

# 07

## WHY AM I HERE?

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A couple of days ago I woke up at 4am and saw there was a need for a 6th grade science teacher. As fate would have it, I was available for some 'substitutin' so I decided I'd accept and see what I could do to help out.

Nearly fifty miles and a couple of hours later I'm in a different world. I'm now among a group of teachers I'd never met, in halls I've never roamed, and with students I've never seen before.

Do I have any idea what I'm walking into? Nope. Not a clue. Do I know any of what the material is they'll be covering? Nope. Not a clue. Do I have any doubts in my ability to just jump in and adapt? Nope. Not at all.

Lunch? Check. Badge? Check. Coffee? Check. Extra coffee? Check. Collared shirt? Check. Ironed collared shirt? Um... next. Something other than jeans? Check. Dress shoes? Check. Comfortable dress shoes I can stand on for 8 hours? Yeah, no.

I walk in, introduce myself to the office staff and ask them to "help a brother out." Within seconds I'm now off

and rolling. I'm now clocked in, have seen the cafeteria, know where the men's room is, am introduced to two other teachers on my team, and am dropped off in my classroom. Two minutes later, students start trickling in.

My first interaction of the day occurs when there were about six students in the room and I ask, "How many students are in your first period?"

The response I get is from a snarky eleven year old boy who has his head half-cocked to one side. With a mischievous grin he says, "Why don't you just count the chairs?"

Now, clearly, this kid has had subs before and, apparently, hasn't been impressed so he thought he'd swing first at me.

I slowly cut my eyes back at him, grinned, and replied. I said, "Interestingly, if I were to count the chairs in the room I'd know precisely how many chairs there are, not how many students are expected." His grin faded and he just glared at me as he sat there trying to figure me out.

Eight hours later and I've been disappointed some six different times as the "clock ran out on me" during every period while I was in my zone. Some fifty or so kids had used the restroom that day and they all learned the difference between "Can I" and "May I" (capability vs permission). And, they were fully involved in a wide range of science discussions. It just so happens the "Google Classroom" assignment they were given didn't have working links so I was left on my own to improvise.

And, improvise I did.

Was my classroom louder than it probably should have been? I'm sure. Were people laughing and enjoying the discussion? Absolutely. Did they learn to ask questions

about everyday things? One hundred percent! In fact, I had written my name backwards on the board to encourage them to think differently. I also wrote a phrase up there and circled it as I used it in every single class, over and over and it was, "How do you know?"

How do you know there are planets? How do you know there are aliens? How do you know the earth is round? How do you know the hand sanitizer works? How do you know the moon landing was real? How do you know what's in prepackaged foods?

I didn't answer any questions definitively, but rather, with more questions. Because, frankly, we "know" very little about most of what we think we know. We're just told to accept it as truth and not question things.

It was baffling to them at first, but then they caught on and started asking each other the same kinds of questions. It was kind of like in the movie *Stand By Me* when the big kid ate all that pie, threw up and then sat back and watched everyone else start throwing up... yep, that was pretty much how it went. It was awesome.

On a positive note, a very kind lady that was an aid in one of my classes for a special needs student came and talked with me at lunch. She thanked me and said, "That was the most engagement I've seen in a classroom in my nine years of doing this."

Very cool!

Oh, and then this happened. A teacher from some seventy-five feet down the hall across from me came and visited my 6th period class. She came in with a resounding "YELL" (I don't blame her after hearing what she saw) while I was just standing there with my eyes bulging.

Here's why...

Somehow, when my 5th period left the room, they left a TON (probably did weigh that much) of garbage on the ground, mostly from their lunch. About five minutes into my 6th period I was bothered by the mess and asked the class if everyone could please pick up the room and throw the trash out. Being that there were two garbage cans in the room, I figured this would be an easy tasking.

They start collecting garbage from what seems like everywhere and now they're throwing it away. Thirty seconds or so into this tasking I see that about half the class has now leaked into the hallway. Unfortunately, they're about twenty decibels too loud for "class time" and not where they're supposed to be.

Enter the YELL.

"WHAT IS GOING ON OUT HERE, AND WHY ARE YOU IN THE HALLWAY?"

That's what I heard from afar. It got closer and louder.

"PUT HIM DOWN!" I hear next and then, "WHAT IS WRONG WITH YOU GUYS?"

Truthfully, I'm a bit confused as I can't see into the hallway and, again, I'm not sure why they're there to begin with. At this point, all kids come flying into the room and high-tail it to their seats. Strange. They're then followed by a very unhappy teacher who apparently just had this class moments before.

She lets them have it for at least twenty to thirty seconds then abruptly leaves.

The door closes and, while I have a terrified group of thirty kids or so looking at me I say in a nodding response kind of way, "That went well."

Turns out, the reason they went to the hall was because of my request. They have a rule that they can't throw food away in the classrooms so everyone who picked up food went to the hallway. Makes sense. I asked about the "put him down" part and, while funny, it probably wasn't.

As the story goes, I told them to "throw the trash out," and, apparently I wasn't specific enough. At the time of the other teacher entering the hallway, three of the boys 'allegedly' picked up another child, turned him upside down and were attempting to "throw the trash out."

They're all friends and it was "in jest," however, in retrospect, they now know they shouldn't have done what they did. Who knew a simple request like "throw the trash out" could go so poorly?

My bad.

Nonetheless, the day went so well that, the next day, when I woke up and saw they needed a sub again for the same class I changed my plans and made it happen.

And, to see the kids light up the way they did and to have so many of them ask if I could be their permanent teacher made it worth it. The second day was even better and to say I enjoyed it thoroughly would be putting it mildly.

By days end I'd remembered what a growth mindset looks like in action. I had seen so many neat transformations of thoughts and manners and had so many great conversations that I knew exactly why I was there.

