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Introduction

This guide, *Classroom Techniques for Creating Conditions for Rigorous Instruction*, is intended as a resource for improving a specific aspect of instructional practice: creating conditions for learning.

Your motivation to incorporate these strategies into your instructional toolbox may have come from a personal desire to improve your instructional practice through implementation of a research-based set of strategies (such as those found in the Marzano Teacher Evaluation Framework) or a desire to increase the rigor of the instructional strategies you implement in your class so that students meet the expectations of demanding standards such as College and Career Readiness Standards, Next Generation Science Standards, College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework for Social Studies State Standards, or state standards based on or influenced by College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards.

This guide will help teachers of all grade levels and subjects improve their performances of specific instructional strategies designed to create conditions for rigorous instruction, such as establishing rules and procedures, recognizing adherence and lack of adherence to rules and procedures, using engagement strategies when students are not engaged, establishing and maintaining effective relationships, and communicating high expectations for all students. The guide allows you to intentionally plan, implement, monitor, adapt, and reflect on elements of your instructional practice. A person seeking to become an expert displays distinctive behaviors, as explained by Marzano and Toth (2013):

- Breaks down the specific skills required to be an expert
- Focuses on improving those particular critical skill chunks (as opposed to easy tasks) during practice or day-to-day activities
- Receives immediate, specific, and actionable feedback, particularly from a more experienced coach
- Continually practices each critical skill at more challenging levels with the intention of mastering it, giving far less time to skills already mastered

The series of Essentials for Achieving Rigor guides will support each of the above-listed behaviors, with a focus on breaking down the specific skills required to be an expert, and give day-to-day practical suggestions to enhance these skills.

Building on the Marzano Instructional Framework

This series is based on the Marzano Instructional Framework, which is grounded in research and provides educators with the tools they need to connect instructional practice to student achievement. The series uses key terms that are specific to the Marzano model of instruction. Table I.1 provides a glossary of these key terms.

Table I.1: Key Concepts and Terms

Term	Definition
CCSS	Common Core State Standards is the official name of the standards documents developed by the Common Core State Standards Initiative (CCSSI), the goal of which is to prepare America's students for college and career.
CCR	College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards are broad statements that incorporate individual standards for various grade levels and specific content areas.
Desired result	The intended result for the student(s) due to the implementation of a specific strategy.
Monitoring	The act of checking for evidence of the desired result of a specific strategy while the strategy is being implemented.
Instructional strategy	A category of techniques used for classroom instruction that has been proven to have a high probability of enhancing student achievement.
Instructional technique	The method used to teach and deepen understanding of knowledge and skills.
Content	The knowledge and skills necessary for students to demonstrate standards.
Scaffolding	A purposeful progression of support that targets cognitive complexity and student autonomy to reach rigor.
Extending	Activities that move students who have already demonstrated the desired result to a higher level of understanding.

The educational pendulum swings widely from decade to decade. Educators move back and forth between prescriptive checklists and step-by-step lesson plans to approaches that encourage instructional autonomy with minimal regard for the science of teaching and need for accountability. Two practices are often missing in both of these approaches to defining effective instruction: (1) specific statements of desired results, and (2) solid research-based instructional strategies. Launching from the solid instructional foundation of the Marzano Instructional Model, teachers will then be prepared to merge that science with their own unique, yet effective, instructional type, which is the art of teaching.

Classroom Techniques for Creating Conditions for Rigorous Instruction will help you grow into an innovative and highly skilled teacher who is able to implement, scaffold, and extend instruction to meet a range of student needs.

Essentials for Achieving Rigor

This series of guides details essential classroom strategies to support the complex shifts in teaching that are necessary for an environment where academic rigor is a requirement for all students. The instructional strategies presented in this series are essential to effectively teach the CCR, the Next Generation Science Standards, or standards designated by your school district or state. They require a deeper understanding, more effective use of strategies, and greater frequency of implementation for your students to demonstrate the knowledge and skill required by rigorous standards. This series includes instructional techniques appropriate for all grade levels and content areas. The examples contained within are grade-level specific and should serve as models and launching points for application in your own classroom.

Your skillful implementation of these strategies is essential to your students' mastery of the CCR or other rigorous standards, no matter the grade level or subject matter you are teaching. Instructional strategies such as those found within this series of books help exemplify the cognitive complexity needed to meet rigorous standards. Taken as a package, these strategies may at first glance seem quite daunting. That is why this series focuses on just one strategy—or in this case, one concept—in each guide.

Chapter 1

CONDITIONS FOR RIGOROUS INSTRUCTION

Rigorous instruction and learning do not just happen by accident or by coincidence. In order for rigorous instruction to consistently occur in your classroom, you must pay close attention to the learning environment. In fact, one could argue that before planning to instruct any content at all, it is imperative to plan for the conditions within the learning environment. Without the appropriate conditions in place, consistent levels of rigorous instruction, learning, and performance are unachievable.

As teachers, you are continuously building relationships with (and between) your students, whether you are conscious of it or not. Your teaching methods, routines, engagement strategies, and expectations speak to your students all of the time. The focus for this guide is planning for and creating an environment that is optimal for rigorous instruction, learning, and ultimately, student success.

When creating conditions for learning, it is important to pay close attention to the needs of your students. English language learners (ELLs), students who receive special education, and students who lack support for school all come with their own unique sets of needs. Supporting these individual needs starts with the learning environment.

Often these needs are the direct result of societal issues such as poverty, which is a growing issue in the United States. Students living in poverty are likely to lack resources, including financial, emotional, mental, spiritual, and physical resources. They may also lack support systems, relationships, role models, and knowledge of hidden rules. Lacking these resources may directly affect academic achievement (Rowan et al., 2004). It is critical to ensure that societal issues do not determine the achievement of students. According

to Shields (1991), there are three key factors that affect student learning: the school environment, the home or community environment, and the policies of the district or state. Although external conditions play a significant role in students' lives outside of school, we can control the conditions created within the school environment and ultimately harness them to influence learning. Good conditions have a positive impact on the student's brain, achievement, and development.

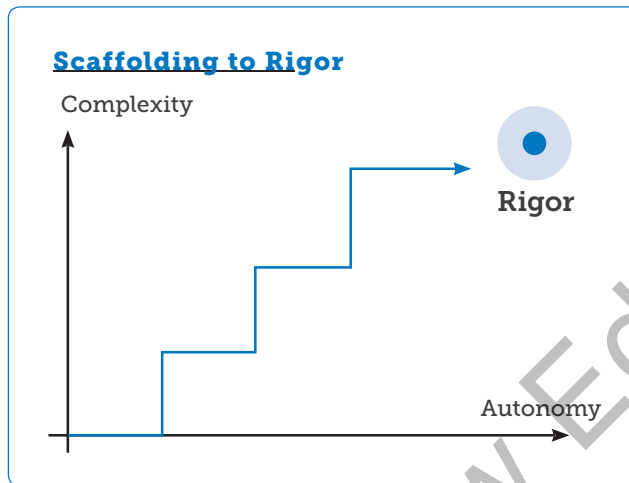
By establishing effective conditions for learning, teachers possess the ability to overcome student impediments to learning despite their root causes. Kati Haycock of the Education Trust puts it this way: The research indicates that students who have strong teachers over multiple years in a row will eventually excel regardless of their backgrounds. Students who receive instruction from just two weak teachers in a row will continue to struggle (Peske & Haycock, 2006). Positive experiences with strong teachers can break the cycle of adverse experiences associated with any and all high-risk root causes. The conditions established for learning inside the classroom can provide students with experiences that are not had elsewhere and create the environment for students to experience emotional, social, and academic success (Jensen, 2009).

Not only does creating conditions for the learning environment allow us to impact students with various needs, but it also allows us to push all of our students to rigor. Rigor is achieved by increasing cognitive complexity and student autonomy of essential knowledge and skills. Rigor cannot be achieved without both cognitive complexity and student autonomy (figure 1.1).

Creating conditions for learning in the classroom and ensuring that the conditions are functioning at a quality level afford the teacher greater ability to increase the cognitive complexity of instruction and learning. Because these conditions are in place, strategies are easily accessed and applied to enhance the classroom learning environment.

Besides impacting cognitive complexity, establishing conditions for learning also provides the necessary structure to ensure autonomy for all students. The learning environment must be facilitated in such a way that every student is pushed to achieve rigorous standards. In many schools, the achievement gap is most pronounced in thinking at higher levels of Marzano's Taxonomy, including deriving meaning from text, drawing inferences, and understanding rate and measurement in mathematics (Noguera, 2012). When student

Figure 1.1: Rigor in a standards-based classroom must contain high levels of both cognitive complexity and student autonomy. The dot marks the sweet spot where rigor lives.



autonomy is lagging, it can often be traced back to the conditions of the learning environment. For rigor to be achieved, student autonomy and cognitive complexity must be attainable for all students. The research-based conditions discussed in this guide serve to do just that.

Effective Implementation of Establishing Conditions for Rigorous Instruction

As discussed in the previous section, the need for establishing conditions for rigorous instruction is twofold. When effective conditions have not been established, student behaviors can be misclassified as emotional or learning disabilities. Effective conditions also provide the environment for achieving rigor in the classroom. These conditions provide the environment for cognitive complexity, as well as enhance instruction, when they are in place. As teachers push to foster student autonomy, conditions must be in place to ensure that all students are advancing. As you move through this guide, you will focus on five strategies. Within each strategy, you will discover multiple techniques for implementation.

The intention of rigorous instruction is to prepare students to be productive members of an ever-changing society. The skills necessary for

participation in the twenty-first-century classroom are vastly different from those in the past. College and Career Readiness Standards require that specific mental skills and processes are directly taught to students and fostered in the context of regular classroom instruction. They are categorized into two broad categories: cognitive skills and conative skills. Cognitive skills are those we are most familiar with in education. They are the ability to think about new information, process it, speak about it, and apply it to other, previously acquired information. Conative skills refer to the ability to examine knowledge and emotions in order to choose an appropriate course of action. These are personality skills involving temperament and emotion. Conative skills are critical for an individual to successfully engage in self-direction and self-regulation. Embedded in the strategies are conative skills, which are necessary for achieving autonomy and ultimately rigor. As you consider how to effectively implement establishing conditions for rigorous instruction, note the following strategies:

- Establishing rules and procedures
- Recognizing adherence and lack of adherence to rules and procedures
- Using engagement strategies when students are not engaged
- Establishing and maintaining effective relationships
- Communicating high expectations for all students

Common Mistakes to Avoid When Establishing Conditions for Rigorous Instruction

As you begin to implement the strategies and techniques involved in creating conditions for learning, consider how to avoid common mistakes. A minor mistake can derail your efforts. The mistakes common to creating conditions for rigor include the following.

Creating an Environment Where Rules Are Used as Punishment

Rules and procedures are a classroom nonnegotiable; they provide structure for the learning environment to increase the probability of achievement. When rules and procedures are used inappropriately, they rob students of the ability to self-regulate. When rules and procedures are provided to students,

and students use them to self-regulate, students take ownership of the environment as well. The classroom belongs to the students as much as to the teacher.

Failing to Be Consistent

Remaining consistent is imperative when supporting students, whether the teacher is providing support through instruction or acknowledging adherence and/or lack of adherence to rules and procedures. Consistency in the volume, depth, and type of interaction goes a long way in establishing a learning environment where all students feel their needs are being met.

Failing to Remain Emotionally Objective

There are undoubtedly moments in the classroom that can cause emotional triggers. Teachers must remain emotionally objective in order to create the type of learning environment that supports all students. Remaining objective and keeping emotions in check can go a long way in establishing positive relationships with students.

Failing to Engage Students

In order for any meaningful learning to take place, students must be cognitively engaged. Cognitive engagement requires that students are attending to the instruction. Teachers must realize that it is virtually impossible to have 100 percent cognitive engagement from 100 percent of the students 100 percent of the time. With this being said, an effective teacher continuously monitors the level of engagement and takes action when students are not engaged.

Failing to Establish Positive Relationships

Positive relationships go a long way in the classroom. If the teacher-student relationships are good, there is a decrease in overall disruptions. In fact, it can be said that a good relationship between teacher and students has the power to enhance everything else in the classroom. Conversely, a lot of behavior issues that occur can be directly linked to a poor student-teacher relationship (Marzano, 2007). Therefore, failing to establish positive relationships has the power to negatively impact the level of rigor achieved in the classroom.