



## MATH FOR ELS: A “PATH” FOR SUCCESS

### 4 Mindsets to Ensure Success for English Learners

By Jim Ewing, PhD

There is a belief that math is math and there is no language involved (Ewing, 2020). Thus, if English learners (ELs) are not doing well, it must be because they are not that capable. This is wrong on both accounts. We can challenge these misunderstandings and encourage teachers to meet the real needs of ELs so they can be successful.

There is also a belief that we need to learn strategies, but it is not enough just to plug in strategies for meeting the needs of ELs in math. In addition to learning strategies, we can help teachers change their mindsets. Read on to learn four mindsets, each with three accompanying strategies. The acronym PATH will help you remember the mindsets—Position ELs to be

RESEARCH AND STRATEGIES  
FOR PK-8 SCHOOL LEADERS

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successful; provide culturally responsive Access; Teach language; and learn from researchers like Hattie.

## Mindset 1

### *Position ELs to be successful*

Consciously or not, day in and day out, teachers position their students by their actions and words. It is not a matter of *whether* teachers position, but whether they do so in ways that are inclusive and fair to all students (Chval et al., 2021). If a teacher reads a book or tells a story students can relate to, she is positioning those students positively. However, other students who do not relate are probably being positioned negatively.

It is challenging to learn math in a second language and therefore we need to be intentional about positioning ELs to be successful. We can help teachers reflect on how ELs are being left out or negatively affected by our positioning. Below are three strategies for positioning Multilingual Learners to be successful.

## Strategies

1. *Use the term “Multilingual Learner” or “MLLs.”*<sup>1</sup>  
The terms “English Learners (ELs)” and “English Language Learners (ELLs)” are examples of deficit language. Calling students “ELs” focuses on their weakness—they are not yet good at speaking English. However, in many ways ELs are language experts. They speak at least one language and are learning another. Calling our students “MLLs” honors them for their talents. When schools and districts are intentional about calling students “MLLs” it can be a reminder of how capable these students are. After all, if MLLs are capable of learning another language, they are also capable of learning math. We can model calling students MLLs and watch the snowball effect—the teachers raise their expectations, classmates raise their expectations, and MLLs themselves raise their expectations about learning all subjects, including math.

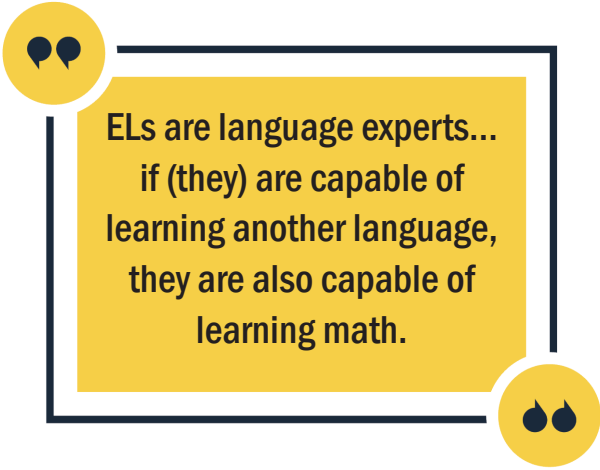
### 2. *Revoice MLLs.*

MLLs are often ignored because they do not speak English well enough to explain their ideas, but by revoicing their

ideas teachers can position them as capable. If teachers say, “Juan Jose says  $1/3$  is bigger than  $1/4$ ; turn and talk to your partner about why Juan Jose is correct,” this positions Juan Jose as a capable mathematician.

### 3. *MLLs help too.*

If teachers consistently call on other students to help MLLs, the class may get the impression that the MLLs are not good at math. They may need the linguistic support, but it is imperative that we are reciprocal with this support. Teachers can position MLLs as being mathematicians by asking MLLs to help other students. For example, if MLLs are familiar with the metric system, teachers should ask MLLs to be the expert in the room and help other students (Kersaint, Thompson, & Petkova, 2014).



**ELs are language experts...  
if (they) are capable of  
learning another language,  
they are also capable of  
learning math.**

## Mindset 2

### *Access—Culturally Responsive*

Access is essential, and visuals, sentence stems and gestures can help provide it, but if the material is not culturally responsive, MLLs are not going to feel they belong. We want MLLs to visualize themselves in the curriculum. MLLs are not only learning to be bilingual (or multilingual), they are also learning to be bicultural (or multicultural.) Thus, it is not enough to use visuals and sentence stems to provide MLLs with linguistic access. We need to consider our students’ culture too.

## Strategies

### 1. *Culturally responsive counters.*

For Spanish speaking MLLs — 90% of MLLs in Texas — teachers can use frijoles instead of plastic counters. This simple adjustment helps MLLs feel special. Or teachers could give Mexican MLLs (the biggest group) an authentic experience by asking the class to draw or make the Mexican flag out of colored cubes. Then ask what fraction of the flag is white.

### 2. *Make word problems about MLLs’ lives.*

How many of us have solved fractions using pizza? How about also asking questions about enchiladas verdes? Instead of asking word problems about Halloween, we can also ask word problems about Quinceañera Parties. Of course we have to be careful of

stereotypes, but we can ensure that the word problems used in their schools are culturally responsive for MLLs.

### 3. *Role Models.*

Think of as many superheroes as you can in a minute.

How many of those superheroes were Hispanic—the biggest group of MLLs? Students need positive role models. In math, we can provide access that is

culturally responsive by introducing students to role models that relate to them. For example, we can discuss how the Aztecs were successful mathematicians. Calling students “mathematicians” is an effective way to develop students’ mathematical identities, but we can take this a step further. We can be culturally responsive for Hispanic MLLs by saying things like, “Today, let’s be successful mathematicians like the Aztecs.” When the content relates to students’ identities, it provides them access because they will be more inclined to persevere to solve the problems.

## Mindset 3

### *Teach Language*

Not only should we provide MLLs with real access to the content, we also need to develop their language. Attempting to help MLLs succeed in math, many teachers provide MLLs with pure arithmetic, but this deprives them of practice developing their language. MLLs need to be challenged mathematically as well as linguistically. In order to develop language, teachers need to offer students opportunities to listen, speak, read and write. MLLs tend to do too much listening and do not have enough opportunities to speak and write (Ewing, 2020). When observing teachers, we can encourage them to give MLLs many opportunities to speak and write in math class.

## Strategies

### 1. *Ask more questions.*

When we ask questions, not only do students learn concepts more deeply, but they also have opportunities to develop their language through speaking. When MLLs are at the beginning stages of English proficiency, teachers can ask yes/no math questions—MLLs can justify their mathematical reasoning with the help of

manipulatives (Bresser, Melanese, & Sphar, 2009).

As MLLs become more fluent, teachers should be encouraged to ask more open questions that require them to explain their answers in greater depth.

### 2. *Small group discussion.*

Instead of having students solve math problems

independently followed by whole group discussions of how they did it, students will flourish working through the problems together in small groups, discussing as they go, with particular benefit for MLLs.

### 3. *Children’s books and storytelling before math lesson.*

The key is to find books and tell stories that MLLs can relate to. When we do, we can tie the books to the mathematics and

develop their language. When students hear stories they can relate to, they will write their own stories and even their own word problems (Ewing, 2020).

## Mindset 4

### *Hattie and MLLs*

John Hattie has not researched Math and MLLs directly, but we can benefit from his research by using best practices. The key message from Hattie is that we should be using teaching approaches that are effective according to the research (Fisher, Frey, & Hattie, 2020). Hattie gives teacher practices quantitative scores according to their effectiveness. We should know our teachers’ impact on student learning and encourage them to adjust their teaching accordingly. Below are three effective practices, according to Hattie, applied to teaching math to MLLs.

## Strategies

### 1. *Teacher Clarity for MLLs in Math.*

Hattie stresses the importance of students knowing what they are supposed to be learning and what success looks like. We can ask teachers to include in their lesson plans how to teach MLLs what they need to know to be successful for each math lesson. Teachers should be encouraged to pre-teach MLLs not only to develop vocabulary, but also to discuss the purpose of the lesson and what they can do to be successful.



## 2. Reciprocal teaching.

When students tutor each other, they learn more deeply and that is the idea behind reciprocal teaching. This approach is more than students just learning in groups—each student in the group has a defined role. This makes it easier on MLLs because it is structured so that they too can participate. In addition, one student in each group can be responsible for making sure that each student, including the MLLs, understands the vocabulary in the math problems. However, as the name implies, the teaching and learning are reciprocal. Thus, the MLLs are positioned to teach others as well as being taught.

## 3. Collective Teacher efficacy.

Hattie claims this teacher practice is the most effective so we should use this finding to position MLLs for success in math. When teachers collectively believe they can positively influence students, learning shoots up. We can work with teachers to encourage them to have high expectations for MLLs in math. When teachers have deep understanding of both mindsets and strategies for meeting the needs of MLLs, they will have strong “Collective Teacher Efficacy.”

We can take the right PATH to ensure success for MLLs in mathematics. Let’s position our MLLs to be successful; be culturally responsive when we provide access; teach language in each subject, including math; and use Hattie or other research-based strategies.

## Endnote

<sup>1</sup>The term “emergent bilingual” is also asset-based and appropriate.

## AUTHOR



**Dr. Jim Ewing** is an associate professor at Stephen F. Austin State University and an education consultant. He has presented at TEPSA conferences and the TEPSA Presents series, and is on a focus group with TEA and Columbia University on meeting the needs of ELs in Texas.



Apart from writing four books for teachers, Dr. Ewing is the lead author of a position paper about teaching math to multilingual learners for NCSM (National Council of Supervisors of Mathematics). Learn more on his YouTube channel “Teaching Math to English Language Learners (ELLs)” and via his book “Math for ELLs. As Easy as Uno, Dos, Tres.” 🐦 @EwingLearning

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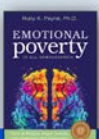


# Emotional Poverty On-Demand Book Study Videos

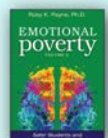
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## WEAVING IMMIGRANT AND REFUGEE STORIES INTO THE MULTICULTURAL FABRIC OF AMERICA

### Immerse Your Newcomers in the Wonder of Books and Stories

By Don Vu, EdD

If you followed the Olympics this summer, you know the story of Suni Lee, the Hmong American gymnast who won gold, silver and bronze medals. Suni's story reminds me that the American Dream is alive and well. From her family's refugee background, to her dad building a balance beam in the backyard because they couldn't afford to buy one, to her family selling noodle soup in their garage so they could raise enough money to send her off to competitions, her story reminds us all that when immigrants and refugees realize their American dreams, we all feel like we've won the gold medal.

Although Suni's story is one in a million, there are countless other stories of immigrants and refugees

worth being told. Some of them right in your schools. My new book, *Life, Literacy, and the Pursuit of Happiness*, hopes to shine a light on those countless stories yet to be told. It is a call to action and a reminder that even if your students are learning English as a second language, they deserve to be immersed in the wonder of books and stories.

As you begin the new school year, I encourage you to find new ways to help all students—especially your immigrant and refugee students—realize that their personal stories are critical pieces in the multicultural fabric of America. Here are two ways educators can use the power of literacy and stories to achieve this:

Hearing the personal stories of immigrants and refugees can be an effective way to combat misinformation and stereotyping that is so prevalent in our society... As Dr. Bishop reminds us, the stories we tell and the stories we don't tell all reflect our values, and kids learn these lessons either way.

### Read immigrant and refugee stories.

Dr. Rudine Sims Bishop, who made popular the idea of windows, mirrors, and sliding glass doors in children's literature, once said, "When children cannot find themselves reflected in the books they read, or when the images they see are distorted, negative, or laughable, they learn a powerful lesson about how they are devalued in the society of which they are part" (Bishop, 1990). If we are serious about empowering all our students, we need to ensure the stories they read in our schools are a reflection of them and their importance in society. It can be as simple as sharing a read aloud of a children's book that highlights the immigrant or refugee experience. For example, reading aloud *Dreamers* by Yuyi Morales in class may be especially meaningful to a newcomer who is looking for belonging and connection. They may finally feel visible when they see stories like theirs are important enough to be shared in school.

### Write and share immigrant and refugee stories.

In addition to reading the stories from diverse children's books, you will want to have your students reflect on and share their own immigrant and refugee stories. For these newcomers, they will find power in understanding and celebrating their own stories as they trace their family roots. For others who will listen to these immigration stories, they will gain a different perspective and, hopefully, see others with a new sense of empathy. Hearing the personal stories of immigrants and refugees can be an effective way to combat misinformation and stereotyping that is so prevalent in our society. As Dr. Bishop reminds us, the stories we tell and the stories we don't tell all reflect our values, and kids learn these lessons either way. Let's seek out these immigrant and refugee stories and let them be told and celebrated

in our schools. When we make this possible, not only are we helping guide all of our students towards realizing their American Dream, we are building a foundation for a better America.

### AUTHOR



*Dr. Don Vu has been an elementary school teacher and principal for 24 years. Don and his former school staff chartered a literacy campaign in 2013 to foster the love of reading in all students. In 2017, he received the Celebrate Literacy Award from the California Reading Association for his outstanding leadership in literacy. In 2018, his school was one of five schools nationally to receive the Exemplary Reading Program Award from the International Literacy Association. In 2020, the school received the California Distinguished School Award for its work in closing the opportunity gap for all kids.*

*Dr. Vu understands the challenges children face when learning a new language and culture, having fled Vietnam with his family in 1975. He also knows that reading can be transformative and life-changing. Don continues to spread the message that literacy can change the world through his work with state and national literacy organizations as well as his writing in publications such as Edutopia and the Scholastic EDU blog. He currently serves on the national advisory boards of Scholastic Book Fairs and the Library of Congress Literacy Awards Program. His new book, "Life, Literacy, and the Pursuit of Happiness" (Scholastic), is a call to action for all educators who want to build a school culture of literacy to empower all students as they pursue their American Dream. Visit [www.drdonvu.com](http://www.drdonvu.com).*

🐦 @drdonvu



How do your literacy programs engage and empower newcomers on your campus? Share tips and tag @TEPSAtalk and #WeLeadTX.



## DON'T LET MONOLINGUAL AGENDAS LEAD MULTILINGUAL LEARNERS

### Four Key Ideas Why Differentiated Instruction is Necessary for Multilingual Learners

By Valentina Gonzalez

Teaching multilingual children is a gift. It's truly a joy. In my own classroom, I learned so much from my students, especially those who spoke more than one language.

Over the years, one thing I learned from experience as well as through professional learning is that each student deserves to be seen and served individually. No one size fits all approach works. While differentiation may seem daunting, it's actually not that scary. Dr. Stephen Fleenor describes differentiation as "not creating individualized lessons...it is creating environments in which students at all different levels, all different proficiencies...can each thrive and each grow one level up in that lesson". Dr. Fleenor offers two wise suggestions for creating of environments that offer differentiation:

- Offering open ended guided questions
- Providing time for students to share and discuss in small groups

Equity and justice in education are paramount. Multilingual learners (MLLs) are entitled to grade level curriculum with support needed for accessing it successfully. Meaning it's not enough just to deliver the instruction. Students who are multilingual deserve instructional practices that are effective for them and not designed for and based on monolingual learners. When teaching multilingual children is led through monolingual agendas, equity and justice are at risk.

Differentiated instruction for MLLs is necessary. Let's examine a few key ideas.

### 1. Multilingual children are not monolingual.

First and foremost, being multilingual means speaking or understanding more than one language. Some students may be emerging multilinguals (still acquiring an additional language). The mere fact that a learner is multilingual gives enough reason to make sure they receive instruction that meets their needs. In his book, *Math for ELLs*, Jim Ewing asks us to imagine being told you could no longer use your right hand. For left handed people, that may be just fine. But for those who are right handed, this may pose a challenge. He pushes us to think about how our writing and drawing may come out and how it may appear to others. It may seem as if we were less capable when actually we are differently able.

**When teaching multilingual children is led through monolingual agendas, equity and justice are at risk.**

### 2. Students who are adding a new language are working hard and using additional brain power.

They are not only learning content. They are also acquiring new vocabulary and language structures. This requires support from educators and takes time and lots of energy on the learners' part. While monolingual students may only need to hear or read new information to learn academic content, multilingual learners may need to translate, process, and discuss for comprehension. They also may need additional support to receive new information, such as videos, images, audio, etc.

### 3. Culture affects how we navigate the world around us.

In some homes it is traditional and part of the culture to talk to children a lot and about all things while in other homes that is not part of the culture. In some homes it is traditional and part of the culture that people work together while in others independence is emphasized. In some homes it is traditional and part of the culture to wait for your turn to speak while in other homes speaking is more fluid. What is learned and lived at home comes into everyday life and inevitably into classrooms.

### 4. Background knowledge and experiences contribute to how students learn.

Multilingual learners often have lived experiences that differ from monolingual learners'. Lived experiences serve to build background. While a monolingual student in the classroom may have vast knowledge on

a particular subject, a multilingual learner may not have had the same opportunities. I recall as a student myself in elementary school trying to read a text on baseball. I was completely confused. Baseball was not a sport played in Yugoslavia when my parents grew up, so when we moved to America, we were unfamiliar with the sport. Reading about it made me feel like I couldn't read. I was stuck on manipulating not only the words

but also the vocabulary. I came across words I had never heard and ideas that didn't make sense to me (strike out, home run, foul ball, etc.).

Lessons and instruction for multilinguals should not be like hand-me downs from older siblings. We should not have to adjust them, patch them, tweak them, tailor them to make them fit the children that need them now. No, instead, lessons and

instruction should always be language-rich from the start, filled with opportunities that invite children of all cultures to grow and show who they are.

### AUTHOR



*Valentina Gonzalez is a longtime educator serving emergent bilingual students and their families from around the globe. Her personal experience as an immigrant from Yugoslavia and language learner fuel her desire to advocate for English learners and support teachers with the best research-based teaching methods. Her work's primary focuses have been on literacy, culture and language. Valentina is the coauthor of "Reading & Writing with English Learners: A Framework for K-5."*

 @ValentinaESL

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**Share your tips for supporting multilingual learners and tag us on social media @TEPSAtalk and #WeLeadTX.**



## WHAT DOES YOUR IDEAL LEARNING ENVIRONMENT LOOK LIKE?

### Developing a Shared Understanding of Desired Outcomes in Your Campus or District

By Katie Martin, PhD


**“Leadership requires two things: a vision of the world that does not yet exist and the ability to communicate it.” – Simon Sinek, Author and Optimist**

I asked a district leader what his ideal learning environment looked like, and he responded, “It’s hard to put my finger on it, but I know it when I see it.” This response is common but also problematic. Think about it for a minute: If you can’t articulate what desired teaching and learning looks like, how can teachers be expected to meet the expectations?


Leaders commonly use strategic plans or vision statements that describe the desire to develop life-long learners, global citizens, critical thinkers, and the like, yet a misalignment often occurs between the vision, policies, and practices. The tension between what we

say we want our students to know and be able to do and what we prioritize and assess often tell a different story.

The Texas Learning Exchange seeks to support district leaders to design a learning solution that aligns with their vision. The Texas Learning Solutions Case Studies feature world-class learning systems in Texas that can be adapted and scaled by other districts statewide. The case studies feature details on each learning solution, which we are defining as intentional, explicit, and coherent plans that include vision, success metrics, resources, and learning model alignment connected to impact student outcomes.



**Empowering and inspiring those you serve to achieve great success requires leading with a unified vision, confidence, and sense of purpose... it is critical to engage in conversations among diverse stakeholders...and then work together to make it happen.**



Each solution highlights the following:

- At a Glance
- Shared Vision and Mission
- Theory of Action
- Desired Outcomes
- Learning Model
- Staffing Model
- Flexible Learning Models
- Curricular Resources
- Technology
- Professional Learning
- Partnerships and Funding
- Impact

To empower educators to develop the type of learners and people that vision statements espouse, administrators, teachers, families, and the greater community must work together to develop a shared understanding of the desired outcomes for and align the vision, policies, and practices. Our hope is that these case studies can help as you engage in more conversations with your communities.

The following protocol can be used to structure a conversation and seek to better understand what's working, what's challenging, and what's possible. You can leverage these resources and protocol to inspire conversations in a variety of contexts such as a district leadership meeting, staff meetings, or you can convene a cross-functional group to include administrators, teachers, support staff, families, and community members.

### **Step 1**

**Celebrations:** Share what makes you proud of your school/district. It can be helpful to capture these ideas in a digital document or on a chart to ensure equity of voice and to capture the many things that are worthy of celebration.

### **Step 2**

If you have a learner profile, remind the group of your goals as you dive into these case studies. If you do not have one that is widely used or known, have the group share the most critical skills, knowledge, and mindsets you hope to develop in learners.

### **Step 3**

Visit the Texas Learning Solution Case Studies for comprehensive models. For national examples of school/program level innovation dimensions to consider, visit our New Learning Models Library. These case studies are meant to inspire district leadership teams in design and implementation as you begin planning for the upcoming school years.

- Option 1: Pick 1 or 2 that you would like everyone to read
- Option 2: Allow each group member to pick a different case study to read

### **Step 4**

Invite your team to make notes about the 4 As as they read each case study:

- What do you **Agree** with?
- What do you **Aspire** to?
- What is **misAligned** with your work?
- What would you **Argue** with?

### **Step 5**

Share out in small groups. Ask a team member from each group to capture ideas on a shared document.

### **Step 6**

Highlight big ideas from each group.

### **Step 7**

In small groups, answer questions and identify priorities based on the following questions:

- What are the desired knowledge, skills, and mindsets?
- How might we leverage bright spots or test our ideas out before scaling?
- How might we measure success?
- How might we define and share the desired learning model?
- How might we allocate staff to support our learning model?
- What curricular resources are necessary to support our model?
- What is the role of technology? What tools do we need to leverage?

- How might we create professional learning experiences that support educators?
- What partnerships might we consider to support our work?
- How can we all work together to achieve our desired outcomes?

After going through this protocol you can use the input to identify next steps based on the conversation and what surfaced. You might consider reaching out to one of the case study communities to learn more or read additional case studies and go through this protocol with additional groups. The key is to keep learning and to improve strategic clarity. There aren't necessarily any right answers to these questions as they will differ based on context, but we can't assume the answers are the same as they have always been. What it seems that we are lacking in education is what renowned educators and authors Michael Fullan and Joann Quinn define as coherence or the "[s]hared depth of understanding about the purpose and nature of the work." When systems struggle to meet desired goals, it is often a result of a misalignment between the vision, assessment, and practices.

Empowering and inspiring those you serve to achieve great success requires leading with a unified vision, confidence, and sense of purpose. To better align schools with the world in which we live, it is critical to engage in conversations among diverse stakeholders to develop a shared vision and then work together to make it happen.

## AUTHOR



**Dr. Katie Martin** is the author of *"Evolving Education and Learner-Centered Innovation."* She teaches in the graduate school of Education at High Tech High and is on the board of Real World Scholars. Dr. Martin is the Chief Impact Officer at Learner-Centered Collaborative and works in diverse contexts to learn, research, and support authentic and purposeful learning for all students.

🐦 @katiemartinedu

### Helpful Links

Texas Learning Exchange  
<https://www.edtx.org/txlx/resources>

The Texas Learning Solutions Case Studies  
<https://www.edtx.org/txlx/resources/texas-learning-solutions-case-studies>

New Learning Models Library  
<https://www.edtx.org/txlx/resources/new-learning-models-library>

*Coherence: The Right Drivers in Action for Schools, Districts, and Systems* by Michael Fullan and Joanne Quinn  
<https://michaelfullan.ca/books/coherence-right-drivers-action-schools-districts-systems/>



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