

Cultures & ELL



I bookended my three days in elementary (Tuesday was in a mentally impaired classroom) with middle-school jobs at the same school. Monday I subbed for a specialty teacher who teaches a course about cultures. I am not sure what it entails, but is a separate course from the normal history/social studies courses. Being a specialty course there are two classes each of grades 6-8. Actually, 8th grade is a completely different course from the other two grades, so I guess the cultural studies is only for the two grades. 8th grade was a course on business- they were making products and campaigns. It wasn't too exciting a day. The 8th grade classes were working independently in their groups so I just walked around and watched mostly, occasionally giving some input. 6th grade had videos, and 7th grade had a test. The highlight was 6th grade, before the videos. I got to read them stories with problems they had to find solutions for, like for example a couple of kids who wanted to build the largest snowman their town had seen. They did eventually build it, and without special equipment (you know how heavy even a normal snowman can be- just think back to the last time you made one and had to push those large balls to become bigger ones, then lift two sections into place on a traditional snowman). They had to figure out that the kids built a ramp out of snow to push the giant balls up to form the head and body, then tore it down after the snowman was done. It was really interesting to hear some of their solutions like making the sections by throwing snowballs at a smaller one until it was big enough, or the snowman was laying down.

So that was Monday. Friday I was down the hall in a different multi-age room. It wasn't one grade at a time- each class was mixed. It was ELL, so the classes were according to their

ability in English. My largest class was six students. What made this ELL class different was the large variety of cultures represented. Rather than 95% Hispanic, the students were from Poland, Albania, Taiwan, Korea, and several other places in addition to Mexico. They ranged in ability from new to English to lived in the US all their lives (what were they doing in ELL??) with immigrant parents. The students were all very good, willing to learn. There were only a couple of chatterboxes, but even they worked. The classes consisted of three writing classes abtly called Writing I, Writing II, and Writing III. These classes all had a writing prompt and spent the period making an organizer, writing a paragraph or more, then editing and finally sharing their pieces. Two of the classes were literacy courses and we read stories together, went over vocabulary, then they made sentences from the vocabulary words and worked on packets about the story for the rest of the time. The last class was a class of just one. This was the student who knew very little English. We worked on a noun packet together.

Either of those two classes I would sub for again in an instant. That ELL class was completely unlike the one at the other school in behavior. In actuality I had another ELL class at the other middle school in the district last year that was similar, but a little crazy due to an assembly. Like this one, I had a period where I worked with just one student. In that case it was an Italian student instead of the Korean student at Friday's school. Both kids were really great to work with. Overall Friday was more pleasant even than that day.

Well, Monday will be an off day due to Presidents Day. I remember when I was in school we actually got *two* days off in February for Washington's and Lincoln's birthdays, but in the 80s they combined the two into a general day to celebrate all Presidents. I felt cheated when this happened. A year or two later they added a day off for Casimir Pulaski (I think that's

how it's spelled) but that didn't last more than a couple of years. I'm still not sure who Pulaski was. In any event, I'm not sure what my next post will be about. I'll figure it out I suppose.

EDIT: Oops- forgot a title!