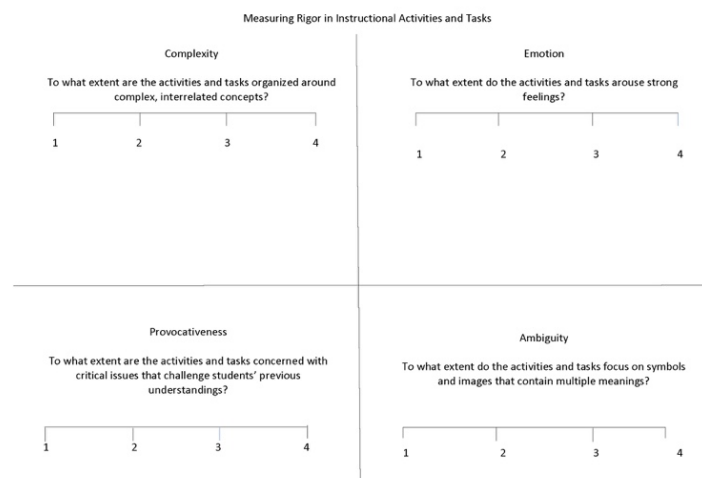**Instructional Tool—*Measuring Rigor Scale***

Maintaining the intellectual rigor of instructional activities and tasks is essential to helping

students meet the high expectations of College and Career Readiness Standards. The *Measuring*

Rigor Scale in Figure 3.6, adapted from Strong, Silver, and Perini (2001), is a tool that provides

teachers with a research–based, comprehensive process for determining what kinds of rigor are

addressed or lacking in a given set of instructional activities and tasks.

Figure 3.6 Measuring Rigor in Instructional Activities and Tasks Adapted from "Teaching what Matters Most: Standards and Strategies for Raising Student Achievement" by R. Strong, H. Silver, & J. Matthew. 2001. Copyright 2001 by ASCD. Adapted with permission.

Measuring Rigor in Instructional Activities and Tasks

Complexity

To what extent are the activities and tasks organized around complex, interrelated concepts?

1   2   3   4

Emotion

To what extent do the activities and tasks arouse strong feelings?

1   2   3   4

Provocativeness

To what extent are the activities and tasks concerned with critical issues that challenge students' previous understandings?

1   2   3   4

Ambiguity

To what extent do the activities and tasks focus on symbols and images that contain multiple meanings?

1   2   3   4

Why Use This Tool: Rigor as it relates to curriculum and instruction is too often thought of as

the quantity or difficulty of the content to be covered. *The Measuring Rigor Scale* is based on a

broader conceptualization of the term—"the goal of helping students develop the capacity to

understand content that is *complex*, *ambiguous*, *provocative*, and *personally or emotionally challenging*" (Strong, Silver, & Perini, 2001, p. 11). Embracing this definition and tool enables you to develop rigorous activities and tasks that will establish high expectations and help students understand complex ideas and difficult concepts.

When to Use This Tool: Considering the extent to which you have established the rigor of your instructional activities and tasks is something you must do for virtually every lesson you design. This is true across all grade levels and content areas. At the same time, the extent to which you address each dimension of rigor may vary from lesson to lesson. So, a tool that helps you think through how to prioritize those dimensions can be used on a daily basis.

How to Use This Tool:

1. Take your *Measuring Rigor Scale* and your lesson activities and tasks. Look at the first quadrant, Complexity. Consider these questions as you rate your lesson.

    a. To what degree does your lesson:

        i. ask students to synthesize information across multiple texts?

        ii. have students transfer knowledge to new and unfamiliar situations?

        iii. move students beyond the surface level to deeper layers of meaning?

    b. Now decide where your activities and tasks rate on the four-point scale. If appropriate, consider ways to increase the rigor.

2. Now move to the next quadrant, Emotion. Consider these questions as you rate your lesson.

    a. To what degree does your lesson:

        i. challenge students' feelings?

ii. trigger empathy for characters or causes?

iii. elicit sympathy for characters or causes?

b. Now decide where your activities and tasks rate on the four-point scale. If appropriate, consider ways to increase the rigor.

3. Now move to the next quadrant, Ambiguity. Consider these questions as you rate your lesson.

a. To what degree does your lesson contain symbols or images that:

i. leave students in a state of suspension?

ii. engage students in divergent thinking?

iii. require cognitive stamina?

b. Now decide where your activities and tasks rate on the four-point scale. If appropriate, consider ways to increase the rigor.

4. Now move to the last quadrant, Provocativeness. Consider these questions as you rate your lesson.

a. To what degree does your lesson engage students in:

i. identifying problems?

ii. dealing with dilemmas?

iii. analyzing multiple perspectives to create a new position or perspective?

b. Now decide where your activities and tasks rate on the four-point scale. If appropriate, consider ways to increase the rigor.

This tool is meant to help teachers find ways to make their activities and tasks more rigorous. None the less, it is important to note your activities and tasks do not have to be

equally rigorous in all quadrants. Some activities and tasks might lean more heavily to one quadrant than the other three because of the nature of the materials or the learning target.

We believe that this tool is as relevant for primary teachers as it is for intermediate teachers. An example of *Complexity* for primary might be comparing different versions of the gingerbread man story. For *Emotion* you could consider a book like *Ira Sleeps Over* and identify the emotions both Ira and Reggie felt and why they felt that way. *Ambiguity* can be experienced when trying to understand the Princess's reaction to the Prince in *The Paper Bag Princess*. For the *Provocative* dimension, students can take a position about whether Goldilocks was right or wrong in entering the Three Bears' house.