

AFTERSCHOOL TRAINING TOOLKIT

Suggestions for Supporting English Language Learners (ELLs)

All students, both native English speakers and non-English speakers, come to afterschool with different skills and attitudes based on their abilities and previous mathematical experiences. Some students may have strong basic skills but lack experience in problem solving, while others might have had more experience in problem solving but lack basic skills. However, ELLs also differ in their exposure and proficiency in the English language. Thus, instructors need to take into account where ELLs fall on the continuum of math conceptual understanding *and* on the continuum of language ability.

Throughout the math toolkit there are suggestions for maximizing the afterschool environment for ELLs. In addition to *ELL Tips and Activities*, you will find suggestions for each sample lesson. The following are overarching suggestions to take into consideration when planning math enrichment activities involving ELLs.

- **Allow nonverbal demonstration of understanding with manipulatives or pictures.** Some beginning ELLs may be in what is called the silent receptive stage. That is, they may understand the mathematical concepts involved but may not have the linguistic competence to orally share an answer or explanation with the group or instructor. In these cases, it may be better to provide opportunities for students to write their answers on the board or demonstrate their solutions with math tools.
- **Communicate information, vocabulary, or instructions nonverbally to ELLs through illustrations, examples, models, and demonstrations.** Math games, for instance, can be fun and lead to valuable learning if one understands the rules and concepts that apply. Before playing, demonstrate the game to be sure that everyone knows how to participate.
- **Be intentional about how you group students.** Although you may want to group several beginning ELLs together to explain a problem or demonstrate an activity, be sure to experiment with different groupings, allowing ELLs to practice English with a variety of native speakers. Bilingual students who are fluent in two or more languages can serve as excellent partners, but it is important not to over-rely on students for translation.
- **Consult with the school-day and English as a Second Language (ESL) instructors to determine a language policy for the afterschool program.** Some schools have bilingual programs in which students may study math and science in their native languages while they are beginning to learn English. In other schools, where there is no predominant second language group, students communicate with each other and with instructors in English. Afterschool can provide an opportunity for both academic and social objectives. While time in afterschool can be spent learning English, it is important that students are allowed to use their native language during times not specifically devoted to English language learning.

- **Identify a linguistic goal for each math activity.** Determine the language that is inherently involved in the math activity and choose a goal that is appropriate for the language levels of the ELL students. By considering the language involved in each activity, instructors can give students the words and language structures they need to be active and successful participants in each activity. Examples of *Language Goals* are included along with *ELL Teaching Tips* for each sample lesson in the toolkit.

Each of the practices, and selected lessons, in the Math Tools section of the Toolkit has additional information for working with English Language Learners. Look for the "ELL Enhancement" button for more information.

References

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