

Partially immersed

日本語を話しますか

If the characters above got rendered properly in your browser you should see Japanese writing. The proper response for me would be, say what? Of course, if I knew what that said the real response should be:

すみません、日本語は話せません

Sorry, I guess you probably don't know Japanese either. The first question was, "Do you speak Japanese?" The response was, "No, I do not speak Japanese." When encountering a Spanish-speaking classroom, I always start with, "No hablo español, solamente inglés." (I don't speak Spanish, only English). It's fun to see the kids' reaction, especially if I add a little bit more from my severely limited Spanish vocabulary. With Japanese, I can't even begin. Three times in the space of two weeks I found myself in dual language classrooms- twice for Japanese, once for Spanish. What kind of class is this you may ask? I will answer. Once upon a time the way to teach kids a foreign language was to offer it as an elective in high school. Then, someone learned that the best time to learn new languages was as a young child, so they added the classes to the junior high curriculum (in some cases making kids take five different ones in sixth grade!). This trickled down to intermediate grades with one language twice a week like gym. Still not happy, the powers-that-be started dual-language classes allowing children as young as six to start learning a different language, and that is where we are today. In such a class, the younger grades slowly learn the language, and then they start instructing in that language as they get older for a sort of immersion experience. In the Japanese class, this means that for the entire afternoon teachers and students use only Japanese. The teaching assistant took over this duty of course since I would be unable to converse in or even understand Japanese. It was an experience not unlike working in a deaf classroom as I have done before, but knowing that I could converse with the students in English when necessary. This was sixth grade, so

they were on their sixth year of this. They seemed pretty proficient to me- having read Japanese books for starters and giving a book report in Japanese. When it came time for me to instruct, however, we all went back to English.

The Spanish class was 4th grade, so they weren't as proficient in their second language as 6th grade was in theirs. There were no book reports or the like in Spanish, though of course it could have just been the day. When trying to read the Spanish social studies book, it became clear many did not understand very well. Unfortunately I did not have a Spanish-speaking assistant at this time as I did for Japanese. When math time rolled around, the Spanish-speaking assistant finally arrived and I expected she might take over for a bit, but she didn't so we did the subject in English as I could do little more than the numbers and operations in Spanish. As it turned out it was probably a good thing we did it in English as they had a difficult enough time with the topic in their primary language.

So what's next, dual language French? Italian? I guess I may find out. It's odd that this is the first year I have been in this sort of classroom in all my years of subbing. Bilingual and regular foreign language classes yes, but not dual-language. This may mean then that the chances of doing it again are somewhat remote, so we'll see.

Full pay, half work



Thursday was an interesting day. I subbed for the gifted teacher at a middle school. For some reason this teacher has only five classes instead of the usual six. Two each of 7th and 8th grades, one 6th grade. Now what happens when the reason for the teacher's absence is because she took the 8th graders on a field trip? Five – two = three. Three classes, and a full days pay. Wow. To be fair I did check around for

extra work, but none was to be had so I pretty much spent the rest of the day reading my book. Friday I had a full contingent of classes though. It was 7th grade math and the teacher was in the building helping with a tour of kids from the local Japanese school (school originally made for Japanese families who would be in the country for a year or two and didn't want the children's education disrupted from the normal Japanese school routine). However, the tour didn't start until the end of third period, so he was still around for the first classes. The rest of the classes had me doing no teaching- he set them up as a homework day so they could independently work on a long assignment he gave them. More book reading... No, not really. I walked around and helped a bit, and more than once headed up to the board to go over some common problems I was getting a lot of questions about. Not a bad day. I will be at their rival school on Monday for 8th grade math.

So, not much excitement, and no- you may not have your minute back that you spent reading this post. ☐

Guess it isn't banned from schools after all

In days of banning tag from the playground because some kids "get too rough" it seems only natural that dodge-ball is so far banned, it is even anathema to mention it. Perhaps that is really only valid in the elementary school though. Or maybe the ones making the rules don't like the attitude of middle schoolers so they say to go ahead and bash each others' brains out with round throwable objects. In any event dodge ball is definitely allowed in middle school, or at least some middle

schools. It was probably banned a while ago before the advent of soft foam balls more commonly known as gatorskin, or rhinoskin balls, though something tells me no alligators or rhinoceroses were hurt in the making of these balls. Softer even than Nerf™ balls ever were, it would take a pretty thin head to actually get hurt by one of these balls, but yet they can still be thrown across the room or even used in a pinch for kickball.

If you haven't figured it out by now I subbed for a PE teacher today. I actually wanted to get up a 6AM to see what was available, but I woke up at 5:30 instead, and this was the only job on the systems so it's the one I took. Of course I didn't mind at all since it was only a mile away too. □ I probably mentioned earlier that middle school PE is one of the easier positions to sub for as the other teachers usually run the show with me helping out. Not always, but most of the time. Because there was another teacher out as well, and the field was still wet from yesterday's two downpours, they mixed up thing a little and instead of doing softball and whatever one of the other teachers was supposed to do (health?) we all played dodge-ball instead. We divided them up into six teams and they played three-minute games, rotating between games to keep things fresh. Three grades, six PE periods, all dodge-ball. There was one period where a girl came up to me and asked if she could take attendance. I had to do a double-take as she clearly had some hormonal problem. There were patches of hair on her face. Growth that would take a guy weeks to grow, so it wasn't just peach fuzz like on many eighth-grade boys. I just took a look at Wikipedia and it looks like it could be either [androgen](#) excess or a rare disorder called [hypertrichosis](#) (werewolf syndrome). I tried very hard not to stare at her, and felt guilty every time I so much as glanced in her direction. Of course I let her take attendance even though I was really just playing at it since I was told I didn't need to take attendance and didn't have a record book to take it in in any event. I just didn't want the kids to

feel they could blow off gym sometime and not be missed.

The end of the day was kind of interesting. This school schedules homeroom at the end of the day, so I was on my way up to the 8th grade classroom I was supposed to be in when I found out all the eighth-graders were on their way to the multipurpose room for an assembly. Okay then, I went there instead. They had a presentation from some Japanese-American people about World War II. I'm guessing it was put together by a teacher from one of the middle schools as she was there and she teaches world history. And she is Japanese-American. They had a video of shots taken in the WWII internment camps and then two elderly people who lived through it talked to them. It was interesting, especially as one of them after going through this decided to join a special Japanese-American infantry that was formed some time after Pearl Harbor. He did this even though he like the rest of the Japanese-Americans were treated so shabbily. He had a few reasons for doing this though other Japanese-Americans understandably refused to have any part of the not-so-good 'ol US of A at this point in history. One reason was he had very good childhood growing up under the tutelage of several teachers who left good impressions on him. Alo he wanted to prove that not all Japanese-Americans were on the side of Japan. In reality, I think very few were on Japan's side in this war making this whole internment camp thing a ridiculous waste of time in addition to being reprehensible. This man became a teacher himself, apparently well-regarded in the circle of Chicago's school system. It would be eye-opening for me if I didn't already think the whole thing was wrong. In fact, when 9/11 happened we didn't do anything even close to this to Middle-Easterners in this country and it looks like we're still here. I still don't trust Islam, and many others don't either, but there have been no more terrorist bombings in this country since so it was clearly the right choice to leave them be.

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.