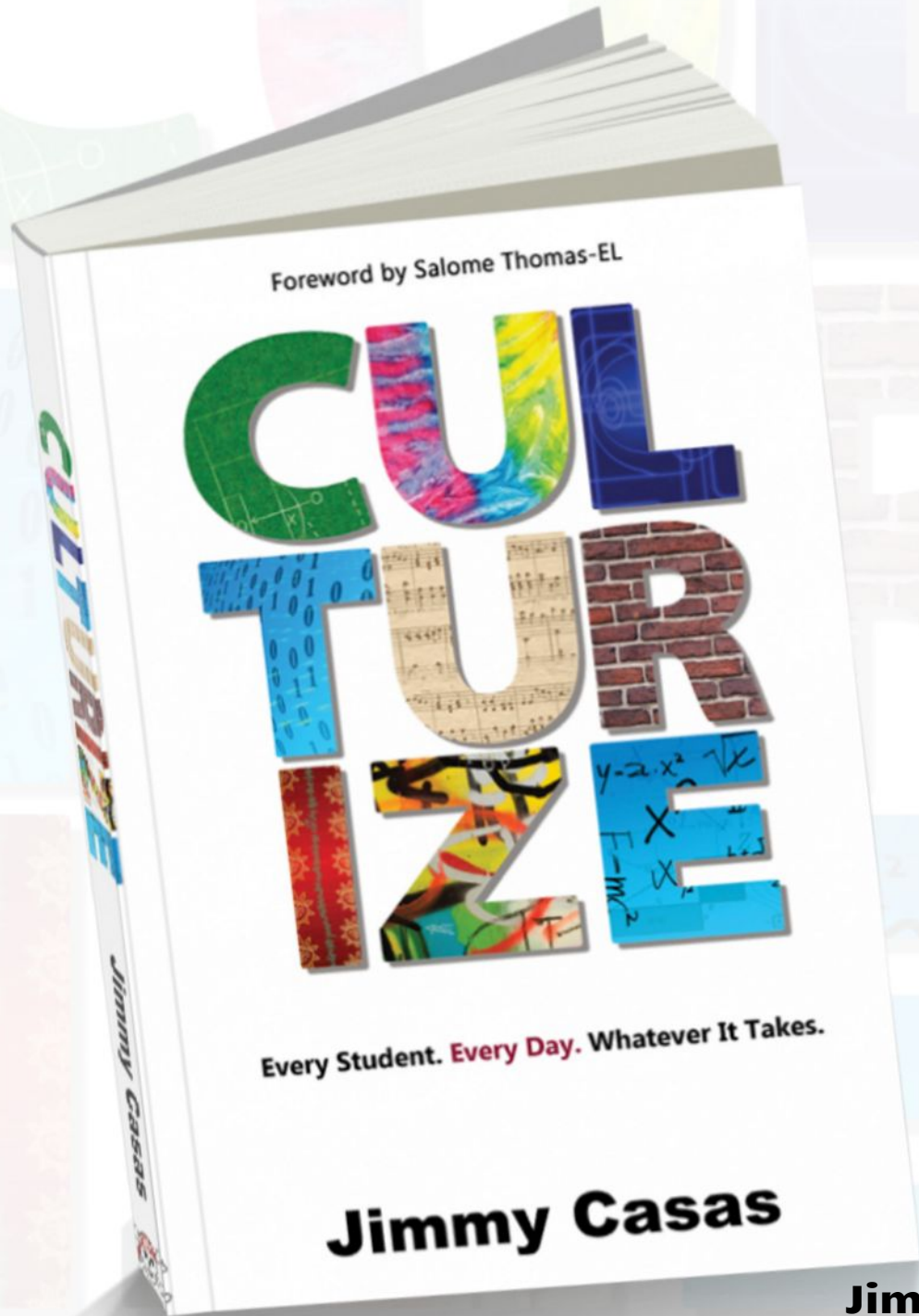


# A Study Guide for **CULTURIZE**

Every Student. **Every Day.** Whatever It Takes.



2018  
Jimmy Casas  
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# A Study Guide for **CULTURIZE**

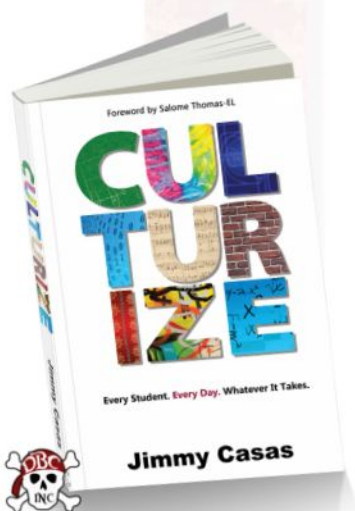
**Every Student. Every Day. Whatever It Takes.**

This study guide was created for you, the reader, to push your thinking in order to reflect on your work as an educator and more importantly, to challenge you to take action. My hope is that you will use this guide with students, teachers, support staff, administration and parents to intentionally examine your classroom and school culture through their eyes in order to eradicate average and inspire them to strive for excellence as a school community. As you work through the study guide, you will see that it aligns with the four core principles that I have shared below which served as the mantra by which I aspired to impact others with whom I had the honor to serve as a school leader:

Champion for All Students - 3 R's,  
Relationships...Relationships...Relationships  
Expect Excellence - Model the Way  
Carry the Banner - Be a Positive Voice  
Merchant of Hope - Everyone Deserves to Be a Part of Something Great

As you read through the guided questions, you may choose to discuss each question before reading the chapters or you may wait until you finish reading each chapter before engaging in a dialogue with your team. Each chapter is filled with content, strategies, ideas, stories, reflections, anecdotes, quotes, and challenges to provoke honest and meaningful discussion.

Thank you for investing in CULTURIZE, but more importantly, for investing in yourself and others in order to cultivate a community of learners by behaving in a kind, caring, honest, and compassionate manner in order to challenge and inspire each member of the school community to be more and do more than they ever thought possible.



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# Chapter 1:

## Just Talk to Me

Casas makes the point that many of our schools have reached the point where we are willing to allow an average culture to determine our student's or school's potential for success.

Where does average currently exist in your school?  
More importantly, what you are willing to do about it?

What are some of the biggest challenges you are currently facing as a student, staff member or parent that is keeping you from reaching your full potential and resulting in fatigue and weariness?

One of the hardest places to look when things aren't going as well as we hoped is at ourselves and our own attitudes, skillsets, and behaviors.

What areas would you identify as stretches needing improvement in yourself?

When was the last time you tried something for the very first time?

How did it make you feel?

Are there students and staff who harbor the same feelings?  
If so, what does this tell you about your culture?

What would you do differently if you were not afraid?  
What is keeping you from going for it?

# Chapter 1:

## Just Talk to Me

Casas believes that everyone in an organization has the capacity to lead.

If you believe this to be true, then why doesn't everyone lead?  
What is holding them back?

What changes need to happen for others to aspire for these roles?

Reflect on this Quote by Casas:

“No one person is responsible for determining your success or failure but you, and no one is responsible for your morale but you.”

Agree? Why or why not?

Casas states that no student or educator wants to be average; that those who have accepted the status quo as their standard have simply lost their way.

What can we personally do as individuals or an organization to inspire others back to greatness?

Challenging the status can seem daunting and overwhelming at times. Fighting something so entrenched can drain us of our energy, create undue stress, and even negatively affect our mindset.

Why is it important to never pass up an opportunity to engage others in conversation? How can we change our conversations with others to inspire them for success?

In what ways do our actions and deeds lift others up?

Does your school have unified expectations regarding how adults are expected to treat the students and their families?

What adult behaviors still exist that need to be challenged and re-examined?



## Chapter 2:

### CORE PRINCIPLE 1 – Champion for All Students

Describe a time that you championed for a student and the end result?

What did you learn from that experience?

Would you do anything differently if given the same opportunity again?

If so, what would you do differently?

Casas believes that we have a fundamental responsibility to challenge colleagues who speak negatively about students.

What concerns do you have about initiating these conversations?

What suggestions can you offer that might influence others to rethink their behavior?

In those moments of self-doubt when you have questioned your impact as an educator, what did you do to flip the switch & remind yourself that what you do matters, even when you were not able to see the results of your investment?

Share a specific example of what you currently do to overcome these feelings?

There are students who see school as an institution that puts limits on their potential. Some believe that schools have categorized them, sticking labels on them that they wear like a scarlet letter.

What classes or programs currently exist in your school that perpetuate these feelings?

What organized structures, if put in place, would support a diverse group of students and families to ensure they feel safe, connected, and valued?

Casas shares three distinct differences in the relationship pyramid and points out the importance of diving deeper below the surface when it comes to relationships. Share ways in which as a staff, you invest in your students, colleagues and parents on a more personal level so you get to know them, they get to know you, and most importantly, they get to know each other?

## Chapter 2:

### CORE PRINCIPLE 1 – Champion for All Students

Many students struggle in school due to the 3 C's - They don't feel connected, they don't feel capable, and they lack confidence. What strategies have you tried to engage students in order to validate these feelings and help them move beyond them?

Reflect on this quote by Casas:  
"Approach each situation with an understanding that at the heart of every problem is a conversation to be had."

What does this mean to you?

In what ways do you establish meaningful relationships with students in order to earn their trust?  
What approach do you use when a student seems reluctant or refuses to engage all together?

Reading and writing are critical in a child's growth and development as a learner, yet so many students continue to struggle in their journey through school.  
What are the factors in our schools that are contributing to this and what can your team begin doing today to turn this issue around?

On Page 48, Casas shares a poem entitled, Take Care of the Student. One line reads, "Students are not an interruption of our work, they are the purpose of it."

In what ways does your school demonstrate, celebrate, and recognize a "Can do Vs. a Cant' do" culture?



# Chapter 3:

## CORE PRINCIPLE 2 – Expect Excellence

Leaders don't need a title to lead.  
Define what leadership means to you and how you try to lead by example every day.

Casas believes that every student, teacher and principal has the potential to be an exemplary model of whatever position they hold.

What attributes and characteristics do such individuals who strive for excellence have in common that set them apart?

Leadership was never meant to be a committee of one. In other words, we should not attempt to lead our classrooms and schools all by ourselves. Building capacity is critical.

What are ways you empower students and/or staff so they begin to see themselves as leaders?

Successful teachers and leaders recognize that often times it is the simple things that play a part in helping others become better. And at the same time, they too become better.

If you were to create a list of all the small things your staff has done this school year, what things would make this list that have helped culturize your school.

Casas shares one of the hardest lessons he had to learn was to saying no, even if saying yes felt easier and a lot less stressful.

Discuss the pros and cons of saying no to student and staff requests and the potential benefits and implications on your school culture.

# Chapter 3:

## CORE PRINCIPLE 2 – Expect Excellence

Toxic environments are often filled with ‘gotcha’ practices. What practices can you identify in your school that possibly fall into this category.

Discuss alternative practices that others would consider to be more beneficial and would result in a more positive, school-wide morale.

Reflect on this quote by Casas: “No matter how many team building activities you do or how many facilitators you bring in to help your organization’s members gel as a team, the results won’t be there unless you model what it means to be part of a team.”

How do you & others in your school interact, respond, and acknowledge the work of others?

Much of the negativity, harsh feelings, and unnecessary work that is endured in schools and district alike can be tied back to poor communication. Can you cite areas in your organization where communication could be improved?  
What suggestions do you have for improved communication that would be more effective and would bring about a more positive result?

Being an educator today requires a great deal of fortitude, especially for those who aim to influence the status quo. Describe some ways in which your resolve is currently being tested. In other words, where are you currently experiencing push back?

If not addressed appropriately, poor morale will threaten a team’s ability to work effectively. If ignored, it will permeate & impact every aspect of your organization.

What are the issues that you & others are currently dealing with that are impacting morale negatively? What suggestions do you have to address these concerns? What are you willing to invest and do to support others in the quest to combat these culture killers?



## Chapter 4:

### CORE PRINCIPLE 3 – Carry the Banner

What do you do to stay positive and refresh yourself when things aren't going the way you want them to go?

Sometimes we fall victim of being overly critical of our colleagues and supervisors.

How can we change our words and actions so that we don't bring harm to others, but rather lift them up?

People who feel valued & appreciated will always do more than what is expected. What are some specific ways that you & your team can support others in this quest?

Describe a time when a student or colleague let you down or disappointed you. How did you respond? Did you respond in a caring and compassionate way? Or did you let your disappointment influence your response in a negative way?

Casas often states that great change begins with self-change. What is one area that you believe would benefit you immediately if you were to make that change today? What is keeping you from following up on that change?  
Don't wait for others to change. You change!

# Chapter 4:

## CORE PRINCIPLE 3 – Carry the Banner

What we model is what we get.  
What are the behaviors that your students, teachers and administrators are currently modeling that we want to replicate and multiply?

Reflect on the following quote by Casas: “Often the word balance carries a negative connotation in that it suggests the goal is to find a 50-50 split between work and life and if we are not meeting this goal we are doing something wrong. Finding a life fit allows us to be forgiving of ourselves and to recognize there are ebbs and flows to life’s events.”

Do you agree with this statement? Have an honest dialogue about how you manage your time and energy in order to be at your best for others.

We often hear about achievement gaps in schools. But what are the opportunity gaps that currently exists in your school?

Is it the same for all kids? Identify areas where you believe your school is effective and areas where you believe the school falls short as a whole?

What are the perceptions that currently exist in your community about the work you do as an educator? What are some steps that we can begin to take today to change how others feel about the work we do? In what ways are you currently celebrating the accomplishments of students and staff in your school? Are there any current practices that need to be added, refreshed or eliminated altogether?

What can we do differently to encourage and support others to pursue a career in teaching and or administration? How does your school intentionally support student teachers, substitute teachers and teacher leaders in their growth and development as professionals? What processes and or systems do you currently have in place?  
What are some other ways this could be accomplished?



## Chapter 5:

### CORE PRINCIPLE 4 – Be a Merchant of Hope

Often times we hear of students and staff feeling like limits are being placed on their potential. Can you identify any areas in your school where this is happening?  
Can you pinpoint the cause of these practices?

To make connections and build relationships that truly make a difference, we need to invest the time by taking time to listen and getting to know our students and colleagues on a more personal level. Is this consistently occurring in your school?

Students and staff want to be treated fairly and believe that others care about them. Casas shares two specific questions in the book how you can work to achieve this goal. What are some other ways this can be done? What challenges exist and how can you work through them in order to give others hope?

Each day our experiences working in schools can be a rose or thorn. Share your rose and thorn with others from today, this past week, month or school year.

How we respond to the daily challenges we face is our choice.  
How do you respond to others' failures or your own?  
How do you fail forward and not allow these circumstances to impact your mood, attitude and/or interactions with others?

## Chapter 5:

### CORE PRINCIPLE 4 – Be a Merchant of Hope

You won't always see immediate results when working with students. Can you describe a time when you kept on working with a student who eventually experienced that feeling of success?

What keeps us from doing this with every student?

Reflect on the following quote by Casas:

"If you want to be an effective teacher or leader, be willing to sincerely accept an apology and move on. Believe that most people's intentions are good."

Is there someone right now that you need to follow up with and apologize to or forgive? What is keeping you from doing so? Why not take care of this today?

We went into education to make a positive difference in the life of a child only to find out that we have often been the beneficiary of such joy and positive influence from others. Who was that person for you? Have you reached out personally and thanked them? If not, why not? Why not do so today?

What makes you stay in the profession?  
What are the things that bring you the greatest joy in the work you do each and every day?

What contribution do you hope to leave in the end when it is all said and done and you walk out those school doors for the very last time?



## Chapter 6: It's Your Choice

How do you measure success in your daily work?

It's critical that you take time to invest in yourself, personally and professionally on a regular basis.

Talk about how you do this.

What goals do you have for yourself this year?

Networking and surrounding ourselves with others who aspire for the same things we aspire for are necessary in order for us to achieve a maximum level of impact. How do you stay connected with others? Is there a particular way that works best for you that you would be willing to share with others?

One pitfall for all educators is that we often want to tell people what to do rather than show them what to do. What are some things that you need to show others in order to bring greater clarity to what you hope to accomplish?

If we are not careful when trying to make decisions or bring about change, we can fall into the trap of allowing the process to become the product. This can result in stagnation and nothing getting accomplished. Have you been a part of such an experience? What was the end result? How could we have responded differently in order to get the desired results we were hoping to get?

## Chapter 6: It's Your Choice

When hiring new staff, what do you focus more on? Knowledge, disposition, skill sets? Is one more important than the other? Discuss what it means to hire for excellence. What role does our own behavior play in the process?

Examine the last two years of hires. Are you happy with the results? Is the quality and effectiveness of these individuals what you expected? Why or why not? What do you believe were the determining factors in their success or failure?

Reflect on the following quote by Casas: "If you want to improve your relationships with others, try changing the manner in which you have those conversations. Managing difficult people requires you to manage yourself first."

Agree? What needs to change in how you conduct yourself in order to influence others in a positive way?

When students or teachers opt out of doing what you expect them to do, that is not a student or teacher issue. That is a teacher or principal issue. Others will do what we allow them to do. Rather than dwell on the problems, focus on the conversation and the opportunities to foster a positive relationship.

Where do these issues currently exist in your school?  
What do we need to do to begin to address these issues?

Casas believes we all need to be inspired every now and then. In what ways do you strive to inspire others so when you look back on your career, you will have left a significant mark on every student and every teacher every day, because you were willing to do whatever it took to help them be more and do more than they ever thought possible?



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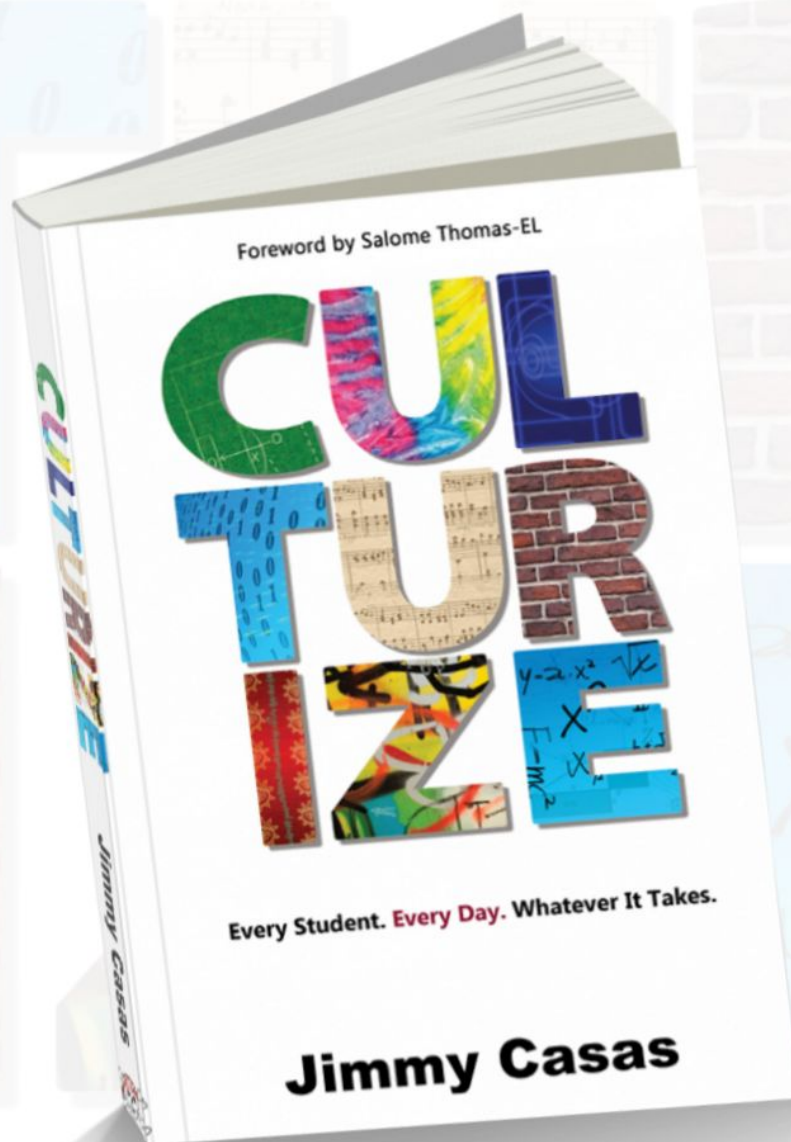
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