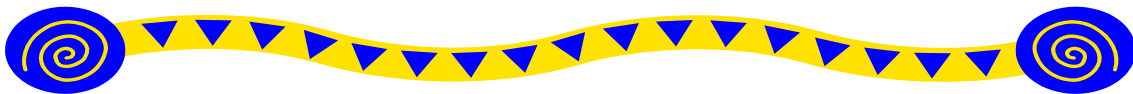


RIGORous Tools for English Language Learners

These tools were developed by [Dr. Barbara R. Blackburn](#) as a supplement to her book *Rigor is Not a Four-Letter Word*, published by [Routledge](#).

Note: Many of these strategies will also work with other at-risk learners.



Raise Level of Content

When choosing a text, pair a simple non-fiction book with a story. This allows students to see the difference between fiction and non-fiction, but can also provide an opportunity for comparison and contrast. For example, if you read Zack's Alligator with younger students, then read a short informational article about alligators. How are they alike? Different? Do you think the author showed a "true alligator"? Why or why not? This activity easily adapts for all levels of students; simply adjust your book selections to the appropriate level.

Increase Complexity

Have you ever shown a picture to students and asked them to describe it? We can make this more complex by starting with a

different step. Cover the picture with several puzzle pieces of paper or cardstock. Rather than showing students the entire picture, uncover one part and see if they can guess what it is. Uncover a piece at a time until they solve the puzzle or can guess the picture. If you prefer, cut the picture into puzzle pieces and show them one at a time. Simply by adding this, students are required to think at a higher level, by analyzing parts to figure out the whole. Again, this is great with all levels because you choose your picture linked to the topic on the day.

Give Appropriate Support and Guidance

Modeling is particularly important for English Language Learners. Kendra Alston, one of my former graduate students, uses “Watch Me”. She asks her students to watch her do something (watch me) then to “Do what I do”. As they immediately follow her modeling, they learn steps in a process. It can be used to teach a strategy, such as math problem solving, or an expected behavior. With older students, she has them complete a T-chart where they list what she did, then what they need to do as a reminder.

Watch Me	Do What I Do

I especially like how this activity scaffolds. For example, it is useful to model solving a one-step math problem. But it's equally useful to build upon it for multi-step problems.

Open Your Focus

It's easy to open your focus at the beginning of class. Rather than telling students the topic of the lesson, ask them to guess. Using 3 Alike, show students three objects and pictures. It's their job to guess the topic. You can add more objects or pictures to help as needed. I originally saw this in a primary grades classroom, but recently I observed a high school teacher using this to engage his students at a higher level!

Raise Expectations

Part of raising expectations is helping students raise their own expectations of themselves. Too often, they don't believe they can be successful. A vision folder is a wonderful adaptation of the vision letter activity. Students find pictures of what they would like in their future and either glue them in the folder, or just collect them in the folder. Of course, you get some pictures of cars or money, but encourage them to focus with these questions (choose based on level of students):

- What job would you like? What do you want to be when you grow up? How would you like to earn money?
- Is there somewhere you would like to go? Is there a place you would like to visit? Where would you like to go on a trip?
- How do you see yourself in school? Do you like to read? Is writing something you want to do? Do you want to participate in sports?

Revisit the folder with students, since it represents their goals. You can then link activities to their goals, and begin to help them see a brighter future.