

# Partially immersed

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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:

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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.

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## 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.