## Teaching English Language Learners (ELL)

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| ELL students may not participate in class. | • 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) | • 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. | • Homonyms (words that have the same spelling, but different meanings)  
  • Examples: table, mean, relationship, operation, area, right  
• Homophones (words that sound the same, but have different meanings)  
  • Examples: sum vs. some, mode vs. mowed, write vs. right  
• Vocabulary shares the same roots, but meanings vary slightly  
  • Example: medium vs. median  
• Density of the English language (more meaning encompassed in fewer words)  
  • Example: The square root of 25 is less than 7. | • Pre-planning to anticipate difficulty with new vocabulary  
• Vocabulary should be introduced within the lesson (not isolated definitions) through experiences to establish meaning  
• Repeated experiences with mathematical vocabulary builds academic language  
• Visual representations of words allow students to create a mental image of the word  
• Be aware of pace of speech and lesson  
• Avoid idioms |
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| 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 misplaced 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 |

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