

Suggestions for Using *Rigor Is NOT a Four-Letter Word* with Book Clubs or Study Groups

Effective Staff Development

While working on my doctorate, I studied schools that had won a national award for their staff development (Blackburn, 2000). From that, I learned there are seven key elements of effective staff development.

Key Elements of Effective Staff Development

- ◆ Clear purpose linked to research, student data, goals, and needs.
- ◆ Accountability through classroom use of ideas and impact on students.
- ◆ Development of a common, shared language.
- ◆ Shared decision making which includes an emphasis on teacher input.
- ◆ Incorporation of relevant, practical, hands-on activities.
- ◆ Integration of opportunities for follow-up and application.
- ◆ Strong leadership and a positive, collegial atmosphere.

Book clubs and study groups are an effective component of a staff development program. Hopefully, you have chosen to study *Rigor is NOT a Four-Letter Word* because it matches a need or goal in your school. Through a book study, your faculty will develop a common, shared language and perspective of rigor, which can serve as a foundation for future growth. Through the application portions in the book and the suggestions provided below, you can incorporate hands-on activities for follow-up which will also allow for accountability through classroom use of the material. Finally, through the leadership of the faculty and administrators in your building, you will be able to tailor the material to the specific needs of your students, in order to maximize learning.

General Suggestions

If you are a facilitator or a member of a book club or study group, many teachers may benefit from discussing ideas and concerns with each chapter. You may want to hold roundtable discussions after the chapters to help faculty build on one another's ideas. This will also help in establishing or implementing schoolwide initiatives as each teacher will have input and ownership over the strategies discussed. Within each chapter, there are multiple application opportunities as readers are asked to "Try It Out!" You will also find open-ended culminating questions for each chapter provided in the *Final Insights*, which may be used as a springboard for group discussion. However, please keep in mind that many of the questions ask teachers to analyze their own behaviors and practices with a critical eye; therefore, unless there is an atmosphere of trust in your group, some teachers may be less willing to share that information publicly.

Overall Guiding Questions and Activities

There are also general questions and strategies for reflection that can be used throughout a discussion of *Rigor Is NOT a Four-Letter Word*. The first set of activities below are divided into three sections: Pre-Reading Activities for teachers to complete prior to reading the book; During Reading Activities, which can be used anytime during the discussions; and After Reading Activities, to be completed after teachers have finished *Rigor*. The ideas are purposely more generic than the “It’s Your Turn” and “Final Insights” provided within each chapter. Balance the use of these with the more specific suggestions to best meet the needs of your particular situation and/or group.

Prereading Activities

Sentence Starters

Write the following phrases on chart paper. Post them around the room and ask teachers to anonymously respond to each using Post-It notes. Group each set of notes by category, and use as a discussion starter.

Rigor is ...

Rigor is not ...

The biggest challenge to increasing rigor in our school is ...

I wish ...

Find the Solution!

On an index card, each person writes one of the biggest classroom or student challenges he or she is facing related to rigor. Fold each card and place it in a bowl. Each group member then chooses a challenge from the bowl. As you progress through the chapters, look for solutions to those challenges. After reading the book in its entirety, everyone will share the index card challenge they drew, as well as the solutions they found in the book.

Pipe Cleaner Responses

Each teacher uses a pipe cleaner to form a shape that represents how his or her students respond to the notion of rigor or challenging work. Ask each to share their shape with the group, and explain why they formed it.

During Reading Suggested Ideas

Learning Walk

As you begin to implement some of the strategies, do a learning walk. Find other teachers who are willing, and visit each other's classrooms. Look for examples of rigor, motivation, and engagement. Discuss the positive examples you see.

Write a Letter to a New Teacher

Write a letter to a first-year teacher using the following terms:

Rigor

Standards

Focus

Engagement

Motivation

Value

Success

Complexity

Support

Customize

My Head is Spinning!

Draw two heads: one smiling and one with a question mark. In the smiling head, write down ideas from the book that you connect with. In the one with a question mark, write questions you have from each chapter.

After Reading Activities

Author Interview

Write a list of interview questions or a letter in which you ask the author a series of questions about some of the ideas expressed in the book.

Sharing Our Successes

Have each take a digital picture of the student work that resulted from one of the strategies suggested in the book. Then, ask the teacher to write what he or she learned from the activity. Create a bulletin board in the faculty workroom or lounge to showcase student and teacher learning!

Blueprint for Literacy

Work together in small groups to create a blueprint or plan for increasing rigor in your school. Include the next steps and any needed tools or resources.