

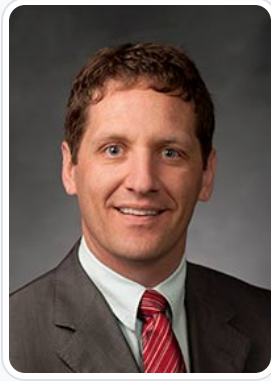
Making Meaning in My Classroom

Fostering Equitable Learning for All in My Elementary Classroom

Bryant Jensen & Royce Kimmons

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Bryant's work addresses the improvement of classroom teaching and learning for underserved children, particularly Latinos from Mexican and Central American immigrant families. He uses observational and mixed methods to address teacher learning and equity in teaching. In collaboration with colleagues, Bryant developed the Classroom Assessment of Sociocultural Interactions (CASI), a classroom observation system that measures cultural aspects of teacher-child interactions in early education and elementary classrooms. Bryant worked as a school psychologist in Phoenix, and has studied teaching and learning in different communities and school types across Mexico. Previously he was a research associate for the National Task Force on Early Education for Hispanics, a Fulbright scholar in Mexico, teacher educator in California's San Joaquin Valley, and a postdoc fellow at the University of Oregon. Bryant is a first-generation college graduate. He and his superhuman spouse Taryn are the parents of five children and live in Provo.



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Introduction

Equity

Teacher Learning



Cultural Knowledge for Teaching

Welcome to *Making Meaning: Fostering Equitable Learning for All in My Elementary Classroom*.

The overarching purpose of this book is to enable **equitable teaching** in K-6 classrooms. Specifically, we want to help teachers have more connected and communal sociocultural interactions with diverse students. To do this, *Making Meaning* takes the rubrics from the [Classroom Assessment of Sociocultural Interactions \(CASI\)](#) and turns them into an instructional experience, openly accessible for teachers (and anyone else) to use as a tool for learning about and practicing equitable teaching.

The CASI was developed by Dr. Bryant Jensen (BYU) as an **observational protocol** to assess the cultural aspects of teacher-student interactions in elementary classrooms. Translation: the CASI is a collection of rubrics that can help you measure how equitable your classroom interactions are, across 9 dimensions:

1. Language Use
2. Content Connections
3. Equity
4. Competition
5. Peer Collaboration
6. Social Organization
7. Autonomy
8. Role Flexibility
9. Equitable Expectations

Each of these is called a "dimension," and each has a few indicators that you can use to figure out when equitable teaching is or isn't happening in your classroom (especially useful for video recordings or peer observations of your teaching). This is not meant to be evaluative; the dimensions are simply designed to be used for your own improvement. We want to foster meaningful discussion and collaboration between teachers, and we believe that giving you specific, defined practices and rubrics will help you improve many equity aspects of your students' education.

So... Why is the CASI needed?

Let's distinguish between two elements of teaching practice: effective generic aspects of teaching, and cultural aspects of teaching. Effective practices should be familiar to you (good things like managing transitions, redirecting misbehavior, and personalized feedback). As you know, practices like these are important for all students to learn. But the ways they are *communicated* to connect or not with students' lived experiences, cultural practices outside of school, and identities matter as well.

That second factor is what we call "cultural aspects" of teaching. That is what the CASI measures. You might think of the cultural aspects as "meaningful teaching practices." They include ways of incentivizing student participation, encouraging interaction, distributing authority in the classroom, incorporating their everyday languages, etc. These aspects affect the meaningfulness of classroom learning—that's where the name of the book "Making Meaning" comes from.

Research suggests that for many diverse, minoritized students, school is disconnected from their out-of-school experiences, social practices, and cultural identities. While a teacher may have excellent lessons and genuinely care (great generic aspects), the meaningfulness (cultural aspects) of those lessons can fall short for minoritized students because of difficulty with the 9 dimensions we listed above.

Lots of professional development and initiatives seek to foster cultural relevance, cultural responsiveness, or equitable teaching, but many teachers report that when it comes to actual *practices*, those trainings are pretty vague. If there are no concrete definitions, nor a way to measure these crucial cultural aspects of teaching, it will be difficult for anyone to actually improve.

That is where the CASI comes in: it aims to provide these standards and definitions, along with more concrete ways to measure and improve the quality of sociocultural interactions in the classroom. We're trying to bridge the gap between desiring equitable change and actually having the resources to make it happen.

The following introductory explanation of the CASI, copied from the protocol itself, explains the structure of the rubrics.

For an quick taste of each of the 9 CASI dimensions, keep scrolling down!

CASI Introduction and Structure

"The purpose of this observational protocol is to assess sociocultural aspects of teacher-student interactions in upper-elementary classrooms. The CASI-U can be used with pre- and in-service teachers to foster more equitable learning and developmental opportunities for diverse students across diverse elementary school settings. Sociocultural interactions are defined by how adults communicate and present information with students, as well as the ways the student participation in daily activities are organized and motivated. CASI-U dimensions address how the substance and form of classroom interactions connect with students' out-of-school experiences, social practices, and cultural identities.

The CASI-U is organized into three domains: Life Applications, Self in Group, and Agency. Within these three domains are nine dimensions.

- **Life Applications** address how interactions explore and value students' out-of-school lives (i.e., their routines, practices, interests, relationships, expertise, and values); dimensions within this domain are Language Use, Content Connections, and Equity.
- **Self in Group** addresses how classroom interactions orient students to work and identify with others versus focus on individual accomplishments; dimensions are Competition, Peer Collaboration, and Social Organization.
- **Agency** addresses students' choice and freedom within the classroom; dimensions are Autonomy, Role Flexibility, and Equitable Expectations.

The CASI-U is organized into four nested units of analysis: behavioral markers within indicators, indicators within dimensions, and dimensions within domains. Qualitative field notes by certified raters are also gathered to describe teacher and student behaviors. These notes are used to assign quantitative scores on five-point scales at the indicator level, based on the rubrics in this manual. For Life Applications indicators, scoring categories range from "**Disconnected**" to "**Well-Connected**", whereas for Self In Group and Agency they range from "**Not Communal**" to "**Communal**." Domain and dimension scores are computed by calculating the arithmetic average of corresponding indicators.

This measure can be used for research and professional development alike."

A CASI Outline

While this introductory chapter is still being written, the following quick summaries of each dimension may be useful to you. For more details on each dimension, as well as the indicators and rating scales, please open the CASI-U Full Rubric [here](#).

Life Applications Dimensions

1. LANGUAGE USE

→ How everyday, non-school languages or language varieties (e.g., dialects, vernaculars, creoles) are incorporated into the classroom-in order to enhance social relations, facilitate instruction, and reinforce cultural identities.

Indicators for this dimension: Instructional Discourse, Social Conversation, Students' Use, Language Inclusion

2. CONTENT CONNECTIONS

→ How teacher and students connect everyday, out-of-school experiences (such as routines, interests, social relationships, perspectives, expertise, values, and traditions) with instructional content and learning objectives.

Indicators: Teacher Sharing, Encourages Sharing, Draws Connections, Personal Sharing

3. EQUITY

→ How teacher and students address fairness, bias, and justice within the classroom as well as in wider society.

Indicators: Examination, Resolution, Commitment to Equity, Experiences with Inequity, Equity Topics

Self in Group Dimensions

4. COMPETITION

→ How interactions promote the success of individual students at the expense of others' success.

Indicators: Comparison, Achievement Emphasis, Peer Orientation, Competitive Activity

5. PEER COLLABORATION

→ The extent to which opportunities are provided for students to collaborate with peers in shared classroom activities, and the manner in which students engage in these activities.

Indicators: Group Work, Social Coordination, Peer Communication, Activity Goals

6. SOCIAL ORGANIZATION

→ How social relationships are organized in the classroom to motivate students' effort and learning.

Indicators: Shared Responses, Authentic Incentives, Social Enthusiasm, Authentic Participation

Agency Dimensions

7. AUTONOMY

→ *How classrooms provide opportunities for students to make choices and be proactive in academic tasks and in the learning process*

Indicators: Task Choices, Classroom Responsibilities, Cultivates Expression, Initiative, Self-Expression

8. ROLE FLEXIBILITY

→ *How classroom interactions provide opportunities for role switching between teachers and students.*

Indicators: Teacher as Learner, Teacher as Listener-Observer, Student as Authority, Listening and Observing

9. EQUITABLE EXPECTATIONS

→ *How the teacher communicates to **all** students that s/he believes in their capability to succeed.*

Indicators: Instructional Inclusion, Equitable Affect, Equitable Scaffolding, Equitable Correction



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Language Use

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Equity

K-12

Teacher Learning

Language

Language Use



"I am my language."

— Gloria Anzaldúa, Chicana scholar and poet

"In order to learn, students must use what they already know so as to give meaning to what the teacher presents to them. Speech makes it possible [...] to relate new knowledge to old. This possibility depends on the social relationships, the communication system, which the teacher sets up."

— Douglas Barnes, British researcher

Portuguese in Boston; Hmong in St. Paul; Mandarin Chinese in Los Angeles and Haitian Creole in Miami; Arabic in Michigan; Vietnamese in San Jose; African-American Vernacular English (AAVE) and many varieties of Spanish, spoken all over the country.

Add Somali and Russian, and you have the [10 most commonly reported home languages](#) of English Language Learner (ELL) students in the United States. Of the 10, Spanish is especially noteworthy: 75% of children from immigrant

families in the U.S. speak Spanish, and with over 40 million speakers, the US is the fifth largest Spanish-speaking country in the world (before Peru, Venezuela, or Chile). This linguistic diversity is impressive and growing: 66 million US residents speak a language other than English at home, a number that has doubled since 1990.

Educators reading all these statistics face a crucial question:

What place should these languages have within the U.S. classroom?

Answering this question is not always a simple task. Though many teachers see the value of incorporating students' diverse, "everyday" or home languages (including varieties like dialects, vernaculars, or creoles), these educators also have practical questions and constraints to grapple with:

- Will letting students use languages other than Standard English slow their learning?
- If standardized tests are given in one language, should I really let my students use another?
- I only speak English; how can I engage in everyday language use with my students?
- How do I avoid cultural appropriation while adopting students' languages or vernaculars?
- My classroom has students that speak many different languages; how do I engage them all effectively?
- Is it appropriate or helpful to divide my students into language groups for discussion?
- Is validating African-American Vernacular English in school appropriate? Won't employers expect them to code-switch anyway?
- Will using different languages affect participation in the classroom for native English speakers?

These are reasonable questions to ask, and we hope that this chapter will help you find answers. As you will see, the Language Use dimension (the first dimension of the CASI) proposes that everyday languages are not something to be discouraged or denigrated; rather, welcoming these languages (which students are already using outside of school) into the classroom can improve the school experience for minoritized students and lead to improved outcomes.

The central question of this chapter is:

Central Question

How can I incorporate everyday languages (e.g., dialects, vernaculars, creoles) into the classroom to enhance the instruction, social relations, and cultural identities of my students?

Our goal with this chapter is to help you find simple, genuine ways to incorporate everyday languages into your classroom more often, for the benefit of all your students (especially those from minoritized backgrounds). Specifically, after working through this chapter and practicing in your classroom (either by yourself or with other teachers) you should be able to:

1. Identify what everyday language use means and what it looks like.
2. Explain some reasons why everyday language use is helpful for students.
3. Interpret actual teaching scenarios (including your own) according to the indicators of Language Use.
4. Plan and implement lessons that incorporate everyday language use more often into instructional content, social conversation, and the classroom climate, as well as encouraging student use.

We've included examples of good practice throughout this chapter, along with outside resources if you want to dive deeper. But before we start working on classroom practice, it's important to understand why everyday language use matters, what it really looks like in the classroom, and how you can measure it in your own day-to-day interactions with students.

Let's start with **why everyday language use matters** (and begin answering some of those questions).

Why Language Use Matters

There are several ways to think about why everyday Language Use matters. One way is to frame it in terms of modern U.S. circumstances: by 2016, over 4.9 million English learners (almost 10% of all students) were enrolled in public schools across the country ([Department of Education, NCES](#)). Twenty-seven states have ELL enrollment higher than 6.0%, with California topping the list at 20%. Importantly, these figures don't include the many students who fail to qualify as ELL, but who still speak a different language at home. For many educators, ELL or multilingual students are the majority population in their schools. Yet, despite a numerical majority in some places, often these students still experience [Minoritization](#); their languages and everyday experiences are neglected, rejected, or hidden during classroom interactions.

You can also frame why language use matters in terms of the implications and benefits for students. If you are a teacher, you probably want all your students to feel comfortable in your classroom; you also want them to be successful and prepared for the world outside of school. For culturally and linguistically diverse students, everyday language use can serve both those purposes. Take a look at the benefits below.

Benefits of Everyday Language Use

- Helps all students feel welcomed and valued in the classroom
- Students are more willing to participate; open language environment encourages students to ask questions, especially those that are language-related
- Teaching students to read in their home language and English simultaneously [promotes higher reading achievement](#) in English, compared to teaching students to read in English exclusively
- Provides new vocabulary for both students and teacher
- Promotes bilingualism as a valuable resource
- Helps English learners work through complex ideas and express opinions, via writing and speaking
- Builds connections between vocabulary and grammar structures of school language and everyday/home language
- Builds positive cultural identities related to certain subjects (e.g., math), especially important for subjects that are culturally stereotyped
- Fosters collaborations and support between students that share home language
- Helps students sense that a teacher understands and knows them (connecting language and identity)
- Yields stronger ELL outcomes in English

Everyday language use facilitates instruction. Language is the vehicle for learning—via content, discussion, feedback, and motivation. Everyday language use “greases the wheels” for minoritized students, facilitating participation, academic engagement, and understanding. As students recognize their everyday language being welcomed and/or spoken in the classroom, they become more motivated to participate and feel safer asking questions to clarify meaning, especially when misunderstandings are language-related. Everyday language use enables children to connect content in their native language or vernacular to school language, creating valuable context for learning. The positive impact of everyday language use is not limited to achievement; it fosters more positive peer interactions and perceptions of ability, all of which enable successful learning (Aronson & Laughter, 2016).

Everyday language use enhances social relations. Teachers have a responsibility not only to instruct their students, but also to develop positive relationships with each child. Relationships and instructional engagement go hand in hand.

When a teacher takes the time to inquire after and use students' everyday languages, they foster a closer relationship with those students and convey affective support. Students will feel acknowledged and seen in the classroom as it takes on a more conversational and "family-like" atmosphere (Bonner, 2014). Everyday language use also improves student relationships because their differences are open and appreciated, rather than hidden or made taboo. And it doesn't just help student-to-teacher relationships—students that have the same or similar everyday languages are able to collaborate together and find extra support when they need it.

Everyday language use reinforces positive cultural identities. School instruction in the US isn't really culture neutral, though it has traditionally been depicted that way. Even at young ages, students are developing cultural identities in the context of subjects like math and reading, and teachers' interaction styles can help shape those identities positively. This is especially true with language use, because language and cultural identity are closely tied. By incorporating everyday language, teachers give students the opportunity to talk about their own culture and associate success with their language, reinforcing just how important their identities are both in society and in the classroom. Everyday language use conveys to students that their languages are assets, not deficits (Abdulrahim & Orosco, 2020), helping them shed negative cultural stereotypes, reconstrue failure, and develop a more confident self-image (Blackley, 2019).

What Everyday Language Use is Not

Only Adding Ethnic Names to Word Problems

Consider the fairly common practice of adding "ethnic" names to word problems in an effort to be more culturally inclusive. While changing a character's name from John to Juan is not a bad thing to do, this fairly perfunctory effort may not have much impact on a Latino student's experience with math.

While almost any kind of effort made to improve the cultural competency of instruction is worthwhile, it is important to understand the difference between minimal efforts and the kind of practices the CASI's Language Use dimension measures. The CASI generally sets a higher standard than token efforts can satisfy. This doesn't mean Language Use must be very hard to "count"; it just means that Language Use efforts should demonstrate concerned interest in the lives of your students. The next section of the chapter (Indicators) should give you some good ideas.

Cultural Appropriation

When it comes to Language Use, teachers may also worry about cultural appropriation (in this case, offending students by adopting their language without fully understanding the context or cultural practice). This is normal, but it may be less of an issue than you think. Consider this experience from one of your book's authors:

Mrs. Bonham's Spanish

"Many teachers are worried about cultural appropriation and offending students, and these are valid concerns. But often, teachers are more concerned about this than students actually are. An experience from my elementary school years in Texas illustrates this: Mrs. Bonham (pseudonym), my fourth grade teacher, often used words such as "mija" and incorporated Spanish language in her classroom. As a student who grew up in a Spanish speaking home while learning English, I enjoyed seeing how my own teacher used my everyday language in her classroom. Even though she wasn't perfect at it, I rarely felt that it was inappropriate—in fact, I admired her efforts. Even my younger sister, who initially thought it was a little weird, eventually came to love Mrs. Bonham's use of Spanish. Although it seemed silly at first, teachers who used my everyday language had the biggest impact on me because they created a comfortable learning environment."

— Jocelin Meza

Here are some principles that will help you have an impact like Mrs. Bonham and use student language in a respectful way:

- Remember, in our hundreds of hours of observation in diverse classrooms, very few (if any) minoritized students have been offended by a teacher's efforts to use their language.
- **Awkwardness may stem from not openly acknowledging language differences.** Avoid this problem by being open about language differences in the classroom and validating/explaining their use.
- **Everyday language use should always have a relational or instructional purpose.** This is important. Adopting African American Vernacular English (AAVE) to express affection or discuss concepts is probably appropriate; co-opting AAVE for memes on the board probably isn't.
- **Your disposition goes a long way.** Students can tell when a teacher is trying to be sincere, genuine, empathetic, and inclusive; seek to be humbly (and perhaps vocally) aware of your own language and limitations, and persist through difficulty! (Remember Jocelin's sister, described above.)

Learning Check

Hopefully we have convinced you that language use matters. Based on what you've learned so far, which of the following statements do you think best defines language use?

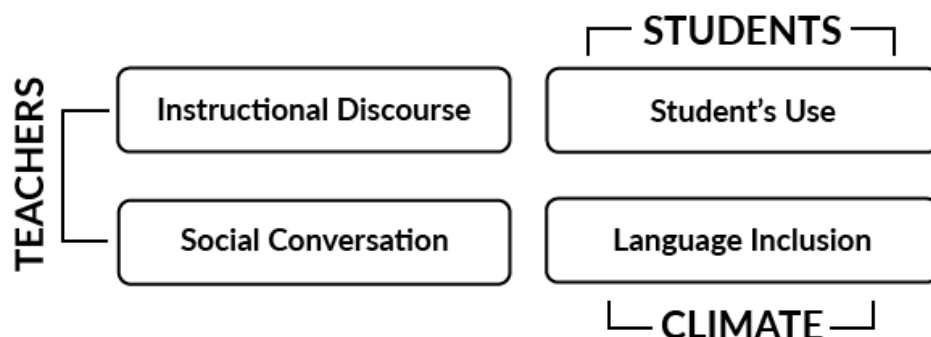
- ☐ How teachers use age-appropriate speech in the classroom to enhance instruction.
- ☐ How teachers help students move from basic interpersonal communicative skills to cognitive academic language proficiency.
- ☐ How teachers and students communicate with one another through different modes of communication (e.g. visuals, gestures).
- ☐ How teachers and students use everyday language and language varieties in the classroom for instruction and conversation.

Looking Ahead

Before you move on, consider:

- What do you think language use will look like in classroom practice?
- If you were asked to evaluate how "connected" a lesson was based on a video recording, what would you look for right now?

The 4 Indicators of Language Use



So, now that we've reviewed why everyday Language Use matters, where do you begin? What does everyday Language Use look like day-to-day, and how can you start practicing it within your current circumstances?

The [Classroom Assessment of Sociocultural Interactions \(CASI\)](#) divides Language Use into four indicators: **Instructional Discourse**, **Social Conversation**, **Students' Use**, and **Language Inclusion**. The first two are teacher-focused, the third is student-focused, and the fourth is climate-focused. We'll discuss each one in turn, giving you the definition, the rubric, and examples.

Instructional Discourse

To what extent do you use everyday language (dialects, vernaculars, creoles, languages) while presenting lessons, leading discussions, or giving instructional feedback?

Note

- This indicator relates to your instructional conversations (e.g., content) with students, not your social conversations (e.g., affection, discipline).
- [This video from a 5th grade class in LA](#) shows a teacher focusing his instruction on everyday language. Note that your lesson doesn't have to be about everyday language in order to make use of everyday language.
- If you are worried about cultural appropriation, see our extended note in "Why Language Use Matters" above.

| | Disconnected (1) | Somewhat Connected (3) | Well-Connected (5) |
|-----------------------------|--|--|--|
| 1a. Instructional Discourse | Teacher does not use everyday language in instructional discourse. | Teacher sometimes uses everyday language in instructional discourse. | Teacher often uses everyday language in instructional discourse. |

- Presents content in everyday language
- Incorporates everyday language in discussion
- Provides feedback in everyday language

Instructional Discourse Examples

Standard: Construct an argument that plants and animals have internal and external structures that function to support survival, growth, behavior, and reproduction ([NGSS.S.4.LS1.1](#)).

Context: Mrs. Born is a fourth grade Title I teacher in Miami, Florida with a mix of Haitian, Brazilian, Latino, and White students. Mrs. Born is teaching a unit based on the structure and function of different plant and animal parts. She compares the external structure of a butterfly to that of a frog to demonstrate how organisms' diverse structures help them survive.

Instructional Discourse (1): Mrs. Born displays pictures of a butterfly and a frog. She has students identify the similarities and differences between each organism. As Mrs. Born walks around the room she hears a student say that a butterfly has wings to help it get its food. Mrs. Born proceeds to show a video on butterflies and talks about how frogs are amphibians while butterflies are insects.

Instructional Discourse (2): Mrs. Born displays pictures of a butterfly and a frog. She has students identify the similarities and differences between each organism. As Mrs. Born walks around the room she hears a student say that a butterfly has wings to help it get its food. "*Wassup, you got it!*" she says, and proceeds to show a video on butterflies as she talks about how frogs are amphibians while butterflies are insects.

Instructional Discourse (3): Mrs. Born displays pictures of a butterfly and a frog. She has students identify the similarities and differences between each organism. As Mrs. Born walks around the room she hears a student say that a butterfly has wings to help it get its food. "Oh yeah, nice!" she says. She proceeds to show a video of a butterfly taken in Brazil, narrated with some Portuguese words, and talks about how frogs are amphibians while butterflies are insects.

Instructional Discourse (4): Mrs. Born displays pictures of a butterfly and a frog. Many of her students speak Portuguese, so she decides to write "butterfly" and "frog" in Portuguese and English on the board. She has students identify similarities and differences between a *borboleta* (butterfly) and a *sapo* (frog). As Mrs. Born walks around the classroom, she hears a student say, "Butterflies have wings to help it get its food." She responds, "*Hey, you right!*" and talks about how frogs are amphibians while butterflies are insects.

Instructional Discourse (5): Mrs. Born displays pictures of a butterfly and a frog. Many of her students speak the Portuguese and Haitian Creole, so she decides to write "butterfly" and "frog" in Portuguese and English on the board. She has students identify the similarities and differences between a *borboleta* (butterfly) and a *sapo* (frog). As Mrs. Born walks around the room, she hears a student say that a borboleta has wings to help it get its food; she responds, "*Sim! Boa!*" (Yes, nice one!). A Haitian student shares that frogs are widely seen throughout Haiti, especially closer to the water. Mrs. Born thanks her student for sharing with a Creole word she learned: "*mési.*"

Learning Check

Which of the following is NOT a way Mrs. Born could incorporate students' everyday language into **her own** instruction?

- ☐ Ask students to share with her other words for 'life cycle' they know
- ☐ Encourage students to tell their table how they say butterfly or frog in their home language.
- ☐ Use Haitian Creole, Portuguese, or another everyday language when commenting on student assignments.
- ☐ Use everyday vocabulary to talk about how life cycles are different like our languages are.

Social Conversation

To what extent do you use everyday language in social conversations with students, like expressing affection, discipline, or encouragement? What kind of everyday language do you use when talking to students one-on-one?

Note

E.g., addressing a Latina student as *mija*, learning how to say "thank you" or explain classroom rules using Mandarin, or adopting elements of African-American Vernacular English (AAVE) while encouraging a Black student.

| | Disconnected (1) | Somewhat Connected (3) | Well-Connected (5) |
|--|---|---|--|
| 1b. Social Conversation | Teacher does not use everyday language for social conversation. | Teacher sometimes uses everyday language for social conversation. | Teacher often uses everyday language for social conversation |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expresses affection in everyday language Reinforces rules or discipline in everyday language Provides encouragement in everyday language | | | |

Social Conversation Examples

Standard: Identify the role of religion in the development of human civilization ([ICS.6-9.GWH.1.9](#)).

Context: Miss Daniels is a sixth grade teacher at a Title 1 school in Boise, Idaho. She has a majority-white class with several African American students and children of South Asian refugees. They are studying how religion has affected the development of civilization. Miss Daniels is having the class discuss in groups the role religion has played in their own lives to activate their background knowledge.

Social Conversation (1): Miss Daniels walks around the room, listening in on the students' conversations. As she walks around, she asks some of the students about their experiences. One student shares that growing up, religion was always part of her family culture. It affected the holidays they celebrated and how they spent their weekends. Miss Daniels thanks her students for being willing to share their experiences with her.

Social Conversation (2): As Miss Daniels walks around the room listening to conversations, she notices one student seems very nervous about sharing with the rest of her group. She knows this student has some anxiety about speaking in front of others. Miss Daniels walks up to her, puts a hand on her shoulder and whispers with a smile, *"Get it girl, you got this!"* She moves on and asks another student to share their experience with religion.

Social Conversation (3): Miss Daniels walks around the room and asks students about their experiences with religion. As she listens to some students discuss, she makes sure to thank them for being willing to share their experiences with the class. She learned how to say "Good job" in Vietnamese for one of her English learners to encourage her and help her feel welcome in the class. She also learned how to say "chair" in Vietnamese and uses it with a smile to remind one of her more excitable students where he should be during discussion time.

Social Conversation (4): As Miss Daniel walks around the room, she hears one boy say his family does not believe in religion so it has had no effect on his life. She approaches the student and says, "Let me *aks* you a question," and proceeds to ask him about some words in the Constitution of the United States that refer to God. He thinks about his statement and decides his life is somewhat affected by religion. Miss Daniels smiles and says, *"That's what I'm talkin' 'bout, good thinking!"*

Social Conversation (5): While students are discussing at their tables, Miss Daniels walks around the room, asking students about their experiences. She approaches a student from Vietnam, whom she greets in the little Vietnamese she has learned so far this year, and asks about her experience with religion. After she shares, Miss Daniels smiles and says, *"Cám ơn bạn"* (thank you). When some students start talking too loud and Miss Daniels has to talk to them, she ends the interchange with, *"We straight?"* and the students nod their heads.

Learning Check

What are some ways Miss Daniels could incorporate everyday language into her social conversation that you didn't see in the example?

Students' Use

To what extent do your students initiate and reciprocate everyday language use with you or their peers? Is everyday language (e.g., home language, dialects) a normal part of their classroom conversations?

Note

- This indicator measures how students are initiating/reciprocating use of everyday language themselves, rather than just responding to your use. This indicator might especially include how they use language with each other, during activities or play.
- Code-switching: when a student alternates between two or more languages or varieties of language in conversation. This “moving-between” is more of an external view of a speaker’s language use.
- Translanguaging: when a bilingual student draws from their entire language repertoire, including language that is not usually legitimized in school, to demonstrate what they know and can do. This “moving-beyond” is more of an internal view of a speaker’s language use.
- For more detail on these practices, see [this interview with Dr. Ofelia García](#) of CUNY.

| | Disconnected (1) | Somewhat Connected (3) | Well-Connected (5) |
|--|--|---|--|
| 1c. Students' Use | Students do not use everyday language with teacher or peers. | Students sometimes use everyday language with teacher or peers. | Students often use everyday language with teacher and peers. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Initiate use of everyday language • Reciprocate use • Code-switch • Translanguage | | | |

Students' Use Examples

Standard: Understand that shapes in different categories (e.g., rhombuses, rectangles, and others) may share attributes (e.g., having four sides), and that the shared attributes can define a larger category (e.g., quadrilaterals). Recognize rhombuses, rectangles, and squares as examples of quadrilaterals, and draw examples of quadrilaterals that do not belong to any of these subcategories ([CCSS.Math.Content.3.G.A.](#)).

Context: Mr. Robles is a third grade teacher in the Bronx, New York. He teaches a class of mostly Puerto Rican students with some Latino and African American students. His class is learning about 2D shapes and how to identify quadrilaterals.

Students' Use (1): Students are sorting different shapes in groups and identifying which shapes are quadrilaterals. Students discuss which shapes are quadrilaterals based on their attributes. As students sort shapes, Mr. Robles reminds them that quadrilaterals are shapes with four vertices. In groups of four, students sort shapes. One student says, "This shape has three sides, that's not a quadrilateral." Another student says "This has four sides, it is a quadrilateral!"

Students' Use (2): Students are sorting different shapes in groups and identifying which shapes are quadrilaterals. Students discuss which shapes are quadrilaterals based on their attributes. A student grabs a rhombus and says, "*Este es un* quadrilateral" while another student grabs a triangle and says "This not a quadrilateral, *it only got three sides.*"

Students' Use (3): Students are sorting different shapes in groups and identifying which shapes are quadrilaterals. Students discuss which shapes are quadrilaterals based on their attributes. A student grabs a parallelogram, and says, "This is a quadrilateral!" Another student at her table responds by saying, "*Por qué?*" She points to the sides while counting and says, "*Quatro* sides."

Students' Use (4): Students are sorting different shapes in groups and identifying which shapes are quadrilaterals. Mr. Robles approaches a group that has trouble deciding if a trapezoid is a quadrilateral. Mr. Robles says, "*Chicos*, how many sides does a quadrilateral have?" A student responds by saying, "*Quatro* sides." As the group analyzes the trapezoid, they each count the sides. A student says "*Es un* quadrilateral," and another student builds on it saying, "*Porque tiene* four!"

Students' Use (5): Students are sorting different shapes in groups and identifying which shapes are quadrilaterals. Mr. Robles approaches a group that has trouble deciding if a trapezoid is a quadrilateral. Mr. Robles says, "*Chicos*, how many sides does a quadrilateral have?" A student responds by saying, "Well, the beginning of the word quadrilateral sounds like *quatro* or four." "Good job," says Mr. Robles "a quadrilateral does have four sides." As the group analyzes the trapezoid one more time, each student counts the sides. "*Es un quadrilateral*" says a student, while another student builds on the comment saying, "*Porque tiene* four sides!"

Learning Check

Which is the best example of Students' Use?

- ☐ At Mr. Robles' insistence, the students count the sides in Spanish.
- ☐ The students use Spanish freely in both peer and whole class conversations.
- ☐ When Mr. Robles speaks to the students in Spanish, the students respond in Spanish.

Language Inclusion

To what extent is your classroom a place that students can feel encouraged to use their everyday language? How do you ask them about parts of their language? How do you incorporate and affirm everyday language in learning activities?

Note

Some special features of this indicator might be:

- asking students how they say something in their language, or asking about vocabulary from their out-of-school experiences (e.g., activities, food, traditions)
- activities that incorporate different languages/vernaculars
- creating a classroom environment (e.g., posters, books) that appeals to diverse languages

| | Disconnected (1) | Somewhat Connected (3) | Well-Connected (5) |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1d. Language Inclusion | The classroom environment does not include everyday language. | The classroom sometimes includes everyday language. | The classroom often includes everyday language. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Inquiry about everyday language• Activity incorporates everyday language• Encourages and affirms students' use of everyday language | | | |

Language Inclusion Examples

Standard: Report on a topic or text or present an opinion, sequencing ideas logically and using appropriate facts and relevant, descriptive details to support main ideas or themes; speak clearly at an understandable pace ([CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.5.4](#)).

Context: Mrs. Williams teaches fifth grade at a Title I school in Dearborn, Michigan. She teaches a class of mostly white students with some African American, Latino, and Syrian refugee students. Her students are working in groups to peer edit their in-class presentations for the upcoming week.

Language Inclusion (1): Mrs. Williams walks around to the different groups of students and asks them about the presentation they are reviewing. She reminds the students to always be courteous and kind when giving feedback. She encourages the students to discuss feedback as a group and to take notes of the suggestions given about their own presentation.

Language Inclusion (2): Mrs. Williams walks around the classroom talking with various groups. At the beginning of the year she had the students fill out a survey about their home language. She often asks students about words or phrases in their everyday language as well. She feels the students' background is important to understand to help them grow. While talking with the students about their presentations, she keeps in mind their individual needs and strengths while giving feedback.

Language Inclusion (3): Mrs. Williams heads to her group of English learners first. She allowed this group of students to decide if they wanted to work together on this assignment or be divided. She knows much of the group speaks Spanish while the rest speak Syrian. She encourages the students to use their everyday language if it helps them to understand the assignment, give feedback, and clarify meaning.

Language Inclusion (4): Mrs. Williams asks the various groups about the presentations they are reviewing. She encourages the students to use their everyday language when planning the assignment and giving feedback. She even encourages students to include words or phrases from their everyday language in their final presentation.

Language Inclusion (5): Mrs. Williams walks around to the different groups. She has asked the students about words and phrases in their everyday language/vernacular throughout the year. She often allows students to choose their groups for activities like this one so they feel comfortable and can discuss in their everyday language. Mrs. Williams encourages students to do outlines and rough drafts in their everyday language and even to include it in their final presentation as long as it is mostly in Standard English.

Learning Check

Which of the following are ways Mrs. Williams can include everyday language in her classroom climate?

- ☐ Visit her students at home to observe their everyday language use.
- ☐ Have a word wall with phrases from diverse languages that can be referenced.
- ☐ Add dual language or bilingual books to the reading area.
- ☐ Discuss different languages in class and how they are an important part of who we are.

Language Use Scenario: Mr. Bradley's Class Counts Coins

Each chapter in this book includes three versions of a teaching scenario to illustrate the dimension and its indicators. In this chapter, we enter our classroom with Mr. Bradley in Sacramento. Here is some context for his background, classroom, and setting:

Mr. James Bradley is a 35-year-old Black male teacher at a Title 1 elementary school in Sacramento. His class has a large number of Latino and Hmong students, in addition to several White and African American students. Mr. Bradley's school is in a less-affluent area of Sacramento and his classroom has limited resources. Students sit together in table groups and can use a rug area for discussions and reading. There are no computers in Mr. Bradley's classroom.

Mr. Bradley himself is from Florida and graduated from Florida A&M. After graduation (10 years ago), he moved across the country to take a teaching job in Sacramento and has taught a few different grades at two schools in the area. He now teaches second grade in a diverse community, where he and his wife Layla (also a teacher) are raising their daughter.

Mr. Bradley knows how uncommon black male teachers are, so he looks for opportunities to break down barriers for his students. That's part of why he likes teaching second grade—it gives him the chance to foster positive views of race, language, and potential in his students before they get too fixed in their cultural mindsets.

Scenario Introduction

Mr. Bradley has previously taught his second grade students about different kinds of currency values, including dollar bills, quarters, dimes, nickels, and pennies. Today he is reviewing the names and values of each kind of currency to prepare the students to solve word problems involving money, fulfilling this Common Core standard:

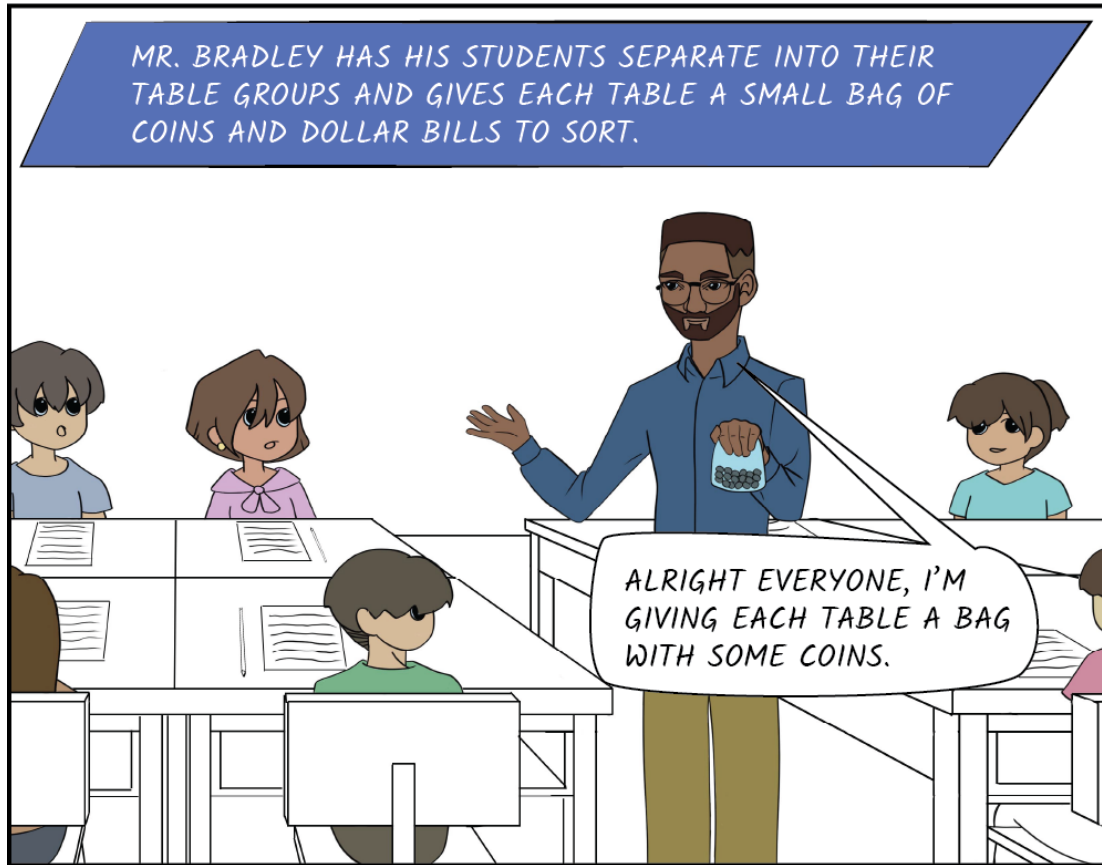
[CCSS.MATH.CONTENT.2.MD.C.8](#)

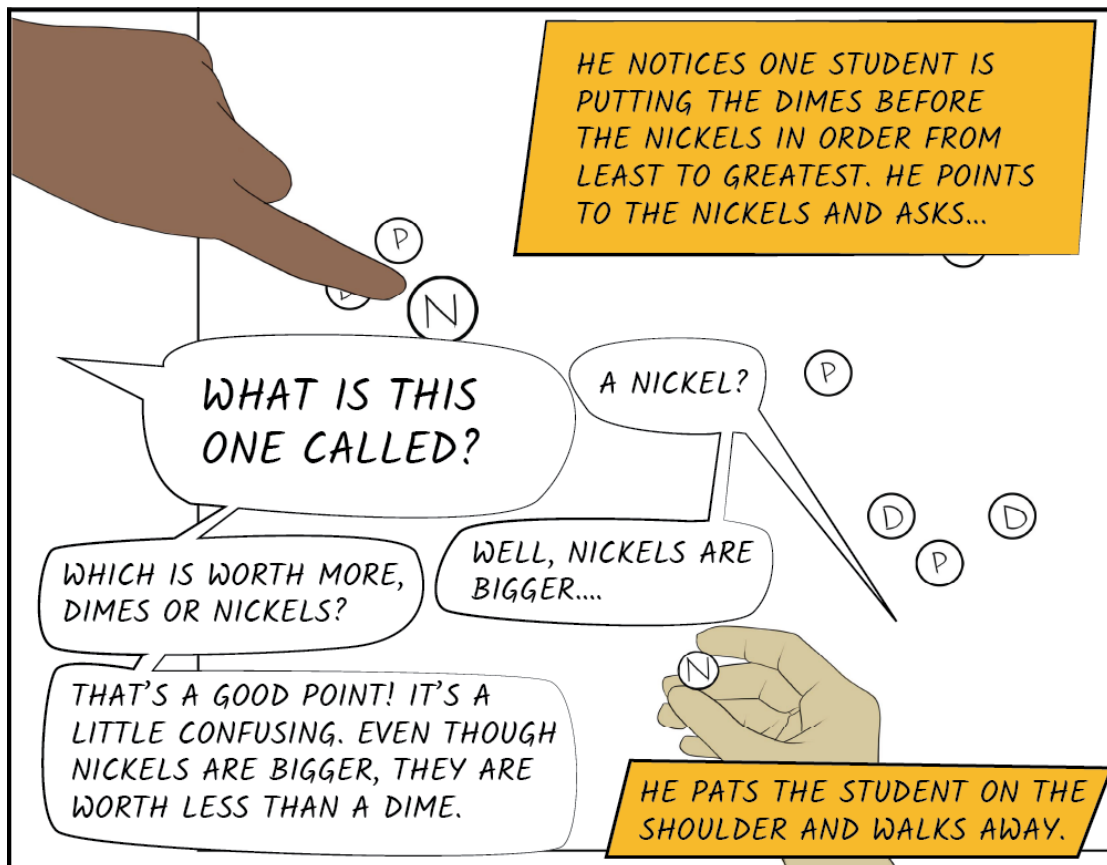
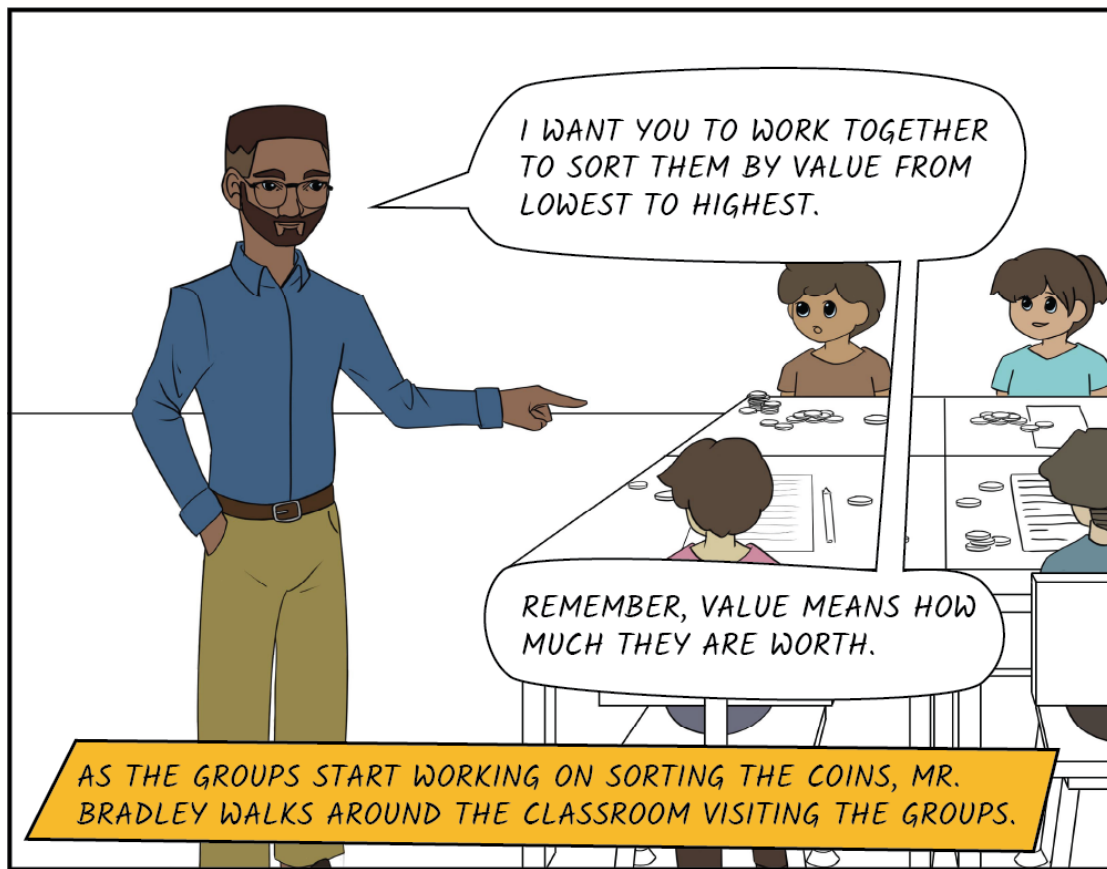
Solve word problems involving dollar bills, quarters, dimes, nickels, and pennies, using \$ and ¢ symbols appropriately. Example: If you have 2 dimes and 3 pennies, how many cents do you have?

Note: Evaluating Teaching Examples

Remember that effective **generic** teaching practices and effective **cultural** teaching practices can be different. In our scenarios across this book, you will find teachers using effective **generic practices** without necessarily being highly **meaningful or socioculturally connected**. Our goal is not to replace effective generic practice; rather, we seek to show how culturally connected and equitable practices can be integrated with generic practice to make meaning in the lives of your students. Pay attention to the differences!

Version 1: Disconnected





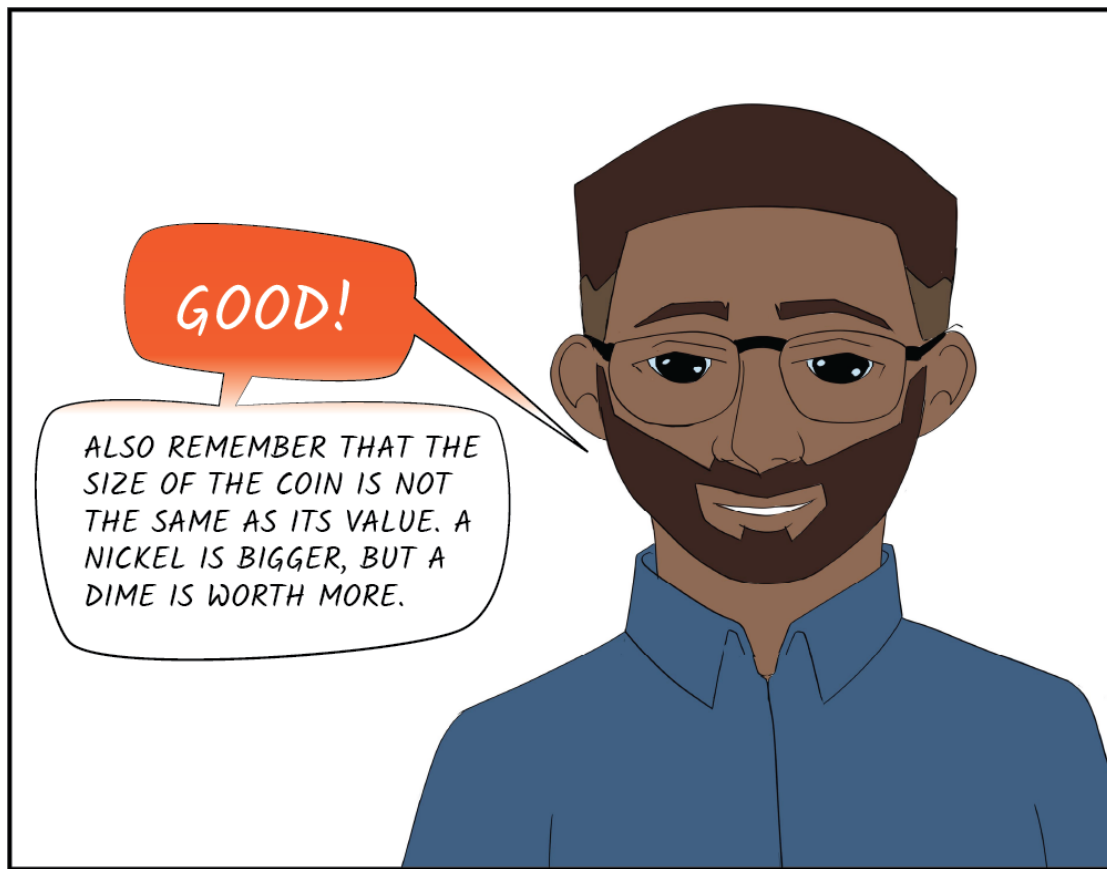
HE NOTICES THAT MOST OF THE GROUPS ARE DONE SORTING THE COINS AND GETS THEIR ATTENTION.

ALRIGHT CLASS, I NOTICED THAT MOST OF YOU ARRANGED YOUR COINS AS PENNIES, NICKELS, DIMES, QUARTERS, AND DOLLAR BILLS.

HOW DID YOU KNOW HOW TO ARRANGE THEM?

WELL I KNOW THE PENNY IS THE BROWN ONE, AND THAT'S THE SMALLEST. ALL THE SILVER ONES ARE WORTH MORE.

MY TEACHER TAUGHT ME, 'NICKEL, NICKEL, THICK AND FAT, YOU'RE WORTH 5, I KNOW THAT!'



Transcript

Version 1 Explanation

Why do we say this example is *"disconnected"*?

Instructional Discourse

Although there is instructional time, Mr. Bradley does not include students' everyday language in his discussion about the coins' values or his feedback. (1)

Social Conversation

Mr. Bradley is not observed using students' everyday language to express affection, provide encouragement, or reinforce classroom rules. (1)

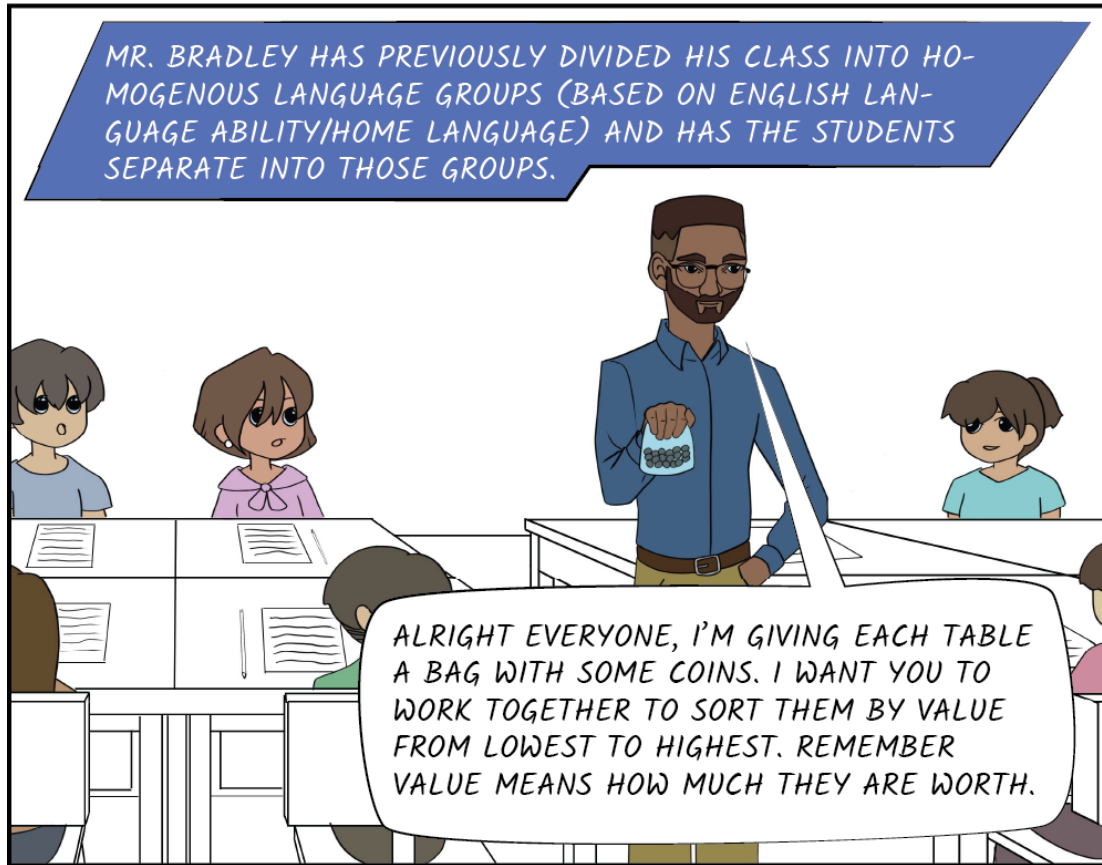
Students' Use

Students are not observed initiating or reciprocating use of their everyday language. There is no code-switching or translanguaging observed either. (1)

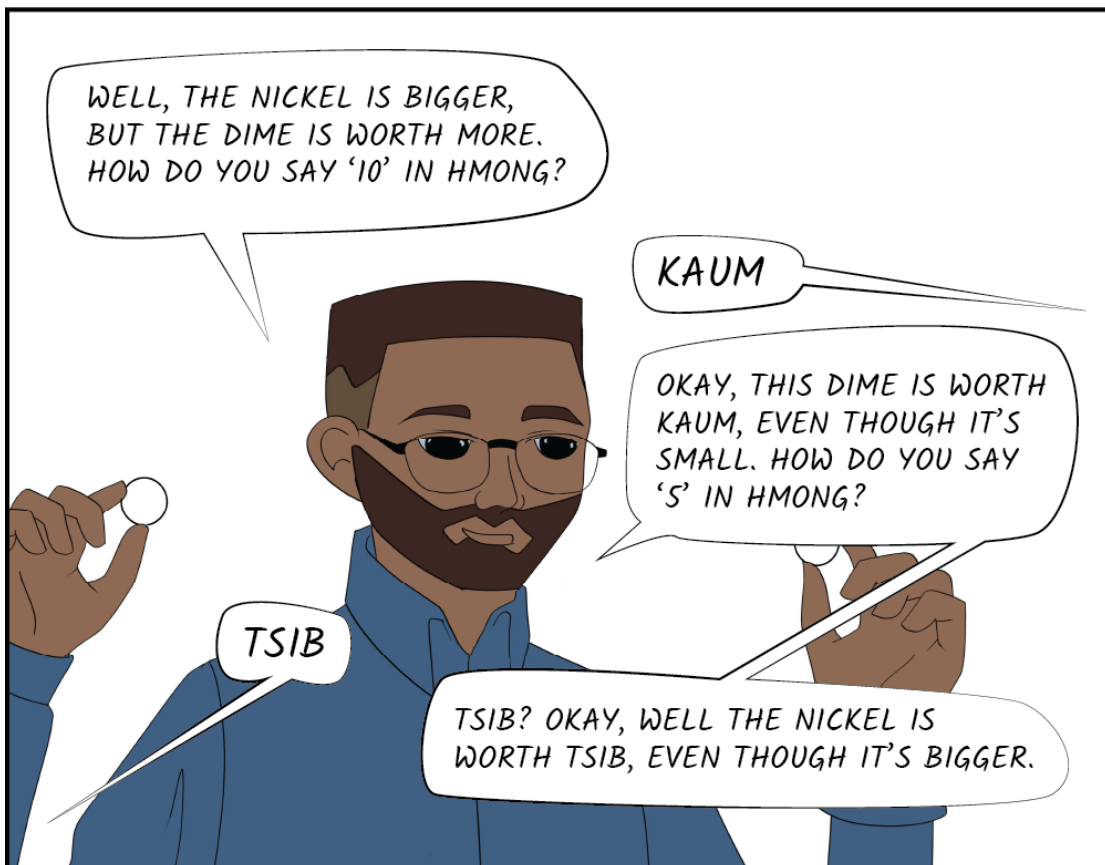
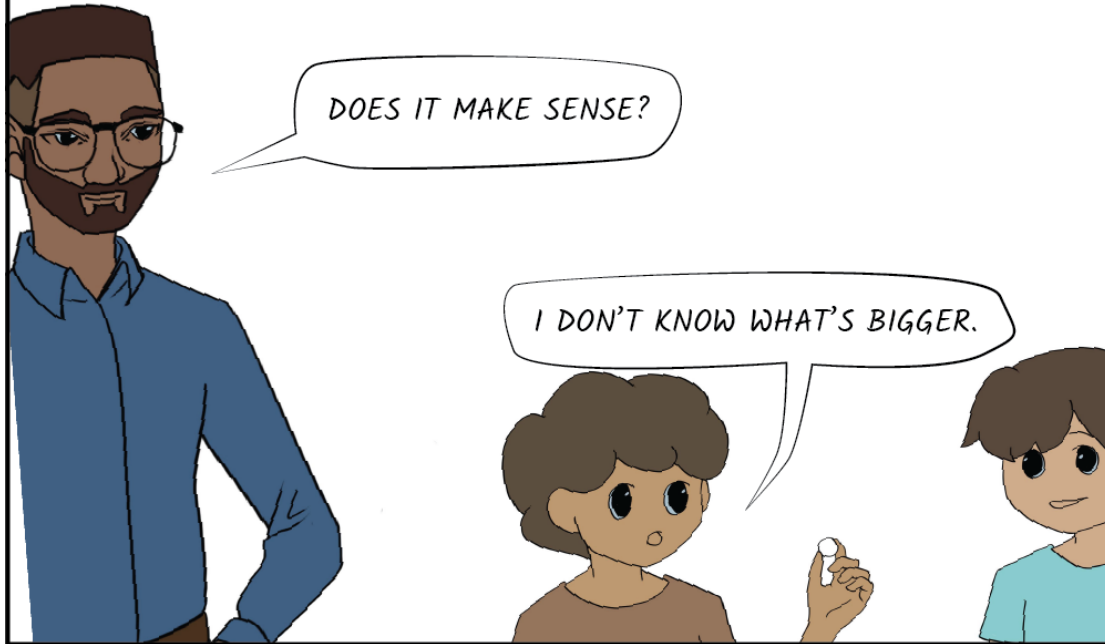
Language Inclusion

There is no inquiry about students' everyday language observed. The activity does not include everyday language and its use is not encouraged nor affirmed. (1)

Version 2: Somewhat Connected



AS THE GROUPS START WORKING ON SORTING THE COINS, MR. BRADLEY WALKS AROUND THE CLASSROOM VISITING THE GROUPS. HE NOTICES TWO HMONG STUDENTS ARE LOOKING AT THE NICKELS AND DIMES WITH CONFUSION. HE APPROACHES THEM WITH A SMILE.



MR. BRADLEY LOOKS AROUND THE ROOM AND NOTICES MOST OF THE STUDENTS HAVE FINISHED. HE GETS THE CLASS'S ATTENTION.

LOOKS LIKE EVERYONE HAS THEIR COINS IN THE RIGHT ORDER. EVE AND CAI REALIZED THAT EVEN THOUGH THE NICKEL IS BIGGER, THE DIME IS WORTH MORE. HOW DID YOU SAY S, AGAIN?

AND IO WAS KAUM, RIGHT?

TSIB!

THE STUDENTS NOD.

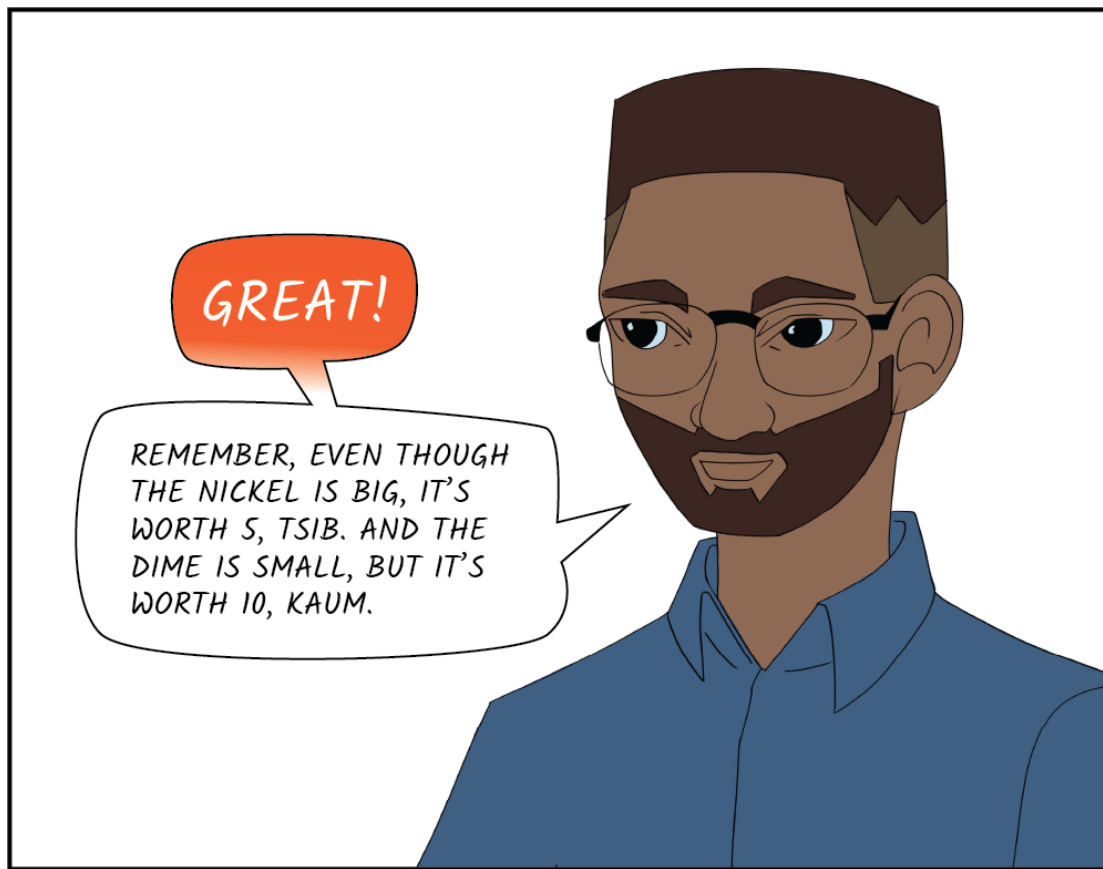
OKAY, LET'S LEARN SOME NEW WORDS. EVERYONE SAY IT WITH ME.

MR. BRADLEY HOLDS UP A NICKEL AND THE WHOLE CLASS SAYS...

TSIB

NEXT, HE HOLDS UP THE DIME AND THE CLASS SAYS...

KAUM



Transcript

Version 2 Explanation

Why do we say this example is *"somewhat connected"*?

Instructional Discourse

Mr. Bradley teaches content using the students' everyday language, Hmong, and provides feedback using it. (4)

Social Conversation

Mr. Bradley is not observed expressing affection or providing encouragement in the students' everyday language. (1)

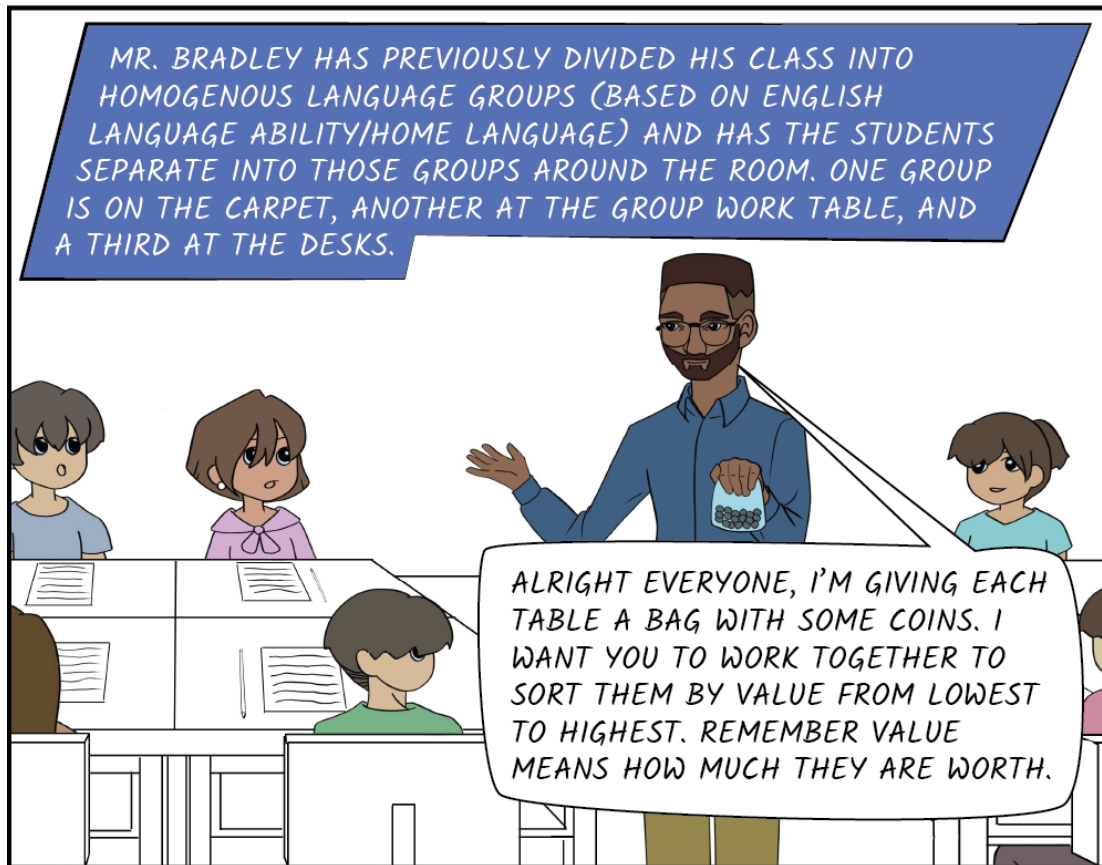
Students' Use

Students use their everyday language when the teacher asks them to, but otherwise are not observed code-switching or translanguaging. (3)

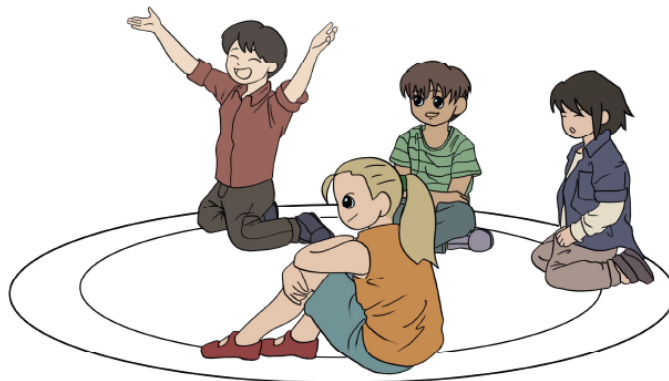
Language Inclusion

Mr. Bradley inquires about students' everyday language by asking how to say 5 and 10 in Hmong and in that way partially incorporates it in the activity. However, everyday language use is not encouraged. (3)

Version 3: Well-Connected



AS THE GROUPS START WORKING ON SORTING THE COINS, MR. BRADLEY WALKS AROUND THE CLASSROOM VISITING THE GROUPS. A YOUNG LATINO BOY SITTING AT THE CARPET IS BEING A LITTLE TOO LOUD, SO MR. BRADLEY MOTIONS HIM OVER.



MIJO, WHAT'S THE RULE ABOUT YELLING IN THE CLASSROOM?

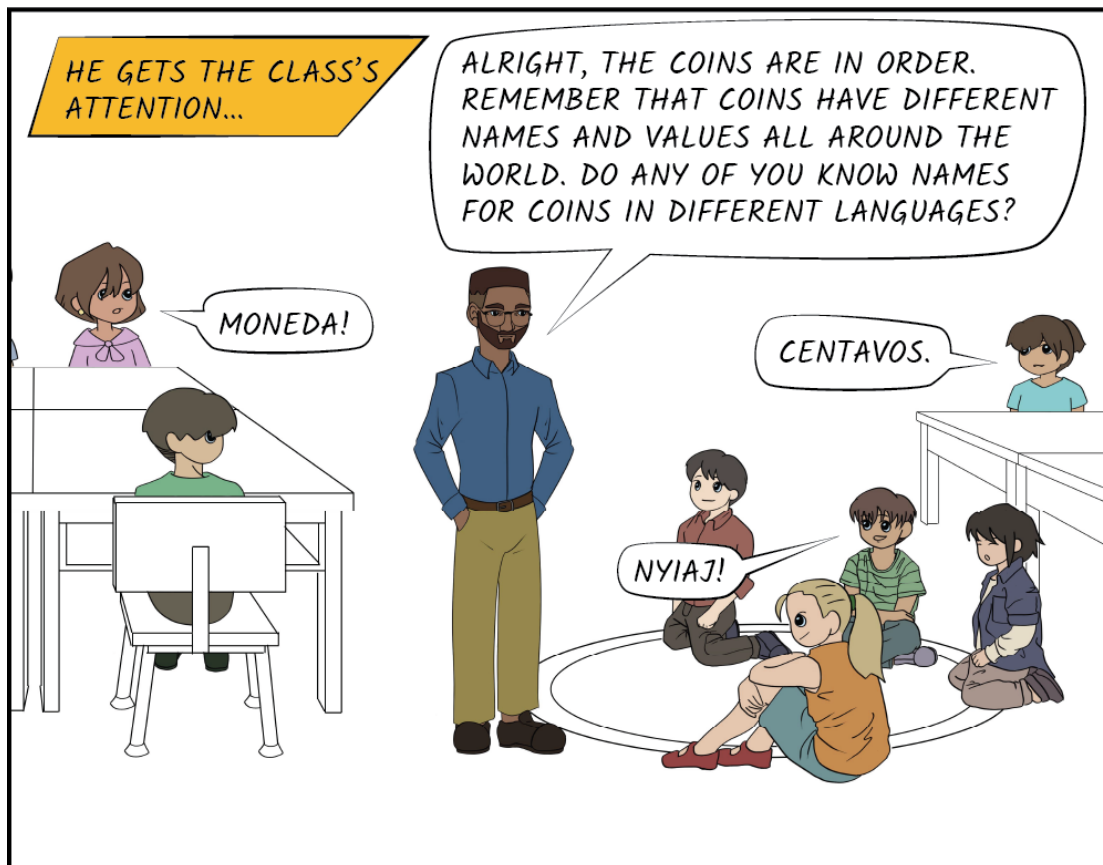
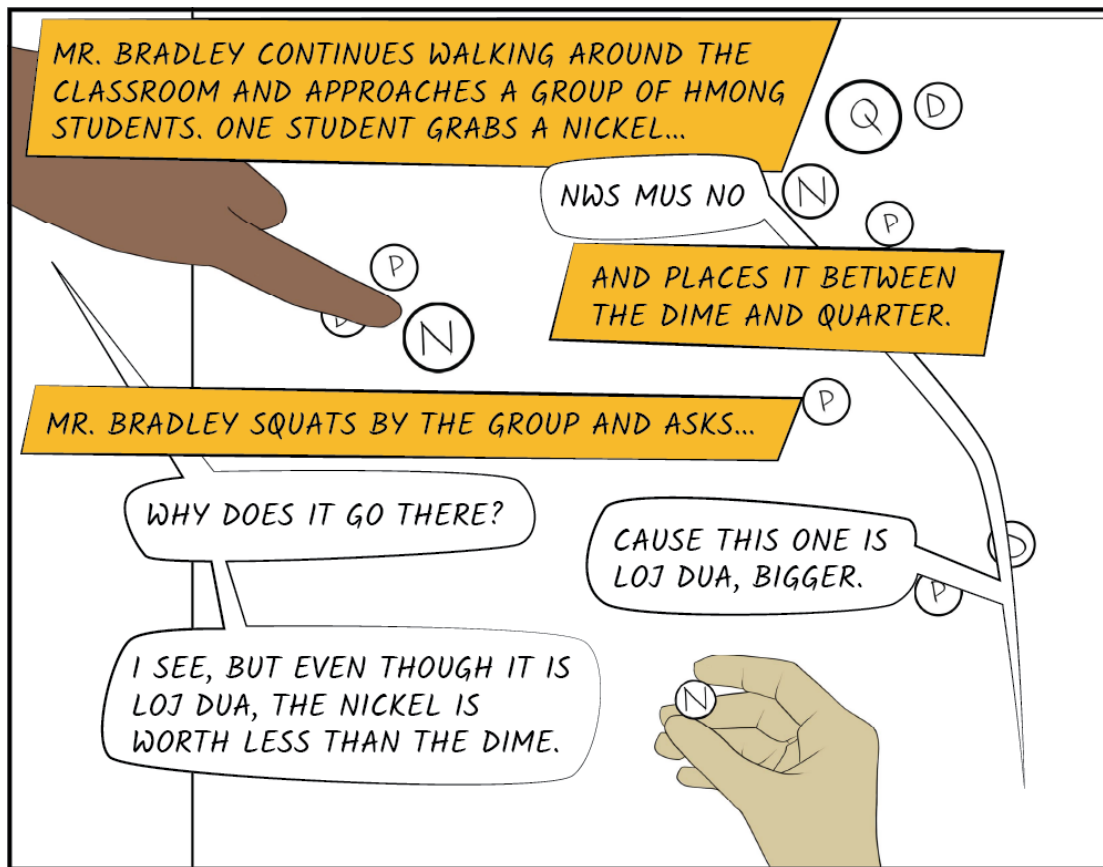
INSIDE VOICE

RIIIGHT, INSIDE VOICE.
VOZ BAJA.

MR. BRADLEY SMILES

BACK TO YOUR GROUP.







[Transcript](#)

Version 3 Explanation

Why do we say this example is “well-connected”?

Instructional Discourse

When talking to the Hmong students, Mr. Bradley uses their everyday language to teach them that dimes are worth more even though nickels are bigger. He also incorporates it into the discussion about coins at the end of the lesson. (4)

Social Conversation

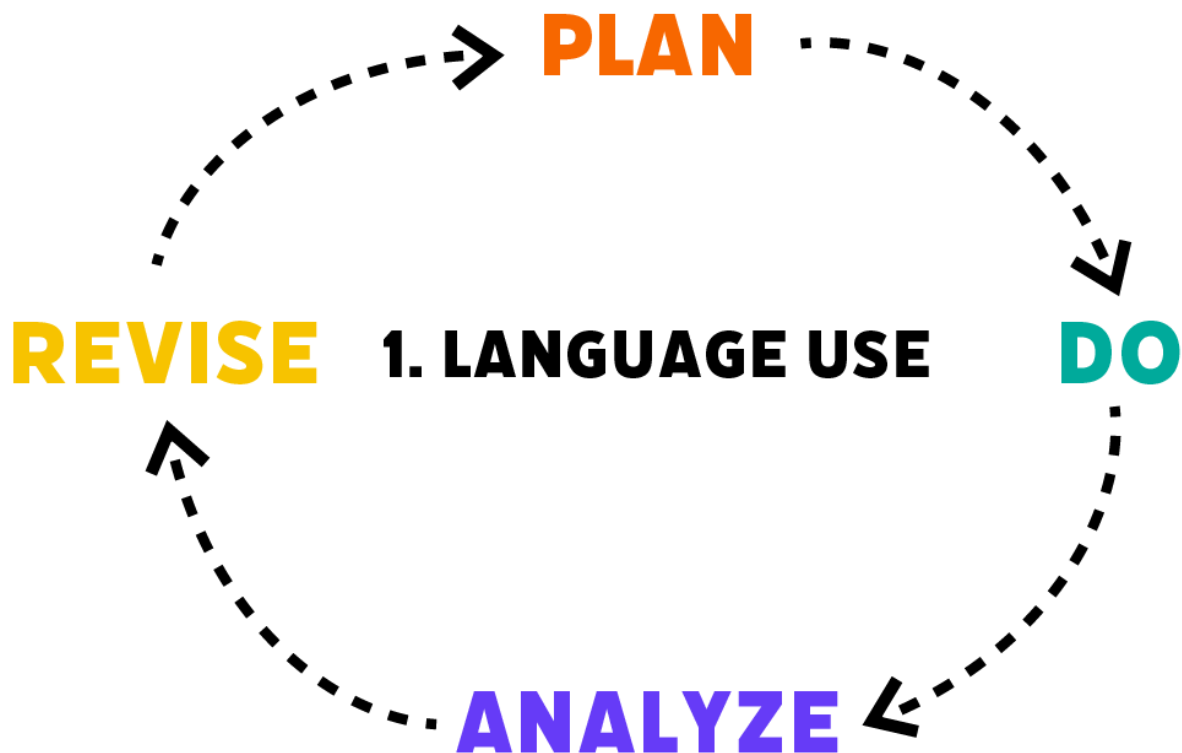
Mr. Bradley expresses affection for the Latino student and reinforces the classroom rules in his everyday language (4)

Students' Use

The Hmong student initiates use of his everyday language and translanguages. The students also reciprocate use of everyday language and are observed code-switching. (5)

Language Inclusion

Mr. Bradley is not observed inquiring about everyday language, but he does try to include it in the activity. He also encourages the students' use of their everyday language. (4)



Practicing Language Use: PDAR

Now that you have reviewed the theory, indicators, and examples of Language Use, it's time to practice in your own classroom.

Below you will find PDAR guides to help you integrate what you've learned into practice, either by yourself or with other teachers.

If you have a Hypothesis account (or create one), you can sign in at the top right corner of this page. This will enable you to annotate and make notes for your PDAR plan. We have also included worksheets below that you can download, fill in, and share. Do what works best for you!

1. Download PDAR Worksheet - [Version A \(Google Doc\)](#).
2. Download PDAR Worksheet - [Version B \(pdf\)](#) | [Version B \(Google Doc\)](#).
3. Open [Language Use CASI rubric \(Google Doc\)](#).
4. Download Self/Peer Observation document ([Google Doc](#)) ([PDF](#))

PDAR At-a-Glance

Plan

1. Identify the upcoming lesson or unit you'd like to work on
2. Review the Language Use indicators with your lesson(s) in mind
3. Identify your "look fors"—what you expect and hope to see
4. Plan your observations, alone or with others

Do

1. Work from your plan (try to reach your goals, but be flexible)
2. Consider recording multiple observations and multiple forms of data (scores, field notes, etc.)

Analyze

1. Record and review what happened, either solo or with your observers
2. Analyze how each indicator showed up in your lesson
3. Compare to your goals and predictions
4. Reflect on your overall experience

Revise

1. Revise your process (observations, data gathering)
2. Revise your direction (new goals? new lesson? new indicator?)
3. Identify your gaps (skills, knowledge, outside help)

PDAR In-Depth

Use the reflective questions below to guide you. You don't have to answer all of them—they are there to give you ideas and help you reflect.

(Take notes in the book or download one of the worksheets above.)

Plan

1. Identify lessons/unit you would like to apply Language Use to
 1. What are your upcoming lessons?
 2. If you need inspiration, jump to our “Lesson Ideas” section below.
2. Review Language Use with your lesson(s) in mind. Ask yourself:
 1. What do I know about my students' everyday language?
 2. How can I incorporate it into my instruction?
 3. How can I incorporate it into the planned activity?
 4. What are some ways I can interact with my students using their everyday language?
 5. What terms might I need to know to enforce rules/discipline in their everyday language?
 6. How do I react when my students use their everyday language in class?
 7. How can I encourage my students' use of their everyday language in class?
 8. What environmental factors might support everyday language use?
3. Identify your “look fors”— what you expect and hope to see.
 1. How would you like to change?
 2. What do you want students to experience?
 3. What do you expect to happen?
 4. How do you think the students will react?
 5. How do you think you will react?
4. Plan your observations
 1. Would you like a video or observation notes?
 2. Do you need any tools?
 3. When will you observe yourself/be observed?
 4. Will you do this study solo or with colleagues?

Do

1. Work from the plan
 1. Do you need to improve?
 2. What kind of notes should observers take?
 3. How long will your observations be? (15-20 minutes)
 4. How many observations before analyzing? (We recommend 3)

Analyze

1. Record/review what happened
 1. If using video, take detailed notes: what did students say and do? What did you say and do?
 2. If using colleague feedback, what did they observe students/you say and do?
2. Analyze each indicator (click here to see the [Language Use CASI rubric](#))
 1. Instructional Discourse
 1. How did I incorporate everyday language into my lesson and feedback?
 2. Social Conversation
 1. How did I use everyday language to express affection and enforce rules?
 3. Students' Use
 1. Did my students initiate and reciprocate everyday language use?
 4. Language Inclusion
 1. What did I do to encourage and incorporate everyday language use?
3. Compare to your goals and speculations
 1. Did you meet the goals you set?
 2. Can you justify your interpretation with evidence?
 3. Were your predictions correct?
 4. Can you justify with evidence?
4. Reflect on your experience
 1. What changes did you notice in yourself or your students?
 2. Which indicators came naturally? Which were challenging?
 3. What happened that you were not expecting?

Revise

1. Revise your process
 1. Do you need to change your observation method? Did your video work?
 2. Were you able to gather good insights from the process?
2. Revise your direction
 1. Would you like to continue or stop CASI use for this dimension? Is it time to move to a new dimension?
 2. Would you like to continue with the same goals or revise them?
 3. What can you revise in your lesson plan to better incorporate LU?
3. Examine your gaps
 1. What skill or knowledge gaps keep you from applying LU in your classroom (e.g., do you know what language or language variety your students speak outside of school? Do you know any words or phrases in that language/language variety?)
 2. Who could you work or discuss with to improve?

Conclusion

If language is the vehicle for learning, everyday language use is grease for those wheels. Integrating students' home and everyday languages into the classroom enhances social relations, facilitates instruction, and reinforces positive cultural identities for those students. It is linked to better outcomes for minoritized students. And, fortunately, it doesn't require huge changes to start practicing language use this week.

Our goal with this chapter was to help you appreciate the value of Language Use, feel confident explaining Language Use to peers, parents, and administrators, and feel ready to begin practicing Language Use in your classroom or school.

But as teacher learners, the process doesn't end for you with abstract knowledge gained from the chapter. Practicing Language Use in the classroom will uncover numerous opportunities and challenges we didn't cover here. When that happens, and we hope it does, share your experiences and questions with other educators, and with us (if you feel so inclined). Talk to students about what's working; talk to families about what language means to them.

Above all, keep asking yourself: "How can I welcome everyday language into my classroom this week?"

Resources for Teaching and Learning Language Use

Materials for the Classroom

- Bilingual, dual lingual, and multicultural book lists:
- American Library Association's [Bilingual Books for Children List](#) (organized by 13 languages!)
- Edutopia's [22 diverse book choices that represent students' lives](#)
- Scholastic's [11 Bilingual Books for Kids](#)
- Scholastic's [Multicultural Books for Kids 6-10](#)
- EdWeek blog: [understanding the benefits of students home language](#) (scroll to the bottom for lesson ideas about integrating home language)

Video Examples

- [Ms. Noonan practices language use while teaching 5th graders how to cut a cube](#). Note her language use at 4:47 and 7:35 related to perseverance and ganas.
- From the LA School District: [A 5th grade teacher plays a home language translation game](#) (including African American Vernacular English) to teach grammar and code-switching
- YouTube video of an AAVE [lesson](#) between a White American and an African American
- Lessons from Lucey Laney Elementary in Minneapolis: [the importance of AAVE in the classroom](#)

Go Deeper with Language Use

- Watch: Jim Cummins on [language and identity](#)
- Read: EdWeek blog: [understanding the benefits of students home language](#)
- Read: [Case studies from ToggleTalk](#), a program that helps K/1st grade African Americans learn to code switch between African American Vernacular English and Standard American English
- Read: [Article from State of Opportunity](#) about the value of validating code switching and the Toggle Talk program
- Read: Deja Washington's essay "[English is Not our Language](#)" in RefractMag on the ethics of AAVE code switching
- Read: Scholastic's [Many languages, Many cultures](#). This article focuses on how to better validate home language in the classroom.
- [Listen: a U of Michigan program called the "Rounds Project"](#) helps pre-service teachers get experience doing rounds in multicultural rural, suburban, and urban classrooms, to help move beyond the "lecture, textbook, and no real-life interaction" approach.

Have other materials or resources? Share them with us at CASlbookteam@gmail.com!

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Contact Us

We are constantly improving this resource. Have suggestions, resources, or experiences with the CASI you'd like to share?

Email us at CASIbookteam@gmail.com

Thank you!





Brenton Jackson

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Brenton Jackson is a masters student in BYU's Department of Instructional Psychology and Technology. His work centers on applying open educational resources to equity problems in education, as well as studying distinctions of worth in design practice. Creating this online book about equitable practices for K-6 teachers is the focus of his thesis. A native Virginian and adopted Bostonian, Brenton enjoys astrophotography and writing music in his spare time.



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Jocelin Meza is from Texas and currently studies Elementary Education at BYU, with a minor in teaching English language learners (TELL). As a proud Mexican American, Jocelin focuses much of her studies on multicultural education and enjoys learning how to effectively incorporate engaging curriculum into the classroom. In her spare time, Jocelin loves to read and run.



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Content Connections

Brenton Jackson, Tresstyn Clubb Daines, Jocelin Meza, & Rachel Thomas

Equity

K-12

Teacher Learning



"Students are willing to struggle with unfamiliar language and abstract notions in science, math, and other content areas when they are motivated by interesting activities they and their families value."

(Tharp, Estrada, Dalton, & Yamauchi, 2000, p. 26)

"Students come to the classroom with preconceptions about how the world works. If their initial understanding is not engaged, they may fail to grasp the new concepts and information that are taught, or they may learn them for purposes of a test but revert to their preconceptions outside the classroom."

(National Research Council, 1999, pp. 14-15)

What we learn in school can be incredibly influential when it is connected to what we know and do outside of the classroom. But many people have (at one point or another) felt a disconnect between themselves and school content, perhaps because they were absent when the teacher explained an important concept, missed the directions—or

misunderstood the whole point of the activity. If you have been in this position at least once, you know that it can leave you disoriented and discouraged, regardless of your age or ability as a student.

Unfortunately, there are circumstances beyond missing class or misunderstanding directions that can facilitate this same experience of disconnect. Consider the following:

- What if the lesson material was unintelligible to you because it had little connection to your understanding of the world and everyday experiences?
- What if a lesson was rooted in traditions, values, or interests you had never learned?
- What if the presentation of content in school assumed a [monolithic](#) way of experiencing the world (e.g., white, middle-class) that was neither universal nor superior?

Much like our opening examples, students experiencing disconnect via these circumstances may be disoriented, discouraged, and/or disengaged.

Many [minoritized students](#) in US classrooms experience this disconnect often, throughout their school day and week. This is especially true for students whose background, routines, interests, perspectives, values, traditions, or expertise outside of school are different from their teacher's, or different from what is presumed by the curriculum design. Because what we teach and the way we teach it typically privilege white and middle-class students over their minoritized peers (Rogoff, 2003), we must go out of our way as teachers to connect what we teach in the classroom with what diverse students know and do outside of school.

This difficulty with connecting content to diverse students actually presents a great opportunity for teachers—the opportunity to relate school content to students' lives outside of school, which is the foundation for the Content Connections dimension, the second dimension in the CASI-U's Life Applications domain. Some researchers refer to content connections as "[making meaning](#)" (Tharp, et al., 2000, p. 26) in the classroom, and it is a process that can ultimately benefit all students (as you will see later in the chapter).

The central question of this chapter is:

Central Question

How can I connect my instructional content and learning objectives with the everyday experiences of my students?

Our goal is to help you implement connected and communal interactions on a consistent basis to enhance meaningful participation for all students, especially those from minoritized backgrounds.

Specifically, after working through this chapter and practicing in your classroom (either by yourself or in collaboration with other teachers) you should be able to:

1. Identify what content connections are.
2. Explain some reasons why content connections are helpful for students.
3. Interpret actual teaching scenarios (including your own) according to the indicators of content connections.
4. Plan and implement lessons that connect instructional content to the everyday lives and experiences of all your students, especially those from minoritized backgrounds.

We also hope that working on content connections will help you feel a stronger desire to connect with your students and deepen your relationships with them. Take time to discuss the pros and cons of these possibilities with other teachers and administrators.

Why Do Content Connections Matter?

Benefits of Content Connections

- Appreciate content more and perform better
- Prevent student resistance or de-identification with school
- Allows students to become a resource in classroom community/access funds of knowledge
- Enable students to share their own experiences
- Increase excitement about learning material
- Promote intrinsic motivation
- Create more inclusive classroom
- Increase perceived value of school learning
- Enhance sense of belonging and academic identity
- Help students persist with difficult concepts
- Create a stronger sense of community

Connected content helps students value school. What educators teach their students should be important to their lives now and help prepare them for the future. Given that there are many students whose everyday lives are different (not better or worse) from the culture within the school, finding ways to connect curricular content to the lives of all students will help to make lessons meaningful in their lives, increase the worth they perceive in school learning, and increase their interest in the subject matter. Jere Brophy (2008) argues that students appreciate the inherent nature of school content more and perform better when they see connections between that content and their own lives and aspirations for the future. Seeing these connections helps prevent student resistance or de-identification with school.

Connected content helps students be invested. Connecting curricular content to students' lives allows them to become a resource in the classroom community as they teach and share their own experiences with others. Teachers afford these connections by demonstrating a genuine interest in what students know and do outside of school (see CASI dimension 8. Role Flexibility). By drawing on students' "[funds of knowledge](#)" (Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti, 2006), educators can keep students invested in school and interested in the subjects. Students are more likely to be excited about learning material that relates to their interests and their lives, and it also promotes intrinsic motivation and creates a more inclusive classroom. Connecting with what students know and do outside of school increases the value students ascribe to school learning and enhances their sense of belonging and academic identity at school (Brophy, 2008). Students are also more willing to struggle and persist with difficult concepts when the activities resonate with their interests and family activities (Tharp, et al., 2000).

Connected content creates community. Additionally, students who know each other and have seen the teacher connect learning to their everyday lives will create a stronger sense of community. All cultural practices and backgrounds are valued in connected classrooms.

Learning Check

Hopefully, we have convinced you that content connections matter. Based on what you've learned so far, which of the following statements do you think best defines content connections?

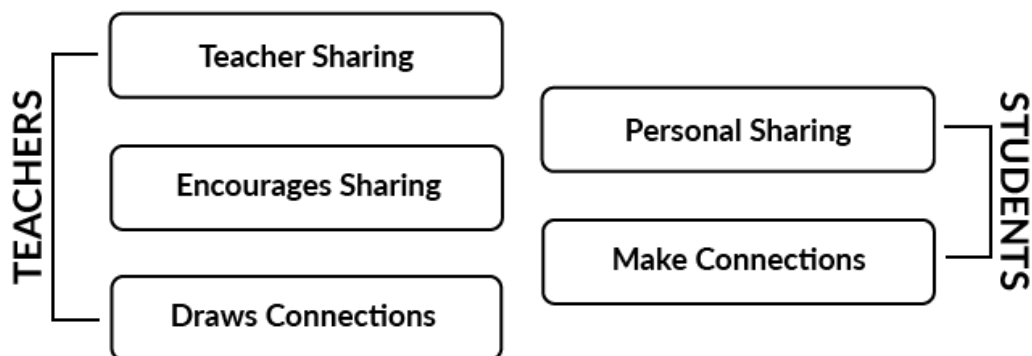
- ☐ Teacher and students connect content to previous lessons in the classroom.
- ☐ Teacher and students connect everyday experiences to content and objectives.
- ☐ Teacher and students share thoughts, ideas, and viewpoints based on content.
- ☐ Teacher and students share life lessons with each other throughout the day.

Looking Ahead

Before you move on:

- What do you think content connections will look like in classroom practice?
- If you were asked to evaluate how "connected" a lesson was based on a video recording, what would you look for right now?

The 5 Indicators of Content Connections



So, now that we've reviewed why Content Connections matter, where do you begin? What do content connections look like day-to-day, and how can you start practicing it within your current circumstances?

The [Classroom Assessment of Sociocultural Interactions \(CASI\)](#) divides Content Connections into five indicators:

Teacher Sharing, Encourages Sharing, Draws Connections, Personal Sharing, and Makes Connections. The first three are teacher-focused, and the last two are student-focused. We'll discuss each one in turn, giving you the definition, the rubric, and examples.

Teacher Sharing

To what extent do you share information about yourself with your students? Do you share how your everyday experiences and knowledge connect to what the students are learning?

| | Disconnected (1) | Somewhat Connected (3) | Well-Connected (5) |
|---|--|--|--|
| 2a. Teacher Sharing | | | |
| • Shares out-of-school experiences (e.g., family trips) and knowledge (e.g., hobbies) | The teacher does not share information about her or himself. | The teacher sometimes shares information about her or himself. | The teacher often shares information about her or himself. |

Teacher Sharing Examples

Standard: Describe the natural resources in the United States, Canada, Mexico, and the Caribbean. ([NGSSS.3.G.3.2](#)) (Note: at the time of writing, Florida used their own Sunshine State Standards for social studies.)

Context: Mrs. Gilles is a 3rd grade teacher in Florida with a mix of white, Cuban, and African-American students. Mrs. Gilles is teaching a unit on physical environment. She is helping her students learn how to conserve and protect natural resources by reducing, reusing, and recycling.

Teacher sharing (1): Mrs. Gilles shares a video that talks about the importance of natural resources. She explains that in order to preserve our environment and resources we must apply the three R's; reduce, reuse, and recycle. Mrs. Gilles then has students point out things they can reuse, reduce, or recycle in the classroom. She then has students create a poster and explain one item they will reduce, reuse, and recycle.

Teacher sharing (2): Mrs. Gilles shares a video that talks about the importance of natural resources. She brings in items from her home that she has either reduced, reused, or recycled. She then has students create a list of items they have either reused, reduced, or recycled in their own home and how its impacted their environment and natural resources.

Teacher sharing (3): Mrs. Gilles shares a video that talks about the importance of natural resources, and brings in items from her home that she has either reduced, reused, or recycled. Mrs. Gilles talks about a trip she took to the Amazon and the impact its deforestation had on her. She mentions that seeing a drastic change in the forest motivated her to reduce, reuse, and recycle paper.

Teacher sharing (4): Mrs. Gilles shares a video that talks about the importance of natural resources, and brings in items from her home that she has either reduced, reused, or recycled. Mrs. Gilles talks about a trip she took to the Amazon and the impact its deforestation had on her. She shares pictures and videos of her trip to the amazon forest and how it motivated her to reduce, reuse, and recycle paper.

Teacher sharing (5): Mrs. Gilles shares a video from her blog in which she talks about the importance of natural resources. Mrs. Gilles brings in items from her home that she has either reduced, reused, or recycled and talks about her trip to the Amazon where she was able to plant trees to improve the air and soil, both natural resources. She shares her own pictures of the Amazon forest and how its deforestation has motivated her to reduce, reuse, and recycle paper.

Learning Check

What can Mrs. Gilles do to help her classroom be more connected in regards to teacher sharing?

- ☐ Play a get-to-know-Mrs.-Gilles game at the beginning of the school year with her class.
- ☐ Have a sharing time each morning where she asks the students about any news.
- ☐ Include her real-life situations (related to the content) as hooks at the beginning of lessons to get the student' attention.
- ☐ Set a goal to share something about herself at least once a week.

Encourages Sharing

How do you encourage students to share about themselves? Do you ask follow-up questions? Do you discuss how their similarities and differences are important?

Note

- While encouraging students to share their thoughts is good practice generally, this indicator is particularly focused on encouraging students to share personal experiences, opinions, interests, or values.
- Affirming and acknowledging can be verbal or nonverbal, showing students that you notice and appreciate their sharing.

| | Disconnected (1) | Somewhat Connected (3) | Well-Connected (5) |
|--|--|--|--|
| 2b. Encourages Sharing | Teacher does not encourage students to share about themselves. | Teacher sometimes encourages students to share about themselves. | Teacher regularly encourages all students to share about themselves. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Asks students to share • Asks follow-up questions • Discusses similarities and differences as assets • Affirms and acknowledges sharing | | | |

Encourages Sharing Examples

Standard: Use precise language and domain-specific vocabulary to inform about or explain the topic.

([CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.6.2.D](#))

Context: Ms. Mona teaches in a 6th grade classroom that has a fairly equal mix of Latino, Black, White, and Pacific Islander students in California. For her language arts lesson, Ms. Mona needs to help students create a narrative that involves transition words and phrases to manage the sequence of events. She decides to use a cake recipe as an example to help students understand transition words and phrases.

Encourages Sharing (1): Ms. Mona shares with students that the recipe she's using is her recently-deceased grandmother's recipe. She puts the recipe on the projector and asks students to raise their hands when she gets to a transition word or phrase.

Encourages Sharing (2): Ms. Mona shares with students that the recipe she's using is her recently-deceased grandmother's recipe. She asks students to suggest transition words and phrases they can use, affirming that it's good to have different answers because it makes their work original.

Encourages Sharing (3): Ms. Mona shares with students that the recipe she's using is her recently-deceased grandmother's recipe. She asks students if they have any special recipes or meals in their family. She asks who created the recipes, and then has them point out transition words in her recipe.

Encourages Sharing (4): Ms. Mona asks students to bring in a recipe or directions for a meal their family likes to make. She then shares the transition words from her own recipe and has the students find the transition words in each other's recipes. She asks them why the recipes are important to their family.

Encourages Sharing (5): Ms. Mona asks students to bring in a recipe or directions for a meal their family likes to make. She then shares the transition words from her own recipe and has the students find the transition words in each other's recipes. She highlights how different students like different food, which means they can learn new foods from each other. She thanks them for sharing!

Learning Check

How could Ms. Mona encourage her students to share more about their everyday experiences outside the classroom?

Draws Connections

To what extent do you draw connections between classroom learning and your students' everyday experiences? Do you make connections to students' relationships, activities/responsibilities, hobbies/interests, and everyday expertise?

Note

- Keep in mind that there is a difference between a teacher drawing connections and a student making connections.
- The teacher can encourage the students to share about their lives without drawing a connection between the students' everyday lives and the content. However, oftentimes encouraging sharing will precede drawing connections.
- Content should be connected to students' individual lives and experiences.

| | Disconnected (1) | Somewhat Connected (3) | Well-Connected (5) |
|---|---|---|---|
| 2c. Draws Connections | The teacher does not connect classroom learning with students' out-of-school experiences. | The teacher sometimes connects classroom learning with students' out-of-school experiences. | The teacher often connects classroom learning with students' out-of-school experiences. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relates content to family or peer relationships • Links with out-of-school activities/responsibilities • Incorporates hobbies and interests into class activities • Draws on students' out-of-school expertise | | | |

Draws Connections Examples

Standard: Use addition and subtraction within 20 to solve word problems involving situations of adding to, taking from, putting together, taking apart, and comparing, with unknowns in all positions, e.g., by using objects, drawings, and equations with a symbol for the unknown number to represent the problem.

([CCSS.MATH.CONTENT.1.OA.A.1](#)).

Context: Mrs. Kobayashi teaches first grade in Minnesota. She has White, African American, and Asian (Hmong) students. She is working on representing addition and subtraction problems within 20 with her class. She decides to have the students work with manipulatives to build on their understanding of word problems.

Draws Connections (1): Mrs. Kobayashi projects three problems on the board and works through them with the class, demonstrating how to use snap cubes to represent the word problems. She breaks the students into groups of four and gives each group a bucket with snap cubes inside. Then she lets them solve ten more problems as a group. She gathers the students back together and they discuss what they learned in their groups as a class.

Draws Connections (2): Mrs. Kobayashi projects three problems on the board and works through them with the class, asking if any of them have used snap cubes before. Some students raise their hands and she has three of them come up to demonstrate to the class. Then she breaks the students into groups of four and gives each group a bucket with snap cubes in it. She has the students work in groups to solve ten more problems. She gets the students' attention and they discuss what they learned in their groups.

Draws Connections (3): Mrs. Kobayashi creates thirteen-word problems that are related to the jobs of her students' parents. She projects three of the word problems on the board and asks students if they have used snap cubes before. Some students raise their hands and she has a student demonstrate to the class. She then breaks the students into groups of four and has them solve the remaining ten-word problems. She gets the students' attention and they discuss what they learned.

Draws Connections (4): Mrs. Kobayashi creates thirteen-word problems that are related to the jobs of her students' parents and has the students bring in 20 small objects from home. She asks the students why they brought those objects and lets a few students answer. Then she models how to use manipulatives to solve word problems and breaks the students into groups of four to solve the rest of the word problems.

Draws Connections (5): Mrs. Kobayashi creates word problems that are related to the jobs of her students' parents and has the students bring in 20 small objects that tell about themselves or their family. She breaks the class into groups of four and has the students share with their group why they chose those objects. She then brings the class back together and lets some students share. Then she models how to solve some word problems and allows the students to solve the rest as a group.

Learning Check

What are some ways Mrs. Kobayashi can draw connections between the classroom content and her students' lives outside of school?

- ☐ Use data from the class survey to find students interests that are related to the lesson, then ask the students to share.
- ☐ Have students who play baseball in their free time help teach the rest of the class during PE.
- ☐ Compare the different relationships between parents and offspring in the wild to the relationship students' parents have with them.
- ☐ Have her students present their favorite activities to do with family to the rest of the class.

Personal Sharing

To what extent do your students share information about their everyday lives? Who shares? Do your students demonstrate an interest in others' experiences?

Note

- Though it is important for many students to share, having the same students share may not benefit the students who don't share.
- Students can show interest and concern for others' experiences through comments, sharing similar stories, and body languages.

| | Disconnected (1) | Somewhat Connected (3) | Well-Connected (5) |
|--|--|--|---|
| 2d. Personal Sharing | Students do not share information about their out-of-school lives. | A few students sometimes share personal information, but rarely demonstrate interest in others' experiences. | Many students often share personal information and regularly demonstrate interest in others' experiences. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family relationships • Activities and routines, roles and responsibilities • Interests and hobbies • Enthusiasm in sharing • Interest in and concern for others' experiences | | | |

Personal Sharing Examples

Standard: Explain that many different groups of people immigrated to the United States from other places voluntarily and some were brought to the United States against their will (as in the case of people of Africa). ([MASS.SS.4.T4.4](#)).

Context: Mr. Silveira teaches 4th grade in a Title I public school in Boston. His classroom is diverse, including African American, Cape Verdean, Haitian, and Puerto Rican students. Mr. Silveira's class is learning about the reasons that people in the Eastern U.S. wanted to move West in the 19th century, including features of pioneer life on the frontier.

Personal Sharing (1): Mr. Silveira shows the students pictures of pioneers that lived on the frontier in the 19th century. He asks students to raise their hand if they have ever heard of the Gold Rush and then reads a short account from a pioneer that migrated West to Colorado seeking gold. Then students try to come up with other reasons why someone might have wanted to move West in the 1800s.

Personal Sharing (2): Mr. Silveira shows the students pictures of pioneers that lived on the frontier in the 19th century. He asks students to raise their hands if they have ever moved somewhere in their life. One student says that she moved when she was younger and her brother was a little baby. Mr. Silveira then describes the Gold Rush and has students think of other reasons someone would want to move West.

Personal Sharing (3): Mr. Silveira shows the students pictures of pioneers that lived on the frontier in the 19th century. He hands out paper to each student and asks them to draw a picture depicting a time when they, or someone they know, moved, and what they did to help. He then has a few students share their drawings in front of the class and describe where and why they moved.

Personal Sharing (4): Mr. Silveira shows the students pictures of pioneers that lived on the frontier in the 19th century. He asks students if any of them have ever been like a pioneer and moved. Many hands shoot up, and several students describe moving from Cape Verde and other areas. Based on follow-up questions, the students share what they did to help in the process and how their lives changed as a result.

Personal Sharing (5): Mr. Silveira shows the students pictures of pioneers that lived on the frontier in the 19th century and asks students if any of them have ever been like a pioneer and moved. Many hands shoot up, and Mr. Silveira asks them to share their experiences with their desk partners, including where they moved from and how the process changed their life. The students excitedly ask each other questions about what it was like in other countries and states.

Learning Check

How can Mr. Silveira recognize when his students share about their out-of-school lives?

Make Connections

To what extent do your students make connections between classroom learning and their everyday experiences? Do they connect lessons to their relationships, expertise, traditions, or interests?

Note

- Though as teachers you are most likely aware, students may share about their personal lives without making any connections to the content. This could be interpreted as personal sharing without needing to be included in making connections.

| | Disconnected (1) | Somewhat Connected (3) | Well-Connected (5) |
|---|--|--|---|
| 2e. Make Connections | Students do not make connections between classroom learning and out-of-school knowledge and experiences. | Students sometimes make connections between classroom learning and the out-of-school knowledge and experiences of themselves or their peers. | Many students often make connections between classroom learning and the out-of-school knowledge and experiences of themselves or their peers. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • connect content to family relationships • connect content to out-of-school experiences • connect content to student expertise, hobbies or interests | | | |

Make Connections Examples

Standard: Plan and conduct an investigation to describe and classify different kinds of materials by their observable properties. ([OAS-2-PS1-1](#)).

Context: Mr. Henricksen teaches a 2nd-grade classroom in rural Oklahoma. Though his classroom is not very diverse, he often has one or two students whose parents are migrant workers. His class is working on describing the characteristics of different rocks. Mr. Henricksen decides to bring rocks from all over the United States into class and have his students guess where they are from.

Make Connections (1): Due to questions Mr. Henricksen asked, many students raise their hands and share stories. None of the stories the students share are related to rocks and their characteristics. One student shares how his little brother threw a rock at him the other day and it hurt. Another student shares how her older brother is mean to her all the time. The students guess where the rocks are from based on their own personal knowledge.

Make Connections (2): Due to questions Mr. Henricksen asked, many students raise their hands and share stories. Unfortunately, only one of the stories is on topic. A student shares how he collects rocks and tells the class what he knows about different kinds of rocks. The students mainly guess where the rocks are from based on their own knowledge.

Make Connections (3): Due to questions Mr. Henricksen asked, many students raise their hands and share stories. Some of the stories are related to rocks, but others are not. One student shares how his family went hiking on a trip last summer and describes the rocks they saw. Another student, however, hears that and shares how he stayed at a hotel and went swimming on his family vacation. The students use their collective knowledge to guess where the rocks are from.

Make Connections (4): Due to questions Mr. Henricksen asked, many students raise their hands and share stories. One student shares about a family trip that he went on last summer. That story reminds another student of an excursion she went on with her older brother in the area surrounding the town. The students use their collective knowledge to guess where the rocks are from.

Make Connections (5): Due to questions Mr. Henricksen asked, many students raise their hands and share stories. One student shares about a family trip that prompts another student to share about an excursion she went on with her older brother. One of the students whose parents' are migrant workers says the rocks are like his family and have seen many parts of the United States. Another student talks about how he collects rocks. Students use their collective knowledge to guess where the rocks are from.

Learning Check

What would be examples of Mr. Henricksen's students making connections between the content and their lives outside of school?

- ☐ Talk about how their moms like cake when doing a math problem where the topic is birthdays.
- ☐ While working on an informative text on lizards, one explains what her dad told her about Komodo dragons in Indonesia.
- ☐ Share how they are planning on going to Disneyland this summer while reading a book.
- ☐ Talk about a trip the family took to visit family in Guatemala while learning about a jungle habitat.

Content Connections Scenario: Miss Grant and Posadas

Each chapter in this book includes three versions of a teaching scenario to illustrate the dimension and its indicators. In this chapter, we return to our classroom with Miss Grant in Houston. Here is some context for her background, classroom and setting:

Miss Rachel Grant is a white female, fourth year, 4th-grade teacher at a Title 1 school in Houston, Texas. She is intellectually curious and committed to the school and the Latino community that she works in. Since moving into a small home near the school during her second year of teaching, Rachel has grown more interested in learning Spanish and integrating herself into the community; she thinks this might be helpful considering the multicultural, majority Latino demographics of her class.

As a part of this effort, Rachel is trying to include some books by Latino authors that are more connected to her students' lives.

Scenario Introduction

Our teacher has decided to read *Becoming Naomi Leon* by Pam Munoz Ryan to help teach some of the Grade 4 Reading: Literature standards:

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4.7](#)

Make connections between the text of a story or drama and a visual or oral presentation of the text, identifying where each version reflects specific descriptions and directions in the text.

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4.9](#)

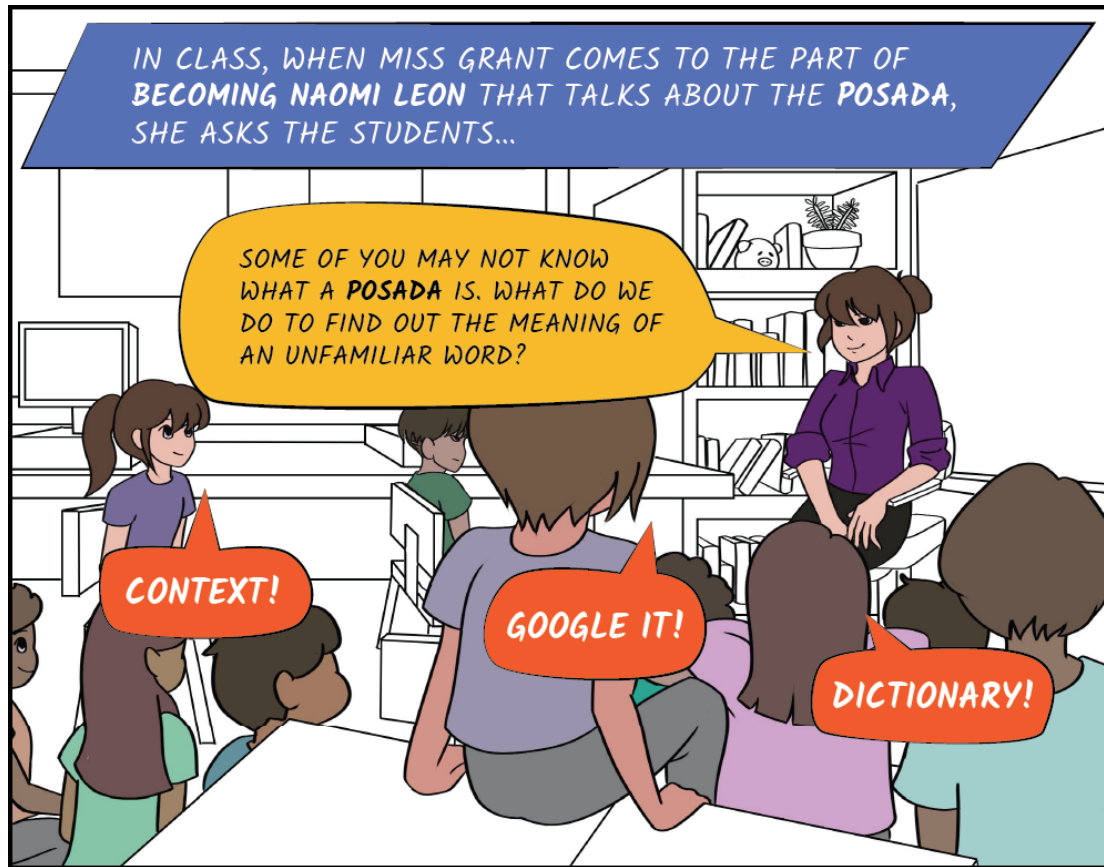
Compare and contrast the treatment of similar themes and topics (e.g., the opposition of good and evil) and patterns of events (e.g., the quest) in stories, myths, and traditional literature from different cultures.

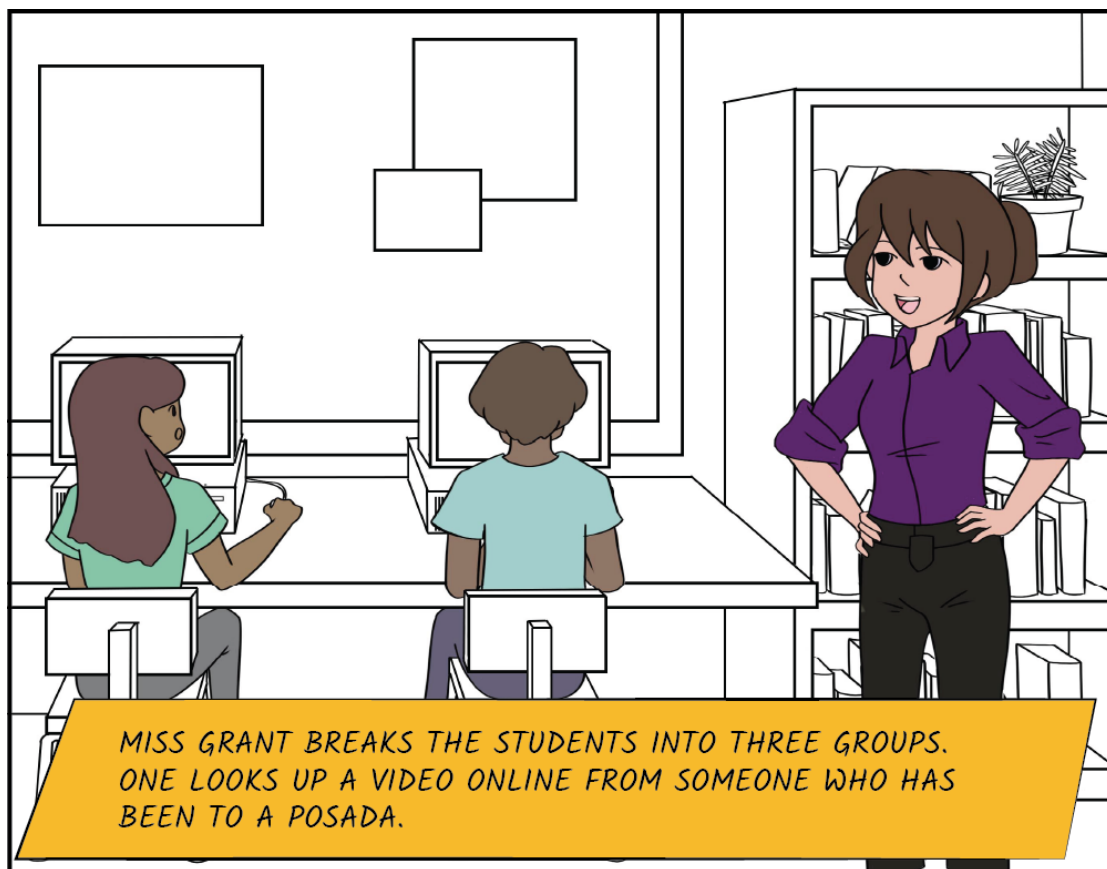
This is her first time using *Becoming Naomi Leon* in her classroom. As she's reading **Chapter 15** to prepare, she comes to a passage where the main character is participating in a *posada* in Mexico. Locals are handing out candles and other items associated with the celebration and several Spanish words are used in conjunction with the *posada*. Miss Grant recalls that several of her students are from Mexico or have Mexican heritage.

Note: Evaluating Teaching Examples

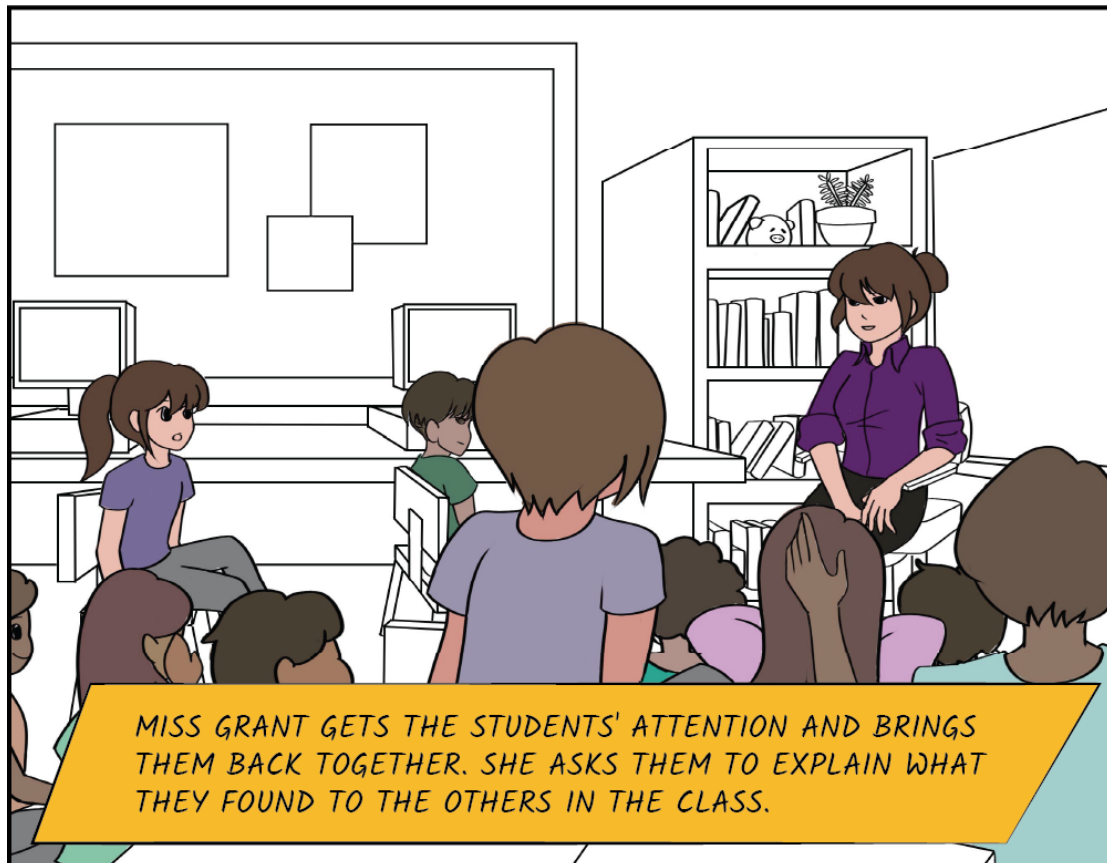
Remember that effective **generic** teaching practices and effective **cultural** teaching practices can be different. In our scenarios across this book, you will find teachers using effective **generic practices** without necessarily being highly **meaningful or socioculturally connected**. Our goal is not to replace effective generic practice; rather, we seek to show how culturally connected and equitable practices can be integrated with generic practice to make meaning in the lives of your students. Pay attention to the differences!

Version 1: Disconnected





THE THIRD GROUP LOOKS UP **POSADA** IN A SPANISH-ENGLISH DICTIONARY.





Version 1 Transcript

Version 1 Explanation

Why do we say this example is *"disconnected"*?

Teacher Sharing

Miss Grant is not observed sharing anything about herself or her life. (1)

Encourages Sharing

Miss Grant does not ask students to share or talk about similarities or differences. (1)

Draws Connections

Miss Grant draws a connection between a posada and a Christmas party which may be helpful for students who do not have a background in Mexican culture. However, it does not necessarily draw a connection for the majority of the students in the classroom. (2)

Personal Sharing

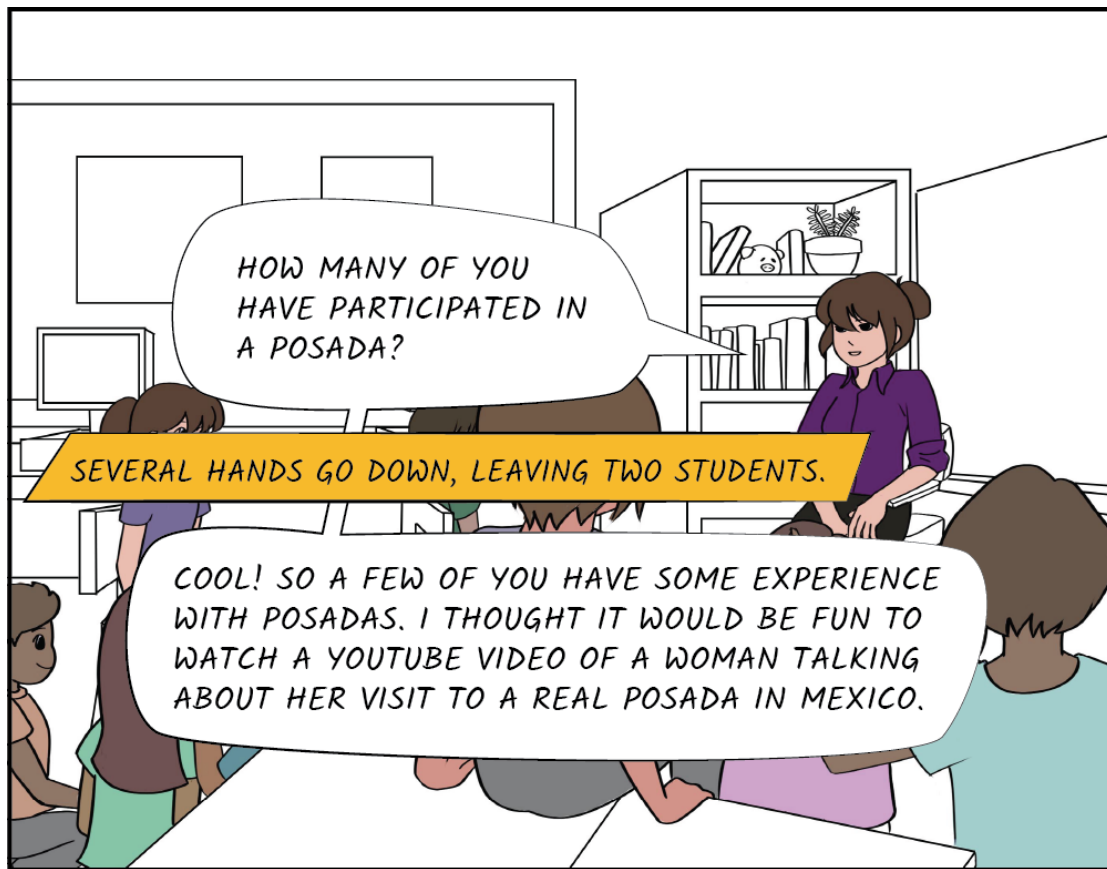
Students are not observed sharing about themselves or their lives outside school. (1)

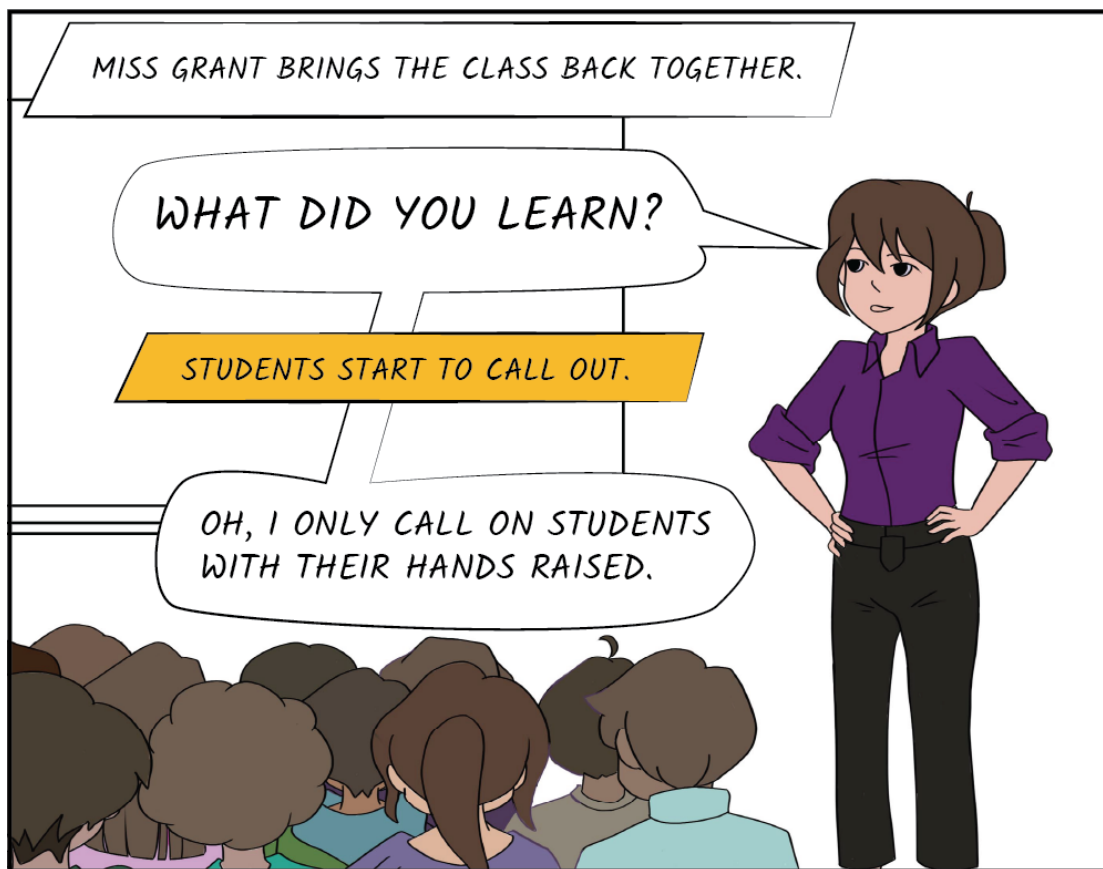
Make Connections

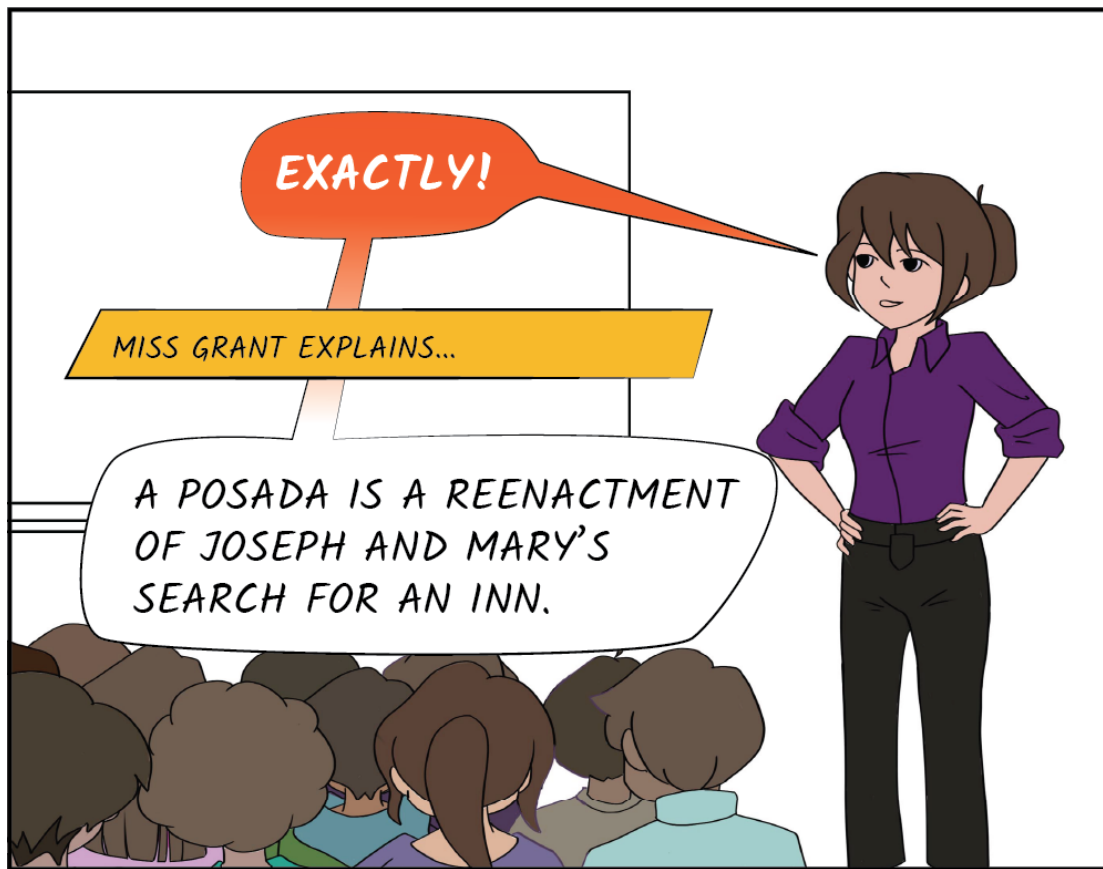
Students are not observed making connections between the content and their out-of-school experiences and relationships. (1)

Version 2: Somewhat Connected









Version 2 Transcript

Version 2 Explanation

Why do we say this example is "*somewhat connected*"?

Teacher Sharing

Miss Grant does not share anything about herself or her life. (1)

Encourages Sharing

Miss Grant asks students to share, but she does not have students compare similarities and differences that involve other cultures. This limits the amount of sharing and participation. (2-3)

Draws Connections

Miss Grant draws connections between a posada and students' experiences, but student sharing is somewhat passive. She connects the topic with out-of-school activities, but not responsibilities, expertise, or relationships. The connection between posadas and the "Joseph and Mary" explanation may be helpful to those who have participated in posadas and to those who have a religious background, but it does not necessarily connect to the majority of the students on its own. (3)

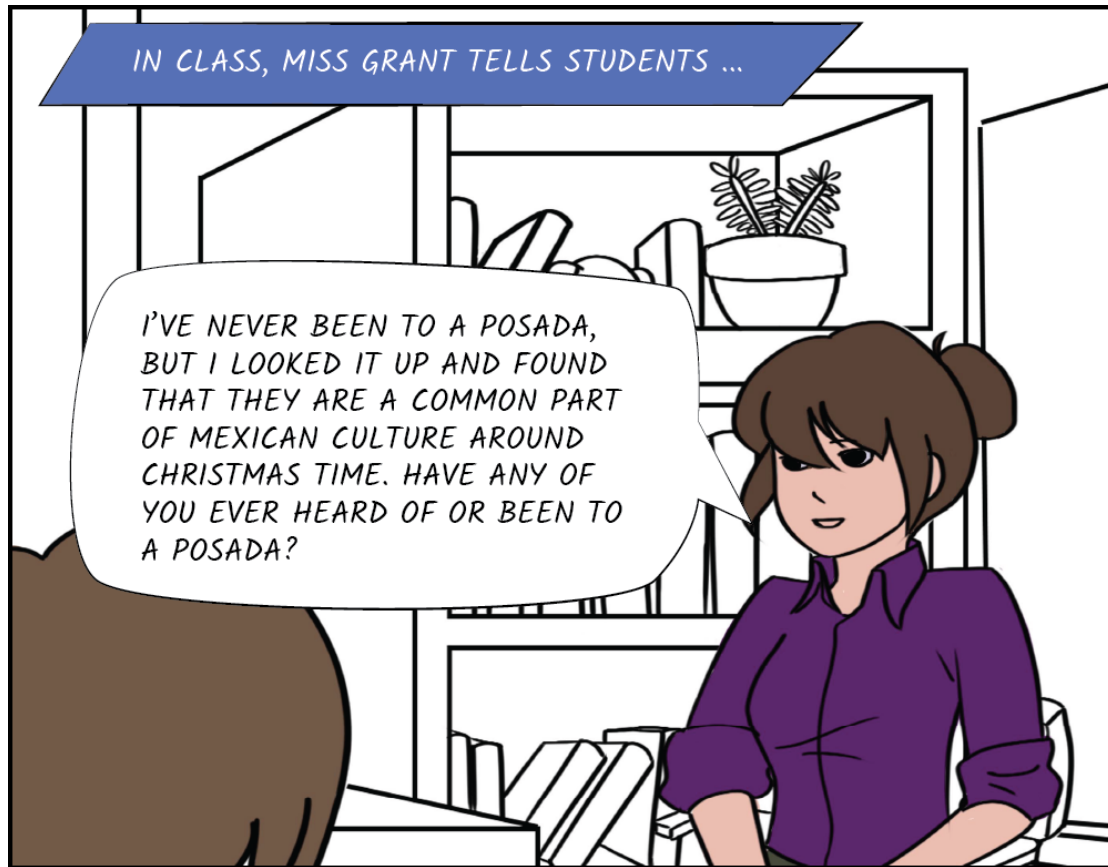
Personal Sharing

Students share about themselves with each other and talk about how content in a posada video relates to what they already know. They indicate who has participated in a posada by raising their hands. Interest in and concern for each others' experiences are not emphasized. (3-4)

Make Connections

Students who have participated or heard of posadas make some connections between the content and their out-of-school experiences. Invitations to connect do not necessarily direct them toward their expertise, hobbies, or interests, however. (3)

Version 3: Well-Connected



SEVERAL OF THE STUDENTS SAY THEY KNOW ABOUT POSADAS BUT HAVE NEVER BEEN. ONE BOY RAISES HIS HAND AND SAYS...

I WENT TO ONE A FEW YEARS AGO WHEN WE VISITED MY FAMILY.

JASON, WHAT DID YOU SEE AT THE POSADA?

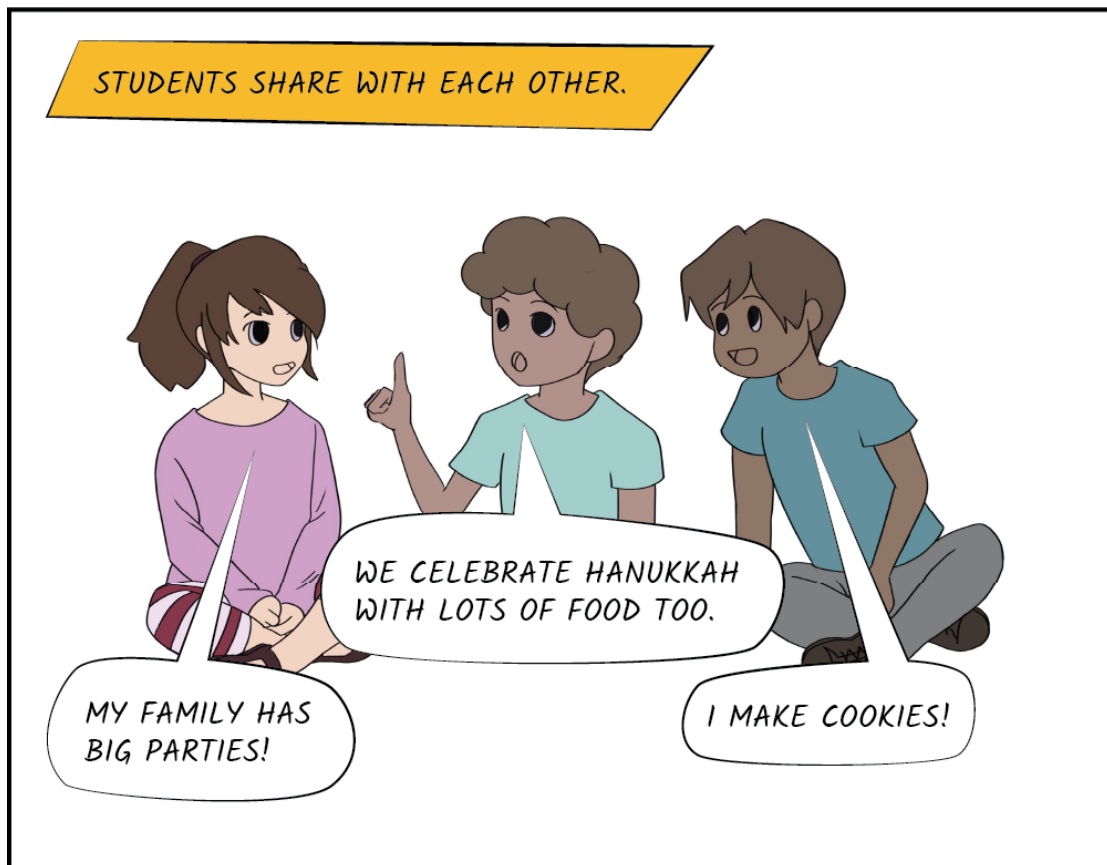
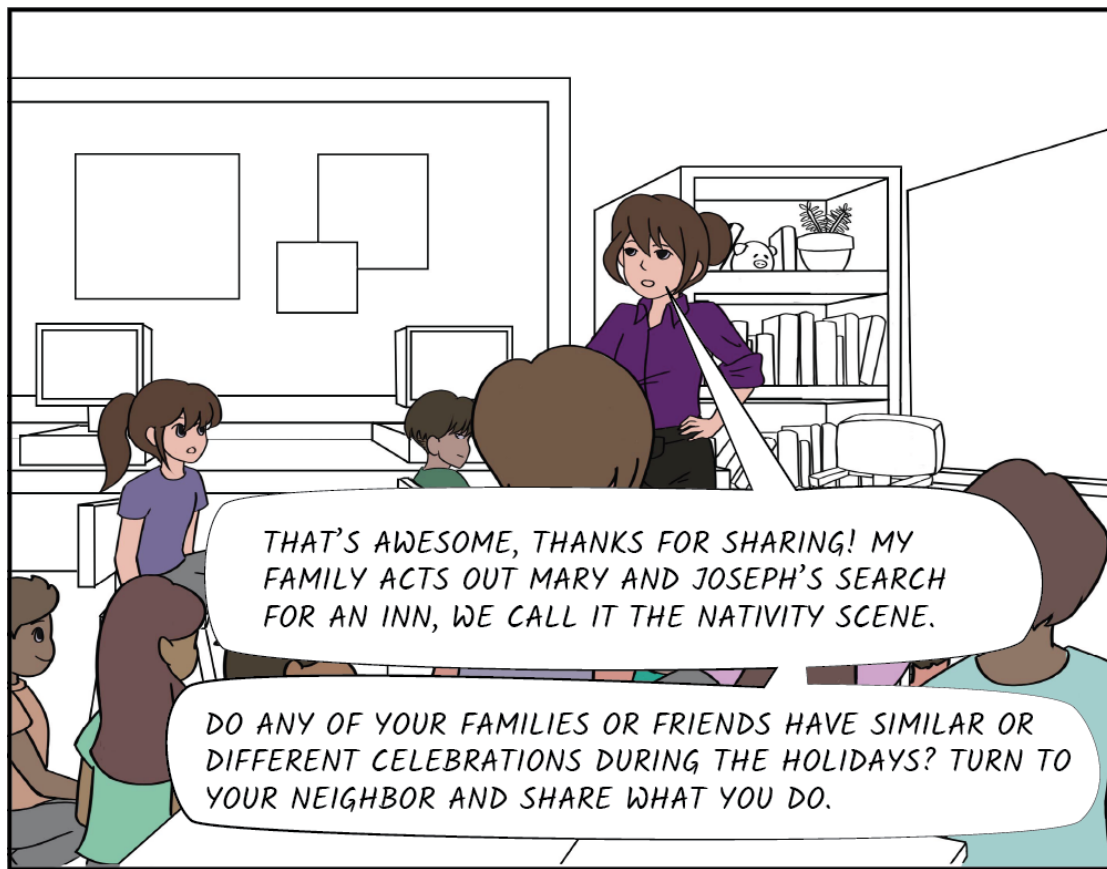
WELL, I REMEMBER PIÑATAS AND CANDLES AND A LOT OF FOOD.

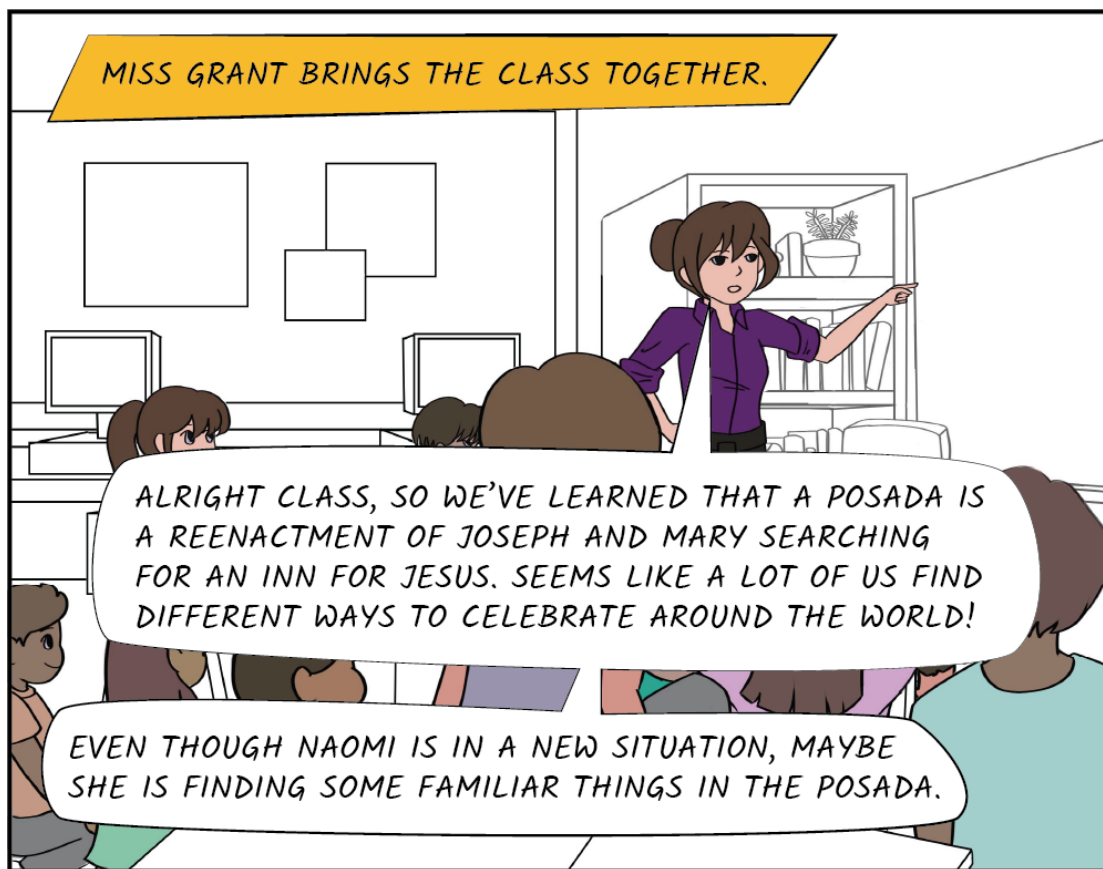
THAT IS REALLY INTERESTING!

THEN SHE CALLS ON ANOTHER STUDENT WHO SHE KNOWS HAS MEXICAN HERITAGE AND ASKS...

RAQUEL, DID YOUR FAMILY EVER TALK ABOUT POSADAS?

I'VE NEVER BEEN TO ONE, BUT MY MOM SAID ONCE THAT PEOPLE GO FROM HOUSE TO HOUSE LIKE MARY AND JOSEPH AND EAT.





Version 3 Transcript

Version 3 Explanation

Why do we say this example is "*well-connected*"?

Teacher Sharing

The teacher shares that she has never been to a posada herself, but goes further to connect the posada to her own family nativity tradition. (4-5)

Encourages Sharing

The teacher asks the students to share about their out-of-school experiences when she asks about the posada, both in general and to specific students. She also encourages them to share with other students. (4-5)

Draws Connections

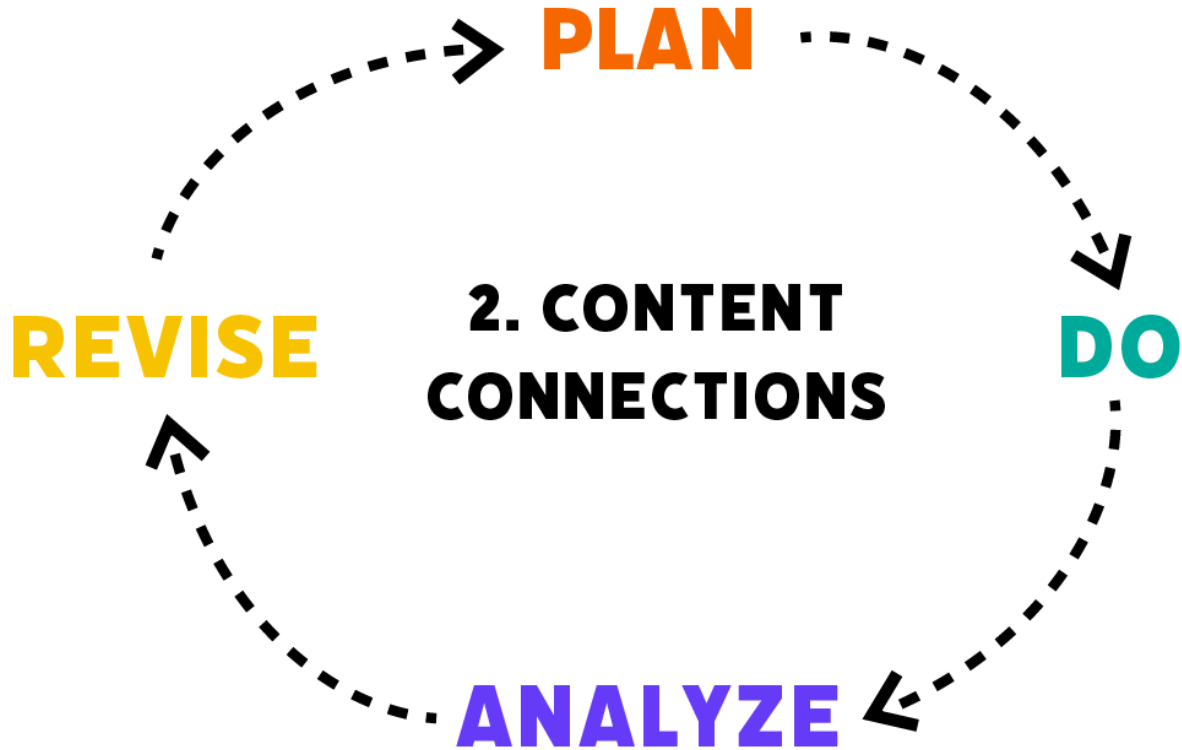
The teacher draws connections between students' out-of-school experiences, a posada, and the book. She acknowledges that she has never been to a posada, relying on the students' expertise to help the class learn. The teacher connects posadas to typical holiday celebrations in the United States for students who do not have a Mexican background. (4-5)

Personal Sharing

Students share their personal experiences, both publicly and with each other. Some students say what their parents have told them about posadas. A few students say they've never heard of one. Students share their family's holiday traditions. (4-5)

Make Connections

Students draw connections between the book and their lives. They relate the content of a posada to their experiences outside of school, their relationships, and what their parents have told them. They also connect a posada to some of their other holiday traditions. (4-5)



Practicing Content Connections: PDAR

Now that you have reviewed the theory, indicators, and examples of Content Connections, it's time to practice in your own classroom.

Below you will find PDAR guides to help you integrate what you've learned into practice, either by yourself or with other teachers.

If you have a Hypothesis account (or create one), you can sign in at the top right corner of this page. This will enable you to annotate and make notes for your PDAR plan. We have also included worksheets below that you can download, fill in, and share. Do what works best for you!

1. [Download PDAR Worksheet - Version A \(Google Doc\)](#)
2. [Download PDAR Worksheet - Version B \(Google Doc\)](#)
3. [Open Content Connections CASI rubric \(Google Doc\)](#)
4. Download Self/Peer Observation document ([Google Doc](#)) ([PDF](#))

PDAR At-a-Glance

Plan

1. Identify the upcoming lesson or unit you'd like to work on
2. Review the Content Connections indicators with your lesson(s) in mind
3. Identify your "look fors"—what you expect and hope to see
4. Plan your observations, alone or with others

Do

1. Work from your plan (try to reach your goals, but be flexible)
2. Consider recording multiple observations and multiple forms of data (scores, field notes, etc.)

Analyze

1. Record and review what happened, either solo or with your observers
2. Analyze how each indicator showed up in your lesson
3. Compare to your goals and predictions
4. Reflect on your overall experience

Revise

1. Revise your process (observations, data gathering)
2. Revise your direction (new goals? new lesson? new indicator?)
3. Identify your gaps (skills, knowledge, outside help)

PDAR In-Depth

Use the reflective questions below to guide you. You don't have to answer all of them—they are there to give you ideas and help you reflect.

(Take notes in the book or download one of the worksheets above.)

Plan

1. Identify lessons/unit you would like to apply content connections to
 1. What are your upcoming lessons?
 2. If you need inspiration, jump to our "Lesson Ideas" section below.
2. Review content connections with your lesson(s) in mind. Ask yourself:
 1. What experiences do I have personally that relate to the topic?
 2. What questions can I ask that would encourage sharing?
 3. What experiences do my students have related to this lesson?
 4. What interests do my students have related to this lesson?
 5. How might students' family/peer relationships relate to this lesson?
 6. How can I help students be enthusiastic about sharing?
 7. What connections would help students see the value of this lesson?
3. Identify your "look fors"— what you expect and hope to see.
 1. How would you like to change?
 2. What do you want students to experience?
 3. What do you expect to happen?
 4. How do you think the students will react?
 5. How do you think you will react?
4. Plan your observations
 1. Would you like a video or observation notes?
 2. Do you need any tools?
 3. When will you observe yourself/be observed?
 4. Will you do this study solo or with colleagues?

Do

1. Work from the plan
 1. Do you need to improve?
 2. What kind of notes should observers take?
 3. How long will your observations be? (15-20 minutes)
 4. How many observations before analyzing? (We recommend 3)

Analyze

1. Record/review what happened
 1. If using video, take detailed notes: what did students say and do? What did you say and do?
 2. If using colleague feedback, what did they observe students/you say and do?
2. Analyze each indicator (click here to see the [Content Connections CASI rubric](#))
3. Teacher Sharing
 1. What did I share about myself?
4. Encourages Sharing
 1. How did I encourage my students to share?
5. Draws Connections
 1. How did I connect the lesson to student hobbies, traditions, or expertise?
6. Personal Sharing
 1. What did my students share about themselves?
7. Makes Connections
 1. What connections did students make between the lesson and their lives outside of school?
8. Compare to your goals and speculations
 1. Did you meet the goals you set?
 2. Can you justify your interpretation with evidence?
 3. Were your predictions correct?
 4. Can you justify with evidence?
9. Reflect on your experience
 1. What changes did you notice in yourself or your students?
 2. Which indicators came naturally? Which were challenging?
 3. What happened that you were not expecting?

Revise

1. Revise your process
 1. Do you need to change your observation method? Did your video work?
 2. Were you able to gather good insights from the process?
2. Revise your direction
 1. Would you like to continue or stop CASI use for this dimension? Is it time to move to a new dimension?
 2. Would you like to continue with the same goals or revise them?
 3. What can you revise in your lesson plan to better incorporate CC?
3. Examine your gaps
 1. What skill or knowledge gaps keep you from applying CC in your classroom (e.g., do you know what cultures your students come from, or what their life outside of the classroom is like?)
 2. Who could you work or discuss with to improve?

Conclusion

When children arrive at school each day, they carry more than just the contents of their backpacks. Each child brings her or his everyday experiences into the classroom—routines, interests, social relationships, perspectives, expertise, values, and traditions—that influence how they see the world. These experiences may align with traditional white, middle-class values and instructional approaches, but for minoritized students they often do not. The way content is delivered in school (as well as the content itself) can seem very foreign. And that kind of sociocultural disconnect, the one between the world inside of school and the student's world of family and culture outside of school, can make it hard to learn.

Our goal with this chapter was to help you appreciate the value of Content Connections—the second dimension of the CASI—which asks teachers to make deliberate efforts to connect instructional content and objectives with the everyday experiences of *all* students. You learned what content connections look like through five dimensions: Teacher Sharing, Encouraging Sharing, Draws Connections, Personal Sharing, and Makes Connections. We hope that you feel confident explaining Content Connections to peers, parents, and administrators. Most importantly, we hope you feel confident elevating your theoretical knowledge of Content Connections into practical knowledge by practicing it in your classroom this week. Fortunately, Content Connections doesn't require huge changes to begin. Start with the lessons you already have!

As teacher learners, your learning process shouldn't end with reading this chapter: this is an introduction, a beginning. Practicing Content Connections in the classroom with the PDAR cycle, even one lesson a week, will uncover many opportunities and challenges we couldn't cover here. Adapt to your constraints; crucially, share what you're learning with other educators (and [with us](#), if you feel so inclined!) so that everyone can improve. Talk openly with your students about what's working.

Above all, keep asking yourself: *"How can I forge new content connections this week?"*

Resources and Ideas

Bilingual, Dual Lingual, and Multicultural Books:

- Scholastic's [Multicultural Books for Pre-K and Kindergarten](#)
- Scholastic's [Multicultural Books for Kids 6-10](#)
- CCBC's [50 Multicultural Books Every Child Should Know](#)
- Edutopia's [22 diverse book choices that represent students' lives](#)
- Mia Wenjen's [60+ Multicultural Books for Children](#) (her whole blog is worth exploring)
- American Library Association's [Bilingual Books for Children List](#) (organized by 13 languages!)

Get to Know Student and Family Cultures

- Home Visits (if allowed) to learn more about students' lives outside the classroom
 - What do you help your parents/family do at home?
 - What resources do students have in their community?
- Make a questionnaire
- Set up one-on-one interviews throughout the week while the rest of the class is working on something else
- Plan some possible questions to ask
 - What is your family like?
 - What is your favorite thing to do with your family?
 - Who do you live with?
 - Do you have any family traditions?
 - Do you have any chores or responsibilities at home?
 - What do you like to do in your free time?
 - Do you have a favorite holiday?
- Start the day with a morning meeting
- Plan activities that provide more information about the student
- Fun facts, spotlight, icebreakers

Lesson Ideas

- Choose books that connect to one or more students' cultural heritage
- Family tree assignment where students investigate their heritage
- Develop a lesson that is centered around one (or a few) students' expertise
- Making a traditional drink (or teach from a traditional recipe)
- Learn about a holiday
- Integrate cultural storytelling into lessons
- Use dance and vocalizations to memorize material
- Bring traditional instruments
- Invite parents to speak or present to the class

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Contact Us

We are constantly improving this resource. Have suggestions, resources, or experiences with the CASI you'd like to share?

Email us at CASIbookteam@gmail.com





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Brenton Jackson is a masters student in BYU's Department of Instructional Psychology and Technology. His work centers on applying open educational resources to equity problems in education, as well as studying distinctions of worth in design practice. Creating this online book about equitable practices for K-6 teachers is the focus of his thesis. A native Virginian and adopted Bostonian, Brenton enjoys astrophotography and writing music in his spare time.



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Jocelin Meza is from Texas and currently studies Elementary Education at BYU, with a minor in teaching English language learners (TELL). As a proud Mexican American, Jocelin focuses much of her studies on multicultural education and enjoys learning how to effectively incorporate engaging curriculum into the classroom. In her spare time, Jocelin loves to read and run.



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Equity Discussions

Tresstyn Clubb Daines, Jocelin Meza, Brenton Jackson, & Julian Palacio

Equity

Bias

Teacher Learning



Equity means to provide students what they need, according to their social positions in an unjust world (Banks & Banks, 1995). Meaningful classrooms for students from minoritized communities foster regular conversations about issues of fairness, bias, and justice (Salazar, 2013). This way, teachers help students merge their cultural and academic identities rather than think of them as somehow separate or incompatible (Varelas, Martin & Kane, 2012). Openly discussing equity issues in society and in their personal lives helps all students from all backgrounds feel a sense of belonging at school and to prepare for civic engagement in a plural society.

As educators, we can take it upon ourselves to be socially aware and analyze how race, status, social class, and other positions shape our perspective of the world and our classroom learning activities. This will require that we step out of our comfort zone, recognize our privileges, and learn and act on the information we receive. Encountering hard questions will be what promotes growth within you and your classroom.

Hard questions can include:

- In what ways do I uphold systemic racism in my classroom?
- What am I doing to work around the discrepancies found in the education system?
- Am I actively working on making my curriculum more inclusive?
- Am I researching history to teach it accurately?
- Am I including marginalized communities in U.S History?
- Are my projects accessible to all students?

Equity as a social topic incorporates in-school and out-of-school experiences for both teachers and students. To promote social equity, it is important to critically examine unfair treatment as it is manifested in day-to-day interactions. As teachers pursuing equity in our classrooms, we should ensure that each student knows the value of their own experience. This means having discussions on topics of equity and inequity, and allowing space for students to share their ideas and solutions. Students should be able to explore current issues in their personal lives, communities, or on a national/global scale. As a class, they commit to examine, discuss, and resolve the equity problems they discover. Classroom habits and activities like these are the focus of the Equity Discussions dimension.

As a teacher, equity discussions entail both designing lessons around topics that spark discussion of inequity and building on student comments and questions that arise every day. Although it may cause discomfort, teachers should not be afraid to have these essential discussions with their students. Occasionally that may mean a long, uncomfortable pause or setting aside time later in the day or week to address student questions, but this dialogue is important for both the students and the teachers. Students are capable of meeting the gravity of these types of discourse.

Pursuing equity is not always easy. Students need to feel encouraged to share their experiences and support in their efforts to create change, and as teachers we must not be afraid to have hard discussions with our students about privilege and bias, especially when the students are the ones who broach the topics. An equitable teacher welcomes these discussions during all lessons and plans to facilitate them when the standards lends themselves to equity topics. As with other CASI dimensions, making these connections requires balance to maintain a positive environment and avoid insincere/less meaningful discussions of equity.

Central Question

How can I address fairness, bias, and justice within my classroom as well as in wider society?

Some issues regarding equity require systemic change. More information about our role in advocating and speaking up about the pressing issues in the system we work for can be found at the end of the chapter.

Learning Check

What do you think equity will look like in classroom practice?

- ☐ Researching and teaching equity
- ☐ Students and teachers becoming informed on their social position
- ☐ Only focusing on 1 point of view (wrong answer)
- ☐ Active unlearning of biases
- ☐ Finding solutions to societal issues
- ☐ Creating a safe classroom environment

Why Equity Discussions Matter

Our lives are filled with judgments made in an instant. Whether or not to hold the door open for someone, help a neighbor with their groceries, or walk faster when we think the male behind us looks suspicious. These are snap judgments. Snap judgments in and of themselves are not bad, they are merely the result of our experiences and subconscious biases. If just yesterday my milk carton exploded when I accidentally dropped it taking it out of my trunk, I am more likely to offer assistance to my neighbor. If I have not interacted with people of diverse backgrounds, I am more likely to make assumptions about their intentions and who they are. The people we are judging do not change, we do. We cannot stop making snap judgments, but one of the ways we can influence them is through proximity. The more we spend time with and get to know people and cultures, the greater our proximity and therefore probability our snap judgments will be positive. Equity pushes both student and teacher to open their minds and hearts to experiences and people. It encourages discussion of privilege and bias, the sharing of individual experiences with inequity, and admiration of heroes from every race, background, and identity. It challenges teachers and students to approximate unfamiliarity and therefore change.

Discussions of social equity in the classroom allow students to become better informed on social issues that continue to exist in our society. This opens up the conversation in a way that teaches students how to discuss topics that may be controversial. It also helps students take ownership of problems they see in society and find solutions. These motivations for learning can transform students' participation in day-to-day activities in the classroom (McInerney, Roche, McInerney & Marsh, 1997; Sleeter & Zavala, 2020).

When fostering equity discussions, students have the opportunity to open up and share their personal experiences with inequity and inform others of injustices they have seen or experienced. Teaching equity in the classroom allows students to single out discrimination, unfairness, and biases. It also gives students the opportunity to identify their own biases towards others allowing them to become more proximate to others. When discussed in an open and safe classroom environment, it allows students to become empathetic towards others (race, ability, gender, SES etc.). Then, being aware of these realities helps them to make more socially-conscious decisions in their personal lives as well as when taking action in their communities.

Starting the conversation about equity in our classrooms allows students to share their experiences and validates them as well. It teaches students to act on their ideas and gives them the confidence to share their voice with the intent on making a difference. Equity is about giving each person what they need. Students need to be able to discuss biases, justice, and privilege or they will not receive an encouraging message to create change in these matters.

Equity is not only important for students, but benefits us as teachers as well. Teachers have the opportunity to deeply reflect on their own privileges, biases and experiences. If we have experienced inequity in our life, we can start the conversation by sharing. Through a meaningful effort to incorporate these topics, teachers can become proximate to our students. Furthermore, we will be better positioned to encourage and support all those in our classroom. If we have not experienced inequity, it can be an opportunity to educate ourselves on the experience of others and seek to understand how it shapes their perspective.

Learning Check

Based on what you have learned so far, why does equity matter?

Looking Ahead

Before you move on, if you were asked to evaluate how “connected” a lesson was based on a video recording, what would you look for right now?

The 5 Indicators of Equity Discussions

Examination

To what extent do you discuss fairness and bias, consequences of inequity, and acknowledge multiple perspectives with your students? What kinds of personal experiences and roles models do you share with your class?

Note:

- Although it is important to make personal connections to students by sharing experiences that connect with curriculum subjects, this indicator measures how well teachers focus these experiences on inequity and seeing multiple perspectives
- Teachers are encouraged to help students recognize fairness, bias, and inequity in everyday circumstances
- Multiple perspectives can, but do not have to, disagree with one another.

| | Disconnected (1) | Somewhat Connected (3) | Well-Connected (5) |
|-----------------|--|--|--------------------------------------|
| 3a. Examination | The teacher does not examine inequity. | The teacher sometimes examines inequity. | The teacher often examines inequity. |

| | Disconnected (1) | Somewhat Connected (3) | Well-Connected (5) |
|--|------------------|------------------------|--------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discusses fairness and bias • Shares personal experience with inequity • Acknowledges multiple perspectives • Discusses consequences of inequity • Describes role models | | | |

Examination Examples

Standard: Identify the main purpose of a text, including what the author wants to answer, explain, or describe ([CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.2.6](#)).

Context: Mr. Miller teaches a 2nd grade class in Indianapolis, Indiana. His classroom consists of a mix of White, Black, and Asian students. He is reading *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* with his class. Harriet A. Jacobs was born into slavery. She was sexually harassed and physically abused by her owner. She eventually escaped to the North where she shared her story and became an abolitionist. He wants to discuss with his class the message about slavery the author is trying to convey.

Examination (1): Mr. Miller informs his class that today they will be discussing slavery. He gives his students a few minutes to read over excerpts from *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* that share the feelings Harriet had as a slave. He asks his students how the author feels about slavery and has them share with their elbow partner. He brings the class back together and calls on a few students to share using popsicle sticks. He reminds them to identify specific details in the text that supports their view of what the author thinks about slavery.

- Mr. Miller shares with his students a role model in the form of Harriet Jacobs and her story. The consequences of slavery are part of the book, but Mr. Miller does not extend the discussion. He only provides the perspective of Harriet Jacobs in this discussion.

Examination (3): Mr. Miller gives his students a few minutes to read over excerpts from *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*. He asks them if Harriet thinks slavery is fair and calls on some students to share their opinion, with contextual evidence. Mr. Miller shares an experience of when he was walking down the street and was called a racial slur that originated from slavery. Then he asks his students if they think slavery is fair and gives them sufficient wait time to gather their thoughts. While they are discussing, he reminds his students the southern farmers thought slavery was fair because of the free labor and asks them to argue against that point.

- On top of what Mr. Miller did for the first scenario, he has his students discuss fairness and bias. He also shares a personal experience with inequity from his life and provides the perspective of a slave owner to contrast Harriet Jacobs' perspective.

Examination (5): Mr. Miller has his students read over excerpts from *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*. They discuss their findings with partners. He asks them if Harriet thinks slavery is fair and calls on some students to share their opinion, with contextual evidence. Mr. Miller reminds his students the southern farmers thought slavery was fair because of the free labor. However, he informs them there were serious repercussions of slavery, one of which was racism. He also shares a personal experiences of being called racial slur that originated from slavery. Then he asks his students if they think slavery is fair and gives them sufficient wait time to gather their thoughts. Twenty minutes pass and Mr. Miller knows his class has to get to their specialty. He asks his students to write down their thoughts and plans time to continue the discussion the next day.

- On top of what he shared in the first two examples, Mr. Miller discusses the consequences of inequity by speaking about the repercussions of slavery.

Learning Check

How can your personal experiences become an asset in making sure your classroom encourages social equity?

Resolution

To what extent do you acknowledge the emotions of those unfairly treated, encourage students to stand up against and resolve inequity, and allow space for students to create and reinforce rules for equity? How do you discourage inequity in students' relationships?

Note

- There are many ways students can get involved in their community; this indicator is not only about encouraging students to become involved, but providing them with the social resources to be able to do so.
- Rules for equity can be created for the classroom as well as for interactions outside of the classroom environment

| | Disconnected (1) | Somewhat Connected (3) | Well-Connected (5) |
|--|--|---|--|
| 3b. Resolution | The teacher does not | The teacher sometimes | The teacher regularly |
| • Acknowledges emotions of those unfairly treated | explore resolutions to inequity with students. | explores resolutions to inequity with students. | explores resolutions to inequity with students |
| • Discourages inequity in students' relationships | | | |
| • Encourages students to stand up against and resolve inequity | | | |
| • Allows students to create and reinforce rules for equity | | | |

Resolution Examples

Standard: Summarize numerical data sets in relation to their context ([CCSS.MATH.CONTENT.6.S.P.B.5](#))

Context: Mrs. Tryon teaches 6th grade in Billings, Montana. Her students are mostly White with some Native American and Black students. She is teaching a lesson on statistics specifically on immigration push and pull factors. Mrs. Tryon starts by showing students a bar graph on Immigration to her students. She asks students to observe the data then asks students to come up with push and pull factors that might have led these immigrants to the U.S.

Resolution (1): Students begin observing data on Immigration. Several students notice that the majority of Immigrants that arrive in the U.S are those from Mexico. Mrs. Tryon then has students share different ideas (push and pull factors) as to why these individuals immigrate to the U.S. Several students mention that individuals move due to war, poverty, and lack of opportunity. Pull factors include freedom, better jobs, and a better quality of life. Mrs. Tryon closes by stating that push and pull factors play a big role in the data set.

- Mrs. Tryon teaches a lesson on immigration, but doesn't extend the conversation or point out any inequities immigrants face. In doing so, Mrs. Tryon fails to discourage and find resolutions to inequities.

Resolution (3): While looking at data on Immigration a student says, "my dad told me immigrants take our jobs." Mrs. Tryon then says jobs are a pull factor that lead immigrants to the U.S. She then shares that many of them aren't treated equally, and most work under unsafe conditions with low pay. Mrs. Tryon says that immigrants who do work under these conditions are exhausted. She has students think of other words that might describe the way immigrants feel and tells students that regardless of where we come from we need to treat others the way we want to be treated.

- Mrs. Tryon has students acknowledge the emotions immigrants might be feeling and reminds students to treat others the way they would like to be treated. Students do not find a resolution on inequities.

Resolution (5): While looking at data a student asks why all immigrants come to the U.S and if there is even enough space for so many people. Space or not, Mrs. Tryon mentions that we should treat others equally. She then has students think of factors that drive immigrants to the U.S. Several students mention that individuals move due to war, poverty, or lack of opportunity. Pull factors include freedom, better jobs, and a better quality of life. Mrs. Tryon states that many immigrants are mistreated and seen as less of a priority than native born citizens. She encourages her students to come up with solutions to be more equitable. A student mentions writing welcome letters to immigrants in detention centers.

- Mrs. Tryon reminds her class that we need to treat others equally and shares how immigrants feel less than native born citizens. Students are encouraged to write welcome letters to immigrants in detention centers to find a resolution to inequities.

Learning Check

In what ways can students be encouraged towards identifying solutions?

Commitment to Equity

To what extent do your students ask questions about privilege and bias? Share concerns about inequity? Commit to resolving inequity?

Note

Students are much more likely to commit to resolution if we as teachers encourage it and create space in our curriculum for them to do so.

| | Disconnected (1) | Somewhat Connected (3) | Well-Connected (5) |
|---|--|--|---|
| 3c. Commitment to Equity | Students rarely, if ever, commit to resolving inequity.. | Students occasionally commit to resolving inequity, or commit in shallow ways. | Students often and emphatically commit to resolving inequity. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ask questions about privilege and bias• Share concerns about inequity• Commit to resolution | | | |

Commitment to Equity Examples

Standard: Conduct short research projects that build knowledge through investigation of different aspects of a topic ([CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.4.7](#)).

Context: Miss Peterson teaches 4th grade at a Title I school in Atlanta, Georgia. Her students are mostly African American with some White and Asian students. She is having her students do a research project in class. She wants it to be about something that will interest her students so they are more likely to work hard and stay engaged in the process.

Commitment to Equity (1): Miss Peterson has her students pick a question to research that is important to their lives. They have to interview at least three people and use at least two books or articles for their research. Based on their research, the students must set a goal for their personal lives and describe how they will achieve it.

- Students do not ask questions about privilege and bias. They do not share concerns about inequity or commit to resolution.

Commitment to Equity (3): Miss Peterson gives her students the assignment to answer the question, “Does racism still exist in the United States?” They need to interview at least three people with varying backgrounds and use at least two books or articles for their research. Based on their research, the students must set a goal for their personal lives and describe how they will achieve it.

- Although this indicator rates the actions of the students, the way the teacher sets up the classroom can influence the behaviors of the students. The students will ask the interviewees questions about privilege and bias. They will also make a commitment to resolution after finishing their project. They do not share concerns about inequity.

Commitment to Equity (5): Miss Peterson gives her students the assignment to answer the question, “Does racism still exist in the United States?” They need to interview at least three people (one must be a Person of Color) and use at least two books or articles for their research. After conducting some interviews, a few students share their concern about negative experiences their interviewees shared with them. Miss Peterson conducts a discussion about what her students can do about their findings. The students decide they will create a website on the forms and harms of racism.

- The students will ask questions about privilege and bias in the interviews. The students share their concern about racism in the country. They commit to resolution when they decide to create a website to educate people about racism.

Learning Check

While Commitment to Equity is an indicator that measures student behavior, what are some ways you could create the environment in which students would commit to resolving issues of inequity in your community? Can you think of any standards that support projects involving community outreach?

Experiences with Inequity

To what extent do your students discuss their personal experiences with unfair treatment or generate examples of equity/inequity? Do they acknowledge the emotions of those who have been unfairly treated?

Note

Although this indicator measures student behavior, it is important for teachers to lead by example with these behaviors and encourage them from their students.

| | Disconnected (1) | Somewhat Connected (3) | Well-Connected (5) |
|--|---|--|--|
| 3d. Experiences with Inequity | Students do not share personal examples or experiences with inequity. | Students sometimes share personal examples or experiences with inequity. | Students often share personal examples or experiences with inequity. |
| • Discuss personal experiences with unfair treatment | | | |
| • Acknowledge emotions of those unfairly treated | | | |
| • Generate examples of equity or inequity | | | |

Experiences with Inequity Examples

Standard: Report on a topic or text, tell a story, or recount an experience with appropriate facts and relevant, descriptive details, speaking clearly at an understandable pace. ([CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.3.4](#))

Context: Ms. Cooper is a 3rd grade teacher in Birmingham, Alabama. Her students are mostly African American and White with some Latino students. Ms. Cooper is having her students share a story to the class based on the topic she has selected. Students share their favorite fairytale, a time in which they were encouraged, and gender equality issues.

Experiences with inequity (1): Mrs. Cooper calls on one of her students to share his favorite fairytale. He states that his favorite fairytale is Jack and the Beanstalk because he was strong enough to defeat a giant. Ms. Cooper thanks her student for sharing his fairytale and proceeds to call the next student.

- Mrs. Cooper does not invite students to share personal stories or create an environment where students feel comfortable sharing personal experiences with inequity.

Experiences with inequity (3): Mrs. Cooper calls on one of her students to share a story that was meaningful to them. Kalynn shares her story about a time another student made fun of her braids but felt better after talking with her mom about how different people can have different kinds of hair but the boy that made fun of her might not have known that. She thanks Kalynn and proceeds to the next student.

- Mrs. Cooper creates an assignment where students have the opportunity to share personal experiences.

Experiences with inequity (5): Mrs. Cooper calls on one of her students to share a meaningful story of a time they were treated unfairly. Morgan shares a story about playing basketball at recess. She wasn't picked to play because the boys said it wasn't a girls' sport. Mrs. Cooper thanks Morgan for sharing her story and asks other students if they have felt similar feelings from Morgan's story. Conner comments to the class about how he was teased about loving to bake, thinking it was too girly. Stacy said she didn't think that was fair and shared that anyone can bake, boys and girls. She then shared a story about others saying she wasn't good at her favorite video game because she was a girl and that was a boy activity. Mrs. Cooper facilitated the conversation.

- Students are acknowledging emotions of those unfairly treated, sharing personal experiences with inequality, and unfair treatment.

Learning Check

What is the best example of acknowledging the emotions of those unfairly treated?

- ☐ A student says, "I felt the same way when my brother was mean to me."
- ☐ A student calls out, "That's too bad! I'm sorry."
- ☐ A student comments, "I don't think I know what that's like, but I hear you."

Equity Topics

To what extent does the curricular content address equity issues? What kinds of equity issues arise in the classroom relationships?

Note

- This indicator refers to topics that arise naturally as well as ones that are brought up by teachers.
- Not all standards will lend themselves to Equity Discussions, try to find topics that fit well.

| | Disconnected (1) | Somewhat Connected (3) | Well-Connected (5) |
|---|--|---|--|
| 3e. Equity Topics | Equity topics do not arise out of classroom content or interactions. | Equity topics sometimes arise out of classroom content or interactions. | Equity topics often arise out of classroom content or interactions.. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• - Content (e.g., story book) addresses equity issue• - Equity issues arise in classroom relationships (e.g., bullying) | | | |

Equity Topics Examples

Standard: Follow agreed-upon rules for discussions (e.g., listening to others with care, speaking one at a time about the topics and texts under discussion) ([CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.1.1.A](#)).

Context: Mrs. Landry teaches in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. Her 1st grade class consists of Black, White, Asian, and Pacific Islander students. She begins by reading “The proudest blue” to her classroom, a book about a girl who wears a hijab to school. Students will then share and discuss what they learned from this story.

Equity Topics (1): After reading “The proudest blue” Mrs. Landry asks students to share what they learned. Students share that a hijab is worn around the head. A student interrupts and shares that it is Asiya’s first day wearing her hijab. Mrs. Landry reminds students to wait their turn and raise their hand.

- After reading “The proudest blue” Mrs. Landry does not bring up any equity issues that arise in the book.

Equity Topics (3): Mrs. Landry shares that Asiya was made fun of for wearing a hijab to school. Several students say they feel sad, angry or embarrassed when they are made fun of. Mrs. Landry discourages inequity by having students share ideas on how to be more inclusive. Several students mention mixing up desk groups, and others mention doing getting to know you games.

- Mrs. Landry addresses equity issues found in “The proudest blue” and encourages students to share ideas on how to become more inclusive.

Equity Topics (5): Mrs. Landry has students share a part of the story that stood out to them, one student shares that Asiya was made fun of for wearing her Hijab. A student shares a personal experience, and says that her mom has been made fun of for wearing a Bindi. Mrs. Landry acknowledges the emotions by asking her student how she and her mom felt. She then asks her class to share how Asiya might have also felt. Mrs. Landry’s students share ideas on how to be more inclusive of other cultures. Several students mention reading authentic multicultural books, and inviting multicultural speakers to the classroom.

- Equity topics arise from content, “The proudest blue”. When a student shares a personal experience related to an inequity students share ideas on how to be more inclusive.

Learning Check

Based on what you have learned so far, how should you handle a student making an unkind comment about the LGBTQ+ community?

- ☐ Make note of it to address later.
- ☐ Tell your students that is not how we talk.
- ☐ Ignore it and monitor for future incidents.
- ☐ Address the issue with the class immediately.

Equity Scenario: Mrs. Sánchez and Statistics

Each chapter in this book includes three versions of a teaching scenario to illustrate the dimension and its indicators. In this chapter, we enter our classroom with Mrs. Sánchez in Prince George’s County, Washington, D.C. Here is some context for her background, classroom, and setting:

Mrs. Ana Laura Sánchez is a 57-year-old Puerto Rican teacher at a Title 1 elementary school in Washington, D.C. She teaches third grade to a class of mostly Black and Central American students with a few Asian and white students. She has been teaching for over 30 years at various schools since earning her degree in Education. It is important to her that each of her students is prepared for life outside the classroom by learning how to be a good citizen, have conversations with people who have different opinions, and enact change in their community.

Since moving to the contiguous United States for college, Mrs. Sánchez has faced barriers of language, perceived immigration status, as well as gender discrimination. Discussing with her students the inequities she has seen in the classroom, community, and world is something she wants to incorporate into her curriculum. She firmly believes each of her students has the power to remove such inequities in their circle of influence.

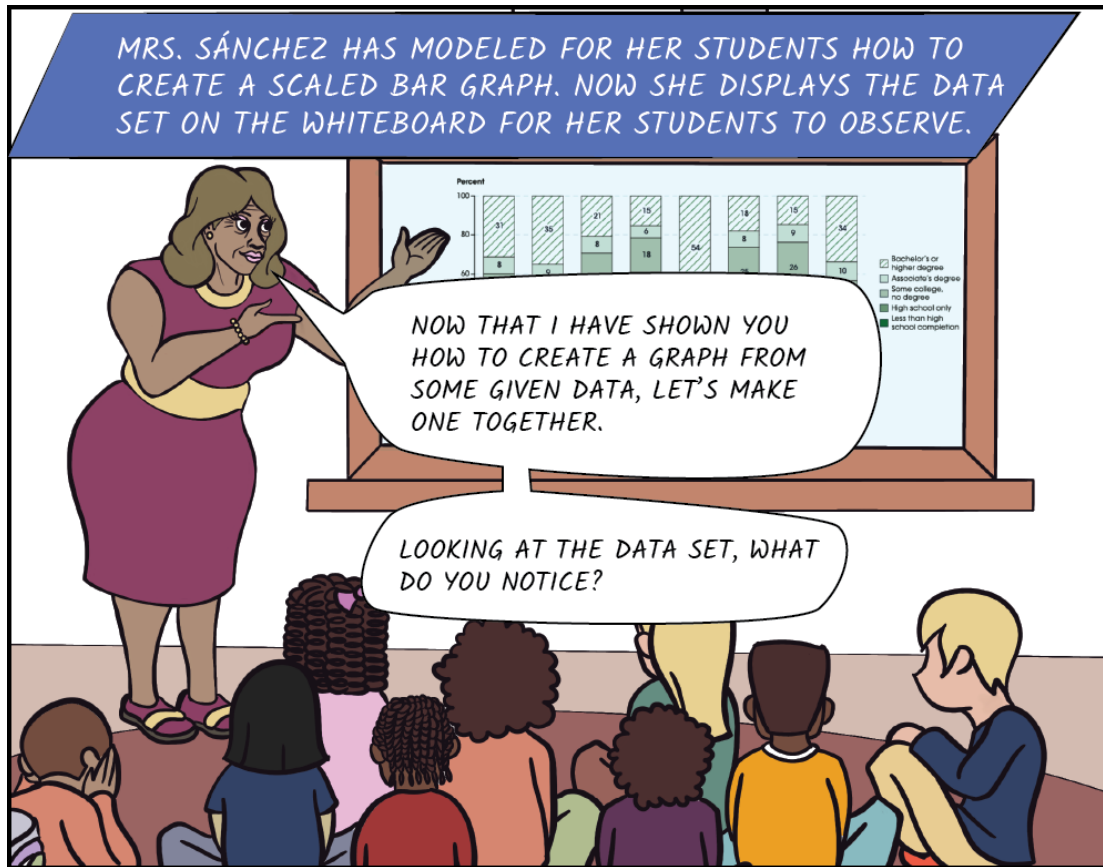
Scenario Introduction

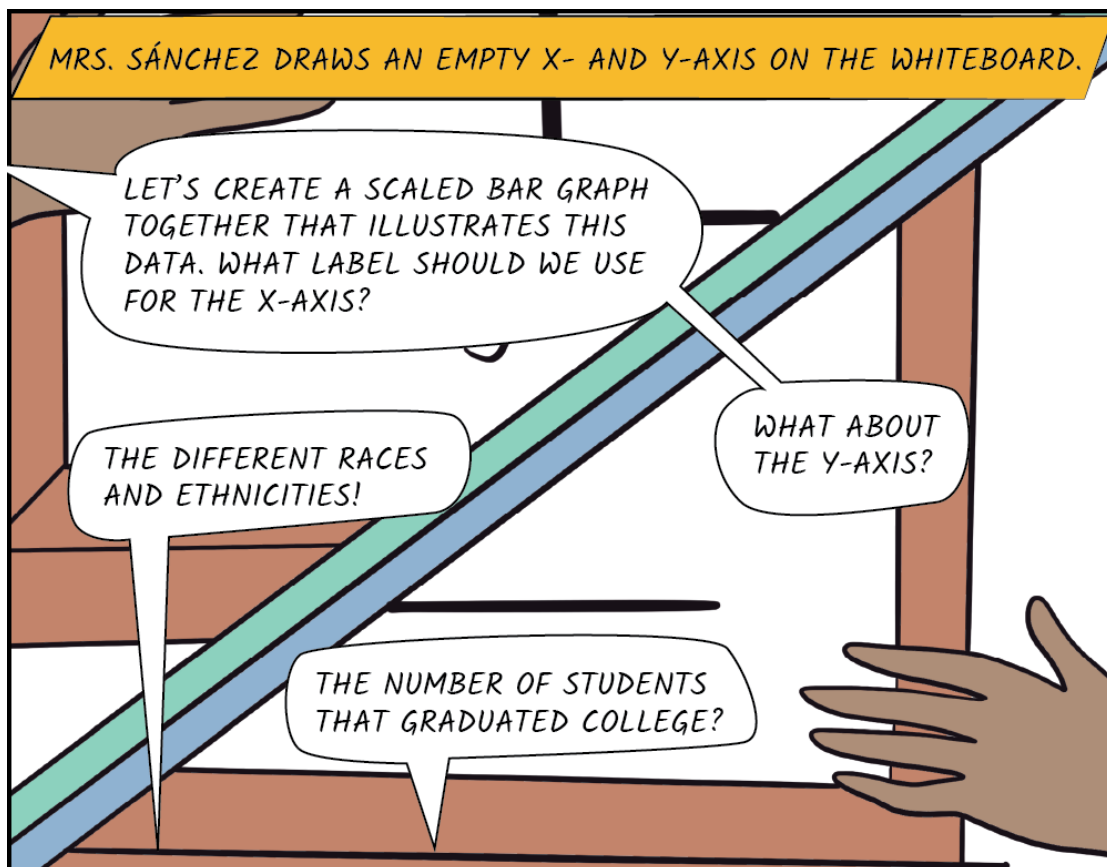
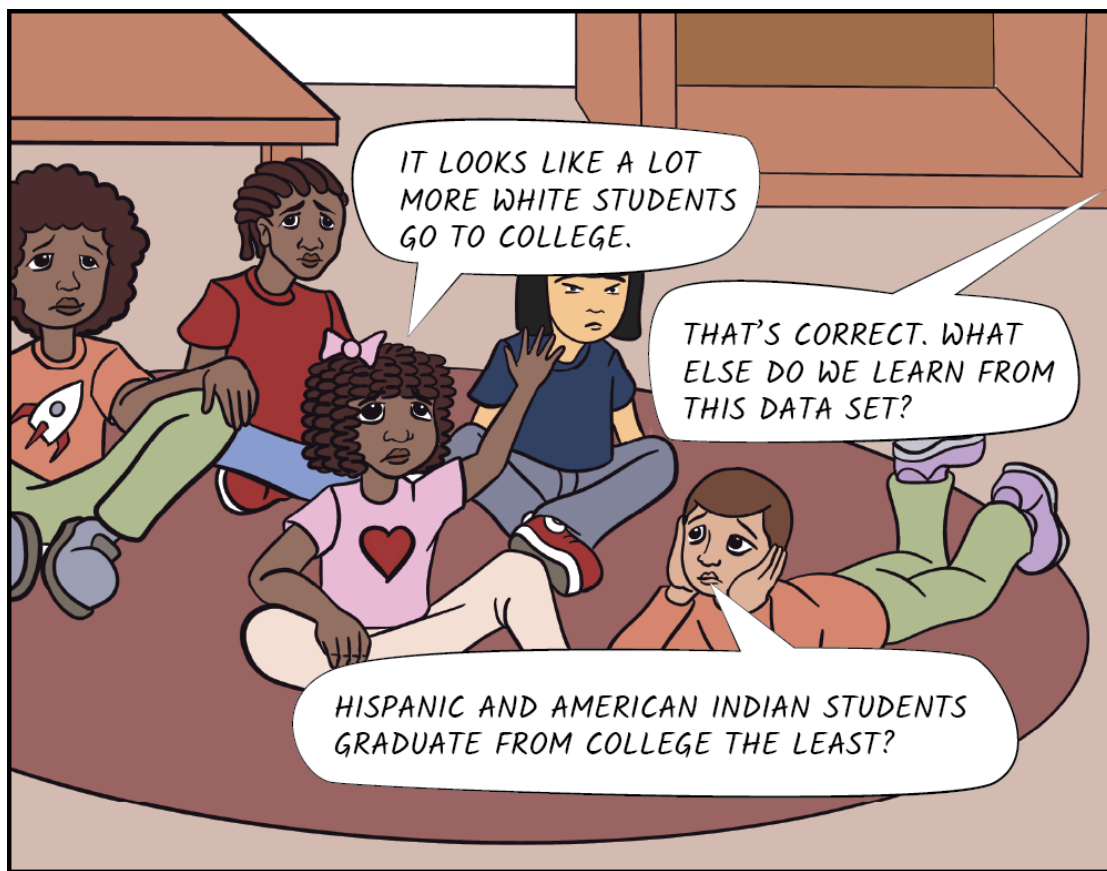
Mrs. Sánchez is teaching a unit on graphs. She has been reviewing bar graphs with her students and plans to learn about scaled bar graphs today. Because she wants to expose her students to some of the inequities she has seen in the education system, she pulls information from the National Center for Education Statistics about [graduation rates based on race](#). She plans to analyze this information with her students while fulfilling this Common Core state standard:

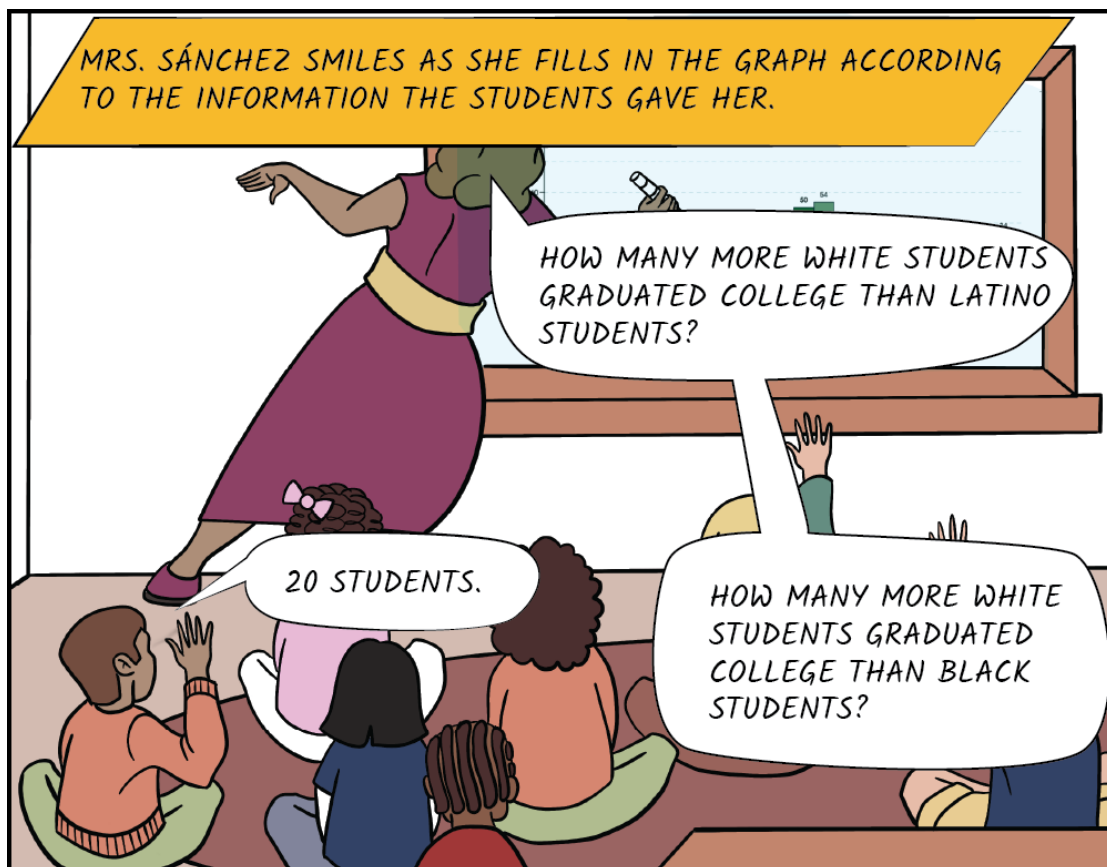
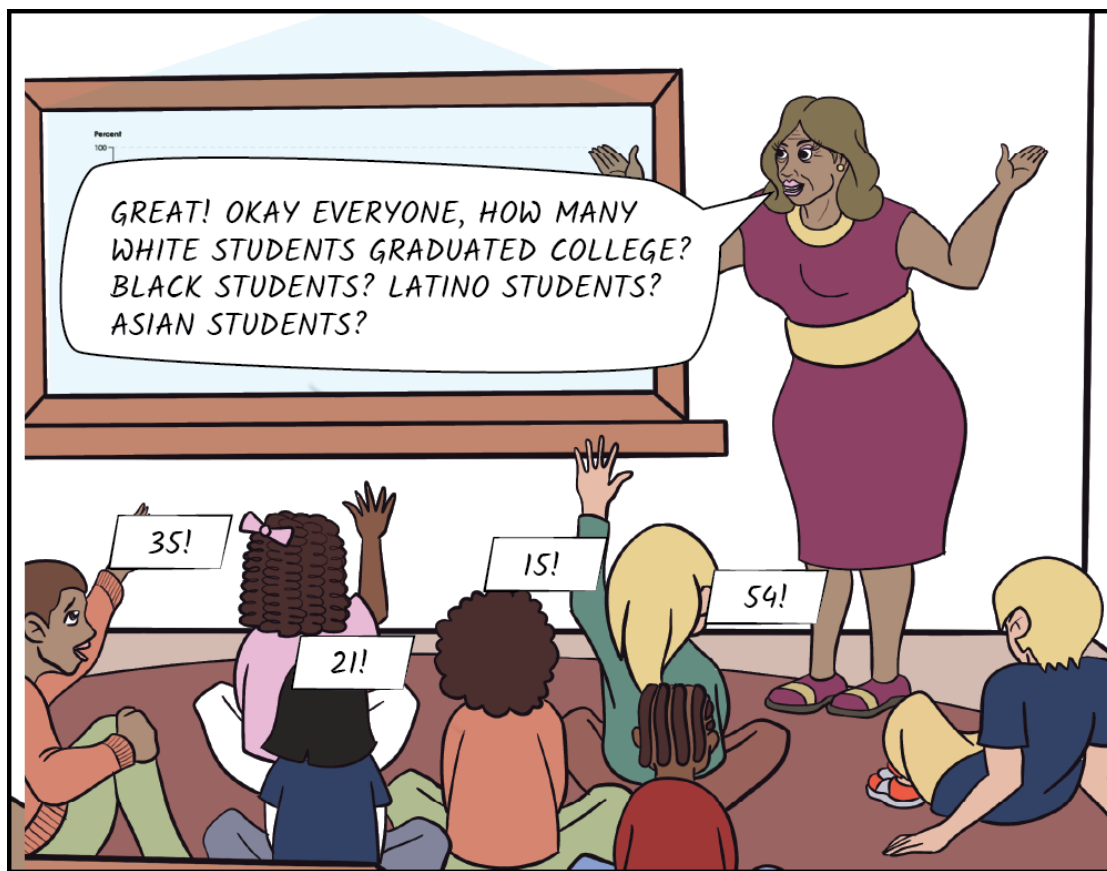
[CCSS.MATH.CONTENT.3.MD.B.3](#)

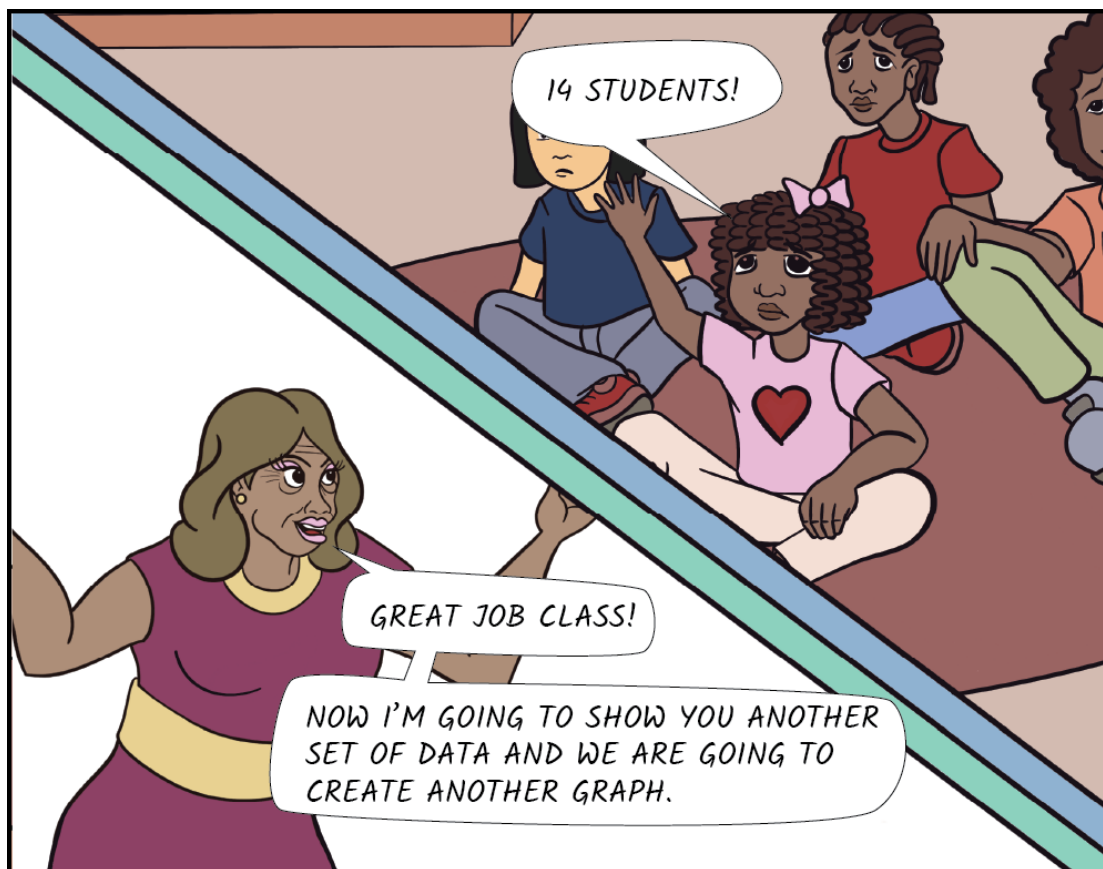
Draw a scaled picture graph and a scaled bar graph to represent a data set with several categories. Solve one- and two-step "how many more" and "how many less" problems using information presented in scaled bar graphs. For example, draw a bar graph in which each square in the bar graph might represent 5 pets.

Version 1: Disconnected









Version 1 Transcript

Version 1 Explanation

Why do we say this example is “disconnected”?

Examination: No role models or personal experiences are shared with inequity. Mrs. Sánchez does not examine inequities regarding the data set. (1)

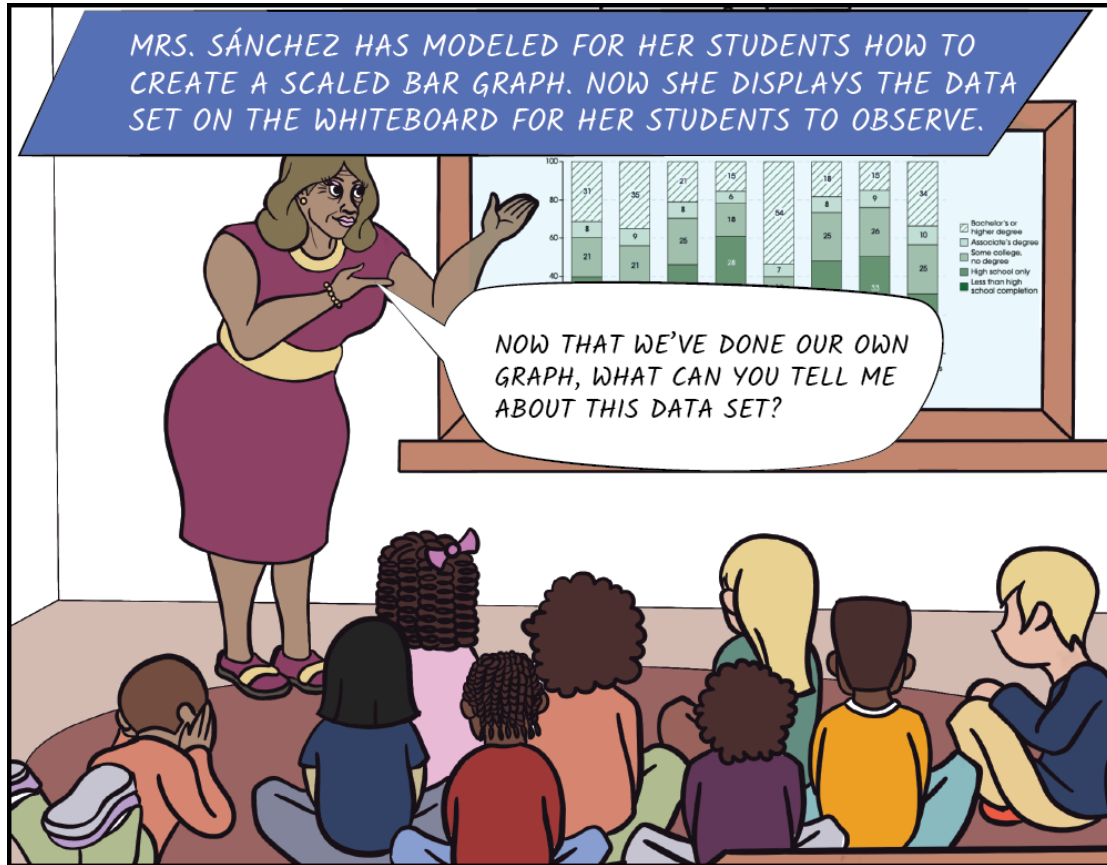
Resolution: Mrs. Sánchez does not encourage or provide opportunities for students to resolve inequities within the education system. (1)

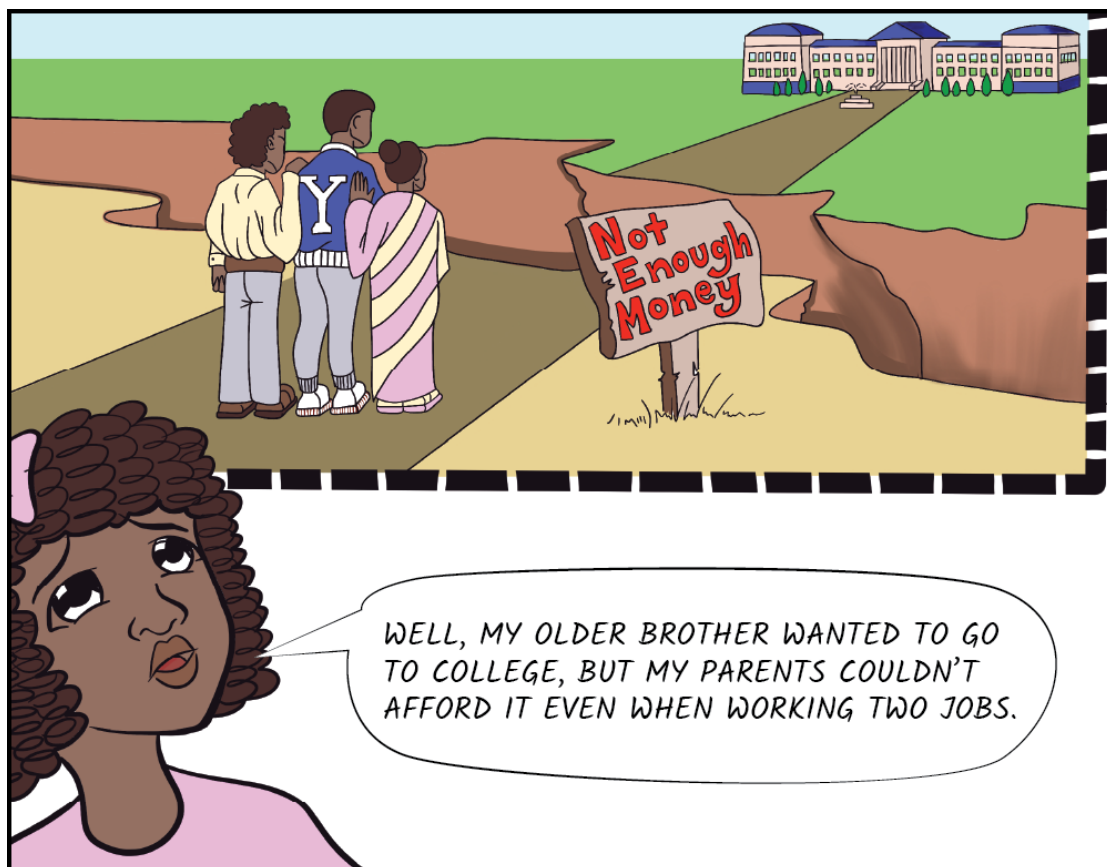
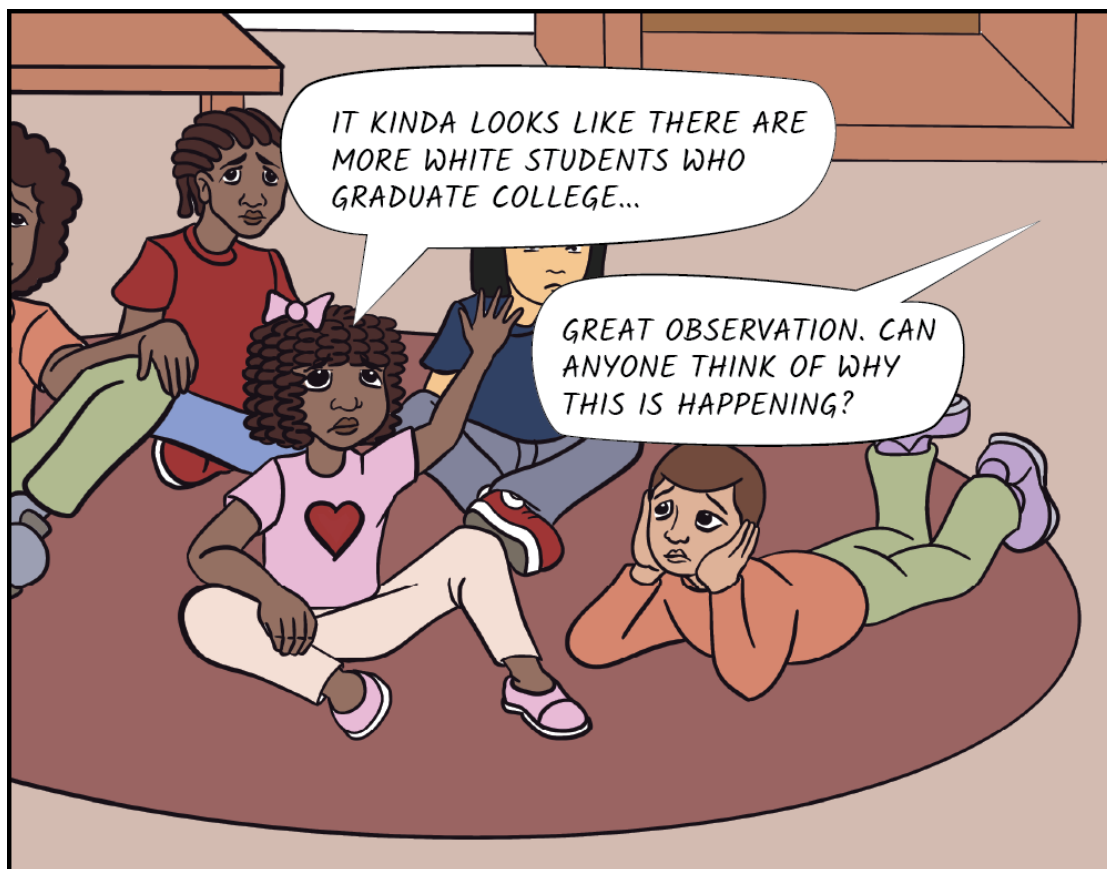
Commitment to Equity: Although students acknowledge that more white students graduate from school, students do not share their concerns or initiate a solution to resolving inequity. (1)

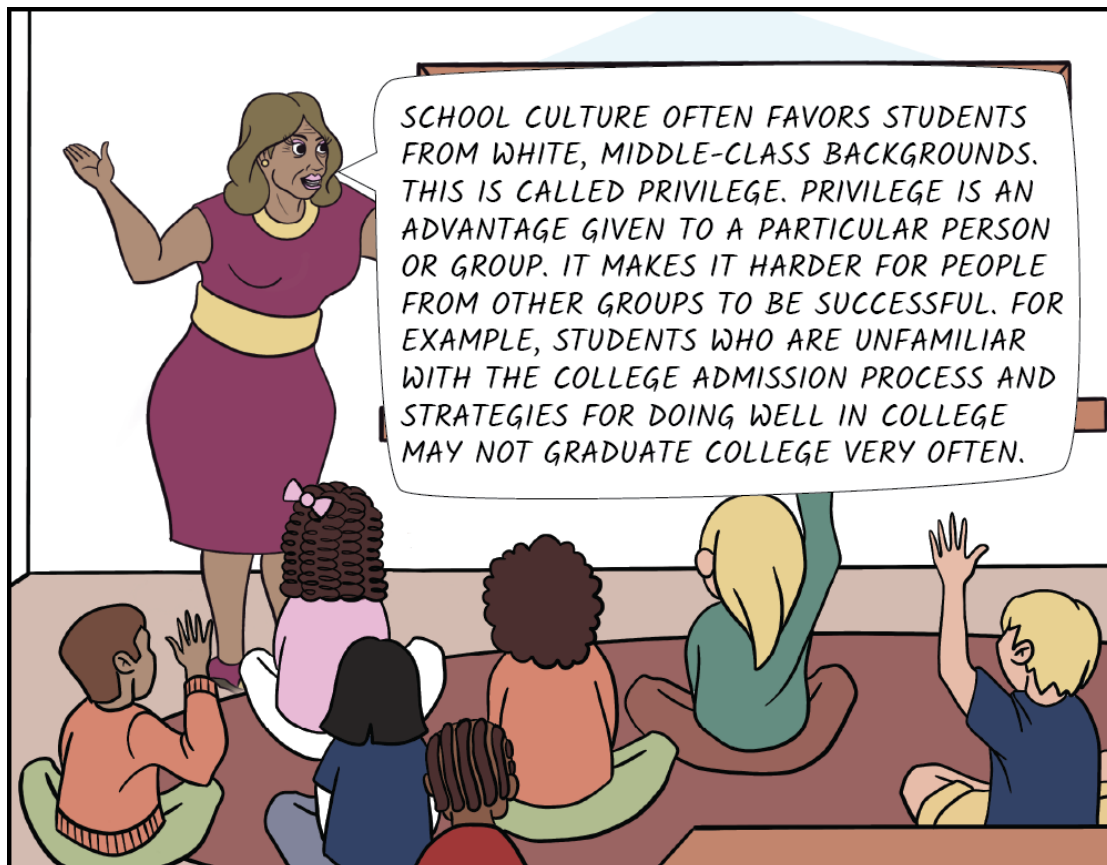
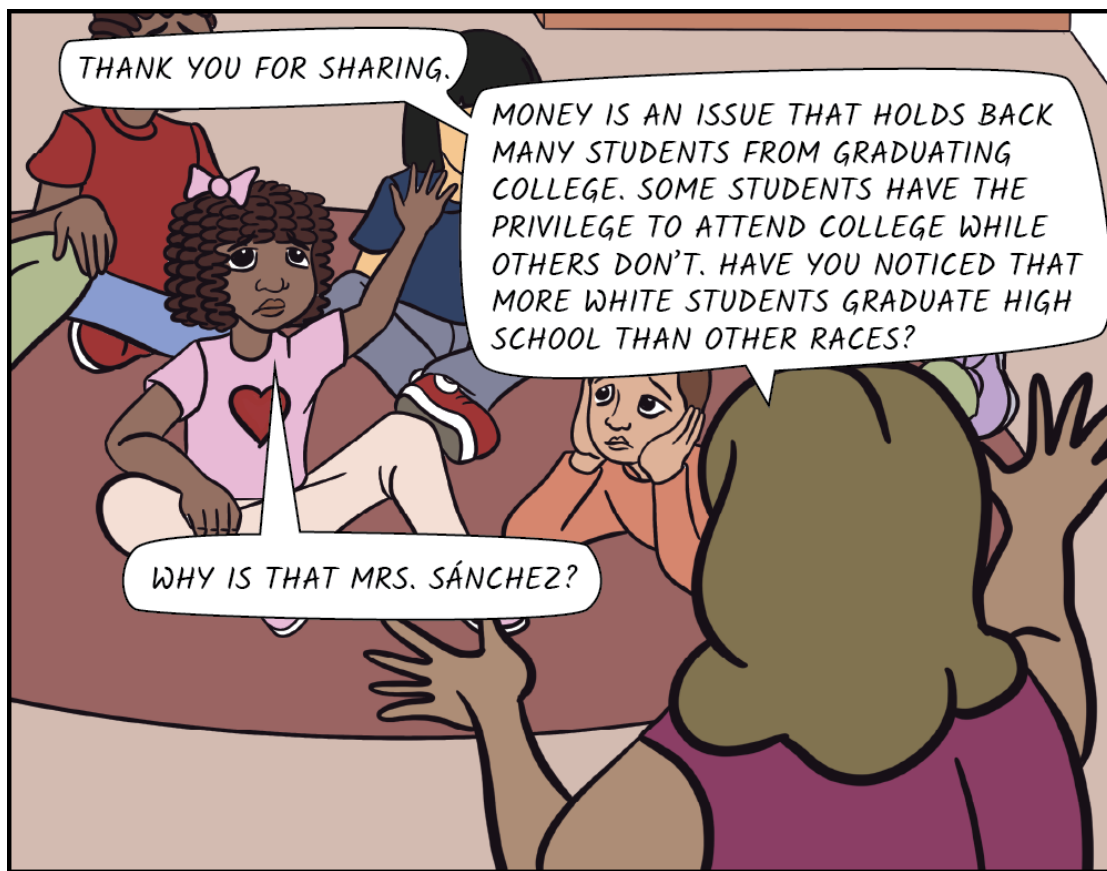
Experiences with Inequity: Students do not draw from their own personal experiences, and fail to acknowledge the emotions of those who are unfairly treated. (1)

Equity Topics: Although equity topics arise from content, they are not addressed. No interactions on inequity are made. (3)

Version 2: Somewhat Connected









Version 2 Transcript

Version 2 Explanation

Why do we say this example is “somewhat connected”?

Examination: Mrs. Sánchez discusses fairness and bias by sharing how schools favor white, middle-class students. She does not share a personal experience, role models, or the consequences of inequity. (2)

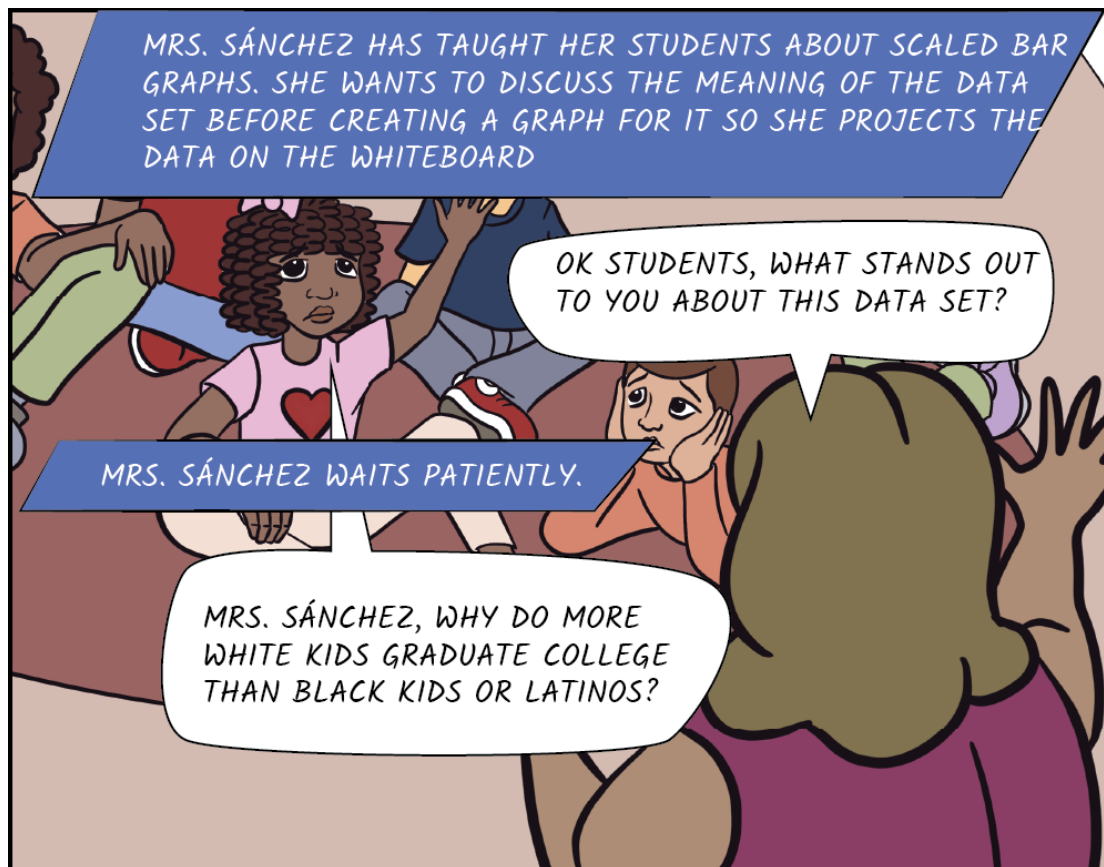
Resolution: Mrs. Sánchez acknowledges the feelings of her students who experience inequity. However, she does not discourage inequity or encourage her students to stand up against and resolve inequity. (2)

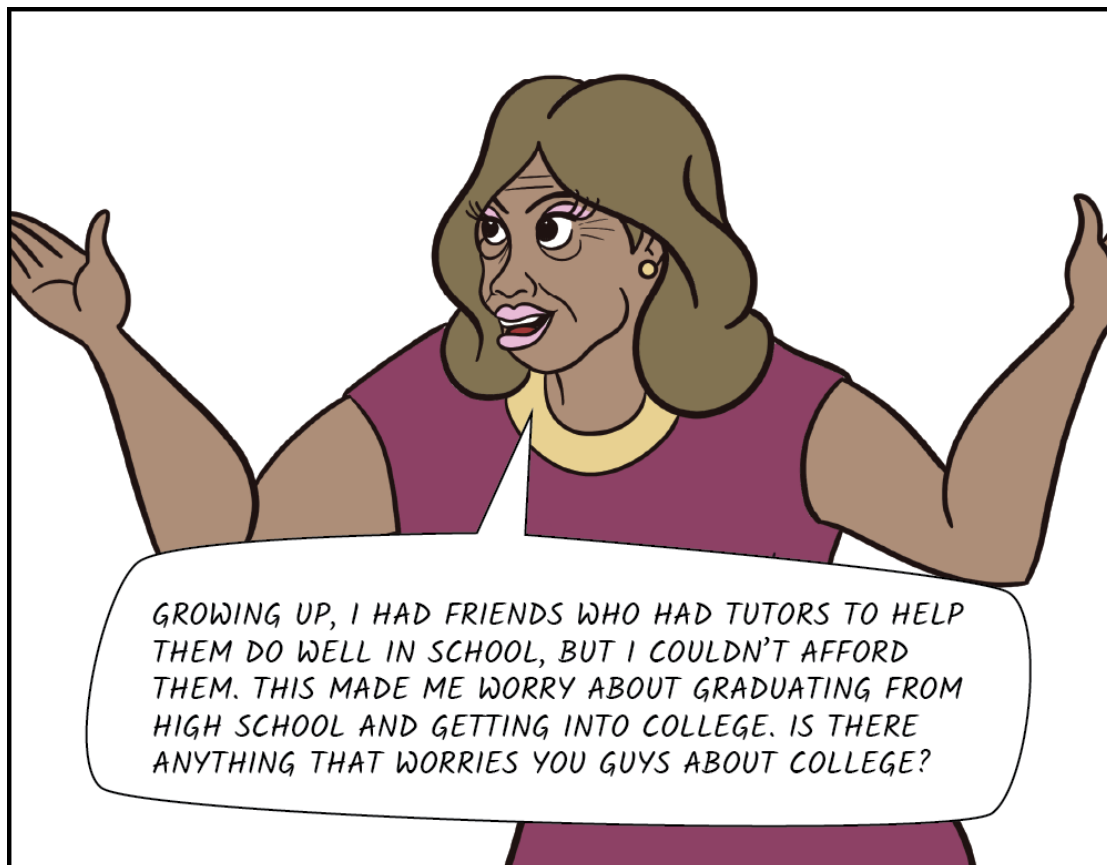
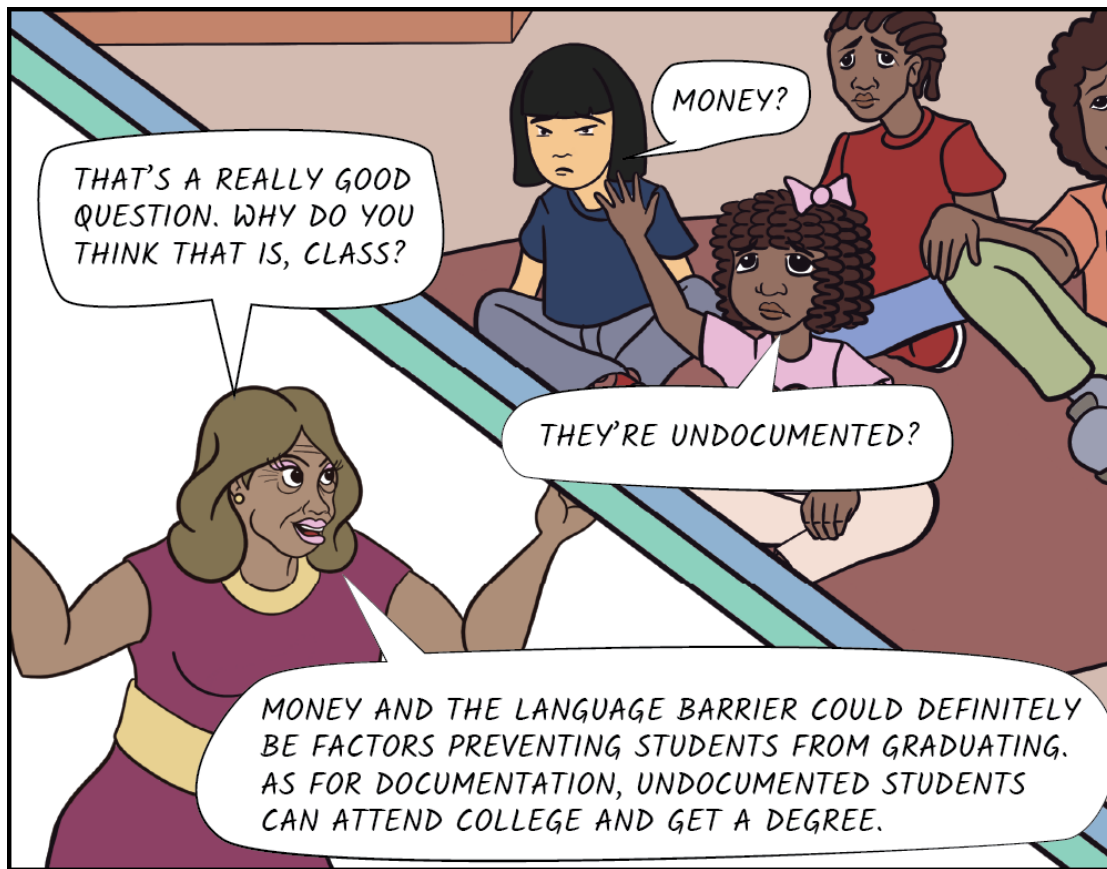
Commitment to Equity: The students ask questions about inequity based on their observations. They also share some concerns about inequity. However, the students do not commit to resolving inequities. (4)

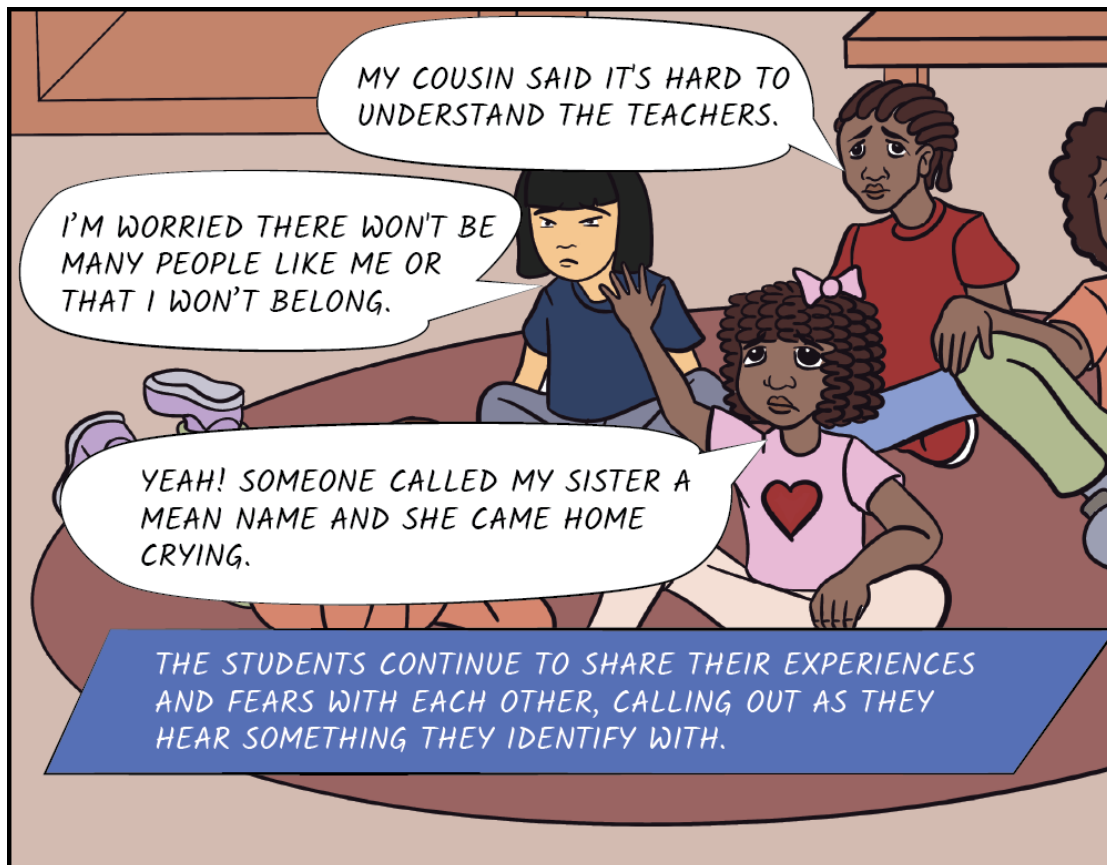
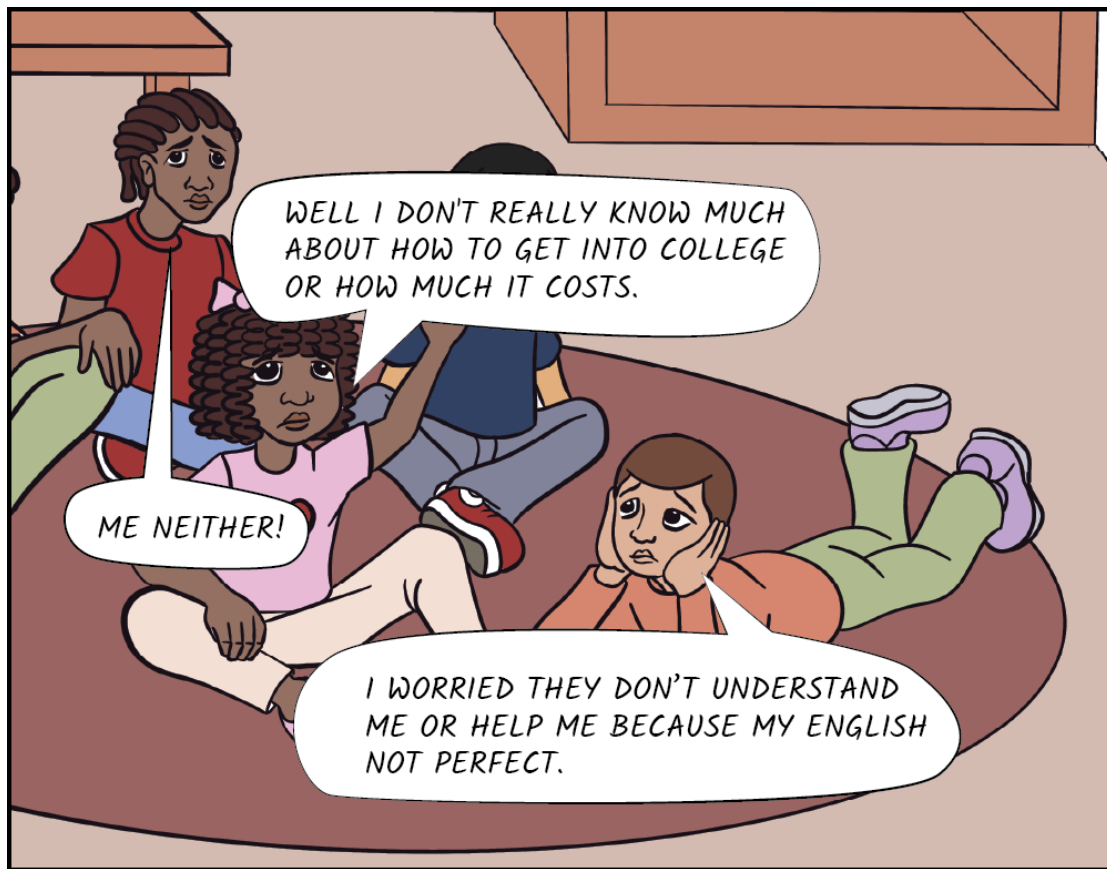
Experiences with Inequity: A student shares a personal experience with inequity by sharing how money has impacted his brother's education. This in a way also generates an example of inequity. The students do not acknowledge the emotions of those experiencing inequity. (3)

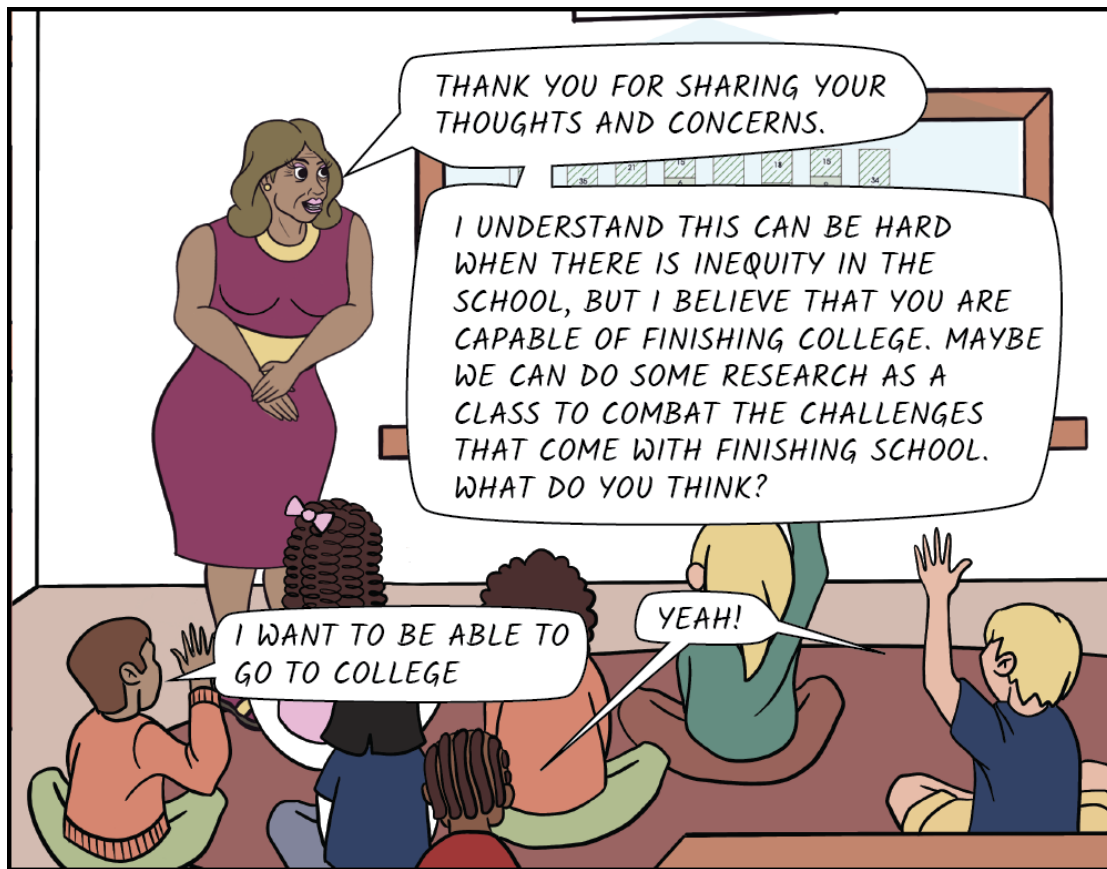
Equity Topics: Although equity topics arise, both Mrs. Sánchez and her students fail to further extend the discussion on inequity. They could have spent more time discussing other inequities encountered on the path to higher education and working to change that. (3)

Version 3: Well-Connected









Version 3 Transcript

Version 3 Explanation

Why do we say this example is “well-connected”?

Examination

Mrs. Sánchez examines inequity by sharing her experience of being nervous about getting into college because she couldn't afford a tutor. She also discusses fairness and bias by allowing her students to share ideas that prevent Blacks and Latinos from graduating. She also discusses the consequences of inequity. However, she does not describe role models or acknowledge multiple perspectives. (4)

Resolution

Mrs. Sánchez acknowledges the feelings of her students that experience inequity. She encourages her students to stand up against inequity by conducting research as a class on what is needed to attend college. She does not discourage inequity in student relationships or allow her students to create and reinforce rules for equity. (3)

Commitment to Equity

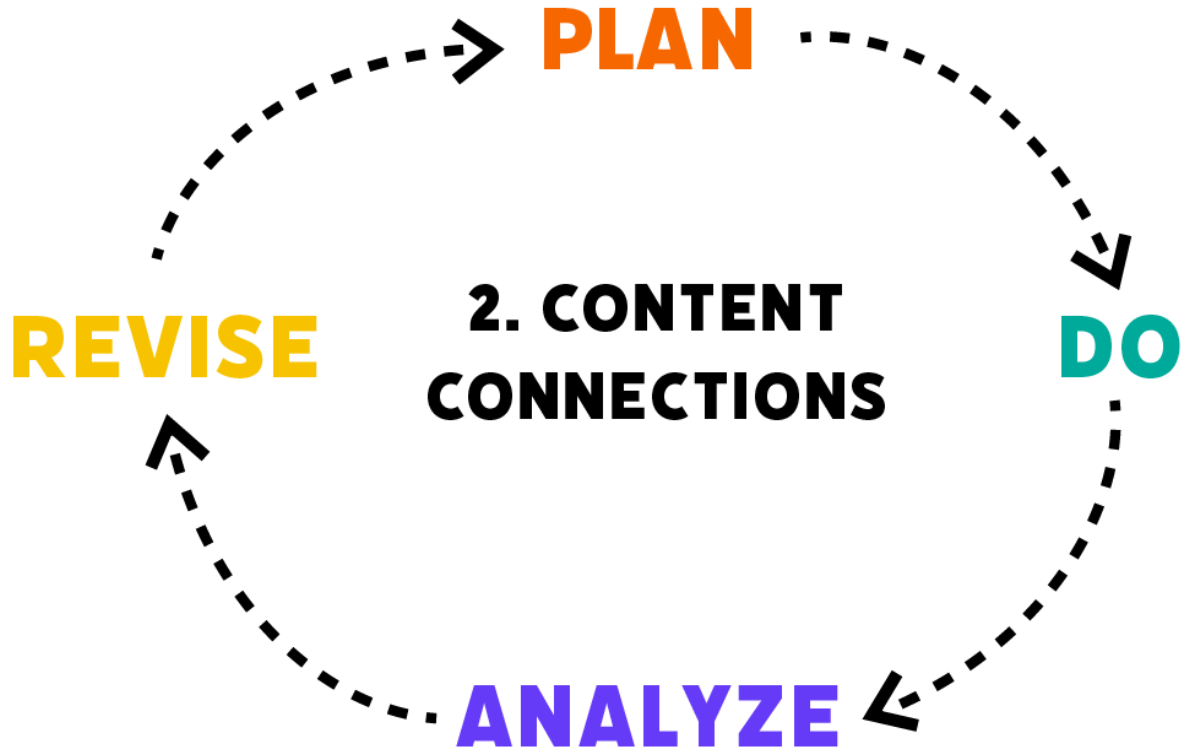
Students ask questions about privilege and bias when they see the data set. They also share their concerns about inequities in college graduation and admission and commit to resolving inequity through research. (5)

Experiences with Inequity

Multiple students generate examples of inequity as well as share personal examples with inequity that might prevent them from attending college. However, they do not acknowledge the emotions of others who were unfairly treated. (4)

Equity Topics

A conversation on equity arose in the classroom from content. Mrs. Sánchez made an effort to extend the conversation and hear the concerns and experiences of her students. The discussion was not over at the end of the comic but could be continued and expanded upon at a later time. Equity issues did not arise in classroom relationships. (4)



Practicing Equity Discussions: PDAR

Now that you have reviewed the theory, indicators, and examples of Equity Discussions, it's time to practice in your own classroom.

Below you will find PDAR guides to help you integrate what you've learned into practice, either by yourself or with other teachers.

If you have a Hypothesis account (or create one), you can sign in at the top right corner of this page. This will enable you to annotate and make notes for your PDAR plan. We have also included worksheets below that you can download, fill in, and share. Do what works best for you!

(Note: Our full explanation of PDAR is in the Introduction chapter. [Click here to view it.](#))

1. Download PDAR Worksheet - [Version A \(Google Doc\)](#).
2. Download PDAR Worksheet - [Version B \(pdf\)](#) | [Version B \(Google Doc\)](#).
3. Open [Language Use CASI rubric \(Google Doc\)](#).
4. Download Self/Peer Observation document ([Google Doc](#)) ([PDF](#))

PDAR At-a-Glance

Plan

1. Identify the upcoming lesson or unit you'd like to work on
2. Review the Equity Discussions indicators with your lesson(s) in mind
3. Identify your "look fors"—what you expect and hope to see
4. Plan your observations, alone or with others

Do

1. Work from your plan (try to reach your goals, but be flexible)
2. Consider recording multiple observations and multiple forms of data (scores, field notes, etc.)

Analyze

1. Record and review what happened, either solo or with your observers
2. Analyze how each indicator showed up in your lesson
3. Compare to your goals and predictions
4. Reflect on your overall experience

Revise

1. Revise your process (observations, data gathering)
2. Revise your direction (new goals? new lesson? new indicator?)
3. Identify your gaps (skills, knowledge, outside help)

PDAR In-Depth

Use the reflective questions below to guide you. You don't have to answer all of them—they are there to give you ideas and help you reflect.

(Take notes in the book or download one of the worksheets above.)

Plan

1. Identify lessons/unit you would like to apply equity discussions to
 1. What are your upcoming lessons?
 2. What standards fit naturally with equity discussions?
 3. If you need inspiration, jump to our “Lesson Ideas” section below.
2. Review equity discussions with your lesson(s) in mind. Ask yourself:
 1. What are some topics we can discuss as a class?
 2. Do I have any personal experiences with inequity?
 3. Who are some role models I can share with my students?
 4. What resolutions can I and my students make that will create change?
 5. How do I discourage inequity in my students' relationships?
 6. How can I encourage my students to commit to equity?
 7. How can I invite my students to share their experiences with unfair treatment?
 8. How do I help my students acknowledge others' emotions?
 9. What equity issues have I noticed in my classroom?
3. Identify your “look fors”— what you expect and hope to see.
 1. How would you like to change?
 2. What do you want students to experience?
 3. What do you expect to happen?
 4. How do you think the students will react?
 5. How do you think you will react?
4. Plan your observations
 1. Would you like a video or observation notes?
 2. Do you need any tools?
 3. When will you observe yourself/be observed?
 4. Will you do this study solo or with colleagues?

Do

1. Work from the plan
 1. Do you need to improve?
 2. What kind of notes should observers take?
 3. How long will your observations be? (15-20 minutes)
 4. How many observations before analyzing? (We recommend 3)

Analyze

1. Record/review what happened
 1. If using video, take detailed notes: what did students say and do? What did you say and do?
 2. If using colleague feedback, what did they observe students/you say and do?
2. Analyze each indicator (click here to see the [Equity Discussions CASI rubric](#)).
 1. Examination
 1. How did I examine inequity in my classroom?
 2. Resolution
 1. How did I explore resolutions to inequity with my class?
 3. Commitment to Equity
 1. How did my students commit to resolving inequity?
 4. Experiences with Inequity
 1. What did my students share about their experiences with inequity?
 5. Equity Topics
 1. How did I build on equity issues that arose in classroom topics and relationships?
3. Compare to your goals and speculations
 1. Did you meet the goals you set?
 2. Can you justify your interpretation with evidence?
 3. Were your predictions correct?
 4. Can you justify with evidence?
4. Reflect on your experience
 1. What changes did you notice in yourself or your students?
 2. Which indicators came naturally? Which were challenging?
 3. What happened that you were not expecting?

Revise

1. Revise your process
 1. Do you need to change your observation method? Did your video work?
 2. Were you able to gather good insights from the process?
2. Revise your direction
 1. Would you like to continue or stop CASI use for this dimension? Is it time to move to a new dimension?
 2. Would you like to continue with the same goals or revise them?
 3. What can you revise in your lesson plan to better incorporate equity discussions?
3. Examine your gaps
 1. What skill or knowledge gaps keep you from applying equity discussions in your classroom (e.g., do you know what cultures your students come from, or what their life outside of the classroom is like?)
 2. Who could you work or discuss with to improve?

Conclusion

Social and institutional inequities exist in our classrooms, communities, and country. They are additional invisible hurdles that must also be overcome by underprivileged groups. We cannot take the necessary steps to resolve these issues without having hard conversations with our students first. Many of them may be navigating through the barriers caused by inequity on a daily basis. We can create change in our classrooms and communities by having these discussions and learning from one another and the different experiences we have. As teachers, we must be prepared to create a safe space for our underprivileged students when it comes to having conversations about equity. We must also be willing to acquire the knowledge we do not already have to respond to our students' questions.

Our goal in this chapter was to help show you the importance of Equity Discussions in your classroom. While we understand there are many time constraints and pressures as teachers, making time for the five dimensions—Examination, Resolution, Commitment to Equity, Experiences with Inequity, and Equity Topics—will help your students to realize life is not separate from school and to care more about the subjects you are teaching.

Through Equity Discussions we can educate and unify our classrooms. The goal is that solidarity can be built by your students and you as their teacher through the sharing and discussion of experiences.

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Jocelin Meza is from Texas and currently studies Elementary Education at BYU, with a minor in teaching English language learners (TELL). As a proud Mexican American, Jocelin focuses much of her studies on multicultural education and enjoys learning how to effectively incorporate engaging curriculum into the classroom. In her spare time, Jocelin loves to read and run.



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Brenton Jackson is a masters student in BYU's Department of Instructional Psychology and Technology. His work centers on applying open educational resources to equity problems in education, as well as studying distinctions of worth in design practice. Creating this online book about equitable practices for K-6 teachers is the focus of his thesis. A native Virginian and adopted Bostonian, Brenton enjoys astrophotography and writing music in his spare time.



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Appendix

| |
|-------------------------|
| Formative Use Scenarios |
| References |
| Glossary |



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References



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Glossary

Q Find something...

Funds of Knowledge

A student's funds of knowledge might include: academic and personal background knowledge; accumulated life experiences; skills and knowledge used to navigate everyday social contexts; and world views structured by broader historically and politically influenced social forces.

Making Meaning

Teachers using a variety of approaches to draw on "students' familiar, local contexts of experience" (Dalton & Tharp, 2002).

Minoritization

We use 'minoritized' instead of 'minority' to highlight that children and families of color often do not have access to equitable opportunity even when they comprise the numerical majority within their communities. Their cultural ways of being remain excluded and relegated to an underprivileged status.

Monolithic Culture

Monolithic means solid, massive, uniform; a monolithic culture is rigid and homogenous at the expense of subcultures, like Detroit's economy when it depended entirely on the auto industry.



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