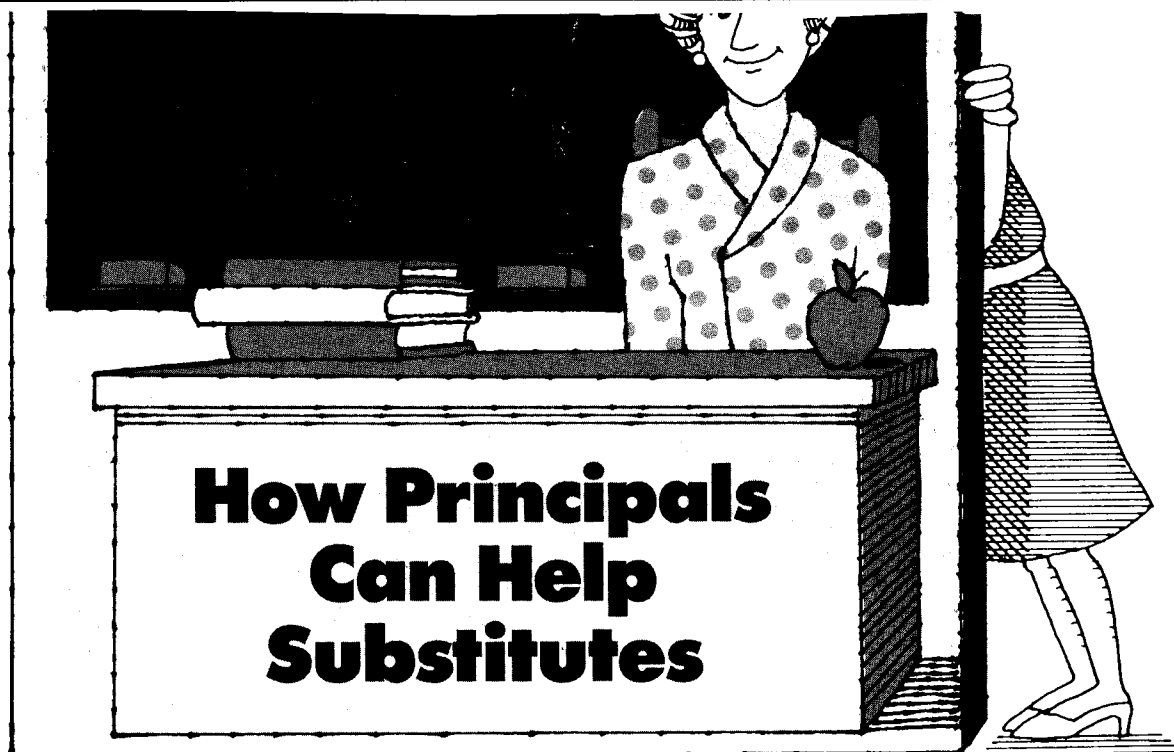


PRINCIPAL



Lily Chu and Harold Bergsma

The scene is a familiar one, repeated almost every day in every school in America. A teacher calls in sick. The principal scurries to locate a substitute, frequently having to accept whoever is available. A hurried, harried, underprepared, and apprehensive substitute confronts an unfamiliar group of students.

The props are all too familiar: lesson plans written in a shorthand that only the regular teacher is able to decode; stacks of uncorrected papers. The script is classic: too much talk; too much movement; too many groans and verbal challenges.

A look at the social and psychological realities of substitute teaching reveals a complex picture. The social scene is one of discontinuity. The sub-

All it takes is a little planning to transform the substitute from a harassed clock watcher to an effective teacher.

stitute—a new adult, an unknown quantity, an authority figure with few earned social credentials—faces a new group of young people in a new environment, where even the location of the pencil sharpener must be learned.

The students, on the other hand, are known to each other and they have established behavior patterns and a unique social chemistry that includes the class clown, the conformers, the challengers, the intellectuals, the amorous, the bored, and the bright. For the substitute teacher, the possibilities

for problems are great; the possibilities for productive learning, small.

The psychological scene is equally complex. The substitute, even if academically prepared for the subject matter, must still overcome the jitters of facing students whose abilities and traits are unknown. The typical substitute understands the rules of the game: keep the class relatively quiet and on task if possible; help the students review material already assigned; and in some cases present new material.

Students also understand the rules of the game: now is the time for experimentation, for challenge, and for breaking down the classroom discipline established by the regular teacher.

Standing in the wings is the principal, who plays a critical role in the success or failure of the substitute teacher. If the role is properly played, the principal can provide the social and psychological preparation that substitute teachers need in order to make them more effective.

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Frequently, however, the principal's only action is to walk substitutes to their rooms, and briefly introduce them. In large schools, substitutes often have to find their classrooms and introduce themselves.

Guidelines for Principals

Here are some guidelines that may help principals in dealing with the challenge of training successful substitute teachers:

- Invite 20-30 potential substitutes to attend a half-day workshop before the start of the school year. There the substitutes would have an opportunity to meet and socialize with the principal and the regular teachers. They would also be given practical tips on such things as lesson planning, classroom management, student motivation, and communication techniques by the school's teachers, by successful substitutes, or by expert consultants.

- Provide substitute teachers with a

handbook or folder containing basic school information, including school policies and basic procedures.

- Provide a personally guided tour of the building, pointing out such facilities as the teachers' lounge, duplicating room, audiovisual center, library, and even the rest rooms.

- Develop a standardized information form for use by all regular classroom teachers. The form can serve as a checklist for teachers calling in to report their absences, providing substitutes with such basic information as the locations of lesson plans and available materials, as well as special instructions for handling problem areas. Two minutes on the phone by the regular teacher, using the form, can save the substitute a whole day of frustration.

- Systematize your procedure for placing and evaluating substitutes. Keep a file of the best substitutes and call on them first.

Although much thought and expense

goes into a variety of inservice programs for regular teachers, the training of substitutes has received little attention. And yet, with relatively little effort, principals can provide training to help substitutes be better prepared socially and psychologically, and to be what they are called in to be—real teachers. □

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