Activity 6

Connecticut Core Standards for English Language Arts and Literacy

Grades K–5

Systems of Professional Learning

Connecticut Core Standards Systems of Professional Learning

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.

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 following pages 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.

From *Five Myths about Rigor and the Common Core*, by B. R. Blackburn, 2014, Little Switzerland, NC: MiddleWeb.com. Copyright 2014 by Barbara R. Blackburn. Reprinted with permission. Retrieved from http://www.middleweb.com/12318/five-myths-rigor-common-core/ (website link: barbarablackburnonline.com)

References

ACT. (2006). Reading between the lines: What the ACT reveals about college readiness in reading. Available from http://www.act.org/research/policymakers/pdf/reading_summary.pdf

Alberti, S. (December 2012/January 2013). Making the shifts. *Educational Leadership, 70*(4), 24-27.

America Achieves (2012). EQuIP Resources. Retrieved from http://commoncore.americaachieves.org/

Aspen Institute. Education & Society Program (2012)*. Tools for teachers: Implementing key shifts in the Common Core State Standards.*

Beck, I. L., McKeown, M. G. & Kucan, L. (2013). *Bringing words to life: Robust vocabulary instruction*. *2nd Edition*. NY: Guilford Press.

Blackburn, B. R. (2014). *Five Myths about Rigor and the Common Core*, by Little Switzerland, NC: MiddleWeb.com. Copyright 2014 by Barbara R. Blackburn. Reprinted with permission. Retrieved from http://www.middleweb.com/12318/five-myths-rigor-common-core/ (website link: barbarablackburnonline.com)

Brown, S., & Kappes, L (2012*). Implementing the Common Core State Standards: A primer on close reading of text*. Available from http://www.aspeninstiute.org/publications/tools-teachers-implementing-key-shifts-common-core-state-standards//

Cappiello, M. A., & Dawes, E. T. (2013). *Teaching with text sets*. Huntington Beach, CA: Shell Education.

CCSSO & NGA. (2010). Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts & Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects. Washington, DC. Author, p. 5. Available from http://www.corestandards.org/

Common Core shifts: a 2-page summary. Available from http://www.achievethecore.org/

Complete College America (2011). Time is the enemy. Available from http://www/completecollege.org/docs/Time_is_the_Enemy.pdf

Dounay Zinth, J., & Christie, K. (2012, January). *12 for 2012: Issues to move education forward in 2012*. Denver, CO: Education Commission of the States.

Fisher, D., Frey, N., & Lapp, D. (2012). *Text complexity: Raising rigor in reading*. Newark, DE: International Reading Association.

Gates Foundation (2012). Strategy scorecard: 2012 College ready strategy review. Bellevue, WA: Gates Foundation.

Guide to Creating Questions for Close Analytic Reading. Available from http://www.achievethecore.org/steal-these-tools/text-dependent-questions/.

Hiebert, E. H. (2012). Unique Words Require Unique Instruction. Available from
http://www.textproject.org/text-matters/.

http://nationsreportcard.gov/reading_2011/summary.asp

http://parccmdfelaliteracyAugust2012_Final.pdf.

http://www.aspeninstiute.org/publications/implementing-common-core-state-standards-primer-close-
reading-text/.

Introduction to the ELA/Literacy Shifts. Available from http://www.achievethecore.org/steal-these-
tools/professional-development-modules/introduction-to-the-ela-literacy-shifts

Kamil, M. L., Borma, G. D., Dole, J., Kral, C. C., Salinger, T., & Torgesen, J. (2008). *Improving Adolescent
Literacy: Effective Classroom and Intervention Practices: A Practice Guide (NCEE#2008-027).*
Washington, DC: National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Institute of
Education Sciences, U.S. Department of education. Retrieved from http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/

Liebling, C., & Meltzer, J. (2011). Making a difference in student achievement using the Common Core
State Standards for English language arts: What school and district leaders need to know. *A PCG
Education White Pape*r. Portsmouth, NH: Public Consulting Group.

Loveless, T. (2011, February). How well as American students learning? *The 2010 Brown Center report on
American Education*, *11*(3). Washington, DC: Brown Center on Education Policy at Brookings.

Model Content Frameworks – ELA/Literacy. http://www.parcconline.org/mcf/ela/parcc-model-content-
frameworks-browser

Mullis, I. V. S., Martin, M. O., Foy, P., & Drucker, K. T. (2012*). PIRLS 2011 International Results in Reading*.
Chestnut Hill, MA: TIMSS & PIRLS International Study Center, Boston, College. Available from
http://timssandpirls.bc.edu/pirls2011/international-results-pirls.html.

Nagy, W., & Townsend, D. (2012). Words as tools: Learning Academic Vocabulary as Language
Acquisition. *Reading Research Quarterly*, *47*(1), 91-108.

National Assessment of Educational Progress (2011). The Nation's Report Card.
http://nationsreportcard.gov/ reading_2011/

National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers (2012).
Supplemental information for Appendix A of the Common Core State Standards for English
language arts and literacy: New research on text complexity. Retrieved from
http://achievethecore.org/steal-these-tools/

National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers (2010).
Common Core State Standard for English Language Arts and Literacy in History/Social Studies,

Science, and Technical Subjects. Washington, D.C.: Authors. Retrieved from http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/; National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers (2012). See Appendix B: Text Exemplars and Sample Performance Tasks. http://www.corestandards.org/assets/Appendix_B.pdf

National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers (2010). *Common Core State Standard for English Language Arts and Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects*. Washington, D.C.: Authors. See also Appendices A, B, and C. Retrieved from http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/

National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers (2012). Supplemental information for Appendix A of the Common Core State Standards for English language arts and literacy: New research on text complexity. Retrieved from http://achievethecore.org/steal-these-tools/

OECD. (2010). PISA 2009 results: Executive Summary. Available from http://www.oecd.org/pisa/pisaproducts/pisa2009/.

Orter, W., Riley, R., Towne, L., Hightower, A.M., Lloyd, S.C., et al. (2012, January). *Preparing for change: A national perspective on Common Core State Standards implementation planning*. Seattle, WA: Education First and Bethesda, MD: Editorial Projects in Education, Inc.

Shanahan, T. (December, 2012/January, 2013). The Common Core ate my baby and other urban legends. *Educational Leadership*, 70(4), pp.10-16. Available from http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/dec12/vol70/num04/The-Common-Core-Ate-My-Baby-And-Other-Urban-Legends.aspx.

Student Achievement Partners. Available from www.achievethecore.org/downloads/EO702_Description_of_the_Common_Core_Shifts.pdf.

Student Achievement Partners. See professional development modules on the instructional shifts. Retrieved from http://achievethecore.org/steal-these-tools/professional-development-modules/introduction-to-the-ela-literacy-shifts?

Videos

"Mars - Supporting Evidence" (Price), http://commoncore.americaachieves.org/module/20

"The Wonders of Nature" (Liben), http://commoncore.americaachieves.org/module/6

"Graphic Non-Fiction: Harriet Tubman" (Sims), http://commoncore.americaachieves.org/module/2

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

Nelson, J., Perfetti, C., Liben, D., & Liben, M. (2012). Measures of text difficulty: Testing their predictive value for grade levels and student performance. Report Submitted to the Gates Foundation. Available from http://achievethecore.org/text-complexity for this paper and more information about text complexity.