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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
RIVERSIDE

Reframing USCIS: Supplementing an American Citizenship Education Curriculum with
Film

A Thesis submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

in

Education

by

Eric Romero

September 2019

Thesis Committee:

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The Thesis of Eric Romero is approved:

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Reframing USCIS: Supplementing an American Citizenship Education Curriculum with Film

by

Eric Romero

Master of Arts, Graduate Program in Education
University of California, Riverside, September 2019
Dr. John S Wills, Chairperson

The United States' Naturalization Test is a non-standardized test that requires officers of the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services Office to assess a candidate's English ability and knowledge of U.S. Civics. To assess a candidate's English ability, the USCIS officers can ask any clarifying questions from the information provided by the candidate in their N-400 Form Application for Naturalization. To assess a candidate's Civics knowledge, on the other hand, the officer may select up to 10 questions from the office's 100 published Civics Questions. This non-standardized exam format favors memorization of as many key terms, concepts, and dates as possible, as students can never be sure of the questions they will be asked. This exam format problematizes learning for EL students who may memorize the terms but not understand the concepts. This thesis identified discussions of films that deal with important civics concepts as a potential tool to help EL students engage with civics concepts beyond

memorization. This thesis introduced the film *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* into the curriculum of an adult *Civics and ESL* class to facilitate a discussion around the concepts of elections, representatives, and statehood. In this context, film was a potential, but imperfect tool. Students were able to connect the visual memory of what they had seen in the film with their understandings of Civics concepts, despite their language barriers. However, a clear purpose, viewing guide, and guided discussion are needed in future iterations to ensure that students engage with the concepts outlined and with complicated presentations of other topics. Furthermore, the format of the test remains a concern, as students were hesitant to connect with the film when they felt it was a distraction from their memorization exercises.

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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, RIVERSIDE

REFRAMING USCIS: SUPPLEMENTING AN AMERICAN CITIZENSHIP

EDUCATION CURRICULUM WITH FILM

Part 1 - Introduction

1.1 Statement of the Problem

To assess a candidate's proficiency of the English language during a naturalization exam, a United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) officer may ask the candidate any clarifying questions from the information filled in their form N-400, Application for Naturalization. *Voices of Freedom*, one of the many naturalization test-preparation books, for example, outlines how an officer may ask an applicant, "Let me verify some information... your first name is Victor. Is that correct?" (Bliss, 2009, p.21). The applicant is expected to have a basic understanding of English to recognize the differences between "family name," "last name," "first name," and "middle name," and confirm, deny, or correct the officer. In this example, the answer provided in the textbook was, "No, it isn't. My first name is Francisco. My MIDDLE name is Victor" (p. 21). The questions an officer may ask can range from simple vocabulary like asking a candidate to explain what the word "drunkard" means in the question "Have you EVER: Been a habitual drunkard?" (Department of Homeland Security, 2016a, p. 15) to more complex concepts like explaining the process of "rescission" to answer the question, "Are removal, exclusion, rescission, or deportation proceedings (including administratively

closed proceedings) currently pending against you? (Department of Homeland Security, USCIS, 2016a, p. 15).

Any individual born (to non-citizen parents) outside the United States seeking to become naturalized U.S. Citizen must sit through the Department of Homeland Security's United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) naturalization exam. According to the USCIS website, the process of naturalization consists of several requirements after filing a Form N-400, including:

1. Be at least 18 years old at the time of filing Form N-400, Application for Naturalization.
2. Be a permanent resident (have a "Green Card") for at least 5 years.
3. Show that you have lived for at least 3 months in the state or USCIS district where you apply.
4. Demonstrate continuous residence in the United States for at least 5 years immediately preceding the date of filing Form N-400.
5. Show that you have been physically present in the United States for at least 30 months out of the 5 years immediately preceding the date of filing Form N-400.
6. Be able to read, write, and speak basic English.
7. Have a basic understanding of U.S. history and government (civics).
8. Be a person of good moral character.
9. Demonstrate an attachment to the principles and ideals of the U.S. Constitution. (Department of Homeland Security, USCIS, 2016b, p. 1).

USCIS has no published guidelines to determine which questions, and to which level of difficulty, will be asked by an officer to assess a candidate's English knowledge during their exam—the process is purposely left unstructured to allow an officer to adjust to working with diverse populations and in diverse settings (Etzioni, 2009). This unstructured exam structure is further complicated by the 100 Civics and Citizenship Questions the USCIS officers use to determine a candidate's understanding of U.S. history and civics. During the official exam, an officer, according to his or her own preferences, selects any 10 of the 100 Government and History Questions the students are set to study and an applicant is expected to answer 6 out of 10 questions correctly (Etzioni, 2009). A 2011 research study by Paula Winke discovered that the 100 civics items on the U.S. Naturalization exam are not, in fact, interchangeable, “as the interchange of items creates varying results (passing or failing) for almost a quarter of test takers” (2011, p. 325). This non-standardized exam structure demands that applicants memorize the answers to all 100 questions, as they can never be sure what questions from either their form N-400 or from the 100 civics questions will be asked.

This exam structure is ultimately an influence on how civics and EL classes structure their curriculum. A 1945 report, *Civic Education for the Foreign Born in the United States*, published by the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service, a predecessor of the USCIS, and the American Association of School Administrators, identified that citizenship programs have often been limited to “a catechistical treatment of government and have been directed solely toward helping the student answer a few questions of fact about the government” (p. 14). Naturalization classes have followed the

pattern of “hammering in” or “plastering on” a few facts to be recited before the naturalization examiner. This teaching method prioritizes memorization without understanding and considers the act of naturalization simply passing the exam and receiving a certificate (p.9).

While teaching should be enabling, this process is merely punitive; as Deborah Cameron outlined, “it has nothing to do with what immigrants need to prosper in a new environment” (Cameron, 2002, p. 70). The same 1945 INS report, in fact, discovered that “persons [had] been reported who could speak English less intelligibly one or two years after naturalization than they could immediately preceding their naturalization” (p. 3). A 1998 INS study further outlined that, “of 7,843 naturalization petitions, 34% of all denials were because of a failure on the language and civics test” (INS 1998, as cited in Kunnan, 2009, p. 91). If the exam is meant to promote learning and development of the English language, then the exam’s focus on memorization complicates the candidates’ ability to meaningfully understand the language of civics concepts.

The problems with this exam structure are a particular problem for adult EL students. In fact, a 2006 Policy report from the Institute for Latino Studies at the University of Notre Dame, *The Naturalization Trail: Mexican Nationality and US Citizenship*, identified that compared to all other immigrant nationalities, Mexican immigrants, for example, delayed their naturalization by the longest and showed the lowest rates of attaining citizenship, in part due to perceiving their language skills as “procedural barriers” (Taylor et al., 2006, p.6). Despite the presence of formalized Civics

and EL classes to prepare students for the naturalization examination, the biggest barrier for students passing the citizenship exam is lack of English ability (Taylor et al., 2006).

English fluency is a key factor in passing the naturalization exam, and for EL students, the opportunity to develop English fluency is complicated by the exam's emphasis on memorization. The emphasis on memorization, ultimately, makes it difficult for Civics and EL curricula to adequately prepare EL students with varying levels of English fluency to understand the language of civics concepts. Civics and EL classes have to address the needs of the students equitably and across their varying levels of English fluency. Barring any changes to the exam structure, classes must make an effort to supplement their curriculum with lessons that add understanding to the memorization of civics concepts to better prepare students to pass the citizenship exam. As such, this thesis proposes that using film in these classes may address the problem by supplementing students' understanding of important civics concepts in spite of their limited fluency in English.

1.2 Research Question

This project hinged on the theory that opportunities for discursive learning, specifically through conversations around films, are beneficial in preparing adult EL students to pass the USCIS exam. That is, my research investigated using film to help EL students with varying levels of English fluency engage with difficult civics concepts and incorporate new language by viewing film content that included representations of specific civics concepts. The project sought to test if using film to support discussions of

difficult civics concepts, as a supplement to memorization exercises, could help EL students with limited English fluency better comprehend concepts in the U.S. Civics curriculum.

This study sought to answer one question: “Can supplementing U.S. Citizenship course curriculum with film help EL students, with varying levels of English fluency, understand difficult civics concepts?”

1.3 Project Outline

This thesis will begin by analyzing a brief history of the Citizenship Exam, particularly its development and effectiveness as a tool of measuring memorization, and the literature around using films as supplemental learning tools in educational curricula. I will explain how this project used an Educational Design Research methodology to analyze and intervene in the curriculum at the Riverside Adult School’s *Civics and ESL* class. I will discuss how the film *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* was used as a supplement in the classroom, and I will outline student interview responses to assess the extent to which students were able to engage with the civics concepts presented in the film. Lastly, I will analyze the students’ interview responses to determine the potential and complications of using this film as a learning tool in the Riverside Adult School’s *Civics and ESL* class. This paper will conclude with the educational implications of the classroom intervention and suggestions for further research.

Part 2 – Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

2.1 A Brief History of Naturalization Education and the U.S. Naturalization Exam

The creation of the naturalization exam as a test of memorization developed alongside a history of institutional restructuring of U.S. immigration agencies. The Naturalization law of 1790, the earliest tracing of U.S. immigration legislation, was the first regulation of access to American citizenship and introduced only two requirements for United States Citizenship: candidates had to be “free white persons” and “prove two years of continuous residence in the United States” (Schneider, 2001, p. 52).

These two requirements expanded to four and introduced immigration judges with the Naturalization Acts of 1802. The 1802 requirements, in some form, still in effect today, included:

1. A waiting period of five years of residency.
2. A declaration of intention.
3. An oath of allegiance to the United States and the Constitution.
4. The testimony of witnesses attesting to the character of immigrants petitioning for naturalization (Schneider, 2010, p. 2382).

The Naturalization Act of 1906 followed nearly a century later with the main purpose of establishing federal control over the naturalization process by creating the Federal Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization, an agency charged with structuring and organizing the naturalization process by developing baseline civic knowledge standards (Schneider, 2010, p. 2383). The new Federal Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization unified national procedures and fees and gave field examiners the agency

to review a candidate's familiarity with the English language and their knowledge of the constitution. Reviewers' assessments, if positive, were then used as official recommendations in federal immigration courts. How these reviews and examinations were conducted, however, was still not standardized and so open to interpretation (Schneider, 2001).

After World War I and the Russian Revolution, historian Kenneth O'Brien argues, "hyphenate Americans became subjects for assimilation" (1961, p. 161) and citizenship education began to push for assimilation of foreign-born citizens through naturalization exams. A fear began to develop amongst Americans that new immigrant voters would not be ready to perform the duties of American citizenship—the duties of being active voters and participants of their society (Schneider, 2001). This fear led to the Bureau of Naturalization expanding their efforts to standardize citizenship education with the explicit focus of educating new Americans (Goodman, 2009). With the help of reformers, patriotic groups, businesses, municipal, state, and Federal authorities the Bureau of Naturalization institutionalized lectures, classes, and evening schools (Schneider, 2001). All of these new partnerships began the process of standardization, part of what was seen as a noble effort of realizing a national community of Americans. Michael Olneck argues that civics and Americanization texts began depicting images of American community that largely emphasized co-operation with public institutions and instructed candidates to "appreciate and to assist city officials, the police, the fire department, public schools, parks, museums, libraries and the like" (1989, p. 405).

In 1918, as these new standardized Americanization programs continued to expand, Congress authorized the Bureau of Naturalization to distribute free textbooks to schools educating adults in evening civics classes and to send the schools lists of names of residents who were eligible for naturalization proceedings (Schneider, 2011). This helped to grow the program even further, the Bureau of Naturalization now had thousands of schools across the nation where it could distribute its standardized citizenship education courses (Miller, M.M., 1918, as cited in Goodman, 2009). The only legal standard for naturalization at this point, however, in addition to the 1802 requirements of 5 years legal residency, a declaration of intention, an oath of allegiance, and the testimony of a witness, was that candidates speak English to sign their name (Schneider, 2011). If Congress and the Bureau of Naturalization were gearing up to expect more civic agency from their new-American immigrants, they were going to require more learning in their education programs. With such a widespread reach from the thousands of sites and the desires of leaders in adult education programs, the government needed a textbook.

Leaders in adult education programs always believed that going further in literacy education was a great necessity in training good citizens (U.S. Department of Justice, Immigration and Naturalization Service, & American Association of School Administrators, 1945). The *Outline Course in Citizenship*, a twenty-eight-page booklet, one of the first official texts, provided an early curriculum for citizenship education classes that, in its efforts to Americanize, emphasized sections on reading, writing, arithmetic, government, and hygiene (Miller, M. M., 1918, as cited in Goodman, 2009).

The *Outline Course in Citizenship* grew to become the more widely distributed *New Student's Textbook* after the Act of May 9, 1918 was passed, and ultimately became the *Federal Textbook on Citizenship* in 1921 (Miller, M. M., 1918, as cited in Goodman, 2009).

By 1931, with the proliferation of courses and standardized textbooks, the Federal Bureau of Naturalization was recommending that every alien have “knowledge of the institutions of Government to the satisfaction of the naturalization examiner, equal to that taught in public schools to children up to the age of 14 years” (U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Naturalization, 1931, as cited in Schneider, 2011, p. 2388). In addition, the courts had agreed to accept a certificate of completion from these public courses as sufficient evidence of a candidate’s knowledge of government (Schneider, 2011).

Later citizenship education textbooks, like the 1943 U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service’s *Introduction to Citizenship Education: A guide for use in the public schools by teachers of candidates for naturalization*, placed an even stronger emphasis on educating candidates on the value of the upright moral characteristics of American citizens. The textbook outlined,

“the granting of citizenship papers does not of itself make a man a good citizen, as well as that the lack of such papers does not keep a man from being a very fine member of our society. It is no new discovery that an immigrant’s complete adjustment in the American way of life and thought is a long, slow process, which must grow naturally out of rich participation in the American community” (p. 20).

The book further delved into the importance of instilling these values of good citizenship on candidates emphasizing that the purpose of citizenship education is not to teach students enough of the language to merely pass the examination but to teach them

to understand, speak, and write the language (U.S Department of Justice, immigration and Naturalization Service, 1943).

This educational method and these textbooks continued to be in use for over 40 years. The largest institutional change during this period was the 1950 Internal Security Act which strengthened the requirements for naturalization by making the ability to read, write, and speak English a pre-requisite and by formally adding knowledge of American history as a requirement (Schneider, 2011). The classes and the exam itself remained, for the most part, structured in the same way as before.

1986, however, marked a shift in the structure of these widespread standardized education programs. Historian Jack Schneider (2011) argues that the decline of citizenship education programs, and the emphasis on memorization within the remaining programs, can be attributed to the development of the current iteration of the citizenship test and the USCIS through their institutional decision-making. The current iteration of the exam began developing with the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) of 1986. The act attempted to standardize the knowledge of American history required to pass the exam and established the 100-question test.

In the 1990s these new requirements grew to become the following specific sections for the English language assessment in the exam, in addition to the 10 civics questions asked:

(1) Speaking: the applicant was to informally interact with the examiner regarding the naturalization paper work (N-400 form, etc.) or other topics;

(2) Reading: the applicant was to read one sentence;

(3) Writing: the applicant was expected to write a sentence from about 100 sentences (provided on websites and textbooks) as dictated by the examiner; the applicant was given three chances (with two other sentences) (Kunnan, 2009, p. 90).

English, Jack Schneider argues, became the hardest part of the exam. The test included problems with examiners using different sentences for reading and writing, examiners using different content for listening and speaking, a varied level of difficulty, and an unknown passing criteria. Kunnan (2009) further outlines that “the history and government questions on the exam encouraged memorization of discrete facts with little understanding of the material,” and some of the questions had several answers and other questions were “memory-type” with obscure or controversial answers (p. 91). The 100 U.S. government, civics, and history questions, Kunnan ultimately argues, de-emphasizes a focus on critical thinking and instead focuses on memory of facts and figures (Kunnan, 2009). At this point, the newly established USCIS officers and the immigration courts no longer recognized the certificate of completion from civics courses as evidence of a candidate’s sufficient knowledge of government. Multiple historians, as quoted by Schneider, believed that this moment marked a shift away from official educational programs (Schneider, 2001). Kunnan describes the shift as a “pragmatic view of cost and benefits of naturalization, rather than an awakening of patriotism on the part of the immigrants” (2009, p. 76).

A 2005 report by the Board on Testing and Assessment of the National Research Council identified that the agency had consistently emphasized practical concerns:

1. Between standardization and flexibility in the test

2. Between making the test meaningful and making sure people could pass it
3. Between the requirement of only basic comprehension of the English language

(2005, as cited by Schneider, 2001, p. 2398)

In 2011, Paula Winke conducted a research study to specifically assess how the exam measures civics knowledge and the results demonstrated that exam questions “vary widely in difficulty and do not all reliably measure civics knowledge” (2011, p. 317). USCIS, the paper argues, has never publicized any reliability or validity studies; they have “apparently never examined the basic questions such as whether civics items truly measure civics knowledge” (2011, p. 319). Civics classes now no longer have a standardized process that emphasizes student learning. They instead have to rely on helping students memorize a large set of arbitrary terms and concepts for the sole effort of helping students pass the exam regardless of whether or not the students have actually understood the concepts and terms they memorize.

We can trace how throughout the history of U.S. immigration agencies the naturalization process has changed to reflect the needs and desires of government agencies. The current iteration of the exam is constrained between trying to make the exam flexible and accessible to a variety of officers working within different communities and creating a reliable and standardized exam. Their current solution, a memory-based test, raises the concern that students may learn the content long enough to pass the exam, but without a deep understanding, they may forget what they have learned soon after the exam is over. If the exam is not revised so that students’ civics knowledge

and understanding becomes an important metric in assessing their candidacy, then civics education classes will either have to continue emphasizing memorization or will have to develop creative curriculum supplements that aim to scaffold memorization of civics topics by introducing discussions of the concepts behind these topics, to create deeper understanding.

2.2 Film as Educational Tool

Films, in their various iterations (short narrative films, short documentary films, feature length narrative films, feature length documentary films, or short clips extracted from either narrative or documentary films), have been introduced into different levels of curricula and found to have a potential as enhanced non-traditional and non-textbook teaching methods to supplement learning (Marcus, Metzger, Paxton, & Stoddard, 2010). The potential of dramatic storytelling in film has been found to provide learning experiences, and specifically crafted lessons with corresponding tasks and viewing guides have been shown to help students gather visual information on specific topics of interest to instructors (Berry, 1980; Marcus et al., 2010). Films have also been used specifically to help English learning students and students with learning disabilities engage with difficult concepts (Gersten, 2006). Gersten et al., developed a curriculum for high school-aged English learning students and students with language disabilities that used film as a way to make American history content accessible to students with lower than average reading skills. Their research demonstrated that by supplementing instruction with non-traditional learning methods, like films, English learning students and students with

learning disabilities could learn relatively complex grade-level material in American history. There is a historical precedent for the potential of film as a tool to help students visualize the past and connect empathetically to historical narratives. For adult Civics and EL students with a memorization-based curriculum, film may be a scaffolding tool that gives students opportunities to engage with the language of civics concepts beyond the act of memorizing them for an exam.

Studies show that films support classroom learning. For example one of the earliest discussions, of the use of film in education dates to a 1921 issue of the journal *Visual Education*. In it, Hobbs and Jensen (2009) found an article where Orndorff, an 8th grade teacher from Indianapolis, described how the process of viewing films may be interesting to students and had potential to facilitate discussions. It is unclear if Orndorff was referring to documentary or narrative films in the classroom, or even if they were leading students on an excursion to their local theater, however, there is a mention of “contemporary films,” which implies that these were commercial films, as 1921 came after the explosion of D.W. Griffith’s 1915 *Birth of a Nation* and its restructuring of the films that were being produced and shown around America (Stokes, 2007).

In a 1937 article for the *Journal of Educational Sociology*, furthermore, Thomas Baird, identified the efforts of The Empire Marketing Board—General Post Office Unit of Britain. The Empire Marketing Board created several of their own short-length documentary films about topics of public interest, such as stories of salmon fishers and steel craftsmen, which were subsequently provided to schools, specifically to be used as teaching tools. Institutions like the Empire Marketing Board, Baird colorfully explains,

saw in documentary cinema “an accommodating eye [with] which to observe the real world; they saw in the cutting process the possibility of synthesizing individual observations into a pattern; they saw in film a dramatic form in which common events could be treated dramatically and imaginatively and thus be brought alive” (p. 143).

British schoolmasters, specifically, presented their students with short-length documentary films in the 1930s as a powerful tool to organize and filter the experience of life and present it as a teaching tool. Documentaries, in this instance, became a “basis for a classroom discussion of the living issues” (Baird, 1937, p. 144).

A huge push for film in the classrooms came about with the increased viability of affordable classroom screening technologies. With the American release of home video and VHS technology in 1977, several national organizations came to prominence with goals of incorporating documentary film, narrative film, and other types of feature-length media into school curricula, including the Action Coalition for Media Education and the National Association for Media Literacy Education (Hobbs & Jensen, 2009).

These national film organizations sponsored the implementation of film-based education in classrooms across the U.S. For younger students, the national advertising agency National CineMedia Inc. (NCMI), sponsored the Cinemedia Screen Education program. The Cinemedia Screen Education Program presented 3rd and 4th grade teachers with questions and discussion prompts to show a full-length documentary on Antarctica in students’ science lessons (Evely, 2000). For Middle and High School students, The Film Foundation, an American non-profit, and College Board, the testing agency, drafted

the National Film Standards for Middle Schools and SpringBoard, a supplemental curriculum to 6th-12th grade instruction modules, respectively (Considine & Baker, 2006).

The multiple organizations' national projects incorporated pre-instruction, short clips, and feature length documentaries and narratives, followed by projects and assignments like museum visits or critical essays. Students who had lessons supplemented with the SpringBoard program were observed diving into character representation in film by discussing the visual language of the films presented and instructors in the Cinemedia Screen Education program noted that students had interesting observations and questions about the topic of Antarctica during a culminating class-excursion to watch a new documentary (Evely, 2000; Considine & Baker, 2006). Researchers have identified that teachers should be provided with specific ideas about how lessons can be developed to build an environment where both positive and negative elements of films are discussed in enriching, inquiry-based lessons (Roberts & Nowak-Fabrykowski, 2017). In these instances, the use of film as a multi-faceted learning tool was successfully integrated into a pre-existing curriculum and used as a tool of clarification and visualization—presenting students with images of the material they had already been learning and which they were to learn further about (Evely, 2000).

Film has also been used as a conduit to classroom discussions around the past and difficult issues, taking advantage of a diversity of opinions among students, and helping teachers address controversial concepts in the classroom (Marcus et al., 2010). Marcus et al. describe how films can be used as historical documents that allow students to scrutinize, critique, analyze, and discuss (Marcus et al., 2010). This scrutiny allows for

students to deconstruct a film's epistemological presentation of history in context, and allows students to challenge the concepts and ideas presented. Gersten, Baker, Smith-Johnson, & Peterson (2006) also identify that using film to present historical topics as engaging stories "helps students understand the events and details because the familiar narrative structure gives them a way to process the content, make predictions, and to draw casual inferences" (p. 269). Connecting with characters, specifically, allows students to connect and empathize with their stories (Marcus et al., 2010).

Films have an ability to present complicated concepts and complicated characters in a way that can engage students in developing feelings of empathy for particular perspectives or experiences in the past (Marcus et al., 2010). For example, narrative films were used in the classroom of a Humanities and Social Sciences Module for graduate Medical Students to explore "the utility of cinematic films as an adult learning/teaching tool for cultivating an appreciation of moral and ethical values among graduate-level university students" (Abidi, Madhani, Pasha, & Ali, 2017, p. 37). Abidi et al.'s research with Medical students incorporated the film into the curriculum by introducing it during one class session and following it up with a film expert helping students discuss and dissect the film and its themes during the next session. This process helped students to develop higher empathy for characters in the films they were seeing and ultimately translate as more empathy to the patients they would treat in the future.

Other classrooms and instructors have similarly used film as supplements to their pre-existing curriculum "as a 'visual textbook' to convey what happened in history or to teach historiography, as well as prompt analysis of the accuracy and reliability of the

images and narratives students are bombarded with in and out of a classroom” (Harshman, 2017, p. 79). In an additional example, one middle school instructor used the 1989 Civil War film, *Glory*, with the explicit goal to “represent or visualize the past—to aesthetically present past events, people, and attitudes” (Marcus et al., 2010, p. 159). The lessons were built around guiding questions, identifying themes, and explicit discussions of the nuanced representation of Caucasian and African-American soldiers. The students were all initially provided with a Viewing Guide to follow along with questions that helped to humanize the soldiers on both sides of the conflict, making them real to students. In this instance, film was presented in the classroom context as a tool to facilitate discussions amongst students and also as a visual reference to a historical period they were studying. The instructor observed an enthusiasm in discussing the film and an increased awareness by students of aspects of the Civil War (Marcus et al., 2010).

Furthermore, Gersten et al., specifically identified how films have been used as supplements when traditional textbook methods are insufficient to “foster meaningful access to challenging content for students with learning disabilities (2006, p.265). Grade-level teachers readily admit that history content presented through the provided texts is not typically “accessible to low-achieving students, available history materials offer scarce support ... for students of differing ability” (O’Connor, Beach, Sanchez, Bocian, & Flynn, 2015, p. 420). In EL classes, where traditional textbook teaching methods for history and social studies have proved similarly complicated and insufficient, film has been incorporated as a tool to help students visualize the concepts they are learning. For example, in a high school level EL social science course an instructor created a lesson

outlining the concepts, dates, and key historical characters surrounding the battle at the Alamo. The instructor observed that the content became more accessible for students by clearly anchoring the lessons in key points and using the film as a text to be studied and discussed. Students showed an increased interest and motivation to learn the stories of the characters and connect them to their current curriculum units (Marcus et al., 2010).

These examples showcase the abilities that films have as more than just a visual aid, but as its own instructional tool to be analyzed, critiqued, and implemented. Films have historically been used to help students visualize, discuss, and develop deep understandings of the past and the experiences of people in the past. Additionally, films have been used to supplement learning in contexts where traditional book learning may be insufficient. In a Civics and EL curriculum films could similarly serve as tools to provide students with visual references of the concepts they are learning—giving the students a visual memory and understanding of a concept they would only have superficially memorized otherwise. Based on this tradition of supplementing educational curricula with film, this project set out to supplement the Riverside Adult School’s *Civics and ESL* class with film to explore film’s potential as a tool to help support student understandings of civics concepts.

Part 3 – Research Methods

3.1 – Educational Design Research

The scope of this work was to discover the benefits and limitations of introducing a film intervention in one, local Civics and EL class to assist students in engaging with the concepts necessary for passing the U.S. naturalization exam. I reasoned that for a non-standardized exam where the questions could be unreliably chosen at random, traditional testing to measure student success would not provide me with reliable data because there could be no indication that success in the practice exams would translate to success in the actual exam, unless students were consistently tested on all 100 questions. To implement and assess the benefits and limitations of using film to supplement the standard curriculum to support students in passing the U.S. Naturalization Test, I relied on multiple methods to gather data and used an Educational Design Research (EDR) methodology to bring it all together.

EDR projects, a subset of the Design Based Research (DBR) family, serve to reliably determine whether educational products, processes, programs, or policies work to provide usable knowledge in specific contexts (McKenney & Reeves, 2019). This methodology is most often used in iterative small-scale interventions at the level of individual classrooms and schools to help students achieve deeper learning than through traditional lecture methods (Anderson & Shattuck, 2012; Penuel, Fishman, Cheng, & Sabelli, 2011; Smith, Schmidt, Edelen-Smith, & Cook, 2013; O'Connor et al., 2015). EDR as a methodology allowed me to rely on multiple methods to study a Civics and EL classroom where the curriculum was built around the civics lessons of the textbook

Voices of Freedom. Furthermore, this thesis sought to serve as a basis for further research into incorporating films to supplement citizenship curriculum to support understanding of civics concepts by EL students with varying levels of English fluency. To supplement this curriculum, the project was broken up into the three-step structure of EDR (McKenney & Reeves, 2012):

1. Analysis and Exploration Phase
2. Design and Construction Phase
3. Evaluation and Reflection Phase

The Analysis and Exploration phase in EDR consists of connecting the expertise and experience of individual instructors along with historical contexts to identify educational problems in need of support. The Design and Construction phase, furthermore, identifies potential solutions and theorizes prototypes based on the theoretical understanding developed in the analysis and exploration phase. Lastly, the Evaluation and Reflection phase assesses the impact of the implemented prototypes and reflects on the findings to refine the process in an effort to achieve a replicable solution (McKenney & Reeves, 2019).

3.2 Introduction to the Site

This study was conducted at the Riverside Adult School (RAS), a local Southern California public adult school. This site was selected due to its access and proximity—the instructor was open to participating in conversations to develop an iterative intervention model to assess the potential of using film to supplement the curriculum. Ms. Farrell, the

Civics and ESL instructor at RAS, has 15 years of experience as an EL teacher and 13 years as the *Civics and ESL* instructor. After these 13 years Ms. Farrell has found a structure that she believes allows for the best learning processes to prepare her mostly Spanish speaking students to sit for and pass the Naturalization Exam. A typical day at the Riverside Adult School's *Civics and ESL* class consists of Ms. Farrell giving students the opportunity to ask her questions about current events and she uses these to guide her class through the lessons.

Ms. Farrell's class curriculum is structured around *Voices of Freedom*, the textbook provided to her by the school, and focuses on preparing students to read, write, and speak English at a basic level and have a basic understanding of U.S. civics. To gauge her student's progress, Ms. Farrell grades the students' accuracy in writing down dictations and administers periodic content quizzes of the civics concepts reviewed.

Ms. Farrell's Civics and ESL class is held on Tuesday and Thursday evenings every week to anywhere between 5 and 20 students. The class lasts for two and a half hours and includes vocabulary reviews, writing down dictations, reviews of the exam's 100 Government and History Questions, readings from the textbook *Voices of Freedom*, and mock interviews. Some of the students worked full-time jobs, were stay-at-home spouses, or qualified for Federal disability support. Enrollment in these classes is completely free for anyone over 18 no longer attending high school, and slots are filled on a first come/first served basis during public registration dates (Riverside Adult School, n.d.).

3.3 Analysis and Exploration Phase

After securing a site for my study, the initial Analysis and Exploration phase developed a practical understanding of the curricular problems the class faced and to assess potential supplemental film interventions to the course curriculum through a series of conversations with the instructor to identify concepts that the instructor believed the students struggled with.

The class operated on an ongoing basis with no designated start and end date for the courses. Ms. Farrell based each class session on one lesson in *Voices of Freedom*, and when the class had gone through the last lesson of the book they would continue with the first lesson again during the following class session. Students who enrolled in the class during the open enrollment date were added to the roster by the next class session and immediately joined the course, regardless of where they were in the curriculum. Furthermore, the classes were not graded, though a physical sign-in sheet enforced attendance requirements. If students missed more than two weeks of the class they were dropped by the school's enrollment system and were required to wait for the next open enrollment period to re-enroll in the course.

It was very difficult for Ms. Farrell to implement long-term projects over a series of classes, as there was no guarantee that the students who started the project would be there to finish it and new students could be added to the class in the middle of a project. Furthermore, an activity Ms. Farrell had developed where students created poster boards on different civics concepts, like the history of the flag, and presented their findings to the classroom had to be scrapped from the curriculum. The format of the exam meant that

students could not predict whether the USCIS examiner would ask them about the history of the flag's design, they could only be assured that the examiner may ask them: "Why does the flag have 13 stripes?" and "Why does the flag have 50 stars?" (Department of Homeland Security, USCIS, n.d.). I identified that if I were to include an educational intervention to supplement the curriculum, then the lesson had to be self-contained within one class session to avoid inconsistent attendance and to prevent from taking students too far out of the comfort zone of the current class structure.

In addition, there was no implemented English language requirement for students in this class, and though their levels of comfort and expertise with the language varied, they were all learners of English as a second language. The school claimed that co-enrollment in an ESL class may be required based on the students' language level. Ms. Farrell noted that this requirement is recommended, not enforced, but that some of her students voluntarily signed up for both courses.

Ms. Farrell recalled instances where students who she believed were not as proficient in English passed the exam because they were able to correctly answer the questions selected for them by the officer. She also recalled situations in which students who were proficient in English were failed because the officer asked them a more difficult set of questions or clarifications. For example, she clearly recalled an instance in which a student with strong English abilities may have failed their exam because they were unable to describe to the USCIS officer what a "rescission" was. I therefore identified that the way to assess the potential benefits and limitations of a curriculum

supplement had to be based on a model that encouraged understanding of civics concepts and emphasized language retention.

3.4 Design and Construction Phase

The Design and Construction phase saw the development of an intervention plan for the instructor to implement in their curriculum. A film lesson was identified as a tool that could facilitate classroom discussion around civics. The film *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* was identified for the instructor to use and further conversations with the instructor developed the film and its presentation as a possible tool to enhance student conversations around the concepts of elections, representatives, and statehood. The intervention was prototyped to include pre-instruction, the film screening with Spanish subtitles, and a short class discussion following the film within one individual class session.

Ms. Farrell and I decided to present the film with limited context, outlining in the pre-instruction only the topics of elections, representatives, and statehood, the names of the characters, and the direction to think of questions for a discussion following the film screening. The discussion was planned as an open-ended, unstructured conversation to identify what civics concepts, characters, or plot elements the students gravitated towards. I would observe and note the language used by students during the discussion. I planned to measure learning by identifying if the students used language introduced by the discussion in individual interviews. Ms. Farrell randomly selected three students, Roberto, Frank, and Emma (the students were all assigned pseudonyms), for 10-minute

interviews during the following class session, based solely on whether or not they had been present for both the film screening and the class session in which individual interviews occurred.

The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance is a 1962 black-and-white film, based on a short story by Dorothy M. Johnson, directed by John Ford starring James Stewart as Ransom Stoddard. The film is a Western in which Stoddard, a young lawyer, travels to the fictional Western town of Shinbone to make a name for himself in this frontier town. Stoddard finds himself drawn into the violence and politics of the town and has to deal with the antagonizing of Liberty Valance (Lee Marvin) and his gang, outlaws hired by the local cattle barons. Stoddard, with the help Tom Doniphon (John Wayne), a horse rancher in Shinbone, repeatedly stands up to Valance in attempts to establish law and order in this young territory.

The film presents extended sequences that dramatize and sensationalize processes of American civics. For example, there is an extended sequence where Pompey (Woody Strode), an African-American man employed by Doniphon, is enrolled in a class that Stoddard has started to teach local kids how to read. Pompey is called upon in class to recite Thomas Jefferson, the Declaration of Independence, and that all men are created equal, while a picture of Abraham Lincoln sits atop a shelf in the background of the shot.

The plot in the second half of the film revolves around sequences of the townsmen (for only the free white men were eligible to vote) coming together to discuss the need for statehood and elect two representatives to travel to a territorial convention and advocate for statehood to protect themselves from the cattle baron's encroaching on

their land. Stoddard and Dutton Peabody (Edmond O'Brien), the local newspaperman, are elected to represent the territory and must do so while defending themselves from Valance's attacks.

The instructor and I identified elections, representatives, and statehood as concepts addressed in the film that could lead to class discussions around the following questions on the USCIS's list of 100 exam questions (Department of Homeland Security, USCIS, n.d.):

24. Who does a U.S. Senator represent?

55. What are two ways that Americans can participate in their democracy?

91. Name one U.S. territory.

Voices of Freedom, the class textbook, emphasizing memorization, presented students with answers to these questions via reading exercises. To answer, "Who does a U.S. Senator represent?" for example, the textbook plainly notes, "A senator represents all the people of a state" and "We elect a senator for six years" (p. 58). This format emphasized the memorization of topics, but not a meaningful engagement with the concepts. The film's visual depictions of the democratic process, on the other hand, provided a richer context in explaining these concepts. The film was selected because of a sequence where all the eligible voters of Shinbone come together at one point to discuss the election of local delegates to represent the township in an upcoming territorial convention. The film not only showcases Robert's rules of order in this sequence as the townsmen first select a chairman and a secretary to lead the meeting, but the film also presents the townsmen discussing the merits of an appropriate delegate. Ransom

Stoddard nominates Tom Doniphon as a delegate and Doniphon respectfully declines, choosing to nominate Stoddard in his place. In this sequence students are presented with a visual of a structured meeting and rather than memorizing that a delegate represents all the people of a state or district, they get to see that Ransom Stoddard is a representative of the townsmen of Shinbone, who nominated and elected him as their representative. While knowing how representatives are chosen (elections) is a useful topic for students to memorize for passing the exam, correlating a visual of the concept of representation in democracy could be a better way for students to remember the job of a representative.

Furthermore, for the question, “What are two ways that Americans can participate in their democracy?”, *Voices of Freedom* lists, “You can participate in our democracy in many ways: You can vote; You can join a political party; You can help with a campaign; You can call your senators and representatives; You can give an elected official your opinion on an issue; You can run for office; You can write to a newspaper; [and], You can publicly support or oppose an issue or policy” (p. 204). In this instance students are provided a list and expected to memorize any two of the options provided. In the film, however, during the town meeting sequence, students are presented with a visual of an election and with a visual of citizens coming together to speak to their newly elected representative about an important issue to them—the need for statehood. Additionally, in a later sequence, Ransom Stoddard and Dutton Peabody are accompanied by some of their townsmen at the territorial convention. The townsmen are shown publicly supporting the issue of statehood and presented with an opposing political party. Rather than presenting students with a list of actions to participate in a democracy, the film

clearly shows students engaged citizens who are actively participating in their democracy.

Lastly, for the question, “Name one U.S. territory,” the textbook states, “Some places are territories in the United States” (p. 32) and proceeds to outline on a map the locations of Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands, the Northern Mariana Islands, Guam, and American Samoa. The film ultimately does not present students with information on any U.S. territories, but rather follows the process of how a territory becomes a state through the journey of Ransom Stoddard in politics.

This film, however, is an imperfect tool. The film provides visual representations of civic processes within the context of its time. For example, all the characters involved in the elections are white males; females and Pompey, the African American character, are notably excluded from the process. In spite of that, the film was selected because of its potential to visually showcase these outlined concepts of elections, delegates, and statehood in a different and more in-depth way than *Voices of Freedom*.

The goal was to observe if EL students with varying levels of fluency in English could connect these visual representations in the film with the underlying concepts of the civics topics included in the exam. If so, then perhaps films could be a useful supplemental tool in the classroom to scaffold student memorization exercises by giving them more than a topic to memorize by providing a visual understanding of a concept.

Following this intervention plan I observed and took field notes of Ms. Farrell’s pre-instruction preparing students for the film screening and of the post-screening discussion. I also recorded audio of the post-screening discussion and transcribed it for

analysis. My fieldnotes focused on what was said by Ms. Farrell and her students, particularly the comments that pertained to the concepts of elections, representatives, and statehood. During the following class session I conducted individual ten-minute interviews with Roberto, Frank, and Emma in a quiet corner of the classroom while the rest of the students sat in a regular lesson (see Appendix for interview questions).

I abstained from taking excessive physical notes during the interview to create a rapport with the students. The audio from the interviews was recorded and then transcribed for analysis. The transcribed class discussion, fieldnotes, and interviews were analyzed and coded for talk about elections, representatives, and statehood, looking for themes and patterns in my observational data.

3.5 Evaluation and Reflection Phase

The Evaluation and Reflection phase consisted of me analyzing the data collected from the instructor's presentation of the film in the curriculum, the ensuing class conversation around the concepts that the instructor identified as difficult for the students, and the answers provided in the individual student interviews. This phase assessed whether the intervention had an impact on student learning by assessing whether any of the language present in the film or during the post-film conversation was also present in the student descriptions of the identified concepts during their individual interviews. These outcomes were then used in this thesis to assess the potential of using film as a scaffolding tool for student learning and to further refine the ways in which the

curriculum of the local citizenship courses could be supplemented to assist students in understanding important civics concepts.

Part 4 – Findings

4.1 Elections

During the pre-instruction Ms. Farrell wrote the names of the film's three major characters along with who they were in the film. She proceeded to read these to the students and inform them that Ransom Stoddard was the lawyer, Tom Doniphon was the rancher, and Liberty Valance was the bad guy. She also wrote the words lawyer and senator with an arrow going from lawyer to senator. Ms. Farrell informed the students to look for how the lawyer became a senator in the film. During the post-screening discussion, Ms. Farrell asked the students what offices Ransom Stoddard had held in addition to being a lawyer and a senator, but did not follow-up with a discussion on how Stoddard had become a senator. The individual interviews asked students both what the overall process of electing a senator entailed and also how Ransom Stoddard, the lawyer in the film, became a senator.

Switching between English and Spanish and struggling to put his ideas together when asked how a representative was elected, one student, Roberto, ultimately explained during his individual interview that people got together to vote: "Go to the reunion for the people living in their downtown...in their city... chose for some guy that represent them to the people...and then when you, they had the two voters go to the vote and send to the represent of Washington for...they go to represent for the next congress" (Interview,

February 19, 2019). Here, specifically, Roberto is referring to the film mentioning the “reunion,” or the town meeting, where the citizens of Shinnbone elected their representatives for the constitutional convention in Washington. Roberto was able to rely on the film to express some understanding of elections, but seemed unable to apply this understanding to other contexts. For example, when asked what he would need to do to become a senator himself, Roberto answered,

“No. I no have idea how I need to do the senator. I think on this is for the people studying. They have good career. For example, writing, doctor, or lawyer. Some people study. I think it's that only way for...No...any people” (Interview, February 19, 2019).

Roberto believed that not just anybody could be elected as a senator. To him, the office is for smarter people—extraordinary people. Despite the fact that the rest of his answer indicates that within the film he was able to pick up on the moral aptitudes of Stoddard, and the values that would make the character an effective representative, Roberto still found the character to be extraordinary, a virtue different from any he possessed himself.

A second student, Emma, similarly showed some difficulty in expressing the concept of elections. She had answered a question about what she had learned from the class with, “when you go vote, where is the election,” showing that elections and voting were concepts that she had engaged with in previous lessons. When asked if she knew who her representative was, she answered “Kamala Harris.” When asked if she knew how Kamala Harris was elected for office, however, Emma answered with one word, “No.” When asked if she could recall the process by which Ransom Stoddard was elected as a representative, additionally, she responded, “I like this men because they is honest

and fight for the rights the people...I like it this man... hopefully the United States have this men, right?" (Interview, February 19, 2019). In this instance, Emma's English ability limited my ability to assess her level of understanding and engagement with the film. Her answers suggest that she had some knowledge of voting and elections, and an idea of what an ideal representative should be, but she was unable to articulate a connection to either the concept or the film to answer the question sufficiently.

A third student, Frank, much more comfortable with English relied on his own experiences and memories when asked if he knew how his representative was elected:

"[when] my mom became a US Citizen and the first time that my mom voted was the first time that her name came across. You know? That I came across her name, Kamala Harris...and ever since then I, you know, I heard about her moving up the ladder" (Interview, February 19, 2019).

Frank's answer did not reference the film in any way. He answered the question with a clear prior understanding of the process of elections and knowledge of his representative.

4.2 Statehood

The conversation about statehood presented a dichotomy between process and facts. The class discussion began with a perception that Shinbone was a city in a real state. The mention of statehood came during a discussion about the representation of African Americans in the film, while discussing Pompey's inability to vote. "I see he no vote when he go to the electing. He don't vote, [right]? He stayed outside," one student asked. "He don't drink," two more students answered. Ms. Farrell then guided the discussion by saying:

“Oh yeah, he said he didn't drink, but did you notice they told him to stay out of the bar? [...] Now it's not really clear what time this was because the statehood was around 1850, but they talked about Lincoln and Gettysburg, so it had to have been after the Civil War, so the timeline is a little [confusing]” (Class Discussion, February 19, 2019).

This was one of the two times when the word “statehood” was mentioned during the post-screening discussion, the other was when Ms. Farrell outlined how statehood is important if you want to have representatives in the Electoral College. Despite the limited discussion of statehood by the class, I decided to still ask questions about it during the interview to assess whether students could connect the way the film's territory became a state to the actual process by which U.S. territories become states.

During his interview, Roberto seemed to not be able to remember how the territory achieved statehood, saying, “I remember, but I forget it right now,” and after being prompted in Spanish he answered “Louisiana.” The limited language ability had caused him to be confused about the concept in question: “Do you remember statehood? How the territory became a state?” After assuring him, in Spanish, that the name of the territory was irrelevant, that I wanted to know if he remembered the process, he answered, “[with a] vote, no?” After some prodding I could see that the student only had a basic understanding of the process by which a territory becomes a state—he knew it involved a vote. Roberto's earlier answer about elections suggests that at least he had some understanding about the process of electing representatives to go to Washington to represent the territory. Roberto doubted himself, however, by his limited language ability, and he confused himself by thinking he had to answer the questions brought up by the instructor during the post-screening discussion. When asked to identify how a territory

became a state he tried to answer what state this territory had become—name, not process.

Similarly, Frank, understood the process of statehood but was distracted by attempting to assign a date and location to the fictional Western state of the film. Frank was much more comfortable with English and since Ms. Farrell had mentioned a confusion of timelines during the class discussion, this student did his own research, “I was gonna [look up] Shinbone Star, Wyoming...”

“I was comparing what the film was telling me...There was, like, this, there was this group, this land, group of people, territory, that wanted to become a state... the way that the movie showed it, it was two delegates from each town, they go to this convention and then they vote whether they want to become a state or not, you know? And then from there, I guess they just take their petition to the US government, and petition to become a state, I guess.” (Interview, February 21, 2019).

Frank seems to have understood the concepts that the film presented to him and was curious to further explore the process. Because of Emma’s limited language abilities I decided to focus her interview on elections, delegates, and representatives. She was not asked about statehood. Frank, much more than Roberto, was able to connect the concept of statehood to the narrative the film presented. Both students, however, took on the task of trying to determine the location and timeline of the film as a real setting.

4.3 Delegates and Representatives

Lastly, Ms. Farrell also led the students through a discussion of the Electoral College and the role of representatives, asking students first, “You usually have two major candidates. What are the two major parties?” (Class Discussion, February 19,

2019). Students quickly answered Republican and Democrat—this is one of the 100 civics questions. Student engagement was limited to correctly answering the series of questions from the list of 100 that Ms. Farrell began the discussion with. These questions included asking how a party can win the electoral vote in a state, asking “Who is our representative?” and “Who are our two senators?” After a few of these questions, Ms. Farrell asked, “...in this story, the lawyer ... what are some of the offices he held? He was a Senator, what else was he?” (Class Discussion, February 19, 2019). The class discussion around representatives at this point was limited to identifying the students’ current representatives and discussing offices held by Ransom Stoddard in the film.

When asked during his interview about the process of electing representatives, Roberto identified how the voting men in the film had initially nominated Doniphon, because he was a good person. “The first was the most [popular]...the good person of the ranch. He say the claim the...decision for the people. He chose other people for the newspaper because he had more idea and the other guy for chose what the lawyer” (Interview, February 19, 2019). The student identified how in the film Doniphon had been nominated as a representative and declined, wishing to allow a more qualified candidate take the position. Roberto was able to rely on the film to conceptualize the value of the democratic process and the importance of selecting willing and qualified candidates as representatives. Similarly, Emma’s earlier answer about elections showed how she identified a representative as an honest person who fights for the rights of the people. While Emma presents valuable descriptors of the ideal character of a representative, Roberto’s answer more clearly articulates how a representative is elected

to represent the people who vote for them. Roberto, furthermore, when asked if the film helped him understand the concept of representatives explained, "...the better person live in...for example, California, we chose the representative that live here because he's a more study or he has good career. He...I think they chose the better person living in California, that is the person I think go to represent...in congress" (Interview, February 19, 2019). This is similarly a comment on the character of a representative, but also specifies that the citizens of a state elect their own representatives. Roberto's understanding in this instance did not seem to be connected to the film content.

Frank wasn't explicitly asked about the process of electing a representative because he discussed the characteristics of a representative while discussing how Liberty Valance attempted to get nominated as a representative in the town meeting sequence: "the bad guy, he was from the other side of the river or something...he didn't live in that community...but he wanted to be a delegate for that town...so I started wondering how was [the process back then]?" (Interview, February 19, 2019). Frank was connecting to the film and its representations of both good representatives and bad representatives, and showed an interest in learning more about the historical processes of territories electing representatives.

Part 5 – Discussion

Several themes presented themselves in the student answers observed during their individual interviews. It appears that democratic or representative processes are difficult for EL students to grasp and the film may be an additional distraction in building this

kind of understanding. Students, instead of connecting with the concepts outlined in the design and construction phase of the project, connected instead with the character traits of specific individuals in the film or focused on the intricate details of the film instead of on the underlying concepts. This is not a problem with the traditional curriculum, represented by *Voices of Freedom*, as all the material presented in this textbook is very specifically the material that may appear on the citizenship exam.

When discussing elections, representatives, and delegates, for example, the students repeatedly commented on the character of representatives and elected officials, using terms like “honest” and “smart” to describe their ideal candidates. When discussing Stoddard, one student connected to the character’s honesty, while another student connected to the image of Stoddard as an extraordinary individual. To determine whether students had learned from the experience I was looking for discussions of how Stoddard was presented as an honest individual—one the townspeople could trust and actively vote for as an advocate for their best interests. The class discussion, however, was unfocused. On a superficial level, students were able to use the film to identify that Stoddard was a “good character,” and that as a representative he would be an honest and qualified man. However, the lack of clear intentions in the discussion also made it likely that students would take a different reading from the film, and take away that the narratives of extraordinarily upright and moral characters would exclude average citizens from the democratic process. A student may potentially find himself in a situation where they identify more with the villain in a narrative, simply because the hero, as a role model, seems an unattainable dream for students with limited education and language ability.

It should be noted again that this is not a perfect film. Though it provides useful visual representations of challenging civics concepts, it does so within the historical context of the time in which it was created. Thus, some aspects of the film may be read as racist or sexist and further problematize a student's reading of the film. During the post-screening discussion, for example, students identified that the character of Pompey, an African-American character was not allowed a vote during the town's elections. Women were also not allowed to vote.

This brought about one of the limitations of the film itself – Hollywood stories present great men and great events, and usually focus on idealistic representations of American democracy (Alridge, 2006). Emma, for example, noted when talking about her representatives that hopefully the United States would have more men like this. Despite being aware that her representative was a female, the inherent sexism present in the narrative, perhaps swayed Emma to believe that only a man could be an adequate representative to solve issues of the nation—much like Stoddard solved the issues of the territory. Furthermore, students like Roberto found it hard to personally relate to the character of Ransom Stoddard as presented. Roberto saw in Stoddard an extraordinary and educated lawyer, qualities that he considered unattainable and therefore not relatable. The students found it hard to personally relate to the characters presented, perhaps because the film presented them as extraordinary or because they could not identify themselves in the leading characters, who were all notably white men.

The structure of the exam itself is skewed towards the narratives of extraordinary people as it asks, not how did someone become your senator, but who is your senator—

focusing on the name itself, elevating the representative beyond a person to a title. During the post-screening discussion Ms. Farrell had asked, “who is our representative?” To which the class answered “Mark Takano,” followed by “Who are our two senators?” to which the class answered “Diane Feinstein and Kamala Harris” (Class discussion, February 19, 2019). An appropriate follow-up question during the class discussion, perhaps, would have asked “How did Kamala Harris become a representative?”—shifting the focus to the process of elections rather than the importance of the elected themselves. Similarly, a different film could have presented students with more identifiable minority and female characters to demonstrate the concepts in question and to show people with a similar cultural background to the students being integral parts of the democratic process. For example, if instead of asking Roberto how did Kamala Harris or Ransom Stoddard become a representative, if he had been asked “How did the relatable minority character in the film participate in democracy?”, perhaps a more intricate discussion could have been had about what he perceives to be his value within democratic participation.

Furthermore, when discussing statehood students focused on hard facts instead of on the contextual understandings of the concept presented. For the interviews, I decided to assess whether students understood the process by which a territory became a state in the film and if they could connect that with an understanding of the process by which the current U.S. territories could become states. However, rather than engaging with the concept enough to make these connections, two of the three student’s viewing focused instead on discovering hard facts—the dates and location of the Shinbone territory as it bid for statehood.

Ms. Farrell’s teaching methods and the students’ “learning strategies”—their initial instinct to assign a name to the territory or a date to statehood—are a consequence of the curriculum, and by extension the exam. Rather than engaging with understanding the concept of statehood, the instructor was focused on discovering the facts the students are often expected to memorize, and the students similarly were looking for explicit answers to potential questions. This is consistent with other studies, as students often focus on small facts and details in instruction because they think, “this is what the teacher wanted them to do,” or because “most history classes typically.... emphasize the memorization and recitation of pieces of factual information” (Marcus et al., 2010 150). Knowing the process of how a territory becomes a state is not necessary knowledge to pass the citizenship exam, but knowing the name of a territory is, which may be why Roberto thought the answer was Louisiana. Similarly, *Voices of Freedom* outlines that Hawaii, a former territory, became a state in 1898, even though it is not an exam question. This may be why both Frank and Ms. Farrell were looking for a specific date.

Part 6 – Conclusions and Limitations

This project identified that citizenship education classes based on memorization of answers to the USCIS 100 Civics and Government questions were not providing any meaningful learning opportunities to their students. The test’s unstandardized and subjective nature evolved as a necessity to provide flexibility for officers working in diverse communities across the nation. Using film as a learning supplement was identified as a potential tool for instructors to help EL students with varying levels of

English fluency visualize and connect with the terms and concepts they were memorizing. Film has been used as a supplemental tool for younger EL students and students with learning disabilities, and the findings of this thesis suggest that film could also be a useful supplement for adult English learners studying civics.

The film, *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*, was used as a supplement in the *Civics and ESL* classroom at the Riverside Adult School to determine the benefits and limitations of using film as a tool in this context. The observations suggested that this film did help students visualize and connect with some of the concepts they were memorizing, however it was still an imperfect tool. Students, like Roberto, identified that the film was a useful tool because “you watch movie and had idea. If the officer asking some question and you don’t have exactly answer, you can talk, and probably you pass the test because you have idea” (Interview, February 19, 2019). Ultimately, however, all three students identified that using other films in the classroom would be complicated, need thorough guidance, or take too much time. Furthermore, some of the film’s potentially problematic depictions of race and gender could further alienate student engagement and civic efficacy. Potential solutions for this would include using more diverse films in the classroom that present varying viewpoints of history and preparing the instructor to guide the class through discussions of complicated representations within a film. More diverse films would include a larger breadth of stories, including those of women and minorities, all equally participating in the American democratic process—giving civics and EL students a clear visualization of what the potential civic efficacy and impact on society of people that look like them could be.

Many of the limitations that were present in the context of the *Civics and ESL* class at the Riverside Adult School were still present during the intervention: specifically, students were still focused on passing the exam as their primary determination, and a film intervention, while helping them further understand a few concepts, did not immediately instill confidence in them—they were looking for breadth of topics and not depth of concepts. The class session, structured as a one-time self-contained lesson, did not provide enough time for both the screening and a meaningful discussion of the film. With inconsistent attendance, furthermore, some students who had been present during the film and discussion were not present the following class-session and thus unavailable for interviews.

The limitations this project set out to address specifically with the film, including the students' limited English ability, were not entirely solved by this intervention. The varying levels of English fluency amongst students meant that some considered the class extremely easy and others saw it as extremely difficult. Neither the school nor the USCIS provide any training materials for the instructor who has had to discover her ideal teaching methods for her diverse classes through trial and error. The intervention was not established based on a baseline level of English understanding, and thus while some students were able to clearly connect with the language of the film, others found it more difficult. As such, it was difficult to rely only on a film as an intervention tool to help student understanding of difficult civics concepts when students interpreted the film differently based on their understanding of the language presented.

It is important to note, ultimately, that Marcus et al. and Harshman outline that within classroom contexts, films are one possible resource, and should not in themselves be an entire lesson (Marcus et al., 2010; Harshman, 2007). Without clear directions for the discussion, the instructor tried to frame the film within a historical context and the students grabbed on to that discussion, believing that they too were expected to learn the details of the fictional town's statehood, for example. One possible solution to this is providing the students with a structured guide for viewing the film and providing the instructor with a structured guide for leading the conversation.

Part 7 – Suggestions for Future Research

An iterative Educational Design Research project like this has the potential to arrive at a fully restructured curriculum that incorporates film and visual media into the *Civics and ESL* classroom as supplemental tools in the students' learning process. Future iterations of this project should first provide students with a viewing guide that outlines characters, questions, and concepts to be aware of during the film screening (Russell & Waters, 2013). Furthermore, the lessons can be refined by giving the instructor clear instructions into what the expected talking points are and training in discussions of visual media to prepare her or him to carry the conversation in whichever directions the students may be interested in going, while still being able to outline the civics concepts selected or discussing important social issues presented in the film. An ideal iteration would present the film to a classroom of students who are all at similar levels of English understanding, and seamlessly incorporate films into the curriculum so they are presented at the

chronological points where they appear in *Voices of Freedom*. This way the films could be used as a tool to supplement student learning by providing the visual references to the concepts being studied and serving as part of the scaffolding of a classroom that goes beyond only memorization exercises.

The conversation for bettering civics education is an active discourse. Some scholars recommend replacing the naturalization exam with public courses in community colleges, adult schools or high schools (Kunnan, 2009). Other scholars recommend a fully revised educational program with several opportunities for test preparation (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004). Ms. Farrell recommends that the immigration courts begin to once again accept certificates of completion from civics classes as appropriate evidence of sufficient knowledge of government. Germany requires candidates for citizenship to attend 600 hours of German language instruction, and thirty hours of culture, history and civics classes (Etzioni, 2007).

An ideal development for this project would be a revised course curriculum that incorporates audiovisual representations of the concepts being taught so students can easily recall and associate the sounds and images with the concepts during exam time. As long as the current iteration of the U.S. naturalization exam rewards memorization, however, using film to learn the processes of democracy and understanding key civics concepts won't be useful to students. Students believe that citizenship means passing the test, and thus their main focus is not on learning the processes of democracy but on memorizing the answers to the exam questions. A test format that allows for students to express their knowledge of government and civics without relying on answering any of

100 different questions correctly could be the solution that allows us to utilize the full potential of film as a tool to generate discursive learning amongst students.

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Appendix

List of Interview Questions

1. What do you think about the class?
2. How does Ms. Farrell help you learn?
3. What are some of the questions you have had trouble with?
4. What did you think of the movie?
5. What do you remember from the movie?
6. Did the movie help shed any light on the process of elections and delegates?
7. Who is your senator?
8. What is the process for selecting a senator?
9. How did the lawyer become a senator in the movie?
10. Do you remember statehood? How a territory became a state?
11. If Puerto Rico wanted to become a state, what would they have to do?
12. Is there anything about the class that you would change?
13. Would you like to watch more movies in class?