

ALTERNATE ASSESSMENTS FOR STUDENTS WITH PROFOUND INTELLECTUAL
DELAYS: UNDERSTANDING THE ACCOUNTABILITY MOVEMENT FROM A
TEACHER'S PERSPECTIVE

By

KRISTINA M. GONZALEZ

A DISSERTATION PRESENTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA

2014

© 2014 Kristina M. Gonzalez

To my amazing husband, Paul, and beautiful children, Tristan and Angelina, your love
and support inspire me each and every day

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I want to thank every member of my dissertation committee, Dr. Eldridge, Dr. Smith, and Dr. E. Oliver and to my chair, Dr. B. Oliver, thank you for your guidance and your suggestions. I also want to thank the Directors of Special Education for accepting my research proposal and allowing me to conduct research in your district. Thank you to each of the participating teachers who offered their time and honest opinions.

Finally, I want to extend a thank you to my family and friends. Without the love of my family and the friendship, I would not have finished my dissertation. I especially want to thank my husband and two children for always believing in me, my mother for her ear when I needed to vent, my father and my in-laws for always being there for me, and lastly, to my girls, for helping me to stay grounded and making me laugh.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>page</u>
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	4
LIST OF TABLES.....	8
LIST OF FIGURES.....	9
LIST OF DEFINITIONS	10
ABSTRACT	11
CHAPTER	
1 INTRODUCTION	13
Including All Students in Accountability Measures.....	13
Statement of the Problem	15
A Framework of Advocacy	20
Purpose of the Study	21
Significance of the Study	22
2 LITERATURE REVIEW	23
Alternate Assessments	23
History of Special Education Students and Accountability Measures	23
Types of Alternative Assessments.....	26
Alignment with State Standards and Content Validity	28
Performance Assessments and the STAAR Alternate	31
Learner Characteristics.....	34
Teacher Perceptions and Alternate Assessments	37
Alternate Assessment Influence on Classroom Instruction.....	39
Access to General Education Curriculum	40
Academic Versus Functional Curriculum.....	45
Concerns Based Adoption Model	47
Summary	48
3 METHODOLOGY	51
Epistemology: Constructivism	52
Methodology: Case Study.....	52
Data Collection	53
Stages of Concern Questionnaire	53
Semi-Structured Interview	54
Learner Characteristics Inventory.....	54

Lesson Plan Analysis	55
Study Setting	56
Participant Selection	58
Teacher Information.....	59
Case Study Procedures.....	60
Validity and Trustworthiness	60
Limitatons	61
Resarcher Subjectivity	61
4 DATA ANALYSIS.....	64
Data Analysis	64
District STAAR Alternate Data	64
Stages of Concern.....	66
Analysis of Questions	67
Question 1 - How do Special Education teachers, at the secondary level, prepare for implementation of the STAAR Alternative exam?	67
Question 2 - What types of guidance do the Special Education teachers receive from their school and district administrators?	69
Question 3 - How much time is required to prepare for each essence statement?.....	70
Question 4 - What types of student physiological responses do teachers utilize as a “response” on the STAAR Alt?.....	72
Question 5 - How do special education teachers academically prepare students for the alternative exam?.....	73
Question 6 - How do special education teachers feel about the emphasis of academics over functional curriculum?.....	75
Question 7 - What are teacher concerns regarding the standardization of the STAAR Alternate?	78
5 DISCUSSION	81
Lack of Training	82
Time Requirements	83
Academic verses Functional Curriculum.....	84
Standardization of the STAAR Alternate	86
Implications and Recommendations for Practice	88
Implications for Future Research	91
Conclusions	92
APPENDIX	
A THE STAGES OF CONCERN QUESTIONNAIRE	94
B CASE STUDY INTERVIEW PROTOCOL.....	96
C LEARNER CHARACTERISTICS INVENTORY	98

D	PERMISSION FOR LCI USE.....	103
E	LESSON PLAN ANALYSIS	104
F	E-CONSENT FOR STAGES OF CONCERN QUESTIONNAIRE	106
G	INFORMED CONSENT	107
H	DATA TABLE FOR EACH TEACHER	109
	REFERENCES.....	115
	BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH.....	120

LIST OF TABLES

<u>Table</u>		<u>page</u>
1-1	Conceptualization of STAAR Alternate Levels and Assessment Requirements (About the Standardized Assessment, 2013)	17
3-1	Study Participant Demographics	59
4-1	Number of Secondary Students Taking STAAR ALT and Number of Students Taking Assessment at Level I Per District	65
5-1	First (2000) conceptualization of the amount of individuals with intellectual disabilities, detailed by severity of cognitive deficit	84
5-2	Type of functional skills used as performance indicators in some state alternate assessments.....	87

LIST OF FIGURES

<u>Figure</u>	<u>page</u>
1-1 Stake's (1999) conception of increased emphasis on assessment material.....	15
4-1 Number of hours spent on academic verses functional skills per teacher	76

LIST OF DEFINITIONS

ALTERNATE ASSESSMENTS	A measure for students with disabilities who cannot participate in the regular standardized state exam, even with appropriate accommodations (Title I, 2004).
ESSENCE STATEMENTS	Objectives for the STAAR Alternate and are linked to grade level curriculum (STAAR Alt Manual, 2011).
FUNCTIONAL VERSUS ACADEMIC CONTENT	Functional academics focus on consumer skills, vocational skills, community skills, and self help skills. Academic content is tied to grade level standards (Ayers, Douglas, Lowrey, & Sievers, 2011).
ONE PERCENT CAP	The federal government limits the number of advanced or proficient scores schools and districts include in adequate yearly progress (AYP). Any assessments over the one percent cap are considered nonproficient, no matter the student score. For example, District A tests 120 students. The one percent cap for the district is 100. Twenty of the assessments are calculated as nonproficient in District A's AYP rating. (Title I, 2004).
PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT	Direct measurement of student's ability to complete specific tasks that are aligned to state standards. Tasks are completed "on demand" with or without teacher assistance (Gong & Marion, 2006).
STAAR ALTERNATE	The State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness Alternate (STAAR Alt) replaced the Texas of Assessment of Knowledge and Skills Alternate (TAKS Alt) (STAAR Alt Manual, 2011).
TEXAS ASSESSMENT OF KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS (TAKS)	The former state standardized assessment.
TEXAS ESSENTIAL KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS (TEKS)	State grade level standards/guidelines.
UNIQUE LEARNING	Standards based curriculum for students with profound disabilities. Lessons are devised into thematic units and include three levels of differentiation to accommodate all learners (https://unique.n2y.com/products/unique/).

Abstract of Dissertation Presented to the Graduate School
of the University of Florida in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Education

ALTERNATE ASSESSMENTS FOR STUDENTS WITH PROFOUND INTELLECTUAL
DELAYS: UNDERSTANDING THE ACCOUNTABILITY MOVEMENT FROM A
TEACHER'S PERSPECTIVE

By

Kristina M. Gonzalez

May 2014

Chair: Bernard Oliver
Major: Educational Leadership

Assessment and accountability are topics evoking strong emotions in educators, policy makers, and the public. Wanting to determine the current achievement level of today's students, the federal government enacted legislation equating student achievement with accountability for states, districts, campuses, and teachers. Among those included in state assessments are students with profound intellectual delays. Their performances on state assessments are included in district and campus adequate yearly process (AYP) rankings. This study utilizes a multiple case study to determine a) how secondary special education teachers implement the Texas alternate assessment; b) what types of guidance Special Education teachers receive from their school and district administrators; c) how much time is required to prepare for each essence statement; d) types of student physiological responses teachers utilize as a "response"; and e) how do special education teachers academically prepare students for the alternative assessment exam?

Data was collected from five Special Education teachers in three San Antonio area school districts. Data includes information from the Stages of Concern

Questionnaire, interviews adhering to an interview protocol, the Learner Characteristics Inventory, and an analysis of a math lesson plan.

Findings suggest the current alternate assessment in Texas has impacted the classroom by forcing teachers to focus heavily on academic subjects and eliminate some functional curriculum. Teachers spend large amounts of time preparing for and administering the assessment. Despite the demands of the assessment, little guidance is given by districts on how to administer the test and no guidance is offered on how to mesh together the functional needs of the students with academics.

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

Including All Students in Accountability Measures

Prior to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1997 (IDEA) and the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, students with severe and profound disabilities were exempted from standardized assessment and accountability measures. Policy makers, who wanted to measure accountability among the disadvantaged population, required schools to include those students, no matter the severity of the disability, in adequate yearly progress (AYP) calculations (Gordon, 2006). Under the 1997 amendments of IDEA, all children with disabilities must participate in state assessments; furthermore, states must create an alternate assessment for students who cannot participate in general assessments (Zatta & Pullin, 2004). Before IDEA 1997, many students with severe and profound disabilities were not exposed to academic content, even basic math and reading skills. With the promotion of high stakes testing, policy makers hoped educators would raise academic expectations for students with cognitive delays (Pullin, 2005).

On January 8, 2004 Congress enacted the Title I-Improving the Academic Achievement of the Disadvantaged Final Rule, or a system of regulations detailing alternative assessments. Under the ruling, states must hold all students to a high level of academics and students, even those with profound intellectual disabilities, must demonstrate their achievement via standardized assessment. (Title I, 2004).

An alternate assessment, as defined by the federal government, is created for students who cannot participate in the standardized assessments, even with modifications and accommodations (Title I, 2004). States are given freedom to design

alternate assessments, including: a checklist or observations of students, samples of student work compiled in a portfolio, or performing tasks on demand (Title I, 2004). No matter what form of assessment a state utilizes, the achievement standards must align with the state's general education content standards. States must comply with following guidelines when creating alternative assessments: 1) establish clear guidelines for the Individualized Educational Program (IEP) to apply when determining whether a child's cognitive disability justifies his or her participation in an alternative assessment; and 2) ensure the parents of students participating in alternative assessments are aware the assessment is based on alternative academic standards (Title I, 2004).

Alternative assessments must comply with reliability and validity standards (Pullin, 2005). Currently, most states utilize a portfolio assessment aligned with state content standards. While a portfolio system is an acceptable form of an alternative assessment, developing a scoring system that is reliable and valid is difficult. Some research indicates that teachers inadvertently influence the quality of a student's portfolio because they compile the work into the portfolio (Johnson & Arnold, 2007). Scoring measures often consider if the student can generalize the skill to the real world and how much assistance the student required to complete the task (Pullin, 2005).

Creating a valid and reliable alternative assessment is essential as scores from alternative assessments are included in adequate yearly progress (AYP). The federal government states that only a small amount of students should participate in an alternative assessment while the remaining students with disabilities should participate in assessments based on grade level standards.

Statement of the Problem

A single assessment cannot measure all that schools are required to teach students and they poorly represent the education a student is achieving (Stake, 1999). Measuring achievement is not synonymous with measuring educational quality. Assessments simply rank students based on their ability to complete a test; however, this ranking does not translate to how educated students are. As the public and lawmakers become increasingly concerned with the state of education, assessment continues to become the most wide spread indicator of school quality (Stake, 1999). Assessments are utilized to influence the well being of students and force educators to teach differently. Figure 1-1 illustrates the emphasis teachers place on assessments.

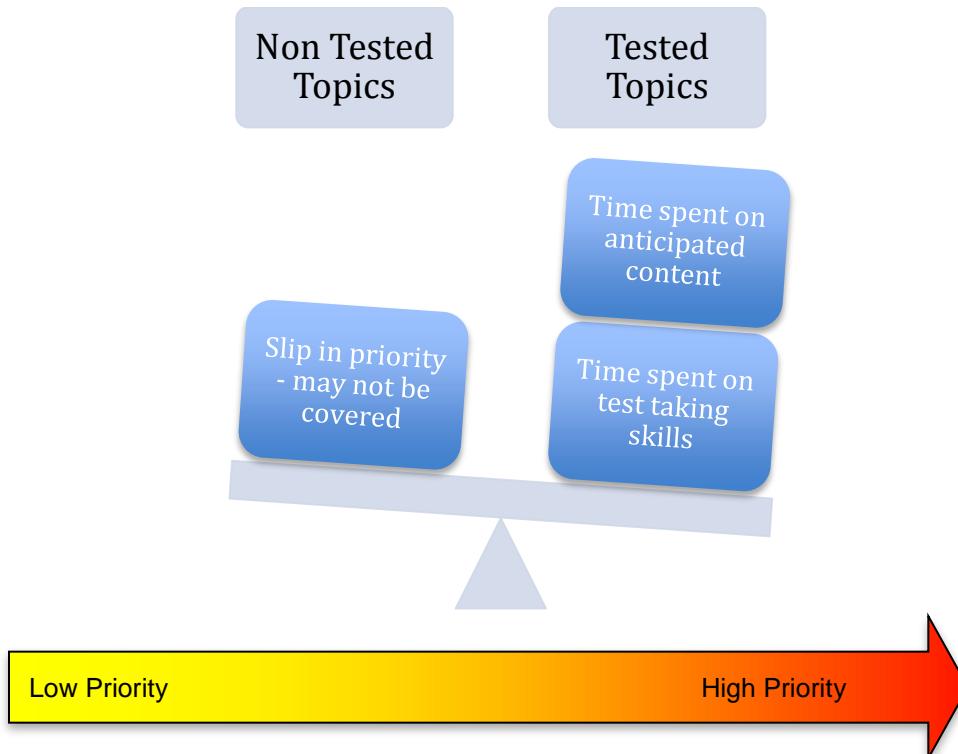


Figure 1-1. Stake's (1999) conception of increased emphasis on assessment material.

Prior to the Title 1 – Final Rule, students with profound intellectual disabilities were exempted from the assessment process. After the reauthorization of IDEA 2004, however, the Texas Education Agency (TEA) created one assessment system for all students. Under the new system, students were administered the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS), TAKS Accommodated (a test with changes in format), TAKS Modified (a test with modified achievement standards), or TAKS Alternative, an assessment for students with significant cognitive delays. All TAKS exams were first administered during the 2007-2008 school year.

Four years later, TEA created a new statewide assessment with increased rigor and aligned to college readiness standards. The State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) was first administered during the 2011-2012 school year. Students with profound intellectual delays participate in the STAAR Alternative (STAAR-Alt). Each assessment is based on grade level alternative achievement standards. For each tested area, TEA created categories, or essence statements, and corresponding tasks with varying complexity level: Level I, Level II, and Level III. Students must meet specific criteria to be given credit for successfully completing a task (STAAR Alt manual, 2011). Table 1-1 illustrates each level and requirements of the student.

Table 1-1. Conceptualization of STAAR Alternate Levels and Assessment Requirements (About the Standardized Assessment, 2013).

	Level I - Beginning Awareness	Level II - Basic Recall	Level III - Application
	Least complex	Moderately complex	Most complex
Definition of Level	Student is aware of stimuli and tasks performed by teacher but does not make choices.	Student recalls or reproduces information immediately after it is presented by teacher.	Student must use higher level thinking skills and determine answers independently.
Student Performance Expectation	Participate in process, react to stimuli, and/or explore materials	Student derives answers from at least three choices provided by the teacher. The student demonstrates understanding by sorting, assisting, choosing options, examining, matching, and/or replicating the activity.	A wide variety of materials are presented by the teacher. Student is expected to organize information, form ideas, compare materials, make inferences, and/or justify answers.
Generalization	Not required.	Student demonstrates internalization of skill by repeating activity with different materials at a later date/time.	Student demonstrates internalization of skill by repeating activity with different materials at a later date/time.
Essence Statement	Uses Transformational Geometry	Uses Transformational Geometry	Uses Transformational Geometry
Activity Example	1) One coffee cup is placed on a table, the student is shown and another coffee cup 2) Student watches as teacher puts coffee cup next to the cup on the table, handles facing out 3) Coffee cups are placed on different spots on table, student watches as teacher slides one coffee cup next to the other	Student is given one symmetrical (a square) and two asymmetrical figures cut from card stock. 1) Student attempts to fold each along its line of symmetry 2) Student identifies symmetrical item 3) Student identifies part of card stock that will make one asymmetrical item symmetrical, demonstrating a reflection	1) Teacher places a glue bottle on the table, student must rotate all glue bottles so they are facing same way 2) Teacher places two glue bottles on a table, student moves one bottle down to align them together 3) Students must determine if activity 1 was a rotation or translation and if activity 2 was a rotation or translation
Generalization Example	Not required.	Same activities as above but a paper heart is the symmetrical figure and two different asymmetrical pieces of card stock are used	Same activities as above but coffee cans are used

Note: During the 2012-2013 students tested at a Level I were considered automatic failures.

For some students even the lowest level of participation, a Level 1, is too daunting. Students categorized as comatose, diagnosed as medically fragile, or those with severe cognitive deficiencies are required to participate in the STAAR Alternate. A “no response observed” (NRO) category exists for students who do not react to stimuli and cannot participate in a meaningful fashion. Teachers submitting NRO responses for a student must collect data, document attempts, and submit a NRO form for each subject. Students given a NRO are included in AYP calculations as participation but their score is not used in calculating performance measures. However, using a NRO is not allowed by most districts, instead teachers must test students with limited intellectual abilities utilizing the category Level 1 (“Susan”, personal communication, January 28, 2013).

As indicated by Stake (1999), a singular, standardized assessment is cheaper than several individualized exams; however, utilizing a standardized assessment on students with the most severe intellectual delays is a relatively new policy. A large research body exists regarding the creation of alternative assessments and aligning alternative achievement standards to grade level content. Flowers, Wakeman, and Browder (2009) illustrate specific steps for aligning alternative assessments to grade level standards. Research also indicates a consensus on the pros and cons of portfolio assessments and on the difficulty of establishing reliability and validity with alternative assessments. Pullin (2005) describes scoring criteria for alternative assessments as challenging as it is difficult to determine if a student can generalize his or her performance to settings beyond the regulated testing environment and to what extent the student required staff assistance to complete the tested task.

Little research exists; however, for on demand task performance, such as the STAAR Alt assessment. The STAAR Alt assessment is based on a student's performance on a specific task related to a content area, such as Algebra. While many students with intellectual delays may have the ability to perform the tasks, another small faction of students have difficulty reacting to presented stimuli (Towles-Reeves, Kearns, Kleinert, & Kleinert, 2009). Furthermore, due to the rigors of the exam, teachers spend time during the school day teaching on grade level academic content (Lowrey, Drasgow, Renzaglia, & Chezan, 2007). Current research suggests placing an emphasis on academic standards means sacrificing the functional needs of the student (Bouck, 2012). Functional curriculum prepares students with intellectual delays for as much independence as possible. Forms of functional curriculum include vocational education, daily living skills, money skills, independent living skills, and social skills (Bouck, 2012). As teachers focus on grade level standards, much of the functional curriculum needed is eliminated from the daily teaching schedule (Lowrey et al., 2007).

Qualitative studies demonstrating how teachers should mesh general education curriculum with functional academics or the individual needs of the students were not located while researching for this study. Addressing the needs and testing of students with profound intellectual disabilities is rarely discussed or researched. Understanding how teachers of students with profound intellectual delays incorporate the systematic requirements of the alternate assessment into their classrooms and their perceptions of the assessment's impact are important steps in understanding the alternative assessment process.

One tool for measuring teacher concerns is the Concerns Based Adoption Model, a framework that illustrates teacher concerns about an innovation and their response to that innovation (George, Hall, & Stiegelbauer, 2006). Using the Stages of Concern Questionnaire, researchers can determine the level of awareness and concern a teacher has regarding a specific procedure or change. For this study, teachers completed the Stages of Concern Questionnaire to determine their level of concern regarding the alternate assessment process and its impact on the classroom.

A Framework of Advocacy

Research indicates a base of teachers with varying perceptions about the importance of the alternate assessment process as well as educators concerned with the decrease in functional curriculum from daily lessons (Flowers, Ahlgrim-Delzell, Browder, & Spooner, 2005 & Ayers, Douglas, Lowrey, & Sievers, 2011). Two organizations, the National Alternate Assessment Center (NAAC) and Texas Council of Administrators of Special Education (TCASE), offer resources and tools for teachers of students with profound disabilities. NAAC was formed to provide technical assistance to states and offer resources, including journal articles and evaluation tools. The website includes material developed by leading researchers well versed in alternate assessments and their contact information (NAAC, n.d.).

In Texas, TCASE offers advocacy, a legislative task force, and resources for special educators (TCASE, n.d.). In 2013, the TCASE legislative task force conducted two surveys to highlight the challenges of the STAAR Alternate (STAAR Alternate Survey, 2013). One survey was created for special education directors and a second survey was created for special education teachers. Eighty-eight percent of the directors surveyed and 93% of teachers surveyed indicated that STAAR Alternate did not

increase student independence or employability (STAAR Alternate Survey, 2013). Seventy percent of teachers surveyed stated they spent over six hours per week, outside of the school day, developing the STAAR Alternate (STAAR Alternate Survey, 2013). TCASE offers an avenue for teachers to share their concerns and/or suggestions regarding the alternate assessment process.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study is to understand how secondary Special Education teachers prepare for the implementation of the STAAR Alternate in three different San Antonio, Texas area school districts. A Special Education teacher administering a standardized performance exam that is aligned to academic content is a new phenomenon; thus, understanding what types of guidance Special Education teachers receive from district and campus administrators is important when trying to explore how teachers prepare and assess their students with profound intellectual delays. Using a multiple case study procedure, the following questions will be addressed:

- 1) How do Special Education teachers, at the secondary level, prepare for implementation of the STAAR Alternative exam?
- 2) What types of guidance do the Special Education teachers receive from their school and district administrators?
- 3) How much time is required to prepare for each essence statement?
- 4) What types of student physiological responses do teachers utilize as a “response” on the STAAR Alt?
- 5) How do special education teachers academically prepare students for the alternative exam?

Significance of the Study

The purpose of this study is to understand how Special Education teachers, in Texas, prepare to implement the STAAR Alternative exam in their classrooms. Understanding how teachers prepare their classrooms and students for the assessment is essential as testing students with severe cognitive delays is still a new requirement. Before the STAAR Alt exam, students were not exposed to rigorous academic topics. In a classroom serving students with intellectual delays academics taught were at a basic level and much of the day was spent on functional skills, such as vocations and hygiene (Ayers et al., 2011 & Lowrey et al., 2007). STAAR Alt, however, measures on grade level academic skills not functional living skills (STAAR Alt Manual, 2011). The rigor of the exam requires teachers to spend more time on test skills and academic content and a limited amount of time is devoted to functional academics (Lowrey et al., 2007). Despite researching ProQuest and the Education Research Information Center (ERIC), qualitative studies exploring the support and guidance teachers receive from the state, district, and/or campus regarding their implementation of an alternate assessment were not located.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Alternate Assessments

Alternate assessments and their linkage to grade level standards is a relatively new concept. The purpose of this qualitative study is to understand how Special Education teachers prepare for the implementation of the alternative assessment in San Antonio, Texas school districts. The purpose of this review of literature is to present an overview of research related to the topic, including the following: a) a history of special education students and accountability; b) defining specific alternate assessments; c) a description of students who participate in alternate assessment; d) teacher perceptions of alternate assessments; e) a review of how alternate assessments influence classroom instruction, including the academic verses functional curriculum debate; and f) a description of the Concerns Based Adoption Model (CBAM) and how it documents teacher concerns to change. An alternate assessment for students with profound intellectual delays is a new issue with a small research base. Literature discussed was found using key words such as special education assessments, alternate assessments, and functional curriculum in the ProQuest and ERIC databases. Most of the research is from experts in the field including Browder, Flowers, and Towles-Reeves.

History of Special Education Students and Accountability Measures

Including students with severe cognitive delays in assessments and accountability measures became a requirement after the inception of two key pieces of legislation, the Individuals with Disabilities Act of 1997 and the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. Reviewing the requirements of both federally mandated laws is essential to

fully understanding the purpose and expectations of an alternate assessment. In 1990 it was common to exclude students with moderate to severe disabilities from standardized assessments. The National Center for Education Outcomes (NCEO) highlighted this phenomenon claiming that students not included in accountability systems were shunned when determining educational achievement (Browder, Ahlgren-Delzell, Flowers, Karvonen, Spooner, & Algozzine, 2005). In 1997, realizing the importance of including all students in assessments for accountability measures, congress reformed the Education for All Handicapped Children Act. Retitled the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), states had to incorporate all students with disabilities into the assessment program or forfeit funding under Part B of IDEA.

The specific assessment provisions of IDEA 1997 are detailed below:

- Children with disabilities must participate in state and district assessments with appropriate accommodations and modifications, if needed.
- States must create an alternate assessment for students who cannot participate in the general education assessment, even with accommodations and modifications, by July 1, 2000.
- States must create detailed reports of assessment results for students with disabilities with the same frequency as reports of nondisabled students. Reports must be made public (IDEA, 1997).

Immediately following the passage of IDEA, only two states had developed an alternative assessment system. States facing the July 2000 deadline had three years to design and pilot an alternative assessment. With only two models, states scrambled to create measurements for students with severe and profound disabilities (Towles-Reeves et al., 2009). By 1999, six states developed alternative assessments focusing on functional skills, 20 states created alternative assessments linked to state standards,

and 24 states were undecided or had developed a different type of alternative assessment system (Browder et al., 2005).

One year after IDEA's alternate assessment deadline, congress enacted the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB). Policy makers and the public wanted to ensure that states, districts, schools, and teachers were using tax dollars to provide quality education. Assessments became the tool for monitoring student progress and holding schools accountable for student achievement on reading, math, and science. Standardized assessments are the favored measure for addressing a host of educational issues, including lack of student motivation, low education standards, and ineffective instruction (Kornhaber, 2004) As states and districts wade through the assessment process, NCLB holds a clear deadline: all students are required to score at or above proficient, as defined by their state, by the 2013-2014 school year (Kornhaber, 2004).

In 2004, the government created Title 1- Improving the Academic Achievement of the Disadvantaged, further delineating the participation of students with intellectual delays in assessment measures. Under the title, all students should have access to general education classrooms or curriculum. Regardless of where students receive instruction, all students with special needs are included in adequate yearly progress (AYP) measurements (Title 1, 2004). States must impose strict qualification guidelines for students participating in an alternate assessment. When Title 1 was first introduced, the government included a stipulation wherein students must be at least three standard deviations below the intelligence quotient (IQ) mean to participate in an alternate assessment. By December 2003, the guideline, Section 200.1, was revoked. States

were given greater flexibility in determining which students could participate in an alternate assessment (Title 1, 2004).

Wanting to ensure only students with the most severe disabilities participated in an alternate assessment, the Secretary of Education proposed a one percent cap on the number of proficient and advanced alternate scores calculated into a school and district's AYP (Title 1, 2004). One percent of all students equates to nine percent of all students with disabilities. The cap was created to deter districts from placing large amounts of unqualified students on an alternate assessment hoping to positively skew school achievement scores (Title 1, 2004). The government does not limit the number of students a campus or district can place on alternate assessment. Rather, the one percent cap limits the number of advanced and proficient scores that can be included in AYP calculations. Any student scores above the one percent cap are deemed non-proficient. For example, a school has 20 students participate in the alternate assessment. Six of those students are above the one percent cap. Though the six students achieved proficient on the alternate assessment, the scores are deemed non-proficient in AYP calculations because they exceed the one percent cap (Title 1, 2004). Local education agencies (LEA) and states are allowed to determine which scores will be included in AYP calculations, if the number of students tested with the alternate assessment exceed the one percent cap (Title I, 2004).

Types of Alternative Assessments

Typically, students participating in alternative assessments have individualized, tailored curriculums, participate in functional activities, and have intellectual disabilities ranging from moderate to severe (Towles-Reeves et al., 2009). Title 1 of NCLB clearly states that alternate assessments must be linked to state standards; however, only

vague suggestions for the types of measurement are included in the statute. Each state is given latitude to develop their own unique alternate assessment, though, most follow one of five specific assessment types.

Gong and Marion (2006), in a report for the National Center for the Improvement of Educational Assessment, define five types of alternative assessments: portfolio, IEP linked, performance assessment, checklist, and traditional. Portfolio assessments are a collection of student work demonstrating specific skills linked to state standards. Work samples are individualized and can include observations, test results, or video and audio recordings of the student completing a task. Items in a portfolio assessment are scored based on a state developed rubric. Similar to portfolios, IEP linked assessments are a collection of work; however, the samples are linked to student IEP goals and measured against a fixed scoring guide.

Performance assessments are unlike work collections as they are a direct measurement of a student's ability to complete specific skills in a one on one setting. Often highly structured, these exams require the administrator to give the student specific tasks related to a state standard. The student completes the task on demand with or without assistance. Scores are determined by a state developed rubric that measures the student's response and level of independence in completing the task (Gong & Marion, 2006).

Checklists are the only assessments that do not require active student participation. A checklist is a list of skills developed by the state. The teacher reviews each task and determines if the student can complete the skills and to what level. Scores are determined by the number of skills the student can complete and the setting

in which the task was observed. Traditional assessments are paper and pencil exams requiring students to select one correct answer from a list of choices. The assessment can be completed independently under teacher supervision or in a one on one setting where the teacher records the student's answers (Gong & Marion, 2006).

Alignment with State Standards and Content Validity

Once a state picks an alternate assessment format, valid construction and technical adequacy become a challenge. For alternate assessments to meet the same content validity as general education assessments, they must be clearly aligned to state standards, allow for access to the general education curriculum, and promote high achievement standards for students with disabilities (NCLB, 2001 & Title 1, 2004). To meet the demands of the mandate, alternative assessments must be constructed with technical adequacy (Browder, Spooner, Wakeman, Trela, & Baker, 2006).

NCLB requires assessments in reading, math, and science for all students; however, many alternative assessment performance indicators are not truly reflective of the content. For example, while reviewing performance indicators, a group of researchers found tasks such as “clean the kitchen” to demonstrate math ability and “makes eye contact” as a language arts skill (Browder et al., 2005). All statewide assessments are utilized to compare student performance across individual schools and districts. Thus, it is important that alternative assessments aptly measure what is intended (Towles-Reeves, Garrett, Burdette, and Burdge, 2006). However, as evidenced by the studies detailed below, not all alternative assessments are equal in alignment or scoring procedures.

Browder, Flowers, Ahlgren-Delzell, Karvonen, Spooner, and Algozzine (2004) conducted a study to determine the alignment of state math and language arts general

education standards and functional domains to alternate assessments. Thirty-one states were originally surveyed; 16 used only math and language arts domains, four used only functional skills domains, and 11 states used a combination of both. National experts in math, language arts, and severe disabilities as well as stakeholders reviewed the selected alternative assessments and participated in focus group sessions. The focus groups identified the following characteristics as evidence of a strong alignment between math standards and performance tasks: an emphasis on math skills and indicators concisely written. Most curriculum experts and stakeholders identified Colorado and South Dakota's math alternate assessment and Arizona's language arts alternate assessment as demonstrating clear alignment between the assessment and state standards. The performance indicators utilized in Colorado and Arizona's alternative assessments meld functional skills with academic standards (Browder et al., 2004).

Variations exist among the scoring methods for alternative assessments. Thirty-seven states utilize a standardized rubric for scoring assessments while one state allows IEP teams to create the scale for the scoring rubric. Allowing IEP teams to set the scale seems appropriate; however, it is important to note that some IEP teams purposely lower student expectations to encourage mastery and meet AYP goals (Browder et al., 2005). Browder et al. (2005) suggests that IEP teams create a baseline of student skills at the beginning of the school year to determine skills students must develop thereby creating high expectations for each student.

When scoring alternate assessments, the most common criteria was student performance of a target skill. Specific scoring indicators are as follows: 71% of states

used mastery of progress as a criteria, 60% required documentation of the level of independence student demonstrated to complete task, and 45% required generalization of the target skill to other settings (Browder et al., 2005).

Browder et al. (2005) suggest that the current use of alternative assessments for students with profound intellectual delays is flawed. Based on the study, it appears states are perplexed on how to align state standards and how to appropriately score alternative assessments. Little evidence exists on how to effectively align curriculum standards or how to create a reliable system for scoring alternative assessments.

After studying the varying abilities of students taking alternative assessments, Towles-Reeves et al. (2009) believe that building a technically adequate measurement is a challenge. Approximately half of participating students can adequately participate in an alternative assessment; however, a small group of students do not have the basic math or reading abilities required to meaningfully complete performance indicators tied to grade level content. State level policy makers must consider the presymbolic and noncommunicative population of students when devising alternative assessments, as the current alternative assessment system seems to perversely highlight student disabilities (Towles-Reeves et al., 2009).

Towles-Reeves et al. (2009) suggest creating two sets of alternative achievement standards for the one percent of students participating in alternative assessments. Content deemed challenging for a student with no awareness of words or numbers would be routine for students with the ability to read sight words and perform basic math operations. The parallel set of standards would ensure both groups

of students are challenged to the best of their ability as well as learning skills attuned to their developmental needs.

Performance Assessments and the STAAR Alternate

Elliott and Roach (2007) state that some alternate assessments are favored due to individualization while others are utilized to improve accountability measures.

Researchers question the validity of portfolio assessments while performance assessments are touted as more aligned to standards and more valid (Elliott & Roach, 2007). States utilizing performance assessments demonstrate alignment of standards by requiring more tasks and work samples. Risk factors relating to performance assessments are noted. The numerous tasks and work samples often result in an intensive and time-consuming assessment process (Elliott & Roach, 2007). Instabilities in student physical health and behaviors can effect the completion of performance tasks resulting in negatively skewed results.

During the 2007-2008 academic year, the Texas Education Agency (TEA) implemented a performance based alternate assessment deemed the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills Alternate (TAKS-Alt). The performance-based assessment was aligned to grade level state standards. Students participated in assessments in reading, math, science, and social studies. In 2012, TEA piloted a new state assessment, the State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness (STAAR). The exam is more rigorous and includes college readiness standards. The STAAR Alternate is a performance-based assessment closely aligned to the state academic standards. At the middle school level students take assessments in reading, math, science, and social studies, depending on their grade level. At the high school level, however, students take STAAR Alt assessments in Algebra, Biology, and English I in

the ninth grade and English II in the tenth grade. Beginning in the 2012-2013 school year, eleventh grade students took a STAAR Alt assessment in United States History.

Each STAAR Alt assessment contains four essence statements with three complexity levels. Activities are based on the following complexity levels: Level I – beginning awareness, Level II – basic recall, and Level III – application (STAAR Alt manual, 2011). Within the complexity level selected, the student must perform specific tasks aligned to a state standard (See Table 1-1). Teachers select the assessment tasks from the STAAR Alt website and instruct students on the specific skills during the school year. During the data collection period, teachers observe the student completing the required task (STAAR Alt manual, 2011). Teachers document the activity completed, if the student demonstrated the activity, and the level of support provided to the student. Students tested at a Level II or Level III must generalize the skill to other settings. Generalization requires the student complete the same task but with different materials. To receive points for generalization, the student must complete the task and not be confused by the new materials.

Once data collection is complete, teachers enter the data into an online management system. For each task, teachers indicate if the student demonstrated the skill and if the student needed cueing, prompting, or performed the skill independently. The online management system tabulates student scores by giving the student two points for each skill demonstrated, two points if the skill is demonstrated independently, one point if the student needed cueing and zero points if the student needed prompting.

Students tested at a Level II or Level III are given additional points if they generalize the skills independently (two points) or with some cueing (one point).

Students tested at a Level I do not generalize skills and are automatically given no points for this area (STAAR Alt Manual, 2011). Level II demonstration of skill scores are given an additional weight of 1.2 points and Level III are given an additional weight score of 1.5, increasing the maximum score for each demonstration of skill from 6 to a possible score of 7.2 or 9 respectively. The essence score is calculated by adding together scores from each of the three tasks: demonstration of skill score (9 points possible), level of support score (6 points possible), and generalization score (6 points possible). Total points possible for each essence statement is 21 points (STAAR Alt Manual, 2011).

The total subject assessment score is calculated by adding together all four essence scores resulting in a score ranging from 0 to 84 (STAAR Alt Manual, 2011). For the 2012-2013 school year, students who received 0 – 49 points were considered developing and had not sufficiently demonstrated the skills required for each assessment task. Scores of 50-77 demonstrate a satisfactory performance and 79-84 represents an accomplished performance (STAAR Alt Conversion Chart, 2013). For each essence statement, a student tested at a Level I can only receive a maximum of six points for demonstration of skill, a maximum of six points for performing the skill independently, and no points for generalization. Students tested at a Level 1 receiving all maximum points for the essence statements earn a total assessment score of 48 points, two points under sufficient (STAAR Alt Conversion Chart, 2013). During the 2012-2013, students tested at a Level 1 were considered automatic failures.

On June 10, 2013, Governor Rick Perry signed House Bill 5 into legislation. The bill dramatically changes two aspects of the STAAR Alternate. Students tested at a

Level 1 are no longer automatic failures due to receiving scores ranked “under sufficient”, this requirement goes into effect during the 2013-2014 school year. Senate Bill 906 states that a student cannot be deemed insufficient if the lowest level of the test accurately represents the student’s academic abilities as documented in his or her Individualized Education Plan (Tex Educ Code Ann. § 39.023). Beginning in the 2014-2015 school year, teachers will not create STAAR Alternate tasks. The Texas Education Agency will create a criterion referenced standardized assessment for all students tested with the STAAR Alternate assessment (Tex Educ Code Ann. § 39.023).

Learner Characteristics

Fully understanding characteristics of students participating in an alternate exam is inherent to a study focusing on alternative assessments. States have created alternate exams based on federal guidelines; however, researchers caution that due to the extreme heterogeneity of the students, developing an effective standardized measurement of their academic abilities is a challenge (Towles-Reeves et al., 2009).

Students who participate in alternate assessments represent various categories of disabilities, including intellectual disabilities, autism, and multiple disabilities (Towles-Reeves et al., 2009). Students with intellectual disabilities have intelligence quotient (IQ) scores in the following ranges: mild – between 50-55 to 70; moderate – 35-40 to 50-55; severe – 20-25 to 35-40; and profound – below 20 to 25 (First, 2000). Approximately one percent to two percent of people with intellectual disabilities are in the profound range. Students with profound intellectual disabilities most often have a neurological condition causing the disability. Severe impairments in sensorimotor functioning are identified in early childhood (First, 2000). Students with profound intellectual disabilities need a structured environment with constant supervision (First, 2000). With intensive

training, some individuals with profound intellectual disabilities can perform simple tasks with assistance.

Towles-Reeves et al. (2009) conducted a study to determine the specific characteristics of students participating in alternate assessments. Special Education teachers in three states completed a Learner Characteristics Inventory (LCI), a survey detailing characteristics, including communication and academic ability, for each of their students participating in the state's alternate assessment. More than 50% of students in each of the three states used verbal or written words, Braille, signs, or assistive technology to communicate expressively. A small group of students, approximately 17% to 26% in each state, used gestures, symbols, pictures, or objects to understandably communicate. A smaller group, approximately 8% to 11% in each state, cried or made changes in facial expression or muscle tone to communicate. While participating in the alternative assessments varying levels of engagement were noted. More than 80% of students in each state responded to assessment tasks and sustained the interaction. A small group of students (7% to 11%) simply alerted to people and (1% to 4%) of students did not react to people or stimuli (Towles-Reeves et al., 2009).

In responding to academic tasks, 33% to 41% of students required additional cues or prompting to complete one to two step directions. Approximately 10% of students in each state needed physical assistance to complete assessment tasks while 3% of students in each state gave uncertain responses to sensory stimulation. Nearly 50% of students in each state could read basic sight words and simple sentences and 14% to 18% of students could not read but were aware of printed letters. One faction of students (3% to 25%) had no awareness of printed words or Braille symbols. A large

majority of students (38% to 57%) of students could complete basic math problems with a calculator while small percentages of students, could only count from 1 to 10 (19% to 27%), or 1 to 5 (6% to 10%). Finally, approximately 11% to 22% of students had no awareness of numbers (Towles-Reeves et al., 2009).

Medically fragile individuals are another faction of students participating in alternate assessments. Students in this category have physical disabilities often resulting in cognitive deficits. Medically fragile students are individuals who require ongoing medical treatments, such as tracheotomies or feeding tubes, and are monitored by trained personnel, including nurses. These students require medical devices or assistive technology to assist with bodily functions required for daily living (Instructional Support, 2013). In Texas students who are medically fragile, including those receiving special education services in homes or nursing homes, are not exempted from the STAAR Alternate (STAAR Alt Manual, 2011).

Students with profound intellectual delays and those with extreme medical disabilities leading to cognitive deficits are tested with a Level I STAAR Alt, or beginning awareness activities. Characteristics of students tested at a Level I include: the use of senses to respond to presented stimuli; cannot make a choice when given two options; and does not communicate verbally or nonverbally (STAAR Alt Manual, 2011).

Level I activities require students to show an awareness of a presented stimulus and then to demonstrate he or she is aware when the stimulus changes; however, students are not required to act on the presented stimulus. Choices in stimuli are not given and all stimuli are presented one at a time. When creating the specific Level I tasks, teachers utilize verbs such as acknowledge, respond, experience, or participate

(STAAR Alt manual, 2011). During the assessment, students do not answer questions but are to acknowledge any statements made by the assessor (STAAR Alt Manual, 2011). Teachers present activities utilizing auditory, physical, or visual stimulus. Examples include creating unusual sounds to elicit a student reaction, placing the student's hand on an object, or presenting objects or images that can be visually tracked by the student (STAAR Alt Manual, 2011).

The STAAR Alternate Manual details examples of accepted verbal, physical, and visual reactions for students assessed at a Level I. For a student required to participate in an activity, the student must have involvement in the activity and demonstrate awareness of the activity. Acceptable student responses demonstrating participation include the student vocalizing during the activity, manipulating presented items, or maintaining eye focus during the activity (STAAR Alt Manual, 2011). Teachers document each activity, if and how the student demonstrated the skill, and the level of support required for student to complete task.

Teacher Perceptions and Alternate Assessments

While Towles-Reeves et al. (2009) highlighted specific characteristics of students taking alternate assessments, Flowers, Ahlgrim-Delzell, Browder, and Spooner (2005) examined how teachers perceive the assessments and its impact on the students. Some individuals oppose participation of students with severe intellectual delays in standardized assessments because of unintended consequences, such as the narrowing of curriculum to focus only on academics. For students with cognitive delays, functional and social skills are an important component of their daily routine (Flowers et al., 2005). Most curriculum and textbooks developed for students with severe cognitive

delays focus on functional and vocational skills with little emphasis on academic content.

To understand the impact of alternative assessments on the educational programs of students with severe disabilities, Flowers et al. (2005) conducted a survey examining teacher perceptions of the assessment. Five states were selected for the study. Three states used a portfolio assessment, one state utilized a performance-based assessment, and one state used a checklist. Nine hundred and eighty-three surveys were analyzed. Most of the respondents had conducted an average of six alternative assessments over two school years.

Seventy-two percent of the respondents did not believe students with severe cognitive delays had greater access to or participated more frequently in the general education curriculum or classroom. Only 22% of respondents believed alternate assessments prepared students to transition to adult living. Regarding the alternative assessment on the daily classroom, only 36% of teachers had a better understanding of general education curriculum and believed the assessment improved instructional strategies. Fifty-eight percent of teachers utilized alternative assessment strategies as part of the daily classroom routine and 71% stated the assessment competed with amount of time spent teaching. Finally, 79% of teachers did not believe the alternative assessment truly reflected their students' abilities (Flowers et al., 2005). While teachers struggle with incorporating functional skills with academics, it is important to note that of 31 state alternative assessments reviewed in a study by Browder et al. (2004) only 11 states blended functional domains with academic tasks. The remaining alternate assessments solely tested academic domains.

Alternate Assessment Influence on Classroom Instruction

Under NCLB, teachers must provide on grade level academics to students with severe cognitive delays; yet, few models exist on how to prepare students for this endeavor (Browder, Spooner, Algrim-Delzell, Flowers, Algozzine, & Karvonen, 2003). The push for the academic content in an alternative learning environment is difficult as the functional learning skills, which are important to the future abilities of the students, lose priority in the daily routine. Browder et al. (2003) postulate that there is little research on how to include the necessary components of academic content into the everyday routine of an alternative environment setting. Much research exists on how to teach students sight words, but no research demonstrates how to teach students with moderate to severe disabilities how to identify story patterns (Browder et al., 2003). Similarly, research exists on how to teach students basic money skills but little research explains how to teach students with cognitive disabilities to solve linear equations (Browder, Trela, & Jimenez, 2007).

Towles-Reeves, Burdette, and Burdge (2006) conducted a quantitative study to determine the influence of one state's alternative assessment on classroom instruction. Three hundred and four teachers who had administered an alternative assessment during the 2001-2002 school year completed a survey detailing how the assessment influenced their instructional practices and IEP construction.

The selected state's alternative assessment is a portfolio containing the following six domains: standards, performance, settings, supports, social relationships, and self-determination. Academic content areas are threaded in each domain. After analyzing survey data, researchers determined that the alternative assessment influenced the IEP construction and classroom instruction; however, emphasis on instruction was greater

than IEP development. It is important to note that 130 teachers stated that the alternative assessment did not influence their teaching practices or IEP construction as the test is not a priority for them. Another group of teachers indicated they had little support to implement the assessment and they did not fully understand how to complete the assessment.

Some teachers added extra comments to the surveys, further explaining their answer choices. Many teachers stated that the assessment infringed on class time usually reserved for teaching functional and social skills. One group of teachers noted that their severe and profound students cannot learn “those things”, or academic content tied to grade level standards (Towles-Reeves et al., 2006, p.54).

Access to General Education Curriculum

Two research studies tested the use of task analytic approaches to teaching students with developmental delays academic content. Systematic processes are often used in teaching students functional skills, such as work tasks. The students are taught sequences and procedures and then are prompted and praised by teachers while completing the task (Browder et al., 2007). Both studies used a task analytic procedure to teach students with moderate developmental disabilities Algebra and literacy skills (Browder et al., 2007 & Jimenez, Browder, and Courtade, 2008).

Before NCLB, reading instruction focused on emergent literacy skills, including identifying sight words and environmental print. Compliance with the mandate at the secondary level is challenging, as textbooks focusing on emergent literacy skills are not aligned with middle or high school reading requirements. Browder et al. (2007) conducted a study to determine if students could gain literacy skills following a task analysis approach to learning while utilizing adapted, grade appropriate novels. The

novels were adapted by shortening chapters, adding pictures representing key words, and repetition of the main idea or important parts of the story. Adapted novels were printed on sturdy pages and presented in a three-ring binder to promote independent turning of pages.

Three teachers of students with severe and profound disabilities in a large urban school district were selected for participation. All teachers taught at the middle school level, were certified in Special Education, and had between 2 and 13 years of teaching experience. Though all three had received some professional development on literacy, only one teacher had formal training at the pre-service level. Each teacher selected two students for participation in the study. To be eligible, students had to have an IQ below 55, a demonstrated ability to identify some pictures, and could not comprehend more than 20 sight words. Teachers were trained to follow three components for teaching literacy. First, the teacher used the research-developed template that encompassed four activities for emergent readers. Each lesson needed an attention grabber or opening, a word and sound study, a text awareness piece, and comprehension questions. Text awareness consisted of the teacher reading aloud and providing appropriate wait time for students to anticipate the next section. Second, each teacher had to incorporate appropriate student prompting during each step. Finally, each teacher had to self-monitor to ensure adherence to the literacy template (Browder et al., 2007).

The six participating students made gains in early literacy skills, such as identifying the title of the book and making predictions. During baseline data, none of the students could identify the title of the novel. After the intervention all of the students

could identify titles at least 35% of the time. Before the intervention, three students demonstrated minimal attempts at making correct predictions. After implementing the task analysis procedure, all students demonstrated correct predictions more than 50% of the time.

Browder et al. (2007) measured teacher satisfaction of the task analysis process by analyzing teacher answers on a modified rating scale. Teachers strongly agreed that the literacy training was practical and enhanced their teaching skills. Participating teachers also strongly agreed that all teachers could benefit from such training.

One year after studying the task analytic approach for teaching literacy to students with profound intellectual delays, Jimenez, Browder, and Courtade (2008) conducted a study to survey the task analytic approach when teaching algebra to students with developmental disabilities. At the time of publication, no studies focused on teaching algebra or any abstract concepts to students with cognitive disabilities. According to The National Council for Teachers of Mathematics, operations, algebra, geometry, measurements, and probability, are the five major strands of general mathematics curriculum. Historically, math instruction for students with developmental disabilities has centered on functional skills, including telling time, money management, and identifying numbers (Jimenez et al., 2008).

Using teacher made materials, three high school students (Jack, Leo, and Cindy) were taught simple linear equations utilizing concrete examples. The three students attended a public high school, had full-scale IQ scores ranging from 41 to 49, and could identify numbers from 1 to 9. Students were taught simple linear equations, such as $3 + x = 4$, using a 3 step process. First, the students learned to solve the linear equation by

employing a poster with the equation, manipulatives (spoons, pencils, etc.) to represent the equation numbers, objects representing place markers to keep their place, and a number line to count out the solution (Jimenez et al., 2008). Second, the teacher promoted generalization by relating the equation to a functional skill, such as a job task. In one example students solved for “x” by determining how many more spoons were needed if they already had 4 but needed 9. Finally, the students were instructed to use a specific 9-step sequence for analyzing and completing the equation. Students were given prompting and feedback when following the sequence (Jimenez et al., 2008).

At the completion of the Jimenez et al. study (2008), Jack and Leo could independently solve simple linear equations using all 9 steps in the sequence. Despite over 31 individual lessons, Cindy could only independently complete 8 of the 9 steps for solving linear equations. Jack and Leo could generalize equations using a multitude of materials, including spoons, candy, and other concrete items. Generalization was also demonstrated in an Algebra class with nondisabled peers. Both Jack and Leo could successfully complete simple linear equations at the front of the classroom using their manipulatives.

Despite the success of both studies, Browder et al. (2007) and Jimenez et al. (2008) note several limitations of their studies. In the literacy study, university researchers, following suggestions and protocols made by experts in the field, developed all materials. Teachers would need guidance and training to create appropriately adapted novels and follow copyright laws. The sample utilized in the literacy study was Jack London’s *Call of the Wild*, a grade appropriate novel for middle school. However, the study did not focus on literature at the high school level.

In the algebra study, students relied on the concrete manipulatives, even with mastery of the task analysis sequence. It is unknown if the students would have been able to independently master simple linear equations if the manipulatives were eliminated. Furthermore, the Jimenez et al. study focused on a basic algebraic equation. It is unknown if the same success would be evident with other abstract concepts. While students in the algebra study were able to generalize skills to another setting and with nondisabled peers, students in the literacy study were not exposed to a general education classroom or nondisabled peers. It is unknown if their ability to identify titles, make predictions, and other new found skills would generalize across multiple settings (Browder et al., 2007 & Jimenez et al., 2008).

Though not discussed by the Jimenez et al. (2008), it is imperative to note that the students participating in the study could identify numbers from 1 to 9 and could actively engage in algebra lessons. As indicated by the Towles-Reeves et al. (2009) study, some students can only identify numbers from 1 to 5 while others have no awareness of numbers. Furthermore, some students simply alert to people and other students do not react to people or stimuli. The students falling into these two categories would not have participated in the study conducted by Jimenez et al. Similarly, students in the Browder et al. (2007) study could identify some sight words and communicate. Though more than 50% of most students can identify basic sight words, another small percentage of students have no awareness of printed words or Braille symbols (Towles-Reeves et al., 2009). Thus, understanding how to teach challenging literary and algebraic concepts to students with profound intellectual delays is still enigmatic.

Teachers must determine how to teach academic content to their students and how to prepare them for participation in state alternative assessments. Students with severe disabilities are not excluded from alternative assessments; yet, testing students with severe medical, cognitive, and physical disabilities is a relatively new phenomenon with little guidance from stakeholders. Teachers need specific examples on how to assess students who do not communicate. Browder et al. (2003) suggest that using indicators such as “attends to visual stimuli” or “uses facial expression to convey meaning” is an example of an infant and early childhood philosophical approach to working with students with severe disabilities. Instead of utilizing stimulus reactions, Browder et al. (2003) suggest defining specific and voluntary responses to entry level academic (K-1 standards) while utilizing age appropriate material. While this is a seemingly positive suggestion, current legislation requires that all students test on grade level academics.

Academic Versus Functional Curriculum

Lowrey et al. (2007) indicate that preparing for an alternate assessment based solely on grade level academics requires teachers to spend hours teaching grade level curriculum leaving little time for functional curriculum. Functional skills are meaningful to students with intellectual delays as it increases their independence (Lowrey et al., 2007). Functional academics consist of consumer skills, community skills, and self help skills. Consumer skills include understanding the value of money, paying for items with cash, using a vending machine, and using a bank card. Ayers et al. (2011) define vocational skills and accessing public transportation are components of community skills. Self help skills include grooming and hygiene, laundry skills, cleaning, and preparing food (Ayers et al., 2011). Achieving and generalizing functional skills takes

time and repetition; however, most classroom time is spent on grade level academics (Ayers et al., 2011).

In Texas, the STAAR Alternate only assess grade level content, no functional skills are incorporated into the assessment. With the focus on testing and adequate yearly progress, many teachers focus solely on academics and eliminate non tested curriculum, such as functional skills (Lowrey et al., 2007). If teachers use the general curriculum standards as a sole basis for their lessons, then instruction is no longer based on the individual needs of the students. Classrooms that once focused on the functional needs of the students are now focused on standards as required by the alternate assessment (Lowrey et al., 2007). Without functional academics students with intellectual delays are in danger of not achieving future independence. Ayers et al. (2011) point out that understanding grade level standards does not ensure that students with intellectual disabilities can secure a paying job, find a place to live, or become meaningful members of society.

While students with intellectual delays can learn scaled down grade level content in one setting, many cannot generalize that standard to other settings, including the general education classroom (Ayres et al., 2011). When teaching functional academics in the classroom setting, students are given opportunities to generalize their functional skills in a multitude of real world settings via community based instruction (Ee & Soh, 2005). Not only are the students practicing skills they need to promote independence but they are practicing them in real world settings, such as grocery stores and restaurants (Ee & Soh, 2005).

Lowrey et al. (2007) point out that research describing the lasting effects of focusing on grade level content in lieu of functional curriculum for students with intellectual delays is not readily available. No current research supports shifting the focus from the functional needs of students with intellectual delays to a curriculum based on grade level standards (Lowrey et al., 2007). Lowrey et al. (2007) suggest that instead of allowing alternate assessments drive curriculum, the needs of the individual should guide the curriculum and then the assessment.

Concerns Based Adoption Model

Education reforms are created by lawmakers and are implemented by education stakeholders and teachers. Understanding how teachers react to educational reforms is paramount to understanding the implementation process (Kwok, 2013). George, Hall, and Stiegelbauer developed the Concerns Based Adoption Model (CBAM), based on the works of Fuller (1969) and Fuller and Brown (1975) to predict teacher concerns of new innovations (Kwok, 2013, p.44). Since its creation in the 1970s many studies have used CBAM to gage teacher reactions to new policies or innovations (Kwok, 2013). It is a popular instrument for understanding teacher concerns about innovations (Cheung, Hattie, & Ng, 2001).

Change, as described by CBAM, is not a singular event but a process of several stages. How teachers' react to change is a personal experience that progresses from the individual to the school system (Kwok, 2013). Teacher concerns follow a logical progression through seven stages categorized as self, task, and impact (George et al., 2006). Initially, teachers are in the self stage when they first learn about an innovation but have not implemented it (George et al., 2006 & Kwok, 2013). Once teachers begin implementing the innovation their concerns progress from self to task, or the time and

materials needed to appropriately utilize the innovation. Finally, after teachers gain experience with the innovation, their concerns move from task to impact, or how the innovation affects the students (George et al., 2006 & Kwok, 2013).

The diagnostic tool of CBAM is the Stages of Concern Questionnaire, a 35-question inventory that gauges teacher concerns regarding the innovation. Teachers answer questions on a one to seven Likert scale. Based on selected answers, teacher concerns are categorized into seven categories and a change profile is developed. Though some research details discrepancies in the CBAM tool, it is important to note that reacting to change is a complex process (Kwok, 2013). Teachers can experience varying stages of concern concurrently with varying degrees of intensity (Cheung et al., 2001).

Summary

Understanding how teachers of students with profound intellectual delays implement the alternate assessment is an integral piece of this study. As stated by Towles-Reeves et al. (2006), a qualitative study investigating the unintended influences of the alternative assessment system is needed. Some unintended consequences include, narrowing the curriculum to focus only on topics found on the alternative assessment; eliminating community based instruction; and decreasing the amount of time spent on functional skills.

As indicated by the survey of the literature, there is an insignificant amount of research detailing how teachers of students with severe cognitive delays mesh the requirements of the alternative assessment to the needs of the students. Browder et al. (2005) suggests teaching academics while embedding functional skills, as this specific population of students still needs instruction in daily living, independence, and transition.

Two specific studies, the algebraic and literature study, demonstrate how to utilize functional or emergent skills in collaboration with on grade level standards. However, both studies were small, focusing on less than 10 students, and only the algebra study centered on high school students. Most importantly, neither study surveyed students with profound intellectual delays. Further research is needed to determine how teachers at the high school teach on grade level concepts to students with severe cognitive disabilities.

Students with significant cognitive delays will not learn academic content without systematic and structured instruction (Browder et al., 2006). It is important to note that there is a lack of textbooks and resources that challenge students academically. Much of today's curriculum for students with severe delays focuses on sight words and basic math skills (Flowers et al., 2006). Many teachers of students with severe and profound disabilities are not familiar with the state standards for on grade level reading, math, and science. Browder et al. (2006) notes that it is important for teachers to be knowledgeable of the state standards for each student's grade level. As Special Education teachers work to develop lessons adhering to state standards, they must collaborate with general education teachers to avoid misunderstanding of the content (Browder et al., 2006). Specifically, teachers in self-contained units should plan with general educators to have a more thorough understanding of the curriculum and required skills (Browder et al., 2006).

While much of today's alternate assessment research focuses on state alignment and implementation of alternate assessments, only a handful of studies found focused on the impact of alternate assessments on classroom instruction. Incidentally, studies

describing how teachers implement grade level academics with students with profound cognitive disabilities were not found. Though procedures are suggested for creating access to general education curriculum, studies definitively demonstrating how a teacher merges academic concepts with the individual needs of the student were not evident in the research. A qualitative study focusing on the classroom teacher and how he or she melds academics with functional skills at the secondary level is needed. Further, understanding how teachers implement alternate assessments and balance teaching grade-level academic concepts with the needs of students is essential to fully understanding the impact of the alternate assessment on the classroom.

CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY

The overarching question for this study is to determine how teachers of students with profound intellectual delays implement the alternative assessment process. Understanding how teachers incorporate academic learning with functional curriculum is needed and the learning characteristics of the students is required to fully comprehend the impact of alternate assessment on teaching. The study seeks to answer the following questions:

- 1) How do Special Education teachers, at the secondary level, prepare for implementation of the STAAR Alternative exam?
- 2) What types of guidance do the Special Education teachers receive from their school and district administrators?
- 3) How much time is required to prepare for each essence statement?
- 4) What types of student physiological responses do teachers utilize as a “response” on the STAAR Alt?
- 5) How do special education teachers academically prepare students for the alternative exam?

Qualitative research is the most appropriate form of research to answer questions regarding the impact of alternate assessments on teaching. This study seeks to understand the opinions and beliefs of special education teachers who implement the STAAR Alternate assessment (Brantlinger, Jimenez, Klingner, Pugach, & Richardson, 2005). Understanding teacher perceptions of how the alternate assessment influences their classroom, most specifically how they academically prepare students for the assessments, is central to this study. Past studies have used personal experiences and perceptions of teachers to understand phenomenon. Specifically, two studies conducted by Flowers et al. (2005) and Roach, Elliott, and Berndt (2007), studied

general teacher perceptions of alternate assessments and teacher perceptions and consequential validity of alternate assessments, respectively. One study, conducted by Ee and Soh (2005) studied teacher perceptions of what a functional curriculum should be for students with intellectual delays.

Epistemology: Constructivism

This study follows a constructivist approach for collecting and analyzing data. Creswell (2009) illustrates constructionism as a researcher's attempt at making sense of the world by interpreting meanings other individuals have about their environment. Constructivist researchers understand that their own backgrounds, experiences, and personal values shape their interpretations of meanings. I will consider my own values and experiences when constructing meaning of the impact of alternate assessments on teachers of students with profound intellectual disabilities.

Methodology: Case Study

Yin (2009) states that case studies are appropriate means of data collection when trying to answer "how" and "why" questions. Furthermore, case studies are used when behaviors cannot be manipulated. I have chosen the case study method as it will allow me to investigate the phenomenon of alternate assessments from the perspective of teachers of students with profound disabilities. Yin (2009) suggests a multiple-case design as it is regarded as more robust and compelling. In each case selected, the same interviews and questionnaires must be duplicated. To ensure future study replication, it is imperative to utilize an interview protocol and valid surveys when conducting data collection.

Data Collection

Data was collected during the 2013-2014 school year. During that time, teachers completed two surveys, participated in one semi-structured interview, and submitted a math lesson plan for analysis. Specific instruments and protocols are detailed below.

Stages of Concern Questionnaire

The Stages of Concern Questionnaire (SoCQ) is one instrument in the Concerns-Based Adoption Model developed by SEDL Research (George et al., 2006). Use of the questionnaire is public and available after purchasing the manual, which includes hard copy questionnaires, conversion charts, and access to digital copies of the questionnaire and scoring materials. The original SoCQ was developed, piloted, and tested for validity over a three-year period beginning in 1973. Thirty years later, SEDL researchers revised the SoCQ to include a Stage Zero demonstrating no concern. The revised instrument was piloted and validated in the summer of 2005.

Individuals experience concerns about changes or innovations at varying levels of complexity. The SoCQ utilizes 35 statements on a 0-7 Likert scale with 0 being irrelevant or no concern and 7 being a high concern (Appendix A). Individual responses regarding specific concerns are scored resulting in a raw score for each of the seven stages: unconcerned, informational, personal, management, consequence, collaboration, and refocusing (George et al., 2006). Conversion charts are utilized to transform each raw score into a percentile score for interpretation. The conversion charts and percentile scores are based on the pilot of the questionnaire with 830 teachers in 1974 (George et al., 2006).

Each participant completed the SoCQ to determine their level of concern regarding the STAAR alternate. Teachers categorized as unconcerned have little

concern about the STAAR alternate and its impact on their classroom. An information ranking indicates the teacher has awareness about the alternate assessment but is still in the learning process. Teachers unsure about the demands of the alternate or questioning their competence regarding the alternate assessment are categorized as personal. Individuals ranked as management are focused on the process of implementing the alternate assessment, specifically how to utilize the information and resources (George et al., 2006). Teachers worried about how the assessment impacts students in their classroom are ranked as consequence. Collaboration indicates the teacher's concern with working with others to implement the assessment. Individuals ranked as refocusing are exploring ways to benefit from the use of alternate assessments or are trying to find ways to alter or replace the alternate assessment (George et al., 2006).

Semi-Structured Interview

Each teacher participated in a one-hour interview, at their campus or mutually agreeable location, regarding the routine of their classroom and perceptions of the STAAR Alternate assessment. To ensure all participants answered the same questions, interviews adhered to the interview protocol. The first version of the interview protocol was utilized during a pilot study with three teachers in February 2013. Following suggestions from the pilot study participants, items were clarified and questions added. The final interview protocol is illustrated in Appendix B.

Learner Characteristics Inventory

Participants completed a Learner Characteristics Inventory (LCI) for each student with profound intellectual disabilities tested during the 2012-2013 school year (Appendix C). The LCI was developed by researchers from the National Alternate Assessment

Center (NAAC) in collaboration with experts from occupational therapy, physical therapy, communication disorders, deaf-blindness, special education, mathematics, and reading (Towles-Reeves, Kearns, Kleinert, & Kleinert, 2009). The inventory was validated by experts across the aforementioned fields and piloted with a group of 25 teachers across all grade levels. Following the pilot study, the LCI was revised and piloted with a second group of 15 teachers. The final instrument includes ten questions, nine requiring teachers to acknowledge student abilities based on a continuum of skills and areas and one question inquiring about the use of assistive technology (Towles-Reeves et al., 2009). Permission to use the LCI in this study was obtained from Jacqueline Kearns, developer of the LCI and member of NAAC (Appendix D).

Lesson Plan Analysis

Teachers of students with profound intellectual disabilities create lesson plans for all academic areas taught. To prepare for the STAAR Alternate, teachers are required to select specific tasks/lessons and practice with their students well before administering the assessment. Each participant submitted one math lesson plan focusing on a specific Texas grade level objective.

Lesson plan evaluation tools utilized at San Jose State University and Stony Brook University were analyzed for common themes. Lesson plans are analyzed in various domains as: ineffective, developing, effective, or highly effective (San Jose State, n.d., & Stony Brook, 2011). Each rubric began with an evaluation of the planning and preparation of the complete lesson plan. Specifically, what components and/or elements are included in the lesson plan. Both rubrics address the classroom environment or how the teacher prepared the classroom for the specific lesson. Connection to teaching standards, specific teaching and thinking strategies used,

learning objectives and how the specific lesson was implemented are included on both templates. Student engagement and time management are analyzed on both rubrics (San Jose State, n.d., & Stony Brook, 2011).

Using components from both lesson plan evaluation tools and the criteria required for the STAAR Alternate, a lesson plan analysis was created to analyze participant lesson plans. In each category, participant lesson plans were rated as: ineffective, developing, effective, or highly effective (Appendix E).

Study Setting

The qualitative study was conducted in San Antonio, Texas area. Each participating teacher is assigned to a self-contained classroom at the middle or high school level. Teachers work within three school districts, Arizona Independent School District, Colorado Independent School District, and Washington Independent School District.

Arizona Independent School District covers fourteen square miles on the south side of San Antonio. During the 2011-2012 school year, 14,911 students attended Arizona schools. Approximately 89.2% are economically disadvantaged and 9.2% are categorized as special needs (AEIS, 2012). Arizona ISD has 22 schools, including two high schools and four middle schools. It is the only district in the study that has a specialized school for students with severe and profound intellectual disabilities (Harlandale ISD, n.d.) The Phoenix Center served 21 students ranging from fourth to twelfth grade in the 2011-2012 school year. All students attending The Phoenix Center receive special education services (HISD, n.d.).

Colorado Independent School district is located in the north east area of San Antonio, Texas. Once a rural district, it is quickly growing in size. Colorado ISD covers

73 square miles and serves two different counties (Schertz-Cibolo, n.d.). During the 2011-2012 school year, Colorado ISD's 15 schools served 13,014 students (AEIS, 2012). Colorado ISD has three intermediate schools, two junior high schools, and two comprehensive high schools. Forty-five percent of students are categorized as white, 36.9% are Hispanic, and 10.7% are African American (AEIS, 2012). Approximately 3,500 students or 27.6% of Colorado ISD students are economically disadvantaged. In Colorado ISD, 9% of students are categorized as receiving special education services (AEIS, 2012).

Boulder Intermediate School is one of the three schools that serve students in fifth and sixth grade. Approximately 620 students attend Boulder and 8.3% of the students receive special education services. All fifth and sixth Colorado ISD students with severe intellectual delays attend Boulder Intermediate. Denver Junior High is one of two junior high schools in Colorado ISD. It serves approximately 1000 students with 10% of the population categorized as special education. Currently, all seventh and eighth grade Colorado ISD students with severe cognitive delays attend Denver Junior High.

Washington Independent School District covers 16 square miles on the west side of San Antonio. It is a small urban district with three middle schools, two comprehensive high schools, and two magnet high schools specializing in fine arts and technology (Edgewood, n.d.). In 2011-2012, Washington ISD served 11,822 students. Less than one percent of students were white, 0.9% of students were African American, and 98.4% of students were Hispanic (AEIS, 2012). During the 2011-2012 school year, 96.6% of students were identified as economically disadvantaged and 9.9% of students

received special education services (AEIS, 2012). Approximately 690 sixth to eighth grade students attend Tacoma Middle School. Eleven percent of Tacoma students receive special education services (AEIS, 2012).

Participant Selection

To open a larger participant sample, three districts were selected for the study. Each district required a completed application, copies of the university institutional review board approval, copies of protocols, and a listing of research questions. Following acceptance of the study, I contacted the Director of Special Education and requested email information for 10 to 15 teachers of students with profound intellectual disabilities. Potential participants met the following criteria:

1. Taught the previous academic school year in a self-contained classroom serving students with profound intellectual disabilities.
2. Will teach in a self-contained classroom serving students with profound intellectual disabilities during the 2013-2014 academic year.
3. Administered the STAAR Alternate Assessment during the 2012-2013 academic year.

The initial email detailed the purpose of the study and included a link to a digital version of the SoCQ. Before beginning the digital survey, potential participants read the E-Consent for participating in the survey (Appendix F). Six teachers agreed to participate in the study. Two of the six teachers completed the digital version of the survey. Three teachers completed hard copies of the SoCQ survey after completing the initial interview.

During the initial meeting, the purpose and requirements of the study were discussed. The informed consent (Appendix G) was reviewed and signed. Confidentiality measures were expressed in detail. After the discussion, one teacher,

from Washington ISD, choose to withdraw from the study. At the end of the study, all participants received a \$50.00 gift card for contributing their time. Each school and district were given fictitious names in order to promote participant confidentiality.

Teacher Information

One teacher was selected from Arizona ISD. He is a second year teacher assigned to The Phoenix Center. Three teachers were selected from Colorado ISD, two teach at Denver Junior High and one teaches at Boulder Intermediate. Two of the teachers have taught students with severe intellectual delays for seven years and the third has taught for thirteen years but has only taught students with intellectual disabilities for two years. One teacher was selected from Washington ISD, she has taught students with severe intellectual disabilities for four years at Tacoma Middle School. Table 3-1 illustrates participant demographical information.

Table 3-1. Study Participant Demographics

Teacher	Age Range	Gender	Number of Years Teaching students with severe intellectual disabilities	Highest Degree	Texas Certifications
TA	31 – 40	F	2	Bachelor's	EC-12 Special Ed EC-8 Generalist
TB	51 – 60	F	7	Bachelor's	EC-12 Special Ed
TC	41 – 50	M	2	Master's	EC-12 Special Ed EC-6 Generalist
TD	41 – 50	F	7	Master's	EC-12 Special Ed EC-8 Generalist
TE	41 – 50	F	4	Master's	EC-12 Special Ed EC-8 Generalist 4-8 English as Second Language

Each teacher expressed love for their job and an overwhelming desire to work with students with severe intellectual disabilities. No teachers expressed negative comments regarding their students or their classroom environment. As detailed in the data analysis below, each teacher has concerns about the current STAAR Alternate and

all are skeptical about the standardized alternate assessment to be released in the 2014-2015 school year.

Case Study Procedures

Data was collected from August 2013 to December 2013. Each teacher participated in an interview, at their campus or mutually agreed upon location, regarding the routine of the classroom and perceptions of the STAAR Alternate assessment. Interviews adhered to the interview protocol. The initial interview was audio recorded to assist in transcription. Audio recordings were only used for transcription and will be destroyed following defense of dissertation. At the end of the interview, the participant was given a LCI inventory for each student tested with the STAAR Alternate during the 2012-2013 school year. LCIs were returned along with one math lesson plan in a self-addressed envelope provided by researcher. Reminders via email and phone were made to remind participants to return all information by the due date.

Validity and Trustworthiness

Qualitative studies require validity and trustworthiness to ensure the study is rigorous, or reliable. To establish validity, I utilized respondent validation, or member checking wherein each participant reviewed a transcription of the interview. Four teachers accepted the transcription as valid. One teacher made corrections or clarifying statements to her transcription.

Strategies of credibility, dependability, and confirmability are created to promote trustworthiness of the study (Yin, 2009). During data collection, I maintained a field journal to ensure credibility and confirmability of the study. I kept a detailed record of the data collection procedures, including field notes of interviews and a catalog of all data. Triangulation of data promotes credibility, dependability, and confirmability of

data. Multiple sources of evidence, or data triangulation, is a major strength of a case study (Yin, 2009). I collected data via interviews, reliable instruments including the SoCQ and LCI inventories, and physical artifacts (the lesson plan) for data analysis. Transferability is a category of validity and trustworthiness; however, because of the small participant sample and short timeline, transferability will not be evident in this study.

Limitations

External validity is unlikely while conducting case studies (Yin, 2009). Threats to internal validity exist as the researcher must make an inference each time an event is not directly observed. Specific tactics for ensuring sound inferences are suggested by Yin (2009), including addressing rival explanations for the inference. Though specific strategies are suggested, determining which tactic will address the internal validity is problematic.

Construct validity is another inherent challenge in case studies as much of the data collection process is subjective. Yin (2009) suggests using multiple sources of evidence during the data collection process, such as an interview protocol to follow when collecting data. Even with a strict protocol, during an interview, it can be difficult to keep the individuals on the task. STAAR Alternative is a new assessment and testing students with profound intellectual delays is a rather new practice. Thus, some districts and teachers were not receptive to discussing the assessment with non-district personnel.

Resarcher Subjectivity

I am a certified Special Educator who taught students with special needs at the secondary level for eight years. For the last two years, I worked at a public university

mentoring novice special education teachers, many of who taught students with profound intellectual delays. It is important to note; however, I never taught students with severe cognitive delays in a self-contained setting. The teachers I mentored struggled with the alternate assessment process and its requirements. I hope studying this topic will add to my understanding of alternate assessments and will add to the emerging research base. Ideally, I hope my study highlights the ambiguity of the alternate assessment process and influences future legislation in Texas.

With my knowledge base in special education and my career experience, participants were willing to offer candid comments during interviews. To avoid sampling bias, I solicited districts for teacher contact information only. As long as selected teachers met the criteria, I did not intentionally omit participants. For example, teaching effectiveness and years of experience were irrelevant to my selection criteria. The participant sample is diverse and representative of teachers in special education.

Case study was specifically chosen as methodology as it most correlates with my research questions. It is important to note; however, that I am familiar with the case study process. In my previous university position, I collected observational and interview data from mentees and submitted it to the College of Education for analysis.

I conducted a pilot study to refine the interview protocol with three I mentored. Piloting the interview protocol helped alleviate ambiguous questions, which can lead to participant misunderstanding of questions. To alleviate question order bias, questions began with general demographic information and ended with open answer questions. All questions were written in positive form.

Each participant contributed one to three hours to the study. Ideally, participants would willingly participate; however, an incentive was offered to ensure individuals completed the entire study. Each case study participant received a \$50.00 gift card at the completion of the study. To eliminate procedural bias, each participant received the exact same gift card at the end of the study.

My career and educational experience possibly influenced findings as I might have looked for specific characteristics in the classroom instead of being open to all data. It is important that I monitored my own bias to ensure I did not disregard data during the data collection process because I believed it extraneous.

CHAPTER 4 DATA ANALYSIS

Data Analysis

Yin (2009) recommends specific procedures for analyzing case study data. It is suggested that analysis begin with a general strategy for organizing the data. Once the data is organized, it can be thoroughly analyzed utilizing a specific technique. Information from interviews, lesson plan analysis and LCI inventory were reviewed and hand coded using highlighters. This preliminary process is integral as it forces the researcher to focus on specific data and ignore data irrelevant to the study (Yin, 2009).

Cross-case synthesis is a recommended analysis technique for a multiple case study. Each of the five case studies was treated individually, as a separate case study. After transcribing interview data, I read through each transcription color coding statements corresponding with the questions of the study. Following Yin's (2009) recommendation I created a table with column headings reflecting my study questions. Under each heading, I digitally copied and pasted parts of the hand coded data that corresponded with each theme (Appendix H). Once this was complete, I reviewed left over data to determine if other themes exist or if remaining data is not necessary to the study. Two more themes emerged from the data: functional verses academic curriculum and standardization of the STAAR Alternate. The data table was analyzed to draw cross case conclusions. I reviewed the table determining similarities and/or differences among the cases.

District STAAR Alternate Data

Before beginning the data collection process, I downloaded the STAAR Alternate information from the Pearson Texas Assessment website. For each district, I

determined how many STAAR Alternates were administered at the secondary level and how many of those were categorized as a Level I. Table 4-1 illustrates the data.

Table 4-1. Number of Secondary Students Taking STAAR ALT and Number of Students Taking Assessment at Level I Per District

	Colorado ISD		Arizona ISD		Washington ISD	
	Number Tested	Level 1	Number Tested	Level 1	Number Tested	Level 1
6th grade math	11	5	13	7	10	0
6th grade reading	11	5	13	8	10	0
7th grade math	13	5	20	7	5	0
7th grade reading	13	5	20	7	5	0
7th grade writing	13	5	20	10	5	0
8th grade math	7	2	12	6	8	0
8th grade reading	7	2	12	8	8	0
8th grade science	7	2	12	4	8	0
8th grade social studies	7	2	12	6	8	0
9 th Grade Algebra	2	0	15	1	12	0
9 th Grade English I	2	0	15	1	12	0
9 th Grade Biology	3	0	15	1	12	0
10 th Grade English II	5	1	10	2	5	0
11 th Grade US History	2	0	24	5	3	0

Looking at the number of STAAR Alternate exams administered by each district was an important first step in understanding district testing needs and the requirements of the teacher. Fewer Level I STAAR Alternate assessments were given at the high school level when compared to the number of Level I tests administered at the junior high level in both Arizona ISD and Colorado ISD. No students were administered a Level I STAAR Alternate assessment in Washington ISD. During an interview the teacher from Washington ISD was asked if the district prohibited teachers from administering Level I assessments, she responded “they couldn’t say you “can’t” but it was highly discouraged”. It is important to note that until legislation was signed on June 10, 2013, all students tested with the STAAR Alternate at a Level I were considered

automatic failures. Teachers from Colorado ISD had freedom in determining STAAR Alternate levels for each student and were not discouraged from administering a Level I. In Arizona ISD, some administrators strongly urged teachers to test all students with at least a Level II on the STAAR Alternate. Knowing the abilities of his students, the teacher at The Phoenix Center ensured all his students were tested at a Level I. He stated that “determining a STAAR Alternative Level is an IEP meeting decision and one person cannot mandate which level a student will take”.

Stages of Concern

Each teacher completed the Stages of Concern Questionnaire, two teachers completed the survey electronically and three completed a hard copy version. Each survey was hand scored and analyzed based on the information provided in the Stages of Concern book. Four of the five teachers scored highest at a stage zero or “unconcerned”. At first glance it seems the teachers have no concern regarding the alternate assessment; however, after further review the authors of the survey state a high score on a stage zero indicates the respondent believes “other innovations or activities are of greater concern than the innovation under consideration” (George et al., 2006, p.48). One possible explanation for an area of greater concern is the teachers’ frustrations with the emphasis on grade-level academics and the declining functional curriculum. One teacher scored highest at a stage six or “refocusing”. A high score on refocusing suggests the individual might want to change the innovation or replace it with an alternative (George et al., 2006). The teacher who scored high on refocusing gave the most detail, when compared to the other study participants, regarding her ideal alternate assessment.

Analysis of Questions

To answer the following questions, data garnered from interviews, completed LCI inventories and lesson plans were analyzed. Results are listed by question. Findings are supported by contextual evidence.

- 1) How do Special Education teachers, at the secondary level, prepare for implementation of the STAAR Alternative exam?
- 2) What types of guidance do the Special Education teachers receive from their school and district administrators?
- 3) How much time is required to prepare for each essence statement?
- 4) What types of student physiological responses do teachers utilize as a "response" on the STAAR Alt?
- 5) How do special education teachers academically prepare students for the alternative exam?

During data analysis two more themes emerged. Teachers had strong opinions on the narrowing of curriculum to focus on academics thereby eliminating much of the time needed to work with students on functional skills. Each teacher also had concerns regarding the future standardization of the STAAR Alternate. Questions six and seven are a result of the emergent themes.

- 6) How do special education teachers feel about the emphasis of academics over functional curriculum?
- 7) What are teacher concerns regarding the standardization of the STAAR Alternate?

Question 1 - How do Special Education teachers, at the secondary level, prepare for implementation of the STAAR Alternative exam?

Three themes emerged from the data regarding the implementation of the STAAR Alternate: training and research; preparing essence statements; and emphasizing academics instead of functional curriculum. Each teacher attended

training and conducted research to properly create activities for essence statements for each student. All teachers stated they attended at least one workshop or “make and take” event at Region 20, an education service center serving the San Antonio, Texas area. Beyond the workshops, teachers spent time perusing the Texas Education Agency website for resources or talked to colleagues and shared ideas about activities.

Once the teachers decided on appropriate activities for the essence statements, they spent hours developing the materials needed for the assessment and practicing assessment tasks with each student. Regarding how much time was spent practicing assessment activities with students, one teacher stated “a lot of it we do every day, throughout the fall, I would say probably 100 hours”. The assessment process is tedious and encompasses various parts including creating the activities, practicing with the student, testing each student individually, documenting observations, and entering results into a software system. One teacher tests students at a Level II or Level III, she described the generalization process as time consuming for both teacher and student. As discussed by the teacher, there are four essence statements for each test; however, to generalize a student will complete eight activities for one test. For all four subjects, an eighth grade student will complete 32 tests.

They get tested, they get beat down on tests. You have your first test and then you have to come back and retest them with a change in materials for generalization. There are four parts to every subject, it's a lot of test.

To ensure students are prepared for the performance assessment, teachers spend hours teaching academic concepts in four core academic areas: math, language arts, science, and social studies. Focusing on grade-level academics leaves little time during the day to work on functional curriculum, including hygiene, toileting, and

vocational skills. All teachers try to embed functional activities into academic curriculum, but four of the five teachers want more time to spend on functional curriculum.

Question 2 - What types of guidance do the Special Education teachers receive from their school and district administrators?

Each teacher's district paid for a substitute, at least one time during the 2012-2013 school year, so they could attend Region 20 workshops during the school day. The teacher from Arizona ISD stated that he was told "if you need to go to that training: go". At the district level, teachers stated they attended meetings regarding the STAAR Alternate. In, Washington ISD, the teacher attended several after school make and take meetings. For the teachers in Arizona ISD and Colorado ISD, district meetings regarding the STAAR Alternate covered more procedural and technical requirements of the assessment. All teachers, however, indicated the training received from Region 20 was more appropriate and beneficial.

Regarding the selection of STAAR Alternate testing levels for students, teachers in Washington ISD were "highly discouraged" from testing any student with a Level I. It appears teachers followed this direction as no students in Washington ISD were tested with a Level I. Teachers in Arizona ISD were asked to consider testing all students with at least a Level II; however, the teacher at the Phoenix Center disregarded this request and chose the appropriate test based on the needs of his students. One teacher stated that trainings covered strict rules regarding wording when documenting student progress on the STAAR Alternate

Instead of hand over hand, I've learned in training in these make and takes, you can provide support but don't call it "hand over hand" call it "assist". We are playing politics or tricks with words, "don't use this word but use this word" but you are still doing the same thing.

When asked if districts offered training or guidance regarding how to mesh together functional and academic curriculum, each teacher indicated they had never received such training. One teacher stated, “There has been a person or two that comes in and tries to give input, but formal training, no.” Each teacher said they had to research and talk to other teachers to learn how to effectively mesh functional and academic curriculum on their own. Four of the five teachers noted that meshing the functional needs of the students and grade-level academic requirements of the state is a difficult endeavor. One teacher stated

It's another area where I have difficulty because we are supposed to teach age appropriate for my kids but intellectually, they are not at that age, so it's very difficult to try to mesh

The fifth teacher stated that meshing together functional and academic curriculum is “a little bit common sense”. She has no difficulty teaching academics with embedded functional and social skills.

Question 3 - How much time is required to prepare for each essence statement?

Each teacher estimated how much time they spent putting together activities for each essence statement, including downloading materials from the Texas Education Agency website and preparing testing materials. Teacher time spent on this process ranged from 20 hours to 100 hours depending on the number of students tested. Teachers spent more time preparing STAAR Alternate materials for students tested with a Level II or Level III. Students tested with a Level II or Level III must be given the opportunity to generalize. In order to generalize, the student is tested on the same concepts but with different materials. In essence, the teacher is preparing two completely different tests covering four essence statements in three to four subject areas.

Once the tests are created, teachers spent anywhere from 100 hours to up to six full weeks practicing the concepts tested with each student. In order to practice, the teacher sits with the student, one on one, and assists the student with the tested concept. Due to student disabilities and lack of sustainment, most are tested in small increments. One teacher stated “for my low one [student] it was three to four hours, my higher functioning ones, it was about two hours [each], over 10 to 15 minutes a day”.

In January, the testing window opens. Teachers are given three months to test the students. All teachers began officially testing once the window opens.

I have to start right when that window opens, because some kids, they can only test a day and then they're done, they start saying "I don't know" and then I know they're done. If he is having a bad day, I might get one test out of him and he's done and you have to shelf him again until another day.

Each teacher stated that the actual testing of one concept or essence statement takes anywhere from five minutes to fifteen minutes. However, for each essence statement, the teacher must document the conditions of the testing environment, how many prompts were required, and what type of assistance was given onto an official document. All information on the document is then entered into software provided by the Pearson Assessment system. Teachers stated that entering data into the software is easy but is tedious and can take up to 45 minutes per student. One teacher stated

Some of the essence statements takes you five minutes to do the whole thing and for that five minutes, I'll spend from developing, printing up the data collection sheets, planning the activity, write down all the observations, go into the system and clicking and typing in notes, because I have to take notes while they are doing it, probably an hour.

Due to the sensitive nature of the assessments all materials must remain secure and locked up on the campus. Teachers cannot take documentation or observations

home to enter into the Pearson system. One teacher stated “my paraprofessionals will teach, and this is all I do....I would stay after school to get stuff done as I needed to”.

Question 4 - What types of student physiological responses do teachers utilize as a “response” on the STAAR Alt?

Communication, sustainment, and academic capabilities are an integral part of the STAAR Alternate. To fully understand the needs of the students tested, each teacher completed Learner Characteristic Inventories for each of the students they tested during the 2012-2013 school year. All together the participating teachers tested 23 students, 48% were tested at a Level II and 52% were tested at a Level I. Nineteen of the students were taught in a self contained unit on a regular campus, three were taught at a specialized school for students with intellectual delays, and one receives homebound services, due to his medical needs. Of the students tested, 52% use symbolic language to communicate, they can request and respond to questions; 22% use intentional communication but not at a symbolic level; and 26% cry, make facial expressions, and have changes in muscle tone but have no clear communication.

Regarding engagement, 43% of students tested initiate and sustain social interactions, 39% respond to social interaction but do not initiate or sustain interactions, 4% alert to others, and 13% do not alert to others. Academic abilities varied amongst the tested students. Only 4% of students read fluently with understanding of point of view, fact and opinion, or emotional response. Twenty-two percent read short passages or paragraphs fluently with a basic understanding of text and 22% read basic sight words and simple sentences. More than half of the tested students have limited or no reading ability, 30% have an awareness of text, they can follow directionality and make letter distinctions and 22% have no observable awareness of print or Braille.

In math, 17% apply computational procedures to solve real-life and/or word problems and 26% perform computational procedures with or without a calculator. Thirteen percent count with 1:1 correspondence to at least 10 and can make numbered sets of items. Seventeen percent can count by rote to 5 and 26% have no observable awareness or use of numbers.

Teachers were asked how they test the 26% of students who have no clear ability to communicate. Each teacher used different techniques to test the students, including voice augmentation boxes, eye gazing, color coded matching, facial gestures, head movement, and placing objects into a student's hand. One teacher explained the testing process with students who are nonverbal.

Some of the kids, they actually pick up items, touch it to explore, they have to manipulate it in their hands. The kids that don't have hand movement, it's actually helping them put their hand on the object so they can touch and explore it. I also use their vision. You put items in their visual field and wait for an eye gaze. I used voice output devices so they can give a verbal response. It was something that I recorded but they could push the button to give a response.

Question 5 - How do special education teachers academically prepare students for the alternative exam?

Four of the five teachers submitted lesson plans for analysis. One teacher stated that she did not create actual lesson plans. The lesson plans submitted all focused on a tested math objective. Based on the developed rubric, one plan was rated ineffective, one was developing, one was effective, and one was highly effective. Each teacher wrote the actual Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) on the lesson plan. The essential component of the TEK drives the rest of the lesson plan. Two of four teachers designate how the activity is modified based on a general lower ability level. One teacher specifically modified the lesson for each of her seven students. The fourth

teacher did not differentiate or modify the lesson on an individual basis as all of his students are functioning at the lowest academic level. Two of the lessons used functional skills to teach a math TEK. One teacher used placing and ordering coins on a number line to teach students how to compare and order rational numbers. On the lesson plan, the teacher noted the type of assistance each student would receive. For example, "Student C: redirections, positive reinforcement, extra processing time, and one on one". Another teacher used cooking to teach students measurement. The lesson was differentiated based on the student's abilities. For example, students tested at a Level I "select measurement tools" while students tested at a Level III "independently use measurement tools". Only one teacher had all components required of an effective lesson plan including detailed verbs, activities, modifications, and required student reactions by student.

Three of the five teachers use Unique Learning Curriculum to teach academics to their students. Unique Learning is a standards based curriculum designed for students with special needs (<https://unique.n2y.com/products/unique/>). Lessons are created around a thematic unit and many of the activities are hands on and can be used with a smart board. The other two teachers create their own lessons and activities based on grade level curriculum. Each teacher stated that they were required to use grade level TEKS but they bring the objective down to the student's academic level.

I look at the TEK and then I take it down to their grade level. It might be Algebra but it's all the way down to counting or just recognizing numbers.

All teachers indicated that they learned how to bring the TEK down to their students' levels on their own time. Each teacher stated that they researched and found

resources. Three teachers depended on other teachers to guide them until they could complete the process on their own.

One teacher indicated, even with the lower academic level required, her students need repetition to grasp the TEK. Objectives are repeated leaving little time to cover all grade level TEKS. Students require constant repetition, as illustrated by one teacher.

We have to do so much repetition because the time I get to school on Monday and ask the students, “what was our story about last week” (and we read the story every day for a week), I will only have one or two that will remember any details.

Question 6 - How do special education teachers feel about the emphasis of academics over functional curriculum?

After examining the data, teacher concerns regarding the emphasis on grade-level curriculum and limited time for functional skills became evident. These concerns could account for teacher scores on the Stages of Concern questionnaire. Four of the five teachers scored a zero or “unconcerned” on the questionnaire, similarly those same teachers shared their want for more time to teach functional skills. As mentioned earlier, a score of “unconcerned” in regards to one innovation, such as the STAAR Alternate, can mean the participants view other innovations, such as grade-level academics versus functional curriculum, as far more important or concerning (George et al., 2006).

Four of the five teachers spend more hours on academics instead of functional skills. The teacher at the Phoenix Center spends much of the day ensuring students’ medical and physical needs are met before teaching academics. After spending time on hygiene, including toileting and feeding, he spends approximately one hour on academics. He details a typical classroom day below

We change [diapers] twice a day, unless they have accidents in between, that was last week, Wednesday and Thursday, we were having accidents all the time. We did nothing but change all day and I felt like we didn't focus on other stuff so I felt like I cheated them out of the academic piece

The teacher's students range in age from 11 to 18 but, due to physical disabilities, cannot actively participate in toileting. Changing a student's diaper requires two adults. A third adult monitors the students left in the classroom.

The amount of time spent on academics and functional skills, as explained by each teacher, is illustrated in Figure 4-1 below.

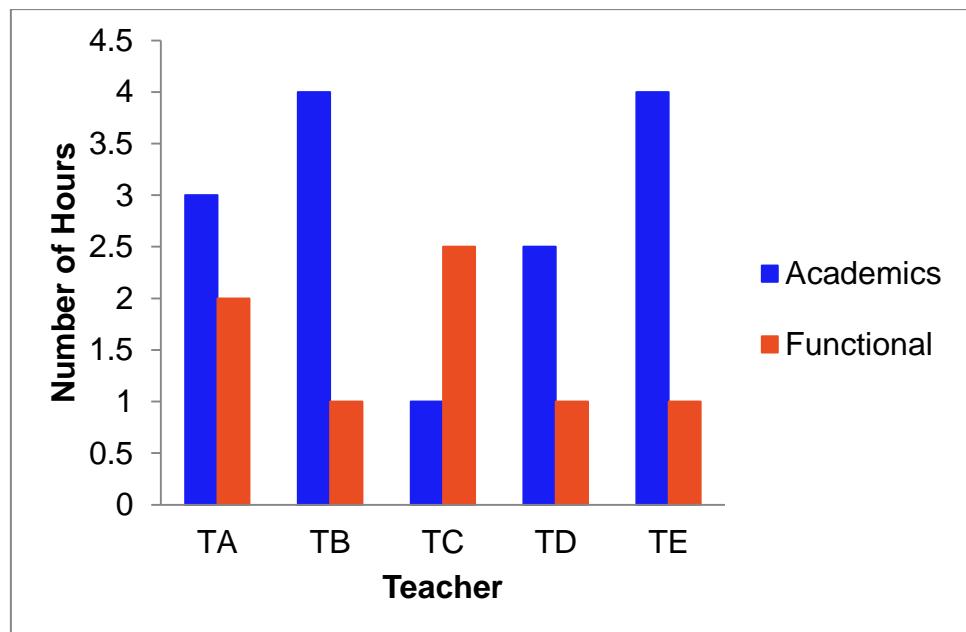


Figure 4-1. Number of hours spent on academic verses functional skills per teacher

Three of the five teachers only spend one hour on functional and/or vocational training. Functional activities include washing laundry, folding clothes, cleaning dishes, and cooking. Vocational skills include assisting with campus recycling and working on activities to increase time on task. Four of the five teachers indicated that finding time to work on functional skills is difficult. One teacher stated, "we have to carve out time

for potty training, time for feeding themselves....it's hard to do when you've got to teach eight different subjects".

The teacher at the Phoenix Center teaches students who are nonverbal and deemed medically fragile, his students have IQs in the profound range (25 and below). He describes how he teaches on grade level academics to his students.

We talked about ecosystems, miniecosystems, I used my aquarium as an example of a mini ecosystem, we talked about ecosystems like the desert, oceans, and those type of things. This coming semester we are going to be doing the polar caps, the Arctic and Antarctic, so I am reading them a book on penguins. If we have time we are going to do an experiment on adherence that has to do with ice and a string and putting salt on the ice and talking about why the string will adhere to the ice.

Four of the five teachers want to spend more of the day on functional curriculum.

Each teacher had strong opinions on the heavy academic focus and lack of functional learning.

I think we need more functional, they do not need to know what a line of symmetry is going to be...I much prefer topics like money, cooking, and those things that are going to make them as independent as possible. Without those functional skills, the academic part is not going to matter...they need to be able to color, need to be able to be independent as possible, and then we can go on to some of the other stuff, and money is a huge one. All of them have trouble with money, they all have difficulty remembering.

Each teacher stressed that teaching concepts like the value of money or telling time are more appropriate and necessary for their students.

I would rather spend my math time not worried about being able to do an equation, which is pretty much, by the time they can do it, it's us doing it for them and then observing. I'd rather be teaching them to write their address, count to ten, learn time on the clock, or money.

One teacher would like to spend more time working with students on basic and fundamental skills, such as toilet training or manipulating their own eating utensils, and less time on grade-level academics.

I would rather spend my day working with behaviors, I could spend so much time focusing on behaviors with my kids, like hygiene, living skills as far as being able to sit at a table...we don't get to spend very much time doing that since I have to get them over to do some kind of reading or math activity. To stay on track and ensure the students receive all four academic subjects, we are rushing through hygiene activities or toileting activities.

One teacher had a different viewpoint than her four colleagues, she indicated that if teachers are meshing academics and functional learning together, then spending more time on academics should not be a problem. She stated

I mean, academics is school, they should be getting academics, and they should be getting what everybody else is getting. We teach both academic and functional skills, it's not one or the other.

Question 7 - What are teacher concerns regarding the standardization of the STAAR Alternate?

At the time of this report, the state of Texas has not released details on the standardization of the STAAR Alternate. Teachers are speculating and worrying about the future of the assessment and the impact on their students. Of the participants in the study, only one teacher is looking forward to the standardized assessment.

I am looking forward to the new alternate assessment next year because this one is too subjective. The teacher makes the test, which isn't fair, it's not fair for us to have to make the tests, nobody else makes the test for their students.

The remaining four teachers expressed concern about the future of the assessment. Right now, teachers write the activities based on the needs of their students. The teachers question how the state can standardize an assessment that is

designed for students with varying disabilities and academic capabilities. One teacher stated

In one breath, I like the idea of not having to sit there and write and come up with a test. Time, I don't have a lot of time to begin with. But on the other breath, how are they writing tests for students they don't know what they can and can't do? I have mixed feelings about it, I don't know what to expect.

Two of the teachers fear the test will have more paper and pencil based activities and less hands on tasks. One teacher stated

I'm very scared about that. Most of them [students] can't write, don't even know what a pencil or crayon is, they are an equivalent of an 8 month old to a 2 year old, you don't expect them to write, so how can we? I think it is such a disservice to these guys.

Another teacher stated

I am concerned about what they are going to do, if they go to standard pencil/paper, I really hope they are going to be able to accommodate for those Level I type kids.

One teacher wonders if testing students with an alternate assessment is the most appropriate means to determine student progress.

Is it really a test that our kids really require or is there some other way that we can ensure that our special needs kids are getting the attention that they need? I understand, I would not want to go to a place, if these were one of my kids, and find out that my kid is doing anything but looking at the wall.

Four of the teachers described their ideal alternate assessment. Teacher A wants students tested on functional curriculum, such as knowing color words or appropriately identifying money. Teacher B thinks the current design of the assessment is "okay" but wishes students were tested on fewer essence statements. Teacher E wants the state to design the tasks but allow teachers to make adaptations based on the needs of their students. Teacher C stated that he would rather keep data in a

binder or jump drive that documents how a student can perform specific activities, similar to a portfolio assessment.

If someone said, “how did this child do xyz activity? I could say, “I’ll show you the videotape, this is what he did”. I think that would be more worthwhile than a standardized test that we have to create to meet the essence statement, implement, and you only get three chances to implement it and they pass or fail.

Until the state releases the new version of the STAAR Alternate, teachers will continue to speculate and worry about the standardized assessments. No district or teacher has concrete answers regarding the new assessment. One teacher stated “It’s kind of nerve wracking and frustrating. This is an individualized program, why are we standardizing a test? We might as well standardize goals and not have IEPs”

CHAPTER 5 DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to understand how Special Education teachers, in Texas, implement the STAAR Alternative exam in their classrooms. Understanding how teachers prepare their classrooms and students for the assessment was the integral piece of the research. The study sought to answer the following questions:

- 1) How do Special Education teachers, at the secondary level, prepare for implementation of the STAAR Alternative exam?
- 2) What types of guidance do the Special Education teachers receive from their school and district administrators?
- 3) How much time is required to prepare for each essence statement?
- 4) What types of student physiological responses do teachers utilize as a "response" on the STAAR Alt?
- 5) How do special education teachers academically prepare students for the alternative exam?

At the conclusion of the study, four major themes emerged from the study. All teachers indicated a lack of training and research, the exorbitant amount of time required to administer the STAAR Alternate, a greater amount of time spent on academics in lieu of functional curriculum, and the standardization of the alternate assessment. Four of the five participants had similar frustrations and opinions regarding the STAAR Alternate and its impact on their classroom. One teacher seemed to believe assessing students with severe cognitive delays had a positive impact on her classroom. The majority of the teachers felt the negative effects of testing students with intellectual delays with grade level academics.

Lack of Training

As indicated by Browder et al. (2003) there is little research on how to include academic content into the everyday routine of an alternative environment setting. Not only is their little research, but based on the experiences of the teachers in this study, there are no trainings or workshops offered on how to mesh together academic content and functional curriculum. Without guidance, teachers are left to figure out their own method for ensuring students receive grade level academics and some functional skills. Four of the five teachers studied indicated that finding a system to meld together functional and academic curriculum was a difficult endeavor requiring hours of research during their first year of teaching. Not one teacher received training or guidance, from the district, on how to accomplish this task.

Each teacher spent their own time researching and talking to others to determine how to teach grade level academics to their students while including some functional skills. When it came to the STAAR Alternate, each teacher had attended at least one workshop covering the basics of the assessment and how to create the tested activities. Each district offered some guidance on the assessment but all teachers felt they received more assistance, including concrete examples, from the Region 20 service center. District trainings did not offer concrete examples but focused on the technicalities and requirements of the test administration.

Flowers et al. (2005) suggest staff development that provides teachers with methods for integrating alternate assessment requirements into the daily routine of the classroom. Further, districts should offer training on how to teach academic concepts while continuing to provide functional and social curriculum to students. Without proper

training and guidance, teachers are skeptical about their students meeting state and federal academic expectations (Flowers et al., 2005).

Time Requirements

As indicated by Elliott and Roach (2007) tasks and work samples required of performance based assessments, such as the STAAR Alternate, are intensive and time-consuming. Roach, Elliott, and Berndt (2007) confirmed that teachers are concerned about the time required to conduct an alternate assessment and the instructional efficacy and appropriateness of the alternate assessment process. All five teachers agreed the necessary components of the current STAAR Alternate are time consuming resulting in hours of lost personal and classroom time. To meet the demands of the assessment each teacher must download testing materials and documentation sheets from the Texas Education Agency website, create activities for each essence statement, practice the activity with the student, formally test the student, document observations during the formal testing, and enter testing information, including observations, into the Pearson testing software. Depending on the number of students tested and the tested level of the students, each teacher spent anywhere from 20 to 100 hours testing students during the 2012-2013 academic year.

The process each teacher detailed correlates with Elliott and Roach's (2007) description of the requirements for a valid performance based assessment. Teachers must collect large amounts of tangible evidence to support a student's ability to complete a task. Performance assessments require copious documentation detailing justification for scores (Elliott & Roach, 2007). As discussed earlier, students tested with a Level II or Level III must generalize skills. Generalization requires repeated sampling of a task using different materials or conditions (Elliott and Roach, 2007). The

generalization fraction of the test requires more time to create extra materials or conditions, more time to actually test, and more documentation to enter into the software system.

Each teacher in the study agreed the time required to fully implement the STAAR Alternate was overwhelming and tedious. Flowers et al. (2005) indicated that teachers surveyed reported challenges in documenting evidence and the time required to fully implement the alternate assessment. Teachers in the Flowers et al. (2005) study indicated that the alternate assessment has created vast amount of paperwork competing with teaching and personal time. Flowers et al.'s finding was reiterated in this study as each teacher described the amount of teaching and personal time lost to fully implement the alternate assessment. While some may consider loss of time a flaw of the teacher or an inability to organize, Flowers et al. (2005) suggest the paperwork burden may be due to "unrealistic expectations for individual student documentation" (p. 90).

Academic verses Functional Curriculum

Approximately three percent of the general population is intellectually delayed (First, 2000). Table 5-1 details the percentage of individuals within varying levels of intellectual disabilities.

Table 5-1. First (2000) conceptualization of the amount of individuals with intellectual disabilities, detailed by severity of cognitive deficit

Form of Intellectual Delay	IQ Score	Percent of Individuals with Intellectual Delays
Mild	50 – 55 to 70	85%
Moderate	35 – 40 to 50 – 55	10%
Severe	20 – 25 to 35 – 40	3% to 4%
Profound	0 to 20-25	1% to 2%

Students with intellectual delays have significantly subaverage general intellectual functioning as illustrated in Table 4-2 (First, 2000). Along with low IQ scores, students also have limitations in adaptive functioning in at least two of the following areas: communication, home living, social skills, self-care, community resources, functional academic skills, vocational skills, recreation/leisure, health, and safety (First, 2000). Before the requirements of NCLB, teachers of students with intellectual delays spent the day teaching students tasks in the aforementioned adaptive areas. Since the inception of alternate assessments linked to grade level academics, teachers spend little time on functional curriculum and more time on grade-level academics.

Though academics are heavily stressed, functional and social skills are an important component of the daily routine of students with intellectual delays (Flowers et al., 2005). An unintended consequence of alternate assessments is the narrowing of curriculum to focus only on grade-level academics (Flowers et al., 2005). As suggested by Flowers et al. (2005) the teachers in this study spend more time on grade-level curriculum and a limited amount of time on functional curriculum. Browder et al. (2005) further confirmed this phenomenon by stating that functional skills, which are important to the daily life of students with intellectual delays, are slipping in priority to state standards in academic subjects.

Agran, Aler, and Wehmeyer (as cited in Flowers et al., 2005) indicated that teachers ranked functional and social skills as more important when compared to grade level academics. In this study, four of the five teachers want more time to spend with their students on hygiene, toileting, and independence skills but they rush through much

of the functional curriculum to ensure academic subjects are taught. All teachers in the study understand the need and importance of academics but four of the teachers would rather spend time on academic skills relevant to the needs of the students, for example identifying and understanding the value of money.

Browder et al. (2005) suggests teaching academics while embedding functional skills. Students with cognitive delays need instruction in daily living, independence, and transition. Many teachers try to maintain a balance between academic requirements and functional skills as a “good faith effort to provide what they deem to be essential tools for these students to live successful lives outside of school” (Kettler, Elliot, Stephen, Beddow, Compton, McGrath, Kaase, Bruen, Ford, & Hinton, (2010), p.472). Unfortunately, many grade level objectives are difficult to tie in or balance with functional curriculum. As indicated by the data, each teacher spends little time on functional skills and more time on grade-level academic requirements. Each teacher in the study is able to include some functional curriculum into the daily routine but four of the five teachers would rather spend the bulk of the day teaching functional curriculum. Four of the five teachers believe their students are not given enough time to practice hygiene, independent living, and vocational skills.

Standardization of the STAAR Alternate

In a study conducted by Flowers et al. (2005), 79% of teachers surveyed did not believe the alternative assessment truly reflected their students. Browder et al. (2005) suggest that current alternate assessments for students with severe intellectual delays are flawed. Confirming both Flowers et al. (2005) and Browder et al. (2005), four of the five teachers in this study do not like the current alternate assessment and are worried about the future standardized STAAR Alternate. Each teacher in the study wants their

students to be tested to determine progress; however, three of the teachers would rather the assessment focused on functional skills or academics that reflect the students' abilities.

In Texas, the STAAR alternate tests academic concepts, functional curriculum is not tested (STAAR Alternate Manual, 2011). Some states, however, do include functional skills as part of their alternate assessment. In a study conducted by Browder et al. (2005), 33% of states include vocational or career indicators in their alternate assessment. The most prevalent functional skills included in alternate assessments are vocational and communication (Browder et al., 2005). Other functional skills are included in some state alternate assessments. Table 5-2 illustrates types of performance indicators included in state alternate assessments.

Table 5-2. Type of functional skills used as performance indicators in some state alternate assessments

Functional Performance Indicator	Number of States
Vocational Career	14
Communication	10
Social/Emotional	8
Personal/Home management	7
Health	6
Recreation/Leisure	6
Community	5
Motor	5
Independent Living	3
Self-determination	3

Kettler et al. (2010) state that many teachers believe an ideal assessment reflects the balance of academic concepts with functional domains, as listed in Table 5-2.

Currently, teachers in Texas have flexibility in the methods used to assess the student, flexibility in the administration of the assessment, and flexibility in the scoring (Gong & Marion, 2006). During the 2014-2015 school year, the state will release a

criterion referenced standardized test wherein the teachers are provided with all tasks and activities. All teachers are fearful of the new assessment and wonder how the new assessment will assess students who are currently tested at a Level I. Teachers also fear how their students' individual needs will be considered as the new STAAR Alternate will be a criterion referenced and standardized assessment. One teacher summed up the uncertainties of the teachers, "will they be tested adequately and will they be provided every opportunity to succeed in taking that test"?

As mentioned by three of the teachers in the study, they worry about assessment requirements for students with no awareness of letters, numbers, or communication. When revising the STAAR Alternate, Texas stakeholders must consider the presymbolic and noncommunicative population of students (Towles-Reeves et al., 2009). Currently, students at a Level I must react to stimuli or make meaningful changes in voice (such as squealing) or make facial changes. Instead of reacting to stimuli or making changes in voice and/or muscle tone, Browder et al. (2003) suggest defining specific voluntary responses the student can learn to make as a reflection of understanding. Using this process, a student can actively participate and demonstrate mastery instead of passively reacting to stimuli (Browder et al., 2003).

Implications and Recommendations for Practice

Assessing students with severe intellectual delays is a requirement under the law. Finding ways to meet the demands of the assessment and the needs of students with intellectual delays is a concern of teachers, including those in this study. Roach, Elliott, and Berndt (2007) and Roach and Elliott (2006) stress the importance of training special education teachers to increase their understanding of the assessment and appropriate instructional strategies. Districts should consider creating and offering

workshops and trainings that detail how to mesh together functional and academic skills and how to streamline the alternate assessment process or create templates for data collection (Flowers et al., 2005).

With little research in specific trainings, districts can select teachers, such as the teachers in this study, who successfully teach students with intellectual delays. Workshops should include how to incorporate functional and vocational skills into the daily routine of the classroom and how to take grade level academics and bring them down to the students' ability levels. The teachers in this study most benefitted from concrete examples and "make and take" workshops. In district offered trainings, teachers should be given the opportunity to see examples and make actual activities that can be used in their classroom. Browder et al. (2006) confirm that teachers need examples of how to appropriately teach middle and high school academic standards to students with intellectual delays. Another suggestion is encouraging novice teachers to observe veteran teachers who have mastered teaching academics while embedding functional skills.

Beyond training, districts should consider tools to assist teachers in meshing functional and academic curriculum. Three of the five teachers use Unique Learning as a way to facilitate academics while teaching functional skills, such as cooking. Districts should consider programs such as Unique Learning as an avenue to help teachers create meaningful and appropriate activities for their students. Three of the five teachers also used a smart board to facilitate learning. Each teacher indicated the technology was loved by their students and helped in teaching abstract academic

subjects. Installing such technology in classrooms with students with intellectual delays may benefit the teacher and the students.

In this study, teachers indicated time requirements are a negative effect of the STAAR Alternate. For teachers to ensure assessments are met, teachers lose valuable in class teaching time and their own personal and family time. Unlike general education assessments, the STAAR Alternate is not administered on one day during the school year. Teachers carve out time during the day to individually test their students, leaving the other students to be supervised by paraprofessionals. Due to the disabilities of the students, they are only tested in 15 to 20 minute increments. Once testing is complete, the teacher spends time outside the school day entering data into the computer.

Flowers et al. (2005) state that few teachers had sufficient resources needed to appropriately assess students. It is imperative that districts consider finding necessary resources and creative strategies to assist teachers in testing students (Flowers et al., 2005). For example, provide a substitute to facilitate learning while the teacher spends the day testing students and entering data into the testing software. In this study, each teacher indicated their district paid for substitutes to allow them to attend trainings during the school day. In the STAAR Alternate Survey conducted by TCASE, 42% of special education directors indicated they hired substitute teachers to assist in the STAAR Alternate process. Of the 42% who hired substitutes, 72% stated they hired substitutes from three to five days to support the teacher (STAAR Alternate Survey, 2013).

Ideally, lawmakers and stakeholders will develop a curriculum that allows for a balance between academic content, individualization based on student needs, and

functional skills (Ayers et al., 2011). Without access to functional skills, parents must pursue outside resources to prepare students for independence. In lieu of a separate functional curriculum, Lowrey et al. (2007) suggest establishing a guideline that allows teachers to integrate the state standards with the individualized functional needs of the students. Browder et al. (2004) suggest that alternate assessments include performance indicators representing general education standards and functional curriculum. Including functional academics on alternate assessments ensures teachers include functional skills into daily learning (Browder et al., 2004).

At the completion of this study, the apparent need for advocacy emerged. Four of the five teachers expressed frustration with the STAAR alternate process and a desire to express their concerns. One organization, TCASE, offers its members access to professional development, blogs, yearly conferences, and other resources (TCASE, n.d.). As members of TCASE, teachers have access to the advocacy page that includes an “advocacy toolkit” with tips on letter writing and communicating with law makers (TCASE, n.d.). Through the organization, teachers also have access to a legal team and liability insurance (TCASE, n.d.). TCASE is an avenue for teachers of students with profound intellectual delays to express their concerns with the current alternate assessment process.

Implications for Future Research

This study confirmed the need for further research on the use of alternate assessments and students with severe intellectual delays. As suggested by Browder et al. (2005), this study illustrated the unintended consequence of focusing on grade-level

academic teaching thereby eliminating much of the functional and vocational curriculum needed in the classroom. Some areas for further research include:

- Research into the potential effects of the grade-level academic curriculum in lieu of functional curriculum is needed. Students with intellectual delays need functional, social, and vocational skills to develop independence skills. With limited time spent on functional skills, are students developing as much as independence as possible? What are the future outcomes of students with intellectual delays who spent little time on functional curriculum (Ayers et al., 2011)?
- Is testing students with intellectual delays solely on grade-level academic concepts an accurate measure of the abilities of the students?
- Currently, legislation requires an alternate assessment to determine student progress; however, states have latitude in developing their assessment. Further research is needed to determine appropriate types of assessments for students with cognitive disabilities. Can assessments focus on functional and vocation skills in conjunction with academics? Some states utilize functional indicators in their performance assessment, this seems an appropriate avenue to explore in Texas. Browder et al. (2004) suggest an alternate assessment that focuses on academic standards and functional curriculum is appropriate for students with intellectual delays.
- Towles-Reeves et al. (2009) suggest creating two sets of alternative achievement standards. A parallel set of standards would ensure all students with intellectual delays are challenged and are developing skills based on their academic abilities. Further research into parallel standards for students tested with alternate assessments is needed to determine if creating two sets of standards will facilitate more applicable alternate assessments for students as well as more meaningful learning opportunities.

Conclusions

Alternate assessments are a requirement under NCLB, but fully understanding how to create an assessment that meets the requirements of the law and the needs of the students it serves is a perplexing issue. In Texas, the STAAR Alternate requires students take assessments in reading, math, science, and social studies, depending on their grade. To prepare students for the performance based assessment, teachers spend hours preparing activities for the grade-level essence statements and practicing

tested skills with their students. As suggested by Browder et al. (2005), a consequence of the alternate assessment requirement is the loss of valuable time spent on functional curriculum. In this study, each teacher spent less than two hours a day on functional, social, and vocational skills, which are needed for students with intellectual delays to transition into society. Finding time to work on functional skills is difficult and only adds to the stress of the teacher. Teachers in this study were not averse to testing their students rather they want an alternate assessment that is meaningful to the needs of students with profound intellectual disabilities. Stakeholders and policy makers in Texas need to look at the current alternate assessment and determine how to balance functional skills with academic concepts. If a balance in functional skills and grade level curriculum is not created, then teaching functional curriculum may continue to slip in priority.

APPENDIX A
THE STAGES OF CONCERN QUESTIONNAIRE

0 Irrelevant	1 Not true of me now	2 Somewhat true of me now	3 5	6 Very true of me now	7
-----------------	-------------------------	---------------------------------	--------	-----------------------------	---

Copyright © SEDL

1. I am concerned about students' attitudes toward the innovation.	0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
2. I now know of some other approaches that might work better.	0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
3. I am more concerned about another innovation.	0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
4. I am concerned about not having enough time to organize myself each day.	0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
5. I would like to help other faculty in their use of the innovation.	0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
6. I have a very limited knowledge of the innovation.	0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
7. I would like to know the effect of reorganization on my professional status.	0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
8. I am concerned about conflict between my interests and my responsibilities.	0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
9. I am concerned about revising my use of the innovation.	0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
10. I would like to develop working relationships with both our faculty and outside faculty using this innovation.	0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
11. I am concerned about how the innovation affects students.	0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
12. I am not concerned about the innovation at this time.	0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
13. I would like to know who will make the decisions in the new system.	0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
14. I would like to discuss the possibility of using the innovation.	0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
15. I would like to know what resources are available if we decide to adopt the innovation.	0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
16. I am concerned about my inability to manage all that the innovation requires.	0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
17. I would like to know how my teaching or administration is supposed to change.	0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
18. I would like to familiarize other departments or persons with the progress of this new approach.	0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

0 Irrelevant	1 Not true of me now	2 Somewhat true of me now	3 Very true of me now	4	5	6	7
-----------------	-------------------------	---------------------------------	-----------------------------	---	---	---	---

Copyright © SEDL

19. I am concerned about evaluating my impact on students.	0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
20. I would like to revise the innovation's approach.	0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
21. I am preoccupied with things other than the innovation.	0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
22. I would like to modify our use of the innovation based on the experiences of our students.	0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
23. I spend little time thinking about the innovation.	0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
24. I would like to excite my students about their part in this approach.	0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
25. I am concerned about time spent working with nonacademic problems related to the innovation.	0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
26. I would like to know what the use of the innovation will require in the immediate future.	0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
27. I would like to coordinate my efforts with others to maximize the innovation's effects.	0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
28. I would like to have more information on time and energy commitments required by the innovation.	0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
29. I would like to know what other faculty are doing in this area.	0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
30. Currently, other priorities prevent me from focusing my attention on the innovation.	0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
31. I would like to determine how to supplement, enhance, or replace the innovation.	0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
32. I would like to use feedback from students to change the program.	0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
33. I would like to know how my role will change when I am using the innovation.	0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
34. Coordination of tasks and people is taking too much of my time.	0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
35. I would like to know how the innovation is better than what we have now.	0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

APPENDIX B
CASE STUDY INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Demographic Information:

Name: _____ School: _____

What is your age range?

20 to 30 31 to 40 41 to 50 51 to 60 60 or above

What is your certification area?

How many years have you taught? _____

How many years have you taught in an ALE/Lifeskills unit?

Study Related Information:

1. How many students did you test using an alternate assessment last school year?

2. Approximately how many students will you test, using an alternate assessment this school year? _____

3. About how many hours did you spend, either last school year or this school year, creating the activities for each essence statement? _____

4. About how many hours did you spend, per student, **practicing** test like activities (combined total for all subjects tested and essence statements)?

5. About how many hours did you spend, per student, **administering the assessment** (combined total for all subjects tested and essence statements)?

6. For students who are nonverbal, what kinds of reactions did you use as an “answer” on the STAAR exam?

7. Did you receive any guidance (workshops, booklets, meetings, sample activities, etc.) on how to create activities for each essence statement?
8. How many hours per day do you spend on teaching functional curriculum? Please describe types of activities.
9. How much time do you spend each day teaching academics? Please describe some activities.
10. Describe the guidance/professional development you received to help you “mesh” general education curriculum with functional curriculum.
11. Are you comfortable with teaching academic subjects, such as Algebra, World Geography, and Biology? Why or why not?
12. As a teacher of students with severe intellectual disabilities, what is your opinion on teaching academic subjects such as Algebra, in lieu of functional curriculum, such as hygiene?
13. Is there anything I did not ask that you feel is important to this study?

APPENDIX C

LEARNER CHARACTERISTICS INVENTORY

Citation: Towles-Reeves, E., Kearns, J., Kleinert, H., & Kleinert, J. (2006). *Learner characteristics inventory*. Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky, National Alternate Assessment Center.

Purpose: This inventory will assist in describing the population of students who take the STAAR Alternate assessment. More specifically, the inventory will create a picture of the disabilities and needs of each of the students tested in your classroom.

1. Student's grade: _____
2. Student's age in years: _____
3. Student's primary IDEA disability label:
 - Intellectual Disability (Includes Mild, Moderate, and Profound)
 - Multiple Disabilities
 - Autism
 - Speech/Language Impairment
 - Visual Impairment
 - Traumatic Brain Injury
 - Emotional Disability
 - Deaf/Blind
 - Other Health Impairment
 - Orthopedic
 - Other
4. Is your student's primary language a language other than English?
 - Yes
 - No
5. If yes, what is your student's primary language (the dominant language spoken in the student's home)? _____

6. What is the student's primary classroom setting?
- Special school
 - Homebound, receives services from the district at home.
 - Regular school, *self-contained special education classroom*, some special inclusion (art, music, PE) but return to their special education class for most of school day.
 - Regular school, *primarily self-contained special education classroom*, some academic inclusion, students go to some general education academic classes (reading, math, science, in addition to specials) but are in general education classes less than 40% of the school day.
 - Regular school, *resource room/general education class*, students receive resource room services, but are in general education classes 40% or more of the school day.
 - Regular school, *general education class inclusive/collaborative* (students based in general education classes, special education services are primarily delivered in the general education classes) – at least 80% of the school day is spent in general education classes.
7. Expressive Communication (check the best description)
- Uses symbolic language to communicate: Student uses verbal or written words, signs, Braille, or language-based augmentative systems to request, initiate, and respond to questions, describe things or events, and express refusal.
 - Uses intentional communication, but not at a symbolic language level: Student uses understandable communication through such modes as gestures, pictures, objects/textures, points, etc., to clearly express a variety of intentions.
 - Student communicates primarily through cries, facial expressions, change in muscle tone, etc., but no clear use of objects/textures, regularized gestures, pictures, signs, etc., to communicate.

8. Does your student use an augmentative communication system in addition to or in place of oral speech?

- Yes
- No

9. Receptive language (check the best description)

- Independently follows 1-2 step directions presented through words (e.g. words may be spoken, signed, printed, or any combination) and does NOT need additional cues.
- Requires additional cues (e.g., gestures, pictures, objects, or demonstrations/models) to follow 1-2 step directions.
- Alerts to sensory input from another person (auditory, visual, touch, movement) BUT requires actual physical assistance to follow simple directions.
- Uncertain response to sensory stimuli (e.g., sound/voice; sight/gesture; touch; movement; smell).

10. Vision (check the best description)

- Vision within normal limits
- Corrected vision within normal limits
- Low vision; uses vision for some activities of daily living
- No functional use of vision for activities of daily living, or unable to determine functional use of vision

11. Hearing (check the best description)

- Hearing within normal limits
- Corrected hearing loss within normal limits
- Hearing loss aided, but still with significant loss
- Profound loss, even with aids.
- Unable to determine functional use of hearing

12. Motor (check the best description)

- No significant motor dysfunction that requires adaptations
- Requires adaptations to support motor functioning (e.g., walker, adapted utensils, and/or keyboard)
- Uses wheelchair, positioning equipment, and/or assistive devices for most activities
- Needs personal assistance for most/all motor activities

13. Engagement (check the best description)

- Initiates and sustains social interactions
- Responds with social interaction, but does not initiate or sustain social interactions
- Alerts to others
- Does not alert to others

14. Health Issues/Attendance (check the best description)

- Attends at least 90% of school days
- Attends approximately 75% of school days; absences primarily due to health issues
- Attends approximately 50% or less of school days; absences primarily due to health issues
- Receives Homebound instruction due to health issues
- Highly irregular attendance or homebound instruction due to issues **other** than health

15. Reading (check the best description)

- Reads fluently with critical understanding in print or Braille (e.g., to differentiate fact/opinion, point of view, emotional response, etc.)
- Reads fluently with basic (literal) understanding from paragraphs/short passages with narrative/informational texts in print or Braille.
- Reads basic sight words, simple sentences, directions, bullets, and/or lists in print or Braille
- Aware of text/Braille, follows directionality, makes letter distinctions, or tells a story from the pictures that is not linked to the text.
- No observable awareness of print or Braille.

16. Mathematics (check the best description)

- Applies computational procedures to solve real-life or routine word problems from a variety of contexts.
- Does computational procedures with or without a calculator.
- Counts with 1:1 correspondence to at least 10, and/or makes numbered sets of items.
- Counts by rote to 5.
- No observable awareness or use of numbers.

APPENDIX D PERMISSION FOR LCI USE

Subject: RE: Permission for LCI use
Sender: Kearns, Jacqueline A <jacqueline.kearns@uky.edu>
Recipient: Gonzalez,Kristina M <kvgonza@ufl.edu>
Date: 04/22/2013 11:43 AM



Kristina

It is my pleasure to grant you permission to use the LCI. Best Wishes.

Jacqui Kearns

Jacqueline F. Kearns, Ed.D.
Human Development Institute
University of Kentucky
Lexington, KY 40507
jkearns@uky.edu

-----Original Message-----

From: Gonzalez,Kristina M [mailto:kvgonza@ufl.edu]
Sent: Sunday, April 21, 2013 6:05 PM
To: Kearns, Jacqueline A
Subject: Re: Permission for LCI use

Hello Dr. Kearns -

My name is Kristina Gonzalez and I am a doctoral candidate at the University of Florida. My dissertation focus is understanding the use of alternate assessments with students with profound intellectual disabilities from a teacher's perspective. My research is a multiple case study and will take place in San Antonio, Texas. I am seeking permission to utilize the Learner Characteristic Inventory as a tool for data collection in my study. I believe using the inventory will add to the credibility of my study. Feel free to email with questions, or you can call me at 210-262-3156.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,
Kristina Gonzalez

APPENDIX E
LESSON PLAN ANALYSIS

	Ineffective	Developing	Effective	Highly Effective
Overall Lesson Plan Student Expectation & Use of Knowledge– What is student expected to do? Level 1 – student shows awareness Level 2 – student makes choices	Missing one of elements below	Contains all elements below	Contains all elements below, with some elaboration	Contains all elements below, with some elaboration & creativity
Typical Materials & Presentation of Materials Level 1 – completed graphs/organizers – presented one at a time. Level 2 – partially completed graphs/organizers – given choices	Materials not appropriate for Level	Materials offered but cannot discern for what level	Materials sufficiently used and delineated for Level	Materials sufficiently used and delineated for each student
Typical Verbs Level 1 – Acknowledge, participate, respond, experience Level 2 – identify, assist, match	Not evident	Not relevant to students' needs	Appropriate use of verbs by Level	Detailed and explanatory use of verbs, by student
Use of Tools Level 1 – student uses tool Level 2 – student chooses appropriate tool from 3 choices	Tools not identified	One tool listed but not specified by Level	Tools listed and how will be used in activity, by level	Detailed description of tools and how they will be used in activity for each student
Questions Level 1 – Not applicable Level 2 – basic recall	No questions Listed	One question listed	More than one question listed	Questions detailed
Investigations Level 1 – participate via reaction to stimulus Level 2 – can perform action	No reaction or action listed	A basic reaction or action is listed for all students	Reaction/action is listed based on STAAR Alt level	Reaction/action listed per each student
Generalization Level 1 – Not applicable Level 2 – yes, if given opportunity	No generalization described	Generalization considered	A generalization scenario is listed	Detailed generalization, including use of other tools is described

APPENDIX F
E-CONSENT FOR STAGES OF CONCERN QUESTIONNAIRE

Online Survey Consent Form for Stages of Concern Questionnaire

You are requested to participate in research that will be supervised by Principal Investigator, Kristina Gonzalez, on the impact of alternate assessments on teachers of students with severe cognitive impairments. This survey should take about 10 to 15 minutes to complete. Participation is voluntary; you can withdraw at any time without penalty. Survey responses will be kept anonymous. However, whenever one works with email/the internet there is always the risk of compromising privacy, confidentiality, and/or anonymity. Despite this possibility, the risks to your physical, emotional, social, professional, or financial well-being are considered to be minimal. There are no direct benefits associated with your participation.

You have the option to not respond to any questions that you choose. Submission of the completed survey will be interpreted as your informed consent to participate and that you affirm that you are at least 18 years of age.

If you have any questions about the research, please contact Kristina Gonzalez via email at kvgonza@ufl.edu or Dr. Bernard Oliver, Dissertation Chair/Supervisor, at beoliver@coe.ufl.edu. If you have questions about the treatment of human subjects, contact the University of Florida IRB Office at 352-392-043

APPENDIX G INFORMED CONSENT

Title: The Impact of Alternate Assessments on Teachers of Students with Severe Cognitive Impairments

Purpose of the research study:

The purpose of this qualitative study is to understand the impact of an alternate assessment on the structure of the classroom and preparation of students. Data collected will be utilized for a doctoral dissertation.

What you will do in the study:

1. Initially, you will sit in a one to one interview with the Principal Investigator. The interview will follow an interview protocol and will be recorded to ensure validity; the audio recording will be for Principal Investigator transcription only and will be destroyed at the completion of the study.
2. Following the interview, you will complete a Learner Characteristics Inventory (LCI) for each student you tested with the STAAR Alternate during the 2012-2013 school year.
3. Each participant will submit one lesson math plan detailing how one specific math objective was taught to prepare students for the STAAR Alternate.
4. A follow up interview may be necessary to clarify information from LCIs and/or lesson plan.

Time Required:

3 Hours over a 4 month period

Risks and Benefits:

Benefits include contributing to a young body of research regarding the use of alternate assessments with students with severe cognitive delays. There are not direct benefits to you for participating in this study. No risks are noted.

Compensation:

You will receive a \$50.00 Visa or MasterCard gift card at the completion of the study.

Confidentiality:

Your identity will be kept confidential as allowed under the law. All data related to you and your classroom will receive a code number. Only the researcher will have the list of connected code numbers and names. In the narration of this study, you will receive a fictitious code name. The LCI does not require specific information regarding the identify of your students. Your name, students, school, and school district will receive pseudonyms in the final report of the study.

Voluntary participation:

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You will not be penalized for non-participation.

Right to withdraw from the study:

You have the right to withdraw your consent to participate in this study at any time without penalty.

Whom to contact if you have questions regarding this study:

Kristina Gonzalez (Principal
Investigator)
kvgonza@ufl.edu
210-262-3156

Bernard Oliver, Ed.D
(Dissertation Chair)
343B Norman Hall
PO Box 117053
Gainesville FL 32611
352-273-4358
beoliver@coe.ufl.edu

Whom to contact about your rights as a research participant:

IRB02 Office
Box 112250
University of Florida
Gainesville, FL 32611-2250

Agreement

I have read the informed consent protocol above. I voluntarily agree to participate in the study as described and I have received a copy of this description.

Participant

Date

Principal Investigator

Date

APPENDIX H
DATA TABLE FOR EACH TEACHER

Teacher A

What types of guidance received from their school/district (STAAR & Curriculum)	How much time is required to prepare for each essence statement	What types of student physiological responses are "responses"
District meetings with other LID teachers; two Region 20 workshops (the district paid a for a sub to attend one)	40 hours to prepare activities; 3 to 4 hours over time (10 to 15 minute chunks) to practice with each student; about 3 hours to administer, including documentation	Following eye gazing, listening to noises like "squealing", color coded matching (students can match but cannot make decisions on their own)
No district guidance - touched on at meetings but received no examples, had to figure out on own time, researching and talking to others		

How do they prepare students academically	Functional vs academic curriculum ("meshing")	Standardization of ALT
Use Unique Curriculum - News to You. Read a book, then do individualized activities. Spend 3 hours a day on academics (all subjects)	Spend about 2 hours a day, cook 3 days a week, fold clothes and recycle. We have to carve out time for potty training and feeding.	I'm very scared about that. Most of them can't write, don't even know what a pencil or crayon is. Not real happy about it, spent hours testing a Level 1 and found he was an "automatic failure", I could have spent those hours potty training him.
Teach prerequisite skills - had to learn to bring TEKS down to the needs of the students - conducted her own research and talked to other teachers for guidance (cognitive ability of 6 months to 2 year old)	Would rather focus on functional curriculum: writing their address, count to 10, learning to tell time, or money skills. Has 2 centers, one sensory and one vocational - fewer behaviors when students focus on functional skills	Would like to be tested on functional curriculum, do they know color words? Do they know how much a quarter is or what a quarter is?

Teacher B

What types of guidance received from their school/district (STAAR & Curriculum)	How much time is required to prepare for each essence statement	What types of student physiological responses are "responses"
Went to Region 20, district paid for sub	About 80 hours: developing, writing down, documenting, and inputting into Pearson	Use of manipulatives and augmentative devices, student reached out and touched

How do they prepare students academically	Functional vs academic curriculum ("meshing")	Standardization of ALT
4 periods of academics each day Lesson Plan: does not create lesson plans.	1 period a day on vocational skills	Thinks it will be harder. Right now teachers have leeway when writing assessments, how will the state know what kids need?
Uses pre-requisite skills, did not find this difficult due to the number of resources out there	Would rather spend majority of the day on vocational skills or functional curriculum: time, money,	The test is "okay" but there should be fewer essence statements. A 2/3 student takes 32 tests all together.

Teacher C

What types of guidance received from their school/district (STAAR & Curriculum)	How much time is required to prepare for each essence statement	What types of student physiological responses are "responses"
One district training that only covered rules of STAAR Alt & how to enter data into Pearson; Region 20 make and takes - District was supportive of attending training "if you need to go to that training, go". Politics with words, cannot call it "hand over hand" but can say "assist". Were asked to reconsider testing at a Level 1, but were not discouraged from using it.	About 3 hours for one statement, includes getting all the materials together, figuring out what to do, printing up documents, looking through resources, etc. spent a lot of weekends thinking about how to design them so it met the needs of my student; Practice with students every other day, but there are days where activities cannot be practiced due to student medical issues	Eye gazes, facial gestures, hand movements, even head movement. Does not focus on vocalization b/c students can not do that when requested, it is sporadic. Turning their head or eyes is easier for them to accomplish.
No, had to figure it out on his own, talking to other teachers		

How do they prepare students academically	Functional vs academic curriculum ("meshing")	Standardization of ALT
Spend an hour on academics each day. Has a smartboard and actively uses it to teach academics.	From an hour to 2 1/2 hours per day. Some days we spend the whole day changing because of accidents.	Likes not having to write the activities, spent hours last year creating them. How will they write tests for students they don't know? I just don't know how the test will be designed so it meets the needs of the students, their abilities.
Has to create lesson plans that are grade appropriate for students in 5th grade, 10th, 11th, and 12th grade - but they have cognitive ability of 12 month to 2 year old.	Would rather spend time on functional skills "for my kids it is more appropriate". I want to focus on behaviors with my kids, like hygiene, living skills as far as being able to, how to sit at the table.	I would rather have a little binder and jump drive that documents how the student completed an activity.

Teacher D

What types of guidance received from their school/district (STAAR & Curriculum)	How much time is required to prepare for each essence statement	What types of student physiological responses are "responses"
One workshop in the district & attended a workshop at Region 20. Not from the district - "it's common sense". Figured out on own time, researched/read articles	Just writing activities, about 20 hours, that doesn't include getting materials ready; took about 6 weeks practicing each subject with students; administering the test took about 30 minutes, for all subjects per student	Some of the kids pick up items to "experience", they have to manipulate it in their hands. Kids that don't have hand movement, I actually place it in their hand so they can touch & explore it. I follow eye gaze by putting the object in their visual field and wait for them to gaze at it. I record answers and put into voice output devices.

How do they prepare students academically	Functional vs academic curriculum ("meshing")	Standardization of ALT
Spend more time teaching academics than functional "we have to". Used Unique Learning - News to You.	Teach on and off throughout the whole day, but specifically about an hour. We do cooking once a week. There is a lifeskills station where the students spend 15 minutes a day starting the laundry, folding clothes, or doing the dishwasher.	I'm looking forward to the standard because this one is too subjective. The teacher makes the test, which isn't fair, nobody else makes the state test for their students. The only thing I do like about it, is that it opens your eyes to activities you should be doing and the way the tests are set up.
I look at the TEK and then I take it down to their grade level, it might be Algebra but its all the way down to counting or recognizing numbers. Can do this easily, it's "common sense"	I think if you're meshing it together, then it shouldn't be a problem. "academics is school, they should be given academics, and they should be getting what everybody else is getting".	I like where they send us the tasks already made, but then letting us put in the adaptations our kids need.

Teacher E

What types of guidance received from their school/district (STAAR & Curriculum)	How much time is required to prepare for each essence statement	What types of student physiological responses are "responses"
Teachers discouraged from using Level 1. Attended workshops at Region 20, the district paid for her to attend 1x this school year. More training last school year than this year.	Probably 80 to 100 hours; practicing with students is about 100 hours b/c we practice everyday; takes about 3 hours to administer (broken into small chunks) and another hour to input into the computer system	One nonverbal student who is capable of moving items, he does a lot of matching and grouping. He cannot write in any way, he can just scribble.
One workshop where they talked about some of that		

How do they prepare students academically	Functional vs academic curriculum ("meshing")	Standardization of ALT
Spends about 4 hours a day on academics - reads a story then they go through and identify vocabulary. Covers all four subjects with hands on activities. Uses Unique Learning & has a smartboard.	Spend about 30 minutes a day on activities, with cooking about an hour. Brush teeth everyday after breakfast, cook twice a week. Do laundry, service the campus when students need clothes washed due to accidents.	I am concerned about what they are going to do, if they go to paper/pencil, I really hope they are going to be able to accommodate for Level 1 students. Right now, for a five minute activity, I'll spend from developing, printing, the whole thing, about an hour.
Bringing the TEKS down is "a bit of a process", but don't do all the TEKS, cover only a 1/4 of them, "we do so much" repetition	We need more functional. I prefer topics like money, cooking, and things that are going to make them as independent as possible. Without those functional skills, the academic part is not going to matter.	

REFERENCES

- Ayers, K., Douglas, K., Lowrey, K., & Sievers, C., (2011). I can identify Saturn but I can't brush my teeth: What happens when the curricular focus for students with severe disabilities shifts. *Education and Training in Autism and developmental Disabilities*, 46(1), pp. 11-21.
- Bouck, E., (2012). Secondary students with moderate/severe intellectual disability: Considerations of curriculum and post-school outcomes from the national longitudinal transition study-2. *Journal of Intellectual Disability Research*, 56(12), pp. 1175-1186.
- Brantlinger, E., Jimenez, R., Klingner, J., Pugach, M., Richardson, V., (2005). Qualitative studies in special education. *Exceptional Children*, 71(2), pp. 195-207.
- Browder, D., Algrim-Delzell, L., Flowers, C., Karvonen, M., Spooner, F., & Algozzine, R., (2005). How states implement alternate assessments for students with disabilities: Recommendations for national policy. *Journal of Disability and Policy Studies*, 15(4), pp. 209-220.
- Browder, D., Flowers, C., Ahlgren-Delzell, L., Karvonen, M., Spooner, F., & Algozzine, F. (2004). The alignment of alternate assessment content with academic and functional curricula. *The Journal of Special Education*, 37(4), pp. 211-223.
- Browder, D., Spooner, F., Algrim-Delzell, L., Flowers, C., Algozzine, B., & Karvonen, M. (2003). A content analysis of the curricular philosophies reflected in states' alternative assessment performance indicators. *Research & Practice for Persons with Disabilities*, 28(4), pp.165-181.
- Browder, D., Spooner, F., Wakeman, S., Trela, K., & Bakder, J. (2006). Aligning instruction with academic content standards: Finding the link. *Research & Practice for Persons with Severe Disabilities*, 31(4), pp. 309-321.
- Browder, D., Trela, K., & Jimenez, B. (2007). Training teachers to follow a task analysis to engage middle school students with moderate and severe developmental disabilities in grade appropriate literature. *Focus on Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities*, 22(4), pp. 206-219.
- Cheung, D., Hattie, J., Ng, D., (2001). Reexamining the stages of concern questionnaire: A test of alternative models. *The Journal of Educational Research*, 94(4), pp. 226-236.
- Creswell, J.W. (2009). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications. Edgewood ISD. (n.d.). *About us*. <http://www.eisd.net/domain/59>

Ee, J. & Soh, K. (2005). Teacher perceptions on what a functional curriculum should be for children with special needs. *International Journal of Special Education*, 20(2), pp. 6-18.

Elliot, S.N., & Roach, A.T. (2007). Alternate assessments of students with significant disabilities: Alternative approaches, common technical challenges. *Applied Measurement in Education*, 20(3), pp. 301-333.

First, M., (2000) *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders* (4th Ed). Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Association. Retrieved from:
<http://online.statref.com/document.aspx?fxid=37&docid=17>. 4/24/2013 1:40:53 PM CDT (UTC -05:00).

Flowers, C., Ahlgren-Delzell, L., Browder, D., Spooner, F. (2005). Teachers' perceptions of alternate assessments. *Research & Practice for Persons with Severe Disabilities*, 30(2), pp. 81-92.

Flowers, C., Browder, D., Ahlgren-Delzell, L. (2006). An analysis of three states' alignment between language arts and mathematics standards and alternate assessments. *Exceptional Children*, 72(2), pp. 201-215.

Flowers, C., Wakeman, S., & Browder, D.M., (2009). Links for academic learning (LAL): A conceptual model for investigating alignment of alternative assessments based on alternative achievement standards. *Educational Measurement: Issues and Practice*, 28(1), p. 25-37. Retrieved from:
<http://www.naacpartners.org/publications.aspx>

George, A.A., Hall, G.E., & Stiegelbauer, S.M. (2006). *Measuring implementation in schools: The stages of concern questionnaire*. Austin, TX: SEDL

Gong, B., & Marion, S. (2006). *Dealing with flexibility in assessments for students with significant cognitive disabilities*. (Synthesis Report 60) Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota, National Center for Educational Outcomes.

Gordon, S. (2006). Making sense of the inclusion debate under IDEA. *Brigham Young University Education and Law Journal*, 189.

Harlandale ISD. (n.d.) *About us*. <http://www.harlandale.net/?PN=AboutUs>

Individuals With Disabilities Education Act, 20 U.S.C. § 1400 (2004).

Jimenez, B., Browder, D., & Courtade, G. (2008). *Teaching an algebraic equation to high school students with moderate developmental disabilities*. Education and Training in Developmental Disabilities, 43(2), pp. 266-274.

Johnson, E.S., & Arnold, N. (2007). Examining an alternate assessment: What are we testing? *Journal of Disability Policy Studies*, 18(23), p. Individuals with Disabilities Education Act Amendments of 1997 PL 105-17

- Kettler, R., Elliot, S., Stephen, N., Beddow, P., Compton, E., McGrath, D., Kaase, K., Bruen, C., Ford, L., & Hinton, K. (2010). *What do alternate assessments of alternate academic achievement standards measure? A multitrait-multimethod analysis*. Exceptional Children, 76(4), pp. 457-474.
- Kornhaber, M.L. (2004). Appropriate and inappropriate forms of testing, assessment And accountability. *Educational Policy*, 18, pp. 45-70.
- Kwok, P., (2013). The role of context in teachers' concerns about the implementation of an innovative curriculum. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 38, pp. 44-55.
- Lowrey, K., Renzaglia, A., Chezan, L. (2007). Impact of alternate assessment on curricula for students with severe disabilities: Purpose driven or process driven? *Assessment for Effective Intervention*, 32(4), pp. 244-253.
- National Alternate Assessment Center (n.d.). *Tools for alternate assessment*. Retrieved from: <http://www.naacpartners.org/>
- No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001, Pub. L. No. 107-110, § 115, Stat. 1425 (2002).
- Pearson Texas Assessment
<https://www.pearsonaccess.com/cs/Satellite?pagename=Pearson/QuickLink/tx>
- Pullin, D. (2005). When one size does not fit all: The special challenges of accountability testing for students with disabilities. *Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education*, 104(2), p.199-222.
- Region 11 (n.d.) *Instructional support: medically fragile*. Retrieved from <http://www.esc11.net/Page/1247>
- Roach, A. & Elliott, S., (2006). The influence of access to general education curriculum on alternate assessment performance of students with significant cognitive disabilities. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 28(2), pp. 181-194.
- Roach, A., Elliott, S., & Berndt, S. (2007). Teacher perceptions and the consequential validity of an alternate assessment for students with significant cognitive disabilities. *Journal of Disability Policy Studies*, 18(3), pp. 168-175.
- San Jose State University (n.d.) *Lesson Plan Evaluation Template*. Retrieved from: http://www.cob.sjsu.edu/splane_m/meira/LPEval.htm
- Schertz-Cibolo-Universal City Independent School District (n.d) *About us*.
<http://www.scuc.txed.net/aboutus.cfm>
- Stake, R. (1999). The goods on American education. *Phi Delta Kappan*. 80(9).

Stony Brook University (2011). *Lesson Evaluation Form Rubric*. Retrieved from
<http://www.stonybrook.edu/pep/docs/August152001LEFRubricforWebsite.pdf>

Texas Council of Administrators of Special Education (2013). *STAAR alternate survey results executive summary*. Retrieved from
http://c.ymcdn.com/sites/www.tcase.org/resource/resmgr/docs/alt_survey_executive_summary.pdf

TEX Educ CODE ANN. § 39.023 (2013).

Texas Education Agency (2013). *About the Standardized Assessment Tasks for STAAR Alternate*. Retrieved from <http://www.tea.state.tx.us/student.assessment/special-ed/staaralt/tasks/>

Texas Education Agency (2012). *Academic Excellence Indicator System: Edgewood ISD*. Retrieved from
<http://ritter.tea.state.tx.us/perfreport/aeis/2012/district.srch.html>.

Texas Education Agency (2012). *Academic Excellence Indicator System: Harlandale ISD*. Retrieved from
<http://ritter.tea.state.tx.us/perfreport/aeis/2012/district.srch.html>.

Texas Education Agency (2012). *Academic Excellence Indicator System: SCUCISD*. Retrieved from <http://ritter.tea.state.tx.us/perfreport/aeis/2012/district.srch.html>.

Texas Education Agency. (2011). *State of Texas assessments of academic readiness alternate (STAAR alternate) manual for test administrators (teachers)*. Austin, Texas.

Texas Education Agency. (2013). *STAAR alternate conversion table*. Retrieved from:
<http://www.tea.state.tx.us/student.assessment/special-ed/staaralt/convtables/>

Title I – Improving the Academic Achievement of the Disadvantaged; Final Rule 34 CFR Part 200

Towles-Reeves, E., Kearns, J., Kleinert, H., & Kleinert, J. (2006). *Learner characteristics inventory*. Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky, National Alternate Assessment Center

Towles-Reeves, E., Garrett, B., Burdette, P., & Burdge, M. (2006). Validation of large-scale alternate assessment systems and their influence on instruction-What are the consequences? *Assessment for Effective Intervention*, 31(3), pp. 45-57.

Towles-Reeves, E., Kearns, J., Kleinert, H., & Kleinert, J. (2009). An analysis of the learning characteristics of students taking alternate assessments based on alternate achievement standards. *The Journal of Special Education*, 42(4), pp. 241-254.

Unique Learning System. <https://unique.n2y.com/products/unique/>

Yin, R.K., (2009). *Case study research: Design and methods (4th ed.)*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc.

Zatta, M., & Pullin, D., (2004). Education and alternate assessment for students with significant cognitive disabilities: Implications for educators. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 12(16). Retrieved [May 15, 2012] from <http://epaa.asu.edu/epaa/v12n16/>.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Kristina Gonzalez was born in Dallas, Texas in 1977. In 1983, Kristina and her parents moved to San Antonio, Texas to be near family. She attended St. Mary's University, a small Catholic University in San Antonio, Texas wherein she earned a Bachelor of Arts in sociology in 1999. After spending some time working in nonprofit agencies, Kristina began a dual teacher certification and master's program at Our Lady of the Lake University, a small Catholic University in San Antonio. In 2003, she began teaching special education students in Northside Independent School District. Kristina earned a Master of Education with a concentration in special education in 2005. She spent the next few years working as a special education teacher in Northside ISD and Northeast Independent School District and eventually became a department head at a large urban high school. Between 2011-2013, Kristina worked at the University of Texas at San Antonio (UTSA) mentoring probationary certified special education teachers. In August 2013, Kristina left UTSA to work for the Department of Special Education in Schertz-Cibolo Universal City Independent School District. Dr. Kristina Gonzalez earned a Doctor of Education in educational leadership from the University of Florida in 2014. Research interests include effective co-teaching and alternate assessments and their impact on students with profound intellectual disabilities.