Educating Individuals With Intellectual Disabilities: The US Constitution, Citizenship And Disability

Julie Ramirez

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.nl.edu/diss

Recommended Citation
https://digitalcommons.nl.edu/diss/575

This Dissertation - Public Access is brought to you for free and open access by Digital Commons@NLU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons@NLU. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@nl.edu.
Educating Individuals with Intellectual Disabilities: The US Constitution, Citizenship and Disability

Julie Ramirez

Disability and Equity in Education

Submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements of
Doctor of Education

National College of Education

National Louis University

April 2021
Educating Individuals with Intellectual Disabilities:
The US Constitution, Citizenship and Disability

Julie Ramirez
Disability and Equity in Education

Approved:

valerie owen
Chair/Co-Chair, Dissertation Committee

program director
Director, Doctoral Programs

3-25-2021
Date Approved

kathleen kotz
Member

kathleen kotz
Dean’s Representative

Dean, National College of Education
This qualitative, design-based research study focuses on teaching citizenship to individuals with intellectual disabilities. The participants were middle school students who communicate in a variety of ways, many of whom don’t use speech. In the State of Illinois, the general education population is required to pass the U.S. Constitution test. However, in spite of a mandate that students with disabilities should have access to the general education curriculum, students with significant intellectual disabilities are not required to learn about the constitution or their rights as citizens. The goal of the research was to meet the needs of all students through federal mandates of gaining access to the general education curriculum. For this study, curriculum was written that includes an adapted Constitution test. The study provides in depth descriptions of the Constitution Unit constructed and adapted for each participant, the pedagogical practices employed, and the assessment results for the students who participated. The research found that when curricula is adapted to their individual communication styles, connected to their lives, and enacted through multiple modalities, that students with intellectual disabilities can learn complex ideas about rights and incorporate their learning into their lives.
The journey began in 2007, when I first began researching doctoral programs for education. I first spoke with my friend and mentor, Dr. Sheila Romano. She proceeded to tell me that she believes that National Louis University would be a great fit for continuing my education. She then proceeded to tell me she was on the Board of Trustee’s. It was within the next few weeks that I met Dr. Valerie Owen. Dr. Owen is by far the first person I need to acknowledge. Without my dissertation chair helping me through re-writes, struggles, tears and triumphs, I would not have this completed. Dr. Owen gave me the drive and encouragement and often told me “You can do it” even when I doubted myself. Even though she retired from the University years ago, she made a choice to continue on my path of success.

Second, I would like to acknowledge Dr. Terry Smith. Not only did Dr. Smith guide me in her classes towards the topic of citizenship, but she also guided me with forming my research study into design-based research. At my proposal, she said that I really needed to guide my focus into a design-based research and that this topic is groundbreaking in the field of education. Dr. Smith has taught me well and I am forever grateful for learning from her.

I would also like to thank Shannon Cribaro, Dr. Kathy Kotel, and Dr. Jeanne Zeitlen. I was honored to take a few courses with them and learned a great deal while listening to them and learning about their journey in the DEE program. Each one has driven me in one way or another. Dr. Kotel shared stories of being a parent and explained how excited she was for a curriculum that taught citizenship. She felt this was an important piece missing in educating individuals with disabilities. Dr. Zeitlen and Ms. Cribaro became close friends and took me under their wing. They backed me when I was not able to express myself eloquently. They both shared books and articles with me throughout this process. I am forever grateful for them.
EDUCATING INDIVIDUALS

Through this process, I lost a few people close to me, including my mother, two very dear friends and a student. Each time I would get discouraged. In one way or another each of these individuals gave me the drive to keep pursuing my dreams. As with any loss comes strength and perseverance to keep moving forward. This is for them.

Last but certainly not least, I want to thank my family. With their unwavering support, they pushed me to succeed. Especially Israel Ramirez, Esther Mossey, Jeanine Lopez, Janet Luken and Edwin Parkhurst, without them, I would not be where I am today. Each of these individuals either gave me the drive to continue or the support of a phone call checking in to see how the process is going. They always believed I could do it and made sure I was on the path to finishing.
Dedicated to Israel Ramirez
Seth and Ethan Ramirez

In Memory of
Grade Ann Parkhurst
Sophia Prunty
Michael Macauley
Dr. Sheila Romano
Alice Wenzlaff
# Table of Contents

**ABSTRACT** ............................................................................................................................... i

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS** ................................................................................................................ ii

**List of Figures** ......................................................................................................................... vii

**List of Tables** ............................................................................................................................... viii

**CHAPTER ONE** .......................................................................................................................... 1
  The Journey into Teaching Special Education ............................................................................. 1
  Educating Students with Intellectual Disabilities, A Brief Overview ............................................ 3

**The Purpose of the Study** ........................................................................................................... 6

**Methodology** .............................................................................................................................. 10
  Plan of the study ............................................................................................................................ 11

**Conclusion** ................................................................................................................................ 11

**CHAPTER TWO** ........................................................................................................................ 12

**The Review of Literature** .......................................................................................................... 12
  Introduction ................................................................................................................................... 12
  **Academic Curriculum: An Overview** ....................................................................................... 12
  **Accommodations within an Academic Curriculum** ................................................................. 13
  **Functional Curriculum: An Overview** ..................................................................................... 14
  Domains of Functional Curriculum ............................................................................................... 16

**Federal Mandates** ...................................................................................................................... 17
  **Culturally Responsive Instruction** ............................................................................................ 25
  **Monitoring Achievement** .......................................................................................................... 26
  **Accommodations and Modifications** ......................................................................................... 28
  **Differentiated Instruction and Universal Design for Learning** ................................................ 30
  Teaching Citizenship ...................................................................................................................... 32

**Conclusion** ................................................................................................................................ 34

**CHAPTER THREE** ...................................................................................................................... 35

**Research Design and Methods** ................................................................................................ 35

**Methodology** .............................................................................................................................. 36
  Ethical Considerations .................................................................................................................... 38
  Context of the Study ....................................................................................................................... 38
  Procedures ....................................................................................................................................... 39
    **Teaching Procedures** ................................................................................................................ 40
  Data Generation .............................................................................................................................. 43
  Data Analysis ................................................................................................................................. 44
List of Figures

Figure 1 An example of level one test using Mayer-Johnson Boardmaker Picture Symbols ............................. 42
Figure 2 An example of a level three test ........................................................................................................... 43
Figure 3 An example of an alternative pencil, picture secured from Google Images ...................................... 58
Figure 4 A modified version of the Bill of Rights ............................................................................................. 60
Figure 5 Bill of Rights ....................................................................................................................................... 61
Figure 6 Bill of Rights Continued ................................................................................................................... 61
Figure 7 Eye Gaze Board Used with Students ................................................................................................. 83
EDUCATING INDIVIDUALS

List of Tables

Table 1 Pre-test results of the Constitution test................................................................. 51
Table 2 Cumulative Data of the weekly pre and post tests .................................................. 53
Table 3 A snapshot of notes taken for lessons ..................................................................... 63
Table 4 Anecdotal notes taken in a lesson ........................................................................... 64
Table 5 Overall Results for the Constitution....................................................................... 71
Table 6 The cumulative data from pre and post tests............................................................ 84
CHAPTER ONE

The Journey into Teaching Special Education

“Mom? Can I have someone over? I met someone new at school today and she is pretty neat.”

I asked my mom as a seventh grader.

“Well sure, when do you want to her to come over?”

“Well, you need to talk to her mom. She needs directions and she needs to stay with Jenny when she comes over. But the sooner the better.”

That is what I conveyed to my mother as my new friend and her mom began their journey to becoming a huge part of my life. The following Saturday, Jenny and her mom, Mrs. Scally, showed up.

My mom was shocked when Jenny and Mrs. Scally showed up at the house. Mrs. Scally needed my mom to help her get Jenny into the house. As far as my mother knew, Jenny was a new seventh grade student at school, and I invited her over. I had neglected to discuss with my mother that she had a disability. She had cerebral palsy, used a wheelchair and communicated in ways other than verbally. When I first met her, her main mode of communication was a vocalization for yes and a head shake for no. By the time she was 16, she had an augmentative communication device that she used to communicate with others. The device had a light scan with picture symbols that she would control using a head switch. She had a great sense of humor, she was very intelligent, and I am grateful she had been a part of my life. She became my best friend until she died shortly after back surgery at the age of 21. She is still near and dear in my heart and there isn’t a day that goes by that I do not think of her. She is the reason I am who I am today. She became my rock and mentor as I have navigated my career. Little did I know at that time what an impact I must have had on them as well.

Similarly, Dr. Sheila Romano was also an inspiration to me throughout the years. She started her career as a special education teacher. She was Jenny’s teacher and also became a dear friend and
mentor to me throughout Jenny’s short life. She ended her professional career as the director of the Illinois Planning Council on Developmental Disabilities. Dr. Romano not only taught me how to be the educator that I want to me, but she demonstrated how much children with disabilities are not given a fair chance at a typical education, or in life for that matter. Years ago, I asked Dr. Romano about the education of students with intellectual disabilities, and she is the one who made me realize that all children, no matter their ability, deserve a right to an education and the right to learn what the general population learns. With that being said, I am just one person, making small changes within my classroom, fighting battles each day with others who do not necessarily see the value in teaching students who have a label of an intellectual disability.

I have been an educator since 1998 at a middle school in the west suburbs of a Large Midwestern City. Through the years, I have worked with a variety of personalities in students and staff. It has been an honor and a privilege to have those students in my classroom. It may sound cliché; however, the students have taught me more than I could ever teach them. The classroom I am the lead teacher of has gone through a multitude of changes over the years. It began as a self-contained classroom with students who were developing at similar levels. It was called the Assisted Instructional Program (AIP) with students who are in the low incidence population. These are students who have more significant intellectual disabilities. Some of my students have major gross motor physical disabilities, some have minor gross motor disabilities, and many of my students are nonverbal. It is common in a classroom such as this for teachers to teach functional life skills that help students become as independent as possible. The class has now evolved into a Specialized Academic Classroom (SPAC), in which I service students who have a wide variety of disabilities, and they rotate classrooms as the general education classrooms do, with the exception of a select group of students who are with me all day.
When I was completing my undergraduate work, I often saw teachers help the students learn how to cook, clean and get dressed with very little focus on academics aside from the math skills that are incorporated with cooking. It is my belief that this is a disservice to the students. I knew from the time I began my career that I was going to make a change with my students. Forget teaching the students how to spell their name, set the table and put simple puzzles together, I was going to teach my students how to read, compute math problems, hypothesize in science and understand about the world.

I was not always confident that I would be able to teach with such passion and drive to help those who do not have a voice, or if they would be receptive to learning new skills. During my studies for my undergraduate work, I had a professor with whom I disagreed for most of my four years. I was never a strong student and had difficulty expressing what I knew through research. It was my last semester before student teaching and this professor gave me the option to repeat her course or continue on with student teaching. After a few days, I decided that I could no longer be at the University, that I would choose to student teach. She wrote me a two-page letter on how I was making a terrible decision and that if I was happy being a “mediocre” teacher, then she would not contact me again. This letter was not only devastating but it impacted my drive to become the educator that I am today. This inspired me to prove her wrong. Her written words are never far from my mind as I walk into work each day. The words that deflated my self-esteem, are now words that encourage me each day and build me up as I begin each school day.

**Educating Students with Intellectual Disabilities, A Brief Overview**

Inclusion, which has been a popular term over the past thirty years, is a philosophy and a practice of educating students with disabilities in general education classrooms. The general education classroom can be considered the least restrictive environment (Shade, & Stewert, 2010). Mainstreaming and inclusion are often substituted for each other when they should not be. Mainstreaming is including
a child with a disability into certain aspects of general education without supports or minimal accommodations.

Inclusion has been around for a long time, although not always thought of as such. The one room schoolhouse was the first educational setting in the United States. Students of all ages went to school together, including students who might be identified as having mild intellectual disabilities, although still excluding those students who have significant disabilities. Children born with significant intellectual disabilities were often placed in institutions, forgotten about and sheltered from society. Although some parents did choose to care for and raise their child without others interfering. However, for the most part, individuals with significant intellectual disability who have been discriminated against and not given the opportunity to learn with their peers over the last hundred years or so.

Public Law 94-142 mandated public schools to offer education to ALL students no matter what their abilities and for them to receive a free education in the public-school system (Protigal, 1999; U.S. Department of Education, 2010). Public Law 94-142 seemed to be a great idea; however, one might ask, “Did it in fact hinder education for those individuals with significant disabilities?” The medical model, or deficit model for the purpose of this paper, is currently what most public-school systems follow. The deficit model is when one looks at the child and sees that something needs to be fixed (Harry, & Klinger, 2007). The deficit model tends to put a judgment on an individual’s life even before he or she is born because it makes it seem that the more severe impairment is, the less worth that person’s life has. A deficit model operates similar to the way doctors and health professionals focus on the “illness” as opposed to the individual (Heyer, 2007). Educators and educational systems most often view disability through the lens of the deficit model; striving to fix or cure the disability.

In contrast, through the social model of disability or the disabilities studies lens, “disability is to be seen as a social construct, rather than an individual deficit and people with disabilities as a minority group, similar to other minority groups based on race and ethnicity (Heyer, 2007)”. From this
perspective, disability exists because, as a society, we have created barriers to access and participation. The social model of disability advocates for society to tear down the barriers individuals with disabilities may face, for example, close parking spots for individuals, cut away curbs, automatic doors and braille labeled signs. While the impairment an individual may interfere with their abilities to navigate the real world, as a society, we use principles of universal design to attempt to remove as many barriers as we can to allow for independence for all using different ways to access the community and school.

Universal Design is “a framework to improve and optimize teaching and learning for all people based on scientific insights into how humans learn” (CAST, 2010). For example, in the school setting, allowing individuals to use audio books as opposed to reading a book is a way to remove a barrier for some individuals. Not all schools remove the barriers for student access, participation and academic achievement. Schools continue to limit opportunities for students who have disabilities. Dr. Valerie Owen wrote that “Neither inclusion nor mainstreaming has, historically, been promoted for students with significant disabilities (p. 5).” The article written in 2008, and it was stated that in the early 2000’s inclusive education had drastically decreased for individuals with intellectual disabilities (Owen, 2008).

Drawing on the tenets of the social model and the principles of universal design, Disability Studies in Education (DSE) paradigm advocates for promoting equitable and inclusive educational opportunities for students with disabilities, no matter what academic level they are performing at in education (Connor et al., 2008). In my experience, 20 years ago it was difficult to have my students be mainstreamed into a general education classroom, with the exception of art, music and home arts. Today, more general education teachers in my district have been open to including my students in their classrooms with modified lessons. On the other hand, individuals with significant disabilities are often educated in self-contained classrooms, my students included. Self-contained classrooms are typically organized so that students, who are functioning at a similar level, are often taught lower academic skills and social interactions are minimal with peers who do not have disabilities (Kliwer, & Biklen, 2007). In
the recent years, it has been noted that there have been some changes to self-contained classrooms across the special educational cooperative to which my students belong. In the early 2000’s my students were in my classroom 100% of the school day, with a few exceptions. Currently, the percentage of students in my self-classroom is averaging 60% of the school day and 40% in the general education classrooms. Students, no matter their ability, are attending general education classes throughout their school day. It is also important to note that the classes are not just exploratory classes such as art and music, they are attending general education classes for core content areas such as science and math. In fact, in the year 2018, a math teacher approached me, requesting to have students from my classroom attend hers.

The brief overview has shown the changes that the 2000s are bringing for special education, general educators embrace the concept of having individuals of all needs in their classroom, truly accepting everyone as a learner within their classroom. Educating those individuals with disabilities, accepting them for who they are, with the noises they may make and having them be a part of everyday education is the difference between deficit and social model of disability. The slight difference between inclusion and mainstreaming is the limited education opportunities that are provided to those individuals with severe intellectual disabilities.

The Purpose of the Study

As mentioned above, students who have significant intellectual disabilities are not often given the same opportunities as students who do not have intellectual disabilities. This study demonstrated that students with significant intellectual disabilities can learn, when they are given the proper tools, supports and motivation. Additionally, I believe a student having a voice is the key to having a successful life. Many students in my classroom do not speak and use alternative methods of communication. Communication in the classroom includes, but is not limited to, technology, sign, gestures, vocalizations and words. Yet, these communication differences can result in barriers to my student’s participation in
school and can limit their ability to self-advocate. These communication differences should not be barriers to their education. These students also depend on a team of professionals and parents to help them gain proficiency in communication and learn how to self-advocate in the classroom and in their communities. Beyond that, they deserve to learn about their rights as a citizen and as a student.

We are people of the United States of America. We have the right to a free public education. We have the right to be educated in the least restrictive environment. We have the right to learn.

“According to *Webster’s Third New International Dictionary* (Grove, 1986, as cited in Vakil et al., 2011), a citizen is an individual entitled to civic rights and privileges and he or she is a member of a community (p 40).” Prior to 1975, individuals with significant intellectual disabilities did not go to school and often times were institutionalized and hidden away from society. They were not considered “full citizens” of the United States (Shaw, 2009). In 1975, President Gerald Ford signed the *Education for All Handicapped Children Act* (EAHCA) (Conroy, et al., 2010) which mandated that all children with disabilities had a right to an education. The law has been amended over the past 40 years and was renamed *Individuals with Disabilities Act* (IDEA) in 1997. This law also included funding for each public school to receive funding to allow equal access to education for all children, no matter the child’s learning ability (Lafee, 2011) although it has never been fully funded by Congress. “Congress believed that access to a free appropriate public education (FAPE) for students with disabilities in part depended on their parents’ ability to advocate on their child’s behalf (Conroy, 2016).” According to their website, the Department of Education, states:

Before the IDEA, the history of special education in America was pretty bleak. In fact, many children with disabilities were denied access to public education altogether. For example, in 1970, U.S. schools educated only one in five children with disabilities, and many states had laws that excluded children with major disabilities.
such as deafness, blindness, and mental retardation. Today, the IDEA is considered responsible for providing special education opportunities to more than 6.5 million children and 200,000 infants, toddlers, and families each year (2011).

As a young child, I grew up knowing what I was able to do according to the laws of the government. Students with intellectual disabilities are not always aware or taught what their rights are as a citizen of the United States. Students need to know their rights as citizens and what they are entitled to in their education. Small changes in the curriculum can lead to large-scale alterations (Ponder & Lewis-Ferrell, 2009). Ponder and Lewis-Ferrell, (2009) are university professors that were on a quest to challenge elementary teachers to “consider building the foundation of their classroom framework around meaningful social studies instruction with an emphasis on active civic involvement and democratic citizenship (p. 129).” Using a design-based research approach, I am able to change the course of the lessons as I teach it. I will alter the plan, when I need to, as well as repeat portions when needed. Ponder and Lewis-Ferrell continue, “......we are convinced that even small changes are noteworthy, and much like the flap of a butterfly’s wing, these small changes can cause a ripple effect that impacts the system on a much larger level, (p. 129).” Design-based research allows for small changes, that will then impact learning for the long run. The two professors designed a course that included objectives for students that (1) understood students’ experiences, values and beliefs, (2) challenged civics, (3) taught critical inquiry, (4) modeled democratic processes through instruction and classroom management as well as a few more objectives for the elementary teachers had to provide.

“Citizenship: it’s either something you do or it’s something you learn about (The Times, 2007).” From a young age, many students learn about rules and laws whether it be at school or in their home. Citizenship of the United States is powerful, because we have a say on who is elected to our Government. “Good curriculum needs to be inclusive of explicit values and citizenship education in order to realize the aspirations of our current policy environment (Shaw, p. 19).” As Vakil et al. (2011)
state, “If in its simplest form citizenship is being a responsible and active member of a democratic society (p. 6).” Individuals with intellectual disabilities need to be empowered and taught to advocate for themselves by teaching them to make choices and set goals for themselves (Vakil et al., 2011).

Based on my belief in the importance of students with significant intellectual disabilities having access to the general education curriculum and understanding their rights as citizens of the United States of American, I decided to develop and investigate the usefulness and efficacy of a social studies curriculum that could be adapted to incorporate their individual communication preferences and abilities and that was based upon the Illinois Constitution test. This test is required to be passed by all general education students. Federal mandates require all individuals have access to the general education curriculum. However, it is not required for individuals with intellectual disabilities to pass the Constitution Test to move up to high school.

I wrote a curriculum based off the history of the United States and how the Constitution protects our rights as a U.S. Citizen. The curriculum is designed with five week mini-units that include content materials about the Framers, the Bill of Rights and the branches of government. I use a modified U.S. Constitution test as the baseline and cumulative data. The lessons are designed around weekly pre and posttests, and vocabulary. I collected data through student learning, reflection journals and student engagement throughout the unit of study.

Through my inquiry, I addressed the following research questions

1.) How does one teach students who have a label of intellectual disabilities about the topic of citizenship?

2.) How does one teach students with intellectual disabilities to enact their role as citizens in a democratic classroom?

3) How does one sway attitudes of those individuals who do not see the necessity of teaching citizenship to students labeled intellectual disabilities?
Methodology

I conducted a qualitative Design Based Research (DBR) study. According to Wang and Hannafin (2005), design-based research is defined as “a systematic but flexible methodology aimed to improve educational practices through iterative analysis, design, development, and implementation, based on collaboration among researcher’s and practitioners in real-world settings, and leading to design principles and theories (p. 6).” Design based research is pragmatic because it solves real-world data while being flexible and interactive (Peer Group, 2006). Design based research is often used within the field of education. Typically, solutions are developed first, then interventions are put in place to test for accuracy (Anderson & Shattuck, 2012).

I gathered real-world data utilizing reflective journals, pre and post-tests as well as information from the students through class discussion using multiple modes of communication and interpreting body language that I journaled so that I was able to use their comments, testimonials and body movements for data analysis. I collected data throughout the unit of instruction. The goal was to show that students with significant intellectual disabilities can demonstrate achievement of the goals in a curriculum aligned with the general education curriculum.

The participants chosen for the research had limited knowledge of their rights, the Constitution and the basic history of the United States. The curriculum was modified for each student to make it less complex than the general education curriculum content, but it required achievement of similar core or basic concepts and objectives. One of the study purposes was to suggest recommendations for making modifications for future curriculum design. The curriculum I designed is still in development, as I have modified it since completing my research in my first focus group. It is important to note that DBR allows for product improvement and adjustments as needed.
Plan of the study

Each week had the same outline for the lessons that were written. I administered the Constitution test to each student before I began the curriculum and assessed what level they were going to be on. This allowed me to have appropriate materials for each student as we moved through the unit. I had each week strategically planned out to start with a pre-test and introduction of vocabulary for the week. Each mini unit was scheduled for the duration of a week. Each mini unit included a project the students needed to complete to assess their understanding. Each unit had a chapter in a book that I wrote and read every day to the students. The outline for the study goes into further detail in chapter 3.

Conclusion

I think about Jenny each time I develop lesson plans for my classroom. I often look back at her education and see what made her thrive and learn. I often remember the times I helped in Sheila Romano’s classroom as a junior high school student and how she taught her students, to shape how I want my classroom to look on a day-to-day basis. Jenny and Dr. Romano are the reasons I am an educator today. Jenny is the reason I fight for academics in a classroom of students who have a label of intellectual or multiple disabilities. She is the one, I began this long fight for.
CHAPTER TWO

The Review of Literature

Introduction

Education in the United States has gone through a multitude of changes since the 1970’s, including students receiving special education. In 2004, a report from “Ready or not: Creating a High School Diploma That Counts,” found that colleges and employers are expecting more from high school graduates than ever before (America Diploma Act, 2004). In 2009, the National Governors Association put together a team of individuals to write standards that are relevant to the real world that reflect knowledge one needs to be a successful adult. As of 2017, forty-two states as well as the District of Columbia have adopted what is known as the Common Core Standards, Illinois included. In short, the main objective is that, in those forty-two states, all students attending the public and some private schools should be learning the same content across the board in their grade level.

What is a Curriculum?

Curriculum has been defined as, “The formal and informal content process by which learners gain knowledge and understanding, develop skills, and alter attitudes, appreciations and valued under the auspices of that school, (Wehmeyer et al., 2002).” It can also be defined as the student experience while in grades K-12. Curriculum from one grade level to the next is designed to scaffold and build upon previous content knowledge that was taught to learners to progress in their knowledge as they reach adulthood. This academic approach to learning is focused on knowledge and the organization of each and every subject matter (Egan, 1986). It is up to the educators to plan, implement, and evaluate the curriculum based on the student performance and the assessment data.

Academic Curriculum: An Overview

“Curriculum typically refers to the knowledge and skills students are expected to learn, which includes the learning standards or objectives they are expected to meet; the units and lessons the
teachers teach; the assignments and projects given to the students (Abbott, 2014).” As a result of the Illinois adoption the Common Core Standards in 2010, each public school is required to modify its curriculum to meet the learning outcomes of the Common Core Standards. Most educators are aligning their classroom curriculum with the learning standards, in which teachers attempt to create a coherent program by narrowing down what is the most relevant and important for the learners and eliminating the learning gaps that may occur between sequential courses and grade level (Abbott, 2014).

An academic curriculum is defined as lessons taught in school with a specific target for students to meet or exceed (Knight, 2001). The academic curriculum not only covers the areas of the common core standards, which are English and Mathematics, it also includes science, social studies, physical education and special classes such as art, music and home economics. My research will be aligned to the academic curriculum of social studies with an alignment to the rigor of common core standards.

**Accommodations within an Academic Curriculum**

Within the curriculum, the educators design lesson plans using differentiated instruction to meet the variety of student learners’ needs. Differentiated instruction is a framework that allows for learners within one classroom; to learn the same material through different techniques to achieve the same outcome (Tomlinson, 2001). Educators will often design lesson plans to meet the needs of all types of learners. A curriculum that is taught in a school district is often decided by administration with teacher input. It has only been since the early 2000’s that there have been curriculums designed for classrooms that cover both academics, as well as life skills. It is important for school professionals, including teachers and administrators should go about making key decisions when designing, implementing and evaluating a curriculum that they may be considering for their schools. It is critical for professionals to support all aspects of their educational programs (Wehmeyer, 2002). An agreed upon belief system or school philosophy is a first step towards curriculum development. For example, a school district in Michigan adopted this mission statement (Wehmeyer, p. 125):
We Believe:
All children can learn.
Children learn best by doing.
When children have choices, they take responsibility for their learning.
Children deserve to be surrounded by good books.
After success, children are ready to take challenges and risk occasional failure.
Children learn best through trial and error.
Children enlarge their vocabularies when they learn new words in context.
Children need a variety of kinds of experiences. (Perez, 1991, p. 5)

A mission statement is a value that the school holds to be true for their path in education. The mission statement above is written in a way that it incorporates all the students in the school, it states a fact that “All children can learn.” This is essentially what the federal mandates are pushing for, including all children. Another key point in the mission statement that reaches out, is that when children have choices, they will take responsibility for their learning. Not only is the curriculum changing for general education students, however, it’s evolving for those individuals with intellectual disabilities. Diane Browder (2004) stated, “curriculum for students with severe disabilities has been evolving. As individuals, we have been through many of these changes as teachers and researchers and were specially invested in teaching skills derived from students’ current and future daily activities outside of school (p. 4).” In my classroom, I often allow my students to have somewhat “control” over the environment and their learning. It is not often a child has control over much of anything. By building it into their school day, I believe it gives them more opportunities as they get older.

Functional Curriculum: An Overview

Functional curriculum has been defined as, “skills, which significantly affect quality of life in the community. They are grouped together with Life Skills, (Autism Outreach, 2017).” Functional curriculum morphs its meanings in many different ways and means different things to different people. For the purposes of this research, functional like skills is defined as, a variety of skills to become independent in life, such as, self-care skills which include learning how to get dressed, brushing teeth or how to use the bathroom (AAIDD, 2010). The goal for community-based instruction (CBI) and functional life skills is to
help students of all ages to acquire the skills that they need to become successful adults and part of the community they live in (Wenham et al., 1997). Most often, when diagnosed with a significant intellectual disability, a student is placed within a special education program that has a main focus on functional life skills.

The special education program where I have taught since the late 90s implements a curriculum that has been designed to teach functional life skills and community-based instruction with supporting curriculum, including reading, math and science. Within a self-contained special education program with students with low incidence disabilities, any type of instruction, such as reading and math, for students with intellectual disabilities has been underemphasized, according to Browder et al. (2006). There is evidence that this shortchanges students. For examples, “qualitative research, including content analyses of textbooks (Katims, 2000) and ethnographic studies of children’s school experiences (Kliewer, 1998), reveals a consistent lack of focus on reading.” Instead, educators have focused on functional skills reflected in daily living activities (Browder et al., 2006).

“A functional curriculum is a curriculum that focuses upon independent living skills and vocational skills, emphasizing communication and social skills. Students at the secondary levels who are prime candidates for such a curriculum are identified (Evans, & Fredericks, 1991).” All individuals need to learn how to do simple things in every-day life, such as wash dishes, set the table or wipe down a table. If an individual has an intellectual or physical disability, it tends to take them longer to learn a task. “The more functional skills individuals with disabilities have in their repertoires, the more they can do for themselves, the more privacy, choices and dignity they have and the fewer social, emotional, financial and other pressures they place upon others, (Brown et al., 1996). The belief of many educators is that if a child with a disability is taught in natural settings, they will become more successful as they age. “Natural environments refer to the variety of integrated and-or respected settings in which a student with significant disabilities is being prepared to function, (Brown et al., 1996). “Functional
curriculum has outcomes of improving a student’s independent functioning in their current and future environments (Snell, & Brown, 2006; Westling & Fox, 2004, taken from Ayers, et al., 2011). A classroom that replaces the core curriculum with a functional curriculum sets up artificial settings to teach the skills needed for independence.

According to Lou Brown (1979), teachers should be innovative, creative, systematic and empirically oriented when educating individuals with intellectual disabilities. The content, methods and materials required to teach is such a way as to develop a proper behavior repertoire that would allow individuals to “function independently in a community setting (p. 9).” One common question in Brown’s findings is, “To ultimately determine the utility of a particular skill......we ask whether or not “students could function as adults if they did not acquire the skill? (Ayres, et al., 2011, taken from Brown, Nietupski, & Hamre-Nietupski, 1976, p. 9.)”

Domains of Functional Curriculum

Typically, a functional curriculum is organized around domains rather than traditional subject areas according to the National Research Council (1997). These include daily living skills, community skills, leisure and recreation, and pre-vocational skills. Each domain includes instruction on activities focusing on independent living skills such as personal care, budgeting, taking care of your personal items and navigating the community. The curriculum is implemented with the assumption that, compared to those without disability, individuals with intellectual disabilities generally take a longer time to learn a skill such as laundry, making a bed or even getting dressed.

Educating individuals with intellectual disabilities about social skills is a large component of a functional curriculum. When students’ needs are not being met and they have limited verbal communication skills, they may be frustrated and confused and exhibit behaviors that could be self-injurious, yelling and laying on the floor which would gain attention from a “typically” developing person. Therefore, the team of individuals working with this child will devise and implement a plan to
help the child regulate their body and work through frustrations in an appropriate manner. General education peers and adults often model appropriate behavior for the students to learn from.

Related to functional curriculum is vocational skills. In Illinois, when a student reaches 14 ½, the team writes a transition plan for the child. The transition plan includes what the student wants to accomplish in adulthood, including, where they will live, where they want to be employed and if they will further their education. Vocational training for individuals with special education services begin early on in their school career. It is to help the student gain those skills that he or she needs to acquire and hold a job in a competitive employment position as they reach adulthood. Students in many special education classrooms begin vocational training within the classroom setting by completing simple jobs, including setting a table, delivering mail, cooperating with other students, learning how to work independently to complete tasks, washing dishes and a simple rule such as following directions. As students move on to high school, many high schools will assist students in finding jobs within the community. Many high schools in the surrounding suburbs of Chicago have students with intellectual disabilities work in a competitive employment setting, such as a fast-food restaurant, hotel or a grocery store. While the student is at their job, they have a job coach to help them learn the skills on the job, and it is the hope that they will continue the job upon completion of high school. All students with significant intellectual disabilities, at some point in their education, participate in some aspects of a functional curriculum and life skills program. For many, however, that can occur after they leave high school programs and enroll in the programs for students who are 18-21 years old.

**Federal Mandates**

“Prior to the mid-1970’s, the general expectation was that most students with severe disabilities would not benefit from a public education and might need to reside in an institutional setting. PL 94-142 (1975) opened the door for opportunity and participation in educational programs.” (Courtade et al., p. 4) The Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EACHA or Public Law, 94-142) was written and
passed in 1975, and mandated that all public schools offer education to ALL students, no matter what their abilities were, to receive free education in the public school system (Protigal, 1999, U.S. Department of Education, 2010). According to Owen (2008), “(p)rior 1975 and the passage of the Education of the Handicapped Act (now the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act or IDEA) schools routinely excluded students with significant disabilities entirely. IDEA mandated that every child with a disability had the right to a free and appropriate education in the least restrictive environment.” This was a riveting time for all children. Everyone has the right to free public education. “IDEA’s definition of an appropriate education is, in essence a procedural one. An appropriate education is one that conforms to IDEA’s process that, the presumption is, will produce an acceptable result for the student.” (Wehmeyer, 2002). Educators were finally exploring the optimal way to serve a low incidence population of individuals with severe intellectual disabilities. More individuals were living in the community and were being supported by a philosophy of normalization (Larsen, 1977). According to the Council for Exceptional Children (2017), “This landmark legislation that forever changed how Americans view individuals with disabilities. Now known as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), this law raised expectations for millions of children and youth with disabilities who were previously excluded from public school” (Exceptional Children, 2017).

When the student qualifies for special education, the multidisciplinary team develops an annual plan, called an Individualized Education Plan (IEP). The IEP is now the educational path for the child in special education, then they are enrolled in courses that would best meet their IEP. In Illinois, the IEP is written in a manner where goals for the student are linked to the Common Core Standards for Learning. For an IEP, a curriculum is designed to meet the needs of the individual student through adaptations, augmentation and alteration. They provide the framework to align “cognitive, affective, communicative, and physical/health demands of the curriculum to the capacities, strengths and needs of the students” (Sands, Kozleski & French, 2000).
By law, “the opportunity to learn general curriculum content is a right of every child who attends school. The primary reason students with severe disabilities have not had this right is that educators may not have recognized the full capabilities of this population of students (Courtade et. al., 2012, p. 5).” When a child enters the school system, typically at the age of 3 if they have a documented disability from a medical physician, the school district is required to complete an evaluation of the child before they are placed into special education. Once the child is in special education, s/he is to receive the special services that s/he needs to become as independent as possible by the time s/he reaches adulthood. A multi-disciplinary team, which may include a nurse, an occupational therapist, speech therapist, social worker, a teacher and a school psychologist, devises an individual education plan (IEP), for the student to work towards gaining independent skills as they grow older. The IEP outlines what the child’s education is supposed to look like for the calendar year. It includes the child’s present levels of performance and goals that the student is to work towards in that year. An IEP also lists what accommodations and supports the child may need to succeed in a classroom setting. Accommodations and supports may include preferential seating, modified worksheets, tests read out loud to the student, or simply allowing a student to use a calculator during math classes, all depends upon the needs of each individual student.

The 2004 reauthorization of IDEA (Individuals with Disability Education and Improvement Act or IDEIA) mandated that schools improve the educational outcomes for students enrolled in special education. Additionally, IDEIA required that an individual curriculum sequence developed for a student 14 ½ and older with an IEP to include a meaningful connection between school and post-school outcomes. Finally, IDEIA requires that students gain access to the general education curriculum as well as meeting their needs in the least restrictive environment as possible (Ayers et. al., 2011). Under IDEIA, the individuals are to progress on their individual goals written by the multi-disciplinary team, to
become prepared to lead a productive life once they graduate school and they are to improve on their functional and academic skills while in school.

Even if the multidisciplinary team determines that a child will have his or her needs met by an alternate curriculum, such as a functional curriculum, it is required by IDEIA that the child have as much access to the general education curriculum as possible. The decision process for the team maps out the general education curriculum, considering the individual needs of the student and models a curriculum to best meet their needs (Wehmeyer, 2002). “Curriculum adaptations are efforts to change the representation or presentation of the curriculum or to modify a student’s engagement with the curriculum to enhance his or her access and progress (Wehmeyer, 2002, p. 57).” Identifying how a student learns, whether it be visually, auditory or through hands on experiences, allows for the instructor to build differentiated instructional activities to help meet the learners needs through interactions with their environment and to help make learning occur.

The federal government has required that all students’ achievement be aligned with grade level standards. Ayres et al., (2010) argued “(t)he questions of whether or not students can learn standards is not the question that is sought, we know they can. The imperative question to be answered is ‘at what cost do they learn these standards?’” (p. 15). It is time to develop a meaningful curriculum that best meets the individual needs of each student in both standards-based learning and the life skills learning that they need to become successful adults. Not all students who have an IEP are in a self-contained classroom like my classroom. Many students receive supports within a general education classroom through a co-teacher and a resource teacher. A co-teacher has a special education degree and will design modified lessons and tests for those students who have an IEP. A resource teacher may have a classroom that students will visit periodically throughout the day to check in and get the supports that they may need that are not offered in a general education classroom. The law requires individuals to be
placed in the least restrictive environment for their needs, therefore each child who has an IEP has the supports he or she needs to be successful in their learning environment.

No Child Left Behind (NCLB) is another federally mandated law which was reauthorized from the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (New America Foundation, 2012). “ESEA was enacted in 1965 as part of the Johnson Administration’s War on Poverty campaign. The law’s original goal, which remains today, was to improve educational equity for students from lower income families by providing federal funds to school districts, (New America Foundation, 2012).” The importance of NCLB was that it “began to interpret and react to stipulations that all students’ (including those with severe cognitive disabilities) education program be tied to grade level standards” (Kohl, McLaughlin, & Nagle, 2006, p. 111).

The latest reauthorization of NCLB is called Every Child Succeeds Act or ESSA (2015). President Obama signed this law in 2015 for long term commitment for equal opportunity learning for all students in a K-12 school setting (U.S. Department of Education, 2017). This law ensures that vital information is provided to educators and families through statewide assessments that measure students’ progress towards the learning standards. This law also provides a higher standard for those students living in disadvantaged areas and high-need students (U.S. Department of Education, 2017). It also maintains an expectation that there is accountability and action to effect positive change in low performance schools (U.S. Department of Education, 2017).

In both NCLB and ESSA, states and their teachers were and are held accountable for their students’ learning with the goal to narrow the achievement gap between students who are in general education or special education (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). States and individual schools were funded by the federal government to increase and maintain student achievement. The laws also require alternative assessments for students with the most significant disabilities. Alternate Assessment in Illinois
In 2001, Illinois began to have special education teachers have their learners participate in the Illinois Alternate Assessment (IAA). It is a performance-based assessment on alternate standards that teachers are to use to educate the students with the most significant intellectual disabilities. The first alternate assessment was a student portfolio that the child had to put together. The portfolio had to meet a specific criterion and was scored by a team of educators. The requirements included baseline data, mid-year data and “end of the year” data along with copies of the students’ work. The guidelines from the Illinois Board of Education for individuals who participate:

“The alternate assessment is intended for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities. These students have intellectual functioning well below average (typically associated with an IQ below 55) that exists concurrently with impairments or deficits in adaptive functioning (i.e. communications, self-care, home living, social/interpersonal skills, use of community resources, self-directions, functional academic skills, work leisure, health and safety). The reference to “typically associated with an IQ of below 55” is to help distinguish between students with cognitive disabilities and significant cognitive disabilities from students with the most significant cognitive disabilities. This means that many students with cognitive disabilities will not qualify for the IAA. By default, they must take ISAT/PSAE with or without accommodations. The inclusion of the words “typically associated with” allows for some district/school flexibility. It is by no means an absolute requirement (ISBE, 2010).”

It was deemed that the portfolio did not assist schools in gathering true data on how all their students were learning; Illinois changed the portfolio into standards-based test. The portfolio became a test the child took, which is now the Dynamic Learning Maps, or DLM. DLM, is the equivalent to the standardized test the general education population takes in the spring. The DLM tests the students according to the essential elements. The essential elements are the alternate common core standards that teachers, such as me, use to guide the coursework for the classroom. “Essential elements are defined as, “grade-level-specific expectations about what students with the most significant cognitive disabilities should know and be able to do (DLM, 2006).” According to Harr-Robins et al., (2014), that
academic achievement standards movement is a national priority and IDEA requires individuals with disabilities to have access to academic curriculum.

The federal government mandates individuals with disabilities receive education aligned with the general education population, therefore, individuals with intellectual disabilities are not exempt from standardized testing. The students' test scores are included in the state report card for performance. The alternate assessment scores are included in each district report card from the state. The DLM has multiple subtests in the three main curriculum areas of math, ELA and science, that are administered a different grade levels. What the general population know as subtests, are called testlets according to Pearson. The DLM that is administered in Illinois has multiple testlets, at least 6 testlets are given in each subject area. Depending on how each student performed on a testlet, a new testlet will be administered based on their previous testlet score.

**Teaching Strategies and Interventions**

As a result of the passage of Every Student Succeed Act (ESSA) educators are held to a higher standard. They need a multitude of strategies and interventions for success as children with intellectual disabilities do not always learn in the same ways as more typically developing children. Teachers who have a classroom of students that fall within this low incidence population are required to teach both functional and academic skills to their students according to the federal mandates. Not only do teachers teach their students within a classroom setting and set up artificial environments for a functional curriculum, but many classrooms similar to mine leave school grounds during the school day to teach the functional skills within the community. Leaving school grounds allows individuals with intellectual disabilities to generalize the skills that they worked on in the classroom in real life settings. “Developing curriculum for students with severe disabilities has been a topic that has been widely addressed since the inception of the field of special education. ‘what’ and ‘how’ to teach are topics that are addressed regularly in literature (Ayers, Lowrey, Douglas, & Sievers, 2011).” Most of the curriculum models
available for classrooms similar to mine, share two common ideas; (1) identification of life areas for curriculum planning (i.e., community, vocational, recreational and domestic) and (2) prioritization process to select skills for students based on preferences and functional use including increasing knowledge for post-school success (Ford et al., 2006).

Students gain knowledge by repeating skills and lessons. According to Brown and Ayers (2011), observational learning and the number of trials a child has will increase his or her knowledge. There is a well-known quote, “practice makes perfect.” Although I do not agree with perfection, practice can help one in the long run to become better at something he or she tries so hard to do.

**Applied Behavior Analysis**

There are a few methods that are common when educating individuals with intellectual disabilities. Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) is a process based on the work of B.F. Skinner (Ford, Blanchett, & Brown, 2006). ABA uses structured models to increase student skills and eventually generalize the skills and apply them to the real world. It is a sometimes-controversial way to increase positive behaviors and decrease negative behaviors in a student. It is considered rigorous and structured. “The overriding goal of ABA was to extend scientific principles of human behavior beyond highly-controlled or laboratory environments to resolve real life problems. The key features of ABA were, of course, that it was applied, behavioral and analytic” (Hieneman, Gonzalez, & Chan, 2010, p. 18).

“Applied” in Applied Behavior Analysis is essentially that the interventions presented to the learners are geared towards achieving social skills and helping individuals in natural settings. “Behavior” focuses on what people say and do rather than assume what they do. “Analysis” is for analyzing the data on the skill set that has been taught and apply it in a real-world setting. For instance, when a child who has an intellectual disability feels angry, they may not know how to help calm themselves down. An educator will use a variety of strategies to teach a child how to use self-calming strategies. An educator may have a picture cue to remind the student to take deep breaths or have a bin with some fidgets that
the child may seek out for self-soothing. Another way would be to have soft music playing in the background or having the child request a break from the classroom activities. These skills are taught in hopes that the child will generalize these skills across all environments.

**Culturally Responsive Instruction**

Culturally responsive instruction is another way to educate individuals with intellectual disabilities. “Culturally responsive teaching involves employing the cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students in the teaching process (Ford et al., 2006).” It is about bringing diversity into the teaching process, which aligns to the Common Core Standards. Culturally responsive teaching plays a role in shaping the thinking process of a homogenous grouping into a more diverse heterogeneous culture. For instance, the 7th grade science teacher, art teacher and myself have teamed up to design a unit for the STEAM (Science, technology, engineering, art and mathematics) program in our school. The STEAM class is for students who are often the students who excel in school. The students who are enrolled in the “STEAM” classroom are to attend a science class in my classroom once a week. By having them attend a class in my room, it is taking a homogeneous group into a diverse culture by pairing students of all abilities together. The students are to work together to complete a science experiment, including a question, hypothesis and conclusion to the experiment. Throughout the year, the all the students are gaining knowledge in content area and working together, no matter their cognitive ability. Ultimately the students in the STEAM program design a machine to assist those individuals with physical disabilities and/or intellectual disabilities.

Another teaching strategy is for students to observe others. Once a student is shown how to do something, from a teacher or another student modeling a certain skill, or simply having the learner watch a video model, students will then begin to imitate or learn how to complete the task that is requested of them. “Through teacher demonstration and modeling of exemplars and nonexemplars, students can begin to formulate their understanding of the features and critical attributes of a concept
An example of matching instruction to a curriculum goal through differentiated instruction, Sands, Kozleski, and French (2000) example:

During a lesson on photosynthesis, the teacher chooses to demonstrate the effect of light on the production of food in plants. By choosing to demonstrate at the beginning of the lesson the teacher creates a concrete example of the results of photosynthesis. The demonstration supports the needs of a variety of learners who range from concrete to abstract problem-solvers. The demonstration becomes the focal point of discourse and problem solving. Some students engage in what they saw. Other students engage in predicting possible reasons for the effects they observed (p. 345).

Assistive technology along with integrated therapies is another teaching strategy for successful classrooms. Around the 1980s it was believed best practice to have students pulled out of their learning environment to gain access to their therapies, including occupational, physical and speech therapy; yet having students integrated into their classroom to gain access to their therapies has shown more improvement on progress towards their educational goals (Hocutt, 1996).

Monitoring Achievement

Special education classrooms are designed to track student progress by data. With baseline data on a student’s goal, the team is then given an idea as to which direction to take the student’s learning. Individuals have specific goals that they need to meet within a calendar year, or by their annual review date. Goals are written so that individuals will progress towards meeting higher criteria as they age. Vocational skills and social skills are no different. Staff relies on data to assess how the student is or is not progressing as he or she moves further in their education. “Intervention is a specific skill-building strategy implemented and monitored to improve a targeted skill (i.e., what is actually known) and achieve adequate progress in a specific area (academic or behavioral). This often involves changing instruction or providing additional instruction to a student in the area of learning or behavior difficulty (Gennerman, 2009).
Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS, 2019) is a framework schools use to target struggling students. They focus on the whole child and the goal is to have interventions in place early so children can catch up and be on the same targeted goal. “RTI grew from efforts to improve identification practices in special education. Simply put, it is a process of systematically documenting the performance of students as evidence of the need for additional services after making changes in classroom instruction. (Positive Behavioral Interventions and Support, 2019).”

MTSS is defined as “the practice of providing high-quality instruction and interventions matched to student need, monitoring progress frequently to make decisions about changes in instruction or goals and applying child response data to important educational decisions (Batsche et al., 2005).” MTSS is grounded in differentiated instruction which includes universal design for learning, researched based instruction in general education and classroom-based screening to identify the need for any additional supports that may be needed (PBIS, 2019). MTSS is another method for educators to monitor student progress towards the common core standards. RTI identifies students who are not progressing as they should and are provides certain interventions and assistance needed for meeting the standards (Grigorenko, 2012). MTSS is not a curriculum, it is a multi-tiered approach to identify individuals who are not meeting grade level standards, in which, educators intervene with strategies to allow for individuals to gain knowledge towards the targeted standards. Response to intervention integrates assessment and intervention within a multi-level prevention system to maximize student achievement and to reduce behavior problems. With RTI, schools identify students at risk for poor learning outcomes, monitor student progress, provide evidence-based interventions and adjust the intensity and nature of those interventions depending on a student’s responsiveness, and
identify student with learning disabilities or other disabilities. (National Center on Response to Intervention, 2010).

RTI integrates assessment and interventions are nothing new to many in the field of special education. RTI is a tiered approach that allows for teachers to target those students who fall in a certain part of the pyramid. Schools are then to determine which interventions would best meet that student within the resources that they have. It shows the tiers and the types of interventions used, from the least restrictive to the most restrictive.

**Accommodations and Modifications**

Teaching strategies and interventions from teachers are the big ideas when it comes to educating students. Along with the interventions and strategies, come the smaller more integral part of the lessons, which are the accommodations, and modifications made for individual or a small group of learners. The difference between modifications and accommodations depends on the delivery model of the program. According to Strom (2017), “Accommodations can help kids learn the same material and meet the same expectations as their classmates.” A great example would be a child who has reading difficulty may listen to the same passage that their peers are physically reading or having an adult read a test out loud to a student. Accommodations are written into a student’s IEP for the school district to follow so that the student’s rights are being met. Accommodations change how the student learns the materials. Simple accommodations may include more time for taking a test, a different due date for a project or even changing the atmosphere of a classroom, such as lighting (Morin, 2017).

Accommodations also include environmental or physical changes which may include allowing students to have frequent breaks, change the classroom routine, it emphasizes a variety of teaching approaches including visual, multi-sensory and auditory lessons, individual or small group lessons (Bouck, & Flanagan, 2010). Accommodations may also involve shortening of a test, or having the test read aloud for a student and include multiple ways for positive reinforcement. When a student requires
accommodations, it is up to the case manager to monitor the student’s progress and evaluate what is working or what may not be working for the student and call an IEP meeting if needs are not being met.

Modifications change what the student is expected to learn. Students who may achieve less than their same-aged peers will require modifications to their curriculum, such as a functional curriculum as mentioned above or the use of less complex standards. Individuals with intellectual disabilities have modifications written in their IEP so that the team that works with that child meet all of their needs, not just academically. Students are assessed differently on the standards that guide their education, and as previously mentioned, they are not required to learn the exact materials as their typically developing peers. Their assessments are aligned with the less complex learning standards (Bouck, & Flanagan, 2010).

Children with more significant intellectual disabilities require a variety of modifications to meet their academic needs. Some examples of modifications for students may include a word bank for students to choose from while taking a test, allowing for spell check on a computer, or completing projects instead of a written paper are just a few. Modifications do alter content knowledge expectations for individuals with significant intellectual disabilities (Sands, Knowlton., & Kozleski, 2001). Modifications for students in my classroom include, allowing a decrease of multiple-choice items, simple language tests, and using picture symbols to assist in reading activities. Therefore, the modification in my classroom is altered for the students, with an emphasis on the essential elements, however, is written in a way so that they are gaining access to the general education curriculum along with gaining access to a functional curriculum. (Jackson, 2005; 2011).

All educators make modifications to their planned lessons to meet the needs of all learners. When an instructor who has a classroom of children with intellectual disabilities, they teach with a different approach, utilizing a functional curriculum. Modifications in a functional curriculum look a bit different than those in a general education class. For example, modifications in a general education
classroom would be having a classmate share their notes or audio recording the lecture in class. A modification in a functional academic classroom may focus on mastering math in terms of money management or using a calculator to complete math problems. A functional curriculum does not replace a traditional educational setting; ideally it enhances the core curriculum with functional academics. As mentioned above, students learn how to read menus, tell time using bus and movie schedules, as well as how to formulate a shopping list and navigate a grocery store. Modifications in a self-contained classroom often have adapted materials with simplified vocabulary, grades are given based on the essential elements and assignments are changed to meet lower reading levels. “The purpose of state standards for all students is to prepare them for functioning as adults in the community, as well as preparing some to pursue college preparation. Increased academic competence adds to the options students with severe disabilities will have as adults for jobs (Courtade et al., 2012, p. 5)”.

It is up to educators to consider how to promote a personal relevance for each student on how a standard based instruction will help them towards independence in the future.

**Differentiated Instruction and Universal Design for Learning**

It is common in a special education classroom for one target lesson to have multiple objectives. As mentioned earlier, differentiated instruction is not only used in special education classrooms, but also a framework general education teachers have adopted in their classrooms. Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is defined as an educational framework based on research in the learning sciences, including cognitive neuroscience that guides the development of flexible learning that can accommodate individual learning differences. The social studies curriculum I have developed has three levels, to meet the needs of all the learners. One student is able to write and formulate sentences, therefore the quizzes are presented to her in sentence format. Another student is unable to hold a pencil; therefore, he will respond to quizzes by using pictures and an augmentative communication system. Many of my lessons are student centered with learning menus. Each center has an objective
that needs to be completed by the end of the class period, and it is up to the students and the adult working with them and utilizing the learning menu which allows for the student to have “control”. The learning menu used in my classroom includes a video clip, a mini reading lesson, vocabulary words on the topic and a quiz the students are to complete. For the students in my classroom, they seem to like to have control of their environment. I prepare lessons to allow for each student to control how they want to learn.

Universal Design for Learning has three main principles for curriculum development: multiple means of representation, multiple means of expression and multiple means of engagement (CAST, 2015). “Individuals bring a huge variety of skills, needs, and interests to learning. Neuroscience reveals that these differences are as varied and unique as our DNA or fingerprints” (CAST, 2015).

When implementing the principles of UDL in a lesson, educators are able to reach multiple facets of the brain. For recognition, learners have the ability to gather facts and categorize what we see and listen to. How many students learn are by the strategy’s educators put in place for student engagement, including the planning and the actual performing of tasks. Effective learning is key to help the learner to stay engaged and motivated to learn about certain topics, that are possibly considered undesirable (CASE, 2014). UDL principles allow for educators to reach multiple facets of the brain when the principles are properly executed.

The UDL framework includes multiple forms of presentation, engagement and assessment. A UDL example includes having learning goals posted in the classroom, so teachers are able to reflect back on during instruction. Another example would be having individual students choose how to present the materials they learned, such as putting together a poster, rather than write an essay. It allows for the child to present materials in the way they feel most comfortable. During lessons in my classroom, the students follow a schedule and cross off what they accomplish. As for implementing UDL in my classroom, I will have each student how they want to present the overall information, whether it be
answer questions in their mode of communication, put together a poster or write a sentence, I give
that option when it is an overall unit of study.

The lessons I develop typical engage the students, so they stay motivated to learn. I often
include the same routine, interactive lessons that include movement and music in my lessons. In the
classroom, we use many ways for engaging students, including small group work, individual and whole
group learning. I begin by presenting the overall learning objective to the class with a targeted question
that the class should be able to answer at the end of the lesson.

Another way to implement UDL is to have a student complete a project to show that they
understood the unit that was taught to them. Some students may request to write an essay, others may
complete a test or individuals may put together a podcast as a presentation for the whole class. Some of
the students in my classroom enjoy watching themselves on video and other students like to write
simple reports. I give them a choice of which final project they want to complete and then assist them in
putting together their final project for the unit of study.

Teaching Citizenship

As special education continues to evolve with the ever changing of federal mandates, research-

based curriculum for low incidence populations is still considered a new topic. It was not until around
2004 that my school district provided an actual curriculum for classrooms like mine. Prior to 2004, there
were books from companies that specialized in making adapted materials for my students with
intellectual disabilities from which I had to design my lessons, however, there was not a curriculum that
I could follow with a scope and sequence of events for the learners. A scope and sequence are
important for a teacher to have a clearer understanding of a student’s progress in order to have student
progress towards academic standards. Currently, there are curricula developed for reading, math and
science that I utilize. There are a few companies that have developed books for teachers who teach
students in special education, however, there really is not a curriculum for teaching students with intellectual disabilities about citizenship. Unique Learning Systems has some curricula on social studies that I have access to, however, they are very limited.

In the state of Illinois, when a student reaches 8th grade, they are required to take the US Constitution test in order to pass to move up to high school. There is not an adapted test for individuals with intellectual disabilities, nor are there any essential elements for individuals with intellectual disabilities in the area of social studies. Therefore, students like the students in my class can pass 8th grade, without learning about the history of our country or their rights as a citizen.

Because there are limited published curricula geared to individuals with intellectual disabilities to teach them about their country, I decided to create one to focus on their rights and how this country evolved into what it is today. I have pulled resources for the Illinois State Constitution Test and modified elementary level social studies curricula to meet the needs of the learners in my classroom. The curriculum I developed parallels an 8th grade general education curriculum, as well as aligns with the essential elements.

To meet the needs of all my students, the curriculum has three learning levels. The curriculum includes vocabulary words that the students will need to know before each section is taught, pre and post-tests to assess their knowledge and achievement and a final unit test which is a modified Illinois Constitution Test. The key points for the curriculum have been taken from the questions from the Constitution Test. That final unit test is also written for three different levels. Within this curriculum, there are vocabulary words, spelling words, worksheets, Power Points, music clips, activities for an interactive white board and homework that should be completed with the student’s parent. The students are educated about the Framers, the Constitution, why and when it was written and about the three branches of government. The students will learn about their rights as students with disabilities and have an understanding that they deserve to go to school. In essence, I hope that it allows them to learn
how to advocate for themselves. I was able to pilot the curriculum a few years ago. At the conclusion of
the unit, those students had an understanding of their rights and what it means to be a citizen. For
example, one eighth grade student was asked what social studies meant to her in which she responded
on a communication device and said, “I am Citizen” and went on to correct herself and said, “We are
Citizen,” to include her classmates.

Conclusion

As this chapter states, education has gone through a multitude of changes since the 1970’s. Children, all
children should have access to the general education curriculum, no matter their
intellectual abilities. ESSA protects the students’ rights and holds schools accountable for their students.
Curriculum is the formal and informal content that students learn to gain knowledge and understanding.
A curriculum is written for an overall standard of learning, although not all children learn the same way,
the curriculum needs modifications and accommodations to meet their needs. Educators have been
trained on differentiated instruction so that they are able to assist all learners to gain the knowledge
that is expected with a standard curriculum.

A functional curriculum is taught to those individuals with significant intellectual disabilities. The
functional curriculum not only covers math, reading, science and social studies, but life skills to help
learners become as independent as possible. A functional curriculum focuses on independent living
skills, such as shopping, being aware of weather and the types of clothes needed and ordering items at a
restaurant are just a few examples of things taught in a self-contained special education classroom.

Lou Brown (1979) states it best when he said teachers need to be innovative and creative when
educating learners with intellectual disabilities. A functional curriculum which covers all facets of life is
just the way to meet the needs of all learners. Students who fall in the category of special education,
require an IEP to help guide their learning. The IEP is written annually to meet the needs and goals of
each learner.
CHAPTER THREE

Research Design and Methods

The purpose of the study was to determine the best ways to educate and assess student achievement in social studies, with the main focus being the Constitution test. As mentioned previously, general education students are required to pass the Constitution test before moving onto high school. This has not been a requirement for students with intellectual disabilities. The 2004 reauthorization of IDEIA mandated that all students must be taught the general education curriculum, therefore teaching content that aligns with the general education Constitution Test is consistent with this mandate. Given this mandate and my belief that all students should understand the rights and responsibilities of citizenship, this study will address the following questions:

1.) How does one teach students who have a label of intellectual disabilities about the topic of citizenship?
2.) How does one teach students with intellectual disabilities to enact their role as citizens in a democratic classroom?

3) How does one sway attitudes of those individuals who do not see the necessity of teaching citizenship to students labeled intellectual disabilities?

The design-based study is primarily qualitative, however, I used data informed teaching. The reflection journals and student responses drive the responses to the research questions. Qualitative research uses self-reflection and personal experience to analyze data (Ellis, 2011). This study included gathered data points on student reactions to materials, descriptive notes from reflection journals and a description of some lessons that were taught throughout the unit. and their responses through their personal method of communication. I draw on this data to tell a story of how the students learn, how it provided a description of the teaching methods, effective teaching strategies that resulted in any academic achievement on the curriculum.

Methodology

I chose DBR for a few important reasons. One, DBR known to be flexible. Teaching needs to be flexible and when working with individuals with disabilities, I need to allow myself to not do everything according to the plan and be willing to change the lesson at the moment, if student engagement is not what it could be, I need to be able to change the way I am instructing the students.

This type of research only made me better as an educator. I had back up plans for each intervention to trial with the learners. One back up plan is that I printed all of the power points and made them into books because technology is known to not work from time to time. DBR’s goal is to produce meaningful interventions for students and improve practices within a classroom setting.

Another reason I chose this specific methodology is that it allows for reflection. I chose to write reflection journals to gather data on student work. This practice allowed me to adjust lessons for the
following weeks when a portion of the original curriculum did not go according to plan. I continued to use the notes to re-invent the lessons as the study continued.

This study is designed for real world situations. There is nothing more real than teaching students about their rights and what they deserve as they grow older. When one has a disability, they tend to have less access to opportunities than someone who does not have a disability. By teaching middle school students their rights, I am allowing them to learn how to advocate for themselves.

**Participants**

Most of the participants (One female and three males) live at home with family members and attend a public-school setting. One student lives in a residential facility with weekly visits with his family. None have previously received instruction on the Constitution. Study instruction occurred in a special education classroom. The students are in the self-contained classroom 60% of their school day and with their typically developing peers 40% of the day.

Carlos*, not his real name, is a 11-year-old Asian boy. He has multiple disabilities, including physical, cognitive, and vision. He lives in a group home. Carlos responds mainly by answering yes and no questions. He blinks his eyes for yes and turns away for no. He also has a 2-switch voice output system to communicate within the classroom that he began using this school year.

Mike* is a 13-year-old Asian boy who has Down Syndrome. He lives with his parents, and three older siblings. He has a few words, signs about 10 words and uses an iPad with TouchChat. He has lived in the United States since the age of 9. Prior to arriving in the US, he had no formal schooling.

Kat is a 13-year-old Caucasian girl who has a diagnosis of Autism. She is verbal and writes letters to make words. She lives with her mom, her mom’s significant other, older sister and brother. She lost her dad two years ago and often makes references to him.

James* is a 12-year-old African American boy who was born prematurely. He lives at home with his mom, and older sister. He is nonverbal and uses his eyes to blink, paired with a nod for yes and looks
away for no. He has difficulty using two hands to complete tasks but will raise up his hands to utilize
switches placed on his wheelchair tray. He has a shunt and some difficulty with short term memory due
to birth complications. The participants that I have included in the study are four students enrolled in
my program. There are two more students enrolled in the class, however, the parents opted out of the
study. Their learning environment was not impacted.

**Ethical Considerations**

The first week of the 2019-2020 school year, I set up individual meetings with each of my
students’ parents. I explained to them my study, showed them the curriculum and requested their
consent for allowing their child to participate in the study. I gained permission after a week for four
students in my classroom. It was explained to each family that even if they decline the invitation, their
child will still learn the content, I would not collect any data. It was at that time, I obtained assent from
each of the four participants. I showed each student the curriculum and the small tests they would have
to complete. Each participant agreed to the study in their way of saying yes. The group of students were
in summer school together, so they were comfortable with being in a group together to learn.

Due to the fact that two students were not participating in the study, I sent all of their
paperwork home the day it was completed, so it was not to be mixed with the four participants. Aliases
were given to the four participants, in which each journal note I wrote, I used the alias as opposed to the
student’s real name.

**Context of the Study**

The study was completed in a special education classroom setting. The classroom is located in a
public middle school in the West suburbs of a Large Midwestern City. The population of the school is
650 students consisting of sixth, seventh and eighth graders of mixed races, with 70% being Caucasian.
The larger size classroom is located on the main floor with other 8th grade classrooms. The classroom
has desks for the number of students enrolled in the class, a teacher test, one horseshoe shaped table
and a rectangle shaped table. The classroom has a kitchen, washer/dryer and a curtained off area for students who need a small break from whole group. The kitchen and laundry set up allows me to teach life skills to students as needed.

The community is around 27,000 people with two elementary school districts. The town has a mixture of multi-communal residential areas along with single family homes. The school has a ratio of one teacher to fifteen students. The population for each gender in the school is split evenly.

**Procedures**

The curriculum I developed is differentiated for individuals who use various alternative and augmentative communication systems, including verbal, pictures, or other electronic communication devices, and who have varying abilities. Each student responded using his or her own communication system, whether it be verbal or some other form.

As for responding to the questions in the curriculum, one student responded by formulating sentences using picture symbols and/or their AAC devices, two students responded with yes and no answers and eye gaze boards, and the girl student responded verbally. I collected baseline data at the beginning of the unit using the modified Constitution test. I gathered cumulative data, comparing it to the pre-test given. I assessed each participant on a pre-test to determine which level they will begin the curriculum.

The curriculum was taught during the morning hours, as I had observed higher student success rates with the selected participants in the morning hours. The curriculum that was written for this study took five weeks to complete.

The curriculum began with a brief history of how the Constitution and Bill of Rights were developed by the framers. The students were taught about the three branches of the U.S. government and their role in the lives of the citizens. The curriculum then divulged further into individual student
rights. The goals were for them to self-advocate and grow in independence. Each week, the students had 5 vocabulary words that coincided with the topic for the week.

Finally, the students were given a pretest and a post-test to show growth on the topic of the week. At the end of the five weeks, they were given the same modified constitution test to show what they learned. The weekly routine was as follows:

**Monday:**
1. Students were given a 5-question pre-test.
2. The teacher read the first chapter to the students.
3. Vocabulary was introduced through a power point.
4. The students completed an activity to review what was read.
5. At the end of the day, the teacher re-read the first chapter.

**Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday:**
1. The teacher presented the vocabulary.
2. A jigsaw activity was completed to see what students remember from the previous day.
3. The next chapter was read.
4. The students completed an activity on what was read.
5. At the end of the day, the teacher reviewed the chapter.

**Friday:**
1. Students completed the post test.
2. Teacher reviewed the chapters.

*Teaching Procedures*

For the past twelve years, most of my students have had access to the Unique Learning Systems curriculum. It is a curriculum that is based on a three-level approach. Most of my students who have
been in my classroom are familiar with this leveled approach to learning. Therefore, each assessment written for the social studies curriculum that I designed aligns with the Unique Learning Systems approach. I adapted the Constitution test and each pre and post-test to have 3 levels. According to their website, “Unique Learning Systems allows all students the opportunity to reach their full potential with six grade bands along with access to the general education curriculum.” (Retrieved from https://www.n2y.com/overview/). I developed each pre and post-test, lesson and discussion points using a format with which the students have been familiar. The pre-test and post-test include five questions for each of the levels. The first level is a three answer multi-choice question. The second level is a fill in the blank quiz with a word/picture bank and the third level is an open-ended short answer question.

In order to assure the validity of these assessments, I asked four of my colleagues in surrounding schools with diverse perspectives to review the social studies curriculum and assessments. All four colleagues critiqued the curriculum I wrote, and changes were made to reflect their ideas. One part of the curriculum I needed to revise were the quizzes. I had written each quiz, using a leveled system but had different questions for each level. To make it easier for assessment purposes, I revised each quiz to have the same questions using the leveled format. Another revision was to complete a power point vocabulary slide show to present to each student on a daily basis to practice each word daily, as opposed to three times a week. By having colleagues review the curriculum, it helped me make sure that the tools are clear and appear to assess what I want them to do (Suskie, & Banta, 2010).

Once I began the curriculum, my students took a 25 question Constitution Test. Once I obtained their scores, they were placed on either level 1, 2 or 3 of the social studies curricula. From that point, each student was taught the curriculum according to how they scored on the pre-test. From that point, they all were taught the same materials while focusing on moving forward, rather than previous knowledge.
Figure one, on the next page, is an example of an assessment pre and post-test for level one learners. Figure two is an example of a pre- and post-assessment for level 3 learners. These tests illustrate the rigor of the curriculum taught and how they were adapted for students with intellectual disabilities.

**Name:**

**Date:**

1. Who wrote the US Constitution?

- King of England
- James Madison
- Constitution framers

2. When did the colonies accept the Constitution?

- 1778
- 1790
- 1700

3. What is the Bill of Rights?

- 10 people
- 10 books
- 10 rights

*Level 1*

*Figure 1 An example of level one test using Mayer-Johnson Boardmaker Picture Symbols*
Figure 2 An example of a level three test

**Data Generation**

Assessment was an ongoing process to check for student learning and understanding (Suskie, & Banta, 2010). There was a four-step assessment process for my study. First, it was imperative to establish a clear goal that is measurable for student outcome. Second, I provided the learning opportunities for each student. Third, assessment was completed throughout the unit and based on this data, information was re-taught to each learner. I collected baseline data from each student before they were taught about the Constitution and their rights as a citizen using the modified Constitution test. I
collected pre and post-test data every Monday and Friday. Once I analyzed each test, I engaged the students in discussions on what they had learned. Further, I collected data through anecdotal notes in reflection journals. As the lesson was being taught, I wrote down any relevant information on how students were learning the content, student behaviors, and comments on how the lessons were completed. I completed short 5-10 question interviews with each student, when possible, and one on one interviews for each student after the unit was completed. By asking each student questions about what they learned and how they felt about it, I gained insight as to what needed to continue to be taught and what needed to be changed to the curriculum.

Each day, I completed reflective journals after the lessons, so that I could re-assess any lesson that needed to be revised for better student learning. In these journals, I recorded any questions students may have had, any questions I may have had as I furthered my research and concerns that were part of the social studies unit. I reflected on how the lesson went and recorded, from my perspective, anything that was out of the ordinary. I recorded student responses, facial expressions and the direction of their eyes when they were possibly making choices since some students chose with their eyes, rather than grabbing with their hands, the picture they were wanting to choose from.

Data Analysis

First, data was analyzed to determine student growth drawing on baseline data from the initial Constitution test and then the final Constitution test. The test was the same for each student. Student growth was shown by graph for individuals as well as the group. Furthermore, each participant was given a pre-test on the first day of each unit and a post-test was given on the last day of the week. Each pre-test was graphed, individually and as a group. Along with my graph, each student was in charge of using a bar graph to chart their own progress as well. With the design of the curriculum, each student showed increased learning in from the pre to post tests and the repetition of vocabulary word throughout the week. The final assessment piece was the adapted constitution test, analyzed with the
baseline data. Using curricula alignment, the assignment allowed for each student to have ample opportunity to achieve learning and meet the learning objectives (Suskie, & Banta, 2009). When utilizing embedded assessments with the pre and post-tests, data were collected on how each participant was absorbing the information.

Reflective journals were written at the end of each lesson. The journals included observations on participant behavior, discussion and an analysis on overall lesson deliverance, as well as a record of student stories and reflections of my “in the moment” interpretations of student learning and curriculum design. I randomly selected 20% of the recorded lessons for a reliability check of student responses. By reviewing the journals, I looked for a common theme for learning strategies and recorded each student’s responses from the pre and post-tests. The reflective journals allowed me to see any trends on the student participation and student growth. The validity of pairing reflective journals with the interviews was compared to the post-tests at the end of each week.

Lastly, completing short interviews with each student on the research topic allowed for follow up re-teaching on what their struggles and successes on the topic that were taught. It allowed me time to adjust and revise the lessons as needed so that this curriculum could be shared amongst colleagues. Data analysis was time consuming, however, by including a variety of forms of data collection allowed me to adequately address my research questions.

**Summary of Methodology**

Education is evolving and special education is no different. I set out to write a social studies curriculum that aligns with the general education curriculum that also meets the needs of learners with complex backgrounds. As I mentioned prior, I chose a design-based research because it is flexible and adapts to real life situations. I wanted to prove that no matter what physical or intellectual disability a child may have, they have the ability to learn content in any academic areas. This study not only is
groundbreaking in the field of special education, but this curriculum is also designed for individuals with more significant intellectual disabilities.

I used a variety of teaching methods in the lessons, including repetition of lessons, music, collaborative group work with general education peers and universal design for learning to allow students to show what they learned in a different format other than a paper or test. The materials used in the curriculum besides the common paper and writing utensils used in most schools, interactive power points, books made from the power points, an interactive whiteboard, posters, picture symbols and modified items to help individuals mark their responses, such as a dot stamper, eye gaze boards and switches to allow for more communication from students.

Limitations

This research had a few limitations. Two parents of the chosen sample have voiced their concern on how would teaching about the U.S. Constitution, Illinois Constitution and their rights would benefit their child. They question how this topic would help their child in the long run. The two families have expressed that they want to increase the day with therapies and functional life skills, as opposed to gaining more access into the general education curriculum. Their main question is why their child with a significant intellectual disability would needs to learn their rights as a citizen. What does learning about the U.S. constitution help them gain as they get older? Other parents are willing to go above and beyond helping their child learn about the constitution and have requested items to follow up with at home because they feel that their child will benefit from this curriculum as their child moves into adulthood.

Other limitations was that data collection occurred across all curricular areas. The participants who agreed to partake in the study all communicate differently. It was up to me to determine exactly how much knowledge they have gained in this month-long study. Attempting to write field notes while teaching was a challenge, therefore a teaching assistant may write notes while I am instructing the students. The field notes is more of a simpler form for data collection. Case studies tend to be biased, in
that the way each child responds, if they are nonverbal, one can never be 100% certain that the child is responding the way we believe they are.

Another limitation was the actual pre and post-tests that were given. There was no control group for learning. This curriculum has been written and the participants were the first students who partake in the learning. “Indirect evidence consists of proxy signs that students are probably learning. Indirect evidence is less clear and less convincing than direct evidence (Suskie, & Banta, 2009, p. 20).”

A benefit to this study is that I had a small sample size. A small sample size is beneficial to data collection and analysis. “Lincoln and Guba (1985, p. 202) state that purposive sampling is based on informational, not statistical, considerations. Its purpose is to maximise information, not facilitate generalisation the criterion invoked to determine when to stop sampling is informational redundancy, not a statistical confidence level.” Researchers are taught to collect, assess data and find trends. Design based research allows for addresses practical problems in teaching and implement new interventions as the lessons proceed. “The human mind is trained to find patterns. As researchers, we like to find patterns (Bock & Sergeant, 2002, p. 7).”

Teaching students with limited communication skills possibly lead to miscued data. Unconsciously, I may have swayed student responses by placing choices on preferred sides of where a student may be looking or giving a less complex choice for a child who is more tired that day and they are not performing at their best ability. “To reduce the risk of bias in qualitative, researchers must focus on the human elements of the research process in order to identify and avoid biases of the research (Norris, 1997, p. 173).”

A perfect assessment does not exist. There are factors that will take part in data collection, such as a student may be absent the day of a test or they may be feeling tired, in which they will not perform the best. “As educators, we must strive to make the assessments sufficiently truthful and that we have
reasonable confidence in our findings that we may have enough assurance to align learning outcomes (Suskie, & Banta, 2009, p. 38). I will take this paper and change the mindset of others.
CHAPTER FOUR  
Data Analysis and Findings

This chapter contains the results of designed-based research that was conducted by the researcher to answer the following questions: How does one teach students who have a label of intellectual disabilities about the topic of citizenship? How does one teach students with intellectual disabilities to enact their role as citizens in a democratic classroom? And how does one sway attitudes of those individuals who do not see the necessity of teaching citizenship to students labeled intellectual disabilities?

This chapter summarizes and analyzes the participants’ learning of the content and student participation in the Citizenship Curriculum including when they choose to participate (assent) or decline participation in each lesson. The four participants demonstrated their acquired knowledge and expressed opinions using their individualized communication systems on each unit of the five-week research study.

My reflection notes describe my perceptions of participants’ acquired knowledge and serve as documentation of classroom discussions on each topic. The notes were coded into trends for each individual participant. Through descriptions of class discussions, I provide evidence of how the students generalized their learning throughout the day.

Results of the Constitution Pre-test

Prior to administration of the pre-assessment test, I reflected on the students’ reactions to the lesson introduction. For example, one student continuously opened and closed his eyes while another student played with her eye lash. I recognized this action as a form of self-stimulation to appease her anxiety.

When designing the afternoon, I made allotments for enough time to complete the lesson while removing stressors. First, I introduced the unit to the classroom to the whole group after obtaining
assent from Kat, James, Carlos and Mike to administer the Constitution test. The pre-test assessment was a 25-question test with three-answer option multiple choice questions depicting picture symbols to accompany the words in order to meet each students’ individual needs.

During the test, Kat and Mike used a pen to circle their answers after having the three choices read to them. For James and Carlos, a dot stamper replaced the pen, and the answer options were changed to yes/no. I used moderate prompting to accommodate their physical disabilities. Prompting for James and Carlos may be a physical prompt or a touch at the elbow and a verbal direction for Kat and Mike. Prompting also includes simple picture cues that students may use as a guide during lessons. James wears hand splints with Velcro attached, therefore I assisted him by placing Velcro on a dot stamper and put it in his hand splint. This allowed for him to stamp his answers with little support from me. Carlos also has physical disabilities. He has the ability to grasp items, but due to lack of his hand strength, he needs assistance holding onto things that have a heavier weight. I placed my finger on the side towards the top of the dot stamper, so that he could push down with his strength and I helped through stabilizing the dot stamper. Each student completed the Constitution test within the first two days of the study.

Carlos, Kat, James and Mike all took the Constitution test within a thirty-minute period individually with me the across two days. Throughout the baseline assessment, I had to break the test down into small sections and the students received a break in between. Kat verbally expressed her concerns about not understanding what I was discussing. I reassured her by saying, “Kat, this is new information for all of us. I want you to know that we will be learning together. I will give you time to ask questions and we will do a lot of review.” Kat began to flick at her eyelid, which is a sign of anxiety for her. So, I assured her again, “Kat, we will take breaks when you request it. Also, there are a lot of small video clips and music to help you learn this new material.” Kat smiled after I told her this.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Constitution Pre-Test</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Carlos</td>
<td>3 out of 25</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James</td>
<td>1 out of 25</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kat</td>
<td>5 out of 25</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mike</td>
<td>9 out of 25</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 1 Pre-test results of the Constitution test*

Figure Five above shows how the students scored. When reviewing responses,

Mike scored the highest with 9 points and James answered 1 question correctly. These results suggest the students did not have mastery level background knowledge of the content. The pre-test percentages are well below even a standard 60% for a passing level.

**Curriculum Outline**

The unit was originally designed for 4 weeks, as the research began, I added a 5th week to cultivate the curriculum. It became clear the students benefitted from repetition of content and required a fifth week to tie everything together. The Constitution curriculum 5-week mini units in order:

Unit 1: Framers

Unit 2: Bill of Rights

Unit 3: Branches of Government

Unit 4: Citizenship and Civics

Unit 5: Constitution Overview

Each unit was designed to use the same routine with different materials and vocabulary. Teaching with similar routines, repetition and consistency. “Aristotle once commented that repetition in education builds a natural tendency (AplnextED, 2020).” Students with intellectual disabilities need time to allow for generalizing the skills they learn in school and applying them to real life applications that allow for more independence when they reach adulthood. Reviewing my anecdotal records, I repeated
the vocabulary power point daily and it was noted that on the post-tests of every week, each student scored higher on each post-test assessment after reviewing the vocabulary daily. This is key information that would seem to indicate that repetition allows for students to learn and absorb the information. All participants participated in the quizzes individually with me to avoid other classroom distractions when the tests were being administered.

I began each unit with projecting the chapter on the interactive whiteboard for the students to view. I read the chapter out loud to the group of students and used the interactive white board to highlight the vocabulary in the book as I was reading. I then followed up with a power point designed around the weekly vocabulary. The lesson then concluded with an ending activity that included music with a quick review of the chapter.

The next few days of the unit included a review of the vocabulary, jigsaw activities to identify what the students retained from the previous day, reading the next portion of the unit and a review activity with music. Jigsaw is a teaching method where the teacher breaks the whole class down into smaller groups. Each student is given a task they work on, they need to work together and then present it to the class. I had some general education students’ model how to complete the task given as a Jigsaw activity and how to present it to the room. On the last day, I reviewed the chapters that were read for the week and then administered the post-test to each student individually. Figure 3 shows cumulative data for all students across each week. Each student had a quiz of 5 question. Carlos and James had multiple choice questions out of 3 possible choices for each question. The picture sizes were 4 inches with a red shiny Mylar behind it to help them focus on the picture due to their vision impairments. I asked the questions in a yes and no question format. James was given the quiz with all 5 questions with 3 multiple choice answers as well, presented as a multiple-choice quiz with picture responses. Kat was given the same 5 questions with fill in the bank answers to complete it. Reviewing the graph, each student made gains throughout each week from the activities taught during the lessons.
Table 2  Cumulative Data of the weekly pre and post tests

After tabulating the overall data, I tabulated the progress cumulatively for all the students. Figure Six shows the pre- and post-test data for each student. According to the upward trend on the graph, all students improved their scores from each pre-test to the post-test by at least 50%.

Student Responses to The Curriculum
Framers Week One

As mentioned in the outline, the first week’s unit was about the Framers and how they shaped the 13 colonies. I began discussing the framers with the class and how they fought with England because they didn’t agree with the law. The Framers wrote the Bill of Rights for the people in the colonies to abide by. I observed James trying to fall asleep and Mike was reaching over to Kat to give her high fives. While this was happening, I had to stop the lesson and give the students a “brain break” which is a time for the students to listen to music and get their brain ready for listening. It was at this time I had to be creative and relate this information to my student’s lives. This information appears to be novel for the students and understanding the content needs to be relatable to their lives. This is a strategy that will allow them to generalize lessons taught to their lives.
I noted in my reflection journal that I needed to focus more on making the learning meaningful to their life in the present for this topic; I chose to stop the curriculum, take a week to plan head so I could make the learning and topic more engaging. This gave me a chance to focus on their family life and what is expected of them. I reached out to see what chores and expectations they have, if any in their home. I used this as a platform to educate them on how it works to have people in charge of you and it may be someone who is not part of your family.

When I provided examples of how it relates to current life, they demonstrated this understanding by answering questions from a pre-determined set of questions I had asked their families about their chores and family life after school hours. James expressed through his eye gaze board that he does not have chores at home and that he would enjoy washing dishes with support. Kat’s family uses a star reward chart. Kat is to complete 3 chores a day and after the week, she is treated with a soda or a dessert, she is able to choose. Similar to James, Carlos does not have chores in his residential facility. He responded “no” to completing chores in the home and he also replied “no” to wanting to complete any chores.

The fourth day of the study, September 12, the students began to demonstrate the understanding of the idea of voting and how it works within the classroom setting. My staff members and the student’s nurses were in the room helping the students with the Constitution lesson on voting. It was right after my lunch break, all the students, including those not participating, gave me slips of paper, with a verbal prompt from my teaching assistant. That verbal prompt from my staff included questions on what they wanted to do at the end of the day. Each paper had something different on it. Kat gave me written letters including, M, V, E. Mike handed me a piece of paper with a box on it. James and Carlos had scribbles on it. I focused on the papers and Kat raised her hands and said, “Well, can we?” I responded with, “Can we what?” and she replied with, “Watch a movie.” This was important for many reasons. It not only showed that they are able to convey what they wanted to do in class, they
wrote down their choice for the class period and they took control of their learning environment. In my notes, I took this as a way of them “voting” by using slips of paper and handing them to me. This was not 100% of the students’ engagement, however, with minimal prompting from staff, they were able to ask to watch a movie. My teaching assistant gave the students the idea to ask about watching a movie and the students needed a little guidance by being handed small pieces of paper to decide what they wanted to do. Ultimately it was Kat who asked the class if they wanted to watch a movie instead of doing the lessons.

**Effective teaching strategies**

Routines are key that help provide consistency for the students. Each lesson has a picture symbol schedule. The lessons are always designed with:

1) **Introduction**—This is the moment where I am capturing the student’s attention to get them involved in the lesson. I introduce the topic, ask the students if they know anything about the topic and discuss what the students are going to learn during the lesson.

2) **Reading**—This is the important piece of every lesson. I project the lesson on the board and point to each word as I read it. The words are paired with picture symbols to help the students make connections in any way they can by looking at pictures as well as words. The reading portion is typically 5 minutes long. I highlight text and the vocabulary words as I read it to the students.

3) **Watch a video on the topic**—I either research videos made on Teacher tube or I pre-make videos to correlate what I want the students to learn. The videos are under 8 minutes long.

4) **Activity**—The activity is where the lessons vary. The students either put together a craft, work together in groups to solve a problem, complete a writing activity or put together a poster on what they have learned. The activities are usually modified for each student so that they are able to complete the activity as independently as possible.
5) Conclusion—I complete a brief overview with pre-determined questions on the topic they learned about and ask the students questions. This is when students are asking questions on the topic they learned about, and I am able to clarify any misunderstandings on the lesson.

The main focus on teaching in the same format for each class allows for the students to be familiar with the lesson plan designs and the staff to be able to step in any time that I am absent. Students who take more time to learn concepts need more time and repetition, therefore designing a class in such a way that they are able to anticipate what comes next, allows for easier transitions.

For the topic of the Constitution, students need time to absorb what they are learning and having the lessons geared to making it meaningful for their personal lives allowed for a better understanding what rights are. One strategy I used to accomplish this was creating small groups with students from the general education social studies classroom along with my students. Students learn best from each other, by having general education students in the room, served as a model and resource for the whole classroom. Another strategy I used is that I put each student into a different level for each lesson. I taught each student as a whole group and when it came time for the activity, I designed each of the students’ work to meet their ability levels. For example, for my student who is able to write, her lessons were built to write sentences or filling in the blank. For my students who needed some extra support and guidance, they had eye-gaze boards that included the content material pictures, as well as pictures that were off topic, so they have a variety of ways to communicate at all times.

Kat

Overall, Kat had the highest improvement from the pre to post test this first week. The specific teaching strategy that worked with Kat was the leveled writing lesson on the vocabulary words. Kat took the vocabulary words, wrote sentences and made a power point presentation that she presented to classmates and her family with visual models from the teaching assistant. Kat does not type very well and needed verbal directions on how to use the computer to build the power point. I recorded a
demonstration video on how to make a power point. During the school day, Kat reviewed the video any break she had, so she was able to learn some basic functions on building a PowerPoint lesson. She is soft-spoken and is learning how to advocate for herself in a variety of settings. The PowerPoint she built focused on the things she likes and does not like at school and at home. Throughout the week, Kat was raising her hand and asking questions during the board presentations. Kat took a copy of the power point presentation home and made a book of the vocabulary words.

*Mike*

Mike showed an improvement of 3 points from his pre to post test. As mentioned previously, Mike’s family is studying to become U.S. citizens, so repetition of materials seemed to be the most effective as the materials were being studied at home. Drawing was also an effective strategy. Each lesson included a writing activity. There are a variety of ways to have students write without having to actually hold a pencil to form letters. James and Carlos use, what is called an “adaptive pencil” which I will discuss later. Mike, on the other hand is able to hold a pencil and draws simple circular type shapes, traces his hand and writes the letter c. He will also write his first name when requested. Each of my lessons have an activity which includes a form of writing. Mike handed me a piece of paper with a box on it, and it caught me off guard because Mike does not draw straight lines with corners. When Mike drew a box and handed it to me, I interpreted that as a video tape for the class requesting a movie to be shown. I used Mike’s picture schedule to help follow along with the lesson because it was not time to watch a movie. I explained that the class can earn a movie at the end of the week for hard work.

Using the same procedure of writing was useful for Mike, at the age of 14, he was learning to draw straight lines and draw more items. Mike also relied on the picture schedule to follow along with the lessons of the week. Mike tends to be more of a visual learner and the more interactive the material is, the more involved he is when communicating with staff. For example, one interactive material I used
for this lesson was the videos Mike was able to express his wants through his drawing and, I believe, demonstrated this understanding about freedom of speech because of that.

James

The specific strategies that seemed more effective for James were using his way of answering questions with yes and no with repetition of the questions. While at home, James is often in his room with little interaction from the family, and more interaction with his nurses. James thrives on adults conversing with him and he shows us that by smiling. James has very little movement in his body and will occasionally move his arms to activate switches.

I started a new writing strategy with James. It is called the “Alternative Pencil.” With this strategy, the staff asks James if the letter he wants is on this page, if he says yes, then the staff goes through each letter individually and then writes the letter down on the paper, so James is able to see what letter is being written down. The staff goes through this process, until James indicates he is finished by looking at the “finished” pictured on the right. By utilizing this teaching strategy James is actively engaged in all the writing activities in the lessons designed.

![Figure 3 An example of an alternative pencil, picture secured from Google Images](image)

James closed his eyes throughout this week, I noticed it more when I discussed what they do at home. James uses a wheelchair and has a full-time nurse to help him with all of his self-care needs. James does not go out with his mom or sister much, due to the family not having a wheelchair van at this time. When we were discussing chores, James had a tear in his eye when Kat and Mike mentioned what they were responsible to do in their home. James typically has a smile on his face, but his demeanor changed when chores were brought up. At this moment, I told him that not everyone has
chores where they live, but he was sure needing to be responsible and do his work at school.

Throughout the whole study, it is not necessarily about how much of the actual content of the Constitution the students learn, but the knowledge on how to make their own personal life richer. At this moment, I redirected the conversation to reflect his work at school. Throughout the whole study, it is not necessarily about how much of the actual content of the Constitution the students learn, but the knowledge on how to make their own personal life richer through being responsible to the greatest extent possible.

Carlos

Carlos improved his score by 3 points as well. The main focus for Carlos was similar to James in that he had to work in school and had jobs to complete. This was the first year for Carlos to be in my classroom and before he came to me, he had a very little response for yes and no. Before I began the study, I needed to assess Carlos on his understanding of yes and no, so I could accurately obtain data for the study. This week, Carlos’s lessons were broken down into yes and no questions for all the curricular content. This was deemed the best strategy for Carlos. Carlos also utilized the “alternative pencil.” Carlos has a vision impairment as well as his physical disabilities, so I brought in larger 3-inch size foam letters that allowed Carlos to feel the shape of the letter while he engaged in the writing activities of the lesson.

Week One Discussion

The first week was complete. I gathered over 30 pages of notes and had successfully given pre- and post-quizzes on the Framers. I gathered my class around a horseshoe shaped table and started to ask questions on how they were feeling. The content is difficult to understand, and the students were being taught to learn about a topic they knew very little bit about. James started to tear up during this week. Especially during the time when we discussed what each child was responsible for at home. At
this moment, when I saw him getting more frustrated by tensing up his body and turning away, I redirected the conversation to reflect his work at school.

**Bill of Rights Week Two**

Week two and part of week three focused on the Bill of Rights. Because the Bill of Rights was written in formal, proper English language that is outdated, I simplified the terms and paired pictures along with the words. Figure four through six contains the modified Bill of Rights.

*Figure 4 A modified version of the Bill of Rights*
1. You have the right to say what you

2. You have the right to carry a weapon.

3. You don’t have to let a soldier live.

4. No one can search your house, unless

---

Figure 5 Bill of Rights

---

Figure 6 Bill of Rights Continued
Week 2 presented more challenges in identifying what it means to each student by using real-life situations. Therefore, a class discussion led to what an amendment is. As a result, Kat asked if it was a rule to follow while Carlos used his switch to indicate that he did not understand. The First Amendment, which is the freedom of speech, was the easiest to comprehend because they are taught to speak up for themselves.

When activating the switch, Carlos uses his right hand, and then he tenses up often in his chair while closing his eyes to indicate that he is bored. Carlos has learned over the course of the school year that if he closes his eyes and gives a sigh that I will change the topic to something more aligned to his interests. In addition, James also learned to close his eyes when he wants a change. Although this may not be socially acceptable to promote advocating for oneself, they found a way to change the subject using their “freedom of speech.”

Much to their dismay, I continued with the lesson that I designed. Carlos and James continued to close their eyes as much as possible. Additionally, this week, Kat showed confusion for the meaning of amendment. Therefore, I divided the classroom into three groups of two and gave them a worksheet with amendments I-V. The students were given sentences written in picture symbols and paired them with the proper amendment. For example, Amendment III, “No Soldier shall, in time of peace be quarter in a house, without consent of the Owner” was explained in detail. Kat made a connection to her brother who graduated into the National Guard when she asked if he needed to move out of her house because of his military status. I eased her mind and told her no.

During the second week of the study, I showed a lot of videos on how the Bill of Rights protect us as U.S. Citizens. Kat knew that her brother was part of the military, so she had a vested interest. Therefore, she kept quiet during the lessons and appeared to be intently listening. In an effort to participate, Kat raised her hands and asked if she was safe with her brother being home. Kat was
working hard and trying to understand exactly what the Bill of Rights meant to her. The chart below shows the key points to the week’s lessons.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week 2</th>
<th>Monday 9/16/19</th>
<th>Tuesday 9/17/19</th>
<th>Wednesday 9/18/19</th>
<th>Thursday 9/19/19</th>
<th>Friday 9/20/19</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Carlos</td>
<td>Closed eyes during video, answered 3 questions correctly on vocabulary from week 1. Answered 2 questions on the video correctly.</td>
<td>3 of the 5 vocabulary words correctly using yes/no responses. Closed eyes and didn’t participate in the rest of the morning.</td>
<td>Absent</td>
<td>I reviewed lessons in the morning. answered 3 of the 5 questions made a poster with his nurse on The pictures chosen were: U.S. Flag, vote, right and people.</td>
<td>4 of the 5 questions correct Post-Test requested the president song. Using a switch.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kat</td>
<td>Putting her head down on her desk. Raising her hand about her brother living at home. She feared that her brother wouldn’t be able to stay due to Bill of Rights #3.</td>
<td>Quiet, reserved, listening to videos, asked for a picture book on the Bill of Rights to take home.</td>
<td>Kat was quiet again. Kat raised her hand throughout the whole day and didn’t interrupt when others were speaking. Kat answered 5 out of 5 questions right on the comprehension quiz I gave on the Bill of Rights.</td>
<td>Kat wrote a 3 word sentence on the board when she was asked to come up show what she learned. “We rght citzn”. I asked her what she wrote and her response was, “We have rights as citizens.” This is the first sentence Kat has written without a visual.</td>
<td>Wrote words without prompts. She wrote “prsdent” “friend” and “vote”. Study notes: Kat was smiling and excited to sit and work hard. Kat expressed that she likes to learn about rights.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3 A snapshot of notes taken for lessons

Some more field notes for James and Mike. These notes were taken directly from the lessons and also identified in the reflection journals after the lessons were taught.
James

Kept his head straight and focused on the video. Used his switch to ask a question about the video. He asked “how many” when he looked at his eye gaze board.

James closed his eyes during the whole lesson today. He didn’t answer any questions.

James answered 2 out of 5 questions on the comprehension quiz. James used his eye gaze board to look at “yes, right” when I discussed the vocabulary.

During our time with peers James, kept eyes open, looked at his eye gaze board 4 times for “yes” and “fun”. James used a switch 3 times in 4 minutes to turn the page in the book presented on the tablet.

James answered 3 out of 5 questions right using his eye gaze board. He made choices out of 4. James kept his head aligned to the center and did not turn it to the side, which he often does.

Mike

Used his AAC to say, “I can talk” “I use words” “I can write” Answered 4 out of 5 comprehension questions correct.

Mike was super silly today. He took his shoes off, got out of his chair and danced. When presented with questions, he always chose the response in the middle. He laughed through the whole lesson.

**Before class, I read a social story on how to behave during class. It has simple words and pictures. I also showed a video model on how Mike behaves in class. Mike answered 4 out of the 5 questions right during the comprehension quiz.**

**Showed the video to Mike again on how behaving in class helps keep focus. Mike raised his hand to answer questions. Mike wrote words to the fill in a blank quiz he was given. He answered 4 out of 5 questions correctly.**

Absent

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>James</th>
<th>Kept his head straight and focused on the video. Used his switch to ask a question about the video. He asked “how many” when he looked at his eye gaze board.</th>
<th>James closed his eyes during the whole lesson today. He didn’t answer any questions.</th>
<th>James answered 2 out of 5 questions on the comprehension quiz. James used his eye gaze board to look at “yes, right” when I discussed the vocabulary.</th>
<th>James answered 3 out of 5 questions right using his eye gaze board. He made choices out of 4. James kept his head aligned to the center and did not turn it to the side, which he often does.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mike</td>
<td>Used his AAC to say, “I can talk” “I use words” “I can write” Answered 4 out of 5 comprehension questions correct.</td>
<td>Mike was super silly today. He took his shoes off, got out of his chair and danced. When presented with questions, he always chose the response in the middle. He laughed through the whole lesson.</td>
<td><strong>Before class, I read a social story on how to behave during class. It has simple words and pictures. I also showed a video model on how Mike behaves in class. Mike answered 4 out of the 5 questions right during the comprehension quiz.</strong></td>
<td><strong>Showed the video to Mike again on how behaving in class helps keep focus. Mike raised his hand to answer questions. Mike wrote words to the fill in a blank quiz he was given. He answered 4 out of 5 questions correctly.</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 4 Anecdotal notes taken in a lesson**

**Kat**

This week, Kat took to the Bill of Rights. She was able to express some of her concerns with her brother by putting her head down on her desk and was quiet the first few days. Kat not only expressed
her concerns on whether her brother could live in her house, but she genuinely showed her interest in learning about what it means to have rights. She raised her hands, improved her test score for the week and wrote words that she never attempted in my classroom before. Kat’s score improved by two points this week.

James

James increased his score by one point this week. He closed his eyes a lot through this week’s lessons. When he closes his eyes, it typically means that he does not have any interests in what is being taught. Upon reviewing my journal notes, one thing that stood out, was that on Friday, he didn’t turn his head to the side. He often turns his head to the side when he does not seem to be interested in what is being taught. This was the day we discussed how advocating for oneself will help them as they become adults.

Mike

Mike’s score stayed the same this week. He missed the same question about freedom of speech on both the pre- and post-test. This week, Mike’s interests with the curriculum was mainly geared towards his behaviors that he exhibits throughout the school day. This week, I used a video camera to record some of his behaviors that were not school appropriate and some that were. Some behaviors that is unexpected is when he runs down the hallway or when he throws papers on the ground. When classroom lessons are not as desirable, such as learning about the Constitution, Mike has been known to throw the papers to the floor.

Upon reviewing my journal notes, I had noted that when my one staff member showed him the videos of him misbehaving, he would use his AAC device to say he was sorry. This is not related to citizenship and the unit at hand; however, it does correlate to his freedom of speech. He exhibited throwing papers to the ground in a sense of protest and then when he saw himself doing the behavior, he showed empathy by apologizing.
Carlos

Carlos’s score also improved this week from his pre- to post test. His score increased from a two to a four. Carlos had his eyes closed for most of the lesson on Monday. By Thursday, I noted in my reflection journal, that Carlos had his eyes open for the videos on Thursday and Friday. It was also noted that “Carlos was highly engaged in the poster; Carlos held the marker with his nurse holding his elbow. Carlos moved the marker back and forth three times. Wow, Carlos nodded along with his eye blink for some pictures, did I see that right? Carlos hasn't nodded before.” This was so enlightening. Carlos has limited movements and to see him nod for a yes is a celebration.

Effective Teaching Strategies

When implementing special education instruction, teachers use verbal prompts, reminders, and pictures to help the students comprehend. Communication tools, such as visual schedules, either with real life pictures, drawings or words, also assist with understanding. Once Mike was shown the social story on how to behave and a video of him acting appropriately, he participated in class following the directions, which is key for working with individuals with intellectual disabilities.

When reviewing this chart that seemed difficult to grasp, students actually answered more comprehension questions from repetition about the Bill of Rights. During this week, I repeated my lessons while changing just a little each day on how I presented the materials and reviewed material from the previous day. On day one, the students took the pre-test. I followed that by reading the chapter, showing the power point of the vocabulary words for the week and ended it with a song. On day 2, I grouped the students into two with an adult, and they read the chapter to the students. Each adult reviewed the power point and played a bingo type game on the meanings of the words. On day 3, I reviewed the book on the board, presented questions on the board, and students answered them with minimal support as we collected data on their responses. On day 4, I showed a video that I made about
the Bill of Rights that focused on differentiating between right and wrong choices and rules versus laws.

**Branches of Government Week Three**

The study was conducted during September -October 2019, the year before a presidential election, which tied into the curriculum seamlessly. Understanding the concept was challenging. The curriculum describes the three branches of government, state governments, cities and municipalities governments. Tapping again into a personal level, I used an example of a grandparent as the head of the family and parents as the second in command. Thus, the parents had to follow the rules that are written for them.

During this lesson, Carlos closed his eyes and turn away every time I brought up the hierarchy of a family setting because it was triggering for him. Yet, he sees his family on weekends and long school breaks. Therefore, I used this to my advantage and discussed how his mom and dad are the rule makers in the home.

The third day of the week, I showed the students a short video I created using pictures, music, and clips from a children’s video learning site on how to run a government including the election process. The lesson commenced with learning that Legislative branch writes the laws that we follow as United States citizens. I designed lessons this week to work on the actual voting process for the students to practice. The schedule allowed for flexibility. Therefore, the students voted on which classes to have and what content to learn.

For example, the choices for cooking this week were pizza or grilled cheese, the popular vote was pizza, four to two. As a result, the students who voted for grilled cheese understood the concept of “defeat”. In addition, I had the students vote for which math lessons were we going to learn from the choice of addition or money. The best voting that took place was on the type of book we were going to read to the class, the choices were comedy or drama, and the students chose comedy six to zero. Voting
for a variety of things through each day gave the students control over their learning environment, which they do not have often due to federal and state curriculum mandates and laws.

**Effective Teaching Strategies**

Throughout the entire school week, I had the students vote. This allowed them to put into practice what it means to vote in a democratic society. The students voted for different songs that were played, books read in class and what “topic” they wanted to learn about, for example during math, the students were asked if they wanted to learn about money on a specific day or work on computations. Mike and Carlos were given picture choices. With those photos, they stamped their answers with assistance from adults and they would drop it in the ballot box we created. On the other hand, Kat and James traced their answers given dotted line samples.

After they finished voting, all the ballots were counted out in front of the classroom. In the open space, they could decipher the winner. With the results, the students showed excitement as well as disappointment. Teaching this life skill was highly effective for James and Mike as they began to understand that you win, and you lose.

Everyone learns in their own way, whether it be auditorily, motorically, kinesthetic, or some other way that is effective. “In general, people learn better when information is presented in more than one way (Sankey, Birch, & Gardiner, 2010).” Incorporating movement and music into lessons allows for individuals to learn in multi-modalities. “Study after study show that physical activity activates the brain, improves cognitive function and is correlated with improved academic performance (Donnelly & Lambourne, 2011).” Most of the music found for my lessons were from educational websites that put the content materials to music, such as “How a Bill becomes a Law” from Schoolhouse Rock. Music is not only a motivator, but it helps elicit communication. Music and movement tend to alleviate stress, therefore in a special education classroom, such as mine, the rigor is taken somewhat away from difficult content and makes it fun for everyone.
Citizenship and Civics Week 4

To prepare for this activity, I printed up picture symbol sentences using the previous week’s vocabulary for each student, and outliers, of each students’ motivators. The purpose of the activity was that they were to design a poster about the curriculum, rather than write a summary. Writing is a difficult task for all the participants with the exception of Kat. The reason for the outliers was to see if the students would choose items related to citizenship, or would they choose the outliers because it was of their interests. The idea was that if the participants chose the outliers, then I would know if they truly did not understand the material.

Each participant had 10 sentences to choose from and were to use up to 5 sentences on their poster. Mike chose to design his poster with six sentences. The sixth sentence was glued to the back and stated that his favorite food was pizza. I interpreted this as he hid the sentence because he was following the directions for the front of the poster, and he wrote “My favorite food is pizza” on the back to use his “freedom of speech.”

Kat has the ability to write simple four-word sentences while requesting from staff how to spell more difficult words. Her poster included stars she drew, flag stickers and four sentences: (a) “I can say stop”; (b) “I can say no like”; (c) “I can say help; and (d) “I no president.”

During the activity, James and Carlos had more intense instruction on designing their posters. They had one-word symbols to represent a sentence. Carlos chose the words, “Me, home, right, citizen, and president.” James chose the words, “right, president, laws, follow and listen.” Carlos and James chose to put down some Illinois shaped stickers and the United States Flag sticker with assistance from staff. Each young man was given choices out of two to design their poster. They were given physical support to glue on the picture of their poster.
**Effective Teaching Strategies**

Overall, the teaching strategy that was most effective were the ones used to teach them about freedom of speech. Each week throughout the study we practiced the basics of democracy in the areas of voting, discussing positives and negatives of people's opinions and current events. This week, I set up simple debates on a few different topics of their interests for Kat and Mike. For example, day one, I worked in a small group with Kat and Mike. Kat, who is verbal and Mike, who uses a communication device discussed which was a better dessert, chocolate chip cookies or ice cream. This activity took some planning because I had to set up pictures for Mike to assist him in how to find some pictures on his device. Kat and Mike both agreed that chocolate was a sweet flavor to eat. When he wanted to prove that he loved cookies, he typed in his AAC, “Crunch good is chocolate.” Kat responded, “yes, cookies are good but get stuck in your teeth.”

However, James and Carlos required more assistance on week 4’s lessons. They have their own way of communicating using body language, their eyes and using their switches. I attempted to set up a debate with them using an eye gaze board. The topic they discussed was which animal is better to have in a home; a dog or a fish. Both boys locked their eyes on a dog and didn’t answer any questions I had written out for them. On day 3, I attempted another debate for them. I made another eye gaze board for them with school subjects. I attempted to guide them into figuring out which subject was more engaging in school, music or physical education. Both boys looked at music and wouldn’t answer any other questions. This was an unsuccessful portion of the study, however it was imperative to continue to try this portion of the curriculum more than once.

Due to Carlos and James having limited communication skills, setting up a debate with picture symbols on an eye gaze board was a stretch. Each boy has a 1:1 nurse and I had to direct the nurses to not intervene, so that I am able to gather authentic data for the study. James and Carlos have ways to
communicate with body language, and they did this by not making any choices on the eye gaze board.

The only data I gathered in my notes was just that both boys looked at the picture of music.

**Constitution Overview Week 5**

The overall results further exceeded my expectations. Figure Five shows the pre and post-test scores out of 25 with each student increasing their scores. Comparing the pre and post-test data, each question the students answered correctly on the pre-test was also answered correctly on the post-test, therefore the changes in scores were all for the positive. Moreover, Carlos had the smallest point increase as well as the most difficulty staying awake during the lessons.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Constitution Pre-Test</th>
<th>Constitution Post-Test</th>
<th>Difference</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Carlos</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kat</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mike</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>88%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 5 Overall Results for the Constitution*

Carlos increased his score from 12% to 48% in a 5-week study. Strategies that worked best for Carlos was to use the same pictures each week on his eye gaze board and break down all the questions into yes and no responses. Carlos also learned that he could use his body to communicate with staff. Carlos shut his eyes when he wanted to and stiffened up during class. When he stiffens up, his nurse will take him out of his wheelchair. Each time he stiffened up; I interpreted that body movement as he was trying to get out of schoolwork. He was surprised that no matter where he was, materials and lessons were brought over to him. We wouldn’t let him give up.

James had the most significant increase. He scored 4% on his pre-test and his score jumped up to 60% on his post-test. He used his ability to look at pictures and make choices along with his nonverbal *yes* and *no* responses throughout the overall 5-week unit to increase his quantitative scores. The most successful strategy for James was to have the same pictures from week to week so he has a concrete
understanding of the materials. James also took a copy of the eye gaze board home so that he was able
to work on the materials with his nurse and family when they had the opportunity to review the
material.

Kat scored 20% on her pre-test and 76% on her post-test. Overall, through the study, Kat
verbally asked questions that were on topic, asked about how the Bill of Rights would affect her brother
and where he lives. Kat took control and advocated for the things she wanted in class, including asking
for a movie and engaging her classmates in a discussion which isn’t simple as they communicate
differently than verbal communication.

Mike scored 36% on his pre-test and 88% on his post-test. Video modeling on behavior was the
strategy that worked best for Mike because he loved watching himself on the large projected image.
Mike also benefited greatly due to the vast repetition from home and in school.

**Thematic Analysis of my Journal**

Educating students is no easy task, and when it comes down to individuals with disabilities,
there are more modifications and accommodations that allow for learning than typically developing
individuals. Teaching today is vastly different than it was before the 2000’s. Teaching has evolved from
the lecture-based classroom into including UDL and differentiation into all classrooms, not just those
who service students with IEP’s, group work, students collaborating and working together to learn from
each other, rather than just from writing down notes and listening to a teacher.

Upon reviewing the data in my reflection journals, I noted that each student showed different
ways they learned the content material throughout the five-week unit. I also noted each week the
behaviors of each participant and their levels of participation. Mike and Kat were both interested in the
music, vocabulary and the variety of projects each week. Mike benefited from the repetition of lesson,
whereas Carlos benefited from the videos shown and vocabulary. One trend that was common for both
James and Carlos is that they used their yes and no response to answer questions on all of the quizzes.
Prior to this unit, Carlos had very little engagement with staff in his school day. Carlos appeared to be sleeping for 3 hours of the school day. Carlos didn’t access a switch independently, until he started in my classroom.

Prior to the unit of study, Kat was often quiet and shy. She did not speak out without raising her hand. Towards the end of the unit, Kat was asking questions and interrupting the lessons and although she was still polite when she spoke out of turn, she had to be re-directed into raising her hand to wait to be called upon, so she didn’t interrupt others.

**Curricular Unit**

Through the course of the study, I had to revise the curriculum that I originally designed. Educators take a variety of teaching methods to educate young adults through various ways including, but not limited to, small groups, jigsaw activities, lectures, building in movements into lessons and repetition. My students increased their tests scores through pre- and post-tests, as well as the Constitution test. I was able to use the general education content and teach those in my classroom though repetition, vocabulary lessons and projects that was able to be generalized into their home life. Overall, each participant showed successes through the unit of study. From James who kept his eyes open, to Carlos nodding for some choices and Kat discussing her brother and if he could live at their home.
Chapter 5

Discussion and Conclusion

The purpose of the study was to demonstrate how to modify a social studies curriculum for individuals with intellectual disabilities, this topic was chosen two-fold: (1) First, to give middle school students the opportunity to access to the general education curriculum requirements for graduation, which includes the Constitution test; and (2) Second, to give individuals with disabilities a voice.

As a citizen, each one of us have the right to stand up for what we believe in and pursue our beliefs. This opportunity is no different for individuals with intellectual disabilities. Thus, they need to advocate for themselves in any way they know how.

Throughout the study, four participants showed quantitative gains by increasing of their pre-test and post-test scores. Over two decades, I have taught adolescents with a variety of disabilities including but not limited to: (a) autism, (b) Hunter syndrome, (c) hydrocephalic, (d) cerebral palsy, (e) Down syndrome, (f) Angelman syndrome and (g) Fragile X. Questions I am often asked:

- “Since your students are more nonverbal, how do you know they are learning?”
- “Why do you teach them how to read?
- “You must be so patient to work with students with intellectual disabilities.

Ultimately, I decided to write a curriculum on the Constitution as a result of a lot of questions from parents years ago. In fact, I had push back from a few parents because I was not able to fully speak as to what their child would get out of this topic of rights and learning about the history of the United States.

In truth, teaching individuals about civics and the Constitution is an arduous task. When you factor in students with disabilities into the learning environment, educators must seek creative in finding ways to make the content material engaging and meaningful. Additionally, students who have
intellectual disabilities typically require the incorporation of concrete materials for better understanding.

Being an educator of students with intellectual disabilities of over two decades, I have developed hundreds of lessons to improve learning for students with intellectual disabilities. Over the years, I have had multiple successes, as well as many failures. Educating individuals with intellectual disabilities is an art in itself. Similar to the general education population, no two children learn the same way, therefore educators need to think outside the box and approach each student with a variety of teaching techniques to meet their learning needs. Teaching individuals their rights and what the government does for our country is a daunting task. When teaching subjects such as math and reading, where it is more concrete and not much room for error with learning, teaching citizenship can be misinterpreted. My goal of this research was to not only to improve my skills as a teacher, but to have more students successfully learning difficult curricular content.

In order to reach them on their ability levels, I created materials relatable to their daily living home and school environments. In other words, I designed items and lessons that make sense to them because they learned in different ways. After the first week, the curriculum had to be redesigned to meet their individual needs. I had a multitude of success and many failures completing this research.

Even though I teach the students using standards that parallel the general education curriculum, they participate in an alternate assessment for standardized testing. The curriculum must be appropriate to best meet their needs and aligned with their IEP. Therefore, the curriculum that was designed as an overall history of the United States Constitution with a modified Constitution test.

Through the course of the study, it evolved into what the students integrate in their learning and how it will benefit them after they age out of the school system. After the first week, I realized that the students needed more information on current events rather than the historical context. This is just
one example of design-based research. Therefore, I revised each week to build upon current events and
used examples to correlate with what was written from the 1770s to today.

Answering my Research Questions

Question one: “How does one teach and what are the processes when teaching individuals with
intellectual disabilities on the topic of citizenship?” Each classroom that is considered self-contained is
set up differently than a general education classroom. Typically, there are more adults and smaller class
sizes with students who have IEPs. Students who have intellectual disabilities need prompting, which are
visual cues, a verbal cues or physical cues, and support with curriculum and goals for them to gain
independence as they age. Purposefully, I set out to design my lessons around each of my students’
strengths and their abilities. For students who have vision impairments, I reach out to the vision
itinerant and collaborate on how to use their vision to the best of their ability. These are just a few
modifications that are used to allow for student learning.

As mentioned previously, there is many adaptations and modifications to meet each students’
needs. The IEP is carefully written by a team that projects what the student should focus on as they
grow. The IEP lists modifications and accommodations that the student needs to be successful. I use
each students’ IEP as a guide to how I will adapt each lesson. For example, in a general education class, if
a teacher is giving a quiz, they had the same form out to each student. In my classroom, I may have to
make five versions of the same quiz so that each of my students have equity. They respond differently,
therefore they need to have the proper materials to be successful on the quiz. I had two students who
have limited communication, therefore most of what my team has to do is to interpret their body
language. While I completed my field notes, I had to make sure I was documenting little details such as
James turning his head or Carlos closing his eyes. The body language that the students demonstrate,
allows for the staff to interpret how and what they may be thinking. It wasn’t until the head nod, did I
truly know that Carlos was in fact answering yes to a question that was asked of him because he blinked
at the same time. Prior to this, it was just noted from his family that he blinks for yes. Now, I have a head nod that pairs with the blink, that I can now understand that is truly his form of a yes response.

To answer “how does one teach students with intellectual disabilities to enact their role as citizens in a democratic classroom” has been demonstrated in numerous examples throughout the study. For example, they voted to use different materials in lesson for the poster. Mike designed his poster with five pictures on the front and added pizza to the back. Mike followed the instructions, as well as adding his own opinion to the back. The students also self-advocated when they requested a movie. Each student has a way of advocating for themselves through freedom of speech, whether it be verbal or through some other modality. Mike has a behavior of throwing items to the floor and breaking his pencil. To me, this means that he is not interested in what the content is or that he is needing some attention. It is often students who do undesirable behaviors often get a quick response from teachers, whether it be positive or negative.

Not everything I did worked. The debate I set up for my students who used an eye gaze board were a failure. I did not give up and attempted a debate more than once for the students. I continued to revise the curriculum to motivate my students. Another lesson that did not go according to my lesson plan was “How a Bill becomes a Law”. I designed a lecture on this topic, along with showing a video on the process. I had six students from the social studies class next to my room, come and listen to my lesson and they were paired up with my students to work with them on a short essay. The lesson was on how lobbyists come up with a bill and how they attempt to make it into a law. I wanted the pairs of students to come up with a “bill” in how to change something at the school and present it to the principal. My students did not see the need for a change at the school, through their voices, choices of pictures and what they decided, they were not helping their friends in coming up with ideas on how to change the school. The general education students, however, had many ideas on how to change the school.
Carlos and James would close their eyes through the unit which I interpreted as refusal to answer questions therefore I had to note that in my journal and re-teach them when they were more motivated to answer questions. I noted that this was not necessarily a reflection of the content that was being taught, it could have been due to the time of the day. Both of these young men wake early in the morning so their personal needs could be met.

Question two, “How does one teach students with intellectual disabilities to enact their role as citizens in a democratic classroom?” This was powerful in and of itself. Reflecting on my journal notes, there were many examples of how each student acquired knowledge in one way or another throughout the 5 weeks. Mike raised his scores on each and every test and had the greatest increase from the first day to the final day of the study. Mike used his power of speech by writing an extra “sentence” on his poster, requesting a movie when it was not in the schedule.

Carlos was given independence by using a switch independently. Carlos started the year by blinking his eyes for yes, through simple instructions and content, Carlos worked on nodding his head for yes, pairing it with a blink. This is huge for people who do not know him well. He has a nod response for yes. When Carlos masters a nod, this will open up a whole new world for him, since a nod is a universal understanding of yes.

Mike had the most increase in his scores, which is probably due to the fact that his family is studying to become citizens. Mike has multiple modes of communication, which also allows for him to get his point across either through AAC, sign and gestures, along with vocalizations. Throughout my reflection journals, I noted how Mike sat in his desk, kept his head up through the lessons being taught and he often requested his wants and needs through his AAC device.

Due to Kat being verbal, it was the easiest to gather data on her learning. She expressed her thoughts and concerns. She also grew with her writing by attempting to spell words she never used
before. Kat even mentioned that she was excited to turn 18 so that she could vote. She told me she was disappointed that it was still a few years away before she could vote.

One question that is difficult to answer, even after the study is, “how does one sway attitudes of those individuals who do not see the necessity of teaching citizenship to students labeled intellectual disabilities?” When I approach my administration about this study, I had push back from some individuals who did not understand how my students learned and did not want to take the time out to understand how I teach. I presented the data from baseline to the final quantitative to the adult and they responded, “Are you sure they actually knew the information or did your staff give them the answers?”

This study shows that individuals with intellectual disabilities have the ability to learn when they are presented with the proper tools and supports. The most difficult question to answer is how one can sway attitudes of another except that the stories described in this study shows how students are able to learn complex material. As a society, we have our stereotypes on how individuals should be, how they should look, or act. Individuals with disabilities get treated differently, for many reasons, and therefore gathering data on how children learn, still may never be enough to sway someone’s attitude on what children need to learn. Videos and conversations with others is a way to sway the attitudes of others on how to educate all individuals. The American Educational Research Association (2021), list the DSE tenants as:

1) “Contextualize disability within political and social”
2) “Privilege the interest, agenda and voices of those people labeled with a disability”
3) “Promote social justice, equitable and inclusive educational opportunities”
4) “Assume competence and reject deficit models of disability”

One of the tenets of disability studies is that we are to assume competence in all students. I always put into practice to “reach for the stars” with my students because I just knew they understood more than
people believed. This philosophy often challenges the medical model of disability. The philosophy of my doctoral program is guided by the DSE tenets listed above. We support individuals with disabilities in non-segregated settings. The downfall is that the technology has not evolved enough so that everyone can understand all students who are communicating in a non-traditional way. When one is not familiar with an individual who has verbal limitations, it may be difficult to understand the point they are attempting to convey. A way to solve this problem is to have the adult that may be with them to educate them on how they communicate or better yet, educate that child to show the adult how they communicate, whether it be notes on a paper the child can hand them or if they are in a wheelchair, have notes attached to the chair to explain how they communicate. Over the years, I have had students who are multi-lingual, and they were nonverbal. This just shows that no matter their “intellectual ability” may show on assessment tests, they have a fascinating brain, and it is up to the educators to teach them.

It is my experience that many children who are nonverbal, have so much to say. It is my job to help them get their points across. Just because they do not speak, does not mean that they do not have anything to say. It is also my job to advocate for my students. They are given the right to a proper education, even though they may not attend many classes with their general education peers, I bring the curriculum to the classroom with modifications and supports so that the barriers are not there.

*Communication*

Students in my classroom often have significant speech impairments. Thus, the speech therapist works with my team on their communication skills and how to interpret their nonverbal cues. By seeking out expertise of others, my students not only feel a strong sense of connection to the material, but also have more confidence in their ability to learn. Our team takes a whole-child approach, and we work on all facets of their abilities through multi-modes of their skillset. In class, I often allow students to “lead”
the lesson when my plans are not going smoothly. I have learned to read their body language and mannerisms to decipher their nonverbal cues.

Because the students are typically in my class for four years, I have built a strong relationship and understand all forms of their communication. For instance, if a student is closing their eyes, I play music and implement a movement break to get their attention. Incorporating music and movement into a lesson engaging the students in a powerful manner.

One misconception about individuals who are nonverbal is that they are not able to express themselves. In fact, the students who are nonverbal in my classroom communicate through body language, sounds and facial expressions. Over time, they learned how to express themselves in different ways so that people who work closely with them are able to understand their “voices.”

**Making Connections with their Lives**

When I taught unit 1, the history on the Framers, James turned his head more than once while I presented him with materials. My interpretation of his physical body language was that he did not seem to be engaged with this topic. It was difficult to make connections for James as well as Carlos. Besides Carlos not living at home, trying to get information on what he does in his group home was difficult because they do not have dedicated one on one nurses for the residents. Therefore, he was not able to participate in some activities due to staff. James did make some connections to his home life; however, it was also difficult for designing lessons because I was learning about his home life through a third party because his mom worked two jobs and did not have much interaction with him through the week.

When it comes down to actually teaching the lessons with unfamiliar history, I had to align their learning with daily life to make it more relatable for students. When teaching about England having control over the colonies, I used examples of my students and the rules of their parents. Another example is when we aligned the rules to the chores. One of Mike’s chores is to fold and put away towels. In the lesson, we discussed the importance of putting the towels away to have after bathing. Mike took
his AAC device and said “help”. I said yes, he does help his family and friends when he folds and puts his towels away. Then he said, “excuse me, I’m sorry.” After reviewing my reflection journal, I was curious as to why he would mention he was sorry. With further review of my notes and after a discussion with his mother, I realized that he was responding sorry to when he does not always complete his chores at home. He connected his lack of follow through to not controlling what is in his control. This realization came from a student who has only had formal education for 3.5 years and using an AAC device for little over a year. This is one way to show how students with intellectual disabilities are learning content materials.

During the guided class discussion of the first week, James used an eye gaze board to look at a picture that represents “angry” on the third day of the study (Figure 3 below). I asked him questions about why he was angry, and he responded using blinks for “yes” and head shake for “no.”

After ten questions about what could possibly make him angry, I asked him if he was angry, he did not have any chores. He responded with a smile and a blink as he has physical disabilities along with intellectual impairments with limited motor movements. Clearly, he communicated with me using this eyes that he was upset he did not have chores at home. This is how I know he learned the first week’s lessons on the Framers and why they were important to the Bill of Rights.
Are the students learning content materials? My first response is yes. This is not enough to show others that they are truly learning the content materials. Is it because their pre- and post-test scores went up? Possibly but I need more information. As I dig further into the curriculum, I reached a tough subject on the Bill of Rights. Through the class discussion, I was explaining our freedoms, the rules of the country and third bill, no soldier should live in a civilian home. Kat was visibly upset. Kat has a brother who graduated from the Army National Guard in October 2019 and recently moved back in with the family. It was at this moment; I knew she was following the lesson and gaining an understanding that our amendments are our rights and not rules. James made the connection between our discussion and his home life; however, it does not show that he truly understood what the Bill of Rights are.
As shown in Chapter 4, all students who participated in the study showed improvement with all of their scores between pre and post-tests. Is this enough to show the learning that had occurred? When looking at the data in the figure, the simple answer is yes, their qualitative scores went up from the beginning of the week to the day of the post test. Data from the baseline Constitution test to the final test, all students’ scores went up.

Mike learned the content of the lessons and showed it in the most unique ways. He uses his AAC device to tell me that he is going to have pizza every day for lunch. When it came to the lesson on designing posters, he chose to write 6 sentences, although followed my directions and put 5 on the front and one on the back, as to hide it from view. Throughout the course of the study, Mike showed the most progress and understanding, so I had to figure out why he chose to put this particular sentence, “My favorite food is pizza” on the back of his poster. Historically, Mike only draws his handprint on the back of his schoolwork and never glues anything to the back of his papers. Then it dawned on me, he was using his freedom of speech to let me know he loves pizza when he completed his poster with 6
sentences, the one was on the back, hidden from view. He wanted his opinion on the poster as a way to show me that he is able to “say” what he wants to say. The Bill of Rights seemed to have the most impact on all the students, as this is where I have most examples of the life lessons with my students. From Kat being upset about her brother, Mike telling me he loves pizza, Carlos turning his head to avoid some lessons and James being upset that he didn’t have any chores at home.

When we were discussing the branches of government, I discussed how the executive branch “ran” the country. The legislative branch “writes” the laws of course the judicial branch enforces the rules. One day James looked at his eye gaze board, looked at the picture of “teacher.” I asked him if he had any questions, he looked at the board and said “no.” He then looked at “teacher” again. I seemed confused. Kat raised her hand and said yes to James. “Kat, what do you mean yes? I didn’t ask any questions to you.” Kat then said, “Yes James, Mrs. Ramirez is a legislature. After a quick chuckle, I smiled and said yes, I write the rules of the classroom. This was a moment I had tears in my eyes, it was vindication that the students were in fact understanding what I was teaching.

In the long run, they have learned important rights that will affect them as they grow to become adults. To assist with this connection, I used multi-faceted ways to make sure they were able to understand the materials with pictures, music, repeating lessons and using real-life situations to make it meaningful. What will this do for them as they are adults? Most of my students will continue to live with their families for the rest of their lives, as some of their needs are too much for nonfamily members to take care of, however, they are able to make choices and decisions when it is most meaningful for them.

By learning this curriculum, I believe the students understand what it means to be a United States Citizen. This gives them the right to understand how important it is to have your voice heard. Especially, people who are nonverbal need to have a way to communicate to others. Not all of my students have a vocal voice, but they have a voice that can be heard through alternate methods.
Civics and citizenship do not tend to be topics that educators who have students with significant intellectual disabilities population choose to teach. It is not uncommon to work on basic reading, writing and math skills, but focusing on civics and government, is a challenge. One may question why this population needs to learn about it. When one researches curriculum for individuals with intellectual disabilities, one will see reading, writing, math, science and life skills as more core curriculum to teach, which is what I have done over two decades. I read a great deal on how to best write a curriculum for individuals. The research I completed has unintended lessons the students learned (Abbot, 2014). Abbot (2014), also discusses how the “formal” curriculum are the actual plans, the learning activities and knowledge enrich student learning. There are no common core standards for social studies, therefore the content area does not tend to have a big emphasis on it. For this purpose, I chose to write the curriculum to educate those who may not be the targeted audience. Civics can be a difficult topic to discuss. When teachers present materials with difficult content areas and parallel it with personal life and how it impacts each student, it increases how much the students are able to learn. Allowing the students to express their thoughts, opinions in any way that they are able to, gives them some influence on the lessons being taught. Often times while in school, students are not given the opportunity to really delve into what they know and understand. Educators are under a timeline and have to accomplish teaching so many standards a year and the process of education seems to get lost. This study showed that given time, repetition and guidance students were able to build on their previous knowledge and come to understand the essential themes related to citizenship.

Education is difficult no matter the student enrolled in the classroom, whether the student is in general education or special education, educating our youth is hard. When students have medical challenges, it adds a whole new dynamic to the field of education. Through this research, it has been shown that even with difficult content, children who have intellectual disabilities do have the ability to grasp the ideas that are not normally taught. They do connect their personal rights to what it will do for
them in the future. They will be able to have a voice in our Country's elections when they turn of voting age because they have the knowledge of what it means to be a U.S. Citizen.

Our country is a democracy, and we have the right to have our voice heard through who we elect to public office. This is why students at the middle school learn about the history of our country and take a U.S. Constitution test before leaving for high school. Since the inception of Public Law 94-142, children with disabilities were now given the right to an education. As quoted in chapter 1, Owen (2008) stated that “inclusion or mainstreaming has been promoted for students with significant disabilities.” In 2019, I supported my student’s placement into general education classrooms and not just the classes that are considered “extra-curricular”. My students were included in science and literacy classes with modifications and adaptations. In the literacy class, the students were to read “Tuck Everlasting.” I modified the book into simpler chapters, so my student was able to read the book along with classmates, at her reading level. I then adapted the writing assignment for her to type up a six-sentence paragraph that she was able to complete independently.

When my student was enrolled in the Science class, I made every experiment the teacher had designed in a picture symbol schedule, so that he was able to complete the experiment using pictures because he had difficulty reading. I also summarized the science chapters from the text, and recorded myself reading the summary, so that he could listen to the chapters as an audiobook. This was just the right accommodation he needed for success in the general education classroom. Specifically, in this class, I was able to adapt the general educators lesson to make it accessible for my student. The research that I completed has shown that with proper supports and an educator who takes the time to learn about each student and build in what they know into a lesson that children can and will learn difficult content material. Children need to know why they are learning content materials, or it will not help them in the future. I can tell you for a fact I had to memorize the quadratic equation in junior high
and in my whole adult life, I have never used it. So, without a purpose behind the lesson, it will go by the wayside for most.

There is inequality in life, whether it be race, ability, financially, or some other reason. The citizens of the United States need to figure out how to come together and help those less fortunate. We have the right to learn in an environment that best meets our needs, and it takes time and effort on the educators to develop a plan with a scope and sequence that does that and gives all students a free and appropriate education in a public-school setting. Civics and government are hard topics to understand and even at my age, it is difficult to understand exactly how many inequalities we have. I am writing this during a time when all schools were closed down due to the Coronavirus pandemic and all children had to learning through electronic learning. This way has been a disservice to students in my classroom for many reasons as well as many students who have IEP’s. Their rights were violated because of a pandemic. Yes, I did lessons to best meet their needs and, yes, I did what was requested of me, but the parents were not given the proper techniques and tools to best reach their child during this time of learning. The parents are to be parents and help guide their children within household chores, they are not there to teach them reading, writing and math and other core topics with modifications and accommodations, that is why I am here.

**Barriers**

There are a multitude of barriers in a classroom that is similar to mine. One barrier that educators have to face is the lack of substitute teachers. Many substitutes do not want to be in a classroom with students who have a unique way of learning. Whether it be because the individuals do not communicate always through their voice or body fluids that may be uncomfortable for some to be around.

Not only that, but another misconception is also that because the individual is nonverbal, they do not or may not understand or have the ability to learn curricular materials. When I discussed with my
district what my research study was about, I had an administrator tell me “Good luck on getting data” and I asked why they said that. Their response was, “Your students aren’t able to learn things like that.” This added fuel to my fire. Once I gathered my data, I showed this administrator the data percentages and proved that no matter your ability, you have the ability to learn when it is done with integrity and individualized for the student.

Another one of the biggest barriers I found a solution to was getting Carlos to use a switch independently. I noticed on the first day of school that he was capable of moving his right hand with a purpose. He does have hypotension, so he does tense up without meaning to, but when I noticed that he was able to move his right hand with a downward motion, I pulled out the wobble switch because one does not need to move much to activate it. He was given the power to access items without someone helping him, which in turn built him up and now is learning to nod his head. When you give a student a little bit of power to do something on their own, you give them a boost of confidence to try something new and build upon it.

Civics and citizenship do not tend to be topics that educators who have students with significant intellectual disabilities population choose to teach. When I discussed the topic with the parents of the participants, I had some hesitation because some parents did not understand the necessity to learn about the Constitution because other skills may be important. Out of the six students enrolled, two of participants did not agree to be a part of the study. As a result, I had to persuade and show the parents the content materials so that they knew and understood that the curriculum was going to be geared to each individual student to help them as they grow. It is not uncommon to work on basic reading, writing and math skills, but focusing on civics and government, is a challenge. Some may question why this population needs to learn about it.
Growth Mindset

From the barriers of some parents and an administrator, I realized that some people need to change their mindset. One can accomplish many things, if they put their mind to it. We need to be given the proper tools and motivators to want to change. Parents are the experts of their children; they are the ones who have raised the students. I am just their educator for a few short years. It is my goal to teach their child to become an advocate for themselves and learn how to do things for themselves to the best of their ability.

If you picture a child who uses a wheelchair, who has difficulty swallowing, may need assistance with holding items and a child who makes sounds, rather than putting words together, you may think that their cognitive functioning is that of a newborn. It is my job to change your mindset. My expertise is to show you how that student communicates, how they use their body to communicate with you, and demonstrate their competence. It is my expertise to teach them to become the best individual that they can be with the abilities that they have. It is not my job to let them throw a fit to get what they want. It is not my job to allow them to continue to pretend to sleep during my class because the content may be dry or of no interest. It is my job to work with them to show them what they have the ability to do. It is important to write IEP’s that reflect their knowledge, rather than discuss their weaknesses. As parents, they know what their child does not have the ability to do, they do not know exactly what their child knows and what they learn and how they learn in school. I will change the mindset and show families through notes, data, and video clips on how their child learns at school. This allows for a change in growth mindset.

Policy

Education is ever changing. This is an uncertain time with a global pandemic. As an educator, I made promises that I would teach my pupils to the best of my ability and focus on their strengths. I also made a promise that I would not let others tell me what the child could and could not accomplish. James
always used a nonverbal yes and no, he has gained more communication through the use of his eyes and choosing pictures from an eye gaze board. Kat started the school year being very quiet and shy. By March of 2020, she would ask people to move out of her way if they were in the way. She gained a voice to advocate for herself. Mike uses AAC along with other modes of communication to figure out a way to talk about his favorite foods. Carlos started with me this year and he had no access to a switch to use independently, and with the proper supports and switch, he will use it independently when he chooses. These are just a few reasons why I do what I do and why ALL children deserve the proper education.

Policies at the state and federal level allow for individuals to have curriculum aligned with the Common Core Standards. What it does not do is change the education at the post-secondary level. Post-secondary classes have maybe three or four classes that students have to take that teach strategies on how to educate individuals with significant intellectual disabilities. The certificate is labeled “learning behavioral specialist” as opposed to when I was in my undergraduate program, most of my classes were geared towards educating individuals with intellectual disabilities.

Professional Growth

As I mentioned in Chapter 1, ever since I was in junior high, I knew I wanted to be an educator. Not just any educator but one who makes a difference for individuals with intellectual disabilities. When it came time to student teaching, the professor of mine that felt I needed to repeat her course and left the decision up to me, when I chose the latter, she was demeaning towards me and mentioned I would not be anything more than mediocre. It took eighteen weeks through my student teaching experience to build up a confidence in myself that the professor took away from me. Shortly after graduation, I was offered a job at one of the schools where I student taught.

It was in 2008 that I began the journey for a doctorate. I had always had a passion for designing unique and engaging lessons for students and using their strengths to build upon skills that they had. This led me to write a social studies curriculum. Finally, in 2019, I was putting all my hard work to
complete the study. When a student has an intellectual disability, educators have to think outside the box and incorporate materials that benefit the student and while identifying skills they need to know in adulthood. My research included modifications and accommodations for individuals who were both verbal and nonverbal. Each week, I saw student growth by their actions and test scores. What I wrote was working with students. Throughout the study, I not only showed student growth, but I was changing as an educator. I was always an advocate, but I was able to take unfamiliar content to the student, teach them about it and help them generalize the knowledge to real life situations. This study has shown me that content that with the proper materials, modifications, accommodations, and repetition students can learn despite their inherent abilities. As a teacher, I chose to re-invent myself. I originally had written the curriculum to cover four weeks, within a few days I realized I needed more content, so I worked on writing more and adapting for the participants that I had. Video modeling, debates among students, and comparing material to the individual person deemed the overall best strategies for educating the participants.

One misperception that individuals have on others who are nonverbal is that that they are not able to express themselves. Throughout the course of the study, I discussed my findings to staff members who formulated a bias against my students. These particular staff members did not understand the reason behind my research. Prior to completing my research, I would not have approached my colleagues to show what my students were learning. When I was teaching unit one, the history on the Framers, James turned his head more than once, when I was presenting him with materials. My interpretation of his physical body language was to show that he did not seem to be engaged with this topic. I took this as a sign that I needed to change my teaching tactics. If I did not embrace a change in re-writing the lessons, I was not going to be able to show growth as a researcher or an educator.
My purpose as an educator is to show others that all students will learn complex materials when given the proper accommodations. When I had the students make a poster, Mike decided to show me on the back that his favorite food was pizza. He not only did not follow the directions, but he also went ahead and took it upon himself to express what he wanted to without anyone asking him to. I have always been open to my students expressing themselves to others in any way that they are able to. I learned from this experience to not put any limits on the assignments. The lesson was to write five sentences, and this was limiting for him, he chose to do more. I have learned since this lesson to not stop a lesson because the bell has rung, I continue to use these moments as teaching moments. I have grown to be more flexible with the school day and allow the students to continue activities when they are motivating to them, for the exception of the end of the school day.

As mentioned previously, Carlos was a new student that year. Carlos’s IEP did not express how he communicated best. I took it upon myself to speak with his family and ask them how Carlos expresses himself to them. His mom said that he speaks with his eyes. It was an eloquent way for her to describe to me how I needed to focus on his cues. I learned that I needed to be constant and watch him to see his motor movements when I spoke with him and when I asked him a question. I needed to educate my paraprofessionals on how he responds because it is subtle at times. I used video clips from lessons that I had completed with him, so I was able to identify when he was responding yes and no. The videos allowed me to show my paraprofessionals what they needed to look for when working with him.

I learned that Carlos needed more ways to communicate. Before entering my school, he used a switch with staff giving him physical prompts and helping him use it all the time, rather than giving him a switch that he can access independently. I found a bendable arm switch and placed it by his righthand. I hooked it up to white lights and taught him how to move his hand to turn on the lights. In a 20-minute time frame, he hit the switch 6 times. When Carlos closes his eyes, he is telling me he has taken in too much information and tends to shut down. Carlos now has the yellow wobble switch hooked into a voice
communication switch that will relay messages. Carlos also has begun to nod his head when he blinks for a yes response. This is what happens when you give power to a student for independence.

Through this process, I discovered I have my own biases when it comes to special education and how it is run in the public schools. I truly feel that I have expertise in adapting materials, writing curriculum and educating individuals in the way that they learn best, this is the one reason that I want my students to stay with me. It is difficult in relinquishing control and “passing the torch” to another educator and allowing them to educate the students. This whole process has allowed me to rethink my own biases for inclusion. I now have the expertise and data to educate my colleagues on how to best meet the needs of all learners through a variety of modifications and accommodations and will further push for students to be in as many general education classes that I can.

**Design Based Research**

Choosing this research topic was challenging to say the least due to the lack of literature on the topic. I was essentially starting from scratch, with the help of a seventh-grade textbook to gather important content for what I wanted to teach. The research evolved into design based because I was able to adapt my curriculum as I went along. I made changes throughout the whole study to make sure that I was able to gather the data I needed for the research questions. I analyzed data to make decisions on how to change my curriculum in order to answer the research questions.

I had to conceptualize what I wanted each student to learn and identify how they will use this content in their adult life. By analyzing the data and intertwining their personal lives into the content, I was able to educate them on key points on what it means to be a citizen of the United States and how it will benefit them as they age. This study among others will be a part of an educational reform.

**Teacher Licensure Change**

Small changes can happen in schools. We, as educators, can work towards full inclusion. Our districts can work on providing professional development for all staff in Universal Design for Learning.
and follow up with implementation. This would allow for all students to become full participants in each
classroom no matter their ability level. Higher level of education needs to change requirements and
that begins with teaching license changes. The changes are bigger than this research. This research is
just a steppingstone to change the mindset of others. As a special educator, I want my students to be
full participants in each classroom they are enrolled in. I am selfish in that I feel I have some of the best
ways to modify for students who have intellectual disabilities and I have ways I am able to “think outside
the box”, however, in saying that I am diserving my students. As an equal team member, I will use my
knowledge and educate others on how they can adapt the lessons using UDL techniques to meet the
needs of all learners. As we know, we all learn differently and should be taught that way. Special
education mandates for the least restrictive environment, and having students, no matter their ability,
should be full participants general education classroom. It is challenging for anyone to make friends,
 imagine being nonverbal or not being able to control your secretions, it makes it more difficult to “fit in”
or belong in a group of individuals who appear to be typically developing. By having inclusion, children
learn together how to interact with each other with little to no support from adults at a young age. As
one ages, it makes it more difficult to try and make friends. To foster that at a young age, it only will
help society.

This study just confirms my thoughts in that there should not be a distinction between teachers.
I should just be considered a teacher, along with my general education colleagues. If someone wants to
become a teacher, they should be taught how to teach all children. Everyone is capable of learning how
to modify curriculum by utilizing UDL strategies to best meet the needs of all children. This begins at the
teacher preparation for undergraduate degrees. Educators have a vast amount of knowledge and
materials and already differentiate to meet the needs of some learners, with some support from
specialists, we could all be one cohesive group that wants the best for our young citizens.
More Work Needs to be done

It is my goal to use this research to educate others on how to best reach students with intellectual disabilities to learn to learn more complex curricular materials. I will use this paper to present to others how to use teaching strategies to reach their students. I will change mindset of those who feel that not all children can learn difficult materials. I will knock down those walls that students put up to help them learn harder materials and I will give them the power to use it to their advantage. More work needs to be done and change the stereotypes that just because someone has a disability that they have an inability to learn. Just because a child does not speak like most people do, does not mean that they do not understand what is being taught to them. It is my job to figure out a way to reach them and understand how they are communicating with me.

I will take this research and discuss the results with the teachers at the elementary level and show them how to make sure the students have ways to communicate whether it be through body language, switches or other modes of communication. I plan on using Carlos as an example. If he had access to a switch that I gave him years ago, that he could potentially be further along with his communication skills than he is at his age now. I am by far an expert in my field, but I get to know my students very well and I listen to the parents. I take in the information the families give me so that I am able to best educate their child.

Disability Rights Legislature

Disability rights is a global measure that advocates for equal rights for individuals with disabilities. As an advocate, I will pursue this topic further. I will work to advocating for what is best for all students. We have the federal mandate in place for protection. Segregation is a huge part of our society, including by race, financial and ability and this needs to change. Being an activist for disability rights, I will work to change legislation. Again, this is a small victory for students that will not be overshadowed by others.
The next step is to continue to fine tune the civics curriculum. There is very little research on the topic of citizenship and individuals with disabilities and this is one that can be used to make changes. As I was completing my research and analyzing data, I realized I had set limitations in myself. I was in the mindset that society puts on self-contained teachers, and I was also doing systematic exclusion by not enrolling my students into general education because I felt I knew best and I had the best strategies, rather than educating my colleagues. I did not set limits on my students; I always knew they were able to learn the content in any way that was presented to them. I knew without a doubt that each child would benefit from this and gain skills in self-advocacy. I just needed to educate others in how to interpret the students’ body language, as a few participants were nonverbal. I believe in full inclusion and will continue to fight for changes, starting with my school.
References


Shade R., & Stewert, R. (2010). General Education and Special Education Preservice to Teachers’ Attitudes to Inclusion, Presenting School Failure


September 10, 2019

Julie Ramirez

Dear Julie Ramirez:

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) has received your application for your research study “Educating Individuals with Disabilities: The US Constitution Citizenship and Disability”. IRB has noted that your application is complete and that your study has been approved by your primary advisor and an IRB representative. Your application has been filed as Exempt in the Office of the Provost.

Please note that the approval for your study is for one year, from September 10, 2019 to September 10, 2020. As you carry out your research, you must report any adverse events or reactions to the IRB.

At the end of your approved year, please inform the IRB in writing of the status of the study (i.e. complete, continuing). During this time, if your study changes in ways that impact human participants differently or more significantly than indicated in the current application, please submit a Change of Research Study form to the IRB, which may be found on NLU’s IRB website.

All good wishes for the successful completion of your research.

Sincerely,

Shaunti Knauth, Ph.D.
Chair, IRB
Appendix B

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Yes, I agree</th>
<th>No, I don’t agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student A</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kat</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student B</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student C</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mike</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student D</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carlos</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>Blinked Eyes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Obtaining Assent

Researcher: “I am going to teach you about the Constitution and your rights. I want to share with other people how you learn. Do you want to be a part of my study? It is ok if you do not participate. I will not be mad.”

Record Student Response

**If student does not agree, I will explain to them that I am still going to teach them the curriculum and I am happy to help them learn the material.

Put a check mark in the box of student response

Record in the box how the student responded.

Key:

V—Verbal
AAC—Used AAC device on responding
Eye Gaze—Looked at the picture of yes or No
Nonverbal Yes/No—Student gives a nod for yes and look to the left for No
Appendix C

The United States Constitution

The Constitution is a document that was written in 1787. It is the law, we the people of the United States follow. It tells us how the government works. It creates the presidency and congress. The Bill of Rights is a part of this document.

Page 1 Constitution
The Constitution tells us how the government works. The constitution was written because people didn't like how the country was working. So these men, who are called the framers, decided to write the document. The constitution is the highest law in our country. It tells us what our rights are. It makes us safe.

Page 2 Constitution
1. What is the highest law?

- School law
- Parental law
- Constitution

2. What is part of the Constitution?

- Bill of Rights
- Book
- Money

3. Why was the constitution written?

- For fun
- Didn't like how country ran
- To be mean
4. Who wrote the Constitution?

The Framers

The teacher

fireman

5. What does the Constitution do?

Keeps us safe

Hurts us

Helps us

Page 4 Constitution Review
The Framers met in Independence Hall in Philadelphia. They talked a lot about writing the Constitution.

After some fighting, they agreed to the laws.

Once they agreed, they asked the states to approve the document. Some people didn't like it, they didn't think that it would protect them because it didn't have
The framers promised to add a bill of rights. After the states approved the Constitution, the Bill of Rights was written and added. George Washington and Ben Franklin were two famous framers. George Washington was the first president of the United States of America.
1. What did the framers do?

- Vote
- Sleep
- Write the Constitution

2. While writing the Constitution, what happened?

- Fought a lot
- Danced
- Went on vacation

3. Who was a famous framer?

- Martin Luther King
- Washington
- Lincoln

Page 7 Framers Review
The Bill of Rights protects important ideas. It protects us and our rights to say what we want to say. We can think for ourselves. It keeps us safe.

There are 10 rules in the Bill of Rights. They are:
1. You have the right to believe in God.

2. You have the right to carry a weapon.

3. You don't have to let a soldier live in your house, unless there is a war.

4. No one can search your house, unless
5. You can't be accused for the same crime two times in a row.

6. If you get arrested, you have the right to a trial before you get sent to jail.

7. You have the right to have a
8. The government can't make you pay a lot of money to get you out of jail.

9. These aren't just your only rights. You have the freedom of speech.

10. Anything that is not in the Constitution, is left up to the state you live in.
1. What is the Bill of Rights?

2. Does the Bill of Rights protect us?

3. Can you speak your mind?
4. The Bill of Rights tells you that you can't carry weapons.

5. What can't happen?
   - Carry weapons
   - Search your house
   - Can't speak your mind
The government is divided into three parts.

The three branches or groups are: Legislative, judicial and executive. Each group operates independent from others. Each group helps protect the rights of us, the citizens.
The Executive Office of the government includes the President of the United States, the White House, Chief of Staff, and the vice president of the United States. The executive branch is in charge of implementing laws that the legislative branch write for our country. The President is the final decision if a law is going to pass. If he doesn't like the
law, he can veto it. That means that the law does not pass. The President is the country's leader. The White House helps run our country. How the framers had intended it to be run.
1. Who is the country's leader?

1. president

2. What is a veto?

2. Saying no to a law

3. Who writes the law?

3. Legislative Branch, president

Page 17 Executive Branch Review
4. Who is the final decision on a law?

teacher
principal
president

5. The White House does not help run our country.

yes
no
The House of Representatives is the legislative branch of the government. The Constitution gave Congress the right to decide how big it should be.

The bigger the state, the more representatives you have. There are six states that only have 1 representative. There are 435 people part of the House.
You have to be elected to be a part of the House of Representatives. You have to be at least 25 years old and have to be a citizen for seven years. A representative is a part of the House for two years. The House of Representatives introduce spending bills.
1. How old can you be to run for the House?

2. What decided how big the House can be?

3. You can live here 2 years to run.

Page 21 Legislative Branch Review
4. There are over 430 people in the House.

5. How long are you in the House?

6. Can a state have 1 representative?

Page 22 Legislative Branch Review
The head of the Judicial Branch is called the Supreme Court. It is where decisions are made for national importance. They believe "Equal Justice under Law."

People who are in the Supreme Court are called Justices. The justices are appointed by the President. They are considered a justice for life.

Page 23 Judicial Branch
responsible for explaining the Constitution. The Supreme Court also has power over smaller governments in our United States of America. If the Supreme Court decides something, it is the end for that problem.
1. What is the head of the Judicial branch?
- judge
- Supreme Court
- king

2. What does the Supreme Court do?
- Veto’s laws
- Help Soldiers
- Explains the Constitution

3. The justices are on for 5 years.
- yes
- no

Page 25 Judicial Branch Review
4. What does the Supreme Court have power over?

5. What is the saying of the Supreme Court?

A. Justice is great.

B. Everyone is equal.

C. Equal Justice under Law.
The President of the United States is the leader of our country. The president has to be at least 35 years old and born in the United States.

The President is the head of the executive branch.

He makes sure the government is working and people are following the rules.
The President is elected for four years. He can be elected two times. The President promises to protect and defend the Constitution.
1. What does the president do?
   - Runs Court
   - Protects the Constitution
   - Runs elections

2. The President can be anyone in the world.
   - No
   - Yes

3. How many years is the President elected for?
   - 2 Years
   - 4 Years
   - 6 Years

Page 29 President Review
4. The President can run for many elections. 

- No
- Yes

5. How old does the president have to be?

- 21
- 45
- 35
What is a good citizen?

- listen
- Be Helpful
- I don't want to
- steal
- Be Polite
- Caring
- fight
- mean
- Service Projects