

Focus on Language during Mathematics Games— an excerpt from *Achievement Inspired Mathematics for Scaffolding Student Success...*

Many mathematics programs include games that students play to reinforce concepts and develop automaticity. We typically model for students how to play the game, but we also need to teach students the language they should be using while playing. This includes phrases like “It’s your turn,” “Roll the dice,” or “It’s time to clean up.” It’s also essential to teach students the academic language that goes with the specific game. This could include sentences like “The 3 is in the hundreds place,” or “Nine is a larger product than six,” or “Twelve is a multiple of six.”



Teacher and students review the game together:

T—What word will we hear every time that you have the low card during *Top-it*?

S—Less

T—What would we say with these two cards? (points to five and ten)

S and T—Five is less than ten.

T—Let’s say it again.

S—Five is less than ten.

T—What word will we hear every time you have the high card?

S—More

T—What would you say with five and ten? (pointing)

S—Ten is more than five.

T—Here’s a challenging one. What would you say if you had five and five? (pointing)

S—The same

T—They are the same. We can say five is equal to five or they are equal. Say that with me.

S and T—Five is equal to five. They are equal.

T—Great. When you are playing today, our goal is to use that language every time.

Recently a first grade class was playing *Top-it* (*Everyday Math*) to work on the concept of more and less. Students play with partners. Each partner chooses a card. The person with the highest card adds both cards to their pile. Typically, students flip through the deck very quickly and what you hear is “I win,” or “You get the cards.”

In this classroom, when the teacher modeled the game, she also taught the students the words *more* or *less* and the frames *___ is more than ___* and *___ is less than ___*. Each student needed to use one of these frames to describe their cards before the round was over. While students were playing, the teacher circulated to reinforce the language they were using and to model when necessary.

Including a language focus in the lesson elevates all students’ language and gives them multiple opportunities to practice these essential mathematical structures. It is very important that the teacher set an expectation that all students will use this language. It has to be an integral part of playing the game. Then the teacher can positively reinforce the use of high academic language by highlighting students using it. For example, “I just heard Kayla say ‘Seven is more than five,’ and Miguel said ‘Three is less than five.’ That is the mathematical language we want to hear!”

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