

Introduction



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

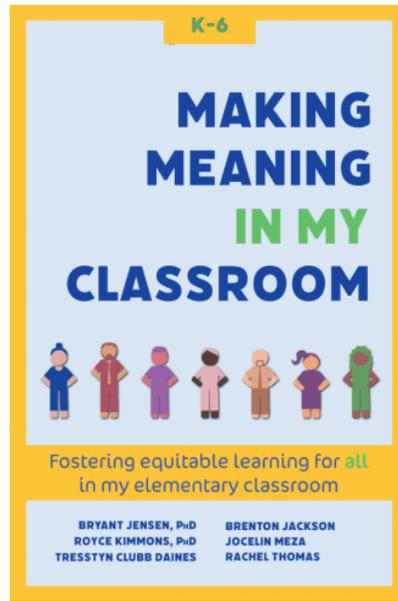
→ How classroom interactions provide opportunities for role switching between teachers and students.

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



Jensen, B. & Kimmons, R. (2021). *Making Meaning in My Classroom*. EdTech Books.
https://edtechbooks.org/making_meaning