Enrichment News

Wenatchee School District Enrichment Program

Mission: To find and nurture talent in students by providing and supporting opportunities for them to pursue their interests at an appropriate pace and level of complexity and regular opportunities to spend time with students of similar abilities

What is Rigor?

We hear the term rigor being used a lot lately. Rigor, relevance and relationships topped the list of important components in the recent Gates Foundation Report, "High Schools for the New Millennium." Several research reports conclude that academic rigor, rather than remediation, improves student achievement, regardless of ethnicity or income level (Adelman, Cooney & Bottoms, Mehan, et al.).

Most would agree that rigorous coursework will better prepare students for college or post-secondary jobs. But what exactly is rigor? Can you think of a class you've had that was rigorous? What were the elements that made it so? Compare it to a class that you thought was easy. Which class did you value the most?

As we think about our personal definitions of rigor, vague terms like demanding or challenging probably come to mind. The following definitions* are more detailed and specific:

Rigor is the goal of helping students develop the capacity to understand content that is complex, ambiguous, provocative, and personally or emotionally challenging.

- **Complex content** is composed of overlapping and perhaps paradoxical ideas.
- **Ambiguous content** is found in poetry, statistics, and primary documents which are packed with multiple levels of meaning.
- **Provocative content** is conceptually challenging and deals with dilemmas. Students conduct inquiry and work on solving real-world problems.
- **Personally or emotionally challenging content**: students study books, events or problems that challenge them to understand how the world works.

Rigor for one student might not be considered rigorous for another. However, all students can respond to open-ended questions and assignments that challenge their thinking. Simply asking a lot of "why?" questions forces students to defend their thinking. Here are some other ideas adapted from Carol Ann Tomlinson designed to increase the level of complexity in your classroom:

- Use advanced resources (by using lexile scores or complex, universal themes)
- Move from facts to concepts and explore multiple concepts
- Probe multiple meanings or interpretations; students must defend their answers with evidence
- Have students reflect by asking, "why" or "what if" questions
- Require students to compare circumstances across time, cultures and disciplines
- Ask for seemingly unrelated connections
- Investigate issues/controversies related to the topic
- Debate issues and support contrary arguments/viewpoints
- Use simulations
- Allow students to make choices about facets of the task
- Have students work like a professional on real-world problems

*Adapted from *Teaching What Matters Most: Standards and Strategies for Raising Student Achievement* by Strong, Silver and Perini, ASCD, 2001.

"A School Worth Studying"

Students feel good about accomplishing difficult tasks. We mustn't underestimate their ability to perform at high levels. In a *Seattle Times* article, "A School Worth Studying," (September 10, 2006) Danny Westneat featured a school in Southeast Seattle that dramatically improved their WASL scores.

Van Asselt Elementary has 80% free lunch, and only one student out of the 460 is Caucasian. Five years ago it was one of the lowest performing elementary schools in Seattle School District. That was when the staff decided to aim instruction at the level of gifted and talented students. Their students rose to the challenge, and now Van Asselt scores in the top 20 of Seattle's 67 elementary schools. WASL prep is mostly ignored until a few weeks before the test, and it's mostly focused on test taking skills. The school still has three recesses, and it emphasizes art, music and gym. (Many other schools replace such programs with remedial classes in reading and math.)

According to ESL teacher, Thereza Przekota, "The point is, don't dummify your instruction. It doesn't work to aim for the bottom or the middle. If you do, that's where you'll end up. If you go for the top it's amazing how an entire class can be lifted."

Gift Ideas

For a list of books, toys, games, CD's, videos, learning kits, and other materials that parents may find helpful in raising their high-potential children, visit www.nacg.org. The National Association for Gifted Children has many other items of interest for parents and teachers. You can also check out the Enrichment web page at home.wsd.wednet.edu/WSD/enrichment for more informaiton about the Enrichment Program and a direct link to NAGC.

Lesson Idea: GIST*

GIST: the essential point or meaning of something. Have students write a 20 word summary after reading a common article or story. *It must be exactly 20 words!* Then have them compare their summary with a small group of students. Together they create one to share with the class. This activity helps students learn the difference between a summary and a list of main ideas. It also forces them to be very concise in their word choice.

Variation: Have students read the first paragraph or section of a longer reading and create a 20 word summary. Read the second paragraph/section and create a 20 word summary that combines the material in the first GIST statement and the new material. Continue this procedure until a 20 word summary is created for the entire reading.

*Source: AVID Summer Institute (Achievement Via Individual Determination) . When using GIST, students must delete trivial information, select key ideas, and generalize in their own words, which are three major strategies necessary for comprehension and retention. (Richarson & Morgan, 2000).