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Special Education Teachers' Perceptions of Professional Development Around Assessment

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Walden University
2019

Abstract

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MA, Walden University, 2012

BS, Jackson State University, 1991

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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Abstract

The significance of professional development (PD) is acknowledged in research studies as essential to implementing rigorous state standards. Although the literature recognizes that PD is a crucial component in improving teachers' knowledge and skills, some teachers at a midsized urban public elementary school in the southern United States did not see the benefit of attending PD. The purpose of this study was to explore elementary special education teachers' perceptions of PD around assessment. Guided by a framework based on Chen and McCray's whole teacher approach to teacher PD, this basic qualitative study was designed to understand how these elementary special education teachers viewed the PD activities related to assessment at the local site. In-depth interviews were conducted with elementary special education teachers at LMP Elementary School who had attended PD about assessment. Interview data were analyzed using the content analysis method. Overall, findings revealed concerns regarding the quality of PD, lack of training, lack of evidence-based practice, teachers' intrinsic motivation and commitment, and teachers' autonomy. Findings were used to design a 3-day PD workshop that engaged learning techniques for special education teachers to assess and implement instructional methods to augment students with disabilities' academic achievement. Ultimately, this study has implications for creating positive social change by advocating and providing for special education teachers to be maximally engaged in PD aimed at enhancing outcomes for the students with disabilities they serve.

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Section 1: The Problem

Professional development is a method of providing teachers with the skills and proficiencies needed to construct exceptional educational results for all students (Darling-Hammond, 2015; Desimone & Garet, 2015; Dufour, 2015). The training also engages learning techniques for teachers to assess instructional methods to advance students achievement (Lattuca, Bergom, & Knight, 2014; Owen, 2015), and preparation for career-readiness and professional knowledge (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2013; Thiers, 2016). The importance of professional development for teachers has been studied from some perspectives. In the elaboration of the conceptual framework, the whole teacher approach, Chen and McCray (2012) stressed having qualified teachers in the classroom is imperative for the augmentation of education. From the perspective of professional development other researchers have found that without developing the skills and competencies of the teachers, improving schools would be impracticable (Guskey & Sparks, 2002; Manduca, 2017; Randel, Apthorp, Beesley, Clark, & Wang, 2016).

In addition to the varied designs of professional development, there has been little research conducted on special education teachers' perceptions of professional development around assessment (Owen, 2015; Ruppar, Neeper, & Dalsen, 2016). An interpretation of special education teachers' perceptions of professional development around assessment may be used to advance existing professional development approaches and concentrate on the knowledge and skills needed for students with disabilities (DuFour, 2015; Saunders, 2013).

This study was designed to explore special education teachers' perceptions of professional development around assessment. Exploring special education teachers' perceptions as a guide for professional development may augment the transfer of knowledge for future professional learning opportunities. Additionally, the analysis of the data collected was utilized to design professional development activities that model the instructional approaches needed in the classroom.

In the following sections, the local problem, the rationale for the study, definitions of terms, the significance of the study, and the research question was described. Finally, a literature review, conceptual framework for the study, literature review key variables and concepts, implication, and summary were also addressed.

The Local Problem

With the requirements of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act, the reauthorization of the Individuals With Disabilities Education Improvement (IDEIA) Act coupled with the need to meet Common Core State Standards (CCSS), and Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015, district teachers are required to provide services to students with disabilities in all components of education, including the use of high-quality assessments to measure educational performance. To ensure that students with disabilities have access to quality education, a midsized urban public elementary school in the southern United States, namely, the Direct Way Public School District (DWPSD) (pseudonym), requires special education teachers to involve themselves in in-service training and professional development programs. Training sessions incorporate different elements of statewide assessment allowing teachers to

adapt the skills gained into classroom practices (Cannon, Tenuto, & Kitchel, 2013; Nitko & Brookhart, 2014). According to Guskey (2003, 2014), professional development programs are an integral component of education and are focused on the belief that competent teachers provide an opportunity for student achievement.

Despite the district standard to provide professional development, some teachers did not see the benefit of attending the training (school superintendent, personal communication, February 7, 2014). Teacher perceptions regarding professional development training have been studied at other sites in the United States (Cameto et al., 2010; McMillan, McConnell, & O'Sullivan, 2016; Robinson, Myran, Strauss, & Reed, 2014; Yildirim, Arastaman, & Dasci, 2016) and in other countries (De Lisle, 2015; Hansén, Eklund, & Sjöberg, 2014; Oz, 2014; Johnson, 2014; Jonsson, Lundahl, & Holmgren, 2015). Researchers' have found that teachers have various beliefs about professional development. Overall, researchers have indicated that teachers do not see the benefit of professional development (Brock & Carter, 2015; Kleinert, Kennedy, & Kearns, 1999; McMillan, 2015; Randel et al., 2016). Several researchers have suggested that teachers envisioned professional development training as measuring teachers' performance (Brock, Huber, Carter, Juarez, & Warren, 2014; Randel et al., 2016). Other factors that have been identified through research included unclear expectations of professional development training by the teachers (McMillan, 2015), lack of alignment between the training and classroom practices (Cho & Kingston, 2015; Wyse, Dean, Viger, & Vansickle, 2013), and lack of teacher input into the development (Kahn & Lewis, 2014), implementation (Murphy & Haller,

2015), and evaluation (Oz, 2014) of professional development programs. In addition,

the training was less efficient in reaching desired goals (Burrack & Urban, 2014;

Karvonen, Wakeman, Flowers, & Moody, 2013; Tindal, Nese, Farley, Saven, &

Elliott, 2016). Additionally, the training offered little or no impact on teachers'

knowledge and skills (Pat-El, Tillema, Segers, & Vedder, 2015; Royster, Reglin, &

Losike-Sedimo, 2014; Young & Jackman, 2014). The current body of literature,

though informative, revealed wide ranges of professional development activities

affecting various views; however, little is known about special education teachers'

perceptions of professional development, specifically around assessment. Therefore,

the purpose of this study was to explore special education teachers' perceptions of

professional development around assessment in the DWPSD. This gap in practice was

addressed in this research study.

Rationale

In the local school district, one school administrator noted that teachers'

attitudes, knowledge and skills, and the pressures and constraints of providing high-

quality education for students shape the reality of the classroom and models for

change (school superintendent, personal communication, February 7, 2014). The result

of this relationship has been, in some situations, the selective attendance of

professional learning activities (school superintendent, personal communication,

February 7, 2014). However, DWPSD leaders want to increase teachers' effectiveness,

and leaders believe that professional development plays a significant role in achieving

this goal (school superintendent, personal communication, February 7, 2014). Both

Hirsh (2005) and Sparks (1997) agreed that learning and achievement occur for both the students and teachers through professional development activities.

Professional development is a strategy used to meet the needs of teachers to transform their current practices at the same time enhancing student learning (Guskey, 2003; Hirsh, 2005). Systems are in place to ensure that students with disabilities have access to quality education, an environment that promotes learning and activities that align integral learning components to the curriculum (Nitko & Brookhart, 2014).

In response to the IDEIA Act, DWPSD established assessments to measure the performance of students with disabilities. These assessments are intended to measure student progress and performance against state standards and validate academic achievement. Currently, the state assessments consist of four components:

1. The Grade Level Testing Program (GTLP), which reference testing in language arts and mathematics administered to students in grades three through eight. Writing assessments reference performance in writing distributed to students in grades four and seven. Moreover, the Science Test reference testing in science administered to students in grades five and eight.

2. The Subject Area Testing Program (SATP) measures end-of-course tests administered for History from 1877, Algebra I, Biology I, and English III.

3. The Career Planning and Assessment System measures occupation-specific Criterion writing assessment administered to all students in vocational programs.

4. The Assessment Program-Alternate designed to assess the educational performance of students with cognitive disabilities (SWCDs) who are not able to participate in the general education curriculum even with accommodations. Integrating differentiated models of professional development around assessment has the potential to reinforce and expand teachers knowledge and skills to close the gap in practice (Minor, Desimone, Lee, & Hochberg, 2016; Suanrong & Herron, 2014).

It is essential to understand that the quality of a school district is contingent upon the knowledge and skills of its teachers (Guskey, 1994; Schipper, Goei, de Vries, & van Veen , 2017). As the trend of disability continues to generate increasing challenges and impediments for the students with disabilities, comprehending how special education teachers perceive professional development around assessment could be a valuable component for district leaders to expand current knowledge about factors that impede or encourage buy-in and sustainability of the training. In addition, the study results may empower special education teachers' needs to be considered within the framework of professional culture by providing descriptive data on how to integrate best practices around assessment. The analysis of the data collected may also be utilized to design professional development activities that model the instructional approaches needed in the classroom.

Definition of Terms

Alternate assessment: Are assessment methods that provide an alternative to traditional paper-and-pencil testing (Karvonen, Wakeman, & Kingston, 2016).

Assessment of program-alternate. Is a method used to measure the knowledge and skills of students with a significant cognitive disability (Cho & Kingston, 2015).

Assessment: is the process of collecting statistical information for making decisions about students, curricula, programs, and educational policy (Nitko & Brookhart, 2014)

Core academic subjects: English, reading, language, arts, mathematics, science, foreign languages, civics and government, economics, history, and geography are considered core academic subjects (Durkin, Mok, & Conti-Ramsden, 2015).

Professional development: Is a method of educating staff with the skills and proficiencies needed to construct exceptional educational results for all students (Cannon, Tenuto, & Kitchel, 2013).

Special education: An educational program that provides individualized instruction for students experiencing disabilities (Johnson & Semmelroth, 2014).

The Significance of the Study

This research study was conducted to fill a gap in practice by focusing specifically on special education teachers' perceptions of professional development around assessment in the DWPSD. This study was unique because it addressed an under researched area in the local environment. Although professional development was implemented in the local setting beginning in 2005, there has been no examination of how the special education teachers perceived professional development around assessment. The result of this study was instrumental in providing much-needed insights into the processes by which the district directs

evidence-based professional development activities around assessment aligning the educational framework for the academic achievement of students with special needs. The understandings gained from this study could help local administrators in supporting and designing a comprehensive professional development program that could enhance teachers' participation and collective performance.

Research Question

In a southern state school district in the United States, there have been concerns in the education department as it related to teachers not seeing the benefit of attending professional development. Exploring professional development from a comprehensive perspective there have been studies conducted in the United States (Cameto et al., 2010; McMillan et al., 2016; Robinson et al., 2014; Yildirim et al., 2016) and in other countries (De Lisle, 2015; Hansén et al., 2014; Oz, 2014; Jonsson et al., 2015). However, little is known about special education teachers' perceptions of professional development, specifically around assessment. Understanding the perceptions of professional development around assessment from the perspective of special education teachers who had participated in assessment training programs in the DWPSD was significant to address this problem.

In alignment with the research problem and purpose, this study was guided by the following research question.

RQ1: What are special education teachers' perceptions of professional development activities, related to assessment in the DWPSD?

Review of the Literature

As federal laws changed, so did the requirement to improve curriculum and teaching representative of special education in public schools under the IDEIA of 2004 (Yell, Katsiyannis, Ryan, McDuffie, & Mattocks, 2008). IDEIA promoted equal access to a free appropriate public education and related services designed to meet the exceptional needs of students with disabilities and prepared them for real-life situations (Karvonen, Wakeman, & Kingston, 2016; Smith, 2005; Yell et al., 2008). Because of the law, special education teachers' tasks increased, traditional measurements no longer existed as new measures were now appended (Petersen, 2016; Sweigart & Collins, 2017); thus, making teaching more multifaceted and challenging. Nonetheless, special education teachers are required to adapt to the needs of students' differences and learning styles (Yell et al., 2008). As such, these teachers must participate in professional development activities in core academic subject area related to assessment (Cannon, Tenuto, & Kitchel, 2013; Nitko & Brookhart, 2014). Assessments are used to determine whether students can apply the knowledge and skills learned in the classroom in real life (Nitko & Brookhart, 2014).

Researchers and academia described professional development in education as a systematic method of collecting and amalgamating empirical data to authenticate knowledge and skills, attitudes, and classroom practice to advance programs and student learning (Cannon et al., 2013; Darling-Hammond, 2015; Letina, 2015). Darling-Hammond, Hyler, and Gardner (2017) comprehended professional development as organized professional learning that results in transformations in

teacher classroom practices and enhancements in student learning achievements.
Nabhani, O'Day Nicolas, and Bahous (2014) identified "action research, coaching
strategies, networking, and self-monitoring and reflection" (p. 231) as established
models of professional development that develops teachers' practice. Likewise,
Patton, Parker, and Tannehill (2015) and Williford, Carter, Maier et al. (2017) linked
professional development to changes in teacher-child engagements. Guskey (2003)
proclaimed having high-quality professional development is a crucial influence on
improving education. Notwithstanding, in the local site, some teachers did not see the
benefit of attending professional development training (school superintendent,
personal communication, February 7, 2014). As Kintz, Lane, Gotwals, and Cisterna
(2015) and Wei, Darling-Hammond, and Adamson (2010) noted, in the United States,
teachers do not take advantage of participating in well-designed professional
development opportunities.

However, in the past decades, educational systems and practitioners have
transformed professional development to meet the challenges of the twenty-first-
century classrooms (Aspfors & Valle, 2017; Darling-Hammond, 2010; Hökkä, &
Eteläpelto, 2014). This transformation exemplified using different approaches to
teaching, including the whole teacher approach to professional development (Chen &
McCray, 2012), assessments and the development of students' competencies (Cho &
Kingston, 2015; Karvonen et al., 2016; Nitko & Brookhart, 2014) in which teachers
participated in the training to make improvements and change possible (Aspfors &
Valle, 2017). To that end, DeNeve, Devos, and Tuytens (2015) recommended a

trajectory of characteristics between teachers and schools to promote professional development in differentiated instruction though Santagata and Bray (2015) reported similar findings but distinguished the change representative of teachers being challenged to view existing practices and focus on new practices specific towards instructional strategies to prompt the need for improvement and change. Furtak, Morrison, and Eroog (2014) on the nature of learning progressions and assessment development, reported findings consistent with DeNeve et al. (2015) and Santagata and Bray (2015). As Tomlinson and Strickland (2005) explained, learning occurs when teachers understand the differences in the learning views of their students. Likewise, Parsi and Darling-Hammond (2015) reported results consistent with the findings in Tomlinson and Strickland's (2005) and Yeo's (2009) studies.

Within the framework of this study, a review of professional development around assessment was considered along with educational researchers that indicated its disadvantages (Burrack & Urban, 2014; Schneider & Bodensohn, 2017; Stocks & Trevitt, 2014). However, this study focus was on special education teachers' perceptions of professional development around assessment. Based on previously discussed research, compelling factors have demonstrated that professional development is considered an active teaching component in the classrooms (Chen & McCray, 2012). Likewise, Junpeng and Tungkasamit (2014) found that teacher development occurred but also noted the effects of continuing professional development was similar to those suggested by Chen and McCray (2012). Although Chen and Herron (2014) recommended teachers to be equipped with high-quality

subject content and rich pedagogical knowledge, Carpenter's (2016) study unconference professional development: edcamp participant perceptions and motivations for attendance suggested a different approach, namely, teacher collaboration. Though these studies have addressed the usefulness of professional development (Darling-Hammond, 2015; DuFour, 2015; Leloup & Schmidt-Rinehart, 2015; Winter, 2016), and best practices (Jita & Mokhele, 2014; Tam, 2015; Watson, 2014) there were a lack of research about special education teachers' perceptions of professional development around assessment (Owen, 2015).

Based on the literature review, understanding how special education teachers view professional development around assessment could develop a positive attitude toward learning. Additionally, the information collected from the interviews was linked to the conceptual framework of the whole teacher approach to professional development to answer the research question.

Conceptual Framework for the Study

This basic qualitative study was guided by Chen and McCray's (2012) conceptual framework for teacher professional development: the whole teacher approach. Though this structure designed initially for the whole child development to promote cognitive, language, physical, and social skills of child development, the whole teacher approach emphasized supporting all aspects of a teacher's development, together with attitudes, knowledge and skills, and classroom practices (Chen & McCray, 2012). The essence of these variables are; for example, for some teachers, attitudes are the most significant self-efficacy feature of overcoming barriers

(Bandura, 1977; Zimmerman, 2000). For others, improving classroom management skills are the component to motivating teachers to teach and manage a diverse group of students (Martin & Baldwin, 1992; Wragg & Wragg, 1998). Still, some teachers discovered the knowledge and skills approach to be useful in encouraging them to examine new practices and expand current proficiencies for future learning activities (Chen & McCray, 2012).

In addition, the interrelated characteristics that distinguish the whole teacher approach are that the methodology is multidimensional, domain-specific, integrated, and developmental that focus on multiple strategies. For example, the multidimensional programs target teacher attitudes, skills, and practices; offering various ways to learn and develop; as well as accommodating teachers' different styles of teaching and motivational skills. A second distinction of the whole teacher approach is that it is domain specific. This approach primarily focuses on the content and the performance requirements of the professional development activities, including providing learning sequences that support the development of the teacher in the different subject area. Also, the whole teacher approach is integrated. The premise of this method is that the teacher attitudes, knowledge and skills, and practices interact with and influence each other. Thus, developing a foundation for facilitating teacher development. The fourth distinction of the whole teacher approaches is its developmental perspective. This method is predicated on the premise that professional development programs' objectives must be consistent with the different levels of

expertise in subject areas such as mathematics, literacy, and technology (Chen & McCray, 2012).

Furthermore, Knowles (1970) theory of adult education posited that the adult learners matriculate from dependency to self-directedness. Thereby, allowing teachers the responsibility to inspire and nurture knowledge. Likewise, Knowles's theory of adult education has three distinctive theoretic foundations for adult learning:

1. learner's role of experience

2. readiness to learn

3. learning orientation

The learner's role of experience. Knowles determined as people mature they develop a more significant reservoir of skills that are rich in culture. Meaning, as the adult learner grows and becomes an active learner, they attached more meaning to the knowledge gained from experience than those acquired inactively.

In the readiness to learn assumption, Knowles reported that adult learners learn based on their need to learn something different "to cope with real life" (p. 44) situations.

In the learning orientation assumption, Knowles perceived adult education as a means of developing augmented competence to fulfill a real-life purpose. Meaning that the adult learners apply whatever knowledge and skill learned currently to living productively for the next day.

Knowles's (1970) andragogy theory also determined that the performance of teachers significantly impact the individual learning climate more than "any other

factors" (p. 47). Additionally, the attitudes of teachers in the classroom convey whether there is an interest in and respect for the students or see them mainly as "receiving sets for transmissions of wisdom" (p. 43). Overall, these approaches allow teachers to adapt instructional strategies that promote teaching for understanding and integrating instruction in practice.

The district administrators may use the whole teacher approach of professional development to enhance teachers knowledge by developing the training methods through professional development that could then affect the teacher instructional strategy that links best practices to the student's academic success. Moreover, McGee and Colby's (2014) study pointed to the effects of professional development programs as a factor in developing teachers confidence and assessment literacy.

Review of the Broader Problem

A systematic search of the databases was used to conduct dissemination of the literature about the professional development around assessment. The key terms that were used to search for additional literature related to the research study included *professional development, staff development, assessment training, in-service teachers training, assessment, education reform, and high-quality teachers*. These terms provided a range of articles related to the phenomenon under study.

To better understand the problem and research question as it related to the current and historical phenomenon under study, peer-reviewed journals were collected from publications dated between 2013 through 2017 from the following databases: ProQuest Central, EBSCOhost, Academic Search Complete, Expanded Academic

ASAP, Science Direct, and Google Scholar. Resources such as books, news sources,
and the study site on the topic were searched, as well as, other contributions before
and during the 1990s: Bandura (1977), Black and Wiliam (1998), Dexter (1970),
Glaser and Strauss (1965), Guskey (1994), Hattie and Jaeger (1998), Johnson,
Wallace, and Thompson (1999) among others. Those databases identified above were
used to explore evidence that professional development around assessment is a crucial
component in the process of teachers' learning development and teaching students
with disabilities. Moreover, Knowles's (1970) theory of adult education was explored
to understand how adult resolve problems.

Professional Development around Assessment

With student learning and achievement being significantly impacted by the
quality of education, practical assessment of student performance is essential (Guskey,
1994), and is an integral component of teacher professional development (Karvonen et
al., 2013; Rutherford, Long, & Farkas, 2017). Assessment has received much
consideration in the past decade due to the tight relationship between student learning
and feedback (Norwick, 2014) and education researchers as (Black & Wiliam, 1998;
Darling-Hammond, 2000, 2014; Hattie & Jaeger, 1998; Xu & Brown, 2016).
Assessment is a method of collecting statistical data for decision-making purposes
around students' achievement (Nitko & Brookhart, 2014; Ysseldyke & Olsen, 1999).
For that reason, DWPSD implemented the statewide assessment program and
assessment program-alternate for students with disabilities and English learners into
their professional development programs. Those evaluations are a set of predetermined

criteria or learning standards to measure students' performance (Graham-Day, Fishley, Konrad, Peters, & Ressa, 2014; Troia & Graham, 2016; Ysseldyke & Olsen, 1999). While it is crucial to promote quality teaching instruction and encourage higher academic student achievement, researchers have found that high-stakes testing systems constrict curriculum-based measures, teacher flexibility, and critical thinking skills (Abrams, Pedulla, & Madaus, 2003; Goertz & Duffy, 2003; McNeil, 2000). For example, Amrein and Berliner (2003) examined the effects of high-stakes testing on student motivation and learning. Amrein and Berliner reported that high-stakes testing decreased students' motivation and increase students drop-out rate, or graduates with an alternative degree. In other sources, Streagle and Scott (2015) examined teachers' perceptions towards alternate assessment based on the alternate standards eligibility decision-making process, reported that 50% of the sample agreed that students with significant disabilities in an alternative assessment curriculum "should be in a state assessment accountability system" (p. 1292). Seventy-one percent of the sample agreed that the alternate assessment affected instructional "time" (Streagle & Scott, 2015, p. 1292), 24 % showed favorable results (Streagle & Scott, 2015, p. 1292), and many suggested that the assessment provided a burden of wastefulness (Streagle & Scott, 2015).

Another example is Stockall and Dennis's (2015) study on the ethical dilemmas in the special education decision-making framework. In this study, the authors reported teachers' predicament were due to students assigned to an alternative assessment framework not being able to test in the regular curriculum-based

assessment because their scores might impede the overall yearly progression of the school.

Additionally, Green et al. (2015) examined past, present, and future of assessment in schools. Green et al. reported the components of teaching that connected student's engagement in classroom activities relegated in favor of a mechanical delivery system. Consistent with those findings, Cho and Kingston's (2015) study on teacher's decisions on test-type assignment or statewide assessments. Cho and Kingston argued that the ambiguity of alternate assessment represented inconsistencies in the eligibility criteria for students with disabilities. Moreover, these authors' claimed that the lack of specificity in current state procedures where the alternative assessment had been implemented was problematic. Further, recommended that teachers develop the practical understanding to perform formative assessment methodically.

Currently, tests are the driving force that guides the direction of the curriculum (Stockall & Dennis, 2015; Streagle & Scott, 2015), and instruction has appeared to be primarily concerned with improving test scores (Katsiyannis, Zhang, Ryan, & Jones, 2007). Assessments have also shifted the paradigm practice of determining relevant knowledge from the involvement of teachers to the influence of the designers (Jones, 2008; Miller, 2002; Schilder & Carolan, 2014). However, researchers have established the method in which teachers change classroom practices are significantly related to professional development in academic content areas (Karvonen et al., 2013), instructional choices and students' symbolic communication levels (Barnes, Fives, &

Dacey, 2017). Thus, addressing the special education teachers' perceptions of assessment in the DWPSD has the propensity to be more relevant for the district and state leaders because teaching staff' beliefs and attitudes are a crucial component of assessment practices.

Teachers' Attitudes

Educational systems comprised of three fundamental components that make up the diverse areas of education: curriculum, instruction, and assessment (Johnson et al., 1999). These elements are an axiom for the object of attaining educational goals and accountability for student achievement (Guskey, 1994). Though assessments are a central component of education reform, Schilder and Carolan (2014) reported assessment invariably did not disseminate the level of knowledge that necessitated instructional design and student learning. Moreover, the confluence of teachers' discomfort with assessment could be connected to their unawareness of competence and efficacy (Johnson et al., 1999). Consistent with those findings, for example, Burrack and Urban's (2014) study on strengthening the foundations for assessment initiative through professional development found that teachers and the programs itself concentrated on content distribution as the principal object of instruction along with a few outdated evaluation procedures made it problematic to impart effective assessment practice. In addition, authors such as Karvonen et al. (2013) and Steinbrecher, Selig, Crosbey, and Thorstensen (2014) noted that teachers who had students with higher achievement ability and teachers who had students with lower achievement ability were differentially impacted. Likewise, Stewart and Houchens's (2014) study on how

formative assessment professional development model affected teacher practice found that some teachers comprehended the guidelines representative of best practices for implementing formative assessment, but others found it problematic to overcome its logistical challenges.

An additional example is Wyse, Dean, Viger, and Vansickle's (2013) study on considerations for equating alternate assessment. In this study, Wyse et al. explained, students using the transition matrix model from year-to-year remained at the same performance level than students who used the multilevel linear growth model. Another is Oz's (2014) case study on Turkish teachers' practices of assessment for learning English as a foreign language classroom found that the teachers preferred the standard methods of assessment rather than formative assessment because the processes were much more natural to implement.

Additionally, there have been supported research originating from studies on the separate effects of professional development and the use of instructional strategies in classrooms. One particular investigation has found that one of the reasons teacher professional development do not result in a change in practices is because the outcomes factors that motivated the training were not considered (McMillan et al., 2016). Additionally, Greenway, McCollow, Hudson, Peck, and Davis (2013) examined autonomy and accountability from the teacher perspectives on evidence-based practice and decision-making for students with intellectual and developmental disabilities. In this case, Greenway et al. reported that teachers felt that the encouraged use of evidence-based practice (EBP) did not meet the distinctive needs of students

with disabilities. Additionally, claimed that the limited access to curricula, professional development, and school resources made it problematic for teachers to implement EBPs. Although, Werts, Carpenter, and Fewell (2014) examined the barriers and benefits to response to intervention, perceptions of special education teachers were consistent with McMillan et al. (2016) and Greenway et al. (2013), but noted that teachers attitudes related to the lack of buy-in to implementing intervention and assessment were due to unwillingness, resistance to change, and fear.

In other examples, Mackenzie, Hemmings, and Kay (2011) examined how teaching experience affected attitudes towards literacy learning in the early years found no significant correlation between teachers experience and the training. Although, Sahanowas and Halder (2016) examined whether experience and training affected teachers' attitudes towards the assessment is in congruence with Mackenzie et al. (2011) but noted that the assessment prescribed was not implemented due to the lack of knowledge, motivation, its significance, and training.

Although there is a growing literature reporting positive effects of formative assessment upon teaching practice and students' outcomes, many studies have demonstrated the limitations or issues of the practitioner's challenges when working within the framework of assessment to enhance learning. For example, both Aspfors and Valle (2017) and Burrack and Urban (2014) reported glitches that often included faculties using dated content as a primary goal of instruction. Yildirim, Arastaman, and Dasci (2016) also argued that teachers consider themselves to be competent, but, on the other hand, the identified results found it to be contradictory. Another example

is Brock et al.'s (2014) study on the statewide assessment of professional development, needs related to educating students with an autism spectrum disorder. According to Brock et al.'s, teachers' little confidence in professional development were not related to the training, but rather to their perceived participation in the workshops. Dierick and Dochy (2001) examined the new lines in edumetrics: new forms of assessment lead to further evaluation criteria. In this case, Dierick and Dochy reported, the quality of innovative assessment approaches appeared to be inconsistent and in a theoretical way less fair than traditional tests. Although, Korthagen (2017) examined the more efficient continuous professional development for teachers were consistent with Dierick and Dochy (2001) but recommended making teachers more responsible for their ongoing professional development.

Another issue with formative assessment is its application perspicacity for teachers to adapt instruction to a diverse population of students (Akers et al., 2015). As a result, teachers reported knowing how to accumulate students data but not the knowledge to interpret or incorporate the data (Akers et al., 2015; Ruppar et al., 2016). Another example is Jonsson, Lundahl, & Holmgren's (2015) study on evaluating a large-scale implementation of assessment for learning in Sweden. Although, Jonsson et al.'s study results were consistent with Aker et al. (2015) and Ruppar et al.'s (2016), found some formative assessment evaluation emphasized more on student-centered approaches as self and peer assessments and students' participation in the test structure rather than the teacher's knowledge. An additional example is De Lisle's (2015) case study on the promise and reality of formative assessment practice in a continuous

assessment scheme in Trinidad and Tobago. De Lisle argued that the development of the formative assessment was often not fulfilled.

Moreover, there was a lack of empirical research regarding the physiognomies of professional development programs in formative assessment and the effect it had on both teacher practice and student achievement (Anderson & Palm, 2017). Thus, fulfilling the academic needs of both the schools and teachers could be beneficial in advancing students accountability through development programs (Parsi & Darling-Hammond, 2015). Overall, the literature reviewed indicated that professional development programs must include aspects of the whole teacher approach to learning (Chen & McCray, 2012).

Knowledge and Skills

Policy and program decisions must involve the facilities to prepare special education teachers to teach students with disabilities (Brownell, Ross, Colon, & McCallum, 2005; Rosenberg & Sindelar, 2005) in the 21st century classrooms (Sayeski, 2015). Previous researchers have argued that teacher education programs provided limited influence on student success (Brownell et al., 2005; Linn, 2003), and is not "intellectually" challenging for "new and experienced teachers" (Cochran-Smith, 2001, p. 4). Currently, the local study site administrators require special education teachers to apply assessment knowledge and skills in a broad range of classroom settings as part of their teaching practice (school superintendent, personal communication, February 7, 2014). However, the teachers face arduous tasks encompassing an understanding of the physiognomies and requirements associated

with multiple classifications of disabilities (Collins, Sweigart, Landrum, & Cook, 2017).

Unfortunately, special education teachers training programs often neglect to train them for the classroom (Guskey, 2002). Consistent with those findings were Kahn and Lewis's (2014) study on the perception of teachers' preparation and attitudes towards teaching students with disabilities in science. Kahn and Lewis reported that teachers received little formal training and felt underprepared to teach a student with disabilities. Moreover, Murphy and Haller (2015) indicated that teachers have the propensity to use the newly learned skills if mentored. Likewise, Brock and Carter's (2015) study on the effects of a professional development package to prepare special education paraprofessionals to implement evidence-based practice, reported consistent findings congruence with Murphy and Haller (2015) and Bouck (2005). Education advocates such as (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Karvonen et al., 2013; Laczko-Kerr & Berliner, 2002; Rice, 2014) argued that the existence of student achievement constructively correlates to teacher's certification training. For example, Darling-Hammond reported states with high proportions of certified teachers to have high students' progression scores. Additionally, Laczko-Kerr and Berliner found that students in classrooms with certified teachers tested significantly better in reading and language arts on standardized tests than those in classrooms with under-certified teachers. Furthermore, Rice (2014) examined working to maximize the effectiveness of a staffing mix reported findings consistent with Darling-Hammond (2000), Laczko-Kerr and Berliner (2002), and Karvonen et al. (2013).

In other sources, researchers found that the training offered little or no impact on teachers' knowledge and expertise. For example, in a study examining the perception of teachers using the Assessment for Learning (AFL) that required shared focus between students and educators to be competent. Pat-El et al. (2015) reported, opposing views from both the teachers and students in understanding the requirement of the assessment to promote learning. As Aspfors and Valle (2017) expressed, teachers are inadequately trained to meet the challenges of the job from the time they graduated from the institution of higher education and entered the workplace. Similarly, Cheng (2016) reaffirmed the above statement by reporting that adequate training positively relates to effective teaching. This premise is particularly noteworthy because teachers are held accountable for the quality of the student training development and performance improvement. However, it is also apparent that perceived behavioral control is a predictor of how teachers implement newly learned knowledge (Cheng, 2016). Thus teachers who have a positive attitude toward professional development means a positive benefit for students 'academic success (Aspfors & Valle, 2017). Sahanowas and Halder (2016) also highlighted the lack of professional training as one of the causes of the science teachers' indifference while implementing ongoing assessment is in congruence with Aspfors and Valle (2017). Although Ekstam, Korhonen, Linnanmaki, and Aunio's (2017) case study on special education preservice teachers' interest, subject knowledge, and teacher efficacy beliefs in mathematics was consistent with Guskey (2003) findings but reported that high-quality teaching is significance to student achievement.

In another study of the dynamic effect of professional development on learning is Berry's (2015) study on the dynamic duo of professional education, collaboration, and technology. According to Berry, teachers' previous knowledge of what and how they absorbed learning was based on particular professional development activity. Furthermore, in a study examining the perception of national board-certified teachers on using measures of student learning for teacher evaluation. McMillan (2015) presented a model including teacher knowledge, external factors, and the realities teachers encountered in the classroom as the most important influences on the instructional decision-making but noted that the system for teachers to master was problematic because of the lack of understanding and unclear expectations. Another broad spectrum of classroom assessment was provided by Koloi-Keaikitse's (2016) study on the assessment training. In this study, Koloi-Keaikitse reported a common theme affecting the quality of classroom assessment in the 21st Century, namely, that teachers were implementing assessment methods based on information they received as learners. However, determining the scope of teachers' skills in student assessment, Schneider and Gowan's (2013) study on teachers' skills in interpreting evidence of student learning reported that teachers found difficulties in providing relevant knowledge to analyze a student response and identifying appropriate instructional strategies.

In other sources, examining assessment collaboration, researchers concluded that the assessment was often not considered. For example, in Hamilton-Jones and Vail's (2013) study on preparing special educators for collaboration in the classroom,

preservice teachers' beliefs and perspectives. In this study, Hamilton-Jones and Vail explained, teachers felt prepared to collaborate with competencies subsequently completing the training certification but not accurately differentiating the skills that made them ready to teach students with disabilities. Likewise, Ronfeldt, Farmer, McQueen, and Grissom's (2015) study on teacher collaboration in instructional teams and student achievement, argued that teachers frequently enhance classroom practices by working collaboratively with other teachers. Additionally, Cunningham, Etter, Platas, Wheeler, and Campbell's (2015) study on the professional development of emergent literacy: a design experiment of teacher study groups was consistent with Ronfeldt et al.(2015). A similar example is Hansén, Eklund, & Sjöberg's (2014) study on the general didactics of Finland Teacher Education but noted the temperament of teacher education was highly research-based and scientific, and teachers found it problematic to transfer the knowledge into classroom practice. As well, Darling-Hammond's (2017) study on to close the education gap, reasoned that the United States and countries like Finland and Singapore should establish policies and systems allowing practitioners to collaborate, globally.

Teachers' training outcomes could be beneficial when teachers select the lesson to be critique because high-quality feedback elicits thinking not emotions (Guskey, 2002). However, the pursuit of professional development standards for learning for both teachers and students, must encourage prudent investments and transform instructional approaches to make learning achievable (Darling-Hammond, Wilhoit, & Pittenger, 2014). Overall, the research revealed that special education

teachers training is considered an integral component in educating students with disabilities.

Classroom Practices

Research studies on teachers' competency related to assessment have consistently demonstrated a significant gap between teachers assessment approaches and professional development (Brookhart, 2011, 2013). Assessment standards articulate fairness and equity in student assessment practices as fundamental rights offered by teachers to every student. The premise here is to provide students with disabilities with the same range of assessments or tests used by other students. However, research findings revealed an extensive range of issues affecting assessments for students with disabilities. For example in a study promoting fairness and equity in student assessment practice, S. Scott, Webber, Lupart, Aitken, and Scott (2014) explained that the problems associated with students' assessment undermined fair and equitable practice, particularly for students with disabilities. Consistent with Scott et al.'s finding was Tierney's (2014) study on fairness as a multifaceted quality in classroom assessment, however, explained, the quality of equity in classroom assessment might not be fully established because it is a continuing effort that vacillates in intensity with sequences of teaching, learning, and assessing. To that premise, Petersen (2016) reported that some teachers did not always adhere to the alternate assessment if it was not a core year for reporting the student's results.

Moreover, Robinson, Myran, Strauss, and Reed's (2014) studyon the impact of an alternative professional development model on teacher practices in formative

assessment and student learning, acknowledged that the idea of the formative assessment practices has been slow to integrate into the teacher's day-to-day classroom practices. Although Stewart and Houchens (2014) findings were consistent with Robinson et al. (2014) but recommended supporting the implementation of classroom assessment and the deliberation of teaching strategies to stimulate the learning also were critical factors. Another example is Deluca and Lam's (2014) study on preparing teachers for assessment within diverse classrooms. In this study, Deluca and Lam reported that both the formative and summative assessments to quantify the student's academic achievement contributed to inconsistent guidelines for teachers to assimilate the knowledge associated with its differential benefit.

In respect to the allocation of considerable time to make transformational changes in practice, Sireci, Scarpati, and Li (2005) acknowledged time and accommodations are not the differentiating factors, but rather the time constricted on teachers to teach students with disabilities is too inflexible. Although, Fensham and Cumming's (2013) study on which child left behind, were consistent with Sireci et al. (2005), but noted that students with disabilities are disadvantaged in many areas and eliminating the barriers associated with time might provide significant improvement. Moreover, time must be allocated for shared personal knowledge about students to receive guidance from experts on varying topics (Noack, Mullholland, & Warren, 2013; Royster et al., 2014).

In other sources related to classroom management and practice was Brookhart (2013) the classroom assessment in the context of motivation theory and research. In

this study, Brookhart explained classroom assessment influences the student's motivation and self-regulation learning. For instance, studies have shown that videotaping teacher's performance in the classes improved both teaching skills and student achievement (Allen, Gregory, Mikami, Lun, Hamre, & Pianta, 2013). Furthermore, as Oleson and Hora (2014) explained, that it is essential for teachers to connect to the material derived from their professional development experiences and knowledge to move beyond the meme of past mentoring.

Additionally, Oleson and Hora (2014) claimed that the design of classroom assessment structures implied the probability of collaboration between formative and summative tenets, but the knowledge infrequently reached the contexts. In this case, Wylie and Lyon's (2015) study on the fidelity of formative assessment implementation issues of breadth and quality found that the curriculum-based assessment approaches frequently failed in practice, in particular, to the extent that augmented student achievement were not determined (Young & Jackman, 2014; Randel et al., 2016). Thus, the assessment could be beneficial for improving student performance (Darling-Hammond, 2010a). Although Myers, Freeman, Simonsen, and Sugai's (2017) study on classroom management with exceptional learners was consistent with Darling-Hammond (2010a), nonetheless noted that the practice, if implemented correctly, could improve not only academic outcomes but also students behavior. Thus necessitated the needs of the teachers to provide the students with identifiable feedback (Petersen, 2016). Though similar, Barlow, Frick, Barker, and Phelps's (2014) study on modeling instruction, the impact of professional

development on instructional practices, recommended distinguishing the factors that affect teachers' ability to efficiently transfer skills from professional development training to create an insightful method to increase the fidelity of classroom instruction.

Finally, professional development is the strategy that most school systems use to strengthen the performance of their teachers and raise student achievement (Johnson, 2014; Woodland & Mazur, 2015). Thus, the research disseminating fairness and equity in student assessment have the general propensity to be beneficial for special education teachers and raise the standards of educational excellence (Myers et al., 2017; Petersen, 2016). Overall, the literature showed that professional development programs must provide accurate information not only to direct further teaching skills but also encourage student commitment to productive learning. Understanding professional development from special education teachers' perceptions could prove vital in closing the gap in practice (Cook, 2014; Jimerson & Wayman, 2015).

Implications

This literature review was intended to identify professional development as it is related to assessment. Even though there was a limited amount of research on professional development around assessment, the information that was available indicated that there is a future need for more studies in this area (Owen, 2015; Ruppar et al., 2016) to close the gap in practice. The collected data and analysis from this study could be used to enhance professional development programs relevant to the specific desires and benefit of the DWPSD special education programs. It may also be

an advantage for another academic discipline within the district such as district administrators, curriculum developers, instructional leaders, and stockholders to understand the learning needs of special education teachers and create dynamic professional development programs that will meet the needs of the 21st-century classrooms for students with disabilities. Also, special education teachers should have the same opportunities as regular classroom teachers to improve their instructional strategies. It is important to consider that achieving a highly qualified status is a primary goal for all teachers because having the right education can make a positive impact on student learning (DuFour, 2015; Saunders, 2013). The implications of this study might assist in reaching this achievement. As a result, the findings of this study might provide an understanding of how special education teachers use classroom strategies to support the learning needs of their students. Secondly, the findings might provide a guide to assessment tools that influence instructional practices. Thirdly, the results might increase positive change in teachers determined to advance 21st-century skills in their teaching.

Summary

Several district initiatives encourage the local schools to improve attendance of professional development activities for all teachers. Confounding these initiatives are that special education teachers did not see the benefit of attending professional development training. This study addressed special education teachers' perceptions of professional development around assessment in the DWPSD. The study's research question was structured to gain insight into special education teachers' perceptions

about professional development around assessment. The NCLB policy stipulated that all teachers should have the opportunity to attend professional development (Jorgensen & Hoffmann, 2003). The same strategy holds for students with disabilities in that these students are to be educated on the level of students without disabilities.

In addition, in Section 1, I introduced the background for this basic qualitative study to explore special education teachers' perceptions of professional development around assessment. I presented the rationale for choosing the problem including evidence from the local setting. Evidence of the problem from the professional literature revealed the lack of research on the perceptions of special education teachers of professional development around assessment. The terms *alternate assessment, assessment of program-alternate, assessment, core academic subjects, professional development, and special education* were defined. I also discussed the significance of the problem and presented the research question to guide this study. This section also included the reviews of the literature about the phenomenon under study, as well as a discussion of the conceptual framework, analysis of the broader problem such as professional development around assessment, teachers' attitudes, knowledge and skills, and classroom practices. Finally, I included the study's implications and summary.

In Section 2, the methodology for this basic qualitative study is explained. In addition, the participants and selection criteria are explained including ethical considerations. This section also includes a description of the research design, a description of the procedures for data collection, the researcher's role, recruitment of

participants, and recording and data storage. Finally, I explained the data collection

methods, analysis plan, as well as a discussion of the study's limitations and summary.

Section 2: The Methodology

The current trends of students with disabilities across the nation have many school districts unprepared for the challenges that accompany this population of learners (Fensham & Cumming, 2013). The quality of teachers has become a topic of concern in the discussion of American education (Darling-Hammond, 2015). Numerous research studies indicated that the fundamental focus to enhance the fidelity of teachers' competence in teaching is their ongoing development and learning through effective professional development (Aspfors & Valle, 2017; DeNeve et al., 2015; Guskey, 2003; Parsi & Darling-Hammond, 2015). Effective professional development programs renew teachers' content knowledge, improve teaching strategies, and prompt continuous development (Darling-Hammond, 2015; Dufour, 2015; Guskey, 2003). As such, DWPSD offers an opportunity to gain a profound understanding of special education teachers' perception of professional development around assessment.

Research Design and Approach

In this study, a basic qualitative study was used to address the research question: what are special education teachers' perceptions of professional development activities, related to assessment in the DWPSD? Merriam and Tisdell (2015) described the paradigm of the basic qualitative study as the latitude given to researchers to select topics of interest without constraints. In addition, basic qualitative methodology present researchers with opportunities to explore the event multiplicatively while remaining genuinely ingrained in its natural setting (Patton, 2015; Ravitch & Carl,

2016). One aspect of a basic qualitative study is that it is not generalized outside the local study site, which implies that the study results cannot be utilized in parallel situations expecting the equivalent outcomes or relevant analysis affects to occur (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Despite the absence of generalizability, the propensity of the findings may increase current discussions in the literature.

In contrast, quantitative research design typically includes numerical data that are tested by examining the relationship between variables (Creswell, 2013). The mixed method design is a methodology that provides in-depth knowledge of a research problem by combining both quantitative and qualitative data in a single study or sequences of studies (Creswell, 2013). Considering the nature of this study was to explore the special education teachers' perceptions of professional development around assessment in a specific district, using a basic qualitative study was best to meet the needs of the associated research problem. Furthermore, basic qualitative study (e.g., Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Patton, 2015; Ravitch & Carl, 2016) allowed me the opportunity to develop an in-depth understanding of the practice related to the research question and capture the experiences and perceptions of the participants in a real-life context.

Additionally, there were other research design methods considered for this study such as ethnography, phenomenological, grounded theory, and narrative. These models, although useful in different types of research, were not applicable given the nature of the research question unique to the DWPSD. For example, the ethnography approach addresses a culture or group behavior (Creswell, 2013) whereas

phenomenological study equates to the lived experiences of a phenomenon and the interpretation of those experience over time (Lodico, Spaulding, & Voegtle, 2010). In grounded research, however, the outline of relationships, action, or system of events emerges from data collection over time (Creswell, 2013), and narrative research is the storytelling of individual lives (Creswell, 2013). Hence, the basic qualitative study was appropriate because it allowed me to develop an in-depth description of special education teachers' perceptions of professional development in a real-life context (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). What is more, this study approach encompassed emerging questions and procedures, data collection from the participants setting that inductively allowed me to analyze the data and create themes used to interpret the meaning of the data.

Participants

The inclusion criteria for this study comprised of special education teachers who had attended professional development training around assessment. Special education teachers were appropriate as participants for this study because their job duties require them to work with students who exhibit special needs. Also, there have been limited research studies on special education teachers' perceptions of professional development programs related to assessments for teaching students with disabilities (Owen, 2015; Ruppar et al., 2016). Additionally, the research question was specific to the phenomenon of the study within the DWPSD and as a result, necessitated the use of a purposeful sampling method. This method allowed the

selection of participants who could purposefully provide an understanding of the phenomenon under study (Stake, 1978; Yin, 2013).

In this basic qualitative study, the teachers in the special education department at LMP Elementary School (pseudonym) served as the potential research participants. The potential participants were exclusive to special education teachers that provided assessment instruction to students with disabilities. Regular classroom teachers did not impart direct assessment instruction to students with disabilities; and therefore, were omitted from this study.

Setting and Sample Participants

LMP Elementary School is within a school district in the southern United States serving about 30,000 students. The selected elementary school were a Title I school that consisted of approximately 419 students, 14 regular teachers, and three special education teachers. Based on the criteria, 100% of the special education teachers at LMP Elementary School responded to participate in this study. Patton (2015), explained that there are no precise guidelines when choosing a sample size for a basic qualitative study. Similarly, qualitative research does not necessitate the sample size to be of a specific number as do quantitative research (Merriam, 2009).

Moreover, the sample size is determined based on the data to be analyzed, the convenience of the participants, outcome credibility, and the fact that this study includes the entire population of possible participants also offers credibility (LeCompte, 1993; as cited in Merriam, 2009; Morse, 2002; Patton, 2015). Since this study focused on interpretation, three special education teachers who teach the

students with disabilities provided a sample size that yielded adequate saturation to answer the research question. LMP Elementary School were selected because it was centrally located in an area accessible for me to collect data; as a result, the convenience sampling was the method applied to this study.

Participant Access

I requested permission to interview special education teachers and received approval from the district administrator, site principal, and Walden University's Institutional Review Board (IRB). Walden's IRB approval number for this study is 03-21-18-0260253. Initially, the district superintendent, the person with organizational authority in the DWPSD, was emailed a letter of permission requesting access to research with the study site participants. Thus, the provost of research, evaluation, and assessment granted permission to conduct the research related to this study topic at the LMP Elementary School. However, the name of the research site district has been removed.

Data Collection

After I obtained permission to conduct the research, the school principal received full disclosure of the study proposal. Once the school administrator approved the agreement to conduct this study at the study site school, letters of participation were emailed to the special education teachers who fit the criteria of the study. These letters included information about the nature of the study and its benefits, how and why the participants were selected, the length of the study, and commitment to protecting confidentiality. After receiving confirmation of cooperation from the

special education teachers to participate in the study, letters of the informed consent was emailed to each of them. The informed consent consisted of an explanation of who would be conducting the research, along with instructions on how to return the forms. Also, the interview questions were emailed to the participants in advance to decrease the possibility of trepidation and to allow them time to reflect on the items. The participants were assured that their involvement in the study was voluntary, free from any coercion, and withdrawal could be made at any time without penalty.

Additionally, clarification was made with the potential participants and the local site administrators, that all data gathered would be kept confidential. All names of participants were changed to pseudonyms including the research site. The participants agreed to begin the qualitative face-to-face interview immediately.

Additionally, an efficient means of organizing and analyzing the transcribed data were established. Merriam (2009) suggested that the collected data should be in sync to make it more manageable. Yin (2013, 2017) proposed creating a database. Therefore, I designed a matrix in Microsoft Word to organize and track each step of the data collection and analysis forming a database as proposed by Yin (2013, 2017). The Microsoft Word document also served as a data trajectory of evidence (Yin, 2013).

The Data Collection Tools

Qualitative One-on-One Interviews

Three special education teachers were scheduled for the interview. Semistructured interview questions were used in this study to answer the research

question. Merriam (2009) described interviews as one of the most established means of data collection. The questions were presented in an open-ended format that allowed each participant to express feelings and concerns in their natural voices (Creswell, 2013). Each interview was conducted after school hours at a unique location to respect the integrity of both the participants and the study site. For example, the first interview was held in a conference room at the local Boys and Girls Club. The second interview was conducted at the local college conference center, and the last interview was conducted in an office at a local community civic center. The participants selected all of these locations.

Before starting the interview using, a digital voice recorder to record the conversation, each participant was asked verbally to consent to be recorded to support the component of the written consent they had received. Each participant agreed to be recorded. With their permission, the questions and responses to the interviews were audiotaped to ensure consistency. The data collection process lasted one week, with each conversation taking precisely 55 minutes to complete.

The interview questions aligned directly with the research question. The purpose of the first set of interview questions was to acquire data to establish ordinary meaning into what the special education teachers perceived as the significance of professional development around assessment. Similarly, the second set of interview questions were conducted to gain an understanding of the standard of learning regarding special education teachers teaching students with disabilities. Also, the third set of interview questions were conducted to gain an understanding into what factors

could facilitate or impede the special education teachers' ability to establish contextual understanding and the support needed to implement assessment best practices. Finally, the fourth set of interview questions were used to discuss special education teachers' views of autonomy and related improvement for participating in professional development programs.

Field Notes

In addition to the interviews, I kept field notes to diminish bias. The field notes were comprised of brief notations of terms that participants emphasized during the interview. Also, the field notes were instrumental in studying the salient points of the interview that could be utilized to support the findings of the study.

Data Analysis

Data were collected from individual interviews. I reviewed each interview transcription by reading the transcribed data and simultaneously listening to the audio recordings of each interview. This procedure was instrumental in correcting any possible transcription oversights. Also, all interview transcriptions were explored to achieve a general understanding and theoretic trend of the data (Yin, 2013). The salient data were separated for use after the data was sorted.

Secondly, Dedoose software was used to transcribe the interviewed data. Dedoose is a web application software used to analyze qualitative and mixed methods research via text, photographs, audio, videotapes, and spreadsheet data (Dedoose.com, 2018). In using this software, the participants identifying information was not exposed.

I coded the collected data using the rubric established through content analysis. Content analysis is used to identify essential attributes and significances of patterns or themes (Patton, 2015). The data were analyzed until full saturation occurred. The data that did not represent evidence of these patterns, themes or categories were separated and the second round of review was conducted before they were excluded. The information from the guided interview questions was used to support the response of special education teachers' perception of professional development around assessment in the DWPSD.

Member Checking

Member checking occurred immediately after the interview transcripts were transcribed. This step allowed the participants to examine their transcripts and make corrections or provide valuable feedback to validate the transcribed information (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 2009; Stake, 1978). The review of the preliminary transcription was provided to the participants within 24 hours after each interview. Each participant was given two copies of their transcriptions to review and make changes to any unclear or misrepresented information. However, the participants were asked not to insert any additional statements or comments to what had already been affirmed in their transcripts but only to review the findings determined by what they disclosed during the interview (Creswell, 2013). The second copy was provided to the participants to keep for their own records. The participants noted that the transcriptions were accurate to the best of their knowledge and, therefore, clarification was not necessary.

Peer Examination

To further ensure the credibility of this study, I used a peer examiner to illuminate any misunderstandings of interpretation of themes or sub-themes and to review the interviewed transcriptions. A peer examiner is a knowledgeable individual who scans and evaluates the data for the credibility of the study findings and analysis (Merriam, 2009). Therefore, I asked a former teacher who was certified and experienced in the field of special education to be the peer examiner for this study. This peer examiner taught students with disabilities in another school district for over 20 years before retiring and has no known affiliation with the study participants or related to the researcher. However, before sending the data to the peer examiner, I explained the research study as well as the Confidentiality Agreement. The peer examiner signed the agreement acknowledging understanding and the importance of confidentiality. The peer examiner and I separated the interview transcripts and grouped them according to similar responses. We checked the transcribed transcripts against the audiotapes of interviews to ensure that there was no misinterpretation of the responses provided by the participants. No discrepant data were found.

The Role of the Researcher

As the researcher for this study, there were no previous relationships with the research participants. Therefore, it was crucial for me to establish a proper relationship with each participant during the interviews. This criterion was vital as participants are the doorkeepers to the desired data (Dexter, 1970). Remaining straightforward about the research topic and answering participants' questions encouraged honesty and

openness during the interview (Robards, 2013). Building relationships through

integrity and fairness were fundamental in establishing trust. As a result, I was able to

conduct the interviews, transcribe, code, and analyzed the data.

Data Analysis Results

The findings of this study are presented in a rich-thick, description utilizing the

narrative method. This method characterizes the perceptions of special education teachers

regarding professional development around assessment at the DWPSD. The findings

from the collected data allowed me to successfully attain a comprehensive understanding

of the study participants' perceptions regarding the phenomenon under study.

At the beginning of the individual interviews, I introduced myself and established

a connection with each participant. I then described the interview process, discussed the

confidentiality agreement, and had all participants to sign the consent forms. Finally, I

started the note-taking and audio recording process. The data collection lasted one week,

with each conversation taking precisely 55 minutes to complete.

During data analysis, various components of the research assisted in

communicating my focus, together with the goals, and the direction of the study's

findings. These components included the identified problem, the purpose of the study,

and the guiding research question.

Throughout the open coding phase, I categorized every chunk of data generated

by underlining words and phrases to pinpoint all reciprocated themes. Open coding is the

practice where the researcher is open to every possible data occurrence (Merriam, 2009).

I then reviewed and discussed the emerging themes from each of the interviews with the

peer examiner to diminish bias by providing different perspectives on the issues. I also, converted the codes into themes representative of the research findings to answer the research question and to address the gap in practice as explained in Section 1. As a result, five significant themes emerged from the collected data, which were: the quality of professional development; the lack of training; lack of evidence-based practice; teachers' motivation and commitment; and, teachers' autonomy. These themes played a vital role in the special education teachers to be effective in teaching students with disabilities.

The purpose of this study was to explore special education teachers' perceptions of professional development around assessment in the DWPSD. For that reason, I interviewed three special education teachers to obtain answers to the research question listed below.

RQ1: What are special education teachers' perceptions of professional development activities, related to assessment in the DWPSD? When the participants were asked about their perceptions of professional development around assessment, I found that the participants consistently agreed that there was a lack of professional development of assessment specifically geared toward students with disabilities and that more of this type of training is needed. All were asked to explain their meaning in detail. The participants described their professional development experience as not pertinent to their needs, and less focus on children with special needs. This lack of professional development adversely predisposed the participants' perceptions as they described being indifferent to or dissatisfied with the state- and district-wide

assessment because students with disabilities must pass the district assessment to

matriculate to the next grade level as students without disabilities.

Themes

The quality of professional development. Participant A1 stated,

> I think that professional development is essential to the development of the
>
> student. But, the training that I received was not specifically for me to teach core
>
> subjects to students with disabilities. We have a variety of students with
>
> different learning difficulties at DWPSD and students with severe cognitive
>
> disabilities, too. So, any training that I participate in as special education
>
> teachers must address these needs individually. And, I do not think that the
>
> training does that. I think, from the training that I have had, it was a waste of
>
> time. But I am glad that the district website gives us a lot of information to help
>
> our students succeed.

Participant A2 stated,

What staff/professional development training? I have not had professional

development on assessment for teaching students with disabilities since the first

one some time ago. I attended in-service training for the first two days, but it

was so general until it was unclear. It possibly was mentioned; I mean the

learning. Uh, a speaker got up and talked for about 40 minutes or so on things of

general disabilities, which was a waste of my time. It was not for me. It did not

peak my interest. And, I think a major weakness for me was that the workshop

did not include how to integrate state standard into the classrooms for a specific

disability except if the student had a severe disability, then we can use an

assessment modification. I believed the training would have been better if it was

about implementing the right assessment tools for the students with disabilities.

Participant A3 stated,

Well, the training would be a good fit for me if it was about helping us as special

education teachers teach students with multiple issues. So, far, the training that I

have attended does not do that. Mostly, the training focuses on IEPs, which is

still a good thing, but we need to know about the standards for teaching students

with disabilities. It is a growing trend, I think, now. So, I feel the training is a

waste of time. The ideal training for me would be learning what the different

federal codes are and how to use them for the right students. There are so many

assessment codes and instructions that go with them, but not all apply to

DWPSD's special education students, but we still need to know how to use them

just in case.

Providing teachers with continuing professional development training around

assessment practice has the potential to support learning in the classroom (Heitink,

Van der Kleij, Veldkamp, Schildkamp, & Kippers, 2016; Van der Kleij, Vermeulen,

Schildkamp, & Eggen, 2015; Warwick, Shaw, & Johnson, 2015). Furthermore, it may

well be reasonable to explain the composition of quality professional development

training by concentrating on the design of the programs. According to researchers

(e.g., Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 2011; Lindvall, Helenius, & Wiberg, 2017;

Van den Bergh, Ros, & Beijaard, 2014), professional development programs that

focus on the subject-specific area and pedagogical themes demonstrated the most productive influences on the program and students' success. However, there are doubts that these belief does not equate to the type of standards needed to support investing in professional development programs (Guskey, 2014; Hill, Beisiegel, & Jacob, 2013; Jacob, Hill, & Corey, 2017). Nonetheless, these conclusions have guided various researchers (e.g., Billingsley, McLeskey, & Crockett, 2014; Pazey & Cole, 2013; Sumbera, Pazey, & Lashley, 2014; Wakeman, Browder, Flowers, & Ahlgrim-Delzell, 2006) to argue that many school administrators are not well equipped to focus on the needs of students with disabilities within their leadership preparation programs.

The lack of training. Insufficient training was found to be the most significant factor relevant to the interview questions when the participants were asked about their perceptions of professional development training around assessment regarding the advantages and disadvantages, expectations, strengths, and weaknesses of their professional development experiences. All indicated that their understanding and clarification of activities related to assessment is essential, but specific content training varied among the participants leading to significant inconsistencies and unambiguousness.

Participant 1A stated,

I think, from the training that I have had, it was a waste of time. It was mostly about students' IEPs. I am a special education teacher, and my training should be a focus on how I can teach my students from a learning plan that the district wants me to use and for the most part, I must search for that information. In my

opinion, professional development was not applicable to the state standards for teaching students with disabilities.

Participant A2 stated,

This year was very hard and in some way professional development training did nothing to help me understand the specific codes and the standards that work with them. If the information doesn't give you its meaning so we can use them the right way, leads to a lot of guesswork.

Participant A3 stated,

While it is easy to administer the assessment to students with a learning disability, it's not that easy for more difficult students. So, the training should be a focus on all area of disabilities and should not be trained once or twice a year.

The position of continuing professional development for teachers to transform their practice is widely recognized (Van den Bergh, Ros, & Beijaard, 2015). Several researchers (e. g., Birman, Desimone, Porter, Garet, & Yoon, 2002; Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, & Yoon, 2001; Guskey, 2003) have identified characteristics that augment the probability of teachers' continuing education is active professional development programs. The significant characteristics of an active professional development program are teacher involvement (Guskey, 2003; Van den Bergh et al., 2015; Voogt et al., 2015). Professional development must, therefore, consider teachers' knowledge, viewpoints, identified problems, and classroom practices (Opfer & Pedder, 2011; Van den Bergh et al., 2015).

Lack of evidence-based practice. State- and district-wide assessments are an essential component of the educational accountability systems that stipulate effective communication to assist teachers in measuring students' progress against state standards (Shepherd et al., 2016). During the interview, each participant stated that the school district did not offer an all-encompassing textbook for students with special needs. Moreover, the participants allowed students to articulate an assignment verbally to explain events in a story as an alternative to a written description as accommodation for the standards CCRS. ELA-Literacy.

When asked about how the training aligns or could align better with the curriculum to improve classroom delivery, participant A1 stated,

I don't think it does. Overall, we teach the students with special needs on an as-needed base. There is no specific textbook for them or instructional binder of curriculum specifics for students with disabilities like those used in the general classroom. Aligning the curriculum to the standards is an indicator of the student achievement or failure because my students still have to pass the standardized test. Neither the alternate assessment or the assessment program-alternate would be hard to understand if all of us were given the option to participate in knowledge led professional development training and that the training trains us on how to use the assessment. I follow; for example, the district standards. I login to the teacher portal and all the information on what students should learn at different grade level is available—from the kindergarten readiness assessment through the subject area assessments. But the training that I have attended did

not provide detailed information on how the standards should align with the

curriculum. And, I think it should.

Participant A1 additionally stated,

The good thing about it is we have intervention in place for students with a

learning impairment because these students are still expected to pass the

standardized test. These would be students placed in a general classroom but

still need special services. What we do is, pull them from the regular class and

give them one-on-one instruction. Then if we have students with more severe

need and are not able to take a written test, we can give it to them in oral form.

  When asked to explain, the participant stated,

If a student cannot write out an assignment, we can allow them to give the

assignment orally to explain a story event as an alternative to writing the answer

out. We use this form of testing as an accommodation for the standards CCRS.

ELA-Literacy.

Participant A2 stated,

One thing I do know is that standards strengthen students' abilities to learn the

material, so all are on the same level of learning. The district provides

instructional materials to students with disabilities on an as-needed basis that are

based on the students learning needs. I do what I can, so my students are not left

behind. Because these students are expected to participate in some form of state-

and district-wide assessments and therefore, is an essential element to help me

stay on point when teaching them. If there is a need to modify an assessment for

a student who cannot write out an assignment, we can use a modification to that assessment. The individual education program (IEP) committee must review and determine whether the change is based on student needs, and sometimes this causes problems and delays for me to help the students get the skills they need. Participant A3 stated,

Undoubtedly, state- and district-wide alignments are important guidance for teaching students, but the training itself did not address what was needed in aligning these standards. For me, I search the district website for that type of information. The site has a lot of information that I used to stay current with what's needed for me to teach my students. The curriculum should be based on evidence about students with limitations from research so that the curriculum covers all the learning fundamentals necessary to teach students with disabilities efficiently. We should have standard evidence of achievement and what the federally identified codes mean. Just like those used by the general teachers.

When asked to explain, the participant stated,

I mean document showing us what the federal codes for certain disability represent. Like, SLD. That code could mean a student with a learning disability, but when I searched the district website for information on the code, it means a specific learning disability. Now, I can use this information to help students experiencing this problem.

The participants indicated that there was room for improvement.

Teachers' prior knowledge shapes what and how they learn (Knowles, 1970; Oleson & Hora, 2014). Of critical importance is the teachers' theoretical knowledge to communicate and organize instruction but using that knowledge to make modifications to a professional development program impede the intentional outcome originally designed by the program developers (Allen & Penuel, 2015). There is evidence that teachers' understandings of the frameworks of professional development support are contrasting perspective from the interpretation of the policymakers' (Allen & Penuel, 2015; Penuel, Fishman, Gallagher, Korbak, & Lopez-Prado, 2009). Especially the teachers' acumens about how the objectives and methods of professional development align with the curriculum and assessment (Garet et al., 2001; Penuel, Fishman, Yamaguchi, & Gallagher, 2007).

When asked about the standard of learning for teaching students with disabilities, I found that all participants agreed that the district significantly encourages them to try new instructional approaches and that the district extensively had provided opportunities to learn about the state recommended assessments.

Participant A1 stated,

Well, we must use our knowledge and skills to help students develop their knowledge, attitudes, skills and behavior values. As special education teachers we must identify with the philosophy and legal foundations in which to teach these students. When it comes to students with special needs, we have to know it all. More so, I work to understand what my students know already and how to help them using various tasks. So, the standards for teaching these students, as I

understand, are support and related services, specialized instruction (i.e., differentiated instruction), and core state standards.

Participant A2 stated,

Knowledge of IEP eligibility policy. I know I have to know the nitty-gritty to understand how to teach these students. We have IEPs because it ties the student to the general curriculum, but it doesn't promise the student will understand the grade level skill. So, I think that additional training is needed to help us as special education teachers to do more to help students stay on track.

When asked to explain the meaning of an IEP, the participants stated, "An IEP is an acronym for Individual Education Plan that we use to determine whether a student needs individualized instruction in an area where they might be failing."

Participant A3 stated, "I feel that the standards are designed for us to teach bureaucratic guidelines more."

The participants agreed that there were dissimilarities in how to teach students with disabilities. They also indicated that there were tools in place that prevented them from performing their best.

When drafting policies at the state level, policymakers must emphasize the provision of the policy to not only include students without disabilities in assessments but also students with disabilities. This lack of consideration has transpired despite clear evidence of the significance of preparing school administrators to meet the requirements of students with disabilities through statewide assessment standards (Trujillo & Cooper, 2014) that guide the "development and approval of most

leadership preparation programs" (Pazey & Cole, 2013, p. 23). The most significant

influence that indicated this lack of knowledge and responsibility is the absence of

"instructional content related to disability and special education in principal

preparation programs" (Billingsley et al., 2014, p. 3). Billingsley et al. reported that

53% of principals surveyed indicated that they had not enrolled in any learning

development related to special education (p. 3). Also, Sumbera et al. (2014) reported

that the discussion of special education subjects received little consideration, and

instructional content typically was established on the regulatory components of

IDEIA. IDEIA also includes making provision for special education teachers to

participate in professional development programs that align with the assessment

(Sayeski & Higgins, 2014). The focus on the regulatory and institutional frameworks

is challenging because the current educational reforms dictate synchronization and

consistency across the multifaceted educational system (Jackson & Cobb, 2013). As

Shepherd, Fowler, McCormick, Wilson, & Morgan (2016) explained, it is imperative

that students with disabilities be accessible to "scientifically-based instruction and

intervention for ensuring their success as students without disabilities" (p. 84).

Moreover, special education teachers need content and process knowledge,

intervention, and technology instructions to support students with disabilities in

meeting the rigorous state standards (Kennedy, Alves, & Rodgers, 2015; Leko,

Brownell, Sindelar, & Kiely, 2015). Stewart (2014) also explained teachers succeed

when they are empowered.

   Teachers' intrinsic motivation and commitment. When asked whether there

were any factors or impediments to their abilities to established contextual understanding and the support needed to implement assessment best practices, I understood that the participants were not motivated in this area of the professional development training because they indicated that the training is not cored specific to them.

Participant A1 explained,

Well, the training is already in place. We accept the agenda as is cuz it there already and we have no say in the matter. It's a take it or leave it kinda thing. I think participating in the kind of professional development program so far is not core specifically for me and is not suitable for my teaching.

Participant A2 stated,

In all honesty, my staff development training did not train me on the diversity or wide range of students with special needs. So, now, I really don't care to attend, but I do if there is one because it's mandatory.

Participant A3 added:

I love teaching, but I feel that I can do better teaching my students without the professional development that I have received because it does not work for me. What keeps me going are the needs of the students. This job is not easy if you are not committed. Being dedicated to the profession is a must. If you don't have the stamina to teach students with special needs, don't do it!

Each of the participants showed an authentic commitment to their students. Though, they did explain that teaching special needs students are very challenging and necessitate a real awe inspiring commitment.

It is essential to understand that teacher motivation has a profound influence on student achievement. Frequent studies have explained the differences in teachers' learning discipline or beliefs (Dixon, Yssel, McConnell, & Hardin, 2014; Rogowsky, Calhoun, & Tallal, 2015), but not how the administrative context of professional development influences the teacher's practice (Allen & Penuel, 2015; Cobb, McClain, Laumberg, & Dean, 2003). Several studies show that teachers exhibited lower levels of motivation and higher levels of anxiety and burnout in comparison with other professionals (Fang & Yan, 2004; Pearson & Moomaw, 2005; Langher, Caputo, & Ricci, 2017; Papastylianou, Kaila, & Polychronopoulos, 2009). Van Eekelen, Vermunt, and Boshuizen (2006), and Gordozidis and Papaioannou (2014) emphasized teachers' temperament toward learning as a priority of professional development participation. Accordingly, Shulman and Shulman (2004) proposed that teachers' impetus to gain knowledge be a central factor of effective professional development programs because teachers would rather choose what and how they learn (Admiraal et al., 2016; Knowles, 1970). For that reason, adjusting professional development program toward the learning needs of the teacher could augment the programs' effectiveness (Gravani, 2007; Gordozidis & Papaioannou, 2014; Shriki & Lavy, 2012); specifically, if the program's standards are established in the framework of the district system (Wilson & Berne, 1999).

Teachers' autonomy. The participants believed in the opportunities to make a difference in the lives of their students and demonstrated a commitment that encouraged buoyancy and retention. Moreover, the special education teachers articulated when asked about autonomy, master, and purpose they have in the enrichment of professional development programs at their school indicated a profound need for them to make learning for special education students attainable. In addition, the participants felt that they had some degree of autonomy when searching the district website for information to use for their students, but not the ability to make decisions without the approval of an IEP team. Others explained that they desired the autonomy essentially to connect to the needs of their students.

Participant A1 explained,

When it comes to having autonomy, we do. I am pretty self-sufficiency when it comes to finding material for my students. I mentioned earlier that the district website has a lot of information that I use for my students. Because I am not engaging in a daily or weekly professional development training does not mean I don't have access to the learning materials.

When asked about the ability of autonomy to make changes as needed to an assessment, the participant stated, "No. Even before we can make a change to students learning, we have to run it pass the IEP team. So, when it comes to making those kinds of changes, I would have to say no."

Additionally, when asked about autonomy toward providing input into the district professional development plan, the participant stated, "Definitely not. The

training is already in place. I don't think any teachers have a say-so in what the training focus on."

Participant A2 stated,

I believe the administrator gives me the latitude I need to do what it takes to meet the needs of my students. Their faith is particularly important to me. It's a good feeling to know that I can be trusted to make decisions that are best for my students.

When asked whether the participant had the autonomy to make changes regarding classroom assessment, the participant stated,

Not really. Our decisions do have limitations because to make drastic or even minimal changes for a student who are struggling happen at the top level. I think as the student's teacher I should be able to decide what my student needs without working through a lengthening process and red tape.

Participant A3 stated,

I believe that I am empowered with a sense of autonomy. When I have a "big idea" about a learning sequence, I feel comfortable speaking to my administrator about it. I have always had their support, but I cannot individually change a student's assessment without consulting the IEP team.

The participants also described their desire for autonomy in the classroom to implement best practices to achieve the desired level of student success.

Research shows that teachers' empowerment and self-efficacy are associated with "adaptive, motivational, and emotional outcomes" (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2014, p.

68). Self-efficacy is the facility to evaluate and execute one's action to attain a specific task (Bandura, 1977). Moreover, Reeve and Cheon (2016) noted autonomy and support benefits both the students and teachers. Pearson and Moomaw's (2005) study on the relationship between teacher autonomy and stress, work satisfaction, empowerment, and professionalism is in congruence with Reeve and Cheon (2016) but noted that autonomy is an essential factor of teacher motivation and job satisfaction. Both Ciani, Middleton, Summers, and Sheldon (2010), Núñez and León (2015), and Reeve and Cheon (2016) acknowledged that motivation occurs when teachers receive autonomy support in the classroom.

Based on the findings, I designed a 3-day professional development workshop to provide special education teachers with skills, knowledge, and dispositions necessary to implement best practices relevant for teaching student with disabilities. Finally, I stored all data collected on a USB drive and securely locked this device in a file cabinet in my home where it will be kept for five years as required. After five years, all data and documents about this study will be destroyed via the process of shredding.

Summary

The selection of the basic qualitative study as the methodology was essential in exploring the professional development around assessment from the perspective of special education teachers. The achievement of students with disabilities in DWPSD is contingent on how competent the teachers are who teach them (school superintendent, personal communication, February 7, 2014). Therefore, DWPSD uses professional

development training around assessment as opportunities for teachers to augment knowledge and improve the academic outcome of all students. This study was developed to acquire an understanding and explore special education teachers' perceptions of professional development activities as it related to assessment at DWPSD. Participants included special education teachers who were interviewed to gain a useful understanding of their individual experience with and perceptions of professional development around assessment. Ethical standards and practices were applied to the study by advising the participants that their responses would be confidential. The data were reviewed, analyzed, coded, and categorized into themes. Coding the data and connecting the findings to the research question and conceptual framework allowed for the emergence of themes to occur. The themes revealed five broad categories: the quality of professional development, the lack of training, lack of evidence-based practices, teachers' intrinsic motivation and commitment, and teachers' autonomy. These themes reinforced the outcomes recommendations shared in Appendix A. Finally; the special education teachers appeared to have limited information about the practice of the state -and district-wide assessments at the school.

Additionally, in Section 2, I presented the data analysis consisting of the processes by which the data were generated and recorded. I explained the patterns, relationships, and themes as findings supported by the data and aligned them with the research question. Furthermore, I clarified all salient data in the results and appropriately handle any discrepant cases. The quality assurance for this study included member checking, peer examination, and credibility in trustworthy peer-

reviewed journal articles, databases, websites, and accessible resources. Moreover, I summarized the outcomes of data collection logically and systematically about the problem, research question, literature on the topic, as well as, the conceptual framework for the study.

Section 3, introduces the Project (see Appendix A). In this section, I described the final research study based on the generated interviews from three special education teachers. As the results of the research findings, I designed a 3-day professional development workshop. I also discussed the rationale for the study, review of the literature, project description, and roles and responsibilities of the researcher and other support. Finally, I presented the project evaluation and implications including social change.

Section 3: The Project

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore special education teachers'

perceptions of professional development around assessment in the DWPSD. Data

collected from special education teachers' interviews revealed the significance of their

involvement in professional development programs related to teaching students with

disabilities. Based on the study findings, I designed a 3-day professional development

workshop for the special education teachers at DWPSD (see Appendix A). The

workshop is entitled, "*State- and District-wide Standards: Teaching Students with

Disabilities.*" This planned professional development workshop provides special

education teachers with a guide to understanding state- and district-wide assessments

and teaching and implementation strategies through group discussions and hands-on

activities (see Appendix A). Moreover, this project seeks to establish skilled, reflective

practitioners by providing learning opportunities and teacher's adaptability to improve

current skills and knowledge. As Sun, Penuel, Frank, Gallagher, & Youngs (2013)

explained, through the influences of continuous professional development, teachers

are given the opportunity to adjust current practices.

In this section, I will describe the project (see Appendix A), and the rationale for

the project. Subsequently, from literature reviews based on case studies, I will

demonstrate why this professional development workshop is a relevant approach to

prepare special education teachers with competencies that align with state- and district-

wide standards for teaching students with disabilities. I will also communicate the project evaluation plan and project implications.

Description and Goals

The 3-day professional development training engaged learning techniques for special education teachers to assess instructional methods to advance students with disabilities academic achievement at the DWPSD. An invitation was sent to special education teachers who participate in professional development activities around assessment. The additional participants were the district and local administrators, director of special education programs, curriculum and instruction specialists, and paraprofessionals who worked with students with disabilities. Additionally, written documentation obtained from DWPSD website were studied considering the research question which was: What is special education teachers' perceptions of professional development activities, related to assessment in the DWPSD? The research question was constructed to understand professional development around assessment better from the perspective of special education teachers. This approach included an analysis of interviews of the target population, and a review of the data to determine common patterns or themes relevant to develop the study. As a result, themes emerged, allowing recommendations to follow.

The description of the workshop can be viewed in Appendix A. The professional development series were voluntary, as participants were not compensated. The workshop series consisted of both formative and summative evaluations (see Appendix A). Also, the series included a PowerPoint presentation outlining the

purpose, rationale, benefits, and characteristics of the state- and district-wide assessment standards (see Appendix A). At the beginning of the series, the participants were given a training packet that included handouts of the presentation, pens, and notepads for note taking. In addition, the workshop comprised of collaboration opportunities for participants to develop new ideas and discuss instructional strategies that lead to further insight in preparing students with disabilities for academic success. As Runhaar and Sanders (2016) noted, teachers gain when knowledge is shared.

The fundamental objectives of the professional development training were to: (a) increase the participants' professional competence as an academic scholar, (b) provide clarity and purpose for effective teaching practices, (c) improve motivation, and (d) support the results-driven high-quality professional development activities developed by the district. The project activities involved core educational materials that related to the practice of professional responsibility and ethical obligations of the special education teachers.

With the collaboration of educational stakeholders, the training might contribute to the district policymakers working to ensure that special education teachers needs are met. Specifically, design professional development programs that provide significant intellectual and practical content knowledge around assessment. As well, address implementation details of the district-wide assessment that align with state standards to strengthen special education teachers understanding and development of the activities.

Rationale

As explained in Section 1, the local problem identified was that some of
DWPSD teachers did not see the benefit of attending professional development
activities. Professional development is considered to be an effective method of
providing teachers with the skills needed to construct exceptional educational results
for all students (Darling-Hammond, 2015; Desimone & Garet, 2015; Dufour, 2015).
Therefore, the net findings of the basic qualitative study and the significance of
professional development have resulted in a 3-day professional development series for
special education teachers; along with information for district leaders and local
administrators to reflect where the opportunity for enhancing professional
development programs exist. The 3-day professional development workshop outlines
the core areas that resulted from the collected data and related recommendations and
requirements.

Furthermore, this project has implications for positive social change by
providing professional development programs that address the needs of special
education teachers to increase their knowledge and skills to teach students with
disabilities effectively. Also, Sun et al. (2013) noted, training that allows for active
and supported involvement has a profound influence on changes in teachers'
instructional practices.

In the same way, studies have shown that when teachers are involved in
professional development their motivation (Cheon, Reeve, J. Lee, & Y. Lee, 2018),
sense of control (Gordozidis & Papaioannou, 2014), and competence increases (Luft

& Hewson, 2014; Whitworth & Chiu, 2015; Zwart, Korthagen, & Attema-Noordewier, 2015). Equally important, Cunningham et al. (2015) reported, "Teacher knowledge and development are successfully constructed through relationship-based approaches" (p. 62). More specifically, Cunningham et al. called for a transformation in professional development apart from the one-day training workshops as the leading method of delivery to an all-inclusive module of relationship-based professional development models. As one district administrator reasoned, professional development serves as a catalyst that inspires educators to meet the challenges of preparing students for the 21st-century; advancing levels of technology; and, increasing accountabilities for student achievement (school superintendent, personal communication, January 19, 2018).

<p style="text-align:center">Review of the Literature</p>

Search Strategy

I used a systematic search of the databases to conduct the literature reviewed articles related to professional development around assessment. The key terms that were used to search for additional literature related to the research study included *professional development, special education, high-quality teachers, in-service training, and alternative assessment and curriculum*. These terms provided a range of articles related to the phenomenon under study.

Additionally, I researched peer-reviewed journals collected from publications dated between 2013 through 2018 from the following databases: ProQuest Central, EBSCOhost, Academic Search Complete, Expanded Academic ASAP, and Google

Scholar. Resources such as books and the study site on the topic were searched, as well as, other contributions before and after the 1990s: Glaser and Strauss (1965), Guskey (1994). Those databases identified above were used to explore evidence that professional development around assessment is a crucial component in education for special education teachers to teach students with disabilities. The literature review consisted of the following sections: background and the significance of professional development.

Background

Historically, professional development is considered the most proliferated training in the United States (Evans, 2014; Jones & Dexter, 2014). The most important form of professional development was staff development or in-service training consisting of a short-term course (Hoyle, 2012; Scheerens & Blömeke, 2016). Although, Patton et al. (2015) believed that professional development concentrated on topics that frequently did not connect to the learning, Earley and Porritt (2014), and Pehmer, Gröschner, and Seidel (2015) reported that professional development was an efficient method to influence teaching competencies and improve student knowledge. Several professional learning groups have used professional development programs to solve genuine problems within the context of their professional practices (Cranton, 2016; Darling-Hammond, 2015).

In the past, education reform that supported decentralized decision-making and the augmentation of accountability sources in schools (Lee & Nie, 2014), recommended the restructuring of long-established roles of teachers and

administrators (Berg, Carver, & Mangin, 2014; Durand, Lawson, Wilcox, & Schiller, 2016). Consequently, special education teachers are performing job responsibilities that are distinctively different from traditional teaching roles (Radford, Bosanquet, Webster, & Blatchford, 2015; Shepherd, Fowler, McCormick, Wilson, & Morgan, 2016). For example , special education teachers must be knowledgeable of the legal guidelines directed by the state and local school district, as well as implementation practices of assessment models and procedures to assist in determining students' eligibility relating to special needs or services (Dukes, Darling, & Doan, 2014; Krethlow & Helf, 2013). In addition, special education teachers must implement assessment instruction that is research-based to achieve the components of assessment directives to close the performance gap in practice (Lemons, Allor, Al Otaiba, & Lejeune, 2016), and provide evidence-based practices (EBPs) for students with disabilities to meet the academic challenge of the 21st-century classrooms (Markelz, Riden, & Scheeler, 2017).

Moreover, research has shown that teachers' education and professional development are linked to their beliefs, values, viewpoints, and constructed decisions made throughout their lives (de Vries, de Grift, & Jansen, 2013; Kyndt, Gijbels, Grosemans, & Donche, 2016; Meirink, Meijer, Verloop, & Bergen, 2009). As an alternative, the acquisition of new knowledge and skills gained through professional development must incorporate analytical thinking skills (DiPaola & Hoy, 2014; Patton et al., 2015).

Colleges and universities faculties devote numerous hours per year teaching specialized and practical knowledge to expand current teaching practices. However, Bogler and Nir (2015) explained that it is inconsequential to distribute resources to train a new teaching strategy unless the new approach is utilized in the classroom satisfactorily than exhibited exclusively at the institutional level. Cranton (2016) believed that teachers needed to focus on communicative knowledge that engages critical thinking skills to inspire changes in classroom practices. Communicative learning encompasses teachers' abilities to share collective experiences and in return builds on the expertise of others (Cranton, 2016). Additionally, Guskey (2014) believed that teachers are the building blocks to "improve student learning outcomes" (p. 12). More specifically, Guskey stressed working and planning backward to generate academic excellence for student learning going forward.

Professional development is a crucial component in education for special education teachers to stay abreast of current directives related to assessment for teaching students with disabilities (Billingsley, 2011; Brock, Huber, Carter, Juarez, & Warren, 2014). It is evident in a review of the literature that researchers and academia's concur that teacher quality has a significant effect on student learning and achievement. Therefore, an all-embracing prospect to develop teachers practices must go further than the one size fit all workshop methodologies frequently utilized (Darling-Hammond, 2015; DiPaola & Hoy, 2014).

The significance of Professional Development

Teachers' professional development activities have become essential in educational studies in the past decades. For example, research has shown that professional development activities influence teachers practices and strengthens their working relationships (Desimone & Garet, 2015; Dufour, 2015). Moreover, professional development prepares teachers with the skills and fidelities needed to improve classroom practices and student outcomes (Darling-Hammond, 2014; Desimone & Garet, 2015; Dufour, 2015; Grosemans, Boon, Verclairen, Dochy, & Kyndt, 2015). In the final analysis, both Borko (2004) and Rice (2017) asserted, teachers' professional development is vital to improving schools. Cook and Odom (2013) noted a need for professional development to be created and implemented around support plans to improve traditional instruction for students with disabilities.

There have been numerous studies exploring teacher quality effort on the education of teachers in pre- and in-service training programs. These results often showed that many teachers lack the appropriate training for their designated teaching contractual obligation (Bayar, 2014; Markelz et al., 2017). Consequentially, students frequently do not have qualified teachers in the classrooms (Bayar, 2014). These findings have necessitated state and district administrators to act in response to the issue of teacher deficiencies by establishing professional development programs (Bayar, 2014; DiPaola & Hoy, 2014). Indeed, Orphanos and Orr's (2014) study on learning leadership matters noted that effective instructional and transformational leadership practices significantly were linked to enhancing "teacher engagement and

commitment, organizational culture, and effectiveness" (p. 681), in turn, were constructively connected to better-quality students outcomes (Pehmer, Gröschner, & Seidel, 2015; Robinson, 2008). Moreover, Stewart (2014) emphasized that professional development be highly efficient in minimizing student variation in achievement when teachers' basic knowledge and skills work in partnership. Furthermore, professional development activities for teachers include renewing current knowledge and skills (Jones & Dexter, 2014), adaptability (Koellner & Jacobs, 2015; Parsons, Ankrum, & Morewood, 2016), and collaboration (Brody & Hadar, 2015). What is more, professional development must support teachers' continuing learning representative of decision-making skills as regards to classroom management and student achievement (Loughran, 2014). It is paramount that teachers improve their "theoretical knowledge, practice, and technological skills" (Gurgur, 2017, p. 1784), which are crucial elements in teaching qualities. Nabhani, O'Day Nicolas, and Bahous (2014) identified various components of action research such as "inquiry, networking, coaching strategies, and self-monitoring and reflection" (p. 231), as established paradigms of professional development that have been corroborated to improve teaching practices. In like manner, Both Kyriakides, Christoforidou, Panayiotou, and Creemers (2017) and Valiandes and Neophytou (2017) stressed the relevance of professional development activities is teacher development, particularly for differentiated instruction to meet teachers' individual needs.

Equally important, most recent educational reforms include investing in professional development to improve school and student outcomes (Desimone & Pak,

2017; Jacob et al., 2017). Of course, professional development programs must be multidimensional (Chen & McCray, 2012) and incorporate, socially interactive, attitudinal, and intellectual components (Evans, 2014), and include criteria for evaluation (Zeichner, 2014). Teachers and students development need opportunities for continuous learning in an environment that encourages higher order thinking skills under leadership that promotes teacher training development and performance improvement (Orphanos & Orr, 2014; Patton et al., 2015). As can be seen, professional development is recognized as a significant resource to increase teacher quality and student learning, ultimately improving schools and reducing student disparity in achievement (Hildebrand, 2018; Loughran, 2014; Rice, 2017).

Project Description

The title of the proposed 3-day professional development workshop is *State-and District-wide Standards: Teaching Students with Disabilities*. The 3-day professional development workshop series included in Appendix A outlines specific detailed stages of recommendations and requirements needed to be useful in developing the workshop. As a first stage, it will be imperative to communicate with the coordinator of professional development programs, director of special education programs, and curriculum and instruction specialists at DWPSD to illustrate the components of the workshop. As well, it is recommended that the local administrator who endorsed the study be included in the conference. It will also be beneficial to develop a strategy for presenting the findings to the stakeholders to be discussed in a general meeting setting or a PowerPoint presentation.

Potential Resources and Existing Support

The potential resources needed for the successful implementation of the 3-day workshop consists of a laptop, projector, Internet connection, and a Promethean Board for the PowerPoint presentation. Video conferencing and other electronic devices may be necessary to deliver the material included in the professional development sessions. The additional essential resources for this workshop include Microsoft Office PowerPoint file on a SanDisk drive, participant handouts, and name tags, tables arranged round for groups of six to eight with chairs. As well, table supplies such as sticky notes, highlighters, and index cards, and set of pencil markers for each table group, flipchart, easel, dry pens, hard copies of the presentation, and the state and district assessment standards.

The workshop will also need the support of the district's office of professional development, district and local administrators, and technical staff in the event of mechanical complications.

Potential Barriers and Solutions

The potential barriers to implementation include the unavailability of the room and training equipment. Therefore, it is recommended that the training facility and equipment be checked two days before the scheduled workshop to ensure that the place is available and adequately prepared for the training.

Another potential barrier could be the scheduling. At the local site, there are reserved times for professional development, but there could be other initiatives that might take priority over the training. For that reason, it is recommended that the local

site administrator schedule the workshop at least one month before the initial training to give the office of professional development time to prepare for the training.

The additional potential barrier could be the lack of personnel to conduct the training. Consequently, arrangements should be made with the district's office of professional development to conduct a train-the-trainer session with the administrator in charge of staff development, curriculum and instruction specialists to assist in developing engaging and compelling future professional development workshops. As an additional resource, I will maintain a partnership with the administrator and curriculum and instruction specialists to encourage continued support of the state- and district-wide assessments that special education teachers are required to implement. Finally, provide prerecorded videos of the previous professional development training. These videos can be checked out weekdays at the school media center from 8:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.

Proposal for Implementation and Timetable

The ideal schedule time for this training is during the Fall of 2019 and continue throughout the 2020 school year at least three weeks before the start of the school year. The hours for the complete implementation of this project are the equivalent of three days of training at seven hours each day for 3-9 months (see Table 1), depending on the time preference of the school district. After the workshop, the participants will be able to:

- Develop an understanding of the state- and district-wide assessments.

- Demonstrate clarity and purpose to understand the concept of implementing the state- and district-wide assessments into classroom practices.

- Identify and understand the benefits of attending an ongoing assessment training.

- Promote and support student-center learning.

- Use critical thinking skills to analyze and solve problems.

Utilizing the professional development and adult learning theory will also be valuable to guide the implementation of this project as it will allow special education teachers to be involved in the planning of their learning (Knowles, 1970) because their involvement provides the foundation for the learning to occur. Furthermore, this project will allow the special education teachers the opportunities to apply the knowledge gained in training to develop assessment plans based on the district requirement and learning needs of the students with disabilities.

In addition, I presented this professional development proposal to the DWPSD administrator and director of professional development programs, suggesting that the special education teachers from LMP Elementary School attend this 3-day professional development workshop because of their direct involvement with students with disabilities. I also discussed the data from this basic qualitative study in Section 2, supported by the literature review I articulated in Section 3.

Table 1

Proposed Implementation Timetable

Date	Activity	Responsible Owner
The estimated start date should occur during the school term of 2019-2020	Review findings, professional development plans, and recommendations.	Director of special education
1–2 weeks after the initial review with the director of special education	Present findings and PowerPoint presentation to the school administrators.	Curriculum and instruction specialists, and other administrators that are identified
2–3 weeks after presenting the findings	Appoint an individual with the department of professional development as the primary contact for the priority area of responsibility.	Director of professional development and other responsible appointees may function as the project manager for this project
6–9 weeks after professional development workshop appointments	Coordinate the activities of the group specialized in developing professional development and hold business meetings to identify the specific requirements of the training, as well as identify resources and develop a strategy for long-term goals.	Professional development group/team
2–3 weeks after the working group identifies requirements	Implement the series of workshops to address the core value of the state- and district-wide assessments and why the standard is an offer by the district, understand the specific components of the standards along with the roles and responsibilities of those involved; and finally, apply the standard assessment practices engaged for teaching students with disabilities.	Professional development group/team
1–3 months after the workshop series have been identified	Deliver the workshops throughout the school term—2019-2020.	Professional development group/team
1-3 months after the workshop series have been implemented	The professional development team should continue to strengthen the vision and strategy outlined in the series to expand the professional development programs for special education teachers.	Professional development group/team

Roles and Responsibilities of Students and Others

My role was to develop and facilitate the project. The office of professional development is responsible for providing the location, resources, equipment, and funding for the workshop. The staff with the department of professional development also offered their scholarly input. The role of the professional development staffer is to assist with program facilitation as well as setting up and monitoring the registration table, providing handouts, and materials needed for the workshop.

Project Evaluation

A formative and summative evaluation of the training series was presented to the LMP Elementary School special education teachers to examine their learning comprehension, and assess the effectiveness of the program. The formative assessment was designed to allow the workshop to be assessed for training development and performance improvement (Dixson & Worrell, 2016; Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006; Spaulding, 2014; Timmers, Walraven, & Veldkamp, 2015). Applying formative evaluation at the start of each training session allowed for immediate adjustment to be made to enhance the usefulness of the workshop (Cornelius, 2014; Stewart & Houchens, 2014). By adding this consideration to the process, I used the formative evaluation to provide additional information related to how well the policy practices were functioning, and whether the intended goals met the objectives of the training. The formative evaluation included participant ratings their perceived experience, confidence, and usefulness of the training (see Appendix A). The evaluation form also provided spaces for comments where the participants could make suggestions to

improve the training sessions, if applicable. Moreover, the processes of the formative assessment might be used as a representative model of specific professional development programs in the local district.

In addition, I used the summative evaluation at the conclusion of the workshop to assess how efficient the participants believed the training equipped them to implement district-wide assessment best practices in their classrooms. According to Tolgfors and Öhman (2016), summative evaluation is an active practice to measure the program outcome based on the participants acquired learning skills at the completion of the training. This evaluation method included the participants rating their knowledge of a subset of content items (Dixson & Worrell, 2016), and to suggest improving future professional development workshops (see Appendix A). The evaluation form also provided spaces for comments where the participants could make recommendations to enhance the training sessions, if applicable. The evaluative data were compiled and compared to determine the impact of the training, and the outcome was reported to the district administrator for review.

Project Implications

Local district implications

The school district in which LMP Elementary School is situated stands to gain tremendously by providing a professional development program related to assessment specifically for special education teachers. Special education teachers' attitudes, opportunities, and knowledge toward understanding the state- and district standards are central in determining the quality of the education students with disabilities

receive. Additionally, the project could provide special education teachers with meaningful professional knowledge to enhance teaching practices (de Vries et al., 2013), and participation in future professional development activities.

Broader implications

Professional development training could be used to influence other school districts within the state to implement an instructional research-based practice that empowers special education teachers with fundamental, continuous training, and the support needed in developing new knowledge (Brock & Carter, 2015; Brownell et al., 2017; Gersten, Chard, & Baker, 2000), to close the gap in practice. In addition, by communicating best practices and experiences in a professional, collaborative discussion, special education teachers may, in turn, diminish their philosophy concerning professional development.

Social Change

The core value of Walden University (Walden University, 2017, Social Change section) mission of social change proposed that through the "development of principled, knowledgeable, and ethical scholar-practitioners, who are and will become civic and professional role models by advancing the betterment of society" (p. 7). Based on these principles, the local school district and students with disabilities may benefit from the development of special education teachers' knowledge through improved instructional methods. Through the teamwork of special education teachers and the comprehension acquired from the contents of the professional development workshop, collaborative partnerships are formed, competencies are achieved, and the students with disabilities

academic achievement advance the betterment of society; thus, relating to Walden University's mission for social change.

In Section 3, I introduced all the characteristics of the planned project, a professional development workshop. I summarized the findings gathered from the special education teachers interviews and research analysis. Based on the findings, I designed a 3-day professional development workshop that provided special education teachers with the tools and resources essential to strengthen classroom practices for teaching students with disabilities. I established the project goals in response to the research findings presented in Section 2. As well, I included in this section the review of the literature, a proposal for implementation and timetable, roles and responsibilities, barriers and solution, and resources. Next, I included the project evaluation plan, and finally, I discussed the project local and far-reaching implications.

In the final section, Section 4, Reflections and Conclusions, I will reflect and discuss the importance of the overall work of the study. Describe the potential impact of positive social change as it relates to the project strengths and limitations of the study. In this section, I will also make recommendations for alternative approaches, describe the scholarship, project development, and leadership and change, and discuss the importance of the work and what was learned as a result of this study. Finally, I will consider the implications, applications, and direction for future research, and the conclusion.

Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

Reflection is a vital part of one's journey. As often delineated, reflection is the embodiment of past experiences and how those experiences can improve going forward (Ryan & Ryan, 2015). Remarkably, that is also what the professional development around assessment activity is about—reflection on special education teachers' perceptions of the professional development activity and how it has supported their classroom practices. In the same way, through the doctoral study series, I have experienced the learning sequences in an innovative and irreplaceable manner.

Additionally, Schön (1983) and Mezirow (2000) asserted that the facility to reflect on one's experiences prompts transformative learning. Transformative learning is the development of corroborating and understanding the meaning of one's experience and the world in which one live (Cranton, 1994; Mezirow, 2000). From this assessment, of introspective and transformational learning, I reflect on the doctoral experience and the development of the professional development workshop for special education teachers to share what I have learned.

Project Strengths and Limitations

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore special education teachers' perceptions of professional development around assessment in the DWPSD. Researchers and academia concur that professional development strengthens teachers' acumen and classroom practices; thus, improving the academic performance of the school (Darling-Hammond, 2015; Desimone & Garet, 2015; Dufour, 2015). The

doctoral study led to a professional development workshop for special education teachers to address the gap in practice in that if the professional development program at DWPSD is augmented to include learning sequence geared toward special education teachers, the district might have at its advantage to differentiate itself from the norm and thereby increase participation in professional development programs.

The themes that emerged from the study indicated that the district needs to focus on the following crucial areas: the quality of professional development, the lack of training, lack of evidence-based practices, teachers' intrinsic motivation and commitment, and teachers' autonomy. The recommendations include: (a) implementing a series of workshops to address the core value of the state- and district-wide assessments and why the standard is offered by the district; (b) work to understand the specific components of the standards along with the roles and responsibilities of those involved; (c) apply the standard assessment practices involved for teaching students with disabilities into professional development programs; (d) appoint an individual with the department of professional development as the primary contact to priority area of responsibility for special education teachers; and (e) coordinate the activities of the professional team to identify the specific requirements of the training, as well as identify resources and develop strategy for long-term goals. For these recommendations to be successful, DWPSD should follow certain requirements where support from district leadership and leaders' adherence is essential. From there, a person should be appointed supervisor whose core job responsibility is to supervise the district professional development programs for

special education teachers. This person will need to convey the core value of the state- and district-wide assessments, as well as provide clarity and purpose for effective teaching practices, and support the results-driven high-quality professional development activities throughout the district. Additionally suggested, a professional development team to search for other requirements for a successful professional development program including developing strategies to meet long-term objectives and plan purposes. With the conditions mentioned above in place, the recommendations may be processed in an all-encompassing and significant way.

Also, I believe that the most significant strength of this project was the development of professional development training for special education teachers. Incorporating the attributes of the professional development activities included creating an assessment workshop of strategies to improve classroom practices for special education teachers to teach core assessments that align with state- and district-wide standards; as well as sustaining professional learning that concentrates on the long-term and positive effect for students with disabilities achievement.

Another strength is that the district and local school administrators can participate in the training to better understand how crucial it is to incorporate the state- and district-wide assessments into the professional development programs for special education teachers. Finally, I believe that the outcomes of the research are another strength because the analyzed findings of the study were based on the responses of special education teachers directly involved with assessment at LMP Elementary School in the DWPSD.

Although this project was designed based on the research findings, there is the possibility of limitations; for example, the lack of buy-in and sustainability from the district and local administrators, and the lack of support from the office of professional development to assist in reviewing the training material or facilitation of the workshop due to a prior commitment. If there are minimum support from the key stakeholders, the project probably would not be appropriately implemented.

Recommendations for Alternative Approaches

This project encompasses a proposal to explore suggestions for alternative approaches. First, it would have been ideal to use web 2.0 technology-based training applications as part of the continuing professional development practice. Web 2.0 technology-based training would have allowed the participants to be presented with an extraordinary opportunity to discover information considerably faster (Batsila, Tsihouridis, Vavougios, & Ioannidis, 2015), and to augment creativity and social contact between individuals at any time from any place around the world (Batsila et al., 2015). Fan and Radford (2015) described web 2.0 as a digital platform with the potential to "establish active, sustainable and capacity building communities of learners" (p. 4). Second, web 2.0 technology-based platforms can be developed around any content area, such as literacy, assessment, classroom management, and much more (Bower, 2016). Third, web 2.0 technology-based training programs make training individuals more efficiently, along with keeping them updated with the latest information at a fraction of the cost (Fan & Radford, 2015). Fourth, a web 2.0 curriculum encourages critical thinking (Herro, 2014). The advantage of

technologically-based technologies is that the tool itself allows users to exert substantial influence as well as control over their learning activities (Newland & Byles, 2014). More importantly, implementing web 2.0 technology-based training in professional development programs could save the district money over costly professional development consultants (Fan & Radford, 2015; Newland & Byles, 2014). As a final point, using a web 2.0 technology-based training method could provide the building blocks of advanced learning practices to achieve increase program participation (Murthy, Iyer, & Warriem, 2015).

Another alternative approach to support the professional development program and provide the essential training support for special education teachers is to design a one-on-one instructional strategy to assist in the integration of the required learning component into professional development. Collaboration with special education teachers to create engaging learning tactics is another approach used to add value to the students with disabilities learning practices.

In addition, if general classroom teachers could have been included in the study, that would have presented a more comprehensive view of the problem related to the phenomenon under study. In this case, permission was not obtained to interview the general classroom teachers because they do not impart direct knowledge to students with disabilities. Though the general classroom teacher's representation in this study is missing; their perspectives should be taken into consideration for future research studies.

Although the project aim was professional development related to assessment, other areas of professional development activities could have been explored. For example, additional questions about the academic process of effective teaching strategies, teach like a champion, or teachers' prior experience with attending professional development activities could have shown additional characteristics about the professional development programs at DWPSD. Furthermore, qualitative research is not generalized to the larger population; but rather, informs about the sample reported (Merriam, 2009). Utilizing a mixed methods approach for future study might diminish this concern.

Scholarship

When I enrolled in the doctoral program at Walden University, I wanted to develop as an educational practitioner, and conduct research that would strengthen my effectiveness as an advocate for children with disabilities. As I experienced the Walden assignments, group discussions, and engaged in self-reflection, I realized that my interests were more related to continuing professional development for special education teachers rather than the general classroom teachers. As such, Walden provided me with the learning opportunities to develop my interested in special education teachers' perceptions of professional development around assessment in the local district. More importantly, developing as a scholarly practitioner as a Walden student, I had the opportunity to learn from a group of amazing professors and collaborate with a diverse group of colleagues.

The subsequent doctoral study qualifies as an example of scholarship to me because it has the propensity to actively effects professional development programs at the local site that could equally increase special education teachers' efficacy, participation, and student with disabilities academic achievement.

Project Development and Evaluation

Working with a special needs' organization, I learned that special education teachers were required to participate in professional development activities, which often time did not include their area of expertise. Therefore, I began my project by exploring the fundamentals of classroom practices for special education teachers such as the state- and district-wide assessments, its connection to the common core, and how special education teachers align the students with disabilities learning with the assessment standards.

During the data analysis, I interpreted the participants' responses as needing more guidance and models of state- and district-wide assessments practices, which led to the 3-day professional development workshop for special education teachers as the project genre. It was not entirely well-defined at the beginning of this study that a professional development workshop would be the appropriate choice as the outcome could have led to program evaluation or modification in policy; however, the findings indicated the need for an all-encompassing method to address the themes that were discovered during the data analysis.

In addition, to evaluate the effectiveness of the project, formative and summative assessments were suggested to serve as a tool to determine whether the

participants perceive the professional development workshop as meeting their learning objectives. As informed by the project genre, I designed a formative evaluation form (see Appendix A) that included the participants evaluating the training at the beginning of each professional development session. This form of assessment was used to determine how well the participants were progressing and whether adjustments to the program were necessary. The summative evaluation form (see Appendix A) was used as an active practice to quantify the program outcome based on the participants learning and is recommended to be completed at the end of the program to help in determining the effectiveness of the training or whether the training needs improvement.

To that end, the 3-day professional development workshop conformed to the evaluation and analysis of the study. DWPSD benefits by having an all-encompassing review of the current practices regarding professional development activities around assessment as perceived by the special education teachers, their vision of an impending professional development program, and specific recommendations and requirements to address the problem that would allow greater teacher participation in professional development activities. Utilizing another genre would not have sufficiently discussed the analysis and findings of this study.

Leadership and Change

What has emerged from various discussions of leadership and change is a personification of the categorization of critical leadership that become visible during the organizational change. While a distinct difference of opinions has been used to

portray different categories of leadership, I see myself as an educational leader. As an educational leader, I have a unique quality that enables me to organize and maintain endeavors within an organization through specific activities amalgamated with personal characteristics to effect change in the area of needs. Nadler and Tushman (1990) identified the qualities of leadership as "observable, definable, and having specific behavioral characteristic" (p. 77).

As an agent of change, I have the determination to achieve excellence in my educational endeavor; as well as, provide a catalyst for people to embrace change. As Martin Luther King, Jr. (1967) explained when one makes an effort to do a thing, do it well.

Reflection on the Importance of the Work

As an educator, my emphasis is on providing a high-quality learning environment for students with disabilities. This endeavor commands persistent concentration on current research representative of best practices for implementing learning sequence to close the gap in practice. Through the doctoral program and the research, I have engaged in at Walden University, I have spent enormous hours reviewing research material, reflecting on the educational practices, consulting with other practitioners, and using analysis to synthesize my understanding of the learning. Throughout this journey of discovery and learning, I became more convinced that I was on the correct path as a scholar of change. This journey has led me to authenticate that special education teacher plays an essential role in educating students with disabilities.

As exhausting as these past years have been, I will continue working as an advocate for children with special needs by equipping special education teachers with the competence needed to achieve academic excellence for students with disabilities in the 21st century.

Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research

While working on this study, it became understandably clear that administrative supports are quintessence for influencing special education teachers in the DWPSD concerning their perceptions of professional development activities and to be given autonomy to use best practices to improve their teaching skills. When special education teachers are compelled to attend professional learning programs, there should be an opportunity for them to have a contribution on topics that are significant to them to improve classroom practice and student achievement as well as time for collaboration. The replies from the special education teachers that participated in this study suggested that there is a potential need for improving the current professional learning program — the project presented a system for utilizing well-defined supports that were acknowledged by the participants in this study. Such supports not only assisted the special education teachers at the DWPSD with the tools they needed for their daily teaching practices, but also shaped the quality of classroom instruction, the learning climate within the classroom, and student accomplishment. Though the research setting was the LMP Elementary School special education department in DWPSD, the study findings may be transferable to special education teachers in similar school districts.

Regarding this study, I recommend further research in the area on the perceptions of special education teachers toward professional development activities in other school districts utilizing Chen and McCray's (2012) the whole teacher approach professional development within classroom practices. It is further recommended that other researchers replicate the research methods used in this study with similar situations to determine whether the discoveries in this study can be generalized to a different environment. Furthermore, future research could reveal how special education teachers involved in professional development activities influence retention, knowledge and skill, and student dropout rate.

Conclusion

The focus of this study was geared toward special education teachers' perceptions of professional development around assessment. Based on the research findings, I designed a 3-day professional development workshop for the special education teachers at DWPSD (see Appendix A). The workshop is entitled, "*State-and District-wide Standards: Teaching Students with Disabilities*." This professional development workshop provided special education teachers with instructions to understanding state- and district-wide assessments and teaching and implementation strategies through group discussions and hands-on activities (see Appendix A). Moreover, the goals of the workshop were to (a) increase the participants' professional competence as an academic scholar, (b) provide clarity and purpose for effective teaching practices, (c) improve motivation, and (d) support the results-driven high-quality professional development activities developed by the district.

As I reflect on this journey, I realized that the task took me to many places via other researchers' work regarding this research topic. Because of this journey, I can truthfully say that I have contributed positively to the scholarly work on special education teachers' perceptions of professional development around assessment. I also believe that this study will help DWPSD address the dispossession of teachers' participation in professional development activities from the perspectives of the special education teachers.

In this final section, I discussed the strengths and limitations of the professional development project and presented reflections on my development as a scholar and practitioner. In addition, I addressed the potential impact on social change and concluded this section with recommendations for future research.

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Appendix A: The Project
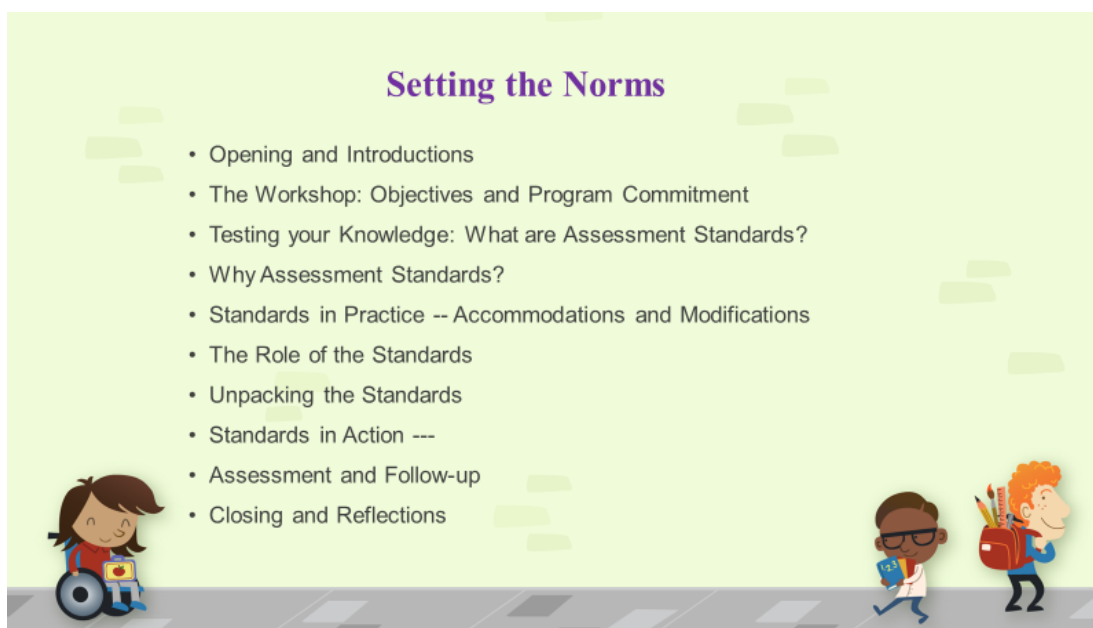
State- and District-wide Standards: Teaching Students with Disabilities

This professional development program is designed for special education teachers. It may also be used to facilitate learning instruction for the staff who work with students with disabilities.

Purpose: To understand the significant of using state- and district-wide instructional strategies in one teaching practices.

Rationale: professional development serves as a catalyst that inspires educators to meet the challenges of preparing students for the 21st-century; advancing levels of technology; and increasing accountabilities for student achievement

Benefit: Three full days of interactive and hand-on instruction to provide knowledge and skill demonstrating the attributes of assessment to implement proficiency in the classrooms.

Training Goals

Upon completion of this training, the participants will be able to:

- Develop an understanding of the state- and district-wide assessments.
- Demonstrate clarity and purpose to understand the concept of implementing the state- and district-wide assessments into classroom practices.
- Identify and understand the benefits of attending an ongoing assessment training.
- Promote and support student-center learning.
- Use critical thinking skills to analyze and solve problems.

What this Training is Not!

- The focus of this training is the state- and district-wide assessments for teaching students with disabilities. This training does not address assessment related to teachers, school administrators, or district leaders' performances.

Icebreaker: TESTING YOUR KNOWLEDGE?????

- What are the assessment standards for teaching students with disabilities?

- How can assessment standards improve the quality and effectiveness of students with disabilities?

- How does assessment standards affect me as a practitioner?

- What do I see happening in my district or school that relates to assessment standards?

- What is my role as a special education teachers?

Unit 1: Accommodations

Times	Activity	Responsible Owner
8:00 – 8:30	Registration	Facilitator
8:30 – 9:00	Continental Breakfast	Facilitator
9:00 – 9:30	Provide the following list of activities: • Set the housekeeping rules • A PowerPoint presentation outlining the purpose, rationale, befits, and characteristics of assessment standards. • A copy of the training packet that will include handouts of the PowerPoint slides, a notepad for note taking, and prints of the district assessment data • Opening and instructions where the participants will introduce themselves by names, experiences, and one expectation of the training they want to receive Provide an overview of the day, including the outcomes and essential questions. • Icebreaker Activity – Test your Knowledge • The activity will build group rapport and provide them with an overview of the objectives of the training. • Establish the general housekeeping rules of the day. Introduce guest speakers for today's training, which include: • District superintendent of study site schools • Keynote speaker, director of special education programs	Facilitator
9:30 – 10:30	Welcome by the district administrator. Topic to be determined by the speakers •	District Superintendent/Office of Professional Development or a representative
10:30 – 10:45	**Break**	
10:45 – 12:00	**Unit 1:** Accommodations of assessment for students with disabilities, addressing the following essential attributes: • The Characteristics of assessment standards • Understanding accommodations	Director of Special Education Programs
12:00 – 1:00	**Lunch**	
1:00 – 2:00	**Unit 1: Continue** • IDEIA • Student supplementary form • Disabilities categories and meanings	Director of Special Education Programs
2:00 – 2:15	**Break**	
2:15 – 4:00	Provide instructions for the breakout sessions. Breakout Session: the presenters will work with the small group to respond to the following: • Why standards • Understanding Accommodations	Facilitator

Unit 1
ACCOMMODATIONS

Characteristics of Assessment Standards

- Standards are a set of expectations for effective professional learning to ensure equity and excellence in learning.

- Standards serves as indicators that guide the learning, facilitation, implementation, and evaluation of students performance.

- The assessment standards are use to establish quality measures to increase learning for all students (Nitko & Brookhart, 2014).

Understanding Accommodations

Accommodations are support services used to help students progress in the general education curriculum. Accommodations does not mean changes in the instructional level, content, or standards. Rather, it means providing the support for students with disabilities to have an equal opportunity to learn and to validate what they have learned (Cho & Kingston, 2015; State and district-wide assessments and students with learning disabilities: A guide for states and school districts, 2004).

Approaches to information that level the playing field for students with disabilities include the following:

- Extended time to do the work
- Large print enough so students with vision impairment can see
- Braille script for students who are blind
- Signed instruction for student with a hearing impediment

Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA) Instructional Strategies

- **IDEIA** requirements expect all teachers to use different learning strategies to accommodate the students needs, whether disabled or not.

- Supplementary aids, services, and other supports are available in: general education classes, other education-related settings, and in extracurricular and nonacademic settings enabling students with disabilities to be educated with nondisabled students to the maximum extent appropriate (Cho & Kingston, 2015).

- The **IEP** team is required to distinguish what accommodations and modifications will be practical when instructing the student in all learning situations (see next slide for supplementary aids form).

SUPPLEMENTARY AIDS AND SERVICES, PERSONNEL SUPPORTS IN GENERAL EDUCATION

Student's Name:

Mississippi Department of Education. (2016). Special population accommodations.

Revised October 26, 2010

Primary Disabilities Categories

ID = Intellectual Disability	HI = Hearing Impairment	SLI = Speech or Language Impairment	VI = Visual Impairment	ED = Emotional Disturbance
OHI = Other Health Impaired	SLD = Specific Learning Disability	OI = Orthopedic Impairment	DB = Deaf-Blind	MD = Multiple Disabilities
AU = Autism Spectrum Disorder	TBI = Traumatic Brain Injury	DD = Developmental Delay	DF = Deafness	

Federal Disability Code Definitions

- **1. Autism (AU):** A developmental disability significantly affecting verbal and nonverbal communication and social interaction, generally present before age three that adversely affects a child's educational performance.

- Other characteristics often associated with autism are engaging in repetitive activities and stereotyped movements, resistance to environmental change or change in daily routines, and unusual responses to sensory experiences.

- **2. Deaf-Blindness (DB):** Simultaneous (occurring at the same time) hearing and visual impairments, which cause such severe communication and other developmental and educational needs that they cannot be served in special education programs solely for children with deafness, or children with blindness.

- **3. Deafness (DF):** A hearing impairment so severe that a child is impaired in processing language through hearing, with or without amplification (aids) that adversely affects a child's educational performance.

- **4. Developmental Delay (DD):** For children from birth to age three (under IDEA Part C) and children from ages three through nine (under IDEA Part B).

  As defined by each State, means a delay in one or more of the following areas: Physical development, cognitive (intelligence) development, communication, social or emotional development, or adaptive (daily living skills) development.

- **5. Emotional Disturbance (ED):** A condition exhibiting one or more of the following characteristics over a long period of time and to a marked degree that adversely affects a child's educational performance:

- (a) An inability to learn that cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory, or health factors.
  (b) An inability to build or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peers (other students) and teachers.
  (c) Inappropriate types of behavior or feelings under normal circumstances.
  (d) A general pervasive (ongoing) mood of unhappiness or depression.
  (e) A tendency to develop physical symptoms or fears associated with personal or school problems.

- **6. Hearing Impairment (HI):** An impairment in hearing, whether permanent or changing, that adversely affects a child's educational performance, but is not included under the definition of "deafness."

- **7. Intellectual Disability (ID):** Significantly below average general intellectual functioning, existing at the same time with below average adaptive behavior (daily living skills) and present during the developmental period, that adversely affects a child's educational performance.

Federal Disability Code Definitions (Continued)

- **8. Multiple Disabilities (MD):** Simultaneous (occurring at the same time) impairments (such as intellectual disability-blindness, intellectual disability-orthopedic impairment, etc.), the combination of which causes such severe educational needs that they cannot be served in a special education program solely for one of the impairments.

- **9. Orthopedic Impairment (OI):** A severe orthopedic impairment that adversely affects a child's educational performance.

- The term includes impairments caused by a congenital (present at birth) anomaly, and impairments caused by disease and impairments from other causes (e.g., cerebral palsy, amputations, and fractures or burns).

- **10. Other Health Impairment (OHI):** Having limited strength, vitality (endurance), or alertness, including a heightened alertness to environmental causes, that results in limited alertness in school, that—

- is due to chronic or acute (sudden onset and short duration) health problems such as asthma, attention deficit disorder (ADD) or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), diabetes, epilepsy, a heart condition, hemophilia, lead poisoning, leukemia, nephritis, rheumatic fever, sickle cell anemia, and Tourette syndrome; and adversely affects a child's educational performance.

- **11. Specific Learning Disability (SLD):** A disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, that may show itself in the imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or to do mathematical calculations. The term includes such conditions as perceptual disabilities, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, and developmental aphasia. The term does not include learning problems that are primarily the result of visual, hearing, or motor disabilities; of intellectual disability; of emotional disturbance; or of environmental, cultural, or economic disadvantage.

- **12. Speech or Language Impairment (SLI):** A communication disorder such as stuttering, impaired articulation, a language impairment, or a voice impairment that adversely affects a child's educational performance.

- **13. Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI):** An injury to the brain caused by an outside physical force, resulting in total or partial functional disability or psychosocial impairment, or both, that adversely affects a child's educational performance.

- The term applies to open or closed head injuries resulting in impairments in one or more areas: Cognition (intelligence), language, memory, attention, reasoning, abstract thinking, judgment, problem-solving, psychosocial behavior, physical functions, information processing, speech, and sensory, perceptual, and motor abilities.

- The term does not apply to brain injuries that are congenital (present at birth) or degenerative, or to brain injuries induced by birth trauma.

- **14. Visual Impairment Including Blindness (VI):** An impairment in vision that, even with correction, adversely affects a child's educational performance. The term includes both partial sight and blindness.
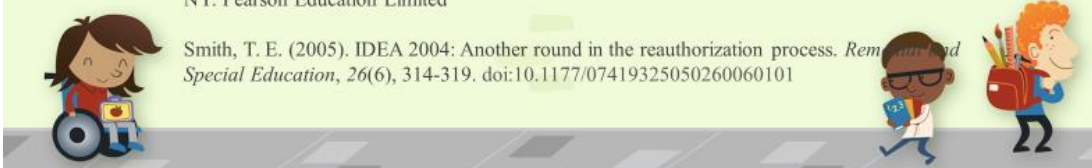
QUESTIONS?

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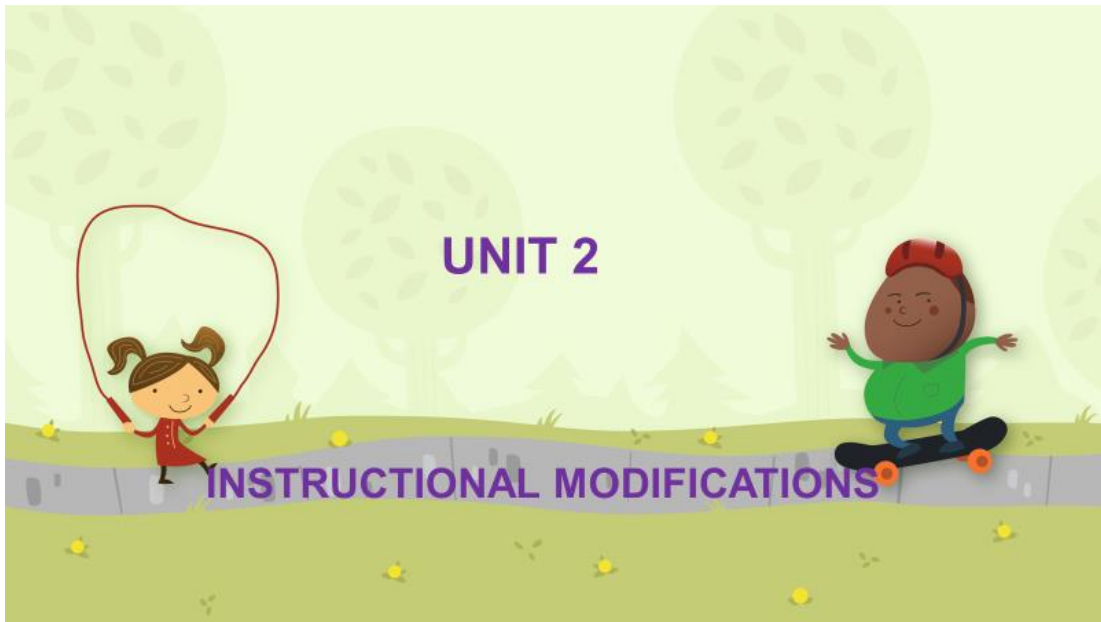
Unit 2: Instructional Modifications

Times	Activity	Responsible Owner
8:30 – 9:00	Continental Breakfast	Facilitator
9:00 – 9:30	Guide the group into the following activities for the second day of the training: Welcome (PowerPoint Slide 2) • Introductions – facilitator states, "Please introduce yourself by name, experiences, and at least one expectation you plan to take away from the training." • Icebreaker Activities (PowerPoint Slide 2) • build a group relationship and provide an overview of the objectives of the day's training. • Divide the participants into small groups of four. Each team member will be given an opportunity to set standards for the team. The members will brainstorm, clarify, and formulate a consensus on standard setting for the team. • Set expectations for the whole group Introduce guest speakers for today's training, which include: • Keynote speaker, director of special education programs • Curriculum and Instruction Specialists	Facilitator
9:30 – 10:30	**Unit 2:** Instructional Modification activities • Discuss the basis of instructional modifications. • Discuss the components of modification as differentiated	Director of Special Education Programs/Curriculum and Instruction Specialists
10:30 – 10:45	**Break**	
10:45 – 12:00	Lead the participants into the following activities: • Direct the participants to list element of strength and weaknesses of implementing assessment in the classroom. • Pair the participants into small groups to facilitate the group discussion. • Provide an opportunity for participants to discover ways to identify, demonstrate, and implement the standards practice by: • Connecting the standards • Managing changes in practice • Moving standards into practice	Facilitator
12:00 – 1:00	**Lunch**	

1:00 – 1:30	Direct the attendee to view a 30- minute video of teachers providing educational guidance in an academic environment for teaching student with disabilities. The video demonstrates how changes in the new alternate assessment affect curriculum and instruction (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I1WDYeNmIB4).	Facilitator
1:30 – 2:30	Organize the participants into groups. - Provide the direction regarding the group activities in which the group will work with the director of special education programs and the curriculum and instruction coordinators to analyze the video presentation. - Direct the participants to participate in collaborative learning, implementation plans, demonstrate their knowledge of assessment best practices used in the classroom and discuss the projected outcomes of their understanding assessments from the perspectives of the video presentation. - Demonstrate the activities of the workshop to reflect the theories of the district-wide assessment that aligns with the common core. - Divide the actions in each course of the training to keep the participants motivated and involved throughout the workshop.	Facilitator
2:30 – 2:45	**Break**	
2:45 – 4:00	Continue with the following group discussion: - standards in action strategies - district-wide policy action - Discuss the next steps for assessment implementation	Facilitator

UNIT 2

INSTRUCTIONAL MODIFICATIONS

Understanding Instructional Modifications

- Not all students with a disability are able to meet all of the requirements of a standard high school diploma.

- Some students may not be able to work on grade-level or pass the required courses for graduation.

- Generally, these students will be working for a special diploma, i.e., the study site Occupational Diploma or a Certificate of Completion(Cho & Kingston, 2015).

Understanding Modifications

Modifications may include:

• Changes in the instructional level or benchmark,

• Changes in the number of key concepts mastered within a benchmark or unit of study, or

•Changes in content (Cho & Kingston, 2015).

Modifications are changes to what a student is expected to learn

Modification also include Differentiated Instruction

Differentiated instruction is a systematic method to designing curriculum and instruction for **diverse group of learners** (Cho & Kingston, 2015).

Why Do Both?

- Differentiating instruction and using accommodations and/or modifications is not an either/or method. These strategies work collaboratively with each other strategic learning method to benefit the learner.

- It is important to know how to implement differentiated instruction or modifications effectively.

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https://WWW.youtu.be/l1WDYeNmIB4

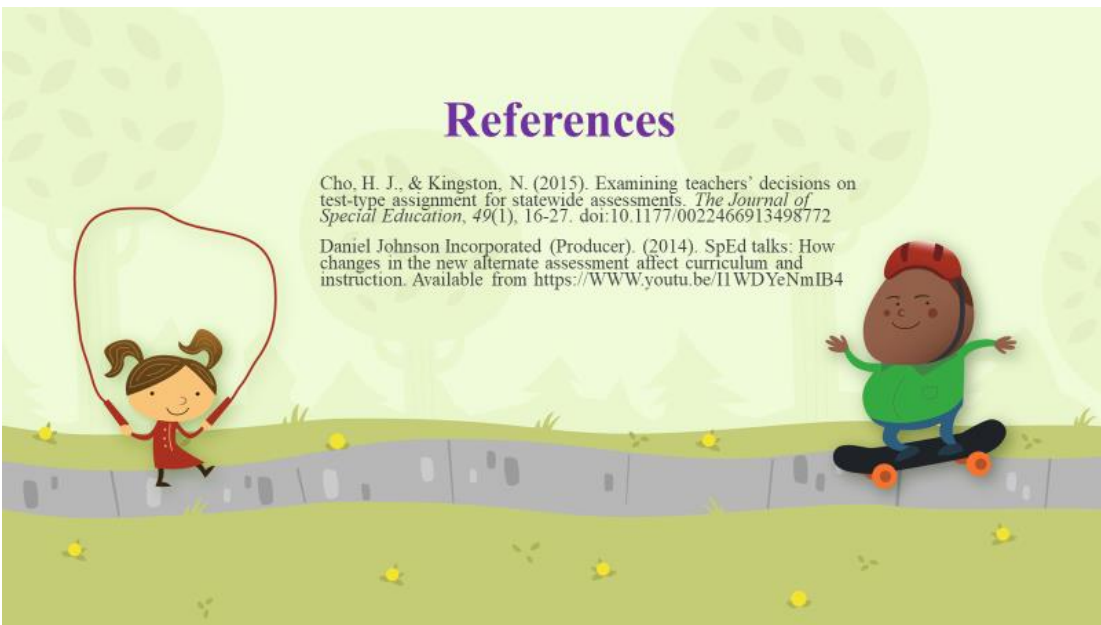The video demonstrate how changes in the new alternate assessment affect curriculum and instruction

QUESTIONS?

References

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Unit 3: Instructional Strategies

Times	Activity	Responsible Owner
8:30 – 9:00	Continental Breakfast	Facilitator
9:00 – 10:30	**Unit 3:** Identifying Instructional Strategies consisting of the elements of classroom differentiated learning: • Content • Process • Product Affect Learning Environment	Director of Special Education Programs/Curriculum and Instruction Specialists
9:30-10:30	Group activity Handout #3.2: The group will learn the specific elements of assessment strategies, and how to apply the plans into practice.	Facilitator
10:30 – 10:45	**Break**	
10:45-11:15	Direct the attendee to view a 30- minute video of assessment and curriculum for students with disabilities (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HPjn-dwv8ZM). This video demonstrated the application for using and scoring alternative assessment.	Facilitator
11:45-12:00	Group Activity: Map-out Strategy	Facilitator
12:00-1:00	**Lunch**	
1:00 – 2:30	Assessment and follow-up: Gauge the participants 'experiences regarding the implementation of the standards and determine solutions to close the gap in practice through: Standards self-assessment (Handout #3.1) • Instruct the participants to assess their level of implementation in their school. Make notes of evidence used to validate their school. • Have the participants, at their table, to share their self-assessment results and evidence. • Have them to move around the table in a round-robin fashion to minimize burn-out. Standards strengths and weakness (handout #3.2)	

- Work with the participants to determine which standard(s) is their most active.
- Have the participants to meet each other and discuss the standards they determine are similar in strength and then have them to move to different tables to identify commonalities among the various group of participants.
- Instruct the participants to share the evidence of their strength to distinguish in what way the standards became their strength.
- Have the participants to create a list of their cumulative evidence to function as strategies for others.
- Direct the participants to return to their original group.
- Determine which standards the group showed the need for improvement.
- Discuss their weakest standards based on their evidence.
- Describe the influence of that standard to address the specific gaps in practice.

2:30 – 2:45	**Break**	
2:45 – 4:00	Closing and reflections: **P**rovide a review of the available resources and opportunities to commit to supporting the implementation of the district assessment.	Facilitator

Bring it all Together:
- Provide a final opportunity for the participants to apply what they have learned in training.
- Allow time for question and answer.
- Distribute copies of the end of the course evaluation form and explain the purpose of the feedback form and allow time for all participants to complete the professional development teacher evaluation form.
- Direct the participants to discuss any concerns they have regarding the state's standards.
- Direct the participants to complete the commitment cards to commit to the new learning.

UNIT 3

INDENTIFYING INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

Setting the Stage for Learning

- There are five classroom elements that teachers can differentiate or modify, to increase the probability for students to learn efficiently as possible:
  - Content
  - Process
  - Products
  - Affect
  - Learning Environment

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Setting the Stage for Learning

- **Content**— is information teacher uses to teach students.

- **Process**—How students come to understand and take ownership of their knowledge skills essential to a topic.

- **Products**—How a student demonstrates what he or she has able to comprehend as a result of the appropriate instruction.

- **Affect**—student's emotions, thoughts, and feelings and how they are associated in the classroom.

- **Learning environment**—The atmosphere is conducive for learning.

Content

The content is core specific to the state- and district-wide assessments. Teachers should not deviate from the established guidelines set by the district because these standards ensure that students with disabilities are being taught the skills needed to achieve academic performance.

Strategies For Differentiating Content

**Student
Characteristic**

Strategy

Readiness

- Provide texts at varied reading levels
- Provide supplementary materials at varied reading levels
- Re-teach students having difficulty
- Demonstrate the "big ideas" in addition to lecture
- Provide materials in various formats; i.e. audiotape, videotape, etc.

Strategies For Differentiating Content

**Student
Characteristic**

Strategy

Interest

- Provide learning strategies that encourage student's curiosity to learn
- Provide a wide-range of materials on a variety of
- related course topics
- Use student questions and topics to guide lectures

Learning Profile

- Present in visual, auditory, and kinesthetic modes
- Use the teach in part or whole methods
- Allow time for student reflection

Process

- Process is the action of the learner (what they are actually doing to accomplish the desired goals).

- Process requires the student effort to complete the content goals.

- Process develops as critical thinkers and not performance outputs.

Strategies For Differentiating Process

Student Characteristic	Strategy
Readiness	• Focused on the same learning goals, but use different levels of instructional activities so students can master difficult ones.
	• Use combination of learning techniques for learners who can engage quickly, and more open for those student who struggles.
	• Allow for mixed intelligences work groups.
	• Use a variety of criteria for success, based upon the teach in part or whole methods.
	• Use self-pacing techniques to endure that the student fully understand the learning concepts.
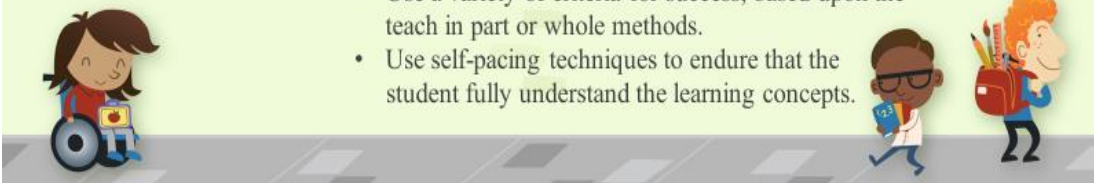
Strategies For Differentiating Process

Student Characteristic	Strategy
Interest	• Use evident-based learning activities. • Create student discussion groups to increase social skills. • Design tasks that necessitate multiple benefits for • successful completion. • Encourage students to participate in the design of • some tasks.
Learning Profile	• Allow multiple options for students expressive • learning. • Inspire students to work collaboratively and • individually. •

Product

- Product means the method by which students give a demonstration of what they have learned.

- Products must have a clear and specified criteria for success, based both on grade-level expectations and individual student needs.

Strategies For Differentiating Product

Student Characteristic	Strategy
Readiness	• Use similar- and mixed-readiness, or teacher-led critique groups during product development, particularly for those students who might need the extra support. • Develop rubrics or other benchmarks for success based both on grade-level expectations and individual student learning needs.

Strategies For Differentiating Product

Student Characteristic	Strategy
Interest	• Use a range of media or formats to allow the students to express their knowledge, understanding, and skill of the product learned. • Provide opportunities for students to become independent critical thinkers to increase learning capacity.
Learning Profile	• Provide hearing, visual, and kinesthetic options to students who need the additional support. • Provide imaginative, efficient, and practical product options.

Affect and Learning Environment

- Affect and learning environment simply means to provide a safe and healthy school culture that fosters academic, social, and behavioral success in the student.

- Weinstein (1979) concluded that environmental variables can influence learners' indirectly and that the properties of different physical settings frequently differ on the temperament of the task and the learner, such as distracting noises that appear to reduce reaction time and performance to a higher degree in young learners. For this reason, it is imperative that the learning environment is conducive to learning.

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https://youtu.be/HPjn-dwv8ZM

This is an instructional video on the assessment and curriculum for students with disabilities

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CLOSING AND REFLECTIONS

Group Activity: Map Out Strategy

- The accommodations and modifications are opportunities to raise aspirations for all students by creating a unified education system that works.

- In decreasing the separation between special and general education, there are really two sets of related questions:

1. How can special education programs help students meet the challenges in education standards, curriculum, and assessments that are now being developed in the general education system?

2. How can the general public education system be adapted and individualized to better serve a diverse population of students - whether or not those students have disabilities?

Bring It All Together

Collaboration

- Invite special educators to be part of the **instructional planning** team.

- Establish methods to problem-solving and program implementation.

Instructional Methods

- What knowledge and skills do the teacher need to select and adapt curricula and instructional methods according to student learning needs?

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Commitments

✓Complete your commitment card.

✓Be prepared to discuss your thoughts with your colleagues.

Appendix A (Continued)

Sample Formative Evaluation
State- and District-wide Standards: Teaching Students with Disabilities

Session: **State- and District-wide Assessment** (Day 1 Session 1)

	Poor	Fair	Satisfactory	Very Good	Excellent
Level of knowledge and skill at the start of the training	—	—	—	—	—
Level of knowledge and skill at the end of the training	—	—	—	—	—
Clear and concise presentation of the training	—	—	—	—	—
Presenter's knowledge of the training materials	—	—	—	—	—
Level of the contribution of the training to instructional duty	—	—	—	—	—
The quality of the handouts for the training presentation	—	—	—	—	—
The quality of the training facility	—	—	—	—	—
The tone and articulation of the Speakers	—	—	—	—	—

Please identify any aspects of the training you found most significant for your learning needs.

_____

_____

_____

What suggestions, if any, would you recommend for improving this training?

_____

_____

_____

Sample Summative Evaluation
State- and District-wide Standards: Teaching Students with Disabilities

Please rate each of the following items by circling the appropriate number on a scale of 1 to 5, where 5 is the higher rank your knowledge level of the training.

	Rating	Comments
Day 1 The foundation of assessment standards in education was clear and elaborated on the assessment methods outlined throughout the training.	1 2 3 4 5	
Day 1 The essential attributes of effective assessment standards corresponded to the methods of the instruction.	1 2 3 4 5	
Day 1 School data, eligibility criteria for alternative standards and assessment was clearly articulated.	1 2 3 4 5	
Day 1 Breakout Session: Why standards, Unpacking the standards Standards in practice were useful.	1 2 3 4 5	
Day 2 Understanding instructional modification assessment standards in education and the implications for implementation were clearly defined.	1 2 3 4 5	
Day 2 Group Activity: Connecting the standards, managing changes in practice and moving standards into practice was active.	1 2 3 4 5	
Day 2 The 30- minute video on teachers providing educational guidance in an academic environment for teaching student with disabilities were useful.	1 2 3 4 5	
Day2 End of Session: the layout of the training was expertly designed.	1 2 3 4 5	
Day3 Identifying instructional strategies were clear and concise.	1 2 3 4 5	
Group Activity: District-wide assessment strategies, and how to apply the plans into practice. Plan implementations and project outcomes of what was learned were clear and concise.	1 2 3 4 5	
The 30-minute video on assessment and curriculum for students with disabilities were useful.	1 2 3 4 5	
Day 3 Assessment and follow-up activities and instructions were practical.	1 2 3 4 5	
Day 3 Closing and reflection and commitment commit to the new learning.	1 2 3 4 5	

What was the most significant part of the training?

_____

_____

_____

_____

What could have been done differently to make the training better?

_____

_____

_____

Standards Self-Assessment – Handout #3.1

Professional development:	1	2	3	4	5	Evidence
Provides professional development that enhances learning effectiveness and results for students with disabilities	(low)				(high)	
Learning Environment: That occurs within the district/school committed to continuous training development and performance improvement, collective responsibility, and goal alignment.						
Resources: Priority, monitor, and coordinate resources for active learning.						
Data: Uses various sources of system data to plan, assess, and evaluate students with disabilities progress.						
Implementation: Applies research-based and sustains support for the implementation of state- and district-wide assessment for long-term transformation.						
Outcomes: Professional development that aligns state- and district-wide assessments outcomes with educator's performance and students with disabilities curriculum standards.						

Standards Strengths and Weaknesses – Handout #3.2

Group Activity

Strengths

Weaknesses

What does having a strong knowledge of state- district-wide assessments mean for you and your work?
How do you continue to improve your strength or weakness in the core area of curriculum learning for students with disabilities?
List at least two strategies you will take away from the training to strengthen a weak standard area in your classroom.

Standards Commitment Card

How will you advance the state- and district-wide standards for teaching students with disabilities in your classroom?

I commit to:

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

How will you advance state-and district-wide assessment standards for professional development in your school or district?

I Commit to:

_____
_____
_____
_____

Teacher Name_____ **Date:** _____

Appendix B: Interview Protocol

INSTRUCTIONS: Good morning (afternoon). My name is Mary Durr. Thank you for coming. The purpose of this interview is to get your perceptions of professional development around assessment in the DWPSD. There are no right or wrong or desirable or undesirable answers. I would like you to feel comfortable with saying what you think and how you feel.

TAPE RECORDER INSTRUCTIONS: If it is okay with you, I will be tape-recording our conversation. The purpose of this is so that I can get all the details but at the same time be able to carry on an attentive conversation with you. I assure you that all your comments will remain confidential. I will be compiling a report which will contain all participants comments without any reference to the individual.

PREAMBLE and CONSENT FORM INSTRUCTIONS: Before we get started, please take a few minutes to read this preamble (read and sign this consent form).

Questions

RQ1: What are special education teachers' perceptions of professional development activities, related to assessment in the DWPSD?

Establish Common Meaning

1. What would you describe as the advantages and disadvantages of attending professional development related to teaching students with disabilities?

2. What are your expectations for professional development training?

3. Tell me about some examples of both the strengths and weaknesses of your professional development experience?

4. Tell me about your understanding of how this training aligns or could align better with the curriculum?

Discovering Opportunities for Improvement

5. What is the standard of learning for teaching students with disabilities?

Establishing Contextual Understanding

6. Do you think that the current method of professional development around assessment inspires critical thinking and metacognition? Why?

7. Tell me what you think are the qualities of an efficient and meaningful professional development program?

8. Tell me what you would do, if given the opportunity, to align professional development training to enhance critical thinking skills?

Exploration

9. How much autonomy, master and purpose do you think teachers have in the enrichment of professional development programs? Why?

10. Do you think if given the opportunity, that your teaching experiences would be a better fit in developing professional development activities?

11. Do you think that your professional development experience encourages significant time to work and process knowledge learned?