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Social Studies Teachers' Perceptions of Alternative Assessments for Students with IEPs

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Walden University
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Project Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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Abstract

Assessments are one of the vital pillars of education but often are designed without the specific needs of students considered. Instruction is often differentiated for students with individualized education programs (IEPs), but rarely are assessments. Students in classes with IEPs in the social studies department at the project site school in the state of New York are performing below grade level. Teachers at this school are encouraged by the department chair to structure their assessments based on the Regents exam, which uses traditional assessment methods. The purpose of this case study was to investigate the perceptions of teachers regarding the implementation and use of alternative assessments to support students' academic achievement in social studies classes. Guided by Davidson's theory of interpretivism, data were gathered from interviews with seven social studies teachers regarding their perceptions of the use of alternative assessments to support students' academic achievement in social studies classes and to support test preparation for New York state Regents exams. Data were also collected through document review of teachers' lesson plans. Data analysis indicated that most teachers feel unprepared to use alternative assessments and teachers lack training or familiarity with alternative assessments. A professional development plan was created and implemented to train teachers on the design and implementation of alternative assessments with the goal of improving outcomes for students with IEPs. The results of this study have potential implications for positive social change that include increased use of alternative assessments at the local site to the benefit of students with IEPs.

Social Studies Teachers' Perceptions of Alternative Assessments in Inclusion Classrooms

by

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Dedication

This doctoral study is dedicated to my mom. There are an infinite number of words I could write to express the support you have given me and the gratitude I feel, but none of them seem like enough, so I will just say thank you for all of it, and I love you.

To my friends, thank you for supporting me through all the difficulties and helping to make this all worthwhile. I am blessed to have your love and support.

To Dr. Vinski and Dr. Blakeley, the two of you helped me to realize that the pursuit of knowledge does not end when the school day ends. Thank you for inspiring me to reach higher and for seeing me as an equal.

Finally, to Elyse, you are the love of my life and an inspiration to me. Thank you for all your support and for proofreading this so many times. You have done more to help me than you will ever know. I would not be here today without you.

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Section 1: The Problem

The Local Problem

In the state of New York, students with individualized education programs (IEPs) often have lower standardized test scores and higher rates of failure than general education students (New York State Report Card, 2018). Many schools in New York incorporate the inclusion model to place students with IEPs in classrooms. Students in inclusion classes are expected to pass the same state standardized tests in New York, the Regents exams, as the regular education students. Because teacher performance scores in New York are partially tied to these test scores, many teachers prepare students by modeling summative class assessments based on the Regents format (social studies department meeting, 2019). This illustrates the impact Regents testing can have on the classroom.

Students in inclusion classrooms comprise both students with IEPs and general education students (Duchaine et al., 2021). Inclusion classrooms consist of a combination of students with IEPs and general education students with two teachers leading the classroom (Faraclas, 2018). One form of accommodation comes in the form of alternate assessments, which have become common in the field of education (Chivu et al., 2018). Certain states have begun to adopt alternate assessments based on expectations for students with IEPs. Keith (2021) discussed research that, in Michigan, students with autism whose teachers used alternative assessments performed better than their peers who were only assessed one way. These changes show that the use of alternative assessments can help improve outcomes for all students.

The problem is that students with IEPs in social studies classes at the local site are performing below grade level (New York State Report Card, 2018). More recent data cannot be obtained due to the cancellation of Regents exams during the COVID-19 pandemic. The local research site is a school district in New York. The high school has a student population of about 1,500 students. Students in the high school are placed in either general education classrooms, Advanced Placement classes, inclusion classrooms, or self-contained classrooms. The students with IEPs receive accommodations and modifications with the goal of allowing them to perform at the same level as the general education students. These students are given traditional assessments based on the New York state Regents examination. Additionally, even teachers of those classes at the local research site that do not culminate in a Regents examination are encouraged, but not required, by the department chair to structure their assessments based solely on the Regents exam (department meeting, 2019). During a 2019 superintendent's conference day, the director of social studies noted that the midterm exams should reflect the Regents exams (department meeting, 2019).

Rationale

Students with IEPs in classes in the social studies department at the local site are performing below their grade-level peers. On the 2018 Transition Regents Exam in Global History and Geography, 99% of general education students received a proficient score, but only 48% of students with IEPs met proficiency. In the same year on the U.S. History and Government Regents, 99% of students earned proficient scores, and 93% of students with IEPs met this standard (New York State Report Card, 2018). This shows

that, despite the current accommodations and modifications offered by the district,

students with IEPs are not performing on par with their general education counterparts.

This problem has existed for several years. However, newer research is not available due

to the cancellation of the Regents exam during the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, the

U.S. History Regents was canceled in 2022 due to concerns about questions on the test

after a recent shooting in Buffalo, New York.

Table 1

Social Studies Regents Scores, 2016

Global History and Geography Regents				
Students	# students assessed	Percentage scoring at or above 55	Percentage scoring at or above 65	Percentage scoring at or above 85
Total	410	98%	94%	66%
General education	351	100%	99%	74%
Students with IEPs	59	85%	66%	20%
U.S. History and Government Regents				
Total	424	99%	97%	80%
General education	390	100%	99%	84%
Students with IEPs	34	94%	79%	44%

Source: New York State Report Card (2016)

Table 2

Social Studies Regents Scores, 2017

Global History and Geography Regents				
Students	# students assessed	Percentage scoring at or above 55	Percentage scoring at or above 65	Percentage scoring at or above 85
Total	432	96%	92%	63%
General education	358	100%	99%	73%
Students with IEPs	74	77%	58%	11%
U.S. History and Government Regents				
Total	407	99%	97%	74%
General education	359	100%	99%	81%
Students with IEPs	48	90%	77%	21%

Source: New York State Report Card (2017)

Students who receive alternative assessments not only score better on the assessment but often report finding the assessment more meaningful (Pereira et al., 2022). Students learn in a variety of ways, but they also express that learning in numerous ways. When students are assessed, they are expressing their knowledge and what they have learned. Even though students can express learning in several ways, testing in the local school district in New York is based on one model. Alternative assessments are particularly effective in measuring the knowledge of students with IEPs, especially when based on alternative expectations (Frey & Gillispie, 2018). Part of the rationale for implementing alternative assessments is that students with IEPs are often harmed the most by a single standardized assessment (Keith, 2021). These students who are performing poorly on the standard assessment are not offered another avenue to assess their knowledge. Many other states have begun to design and adopt alternative assessments at the state level and implement them into their local curricula (Clark & Karvonen, 2021).

Students with IEPs are some of the most vulnerable within a school district (Frey & Gillispie, 2018). Much is done within the local school to support students with IEPs. There is a heavy focus on differentiated instruction, with grading policies designed to be flexible in classes to meet individual student and teacher demands. Students with IEPs are often not supported when it comes to assessment design (Smucker, 2022). The assessments are often designed around a standardized test and are not based on individual student capabilities or local standards (Pecheone, 2018). Alternative assessments have

been shown to benefit students with IEPs by providing them with an assessment style in line with their ability to express knowledge (Andersen et al., 2018).

The purpose of this study was to investigate the perceptions of teachers regarding the implementation and use of alternative assessments to support academic achievement in social studies classes for students with IEPs. By understanding why alternative assessments are or are not being used, changes can be made to support students with IEPs. These changes could result in improved comprehension for students with IEPs and provide teachers with more options for assessments in their classrooms.

Definitions of Terms

For this study, the following terms are used:

Alternative assessment: Any assessments outside of what is viewed as the traditional assessments of multiple-choice, true–false, and short answer questions. Alternative assessments are viewed as being more student centered than traditional assessments (Becker et al., 2023).

Assessment: The process of measuring a student's acquisition of knowledge. Assessment is an evidence collection process used to measure student learning and understanding of the curriculum (Shahbari & Abu-Alhija, 2018).

Formative assessment: Measures student learning as part of the process. Formative assessments are given more frequently than summative assessments to measure whether students have grasped the material before continuing on with the curriculum (Ahmed & Shah, 2019).

Individualized Education Program (IEP): A legal document mandated by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004 that outlines special education services for a student to receive including modifications to instruction, accommodations for testing, and any related services the student receives (Curro & Foo, 2022).

Summative assessment: Measures a student's long-term achievement and understanding of the material. Summative assessments are given less frequently than formative assessments are (Ahmed & Shah, 2019).

Traditional assessment: Any assessment that primarily uses multiple-choice, true–false, and short answer questions. These types of questions are often used in standardized assessments (Becker et al., 2023).

Significance of the Study

Alternative assessments allow students to express their knowledge in a variety of ways. The findings of this study may have a lasting effect on the social studies department in the local school district. The information from this study was used to create a project (Appendix A) to assist teachers in using various forms of assessment by addressing the reasons teachers are not currently implementing alternative assessments and providing them with support. This may help to close the gap in practice and give students with IEPs a broader range in expressing their knowledge. By closing this gap in practice, students with IEPs may be assessed in a way that matches their learning style.

The material gathered from this study may have a meaningful impact on the site of the study. The use of alternative assessments has not been adopted by the department as official policy, which could limit its use by teachers. Furthermore, by assessing

teachers' attitudes and perceptions, a plan was created to help teachers by crafting an appropriate policy. The use of alternative assessments helps all students but especially the most vulnerable student populations (Frey & Gillispie, 2018). Alternative assessments have been shown to improve the understanding of the curriculum. Because alternative assessments allow for more access to the curriculum and provide for expressive assessments, students who do not learn through traditional formats benefit (Frey & Gillispie, 2018). Studies have shown that special education teachers, in particular, indicate that their students struggle to access the curriculum and that alternative assessments can alleviate this problem (LaRon & Bruno, 2018; Lazarus et al., 2022).

Understanding teachers' perceptions regarding alternative assessments is key to making a positive social change and improving education of district students. Teachers' perceptions would allow for the understanding of their current implementation and design of alternative assessments. This would help to understand how assessments are designed to best support students. Without doing so, the district would risk increasing numbers of students who struggle to meet the requirement to pass standardized tests.

Research Questions

RQ1: What are social studies teachers' perceptions regarding the benefits of using alternative assessments to support the academic achievement of students with IEPs?

RQ2: What type of support do social studies teachers perceive as needed to effectively use alternative assessments to support academic achievement for students with IEPs?

Review of the Literature

The purpose of this study was to investigate the perceptions of teachers regarding the implementation and use of alternative assessments to support academic achievement in social studies classes for students with IEPs. An understanding of this phenomenon would allow for policy changes that implement best practices and allow students to better express themselves on their assessments. Assessment is a valued part of education that teachers are often underprepared for (Şenel et al., 2018).

This section will cover a review of previous research conducted on the history and variety of assessments. This history will detail current and historical challenges to the implementation of effective assessments. The literature used in this review was thoroughly researched to ensure saturation. I used Education Source, ERIC, and SAGE Journals, among other databases. Keywords and phrases used to search for articles were *alternative education, service learning, alternative assessments, differentiated assessments, students with IEPs, and inclusion. alternative assessments, service learning,* and *students with IEPs*.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework used for this case study is interpretivism. Interpretivism is a conceptual framework in which social scientists grasp the subjective meaning of social action (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020; Kankam, 2019). Interpretivism looks at reality from the lens of the participants' views and lived experiences (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020). The authors noted that the world is a matter of perspective, and the same event can be viewed differently depending on the individual. Because

everyone sees the world differently, they also see the best method of accomplishment differently (Rapley, 2018). Grasping the meaning of social actions can be difficult because of the numerous variables that factor into the cause of actions. Actions are shaped by both what people do intentionally and their circumstances (Rapley, 2018).

The case study being conducted is well supported by the theory of interpretivism. A case study allows for a more personal view of the participants and the data. By interviewing my subjects, I collected their personal recollections and perceptions of the problems. With the document analysis I conducted on the lesson plans I reviewed the structure and design of assessments created by these teachers. In this study, I looked at the social action of assessment to develop a better understanding of teacher use of assessment and the role that plays in assessment design can be better understood. Interpretative research is more subjective than objective (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020), allowing for the analysis of interview data as opposed to hard statistics.

Teachers who are uninformed about the use and implementation of assessments may not see changes to assessments as the solution. Teachers with higher assessment literacy are more capable of implementing successful alternative assessments (Stiggins, 1991). Additionally, alternative assessments have been shown to close achievement gaps and help students view their assessment experience more positively (Alokozaya, 2022). Phongsirikul (2018) found that teachers' personal perceptions influence the impact they have in a number of areas including assessment. Interpretivism used in this way allows the research to reflect not only the current state of assessment but teacher attitudes toward an appropriate change. This approach is important because the goal of this study was

viewing teacher paradigms. Using the interpretive model helps to structure the research to uniquely look at these paradigms and focus on how they impact a teacher's practice (Kankam, 2019). Stiggins (1991) found that teachers' views of alternative assessments are a major challenge to successfully implementing new assessments. By understanding the perspectives that have resulted in a lack of alternative assessments, changes can be made to incorporate them.

Review of the Broader Problem

Assessing students is not always an easy task, nor is determining the right assessment to give (Al-Mahrooqi & Denman, 2018). Traditionally, classroom assessments are divided into two main forms: summative assessments and formative assessments. Summative assessments are a reflection of what students have learned in the past, while formative assessments are an assessment of student progress and learning needed to adjust instruction (Ahmed et al., 2019). Each form of assessment has a different goal. Summative assessments are used to measure learning outcomes and the effectiveness of methodology. Formative assessments, however, can be used to determine the strengths and weaknesses of teaching and learning methods (Chivu et al., 2018). These two forms do not include psychological testing, such as aptitude tests, which are used to "predict how well students are likely to perform in a subsequent educational setting" (Popham, 1999, p. 8).

Traditional assessments include oral, written, and practical assessments, which most preservice teachers are taught in their college training (Chivu et al., 2019). These are often the same design as many standardized tests. However, assessments can be

conducted in numerous different ways (Al-Mahrooqi & Denman, 2018). Assessments and evaluations encompass more than just memorized information (Chivu et al., 2019). The largest obstacle to implementing a variety of these assessments is a lack of assessment literacy.

Assessment Systems

Douglas (2016) divided assessments into four basic systems measured by how inclusive the assessments are: (a) total exclusion, (b) accommodated systems, (c) alternative systems, and (d) universally designed systems. Total exclusion is when an assessment leaves out a particular group entirely (Douglas et al., 2016). These assessments often leave out students with IEPs (Andersen et al., 2018; Khan, 2020).Accommodated systems are when assessments or their parameters are modified to include students with IEPs (Douglas et al., 2016). Often these assessments incorporate universal accommodations such as large-print tests, providing definitions for difficult vocabulary, or other assistance that might benefit students with IEPs. These assessments can also allow for individual modifications based on the student.

The final two systems attempt to account for as many stakeholders as possible. Alternative systems are when a range of assessments with different criteria are created with varying levels of complexity, and students are given the choice to select which assessment best fits their needs and abilities (Douglas et al., 2016). Assessments such as these can account for each student's current ability rather than what their perceived ability should be. These assessments benefit students performing both above and below grade level. Universally designed systems are when a single assessment is crafted so that

it can be given to all students (Douglas et al., 2016). While this is the goal of many assessments, it is the most difficult to incorporate in practice.

Assessment Designs

One of the most difficult aspects of assessments is assessment design. Technical issues in the design of assessments can exclude vulnerable groups (Frey & Gillispie, 2018; Hathcoat, 2018). These can be simple design choices such as the language used in the questions. A significant problem in assessment design and use is teacher perceptions. When teachers view the results of an assessment as irrelevant, it rarely results in meaningful changes in instruction. This can be a challenge when implementing new forms of assessment. Teachers can use new and innovative assessments because they are directed to do so, but if there is no teacher buy-in, these new assessments will not provide meaningful change (Clark & Karvonen, 2021).

Another obstacle is a misunderstanding of the purpose of performance on assessments. As previously discussed, both formative and summative assessments have inherently different goals. Creating assessments for learning, rather than assessments of learning, helps to close achievement gaps (Hirsh et al., 2022). Additionally, many teachers will view a singular data source and generalize those results regardless of whether there are contradictions in these findings. Assessment data are more reliable when coming from multiple data sources (Ma & Wink, 2019). Finally, poor student performance on an assessment can occur for different reasons. A student failing to complete a task could be a result of either a lack of ability or a lack of understanding of the assessment (Hathcoat, 2018).

These shortcomings do not mean that effective assessments are beyond the reach of educators. Research can guide educators on the creation of effective assessments. Assessments should also be locally designed whenever possible. Skills and content knowledge of students varies greatly throughout the United States (Minjong, 2018). Improving the quality and effectiveness of formative assessments raises student performance on summative assessments (Dini et al., 2020). This allows students to build on prior knowledge and help close previous deficits. Effective assessments provide information about the ongoing learning process (Bin Mubayrik, 2020). Alternative assessments can help inform instruction in the classroom (Andersen et al., 2018).

Types of Alternative Assessments

Going beyond Becker et al.'s (2023) definition, alternative assessments are assessments outside the scope of traditional assessments, and alternative assessments encompass a vast array of options. These options allow for a variety of methods that are not present on traditional assessments. Skills utilized on these assessments can help students to better express their knowledge. Assessment methods should be aligned with the intended achievement targets (Andersen et al., 2018).

One form of alternative assessment that has been adopted on both the secondary and postsecondary level is service learning. Service learning is an alternative assessment that combines classroom instruction with community service (Christensen & Woodland, 2018). In this sense, alternative assessments can also be called *active assessments* (Shahbari & Abu-Alhija, 2018). Service-learning assessments can help to assess student abilities and knowledge in a practical sense while also building community relations.

When surveyed, those who participated in service learning showed higher rates of understanding satisfaction with their education than those evaluated via traditional means (Christensen & Woodland, 2018).

Alternative assessments often have a different aim than traditional assessments (Shahbari & Abu-Alhija, 2018). While many traditional assessments are targeted to one particular content area or skill, alternative assessments can reach a broader audience. The variety offered by alternative assessments means that student choice can play a larger role in the assessment process. Alternative assessments include portfolios, investigations, task assessments, rater checklists, and self-evaluations (Chivu et al., 2018). Scratch and Challenge boards are digital forms of alternative assessment that engage students in the lesson while allowing teachers to view student progress (Sulaiman et al., 2021). Systematic observations are a valuable assessment form that allows teachers to gather information difficult to obtain in traditional assessments (Chivu et al., 2018).

Many alternative assessments have students working with a visual medium rather than a reading or writing format. Drawing can be an effective method of alternative assessment among children (Söküt Açar et al., 2019). Service-learning assessments can have practical application of assessments including having medical students read MRI scans and conduct risk assessments based on the results (Deignan & Brown, 2016). Learning maps models are visual representations of the relationship among various aspects associated with the content (Bechard et al., 2019).

Alternative assessments also bring agency to students in a way they are usually not given in the assessment process. Allowing student choice in assessment selection is a

great way to provide students with the power of their assessment results. Self-assessment and peer-assessment are two of the most common alternative assessments (Yan et al., 2023). Student-designed assessments are also a form of alternative assessment (Vasu et al., 2022).

The goal of alternative assessments is to be inclusive. Inclusive assessments are assessments that allow for everyone to receive support to participate in the assessment, including traditionally excluded populations such as students with IEPs (Goegan et al., 2018). These assessments strive to create equity among all students. Equitable assessments are assessments that allow all participants to demonstrate their knowledge or abilities (Andersen et al., 2018). This allows students to demonstrate their individual knowledge or abilities and helps to better personalize assistance in improving students' education. The goal of inclusion education includes not leaving anyone out and allowing for all students to have active participation in school life (Duchaine et al., 2021).

Standardized Testing

One of the most widely used forms of assessment is standardized testing. The use of standardized testing presents two major challenges. The first challenge is how the information from these assessments is used. Poor understanding of what standardized tests are or what they should be used for results in the creation of poorly designed educational policy (Minjong, 2018). Second, standardized test design often precludes these tests from being accessible to all students (Betzig, 2021; Pecheone, 2018).

Standardized assessments are used at both the state and national level. In New York state, to graduate from high school, a student must receive credit for five Regents

examinations. On the national level, students can take standardized exams such as the SATs and the ACTs. National assessments serve multiple purposes, such as awarding scholarships and determining if students are meeting goals set by policy makers (Khan, 2020). Students who struggle on traditional assessments begin with an inherent disadvantage. Standardized assessments also put tremendous pressure on schools. Schools struggle to balance teacher accountability and the needs of teachers and students in the classroom (Pereira et al., 2022). This added pressure forces teachers to put more focus on standardized tests. A student's educational future can be determined by how well they score on standardized tests (Khan, 2020).

Standardized tests are used to measure how students perform compared to the norm. This means that, for a standardized test to be considered valid, questions on which large numbers of students perform well inherently cannot make up large portions of the test (Popham, 1999). Because the test results are designed to represent a bell curve, standardized tests measure every student by what the perceived norm should be. Personal circumstance can affect a learner's performance on an assessment and fail to provide accurate data (Betzig, 2021). Furthermore, despite being standardized, there are metrics that can account for variability. Outcomes on standardized tests can vary based on the textbook used (Popham, 1999). Standardized tests are also hampered from issues with reliability measurements. Direct assessments which demonstrate an application of skill provide a more reliable assessment of ability than generalized assessments which demonstrate the memorization of information (Hathcoat, 2018).

The inherent design of standardized test also poses a serious obstacle to their validity. Standardized tests have a design bias against multilingual and minority students (Khan, 2020). Standardized administration of assessments can restrict a student's access to accommodations (Clark & Karvonen, 2021). This means that minority students, who are already overrepresented in special education, are often at a double disadvantage. In this case, the norm being represented is not a true representation of the population.

The flaws in standardized tests are often by design. Standardized tests, by design, are often not innovative because they "represent continuity and stability" (Deignan & Brown, 2016 p. 380). The standardization part of standardized testing prevents innovation and forces a reliance on simpler tasks, such as true–false questions or standardized multiple-choice questions. Both of these simpler tasks have serious flaws. When poorly designed, true–false tests allow for blind guessing with a reasonable probability for success (Brabec et al., 2021). Even the father of standardized tests later said that multiple-choice standardized tests are more harmful than helpful to the educational process (Khan, 2020).

All these issues are made worse by the fact that standardized test scores are often used by policy makers to make decisions for schools (Minjong, 2018; Popham, 1999). Often a correlation is seen between these scores and the quality of education. In fact, districts where teachers focus on test content have students who perform better on standardized tests but do not necessarily have a better quality of education (Popham, 1999). This push led to schools adopt more traditional assessments. Traditional assessments have led to teacher attitudes that assessments do not foster learning but

simply measure performance (Learned, 2020). These tests prevent students from experiencing valuable assessments that can not only aid in instruction, but also measure qualities that are looked for in individuals. Aspects of learning such as commitment, leadership, and collaboration are rarely assessed or utilized in traditional assessments (Greenwald & Zukoski, 2018; Sulaiman et al., 2021).

Assessment and Students with IEPs

Students with IEPs fall into many categories of students with IEPs. These students range from simple learning disabilities to students with autism. Often, the students most harmed by traditional assessments are students with IEPs (Frey & Gillispie, 2018). In many states, alternative assessments are not available for large scale statewide standardized assessments (Khan, 2020). Even when they are available, most students with IEPs in the study take the general large-scale assessment rather than the alternative assessment (Keith, 2021). This is even though alternative assessments benefit students with IEPs who perform poorly more often than other students (Rhim & The Center for Learner Equity, 2021). Students with autism are more likely to find the large-scale assessment is not appropriate for them than general education students (Keith, 2021). This participation in large-scale assessments is often mandatory. The previously mandated No Child Left Behind (NCLB) law mandated that students with IEPs be taught the content that their age-appropriate peers be taught (Clark & Karvonen, 2021). Teachers of students with IEPs are required to align Common Core State Standards, Individualized Education Programs, and state and local assessments (Frey & Gillispie, 2018).

Teacher surveys show that they generally support allowing students to take alternative assessments (Phongsirikul, 2018). Teachers report students with significant delays who are classified as having autism on their IEP should be offered alternative assessments (Keith, 2021). Students with IEPs benefit from modified assessments that are designed to meet their needs (Faraclas, 2018). The struggle here is appropriately designing assessments so as account for students with IEPs. Assessments that accommodate students with IEPs were found to be of higher quality (Boutin, 2021). Despite this, most teachers report feeling unprepared to adequately help students with IEPs (Faraclas, 2018).

Much of the focus on students and assessments deals with student placement. IDEA requires that all students receive a free education in the least restrictive environment (Clark & Karvonen, 2021). This least restrictive environment varies from student to student. Nationally, 62% of students with IEPs received their instruction in a regular education classroom (Faraclas, 2018). The more time a student spends in a general education setting, the more likely they are to take the large-scale assessment instead of alternative assessments (Keith, 2021). When provided with specially designed instruction and adequate support, students with IEPs can perform successfully in general education classrooms (Andersen et al., 2018). Co-teaching is a model in which a special education and general education teacher work in the same classroom designing lessons and delivering content (Faraclas, 2018). However, the issue becomes when students outside of the general education classroom are ignored. Students outside of the general

education curriculum are more likely to not participate in mandatory assessments at all whether it be traditional or alternative (Keith, 2021).

Impact of Alternative Assessments Beyond the Classroom

Alternative assessments can have positive benefits on teachers, the community, the school, and, of course, the students. Many of these benefits not only make meaningful community improvements but can also improve the educational quality of a school. Alternative assessments can have an impact on the lives of students that is memorable beyond simply the content they reinforced.

Teachers can find the aspect of assessment design overwhelming. Use of alternative assessments can help to increase the responsibility of the learner in education (Pereira et al., 2022). This gives students more agency and helps the teacher fulfill the role of facilitator. Alternative assessments are also more capable of fostering intrinsic motivation in comparison to traditional assessment (Sulaiman et al., 2021). By furthering a student's intrinsic motivation, they are less likely to come into conflict with the teacher in the future. Teachers who linked summative and formative assessments stressed creating tests that provide a better understanding of students' ability (Ahmed et al., 2019).

Alternative assessments such as service-learning are also excellent at improving school and community relations. Schools that partake in alternative assessments develop better school-community relationships (Christensen & Woodland, 2018). Administration of alternative assessments allows for interaction and hands-on assessments (Chivu et al., 2018). Students' performances in staged clinical trials were more closely correlated to their scores on alternative assessments than on traditional assessments (Deignan &

Brown, 2016). Conducting these trials can help expose students to community

stakeholders and provide a more positive view of the schooling system. Students in these

programs experience real world applications of their knowledge (Chivu et al., 2018;

Christensen & Woodland, 2018).

The use of alternative assessments also presents benefits to students beyond

learning objectives. Using portfolios allows students to demonstrate their uniqueness and

creativity (Chivu et al., 2018). Alternative assessments can be minimally intrusive on the

education setting by being activities which are fun and engaging (Al-Mahrooqi &

Denman, 2018). Alternative assessments can be less stressful for students than traditional

assessments (Frey & Gillispie, 2018). This can be especially important for students with

anxiety.

Creating an enjoyable educational environment can also help to foster better

comprehension and learning. Turning mental images into drawings has been shown to

help connect comprehension and learning (Söküt Açar et al., 2019). This helps students

view their subjects in more concrete terms. Alternative assessments are more realistic and

student-centered than traditional assessments (Becker et al., 2023; Sulaiman, Rahim,

Wong, & Jaafar, 2021). A significant and meaningful improvement was found in students

who were given drawing assessments as opposed to those who were not (Söküt Açar et

al., 2019). Not only are they more enjoyable, but the use of alternative assessments

allows for collaborative assessment (Greenwald & Zukoski, 2018). When viewed as a

whole, the results collected from alternative assessments offer a more holistic view of

learning than traditional assessments (Shahbari & Abu-Alhija, 2018).

Effective Assessments

With time and patience, alternative assessments can be an effective part of the classroom. Certain criteria have been found to make effective alternative assessments. Assessments should have clearly defined expectations and directions (Hathcoat, 2018). This ensures that students understand the directions and purpose of the assessment. Alternative assessments can be scaffolded to account for student ability (Andersen et al., 2018). Scaffolding assessments allows teachers to focus on what is possible for each student rather than what is typical of the student population as a whole and provides a clearer picture of student ability (Hathcoat, 2018). Teachers should be mindful that certain types of alternative assessments such as service learning require detailed planning (Christensen & Woodland, 2018). Finally, feedback and results are very important and should be provided in a timely manner (Al-Mahrooqi & Denman, 2018).

Positive change is difficult to make without stakeholder buy-in. The views that students, educators, and even the public have regarding assessments play a large role in not only how effective assessments are, but which types of assessments are given. Understanding these views helps to create better assessments and can help in changing the conversation about what makes an effective assessment (Carriere et al., 2020).

The primary stakeholder in any schooling system is the student. The entire purpose of education is the translation of knowledge to students. Despite this, student input is often left out of consideration in assessment design. Understanding student perceptions of assessments shows that students tend to favor alternative assessments. Students associate traditional assessments with poor learning and lack of control and

view them as arbitrary and irrelevant. On the contrary, students perceive alternative assessments as high-quality learning, active learning, and meaningful tasks (Pereira et al., 2022). This includes various forms of alternative assessments. Students reported high levels of satisfaction with service-learning programs (Christensen & Woodland, 2018). In an economics class, students preferred portfolio as their method of assessment (Chivu et al., 2018).

When given the choice, students tend to choose assessment methods in which they can be more involved in the assessment process (Andrade, 2019). Students who participated in service-learning programs felt more prepared than students who did not and scored better on senior assessment tests and alumni surveyed responded with continued satisfaction with service-learning programs (Christensen & Woodland, 2018). Higher education students view traditional assessments as detrimental to learning (Pereira et al., 2022).

Attitudes Toward Alternative Assessments

Students are not the only group of stakeholders who prefer alternative assessments. Students and teachers report positive attitudes towards alternative assessments (Phongsirikul, 2018). Even teachers who struggle to implement alternative assessments report having positive attitudes towards them (Shahbari & Abu-Alhija, 2018). Many educators do not believe that standardized tests provide adequate information about students (Chivu et al., 2018). This attitude has led to wider adoption of alternative assessments. Teachers of students with IEPs especially feel that alternative assessments provide students with greater access to the general education curriculum

(Frey & Gillispie, 2018). Even within the higher education community, there have been calls for more diverse methods of assessment than essays, exams, and dissertations (Pereira et al., 2022).

Despite these beliefs, public perception continues to support the use of standardized tests. Standardized test scores have often been linked to public perceptions on teacher effectiveness (Popham, 1999). Accountability systems can lead to teachers reducing the validity of assessments to raise test scores (Şenel et al., 2018). In many states, these tests are tied to teacher evaluation scores. This view often stems from a misunderstanding of the purpose of standardized tests (Couch II, 2021). In certain areas, however, there has been a push by policy makers to further adopt alternative assessments.

Using Alternative Assessments

Implementation of alternative assessments can meet resistance (Learned et al., 2020). Using new or innovative assessments comes with new challenges and risks (Pecheone, 2018). Teachers may find themselves unprepared, students may be confused by new assessments or directions, or schools may be resistant to taking risks. Alternative assessments require considerably more time and effort from teachers than traditional assessments (Pecheone, 2018). While struggling to complete their curriculum, teachers also worry about standardized testing. High stakes assessments cause teachers to use standardized assessments as models for classroom instruction (Clark & Karvonen, 2021). This means that longer assessments which consume valuable instructional and preparation time can be an obstacle. Teachers also report pressure from the educational system on the design of their assessments (Şenel et al., 2018).

The majority of assessments that a student takes are usually locally designed (Shahbari & Abu-Alhija, 2018). Either by the individual teacher, or sometimes collaboratively, these assessments are the bulk of what students experience when they take an assessment. Numerous factors can impact what types of assessments teachers give. Teacher knowledge and proficiency plays a large role in assessment design (Şenel et al., 2018). Teachers who receive training on alternative assessments are more likely to implement alternative assessments (Shahbari & Abu-Alhija, 2018). Despite knowing this, teachers report having a lack of knowledge in the implementation and design of alternative assessments (Şenel et al., 2018). Educators should also be familiar with their students, not just their assessments. Teachers who were familiar with their students' classroom performance had students who scored higher (Ahmed et al., 2019).

Teachers should be well versed in both formative and summative assessments (Ahmed et al., 2019). Teacher training was shown to improve the ability of teachers to design inclusive assessments (Faraclas, 2018). As each method of assessment has different purposes, teachers cannot rely solely on formative or summative assessments; they need to be able to use both. Teacher assessment literacy is an important factor in the design of assessments. This means that teachers need to be adequately trained and need to believe the changes will create positive outcomes for their students. Teachers are more likely to implement what they learn in professional development when they buy-into the material (Swaran Singh et al., 2022). The alternative is students who instead focus mainly on summative assessments which stress content over skills (Ahmed et al., 2019).

Implications

The results of this study have the potential to create positive social change at the local site. The data from this study provided us with insight into teachers' attitudes towards alternative assessments which allowed the researcher to create an effective professional development plan to assist teachers in using alternative assessments (Swaran Singh et al., 2022).

Based on the findings of this study, a professional development plan was created where teachers were informed of the benefits of alternative assessments, especially for students with IEPs. The proposed workshop also addressed the numerous forms alternative assessments can take to show teachers the versatility of alternative assessments and how teachers can adapt alternative assessments to fit with their material and teaching style (Shahbari & Abu-Alhija, 2018). Teachers were given an opportunity to create alternative assessments to use in their classrooms. Appropriate professional development has been shown to increase teacher use of alternative assessments (Shahbari & Abu-Alhija, 2018).

The authors noted in the literature review showed that most teachers do, in fact, have positive views towards alternative assessments. However, a positive attitude alone does not mean that teachers are using alternative assessments. By analyzing the design of these teachers' assignments and determining if they are appropriately created, a determination was reached on the effectiveness of the assessments. The teachers were found to be using traditional assessments as opposed to alternative assessments. If teachers were using alternative assessments properly, the next step would have been to

look for other reasons for the achievement gap. If assessments cannot make an impact, it is vital to determine what can.

Summary

This section defined the policy of assessments at the site to be studied. It further defined the types of assessments currently administered and the relevant definitions. The research questions and process were outlined as was the framework under which the study will be conducted. Interpretivism was chosen as the framework because of its focus on the individual perceptions (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020).

Section 2: The Methodology

Research Design and Approach

The purpose of this study was to investigate the perceptions of teachers regarding the implementation and use of alternative assessments to support academic achievement in social studies classes for students with IEPs. The most appropriate research design for this topic was a case study. A case study allows for a more holistic view of the research and its participants and aligns with the purpose of this study and the nature of the research questions. I chose this methodological tradition because a qualitative approach would allow me to view phenomena that cannot be statistically quantified (see Ravitch & Carl, 2020). Case studies allow for the direct observation of the topic being studied and to better understand the relationship between the research participants and the topic being studied (Nilmanat & Kurniawan, 2021). In this research, the topic being studied was alternative assessments, and the participants were teachers in the local school district. This bounds the research to a specific group.

Case studies are widely used in social sciences and important in the field of education. Case studies are used to analyze groups or a phenomenon (Sibbald et al., 2021). One of the primary data points for this study was teacher interviews. Teacher interviews allow for the direct collection of data (Ravitch & Carl 2020). Additionally, due to the demographic composition of the district ethnography would not be appropriate. Viewing the data as a nuanced result of ethnicity would not provide a full and accurate picture (Sherman et al., 2021).

Participants

This case study was conducted in a school district located in New York. All participants were members of a high school social studies department that has 17 members. All participants teach classes that require the administration of state standardized assessments known as the Regents. In social studies classes in New York State, there are two Regents: one at the end of sophomore year, the Regents Exam in Global History and Geography II, and one at the end of junior year, which is the Regents Exam in U.S. History and Government.

Criteria for Selecting Participants

The setting was familiar to me as the researcher, and I had access to the setting and therefore a convenience sampling strategy was used. The participants were selected only from sophomore and junior classes because those classes conclude with a state assessment. All participating teachers have students with IEPs in their classroom. Students with IEPs are often the students who benefit the most from alternative assessments (Andersen et al., 2018); therefore, I had a particular interest in the benefits this research could have for them.

Eight educators, all who meet the criteria outlined above, were invited to participate. This range provided me with an appropriate amount of data while also ensuring a diverse cross section of teachers. Participants in the study were not compensated and their participation was voluntary.

Procedures for Gaining Access to Participants

The local district employs directors to oversee departments on a district level. Each building has a teacher who is designated as the instructional specialist for their building. The instructional specialist knows the teachers in the department and helps to coordinate professional development and departmental responsibilities. To gain access to the appropriate participants, an e-mail was sent to the instructional specialist of social studies for the building to find teachers who would meet the appropriate criteria. The instructional specialist provided the e-mail addresses of all teachers who met the requirements to participate in the study. Participants were then contacted through the district e-mail.

Establishing Researcher–Participant Relationship

To help establish a working relationship with the participants, in the introduction e-mail, I outlined why they were being contacted and how their participation could help to benefit them and their students. When meeting with the participants, I was polite and respectful. Before interviewing them, I spoke about my passion for education and history in the district. I inquired about their history as well and discussed various topics of interest. All the participants were welcoming and interested in not only the research, but the process as well. The positive interactions with the participants helped to make the process more comfortable.

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Data Collection

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The data for this study were collected through a combination of interviews and a document analysis of lesson plans and assessments. These methods were used to stay in

line with the qualitative design of the study. I collected qualitative data to help answer the

research questions because qualitative data allows for a look at the individual experiences

of the teachers to allow for a larger picture to be seen. The data in this case were

reviewed to help understand both the teachers' current assessment practices and their

training or experience with assessments.

Instruments

In this case study, I used two main sources of data: interviews and lesson plans.

The interviews were conducted on site at the school building. Interviews are a common

tool used in qualitative research because they allow participants to express their

perceptions of the phenomena (Merriam & Grenier, 2019). I also examined lesson plans

to see if and how alternate assessments are being used in the classroom. These data points

helped me answer the research questions.

The interview questions were created to help determine what teachers understood

about alternative assessments and how often they are used. I created the questions myself.

I was looking at what information would be needed to answer the two research questions

of the case study. I wrote a protocol that I followed during the interviews. The protocol,

which can be found in Appendix B, outlines a script of the steps in the interview as well

as the interview questions. An interview protocol helps to ensure that each interview is

conducted with the same standard in mind and that all participants in the study are

provided the same directions. This consistency helps not only the research, but helped me

as a researcher as well. The protocol provided me with a structured script that ensured I

did not forget any important steps when conducting the interviews (Yeong et al., 2018).

Participants were contacted through their school e-mail addresses and invited to be a part of the study. Teachers who responded to the email were scheduled for an interview. All the interviews, except for one, were conducted after school. A single interview was conducted before school due to the teacher's personal schedule. All interviews were conducted outside of the school day. Participating teachers were also asked to share a lesson plan and assessment for analysis. Lesson plans were collected as a physical copy with all identifying information redacted.

The information in the email outlined the roles and responsibilities of both the participants and me. The email provided a rationale and explanation that this study is being conducted as part of the completion of an advanced degree program. Additionally, I let participants know they would be asked to complete a short survey of questions as well as a document analysis of their lesson plans (Appendix C). Finally, the email ended with a statement regarding the confidentiality of the information. I also reviewed this confidentiality policy during the interview process.

Participants were asked to reply to an informed consent form agreeing to participate in the research. The form once again outlined the need for the collection of the information and what the intended use was. Participants were informed of the nature of the information that would be collected and advised they were under no obligation, legal or otherwise, to participate. The form also included a section on the risks and benefits of participating in a study of this nature. The form concluded with a statement of consent. Teachers replied their consent by email after receiving a copy of the form. Only teachers

who responded giving consent were interviewed. Teachers who did not respond were excluded as participants in this study.

Teachers invited to participate in the study had the option of having their interview conducted either in person or through an online conferencing tool (e.g., Google Meet). All interviews were conducted in person. The interviews were audio recorded to ensure accuracy in the data collected. Participants were informed prior to the interviews, and all consented to being recorded. I reviewed copies of the provided lesson plans and assessments as part of a document analysis.

At the time of the research, I was employed by the school district in the building where the case study took place. At the time, I worked in the district as a special education teacher in the local school. I taught a mixture of inclusion and self-contained classes. I was working as a special education teacher in the school building where the research was conducted. This allowed for both access and a professional setting to conduct the research.

To ensure that all individuals contacted felt comfortable, I used neutral language in all communications. I ensured that no participant felt coerced into being a part of the research. No participant received financial compensation or any special considerations, which are two of the most identified forms of coercion (Miller & Kreiner, 2008). Steps were also taken to prevent researcher bias. The department in which the research was conducted is separate from the department I was employed in. They have separate offices for their faculty to conduct business in, as well as separate meetings and directors.

Conference day activities and communication channels are separate for the two departments, as well.

Data Analysis

The data collected from the interviews were analyzed once all interviews were completed. No data were analyzed until all data were collected. To ensure the data were appropriately analyzed, I transcribed interviews verbatim from the recordings of the interviews using speech-to-text software, which I then proofread. The data were transcribed into a Microsoft Word document so that they could be easily searched and accessed.

Analysis of the Interview Data

Once data were collected, I began the process of coding. Coding is the process of analyzing information—in this case, interview answers and documents—to find common themes and phrases. Codes correlate to words, phrases, or sentences as a way of appropriately grouping qualitative data (Sevilmiş & Yıldız, 2021). In this study, I used both a priori and inductive coding. The a priori codes gathered from the literature review were *alternative assessments, multiple-choice, Regents,* and *accommodations*. After these four codes were exhausted, I then searched the data for reoccurring words or phrases. These emergent codes were then applied to the data the same as the original code set.

The interview data were transcribed into a Microsoft Word file using the audio recording and speech-to-text software. The file was then proofread. The initial codes were placed into a Microsoft Excel file. A worksheet was created with a separate tab for each code. During coding, any relevant responses were copied and pasted into each file to

track codes. Open coding was used when analyzing the initial data to determine major themes and patterns. On the initial review of the data, instances of the priori codes were noted and logged. The subsequent passes used inductive coding to generate new codes from the data. I started by coding a single participant and then searching for any of their codes in the other transcripts. After completing this for each participant, I did a final pass through of each data set looking for any codes I missed. After multiple reviews of the data, I grouped the codes into categories. These categories helped to illustrate the common experiences among participants (Farber, 2006).

After the data were coded and categorized, I began a thematic analysis that needed to be conducted. A thematic analysis is a method of analyzing codes to find patterns within a data set. To help create themes, I first reviewed both the data set and the codes. Following this, I generated the themes and assigned codes to the appropriate themes. Ultimately, four themes were created. To assist in the organization of codes into themes a matrix was created. Key phrases ran along the side with participants, question number, and corresponding research questions in the adjacent columns to help organize the information (see Castleberry & Nolan, 2018). Finally, I reviewed any codes or data that did not align to any of the themes or stands independent of other codes. This process allows for the organization and interpretation of qualitative data (Scharp & Sanders, 2019).

Analysis of the Lesson Plans

The lesson plans were subjected to a document analysis. Document analysis involves a systematic review of the content and presentation of both electronic and

physical documents. Reviewing documents in such a way allowed me to gain insight and a deeper understanding of the documents and their effects. Document analysis is often used in conjunction with other sets of data (Cardno, 2018). In this instance, I used the data collected from the interviews. Reviewing lesson plans through this format allowed for a better correlation with the data gained from the interviews (Bowen, 2009).

The lesson plans and any attached materials were reviewed in terms of their assessments. Each lesson plan was viewed for any aspects of alternative assessments as well as any special considerations given to students with IEPs. Through this analysis, I looked for themes. Themes that emerged were defined, and the appropriate information was categorized. The information was then compared to the interview data to see if there were common themes between the two data sets (Bowen, 2009). All the lesson plans collected contained assessments that were traditional assessments, either multiple-choice questions or an essay format based on the New York state Regents exam.

Of the assessments received, one was an essay while the other seven were multiple-choice tests. The multiple-choice tests all contained a few stimuli-based multiple-choice questions, the format used on the Regents exams for both U.S. History and Global History. The essay test is based directly on the prompt from the United States History Regents, with the prompt copied almost word for word. The tests with multiple-choice questions were all designed to be completed in a single period, with extra time allowed for students with accommodations. The essay test was designed to be completed in half a period so students with extended time could still complete the test within a single class period. None of the assessments could be considered alternative assessments.

This correlates with the responses received that teachers have not received training on implementing alternative assessments.

Ethical Issues

Steps were taken to ensure the data were free of ethical issues or research bias. First, no pre-analysis of the research was conducted. The data were only looked at once it had all been assembled. This prevented me from unconsciously interpreting new data to fit initial results. Second, the researcher did not seek any specific set of results from the data, even if the data proved to be inconclusive. This prevented the results from being manipulated to suit a predetermined outcome. Finally, all data were transparently reported to ensure that the findings could be reviewed and questioned by peers (Baldwin et al., 2020). To help account for my personal bias, I used a journal to keep track of my thoughts on the process. I noted any assumptions I was making as I reviewed the research and rereviewed the data numerous times to ensure the data remained as untainted as possible. As I coded, I looked for common key words or phrases in the language of the participants and kept track of these to ensure I was not influencing the coding with my language.

The information collected is being kept confidential. To ensure confidentiality, no participant was asked identifying information, such as name, age, or ethnicity. Participants were welcome to drop out of the study at any time. The information gathered was scrutinized to ensure that no third party analyzing the research can piece together the identities of any of the participants. Participants in the study are labeled Participant 1, Participant 2, and so on. Participant numbers were randomly assigned at the end of the

interview using a random number generator. The lesson plans collected were numbered the same way so that they correspond to the participant who provided them.

Evidence of Quality

The credibility of the study was ensured through the triangulation of the information from the two sources of data: lesson plans with assessments and teacher interviews. By comparing the interview responses and the document analysis, I was able to determine how effectively teachers are utilizing alternative assessments. This document analysis was compared with the answers collected during the interviews to understand the relationship between a participants' interview responses and the structure of their assessments. Using multiple sources of data also helped to ensure the accuracy of the information provided.

The second credibility strategy was member checking. Interview transcript review was used to help ensure accuracy as well. This involved sharing preliminary findings with participants to determine if the participants' answers were being accurately represented. Not only did this help to improve accuracy, member checking also allowed for the integration of the participants more fully into the research process (Netta, 2018). Netta noted that this method of creating codes and translating them into themes is supported by decades of qualitative research. None of the participants responded to the questions submitted for member checking.

To ensure consistency throughout the research, strategies were implemented to ensure dependability. The study took place at the building in which these teachers are employed; this ensured that the study was conducted in a natural context. An audit trail

was also conducted. The audit trail outlined the process of collecting the data as well as the coding process. This helped to provide transparency and establish the consistency of the research process (Williams, 2012).

Limitations

This case study is not without limitations. The information for this study is not transferable for the rest of the school district beyond the social studies department or to other school districts. The information is being viewed within a limited scope which prevents the application of any findings to another setting. Additionally, this information cannot be used to analyze social studies classes outside of the criteria for the case study. The unique circumstances of each of these classes prevents this information from being transferable. This study should not be used to scrutinize the validity of the assessments being analyzed, only whether they qualify as alternative assessments. Other states do not use Regents Examinations as their required graduation assessments. The protocol used to analyze the lesson plans and assessments to determine whether they qualified as traditional or alternative assessments was developed by me and was not tested outside of this study.

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Data Analysis Results

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The purpose of this study was to investigate the perceptions of teachers regarding the implementation and use of alternative assessments to support academic achievement in social studies classes for students with IEPs. Data from open-ended interviews and a document analysis of lesson plans were used to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: What are social studies teachers' perceptions regarding the benefits of using alternative assessments to support the academic achievement of students with IEPs?

RQ2: What type of support do social studies teachers perceive as needed to effectively use alternative assessments to support academic achievement for students with IEPs?

In the pursuit of obtaining this data, interviews were conducted with eight teachers who responded to the invitation. The interviews were all conducted on school property in classrooms familiar to the teachers to create a neutral environment. All the interviews took place following the school day except for one because the participant could only make time prior to the school day. No interviews were conducted during the school day. All interviews were recorded and afterwards participants were labeled one to eight to help organize the data. The data collected from the interviews and the lesson plans with attached assessments were subjected to a typological analysis. This is a methodology used in data collection for interviews which involves rereading data to ascertain the main ideas contained within the data set (Hatch, 2002).

After conducting the interviews and collecting the lesson plans, the data were compiled and reviewed. First the interview transcripts were read and reread to familiarize myself with the transcripts. Next, the lesson plans were reviewed, and each lesson plan was reviewed after rereading the corresponding respondents' interview. In reading, the data patterns began to emerge, and these patterns were turned into codes.

After the interviews were conducted, numerous codes became apparent which included alternative assessments, traditional assessments, regents, special education,

curriculum, instruction, teacher resources, teacher training, benefits of alternative assessments, and struggles with alternative assessments. These codes were created after an exhaustive view of the data. The preset codes of multiple-choice and accommodations were combined with traditional assessments and special education respectively. This was done because there was a large amount of overlap in the corresponding categories.

The codes were then translated into themes which were analyzed to see how they could be generalized to answer the research questions. They were also grouped to see how they could demonstrate themes that continued throughout the data. The themes were created by grouping codes and answers together which discussed similar topics or events. The codes related to traditional assessments were used in creating the first theme. This was because a large number of answers corresponded to assessments that fit with the format of the assessments collected. The other themes grew out of analyzing the codes and discovering patterns which run through them. The patterns were analyzed for their relevancy to the research questions and the study as a whole.

After all the data were collected, coded, themed, and reviewed four trends became apparent. The first was that the participants of the study appear to be mainly utilizing traditional assessments. The second was divided opinions on the use of alternative assessment. The third is that there is minimal to no support offered by the district or department for the development of alternative assessments. The fourth was the impact of the assessments on students with IEPs was minimal. This was achieved by analyzing both the interview data and the lesson plans submitted by the teachers who took part in the study.

Theme 1: Traditional Assessment Use Among Teachers

The first theme which became apparent after reviewing the data were that most teachers are using traditional assessments. As I reviewed the codes and categories as well as the lesson plans, I found that the primary method of assessment among the participants was traditional assessments. This theme helped provide answers to the first research question. This showed a strong bias in favor of using traditional assessments. This bias was the beginning of discovering teachers' perceptions of alternative assessments. The use of traditional assessments demonstrates either a lack of familiarity or confidence in alternative assessments.

All the lesson plans reviewed contained either multiple choice tests or essay tests. These assessments are in line with the style of question or prompt given on the Regents exam. For example, Participant 1 submitted a lesson plan with an attached essay assessment which contains questions with the same wording as the Framework Regents in United States History. Similarly, most of the multiple-choice assessments submitted contained stimulus-based questions, which are now the style on both social studies Regents Exams.

Participant 1 was perhaps the most vocal in explaining why they structured their assessments as such. When asked what factors influence assessment design they responded, "I guess the format of the Regents exam– for the exams. You know the free response and the multiple-choice exams are formatted exclusively based on the Regents exam." Participant 1 later added, "I mean I did last year; I did an alternative assessment simply because there was no Regents."

Participant 2 spoke about the struggle of creating assessments while also having to prepare students for the reading, adding, "I know, I want students to be ready for the summative assessments they have at the end of the year, but I also want them to be critical thinkers." Participant 6 added, "The fact that it's probably most important is trying to mirror what they'll be asked to do on the Regents exam." When discussing use of alternative assessments, Participant 4 said, "You know might be like a more of a homework assignment or a small class activity then a whole there not– as really summative assessments."

Every participant mentioned either the Regents exam or the New York State learning standards for their topic area in their responses for how they create their assessments. This is in line with the lesson plans and assessments which were received during the data collection process. This information was looked at in the context of the first research question regarding perceptions of the benefits of alternative assessments. While conducting the interviews, Participants 1 and 6 asked me to clarify what I meant by alternative assessments. Prior to the start of the recording of the interviews, Participant 4 let me know that they were not sure if they knew enough about the topic but were willing to participate. This lack of familiarity is displayed in their lesson plans and answers.

Theme 2: Divided Opinions on Alternative Assessments

As part of the interviews, the participants were asked for their perceptions of alternative assessments as an assessment strategy. After reviewing the information on traditional assessments, I looked next to see what the participants had to say about

alternative assessments. I quickly learned that while there was support, it was not

unanimous. Teachers held differing views on alternative assessments. This information

also helped to answer the first research question. This was done to provide context for the

perception of educators about the benefits of alternative assessments. The data showed

that while teachers are not currently incorporating alternative assessments, there are many

who expressed positive positions on the topic. While most participants provided vague

assertions that alternative assessments were positive, few were able to give descriptive,

concrete answers on their benefits. Many teachers stumbled while answering this.

> Participant 2 said of alternative assessments:
>
> So, I've attempted to collaborate with other teachers so that there's assessments
>
> where students don't just answer multiple choice questions or write an essay, but
>
> they apply their knowledge in some innovative and creative way that I think really
>
> makes them really makes them apply the knowledge.

Participant 5 added, "For example, I– there is a good lesson that I– in my opinion is a

good lesson. Where we have the students really track somebody, it's almost like a diary

for the Great Depression." Participant 7 spoke positively about alternative assessments

but did not elaborate saying, "I think it's great in terms of individual experiences. It's not

great in terms of Regents exams but it's great in terms of the class itself and learning

important skills that they'll need later in life but not so much for Regents preparation."

Despite the lack of detail, a number of participants responded that they held

positive views towards alternative assessments or that they had positive experiences

using alternative assessments. Participant 2 gave perhaps the most positive response, saying,

> I think if they're put together really well, I think if you take the time to put them together, I think if you collaborate with other teachers, if you do research on how to do alternative assessments, I think they're the best way to assess students.

Participant 4 added, "I think they can be very valuable in like I said giving students a chance to work with content in a different way…" Participant 5 spoke about his use of alternative assessments when he is not bound to a state exam, saying, "I do think it could be a valuable way to assess students. I'm more likely to use alternative assessments in classes that don't have the New York State learning standards attached to them."

While discussing a particular alternative assessment Participant 8 said, "The students really get a good grasp of the information when they have to take the information and create a factual story or based on a factual story. They tend to have a major grasp on the information, tend to do extremely well with the information when I have used alternative assessments like this storybook…"

Not all the teachers had positive outlooks regarding alternative assessments. Some of the teachers reflected on the difficulties of utilizing alternative assessments and at least one appeared to feel they were inferior to traditional assessments. Participant 1 was perhaps the harshest on alternative assessments saying, "Yeah, I mean I generally shy away from them 'cause I don't find them to be that good a use of time. They tend to take up more, they tend to take up more time than a traditional assessment."

Participant 1 also felt that alternative assessments created issuing in grading, adding,

> The only thing about alternative assessments is I know with other teachers
>
> oftentimes do them,– the grade, what they're graded on oftentimes is not history
>
> related. It could be you know like how nice it looks or something like that as
>
> opposed to the substance of it.

Participant 3 felt that alternative assessments sounded good in concept but also spoke about their difficulties, saying, "My perception would be that they, in theory, sound, like, you know, sound like a good solution but I think in practice it might be difficult to implement."

Participant 7 spoke previously about the concern of using alternative assessments in a class which culminated in Regents exam. Participant 8 also reflected a similar concern when they said, "So, I do like to use alternative assessments, unfortunately I don't get to use them as often as I would like to because of the New York State Regents exam that is at the end of the year."

The data revealed that participants were split in their views on alternative assessments with some finding them valuable and actively using them while others only saw obstacles or thought they may distract from Regents preparation. Additionally, when discussing alternative assessments in the context of students with IEPs, many of the teachers focused more on the obstacles of how to modify the assessment for the students rather than the specific benefit to the students. The participants who gave positive answers spoke about how the format allows more access for students.

Participant 4 articulated the positive effect of alternative assessments for students with IEPs by saying,

I think usually students with IEPs, as long as everything is presented in, a, you know, a clear way it can often be a good experience for those students who maybe don't always perform well on traditional assessments like multiple choice questions and things. When students have a chance to maybe express things in their own way or be a little more creative, those students I think you have more of a chance to shine at times when it's not a stressful test situation or traditional testing situation.

Theme 3: Minimal Support or Training on Assessments

Of all the questions asked during the interview, Question 8 (Please describe any training you have received on implementing alternative assessments) received the most similar answer from all of the respondents. This was apparent even when interviewing. While asking this question many participants paused or hesitated. This theme became obvious when viewing how many participants had the same answer to this one question. This theme helped to answer the second research question and provided some additional context for the first. Almost all the teachers reported that they had not received any training on alternative assessments. Those few who did spoke about training either spoke about the midterm or of previous training they had received.

Answering Question 8, Participant 1 said, "Okay, that's easy I think the answer is zero, I don't think I, repeat the question one more time just to make sure I'm not." Participant 7 was much more succinct simply stating, "None."

Other participants spoke about the limited amount or the amount of time which passed. Participant 3 stated, "I would say I have not really received any training, maybe informal." Participant 4 added, "I think there was a Superintendent Conference Day where we had a choice of different topics and I signed up for one that had different resources and ideas for alternative assessments but that was probably a long time ago." While discussing a training they had received Participant 6 said it was, "…quite a long time ago. Maybe 2010." Participant 8 echoed their colleagues by saying, "Alternative assessments there– hasn't been too much training on alternative assessments."

Despite this lack of training there does seem to be an interest in further pursuing alternative assessments as an assessment strategy. As noted above, a number of participants had positive associations with alternative assessments and some even vocalized their desire for further training on the topic.

Participant 3 spoke about the negatives of a lack of training by saying, "So, I will say like, I'm definitely at a loss for… you know fully, I don't fully understand what other alternative assessments there are." Participant 4 spoke about the benefits of collaborating on alternative assessments when they said, "So, I think that if I think it would be more common, which I think would be a good thing, if we just had more of a chance to collaborate." Participant 5 put it simply, "I wish there was more proper training available on alternative assessments."

The lack of training for staff on the proper use, implementation, and benefits of alternative assessments could potentially account for the lack of teacher buy-in (Carriere et al., 2020). For staff to be properly motivated they have to be properly informed. The

lack of support from the district and department have made it difficult for these teachers to feel comfortable using alternative assessments, especially in the face of high stakes standardized testing such as the Regents exam.

Theme 4: Impact on Students With IEPs

Students with IEPs was one of the least discussed topics by respondents who were interviewed. As these students are the focal point of the study, it was important to understand what the participants had to say and how this would impact the students. The lack of discussion could be because general education teachers were interviewed and not special education teachers. The teachers interviewed all have students with IEPs in their class and were comfortable talking about them and used appropriate terminology. Almost all the teachers interviewed collaborated with a special education teacher, either directly in the classroom with a co-teacher or by consulting with the primary or resource room teacher. At the local site all students with an IEP are assigned to a special education teacher to be their caseload manager. This person is referred to in district as a primary and is responsible for reviewing the student's grades, writing their IEPs for a students' annual review meeting, and ensuring that students are receiving their appropriate testing accommodations among other responsibilities.

While discussing the assistance they have received from a special education teacher, Participant 2 said,

Obviously in the past when I've taught inclusion classes, I have the inclusion teacher there. That's a help in implementing the modifications on tests and assignments that are needed. If there's no inclusion teacher in the classroom it's

my responsibility to take a look at the IEP and implement the IEP's modifications

as best as possible. Often, I will consult the primary teachers of those students or

other special education teachers in the building in order to modify assignments,

tests, homework, whatever for those students.

Participant 4 spoke of input they received saying, "I will show them the test and

to see if they have any feedback of it if the formatting is– problematic for whatever

reason…" Participant 5 spoke of their working with their cooperating teacher saying,

"Every time I've design an assessment, I, like I said, I've always gone to that special ed

teacher to make sure it fits the needs of our students…"

They further elaborated that they relied on their co-teacher saying, "I don't have

the same type of training that they would normally have…" Participant 7 added, "Not

much on the formal assessments, but informally, you know, like, on the day-to-day stuff I

would." Participant 3 was the only one who did not have input from a special education

teacher saying, "Generally, I have not."

Of the specific feedback they received from special education teachers, most of it

seemed to simply be formatting the questions or wording of the questions or a focus on

students receiving their accommodations. No teacher indicated that their assessment type

was changed to meet the needs of students with IEPs and none of the lesson plans provide

special education information other than references to a co-teacher providing

accommodations.

Data Analysis Findings

After analyzing all the data, there were no glaring inconsistencies found. Many of the teachers discussed the heavy influence the Regents exam has on their classroom assessments; this was reflected in the lesson plans and assessments submitted. The responses that participants gave about a lack of training in alternative assessments correlated with a lack of familiarity with alternative assessments. Throughout the coding process, numerous teachers discussed a broad approach to assessment design with few comments about designing them to reflect their student population or individual student performance. None of the assessments provided required students to apply their content knowledge to problem solving tasks and were directly modeled after the Regents exam. None of the participants responded to the request for more information when contacted.

The perception of teachers interviewed towards alternative assessments was mostly positive with some hesitation as to the impact they would have on the pacing of the class and scores achieved by students on the Regents exam. While the participants discussed benefits of alternative assessments, few directly addressed their impact on students with IEPs. Even when directly asked about students with IEPs, participants struggled to give detailed responses or articulate specific benefits for these students. None of the participants spoke of receiving assessment support specifically related to students with IEPs.

Teachers who held positive views of alternative assessments felt strongly that more training would be needed for them to properly incorporate them into the classroom. Teachers at the local site are required to attend four days of professional development a

year offered by the district. The district provides some flexibility to teachers and

department directors in planning their professional development time. The district

typically requests teachers volunteer to run workshops, when possible, to allow for

internal professional development. Many teachers felt that proper professional

development would allow them to assess their students more effectively. Considering

these findings, and the current body of research, it is recommended that a professional

development workshop take place to train teachers on the creation and implementation of

alternative assessment to encourage their use (Swaran Singh et al., 2022).

Section 3: The Project

Introduction

After collecting and analyzing the data, I determined the best genre of project to address the problem would be professional development. The research indicated that numerous teachers have a lack of knowledge when it comes to alternative assessments. Numerous teachers were unaware of what alternative assessments were and lacked even foundational knowledge of their use and application. The results from the data demonstrated they are generally interested in receiving professional development on the topic. The professional development I designed would be spread over the course of 3 days to maximize participant engagement and ensure a thorough understanding of alternative assessments. I designed the workshop to have teachers engage with the presenter, so they are not passive participants. I developed the professional development to address the needs of both new and veteran teachers. The goal of this training is to familiarize teachers with alternative assessments and their benefits. In addition, the professional development provides teachers with a structured environment in which they can collaborate on the creation of alternative assessments and create lesson plans they can incorporate into their classroom. In this way, the professional development provides the participants with a practical resource of their own creation. The information gathered from this research was used in the creation of this professional development plan.

Rationale

There is good reason to be optimistic about the use of professional development to foster the use of alternative assessments. Shahbari and Abu-Alhija (2018) found that

math teachers who received professional development on alternative assessments reported more positive views of alternative assessments after completing the course. Furthermore, teachers in the course created assessments with a more conceptual focus rather than a procedural focus (Shahbari & Abu-Alhija, 2018). This higher-level learning through assessment is exactly what this professional development seeks to replicate. Sahin-Taskin (2018) found that preservice teachers who received professional development felt more assured of themselves and were better able to implement alternative assessments in their classrooms.

As previously stated, in conducting the interviews, multiple teachers expressed interest in receiving professional development on the topic of alternative assessments. However, not all teachers held positive views of alternative assessments and not all of them asked for training. However, providing training to those teachers with negative conceptions of alternative assessments may help to change their view (Shahbari & Abu-Alhija, 2018). For teachers who are open to the idea of professional development, the training provides context to better understand the benefits and limitations of alternative assessments and the appropriate application for their classrooms. Some of the teachers who mentioned using alternative assessments were given a chance to share what they already use and collaborate with colleagues on the creation of new materials. As many teachers feel the department or district has not supported them with professional development on assessments in the past, this training helps fill this gap in understanding.

Review of the Literature

To help create the professional development plan, I conducted a review of the literature. The findings were used as the basis for the professional development plan. The literature review includes research on the use of professional development in teacher training and concepts gathered from the research including alternative assessment training, alternative assessment design, and supports for assessment design. The literature was gathered using databases provided by Walden University including ERIC, Education Source, and SAGE Journals, as well as searches conducted using Google Scholar. The following terms were searched on these platforms with publication restricted to the last 5 years: *professional development, teacher motivation assessment, alternative assessment training, incorporating alternative assessments, alternative assessment design, alternative assessment strategies,* and *assessment support.*

The goal of this training was to provide teachers with information on the benefits of alternative assessment and how to appropriately use them in their classrooms. The hope is that teachers will incorporate more alternative assessments into their teaching and provide students, especially students with IEPs, with an array of techniques to assess knowledge.

Alternative Assessment Education

As previously discussed, multiple studies have been conducted on the benefits of training teachers in the use of alternative assessments (Sahin-Taskin, 2018; Shahbari & Abu-Alhija, 2018). Teachers who receive training are more likely to have positive views of alternative assessments and are more likely to incorporate them into their classrooms.

Giraldo (2019) found that teachers create their assessments based largely on their own experiences teaching and that effective professional development on assessments should include both practical applications and theoretical foundations. With this professional development, I sought to both ensure that teachers understand how to implement alternative assessments and why they should do so as well. One participant expressed that alternative assessments are time consuming, and the hope is that through this training, such misbeliefs can be dispelled.

Training teachers in the use of alternative assessments is not as simple as giving them an example to copy. Alternative assessments require a change not just in structure, but also in implementation. For longer or more interactive alternative assessments, students should be given formative feedback. This not only increases students' confidence with the assessment but allows for the student to respond to their weaknesses and correct them throughout the assessment process (Duque-Aguilar, 2021). Training alone does not result in teachers adopting alternative assessments. The training needed to be in-depth and practical. Swaran Singh et al. (2022) found that even after receiving professional development on the benefits of alternative assessments, teachers desired further training on how to implement them. Schools have already begun to incorporate student achievement on alternative assessments into their evaluations of students. One study in China calls for alternative assessment to be included in their measurement of students' academic progress (Zhuang et al., 2019).

Researchers have found that students often have positive views toward alternative assessments. These views provide further insight into the most appropriate training for

alternative assessments (Alokozaya, 2022). Viewing a task from a student's perspective can give valuable academic insight and improve teaching methodology (Moscardini & Moscardini 2020). The positive view of students toward alternative assessments correlates with student motivation toward the assessments. Students who are more motivated to complete an assessment are more engaged in the assessment. Additionally, students have associated alternative assessments with critical thinking skills (Alokozaya, 2022).

Alternative Assessment Design

When creating alternative assessments, it is important to consider the student population first. Students from different demographics will have different needs and different abilities or methods of displaying their knowledge. For this reason, the professional development workshop will contain a discussion on the local population and the effect alternative assessment could have on them. This study was conducted with a special focus on students with IEPs as they belong to a population that often benefits most from alternative assessments. Majoko (2018) conducted a survey of students with IEPs in Zimbabwe and found that alternative assessments helped to give these students greater access to the curriculum. In another study, researchers found that alternative assessments in physical education classes allow teachers to assess students whose disabilities prevent them from participating in traditional skill tests or written tests (Ha et al., 2022). Assessment design can help with more than just testing student knowledge. Jimenez and Warren (2023) found that alternative assessments can help students in developing self-determination skills. These demonstrate that when it comes to assessment

design, the student population is a significant factor of consideration, and any

professional development must consider this factor.

The COVID-19 pandemic forced many educators to make sudden changes to their

teaching approach. One study of changes forced by the pandemic found that alternative

assessments could be a way to assess students while maintaining academic integrity. This

same study found that one of the biggest challenges to this type of change was a lack of

teacher buy-in, which further necessitates professional development (Lau et al., 2020).

However, the pandemic also presents teachers with problems that come with a lack of

oversight of students. Students need to be engaged with the assessment to find value with

it. This shows the value of pairing alternative assessments with engaging instructors and

the limitations of assessments without student engagement (Kuzu et al., 2022). When

designing alternative assessments, it is important to ensure the assessment measures the

content. Teachers can use students to help measure content engagement by having them

participate in the evaluation of alternative assessments. Dolu et al. (2022) found that

having students rate the scientific accuracy of an alternative assessment correlated with

most of the students correctly completing the assignment.

Alternative assessments do not need to be viewed by teachers and students as a

unique part of the classroom experience. Many teachers have incorporated alternative

assessment activities into the structure of their class. This allows students multiple

opportunities to express their knowledge and creativity in a way that is natural to the

classroom structure (Singh et al., 2022). Alternative assessments can also be broken

down into their base components to help teach specific skills while building toward larger

assessments. Kiley et al. (2022) used the REACH program developed by the University of Montana as an alternative assessment for science students. The authors found that by having students conduct small-scale research and report on their findings, they helped to develop the skills that would be beneficial when they conducted research of a larger scale. During the workshop, teachers created a usable product they can incorporate into their classrooms.

Support for Assessment Design

For teachers to incorporate alternative assessments into their classroom, they must receive support for not just the design but the implementation as well. To do this, teachers need to believe in the efficacy of alternative assessments. Research has shown that teachers with a constructivist outlook of teaching are more likely to view grading students on aspects beyond the curriculum as important. This would include grading students on attributes such as confidence and effort (Bonner & Chen, 2021). For teachers who do not take a constructivist viewpoint, the training needed to stress that grading is ultimately left up to the individual teacher and does not need to be incorporated into their grading. Professional development is an excellent tool to help support teachers in assessment design. The training focused on more than just simply what an alternative assessment is by also addressing more abstract concepts such as digital tools and time management (Okoro et al., 2021). Even when districts support or encourage the use of alternative assessments, training and support is needed to appropriately develop them. Researchers in Turkey found that teachers feel demotivated to implement alternative assessments because of the pressure of standardized testing (Basok, 2020). For

professional development to be effective, it must demonstrate to teachers that these assessments can improve understanding.

The goal of this training was to support teachers, so they feel confident incorporating alternative assessments into their classrooms. This training aimed to be thorough and engaging so that teachers find the most value in it. Additionally, this training, or a similar training, should be offered regularly so that teachers can refresh their knowledge or receive further development (Zhang, 2019). To help support teachers in their training and assessment implementation, a survey was sent via e-mail before the training began. This gives the instructor a chance to assess a teacher's knowledge before the training begins and give the teachers an opportunity to express concerns prior to the training (Hirsch et al., 2020).

Professional Development and Alternative Assessments

Professional development remains one of the primary ways for teachers to improve their abilities and stay up to date on emerging practices in the field (Hirsch et al., 2020). This professional development project was designed to be delivered as a 3-day summer session. Summer professional development allows for 3 days of training without interruption of the school day. The summer is often viewed as an underutilized opportunity to deliver professional development (Başaran & Dinçman, 2022).

Any training on alternative assessments must encourage teachers to implement alternative assessments into their classroom. A professional development workshop that addresses not only the benefits, but also practical use of alternative assessments may change the attitudes of teachers so they view alternative assessments more favorably

(Shahbari & Abu-Alhija, 2018). Shifting teachers' perspectives is an essential part of

professional development training. The training must provide teachers with a practical

example of alternative assessments and demonstrate the construction of alternative

assessments or teachers will struggle with their implementation (Giraldo, 2019).

Project Description

The project that was developed as a result of the data collected will become a 3-

day professional development plan which educates teachers on the benefits of alternative

assessments and will provide them with time to collaborate on the development of

alternative assessments. The plan will focus on both ensuring the teachers buy-in of

alternative assessments as well as giving them a practical artifact which they will be able

use in their classroom at the culmination of the professional development sessions.

Additionally, the examples of alternative assessments will be chosen based on participant

responses and current research in the field.

Throughout the study, participants remarked that they had received little to no

training from their department or district on assessment design. To help mitigate this

deficiency, the professional development will begin with an overview of assessments and

what an alternative assessment is. When lesson plans and assessments were reviewed as

part of the data, they all demonstrated a reliance on traditional assessments as well as a

structure based on the New York State Regents examination. For this reason, the

professional development will also briefly discuss the purpose of standardized testing and

the role that plays in educational policy. This training will be eligible for all members of

the social studies department, whether their class culminates in a Regents exam or not.

This is done in part because schedules change every year, allowing teachers who may teach Regents classes in the future a chance to receive the training beforehand. Additionally, many of these teachers have students with IEPs in their classroom, necessitating the focus on the benefits of alternative assessments for students with IEPs. It is important that teachers who received this training understand the impact alternative assessments can have for students, especially the those in the most vulnerable student populations.

Resources

To ensure that all participants will be able to attend the professional development sessions without interfering with their classroom responsibilities, the professional development will be offered during the summer months as part of the teachers' professional responsibilities. The department head will determine the date and location for the workshop to take place. The presenter for the professional development will need to access a classroom with a computer, projection screen (SmartBoard), and enough seating for 12-15 individuals. All necessary district forms for the use of space will be completed. The professional development will not come at a cost to the district. The teachers attending the workshop will be asked to bring either a laptop or Chromebook with them. The classroom computer will have internet access and Wi-Fi that will be made available for all attendees. Copies of the presentation and all materials will be left in a folder with a writing utensil on the opening day of the sessions.

Roles and Responsibilities

   The two primary roles will be the presenter and the attendees, or teachers. The primary responsibility of facilitating the training and instruction will fall to the presenter. The presenter will be required to be familiar with all of the training materials as well as the underlying research which supports the materials. It will be important for the presenter to speak clearly and effectively when delivering the training. The presenter will be thorough in their delivery and will be prepared for any questions that arise during the training. If a question is posed that the presenter is not prepared for, they will inform the attendees that an answer will be researched and delivered to them the next day. The participants will be made aware that the materials for this presentation were made based upon research that was conducted at the local site. As a result, the presentation had been created with this exact teacher population in mind.

   The primary role of the attendees will be to engage with the material and maintain their focus throughout all of the sessions. Attendees will be responsible not only to themselves, but to the other participants in the room as well. Attendees will be expected to take notes, participate in both small and large group discussions, and participate in the creation of an alternative assessment. Development of the alternative assessment will take place on the last day of training and will require research and engagement from the teachers who attend. These assessments will be shared with the department as a whole upon the completion of the workshop.

Potential Barriers

The primary potential barrier will be attendance. As the professional development will be offered in the summer, some teachers will choose to use this time to relax. However, as professional development hours are required to maintain a teaching certification in New York State and out of pocket professional development can be expensive, teachers are incentivized to attend a free workshop through their district. An agreement may also be reached with the department head to allow the summer professional development to take the place of other departmental duties such as meetings or curriculum writing. This will be at the discretion of the department head.

Another potential barrier will be the engagement of the attendees. Attendees who do not engage with the professional development or do not actively participate in the creation of the alternative assessment could potentially limit the effectiveness of the professional development. To encourage all attendees to engage to their fullest extent, the department head will be invited to attend the workshop. Additionally, the program will be voluntary, which should draw attendees who are serious about engaging in the professional development.

Proposal for Implementation and Timetable

The project will be presented to the social studies department head with the findings of the research and potential implications. This presentation will outline for the department head the current lack of alternative assessment in social studies classrooms and also the steps which can be taken to rectify the situation and the benefits of doing so.

Once permission to offer the project is obtained, the goal is to offer this professional

development during the summer of 2023.

To implement this professional development, a meeting will be held with the

department head, lead teacher, and appropriate building and district level administrators.

At this meeting, the presenter will review all the findings of the research as well as all of

the required materials for the project and expectations for both them and the attendees.

Additionally, the presenter will consider the feedback received from the various

stakeholders in making a modification to the project. At the conclusion of the meeting, a

date and location will be determined for the proposed project.

Project Evaluation Plan

There will be three primary methods by which the project will be evaluated. The

first is that the project is assessed as it is delivered through formative assessment

activities. Second, the alternative assessments developed at the end of the project are

evaluated for form and effectiveness. Finally, a survey will be sent to attendees upon the

completion of the professional development. (See Appendix D)

Throughout the delivery of the professional development, it is vital that the

presenter ensures that participants are focused and engaged. It is also vital to ensure that

attendees understand the material as it is delivered to them. To ensure that these goals are

reached, the presenter will occasionally solicit feedback or answers from the attendees as

the professional development is delivered. Attendees will provide feedback informally

through discussion and formally through targeted responses. After reviewing the benefits

of alternative assessments, participants will be broken into small groups and asked to

discuss which of the benefits they found most compelling and why. Groups will then share their responses and discuss with other groups how they arrived at their answers. Additionally, when types of alternative assessments are reviewed, attendees will be asked if they have experience with any of them and will be asked to share how they have utilized them in the past.

The professional development workshop will culminate in the creation of an alternative assessment by each group. Teachers will be asked to present their alternative assessment to the rest of the attendees along with any required materials to conduct the assessment and a method of evaluation. The presenter will help the teachers as they develop these assessments to ensure that they are on the right course as the assessments are developed. After the session, the presenter will evaluate the materials created to ensure that they are alternative assessments. All assessments that fit the criteria will be approved. The presenter expects that each group will be able to develop an alternative assessment.

After the professional development has been delivered, attendees will complete a brief questionnaire asking them to evaluate the effectiveness of the professional development they have received. This questionnaire will be used by the presenter to collect feedback and make any necessary changes to the professional development. The questionnaire consists of approximately six questions and concludes with an area for attendees to leave comments or concerns.

Project Implications

From the beginning of this research, the hope was that the information gathered would be used to make a positive impact on the local site. The information gathered from this research, when utilized with the proposed professional development, will create an excellent opportunity to bring about improvement. The professional development project was designed to not only change teachers' perspectives of alternative assessments, but also train them in the creation and implementation.

Alternative assessments have numerous benefits, including helping vulnerable students, increasing community engagement, and improving skills not measured using traditional assessments. By incorporating more alternative assessments into classrooms, teachers improve their practice and accommodate students in unique and engaging ways. Using alternative assessments allows teachers to exercise a greater level of creativity. While alternative assessments can require a large amount of effort, their use can also have a tremendous impact.

In the local setting, students with IEPs are underperforming their peers. This underperformance has implications for teachers and students beyond grades, including funding, performance evaluations, and confidence. By improving the assessments at the local site, students can build stronger skills and master the content in a way that was previously unavailable to them. With new laws and regulations targeting schools, and relationships between districts and community stakeholders struggling, improvements such as this not only help the students, but also work to build trust and confidence in the school system.

Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

Project Strengths and Limitations

This project has a number of strengths. First, the project brings together an entire department for training. Second, the project addresses an area of training that teachers are interested in. Finally, the project will create a number of actual assessments that can be used by teachers who attend the training. While the project has many strengths, it also has limitations. The primary two limitations to this project are implementation and commitment.

While departments often gather for meetings or conference days, they rarely meet for extended professional development. This training would bring members of the department together for 3 consecutive days to learn about alternative assessments. This extended time together would allow them to collaborate in a way rarely available to teachers. This level of collaboration would mean that colleagues will have the opportunity to discuss and share lessons and materials that could be beneficial to each other. In addition, members who may not be familiar with each other could work together and build strong relationships. The increased unity of the department would hopefully foster a greater level of collaboration throughout the school year.

The second major strength of the professional development workshop is that this is a topic teachers have expressed interest in. During the interviews, numerous teachers verbalized a desire to take professional development courses related to alternative assessments. Almost all the participants said they had little to no professional

development on assessment at all. This professional development would capture the interest of the educators while training them in an area in need of further development.

The final major strength is perhaps the most important. At the end of the workshop, teachers would have a number of artifacts they could incorporate into their classrooms. Teachers create an alternative assessment that could be shared with the department, thereby giving teachers a chance to incorporate a number of different alternative assessments. By test running these assessments, teachers could get a better understanding of how to use alternative assessments and an understanding of what type of alternative assessments work with their teaching style. The students in these classes would also be exposed to alternative assessments and could give teachers firsthand feedback on what they felt worked and what did not. This will also benefit teachers who are unable to attend the workshop and do not receive the training.

The primary goal of this workshop is to increase the number of alternative assessments used by teachers who attend the training. Teachers who attend will leave the workshop with a better understanding of the importance of alternative assessments and how assessments in general affect the most vulnerable student populations. The workshop aims to create a lasting change in not just district practices, but the overall paradigm of the department. By putting such a strong emphasis on assessments, the hope is that teachers will put more consideration into the creation and implementation of assessments in their classrooms.

The primary limitation of this project is implementation of alternative assessments. There is no requirement that the teachers who attend the workshop use any

of the artifacts created. Teachers could leave the training and never turn their attention to alternative assessments again. Even the teachers who use these assessments run the risk of incorporating them inappropriately or modifying them in ways that make them less valuable. To help mitigate these situations, presenters make their contact information available to all participants so they can contact them with any further questions.

The other limitation would be the commitment of the teachers. Because the professional development is voluntary, teachers need to agree to attend. This could lead to unmotivated teachers not attending the workshop. Additionally, teachers who want to attend the workshop have to commit to 3 full days of professional development. For these 3 days, they have to be focused, attentive, and engaged. Teachers at the workshop will be asked to create an alternative assessment for distribution to the department. These teachers will be informally responsible for assisting other teachers with the implementation of alternative assessments. The teachers who agree to attend the workshop will be responsible for a strong commitment to the ideals of the workshop.

The actual professional development also has its own limitations. The presenter needs to be mindful of the time they spend on each topic to ensure they do not run out of time or fall short. This balancing act can be difficult but is essential to ensure that the training is completed appropriately. The training relies on the use of technology, which can fail at unexpected moments. The presenter needs to ensure they check everything is working well in advance of each day's session and, if not, contact the appropriate individuals to rectify the situation. The presenter also needs to acquire district approval for all resources at least 1 week prior to the start of the workshop.

Recommendations for Alternative Approaches

Professional development workshops are the most common type of teacher training offered by the local site. Teachers attend professional development workshops on conference days, during department meetings, and as part of national or local organizations. However, it is not the only way to deliver the information. The information and implementation of alternative assessments could also be achieved by using a consultant.

The major benefit of using a consultant would be the personalized and hands-on approach. A consultant could hold a brief workshop that introduces the topic to the teachers and then meet with them individually to discuss their specific needs. A consultant could also push into classrooms to observe the implementation of alternative assessments and help teachers use them to their fullest potential. The biggest obstacle with a consultant would be the cost to the district. Educational consultants who work with teachers to this degree are likely to be prohibitively expensive. Additionally, the district would have to locate a qualified consultant as the presenter for the workshop is employed full-time as an educator. Finally, teachers may feel pressure working with a consultant and allowing the consultant access to their classroom to monitor their teaching. This could discourage teachers who would otherwise attend the professional development.

Scholarship, Project Development and Evaluation, and Leadership and Change

To say that putting together this project study was an adventure would be an understatement. This entire process coincided with a number of fairly significant moments in my life. Despite numerous setbacks, both personal and academic, this

adventure was incredible. I have learned more than I thought I would and feel that my ability as a teacher has improved significantly. My research gave me valuable insights into the material I learned and the research process as well.

When this adventure began, I knew I wanted to look at assessments. Throughout my education, I have found that a heavy emphasis is placed on instruction and curriculum but rarely is there a focus on assessments. As I began my research into assessments, I found an entire world of assessments I did not know existed. While I was familiar with certain types of alternative assessments, such as portfolios and project-based learning, I was unaware of the sheer amount of variety that existed. I was also unaware of the significant benefits these assessments have for students with IEPs. As I learned more about the benefits of alternative assessments, I realized I was not the only person who lacked this information. Numerous educators I spoke with expressed a lack of understanding that was similar to my own. With this in mind, I decided to focus my project study on alternative assessments.

Prior to this project, I would have considered myself a decent researcher. However, I was basing this perception solely on the idea that I could use search engines and databases to find the information I was looking for. I had never considered that I would contribute to the body of research in those databases. Having now conducted my own research and having analyzed the results, I realize how little I understood before. I have found myself reading everything, not just research, with a more critical eye. This has also increased my interests in ways I did not expect. Previously, when I read research, I usually found the methodology sections to be the least engaging parts of the article. I

now find myself captivated with the methodology sections and find myself comparing what I have learned to what I am reading.

This process has also led me to evaluate the role I play as a teacher in my district. Prior to the project study, I viewed myself in the traditional hierarchy of teachers. I often sought advice from older, more experienced teachers while mentoring newer teachers myself. However, throughout this process, I have come to realize there are techniques and information everyone possesses, regardless of age or experience, that are valuable to share. This process also reinforced that no matter how much experience a teacher has, there is always more to learn.

Reflection on the Importance of the Work

The value that alternative assessments bring to a classroom can be as revolutionary as differentiated instruction. Traditional assessments are effective for most students but are often a struggle for students with IEPs. By increasing the utilization of alternative assessments teachers can give their students greater access to the material while also increasing their own satisfaction with the learning process. All too often, teachers see the barriers and not the benefits. When conducting this research, I found that one teacher in particular held fairly negative views about alternative assessments, with one of their strongest criticisms being the amount of time they take. While it is true that alternative assessments can be time consuming, though not all of them are, their value can outweigh the cost. I truly hope this research brings about a paradigm shift for some and begins to make positive changes, even if just at the local site.

Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research

The potential impact of this project is enormous. While the training and workshop will focus on a single department, the interest will hopefully spread to other departments. The hope is that by providing research based professional development on alternative assessments, other teachers will begin to inquire about their use. Increasing this use across the board could benefit all students and create an educational environment that is both enjoyable and responsive to students needs and interests. If teachers start using service-learning projects, this research could potentially benefit the local community by having students engage with local stakeholders and work to improve the community. Improving relations with the community could also have a positive impact on the district. Better relations could mean more community involvement with district initiatives and a better chance of passing the yearly budget.

Further research needs to be done on the best use of alternative assessments and the role they play in preparing students for college and career readiness skills. While the research thoroughly addresses the benefits of alternative assessments, the application of them to the local site should be further studied. This would allow for the district to better target areas in need of improvement or to support and reinforce what is already working. Additionally, surveys or interviews like the one conducted should be repeated periodically to best tailor district professional development to the needs and wants of the teachers. This will allow the district to maximize its professional development potential and respond to changing demographics in the district. Additionally, the district could benefit from spending time studying the impact of standardized testing on teaching

practices. A large number of teachers spoke about the pressures of the New York State Regents Exam and the small amount of departmental professional development that was offered on assessments revolved around structuring tests in the format of the Regents.

Conclusion

Despite significant research on the topic, alternative assessments are often treated as a novelty. They are viewed as something that can be done in electives or fun assignments to interest students, but rarely are they viewed as being academically rigorous. The value alternative assessments bring to a classroom resonate beyond that one moment. They allow nontraditional learners to access the curriculum in unique and engaging ways. They can be used to improve skills that traditional assessments do not focus on. Alternative assessments impact students in ways that they can carry forward with them into their futures and even can impact communities in districts where they are incorporated. By changing teacher perceptions of alternative assessments, it is possible increase their use of alternative assessments and improve the education of all students.

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Appendix A: The Project

Three Day Professional Development Outline
<u>Understanding and Utilizing Alternative Assessments Professional Development</u>
<u>Plan</u>
Day 1 (7:20 A.M. until 2:05 P.M.)

7:20 A.M. – 8:00 A.M.	Welcome and Introductions and Ice Breaker
8:30 A.M. – 9:00 A.M.	Overview of Goals for the Professional Development
9:00 A.M. – 9:10 A.M.	Ten Minute Break
9:10 A.M. – 10:30 A.M.	How did we get here? Study, Findings, Research, Project
10:30 A.M. – 12:00 P.M.	Lunch Break
12:00 P.M. – 12:45 P.M.	Why Are Assessments Important and What Are Alternative Assessments?
12:45 P.M. – 1:30 P.M.	Group Activity #1 – What Training / Experience Do I Have With Assessments?
1:30 P.M. – 2:05 P.M.	Group Activity #1 – Report Out / Discussion

Day 2 (7:20 A.M. until 2:05 P.M.)

7:20 A.M. – 7:45 A.M.	Breakfast and Informal Review
7:45 A.M. – 9:00 A.M.	Benefits of Alternative Assessments
9:00 A.M. – 9:10 A.M.	Ten Minute Break
9:10 A.M. – 10:30 A.M.	Types of Alternative Assessments
10:45 A.M. – 12:00 P.M.	Lunch Break
12:00 P.M. – 12:45 P.M.	Who Benefits from Alternative Assessments?
12:45 P.M. – 1:30 P.M.	Group Activity #2 – What Alternative Assessments Do I Use?
1:30 P.M. – 2:05 P.M.	Group Activity #2 – Report Out / Discussion

Day 3 (7:20 A.M. until 2:05 P.M.)

7:20 A.M. – 7:45 A.M.	Breakfast and Informal Review
7:45 A.M. – 9:00 A.M.	Group Activity #3 – Alternative assessment creation
10:45 A.M. – 12:00 P.M.	Lunch Break
12:00 P.M. – 1:00 P.M.	Group Activity #3 – Report Out / Discussion
1:00 P.M. – 1:45 P.M.	Questions / Wrap Up
1:45 P.M. – 2:05 P.M.	Professional Development Evaluation

Professional Development Presentation

ALTERNATIVE ASSESSMENTS

Presenter: Chander Mallhotra Jr.

Summer 2023

INTRODUCTIONS

Please state your name, courses taught, and years of experience.

If you could live the life of any person from history, who would it be?

Questions We Will Answer

- What are alternative assessments?
- Why should I use alternative assessments?
- Which students benefit the most from alternative assessments?
- How do I create an alternative assessment?

AND….. BREAK!

Please return in ten minutes.

Research Review

Study: A study was conducted by interviewing 8 social studies teachers about their knowledge and use of alternative assessments. This information was then reviewed for common patterns and themes.

Findings: The study found that numerous teachers have no received training on alternative assessments, and few felt confidence in their knowledge of alternative assessments. Several participants expressed a desire for further training.

Action: This professional development was designed to help improve the use and creation of alternative assessments by teachers.

We are adjourned until 12 P.M.

Three Pillars of Education

CURRICULUM   INSTRUCTION   ASSESSMENT

Assessment

- What is the goal of an assessment?

- Formative Assessment: A formative assessment measures student learning as part of the process. Formative assessments are given more frequently than summative assessments to measure whether the students have grasped the material before moving on in the curriculum.

- Summative Assessment: Summative assessments measure a student's long -term achievement and understanding of the material.

- When would a formative assessment be more appropriate than a summative assessment?

What are alternative assessments?

- Alternative Assessment: Alternative Assessments are any assessments outside of what is viewed as the traditional assessments of multiple choice, true -false, essays, and short answer questions. Alternative assessments are viewed as being more student centered than traditional assessments.

- Based on this definition would you consider the Regents exam to be an alternative assessment? Why or why not?

WHAT TRAINING HAVE YOU RECEIVED ON ASSESSMENTS?

WHAT EXPERIENCE DO YOU HAVE WITH CREATING ASSESSMENTS?

Please divide into four groups and discuss the prompts on the screen. You will be asked to share a summary of your discussion.

LET'S DISCUSS

Benefits of Alternative Assessments

What type of students do you believe would benefit the most from alternative assessments?

How could alternative assessments support social and emotional learning?

How could alternative assessments increase community or parent engagement?

What type of skills could alternative assessments foster that traditional assessments cannot?

AND..... BREAK! (AGAIN)

Please return in ten minutes.

Types of Alternative Assessments

Self-evaluations

Peer-evaluations

Jam boards

Drawing

Service-learning

Portfolios

Investigations

We are adjourned until 12 P.M.

Let's Review

What are alternative assessments?

What are the benefits of alternative assessments?

What are some types of alternative assessments?

Who Benefits?

Students with learning disabilities	Students with communication disorders	Students with physical challenges

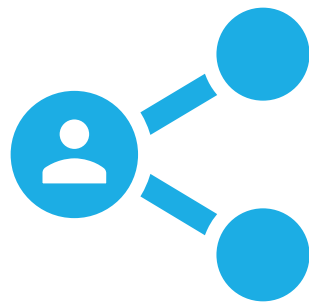|	
Students with emotional disturbances	Students who struggles with traditional skills

WHAT ALTERNATIVE ASSESSMENTS DO I USE?

WHAT ALTERNATIVE ASSESSMENTS HAVE I EXPERIENCED?

Please divide into four groups and discuss the prompts on the screen. You will be asked to share a summary of your discussion.

LET'S DISCUSS

Creating an Alternative Assessment

Divide up into four groups. Your group will work together to create an alternative assessment. The assessment should be usable by the end of the workshop so please create all parts of the assessment. The assessments will be presented afterwards and shared with the department.

We are adjourned until 12 P.M.

LET'S DISCUSS

QUESTIONS?

THANK YOU VERY MUCH!

Thank you for taking the time to attend this training. Please complete the surveys and leave them in the bin as you exit. Enjoy the rest of your summer!

Appendix B: Interview Protocol

Hello, my name is Chander Mallhotra Jr. I would like to thank you very much for

agreeing to participate in my study. This study is being conducted as part of the

completion of my graduate degree at Walden University. The purpose of this study is to

investigate the perceptions of teachers regarding the implementation and use of

alternative assessments to support students' academic achievement in social studies

classes while still having to implement the summative assessment of the Regents exams.

Our interview is expected to last between thirty to forty-five minutes. I will be asking you

about how you assist students with IEPs, design assessments, and any training or

assistance you have received on designing and implementing assessments.

Prior to today you received a consent form which you signed and returned. Just as a

reminder you agreed to participate in this study by allowing for this interview and

submitting a lesson plan relevant to an assessment. You also agreed to be recorded for

today's interview. Do you still consent to these terms?

Excellent, before we begin do you have any questions for me?

Okay, if any questions arise at any time, feel free to let me know and we can discuss

them. Let us begin with our first question.

[Note: Throughout the interview I will use, as appropriate, probing questions such as

"Can you tell me more about…", "Could you give me an example of…?", and "Could

you elaborate on …?" to illicit further insights from the participants.]

1) What factors most influence assessment design in your classroom? (RQ 1)

2) Please describe the experience you have teaching classes which contain

students with IEPs. (RQ 1)

3)   How are students with IEPs supported in your classroom? (RQ 1)

4)   Please describe the process that goes into planning, creating, and

implementing your assessments. (RQ 1,2)

5)   What, if any, input have you received from a special education teacher

when designing your assessments? (RQ 1,2)

6)   Can you provide an example of how this input changed your assessment?

(RQ 1)

7)   What support is provided by the district or department for assessment

design in your classroom? (RQ 2)

8)   Please describe any training you have received on implementing

alternative assessments. (RQ 2)

9)   What are your experiences with using alternative assessments? (RQ 2)

10)   Can you describe in more detail how this experience would impact

students with IEPs? (RQ 1,2)

11)   Please describe your perception of alternative assessments as an

assessment strategy. (RQ 2)

Before we finalize our interview, is there anything related to alternative assessments or

your view of alternative assessments that you would like to share? Is there any in general

that you would like to share that you feel may be relevant? Well, thank you very much

and I hope you enjoy the rest of your day!

Appendix C: Document Analysis Protocol

To perform my document analysis, I reviewed the lesson plans and assessments submitted by each participant. The goal was to determine if the assessments submitted by each participant qualified as a traditional or alternative assessment. To determine the type of assessment each participant submitted the lesson plans and assessments where reviewed to identify if they were more consistent with traditional assessments or alternative assessments.

The first part that was analyzed was the type of questions on the assessments. The assessments were analyzed to determine whether they consisted primarily of traditional assessment tasks or alternative assessment tasks. Traditional assessment tasks include multiple choice questions, true/false questions, traditional essays, and short writing tasks. The questions on the test where also analyzed to see if they conform to the format of the two Regents exams. Both Regents exams contain stimulus based multiple choice questions. The United States history Regents contains a Civic Literacy Essay with specific wording that is consistent across exams.

Next, the assessments where viewed for what they actually assessed. The questions were broken down into whether they measured content knowledge, academic skill, or both. Questions which measure academic skills where examined to see if they measured writing skills or other tasks. The questions were also viewed for any problem-solving elements they may contain. I looked to see if any questions translated to real-world problems or historical research skills.

After that evaluation, I viewed the materials available to students while taking the test to see if any of the assessments contained a nontraditional format. The lesson plans and assessments were reviewed to note whether or not any teacher allowed students to collaborate on the assessment, whether in person or digitally. This is also when I noted the amount of time that was allotted for each exam.

Finally, I checked the lesson plans for any information on how students would be graded for their assessments and to see if there were any accompanying rubrics. After all of this information was reviewed for each pair of lesson plans and assessments, a determination was made as to whether or not the assessment qualified as a traditional assessment or an alternative assessment.

Appendix D: Alternative Assessment Professional Development Evaluation

1.   I found this professional development to be informative and worthwhile.
        5 – Strongly Agree
        4 – Agree
        3 – Unsure
        2 – Disagree
        1 – Strongly Disagree

2.   I found the presenter to be clear, articulate, and understandable.
        5 – Strongly Agree
        4 – Agree
        3 – Unsure
        2 – Disagree
        1 – Strongly Disagree

3.   The presenter managed time and transitions effectively.
        5 – Strongly Agree
        4 – Agree
        3 – Unsure
        2 – Disagree
        1 – Strongly Disagree

4.   This professional development improved my understanding of alternative
assessments.
        5 – Strongly Agree
        4 – Agree
        3 – Unsure
        2 – Disagree
        1 – Strongly Disagree

5.   This professional development improved my ability to create alternative
assessments.
        5 – Strongly Agree
        4 – Agree
        3 – Unsure
        2 – Disagree
        1 – Strongly Disagree

6.   This professional development improved my ability to utilize alternative assessments.

      5 – Strongly Agree

      4 – Agree

      3 – Unsure

      2 – Disagree

      1 – Strongly Disagree

7.   Attending this professional development made me more likely to use alternative assessments in my classroom.

      5 – Strongly Agree

      4 – Agree

      3 – Unsure

      2 – Disagree

      1 – Strongly Disagree

8.   Attending this professional development gave me a more positive view of alternative assessments.

      5 – Strongly Agree

      4 – Agree

      3 – Unsure

      2 – Disagree

      1 – Strongly Disagree

9.   Overall, the professional development was impactful and should promote change.

      5 – Strongly Agree

      4 – Agree

      3 – Unsure

      2 – Disagree

      1 – Strongly Disagree