

## Vigor not rigor: A culturally relevant learning and studying pathway for Black students

The term rigor and the strong academic climate it produces is the latest rage in schools seeking high test scores. Academic vigor is mentioned, but it doesn't hold the attractive power dynamics of rigor.

A question for this rigor vs. vigor discussion:

*Which concept is more academically appropriate and culturally relevant for Black American students?*

Rigor was introduced as a result of Bill Daggett's re-envisioning the traditional "Three R's" as "Relationships, Relevance, and Rigor" (<https://preilly.wordpress.com/2008/06/05/the-three-rs/>) much debate has occurred since then. Any number of schools uses the term "rigor" to describe how they want students to learn and study.

### **Vigor is more academically appropriate for each student**

The public and educators want more **rigor** because it reflects high expectations which lead to self-control and maturity. Proponents say rigor requires a depth of studying that really makes students think--and think deeply--giving them the academic discipline needed for career, college, and citizenship. All of this is true.

**"Vigor includes rigor."** ~ Joe Bowers

Proponents of **vigor** say we can have the same amount and quality that comes from long hours (longer school days/years) and doing the constant hard work in deep research, but without the sense of drudgery. Vigor inspires students to work hard too. And, vigor is even fun.

"Vigor is bigger than rigor." ~ Mark A. Thompson

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NZzUgNfuoiU>

"Vigor not rigor: Schools should be dream driven, not data driven" ~ Barry Lane

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wKbX7B97Iuo>

### **Vigor as more culturally appropriate for African American students**

Vigor fits Augusta Mann's "Nine Recurring African American Cultural Themes":

<http://vorcreatex.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/Augusta-Mann-Recurring-African-American-Cultural-and-Educational-Themes-Practices-and-Patterns-1.pdf>

- Spirituality
- Resilience
- Humanism
- Communalism
- Orality/Verbal Expressiveness
- Realness
- Personal Style/Uniqueness
- Emotional Vitality
- Musicality/Rhythm

Before accepting the value for **rigor**, looking more closely at the definition will help:

- strict,
- harsh
- severe,
- obsolete
- inflexible
- stringent

Does any of the above sound like a good description of a learning environment we would want for children?

Look more closely at the definitions for **vigor**:

- drive
- active strength
- energetic activity
- force
- flourish
- vitality

Does not vigor sound like a far more engaging and purposeful learning environment?

## Contrasting the relevance of academic rigor vs. academic vigor to African American cultural themes

<i>Augusta Mann's Nine Recurring African American Cultural Themes*</i>	<i>Rigor</i>	<i>Vigor</i>
<b>Spirituality</b> pervades the traditional African and African American ethos. It's based on the belief that all elements in the universe are of one substance (Spirit) & that all matter, animate or inanimate are merely different manifestations of the God force (Spirit)	<b>No</b> "Spirituality" is academically inappropriate; it's not rational	<b>Yes</b> Spirituality gives learning its aliveness & purpose
<b>Resilience</b> is the conscious need to bounce back from disappointment & disaster and to have the tools of humor & joy to renew life's energy. Resilience is related to verve. <i>Verve</i> is desire for creative extemporaneousness-a sense of utter antipathy for the mundane and monotonous, the ability to focus on & handle several issues at once. The idea of transformation (the process of becoming better) is informed by two distinct yet interrelated ideas, <i>verve</i> & resilience.	<b>No</b> "Verve" is academically inappropriate: it's too close to emotions & not logical or linear enough	<b>Yes</b> It is verve that drives inquiry/learning; verve gives rigor the "life" it needs to be real & authentic
<b>Humanism</b> describes the African view of the whole world as <i>vitalistic</i> (alive) & this <i>vitalism</i> is grounded in a sense of goodness.	<b>No</b> Humanism is not grounded in science	<b>Yes</b> Essence of vigor is vitality & aliveness
<b>Communalism</b> denotes awareness of the interdependence of people. One acts in accordance & the notion that the duty to one's family & social group is more important than individual privileges & rights.	<b>No</b> Purpose of rigor not chiefly communal	<b>Yes</b> Informs community sustainability
<b>Orality/Verbal Expressiveness</b> refers to the special importance attached to knowledge passed on through word of mouth & the cultivation of oral virtuosity.	<b>No</b> Orality is not as academic as writing	<b>Yes</b> Adds to, not subtracts from, academics
<b>Realness</b> refers to the need to face life the way it is without pretense. It's manifested by frankness of manner, casualness in social transactions, contempt for artificiality & falseness in human conduct, & an aversion to formality & standardization.	<b>No</b> Seen as having little to do with academics & studying	<b>Yes</b> Gives substance/ authenticity to purpose of academics
<b>Personal Style/Uniqueness</b> refers to the cultivation of a unique or distinctive personality or essence & putting one's own brand on an activity. It implies approaching life as if it were an artistic endeavor.	<b>No</b> Seen as having little to do with academics & studying	<b>Yes</b> Drives the depth/breadth of both rigor & vigor
<b>Emotional Vitality</b> expresses a sense of aliveness, animation, & openness conveyed in language, oral literature, song, dance, body language, folk poetry, & expressive thought.	<b>No</b> Seen as having little to do with academics & studying	<b>Yes</b> Matches perfectly with essences of vigor
<b>Musicality/Rhythm</b> demonstrates the connectedness of movement, music, dance, percussiveness, & rhythm, personified through the musical beat. Also implied is a rhythmic orientation toward life. Rhythm, the fundamental principle of human behavior, reigns as the basic ingredient of African American expressiveness.	<b>No</b> Musicality/ rhythm seen as having little to do with academics/studying	<b>Yes</b> Musicality/ rhythm adds to spirit/climate of academic study in classroom

**Rigor:** strictness, severity, or harshness [www.dictionary.com/browse/rigor?s=t](http://www.dictionary.com/browse/rigor?s=t)

**Vigor:** strength; vitality; energetic activity; intensity; healthy growth [www.dictionary.com/browse/vigor?s=t](http://www.dictionary.com/browse/vigor?s=t)

**Rigor** is about the levels/depth of thinking: recognizing/supporting/planning/assessing levels of thinking. It is not about: harder worksheets, AP/Honors courses, higher level books, or more work.

**Vigor:** Vigorous, dynamic, and enthusiastic learning; interactive, innovative, and collaborative environments; growth focused; organic and authentic; and reflective for teachers and students.

\*<http://vorcreatex.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/Augusta-Mann-Recurring-African-American-Cultural-and-Educational-Themes-Practices-and-Patterns.pdf>

***Proposed Action item***

AACI will form an action committee to look into and share the research, supporting or not, from a longitudinal study regarding the academic and pedagogical appropriateness of rigor and/or vigor.

AACI will also challenge Mayor Hogsett's charter schools to recruit 4 teachers to implement a [Participatory Action Research](#) study--to be published for a series of public conversations--that will compare/contrast rigor vs. vigor approaches to academic outcomes in their classrooms.

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