Activities in the Mathematics Classroom that Promote Mathematical Fluency

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Sevasti Tagaris
Illinois Wesleyan University

Leah Nillas, Faculty Advisor
Illinois Wesleyan University

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Promoting Mathematical Fluency
Sevasti Tagaris and Leah A. Nillas*
Educational Studies Department, Illinois Wesleyan University

Research Questions

• How can I use reading, writing, and speaking the language of mathematics to promote mathematical fluency?

• What activities help students become “fluent” in mathematics?

• Which activities accomplish targeted learning goals such as initial learning or reinforcement?

Literature Review

• NCTM (2000) identified learning to communicate mathematically as a major goal for students. When required to justify, students are challenged to think and reason.

• Shield and Swinson (1996) used writing as a means of organizing ideas through “link sheet” activity.

• Huinker and Laughlin (1996) considered the benefit of classroom discourse in exploring concepts with “think-talk-write” activity.

• Discourse aids in writing or writing aids in discourse? Literature lacked evidence on the benefits of the activities.

Methodology

• 40 students from two sections of Algebra II classrooms in a Central Illinois urban high school

• Implemented activities, reviewed student work, and analyzed reflective teacher journals

• Lessons emphasized and assessed reading, writing, and speaking mathematics

• Math-Talk community framework was used to analyze how I promote mathematical discourse (Hufferd-Ackles, Fusin, & Sherin, 2004)

Activities’ relevance to themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Math-Talk Themes</th>
<th>Matrix Activity</th>
<th>Board Work</th>
<th>Partner Work</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Questioning</td>
<td>+</td>
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<td>+</td>
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<tr>
<td>Explaining</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Source of Ideas</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+</td>
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<tr>
<td>Responsibility for Learning</td>
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Results and Data Analysis

• **Matrix Activity**: By design, this writing activity required justification and encouraged questioning because students’ interactions were limited to writing. This activity reinforced concepts.

• **Board Work**: Students’ work and explanations demanded precision. Through reflection, I noted students’ reluctance to question or be incorrect in front of peers. Board work activities reinforced and assessed understanding.

• **Partner Work**: Students were more comfortable exploring and asking questions during group work. This activity reinforced concepts.

Conclusion

• Continuing to draw from literature as inspiration and modifying lessons I’ve implemented, there are a number of activities that allow students to practice using math as a language.

• Activities that require written explanations and oral justifications help students develop “fluency.”

• Given more time, I would use levels described in the Math Talk framework to quantify progress across themes.

• In the future, I want to determine through assessment which activities help achieve certain learning goals.

Figure 1. The extent to which implemented activities accomplished goals or themes.