Washington State Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development

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When you think about RIGOR and challenging all students, what comes to mind?

Consider describing RIGOR using three key words: motivating, engaging, and supportive. So, when we talk about increasing instructional rigor in our classrooms, we talk about increasing motivation, engagement, and support.

To do that, we must be intentional and strategic. And to be intentional and strategic, we need to know:

1. Standards
2. Our students' funds of knowledge
3. Effective input, processing, and output teaching moves

The first component is simple because it is not within our control. It is a given, tangible, and concrete set of standards that frame our teaching and learning destination. We have a set of Common Core Standards that serves as a roadmap. It is essential to understand *how* the standards correlate with the state language standards or ELPs and know *how* to unpack them and break them down to learning targets.

The other two components are within our zone of control. Focusing on how we invest our time in understanding *funds of knowledge* and *strategic use of input/process/output teaching moves* will provide our districts and schools specific trajectory to ensure access to rigor for every child.

Each year, more and more students with diverse life experiences grace our classrooms. They stretch us to grow and evolve in our teaching practices and yet we often, unintentionally, get in the way of access to rigor. It is critical to understand and **believe** that these students bring great assets with them. These assets are called "funds of knowledge" and are the DNA of our learners. Instead of looking at the funds of knowledge of each child as strengths and using that to build on, we often focus on their funds of knowledge as a deficit and use that to excuse students from rigorous learning and teachers from rigorous teaching. We build on the "can'ts" instead of the "cans". We perceive what the child is ready for, we create the reality for the students in the classroom, unintentionally, by segregating students by levels, language, behaviors, etc. The first shift that needs to happen is from deficit mindset to asset mindset. And that is no easy task. This shift begins with careful reflection on how we think and talk about our students and their families. Whether we want to or not, we frame our students' school life with our words. It is critical to reflect upon how we are showing up and modeling the conversations we are having with staff about our school, students, and families. The table below provides specific quotes we have heard in classrooms and schools and suggestions on how to reframe the language and conversation.

Behavior	Maria is really being a B****.	I am struggling to support Maria in seeing herself as a positive and valued member of our classroom community.
Academics	It's September, but I know this kid is not going to make it in my class because he speaks 4 different languages and doesn't have books he can read at home.	I wonder what I can do to elevate this kid's ability to understand and speak 4 different languages and use it to support his development of English language and literacy.
Family Engagement	John's family doesn't ever show up for conferences, return papers, or phone calls. No wonder he is so behind. Parents are not involved in his school life.	It is important for me to understand how John's family is involved in his school life. None of the traditional methods I tried worked, so I might need to move beyond the 4 walls of my classroom and visit their home.

The third component is the most difficult to unpack because of its complexity and tremendous impact on our students. This impact can be positive or negative, depending on how inclusive our teaching and learning is. Over the last twenty five years, we have worked to expand and challenge staff pedagogy around instruction and systems that move us beyond the inequitable practices that have been in place for the past 200 years. Yes, access or lack thereof, is indeed an equity issue. We have seen great changes in districts, schools, classrooms, and communities as they face this issue head on and build culturally responsive infrastructures that enable teachers to provide high quality instruction for every student. Their success is anchored in language, literacy, and content integration. It is grounded in equity and understanding of how to create academically and socially-emotionally inclusive schools and classrooms. Unfortunately, this is not a reality in many communities, districts, and schools which means that we are still challenged to see beyond students' perceived limitations and into their potential. We are still challenged to provide equitable access to rigorous core instruction that accelerates students' learning, builds on their strengths, and liberates them to meet their dreams.

Many times we turn to programs, assessments, or curriculums that will "fix" the differentiation; we allow that to drive our instructional decisions, leaving us empty handed. The first step is to break these systemic issues and turn to some basic principles of high quality instruction.

To challenge our students and access the rigor of the standards, we must first explore essential strategies for every classroom. These essentials are input, process, and output strategies that see beyond any programs and curriculum and into the hearts of the pedagogy of teaching. Regardless of your student make up, access to rigor requires presence of effective strategies from all three categories. For example,

let's look at vocabulary. Some of the most common strategies we use for vocabulary development are: write a list of vocab words, define them using a dictionary, write a sentence using each word, draw a picture representing each word, match. All these are processing vocabulary strategies. Very rarely do we hear teachers talk about how they are going to intentionally input vocabulary words into their students' brains which is a precursor to learning something new. When designing lessons it is critical to include input strategies such as picture file cards, demonstrating, allowing students to translate, compare/contrast, and dramatization. We need to create multiple ways to allow our students to showcase their learning. Output strategies provide that opportunity.

Thinking about input, processing, and output strategies through the lense of Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing could be very helpful and clarify some of the existing misconceptions. Reading/Writing/Listening/Speaking are critical modalities that we use to input new information into our students, allow them to process it, and output their learning in every content area. These modalities do not exist in isolation. They are interconnected and need to be used intentionally to differentiate input, process, and output to ensure access to rigorous learning. The use of input/process/output strategies in a cyclical fashion creates an inclusive learning environment that is motivating, engaging, and supportive. How might you use input/process/output strategies to ensure students have access to rigorous thinking and learning in your classroom?

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