

5.1 Rigor and Culturally Relevant Teaching

Educator Objective

Educators will develop an understanding of the concept of rigor and its role in culturally relevant teaching.

Overview

One of the core beliefs of the AVID College Readiness System is that if schools hold students accountable to rigorous coursework and provide the needed support, they can and will succeed. Zaretta Hammond, author of *Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain* (2015), has developed *Ready for Rigor: A Framework for Culturally Responsive Teaching*, which is designed to help educators deepen their understanding of what is needed to move the basics of culturally responsive pedagogy into culturally responsive teaching practices. The framework outlines what educators need to have in place in order to set the stage for all students to be ready for rigor and independent learning. The framework contains the four practice areas of culturally responsive teaching—awareness, learning partnerships, information processing, and community building—that are interdependent. When these practice areas are used in unison, they create the social, emotional, and cognitive conditions that allow students to become actively engaged with rigorous content and instruction. This activity allows educators time to explore the framework and reflect on the level of rigor in their classrooms.

Materials/Set-Up

- Educator Resources:
 - 5.1a: AVID’s Definition of Rigor
 - 5.1b: Ready for Rigor: A Framework for Culturally Responsive Teaching
 - 5.1c: Ready for Rigor: Classroom Connections

Instructional Steps

- Direct educators to participate in a Think–Pair–Share about the following question: “What is rigor?” Allow think time, and then have educators pair up and share their thoughts. Direct each pair to develop a definition of rigor.
- Share AVID’s Definition of Rigor, either as a handout or by using a document camera.
- Direct each pair to compare their definition with AVID’s, looking for similarities and differences.
- Distribute the Ready for Rigor: A Framework for Culturally Responsive Teaching resource to introduce educators to Hammond’s framework.

“Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.”

Nelson Mandela

- Explain and discuss the four interdependent practices of culturally responsive teaching outlined in the framework, using the following talking points:
 1. **Awareness:** This is the “inside-out” work for educators, as they examine their own sociopolitical lens and an understanding of all three levels of culture (*surface* – artifacts; *shallow* – values and behavior; *deep* – assumptions and beliefs) and how their interpretation and evaluation of students is impacted.
 2. **Learning Partnerships:** Creating learning partnerships is all about building trust with students by reducing stress from possible stereotype threats and helping create a positive sense of self. The human brain is wired for connection and gives educators an advantage in establishing social-emotional partnerships for deeper learning.
 3. **Information Processing:** This practice focuses on building instruction and delivering content in a manner congruent with how the brain learns and with the cultural models that students bring with them, so students can engage in deeper, more complex learning.
 4. **Community Building:** Establishing a safe, scholarly environment that builds a learning community where students feel supported by one another creates students who are ready to engage and learn.
- Point out the conventions at the core of the framework that should be ongoing and interwoven throughout instruction:
 - **Affirmation** is the educator’s ability to support and encourage students in all aspects of their identity—to create positive identity development.
 - **Validation** means that educators should recognize and understand the sociopolitical context that students bring with them into the classroom, and should validate the cultural heritages that affect students’ dispositions, attitudes, and approaches to learning.
 - **Wise feedback** should be relevant and timely, helping students think about their learning and how they can grow as a learner.
 - **Instructional conversations** should allow time for students to talk about, and further reflect on, their learning. Educators need to plan for instructional conversations and give students the language that they need to talk about their own learning and thinking processes. These interactions should contain depth and focus on moving the learning to the next level through such protocols as Helping Trios, Think–Pair–Share, or World Café. (For further information about these activities, please see the AVID Critical Thinking and Engagement webpage on MyAVID.) Allowing students time to talk about their learning provides opportunities to make connections that allow actual learning to occur.

- Once educators are comfortable with and understand the framework, direct them to form groups of four to six, based on either content or grade level taught, to further explore the framework and make connections to their classrooms.
- Distribute the Ready for Rigor: Classroom Connections resource.
- Direct groups to put their content or grade level in the circle and use the Ready for Rigor: A Framework for Culturally Responsive Teaching resource to list and make connections in each of the four practice areas. In learning partnerships, one connection might be to teach students about the concept of growth mindsets and foster the use of growth mindset language in the classroom. An example for Community of Learners and Learning Environment could be the establishment of a social norms contract that all students help create and agree to honor.
- Encourage each educator to complete their own list based on the group brainstorming session.
- Allow time for each group to share one or two connections.
- Ask each educator to select one connection that will be their next step by highlighting it on their resource and writing it on a sticky note that will serve as their exit slip.

Extension

- To extend the learning, pair educators up with a “rigor buddy.” Partners should meet regularly to review their list of classroom connections, discuss progress made in each of the four key areas, and set goals for future growth. If possible, schedule professional learning time for these interactions to occur.

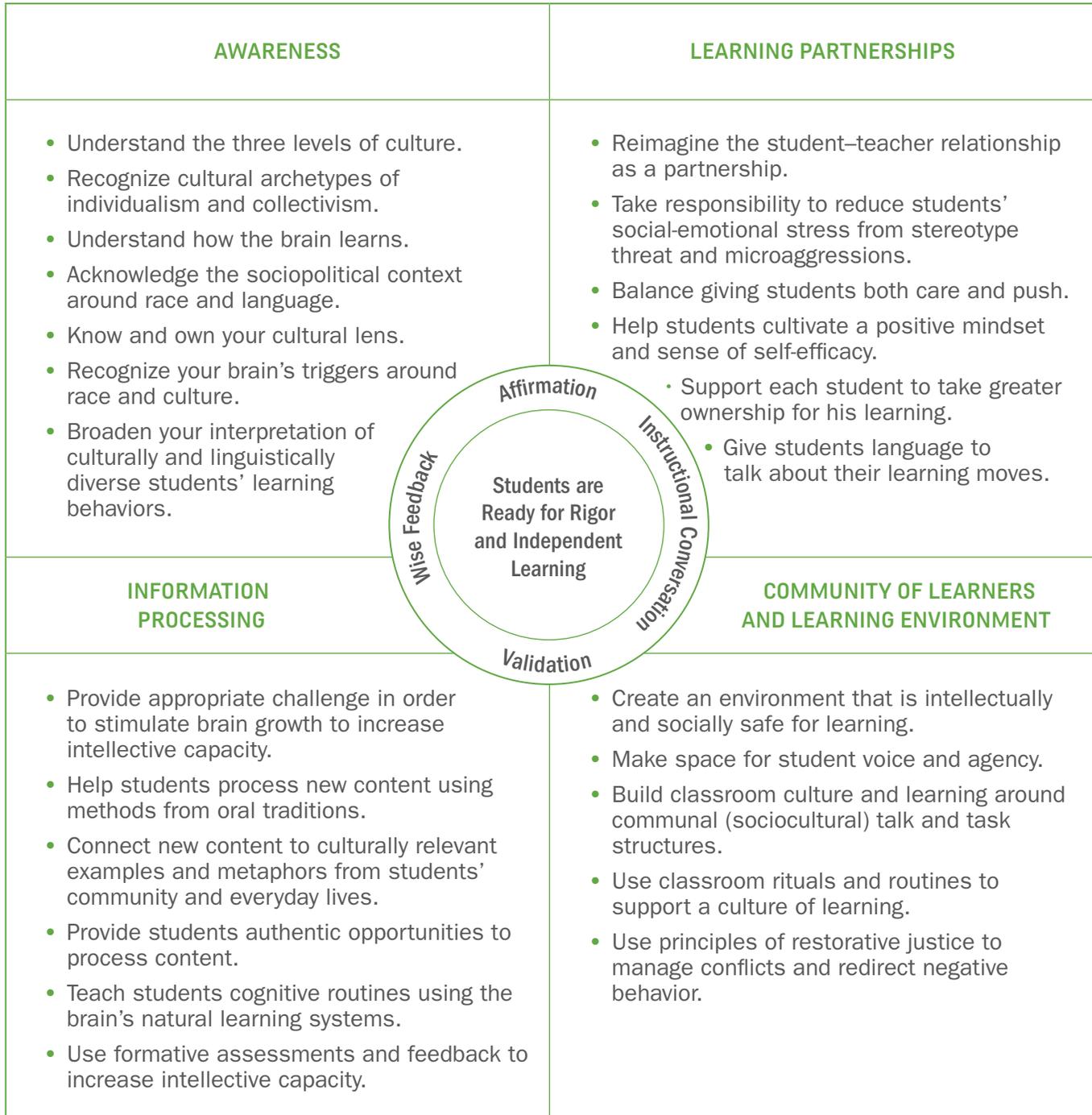


AVID's Definition of Rigor

AVID defines rigor as using inquiry-based, collaborative strategies to challenge and engage students in content, resulting in increasingly complex levels of understanding.

In AVID's definition, rigor is a method to be applied, rather than a set of specific coursework materials; it is how students learn—not just what they learn—that is emphasized. Rigor is directly related to what the student is doing and the amount and level of thinking required. As such, rigor can and should be applied universally to all students in all subjects, regardless of background or ability.

Ready for Rigor: A Framework for Culturally Responsive Teaching



Ready for Rigor: Classroom Connections

