

Taking Charge of My Learning

Alejandra Mendoza

BEFORE YOU READ: What does it mean to “take charge” of your learning? In what ways have you taken charge of your learning?

My Journey with a Learning Disability

I was diagnosed with an intellectual disability at the age of four years old. My mom saw that I was not learning like other kids. I was not talking much, and when I did, it was hard to understand me. I did not play like other kids my age. I did not follow directions or pay attention when someone was talking to me. I would get frustrated when I could not say what I wanted. That’s when my mom knew something was different. She took me to the doctor and they did some tests. That’s how they found out I needed extra help.

Despite the circumstances, I am proud of how far I have come. As an adult who is working and attending school part time, it has been difficult to find a balance but I am making it work. Every step I take toward becoming a Teacher’s Aide or Early Childhood Educator makes me feel stronger and helps me believe that I can reach my goals.

Me as a Learner

I learn in my own way. For example, I do my best when someone explains things step by step because it helps me stay focused. I also like having extra time and doing hands-on activities because it makes learning more fun and helps me stay engaged. When my teachers take the time to teach me in a way that works for me, I feel more confident.

My school has supported me in different ways. I have an Individualized Education Plan (IEP), which is a learning plan for students with disabilities. The IEP helps me with my learning needs, and I get more time on tests and assignments. In the classroom, my teachers



explain things clearly and give me directions I can follow.

However, not all experiences were helpful. Some teachers did not know how to help when I struggled, or they moved too fast during lessons, which made it hard for me to keep up.

My teacher from high school would always help me when I needed it on my assignments or tests. She would take the time to explain things to me in a way I could understand. That really helped me feel more confident.

As a teacher’s assistant currently working at a daycare, that is something I strive to do for my own students. If I see students who need help, I will give them extra time to turn in their work so they don’t feel rushed. I will also sit with them and go over the assignment step by step. I will explain it in a way that makes sense to them and make sure they feel supported, just like my teacher did for me.

Me as a Human Being

Having a disability has made me a stronger person. I have learned to keep going even when things are hard. I know how to ask for help, and I

have learned to be more patient with myself and others. I cheer for people when they do something good, and I try to be kind and understanding. I feel proud of how far I have come. My disability does not stop me; it makes me who I am. Being around others with disabilities helps me feel less alone. We support each other, help each other when we struggle, and understand each other better. I like knowing I am not the only one who learns differently from others.

Advocating for Myself and Others

I speak up when I need help in class. I tell my teachers what helps me learn. I ask for breaks when I feel stressed or need time to think. I try to tell people that learning differently is okay. I want people to understand and be kind to others like me. I just want to make school better for people with learning disabilities. I tell teachers and staff when something is not working for me. I share my ideas in class or meetings.

Sometimes I help other students who also learn differently. I remind people that we all learn in our own way. I try to be a voice for others who might be shy or scared to speak up. I want to make sure we all feel safe, happy, and supported at school.

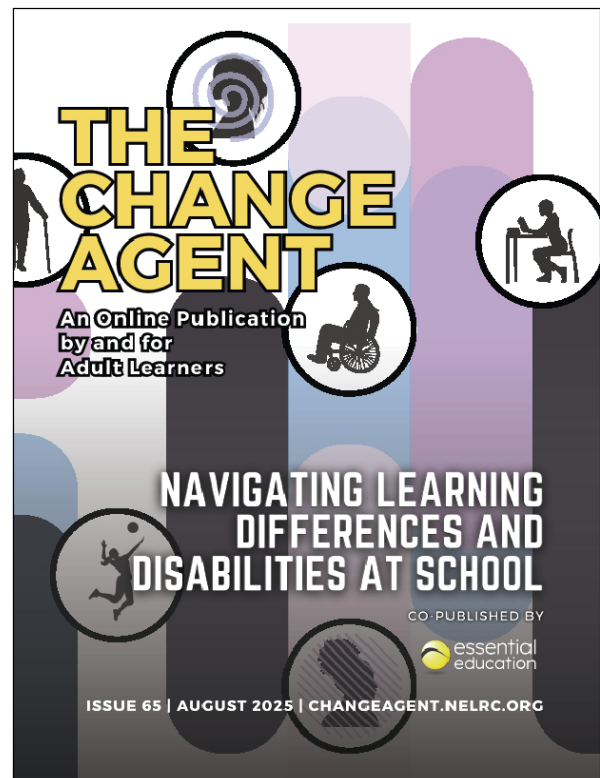
AFTER YOU READ:

1. Name some key strategies that have made a difference for Alejandra.
2. How does Alejandra's experience with learning differences inform her work as a teacher's assistant?
3. Read the box on the right and look up some of the articles in Issue #65 of *The Change Agent*.

Alejandra Mendoza is a student at Ysleta Community Learning Center in El Paso, Texas. She currently works at a daycare as a teacher and enjoys working with children. She aspires to enroll in college and earn a degree in Early Childhood Education.

Read More Stories by Students Navigating Disabilities and Learning Differences at School

Many learners are like Alejandra. They have a learning difference or disability, and they have taken charge of their learning. You can read their stories in Issue #65 of *The Change Agent*. The stories are available in multiple formats: PDF, audio, and some are in Google slides.



[Issue 65 of The Change Agent](#)