

Definition of Academic Rigor in the Classroom

Academic Rigor is a quality of instruction that requires teachers to *strategically scaffold core standards to enable all students*: 1) to construct meaning for themselves, 2) impose structure on information, 3) integrate individual skills into processes, 4) operate within but at the outer edge of their abilities, and 5) apply what they learn in more than one context and to unpredictable situations.

Explanation of Instructional Qualities:

- ***Students construct meaning for themselves: (Conceptualize)***
Students are required to go beyond memorized facts, acquired understanding of concepts, and the developing of basic skill proficiency. They are *explicitly instructed* in “how to”: think critically about the content; unpack the concepts; ask interesting questions; compare and construct meaning to develop their own opinions and determine value of the information.
- ***Students impose structure on information: (Graphic Organizers)***
Students are required to learn “how to” receive and structure information to make sense of concepts and algorithms to establish appropriate use of new information. They are *systematically instructed* in the use of mental graphics to organize concepts, make connections among and between concepts, and deal with ambiguity and complexity. Doing so helps them to think accurately, consider multiple meanings and interpretations, and engage in disciplined inquiry and thought.
- ***Students integrate skills into processes for thinking globally: (Metacognition)***
Students are required to know the content, perform the skills; then are immersed in guided practice with the *linking and developing* of acquired content and skills with other subject areas to extend their thinking process and strategies.
- ***Students operate within but at the edge of their current abilities: (Healthy Challenges)***
Rigorous instruction *brings learning within the reach* of all students’ abilities and peek their interest. Students are worked independently and cooperatively to stretch just beyond their present abilities. In doing so, they develop new ways of understanding and problem solving.
- ***Students apply what they learn in more than one context and to unpredictable situations:***
Students are required to use and adapt skills and content learned --and their acquired thinking strategies --to research, adjust and/or solve real-world problems in multiple contexts with the use of rubrics

(Adapted from: Mindsteps (<http://mindstepsinc.com>)