

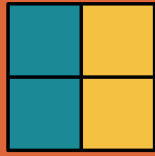
SHOW WHAT YOU KNOW:

Assessing Understanding

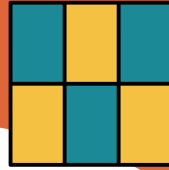


One-half

$\frac{1}{2}$



I understand a fraction



of what you're saying.

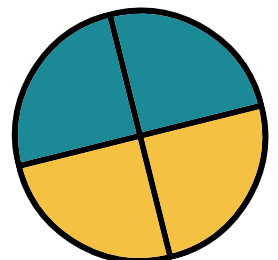
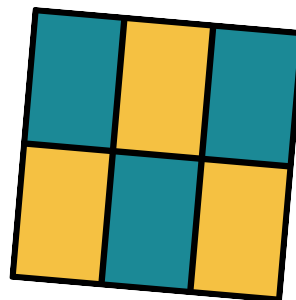
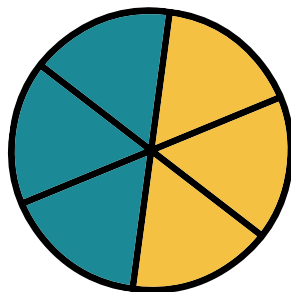
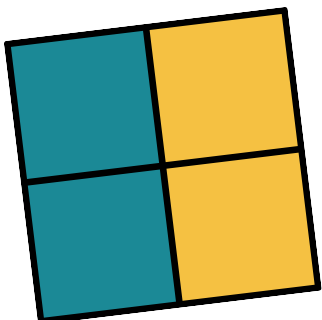
When we teach any lesson, our assessment practices will ideally allow us to gauge what our students are able to understand. Were they able to access the material presented? How much of the content did our students comprehend? Did they meet the target content and language objectives of this unit?

Being able to assess what students know is critical for our work as teachers, as it permits us to make instructional decisions that validate our students' strengths and also to differentiate for their challenges. In this session, we will consider some of the challenges of assessing English language learners (ELLs). What does it mean to engage in equitable assessment practices for ELLs? How do we gauge ELLs' understanding when they are unable to fully communicate their ideas in English?

Let's consider the following third grade "Number and Operations-Fractions" mathematics standard from the New York State Next Generation Mathematics Learning Standards:

NY-3.NF.1 Understand a unit fraction, $\frac{1}{b}$, is the quantity formed by 1 part when a whole is partitioned into b equal parts.

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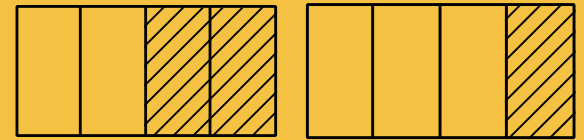
NY-3.NF.1 Understand a unit fraction, $1/b$, is the quantity formed by 1 part when a whole is partitioned into b equal parts.

To achieve this standard, we want students to be able to break a whole into equal parts and then describe the parts as a fraction. For example, if we share a cake with two people equally, we cut it into two equal parts and describe each piece as $\frac{1}{2}$.

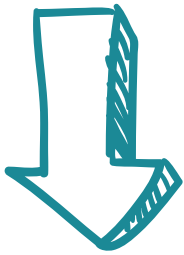
STANDARD ASSESSMENT

After a lesson where third graders practice breaking wholes into halves ($1 = \frac{1}{2} + \frac{1}{2}$) and fourths ($1 = \frac{1}{4} + \frac{1}{4} + \frac{1}{4} + \frac{1}{4}$), the teacher displays the following images and asks students to name orally the fraction that is shaded.

Assessment Strategy

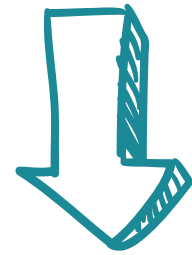


If a student orally names the first shape as “one-half” and also states orally the name of the second shape as “one-fourth,” the teacher is then able to verify that the student has met standard NY-3.NF.1 with halves and fourths. By stating the fractions orally in English, students are able to communicate their understanding of the standard. However, if a student is a newcomer and does not yet speak English, we run into the challenge of accurately assessing their mathematical understanding. An ELL may actually understand halves and fourths, but not be able to express their content knowledge due to their emergent English skills.



MODIFIED ASSESSMENT

Equitable for ELLs



- For newcomers and students who read in their home language, use Google Translate to state the directions in the home language to make sure the student understands the question. Remember to use caution since Google Translate may not always provide an exact translation.
- Create a visual word bank or digital flyer for “ $\frac{1}{2}$ one-half” and “ $\frac{1}{4}$ one-fourth” that students can point to if they are not yet able to state their responses orally or in writing in English.
- Throughout the lesson, explicitly model how to use the language of fractions, both orally and in writing, supported by the visuals that match the type of images that will be used on the assessments.
- Encourage students to use their multilingual repertoire to talk about fractions using authentic examples. You can prompt an ELL to speak into the Google Translate app so you may translate their responses into English.

To build on what they know, we have to know what they know.



*We have to be careful to acknowledge what the child is able to do in reading, even if the child is barely speaking in English. We shouldn't level a beginner speaker as an **emergent reader** just because of his language level.*
- Consultant Mary Cappellini

When selecting books for an ELL, Cappellini (2005) pushes us to look carefully at the reading strategies an ELL applies – such as using translation or rereading to find meaning in text. Cappellini continues: “If a child knows how to use any of these strategies, she doesn’t have to learn them again in a new language.” Hopewell and Escamilla (2013) believe that conducting assessments only in English results “in children being labeled as at risk of reading failure when in fact they are not” (p. 81).

Understanding a student’s literacy level in their home or native language is an important key to finding the appropriate scaffolds, supports, and accommodations. If students are unable to read and write in their home language, supports such as glossaries or translated materials may not be appropriate. Even in bilingual programs where ELLs are assessed in two languages, they are often evaluated primarily on whether they have met the reading standards in English. Even when their home language reading assessments present them as at or above grade level, their overall reading abilities are still perceived as deficient, as teachers are directed to report any low English scores, as if ELLs are functioning below grade level.

For example, a newcomer assessed in Spanish may show that they are able to “read and comprehend grade-level texts independently across a variety of genres (fiction and nonfiction)” (New York City Department of Education Report Card, 2014), but because they are unable to do so in English, the newcomer may be deemed “at risk.” If we have evidence that the student can read and comprehend grade-level text at grade level or above, regardless of language, then we must honor the student’s abilities. Giving the student a below-grade-level score in English simply because a student is learning the English language does not give an accurate picture of the student’s abilities. With a more accurate assessment, a student should continue to read at- or above-grade-level texts in Spanish, while receiving necessary differentiated instruction in word work/phonics instruction to further develop English decoding skills.

To examine the impacts of assessment on intervention placement, Hopewell and Escamilla extrapolated the findings from their study to statewide data. This extrapolation data suggested that thousands of multilingual learners in Colorado were labeled “at risk” and placed in intervention programs unnecessarily.

Extrapolating further, they estimated that when only English language reading scores were considered, just over 900 students were recognized as proficient readers, as opposed to 6,800 when students were assessed bilingually. They state that “bilingual students are relegated to compensatory education that neither builds on what they know and can do nor allows resources to be targeted to those truly in need” (p. 81). Furthermore, most English language reading assessments have not been normed for ELLs.



Mindset Shift!

USE HOME LANGUAGE FOR ASSESSMENT



In Session #1

We established six new mindsets that are essential to providing an excellent education for ELLs across learning environments. The fourth mindset empowers teachers to **use students’ home languages to assess student understanding.**

Equitable Assessments

Equity in education means giving each student access to the support and resources they need to achieve their educational goals. What does it mean to engage in equitable assessment practices for ELLs? Equitable assessment practices require us to leverage our ELLs’ home languages to more accurately understand what they know about reading and content areas. Otherwise, we risk developing an inaccurate view of their abilities.

Across Learning Environments

As we know from Module 1, Session 9 of the TALE Academy, assessment refers as much to the in-the-moment check for understanding as it does to the final exam or placement test. Our comprehension checks, or formative assessments, help us know where to go next in our teaching. No matter what environment we are teaching in, frequent checks for understanding of ALL of our students is the key to better learning and teaching. Fortunately, there is no shortage of digital tools and apps that teachers can use to support formative assessment in the classroom! Our goal is to focus on a few flexible tools that can help us check for understanding and give actionable feedback to ELLs.

- Supplement a tool such as Zoom with Peardeck, assessing periodically during a lesson to adjust instruction.
- Kaizena gives students real-time feedback on work they upload. You can use a highlighter or give just-in-time verbal feedback. You can also attach resources.
- Spark lets you add visuals and graphics to exit tickets.
- Typeform is a free online poll creator that allows you to add graphic elements to quick assessments.

More Ways to ASSESS UNDERSTANDING

Think about Session 3 with the Chinese mathematical proof and the types of scaffolds we would need to solve that problem – especially for a high-stakes assessment. Fortunately, many of our students are at a higher level with their English than we are with our Chinese language.



While translation can be a useful tool for newcomers or students who read and write in their first language, **look at the list below and consider which modifications might be most appropriate for your ELLs depending on their proficiency levels, background knowledge, and prior experience with this content.** What might be the perfect modification for one assessment may not be appropriate for another. You may also remove these scaffolds as your ELLs progress in their language development.

Read directions to all sections of an assessment orally to the whole class or a small group of ELLs. Ask if there are any questions and elaborate before students begin the assessment.

Model or provide sample answers to the first item of each assessment section.

Add pictures or visuals to the directions or items to aid in comprehension.

Allow students to complete the assessment in a different modality (e.g., through oral language instead of written, with multimedia, or drawing).

Have students complete the assessment in pairs or small groups.

Simplify – or amplify – the language of the items, while ensuring they are clear:

- Avoid negation and dependent clauses
- Provide fewer multiple choice options
- Define terms in context
- Remove extraneous information

Allow ELLs to complete only the odd or even items for assessment.

Provide a differentiated rubric for ELLs which is shared in advance of the assessment.

Provide a word bank (include additional words for increased challenge, depending on proficiency)


Include sentence stems so that ELLs know where to begin.

Allow ELLs to revise and resubmit based on initial feedback before grading.

Encourage students to use their full linguistic repertoire.

Evaluate only the language (e.g., spelling features, vocabulary, verb tense, sentence structures) that you have explicitly taught previously.


Note on Alignment



In addition to selecting the appropriate scaffolds and knowing how and when to use them, ensure that the assessments are aligned with your classroom tasks and assignments. The students – or an observer – should be able to make direct connections between the lesson or unit objectives – both content and language, the lesson tasks, and the assessment.

Comprehension checks should also be frequent so that you are continually getting feedback on what your next steps are for instruction. Based on your evaluation of the student's work or performance, what content do you need to teach next? What language features?

Now It's Your Turn!



In your workbook, think through the assessments you use and how they can be modified to assess the content understanding of ELLs. In Sessions 6 and 7, we will continue to explore how to use ELLs' home languages to more accurately assess student understanding in order to support their oral and written class participation in virtual learning.

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About Us

The TALE Academy

The TALE Academy is a series of virtual learning experiences available to all New York State educators and offers a rich array of resources on topics related to teaching across learning environments (TALE). The TALE Academy is built upon the work New York State educators carried out during emergency remote teaching (ERT) throughout the COVID-19 pandemic and extends it toward the future. TALE invites educators to think beyond online learning to consider a broader perspective on teaching and learning that encompasses teaching across multiple environments (in-person, remote, and hybrid).

The Teaching in Remote/Hybrid Learning Environments (TRLE) Project

The TALE Academy is part of a broader New York State Education Department (NYSED) initiative known as Teaching in Remote/Hybrid Learning Environments (TRLE). In July 2020, NYSED was awarded funding through the United States Department of Education's Education Stabilization Fund-Rethink K-12 Education Models Grant to implement TRLE – a three-year project to build the capacity of teachers and educational leaders to effectively implement remote/hybrid learning for all students. Launched in the depths of the pandemic, the first phase of the TRLE project focused on getting resources to the field through partnerships with Boards of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES) and school districts across the state. The second phase, which began in February 2022, focused on aggregating lessons learned and emerging teaching and learning strategies to address a broader field of practice: teaching across learning environments.

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