How Long-Term Substitute Teachers Can Improve Parent Involvement

As a long-term substitute teacher, there are general struggles of building rapport, connecting with students, completing lesson plans to fill your time and getting used to the school environment. One such hurdle that isn’t mentioned often is parent involvement and communication. Long-term substitutes need to be able to communicate and connect with parents to build rapport, trust and credibility.

This can be tough, but not impossible. Parents want to be involved or communicate but may not know exactly how to. Read on for tips on how to facilitate parent involvement as a long-term substitute teacher.

Reach Out to Parents

Similar to building rapport with students, you need to build rapport with parents. One mistake most teachers make is waiting until a parent reaches out to them for this to be their first interaction. Instead of taking the back seat, be proactive and communicate with parents first. Introduce yourself, give some background on yourself and talk about why you love being a substitute teacher. Allowing parents to connect with you on a deeper level rather than just being the substitute teacher will help.

If you’re in it for the long haul, have parents come in to meet you in person. You’ll be able to field any questions they may have and eliminate any nerves they have about introducing a new teacher into their child’s life, sometimes unexpectedly.

Establish a Solid Communication Plan

Use a structured plan for when parents need to reach out. If one is already in place, be sure to use it for the sake of consistency. In the event the classroom lacks a communication plan, develop your own that you can use in other classrooms you substitute teach in throughout your career. Your communication plan will act as a contingency plan. Be sure to provide printed information for parents on homework assignments, projects and anything else that may need additional explanation. If not done already, send student work home in a folder and encourage parents to do any written communication in this folder as well. Provide families with direct school phone extensions or email addresses that they can contact you at if there are questions that you can’t answer in a short note in this folder. Lastly, be open to parents making suggestions. Allow parents to give ideas whether it be for assignments or a suggestion for their own child’s learning. When you keep communication open and collaborative, it will feel more like a partnership than a one-sided job.

Share Positive Notes First

More often than not, teachers begin communication with parents because of a behavior issue or something negative the student has done. We suggest that the first time speaking with a parent should be about something positive their child did while in the classroom or on an assignment. If you don’t decide to do a preemptive strike and email parents within your first week, choose a positive moment their child was involved in to connect with parents. Doing so will show that you’re not just a teacher or disciplinarian, you’re also their child’s cheerleader. Parents love to hear the great things their children accomplish in the classroom, so be sure to keep them in the loop.

Use Your Experience

Sometimes the best thing to do is leverage your experience. You may be a parent and that means you’ve probably had some interactions with a teacher or two. Take note of or remember the things that you liked or disliked about your communication with that teacher of the involvement opportunities that were offered to you in your child’s classroom. Use your expertise as a parent to guide your time in the classroom and increase overall parent involvement.

When teachers use nonlinguistic representation strategies, they help students represent knowledge as imagery. These strategies are powerful because they tap into students’ natural tendency for visual image processing, which helps them construct meaning of relevant content and skills and have a better capacity to recall it later. For example, diagrams and models are used in mathematics and science to help represent phenomena that students cannot observe, such as the arrangement of atoms in a molecule and how that arrangement changes during a chemical reaction. In other subjects, students can use nonlinguistic representations such as graphic organizers to organize information into a conceptual framework. Using this type of representation increases transfer of knowledge because it allows students to see how the information connects in new situations. The ultimate goal for using these strategies is to produce nonlinguistic representations of knowledge in the minds of students so they are better able to process, organize, and retrieve information from memory.

Classroom Practice for Nonlinguistic Representations

There are a variety of ways that teachers can help students generate nonlinguistic representations of knowledge, and students will benefit most when teachers structure learning activities that use the range of nonlinguistic representations. The classroom practices described here emphasize that when they engage in nonlinguistic representation, students elaborate on or add to their existing knowledge. When students explain and justify their nonlinguistic representations, they enhance the power of elaboration. There are five commendations for classroom practice with nonlinguistic representations. Teachers should provide opportunities for students to:

Use Graphic Organizers

Graphic Organizers combine linguistic and nonlinguistic forms of information. In other words, students create complete graphic organizers as they use both words and symbols to represent and organize knowledge. To help students take advantage of the power of graphic organizers, teachers should provide them with information about and opportunities to use graph organizers when developing summaries, taking notes, identifying similarities and differences, generating and testing hypotheses, and organizing information that may be difficult or poorly organize.

Make Physical Models or Manipulatives

Physical models are concrete representations of knowledge. For abstract concepts, teachers might need to model the process several times since it is difficult to create a mental picture that is highly symbolic. When teachers provide experiences for concrete and abstract concepts, students become better equipped to use this powerful strategy on their own. Forming a mental picture is often a good first step to understanding new information. With a mental picture as the foundation, students can use another nonlinguistic strategy to develop a deeper understanding of the relevant knowledge.

Concrete Mental Pictures

As students are presented with new information, the most direct way for them to generate a nonlinguistic representation is to create a mental picture of that information. This helps them make sense of the information and store their learning for future use. Teachers can facilitate students’ construction of mental pictures by providing details that enable students to incorporate sounds, smells, tastes, and visual details as part of the overall mental picture. For abstract concepts, teachers might need to model the process several times since it is difficult to create a mental picture that is highly symbolic. When teachers provide experiences for concrete and abstract concepts, students become better equipped to use this powerful strategy on their own. Forming a mental picture is often a good first step to understanding new information. With a mental picture as the foundation, students can use another nonlinguistic strategy to develop a deeper understanding of the relevant knowledge.

Once you have completed a job using Smart Find, you should check the job completion for payroll at least on the last working day of the month in Digital Schools. You can access this program by following these steps:

1. First-time users will need to register to access their information. To register: Navigate to https://vistausd.digitalschools.com/ or go to the VUSD website under Employees and click on the Digital Schools Link.
2. Click on the “Register/Reset Password” link.
3. Last Name: Enter your last name, as it appears on your social security card.
4. Email: Enter your personal email.
5. DOB: Use the calendar icon to enter your date of birth. You will need to select your birth year first, then select the month and day.
6. SSN: Enter the last four digits of your social security number.
7. Zip Code: Enter your five-digit home address zip code.
9. Once you log in to Digital Schools, click on the following in this order: My Digital Schools: My Access: Leave Account; and then Time Sheet Activity.

Access to Digital Schools will only be available through your personal email as a substitute teacher.

Classroom Instruction That Works: Chapter 5 (Continued)

Create Pictures, Illustrations, and Pictographs

Most students have drawn or colored pictures that represent knowledge. Students might be less familiar with pictographs, however, which use symbols or symbolic pictures to represent information. Pictures and pictographs provide opportunities for students to represent their learning in a personalized manner. Creating pictures (especially by hand or on a computer) that are personally meaningful can be especially helpful when students are learning new vocabulary words and terms. Technology provides a way to add animation to pictures, which enhances the effect of using pictures to represent knowledge.

Engage in Kinesthetic Activities

As students engage in physical movement associated with specific knowledge, they generate a mental image of that knowledge. This is true because mental images include physical sensations. When students move around as part of learning activities, they create more neural networks in their brains and the learning stays with them longer. Kinesthetic activities include roleplaying, acting out vocabulary words and using one’s body to illustrate concepts. For example, students can arrange cards representing sentence parts on the classroom floor, tap out the rhythm of poems and rhymes to create awareness of the rhythm of language or use hand gestures to cue their memory of comprehension strategies. The gestures help students remember what the strategy is and how, when and why to use it when reading. Students can use their bodies to demonstrate their understanding of the motions of objects as they make the motions. As they make the motions and talk about what they are doing, they encode information in their memory in multiple ways, helping them increase their understanding of concepts.

Tips for Teaching Using Nonlinguistic Representations

1. Model the use of the strategies for nonlinguistic representation through demonstrations and think-alouds.
2. Provide students with opportunities to practice each of the strategies with familiar information before they are expected to use the strategies with new material. This makes it possible for students to focus on the process and not worry about learning new content at the same time.
3. Provide students with a variety of opportunities to use nonlinguistic representations as they learn new content.
4. Model how students can use more than one nonlinguistic representation as they learn a new concept or vocabulary term. For example, students can create a mental picture of an action word and then demonstrate the appropriate action.
5. Provide students with information about and opportunities to use graphic organizers when developing summaries, taking notes, identifying similarities and differences, generating and testing hypothesis, and organizing information that may be difficult or poorly organized.
VUSD Beliefs

We believe that...

* All students have a unique capacity to learn.
* Risk taking, effort and perseverance lead to excellence and innovation.
* Individuals learn and work best in a safe, nurturing environment.

Important Dates—February 2019

- February 6: K-8 Staff Development (Minimum Day)
- February 15: Lincoln’s Birthday Observed (Legal Holiday)
- February 18: President’s Day (Legal Holiday)

Principal’s Corner

Thank you to the following substitute teachers from our site Principals:

- **Mary Castronovo** has been a reliable substitute teacher at Grapevine. She is a true professional who puts the students first and who sets high expectations for all during the time she is in the classroom, covering with fidelity the lesson plans set by the teacher.

  * Rafael Olavide, Principal at Grapevine Elementary School*

- **Ashley Blair** is consistent, positive, has great judgement and maintains positive relationships with students and staff. Even when she has a rough class or a rough day, she returns determined to connect with students and make each day as great as it can be!

  * Krista Bernsten, Principal at Lake Elementary School*