

Teaching English Language Learners (ELL)

Potential Challenges	Understanding the Challenges	Best Practices
<p>ELL students may not participate in class.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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
<p>ELLs are tasked with learning conversational and academic language simultaneously.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Homonyms (words that have the same spelling, but different meanings) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Examples: table, mean, relationship, operation, area, right • Homophones (words that sound the same, but have different meanings) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Examples: sum vs. some, mode vs. mowed, write vs. right • Vocabulary shares the same roots, but meanings vary slightly <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Example: medium vs. median • Density of the English language (more meaning encompassed in fewer words) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Example: The square root of 25 is less than 7. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organizing and synthesizing prior knowledge with new content requires connections between language and content The abstract nature of mathematics causes difficulties in deeper understanding 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide explicit instruction in reading, writing, and selecting accurate math symbols from multiple representations
ELLs may struggle to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assessments may not provide accurate feedback on the level of student understanding due to the language barrier 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In some cultures, it is inappropriate for children to ask questions of their elders. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Set clear guidelines and expectations regarding appropriate mathematics discussion behaviors
ELLs may not have the proper background knowledge.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of involvement is probably a symptom of the language barrier that exists. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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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