

WIDE RANGE OF ABILITY IN UPPER-LEVEL CLASSES

The following comments from a tprs German teacher's level 3 are not unusual:

- > I have a lot more lower ability
- > students who have gone on to level 3 German. Which is wonderful as far
- > as enrollment goes, and keeping my program intact in the face of huge
- > budget cuts in my district. On the other hand, now I have kids who are
- > very high ability all the way down to very low ability in the same level 3.
- > I've never had that kind of spread in level 3 before.

We absolutely must come to terms with this situation. Either we accept that everyone can acquire a language, or we flunk these kids out and sentence our nation to another generation of monolingualism. (Before TPR Storytelling we had only the academically able students in levels 3 - 5.)

While every problem has many solutions, I would like to suggest one that Blaine used with success:

Everyone can take upper level language classes and continue to develop fluency. However, advanced grammar is not appropriate for everyone; that is why most students drop out of language classes. Blaine's solution is to offer two kinds of enrollment, although they are all in the same class at the same time. The kids enroll for either Language 3 or Language 3H. The honors students get a 5-point A. They do the advanced grammar, they read more books, and they write compositions. The kids who are in Language 3 just take the vocabulary tests. They read the in-class books, but not the homework books. They are learning more language and getting more fluent every year, but they are not expected to do the grammar stuff that they **cannot** do.

Here is why I support Blaine's solution:

- 1) The only way to stop being a monolingual country is by getting all of our citizens to be proficient language USERS, even if they are not proficient at accuracy. The sad state of American monolingualism can ONLY be remedied by FL teachers. Nobody else can do it.
- 2) The students who are NOT grammarians will be the political leaders of tomorrow. They always have been and I suspect they always will be. We vote for our leaders based on lots of criteria, but a good grammatical foundation in another language is not one of them. If they hated FL and dropped it when they were in high school, they are not likely to support FL legislation and FL funding for public schools. If we wish that FL were better supported and funded by our state legislators, then we must change their opinion of us. Nobody else can do that for us.
- 3) The financial leaders and the popular cultural icons achieve fame, influence, and power because of their charisma or talent. Not because they were top FL students. Most

of them are "sparklers" (as I call them) and they grow up to make wisecracks about high school. They award thousands of dollars to whatever cause appeals to them. They rarely award any money to FL causes because their memory of high school FL class is one that they could not get away from fast enough. The only people who can change that tortured memory is FL teachers. Nobody else can give them different memories.

4) All students are entitled to the best FL education we can give them. The students who want to be language **users** are entitled to it. The students who would benefit from linguistic analysis and rigorous academic standards are entitled to it. In order to accommodate both groups, we can have them all in the same class at the same time, but they are given different exams and different assignments. They can all co-exist in the same class. The sparklers make the stories fun, they get improved fluency and they develop accuracy at their own rate. The super-stars read more, write more, get good grades on grammar tests, and go on to college foreign language classes with excellent preparation.

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