

Activity 6

Connecticut Core Standards for English Language Arts and Literacy



Grades 6–12

Systems of Professional Learning

Connecticut Core Standards Systems of Professional Learning

The material in this guide was developed by Public Consulting Group in collaboration with staff from the Connecticut State Department of Education and the RESC Alliance. The development team would like to specifically thank Ellen Cohn, Charlene Tate Nichols, and Jennifer Webb from the Connecticut State Department of Education; Leslie Abbatiello from ACES; and Robb Geier, Elizabeth O'Toole, and Cheryl Liebling from Public Consulting Group.

The Systems of Professional Learning project includes a series of professional learning experiences for Connecticut Core Standards District Coaches in English Language Arts, Mathematics, Humanities, Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics (STEM), and Student/Educator Support Staff (SESS).

Participants will have continued support for the implementation of the new standards through virtual networking opportunities and online resources to support the training of educators throughout the state of Connecticut.

Instrumental in the design and development of the Systems of Professional Learning materials from PCG were: Sharon DeCarlo, Debra Berlin, Jennifer McGregor, Michelle Wade, Nora Kelley, Diane Stump, and Melissa Pierce.

Published 2014. Available online at <http://ctcorestandards.org/>



Activity 6

Activity 6: Myths about Rigor in the Common Core Classroom

DESCRIPTION

In mixed grade table groups, coaches will discuss and take a short quiz on myths about rigor and the CCS-ELA & Literacy. They will then read the article to find the “answers.” At tables, participants discuss what they have learned.

RESOURCE

Blackburn, B. (2014). Five myths about rigor and the Common Core. Posted on *Middleweb* 1/22/2014. Retrieved from <http://www.middleweb.com/12318/five-myths-rigor-common-core/>

DIRECTIONS

1. In mixed table groups, coaches discuss and take a short quiz on beliefs about rigor in the classroom related to the CCSS-ELA & Literacy. Table participants make consensus decisions about each statement. See the quiz below.
2. Each person at the table reads an entire blog post on the next page and underlines information pertinent to the rigor quiz they have just taken.
3. Coaches discuss and revise their answers on the quiz, using evidence from the blog post.

SHORT QUIZ: RIGOR AND THE CCS-ELA & LITERACY

Statements about the CCS-ELA & Literacy	Yes	Maybe	No
1. Quantity of homework is a sign of rigor.			
2. More classwork and activities are signs of rigor.			
3. Rigor is not meant for all students.			
4. Providing support for students means the rigor is less.			
5. Raising the level of rigor requires new resources.			

Five Myths about Rigor and the Common Core

MIDDLEWEB 01/22/2014 by Barbara Blackburn

Rigor is one of the most discussed topics in education today, especially given the emphasis on meeting the challenging Common Core State Standards. But there is much debate over what rigor is and is not. Let's look at five myths of rigor that will be familiar to many middle grades educators, then at a concrete definition of the actual meaning.

MYTH ONE: LOTS OF HOMEWORK IS A SIGN OF RIGOR.

For many people the best indicator of rigor is homework. Some teachers pride themselves on the amount of homework they expect from their students, and there are parents who judge teachers by homework quantity.

Realistically, all homework is not equally useful. Some of it is just busywork, assigned by teachers because principals or parents expect it. For some students, doing more homework than necessary leads to burnout. When that occurs, students are less likely to complete homework and may become discouraged about any kind of learning activity, in or out of school. In the Common Core, you'll notice the focus is on depth, not coverage, which extends to homework.

MYTH TWO: RIGOR MEANS DOING MORE.

"Doing more" often means doing more low-level activities, frequent repetitions of things that students have already learned or can learn with little investment of time. Such narrow and rigid approaches to learning do not define a rigorous classroom.

Students learn in many different ways. Just as instruction must vary to meet the individual needs of students, so must homework. Rigorous and challenging learning experiences will vary with the student. Their design will vary, as will their duration. Ultimately, it is the quality of the assignment that makes a difference in terms of rigor.

Again you'll notice throughout the Common Core State Standards that the focus is on high-quality, in-depth assignments, rather than simply assigning more problems.

MYTH THREE: RIGOR IS NOT FOR EVERYONE.

Some teachers think the only way to assure success for everyone is to lower standards and lessen rigor. This may mask a hidden belief that some students can't really learn at high levels.

You may have heard of the Pygmalion Effect—students live up to or down to our expectations of them. It's true. Each student can complete rigorous work at high levels, whether they are advanced or a student with special needs. As I said in Myth Two, "rigorous" is different for different learners.

The Common Core standards reinforce this notion when they speak of preparing each student, not just some students, for college and careers. I know from my own experience as a teacher of struggling students who came reading far below their grade level that any teacher can be rigorous, and any student can reach higher levels with the right support.

MYTH FOUR: PROVIDING SUPPORT MEANS LESSENING RIGOR.

In America, we believe in rugged individualism. We are to pull ourselves up by our bootstraps and do things on our own. Working in teams or accepting help is often seen as a sign of weakness. Supporting students so that they can learn at high levels is central to the definition of rigor. As teachers design lessons for the Common Core that move students toward college and career-ready work, they must provide scaffolding to support them as they learn. The Core calls on teachers as well as students to respond to higher expectations.

MYTH FIVE: RESOURCES EQUAL RIGOR.

Recently, I've heard a common refrain. "If we buy this program, or textbook, or technology, then we would be rigorous." This is particularly true with resources claiming to match the Common Core.

Some of these resources are much better than others, so the old saying "Buyer Beware" is particularly pertinent. The right resources can certainly help increase the rigor in your classroom. However, raising the level of rigor for your students is not dependent on the resources you have.

Think about the resources you have now. How can you use them more effectively? Do you use a textbook that includes true-false tests? Often, they are not rigorous because students can guess the answer. However, add one step for more rigor. Ask students to rewrite all false answers into true statements, requiring students to demonstrate true understanding.

It's not the resources; it's how you use them that makes a difference.

TRUE RIGOR

Despite its reputation, the word *rigor* does not have to be a negative in your classroom.

True instructional rigor is "creating an environment in which each student is expected to learn at high levels, each student is supported so he or she can learn at high levels, and each student demonstrates learning at high levels (Blackburn, 2012)."

Notice we are talking about four distinct aspects of the classroom: environment, expectations, support, and demonstration of learning.

- An environment that supports rigor focuses on risk-taking, since working at higher levels requires that students take a risk. How do we do this? By reinforcing progress, effort, and grit, or persistence.
- Next, having high expectations means increasing wait time, using positive encouragement to coach students to continue with their work rather than shutting down, and insisting that students provide high quality responses to higher-order questions.
- Support must balance these high expectations, since learning to learn at higher levels requires assistance while moving there. This can include modeling, use of graphic organizers, or chunking information.
- Finally, students must demonstrate learning at high levels. This includes providing work that is quality, rather than just completed at a minimum level. Teachers should provide rubrics and other tools to help students understand what “good” looks like.

A FINAL NOTE

Moving beyond the myths of rigor to incorporate true instructional rigor in the classroom is critical, especially in light of the Common Core State Standards. The standards are rigorous, yet we must match the rigor of those standards with our instruction. Having a thorough understanding of rigor allows us to match the standards with appropriately rigorous instruction and assessment.

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Videos

“Declaration of Independence”, History/Social Studies, grade 8:
<http://commoncore.americaachieves.org/module/5>

“I Hear the Wail of Millions” (Feaser), Grade 10: English:
<http://commoncore.americaachieves.org/module/14>

Websites for Quantitative Text Analyzers

ATOS Analyzer – Renaissance Learning. Available from <http://www.renlearn.com/ar/overview/atos/>

Degrees of Reading Power – Questar. Available from <http://www.questarai.com>

Lexile Framework – MetaMetrix. Available from <http://www.lexile.com/analyzer/>

Coh-Metrix Easability Tool. Available from <http://141.225.42.101/cohmetrixgates/Hoes.aspx?Login=1>

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