a supply teacher, kids try to get away with as much as they can” (IM, p.10). He describes his frustration when explaining that he feels like “a guy who walks in and gets taken advantage of and that really irritates [him] because [he believes that] it is disrespectful” (IM, p. 10).

Mike continued by explaining that he also perceived behaviours that suggested a lack of respect towards him from classroom teachers. He described “times when [he] has thought that some teachers really have no respect for what [he] is doing in the classroom as a supply teacher” (IM, p. 11). However, he added that, when he has approached

classroom teachers, he has experienced “a lot of teachers that are actually very sympathetic to supply teachers and really willing to make your job easier” (IM, p. 12).

### **Sources of support**

In anticipation of his first occasional teaching assignment, Mike “was very nervous to hear from the dispatcher because it meant that [he] would be experiencing his first day shortly, but, as it turns out, she is the nicest woman [he] knows” (IM, p. 15). Although he can never know for sure, he believes that because she has talked to so many “rookies who are so nervous” that for his first teaching assignment, she “gave [him] a really nice class for three straight days on purpose to help ease him into supply teaching” (IM, p. 15). Mike felt that he had established a positive relationship with the dispatcher and assumed that “she establishes individual relationships with each occasional teacher” (IM, p. 15). He described himself as being “overwhelming[ly] happy when [he] met her” (IM, p. 15).

Mike identified the school secretary as another important positive resource. He explained that, because secretaries are usually the first person anybody sees in the morning, they can “really make or break your day...especially if they give [supply teachers] a heads up about a tough classroom that [he] will be working in” (IA, p. 18).

### **School and classroom program information**

Mike arrives at the school and prepares for the day by familiarizing himself with the day plans. He knows that this morning routine is important because there is no certainty that he will be provided with preparation and planning time during the school day. He described “every classroom as having a new routine... and [he has] a million questions that aren’t always in the planning” (IM, p. 3). Mike explained that “[he]

sometimes wonders if some teachers move their prep around“ (IM, p. 3) when he does not receive it, and explained that “it is not that [he] actually has any planning to do but at the same time that break can give you the energy you need to have a successful day” (IM, p.3).

### **Enacting day plans**

Mike explained that he “always tries to stay with what the teacher has planned” and that he “does not want to stray too far from it because [he] does not want to tick the teacher off” (IM, p, 17). Although he respects the classroom teacher’s plans, he finds it difficult to follow them without adding to them at times, especially when “teachers have got forty five minutes and ask [him] to have the students color a circle” (IM. p.12). He continues by explaining that “he does not mind thinking on [his] feet and [he] kind of likes the challenge” (pg. 12).

Although he finds some of the lessons left for him to deliver mundane, there are times when he admits there are lessons left for him that challenge him intellectually. He explained that he sometimes feels that he has to “brush up on [his] grade seven math because [he] has not done it in years” (IM, p. 5). He explained that those types of lessons “keep [him] on [his] toes because [he] wants to be able to teach it and teach it in an exciting way” (IM. p.5). Mike fears that, if he does not teach his classes in engaging ways, “the [students] will misbehave” (IM, p. 5).

Mike described feeling pressured to be overtly engaging and exciting when delivering lessons in the day plans left for him. Mike believes that “when [he] goes into a classroom the more entertaining [he] is the better the entire day is going to go” (IM, p. 5). He admits that making another teacher’s activity engaging in order to hook students that

he has just met into learning is “exhausting but worth it” (IM, p. 5). After putting so much energy into delivering the day plans, he explains that he “really wishes that he could see if he is impacting the students’ learning but [he] usually is not with the students long enough” (IM, p. 17).

### **Coming to terms with a record-keeping focus**

When Mike first began supply teaching he was “writing big notes by going through each lesson and commenting” (IM, p. 3). After three years as a supply teacher, Mike admitted that he “still usually writes three quarters of a page if he does not know a teacher and has never been in the class before, but he does not feel obligated to write a big note if he is familiar with the class” (IM, p. 3) and with what the regular teacher wants or needs to know. Mike writes a note to the classroom teacher using “common sense” (IM, p. 3). Although he was unsure if he was obligated by the school board to leave a note, he explained that he thought “some other supply teachers said it was a good idea to leave a note at the end of the day” and that, to him, “it just makes sense to touch base to let the classroom teacher know how their students were and what was accomplished” (IM, p. 3).

### **Less authority than others**

When Mike walks into a school as the supply teacher he “feels like the low man on the totem pole and, in reality, that is what you are because you are in there for one day” (IM, p. 7). He described his goal to “be viewed as one of the staff” in every school to which he is assigned. Although Mike reports that he is happy “in some schools [where] you are viewed as staff,” he finds it difficult to be in schools where he feels that he is considered to be “*just* a supply teacher” (IM, p. 7).

When asked to talk about supports within the school community, Mike explained that he has different experiences in each school he visits. In some schools the “principals are really supportive because they ask if [he] needs any help and introduce themselves and then there are other schools where [he] knows that the principals just don’t have enough time” (IM, p.9). Mike explained that this “gave [him] the impression that perhaps a supply teacher isn’t really that important to regular teaching staff or that maybe [he] just needed to try harder to integrate himself” (IM, p.9) but he could not help but feel that he was “just there as a filler, trying to get through each day” (IM, p. 9).

When asked where he felt that classroom teachers would place supply teachers on a list of importance, Mike explained that he felt that

full time staff look out for full time staff and, although full time staff see the importance of supply teachers and the importance of a good supply teacher, [he] thinks they would put them at the bottom because they are not a large enough presence in a student’s education. (IM, p. 9)

### **Maureen**

At the outset of our interview, Maureen explained that she had never expected to be supply teaching at the age of 45 and especially did not expect the possibility of being a retired supply teacher in 20 years but that her “occasional teaching experiences have shaped her identity as an educator” (IM, p. 3). In this section, Maureen’s initial occasional teaching experiences are highlighted.

### **Ever-changeable teaching assignments**

Maureen realizes that, because there are “over twenty schools that [she] can be called to” (IM, p. 13), it may take a lot of time to become familiar with any school in her particular school board. She admits that, when she is working in any school, she avoids

sending students to the principal's office or calling on support in most cases because she fears "looking like [she] is not capable of doing [her] job if [she] had to send a kid out of the classroom" (IM, p. 12) Even if a classroom situation were to escalate, she admits that, when she should "probably should be sending them to the office, [she] feels that the principal and classroom teachers are just going to think that [she] doesn't know what she is doing" (IM, p. 12).

### **Sources of support**

Maureen identified three people who support her occasional teaching experience. She explained that in each school she visits she identifies "the secretaries as the ones who run the school" (IM, p. 5). She explained that the secretary is often the first person she will go to if she has a question about anything during her day of work. While in her classroom, if Maureen has an EA, she explained that she "always feels like [she] can use them to help with management issues" (IM, p. 12). Maureen felt that the EA is usually willing to offer a helping hand because they "have a rapport with the students and, more importantly, they understand the possible behavior issues in the classroom and how to handle them" (IM, p. 14). Maureen added that, although she "does not get enough interaction with other supply teachers, [she] finds them to be very helpful sources of advice about particular schools, classroom teachers and principals" (IM, p. 13). She feels that other occasional teachers understand the experiences that she is having "and can suggest classroom management strategies that have worked for them" (IM, p. 14).

### **School and classroom program information**

Maureen spoke highly of classroom teachers who leave ancillary material to support the day plans, such as a "list of kids to look out for" (IM, p. 14). She gave a

concrete example by recalling an experience when she was “sitting at lunch time looking at the wall [in the staffroom] and realized that there were 2 students in [her] class who had severe allergies” (IM, p. 14) but those students were not identified in the day plan “as anything to look out for” (IM, p. 14). She elaborated saying that the day plans she is left with often leave out behavioural information such as “students who fight...students who are not supposed to sit beside one another” (IM, p. 14).

Maureen wondered if classroom teachers were “setting [her] up to see how much [she] can handle” (IM, p. 15) by excluding student behaviour or classroom behaviour plans from their day plans. On such occasions, Maureen cannot help but feel “judged because [she] could not adequately manage the class” (IM, p. 15).

### **Enacting day plans**

Maureen described her best days as an occasional teacher as being those on which the classroom teacher has “left [her] the responsibility of teaching a lesson” (IM, p. 14). She explains that this actually “does not happen very often because you are mostly left with busy work” (IM, p. 14). Maureen admits that she understands that most classroom teachers might be worried about having to “re-teach a lesson if the supply teacher teaches it in a way that is backwards for the kids” but that in the “last year [she] thinks [she] has only taught a new lesson in one class” (IM, p. 14).

Maureen adds to her description of a great day as an occasional teacher when she describes how much she “loves to see that light in their eyes [when they learn something new] that [she] has been able to teach them” (IM, p. 14). As a result of her initial experiences as a supply teacher, Maureen often wonders if she does not get to teach very many lessons because “some teachers’ think that she is *just* a supply teacher so [she] is

not going to get a lesson done anyway” (IM, p. 16) or if this is an issue of the regular classroom teacher not knowing what is appropriate to include in a day plan.

Maureen described an experience she had where she was “assigned a double yard duty because the classroom teacher had missed a duty a few days previous” (IM, p, 17). She explained that this experience was not uncommon but that it had happened to her a number times and that she “feels vulnerable” because she cannot protest when it happens without fear of being judged. Maureen expects that classroom teachers “know that [she] is not going to say no to opportunities to go above expectations set out for [occasional teachers] by the school board” (IM, p. 17).

### **Coming to terms with a record-keeping focus**

Maureen uses some of the time in each classroom that she works in to “take pictures using [her] phone of great ideas” (IM, p. 4) that she sees. She adds that she documents “great teaching ideas, classroom management techniques and crafts that [she] keeps in a folder at home” (IM, p. 4), so she can use them when she has her own classroom.

When speaking about reporting back to the classroom teacher, Maureen explained that she always wonders “whether [she] should be honest in [her] note” (IM, p. 14). She continued by asking, “Do you tell [the classroom teacher] how horrible the students were, or do you just leave that out?” (IM, p.14) When asked why she would leave negative information out about the day, she answered that she always wondered if she should leave it out because she “never gets to see what happens when [she] leaves and [she] does not get to explain the situations in detail because [she] only has so much time, so sometimes it is just more simple to leave it out” (IM, p. 14). Maureen does not want the

report that she leaves to reflect badly on her abilities as a teacher without being able to explain her choices in person.

### **Less authority than others**

When asked where occasional teachers would be placed in a list of importance in a school, Maureen responded with overwhelming assurance, “Occasional teachers are below everybody else; they are below caretakers; and they are at the bottom of the barrel” (IM, p. 4). She explained that if a student was asked to create this list, “they would put supply teachers at the bottom because that is how they value our jobs” (IM, p. 5).

Maureen finds it difficult to listen to students talk about supply teachers they have had and explained that she will stand up for other supply teachers by telling students that she “knows that supply teacher...they are [her] friend...even if they really aren’t” (IM, p. 5).

She continues by explaining that “it is not just students that [she] hears talking negatively about supply teachers, [she] hears the same thing in staffrooms all the time” (IM, p. 5).

Maureen described her frustration from hearing teachers and students talk badly about some occasional teachers and explained that her feelings stem from the fact that “we all have the same degree” (IM, p. 5).

Maureen hears “full time staff talking openly about their favourite and least favourite supply teachers” and points out that “Of course, there are supply teachers who aren’t the greatest but there are a lot of teachers that aren’t the greatest as well” (IM, p. 6). She explains that she wishes that classroom teachers and occasional teachers could come together as a community because “we are all trying to do the same thing, but supply teachers are coming into a position where they may not know the students so they have

one extra challenge” (IM, p. 6) and admits feeling like classroom teachers “don’t think we are on the same page...they think they are above us” (IM, p. 6).

Maureen recalls working at one school where they changed the name of “supply teacher” to “guest teacher.” She explained that administration spoke to students about treating an occasional teacher like you would treat “a guest coming into your house... with respect” (IM, p. 7). After recalling this event, Maureen explained that she “often thinks back to the experience because it resonated with the kids” (IM, p. 7).

### **Alyssa**

Alyssa describes some of her initial occasional teaching days as ending with her “running for the door” (IA, p. 7). In the next section, Alyssa’s initial experiences as an occasional teacher are described.

#### **Ever-changeable teaching assignments**

Alyssa found her initial experiences as an occasional teacher to be vastly different depending on the school in which she was working. She experiences each school as having “different procedures and policies” (IA, p. 15). Alyssa spoke candidly about her first introductions to every school where she works. She explained that the degree to which she feels welcomed relies heavily on how she is welcomed by the secretary when she signs in at the office before heading to her classroom. She explained that sometimes “the secretary acts like [I am] not there by hardly looking up from her work and sometimes reaching for the phone when she sees [her]” (IA, p. 11). In contrast, Alyssa described some situations when the secretary would “greet [her] with a warm welcome, offer to help her find her classroom, or even introduce [her] to the principal” (IA, p. 11).

Alyssa described her interactions with school principals as limited because she felt as if they “did not want to make an effort to introduce themselves because they have other things to do” (IA, p. 15), which she admitted was “understandable” (IA, p. 20).

During Alyssa’s initial experiences as an occasional teacher, she explained that she “does not have any problems asking questions to become more familiar with routines” because she felt that most staff must “realize [she] is new,” however; she was adamant to emphasize that she would “rather not ask too many questions” (IA, p. 15) because she does not want to seem like a bother to the busy teachers.

### **Sources of support**

In each school that Alyssa works in, she identifies classroom EAs and ECEs (Early Childhood Educator) as her biggest supporters. She describes feeling “so excited when [she] sees them, because they know the routine, they know all the kids and what and who to watch out for” (IA, p. 3). Just as she described her introductions to each school as being inconsistent, she also found that her initial experiences as an occasional teacher in terms of supports within each school varied. She explained that “some teachers can be very supportive, principals, too, but it just depends on the school” (IA, p. 5).

### **School and classroom program information**

Upon arriving at a school in the morning, Alyssa has found that she is often “bombarded with a lot of information at once and sometimes [she finds] it hard to interpret it all before the bell rings” (IA, p. 21). She explained that if a day plan is “extensive, and [she] is running short of time, [she] just reads the morning plans before lunch and then during [her] break [she] reads the afternoon plans” (IA, p. 2).

When dismissing students at the end of the day, Alyssa described an experience that “was extremely stressful” and felt that, although it was not her responsibility, she was being asked to “get kindergarten students on the right buses to go home” and she “did not have sufficient information to ensure they were going on the right buses” (IA, p. 18). Alyssa felt that her professionalism was compromised because she was put into a situation above which she was unprepared and untrained.

### **Enacting day plans**

Alyssa believes that she is “confident and capable of taking care of each class and fulfilling each lesson plan that teachers have set for the day” (IA, p. 15); however, she admits that sometimes teachers leave plans that are “overwhelming with too many things to do” (IA, p. 21). In these situations Alyssa tries hard to “get everything done and leaves a note apologizing if [she] cannot possibly finish everything in the day plan” (IA, p. 21). There have been a number of times when Alyssa felt “incompetent when left with math that [she] has not done in years” (IA, p.21) due to the expectation to be expert in all subjects across the elementary grades. Alyssa explained that she sometimes uses her phone to look up certain math concepts because “the teacher usually does not leave technology for her to use” and fears that the classroom teacher “judges [her] for not being able to complete the lesson” (IA, p, 22).

### **Coming to terms with a record-keeping focus**

Alyssa described the importance of time management when she explained that “sometimes classroom teachers, maybe if they are ill in the morning, ask you to do photocopying before class starts at the beginning of the day” (IA, p. 23); but, unless you are already familiar with the school, she explains that she “does not have time to

photocopy because [she] is still learning the school, what to do for the day and possibly learn content that she has to teach later” (IA, p. 23).

When negative classroom behaviour issues arise, Alyssa likes to “handle them [herself] because [she] is good at enforcing classroom rules” (IA, p. 8). She avoids calling the secretary or making a habit of calling the principal because she “does not want to have that stigma... you don’t want to be the teacher who can’t manage a class for a day” (IA, p. 15)

Alyssa added that she “struggles with the term occasional or supply teacher because [she] feels that students don’t respect her” (IA, p. 2). To help manage classroom behaviour, establish authority and communicate expectations, Alyssa “tries to explain to students in every class [she] works in that [she] is to be treated with respect just like Mrs. Smith is treated” (IA, p. 2).

### **Less authority than others**

In her initial experiences as an occasional teacher, Alyssa often heard students tell her that she is “not a real teacher but rather [she] is *just* a supply teacher” (IA, p. 10). Alyssa wondered whether the way principals and teaching staff welcome their occasional teachers resonate with the school’s students.

She recalled one experience when she felt that the principal’s attitude was that “you can treat [occasional teachers] any way you wish because they only come to the school occasionally...they are not going to be here long” (IA, p. 17). This type of experience has occurred on more than one occasion and left Alyssa feeling like she was “at the bottom of the run” (IA, p. 10). She continued by explaining that “some principals will pass you in the hall and not really care to introduce themselves and that doesn’t make

[her] want to introduce [herself] ” (IA, p. 12), which only adds to her feeling more of an “inconvenience and very much of a pain” (IA, p. 12). When Alyssa is not acknowledged by staff, principals or the secretary, she admits that she feels “very much like a student” and that “influences [her] decisions not to accept calls from particular schools” (IA, p. 12).

Alyssa explained that she loves interacting with parents at the beginning and conclusion of the day, if she gets the opportunity. She explained that parents “talk to you like they would the regular classroom teacher and it makes you feel useful” (IA, p. 10). She added that sometimes parents would even give her information about their child’s “behavioural issues if they saw [her] before class started, which is so helpful if it isn’t written in the day plan” (IA, p. 12).

### **Katlynne**

Katlynne has found her initial experiences of occasional teaching to be “pretty exhausting” (IK, p. 1). In the next section, Katlynne’s initial occasional teaching experiences are described.

#### **Ever-changeable teaching assignments**

Katlynne describes each of her occasional teaching assignments as being “different at every school” (IK, p. 2) She explained that in an effort to make herself more familiar with the school and the staff she tries “to introduce [herself] and make sure the principal knows who [she] is” (IK, p. 7). She admits that this is not easy to do because she is “sometimes only at the school for one day in the whole year” (IK, p. 17).

Katlynne explained that it is difficult to manage students when they are not familiar with her and with her teaching style. On one occasion when four boys disobeyed

Katlynnne and called her names, she explained that they might not “have acted that way for their teacher because they have a relationship and familiar expectations” (IK, p. 17). Katlynnne explained that it was frustrating because she “would never see those kids again” (IK, p. 17) and it was impossible for her to have built a rapport that could have influenced the way she was treated by the boys.

Katlynnne believes that “the more [a supply teacher’s face] is seen in a school, the better they will be treated” (IK, p. 18). She added that the more familiar she becomes with a school, the “more comfortable [she] feels asking questions” (IK, p. 18). Otherwise she admits that she “tries [her] best not to seek out support” (IK, p. 8). Katlynnne describes situations in which teachers have given her options to send misbehaving kids to them but admits that, even “if the offer is not there, I am not going to ask for help because I want to prove that I can problem solve and handle it myself” (IK, p. 14).

Katlynnne described her struggle between trying to “make [herself] visible in schools” and avoiding being recognized as “*that* supply teacher, the incompetent one who asks too many questions” (IK, p. 8). In her experience, Katlynnne has heard from other supply teachers that “it is recommended that [occasional teachers] try to deal with student behaviour on their own” (IK, p. 8) as opposed to contacting the principal. She explained that because schools vary in the way they handle behaviour issues, she finds herself avoiding asking questions of the administration because she is unfamiliar with school policy. Katlynnne told one story about a principal who she “will always remember” (IK, p. 10). After Katlynnne arrived at the school, the principal introduced herself and “went through a list of tough students that [Katlynnne had in her] class” (IK, p. 10). Katlynnne highlighted this positive experience by explaining that this situation was rare because

“most of the time principals are not visible and they rarely introduce themselves” (IK, p. 8).

### **Sources of support**

Katlynn identified other occasional teachers as her biggest supporters. She described how much she enjoys “talking to supply teachers and hearing about their success and even their failures...because it makes [her] feel like [she is] not the only one” (IK, p. 11). Katlynn talks to other occasional teachers frequently in schools and has “become very good friends with some of them” (IK, p. 11).

Additionally, Katlynn spoke about the school board’s dispatcher as being “so helpful and understanding” (IK, p. 18). Katlynn explained that the dispatcher often tried to keep the same supply teacher in a classroom for consecutive days, if possible. She described this as creating “a little bit of consistency for the students” and added that it helps her to “build rapport with a group of students” (IK, p. 18).

### **Information upon arrival to the school and in day plans**

Katlynn felt that each school she was called to had a different way of introducing her to the school and different resources. At some schools, Katlynn gets a “key for [her] classroom, a school procedure manual (like fire routes or lock down procedures), and important phone numbers and sometimes [she] gets nothing” (IK, p. 1). In her initial experiences, Katlynn has encountered “secretaries who are nice and secretaries who assume [she] knows where [she] is supposed to go even though there are 18 locked doors and [she] is not given a key” (IK, p. 5). Katlynn explained that she understands “everybody is busy...but it does make [her] feel really nice when secretaries, who are the first people [she] sees in the morning, answer questions and introduce [her] to the school”

(IK, p. 5). She laughed as she exclaimed that “if the secretary is having a bad day, [you’re] not going to get [the] answers you are looking for” (IK, p. 5)

Each day plan from which Katlynne has worked has been quite different. The most important element for which she looks are student behaviour plans. Katlynne has encountered many different kind of behaviour plans, some “great ones and other times only small blurbs about the students” (IK, p. 20). Small blurbs are not sufficient for Katlynne. She finds herself wondering “what action the teacher takes that is effective for the student because [she] wants to be consistent with what the teacher does” (IK, p. 20).

### **Enacting day plans**

In her experience Katlynne has sometimes felt that the “quality of work that is left for students to complete” (IK, p. 3) is not sufficient for a full teaching day. She believes that work, such as, worksheets, colouring and “busy work in general, might say something about [occasional teaching], that maybe [occasional teachers] aren’t capable of teaching what the regular teacher might teach” (IK, p. 3). Katlynne understands that, when a classroom teacher is sick, it is not easy for them to make “creative supply plans. It is easier for [teachers] to give 10 worksheets but this does not make for a very meaningful day” (IK, p. 3). Katlynne fears that, if she continues being asked to give students busy work that, “students will start associating supply teachers with mundane work and unskillful teaching” (IK, p. 3).

Katlynne excitedly told a story about a recent opportunity where she was asked to work in the same classroom for five days while a teacher was away on a personal leave. There were day plans left for the first day; but, when Katlynne spoke to the classroom teacher over the phone that night, the teacher gave her a general idea of what units they

were studying and then asked Katlynnne if she would like to plan the next 4 days.

Katlynnne explained, that on her second day of work, she “knew what the teacher was expecting so [she] got to be creative with the day plan by adding to it as [she] wished” (IK, p. 4). Katlynnne described these consecutive days as some of her best days as an occasional teacher because “it gets boring and redundant to use other peoples’ ideas when [she] has [her] own” (IK, p. 4).

Katlynnne’s best occasional teaching days are when she “knows the good kids’ names and not the bad kids’ names and when [she] can sit down and have a conversation with a couple of kids to get to know them” (IK, p. 14). She feels the most satisfied when she can “share some of [her] knowledge when classes are listening and being respectful by going outside the box and let [her] personality, creativity and abilities show” (IK, p. 14). If the opportunity arises, Katlynnne has “no problem going outside of plans, for example, even little things like bringing up Google Maps to show an area of the world that is being discussed” (IK, p. 15).

### **Coming to terms with a record-keeping focus**

Katlynnne uses her own classroom management skills in the classrooms she visits and explains to her students that “the day is going to be different than what [the classroom teacher] does, but they need to respect [her] (IK, p. 3). Although she does not always feel respected by the students she teaches, she expects that she is “going to be a better teacher because [she] might have dealt with more negative behaviour than [she] is going to deal with in her own classroom with [her] own procedures and rules” (IK, p. 6).

Katlynnne always leaves a note for the classroom teacher at each day’s end but is left wondering “whether teachers follow up with behaviour issues the next day” (IK, p.

15). She gives consequences to students who are misbehaving during the day but fears that “the classroom teacher reads the note and does not have a conversation or some form of follow up with the students which means the kids might do the same thing with the next supply teacher” (IK, p. 16).

### **Less Authority than others**

Katlynnne believes that her personality is an important reason why she engages in conversations with staff at each school she visits. She watched some occasional teachers “sitting in the classroom at lunch instead of the staffroom probably feeling like nobody wants to talk to them” (IK, p. 4). She explains that she has “no problem engaging in conversations in the staffroom even if [the classroom teachers] are sitting with their backs to [her]” (IK, p. 4). There have been many times when Katlynnne has asked fellow occasional teachers who feel excluded if they had initiated conversations and finds that most of them say “they didn’t talk to me” (IK, p. 4). Katlynnne feels that occasional teachers are “not always equal but [wonders if occasional teachers] can make themselves equal by being more assertive or giving even more effort on a daily basis” (IK, p. 4).

Katlynnne believes that the majority of “students don’t see [occasional teachers] as equal to classroom teachers judging by how little respect they have for [them]” (IK, p. 6). She questions whether students who show disrespect to her also show disrespect to their classroom teacher. She also wonders if classroom teachers talk about other classroom teachers like they talk about occasional teachers. She recalls hearing classroom teachers talking in staffrooms about fellow occasional teachers and believes that classroom teachers “who [may] have never done one supply day in their life do not understand what

the occasional teaching experience is like” (IK, p. 6). Katlynnne explains that her experiences with classroom teachers leave her feeling like she is “different” (IK, p. 10)

Katlynnne’s experience with parents has been limited. She admits that “most days parents probably don’t even know there has been a supply teacher in their child’s classroom” (IK, p. 7).

Katlynnne describes her experiences working with EAs as complicated. In one story, Katlynnne struggled with feeling like she “was the bad guy because the EA chose to override what [she] had promised to a student” (IK, p. 21). In this situation Katlynnne had promised, as a positive reinforcement, that a student could build a castle with her but had not been informed that this privilege had been taken away from the student on a previous day. Katlynnne explained that “whether it’s miscommunication or not, working with an EA as a supply teacher is tricky because they know their students much better than [she] does but [she] is supposed to be the teacher in the classroom” (IK, p. 21).

### **Brittney**

Brittney often finds herself “waiting by the phone hoping for a phone call” (IB, p. 15) because she knows that if she misses the call there are “hundreds of occasional teachers waiting to accept it” (IB, p. 15). Although she often feels like she is a “dime a dozen” because of the over-abundance of occasional teachers, she loves her job because she gets to interact with students every day. In the next section, Brittney’s initial occasional teaching experiences are described.

### **Ever-changeable teaching assignments**

Brittney described one of her best experiences as an occasional teacher as times during which she worked in “the same classroom for a couple of days” (IB, p. 23). She

became familiar with the students in the class and the content of the lessons that they were learning. Brittney describes these as her best days because she “could actually see that [she was] positively impacting the students’ learning” (IB, p. 23). She explained that “part of the problem with supply teaching is [she] might be positively impacting a student’s learning but might never see that impact because [she] is not at the same school very often” (IB, p. 23).

Brittney explained that she feels most welcome in schools when she is introduced over the announcements. She described feeling “excited and more familiar with the school because the kids know that there is a teacher in the school that they might not recognize” (IB, p. 25). When Brittney does not feel familiar with a school, she admits that she “might stay in the classroom and do [her] own thing because making professional connections is a bonus but the student’s education is [her] top priority” (IB, p. 7).

### **Sources of support**

Brittney identifies her biggest supporters as other classroom teachers within the school who drop into her classroom “if it is a difficult class and offer support if [she] needs it later in the day” (IB, p. 4). Additionally, Brittney explains that EAs can be one of her biggest supports but that the relationship is complex. She describes her relationship with EAs as having an understanding that EAs are there to support teachers but, when a supply teacher comes in, it is “sometimes easy to sit back and have the EA (who knows all of the routines) run the day” (IB, p. 13). Brittney explains that she wants EAs to feel comfortable offering support with specific students but does not want them to feel like they have to manage the class. She fears that some EAs may not “feel that [she] is doing [her] job if [she] relies on them too much” (IB, p. 13).

### **School and classroom program information**

Each time Brittney gets called to a school, she prepares herself to be flexible because she “never knows what the day is going to be like” (IB, p. 3). When Brittney arrives at the school each morning, she finds that she has to “fend for [herself]” (IB, p. 1) when finding her classroom and preparing for the day according to the day plan. When the classroom teacher “doesn’t leave plans for the day or they don’t leave any information about the students, [she] has to be on her toes” (IB, p. 1).

In Brittney’s experience she finds that “when the teacher leaves information about her specific behaviour management strategies, the day goes smoother than if she does not” (IB, p. 3). Brittney told a story about a time when she “had tried out [her] own classroom management strategies on a difficult student, like counting to three, giving him a time out, everything [she] could think of” (IB, p. 10), until finally she was able to contact the classroom teacher who was attending in-school professional development. It was at this time that the teacher informed her of the specific strategy she uses with the difficult student. Brittney explained her frustration in our interview by questioning why most teachers do not include these strategies in their day plans.

Brittney has experienced day plans that are too long to read in the time that she has before class begins. She admits that she “understand that some things need to be written in detail but point form would be more effective because [she] does not have time to read over 5 pages of notes” (IB, p. 8).

### **Enacting day plans**

At the end of each supply day, Brittney describes often feeling that she might be judged negatively by the classroom teacher because she did not complete everything in

the day plan. She explains that, when she does not complete everything in the day plan, it is often because of things such as “wrong times written down for activities, or special events at the school” (IB, p. 16). Brittney fears that the classroom teacher is going to think her failure to complete the day plan is because she is “*just* a supply teacher” (IB, p. 16).

Brittney is often asked to supervise what she calls “busy work” (IB, p. 17). This type of work makes Brittney feel that “teachers don’t have faith in [occasional teachers], so they give [occasional teachers] worksheets and colouring pages” (IB, p. 17). In contrast, sometimes Brittney is asked to teach lessons that she needs to “brush up on” (IB, p. 17). She described an experience where she asked to deliver a lesson about Lent. She admitted that she had to “go on the internet on [her] phone and try and write some points down so [she] could talk to the students about it” (IB, p. 17). Brittney did not have access to computers at schools nor did she have any passwords and the classroom teacher “did not leave [her] any resources to teach from” (IB, p. 17).

Although Brittney had to look up information about Lent when asked to teach it, she explained that having been given some responsibility made her “feel like a teacher because the kids were asking [her] questions and [she] was making them understand something” (IB, p. 24). She felt less like “a babysitter giving tedious, boring tasks and more like a regular teacher” (IB, p. 24).

### **Coming to terms with a record-keeping focus**

Brittney is always sure to write down what how much of the lessons she has covered “just in case the teacher wants to go over things again” (IB, p. 4). She explained

that, if there were any behavioural issues during the day, “[she] leaves [her] phone number” (IB, p. 4).

If Brittney has difficulties with classroom management, she “usually does not ask for help but, if [she’s] really struggling, [she] might ask the secretary for advice about whom to approach” (IB, p. 20). Brittney explains that the reason she does not ask for help very often is because “everybody seems so busy and so into their own issues” (IB, p. 21). Even after school, when Brittney expected there to be time to converse with other teachers, she has experienced teachers who are “in their rooms talking or mingling with each other” (IB, p. 21). Brittney feels that she does not “want to bother other teachers, so [she] will normally just leave a note with the regular classroom teacher for them to handle the next day” (IB, p. 21).

### **Less authority than others**

Brittney does not “really know where [she] stands” (IB, p. 7) in terms of how important she is as an occasional teacher to the school community. When asked where she would place occasional teachers on a list of importance, Brittney placed them “closer to the bottom” (IB, p. 9).

Brittney describes students as viewing her job as “a time to test her limits because [occasional teachers] are only there for a day” (IB, p. 9). In her experience Brittney has heard students tell supply teachers that they are “not *real* teachers” (IB, p. 10). Her interactions with parents have been limited to parents asking her “if there is anybody else that can speak with?” (IB, p. 11). She admits that she can understand why parents would want to speak with a person who is a constant presence in the classroom because, come tomorrow, she “will have a whole new class and a whole new set of problems” (IB, p.

11). Sometimes Brittney feels “undermined if a parent explains an issue to an EA instead of [her]...because ultimately the classroom is [her] responsibility for the day” (IB, p. 11). Brittney explains that miscommunication, or no communication between the ECE or EA and her, can sometimes look really bad because she is “unaware of important information” (IB, p. 11). For example, Brittney recalls a time when there had been an issue between two students on Monday and the EA or ECE or classroom teacher did not communicate that to Brittney and she ended up “paring them up for group work and they got into a fight...If [she] would have known she could have avoided the situation” (IB, p. 11).

Brittney has experienced uncomfortable situations in which she has heard teachers talking about supply teachers in the staffroom. Hearing classroom teachers speak negatively about fellow occasional teachers frustrates Brittney because “they might not know the whole story but it is so easy for them to give that supply teacher a bad reputation” (IB, p. 16). Brittney has found that friendliness from classroom teachers is very inconsistent. She explains that “there are some teachers that will stop and talk and there are some that blatantly ignore [her]” (IB, p. 24).

Brittney had little to say about interacting with school principals. She explained that, unless she knows who the principal is and she sees him/her “passing in the hall that [she] rarely has been introduced nor have principals introduced themselves to [her]” (IB, p. 4). Brittney told one story about a parent who mistook her for a classroom teacher and described feeling like “a real teacher. It was a small little victory [for her]” (IB, p. 27).

## Summary

This chapter includes the occasional teachers' initial experiences of occasional teaching. All participants wished that they could work in the same schools more frequently to build rapport with teaching staff and possibly see the effect they are having on students' learning. Most frequently, participants identified the dispatcher, support workers such as EAs and ECEs, and other occasional teachers as their biggest supporters. Only Brittney identified her biggest supporters as other classroom teachers within the school who drop into her classroom. Commonly, participants suggested that day plans were not sufficient, either in terms of detail or what information was included. In contrast, one participant suggested that day plans could be more concise if they just had the information that was really useful to occasional teachers, such as, plans for negative behaviours. Although each note varies in length and in content, all participants explained that they leave a note about the day for the classroom teacher. Katlynne questioned whether or not classroom teachers follow up on negative behaviour that is reported by occasional teachers in notes. In addition, when Maureen writes her notes to classroom teachers she fears that bad student behavior might reflect badly on her without being able to explain the circumstances in detail. As a result, Maureen sometimes omits writing about negative behaviours in the notes she leaves for classroom teachers. When asked to place occasional teachers on a list of importance, all participants' placed them at the bottom and suggested that other teachers, parents and students might place them at the bottom as well.

## **Chapter 7 Responses and Actions**

This chapter examines the participants' own reactions, actions and supports based on their initial experiences of occasional teaching. First, they describe what steps they took to being proactive on a daily basis. Next, participants described strategies they used to become integrated into the school communities. Then, they described how they felt about asking for input about from classroom teachers, principals, secretaries, and other occasional teachers and support staff. Lastly, the participants described with whom and why they share their occasional teaching experiences.

### **Colleen**

My early experiences of supply teaching guided how I responded to situations and have influenced my development as an occasional teacher. In this section I will describe my responses and actions to the occasional teaching experience.

#### **Being proactive**

When teachers left day plans for supply teachers, they would often forget that we are only required by the school board to be at the school for 15 minutes prior to beginning our teaching day. Often teachers would leave more information than I had time to read in the morning without highlighting the most important and useful information for that specific day. As a result, I began arriving 45 minutes early in order to feel prepared for my classes. Behaviour plans became one of the first things I began to look for in the day plans. If I arrived early, I learned that I could speak to EAs and try to figure out who the kids were who did not respond positively to change. I soon decided that “these difficult students would be the first people I would speak to in the morning” (IC, p. 12). If there were no difficult students highlighted in the day plan and I did not have an EA in

my classroom, I was sure to identify difficult students by their behaviours early in the day to make my day and theirs go more smoothly. Although few and far between, this strategy gave me opportunities to add some of my own teaching style into lessons (because I was not devoting all of my time to classroom management) and be more flexible with the lesson plan.

I always told the classes I worked in that I was “leaving a note for their teacher and it would tell her how they were that day” (IC, p. 3). I often found that by telling them this they were more mindful of their behaviour. By day’s end, I was always sure to tell the students “if they had a good day or a bad day and then we would go over some ways we could improve” (IC, p. 3) for the next supply teacher.

Being an occasional teacher was “often a very isolating experience” (IC, p. 7), so I yearned to make a connection by offering my time to teachers if they needed assistance and putting forth extra effort as needed. I felt that my main purpose was to teach children; however, I also felt that I had a second job. My second job was to make myself visible in schools and to others around me “because someday soon I wanted to be a regular classroom teacher” (IC, p. 7), so I had to network and be seen in a positive professional light by my peers. At any given school if I did not initiate the effort to say hello to teachers, shake hands with the principal, or visit the busy staffroom at lunch, it was quite typical for “no one to even know I was there except the students in my classroom” (IC, p. 7).

### **Strategies to become integrated into the school community**

Although most days I often found myself going with the flow, being flexible, and sticking to the plan left for me, I also sought opportunities to make a positive impression

on regular classroom teachers and principals. When asked by the interviewer to describe one of my best days as an occasional teacher, I described this as being a day “when I felt really noticed in the school” (IC, p. 17) and continued, “and that doesn’t happen in a lot of schools; and some days, especially the ones that are centered around a special school wide event, you can be feel totally invisible” (IC, p. 17).

Even though it was easy to go unnoticed in a school that you might only frequent every two months, I learned that I could become visible in two ways. First, I had to always appear to be in control of my students and situations, even if, in reality I did not feel like I was. Second, I had to go beyond the expectations laid out for me. In order to appear in control of my students, I would always make sure my classroom looked orderly because “when a teacher comes into your room, or a principal, even though they rarely do, their first opinions of you are going to be built partly by how the room looks and what the kids are doing” (IC, p. 3). I was always striving to be noticed for positive things and “always had this fear in the back of my mind of the principal remembering me as being a teacher who couldn’t handle it...and they’re the people who hire teachers” (IC, p. 15). In addition, I always made sure that, if I had any activities in my day plan that were different from the routine, “that I made myself familiar with these places before the students arrived in the morning (IC, p. 2). For example, if the class had to go somewhere, or I had photocopying to do, getting to work early not only allowed me to read over complex day plans but also gave me the opportunity to “familiarize myself with the school and some regular teaching staff” (IC, p.2), which, in turn, allowed me to appear as if I knew the school routines and belonged.

My best occasional teaching days were those that I described as including an opportunity to “do something for somebody and they notice” (IC, p. 17). For example, I was at a school when the whole school was invited to attend an assembly in their gymnasium. I happened to be on yard duty at the recess following the assembly and the students were dismissed from the assembly ten minutes early. I decided to take all of the students outside so that their teachers could start their lunch or afternoon preparations early. I described the teacher’s reactions, “You should have seen the look on their faces! Something so small and so simple, but every teacher in the hallway smiled and thanked me” (IC, p. 17). My best days involved feeling “like I was wanted and needed in the school” (IC, p. 17); but to achieve that feeling, “I had to do something extra, I couldn’t just do a good job” (IC, p. 16).

### **Asking for input**

Finding a friendly teacher or member of the support staff before the day began became a daily top priority to answer the many questions that I had. I would often find myself trying to build a rapport with school employees which meant getting to the school early, eating in the staffroom and constantly introducing myself to everyone that I met. When I had questions about something in the day plan or where to find something in the school, individual support staff members such as an EA or a secretary were often very helpful in assisting me. The EA is used by the regular classroom teacher to offer support for specific children and is a part of the classroom community. I felt most comfortable asking an EA questions because, in my view, “they [were] expected to support [the students, which, by extension, meant that they were supporting] me” (IC, p. 4).

When I decided to make even a slight change to the teacher's written plans, "I would usually confirm or get an opinion of another teacher to see if they thought the regular classroom teacher would mind the change" (IC, p. 3). These questions were usually met with suggestions to stick to the plan. In my experience, some teachers make a decision for you. For example, often when I ask EAs questions, they respond by offering "to do it themselves because it is quicker and they are more familiar with their students" (IC, p. 13)

During the first few months when I first began supply teaching, I tried to use my own professional judgment in most situations and these judgments were often met with reactions; such as, teachers' suggestions to take their advice or another teacher stepping in and making a decision for you. Consequently, I changed the way I responded to difficult situations. Even if I did not agree with a teacher's opinion, "I would normally go along with things" (IC, p. 6) and found myself trying to be flexible and easy going. A good supply teaching day was one "when I felt like a professional" (IC, p. 17). Although it did not happen too often, I described feeling like a professional when somebody asked for my professional opinion; for example, "if I was in a classroom and an EA asked if I thought the reading level of Johnny's independent book was appropriate" (IC, p. 17). This question instantly made me feel like I was capable of making professional decisions because I was given an opportunity to use my professional skills.

### **Sharing experiences**

After I had been supply teaching for approximately one year, I discovered that my biggest support system lay outside of the schools that I visited; my biggest supporters were fellow occasional teachers. I began collecting phone numbers of supply teachers

whom I saw often and learned that, away from the school environment and the ears of principals and teachers who had secured full time contracts, many occasional teachers had the same questions and concerns as I. Once I began talking to other occasional teachers, I noticed that every one of my peers felt comfortable sharing their experiences without fear of being judged, and, in fact, was eager to have support from a peer who shared a common experience.

### **Mike**

#### **Being proactive**

Mike said that he liked to arrive at the assigned schools “thirty minutes in advance of the bell ringing” (IM, p. 1). He does this so that he can “get to know the school, say “Hi” to the secretary and read over the day plans” (IM, p. 1). Mike has found that getting to the school 15 minutes early, like the school board suggests, is not enough time to “see where the resources are... that [he] will need for the day and get familiar with the day plans” (IM, p. 1). Mike is always “a little paranoid that [he] is going to lose the plans, so [he] jots the day plans down on a sticky note” (IM, p. 2) so that he does not stray from what the regular classroom teacher has left for him.

Mike finds himself accepting any challenge that comes his way because he is always “trying to give off the impression that he is in control... and that [he is] a good teacher” (IM, p. 19). One of the challenges that he faces daily is that the work that is left for the occasional teacher seems, to him, to be often very “mundane” (IM, p. 13). He rises to the occasion by striving to make the content interesting and important to the students, saying that translating the plans into action ultimately “comes down to the [efforts of] supply teachers” (IM, p. 14). Mike strongly believes that “a lot of being a

supply teacher is the performance part of the job” (IM, p. 14). Getting his students interested in what is left for him to teach by being enthusiastic is “imperative to having a good day and is part of being a good supply teacher” (IM, p. 14).

### **Strategies to become integrated into the school community**

As a reaction to feeling invisible at times, Mike explained that sometimes he “tries to blend in...[he] does not even try to stand out at all...[he] just gets through the day” (IM, p. 7). Mike explained that he

really needs to do an incredible job as a supply teacher to make a difference to the kids that day. Students and staff can always remember you or you can go in there and be completely forgettable and not accomplish what you are there for. (IM, p. 8)

Mike feels like there is a constant struggle between trying to get by without making any ripples and getting noticed. He explained that, as a supply teacher, he is “still trying to prove to staff and principals that [he] deserves to get that whole contract” (IM, p.19).

Mike’s ultimate goal working as an occasional teacher is to secure a fulltime contract. As a reaction to feeling “as if [he] is invisible” (IA, p. 18) in some of the schools in which he worked, he made an effort to get noticed by regular staff, students and principals. He described feeling that, because he is a supply teacher, he is always “trying to suck up to everybody” (IM, p. 11) and admits that “it diminishes [his] self-respect” (IM, p. 11). Everyday Mike goes to work and tries to earn a good reputation by “trying to be the best [he] can so that the principals are noticing [him]” (IM, p. 9).

One strategy that Mike uses to integrate himself into the school community is to put himself in situations where he can interact with regular teaching staff. At lunch hours

Mike goes to the staffroom to be seen “even if [he] does not chat that much, [he thinks] it’s good just to have a presence there and try to get into friendly conversations” (IM, p. 2). Mike puts effort towards meeting regular staff because “it makes [his] day better because if staff knows [he] is there [he] feels more like he belongs” (IM, p. 3). He also uses his time in the staffroom to “ask questions” (IM, p.3) about students in his class or about the day plan.

Mike would like to visit the same schools more often because “it’s easier to ignore a stranger than somebody who you recognize because they have been seen in the school before” (IM, p. 9). Mike has noticed that principals are more comfortable talking to him and become more willing to help after he has frequented their school more than a few times. In addition, Mike believes that “Principals are able to see the fact that students really like a supply teacher” (IM, p. 10) when they are at the same school more frequently.

### **Asking for input**

Mike told a story about a time he asked for input from a classroom teacher who was partaking in professional development within her own school and happened to step into her own class close to the end of the day. Mike was finding this specific job quite challenging because he was teaching French and the class was losing interest. Mike noticed that classes were being let out across the hall and made a decision to let his students out as well. He recalled that he took the students outside “two minutes before the dismissal bell rang” (IM, p. 11). He checked in with the teacher after the students had gotten on their buses and recalled the teacher, “without even looking up, saying “that wasn't alright”” (IM, p. 11). This experience affected the way Mike went about asking for

input. He often avoided asking for input or he does not ask just one person. He has experienced feeling that asking one teacher too many questions “burdens them because they have enough on their plate with just their own class” (IM, p. 15). To avoid burdening regular teaching staff, Mike “throws [his] questions out to a whole bunch of people so that [he] is not hounding one person” (IM, p. 15). To avoid always using the regular teaching staff to ask questions, Mike also uses his students as a group to ask questions.

Mike has one more option if he needs an answer to a question in the day plan. If he does not understand the content that he is supposed to teach, he does not ask teaching staff for help; instead, he uses his Iphone to “get a little clarification” (IM, p. 6). He explained that sometimes he used the “school computers but they are tricky because of passwords and access in general” (IM, p. 6).

If behaviour gets out of control in his classroom, Mike does “not want to be viewed as somebody that needs to send a student to the principal’s office” (IM, p. 14). Rather, Mike wants staff to view him as “able to handle the class,” so he avoids using the principal’s office as an option for discipline. Mike’s classroom management strategies include “telling the class about [himself], discussing local news, one-on-one conferences with students who are behaving badly, and using an activity, such as, two minutes of free time at the end of the day, as incentive for good behaviour” (IM, p. 15).

### **Sharing experiences**

Mike has found that sharing his experiences with his close friends who are supply teachers is helpful when he has “questions or wants a heads-up about a classroom” (IM, p. 15) where he is going. Mike often asks other supply teachers about strategies that they

use in tough situations and will incorporate those strategies into his own teaching. He finds it useful to talk to other new occasional teachers but finds it even more helpful to “talk to more experienced occasional teachers because they can offer great strategies about classroom management and what to expect the experience to be like further down the road” (IM, p. 16). In addition, Mike’s sister, who has supply teaching experience, is a great resource for Mike when he wants to confirm if his responses and actions to specific situations were appropriate.

### **Maureen**

#### **Being proactive**

When Maureen first gets to the school in the morning, she is “obsessive-compulsive when it comes to reading over the plans” (IM, p. 1). She wants to ensure that she knows what is supposed to happen during the day “step by step and also, when certain things are supposed to happen” (IM, p. 1) Maureen also looks out for activities that are not part of the normal daily schedule; such as, “gym, an assembly or a field trip so that [she] is prepared” (IM, p. 1). Maureen makes an effort to make herself familiar with every school in which she works. She does this by getting to the school early and walking around the hallways to learn “the layout of the school especially if [she] has not been to the school that often” (IM, p. 2).

Maureen collects “spare work, such as, story and journal writing or drawing pictures” (IM, p. 10), from her years of practice teaching and supply teaching to use in classrooms when students finish early. She explained that sometimes this work comes in handy to help control behaviours if students finish what is left in the day plan in less than the allotted time.

Maureen has found that, in her experience, sometimes regular teaching staff “will ask [occasional teachers] to do more than they are supposed to do according to [the occasional teachers’] collective agreement” (IM, p. 18). Maureen feels pressured to do some things that she knows are “not in the collective agreement” (IM, p. 18) and, in most cases, will comply with the teacher’s request. Maureen recalled a situation when a classroom teacher who was doing in-school professional development came into the staffroom and told Maureen she had morning duty. Maureen explained to the classroom teacher that she “had not finished reading over the day plan” (IM, p. 18) but, instead of asking another teacher to do the duty, she took her day plan with her on the school yard to finish reading.

### **Strategies to become integrated into the school community**

In an effort to become acquainted with regular teaching staff, Maureen explained that she goes to the staff room “just [to] be there” (IM, p. 3). Sometimes she will “make an effort to get to know people and talk about [her] day” (IM, p. 3). Maureen wants her peers to recognize that she is a “good supply teacher” (IM, p. 18) but finds it difficult to establish a positive professional reputation because she is not assigned to the same schools on a consistent basis. She described another local school board that allows occasional teachers to “choose six schools as the schools to which they will be called most frequently” (IM, p. 18). Maureen wondered if her current school board might take a suggestion from her to create this type of continuity by employing the same policy. She thought that this policy might allow the “kids to get to know [her] and make [her] feel more welcome at schools because [she] wouldn’t have to introduce herself every time as if it was [her] first day of work” (IM, p. 18).

### **Asking for input**

Maureen believed that “the majority of contract teachers do not think of [occasional teachers] as [professional] equals” (IM, p. 6). As a reaction to hearing that she is “*just* a supply teacher” (IM, p. 6), she takes steps to diminish the possibility of being judged to be incompetent. For example, instead of sending students to the principal’s office when they misbehave, she calls upon “the EA, (if there is one) to help her manage negative behaviours in the classroom” (IM, p. 12). Maureen also tries to introduce herself “to the caretakers because [in her experience] they are [excellent resources] and have helped her with tough kids with whom they have established a rapport” (IM, p. 5). Sometimes Maureen admits that she does not know each school’s unique policies about “where the kids can go if there is a behaviour issue or what [she] is supposed to do if they need to be removed from the classroom” (IM, p. 5).

### **Sharing experiences**

Maureen has not had very many opportunities to talk to anybody about her experiences as an occasional teacher; however, she “often wonders why 50 or 20 [occasional teachers] don’t have a dinner just to talk about what is going wrong, what is going right and how they are feeling about doing what they are doing” (IM, p. 16). Maureen has had the opportunity to get together with a fellow occasional teacher and found that she “felt more confident about what [she] was doing in the classroom and the actions that [she] was choosing to take” (IM, p. 6), such as, eating in the staff room and avoiding approaching the principal (at times) for support with negative classroom behaviours.

## Alyssa

### **Being proactive**

In order to make herself feel like a member of the schools in which she works, Alyssa “looks up who the principal and the secretary are on the school board’s website” (IA, p. 7) prior to arriving. She ensures that she gets to each school earlier than the 15 minute recommendation so that she can do photocopies and prepare for her lessons; however, she believes that regular classroom teachers should be told that occasional teachers “do not have to do photocopies at the beginning of the day because not enough time is allotted” (IM, p. 24).

There are many times when Alyssa is “unsure of the content” (IM, p. 26) that she is asked to teach in the day plan. As a result, Alyssa consults the teaching manual first but then uses her “phone to look up concepts” (IM, p. 22). Alyssa has tried using the computer lab computers but finds that bringing her phone to work is much more effective because there are firewalls, passwords and often limited internet access.

### **Strategies to become integrated into the school community**

Alyssa considers herself to be a “social person” (IM, p. 3) but finds that she still has to make an effort to get noticed. Every day that she works, Alyssa makes sure to eat in the staffroom. She does not always have to be “chatty and [she] sometimes even brings a book; it is just important that [she] is there” (IM, p. 3).

Alyssa also makes an effort to be remembered by the regular classroom teacher that she is replacing. She makes sure that her notes are detailed and explain “exactly what happens” (IM, p. 19) during the day.

### **Asking for input**

In most situations when Alyssa has questions, she “feels like [she] would rather just help [herself] than go to the principal” (IM, p. 5). Frequently, she wonders “why [she] would ask the principal a question because [she] would just be bothering him” (IM, p. 15). Alyssa has experienced that the limited interaction that occurs between her and the school’s administrators is often limited to her “approaching them more than [administrators] approaching [her] because they are often so busy dealing with other situations” (IM, p. 12).

Alyssa explains that there are also often logistical issues with asking for advice or assistance. Often she does “not know the extension for the principal, or [she] cannot leave the classroom to get anyone unless she can flag down a staff member in the hallway” (IM, 14). Alyssa has also found that sometimes using the principal’s office as an option for when a student misbehaves backfires. She recalled one experience when she “threatened students with going to the principal’s office and the students actually wanted to leave” (IM, p. 16). This experience left Alyssa feeling “incompetent” (IM, p. 16), so she continues to avoid asking for principal assistance by trying to find her own solutions to problems as they arise.

### **Sharing experiences**

Often other supply teachers outside of school ask Alyssa questions about certain ways she handles situations and how she interacts with specific staff at certain schools. She has found, in her experience, that people are sometimes “surprised that [she] sits in staffrooms and talks to regular staff” (IM, p. 1). Alyssa enjoys talking to other supply

teachers about “particular secretaries, staff and principals because it makes [her] feel like [she] is not alone” (IM, p. 11).

## **Katlynne**

### **Being proactive**

Katlynne always “tries to arrive at the schools to which she is assigned about 40 minutes early because each one is different” (IK, p. 1). In her experience, Katlynne has found that there is “just not enough time with 15 minutes to go over your lesson plans and do photocopies” (IK, p. 20). Often things that she has to do snowball from the lesson plan, such as an experience she described when the classroom teacher asked her “to do photocopies but didn’t leave a photocopier password, which means [she] had to run around to figure out how to make copies, and when [she] figured it out, [she] discovered the photocopier was out of paper” (IK, p. 20).

After she has read the day plan and prepared for her day, Katlynne makes sure she greets the students at the door. She feels that the biggest downfall of occasional teaching is that “it is difficult to build relationships with students” (IK, p. 17). She describes some of her best days of occasional teaching as those when she can “find time to use some of [her] icebreakers to get know the students” (IK, p. 15). When Katlynne has been called to the same school for consecutive days she takes the opportunity to have these conversations with students who recognize and remember her and also speaks to teachers whom she has replaced in the past. Katlynne uses these opportunities to ask classroom teachers “about what specific management techniques they use for specific students” (IK, p. 18).

### **Strategies to become integrated into the school community**

Often Katlynnne tries to introduce herself to the school Principal but often cannot identify them without creating “a very awkward situation” (IK, p. 8). She described an experience when she thought she had been “speaking to a teacher but later found that he was a vice principal” (IK, p. 8). If occasional teachers want to get to know members of the administrative team, Katlynnne believes that it will “depend on their personality because, unless [supply teachers] are outgoing, they may never meet anybody” (IK, p. 4). She hopes that, in the future, the school board that she works for will allow occasional teachers to “pick their top five schools just like the other school board” (IK, p. 18), so that it might be easier to build “rapport [with students] and get to know the staff” (IK, p. 19).

There have been times in Katlynnne’s experience when she has felt that she would like to tell the principal about some of the issues that occasional teachers face; however, “principals do the interviews for bigger jobs and who wants to be known as *that* supply teacher? It is unfortunate, but [she] feels like [her] hands are tied when it comes to standing up for [herself] but [she] stays positive” (IK, p. 22).

### **Asking for input**

Katlynnne does not seek out assistance from administrators when there are discipline problems. Katlynnne recalls a colleague telling her about being humiliated by the principal who denigrated her disciplinary skills in front of the misbehaving student. Katlynnne has heard stories like this “more than once, so [she] avoids the principal if possible and deals with situations on [her] own” (IK, p. 9). If a situation becomes unsafe in Katlynnne’s classroom, she has “no problem calling the principal for advice or sending

the student there; but [she] feels bad because principals are busy, so [she] waits until situations get to their limit” (IK, p. 9).

Katlyne admits that there is often not enough time to ask anybody else, such as, regular teaching staff, for input; “but in most situations, there is usually no other option than the principal” (IK, p. 14).

### **Sharing experiences**

Katlyne does try to find time to eat her lunch in the staffroom. Often when she arrives, she looks for “supply teachers that are usually sitting together and ends up conversing with them” (IK, p. 11). She always has a lot to talk about with occasional teachers, but has to be careful in a staffroom even when talking about things like current “interview processes because classroom teachers do not relate to that and it could come across as rude” (IK, p. 11).

## **Brittney**

### **Being proactive**

Brittney always arrives at school “early so [she] can read through all the plans and sometimes figure out where supplies or make photocopies but mostly to make sure that [she] is prepared for the day” (IB, p. 10). Brittney has found that arriving half an hour early at school to be “not enough time but [she] does not want to get there way too early” (IB, p. 3). Brittney has experienced getting to school early only to find that the classroom teacher has not arrived. She recalls one situation when the classroom teacher told Brittney that she “needed to go out to morning yard duty as the teacher was still writing up the plans” (IB, p. 33).

Brittney also takes steps to develop professionally. To keep current with educational practices, Brittney “takes courses at a university in Kingston investing [her] own money and [her] own time because that is [her] prerogative” (IB, p. 19).

### **Strategies to become integrated into the school community**

Brittney finds it difficult to get to know regular teaching staff because, when she has “free time, like on [her] preparation time, there is nobody to talk to because everybody else is so busy” (IB, p. 25). She finds that the best time to get to know teaching staff is on lunch hour but, it “can sometimes be hard to engage in conversations with teachers when you do not know them” (IB, p. 25).

In the classroom, Brittney brings along “a bag of tricks, like ice breakers and brainteasers, that [she] uses to help control behaviour” (IB, p. 28). It would be easier for Brittney if the classroom teacher would “leave plans that identified what they usually do with specific kids” (IB, p. 28), but her bag of resources and ideas from previous experiences are helpful.

Brittney wants other staff to see her as being in control of the students with whom she is working. She described some times when classroom teachers would arrive “5 minutes before the bell rang and [she] would have to ask the students to talk amongst themselves while [she] read over the day plans” (IB, p 34). Having plans handed to her last minute, or not at all, has happened to Brittney on more than one occasion. She fears that, in those situations, “if the principal or other teachers walk by, they will judge [her] negatively when it is not [her] fault” (IB, p. 34).

### **Asking for input**

Brittney is usually “hesitant to ask for input from anybody” (IB, p. 21). She feels most comfortable asking for assistance when there “is somebody in the class like an EA that she can talk to about a difficult student because the EA knows the class and school” (IB, p. 21). On the days when Brittney does not have an EA in her classroom she usually “waits until recess and then finds a friendly teacher because principals aren’t around” (IB, p. 21).

Although Brittney does not often ask for input, she does request input for the future by giving some teachers a gentle reminder about what information would contribute to a positive day. Often, Brittney will leave comments in her notes to the classroom teachers, such as, “if you could leave strategies that you use with Johnny in the day plan, that would be so helpful because he was difficult today” (IB, p. 30). She explained that, because she classroom teachers routinely exclude behaviour management in their day plans, she feels it necessary to leave a comment about it.

### **Sharing experiences**

Brittney feels that because it is “quite difficult to secure a full-time teaching contract” occasional teachers are often in competition with each other. She admits that she has not had many opportunities to speak to fellow occasional teachers but wishes that “supply teachers could all get together as a community instead of individuals fighting for jobs that do not exist” (IB, p. 45).

### **Summary**

All participants described that they try to distinguish themselves from other occasional teachers by making positive contributions, to student learning and to the

school community that they hope will stand out. One participant described willingness to contribute to the school community, such as by doing morning yard duty, that might stretch her thin in terms of preparing for the school day, in order to be viewed positively by classroom teachers. When faced with a difficult situation, all participants try to avoid asking for input or assistance if possible. In most situations when they may need assistance, such as, a student misbehaving, they try to handle the situation themselves. Although it is sometimes described as awkward or uncomfortable, participants often eat in the staffroom and try to find opportunities to introduce themselves to principals and classroom teachers in order to integrate themselves into the school community. Each participant described finding it helpful to speak to fellow occasional teachers but found it difficult to find opportunities to engage in meaningful conversations.

## **Chapter 8 Recommendations**

This chapter examines the participants' ideas and recommendations to improve the experiences of new occasional teachers. All recommendations suggested by the 6 participants focus on the theme of communication. Among the data there was much congruence and little diversity between recommendations which highlights the occasional teachers' common experiences and concerns. First, the participants suggest changes that could be made to the day plan left for occasional teachers by the classroom teachers. Next, they describe opening lines of communication between themselves and other occasional teachers and lastly, the participants suggest steps to make schools inclusive to occasional teachers.

### **Colleen**

Although I felt that each school I visited represented a different and unique context and afforded an exclusive suite of experiences, there are commonly applicable recommendations that I feel could enhance the occasional teaching experience of new occasional teachers in all schools.

#### **Day plan**

Based on my own first-hand experiences with inconsistent day plans, described in my "Initial Experiences" and "Responses and Reactions" data, I would recommend that each school board develop explicit policy guidelines outlining the elements and degree of detail that should be articulated in the day plan prepared in advance by the classroom teacher for occasional teachers. Classroom teachers would then be required to apply these board-endorsed guidelines to ensure that all occasional teachers who supply in their classroom would have complete instructional plans and requisite background information

about individual students and their accommodations. Guidelines should include: classroom seating plans, a current map of the school (including fire routes), student allergy alerts (including EpiPen instructions/administrators), behaviour management techniques for specific students, a clear and legible outline of the day that includes times for recesses, lunch and dismissal, emergency procedures, and special events and library times. These should be in an indexed, easy-to-use document that is given to the occasional teacher at the beginning of the day by the secretary and returned at the end of the day.

### **Opportunities to communicate with fellow occasional teachers**

New occasional teachers need to be offered extra support via a mentee/mentor relationship with more experienced occasional teachers. An example of the way this program could work is modeled in the New Teacher Induction Program (NTIP)<sup>3</sup> currently in place in Ontario school boards. I believe supply teachers would “want to be a mentor to new occasional teachers because they have had that experience before and they know that there are certain questions that they would want help with” (1C, p.22).

In addition, I believe that the school board should have a mandatory information session which should include cases built from the experiences of occasional teachers. Occasional teachers could put together a “wish list” of information and procedures that would have been helpful to make available to new employees at the information session. Currently there are two resources: *The Occasion To Lead* written by the Elementary Teachers’ Federation of Ontario (ETFO) in 2002 and the OECTA *Daily Occasional*

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<sup>3</sup> The New Teacher Induction Program (NTIP) provides comprehensive support to many beginning teachers who succeed in gaining regular teaching positions or long-term occasional positions in Ontario school boards. Established in 2006, the NTIP provides support for the early professional growth and development of entrants to a challenging profession.

*Teacher Survival Guide* (Ontario English Catholic Teachers Association, 2010) both of which were created by supply teachers and teachers and intended for occasional teachers. These resources are posted online; however, in my experience, these resources are not included in the occasional teacher package that one receives during orientation programs at the board office, nor are they prominently featured in the schools. In fact, the sole reason I know about these resources is because of the research I have done for this project. Occasional teachers, teachers and administrative team members should be aware of these resources in order to have them implemented in schools. If occasional teachers were able to hear panel presentations from fellow occasional teachers for the purpose of professional development and discussion via a workshop at the beginning of their careers, this may save them the time it takes to search for answers further down the road and could avoid challenges and missteps.

### **Steps to make schools inclusive to occasional teachers**

The lived experiences of occasional teachers could be shared with principals, teachers, and support staff. If school-level personnel gain awareness of the experiences of occasional teachers through the lens of those who live it daily, they could learn how to support those in this key educational role. If a principal was to include a note in a staff meeting about the occasional teaching experience and “strategies to help make supply teachers feel welcomed and important in their schools, it could become a school initiative” (1C, p.20). This effort to share occasional teaching experiences may make occasional teachers feel and, potentially, become valued members of their school communities.

In addition, I would suggest that schools make occasional teachers identifiable by providing them with a name tag. In my experience, the sense of “feeling invisible” in a school makes me feel both unwelcome and undervalued. A simple name tag “that could be picked up at the beginning of the day by the occasional teacher” (IC, p. 21) might take away the occasional teachers’ responsibility of introducing themselves as others would be aware that they are an occasional teacher. As a result, the Principal and fellow teachers may feel comfortable introducing themselves to open a pathway for communication.

### **Mike**

#### **Day plan**

Mike would recommend that strategies used by classroom teachers to handle negative behaviour by students be included in day plans left for occasional teachers. Classroom teachers could include this information in the day plan by “identifying students who may require extra support and leaving a description of what the [classroom teacher] does to correct negative behaviour” (IM, p. 21). Such strategies may include: “extra praise, counting to 3, or one-on-one conferencing with the student” (IM, p. 21). Mike extends this recommendation by suggesting that “there could be a standardized day plan, made by supply teachers and teachers together, to help teachers identify what is important information to leave for supply teachers” (IM, p. 22).

#### **Opportunities to communicate with fellow occasional teachers**

Mike believes that “it is always helpful when you get to hear from other people and what they have experienced” (IM, p. 23). He would recommend that pre-service teachers have an opportunity to “shadow a supply teacher for a day before beginning their career” (IM, p. 22). He explained that, if he could ask a more experienced occasional

teacher about a specific classroom or “ask a question to someone who has lived it,” (IM, p. 24) it could make him feel more confident about specific issues. Mike suggests that each new occasional teacher could be given the contact information of a more experienced occasional teacher that could be used as a professional mentor.

### **Steps to make schools inclusive to occasional teachers**

Mike suggested that his occasional teaching experience could be enriched by communicating with classroom teachers about what he has experienced as an occasional teacher. He thought that, if experiences like his were communicated to classroom teachers by occasional teachers, then it would make teachers aware of what it is like to supply teach and thus allow classroom teachers to relate to occasional teachers. Mike explained that such communication would be best delivered in “short presentations, such as, ten to fifteen minutes at a staff meeting as opposed to a pamphlet that teachers may not have time to read” (IM, p. 21). Something that could be included in a presentation could be “quick tips for the classroom teacher that might help out the supply teacher” (IM, p. 21).

Lastly, Mike suggested that, in an effort to prepare new teachers for the occasional teaching experience, an experience that is no longer a probability but a certainty, universities could create professional development workshops that invite occasional teachers in to speak with pre service teachers. Mike thought that these workshops could be focused on communicating “what is to be expected and what a new teacher can gain from the occasional teaching experience” (IM, p. 24). Mike explained that if he was to speak to new teachers he would talk about what he has learned in his

experience; such as, “being flexible, taking notes about exemplary classrooms that [he] has worked in and building a portfolio of lessons” (IM, p. 24).

### **Maureen**

#### **Day plan**

Maureen recommends that there be a list of mandatory items that could be included in the day plans left for occasional teachers. These mandatory items might include: “where the gym key is located and what strategies the teacher uses with specific students for negative behaviour” (IM, p. 20). Maureen suggests that this list of mandatory items could be created by “both classroom teachers and occasional teachers” (IM, p. 20). In this way, preparation for occasional teaching is a two-way street. Occasional teachers need to be prepared for the classroom with specific information in day plans but classroom teachers need to know how and why they need to prepare for occasional teachers.

In Maureen’s experience as an occasional teacher, she would have benefitted from knowing whom to approach for support if she had questions or problems with misbehaviour. She recommends that regular classroom teachers leave the name of a “nearby teacher that the occasional teacher could call on if they need support” (IM, p. 20). Maureen explained that she had been in a classroom where this strategy was used and then not only was a support teacher identified in the day plan but the “classroom teacher next door introduced herself to [Maureen] before the day began” (IM, p. 20).

#### **Opportunities to communicate with fellow occasional teachers**

Maureen suggested that the school board might arrange a night for occasional teachers to meet to discuss professional matters. She recommends that meeting with

occasional teachers who share a similar experience may provide an “outlet for occasional teachers to share resources and classroom management strategies” (IM, p. 21).

In her previous experiences working as an occasional teacher, Maureen has found that it is “difficult to talk to supply teachers in staff rooms because [she] feels uncomfortable sharing strategies in front of experienced teachers” (IM, p. 22). Maureen believes that occasional teachers might best share their experiences during a “professional development night held maybe one day a year” (IM, p. 23) that is facilitated with constructive suggestions; such as, “effective classroom management strategies and a time to ask questions of experienced occasional teachers” (IM, p 24).

### **Steps to make schools inclusive to occasional teachers**

Maureen recommends that the term “occasional teacher” might be changed to “guest teacher” (IM, p.7). Having once worked in a school that used this term, she suggests that if it is used throughout all schools in the board it might affect perceptions of occasional teachers. She feels that the term “guest” carries a different connotation than “occasional” because “when a guest comes over to someone’s house there is an expectation to treat them with respect” (IM, p. 7).

To better prepare pre-service teachers for the occasional teaching experience Maureen recommends that they might be made aware of what the experience involves. She suggests that pre-service teachers could attend a workshop where they are given scenarios such as:

[The occasional teacher] arrives in the classroom and realizes there are no day plans left from the classroom teacher or there is an issue in the classroom [the occasional teacher is working in] that they can’t handle and they don’t know anyone’s name. (IM, p. 24)

After each scenario is presented, pre-service teachers can discuss how they would handle the situation and “hear directly from current occasional teachers” (IM, p. 24). To complement this workshop, Maureen recommends that a “practicum be offered where pre-service teachers can spend a week travelling from school to school with a supply teacher” (IM, p. 25).

### **Alyssa**

#### **Day plan**

Alyssa had recommendations for what could be included in all day plans left by classroom teachers. She has sometimes found herself needing a “reminder of some concepts [she] is asked to teach but [has] found it difficult to find the technology to assist [her]” (IA, p. 24). She suggests that classroom teachers identify where occasional teachers can access “technology, like, a school computer, to help prepare them for lessons that they feel unprepared to teach” (IA, p. 25). Another option Alyssa would suggest is for the classroom teacher to “leave a school laptop with the day plan for the [occasional teacher] to use while they are absent” (IA, p. 25).

In addition to providing technology to support occasional teachers, Alyssa would recommend that classroom teachers leave the name of “a contact teacher because [she] often has questions first thing in the morning and this is usually the secretary’s busiest time of day” (IA, p. 24). She suggested that each school “name a school representative for the week whose job it could be to check in with occasional teachers to answer questions and offer support” (IA, p. 24). Alyssa feels that this type of support could be helpful “especially if an occasional teacher has a situation in the classroom and the principal is away or busy” (IA, p. 25).

When working in Kindergarten classrooms, Alyssa has found that sometimes she does not have enough information to confidently dismiss students to caregivers or put them on the correct buses at the end of the day. She would suggest that, in Kindergarten classrooms, “when some kids are unaware of custody arrangements and their bus numbers, that teachers would leave detailed dismissal information or send an EA to support occasional teachers at this time” (IA, p. 26). She suggests that this information could be included in a package given to occasional teachers each morning and could help ensure student safety.

### **Opportunities to communicate with fellow occasional teachers**

Alyssa suggests that the daily experiences of occasional teachers be shared with all occasional teaching staff working in the school board. She recommends that the school board arrange a “day for occasional teachers to discuss hiring practices, specific school experiences and classroom management techniques” (IA, p. 29). While she has been working as an occasional teacher, Alyssa has “overheard classroom teachers talking about professional development opportunities but has not been given the opportunity to attend” (IA, p. 29). Alyssa feels that the best form of professional development that she could attend as an occasional teacher would be “an opportunity to talk to other occasional teachers about resources they use, successful management techniques they employ, and what they are doing to prepare themselves for their own classroom” (IA, p. 29).

### **Steps to make schools inclusive to occasional teachers**

Alyssa recommends that occasional teachers be welcomed to each school they visit. She suggests that, to do this, occasional teachers’ “names are read over the announcements and the classroom teacher they are filling in for” (IA, p. 26). Alyssa feels

that this could help to identify occasional teachers as “real teachers and as a presence in the school” (IA, p. 26).

Alyssa suggests changing the name “occasional and supply to guest teacher” (IA, p. 29). She feels that the terms “occasional” and “supply” carry “negative associations” (IA, p. 26). She would suggest that classroom teachers speak to their students about expectations of how to treat a guest and explain that “supply teachers are guests in our schools so [students] should treat them accordingly” (IA, p. 26).

### **Katlynn**

#### **Day plan**

Katlynn recommends that the day plans left for occasional teachers include “the correct times that things are supposed to happen” (IK, p. 26). Including times for daily routines such as, snack break, lunch period and recess breaks may help occasional teachers to “follow the usual classroom routine” (IK, p. 26). Katlynn would also suggest that regular classroom teachers include strategies to handle negative student behaviours. She adds that these behaviour plans do not need to be “official documents but rather something [she] can use during the day like, Suzy gets three strikes and then she is sent to the office” (IK, p. 26).

Katlynn would recommend that regular classroom teachers leave a name of a teacher whom the supply teacher can contact if they have questions or concerns. She suggested that this be called a “buddy system” (IK, p. 24) and felt that this system might help occasional teachers feel more comfortable seeking support.

### **Opportunities to communicate with fellow occasional teachers**

Katlyne is aware that there are resources available for occasional teachers but believes that “if these handbooks are so important why aren’t they mailed to us because [she] doesn’t know how to get one” (IK, p. 31). In addition to a handbook, such as, *The Occasion to Lead* (The Elementary Teachers Federation, 2002), Katlyne recommends that occasional teachers have access to “some sort of forum that might allow them to ask questions about specific schools and classrooms” (IK, p. 27). Katlyne suggests that, because it may be “difficult to ensure confidentiality online, maybe supply teachers could have an opportunity, like a professional development night, to talk to fellow supply teachers about their experiences” (IK, p. 28).

### **Steps to make schools inclusive to occasional teachers**

Katlyne would recommend that principals and teachers be made aware of the experiences of occasional teachers. She feels that if regular teaching staff and principals were made aware of occasional teachers’ experiences they might then be motivated to “share their expectations of positive student behaviour towards adults in their school through a school wide assembly” (IK, p. 23).

Katlyne suggests that a part of the teacher education program could include learning about the experiences of new occasional teachers. She recommends that teacher education programs “set up a week where for five days [pre-service teachers] go to five different schools” (IK, p. 25) to try to mimic one aspect of the occasional teaching experience.

## **Brittney**

### **Day plan**

Brittney recommends that all day plans include “the name of a teacher who [the occasional teacher] can contact for support” (IB, p. 39). In her experience as an occasional teacher, Brittney has often felt like she was “interrupting or asking questions that weren’t important” (IB, p. 10). However, with an identified teacher to turn to for support, she could feel “more supported and less of an annoyance” (IB, p. 40).

She suggests that the school principal “pair teachers up by similar grade and proximity” (IB, p. 39) to motivate them to use this strategy. After the teachers have been paired up, they can create “a template for their day plan that includes the name of the support staff or post the name by the phone for the occasional teacher to see” (IB, p. 39).

### **Opportunities to communicate with fellow occasional teachers**

Brittney would recommend that the school board create opportunities for her to talk to other occasional teachers in a professional environment. Since beginning her career as an occasional teacher, Brittney feels that she “has not had many opportunities to talk to grow professionally” (IB, p. 44). She would suggest that the school board offer “professional development opportunities targeted at occasional teachers” (IB, p. 44). Many of Brittney’s jobs require that she covers for a regular classroom teacher who is attending a professional development day and so she suggests that “an occasional teacher professional development day could be held after school hours” (IB, p. 44).

### **Steps to make schools inclusive to occasional teachers**

Brittney has experienced unique policies and procedures at each school she has worked at as an occasional teacher and sometimes she found it “challenging to remember

each specific routine” (IB, p. 37). To prepare her for each school where she acquires an occasional teaching job, Brittney recommends that a “section be created on all school websites dedicated to occasional teachers” (IB, p. 37). This dedicated section for occasional teachers could include: “facts about school routines, such as, special events and policies about students in the hallways and expectations of occasional teachers, such as, when to arrive at the school and signing in at the office” (IB, p. 37).

Brittney suggested that maybe some full-time teaching staff is unaware of what the occasional teaching experience consists of “because they may have never been an occasional teacher” (IB, p. 45). Brittney explains that “some teaching staff might not realize what information is important for us to have to have successful day...and maybe, after teaching for thirty years, including detail in day plans feels less important to include” (IB, p. 45). She recommends that principals and teachers be made aware of what the occasional teaching experience entails by “sending out a questionnaire to supply teachers to identify what is helpful information to include in a day plan and then share the results at a staff meeting” (IB, p. 45).

### **Summary**

Almost all participants recommended that there be changes made to pre-service education programs. Participants suggested that the occasional teaching experience is something that all new teachers will experience and so changes to pre-service education programs should include a week long practicum shadowing an occasional teacher or workshops focused on the occasional teaching experience. All of the participants suggested that the school board implement a professional development day or induction workshop, where occasional teachers could discuss their experiences with other

occasional teachers who may have similar experiences and concerns. One participant recommended that new occasional teachers should learn from experienced occasional teachers via a mentor/mentee relationship formally implemented by the school board. All of the participants suggested that changes be made to the day plans left for occasional teacher by classroom teachers. Some participants suggested that day plans should include strategies for handling negative behaviours and four participants suggested that the name of a classroom teacher whom the occasional teacher could turn to for support be identified in the day plan. Brittney suggested that each school make important information about school policies, such as, emergency plans, special events and dismissal information available to occasional teachers via their school's website as a restricted webpage. Other participants suggested that important information about school policy be given to occasional teachers; however, they suggested that this information be given to them at the beginning of the day in a binder that could be returned to the secretary at the end of the day. Two participants suggested that the terms "occasional" and "supply" be changed to "guest teacher."

## Chapter 9 Discussion and Recommendations

The purpose of this study was to describe the experiences of new occasional teachers and solicit their input, based on these experiences, about the ways in which introduction to the teaching profession (i.e., occasional teaching) could be improved and then make recommendations as to how to better meet those needs. The new occasional teachers, who are most affected by the school board's and individual school's policies, have described some of the challenges they faced and made suggestions for improvement. Given the current policies and practices for entry to the profession, i.e., mandatory occasional teaching experience, it is timely for school boards, school principals and classroom teachers to consider this initial professional phase from the perspective of current occasional teachers. There is a higher probability that some of the recommendations made could be implemented more readily than others based on current policy, cost and release time.

The six supply teachers who participated in this study were new occasional teachers within their first to fifth year working in one school board in Ontario, and shared remarkably similar experiences, resulting in synchronous recommendations for improvement of the "occasional" phase of a teaching career. My conversations with Mike, Katlyne, Brittney, Maureen and Alyssa have helped me understand how they approach managing student behaviour in their classrooms, the extent to which they see themselves as professionals, and their perspectives regarding occasional teaching in elementary education. As an occasional teacher, there are several lessons that I can extract from this research for application in my daily practice and, because there were so many common experiences, there are important lessons to be learned beyond this project.

### **Expectations of occasional teaching before hiring**

I found that while all of the occasional teachers interviewed expected that the next step after their teacher education would be to work as a supply teacher they did not feel prepared for occasional teaching. Each participant described feeling underprepared by their pre-service education and under-supported during their transition from university to occasional teaching by the school board for whom they currently work for. Given that it is anticipated that occasional teachers will be in this role for five years on average (Transition to Teaching, 2014), they require mentorship, professional development and support throughout this important, mandatory stage in their career. This is no longer a “stop gap” role but an essential stage of one’s teaching career and so occasional teachers must be included in the overall induction plan of new teachers implemented by school boards.

To better meet the needs of new occasional teachers, pre-service education programs might include targeted courses or workshops about occasional teaching or offer an occasional teaching practicum. For example, it was suggested that experienced occasional teachers be invited to present at a workshop for teacher candidates. Having experienced occasional teachers as workshop leaders would provide novice occasional teachers with the opportunity to ask questions about the occasional teaching experience and help to prepare them for their introduction to the role. This workshop could encourage occasional teachers who have particular strength in a particular area of expertise, such as classroom management, to share their strategies on a broader scale. In addition, it was recommended that, along with a teaching practicum with classroom teachers, education programs should implement a specialized practicum block, during

which teacher candidates shadow practicing occasional teachers. Shadowing could be implemented in three ways: (1) teacher candidates could be assigned to an experienced occasional teacher who would contact the teacher candidate when called by the dispatcher each morning or night; (2) the teacher candidate could be assigned to a school (it would be most convenient if this was their assigned school for their regular practicum) and they could shadow occasional teachers who are called to that school; or (3) the teacher candidate could be assigned to five schools (one for each day of the week) where they would shadow an occasional teacher who is working at the school. The first and third option would best mimic the occasional teachers' ever-changing teaching assignments.

The majority of the occasional teachers who participated in interviews agreed that the induction workshops for occasional teachers, held by the school board, were not helpful to prepare them from their initial experiences. While these workshops provided teachers with knowledge about board policies and procedures, such as, how to fill out timesheets, the new teachers suggested that the information provided in the workshops had little direct application to their classroom role. Most of the participants suggested that experienced occasional teachers would be valuable practical workshop leaders. The new occasional teachers in this project suggested that some of the anxiety and feelings of under-preparedness may have been alleviated had the induction workshop included time to speak and ask questions of current occasional teachers about their experiences.

Katlyne recommended that the occasional teacher resource that she came across in a staff room called, *The Occasion to Lead* (The Elementary Teachers Federation, 2002), be given to all occasional teachers upon being hired by a school board. Resources that have

been created to support occasional teachers could be formally disseminated by the school board via an induction workshop, mailed, or emailed to new occasional teachers upon entry into the teaching profession.

Many of the occasional teachers involved in this study responded that they would have benefited from an opportunity at the workshop to become acquainted with new occasional teachers and engage in both facilitated and informal conversations. In order to maximize the potential of such workshops, all agreed that there be a scheduled period for new teachers to share their concerns, problem solve scenarios that describe typical occasional teacher challenges, and exchange resources and strategies. For example, each new occasional teacher induction workshop could include an agenda that is designed to address concerns or questions occasional teachers submit prior to the workshop and begin with novice occasional teachers discussing current concerns and questions. By doing this, new occasional teachers can learn from their colleagues, gather ideas, and, more importantly, realize that the questions and concerns they have as novice occasional teachers are not unique to them. Establishing lines of communication that facilitate discussions between new occasional teachers may be beneficial in inducting new occasional teachers to the profession.

As the participants in my project described, the one-time only board induction workshop occurred during the school day, a time during which occasional teachers were required to fulfill duties in schools. It was suggested by some of the occasional teachers that the workshop be repeated on multiple days at different times to ensure that all new occasional teachers would have the opportunity to attend. A suggested time to hold the

induction workshop would be at the end of August before the first day of school in September.

### **Initial experiences**

Each participant described their initial experiences as an occasional teacher to be very different depending on the school to which they were assigned. In spite of working in over 20 different schools over the course of 10 months, each participant described feeling like an outsider. A suggestion was made that the school board should allow occasional teachers to choose a smaller, set number of schools for which they could be called. This means that occasional teachers might frequent the same schools more often and become more familiar with the staff and students at their designated schools and thus, isolated.

Participants described the occasional teacher dispatcher, the secretary, other occasional teachers and support workers, such as, EAs and ECEs as their biggest supports. Participants found it difficult to find the time and space to speak openly and honestly with other occasional teachers at the schools in which they were working because they feared that they might be judged by classroom teachers. It was recommended that the school board implement a formal mentoring program to complement the induction workshop, which matches new occasional teachers with an experienced occasional teacher. The induction of the occasional teacher could involve an on-going mentoring program that offers novice occasional teachers the opportunity to talk to, ask questions of, and get advice from experienced occasional teachers. This program might give new occasional teachers the contact information of seasoned occasional teachers who have volunteered to mentor occasional teachers in their first year

of work. The experienced occasional teacher might send an email to their mentee that introduces them to the school board and offers them support through their initial experiences. The seasoned occasional teacher can be a local source of expertise for the novice occasional teacher.

Brittney identified one of her biggest supporters as teachers who drop into the classrooms to which she is assigned to offer assistance over the course of her working day. Although Brittney was the only participant who identified school staff who drop into her room as one of her biggest supporters, all participants mentioned this type of support as a recommendation. It was recommended that each school implement a “buddying” or partnering program. This program would partner each classroom teacher with another full-time classroom teacher at the school. If a classroom teacher is absent, their partner will be identified in the day plan as the support teacher to whom the occasional teacher can contact to get answers to questions. In the case that both teachers are absent, the principal or secretary will be the alternate contact. Since the occasional teachers in this project often felt that it was sometimes uncomfortable or awkward to approach random classroom teachers because they are often so busy, the opportunity to have a designated “buddy” would ease introduction to the school and facilitate information gathering. Providing more of a formal partnership would simply mean that every occasional teacher in the school board would have a classroom teacher at each school in which they work that they can comfortably approach for support.

All participants greatly appreciated those classroom teachers who included specific management strategies in their day plans for individual students; however, the occasional teachers in this project agreed that that most classroom teachers did not leave

these strategies in their day plans. When faced with a challenging situation involving negative behavior by a student, participants would often choose to handle the disruption themselves even when they felt that the situation might best be dealt with by a principal. Participants attributed these choices to feeling unfamiliar with school behaviour plans, and wanting to prove that they could handle tough situations. All participants agreed that it should be mandatory for all classroom teachers to include behaviour management strategies in their day plans. In addition, participants described that there were times when they felt inadequately prepared to teach some content. When they turned to support from technology, they were often unable to locate computers in the school or did not have access to teacher or school passwords and thus they would turn to their cellular telephone for support. It was recommended that a standardized day plan template be created by a group of occasional teachers along with a group of exemplary teachers together at the school board. This day plan template could include suggestions from occasional teachers, such as, blank sections to write in times for activities, detailed dismissal information, behaviour management strategies for specific students and locations of computers and how to access a usable password.

To improve their status as a member of the school community, some participants suggested that the phrase “guest teacher” was constructive and welcoming. They suggested that the term “guest” carries a more positive connotation than the term “supply” or “occasional” and that students might be asked to treat occasional teachers with the same respect as they treat guests in their homes.

### Responses and actions

All of the participants felt that, in order to prepare adequately for the teaching day, they had to arrive at the school earlier than the suggested arrival time. Each participant described taking steps to be proactive when it came to positive experiences as an occasional teacher; such as, getting to work early and accepting challenges. Although the participants often described being very willing to accept challenges, it was recommended by more than one participant that classroom teachers place lessons that require photocopying after first recess to allow occasional teachers time in the morning to get acquainted with the school (which is often unfamiliar), school behaviour plans, and emergency procedures.

All participants described their efforts to make positive contributions to classrooms, student learning and the school community to establish their competence and integrate themselves into the school community. In order to make such contributions, occasional teachers need to have a comprehensive understanding of how each school operates. It was recommended that a package be available at each school on arrival containing school-specific resources and important information about the school; such as, a name tag identifying the “guest teacher,” student allergy alerts, emergency procedures, a school calendar and special events. This package would complement the classroom teacher’s day plan and could be returned to the secretary at the end of the day. For an example of what to include in such a package, the *Substitute Teachers: Professional Replacements* (Alberta Teachers’ Association, 2013) could be consulted. It was also suggested that each school post this information online on their school website. This information could be housed in a password-protected tab on the website accessible to

teachers and occasional teachers. Posting information about specific schools' policies and procedures online for occasional teachers would allow them the opportunity to view this information before they arrive at the school in the morning, which, in turn, would give them more time at the school to prepare for the day's lessons.

Participants felt that principals and classroom teachers should hear about the experiences of new occasional teachers. If principals and classroom teachers were more aware of occasional teachers' experiences in their schools, they could work together to address recurring issues and create a stronger school community. It is recommended that reciprocal communication channels between OTs and school staff be improved. To satisfy this recommendation, it was suggested that principals use resources such as this project or occasional teacher surveys to guide discussion at a staff meeting. Alternatively, classroom teachers and principals could be invited to a workshop implemented by the school board, about the occasional teaching experience. This workshop could be created by both experienced occasional teachers and classroom teachers together and focus on topics such as, the best and worst days in an occasional teacher's early career, essential materials for the occasional teacher and strategies to support the occasional teacher.

### **Summary of recommendations**

All six participants had recommendations that were related to the idea of communication between the education programs, school boards, occasional teachers, classroom teachers and principals. Communication can be improved and established in the following areas: mentor/mentee programs, document accessibility, expectations for procedures made clear and day plan formats and contents. The following is a summary of recommendations to improve the experiences of new occasional teachers.

Recommendations are listed in order from the easiest to implement to the most difficult to implement.

1. Principals should implement the phrase “guest teacher” in their schools.
2. A package should be made available to occasional teachers upon entry to schools. This package should include resources and important information about the school, such as, a name tag identifying the “guest teacher,” student allergy alerts, emergency procedures and special events. This package should complement the classroom teacher’s day plan and should be handed to the secretary at the end of the day. This information should also be posted on each school’s website and restricted to teaching professionals so that it can be accessed before the occasional teacher arrives at the school.
3. The school board should implement a standardized day plan template to be used by all elementary classroom teachers. This template should be constructed by exemplary classroom teachers and occasional teachers. The template should include blank sections to write in times for activities, detailed dismissal information, behaviour management strategies for specific students and locations of computers that can be used by occasional teachers and how to access a usable password.
4. New occasional teachers should be provided, by the school board, with resources that are currently available to support the occasional teachers’ experience. These handbooks should be mailed, given directly to occasional teachers at an induction workshop that they could attend prior to beginning their careers, or emailed a list of resources and how to access them upon being hired by the school board. The

four resources to support occasional teachers that are currently available in Ontario include: *The Occasion to Lead: A Resource Guide for Occasional Teachers* (Elementary Teachers Federation of Ontario, 2002), *Survival Skills for Occasional Teachers* (Ontario Secondary School Teachers, 2005), *Daily Occasional Teacher Survival Guide* (Ontario English Catholic Teachers Association, 2010), and *Essential Information for Occasional Teachers: Practical Advice and Support Occasional Teachers and the Teachers they are Replacing* (Ontario English Catholic Teachers Association, 2010).

5. The school board should ask or assign occasional teachers to 5 or 6 schools that they could be designated to be called to.
6. The induction workshop currently held by the school board for new occasional teachers should provide time for new teachers to share with their colleagues, and hear from and ask questions to experienced occasional teachers. Experienced, volunteer occasional teachers should be invited to come to the induction workshop to answer questions and share with their future colleagues: something they have learned, a concern they have, a question they would like answered, a resource they would recommend, a strategy that worked, etc.
7. Education programs should include professional development focused directly on occasional teaching. Experienced occasional teachers should be invited to present at a workshop for teacher candidates. This workshop should encourage occasional teachers who have particular strength in a particular area of expertise, such as classroom management, to share their strategies on a broader scale.

8. Principals should set up partnering or “buddying” programs in their schools that have classroom teachers with another regular teaching staff at the school. If a classroom teacher is absent their partner will be identified in the day plan as a support teacher whom the occasional teacher can contact if they have any questions. In the case that both teachers are absent, the principal or secretary will expect to be contacted.
9. The induction of occasional teachers into the teaching profession should include formal mentoring; however, the school board must not use mentoring alone as the induction program but rather as one part of it. The school board should partner experienced occasional teachers with new occasional teachers and, preferably, the occasional teachers with the same divisional qualifications, such as, elementary or secondary. The purpose of the partnership is for the new occasional teacher to have a contact person who they can ask questions to and receive advice from. Often these partnerships develop on their own; but, for many new occasional teachers, they need assistance and guidance in advance of being in schools. When the school board partners new and experienced occasional teachers, it might provide more stability and develop confidence in new occasional teachers.
10. Principals should be invited to a workshop run by the school board about the experiences of new occasional teachers. This workshop should include topics such as: what makes up an occasional teacher’s best and worst teaching days, what to leave for the occasional teacher and how to support the occasional teacher. Principals should take their learnings and discuss them in a staff meeting with all classroom teachers.

11. Education programs should implement a specialized practicum block, during which teacher candidates shadow practicing occasional teachers. Shadowing could be implemented in three ways: (1) teacher candidates could be assigned to an experienced occasional teacher who would contact the teacher candidate when called by the dispatcher each morning or night; (2) the teacher candidate could be assigned to a school (it would be most convenient if this was their assigned school for their regular practicum) and they could shadow occasional teachers who are called to that school; or (3) the teacher candidate could be assigned to five schools (one for each day of the week) as which they shadow an occasional teacher who is working at the school. The first and third option would best mimic the occasional teachers' ever-changing teaching assignments.

### **Conclusions**

#### **Implications for research**

The present research presents at least two possibilities for future research. First, there were just six participants in this study, all of whom were Caucasian and employed in a single school division in southeastern Ontario. Only one of the participants was male while the other five were female. Future research should include larger, more diverse samples.

Second, the present study focused exclusively on the perspectives of currently practicing occasional teachers. To more fully understand the challenges that new occasional teachers can face it is important that future studies be informed by the perspectives of occasional teacher who have left the profession partly or completely due

to the challenges associated with being an occasional teacher. Future research should also include the perspectives of prospective occasional teachers.

### **Implications for practice**

This research offers three main implications for practice in the field of elementary education. First, teacher preparation programs must work to ensure that prospective occasional teachers are aware of both the challenges that they may face in the field and approaches for addressing those challenges. This goal can be achieved if pre-service courses acknowledge that all of their graduates will begin their career as an occasional teacher and thus work to educate their students for this role by creating undergraduate education courses open to teacher candidates that explore the complexities of occasional teaching. It could also be achieved by inviting occasional teachers in to speak to prospective teachers about their experiences during their introduction to the teaching profession.

Second, supervisors such as principals, vice-principals, and lead teachers in the field of elementary education should be made aware of the issues concerning occasional teachers. Supervisors could be encouraged to obtain this knowledge through independent examination of the scholarly research on the subject. Alternatively, they may obtain it through professional development opportunities at conferences. If all supervisors were aware of the challenges that new occasional teachers can face in the workplace, they might be better equipped to support teachers through those challenges.

Lastly, schools and school districts should consider establishing formal or informal mentorship opportunities for occasional teachers who are entering the profession or encountering difficulties associated with being a new occasional teacher. Having

access to other occasional teachers who face or have faced similar difficulties might help to lesson new occasional teachers' experiences of isolation from teaching staff and give them an opportunity to share their successes and challenges with colleagues who can relate personally. Additionally, school districts should consider if or how occasional teaching resources are being distributed to new occasional teachers. Although there are resources that have been created to support the experiences of new occasional teachers in Ontario, the six participants of this study were either unaware that the resources existed or inadvertently encountered a document in the workplace, but had not received, nor been directed to any resources to support their work.

### **Final thoughts**

The questions that informed the present study were borne of my own experiences as a new occasional school teacher. Throughout the process, I have reflected on the complexities about interviewing members of my own occupation. Mike, Alyssa, Katlynn, Maureen and Brittny were aware that I was an occasional teacher. Given my experience in the field, I understood the nature of their work. There were some potential benefits to interviewing fellow occasional teachers. For example, it is possible that the participants' willingness to participate in the research was based in part on our similarities in occupation and geography. It is also possible that, knowing that I was likely to be able to relate to their experiences, the participants gave me more detailed responses than they might have offered someone without the same professional background. There were also some potential drawbacks to interviewing fellow occasional teachers. Participants might have neglected to elaborate on their experiences under the assumption that I could infer the details. There was also the possibility that I might be too

eager to make connections between my own experiences and the participants' responses, thereby exposing those responses to misinterpretation. As a result, I found it important to ask participants to elaborate on their responses where necessary and to clarify any points on which I was not clear. I was also mindful to regulate the amount of talking I did during the interviews to ensure that my conversations with the participants focused solely on their experiences as occasional teachers and not my own.

One of my principal aims in completing the present research was to learn more about new occasional teachers experiences in teaching profession. Individual face-to-face interviews were an excellent means of data collection because they allowed the participants to tell me their stories in their own words. Including focus groups in the design of future studies on this topic might be useful in eliciting a broader range of issues and challenges from the participants. The group dynamic of a focus group might also provide less talkative interviewees such as Brittney with an increased number of jumping-off points for discussion, thereby enabling her to describe her experiences as a new occasional teacher in greater detail.

The findings from this, albeit small, study demonstrate that, while new occasional teachers in this one school board in Ontario are being proactive by going beyond the expectations set out for them and are enthusiastic about teaching, many of the needs of these first year teachers are not being met. The recommendations emanating from this study are possible to implement; the benefits of doing so could be constructive for many beginning occasional teachers.

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## Appendix A

### Letter of Information for Interview Participants

“The Rookie Teacher: A Description of the Occasional Teaching Experience seen through the Eyes of New Supply Teachers”

Dear Possible Participant:

This research is being conducted by Colleen Thompson in the Faculty of Education at Queen’s University in Kingston, Ontario. This study has been granted clearance according to the recommended principles of Canadian ethics guidelines and Queen’s policies.

**What is this study about?** The purpose of this research is to examine the lived experiences of new occasional teachers by investigating how these experiences shape their self-image and compare to their initial expectations of occasional teaching. Specifically, the study seeks to explore how new occasional teachers frame their professional experiences and construct their role as an occasional teacher.

**What does this study involve?** The study will require one interview of approximately 45-90 minutes in length. The interview will take place at a location that is mutually convenient and where privacy and confidentiality can be provided. It will be audio recorded. There are no known physical, psychological, economic, or social risks associated with this study.

**Is my participation voluntary?** Your participation is entirely voluntary. You may withdraw from the study at any time for any reason, without pressure or consequence of any kind, and you may request the removal of all or part of your data from the research. You should not feel obliged to answer any questions that you find objectionable or that make you feel uncomfortable. To withdraw from the research please contact the researcher Colleen Thompson ([colleen.thompson@queensu.ca](mailto:colleen.thompson@queensu.ca); 613-888-8230).

**What will happen to my responses?** Your responses will be kept confidential to the extent possible. Only the researcher will have access to this information. The data may be published in professional journals or presented at conferences, but any such presentations will be of general findings and will maintain individual confidentiality to the extent possible. A pseudonym will replace your name on all data that you provide to protect your identity. Data will be retained for five years in a secure locked cabinet after which time it will be destroyed. Should you be interested, you are entitled to a copy of the findings.

**Will I be compensated for my participation?** You will not receive any monetary compensation for your time.

**What if I have concerns?** Any questions about study participation may be directed to Colleen Thompson at [colleen.thompson@queensu.ca](mailto:colleen.thompson@queensu.ca) or my supervisor, Lynda Colgan at 613 533 6000 x 75553 or [lynda.colgan@queensu.ca](mailto:lynda.colgan@queensu.ca). Any ethical concerns about the study may be directed to the Chair of the General Research Ethics Board at 613-533-6081 or [chair.GREB@queensu.ca](mailto:chair.GREB@queensu.ca).

**What do I do if I am interested in participating in the study?** If you are interested in participating in this study please reply to this email or call Colleen Thompson at 613-888-8230 to arrange an interview. If you agree to participate, please sign the accompanying consent form and bring it to the interview. There will be an additional consent form at the interview is needed. Please retain the second copy for your records.

Sincerely,  
Colleen Thompson  
Faculty of Education, Queen’s University

## Appendix B

### Consent Form

“The Rookie Teacher: A Description of the Occasional Teaching Experience seen through the Eyes of New Supply Teachers”

Name (please print clearly): \_\_\_\_\_

1. I have read the Letter of Information and have had any questions answered to my satisfaction.
2. I understand that I will be taking part in the study: *The Rookie Teacher: A Description of the Occasional Teaching Experience seen through the Eyes of New Supply Teachers*. I understand that this means that I will take part in an interview where I will be asked to describe my experiences and interaction as it pertains to occasional teaching. I understand that the interviews will be audio recorded, and will take approximately 45-90 minutes. Interviews will be conducted at a location that is mutually convenient and where privacy and confidentiality can be ensured.
3. I understand that my participation in this study is voluntary and I may withdraw at any time. If I do withdraw, I understand that I may request removal of all or part of my data from the study. I understand that the researcher will maintain confidentiality to the extent possible. Only the researcher directly involved with this study will have access to this data. The data may also be published in professional journals or presented at conferences, but any such presentations will be of general findings and will maintain individual confidentiality to the extent possible. Should I be interested, I am entitled to a copy of the findings.
4. Any questions about the study participation may be directed to the Graduate Student, Colleen Thompson at [colleen.thompson@queensu.ca](mailto:colleen.thompson@queensu.ca) or my supervisor, Lynda Colgan at 613-533-6000 x 75553 or [lynda.colgan@queensu.ca](mailto:lynda.colgan@queensu.ca). Any ethical concerns about the study may be directed to the Chair of the General Research Ethics Board at 533-6081 or [chair.GREB@queensu.ca](mailto:chair.GREB@queensu.ca).

I have read the above statements and freely consent to participate in this research.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

I would like a copy of the final report sent to the following email or postal address below.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Email or postal address: \_\_\_\_\_

**Please sign one copy of this Consent Form and return it to Colleen Thompson. Retain the second copy for your records.**

## Appendix C

### Recruitment Script

Subject: The Rookie Teacher: A Description of the Occasional Teaching Experience  
seen through the Eyes of New Supply Teachers – An Invitation

My name is Colleen Thompson and I am a Graduate Student at the Faculty of Education at Queen's University in Kingston. As someone who is interested in the experiences of occasional teachers, I would like to ask for your participation in research aimed at investigating the lived experiences of new occasional teachers and exploring how new occasional teachers frame their professional experiences and construct their role as an occasional teacher.

As part of this research, I would like to invite you to participate in an interview. I have a *Letter of Information* that explains, in greater detail, this research and a copy of the Consent Form if you are interested in participating.

If you would like to participate in this study, I can offer you contact information ([colleen.thompson@queensu.ca](mailto:colleen.thompson@queensu.ca)) to discuss the details.

Sincerely,

Colleen Thompson  
Master's of Education Student  
Queen's University  
Email: [colleen.thompson@queensu.ca](mailto:colleen.thompson@queensu.ca)

## Appendix D

### Sample Interview Questions

“The Rookie Teacher: A Description of the Occasional Teaching Experience as seen through the Eyes of New Supply Teachers”

*How do occasional teachers envision their role?*

1. Describe a typical day as an occasional teacher.
2. Before you began your formal contract as an OT, what did you imagine yourself doing at the school?
3. Now that you have been an OT for (amount of time), how does the reality of your working days compare to your original ideas about what the job would be like?
4. How do the similarities and differences make you feel?
5. If you were to list the staff at a school in order of importance what would the order be and where would occasional teachers be on the list?

*How do occasional teachers perceive their role to be envisioned by others?*

1. How do you think your list would compare to the list student’s, full-time staff, admin and parents have? Please provide examples to illuminate why you think this is the case.
2. When you were a teacher candidate how did you think about OT’s?
3. What observations did you make about the ways students, other teachers, and parents viewed OT’s?

*What supports do occasional teachers identify?*

1. What course work, professional development or individuals prepared you specifically for your role and responsibilities as an OT?
2. If you encounter problems on the job, to whom do you turn for help, advice and support? Why? Provide an example.

*What barriers do occasional teachers face?*

1. Tell me about the best day you ever had as an OT. What other positive experiences stand out for you?
2. Think about some of your worst supply teaching days. While keeping in mind some of your negative experiences, describe the worst day you ever had as an occasional teacher.
3. What other negative experiences stand out as you think back on your career as an OT?
4. What could have prevented you from having such a negative experience?
5. What situations and barriers make it difficult for you to fulfill your role in the way you would like to do so?

*What recommendations do new occasional teachers have for facilitating their transition to the teaching profession?*

1. In an ideal world, what programs, policies and practices would be in place to make the life of an OT better and support their work in the school?
2. Who needs to hear about the things we have talked about today in order to improve the OT experience? Why?
3. Do you have any other thoughts you would like to add to this interview?