



UNC

Center for Urban Education

Leadership Council Chronicle

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CUE Professor Cari Riedlin teaching Social Studies Methods

8 Key Skills You Need to Teach in Urban Classrooms

At the [UNC Center for Urban Education](#) (CUE), our professors are a vital link in the chain that prepares successful teachers for urban classrooms. Carolyn (Cari) Riedlin is one such professor who has been with the Center for seven years, where she teaches Social Studies Methods.

In this article, Riedlin explains the characteristics urban school principals look for in teacher candidates and how she does everything she can to prepare CUE students to become successful urban teachers.

Riedlin has had a long, distinguished career in education. She taught first and third grade in Denver Public Schools for 27 years. She was assistant principal for two years at an elementary school, then moved to Lowry Elementary and worked as a principal for seven years. Lowry had a diverse student population in terms of socioeconomic status, and students spoke more than 12 different first languages.

After she “retired,” Riedlin went to work as an adjunct faculty member at the UNC Center for Urban Education and at Regis University, where she is responsible for supervising student teachers. All that to say that her opinion about what makes for a good teacher in urban classrooms is backed by real-life experience.

From Riedlin’s perspective, these are the characteristics teachers need to be successful in urban schools:

1. Responsibility

A candidate who takes responsibility shows up early for the interview and is dressed professionally. The person demonstrates preparedness by thoroughly researching the school, demographics, and neighborhood where they are interviewing.

Riedlin notes that it’s also helpful to bring letters of recommendation, which help principals make decisions about the final candidates.

2. Communication Skills

Riedlin looks for listening skills, as well as skills in discourse. Does the candidate wonder and question about their own teaching practice?

3. Passion

A candidate who is passionate takes the job seriously. They demonstrate how they will put in the effort and go above and beyond the minimum requirements of the job.



4. Creativity

Does the candidate think outside the box? Can they talk about times when they’ve come up with creative solutions to difficult problems? Riedlin looks for examples such as the use of “wonder books”—journals students use to write down their own questions, and answers.

5. Collaboration

Successful teachers must be able to cooperate and collaborate. Is the person a good problem-solver? Riedlin says urban teachers need to be able to be resourceful and figure things out quickly.

The way she tested these skills was by conducting group interviews. She’d put candidates together in a small group with team teachers, a parent, and the principal and give them a hypothetical classroom problem that they had to work together to solve, such as communicating with a difficult parent. The team had five minutes to read the problem and 10 minutes to come up with a successful solution for a particular child or the whole class.

Riedlin monitored which candidates contributed but didn’t take over, who demonstrated leadership skills, and who made sure their voice was heard while still working to resolve the scenario. She and her team teachers scored candidates using a rubric—of course!

6. 21st-Century Skills

Today’s teachers also need to be technologically savvy. In interviews, Riedlin asked about candidates’ experience using a white board, and had candidates answer a question on the computer. That way, she could see how candidates handled simple computer tasks, and also how well they could write.

7. Understanding of Teaching Methods

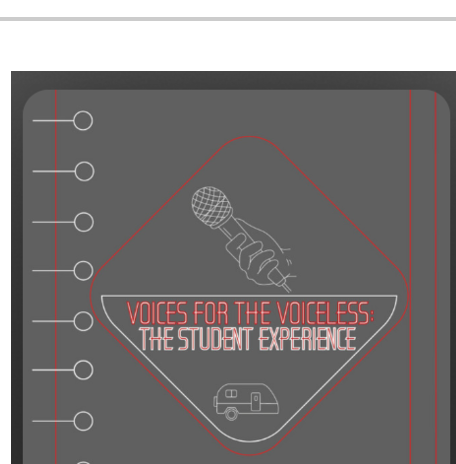
Though it may seem obvious, Riedlin advises candidates to be prepared to describe how they are going to teach writing, reading, and literacy in their classroom.

To determine readiness level, Riedlin asked candidates to describe what their classroom would look like. She looked for key concepts, such as desks set up in small groups or pods, an area for large-group instruction, activity opportunities at different stations, vocabulary words posted all over the room, a world map on the wall, and a library corner with leveled and thematic books.

8. Community Building

Last but not least, Riedlin considers community-building a key skill for urban teachers. How do they do the teacher preparation program at UNC Center for Urban Education and why it produces successful teachers. High points include a discussion of urban education, and what teacher training should look like. Give it a listen!

As you can see, students at the Center for Urban Education benefit a great deal from their experienced, caring professors, who help them prepare for a successful future in urban classrooms.



CUE Director Featured on “Voices for the Voiceless” Podcast

CUE Director Dr. Rosanne Fulton was featured in an [interview](#) conducted by teacher Johnathan Frame, who traveled the country in July 2022 to listen and give voice to the needs of students. The podcast is called [Voices for the Voiceless: The Student Experience](#).

In the interview, [Chapter 13: Confidence and Competence](#), Frame and Fulton discuss the structure of the teacher preparation program at UNC Center for Urban Education and why it produces successful teachers. High points include a discussion of urban education, and what teacher training should look like. Give it a listen!

Follow Johnathan Frame on [Instagram](#) and [Facebook](#) @vforvpod.

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Contact Us

Rosanne Fulton, PhD
Director, Center for Urban Education
UNC Denver Center at Lowry
1059 Alton Way
Denver CO 80230
Office: 303-637-4334
rosanne.fulton@unco.edu
www.unco.edu/UrbanEd

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