

# Running into acrylics

Erm... Running into what?? It sounds like I mixed up two topics here... Well as to the second, since it's the least interesting, the position I wound up subbing for was art. After patting myself on the back for actually arriving a little early for once I ashamedly dragged my tail out the door and over to the school I was **supposed** to go to. Okay, though that scene has actually happened before, this one wasn't my fault. Really. You see, many of the specials positions in this district are itinerant, or traveling jobs. That is, the teacher works out of two schools. Having been burned before I meticulously checked, and rechecked both the message ("special instructions") the teacher left and the online system so I would *really* know where I was going. Real- okay, enough of that word. Anyway, the message told me all about how there was a student teacher and I would leave the teaching to her... yada yada. Been there, done that. No school mentioned. Check. Over to the online system, looked at the school, check. Go to the school, sign in, drop my lunch off, pass over the store-bought bagels someone brought in, go to the art room, and... another teacher is there who says she has the room Friday mornings. Check in with the office, and sure enough all my careful detective work is shattered when they (now) inform me the teacher I am subbing for works out of a *different* school on Fridays. Oops... Sign out, collect my lunch, pass over the bagels again, travel to the other school which is fortunately only five minutes away hoping all the while it wasn't one of *those* schools that closes their parking lot when the buses start to arrive (seriously), fortunately again find out it is not, check in, put my lunch away, pass over... wait- *Panera* bagels? Grab bagel, go to art room, carefully verify with student teacher that I am indeed in the correct place this time, then finally take my coat off and plop down with relief. Hey, at least someone brought good bagels over here. ☐

So, it turned out there were eight classes to teach: four 5th/6th, and four 3rd/4th. Apparently all classes except kindergarten are multiage at this school. Well, the 5th/6th classes were in the middle of a project involving Crayola®-clay animal pots and acrylic paints. Yes, they looked better than that just sounded (most of them...). I of course assured them that yes, the olive green and yellow plaid shirt I was wearing was on purpose because I hate it and don't care if it got messed up in art. Through all four periods unfortunately it didn't. I guess with three wins ("fortunatelies?") I was bound to lose one.

The 3rd/4th grade classes started a new unit on movement. No, this wasn't PE or performing arts. Movement as portrayed on the canvas. They even got to draw a little, well, er, two of the classes did. Such a crime- art class and some didn't even get to do art! Well, that's unit introductions for you.

Okay then, until next post.

Wait, I'm forgetting something aren't I? Yes, really (didn't I ban this word earlier?). "Running into" doesn't actually refer to the movement, as they weren't allowed to draw people today anyway, only objects. Drawing people and showing their movement is apparently for more advanced students, more advanced than 8-10 years anyway. And besides, I had to have added the church category for this post for *some* reason.

In this case "running into" refers to me running into someone I actually knew from church. No, not *really* (that word again!) running into him, adults don't run in school rooms now, do they? So anyway, It had been a couple of years, and memory for names and faces isn't exactly one of my strengths, or even neutral features (you know where I'm going with this...). Apparently his memory was only slightly better as I just "looked familiar" like maybe someone from camp. I one upped him and said "church camp?" still not recognizing him. Then *he* one upped and gave the name of the camp and his name. I of

course pretended to recognize him before he said his name (secretly grateful he said it, ~~reall-~~ truly recognizing him only *after* he said it). As it turned out, he was the one student from my cabin I spent a week with (yes I truly am pathetic...) and never saw again after that summer. There were two like that the following summer, but at least I *knew* I wouldn't see them again when they told me that the one was from another church and the other was a friend he invited to come with him. Anyway, since you have suffered through this entire post I will provide an obligatory picture of my cabin from that year, but you will have to just guess which one he is. All I'll tell you is he isn't the one on the right (that would have been a *really* (sigh) big 5th grader). The one on the right was actually my junior counselor (I was the adult counselor). I of course am behind the camera, so no picture of me- sorry! ☐

Note: The thumbnail picture is not so good, so click on it to see it in it's full glory!



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## Cancellation drama

One of the things I don't like about subbing is cancellations, especially those of the last minute variety. That happened this morning, but here is where the drama comes in:

Waking up several minutes before my alarm clock goes off, I look at the clock and see that it's too late to try to go back to sleep so I decide to just get up. I do my morning business and go to get the paper. I open the door. No paper. But what's that I see? Fresh snow! So I decide to go outside and do a quick shovel job. Fortunately it was only about an inch or so.

I finish, grab the paper which was by now delivered, go inside, and pour myself some breakfast. As I'm putting the milk in the cereal the phone rings.

What? The other districts should have me down as unavailable.

I look at the caller ID and it's the district I am signed up in today. Heart falling, I answer the call expecting "this job has been canceled." But as I listen the computer voice is offering me a position for today!

What?

I scroll through the caller ID and I see that they called about five times this morning, once while I was outside shoveling snow! Perhaps I should have had the phone in my bedroom so I could have heard it, but instead it was in the office where I left it last night. Well, no harm done- I still have a job.

So I sit down, read the paper while eating. About 10 min later the phone rings again- same district! This time it **was** the dreaded "your job has been canceled" notice. Understandably upset at this point I hang up before hearing it all and go to the online substitute site to see for myself. Job still shows up.

What?

I shrug, finish getting ready for work, check again and the job is still safely intact. Just about ready to walk out the door the phone rings **again!** This time I listen to the cancel message further, suspecting the reason why, and sure enough the system is still trying to let me know the **original** job has been canceled, not the new one. One would think my accepting the new job would serve as my notice that the first one was canceled, or logging into the website... Well I must say the district is nothing if not thorough.

Oh, apparently that was not the end of it. After I left I guess they called again. Maybe not so much being thorough as a bug in their system? Sigh.

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## **Not so bad after all / Quiz show**

When one thinks of 8th grade, it is often associated with hormonally-challenged, impossible to control young adolescents, and indeed I have found this to be the case in several classrooms. Add learning, or especially behavioral disabilities to the mix and... well, I'll leave it to the imagination. There is one school where I just refused to take any more positions last year for the older kids (7th and 8th in fact, this year just 8th so far at that school). The school district I was in today I consider to be the best of the local districts I work in. Besides the money spent on education from a funds-not-so-challenged village, the kids tend to be far better behaved than in other districts. I would place the reasons at better family life. In many areas there are low-income families which causes family struggles due to not enough money and parents who are always working and have no time for their kids and so pretty much leave the raising of the kids to the schools. This town really doesn't have any low-income families (it costs too much to live here!). Of course there are other factors influencing family life and behavior, but this I think is number one. In any event, these 8th graders were not so bad to deal with at all. Well, the fact that I always had an assistant helped more than a little as well. As with other special ed teacher situations in a middle school, I had many of the same students all day. I taught two language arts classes (4-6 students in each!) and

watched over two tutorial (study hall) periods. Additionally I had two science "co-teaching" classes. Like one time last week, one of these "co-teach" classes had two subs! Fortunately the main teacher left the other sub clear plans.

Interestingly enough, the regular teachers for myself and the other teacher I mentioned were actually in the building, just in meetings all day. Something that is somewhat common with special education actually. The teachers have many meetings throughout the year, so it is only logical that some of those meetings would be in the school rather than an administration building.

One of the neat things to see was one of the science classes created electric quiz machines- the type where you use a wire to complete a circuit with a correct answer (multiple choice or true/false) and light up a bulb. The quality and size of these quiz games greatly varied, and some were even quite creative. One student took a shortcut and used an Operation game as a starting point, but most did theirs from scratch. Some used one wire (true/false and multiple guess) and some used two (matching). One boy used a motor instead of a light bulb that would shoot up a spinning helicopter-disc. They were very interesting to try out. Actually, the class didn't get to try them out as other classes apparently did due to poor treatment of a substitute teacher yesterday. Yes, I got to watch the aftermath of a bad substitute report. Apparently they lost out on playing a review game yesterday as well as not getting to try each other's quiz games. Hey, just because it's a good town doesn't mean the kids are *always* good. I guess maybe I just lucked out today, but what I said about this district generally holds true.

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# Interesting Day

Well, I really have to get to bed as I will be working at a middle school tomorrow and they start over an hour earlier than their elementary counterparts. 8th grade special ed- so I am sure to have something to write tomorrow. As for today, I was in a multiage room, 4th and 5th grades specifically. This is the second time I have subbed for this class and there is one thing a bit unusual. There are not one, not two, but **three** students in that class who are really big for their age. They are fifth-graders, but they look like they would physically fit right in in seventh grade. So were they held back a year? Well, that was what I was wondering, but nope! The teacher just happened to have a list with their birthdays (well one wasn't on the list- she must have transferred in after the start of the year) and the two boys at least are the right age for fifth grade. Now of course I have encountered the occasional large or small student for their age, but three in one room is just pushing the odds. I would have to check if they live near power lines or some such situation affecting their growth. They drink the same water as I do so I know that isn't the reason...

On another note, the classroom is in a new section of the school and so is one of the few rooms that are air conditioned (no big deal this time of year of course) though the district has finally approved air conditioning for all the schools now starting next year. The classroom was also quite large and had a widescreen LCD TV. Nice. Of course the LCD TV is wasted on them as they have the DVD player/VCR connected only through ordinary video- someone give them some component cables, please!

The last abnormal thing for this class I was in was they have a special foreign-language program there- they were learning Japanese! This made for an easy morning for me since before Japanese they had music and gym. I even learned how to write

my name in Japanese (Katakana I believe it was called).  
Pretty neat.

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## 2nd Grade

This will be a shorter post this time around I think. Today I worked in a second grade classroom. This is stretching my comfort zone a bit, but toward the end of the year they are becoming more like third-graders as they grow. Unlike yesterday I was the sole adult in this room, which is the norm for regular classrooms. The other second-grade teacher, a rare male primary teacher, was very helpful in making sure I knew what was going on and checking up on me when he could. As this was hardly my first time in a classroom I didn't need too much help, but he did make sure I knew about an assembly at the end of the day that for some reason didn't make it into the plans and gave me some tips about the class as well. Even though this was also a no-specials day (if you don't count the assembly) it was rather enjoyable. I had only a break a lunchtime, but was able to do an acceptable job with the plans. I didn't finish the reading plans, but typically a teacher writes more than can often be taught to make sure there is no time the students aren't engaged. The fact that the plans were well-written and detailed was a bonus. Not to pick on any gender, particularly mine, but I find that most often women leave more detailed plans than men. This is not always the case of course but it is typical. The only real downer for the day was that I had to stay longer than normal because again there were no breaks other than lunch, so I didn't have time throughout the day to leave all the notes I wanted so I had to spend time after school instead. Fortunately this school was in my home town so I still got home at a reasonable time.



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# Student Teachers

One of the easiest types of jobs a substitute can take is a job that has a student teacher. Typically, the student teacher does all the teaching while the sub just helps as needed. I have even encountered positions in the past where the teacher leaves a special instruction on the website that says "bring a book." □ I actually subbed for this teacher a couple of weeks earlier and so I knew what to expect. It was a classroom with mentally impaired children, ranging from a boy in a wheelchair who could really only cry out (he spends much of the day listening to music) to a couple of students who are mainstreamed into some specials but still have pretty severe language problems (reading and writing, and in some cases, talking). Also on hand were two assistants, so between us there were two students per adult. As expected I spent much of the day helping rather than teaching, but that is actually expected in this type of class even when there is no student teacher. In that case the assistants take over because they know where each student is at, which really varies dramatically, and what to expect from each student. Without the people in the room who know this a sub can never know if the work the student is doing is really acceptable or if (s)he is just blowing off the work. For some reason I tend to get this sort of job often, whether mentally impaired or just learning disabled, in this district. It may just be that these teachers have more meetings due to the nature of their job, or it may be that the preferred subs have the opportunity at the regular jobs first, or that the regular classroom teachers tend to create a preferred list while the special education teachers don't.

Actually, I should really explain what I mean by "preferred."

In this district there are two types of preferred subs. The first is on a list made by each teacher of who to call first if a substitute is needed (conversely, I believe they also have a do-not-call list for teachers they never want to see back in their classrooms again). The other type of preferred sub is the 120-day (can work 120 days per school year in the district), or certified substitute. These subs are actual certified teachers either looking for a full-time position but subbing in the meantime or are retired. The system looks for the individual preferred teacher first, and if none are available calls on the 120-day subs, and finally resorts to the 90-day subs. I am a 90-day sub. This means I am not certified as a teacher, but have simple substitute certification for which anyone with any bachelor's degree can apply. I do not fault them for this system at all. In fact, they are completely up front as to the way it works. Yet, I do get calls and see the jobs posted online. The only thing that rubbed me the wrong way was when they applied for a waiver so they could use 120-day subs for more than 120 days. Essentially, some subs are liked so much by the various schools and teachers that they are pretty much called every day. Of course, the one year I know of when they *didn't* have the waiver I don't know if they had trouble getting subs- perhaps they did. Therefore I will withhold judgment on this.

In any event, this is just one district. Other districts have different rules of course.

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## Special Ed

One of the most common roles I fill in for is special education. Sometimes it's quite challenging, sometimes quite easy. Well, it is only truly easy when there are teaching

assistants who pretty much take over while I take the role of assistant. This is commonly the case in mentally impaired classrooms (autism, Down syndrome, etc.). Yesterday was mostly on the easy side. I was subbing for a junior high teacher who actually only had one class of her own- the rest were "team teaching," which generally means the sub plays the part of assistant while the other teacher teaches. But what does one do when both teachers are out and both left plans saying the other teacher will take over? That appeared to be the case when I walked into second period and compared notes with the other sub. Fortunately, this turned out to be a non-crisis as the teacher he was subbing for left plans on the board in addition to saying that my teacher would take over. I can only guess his teacher found out about my teacher's absence only after writing the plans. Whew. The rest of the day was quite uneventful, just following the same group of students around through social studies, math, science and language arts. I also had to help look over a group of homework lunchers (detention really). It's just as it sounds- students who didn't turn in homework in one or more classes worked on it during lunch. I was told when they first started this program there were over 60 kids in the room at one time! Now that has to be against fire codes. I was quite happy there were only about 15. In any event this was definitely a position I would do again.

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## **Unexciting day**

There's not really much for me to say today. I was with 3rd grade, which is about the bottom of my comfort zone. I have done lower grades, even preschool, but 3rd-7th is what I prefer. The day actually started out not looking so good with a **lot** of chit-chat while the kids did their morning work.

Fortunately they improved throughout the day. Right after morning work was silent reading time and I have to admit they did very well. When we got to math I had the pleasure of teaching a lesson I had a chance to teach twice before, believe it or not, in the previous weeks so in a way it was like teaching the second or third class in a middle school after getting the "practice" time with the first class. Not much to say about reading and writing. Another teacher came in to do a couple of writing assessments, which wasn't planned, so I only taught part of the original lesson. Reading was one of the "just give them this independent work" times where no lesson was involved.

Specials, read "break time for subs" are sort of a hit or miss thing with elementary school- some days you may have two, other days none. Today there was one at the end of the day, giving a little time for me to write some notes so I wouldn't have to stay a half-hour after the kids leave as I occasionally have to do. Rather than the kids going out as to music or gym, a social worker came in with a lesson. This unfortunately meant that I *still* couldn't leave the room, but at least it gave me that note-writing time. All-in-all the day wasn't too bad.

Interesting coincidence- the team name of the school I was at was the wildcats. The middle school, actually junior high as that district still uses that term though they run the schools like middle schools (there is a difference), where I will be tomorrow has the same team name. Nothing big, just interesting.

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# Scheduling errors

One problem that comes with subbing is scheduling errors and cancellations with little to no notice. There was one day last year when I signed up to sub for a social worker only to find out when I arrived that the social worker is a position that doesn't get a sub. Okay, you might say to yourself, "how obvious," but in that same district earlier I had subbed for a speech/language pathologist. Obviously a sub can't really fill in for that position either, but as it turned out there was a student teacher so they needed a sub just to have a certified person in the room so I just figured this would be the case again. Well, at least they paid me for half a day's (non)work.

Anyway, today there was another error, only it wasn't an error. I was called in for a full day, but when I got there the plans were only for a half day. I checked with the office and it was indeed a full day they scheduled. Fortunately they had another teacher that would need me in the afternoon so they could keep me the full day. But wait, it wasn't over. The team partner of the one I subbed for then told me shortly after that *she* wouldn't be there in the afternoon and was wondering about *her* sub. I had to go to the office anyway about a small problem with the arrangement to work for the afternoon teacher, so I said I would ask about her sub while I was there. Well, it turned out there was no sub arranged for her. To make a long story short (yes, I know...) apparently the original teacher had requested a full day sub to cover for *the two of them* and her partner either wasn't told or forgot, so they changed the arrangement again and so I wound up actually subbing for three teachers throughout the day like a floater. As you can see, the classrooms themselves aren't the only source of drama.

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# Getting the hang of this

Last post was actually my first post- short and sweet as a friend was guiding me through the process. Come to think of it, this one will be short too. Sometimes I have jobs lined up in advance, like for this coming Friday, but most of the time it can be a little stressful waiting for jobs to become available. In the past one would always just wait for a phone call from a sub caller, and in fact I am in one district that still does that exclusively. For the rest the onus is on me to keep checking the websites, which can be more stressful than just waiting for calls. Anyway, it's time to end this post- I am still being trained by my friend and he's waiting to go on...