Teaching English Language Learners (ELLs)

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Potential Challenge #1

ELL students may not participate in class.
Potential Challenge #2

ELLs are tasked with learning conversational and academic language simultaneously.
Potential Challenge #3

ELLs may struggle to make meaning of content while simultaneously learning the language.
Potential Challenge #4

ELLs may overgeneralize the use of key words
Potential Challenge #5

ELLs may struggle to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding
Potential Challenge #6

ELLs are often misplaced when they initially enter school or tracked based on assumptions about their mathematical skills.
Potential Challenge #7

ELL students may not ask questions when they do not understand a concept or something that was said in class.
Potential Challenge #8

ELLs may not have the proper background knowledge
Families of ELL’s may not be involved in the school community
# Teaching English Language Learners (ELL)

## Potential Challenges

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ELL students may not participate in class.</th>
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## Understanding the Challenges

- Not all ELLs are embarrassed or reluctant to participate. ELLs go through a complex process when trying to understand questions or concepts.
- Coggins, Kravin, Coates, and Carroll (2007) list the following questions that many ELLs go through when asked to participate:
  - What is the teacher asking?
  - What do the teacher’s words mean?
  - What does she expect to hear?
  - What words should I use in my response?
  - Can I respond in my language and have someone translate?
  - What if I mispronounce the words?
  - Will others make fun of me? (p. 82)

## Best Practices

- Increase wait time
- Incorporate all students in the conversation
- Set clear guidelines for participation in class for all students
- Allow for home language or code switching (using some of each language)
- Provide students with sentence starters posted in the classroom
- Teach explicit instruction for expression of mathematical ideas
- Allow students to work in collaborative groups to build confidence

## ELLs are tasked with learning conversational and academic language simultaneously.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Homonyms (words that have the same spelling, but different meanings)</th>
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<td>Examples: table, mean, relationship, operation, area, right</td>
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<table>
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<th>Homophones (words that sound the same, but have different meanings)</th>
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<td>Examples: sum vs. some, mode vs. mowed, write vs. right</td>
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<tr>
<th>Vocabulary shares the same roots, but meanings vary slightly</th>
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<td>Example: medium vs. median</td>
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<th>Density of the English language (more meaning encompassed in fewer words)</th>
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<td>Example: The square root of 25 is less than 7</td>
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<th>Pre-planning to anticipate difficulty with new vocabulary</th>
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<td>Vocabulary should be introduced within the lesson (not isolated definitions) through experiences to establish meaning</td>
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<td>Repeated experiences with mathematical vocabulary builds academic language</td>
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<td>Visual representations of words allow students to create a mental image of the word</td>
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<td>Be aware of pace of speech and lesson</td>
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<td>Avoid idioms</td>
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<td>Potential Challenges</td>
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</table>
| ELLs may struggle to make meaning of content while simultaneously learning the language. | • Organizing and synthesizing prior knowledge with new content requires connections between language and content  
  • The abstract nature of mathematics causes difficulties in deeper understanding | • Effective introduction of the lesson using multiple representations  
  • Use of graphic organizers  
  • Use of manipulatives  
  • Student created visual representations  
  • Pre-plan questions to guide student thinking  
  • Make explicit connections between mathematical, visual, and verbal representations |
| ELLs may overgeneralize the use of key words.                                       | • When students see “more” they automatically think that it means to add, so when it is contained in a phrase, “more than” they may operate with addition. | • Provide explicit instruction in reading, writing, and selecting accurate math symbols from multiple representations |
| ELLs may struggle to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding.                   | • Assessments may not provide accurate feedback on the level of student understanding due to the language barrier | • Allow students to show knowledge in a variety of ways  
  • Accommodate tests to lessen language complexity without reducing the rigor |
| ELLs are often misclassified when they initially enter school or tracked based on assumptions about their mathematical skills. | • The language barrier is not indicative of mathematical knowledge or skill.  
  • The nature of specialized scheduling may force students to be placed in classes that do not account for their ability. | • Appropriate formative assessment to determine proper classroom placement  
  • Effective differentiation to meet students at their level |
| ELL students may not ask questions when they do not understand a concept or something that was said in class. | • In some cultures, it is inappropriate for children to ask questions of their elders. | • Set clear guidelines and expectations regarding appropriate mathematics discussion behaviors |
| ELLs may not have the proper background knowledge.                                   | • ELLs are not all from the same country, do not all speak the same language, and have not all had the same experiences. They represent a diverse group of students therefore experiences vary.  
  • Many math problems are contextually based and students may not have sufficient background knowledge to access the task. | • Acknowledge and learn about the different cultures represented in your classroom  
  • Incorporate this into your lessons and activities  
  • Providing adequate prior knowledge so students can be successful with the tasks  
  • Respect student individuality |
| Families of ELL’s may not be involved in the school community.                        | • Lack of involvement is probably a symptom of the language barrier that exists. | • Find ways to incorporate families in school community events. Reach out to these parents to get them involved.  
  • Provide information in home language when possible |


