Rigor, Relevance, and Relationships in Today’s Classroom™ Online

Rigor, Relevance, and Relationships in Today’s Classroom™ Online explores the sophisticated skills and habits of mind students need to be successful in their educational pursuits, the world of work, and for lifelong learning. Student and educator mindsets, methods for increasing rigor appropriately and purposefully, supporting student success through relationship building, connecting student engagement to relevancy, and revising units to reflect Common Core State Standards (CCSS) are among some of the topics explored during this course.

To the right are the key areas of focus for the 45-hour course. Please refer to the syllabus for a detailed outline of the course material as well as a bibliography of research on which the course is based.

In this course, participants will:

- Explore students’ skill gaps in today’s competitive world and how to equip students with requisite skills for success.
- Examine research and mindsets on what constitutes rigor, positive relationships, and relevant instruction/assessment, including their relationships to student achievement.
- Create new or analyze current units of instruction and connect them to CCSS.
- Apply new tools and processes designed to promote rigorous thinking, relate relevancy to engagement, and foster meaningful relationships.
- Discover the skills and habits of mind students and educators need to realize academic, personal, and professional success.
Rigor, Relevance, and Relationships in Today’s Classroom™ Online

Course Description
*Rigor, Relevance, and Relationships in Today’s Classroom™* Online focuses on the sophisticated skills and habits of mind students need to be successful in post-secondary education, the world of work, and life in general. This course demonstrates the importance of integrating rigor, relevance, and relationships into classroom practice in order to provide these skills and improve achievement throughout the K-12 system. Educators will develop a deeper understanding of the terms as they are used in academic settings and will have multiple opportunities to reflect on their own practices, engage with new ideas, and apply tools and processes to use with their students.

Course Outcomes
Upon completion of this class, the learner will be able to:

1. Understand the critical need to equip all students with 21st century skills required for academic, personal, and professional success.
2. Synthesize research findings to make informed decisions about professional practice.
3. Evaluate his or her personal understandings of rigor, relevance, and relationships and assess current implementation practices.
4. Determine the various ways content and assessments may be rigorous and the need for multiple approaches to address the variation (e.g., diversity of student needs and backgrounds).
5. Examine the research on high expectations and student achievement and the critical roles they play in the current educational environment.
6. Explain the difference between growth and flexible mindsets and their effects on rigorous thinking.
7. Design implicit and explicit methods for developing flexible mindsets in all students.
8. Determine the various ways content and assessments may be rigorous and the need for multiple approaches to address the variation (e.g., diversity of student needs and backgrounds).
9. Create or adapt organizational tools that provide quick access to student information focused on relationship building in support of student achievement.

10. Understand the foundational importance of positive relationships as a precursor to students being successful in rigorous settings.

11. Assess the types of working relationships students would like to foster with their teachers and peers.

12. Create a three-tiered intervention plan for a unit of instruction that can support all students who require support within rigorous units.

13. Identify and assess various methods of creating relevancy within the classroom.

14. Analyze the Rigor/Relevancy Framework™ as an effective tool for rigorous/relevant unit planning.

15. Utilize Questions for Life® to promote rigorous thinking.

16. Analyze an existing unit of instruction for rigor and relevancy.

17. Work collaboratively to share knowledge, skills, experiences, and tools.

18. Reflect on the ways personal beliefs affect practice, make appropriate adjustments to those beliefs as necessary, and actively seek out opportunities to grow professionally using the knowledge and skills learned in this course.

19. Design a plan for strengthening positive relationships and achieving a growth mindset within the classroom.

20. Design or adapt a unit of instruction using Common Core standards, 21st Century Skills, and the knowledge and skills learned as related to rigorous and relevant assessment and instruction.

**Required Text**

There is no formal textbook requirement for this course. Instructors and learners will use instructor-generated materials, learner-generated materials, and Web-based resources to facilitate learning.

**Topical Outline**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Setting the Context</th>
<th>List of Concepts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Current research concerning students’ skill gap in a competitive world; reflection on college and career ready skill sets; introduction to Wagner’s Seven Skills for the Future; personal definitions of rigor, relevance, and relationships applied to academic settings; self-assessment of current implementation practices</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<p>| Exploring Rigor | Researchers’ definitions of rigor; review of myths associated with rigor; multiple ways content can be considered rigorous; the research on higher expectations and student achievement |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Establishing Mindsets</th>
<th>Examining students’ and educators’ mindsets; review of research and case studies of fixed and growth mindsets; self-assessment of one’s own mindset; exploring ways to promote flexible mindsets as a catalyst for rigorous thinking</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Methods and Practices to Increase Rigor</td>
<td>Bloom’s revised taxonomy; PLS’s Questions for Life®; three criteria for determining a rigorous summative assessment; various approaches to instructing for rigor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building Relationships</td>
<td>Research on positive relationships and increased student achievement; importance of knowing students’ skills, interests, and goals as a way of customizing learning to support achievement; tiered structures of support within rigorous units; organizational tools to assist in relationship building to support student success</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incorporating Relevance</td>
<td>21st Century Skills; Rigor/Relevancy Framework™; nine ways of planning for relevancy; connection between student engagement and relevancy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analyzing for Rigor and Relevance</td>
<td>Components of rigor/relevancy rubrics; checklist for analyzing a unit of instruction; analysis of unit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrating Learning: Capstone Experience</td>
<td>Create or revise a unit of instruction tied to Common Core, 21st century standards and rigorous and relevant learning; reflections on course learning</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Course Assessments and Links to Institutional Outcomes and Course Outcomes
Throughout the course, the learner will be assessed and evaluated on the completion of the following assessments. Learning activities include whole-group and small-group discussions and assessments for a total of 440 points.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Modules</th>
<th>Topics of Modules</th>
<th>Points</th>
<th>Correlations With Course Outcomes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Module 1:</td>
<td>Setting the Context</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>1, 2, 3, 8, 14, 15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Module 2:</td>
<td>Exploring Rigor</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>2, 3, 4, 14, 15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Module 3:</td>
<td>Establishing Mindsets</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>1, 3, 5, 6, 14, 15, 16, 18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Module 4:</td>
<td>Methods and Practices to Increase Rigor</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>2, 3, 4, 5, 12, 13, 14, 15, 17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Module 5:</td>
<td>Building Relationships</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>1, 2, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 14, 15, 16, 18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Module 6:</td>
<td>Incorporating Relevance</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>1, 2, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 17, 19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Module 7:</td>
<td>Analyzing for Rigor and Relevance</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>1, 2, 3, 11, 12, 13, 15, 17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Module 8:</td>
<td>Capstone Experience</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>1, 2, 3, 11, 12, 13, 15, 17, 18, 19</td>
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</table>

**Total** 440

Criteria specific to each assessment will be explained in conjunction with the instructional activities.

**Instructional Methodology**
The instructional methodology of this course focuses on developing, enhancing, and improving the instructional expertise and pedagogical knowledge base of practicing educators. Strategies include presentation of new content through online readings, active construction of knowledge through practice and problem solving, collaborative group work, personal reflection, structured small-group or whole-class discussion, analysis of assigned reading, and the application of course content and skills to participant’s individual grade level, subject area(s), and classroom.

**Grading Scale**
The course facilitator will post the college-specific grading scale.

**PLS 3rd Learning’s Late Policy**
There will be a 10% deduction of points per day for all posts and submitted assignments that are late. Replies posted after the due date will earn no points. In rare cases, partially or poorly completed assignments may be resubmitted for partial credit at the discretion of the instructor. The following exceptions apply:

- If a participant is sick/hospitalized or has a death in the family, the timing of makeup work may be arranged with the course facilitator. No points will be deducted if the work is completed according to the agreement.
- If a participant is on vacation/traveling/etc., the participant must contact the course facilitator ahead of time to avoid a penalty. This type of absence may
occur only once during a course. All posts should be submitted for the missed module before leaving.

• If a participant has difficulty completing everything in a week, an extension can be granted if the participant contacts the facilitator during the week (not at the last minute).

**PLS 3rd Learning’s Participant Drop Policy**

• Participants are eligible to receive a refund if they attend class for one week or less. This means participants must withdraw by the end of Module 1 to receive a refund.
• Refunds of the balance of tuition paid will be given, minus the $50 deposit.

**PLS 3rd Learning’s Academic Integrity Policy**

PLS 3rd Learning expects absolute academic honesty and integrity from every course participant. The specific Academic Integrity and Honor Code Policies of our partner colleges and universities are embraced and enforced by PLS 3rd Learning instructors. The following are considered to be serious violations:

• Plagiarism: the use of another’s ideas, data, or words without proper acknowledgement.
• Fabrication: the use of invented information or the falsification of research or other findings with the intent to deceive.
• Collusion: improper collaboration with another in preparing assignments or projects.
• Cheating: an act of deception by which a student misrepresents that he or she has mastered information on an academic exercise that he or she has not mastered.
• Academic Misconduct: tampering with grades, or taking part in obtaining or distributing any part of student work that is not his or her own.

Violation or suspected violation will be investigated and pursued according to specific college/university procedures.

**Identity Authentication**

The college/university, PLS 3rd Learning, and students share a joint responsibility to ensure that each student’s contribution in an online course activity comes from that student alone. For the student, this responsibility has two parts:

1. Students are responsible for positively ensuring that every contribution to an online course created with the student’s computer account is made by the student alone. Contributions covered under this policy include: written assignments; quiz and exam submissions; discussion forum postings; live participation in text-based chat sessions, phone conferences, and videoconferences. If a student allows another person to write or make any kind of submission to an online activity in the student’s name, then this constitutes cheating and will be treated as a violation of academic honesty.
2. Students are responsible for ensuring the integrity of their computer account security by following the actions required of them by the PLS 3rd Learning Acceptable Use Policy. These actions include keeping passcodes private,
updating passcodes when required by PLS 3rd Learning, and reporting breaches of the security policy to the IT Helpdesk.

**Course Evaluation**
The evaluation of learner work will be based on the defined criteria for learner assessments. The criteria for learner assessments will be outlined for students prior to instructional activities and engagement with student learning targets (outcomes). Grading is based solely on the evaluation of student learning targets and defined criteria for learner assessments.

Formative assessment of learning outcomes is conducted throughout the course, using a variety of means that include the following: completion of assessments; constructive contributions to class discussions (whole-class as well as small-group); sharing of valuable, pertinent, and/or applicable ideas and experiences; and active participation in online interactions. It is expected that each participant will contribute to the academic quality of the course.

Summative assessment includes the completion of weekly learning activities and assignments for which the participant will need to synthesize class content, apply it to his or her own practice, and complete a plan for implementing the major components of content and skill acquired during the course.
## Course Outcome Correlations With INTASC Standards for Teachers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Standard</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Course Outcomes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Standard 1: Learner Development</strong></td>
<td>The teacher understands how learners grow and develop, recognizing that patterns of learning and development vary individually within and across the cognitive, linguistic, social, emotional, and physical areas, and designs and implements developmentally appropriate and challenging learning experiences.</td>
<td>1, 4, 5, 6, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 18, 19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Standard 2: Learning Differences</strong></td>
<td>The teacher uses understanding of individual differences and diverse cultures and communities to ensure inclusive learning environments that enable each learner to meet high standards.</td>
<td>2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 11, 12, 17, 18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Standard 3: Learning Environments</strong></td>
<td>The teacher works with others to create environments that support individual and collaborative learning, and that encourage positive social interaction, active engagement in learning, and self motivation.</td>
<td>2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 11, 12, 14, 16, 17, 18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Standard 4: Content Knowledge</strong></td>
<td>The teacher understands the central concepts, tools of inquiry, and structures of the discipline(s) he or she teaches and creates learning experiences that make these aspects of the discipline accessible and meaningful for learners to assure mastery of the content.</td>
<td>1, 2, 3, 4, 11, 12, 13, 14, 18, 19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Standard 5: Application of Content</strong></td>
<td>The teacher understands how to connect concepts and use differing perspectives to engage learners in critical thinking, creativity, and collaborative problem solving related to authentic local and global issues.</td>
<td>1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 11, 12, 13, 14, 17, 18, 19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Standard 6: Assessment</strong></td>
<td>The teacher understands and uses multiple methods of assessment to engage learners in their own growth, to monitor learner progress, and to guide the teacher’s and learner’s decision making.</td>
<td>2, 3, 4, 6, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 17, 19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Standard 7: Planning for Instruction

The teacher plans instruction that supports every student in meeting rigorous learning goals by drawing upon knowledge of content areas, curriculum, cross-disciplinary skills, and pedagogy, as well as knowledge of learners and the community context.

Standard 8: Instructional Strategies

The teacher understands and uses a variety of instructional strategies to encourage learners to develop deep understanding of content areas and their connections, and to build skills to apply knowledge in meaningful ways.

Standard 9: Professional Learning and Ethical Practice

The teacher engages in ongoing professional learning and uses evidence to continually evaluate his/her practice, particularly the effects of his/her choices and actions on others (learners, families, other professionals, and the community), and adapts practice to meet the needs of each learner.

Standard 10: Leadership and Collaboration

The teacher seeks appropriate leadership roles and opportunities to take responsibility for student learning, to collaborate with learners, families, colleagues, other school professionals, and community members to ensure learner growth, and to advance the profession.

The Interstate New Teacher Assessment and the Support for Consortium (InTASC) standards were developed by the Council of the Chief State School Officers and member states. Copies may be downloaded from the Council’s website at http://www.ccsso.org/intasc.


**Course Outcome Correlations With National Board of Professional Teaching (NBPTS) Five Core Propositions**

**Proposition 1: Teachers are Committed to Students and Their Learning.**

- NBCTs are dedicated to making knowledge accessible to all students. They believe all students can learn.  
  - Course Outcomes: 1, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 10, 11, 17, 18

- They treat students equitably. They recognize the individual differences that distinguish their students from one another and they take account for these differences in their practice.  
  - Course Outcomes: 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 11, 17, 18

- NBCTs understand how students develop and learn.  
  - Course Outcomes: 2, 5, 6, 9, 11, 12, 17

- They respect the cultural and family differences students bring to their classroom.  
  - Course Outcomes: 2, 4, 16, 17

- They are concerned with their students’ self-concept, their motivation and the effects of learning on peer relationships.  
  - Course Outcomes: 2, 4, 5, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 14, 18

- NBCTs are also concerned with the development of character and civic responsibility.  
  - Course Outcomes: 12, 15, 17

**Proposition 2: Teachers Know the Subjects They Teach and How to Teach Those Subjects to Students.**

- NBCTs have mastery over the subject(s) they teach. They have a deep understanding of the history, structure and real-world applications of the subject.  
  - Course Outcomes: 1, 2, 3, 12, 13, 15, 19

- They have skill and experience in teaching it, and they are very familiar with the skills gaps and preconceptions students may bring to the subject.  
  - Course Outcomes: 4, 5, 6, 7, 11, 12, 16, 18, 19

- They are able to use diverse instructional strategies to teach for understanding.  
  - Course Outcomes: 2, 3, 4, 11, 12, 19

**Proposition 3: Teachers are Responsible for Managing and Monitoring Student Learning.**

- NBCTs deliver effective instruction. They move fluently through a range of instructional techniques, keeping students motivated, engaged and focused.  
  - Course Outcomes: 2, 3, 4, 7, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 18, 19
They know how to engage students to ensure a disciplined learning environment, and how to organize instruction to meet instructional goals.

NBCTs know how to assess the progress of individual students as well as the class as a whole.

They use multiple methods for measuring student growth and understanding, and they can clearly explain student performance to parents.

**Proposition 4: Teachers Think Systematically about Their Practice and Learn from Experience.**

NBCTs model what it means to be an educated person – they read, they question, they create and they are willing to try new things.

They are familiar with learning theories and instructional strategies and stay abreast of current issues in American education.

They critically examine their practice on a regular basis to deepen knowledge, expand their repertoire of skills, and incorporate new findings into their practice.

**Proposition 5: Teachers are Members of Learning Communities.**

NBCTs collaborate with others to improve student learning.

They are leaders and actively know how to seek and build partnerships with community groups and businesses.

They work with other professionals on instructional policy, curriculum development and staff development.

They can evaluate school progress and the allocation of resources in order to meet state and local education objectives.

They know how to work collaboratively with parents to engage them productively in the work of the school.

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Bibliography


