

# ELT RESOURCES REVIEW

## A must-have resource for supporting K-8 math learning: Positioning English learners for success

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*Summary: This resource offers educators with varying experience levels research-based, practical, and accessible strategies for supporting multilingual students' mathematical learning. The book offers compelling stories from real classrooms that inspire the reader to consider asset- and empathy-based perspectives as they work to position multilingual learners for leadership and success in the mathematics classroom.*

*Keywords: multilingual learners in mathematics, equitable mathematics teaching, positioning multilingual learners, asset-based mathematics instruction*

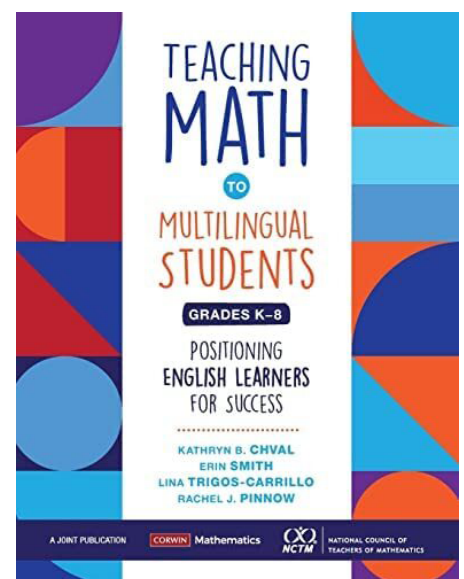
The National Council of Teachers of Mathematics calls on educators to develop practices that “position multilingual learners as valued leaders and participants in the mathematics classroom” (NCTM, 2022). *Teaching math to multilingual students grades K-8: Positioning English learners for success* (Chval, et al., 2021) is a resource that responds to the challenge of this mandate. This book presents practice-based classroom strategies that support the development of mathematics and language for multilingual learners. The strategies come from studies of teachers' practices across multiple elementary classrooms in rural and urban settings. The authors use transcripts of classroom mathematics lessons, interviews with teachers and multilingual learners, and student work samples to illustrate teaching practices that provide social and academic opportunities for multilingual learners to develop understanding of mathematical ideas. Text illustrations are followed by “Try It” activities that offer educators strategic access points to apply the strategies and practices in their own teaching.

This resource goes beyond a “quick fix” approach by challenging readers to examine and explore asset-based, empathy-based principles that undergird the strategies and practices. The book presents vignettes of conversations between actual teachers and students to illuminate multilingual learners' classroom experiences. Readers are prompted to imagine how they might feel in the scenarios and asked to consider the perspectives and resources of the multilingual learner. The vignettes forefront the importance of drawing upon students' language and culture as strengths, centering students' academic success, and attending to students' social and cultural identities in equitable mathematics teaching.

The overarching frame of the book invites readers to reflect

on their current practice and consider ways they might advance their practice to accomplish the following: ensure the academic success of multilingual learners; value, sustain and learn from multilingual learners and their families' heritage, knowledge, and culture; and work with multilingual families as partners in educating their children. The authors' stated purpose is to support educators who desire to give multilingual learners social and academic opportunities to learn mathematics deeply.

As a professor in the Department of Teacher Education at Gonzaga University, I use this book in my elementary mathematics methods course. The strategies offered in the book have explicit pedagogical connections to equitable mathematics teaching practices that are the focus of my course. The book's structure provides entry points for developing understanding of teaching mathematics to multilingual learners. For example, I have used the teaching and learning vignettes to introduce the idea of positioning and its impact on students' learning. Positioning describes the ways in which students' identities are claimed,



refuted, or assigned through language and social interactions in the learning environment. The classroom transcripts serve as a resource for unpacking concepts of positioning by allowing us to examine the discourse and social interactions in the classroom. I use the reflection questions to further develop my students' ability to notice teacher actions of positioning. Building from the concept of positioning, I then move to exploring the practical strategies for positioning multilingual learners as leaders in the classroom such as assigning ownership of mathematical ideas to multilingual learners and encouraging multilingual learners to teach peers. Again, I draw upon the classroom transcripts included within the book to illustrate, notice, and name the explicit and implicit positioning practices of teachers. The book supports the framework of the course while developing my students' understanding of the complexity and nuances of challenging teaching contexts.

The preservice teachers in my course are concurrently in elementary classrooms for a field experience. The book's practice-based approaches make important theory-to-practice connections that bridge university-based learning with application in the field experience classroom. For example, in their field experience, my preservice teachers take note of instances of positioning in student-to-student and teacher-to-student interactions in mathematics lessons. Their observations are then shared in the university classroom, providing authentic experiences to examine. Further, to develop my preservice teachers' skill in taking up positioning strategies in their own practice, I incorporate the "Try It" activities which students rehearse and receive targeted feedback on prior to teaching in the field.

The book's accessibility also makes it a useful resource for classroom teachers who desire to expand their professional knowledge base and instructional practice in serving multilingual learners. The individual chapters offer a menu allowing for targeted exploration of relevant topics: engaging multilingual learners through culturally relevant contexts and multimodal means, supporting academic language development in mathematics, facilitating student and teacher discourse in mathematics, writing in mathematics, enhancing curriculum materials for multilingual learners, and engaging with parents and families of multilingual learners.

The structure and accessibility of *Teaching math to multilingual students grades K-8: Positioning English learners for success* make it a valuable resource in supporting the professional development of K-8 educators across a variety of settings. For example, this resource could be used by ELD teachers to expand their knowledge base of strategies to support students' mathematical learning alongside language development and subsequently offer suggestions to support mainstream teachers. Additionally, the book could serve as a primary resource in school or district professional learning communities to further collective development of classroom teachers' dispositions and practice. This resource furthers the aspirations in [Mathematics Education Through the Lens of Social Justice: Acknowledgment, Actions, and Accountability](#) (NCSM & TODOS, 2016) in empowering mathematics teachers through re-framing, re-conceptualizing, and transforming practices that cultivate and sustain multilingual learners as successful doers of mathematics—as mathematicians!

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## CITE THIS ARTICLE

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