Building a Sense of Belonging and Community for Newcomer Students

Competency

The educator cultivates a welcoming and inclusive classroom environment by fostering relationships, celebrating cultural diversity, facilitating peer connections, and promoting practices that help newcomer students feel valued, safe, and connected to the school community.

Key Method

The educator exemplifies a welcoming and inclusive classroom for newcomers through strategies that support the legal aspects of educating newcomer students, the celebration of diversity, and creation of environments that support connection, safety and value.

Method Components

Exploring the World of Newcomer Students

Who is a Newcomer?

A newcomer student is generally defined as a K-12 student who was born outside the United States and has recently arrived, typically within the last three years, and who is still learning English. This definition often includes students who may also be identified as English learners, asylees, refugees, unaccompanied youth, undocumented youth, migratory students, or those with interrupted or limited education.

Educational Equity

Educational equity means that all students, regardless of culture, race, economic status, background, or other personal circumstances should have equal access to opportunities, resources, and support needed to achieve academically.

Levels of Culture (from Hammond's Culture Tree)

Surface - This level is composed of observable and concrete elements of culture such as food, dress, and music.
Shallow - This level is composed of the unspoken rules around everyday social interactions and norms such as attitudes towards elders, concepts of time, nonverbal communication, and rules about eye contact, or appropriate touching.
Deep - This level is composed of tacit knowledge and unconscious assumptions that govern our worldview. It also contains the cosmology that guides ethics, spirituality, health, and theories of group harmony.

Newcomer Students' Challenges

Language Dominance and Identity— Students may feel pressure to fit in, thus feeling shame about or hiding their identity, which may lead to feelings of isolation.

Translanguaging and Cognitive Load—Translanguaging, previously known as code-switching, can create cognitive load and mental strain on multilingual students. Multilingual students may experience mental fatigue, especially when being precise in language usage is necessary.

Language Discrimination and Stigma—Multilingual learners may experience discrimination based on their language use. These actions may impact learners' self-esteem.

Communication Anxiety—Students may worry about making a mistake when speaking. They also may fear facing negative judgments or bullying from others.

Social Isolation—Students may feel excluded from conversations.

Academic Pressure—Academic pressure can contribute to stress when a student is learning a new language in addition to meeting grade-level expectations.

Family and Cultural Expectations— Students may have conflicts between family and new cultural expectations related to language use.

Loss of Heritage Language—Multilingual learners may experience a sense of loss if they do not maintain their heritage or native language. This can lead to disconnectedness from cultural roots.

Limited Mental Health Resources—There may be limited access to resources available to learners in their native languages. This can hinder their ability to seek help.

Acculturation Stress—Adapting to a new culture and language can lead to stress and anxiety or feelings of alienation.

Pressure to Conform—Newcomer students may face pressure to conform, but their preference may differ from the dominant culture.

Educators as Advocates

Educators have a unique position to advocate for meaningful changes that positively impact students, schools, and communities. By leveraging their expertise, passion, and influence, educators can contribute to building a more equitable and inclusive educational landscape.

Educators need to ensure that newcomer students are not only receiving all the services they are entitled to under the law, but have access to all programs in which every other student can participate.

Here are some ways you can become an effective advocate:

- Stay informed about educational policies and issues affecting your students.
- Identify areas within your community that require advocacy.
- Cultivate relationships with fellow educators, parents, students, and policy makers.
- Share real-life experiences faced by your students to illustrate the need for change.
- Join or engage with professional organizations related to education advocacy.
- Use social media platforms to raise awareness.
- Attend school board meetings, town halls etc. to express your concerns.
- Contribute opinion pieces to publications.

- Reach out to elected officials individually or with a group to advocate for your students.
- Plan workshops to educate the community and stakeholders.
- Involve students in advocacy efforts.
- Offer your expertise in education to local organizations that align with your advocacy goals.

Internal School-based Supports for Newcomers

It is important to use approaches which recognize cultural norms, values, and communication styles. These may include:

- Observation and listening
- Asking respectful questions
- Noticing nonverbal signals and gestures
- Use cultural resources
- Build relationships
- Have an open attitude
- Adapt your approach to align with others
- Reflect and learn from mistakes

Respectful Communication thatIncludes Technology-based Tools:

- Visual aids to transcend language barriers
- Comprehensible language by avoiding jargon and idioms
- Bilingual educators or interpreters to facilitate direct communication
- Conferences and other scheduled family events
- Translating materials to ensure information reaches all parties
- Digital communication can effectively bridge language gaps

Family and Community Engagement.

Community engagement cultivates a sense of pride and ownership in the educational institution. When families and community members feel invested in school and student success, they contribute to creating and maintaining supportive environments for students. Some strategies to consider in your work are:

- **Open Dialogue and Communication Channels**—These are regular meetings and other platforms (e.g., newsletters and messages)

- **Partnerships and Collaborations—**These are opportunities for community members and families to have input and feel a sense of community pride.
- **Volunteer Opportunities—**These are roles that tap into contributors' skill sets and leverage them to enhance community involvement
- **Family Workshops and Events—**Connect with families with relevant topics to provide opportunities for families to actively engage in their child's education.
- **Student-led Initiatives and Student Achievements—**These activities help to empower your students to organize or participate in events to develop their connection to community and build leadership skills.
- **Cultural Celebrations—**These activities and events recognize and celebrate cultural diversity.
- **Advisory Councils—**Establish these bodies and include parents, community leaders and members, and educators to provide insights and feedback.
- **Digital Platforms—**Use technology to stay connected to the community using social media, websites, and other digital and online resources.

Supporting Rationale and Research

What is Culturally Responsive Teaching
https://www.edweek.org/teaching-learning/culturally-responsive-teaching-culturally-responsive-pedagogy/2022/04

The Dire Consequences of Family Separation for Refugee Mental Health (April 2018) "Analyses of in-depth qualitative interviews revealed that many refugee participants experienced family separation as their greatest source of distress since resettlement. Refugees described their fears for family members still in conflict situations and their feelings of powerlessness to help them"
The Dire Consequences of Family Separation for Refugee Mental Health

Inclusive Language Guidelines (2021) "...the guide is written to raise awareness, direct learning, and support the use of culturally sensitive terms and phrases that center the voices and perspectives of those who have been historically marginalized or stereotyped. The guide also explains the

origins of problematic terms and phrases and offers suitable, more contemporary alternatives." Inclusive Language Guide

Helping Newcomer Students Ease Trauma and Stress (Feb. 2023) "Newcomer students often arrive in the country on their own and have experienced trauma. Mindfulness is a proven strategy to help ease stress and trauma. Mendez High School is a community school with community partnerships that target the needs of all students." Helping Newcomer Students Ease Trauma and Stress | NEA

'The Newcomers': Refugee Students' First Year in a U.S. Classroom (2018) "A new book tells the powerful story about 22 students from around the world and their determination to find a place in their new home - and the educators who help them on their journey." 'The Newcomers': Refugee Students' First Year in a U.S. Classroom | NEA

How Educators Can Support Immigrant and Migrant Students (March 2021) "Welcoming and inclusive classrooms help all students thrive. For students new to the U.S., culturally responsive pedagogy and social-emotional and mental health supports are among best practices to help students and their families thrive in their new community. NEA established a platform where educators can share stories that draw attention to the plight of children and young people crossing the southern border—submit today." How Educators Can Support Immigrant and Migrant Students | NEA

Teens: Supporting a Friend Who is Struggling Emotionally (July 2024) "When a friend is going through a tough time, one of the best ways you can help them is by offering your support and showing you care." Teens: Supporting a Friend Who Is Struggling Emotionally | Kaiser Permanente

9 Ways to Help a Child Who's Had Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) (July 2024) "After a child has had ACEs, the best thing you can do is try to prevent future harm while helping the child heal from the experiences they've already had. Sometimes it can be hard to know where to start, or what to do. Remember, it's never too late to make changes, big or small. Here are some tips." 9 Ways to Help a Child Who's Had Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) | Kaiser Permanente

Resources

Cultural Standards
Alaska Standards for Culturally Responsive Schools | Alaska Native Knowledge Network

Standards, Indicators, and Evidences for Evaluating Culturally Responsive Teaching A publication of SERRC

Levels of Culture
Levels Of Culture For Culturally Relevant Teaching - Zenned Math

The Cultural Tree(s)
The Cultural Tree: Getting to Know Yourself and Your Students - CENTER FOR THE PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION OF TEACHERS

Culture Tree Graphic

Funds of Knowledge
The Funds of Knowledge approach

Bing Videos

Funds of Knowledge Toolkit

Newcomers Toolkits
Newcomer Toolkit | NCELA - English Language Acquisition & Language Instruction Educational Programs

Newcomer Tool Kit (PDF)

School Climate Improvement Resource Package | National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments (NCSSLE)

Language Acquisition. https://ncela.ed.gov/family-toolkit

Other
Dear Colleague Letter: English Learner Students and Limited English Proficient Parents (01/7/2015) | Colorín Colorado

Five strategies to welcome newcomers into your classroom

Basic guidelines - Infographics - LibGuides at St Paul's High School- Canada

Infographic Templates

Fact Sheet: Ensuring English Learner Students Can Participate Meaningfully and Equally in Educational Programs

Strategies for ELL Success

How to Create a Welcoming Classroom Environment for ELLs | Colorín Colorado

Educator Support | NCELA - English Language Acquisition & Language Instruction Educational Programs

Overview of Culturally Responsive Practices : The Culture Tree.

States' Standards for Teachers Don't Define Culturally Responsive Teaching, Study Argues

Provide Sentence Frames or Sentence Stems

Google Translate

A Toolkit for Educators of Immigrant and Refugee Students in Secondary Schools

50 Strategies to Support Multilingual Learners | Heinemann

Twenty Ways You Can Help Your Children Succeed At School

Building Strong Parent-Educator Partnerships

Tips for Parents: Parent-Teacher Conferences

School Attendance: A Key to Success

When to Call Your Child's Teacher

Submission Guidelines & Evaluation Criteria

To earn this micro-credential, you must receive a passing score in Parts 1 and 3, and be proficient in all components in Part 2.

Part 1. Overview Questions (Provides Context)

400-600 words.
Please do not include any information that will make you identifiable to your reviewers. It may be helpful to restate the question in your response.

Please answer all the following questions (please number each individual answer so your assessor can easily evaluate):

1. Describe your learning environment (consider district-level, school-level and classroom-level) by sharing background information that is important to understand the context of your school. Consider population, demographics, and any relevant cultural information, and special considerations regarding student characteristics. Be mindful not to reveal anything confidential.
2. How have you helped, or how can you welcome newcomers and their families into your inclusive classroom environment?
3. What do you believe is your role in introducing and celebrating newcomers as they navigate peer connections and new environments?
4. Share a strategy you employ to connect multilingual learners while celebrating cultural diversity.
5. Share practices and routines currently in place in your learning environment that make newcomer students feel safe, valued, and connected in their new communities.

Passing:
Response addresses all required components as outlined in the overview section. Supporting evidence includes specific examples from the learning environment. Writing is organized and easy to understand.

Part 2. Work Examples/Artifacts/Evidence

To earn this micro-credential, please submit the following five artifacts as evidence of your learning. See the Rubric for the passing criteria.

*Please do not include any information that will make you or your students identifiable to your reviewers.

Artifact 1: A Welcoming Environment

- Show how your learning space is inclusive to all students while being welcoming to newcomers who may also be multilingual learners. Pick one of the two options below:
- Upload a two- to four-minute video showing the physical layout and decor of your classroom. Narrate and/or caption your film to clearly show the key elements that address where you have specific decor that embraces culturally responsive learning and the various identities that make up your learning community.

OR

- Create a photo essay showing the physical layout and decor of your classroom (can be a slideshow or document of 15-20 photos). Caption each photo to clearly share where you have specific decor that embraces culture and the various identities that make up your learning community.

Artifact 2: Social and Emotional Development for School Success and Beyond

Share a lesson (a template is available for reference in the Resources section) in which students connect their understanding of the levels of their individual culture while practicing collaboration and cooperation. Define whether this is a whole group (possibly a morning meeting-type of activity) or a small group focus. Please clearly label the bullet points below in your lesson plan:

- Grade level
- Time needed
- At least one cultural standard and one content-area standard
- Learning objective(s)/outcome(s)
- How participants engage with the three levels of culture: surface, shallow, and deep. (See Resources section for guidance and examples of state standards).
- Connections beyond the classroom

- Considerations for various learning levels, accommodations for individualized learning plans as well as access and inclusion for multilingual learners.

Artifact 3: Meeting the Academic Needs of Newcomers (legal aspects...)

1. Research the pathway your district has in place for evaluating and placing learners into support programs. Who are the providers and what is your role in communication among providers?
2. Create an infographic (see Resources section for information about making an infographic as needed) that can guide someone an educator in assessing and connecting any newcomer to accessing their new learning environment. Include:
    a. How to connect to parents/guardians in the language they can best understand
    b. What information is important to share to parents/guardians
    c. How to gain information about prior educational experiences
    d. Which support providers are available and how to communicate with each

Artifact 4: Family/Community Partnerships to Support Newcomers

1. Research educational and community supports in your region that assist newcomers in your educational system.
2. Create a document in table form that shares 5-10 supports. Include the name and contact information for each, a working electronic link and a short summary of what is offered. Write a short summary or introduction for this piece that includes specifics about which country and cultures your document supports.
3. Share with a colleague and report their reactions and any suggestions if offered.

Artifact 5: Strong Connections!

1. Create a parent toolkit that is specific to your learning environment. This will be a usable document that you will be able to share with parents.
2. Parent Toolkit:
    a. Create a Student/Family Intake Form. This form will be completed by parents/guardians and will aid all in understanding about newcomer students. include language and background educational information. How will you make this form accessible to all newcomer families? State how it meets multiple language needs: electronic fill-out,handwritten, etc.

b. Language Supports: Share how the school will communicate with the family.
c. School District 101: How will you navigate the basics of your school/classroom system: how to look up and interpret grades; how to get in touch with a teacher; how to understand/interpret report cards; how to access online and printed communications; how to pay for or sign up for free or reduced meals.
d. Parent/guardian participation in school activities/functions. Share a calendar of events (state which method: on paper, electronic). Profile the tools you use to help make newcomer families feel welcome. Make a list of modes of travel newcomers and their families can access to travel to the event including any public transport schedules.
e. Cultural Integration: Share how the school will initiate open dialogue about newcomers' culture and previous experiences.
f. Community organization partnerships: Share which local partnerships make sense in relation to your content area and in relation to your school community. State which forms of communication tools newcomer families will employ to connect with partners. Where can newcomer students and families receive tutoring and or language services?

Part 2. Rubric

	Proficient	Basic	Developing
Artifact 1: Welcoming Environment	The video or photo essay shows how the Learning is inclusive and welcoming to all students with clearly narrated or labeled key elements including representation of culture and identity. The photo essay has 15-20 appropriately labeled photographs; The video is 2-4 minutes in length with captions and/or narration.	The video, map, or photo essay lacks the length, neatness or number of photographs. The video, map, or photo essay lacks labels or narration. The video, map, or photo essay does not demonstrate inclusivity, and/or welcoming atmosphere.	Artifact is attempted but is not complete, or upload has failed to present properly.
Artifact 2: Social and Emotional Development for School Success and Beyond	SEL Lesson includes: grade level, time needed, one cultural standard, one content-area standard, learning objective and outcome(s), learner engagement with **three**	SEL Lesson lacks one or more of the needed sections.	Artifact is attempted but is not complete, or upload has failed to present properly.

	levels of culture, connections beyond the classroom, and differentiation.		
Artifact 3: Meeting the Academic Needs of Newcomers (legal aspects)	The document is easy to share and visually appealing. Includes: connections to language, important information for parents/guardians about school systems, networking path for past educational histories, and a list/link to support providers.	The document has the needed information but lacks organization and/or visual appeal.	Document is lacking in the required information, or does not upload as a readable artifact.
Artifact 4: Family/Community Partnerships to Support Newcomers	Partnership Informational Table has 5-10 supports including contact information, links, and summaries.	Partnership Informational Table has fewer than 5 supports with required information.	Partnership Informational Table is lacking in the required information or does not upload as a readable artifact.
Artifact 5: Strong Connections!	Parent Toolkit: parent engagement includes sections on: student/family intake form, student information, language	The Parent Toolkit is missing some of the needed information.	Parent Toolkit is lacking in the required information or does not upload as a readable artifact.

	supports, school district 101, parent/guardian participation, cultural integration, and community partnerships.		

Part 3 Reflection

(400 - 600 words)

For tips on writing a good reflection, review the following resource:
How Do I Write a Good Personal Reflection?

Please do not include any information that will make you identifiable to your reviewers.

Answer **all** of the following questions:

1. Upon reflection, what practices do you have in place pertaining to newcomers that you are most proud of and why?
2. Now that you have examined your learning spaces, what specific steps do you plan to change or do differently pertaining to connecting to newcomers in your future practice and why?
3. In relation to connecting to newcomers -what is a new philosophical realization that you are thinking about> How does this affect your current and future practice?

Passing:
Response addresses all required components as outlined in the reflection section. Supporting evidence includes specific examples from the learning environment. Candidates may use student anecdotal evidence to support claims. Writing is organized and easy to understand.