Classroom Culture

The rising educator analyzes the underlying strategies and active practices that skilled educators must implement to support a sustainable, equitable classroom culture.

Key Method

The rising educator identifies and evaluates successful strategies for implementing and sustaining the critical components of equitable classroom culture in a learning space.

Method Components

Critical Components of Classroom Culture

Skilled educators accept responsibility for planning and delivering instruction that brings the five critical components described below to life for all learners.

At times, external factors beyond the classroom walls will affect an educator's ability to sustain all five critical components. Skilled educators find ways wherever possible to ensure that these five critical components are present in all aspects of classroom culture.

Critical Component #1: Honoring Student Experience

When asking students to explore issues of personal and social identity, teachers must provide safe spaces in which students are seen, valued, cared for, and respected. It is also important that students have opportunities to learn from one another's varied experiences and perspectives. To create this learning environment, teachers need to skillfully draw on student experiences to enrich the curriculum.

Critical Component #2: Thoughtful Classroom Setup and Structure

Without saying a word, classrooms send messages about diversity, relationship building, communication, and the roles of teachers and students. The classroom setup should be student-centered. Specifics will vary from teacher to teacher and class to class, but common elements include the following:

- *Classroom milieu.* Classrooms should be decorated with multicultural images that mirror students' backgrounds and showcase the diversity of our society.
- *Arrangement of furniture and supplies.* The arrangement will look different depending on age group and subject, but all teachers can draw on these goals when setting up a classroom: supporting collaboration, fostering dialogue, encouraging ownership, and ensuring comfort.
- *Student roles and responsibilities.* Classrooms will be most effective when they are structured to maximize students' voices and participation.
- *Classroom norms.* Norms and expectations should take into account different cultural and communication styles, gender differences, language needs, and the desire to challenge stereotypes. Students should be involved in setting classroom norms to generate buy-in.

Critical Component #3: Shared Inquiry and Dialogue

Dialogue is more than conversation. It is also different than debates, in which someone wins and someone loses. Dialogue requires openness to new ideas and collective learning. This is not an easy practice; for students (and teachers) to engage in dialogue, they must build and exercise specific skills:

- *Listening.* Deeply listen to what others say and to the feelings, experiences, and wisdom behind what they say.
- *Humility.* Recognize that, however passionately we hold ideas and opinions, other people may hold pieces of the puzzle that we don't.
- *Respect.* Trust the integrity of others, believe they have a right to their opinions (even when different from your own), and value others enough to risk sharing ideas.
- *Trust.* Build a safe space to explore new ideas and work through conflicts, controversies, and painful moments that may arise when talking about issues of injustice and oppression.
- *Voice.* Speak the truth as we see it and ask questions about things we don't know or understand, particularly on topics related to identity, power, and justice.

Critical Component #4: Social and Emotional Safety
Creating a safe climate takes time and work. These are some of the most important components:

- Active teaching of social-emotional skills
- Attention to creating positive relationships
- Bullying prevention and intervention
- Community building
- Explicit focus on understanding and appreciating differences
- Meaningful conflict resolution
- Teaching students to challenge bias and exclusion

Critical Component #5: Values-Based Classroom Management
Classroom management is central to classroom culture. Classroom management systems must support safe, inclusive communities by promoting high standards for respectful interaction; incorporating student-generated classroom norms; teaching conflict resolution; and actively addressing all instances of bias, bullying, exclusion, or disrespect.

Disciplinary incidents must transition from punishment to opportunities for growth, restitution, and community building. For community respect to be a core classroom value, students should not be cast out of the group but rather given the support needed to be positive, contributing members of their classroom community.

Finally, classroom management practices must reflect fairness, equity, and cultural awareness.

Suggested Activities
It is recommended that rising educators visit the same learning environment (and not their own classrooms where they are students) as observers at least two times for at least 40 minutes per visit. These observations will form the source material for demonstrating what the rising educator learned about classroom culture in the micro-credential submission.

The learning environment that the rising educator will observe does not need to be one he/she visited prior to working on the micro-credential submission. As an observer, the rising educator will be a "fly on the wall" taking detailed notes through the lens of critical practices to support classroom culture.

The rising educator should seek to earn this micro-credential after developing a deep understanding of the five critical components to support a sustainable, equitable classroom culture.

Educators Rising Standards Alignment
This micro-credential is aligned to the following Educators Rising Standards:

I. Understanding the Profession

Supporting Research

- "Critical Practices for Anti-Bias Education." *Teaching Tolerance*, 2014,
  http://www.tolerance.org/sites/default/files/general/PDA Critical Practices_0.pdf

- "Social Justice Standards: The Teaching Tolerance Anti-Bias Framework." *Teaching Tolerance*, 2016,
  http://www.tolerance.org/sites/default/files/general/TT_Social Justice Standards_web_0.pdf

- Squire, K. D., MaKinster, J. G., Barnett, M., Luehmann, A. L., & Barab, S. L. (2003, June 6). Designed curriculum and local culture: Acknowledging the primacy of classroom culture. Science Education, 87, 468-489,
  http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/sce.10084/abstract

Resources

- Critical Practices for Anti-Bias Education (strongly recommended reading)
  http://www.tolerance.org/publication/classroom-culture

- Critical Practices for Anti-Bias Education
  http://www.tolerance.org/sites/default/files/general/PDA Critical Practices_0.pdf

Sample Videos of Positive Classroom Cultures in Action
- National Board videos (access to this resource requires free Educators Rising registration)
  https://www.educatorsrising.org/virtualcampus/getinspired/national-board-videos

- NEA Diversity Toolkit
  http://www.nea.org/tools/diversity-toolkit.html

Submission Guidelines & Evaluation Criteria

To complete the application for this micro-credential, the rising educator will complete the Educators Rising Classroom Culture submission form. To earn the micro-credential, the rising educator must earn a score of "Highly Skilled" or "Commendable" on all components of the Part 1, 2, and 3 rubrics. If the rising educator does not earn the micro-credential, he/she is encouraged to reflect on where the submission fell short, address those areas successfully per the rubric, and resubmit. Remember to download the Educators Rising Classroom Culture submission form for compiling your submission here:
http://bit.ly/EdRisingClassCulture

Part 1. Overview Questions

- **Instructional Context Overview**: Complete the questionnaire provided in the submission form.

	"Highly Skilled"	"Commendable"	"Developing/Emerging"
Comprehensiveness	All the required contextual information is provided, and the descriptions are thorough, highly relevant, and clear.	Much of the required contextual information is provided, and the descriptions are aligned and clear.	A significant portion of the required contextual information is missing, irrelevant, and/or unclear.

Writing: Clarity and Mechanics	Flawless execution	There are one or two unclear moments or errors in mechanics, usage, spelling, punctuation, or grammar.	There are three or more unclear moments or errors in mechanics, usage, spelling, punctuation, or grammar.

- **My Perspective Essay**: Compose a well-developed essay based on the following prompt (500-word maximum; use the provided submission form).

  - Describe two past experiences you have had as a learner in which your teacher succeeded in facilitating a sustainable, equitable classroom culture. Describe specific strategies the teacher implemented to do this and what that meant for you and your peers. Use the five critical components of classroom culture as a guide for framing the experiences your teacher facilitated.

	"Highly Skilled"	"Commendable"	"Developing"	"Emerging"
Quality and Depth	The rising educator's work reflects clear and comprehensive explorations of the questions in the prompt. The analysis is profound and cogent.	The rising educator's work reflects commendable understanding of classroom culture, a quality analysis, and a satisfactory examination of the prompt.	The rising educator's work reflects partial or developing understanding of classroom culture, occasionally superficial, analysis, and/or a limited examination of the prompt.	The rising educator's work reflects an incomplete understanding of classroom culture, limited analysis, and/or a very limited examination of the prompt.
Writing: Clarity and Mechanics	Flawless execution	There are one or two unclear moments or errors in mechanics, usage, spelling, punctuation, or grammar.	There are three or four unclear moments or errors in mechanics, usage, spelling, punctuation, or grammar.	There are more than four unclear moments or errors in mechanics, usage, spelling, punctuation, or grammar.

Part 2. Artifacts
Observation Notes: Visits 1 and 2

Use the spaces on the submission form to write what you observed during your visits to the learning spaces. Your notes should relate directly to the critical components in each section.

Tips to make your note-taking most effective:

- <u>Focus on the critical components of classroom culture.</u> It's impossible to document everything you observe! Stay focused on what matters, and avoid cluttering your notes with information that isn't relevant to examples of how the classroom culture is developed or maintained.

- <u>Be specific and descriptive</u>. Use descriptive words to document what you observe. You can even include quotes from the teacher or students that bring these concepts to life.

- ▪ <u>Make note of your insights and thoughts as you observe</u>. Jot down why you are making note of this activity, quote, classroom setup, etc. You could simply write "ex. of honoring student experience." This will help you remember the importance of the event when you write your notes or essays later.

|	"Highly Skilled"	"Commendable"	"Developing"	"Emerging"
Visit 1 Notes	Notes thoroughly reflect relevant, comprehensive observations from the experience per the assignment	Notes reflect wholly on-topic observations from the experience per the assignment	Notes reflect some observations that don't contribute to or reflect a strong understanding of classroom culture components	Notes reflect a limited understanding of classroom culture components
Visit 2 Notes	Notes thoroughly reflect relevant, comprehensive observations from the experience per the assignment and a deep understanding of classroom culture components	Notes reflect largely on-topic observations from the experience per the assignment and indicate familiarity with the classroom culture components	Notes reflect some observations that don't contribute to or reflect a strong understanding of the classroom culture components	Notes reflect a limited understanding of the classroom culture components

Part 3: Reflection
Compose a reflective essay using the following guiding questions (500-word maximum; use the provided submission form).

- ▪ In what specific ways did the learning space you observed succeed in maintaining an equitable classroom culture? In what specific ways did it fall short?

- ▪ What are your recommendations to strengthen the classroom culture in the learning space you observed?

- ▪ What are your specific plans to prepare yourself to implement and sustain an equitable classroom culture in the future when you have the main responsibility for a learning space?

	"Highly Skilled"	"Commendable"	"Developing"	"Emerging"
Quality and Depth	The rising educator's work reflects a clear, comprehensive understanding of classroom culture, a profound analysis, and a comprehensive examination of the prompt.	The rising educator's work reflects a commendable understanding of classroom culture, a quality analysis, and a satisfactory examination of the prompt.	The rising educator's work reflects a partial or developing understanding of classroom culture, occasionally superficial analysis, and/or a limited examination of the prompt.	The rising educator's work reflects an incomplete understanding of classroom culture, a limited analysis, and/or a very limited examination of the prompt.
Writing: Clarity and Mechanics	Flawless execution	There are one or two unclear moments or errors in mechanics,	There are three or four unclear moments or errors in	There are more than four unclear moments or errors
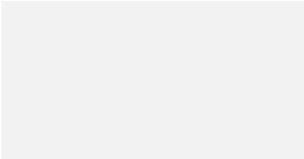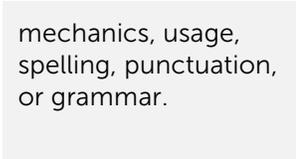
	usage, spelling, punctuation, or grammar.	mechanics, usage, spelling, punctuation, or grammar.	in mechanics, usage, spelling, punctuation, or grammar.