UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA

GRADUATE COLLEGE

SPIRALING DOWN THE RABBIT HOLE: A CASE STUDY OF STUDENTS' AND PARENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF ANXIETY IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS

A DISSERTATION
SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

By Stacey Hughes
Norman, Oklahoma
2019

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SPIRALING DOWN THE RABBIT HOLE: A CASE STUDY OF STUDENTS' AND PARENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF ANXIETY IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS

APPROVED FOR THE
DEPARMENT OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP AND ACADEMIC CURRI ULUM

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My research study would not have been possible without the continuous support and guidance from professors at the University of Oklahoma, specifically those serving on my dissertation committee. Each member of my committee has provided me extensive guidance throughout the pursuit of my degree, teaching me the various skills needed to conduct an extensive research study and exposing me to theory and pedagogy that has forever changed the way I view educational praxis, research, and social justice.

I would like to acknowledge the guidance and passion of Dr. Crag Hill, professor of English education in the department of Instructional Leadership and Academic Curriculum. Dr. Hill has helped me rediscover my passion for Young Adult Literature as well as the power of art integration in the English language arts classroom. He exposed me to various forms of literacy, theory, literature, and art that has helped me grow as a learner and educator. His passion for his work is inspiring to all who meet him.

While I have had many influential people help me throughout my doctoral journey, no one has supported me, inspired me, or guided me quite like Dr. Baines. He has done more for me than I could possibly give him credit for. He has shown me, by example, what an ethical, prolific, compassionate, and kind person I can be as a professor. He has always provided me with attention and guidance that made completing my doctoral degree possible. He has helped me through the most strenuous moments of my journey. More than anything, though, Dr. Baines never made me feel like I was just a student. He always made me feel like a colleague, someone he trusted and even enlisted as coresearcher on projects. Dr. Baines helped me become confident in who I am and the knowledge that I possess. He is a person I trust completely and will admire always. Every time I felt like I was on an impossible journey, he made feel like I could overcome anything. He was right. Without him, I would not be where I am in the field of education.

In addition to the amazing faculty at the University of Oklahoma, my family has provided me emotional support, helping me reach my goals. My parents are my biggest fans, believing that there is nothing that I cannot do. My brothers have always supported me and expressed their admiration for my willingness to devote so much time, money, and effort into becoming the best educator I can be. There were many times when I felt like I could not keep going, but my brothers were always there to tell me how much they respected my work ethic and how proud they were of me. I do not know if they understand how important those comments were in my decision to push through any obstacle over the past four years.

Most importantly, though, I would like to think my amazingly supportive husband, Zachary and my beautiful daughter, Harper. I love you both more than you know. You make everything in life more precious and meaningful. I am forever thankful to be able to share this monumental moment of my life with you both. You both bring me immense joy. I don’t know how I would have reached my goal without you.

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Abstract

The current study explores students' and parents' perceptions of the growing phenomenon of adolescent anxiety, its triggers, and its manifestations, specifically anxiety related the English language arts classroom, including but not limited to reading, writing, speaking, testing, and socializing. The exploratory case study included five participants ranging from fourth grade through tenth grade at Grand One-on-one Charter Schools. Observational data, semi-structured interviews, student writing, and student art were used as data collection tools. A narrative analysis approach was used to gain insight in to students perceptions of their struggles with anxiety in the English classroom, finding that students with classroom anxiety may experience feelings of being ill-prepared for tasks they are ask to complete, feelings of inadequacy, lack of self-efficacy, fear of judgement or negative feedback, and social anxiety. Based on the results of the exploratory case study, practitioners can gain an insight into the struggles that students face in English class and other classes as well. Students' voices were used to raise awareness and examine changes educators may consider creating an environment that is safe and welcoming for all.

Keywords: Anxiety, Adolescent anxiety, Classroom anxiety, Writing anxiety, Reading anxiety, English classroom anxiety, Testing anxiety, English language arts, Critical Theory in education, Ecological Systems Theory, Self-efficacy Theory

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Chapter 1

Introduction

When I was in middle school, I was considered the smartest student in my class. I had always prided myself on my academic achievements and felt confident in classroom activities, even those that involved participating in front of the class. Unfortunately, however, that confidence did not last long and would never return after a humiliating experience in my English class. My English class was reading *The Torn Veil*, the story of Gulshan Esther, and my teacher called on me to read out loud in a popcorn reading activity. Typically, reading out loud was not a problem for me, but that soon changed. While I was reading, I pronounced a simple word incorrectly, and the whole class laughed hysterically. I do not know if it was hilarious because I was supposed to be the smart girl or if it was funny because of the simplicity of the word I mispronounced. Maybe it was funny simply because we were in middle school and lacked the maturity to understand the effect our actions could have on others. No matter the reason, I was mortified. To this day, I remember feeling my heart rate increase and my breathing become more labored with each passing moment of laughter. I remember feeling the color of my cheeks change, flushed with the embarrassment I was feeling when I mispronounced the word "horizon."

From that moment on, my classroom reading habits changed. Despite being a straight-A student, reading was never something I necessarily enjoyed much at that point in my life. After that experience, reading became something that caused me to feel panic. The anxiety I felt about reading aloud became the Achilles' heel of my educational experience. I remember several moments in various classes where I would count the paragraphs to figure out which one would be my responsibility to read out loud. Instead of listening to the information my classmates were reading or even trying to glean any information from class, I would practice reading my

paragraph to myself as many times as I could before it was my turn. Heart racing, head sweating, hands shaking, I would read my paragraph, silently experiencing intense dread and anxiety. Each moment that passed made the symptoms of my anxiety increase. Every time I finished the monstrous task of reading the designated paragraph, I would quickly count the remaining paragraphs to see if I would be required to experience that dreadful fate again or if I would be safe until the next class period. Of course, if I discovered that I would have yet another paragraph to read, I would continue to ignore the content being presented, and instead, I would begin practicing for the next round of torture.

In high school, I eventually fell in love with reading and discovered the power of literature. Even my love of reading, though, could not outweigh the dread I felt when asked to read out loud in class. That same dread and debilitating anxiety that stemmed from a simple mistake in my middle school English class followed me not only through high school but also to college. To this day, I do not like reading out loud in my classes, and sometimes, I even feel anxious reading in front of students.

Research Problem

That one moment of intense anxiety in my English class nearly twenty years ago still haunts me, affects my career, the pursuit of my doctoral degree. Larson, El Ramahi, Conn, Estes, and Ghibellini (2010) describe anxiety as an "anticipated belief of psychological distress which is a result of a perception of a disconcerting and potentially dangerous event." Students do not have to be diagnosed with an anxiety disorder to experience anxiety. Anxiety is the belief of distress or the perception of a dangerous event (Larson et al., 2010). I clearly perceived danger when asked to read out loud after my negative experience. My experience came to be my kryptonite, and many adolescents face similar symptoms every day. Anxiety is frequently

recognized, evaluated, and diagnosed in school aged children and adolescents, and all students, whether officially diagnosed or not, respond differently to their anxieties (Brady & Kendall, 1992; Essau, 2003).

According to the National Institute of Mental Health (2017), about one in three adolescents suffer from anxiety, and nearly 10% of adolescents may suffer from extreme impairment as a direct result of their anxiety. Anxiety, its triggers, manifestations, and overall effect on students is not well understood by many educators. Anxiety can lead to misbehaviors, poor performance, health difficulties, and mental instability. Sometimes those manifestations of anxiety may be mistaken as simply insubordination (Kessler et al., 2005; National Institute of Mental Health, 2017; Larson et al., 2010; American Psychiatric Association, 2000). Miller et al. (2011) found that children and adolescents with anxiety disorders may have multiple anxiety disorder diagnoses (Brady & Kendall, 1992; Essau, 2003).

Polly Wells (2013), author of *Freaking Out*, a book of the real-life stories of thirteen teenagers who suffer from anxiety, states that, "Fear is a response to known or actual danger or threat. Anxiety is response to a possible or imagined danger or threat" (p. 1). According to Kumara and Kumar (2016), when students experience extreme anxiety, many areas of their lives may be affected. Students' thinking, decision-making, perceptions, environment, learning, and concentration can all be signs of students experiencing anxiety. For many adolescents, school can become a breeding ground for the debilitating symptoms of anxiety (Compton et al., 2010). For students who suffer anxiety in schools, learning may be inhibited. According to Waldman (2019), learning occurs when students feel "safe, engaged, connected, and supported."

Though a certain level of anxiety is a common response during child development, excessive anxiety may be missed or be misdiagnosed (American Academy of Child and

Adolescent Psychiatry, 2012). When anxiety goes unnoticed or misinterpreted as misbehavior, a child's social, academic, and emotional wellbeing can be affected negatively (Thompson et al., 2013). Only a small portion of students who experience severe anxiety receive a correct diagnosis or appropriate treatment (De Wit, Karioja, Rye, and Shain, 2001; Miller et al, 2012).

In an interview with *The New York Times* (2017), Philip Kendall, director of the Child and Adolescent Anxiety Disorders Clinic at Temple University in Philadelphia, stated that "Anxiety is easy to dismiss or overlook, partially because everyone has it to some degree" (Denizet-Lewis, 2017, p. 6). When people feel uncomfortable in a given situation or feel uneasy about something going on in their lives, there is a natural feeling of anxiety. While people experience anxiety on a regular basis, those who suffer from disorders, even disorders that may be undiagnosed, may experience anxiety much more intensely. Denizet-Lewis (2017) explains that "Highly anxious people…have an overactive fight-or-flight response that perceives threats where there often are none" (p. 6). In some cases, interpretations and misperceptions may exacerbate anxiety, in that individuals interpret situations as more threatening than they actually are. According to Muris et al., (2010), a cycle of thinking is created in which people internalize and reflect on negative implications. Negative thoughts, in turn, may cause internalization of fear towards anxiety, itself.

Many students suffer from anxiety when facing difficult academic tasks, students with disabilities being the most vulnerable (Nelson & Harwood, 2011). Students may feel a sense of dread when asked to read, write, or speak in English class whenever a threat of judgement or criticism exists. Anxiety may ensue when faced with the possibility of failure or disastrous tests results. No matter the cause of students' anxiety in the English Language Arts classrooms, feelings of anxiety, panic, and dread should be taken seriously. Typical responses to students

who suffer from anxiety are 1) to encourage them to get over their feelings or 2) to simply power through them (Adams, 2004; Park, 2011; Francesco, Mauro, Gianluca, & Enrico, 2009). Anxiety, however, is usually not something students can nonchalantly power through. Anxiety may cause a student's academic performance to suffer. In turn, the anxiety levels related to those academic tasks as well as failures they perceive tend to increase (Huberty, 2012). For example, if a student suffers from social anxiety, the student might not be able to complete group tasks, present in front of the class, participate in discussions, or even just ask for help. (Ader & Erktin, 2010).

Unfortunately, students experiencing anxiety might not have access to mental health services. According to the National Mental Health Report Summary (2018), Oklahoma ranks 42nd in overall access to mental health care and 50th in the United States for children who have no mental health insurance. Oklahoma is ranked 41st in the percentage of students with depression who are not being treated. When schools are unable to provide mental health care, students may be left with few to no options (National Mental Health Report, 2018). According to Denizet-Lewis (2017), students who are labeled defiant, dangerous, or isolated may be misdiagnosed and in reality, be "silent sufferers" who do not respond well to situations that trigger their anxiety (Denizet-Lewis, 2017, p. 6). Madeline Levine, an advocate for school reform and founder of Challenge Success (affiliated with Stanford University and concerned with school reform and the well-being of students) acknowledges that, "Many students have internalized anxiety" in an attempt to cope with feelings and symptoms (Denizet-Lewis, 2017, p. 7).

Significance and Purpose of the Case Study

Through my case study, I explored the triggers and manifestations of students' anxiety in the English language arts classrooms. The research examined the personal experiences, thoughts, and perceptions of students and parents of students who suffer from anxiety in English class. The

case study contributed to a better understanding of English class anxiety in K-12 students. Reading, writing, testing, speaking, and social anxiety may cause people to limit their life experiences or convince themselves they are incapable of completing tasks that require written or verbal expression. They may feel inadequate and incapable of success (Wynne et al., 2014; Al-Shboul & Huwari, 2015; Grupe & Nitschke, 2013; Karadag, 2015, Park & Brenna, 2015).

Initially, I planned to use Relational Cultural Theory (RCT) as one of my theoretical frameworks. According to RCT, "most individuals desire to be connected to those around them but struggle to do so in a world that privileges autonomy, independence, and self-sufficiency" (Rattine-Flaherty, 2014, p. 27; Jordan, 2000). While Relational Cultural Theory could provide insight, as I continued my research, I determined that Critical Theory would be more appropriate in answering my research questions pertaining to students' and parents' perceptions, by giving participants a voice to share their stories. Critical theory holds that the role of established structures of power, leadership, expectations, and standardization can be analyzed to understand how they contribute, if at all, to English anxieties (Freire, 1972; 1993; 1998; Giroux, 1988; 1992; 2011; Apple 2000; 2008, Greene, 1995; 1998; McLaren, 2007). The primary and secondary influences of students' anxiety in the English language arts classroom was explored through Bronfenbrenner's (1979; 1992; 1999) Ecological Systems Theory with the addition of Johnson's (2010) Techno-Subsystem. The primary purpose of my study was to understand student and parent perceptions of anxiety in the English classroom. The secondary purpose of my study was and is to give a voice to students who have felt anxious in their English classrooms.

To better understand anxiety in students, my case study (Yin, 1984; 2003; 2008; 2014) included continuous recording of data as well as four stages of qualitative data collection: semi-

structured parent and student interviews, eight months of observations, student writing samples, and student art samples (Yin, 1984; 2003; 2008; 2014; Creswell & Poth, 2018).

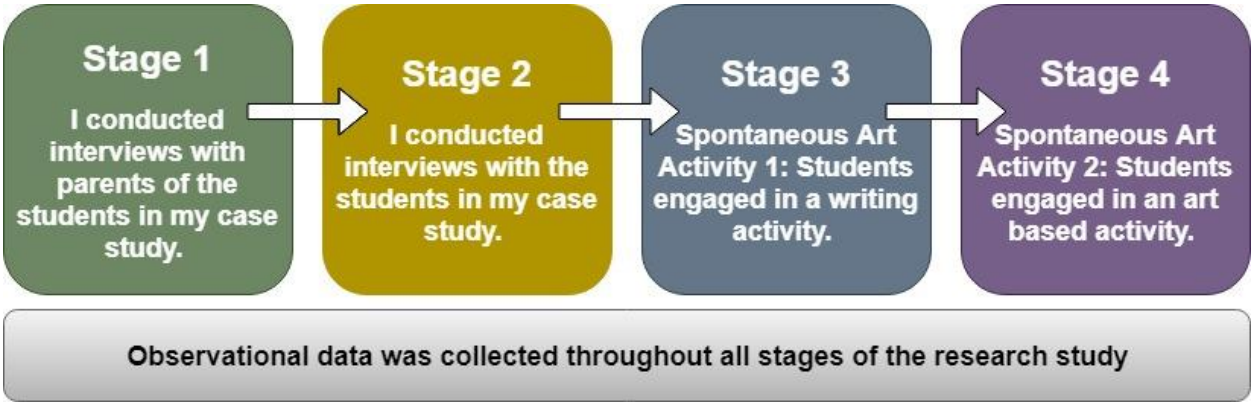


Figure 1: The Four Stages of Data Collection

Research Questions

My exploratory case study was conducted to answer the following research questions:

Primary Research Question

1. What are students' perceptions of their anxieties towards language arts?

Secondary Research Questions

2. What are students' and parents' perceptions of the triggers of their anxieties in language arts?

3. What are students' and parents' perceptions of the manifestations of their anxieties in language arts?

Context of Setting

The case study I conducted included five student participants from Grand One-on-One Charter School as well as the mother of each student. Richard Davidson (pseudonym) (2017), the founder of Grand One-on-One Charter Schools, created Grand because his son was continually getting in trouble, finishing his work too quickly and eventually becoming a distraction to his classmates. Mr. Davidson explained that he asked the teachers to provide his son with more intense, individualized instruction, and the teacher sincerely and honestly responded that he did

not have the time. He was overworked as it was. Mr. Davidson left that meeting thinking, "School can be different." Now, several years later, "School can be different" is the slogan for Grand Charter Schools which predicts to have approximately 30,000 to 35,000 students statewide in Pre-K through 12th grade for the 2019-2020 school year (Davidson, 2017; 2019).

Grand Charter Schools' model is one of individualized instruction for all students. When a student is assigned to a teacher's roster, the teacher schedules a meeting with the student and family to discuss goals, strengths, weaknesses, and to create an individualized learning plan for the student. These individualized plans may involve online work, offline work, or project-based learning. What sets Grand apart from other virtual charter schools is that teachers at Grand meet one-on-one with their students a minimum of two times a month. That one-on-one time is for anything the student needs, e.g. tutoring, progress updates, etc. Many parents' whose children attend Grand refer to it as "homeschooling"; however, Grand is a fully accredited public charter school. According to Davidson, Grand is "not homeschooling but rather schooling at home" (Davidson, 2017; 2019).

I am currently a teacher at Grand Charter Schools. I have forty-one students on my roster, and every grade, Pre-K through 12th grade, is represented amongst those students. Students work primarily online in core curriculums, varying in learning styles to meet the needs of the student. Some curriculums incorporate more writing. Others incorporate more videos or hands on projects. Families are given links to the available curriculums before the initial meeting so they can research which program they believe will be the best fit for the student(s). Each month, I attempt to meet with my students a minimum of two times; however, I meet some students, specifically those preparing for Oklahoma's state testing, every week. Every student and parent on my roster know they can call, text, or email to set up appointments more frequently if they

feel they need more frequent meetings. I also have what I call an "emergency Zoom session." These sessions take place during my office hours and allow students who need help unexpectedly to have a chance to meet with me for tutoring. For my regularly scheduled meetings, some families prefer to meet with me at the library, and other families prefer meeting in their homes. The five students who participated in my case study all preferred to have me come to their homes for meetings.

Introduction of Student Participants

Ryan is a compassionate 5th grader who cares deeply about his family and the faith they share. He loves golf and hanging out with his sister, Tasha. His family has moved three times in the past couple of years, so he does not have many friends. Ryan spends time supporting Tasha at her gymnastic meets both in and out of state, and he has become friends with some of her teammates. His mom told me he is starting to seem interested in his female counterparts.

Tasha is fierce and talented. She is only in 4th grade; however, she has the maturity of someone three years older. She recently won state on the bars in gymnastics, pushing through the pain of her broken foot. Her family is incredibly supportive. They moved more than two hours away from their home so Tasha would have the opportunity to attend one of the most prestigious gymnastics gymnasiums in Oklahoma. Like her brother Ryan, Tasha loves spending time with her family. She is active, sweet, diligent, and persistent.

Steven is a hardworking 8th grader who is a talented artist. He enjoys video games in multiple capacities. Of course, he enjoys playing video games, but he is also intrigued by the idea of how game systems work and the stories behind video games. He also loves making helmets and other costumes out of duct tape. Schooling has never been easy for Steven. He faces many hurdles such as autism, dyslexia, and other learning disabilities. He also lives in poverty

with his devout family. Despite his struggles, Steven is optimistic and kind. School, however, is challenging for Steven and he finds himself frustrated easily.

Both Addison and Daniel are sophomores at Grand Charter Schools. Addison plays the piano beautifully. She also loves painting and reading. She is incredibly sheltered and does not appear to have many social interactions outside of her home because being around others is hard for Addison. Despite her love of reading, Addison is hard to motivate. She often forgets discussions we have shared and needs me to re explain assignments and scheduling frequently.

Daniel, too, finds it difficult to be around people, but he has a small group of friends that he is close to. He is a video gamer, and school is simply a nuisance to him. I, however, went to high school with his aunt, so he is always on his best behavior when I am around and eventually gets around to doing the work that has been assigned to him. Despite his lack of interest in school, I was able to convince him to read *Animal Farm* last year. He loved the book and was able to write argumentative essay over the assigned topic. It was the first book he had ever finished and the first essay he had ever written.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Theoretical Framework: Critical Theory

Critical Theory encompasses areas of interest as diverse as literary theory, philosophy, gender studies, linguistics, psychoanalysis, and historical materialism and seeks to question the multifaceted politics of modernity and the innumerable generative mechanisms that affect the positioning of the individual within it. Next generation thinkers such as Foucault (1977) and Habermas (1974) started the wave of thinking that has become Critical Theory, and in different ways, brought awareness to the emphasis on power relations and the generative mechanisms that inform those relations (Macey, 2000; McLaren 2007; Freire 1972; 1993; 1998; Giroux, 1988; 2011; Apple, 2000; 2008; Greene, 1995; 1998).

As critical studies gained momentum, theorists such as Giroux, Freire, Greene, Apple, and McLaren began to question the power relations formed within educational institutions. They began to call for social justice in education for students oppressed by the unbalanced power given primarily to white, affluent, male students (Freire, 1972; 1993; 1998; Giroux, 1988; 1992; 2011; Apple, 2000; 2008; Greene, 1995; 1998; McLaren, 2007).

Giroux (1988) strongly believed that a teacher's pedagogical practices must be seen as a social responsibility. The pedagogical praxis in which teachers engage must support and promote personal freedom for all and empathy for others. Pedagogical praxis must be socially aware and intolerant to injustices. Pedagogical praxis cannot remain motionless, allowing human suffering to continue unchallenged. Within pedagogical praxis, the hope is that change can and must occur. According to Giroux (2011), educational practices have failed to create critically conscious educators and instead focus on creating automatons that can meet standardized

requirements. The current education systems demand that teachers give "unquestioning support" for the dominant, powerfully affluent culture (Freire, 1972; 1993; 1998; Giroux, 1988; 1992; 2011; Apple, 2000; 2008; Greene, 1995; 1998; McLaren, 2007).

Freire and Giroux express the importance for discourse between students and teachers (Freire, 1972; 1993; Giroux, 1988; 1992; 2011). Teachers have knowledge and skills students might not possess. Likewise, students have knowledge and skills that teachers might not possess. Educators must realize that part of their role is appreciating the autonomy of students and recognizing that when students walk into the classroom, they bring with them knowledge and skills and narratives that provide insights for the teacher if the teacher is willing to engage in discourse (Freire, 1972; 1993; Giroux, 1988; 1992; 2011). Freire (1998) conveys his belief that creating a discourse, one that recognizes the knowledge and experiences of students, is part of ethical teaching praxis. Ethical teaching practice breaks away from the social and politically driven constraints imposed on students, especially students living in poverty and students of color. Ethical teaching praxis encourages critical thinking, condemns false images of reality, and prepares students for the truth of reality in order to help avoid hopelessness and the feeling of being trapped or destroyed by those in power. Ethics are inseparable from teaching (Freire, 1972; 1993; 1998; Giroux, 1988; 1992; 2011; Apple, 2000; 2008; Greene, 1995; 1998; McLaren, 2007).

Maxine Greene (1973) criticized the bureaucracy of educational institutions for creating facades of social reality. Teachers, sometimes unknowingly, adopt these inaccurate versions of social reality and may unconsciously prejudge what they believe to be their students' capabilities based on the social class, race, and perceived ability and understanding of their students or the locations of their schools. Often, these bureaucracies present a reality that is unchangeable and

encourage those within their systems to just accept what is because it is given or predetermined based on criteria that is innate (Freire 1972; 1993; 1998; Giroux, 1988; 2011; Apple, 2000; 2008; Greene, 1995; 1998; McLaren, 2007). Greene (1995) explained that no one can truly understand discrimination unless they have been held back by discrimination personally. The voices of women and minorities are not the only voices that deserve to be heard in the pursuit of social justice. All voices – women, minorities, LGBTQ, people with disabilities, children, patients, addicts, wanderers, those who suffer from mental illness, etc. – must be heard (Freire, 1972; 1993; 1998; Giroux, 1988; 1992; 2011; Apple, 2000; 2008; Greene, 1995; 1998; McLaren, 2007).

Apple (2008) echoes the social injustices described by the above-mentioned theorists throughout his prolific body of research. Apple (2008) explains that education is a political act that educators must think relationally to understand. He continues that to understand education requires one to "situate it back into both the unequal relations of power in the larger society and into the relations of dominance and subordination – and the conflicts to change these things – that are generated by these relations" (Apple, 2008. p. 241). His statements reflect those of the social injustices described by Freire, Giroux, and Greene. He explains that educators cannot simply look at mastery of particular standards and success on standardized tests. Standardized perceptions of what is knowledge is imposed by those in power (Freire, 1972; 1993; 1998; Giroux, 1988; 1992; 2011; Apple, 2000; 2008; Greene, 1995; 1998; McLaren, 2007). Educators must question why the widely accepted knowledge is considered knowledge and work to uncover the benefits that established knowledge provides to those who are elite in society. Educators must ask themselves what they can do to be agents for change in the social injustices imposed on students in their schools (Apple, 1996; 2000; 2008; Apple and Beane, 2007). Apple

(2011) argues that one of the most crucial topics in critical education is that of globalization. And, while globalization is a current trend, Apple (2011) explains that the trendiness of globalization is, in fact, the opposite truth in looking at the critical need for globalization in education. He continues by explaining that economics, growth, crises, immigration, and population in one country affects other countries and all of that, in turn, affects what is considered to be knowledge. Consequently, it affects what is considered appropriate teacher training and practice (Freire, 1972; 1993; 1998; Giroux, 1988; 1992; 2011; Apple, 2000; 2008; Greene, 1995; 1998; McLaren, 2007).

Through the lens of Critical Theory, students can be empowered to control their environments and the anxiety they may feel. This can be done by first looking at the situation and then asking the people in this group to reflect on and question their current experiences and the value put on them (Giroux, 1988). Empowerment comes with control of a child's anxiety in the school setting. Researchers have found that stress and anxiety can be reduced if the person perceives some degree of control over his or her environment (Friedman, Lehrer, & Stevens, 1983). Students cannot remain passive vessels of the knowledge that is imparted by the teacher, but instead, students must be engaged in the learning and together with the teacher must determine what knowledge is, why it is knowledge, and create new knowledge (Freire 1972; 1993; 1998; Giroux, 1988; 2011; Apple, 2000; 2008; Greene, 1995; 1998; McLaren, 2007). While breaking out of the cycle of oppression may seem like an impossible task, students can start the process of believing in themselves, believing in the power of their voice, in the classroom. Students must learn to be investigators, seeking their truths (Freire, 1993)

Theoretical Framework: Ecological Systems Theory

The second theoretical framework for the current study is Bronfenbrenner's (1979; 1992; 1999) Ecological Systems Theory. According to Ecological Systems Theory, there are layers of systems of influence on an individual. The microsystem is the layer that involves direct contact with an individual. The mesosystem possesses linkages between the microsystems and the larger social exosystem, and the cultural influence of the macrosystem. Both primary and secondary influences throughout the layers of systems must be considered as potentially influential causes of students' anxiety in the English language arts classroom (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Primary influences tend to influence learners directly for long periods of time, even a life span. Typically, the balance of power having one party exhibiting more influence over the other (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Secondary influences often evolve and change as situations change. Primary influences are lifelong layers that are closest to the learners and have the most direct influence (e.g., family); secondary influences are more situational and often temporary (e.g., childcare environments, schools, or neighborhoods; Bronfenbrenner, 1979; 1992; 1999). Bronfenbrenner explained that his theory was designed to analyze forces that operate today to influence what human beings may grow to be (Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000, p. 117; Bronfenbrenner & Crouter, 1983; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). Bronfenbrenner's theory evolved extensively from 1973 when he began to first introduce his theory to the present use of the theory. Although the theory has evolved, I will be most closely looking at Bronfenbrenner's (1979) *The Ecology of Human Development: Experiments by Nature and Design* as a guide for my study along with Johnson's (2010) addition of the techno-subsystem.

According to Bronfenbrenner (1979), "The ecology of human development involves the scientific study of the progressive, mutual accommodation between an active, growing human

being and the changing properties of the immediate settings in which the developing person lives, as this process is affected by relations between these settings, and by the larger contexts in which the settings are embedded" (p. 21). The environment is a crucial part of human development in the Ecological Systems Theory. The environment is composed of intricate structures and relationships that influence an individual (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; 1992; 1999). When the environment shifts or changes, a rippling effect may take place throughout the other systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; 1992; 1999).

In 2010, a new layer was introduced to Bronfenbrenner's (1979, 1992, 1999) Ecological Systems Theory. Johnson (2010) examined children and their use of the internet and proposed that researchers utilize a theory she terms the "Ecological Techno-Subsystem" Theory. Within her theory, Johnson (2010) builds upon Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979; 1992; 1999). Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory examines the environmental factors which play a role in the development of children, including family, status, income, culture, values, beliefs, etc. (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; 1992; 1999). Johnson (2010) acknowledges that Bronfenbrenner's work emerged before the internet revolution, and Johnson and Puplampu (2008) proposed their Ecological Techno-Subsystem Theory, extrapolating Bronfenbrenner's (1979, 1992, 1999) Ecological Systems Theory. Johnson (2010) uses her theory to look closely at children's interactions of both living and nonliving communication, including information and recreational technologies within their environments. The techno-subsystem includes factors such as cell phones, computer software, audio devices, and the internet, including social media (Johnson, 2010).

The layers within the Ecological Systems Theory are applicable to English Language Arts anxiety because students' anxieties develop from different environmental sources with

some students experiencing only periods of anxiety while others struggle throughout their educational experiences. The layer of influence closest to the learner having the most direct influence is the microsystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The lifelong and typically tight knit relationships within an individual's microsystem may establish "strong emotional feelings and continue to influence one another's behavior even when apart" (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 58). Family members, lifelong friends, and others that are closest to one's life are examples of primary influences; however, transient friends or neighbors, childcare environments, school personnel, and others who may come and go in a person's life are considered secondary influences (Paquette & Ryan, 2001). Within the microsystem, individuals influence one another; however, the balance of power is usually that one member of the dyad has more influence over the other (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

These primary and secondary sources are just a few of the many influences students have in their lives that may contribute to the anxiety they struggle to overcome based on experiences of and support by those others in the microsystem. When students engage or disengage in educational settings, a multitude of factors influence performance, including the relationship with parents, peers, and teachers within which support is given or denied (Cajic-Seigneur & Hodgson, 2016).

According to Bronfenbrenner (1979), the definitions of each system is as follows:

System	Definition
Microsystem	"A microsystem is a pattern of activities, roles, and interpersonal relations experienced by the developing person in a given setting with particular physical and material characteristics" (p. 22)
Mesosystem	"A mesosystem comprises the interrelations among two or more settings in which the developing person actively participates (such as, for a child, the relations among home, school, and neighborhood peer group; for an adult, among family, work, and social life)" (p. 25).
Exosystem	"An exosystem refers to one or more settings that do not involve the developing person as an active participant, but in which events occur that affect, or are affected by, what happens in setting containing the developing person" (p. 25).
Macrosystem	"The macrosystem refers to consistencies, in the form and content of lower-order systems (micro-, meso-, and exo-) that exist, or could exist, at the level of the subculture or the culture as a whole, along with any belief systems or ideology underlying such consistencies" p. 26).

Table 1: *Definitions of the environmental systems* (Bronfenbrenner, 1979)

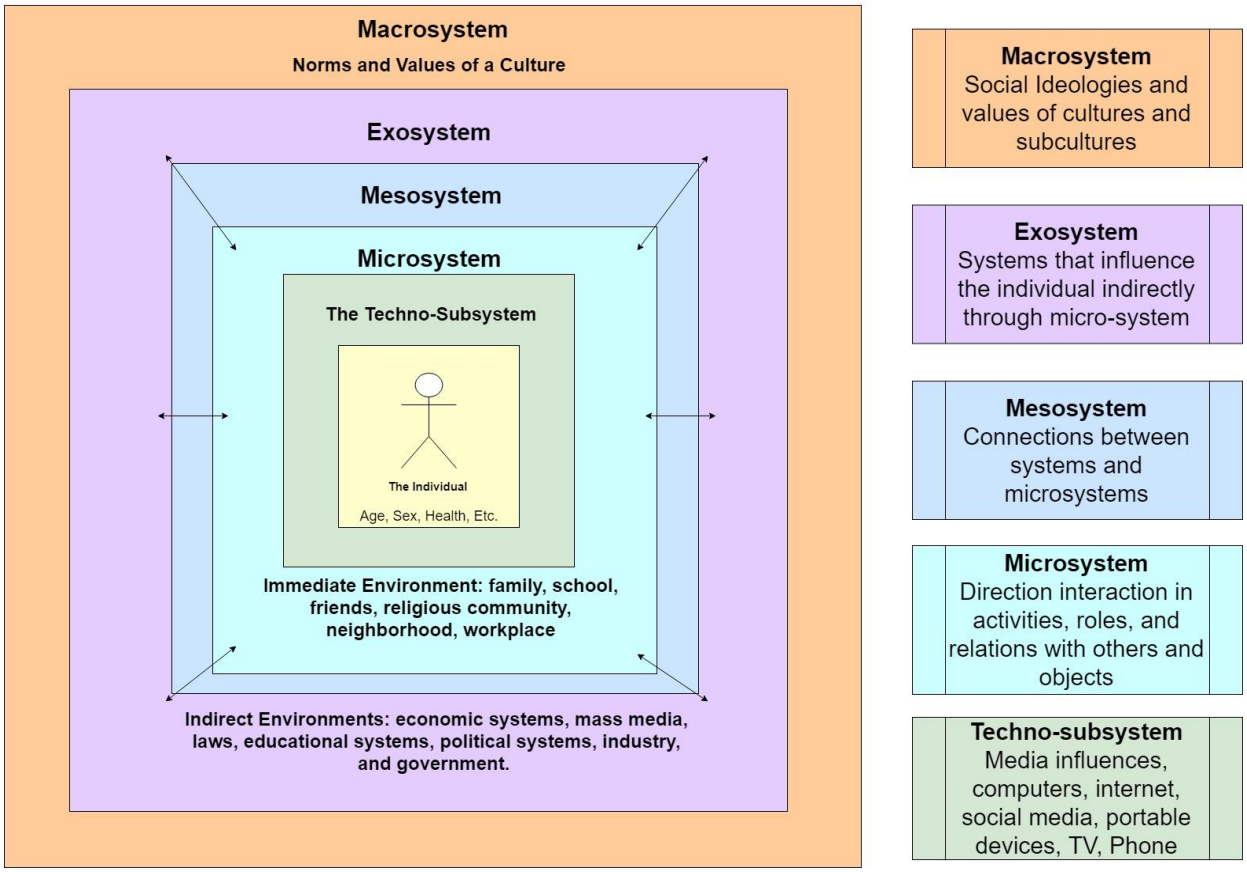


Figure 2: Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Ecological Model of Human Development including Johnson's (2010) Techno-Subsystem

According to Bronfenbrenner (1979), when a person's environment or their position in a particular environment changes, an ecological transition occurs. The environment is altered. As humans grow and develop, "the growing person acquires a more extended, differentiated, and valid conception of the ecological environment, and becomes motivated and able to engage in activities that reveal the properties of, sustain, or restructure that environment at levels of similar or greater complexity in form and content" (p. 27).

Anxiety Defined

Anxiety has been called by many names over the centuries. Anxiety hysteria (Globus Hystericus), nervous 3 exhaustion, soldier's heart (Da Costa's Syndrome), and phobic-anxiety depersonalization syndrome (Van Valkenburg, 2008) are just a few of the terms used to describe

anxiety in the past. Social phobia and school phobia are newer names being used for anxiety (Chartier, Walker, & Stein, 2001; Tyrrell, 2005).

The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM–IV–TR) (American Psychiatric Association, 2000) defines *anxiety* as a natural reaction and a necessary warning response in humans; however, anxiety becomes a serious disorder when it is excessive and uncontrollable, when there does not seem to be any rational reason for it, and when it begins to show itself through symptoms, both physical and mental. Cognitive abilities and behaviors can fall anywhere between slightly changed to severely change (American Psychiatric Association, 2000; Davidson, 2000, Wittchen, 2002). Specific anxiety disorders include (a) panic disorders, (b) specific phobias, (c) obsessive-compulsive disorders, (d) post-traumatic stress disorder, (e) acute stress disorder, and (f) generalized anxiety disorder (DSM-IV-TR; American Psychiatric Association, 2000). According to Davidson (2000), the most chronic and recurrent of the anxiety disorders is social phobia. The most prevalent anxiety disorder is generalized anxiety disorder (GAD) (Wittchen, 2002). Nearly half of all children diagnosed with anxiety suffer from at least two forms of anxiety disorders (Rachman, 2004).

According to Miller et al. (2011), anxiety can be described as significant when it is excessive and interferes with children's ability to function and experience healthy development. Anxiety may also be defined as "subjective feelings and thoughts and observable fight-flight-freeze behavior, but also in physical symptoms such as palpitations, trembling, and shortness of breath." (Muris, Mayer, Freher, Duncan, & van den Hout, 2010). Park (2011) explains that for some students the response to their anxiety may be helpful or harmful, not the anxiety itself. However, those who suffer from anxiety disorders feel it at a disproportionate extreme. The anxiety disorder may begin to interfere with the ability to carry out everyday situation and

activities (Adams, 2004). It is the unpredictability, uncertainty, and uncontrollable feelings that provoke anxiety to a level that basic functioning is interrupted (Park, 2011). An anxiety disorder can be a disabling disorder when it becomes an excessive, irrational reluctance to everyday situations (Francesco, Mauro, Gianluca, & Enrico, 2009). It can be so intense and extreme that, in self-reports, patients describe it as a transcendental, unreal experience. They report feeling extremely nervous and doomed with what they perceive is about to happen. Some patients describe that their surroundings are changing and menacing, and some fear they do not have control of their bodies (Van Valkenburg, 2008).

Symptoms and Manifestations of Anxiety

According to Reilly (2018), anxiety is not a new phenomenon, but it is a growing one. From 2009 to 2015, while enrollments in universities increased by 6%, visits to counseling centers available to students increased by 30% (Reilly, 2018, p. 28). In 2017, the American College Health Association (ACHA) conducted a survey of more than 63,000 students through the country, representing 92 schools. Of those 63,000 students, 61% reported having "felt overwhelming anxiety" (ACHA, 2017).

Unfortunately, many childhood anxiety disorders go undiagnosed. Many experts believe that adult psychological disorders may be the result of the lack of diagnoses of children suffering from anxiety (Masia-Warner et al., 2005). Childhood symptoms were reported in 30% to 50% of adults who suffer from anxiety and began showing symptoms in childhood. The symptoms included but were not limited to poor performance in school and lack of a social identity (Christie, 2007). Some children with symptoms may go undiagnosed because they may react to their anxiety by internalizing the symptoms. In other situations, anxiety may look like depression or be mistaken for shyness (Albano et al., 2003). Other circumstances may cause children to

externalize their symptoms – hyperactivity, oppositional behaviors, and conduct problems. Typically, students with these symptoms are more likely to be diagnosed because teachers, peers, and family members notice that the symptoms interfere with daily functioning, both at school and at home (Albano et al., 2003).

The National Institute of Mental Health (2006) reported that the lifetime prevalence of anxiety in 13 to 18-year-olds is 25.1%. That number increases if the anxiety has gone untreated. Educators and physicians are more in tune with signs of anxiety because childhood anxiety is growing rapidly (National Institute of Mental Health, 2006). According to Merrell (2001), symptoms that parents, teachers, doctors and others may recognize as possible anxiety-related behaviors are excessive worries in general, panic attacks, misinterpretations of symptoms and events, negative and unrealistic thoughts, physiological arousal, hypersensitivity to physical cues, obsessive and/or compulsive behaviors; and fears and anxieties regarding specific situations or events (Merrell, 2001).

Muris (2004) and his team of researchers studied anxiety extensively and found that the manifestations of anxiety, both physical and mental, include most commonly hands trembling, faster heart rates, sweating, nausea, abdominal discomfort, dizziness, hot flashes, chills, and difficulty breathing. The most common symptoms were hand trembling, increased heart rate, and difficulties breathing (Muris et al., 2004; Muris et al., 2007; Muris et al., 2008).

In Muris et al. (2008), researchers evaluated the patterns of interpretation of anxiety by 171 children. These children interpreted their physical symptoms as well as their emotional reasoning while experiencing anxiety. In the Muris et al. (2007) study, researchers found that cognitive development was a turning point to being able to interpret physical symptoms as a marker of anxiety. Muris et al. (2007) found that children as young as 7 years old were

increasingly capable of connecting physical symptoms to their anxiety. Muris et al. (2008) provided similar conclusions supporting the idea that young children are capable of recognizing or expressing their symptoms of anxiety.

Schieman (1999) was the first to present the idea that sufferers could use their experiences to make connections and possible discover an appropriate diagnosis and treatment that could help reduce anxiety and give them a sense of control over life outcomes. Muris et al. (2007; 2008) built on the ideas presented by Schieman (1999) and offered new knowledge for educators as well as clinicians, knowledge that include invaluable information for the treatment and empowerment of students with anxiety. New connections between physical symptoms and anxiety empowered patients of all ages with greater optimism for their personal care (Muris et al., 2007; 2008).

Students with anxiety may also be diagnosed with ADHD or similar conditions. According to Schatz and Rostain's (2006), the prevalence of anxiety disorders comorbid with ADHD to be as high as 50%. Bagwell, Molina, Kashdan, Pelham, and Humza's (2006) study of 142 adolescents with a history of ADHD hypothesized these adolescents would have higher levels of anxiety and mood disorders, partly due to associated academic, social, and other impairments of ADHD in adolescents. Though it was supported by a 1996 study of children with ADHD and the association of lifetime diagnoses of major depression and multiple anxiety disorders (Biederman et al., 1996), the results did not show a strong correlation of this hypothesis. There was evidence of a significant increase in persistent anxiety in the students who had more externalizing behaviors or social problems. Often, students who externalize get the attention of their teachers, peers, and family members because they interfere with daily functioning (Albano et al., 2003).

Merrell (2001) found that students may experience symptoms such as excessive worries in general; panic attacks; misinterpretations of symptoms and events; negative and unrealistic thoughts; physiological arousal; hypersensitivity to physical cues; obsessive and/or compulsive behaviors; and fears and anxieties regarding specific situations or events (Merrell, 2001; National Institute of Mental Health, 2006). Students entering adolescence already have many biological related stressors related to anxiety (Grills-Taquechel et al., 2010; Marks et al., 2010). Because adolescents often do not seek help from problems, some may not even recognize that they have a problem until the severity of their anxiety interferes with overall functioning (Thompson et al., 2013). If students are not able to recognize when they have a problem with anxiety, they can suffer physically, socially, academically, and emotionally (Bostick & Anderson, 2009; Thompson et al., 2013).

Anxiety has both physical and mental manifestations and can impair a student's ability to perform certain tasks or achieve certain outcomes (McDonald, 2001). Physical manifestations typically include increased heart rate or high blood pressure. In some cases, adolescents who experience anxiety may also develop stomach ulcers or other serious health conditions (Vannucci, Flannery, & Ohannessian, 2017). In addition to the physical manifestations, students may experience self-doubt, self-criticism, irritability, and sleep deprivation (Kumara & Kumar, 2016). According to Woodward and Ferguson (2001), adolescents suffering from anxiety are more susceptible to continued or worsening anxiety, depression, drug use, and underachievement (p. 1086). Isper et al. (2009) found that students who suffer from anxiety are much more likely to also suffer from depression, obsessive compulsive disorders, and eating disorders.

Students who are distracted by anxiety symptoms struggle to focus on classwork, worry excessively, experience physiological arousal, stomachaches, headaches, often poor attendance,

and subpar performance (Bostick & Anderson, 2009; Ingul et al., 2012; Thompson et al., 2013). Specifically, poor attendance can lead to school dropout, lower income, and subsequent health and social problems (Ingul et al., 2012). According to Von der Embse et al. (2013), students' anxiety interferes with thoughts, feelings, and behaviors that impact test results. These test results then reinforce student's anxiety about performing well, perpetuating the cycle of anxiety (Von Der Embse et al., 2013). Anxiety sufferers tend to have lower self-efficacy and can have difficulty regulating their emotions. Anxious students may also be at greater risk for depression, addiction, eating disorders, and suicidality (Miller et al., 2011). As part of the increased responsibility and independence students receive, as they get older, emotional support often decreases in secondary schools. De Wit et al. (2011) found that anxiety symptoms can escalate when emotional support decreases. When anxiety is constantly getting in the way for student's overall functioning, they tend to have psychosocial difficulties and school can be a difficult place for them to be.

Anxiety: Students Perceptions

As the pressure on schools increase, so too, did the pressure on students. In a study by Everson, Tobias, Hartman, and Gourney (1993), 196 first year college were chosen to participate in the study's surveys. These surveys were used to determine how students' perceptions of a subject's difficulty affected their levels of test anxiety in various subjects. The students self-reported their test anxiety levels in social science, math, physical science, and English. It was hypothesized that students in general tend to be more anxious about tests in subjects they perceived more rigorous than in subjects such as humanities or the arts. The more complex the subject's content matter, the more likely it is to cause students anxiety. Physical Science was the

most anxiety inducing subject in the study; although, math anxiety was significantly higher for female participants (Everson et al., 1993).

Gender may also affect the way in which students experience anxiety, specifically math anxiety. According to Campbell and Evans (1997), females in a single-sex algebra class had statistically lower level of math anxiety rating than the females in the co-ed algebra class ($t = -3.37$, $p < .005$). The findings suggest that female students may experience increased anxiety with male counterparts in the room. Similarly, Hyde, Fennema, and Lamon (1990) concluded that in order to explain these higher anxiety levels in math scores and math-related occupations held by girls, other factors should be consider, such as internalized belief systems, parental influence, and any other primary or secondary influence that may impact a female student's perception of math, causing anxiety. Eccles and Jacobs (1986) further support the role of gender difference, finding that parents' stereotypical gender beliefs, as well as students' perceived beliefs of the value of math, played major roles in explaining gender differences in mathematical achievement. Geist (2010) explains that females are too often overlooked or socialized to dislike math, although their cognitive abilities in math were on par with their male classmates. Despite females' cognitive abilities, Breton et al. (1999) found females to be about one and a half to two times more likely to have anxiety regardless of the course taken.

According to Carey et al. (2019), an individual's other personal characteristics might influence their math anxiety. Girls are more likely to experience anxiety about math (Hembree, 1990). Self-esteem is also a factor, with a lower self-esteem contributing to higher levels of math anxiety (Abbasi, Samadzadeh, & Shahbazzadegan, 2013). Learning style also influences students. If they perceive that the teacher does not understand them or how they learn, anxiety can increase and performance decrease (Sloan, Daane, & Giesen, 2002). Finally, attitude and

how a student feels about a subject may influence their level of anxiety towards math and other subjects – those who generally like math tend to have lower math anxiety levels than those who dislike math. The same idea can be applied to English class (Hembree, 1990).

Anxiety in School and the Classroom

According to Carey et al. (2015), there is a long-established relationship between anxiety and performance (those with higher anxiety tend to have poorer performance). Carey et al. concluded that this is likely because anxiety interferes with performance, and poorer performance increases anxiety, acting as a vicious circle (Carey et al., 2015). Anxiety in school-aged children affects not only their quality of life but also their educational experiences (Tramonte & Wilms, 2010). As researchers learn more about the growing phenomenon of anxiety in adolescents, more research studies are being conducted to observe the relationship between anxiety and student achievement in various classes, such as English, as well as high stakes testing (Donato, 2010; Park, 2011; Huberty, 2012).

There are two critical federal laws that seem to have the most impact on students' anxiety. In 2009, the Obama administration's U.S. Secretary of education, Arne Duncan, introduced the Race to the Top initiative. The goal behind the Race to the Top initiative was to create and implement more rigorous state standards, create new data systems to monitor and track students' progress in various categories such as high stakes standardized testing, improve teacher effectiveness, increase career and college readiness, stimulate charter-school expansion and strengthen low-performing schools (Howell, 2015). The Race to the Top initiative came after the No Child Left behind Act was enacted by the Bush administration in 2001. Both laws placed heavy emphasis on the results of high-stakes testing. These high-stakes tests have dramatically changed education, what constitutes knowledge, and how students are taught

(Donato, 2010). While the original goals of the initiative were to challenge districts to make education equal for all, the initiatives did not meet their goals. They did not eliminate academic gaps that were widespread across the nation or diminish the educational disparity that exists because of race, location, or any other factor that may make school challenging for students, including suffering from disorders such as anxiety (NCLB, 2002; Howell, 2015).

One way in which various administrations believed they would diminish educational disparities would be by creating one-size-fits all standards and assessments for students across the country. Supporters believed that teachers in low performing schools needed to increase the rigor of their curriculum and have higher expectations for their students. Supporters argued that all students could achieve success on standardized testing if administrators and teachers would increase the rigor of the schools (Mirra & Morrell, 2011; Hill, 2017). NCLB policies failed to account for the multiple factors outside of school that affect student performance. Some of these factors include school budgets, overcrowding, "social environment, teacher selection, class size, student-teacher ratio, and school rules" (Rowley & Wright, 2011, p. 94). Lack of social services such as counseling were also not taken into account. These initiatives also fail to take in account other factors such as social, writing, reading, speaking, and testing anxiety that students may feel when they enter their English classes (Adams, 2004; Park, 2011; Francesco, Mauro, Gianluca, & Enrico, 2009; Huberty, 2012).

By trying to enforce the idea that education can be one-size-fits-all, American schools instead increased levels of educational disparity of students from low socio-economic backgrounds and students who may be unable to have successful education experiences because of anxiety, leading to possible failure on standardized assessments (Adams, 2004; Park, 2011; Francesco, Mauro, Gianluca, & Enrico, 2009; Huberty, 2012, Rowley & Wright, 2011). These

initiatives and the pressure placed on districts, schools, administrators, and teachers to orchestrate the manufacturing of students to fit a predetermined idea of what success in English class looks like and what knowledge consists of does not take in to account the various struggles that many students face that make a one-size-fits-all educational system not only unjust but also unrealistic (Apple, 1996, 2000, 2008, 2011; Apple & Beane, 2007; Freire, 1972, 1993, Giroux, 2011; Greene, 1973, 1988, 1995; McLaren, 2007; Huberty, 2012; Park, 2011; Francesco et al.).

Many educators in low-performing schools or districts are given scripted lessons as a result of the pressure to prepare students to pass state tests. Individualized education, education to meet the needs of each students, dissipated, leaving many students to fall through the cracks of a broken system. These initiatives have "segregated the curriculum and turned the achievement gap into a chasm" (Hill, 2017, p. 84). Students are tested so frequently in reading, English teachers do not have the opportunities to create lessons and activities that could foster transformative learning experiences for their students (Nemec, 2012). Adding such pressure to students may cause those with classroom anxiety to decline instead of thrive (Von Der Embse, et al., 2013). Despite the fact that the NCLB policies have now expired, the effect that it had on educational practices remains. Resmovits (2015) expresses that the standardization of schools and their curriculums that has been left in place because of NCLB and other educational initiatives such as the Race to the Top initiative (2009) "reduce children to the sum of a single score, and they discourage teacher creativity" (p. 2) creating a banking style of education (Freire, 1973; 1993) that makes classrooms feel more like a factory than a safe space for students to go (Kimbrough, Magyari, Langenberg, Chesney, & Berman, 2010).

In addition to high stakes testing, Rhein and Sukawatana (2015) found that varying influences contribute to classroom anxiety, specifically anxiety in the English classroom. They

found that one the primary factors for students' English class anxiety was a result of adolescents experiencing transitional periods in life. Increased hormones and discovery during this time may cause students to feel a range of heightened emotions. Secondly, cultural conflicts also influence students anxiety in English class when asked to participate with those outside of their culture or in front of those who are outside of their normal social cliques or are from different cultures on a larger scale – religion, socio-economic status, popularity, etc. (Rhein & Sukawatana, 2015). These cultural factors may be from various microsystems in a student's life or from macrosystems on a larger scale (Bronfenbrenner 1979; 1992; 1999). English classes can be especially challenging for students with anxiety because the vulnerability some students may experiencing associated with writing or lack of self-efficacy about their reading or writing abilities (Peel, 2014; Krieger, 2010). Within the walls of a classroom, too, are many secondary influences. Friends, teachers, and the relationship one's home has with the school are all secondary factors that may contribute to students' anxieties (Al-Shboul & Huwari, 2015; Peel, 2014).

Primary and secondary influences of anxiety in the English classroom can be linked to the concept of culture within the macrosystems, the outermost layer of Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner 1979; 1983; 1992; 1999). As adolescents go through various stages in life, they may acquire any number of microsystems. If one's cultural elements differ between those microsystems, for example, between one's family (lifelong influence) and one's friends (temporary influence), a student may begin to experience anxiety as a result of the internal or in some cases external conflicts that may arise between the microsystems (Twenge et al., 2015; Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Twenge et al. (2015) provides a specific example of what a conflict between microsystems may look like. Imagine a student who was raised in a religious home

(primary influence). The student dutifully follows the strict rules of his home and faith. Eventually, the student attends college (secondary influence) and becomes a part of a new culture by creating a circle of close friends outside of his family's influence. The student may feel empowered by the freedom felt at college and could adopt new cultural beliefs, challenging the primary influences' religious establishments while at college, favoring the student's secondary influences over the primary influence of his family during that time period (Twenge et al., 2015).

When a student begins favoring friendships, athletic teams, or other secondary sources over those primary influences of family, family values, religion, or other belief systems, they may temporarily rebel against the values to which they are accustomed (Rhein & Sukawatana, 2015; Young, 1999; Twenge et al., 2015). These influences may cause students to struggle with or question their identities within various systems, which may cause students to experience anxiety (Twenge et al., 2015). The juxtaposition students may face during these periods in life affect various areas of a student's life, including school and classroom anxieties (Olanezhad, 2015).

According to Martinez et al. (2011), students who struggle with identity may begin to experience self-doubt. For students who are vulnerable and unsure of themselves, English class may become more challenging. Finding books students can relate to or motivating students to write about their own identity or engage in self-expression of any form may become challenging (Martinez, et al., 2011). Students may act out or express frustration or refuse to participate in classroom activities. Students may begin to use negative self-talk and may over complicate assignments, making them feel various symptoms of frustration and defeat which may lead to anxiety, and students may become unwilling to be active learners, engaging in discourse in the

classroom, for fear of what may happen if they do (Martinez, et al., 2011; Peel 2014; Freire, 1993).

Peel (2014) explains the influences between school and home life. The connection between the two parts of a student's life would be in Bronfenbrenner's (1979) mesosystem, the influence of connections between home life and school life. The mesosystem links the microsystems within an individual's life (Peel, 2014). In a study he conducted of a highly motivated 10th grade English class, Peel (2014) discovered what his students perceive to be primary influences in their microsystems that impact their learning in some capacity, including but not limited to an unstable home life due to alcoholism, violent verbal arguments, and unemployment (Peel, 2014). The primary influence of their home microsystem linked through the mesosystem to their school microsystem and made them feel disconnected to reading and writing assignments, in many cases causing students in the class to suffer from both reading and writing anxiety (Peel, 2014).

In Peel's (2014) study, one student felt her family verbally prioritized her education so that she could someday get a good job with high income potential. Despite the verbal statements her parents made about the value of her education, they constantly took her out of school travel to their home in another country. The student missed an incredible amount of instructional time. The student began to feel anxiety and believe she would be jeopardizing her future if she could not maintain her high GPA. As her absences increased, the relationship between her home life and school life began to degrade. She began falling behind in school and the confidence she once had with reading and writing diminished drastically. Her self-efficacy dropped noticeably. The once bright, engaged student became introverted with no self-confidence in her abilities in her English class (Peel, 2014). The two microsystems increased her English class anxiety by

lowering the confidence she once had as a student. Conflicts between various secondary influences in the mesosystem may contribute to anxiety in the English classroom (Olanezhad, 2015).

Peel (2014) found that anxiety in students' ELA classes developed primarily when students were assigned conflicting writing demands between personal situations (e.g., writing with friends) and academic realms (e.g., formal writing). Students may, for example, use varying forms of misspelling, slang, and lack punctuation through text messages and communication on social media. The way students communicate with their friends would not be acceptable in a formal writing assignment. The identities they form with their friends did not match how they were asked to participate in their English classes (Peel, 2014; Liu & Ni, 2015). In addition, academic writing and speaking in front of the class is seen as more challenging than discussions with one's friends (Liu & Ni, 2015). When students encounter assignments, they find challenging, they may experience lack of self-efficacy which may further exacerbate their English classroom anxiety (Olanezhad, 2015). Other factors may increase students' anxiety in the English classroom as well. When students are given time limits or timed assignments, completion became more challenging. When the difficulty increases, confidence may decrease, causing anxiety in the academic setting to build (Kirmizi & Kirmizi, 2015).

Learning for students, especially in English language arts, a subject that requires testing throughout one's entire K-12 educational experiences, has created an atmosphere that enables passive learning in lieu of authentic transformative learning experiences. A transformative learning experience occurs when dramatic changes happen in students' thought processes that may makes the student reconsider perspectives and may even shift the way he/she thinks about the world (Nemec, 2012). Passive learning through test prep activities may be a causal effect,

perpetuating the anxiety students experience in English class. Because of current pressures on students to pass reading tests, students may restrict thinking outside the box (Gallagher, 2009: Josephs, 2016). The fears that students begin experiencing as early as elementary school continue to grow and fester as they graduate to the next grade level. Those fears may grow into full-fledged anxiety directly related to the language arts or may expand into other areas of students' lives (Gallagher, 2009; Adler, 1982; Josephs, 2016).

In an educational system that demands students perform well on standardized testing, pressure may induce anxiety. According to the Oklahoma State Department of Education (2018), 3rd grade through 8th grade students are required to take a battery of standardized tests. In 5th grade and 8th grade, the state requires additional writing tests. Once students are in high school, juniors are required to take the ACT or SAT which include several essays. Students in 3rd grade can be held back if they do not obtain a high enough score to indicate they are "proficient." In 8th grade, students reading test scores are directly linked to whether they are able to apply for a driver's license or not. The anxiety some students feel can ultimately affect their performance on the very test they are anxious about. Beidel (1988) discovered the hearts of students who suffer from testing anxiety beat significantly faster than their peers. Because information processing involves memory, students who fret over testing tend to perform more poorly.

For many students, reading out loud produces anxiety (Moons & Shield, 2015). Sometimes, continued anxiety associated with reading in English class is made more severe by family, friends, teachers, and other secondary influences (Bronfenbrenner 1972; 1990; 1999; Moons & Shield, 2015). While most classrooms have at least a few students who enjoy reading out loud to the class, there are those who may sit in class panicked about being asked to read out loud. According to Eisner (2003), "There is a huge difference between knowing how to read and

having an interest in doing so" (p. 650). Students may know how to read but having interest in doing so in front of the class may be suppressed because of anxiety (Hinton et al, 2008; Eysenck et al., 2007). Jalongo and Hirsh (2010) explain that reading and fear are connected, typically through students having to read out loud in classrooms.

According to Eysenck et al. (2007), reading out loud or reading, in general, can be the cause of classroom anxiety. When students are asked to read out loud in English class, a student with anxiety may experience activation of the amygdala, "the part of the brain which elicits an immediate sense of dread and fear," a dread and fear that may have been cultivating for years (Jalongo & Hirsh, 2010). Students begin to sense a feeling of alarm and their anxiety begins to manifest, causing students to remember past embarrassments (Hinton et al. 2008). Students with anxiety may also experience self-doubt, embarrassment, and fear and may interfere with reading in English class. Those feelings are painful and can cause students to resent reading (Hinton et al. 2008; Jalongo & Hirsh, 2010).

Krieger (2010) surveyed fifteen students about their reading habits. Of those surveyed, the majority said that they read if required for homework and rarely read for pleasure. "Two male students claimed that they never read for pleasure, while two female students admitted that they regularly read romance novels but did not consider that 'real' reading since the books were not academic texts" (Krieger, 2010, p. 4). When Krieger (2010) opened a discussion with her students about their lack of reading habits, an overwhelming majority said that the reason they disliked reading was because of their high school English classes. Students felt that they were forced to read "boring, insignificant texts that were irrelevant to their lives" (Krieger, 2010, p. 4). English language arts teachers have a challenging task. Not only are students not reading because they may lack the interest, but many may choose not to read because the anxiety reading triggers.

Gallagher (2009) refers to anxiety about reading as readicide: “the systematic killing of the love of reading, often exacerbated by the inane, mind-numbing practices found in schools” (p. 2). Students simply are not reading (Wilhelm, 2007; Smith and Wilhelm, 2002).

Earley (2007) conducted a study of the effect of anxiety on oral reading fluency on forty-three students, ranging from 4th to 6th grade. These students were given the Woodock Johnson III Passage Comprehension (Woodock, McGrew, & Mather, 2007), a test that measures reading comprehension, Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills, and the Social Phobia Anxiety Inventory for Children. Earley’s (2007) study revealed a heavy correlation between anxiety scores and student reading comprehension. Earley (2007) concluded that when students experience increased anxiety, their reading comprehension decreased.

Unfortunately, having to read out loud in class can often be paired with judgement and ridicule from peers and in some instances possibly the teacher. Much of the fear attributed to reading may have a direct correlation to the increase in standardized testing. According to Gallagher (2009), a critic of standardized testing, students become disinterested in or anxious of reading throughout their secondary schooling by “high interest reading being squeezed out in favor of more test preparation practice” (p. 4). Adler (1982) echoes Gallagher’s stance and explains, “All genuine learning is active, not passive. It involves the use of the mind, not just memory” (p. 50).

Oxford (1999) found that the way in which teachers correct students’ work in the classroom greatly increased students’ anxiety if done in a negative manner. Additionally, Al-Shboul and Huwari (2015) found that teacher feedback greatly contributed to anxiety students felt in their English class. According to Al-Shboul and Huwari (2015), English teachers continually attempt to help students build literary skills and offer feedback in hope of improving

students' abilities in reading, writing, speaking, and listening. Students, however, do not always perceive feedback as constructive. If students are not taught how to receive feedback from their English teachers, they may experience increased anxiety and lowered confidence (Al-Shboul & Huwari, 2015). Anxiety is most likely to increase if negative feedback was received by students who were already concerned or anxious (Kirmizi & Kirmizi, 2015; Liu & Ni, 2015; Olanezhad, 2015).

Olanezhad (2015) found that students with English classroom anxiety may place causal blame on teachers. Al-Shboul and Huwari (2015) found that students were more likely to experience anxiety in English class if they felt insecure about knowledge of material or felt rushed. In general, students claimed to need more time in low stress situations to develop certain skills, particularly writing (Grupe & Nitschke, 2013; Al-Shboul and Huwari, 2015). Some students may express boredom as an attempt to mask English classroom anxiety (Peel, 2014).

According to Eysenck et al. (2007), the word *writing* is one that seems to expose many fears in English class. Being able to communicate in a professional manner through emails, texts, social media or being able to write in an academic setting is a necessary part of students' lives. The anxiety students experience because of the pivotal role that writing has in many aspects of life may be crippling for students' academic, professional, and personal lives (Eysenck et al., 2007). Students tend to believe that writing is "a dark and bloody mystery, the secrets of which the gods reveal to some but never to basic writers" (Sledd, 1993, p. 2). Before basic writing students ever enter the English language arts classrooms, they have often acquired a deep-rooted fear that language reveals both the contents of their mind and soul (Eysenck et al., 2007). Writing, for these students, may simply be a vehicle, transferring their innermost thoughts, feelings, and experiences in to the hands of peers. Such vulnerability could inform others of

private details and weaknesses which, if exposed, would make them easy targets. Other students may fear that their writings may be seen as wicked or inappropriate, possibly causing judgement and condemnation (Eysenck et al., 2007).

When Sledd (1993) consulted with teachers about the root of students' fear of writing, teachers said they "see the effects of students' fear most clearly on the surface of writing, for the surface reveals their vileness and depravity" (p. 2). Basic writers, for fear of the consequences of their words, tend to take what they believe to be the safest routes. "Thus the fear of error and a profound lack of confidence impedes development not only of command of the written language but in the development of ideas worth having or insights worth writing about" (Sledd, 1993, p. 3). Students place themselves inside a box, diminishing their possibility when given pen and paper or a screen with letters at their fingertips.

Before the 1970's, little research was done on writing anxiety; however, that all changed when Daly and Miller (1975) published quantifiable data on writing anxiety through the Writing Apprehension Test (WAT). The WAT has no score of zero, suggesting writing anxiety exists at some point in all writers. Writing anxiety symptoms include, but are not limited to, discomfort, distress, or disease of mind. Some students may experience a normal level of mild anxiety when asked to share writing in class, but for other students, simply the thought of having to share writing with another person may cause debilitating anxiety. Often, the anxiety about being anxious further increases anxiety (Bast & Barnes-Holmes, 2015; Cocuk, Yanpar Yelken, & Ozer, 2016; Rhein & Sukawatana, 2015; Stewart, Seifert, & Rolheiser, 2015; Zorbaz, 2015).

Martinez, Kock, and Cass (2011) found that students who suffered from writing anxiety had poorer academic performance, resulting in a lower GPA (Martinez, Kock, & Cass, 2011) and may have contributed to students dropping out (Kilgore, Cronley, & Amey, 2013). Writing

anxiety can also limit future job possibilities. Students may choose to avoid any career path they believe may incorporate writing (Vekarić & Jelić, 2013) such as careers in science and business (Martinez et al., 2011). Students' lack of personal writing skills can also contribute to anxiety, further negatively affecting identity development (Park & Brenna, 2015), resulting in lower values of self-worth (Stukalenko, Zhakhina, Abuyev, Seitkasymov, & Utegenov, 2016), and lower self-efficacy (Scullin & Baron, 2013). When students place limitations on themselves, believing they are incapable of accomplishing writing tasks, when students are unwilling to open themselves to the vulnerability that coexists with sharing one's writing, their academic performance is affected. Not only do these students tend to have lower grades, students with lower academic performance have a higher rate of dropping out of high school (Kilgore, Cronley, & Amy, 2013).

In addition to anxiety experienced through reading and writing, students may experience anxiety when faced with the task of presenting an oral report or any assignment that requires public speaking (Raja, 2017). Students entering the classroom often feel devastating fear and anxiety when faced with speaking in front of their classmates. Many even experience a sense of dread in these situations (Brodie, 2010; Rattine-Flaherty, 2014). Students may feel an increase in their sense of apprehension of public speaking because they do not welcome the perceived extra attention or judgement that they believe they are receiving as result of their public speaking (Rattine-Flaherty, 2014; Richmond, Wrench, & McCroskey, 2013). Students who already suffer from low self-esteem are particularly susceptible to feelings of anxiety when faced with public speaking because the idea of everyone's eyes being on them is panic inducing. These students tend to feel isolated, and public speaking makes that isolation seem more severe, placing them on

a pedestal open to ridicule (McCroskey, 1997; Pearson, Child, DeGreef, Semlak, & Burnett, 2011; Rattine-Flaherty, 2014).

Social and Technology Based Anxiety

With the constant reinvention of technology, students are exposed to various social media outlets such as Snapchat, Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter. Lunden (2014) found that in the second half of 2013 alone, Instagram grew by 23%. Lenhart (2015) found 52% of adolescents between the ages of 13 to 17 have an Instagram account. Warscharuer and Ware (2008) explain that technology, literacy, culture, and society are viewed as being completely intertwined. From this perspective, technologies do not impact literacy, society, or culture, but rather are seen as embodiments of social and cultural relations that, in turn, structure social and cultural futures (p. 222). Prensky (2001), a developer of educational software, explains that students have changed and the educational system in place does not meet students' needs. Prensky (2001) explains that these "students have been born into a world filled with gadgets and online community, and to most of them it's a way of life." Society has seemed to lose the dynamic interests that it once possessed. Students, today, live in a "flat" world (Friedman, 2007) – the connection of "all the knowledge centers on the planet together into a single global network" (p.8).

Students may be engrossed in technology and social media. Unfortunately, however, these habits may be cause for one of the most common types of anxiety adolescents experience, social anxiety (Perrin, 2015; Vannucci et al., 2017; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). According to Vannucci, Flannery, & Ohannessian (2017), social media plays an important role in the growing anxiety adolescents feel. Social media refers "to internet applications that enable users to generate and exchange content with others," e.g. snapchat, facebook, etc. (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010), has become central to the lives of emerging adults (Vannucci et al, 2017). According to

Perrin (2015), 90% of adolescents and young adults use social media, and of those who participate, most use more than two social media sites.

According to Bandura & Walter's (1963) social cognitive learning theory, peer influence occurs partly through "behavioral display." Individuals display behaviors or attitudes that are socially desirable. Peers, in turn, mimic that behavior. Freeman, Hadwin, & Halligan (2011) provide an example of behavior display in their study. They found that adolescents were more likely to endorse risky behavior like smoking, fighting, drinking, and trying drugs if at least three people considered popular endorsed it first through a chat room or other social platform (Freeman et al., 2011). Social media is vastly popular and connects adolescents even when separated by distance. One recent report (Common Sense, 2015) found that 67% of American adolescents own a smartphone, suggesting that online peer interaction is at the fingertips of most adolescents in the United States in virtually any location and at any time (Sherman, 2016).

Internet use during childhood and adolescence tends to be high and typically includes playing games, communicating, and visiting websites (Johnson, 2006). During childhood development, children becoming more capable of complex social (e.g., friendship), emotional (e.g., anxiety), and cognitive (e.g., problem solving) behavior (Johnson & Puplampu, 2008). Sanders et al. (2000) found that those who used the Internet the most had the weakest interpersonal connections. While playing games online may have some benefits to cognitive development, other studies have found a direct link between internet use and distractibility, over-arousal, hostility, and aggression (Bacigalupa, 2005; Funk, Chan, Brouwer, & Curtis, 2006). Bacigalupa (2005) conducted a study using observations in a daycare setting. He concluded that when children played video games, "their interactions with others were disjointed, rushed, and ineffective" (Bacigalupa, p. 25). Funk et al. (2006) conducted focus group interviews with

children and discovered that students had the perception of over-arousal and loss of awareness of surroundings during game playing. In addition to playing games online, children spend nearly one-third of the time they are online using communication tools such as email, chat, and different forms of instant messaging (Livingston & Bober, 2005; Media Awareness Network, 2006; Roberts et al., 2005). According to Valkenburg and Peters (2007), who surveyed children and adolescents, "Socially anxious respondents communicated online less than did non-socially anxious respondents" (p. 267). Children also reported visiting websites approximately one-third of the time that they are online, (Livingston & Bober, 2005; Media Awareness Network, 2006; Roberts et al., 2005).

Many adolescent students tirelessly compare themselves to others, check their feeds for likes on posts or pictures every minute, and desire affirmations in the forms of likes, comments, shares and other similar social media signs of affirmation. Social media and the pressure it places on students to act or be a certain way causes severe anxiety in many students. It affects their self-confidence as well and their mental stability. Marengo, Longobardi, Fabris, and Settanii (2018) conducted a study using Social Comparison Theory (Festinger, 1954) and found that high use of social media such as Snapchat and Instagram posed a particular danger for adolescents, causing those who use social media more than two hours a day more likely to experience anxiety and depression as result of the idealized, filtered photos that users are constantly exposed to. The more time a student spends on social media, the more likely that student is to develop anxiety related to body image or concern over what others think about one's image. Lowered self-confidence may in turn influence a student's behavior in the classroom (Marengo et al., Holsen et al., 2001; Morin et al., 2017; Paxton et al., 2006). Denizet-Lewis (2017) found that parents believed that social media, texting, and the obsessive need to participate in online activities were

partly to blame for the anxiety that plagued their children. Surprisingly, many students agreed with their parents about the negative impact that social media plays in their lack of self-efficacy and increased anxiety (Denizet-Lewis, 2017).

A study by Schou Andreassen et al. (2016) examined the relationship between social media and anxiety in a Norwegian community sample of late adolescents and adults. Their study suggested that participants who showed addictive social media use also showed increased anxieties (Schou Andreassen et al., 2016). Campisi et al. (2012) conducted a study composed of United States undergraduate students. Of those included in the study, 17% of students reported that Facebook caused them to experience symptoms of anxiety. Half of those surveyed admitted to experiencing anxiety when sent a friend request, even delaying the response to the request because of the anxiety it caused (Campisi et al., 2012).

Anxiety: Coping Strategies

Unfortunately, more adolescents are experiencing anxiety than are recognized or treated within the school setting (De Wit et al., 2011; Thompson et al., 2013) Anxiety is becoming one of the most common and wide-spreading mental illnesses, and the need for treatment should no longer be ignored (Masia-Warner et al., 2005). The longer problems with anxiety go unnoticed the more impact they will have on adolescents' lives (Ingul et al., 2012). Effective coping skills can help adolescents overcome many of the challenges they face during adolescence and throughout life (Lothmann, Holmes, Chan, & Lau, 2011; Marks, Sobanski, & Hine, 2010; Von Der Embse, Barterian, & Segool, 2013). Awareness and treatment of anxiety can be crucial in reducing comorbidity among mental health disorders (Miller, Laye-Gindhu, Bennett, Liu, Gold, March, Olson, & Waechtler, 2011), slowing progression of anxiety into adulthood (Lothmann et al., 2011), and offering adolescents protection from the stressors that are frequent during that

stage of life (Broeren & Muris, 2009; Marks et al., 2010). Students would be able to function more effectively and focus more on academics, reducing behavioral, attendance, and social concerns for students themselves, teachers, and administrators (Bostick & Anderson, 2009; Lothmann et al., 2011; Marks et al., 2010; Thompson et al., 2013; Von Der Embse et al., 2013). Involving parents could help create consistent support and potentially encourage them to seek help for their own needs, if they exist (Bogels et al., 2003).

Specific methods have shown some success in research studies concerned with reducing anxiety. Gosch, Flannery-Schroeder, Mauro, and Compton (2006), found that positive self-talk can show a positive correlation in the reduction of anxiety in students. Gosch, et al. (2006) found that students who have a higher ability to articulate their feelings have found long-term benefit in being.

Masia-Warner, Dent, Fisher, Alvir, Albano, and Guardino (2005) used the Theory of Influence and Social Learning Theory as the framework for their study of forty-two high school students. Marsia-Warner et al. (2005) determined that few anxious adolescents receive treatment for anxiety. They provided services for students with anxiety at school, hoping that barriers to treatment would be circumvented. Participants in the study reported a reduction in anxiety. Sixty-seven percent of the participants no longer met the criteria for social anxiety at a nine-month follow-up (Marsia-Warner et al., 2005).

While anxiety can be crippling, some studies have had positive results in the classroom, implementing practices to help students feel more comfortable and overcome some of the anxiety they feel. Freire (1993) refers to educational practices that hinder students' abilities to create, engage, and construct knowledge as "narration sickness" (p. 52). In many classrooms, students are talked to or talked at. They are given information to memorize without being active

participants in their learning. They become undemanding recipients of knowledge that serve a singular purpose – to pass the state test. In classrooms that do not engage students in learning, students feel oppressed, disengaged, and void of curiosity, creativity and imagination. Because of the oppressive nature of testing, some teachers feel they must "adapt the student to what is inevitable, to what cannot be changed" (Freire, 1998, p. 23-24). Feelings of hopelessness and disengagement can cause students to feel anxiety. Many students in these situations feel ill-prepared for what is asked of them in the classroom, causing anxiety to build. Teachers who create a classroom environment that is non-threatening to students and supports their learning process can minimize anxiety and maximize learning (Laio & Wang, 2015).

Online Schooling

According to Clark (2001), online schooling is defined as "an educational organization that offers K-12 courses through Internet or Web-based methods" (p. 1). Russell (2004) explains that online schools can provide all or some of a student's curriculum. Online schooling can take on various forms. Some schools are completely online while others may be blended with a brick and mortar setting (Roblyer & Marshall, 2002–2003). Richardson (2019) introduced Grand Charter Schools as a model that incorporates online curriculum, guidance of a teacher, and one-on-one instruction.

Online schooling has continued to grow in popularity as a viable alternative to traditional classroom education (Archambault & Kennedy, 2017). According to Lee, Edwards, Menson, and Rawls (2011), many reasons contribute to the increase in enrolment in K-12 online schooling options. Online offers students the ability to work at their own pace and to take courses that would otherwise be unavailable (Lee et al., 2011). Other factors may possibly impact a family's decision to enroll their student(s) in online schooling, including health issues, bullying in brick

and mortar schools, desire to advance quickly through curriculum, or athletic schedules (Lee et al., 2011). Online schooling also may provide families who wish to homeschool the opportunity to stay at home without feeling like their child may become behind because of the parents' limited knowledge of content (Archambault & Kennedy, 2017). Students considered high-risk may also be drawn to online schooling options because it may be the best mechanism for completing high school (Archambault et al., 2010).

According to Archambault and Kennedy (2017), "anytime, anyplace" learning, along with the ability of the technology to individualize the curriculum to meet the needs of students, are motivating factors for enrolling in online education. Online schools challenge the traditional organization of education, allowing students at various levels to engage with content and curriculum pacing that meets their needs, interests, and state standards (McNabb & Olmstead, 2009; Archambault & Kennedy, 2017; Lee et al, 2011). McNabb and Olmstead (2009) extol online learning for its ability to meet student needs through individualized curriculum.

According to Roblyer and Marshall (2002-03), while there are possible advantages to online schooling, there are also challenges. Online schooling does not necessarily work for all students. Typically, for a student to be successful in online learning curriculums, the student must be able to self-regulate (Archambault & Kennedy, 2017; Roblyer & Marshall, 2002–2003). Self-motivation, the ability to engage and structure one's own learning, previous experience with technology, positive attitude, and self-confidence in academia all are determining factors when considering whether online schooling is the right choice for a student (Archambault & Kennedy, 2017; Roblyer & Marshall, 2002–2003).

Apart from state testing, some students may not have to meet at any location or prove they are the ones working. Everything is conducted online without requiring verification (Perrin

& Duggan, 2015; Lowes & Lin, 2015). For many students, parental involvement plays a pivotal role in success. Some parents welcome the chance to engage with student's learning, while others do not have the time or the capability to help (Archambault, et al., 2010; Lee et al., 2011). Online schooling aims to help bridge the gap between socio-economic statuses of students (Archambault & Kennedy, 2017). Perrin and Duggan (2015) explain, however, that low-income families still experience disparity in their education compared to more affluent students. Students are still experiencing oppression because of their socio-economic statuses (Freire, 1993; Giroux, 2011; McLaren, 2007).

While online schooling may be an appropriate choice for some students, not every student has the skills, self-efficacy, or family support needed to be successful in online schooling (Lowes & Lin, 2015; Perrin & Duggan, 2015; Archambault & Kennedy, 2017). Online schools, however, often provided computers and internet access to families who would otherwise not be able to afford such access (Lowes & Lin, 2015). Digital literacy is an important component of online schooling, and for some there may be a gap that must be overcome for students to be successful in online schooling (Lowes & Lin, 2015).

Chapter 3

Methods

Epistemological Stance

My theoretical ideology lies within that of social constructivism, centering on the idea that a teacher plays the role of "a colleague or companion whom students can look up to rather than as an authority who has control over them" (Schiro, 2008, p. 166). It is vital for humans in every stage of life, including adolescents, to be able to construct knowledge and connect that knowledge to the world in a meaningful way. Bruner (1961) proposed that learners' construct their own knowledge and do this by organizing and categorizing information using a coding system. Bruner believed that the most effective way to develop a coding system is for students to discover it through their learning, rather than rote memorization within a banking system of education (Bruner, 1961; Freire, 1993). According Giroux (1992), the role of schools should be "to provide students with knowledge, character, and moral vision" (p. 18) that encourages "the principles and practices of human dignity, liberty, and social justice" (p. 8).

My theoretical perspective lies within interpretivism, specifically of symbolic interactionism. According to Blumer (1969), there are three basic assumptions of the interactionist. First, "human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings that these things have for them" (p. 2). Secondly, "meaning of such things is derived from, and arises out of, the social interaction that one has with one's fellows'" (p. 2). Finally, "Meanings are handled in, and modified through an interpretive process used by the person in dealing with the things he encounters" (p. 2). Blumer's (1969) interactionist assumptions lie "against the backdrop of pragmatist philosophy" (p. 72). In pragmatism, researchers use whatever methods may be needed and whatever data collection tools will lead to the best possible research to answer one's research

questions. Rescher (1995) explains that "The characteristic idea of philosophical pragmatism is that efficacy in practical application--the issue of 'which works out most effectively'--somehow provides a standard for the determination of truth in the case of statements, rightness in the case of action, and value in the case of appraisals" (p. 710). Tashakkori and Teddie (1998) summarize the overarching idea of pragmatism. They encourage researchers to "study what interests and is value to you, study it in the different ways that you deem appropriate and utilize the results in ways that can bring about positive consequences within your value system" (Tashakkori & Teddie, 1998, p. 30).

Application to Research

My epistemological stance in interpretivism allows me to take the stories, the writing, the artistic creations of participants, and my personal observations and analyze participants' stories and themes. By doing so, I hope to help better understand the effects of anxiety on students in the English language arts classroom. I expect that no story will be the same, but that each might provide unique insights into struggles with anxiety. By utilizing a symbolic interactionist theoretical framework set in the foundational worldview of interpretivism with a backdrop in pragmatism, the possibilities for data collection and analysis remained open and allowed for me to provide students the platform in which they can share their experiences and have a voice where they may not have in the past.

Research Design

A case study was chosen to explore the research questions, Creswell (2012) defines a case study as "a qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a real-life, contemporary bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information, and reports, a case description and case

themes" (p. 97). Stake (1995) and Shank (2006) elaborate that a case study must capture the uniqueness of the case. It provides tools for the researchers to understand an individual situation in depth, examining the details and interactions within its context. Case studies look at the peculiarity and complexity involved in a case and hope to understand those peculiarities and complexities in a more profound way. Using a case study enables a better understanding of an "issue or problem using the case as a specific illustration" (Creswell, 2007, p. 73).

Case studies enable researchers to utilize various data collection tools and provide a path of insight into the perceptions of the participants. According to Yin (2008), a case study is "an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context" (p. 18). By utilizing a case study approach, the researcher may gain a more holistic, genuine view of the problems or cases being studied (Yin, 1984). The current study utilized an exploratory case study (Yin, 1984; 2003; 2008). Studying the effects of anxiety on students in an English classroom is far more complex than a survey or statistical data can show. I explored the anxiety my students experience to better understand the struggles they face (Yin, 1984; 2003; 2008).

Narrative analysis was used to explore and better understand meaning through participants' voices as they shared their stories about experiences with and perceptions of anxiety in the English classroom. Narrative analysis (Riessman, 1993; Clandinin & Connelly, 2004; Mitchell & Egudo, 2003) utilizes discourse with participants about lived experiences of the phenomena or problem being studied to gain insight through participants stories and experiences that demonstrate the realities in which participants perceive and experience the study's phenomena or problem. Narratives provide a medium for participants to share their realities which involve personal and social contexts, where "narratives are a construction of a story about reality rather than a direct representation of reality" (Mitchell & Egudo, 2003, p. 9).

While my findings include themes discovered amongst the five participants, I was not as concerned with themes among participants, but rather, I wanted to know students' and parents' individual stories and perceptions of anxiety in the English classroom. It was about understanding and hearing students' voices. According to Clandinin and Connelly (2004), narrative analysis is "aimed at understanding and making meaning of experience" through the stories participants tell (p. 80). For the purpose of my study, narrative analysis was appropriate because students' and parents' stories were imperative in understanding their perceptions of anxiety in the English classroom. Students and parents provided information about their experiences through "narrative fragments, enacted in storied moments of time and space, and reflected upon and understood in terms of narrative unities and discontinuities" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2004, p. 17). Perceptions of English classroom anxiety emerged based on remembered experiences of both student and parent participants. Their perceptions of their experiences of English classroom anxiety was shared through narratives that students and parents constructed over time based on their memories of their experiences. People connect what they know to make sense of experiences and create unified life experiences, attempting to eliminate any discontinuities by combining their experiences in to a sequence of events, a narrative (Riessman, 1993).

A variety of qualitative data, including interviews, student artifacts, and observations, was collected. Qualitative data enables the researcher to learn from the participants to understand the meaning of their lives (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Qualitative data correlates with my epistemological stance of interpretivism. The researcher studies what is part of their natural environment, working to make sense of people and their experiences. Qualitative research is descriptive, providing a vivid overview of the experiences of participants (McMillan &

Schumacher, 2006). Qualitative data is open-ended and is a process of evolving with time and research. (McMillan, 2008). According to Buchler (2013), "Qualitative researchers explore, discover, and construct the meaning using a wide-angle lens, with more constructivist claims to develop new knowledge." As a researcher, using qualitative research allows me to explore the specific problem of student anxiety in the English language arts classroom. Qualitative research enables me to gain a broader perspective of the complex nature of student anxiety based on students' personal experiences and allows flexibility with regards to collecting, analyzing, and writing about my findings (Creswell, 2018, p. 61). The hope is to encourage students to use their voices and share their stories (Creswell, 2018).

Within a case study, researchers may choose to set boundaries (Stake, 1995). This bounded system comprises five students from Grand Charter Schools. The participants vary in their background experiences with anxiety in the English classroom; however, all five students share a commonality of anxiety triggered in the English language arts classroom. Various types of qualitative data were collected from students and parents in order to better understand the perceptions students have about their experiences (Creswell, 2007; Stake, 1995).

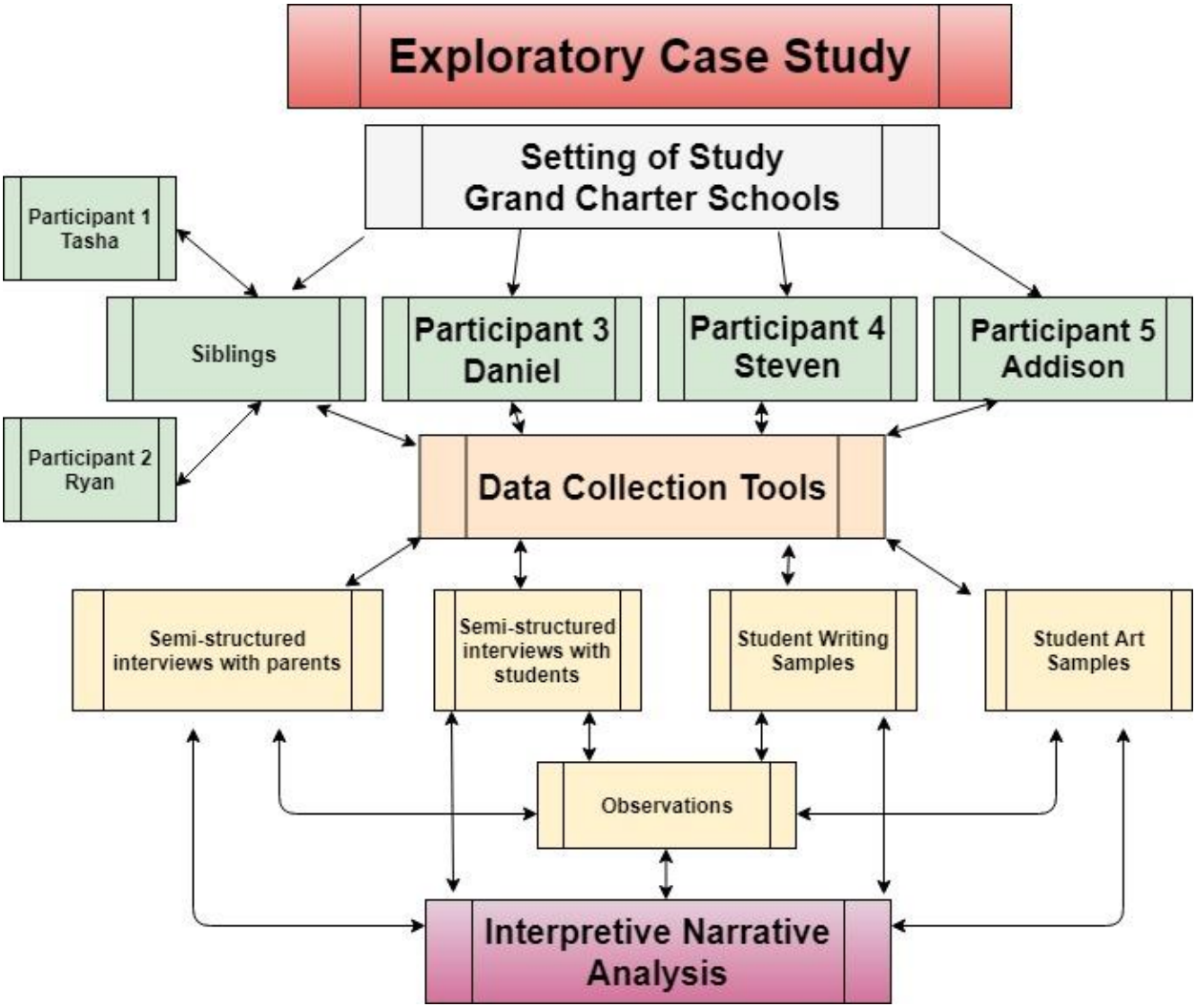


Figure 3: Exploratory Case Study Design

Rationale for Research Methods and Instrumentation

I conducted a case study of five students and one of their parents from Grand Virtual Charter Schools in order to better understand the way students and their parents perceive their experiences with anxiety in English class. Qualitative research aims to explore people's lived experiences, discover possible meaning of those experiences, and explain possible thinking or patterns of participants through various instrumentation (Yin, 2016). My research questions aim to explore "the views and perspectives of a study's participants" (Yin, 2016, p. 9). Exploring the

narratives of the participants in the study developed "multiple realities" (Yin, 2016, p. 16) and was appropriate to understand the "contextual richness" (Yin, 2016, p. 3) of anxiety from various K-12 students who have experienced anxiety in their English class, a place expected to be safe for all students.

Within qualitative research, multiplicity allows for research to include "social, institutional, cultural, and environmental conditions" (Yin, 2016, p. 9). A qualitative study of anxiety best connected these conditions with primary and secondary influences (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; 1992; 1999). Within qualitative research, the researcher may actively converse with, listen to, and observe the participants (Yin, 2016). Although there are useful ways in which one may quantify anxiety levels in students, a quantitative design lacks the ability to gain the insight needed to understand students' and parents' perceptions of English classroom anxiety. The richness of qualitative data may have been forgone by a quantitative study because of the limitations and lack of discourse with participants. Quantifications about reading, writing, public speaking, and testing anxiety in a statistical analysis would not have been adequate in identifying real world primary and secondary influences (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; 1992; 1999) that contribute to English classroom anxiety or examining the anxiety students experience through a critical lens (Freire, 1972; 1993; 1998; Giroux, 1988; 1992; 2011; Apple, 2000; 2008; Greene, 1995; 1998; McLaren, 2007). A qualitative study analyzed information from those who had direct experience with the English classroom anxiety, allowing for a better understand of the anxiety being explored in the case study (Chase, 2013; Marshall & Rossman, 2016).

The current qualitative exploratory case study (Yin, 1989; 2016) explored students' and parents' perceptions of English classroom anxiety using a narrative interpretive analysis. Narrative interpretive analysis enabled the researcher to collect and analyze participants' stories

about their direct experiences with English classroom anxiety and was "aimed at understanding and making meaning of experience" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2004, p. 80). Experiences are constantly shaped by thoughts and connections to other memories or experiences. These memories and experiences can be created and interpreted through narratives (Bruner, 1996).

There are various methods that a researcher may employ when conducting a case study. Each tool used represents different philosophical positions in the approach used by the researcher as well as the data collected (Abma & Stake, 2014). One of the characteristics of a case study is the collection of data from multiple sources which allows for triangulation of evidence (Carolan et al., 2016). Triangulation improves the accuracy of a case study, making the study more trustworthy and the findings more credible (Cronin, 2014; Yin, 2014) Researchers may choose to employ the use of multiple data sources depending on the research questions, including but not limited to interviews, student artifacts, and observational data (Yin, 1994).

Instrumentation: Semi-structured interviews

According to Merriam (2009), researchers may explore certain phenomena and desire specific information from all the respondents, in which case there is a more structured section to the interview, asking more specific, less open-ended question. Within qualitative studies, however, researchers may desire to build off of the interviewee's responses. The researcher begins with a guide; however, there is liberty within a semi-structured interview to add and redirect as needed. But the largest part of the interview is guided by a list of questions or issues to be explored by the researcher. Semi-structured interviews are designed for subjective responses from participants and are appropriate for an exploratory case study because there is a lack in understanding of students' and parents' experiences and perceptions of anxiety in the literature (Merton & Kendall, 1946; Morse & Field, 1995).

According to Bartholomew et al. (2000), within the semi-structured interview, a framework is constructed to develop a guide of question stems developed by the researcher. The interview questions are individualized to the participants as needed. Participants respond to these open-ended questions as they wish, and the researcher may probe their responses when appropriate for answering the research questions. It makes semi-structured interviews unique among interview methods for the degree of relevancy it provides the topic while remaining responsive to the participant (Bartholomew, Henderson, & Marcia, 2000).

The semi-structured interviews for the current study were administered face-to-face, allowing the study certain advantages. One advantage to face-to-face interviews is that interview situations are more structured when the interviewer is present (de Leeuw, 2008). Another advantage is the optimization of communication because verbal and nonverbal communication may take place (de Leeuw, 2008). Conducting face-to-face, semi-structured interviews also allows researchers the opportunity to clarify questions if the participant does not understand a question and to insert unscheduled prompts for participants to answer based on previous questions and answers. In addition, being present for the interviews offers researchers the opportunity to observe and recognize any discomfort the interviewees may be experiencing (de Leeuw, 2008).

Instrumentation: Student writing

Writing has a pivotal role in education, especially in the English classroom. Randler et al. (2015) found that expressive writing had positive benefits for anxiety in general, but specifically for writing anxiety. If a student is anxious about writing, expressive writing can help negate that anxiety and reduce the negative feelings the student associates with writing. Expressive writing does not focus on grammar, spelling, mechanics, or organization of ideas; instead, expressive

writing is simply that – expressive (Scullin & Baron, 2013; Wynne et al., 2014). When students with anxiety engage in expressive writing, negative intrusive thoughts decrease and the working memory increases, reducing anxiety related to English class (Alparone, Pagliaro, & Rizzo, 2015).

Students with anxiety who lack self-efficacy may also benefit from writing about their perceived failures in English class. Tsai et al. (2015) found that when those suffering from anxiety face those negative thoughts through writing, emotional well-being increases or maintains, and self-enhancement may occur. By writing about negative perceptions or fears, "self-improvement is propelled by open consideration of one's shortcomings" (Tsai et al., 2015, p. 584). If students who suffer from anxiety actively participate in expressive writing, they may avoid the internalization of negative self-talk that students with anxiety may experience (Wynne et al., 2014).

Additionally, expressive writing utilizing positive experiences allows students with anxiety to recall moments associated with positive memories in which they may have felt self-confident and feel like they are capable of certain tasks that may otherwise deem daunting (Randler et al., 2015). Anxiety involves negative emotional factors (Stewart et al., 2015). By framing writing experiences in a context that induces positive memories or experiences, students with anxiety may have a positive writing experience. The experience a student with anxiety has depends largely on the setting of the classroom and the context in which the writing is presented to the students (Randler et al., 2015; Stewart et al., 2015). Classroom environment and instructional approach play a vital role in the perception a student with anxiety has towards a writing assignment. Cocuk et al. (2016) found that students who suffer from writing anxiety may

inhibit their writing competence, demonstrating the vitality of the way writing instruction is presented.

Instrumentation: Student Art

According to Morris (2014), students in English class may experience a sense of relaxation if they engage in some art related activity: doodling, drawing, painting, sculpting, etc. Some therapists focus specifically on drawing objects such as mandalas because they are circular, geometric patterns which have shown to be relaxing for those suffering from anxiety (Morris, 2014). Curry and Kasser (2005) implemented the drawing of mandalas and geometric patterns and found that it significantly reduced anxiety in college students. The complexity of the design helped college students with anxiety meditate and reduce their anxious thinking. Van der Vennet and Serice (2012) found similar reduction in anxiety when they replicated Curry and Kass's (2005) study.

Art interventions have successfully reduced anxiety in many studies (Chambala, 2008; Albertini, 2001; Crystal, 2001). Chambala (2008) used art interventions to successfully reduce anxiety that was comorbid with other disorders. Some of the activities included were creating two- and three-dimensional images of anxiety or safe places. Not only does art therapy help reduce anxiety, it also helps improve interpersonal skills, confidence and positive thinking in those who suffer from anxiety (Albertini, 2001; Crystal, 2001). Crystal (2001) tested the improvement of perceived self-efficacy, control, mobility, and positive thinking in participants with anxiety using art therapy. Crystal (2001) included various art forms with the participants, including sculptural masks, safe places, collages, and free drawing. In a particular session of the study, participants were asked to draw fears and how they might master those fears. Participants

reported higher levels of positive thinking and reduction in the anxiety felt when speaking about those fears (Crystal, 2001).

For the purposes of my case study, students engaged in an art-based activity, not to practice any form of cognitive behavior practices or therapy. Instead, the art students created served as a vehicle for students to explain with metaphor or deeper detail the way their anxiety makes them feel or the experiences that they have had with anxiety in language arts.

Instrumentation: Observational Data

One tool in which researchers may collect data for their case study is through the use of observational data. Obtaining observational data may involve the direct observations and recordings of research participants' behaviors within their physical and/or social environments (Mays & Pope, 1995; Mulhall, 2003).

Mulhall (2003) explains that observations provide "insight into interactions between dyads and groups; illustrates the whole picture; captures context/process; and informs about the influence of the physical environment" (p. 307). There are multiple ways in which researchers may collect observational data (Walshe et al., 2012). For some, observations may consist of non-participant observations in which the researcher has no relationship with the participants being observed (Quinlan, 2008). For the case study, however, observations were conducted in a setting that included the researcher in the group being observed through student, teacher, and parent relationships (Bloomer, Cross, Endacott, O'Connor, & Moss, 2012). Compared with observation methods, non-observational or self-reporting qualitative methods, such as interviews or focus groups, are typically less challenging to undertake but are subject to participant reporting problems and addressing the phenomena of study without being led in any direction (Curry et al., 2009; Morse, 2003; Walshe et al., 2012). Observational data allows the researcher to actually see

what people do rather than what they say they do (Caldwell & Atwal, 2005; Mulhall, 2003; Walshe et al., 2012). Observational data allows the researcher a unique opportunity to observe naturally occurring contexts and reveal much more information than individuals may recall, be aware of, choose to report, or decide is relevant than with other self-report data collection methods (Mays & Pope, 1995; Morse, 2003; Mulhall, 2003).

Participants

There are two types of sample selections typically used within case studies, probability and nonprobability sampling (Merriam, 2009; Yin, 2008; Punch, 2005). Probability sampling relies on random sampling while nonprobability utilizes purposeful sampling. Honigmann (1982) explains that nonprobability sampling m'

ethods "are logical as long as the fieldworker expects mainly to use his data not to answer questions like 'how much' and 'how often' but to solve qualitative problems, such as discovering what occurs, the implications of what occurs, and the relationships linking occurrences" (p. 84). For the purpose of the current study, nonprobability sampling was more appropriate because the sample was selected from students enrolled at Grand Charter Schools who were placed on my roster for the 2017-2018 and the 2018-2019 school year. Creswell (2017) refers to the sampling for the current study as purposeful critical sampling. The five participants sampled for the current study are students from Grand Charter Schools who come from various backgrounds but have suffered from anxiety in English classes while attending brick and mortar schools. The five participants range from fourth grade through 10th grade. Each participant presents a unique perspective into struggles with anxiety, specifically their anxiety in English class. One parent from each of the five student participants was also sampled to glean a more holistic view of students' experiences with anxiety in English class.

Ryan struggles with a stutter induced by anxiety in English class. Other than that, he has little obvious anxiety. Tasha, experiences debilitating test anxiety. They share a home and are part of an affluent family; therefore, I chose them to be able to observe two students in the same microsystem with the same primary influence of family according to Bronfenbrenner's (1979; 1992; 1999) Ecological Systems Theory. Steven suffers from irrational anxiety, dyslexia, and may be on the autism spectrum. Steven's family is unfalteringly devout and live in poverty. Steven's family's strong faith and lower socio-economic status within their microsystem affect other microsystems that Steven has been a part of in the past, including school (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; 1992; 1999). Addison has been formally diagnosed with General Anxiety Disorder; and, the social aspects of discussions, presentations, and participation in English class cause her anxiety. Her mother worked at the middle school she attended before transferring to Grand Charter Schools. The primary influences of her family's microsystem overlapped significantly with the secondary influences at school (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; 1992; 1999). Daniel suffers from excruciating social anxiety, and because of that, anxiety has remained within the microsystem of his family (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; 1992; 1999). All five student participants have experienced anxiety as a result of being enrolled in an English language arts class. Pseudonyms were used to protect students' and parents' identities. Student participants were preselected because of information from parents about their student(s) anxiety, 504's, and IEP's.

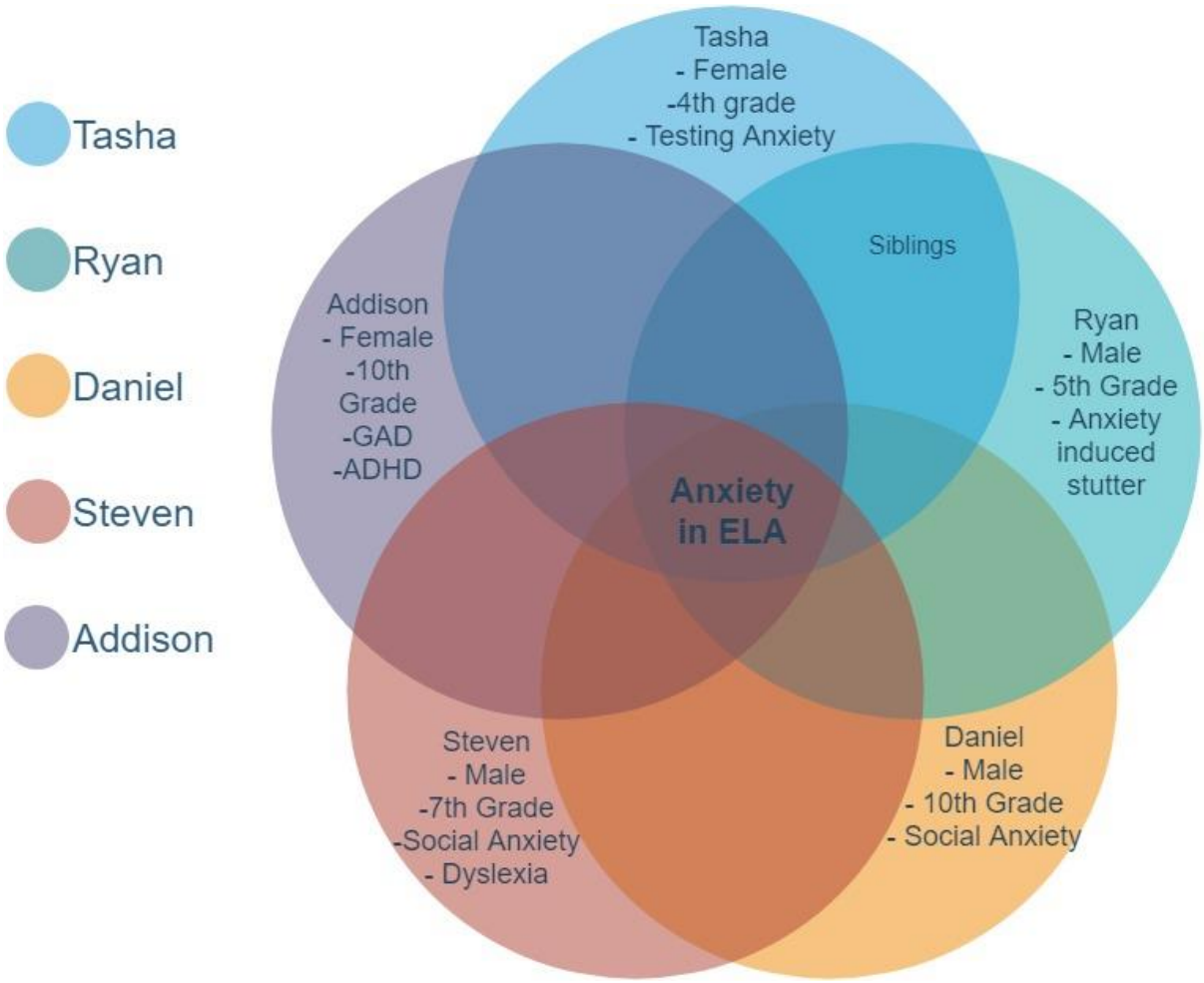


Figure 4: Student participants in case study

Qualitative Data Collection - Interviews

Throughout the four stages of data collection, I used multiple sources of data to provide triangulation and glean a more holistic view of students' and parents' perceptions of English classroom anxiety (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 2009). I began my data collection by interviewing one parent of each of the five students chosen to be part of the study. In all five scenarios, the mother was the parent I interviewed. The interviews I conducted were semi-structured personal interviews using the interview guide approach (Johnson & Turner, 2003). According to Patton (2002), "We interview people to find out from them those things we cannot directly observe… The purpose of interviewing, then, is to allow us to enter into the other person's perspective" (p.

340-341). The interviews were audio recorded with a recording device and video recorded from a laptop to ensure that the interviews were taped as a backup in case of technological issues with one recording device or the other. As soon as I confirmed the audio recording was a success, video recordings were deleted. Once I analyzed the interviews and data of each participant, the audio recordings were also deleted to protect the participants' identities. The semi-structured interview guide I followed for the parent interviews had 15 key questions (See Appendix A). After conducting interviews parents, I conducted semi-structured interviews with each of the five students, utilizing the interview guide approach (Johnston & Turner, 2003). The semi-structured interview guide I followed with student participants had fourteen key questions (See Appendix B).

Participant	Interview Date	Interview Time	Length of Interview
Kori (Ryan and Tasha's mother)	January 28, 2019	1:00 p.m. - 2:47 p.m.	1 hour 47 minutes
Ryan	January 29, 2019	11:15 a.m. - 12:06 p.m.	51 minutes
Tasha	January 29, 2019	12:12 p.m. - 1:01 p.m.	49 minutes
Olivia (Daniel's mother)	January 31, 2019	10:02 a.m. - 11:13 a.m.	1 hour 11 minutes
Daniel	January 31, 2019	11:21 a.m. - 12:05 p.m.	44 minutes
Suzanne (Addison's mother)	February 4, 2019	5:40 p.m. - 6:58 p.m.	1 hour 18 minutes
Addison	February 4, 2019	7:03 p.m. - 8:01 p.m.	58 minutes
Erica (Steven's mother)	February 7, 2019	10:31 a.m. - 11:40 a.m.	1 hour 9 minutes
Steven	February 7, 2019	11:45 a.m. - 12:28 p.m.	43 minutes

Table 2: Interview data collection information

All interviews took place in the participant's home. Kori, Ryan, and Tasha all interviewed at the kitchen table. Olivia's interview took place in her living room. Daniel preferred to have his interview at the dining room table. Suzanne and Addison both preferred to be interviewed in their kitchen area, Suzanne at the kitchen bar and Addison at the kitchen table. Erica's interview was conducted in her living room, while Steven and his siblings did school work in the dining room. Steven stayed at the table for his interviews, but his siblings did leave the area.

Qualitative Data Collection - Observations

In addition to interviewing both parents and students, I journaled observational data from the sessions I had with my students throughout my research study from August 2018 through March 2019. According to Yin (2008), direct observations document relevant behaviors and environmental conditions. Direct observations provide the researcher insight in to the "the natural setting" of a research study (Yin, 2008). Observations, according to Merriam (2009), are effective when the researchers can observe events or participants first hand with fresh perspective. Observations provided additional information and evidence about the case by documenting attitudes and behaviors over the course of nearly a year.

For the current study, I was the teacher-researcher. Yin (2009) warns that the role of teacher-researcher may be challenging because of the time involved in documenting observational data; however, because of the structure of Grand Charter School, I have flexibility of schedule and teach in a one-on-one setting and/or one-on-two in some cases such as Ryan and Tasha when they are covering the same standards or similar standards in a course such a reading or writing. My observational notes provided deep insights into my primary as well as both of my secondary research questions. I adapted my observational notes from Creswell's (2018) sample observational protocol.

Descriptive Notes	Key Word, Phrases or Actions used by Student	Reflective Notes
Experiences? Setting? Structure and Layout of Environment?	Does the student display any behavior relevant to my research questions? Does the students explicitly state words or phrases relevant to my research questions?	Reflect on Findings. What does this make me think about? What theories?

Table 3: Observational Protocol Adapted from Creswell (2018)

Qualitative Data Collection - Spontaneous Paint - Write Activity

After my interviews were completed and my observations continued, students completed a paint-write activity. Cassou and Cubley (1995) believe that providing students a creative outlet to experience and understand the emotions that anxiety causes them to feel has healing components. "By spontaneously painting [those emotions], healing happens, not because of what you do with the image or meaning, but because of the powerful cleansing energy of creativity. It is therapeutic in that sense" (p.139-140). Although my research does not look to specifically answer the question of the healing powers of art or writing, providing students a creative outlet and asking them to respond about their experiences during that creative process can provide invaluable insight into emotional struggles. Cassou and Cubley (1995) continue; "Like a broom that sweeps away dust and residue, creation acts as a purification of what has accumulated in the life of the psyche. It is neither your role nor to your advantage to analyze the dust, but only to let the cleansing take place" (p. 141). I went in to the spontaneous paint-write activity without any preconceived ideas of what themes would develop. I simply wanted to see what happened, how students reacted, and what their experience with art revealed. I provided students with prompts (See Appendix C) for the two-session paint-write activity.

Data Analysis Procedures

Data was collected in a predetermined intentional order. I received IRB approval for my study in August 2018 which included a letter of support and permission from Grand Charter Schools. Once IRB approval was received, I immediately reached out to families via an email approved by the IRB, and had participants sign the appropriate forms per the IRB's instructions. I explained to the families that I would start gathering observational data firstly. I began the collection of observational data when Grand started the 2018-2019 school year in September. I used an adapted version of Creswell's (2018) observational protocol. Observational data was cataloged by student participant. I did not have separate observational data tables for parents; instead, however, any observational data about parent participants were included with their student's observational data. In Kori's case, observational data was placed with either Ryan's or Tasha's observational data, depending on which student the data was relevant to. In some instances, observational data about Kori was placed in both Ryan's and Tasha's observational data tables. Collection of observational data lasted from September 2018 through April 2019.

Participants	Number of logged observations
Kori, Tasha, and Ryan	32 observations logs
Erica and Steven	28 observations logs
Olivia and Daniel	25 observation logs
Suzanne and Addison	22 observation logs

Table 4: Observational Data Logs

While observational data was gathered throughout the entirety of the case study, interviews with parent and student participants was the first data collected in which participants were completely aware of data collection taking place. I conducted interviews with parent

participants first. When planning my data collection, I felt that interviewing the parent participants first might provide me with insights that would help me during my interviews with student participants. The information provided to me from the mothers of the participants did provide me information to use for impromptu interview questions and further probing of existing questions during my student interviews. Once the interviews were completed, I utilized Shank's (2005) model of analysis, transcribing the interviews. After interviews were transcribed, I conducted line by line coding. According to Strauss and Corbin (1998), coding is "the analytic process through which concepts are identified and their properties and dimensions are discovered in data" (p. 101). Coding helped me create outlines for each student's narrative. While coding, I utilized colored highlighters to help me stay organized and on task to answer my research questions. Anything that I thought may prove relevant to answering research question 1 was highlighted in yellow. Relevant information for question 2 was highlighted pink, and relevant information for question 3 was highlighted blue. I repeated the process for each student participant and their parent participant.

Approximately one week after the interviews took place, student participants engaged in a writing activity. Each of the five students sat at their tables with me and wrote based on the prompt provided to them. Two students chose to write narratives. Three chose poetry. Their writing was included in the data analysis for themes. After the writing portion of the paint-write activity took place, students engaged in an art-based activity one week later. For this activity, I brought students painting supplies and painted with them. My paintings were not tied to the prompts because I did not want to influence their paintings. I just painted with them to make them more comfortable. Students' paintings were not analyzed; however, their responses and/or descriptions of their paintings and what they meant to them were used.

Once I coded the interviews of parent and student participants within the same family, I took extensive notes on the codes, creating the outlines for my narrative analyses. For the purpose of the narratives, I focused on individual student and parent participants observational data, semi-structured interviews, and student writing and descriptions of paintings from the spontaneous paint-write activity. Once I completed interview transcriptions, coding, and narrative analysis of each student's story, I returned to my interview transcriptions and codes and began to categorize the codes amongst participants, looking for themes that might provide insight into the similar causes of students' anxieties in the English classroom. The process of coding, categorizing, and analyzing themes within data is interpretation by the researcher (Shank, 2005; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The thematic analysis of each narrative used observational data, parent interview data, student interview data, student writing, and student responses and explanations of their art.

After I had composed the five narrative analyses, I felt that multiple themes had emerged. To help reduce any bias on my part, I asked two colleagues to evaluate my transcriptions, read my narratives, and write down themes they noticed. My colleagues agreed to sit meet me to participate. We all sat in a room together, individually pouring over the data before coming together as a group. We then engaged in discourse about their thoughts and what they derived from the narratives (Patel, Schaufelberger, Begley, & Berg, 2016). After compiling notes from both colleagues, I analyzed their perceptions of themes and compared them to my own. From that, three themes emerged: 1) Students who feel unprepared and/or inadequate may experience anxiety in English class. 2) Students who fear judgement from peers and/or teachers may experience anxiety in English class. 3) Students who suffer from social anxiety may experience anxiety in English class.

Data Analysis

In order to better understand the full spectrum of students' and parents' perceptions of anxiety, I analyzed my data and the findings of my data using interpretive narratives. By writing narratives, students' stories will be presented with the raw detail, emotion, honesty, and vulnerability that each deserves. Their voices will be heard, which is a critical aspect of critical theory in education (Freire, 1993). In addition, understanding the sequence of events conveyed through stories (Riessman, 1993) helped inform the researcher of elements that influenced the development of English classroom anxiety and the strategies used to alleviate that anxiety.

According to Mishler (1999), personal narratives are one branch of case-centered research. Unlike most research frameworks, narrative analysis does not "assume objectivity but, instead, positionality and subjectivity" (Reismann, 2002, p. 704). Shank (2006) explains that "stories are about meaning, and qualitative research is a systematic empirical inquiry into meaning" (p. 169). According to Labov (1982), "All narratives are stories about a specific past event," and all share six common elements. Narratives have an "Abstract," a summary of the substance of the narrative. Then, there is an "Orientation," which describes the time, place, situation, and participants. There is a "Complicating action," told through a sequence of events and "Evaluation," revealing the attitude of the narrator and providing meaning and significance. Finally, there is the "Resolution" of the story. After the story is complete, the researcher concludes with the "Coda," taking the audience from the narrative to present (Labov, 1982). According to Laslett (1999) narrative analysis takes "individual and collective action and meanings, as well as the social processes by which social life and human relationships are made and changed" and theorizes based on those narratives and the meanings and significant issues addressed within them (p. 392).

As I composed the narratives of my students' stories, I paid attention to Bruner's (1996) concept of universal narratives. Bruner's (1996) first principle is that narratives unfold in their own time. The research must not try to force narratives into a construct of time. The second principle is that narratives are about the particulars of the story being told. The genre in which a narrative is written, for this principle, organize and possibly generate the particulars. The third principle is that actions within a narrative have reasons. Purpose and choice are more essential than the ideas of coincidence or chance. In the fourth principle, Bruner (1996) explains that the purpose of narratives is to be composed and understood within the hermeneutic dimension. Within this principle, focus is shifted away from the issues of structures and placed on the why. The fifth principle is that narratives recognize and are sensitive to rules of society, yet narratives break those rules in many cases. The sixth universal principle of narratives is that of ambiguity. The researcher must compose a narrative that is loose enough to allow for liberal substitutions of elements and events. The seventh principle of narratives is that which deals with norms. Norms exist to be violated. The eighth principle Bruner (1996) presents is that negotiation between the creator and consumer is essential. The final principle of narrative writing is that narratives unfold throughout time and history. There are historical antecedents, and no two historical narratives are required to be identical (Bruner, 1996)

Interpretive narrative analysis was an appropriate approach for the current study because subjectivity was involved in the identification and interpretation of primary and secondary influences of students' English classroom anxiety (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; 1992; 1999). In addition, narrative analysis revealed the answers to the primary and secondary questions of students' and parents' perceptions about English classroom anxiety within the theoretical framework of both Critical Theory and Ecological Systems Theory. The process of inductive

narrative analysis required ongoing review after each phase of data collection and concluded when no new information transpired and saturation had been reached (Saldaña, 2016).

In all cases, bias was reduced, which was done, in part, through an ongoing, thorough literature review, continuing even after data had been collected and analyzed (Quick & Hall, 2015). Additionally, by allowing two colleagues to review data, a consensus of themes emerged through a peer debriefing process once the narrative analysis had been completed (Yang et al., 2016).

Ethical Considerations

Throughout the current research study, the researcher continuously considered the ethics surrounding said study. Because participants of the study maintain a professional relationship with the researcher, each interaction during the research process was considered and carefully planned out. Because of my personal bias and interest in the research phenomenon, reflexivity also added to the trustworthiness of my research study and aided in the reduction of researcher bias during data collection and analysis. According to Probst (2015), Reflexivity is "awareness of the influence the researcher has on the people or topic being studied, while simultaneously recognizing how the research experience is affecting the researcher" (p. 37). Reflexivity allows for self-evaluation. The practice of self-evaluation allows the researcher to consider potential biases by reflecting on any prior knowledge or preferences of the researcher that might affect research design, data collection, or data analysis (Yin, 2016). Reflexivity was vital for the researcher because of the teacher-researcher role that emerged as a result. Ethical guidelines helped to reduce the researcher's own bias to create a positive experience for participants, one in which their voices were the primary focus. Because of the subjective nature that qualitative

research can possess (Wagner et al., 2014), reflection through reflexivity was needed throughout each part of the process.

Participation in the research study was voluntary, and no incentives were offered by the researcher to entice participation. Participants were contacted by emails approved through the Instructional Review Board (IRB). The researcher chose email to contact the participants of the study so no potential participant would feel pressured to agree from a face-to-face conversation. Email allowed participants to respond with their honest feelings and desire (or lack thereof) to participate in the study. After approval from the IRB was received and participants agreed to be in the study, the appropriate informed consent or assent forms were dispersed to both parent and student participants, obtaining signatures from both student and parent participants prior to starting interviews. Participants were notified that research materials would remain confidential, interviews were audio and video recorded, and the recordings would be deleted as soon as the researcher had completed analysis of the interview data. Questions were posed to answer research questions without leading the participants in a certain direction.

As should any study, ethical considerations included beneficence, nonmaleficence, justice, protection of participants' identities and dignity, and a truthful interpretation of research results (Petrova et al., 2016). Protecting the identity of, not only the participants of the study, but also those mentioned in stories, was vital. For example, students sharing stories about their English classroom anxiety (i.e., direct participants) mentioned past teachers, peers, etc. (i.e., indirect participants) who may have taken issue with stories involving them. Both direct and indirect participants were assigned pseudonyms. In addition to using pseudonyms to protect the identities of participants, all research material was stored and locked in a filing cabinet or password protected personal computer to which no one else had access.

Trustworthiness

I am a teacher-researcher, making me an active participant of the research setting and context. According to Postman and Weingartner (1969), educators cannot help but rely on their "beliefs, feelings, and assumptions" to construct the learning environment (p. 33). I acknowledge that my own experiences and struggles with anxiety, including English classroom anxiety, motivated my interest in conducting the current study because of my desire to give students a platform to share their stories and have their voices heard. I did not have an advocate during my adolescent struggles with anxiety. That lack of advocacy or support led to many painful experiences. Walker and Soltis (2009) explain that "educators have aims that motivate them and guide what they do" (p. 13). As a result, my bias as a researcher was based in my personal teaching ideology, my personal experiences, as well as the professional relationships with participants that began nearly a year before data for the current study began to be collected.

Because of my acknowledged bias and motivation, there are several steps I took to ensure the trustworthiness of the current study. Firstly, the current study was not one that was rushed. Observations began informally before my dissertation topic had been decided in a pilot study that had IRB approval. Students' experiences and stories that they shared with me as part of their personalized learning experiences at Grand Charter Schools triggered some of my own memories of growing up with anxiety in the classroom setting. I had already become a passionate advocate for students with mental illness while working in the secondary brick and mortar setting for eight years. Transitioning to Grand Charter Schools and getting to know my students, specifically the students in the current study, opened my eyes to the severity, prevalence, and debilitating effects that anxiety may cause adolescents.

In addition to prolonged observations and consideration of my research, the observational and interview data I obtained can be corroborated by multiple sources including the participants as well as family members who were not active participants in the study. I also utilized parents' interviews along with my students' interviews to ensure interviews and observations were thorough and provided vivid description.

In addition to interviews and observational data, I contributed to the trustworthiness of my research study with triangulation that also included student art and writing samples. These samples provided insight by adding details about students' perception of anxiety and also added to the themes among participants. My research study was peer reviewed by two colleagues (Leung, 2015) and the narratives were approved by students and parents before being included in the study (Davidson et al., 2016). According to Petrova et al. (2016), truth is socially constructed from multiples ways of knowing. With that belief in mind, validity and accuracy were maintained through participants approving their narratives, their "truths," and peer debriefing.

To ensure what was intended to be measured was actually measured, the use of different theories checked the data against complementary or contradictory theoretical foundations (Burau & Andersen, 2014) that allowed for "the convergent aspect of the triangulation process" (Ma & Norwich, 2007, p. 224). The connections made through triangulation aided in validation of results (Carter, Bryant-Lukosius, DiCenso, Blythe, & Neville, 2014). My case study explored the conceptual framework consisting of primary and secondary influences among various micro and macro systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1992, 1999) that contributed to students' English classroom anxiety and giving students a voice in an educational system that may oppresses those it should be liberating (Freire, 1993; 1998; Giroux, 1988; 2011; Apple, 2000; 2008; Greene, 1995; 1998; McLaren, 2007).

I acknowledge that, while I do have professional relationships with those involved in the study, I had no bias, one way or another, in regard to how participants might portray the anxiety they have in connection with English language arts. I simply hoped to explore and better understand struggles of students and parents in regard to English classroom anxiety (Perlesz & Lindsay, 2003). In addition, my study strived to possess external validity, allowing me to glean insight from participants voices and add insight for other educators about the struggles students may have with anxiety (Medina McKeon & McKeon, 2016).

Chapter 4

Narrative Analyses

Ryan's Story

Ryan describes himself as a Lego fanatic and golf lover. "Golf," he explains, "helps [him] relax." He is on a small golf team. He loves his family dearly and hanging out with his sister Tasha is one of his favorite past times. His mom described him as a type B personality trapped in a house with three type A personalities.

From the time Ryan was born, Kori, Ryan and Tasha's mother, has worried about him. Ryan did not speak at all until he was two and a half, so his parents put him in speech therapy at just 20 months old, but he showed no interest in developing oral language. Kori said, "We actually thought he was on the spectrum for autism or had Asperger's. He would not make eye contact. He was obsessed with lining up all his cars and toys. He refused to talk." All of these "symptoms" were factors in Ryan beginning speech therapy. Over time, he slowly began to make progress. He began talking, a word here and there at first, followed by full sentences and conversations.

The progress Ryan made helped grow his confidence. Before he started gaining confidence, Ryan's self-efficacy was tragically low. Kori explained that Ryan "was a happy kid. Well, he cried a lot because he was so frustrated from being unable to communicate," she continued. Kori believes his inability to communicate may have caused Ryan to become introverted. Kori explained, "Ryan is deep. He can go deep within himself." Despite their initial concerns, speech therapy helped Ryan develop his language skills. "It was like one day," Kori smiled, "He woke up and everything was different. It was like something magical had happened to him while he slept. It all just clicked in." Ryan had his tonsils and adenoids removed right

before the transformation. Ryan explained that the discomfort he was experiencing was making talking difficult, so he decided to retreat into himself instead. Suddenly, however, Ryan became an outgoing child, and his symptoms seemed to have disappeared for the most part. That, however, did not last. As soon as the family moved to Oklahoma from Texas, Ryan regressed. The security of his home that aided in his development was gone.

Ryan was starting kindergarten in a small new town in a new state and in a new home. The rural school where Ryan was placed caused him to experience social anxiety because students noticed he was stuttering when he spoke. Students noticed that Ryan was different and would constantly comment on it; he began to experience anxiety at the thought of going to school. Ryan's teachers were overwhelmed by overcrowded classrooms and lack of resources and did not recognize what was happening to him. Ryan explained, "I begged my parents not to make me go to school." They felt terrible, of course, but they had no choice. By law, children had to go to school. The family knew a change was vital to their son's mental and social development.

After researching their options, Ryan's parents decided to send him and his sister to a private school, hoping negative experiences he had in public school would no longer be an issue. During his first-grade year, Ryan stated, "I could no longer take the confusion and anxiety my classes were causing me." With tears running down his face, Ryan told his parents he did not understand school. He did not understand his teachers. At his previous school, Kori believes that Ryan fell through the cracks. He always had straight A's. Suddenly, at his new school, he was a failure. "I felt anxious the entire I was in classrooms," he said. He allowed the pressure of his anxiety to build. His parents took him to a specialist; he was diagnosed with an audio processing disorder (APD) as well as a stutter.

Ryan's APD and stutter amplified his English classroom anxiety. Because of his stutter, Ryan refused to read out loud in class. He also could not hear as well as other students because of his APD, so he often missed important information, making it impossible for him to learn in a loud, mainstreamed classroom with no accommodations in place. Ryan's first grade teacher did not seem to be a nurturing person, and Ryan did not feel comfortable going to her. Ryan explained that he "did not understand what was happening to him," so he did not tell his parents until the pressure and anxiety he was experiencing became too much to carry on his own. Ryan's parents made sure that he was receiving whatever course of treatment recommended by their family doctor, including the continuation of speech therapy. Ryan explained,

> Before I started receiving treatment, I always felt unprepared in class. I knew I wasn't where I needed to be, and I knew I couldn't get there because of the anxiety I felt from my stutter and APD. I felt like I wasn't good enough compared to other students. I also felt like nobody understood what I was going through, so I let me anxiety and frustration build up.

Second grade proved to be a much more positive experience for Ryan and his family. His teacher noticed the anxiety he experienced in his classes and built a relationship with Kori to help Ryan find ways to function in the classroom. According to Kori, "He was not functioning. He was anxious all of the time, and his peers were cruel to him." During this time, it became evident to Kori and Ryan's teacher that he was not retaining information. They worked together to create less stressful environments for Ryan. Kori and the teacher moved Ryan to the front of the class to hear better. He would sit with his dominant right ear towards her. His teacher also did a wonderful job at engaging with students as she taught. According to Ryan, his previous teachers "stared at the chalk board the entire time they taught." Because of his APD, Ryan has a difficult time ignoring background noise to be able to focus on the teacher's voice, so the fact that his second-grade teacher engaged with him was positive experience. He also was able to

read lips to a degree. He was not able to utilize reading lips in his previous classroom experience because the teachers did not talk much with students. His second-grade teacher would come to him individually after each introduction to an assignment or unit and make sure he understood what was going on. Educationally speaking, the extra instruction and clarifications were highly beneficial; however, students began to talk about him and make fun of him for needing the teacher so much. His anxiety levels began to increase as the bullying increased. Ryan was "different." He knew it. He felt it every day. Gym class and recess were particularly challenging because of the lack of supervision and the free-for-all attitude. Ryan was an easy target for bullies because of his stutter, which he could not control.

English class was one of the more challenging classes for Ryan. Engaging in discourse with other students made him feel anxious, which made his stutter worse. Students would tirelessly tease him after hearing him read out loud in class or try to ask a question in class. Ryan recalled how painful his past experiences had been,

> Each time I was forced to actively engage in speaking in class, I was terrified. Socially, I wasn't very popular. Other students didn't really give me a chance. They just thought I was different and that was enough for them to avoid me and make fun of me. I slowly started hating being around other students. Social anxiety started to grow inside of me. I didn't want it to. I had always been kind to people, so I didn't understand why people weren't kind to me. I decided I didn't want to be around people if it was always going to lead to painful experiences.

Despite Ryan's sweet persona, his peers could be cruel. Seeing him go through so much pain, especially at a private Christian school, was aggravating for his parents. Eventually, Ryan's anxiety began to become unbearable again. He had started to attend speech therapy more often, causing him to miss instructional time. His second and third grade teachers would have him come in during his gym or recess hours to make up work. Knowing he was behind, even with a plan to catch up, made Ryan more anxious. Hoping to help alleviate some of the anxiety Ryan

was experiencing because of his pacing in class, his parents moved all his therapy sessions to after school. At first, going to speech therapy after school helped alleviate some of Ryan's anxiety towards classroom activities; however, when he was in third grade, he experienced his first year of testing pressure.

In third grade in Oklahoma, students must pass a reading test or face retention. That immense pressure caused Ryan's anxiety to skyrocket. About one month before state testing began, Ryan was participating in a practice reading test in which he had to bubble in the correct answers. For Ryan, bubbling in answers on a test was one of his most significant triggers for anxiety. The reading test he was completing was no exception. At some point during the test, Ryan had mis-bubbled an answer by mistake. His bubble answer sheet, of course, no longer aligned with the appropriate question. Once Ryan realized that had happened, he had a "complete meltdown."

Since that experience, Ryan states that he has experienced anxiety every time he has had to complete bubble answer sheets. His feelings of inadequacy and unpreparedness grew the further he got into the testing grades. In fact, because of his anxiety, Ryan was placed on a 504 plan which allowed for accommodations for anxiety. One of his accommodations was that he did not have to bubble in answers. He could write the answers on a piece of paper and the test administrator could bubble in the answers after testing and under the supervision of the test proctor. Having to do tests and other activities differently was incredibly obvious to other students because Ryan and his sister Tasha were attending a small private Christian school. Everyone knew everything about everyone. So, despite the accommodations being put in place with hopes of easing Ryan's anxiety, the accommodations made him experience a more social anxiety than the academic anxiety he experienced with testing. Ryan's educational experiences

seemed like a catch-22. He could not escape the anxiety that was plaguing his life. Ryan explained,

> I just felt so alone and different. Usually, people really like me as a person when they get to know me, but because I wasn't exactly like other people, they didn't even give me a chance to show them who I was. Everyone was just mean to me. They didn't even know me. My experiences made me a better person, I think. I try to be nice to everyone, no matter what differences they may have on the outside.

According to Ryan, students viciously made fun of him after his testing meltdown. Ryan did not want to go to school anymore. That testing experience shattered any last hopes the family had of Ryan being able to flourish in a brick and mortar setting. No matter what the family or teachers tried, Ryan's anxiety continued to grow and fester on the memories that had left him with emotional scars.

Eventually, Ryan's parents relocated again so that his dad could be closer to his job and his sister could attend one of the most prestigious gymnastic programs in Oklahoma. Kori and her husband considered all options for Ryan and Tasha's education. They knew Ryan could not be in a public-school setting. Kori knew that he would fall through the cracks and be ridiculed by his peers. After researching options, Kori heard about Grand Charter Schools through a friend. Ryan was in fourth grade when he began his journey at Grand Charter Schools, and the family has noticed a vast difference. Ryan's confidence has soared. He receives one-on-one instruction from his teacher, which reduces the social anxiety he was experiencing in brick and mortar settings. He can do speech therapy online through Zoom, a video chat program that Grand teachers use to do online tutoring or classes with their students. Ryan said, "I no longer worry about being different because I am learning from the safety of my home." Schooling at home has enabled Ryan to grow past some of his anxieties. His parents actively work with him to help him overcome anxieties that will impact his life. For example, Ryan has an incredibly difficult time

ordering food at new places. Spontaneous actions and unknown environments are two triggers of anxiety that Ryan and his parents want to work past as they continue their journey and fight against the sometimes-all-consuming anxiety that plagues Ryan.

Ryan's Paint-Write Activity

Ryan was quickly engaged in the paint-write activity. Not only did he write about a troubling experience, Ryan chose to compose two paintings instead of one. For his writing activity, Ryan shared his perceptions of what happened on the day he had his bubble test meltdown in third grade. Ryan wrote,

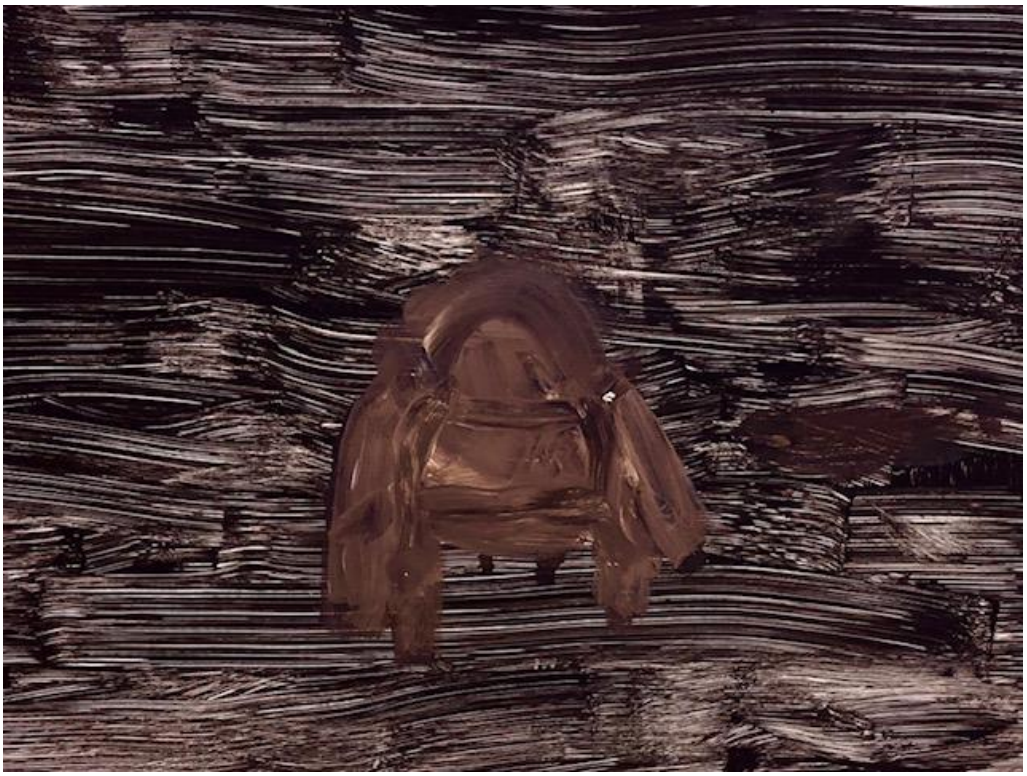
> I used to be fine with bubbles on a test until something bad happened that burned into my memory. I went to a private school. and it was testing time. I felt confident. I thought I was smart and would do well on the practice reading test. I hated reading out loud because of my stutter, but I enjoyed reading silently and usually did pretty good on my writing assignments in school. The teacher tried to tell us what the test would be like, but she didn't mention some of what was on the test. I tried to shake off the anxiety I felt, but students in the classroom made just enough background noise that I couldn't focus. My anxiety just got bigger and bigger. The noise threw me off. I started crying and freaking out. When my anxiety gets bad, my stutter gets worse. Students could hear me trying to explain the situation to the teacher in between sobs, so the teacher moved me to the baby room to finish my test. It was terrible I could smell baby diapers in the trash can. I was alone. I was humiliated. From that moment on, I said I would never take a bubble test on the computer or in a book again. I was wrong because I still have to do a lot of bubble tests, but I don't feel the same anxiety I felt in the classroom.

The week after Ryan composed his story, I had him participate in the painting portion of the paint-write activity. He actively engaged in the process and created two paintings instead of one. Each painting unveils a unique perspective of the experiences Ryan had in school. His first painting, which he titled *Lonely Desk*, has a black background with a lone brown desk in the center. When asked to explain the significance of his painting, Ryan explained,

> Every experience I had at my old schools that caused me to experience anxiety made me feel completely alone. It was like I was the only person who experienced what I was going through. I know that's not true, now, but at the time, it felt like it. The reason I chose a black background is because my anxiety often makes me feel a sad lonely

> darkness. Until I started at Grand Charter Schools, I felt completely alone, even when there were many other people in the room.

While Ryan was painting *Lonely Desk,* Kori said, "This makes me sad. Really, really sad." Tears started dripping from her eyes, and she soon turned around and left the kitchen table where Ryan, Tasha, and I were painting. Ryan's family is incredibly supportive of him and his dreams. According to Kori, it is heartbreaking to see him hurt and struggle with anxiety the way he does. No parent wants their child to feel alone, like an empty desk in a dark room.



Student Artifact 1: Ryan's painting *Lonely Desk*

After he painted *Lonely Desk*, Ryan asked if he could have another paper to paint on. He made more of a metaphorical leap with his second painting. He called it *House of Dread*. He said,

> My inspiration was to paint something that felt scary because when I have to read in class or speak in class, I feel scared. I feel dread. Will I be able to control my stutter long enough to get through? I ask myself this question over and over again until the experience that I am dreading is finally over. School, for me, was like attending a house

of dread, something you'd see on Halloween night. School was a terrifying place for me to be. I used black and red because they seem like spooky colors. I also painted a raven because I feel like they are usually around on television or movies when someone is about to go into a creepy house.



Student Artifact 2: Ryan's House of Dread

Response to the Research Questions

1. *What are students' perceptions of their anxieties towards language arts?*

For Ryan, anxiety has become a normal part of his life. His main triggers are having to read or speak in front of the class or having to take standardized testing that involves bubble answer sheets. He feels inadequate in comparison to his peers and convinces himself that he is not prepared for certain tasks. Ryan feels like his peers and sometimes his teachers made his experiences with anxiety worse, more dramatic in a sense. In the past, Ryan did not feel like he could overcome the anxiety he was experiencing; however, his confidence is growing. He consciously works to improve his stutter and his understanding of the world and people around

him. It is not easy for Ryan to cope with his anxiety, but schooling at home has helped him regain some of the control he felt slipping away from kindergarten to third grade.

2. What are students' and parents' perceptions of the triggers of their anxieties in language arts?

Both Ryan and Kori have similar beliefs regarding the triggers of Ryan's anxiety. He does not want to be asked to read out loud in class. The pressure makes him stutter, and students hearing his stutter typically leads to various forms of bullying. He is socially anxious in the classroom setting and the school setting. Being around more students leads Ryan to believe he will be judged or made fun of. He also is triggered by being separated from other students. Ryan feels incredibly anxious in the classroom setting when he is treated differently. He does not want to be different. He also feels extremely anxious when pressured by time restraints. Luckily, according to Ryan and Kori, schooling at home has helped him learn to control those anxieties that he still struggles with.

Although Kori claims significant progress in Ryan's control over his anxiety, she believes anxiety is something that he will struggle with his entire life. Ryan will always have to consciously work on controlling his stutter and attempt to remain calm when faced with triggers that cause his anxiety to spike. His environment, or lack of familiarity with an environment, will likely continue to be a trigger. The microsystem of his home has become his safe place, creating a mesosystem between home and school through Grand (Bronfenbrenner 1979; 1992; 1999).

3. What are students' and parents' perceptions of the manifestations of their anxieties in language arts?

One of the most obvious manifestations of Ryan's anxiety is his stutter. Both Ryan and his parents have been working with a speech therapist since he was nearly two years old; however, his stutter only got worse as he started school and began experiencing reading anxiety,

testing anxiety, and social anxiety. Kori and her husband tried a traditional brick and mortar school, a private brick and mortar school, and now school-at-home through Grand Charter Schools. Grand has helped Ryan learn to control his stutter through work with a speech therapist and through working one-on-one with his teacher to build his confidence. Kori believes that Ryan's desire to please those around him and to be a "good boy" will always be a trigger of anxiety for him. If he feels anyone is upset with him or if he has done something that makes someone upset, he worries constantly until the issue is resolved. Ryan also has a difficult time accepting any change to his routine or schedule. It makes him feel overwhelmed and anxious even though he is fully capable of completing assigned tasks or adhering to the schedule presented to him.

Although his stutter was the most obvious physical manifestation of Ryan's anxiety, he also experienced an increase in heart rate each time he had anxiety in school. In classroom activities that made him feel anxious, Ryan explained that he often felt symptoms like he was becoming ill. His head would be clammy, and he would sometimes turn red when his anxiety started to build up inside of him. In extreme cases, such as the bubble test incident, Ryan's anxiety manifested through breakdowns. During breakdowns, Ryan has experienced light to moderate shaking, usually in his hands but occasionally shaking that was noticeable throughout his entire body.

Tasha's Story

Tasha, Ryan's little sister, has not had to face the same academic struggles as her brother. While Tasha and Ryan are best friends, they could not be more opposite as siblings. Tasha has never struggled in school regarding performance and grades. She has always been a straight-A student. She is a fierce competitor and has a strong work ethic because of her passion for

gymnastics; however, that same passion can often be seen in school. When asked about her future, Tasha explained that her dream is to attend the University of Oklahoma on a gymnastics scholarship and possibly go to the Olympics one day. She is a star on bars, winning state on bars in March 2019. She also loves to bake and play outside on her trampoline with Ryan. She is not afraid to step out of her comfort zone if she believes she can achieve success or perfection. Tasha explained,

> Gymnastics really is like my life. I practice 4-6 hours every day. I wouldn't be able to be on the team if I was in a regular school. Our practices start during the day. Several of my teammates also attend Grand Charter Schools. I want to be the best and work hard to be. Sometimes, when I do badly, it makes me sad for weeks. I just want to be the best and see all my hard work pays off.

Perfectionism is the primary source of Tasha's anxiety, and that desire for perfection stems in to every aspect of Tasha's life, including English class. Tasha explained, "I refuse to be anything but perfect. I feel immense pressure to always be successful." Because Ryan receives so much attention because of his stutter and APD, Tasha fights for attention by striving for success in everything she does. Perfection is not optional in Tasha's mind.

The pressure she feels is not necessarily a pressure that she created with her own thoughts. Her parents put pressure on her, especially in school and gymnastics. One time, Tasha was performing at her gymnastics meet. She is a star on the bars; however, the balance beam is her trigger for anxiety in gymnastics. She was incredibly nervous about a cartwheel move she had to do. She ended up perfectly completing the trick she was anxious about, but soon after, she fell off the beam in a relatively simple move. Her dad immediately stood up and left in frustration. Kori (her mother) soon followed Tasha's dad. Nearly 45 minutes later, they returned to the meet, but stood in a corner of what seemed to be parents frustrated with their young children's performances.

Just as Tasha strives for perfection in gymnastics, she also strives for perfection in school. Tasha is intelligent beyond her years, but despite her abilities, Tasha doubts herself. Her lack of self-efficacy and her desire for perfection create an uncomfortable juxtaposition. On the one hand, she is completely capable; however, on the other hand, she does not always believe in her capabilities.

"English class makes me feel too vulnerable and makes me lose confidence," Tasha explained. Tasha needs to feel completely sure of herself in class, so when teachers explain curriculum and she needs the teacher to review the material or explain it a different way, Tasha often becomes incredibly frustrated with her teacher. Tasha's perfectionism drives her to desire complete understanding. If she does not completely understand material, she feels incredibly unprepared and inadequate.

Last year, her anxiety began to manifest itself in her English class as she prepared for the Oklahoma third-grade reading test (the same test that plagued Ryan). At the beginning of her third-grade year, Tasha was told about the tests that she would be required to take in April. From that moment on, she was anxious. Kori and Tasha both explained how her anxiety about testing would keep her up hours a night, especially, in the two or three weeks right before the administration of the test.

Tasha's Paint-Write Activity

Like her brother, Tasha completed two paintings because she was not satisfied with the outcome of her first one. Before she took part in the art project; however, she wrote about an experience in her Grand live math class that she attends once a week through Zoom with a certified math teacher from Grand who works with fourth graders to make sure they meet all their standards before state testing.

Tasha wrote,

> The other day, I was in my math class on zoom. The math teacher was reviewing area, which is a new skill for fourth graders. I wasn't really understanding what she meant at one point. I was so confused and wanted to tell her, but she did not stop once to check if we understood. She just kept teaching and giving us too much information at once. I may have been the only one confused, but I looked at the faces of other participants in the zoom class, and honestly, everyone looked a little confused. Despite our looks, the teacher persisted. I felt my heart rate increase. My mind flooded with thoughts about how I needed to understand area, or I'll miss those questions on the state test. Then, I will fail. Slowly, the noise coming from other students' homes and other background noise began clouding my mind. I couldn't understand anything that was happening. I felt anxiety rising in me. I was terrified that what I was missing would be what might cause me to fail my state test. After the teacher completed her lesson, it was time to review through a learning game. By this point, I was freaking out. I am so competitive, but I had to participate in a game over material I didn't get. I was devastated. I almost logged out to avoid having to play the game. My Grand one-on-one teacher is really understanding and chill, so I knew if I explained to her how I was feeling, she would be okay with the fact that I left the class because I felt I was losing control. I decided not to leave the class because I didn't want to disappoint anyone, including my zoom math teacher whom I barely know because I only meet with her in an online class once a week. Despite my hesitation, I participated. I did poorly and started really freaking out. I felt like I couldn't breathe. I had numbers everywhere in front of me, but I didn't know what they meant. I never wanted to do area again. Luckily, my teacher came over two days later and taught me area. I decided I never wanted to attend my math class again because I felt so much anxiety, frustration, and embarrassment.

The week after Tasha composed her story, she, too, participated in the painting portion of the paint-write activity. Tasha was hesitant at first, doubting her artistic abilities; however, she participated anyway, and the results were something she was proud of, eventually.

Like her brother, Tasha created two paintings. Her motivation for doing so was much different than Ryan's. Tasha thought the quality of her first painting was low. She was going to throw it away; however, I convinced her to let me use it because it really did speak to a serious symptom that Tasha feels when anxiety begins to manifest internally and externally. Each painting Tasha completed added to the depth of her experiences and perceptions of those events.

Tasha explained the meaning behind her first painting, *Heart on fire:*

Heart on fire is about how my heart feels on fire when I get anxious. Standardized testing is hard for me because there is no way to know what will be on the test, so all I can do is follow the curriculum my teacher creates for me and trust that everything I need to know will be covered. I trust my teacher with my life, but I still like to be in control most of the time. I used a red heart in the center of the painting to represent the increase in heart rate I feel and fiery burning I feel inside when I don't feel like I am going to do well on something. I attempted to create a fiery yellow-orange around the heart, but it ended up looking like a lighter red. I was disappointed, but it was supposed to represent how sometimes when I have an anxiety attack or feel anxious, my heart feels like it is on fire.



Student Artifact 3: Tasha's painting Heart on Fire.

After her first painting did not meet her expectations, Tasha decided to try again. Before the activity, a discussion occurred about the different types of paintings people can do, specifically concrete or abstract. Tasha wanted to create a painting that looked fiery because she felt her first painting did not adequately portray the fiery pain anxiety caused her sometimes. When asked to explain her second painting, Tasha said,

> I started with a dark red based. Red sometimes symbolizes anger and I also thought it would help my painting look like fire. I added streaks of orange before the red paint dried, so the orange mixed with the red in some pieces of the painting, but each color is also represented by itself. I then got a smaller paint brush and tried at first to make flames, but they didn't really look like flames. I was ready to give up, but my teacher encouraged me and said my painting looked great and I should just try to have fun and not worry about what it looks like at the end. So, I just started turning my messed-up flames into swirls, and I thought it looked cool. I think my teacher would say this is an abstract representation of fire.



Student Artifact 4: Tasha's painting Fire

Response to the research questions

1. What are students' perceptions of their anxieties towards language arts?

Tasha's anxieties in English class stem from her perfectionism and desire to be the best at everything she does. She feels anxious in situations where she believes the teacher is not adequately teaching material or is moving too fast for anyone to understand the material. Situations where she perceives that a teacher is not preparing her appropriately makes her feel inadequate, fearing judgement and the possibility of imperfection. Reading tests also cause Tasha anxiety. She could practice every language arts standard for her grade level and even show mastery on those standards, but still feel anxiety from the unknown that comes with testing. She feels anxious not knowing what words will be tested for vocabulary. She feels anxious about the wording of certain questions and when she feels there could be two right answers to the question or maybe none of the answers seem right. She prefers being able to write and explain her thoughts about specific concepts such as conflict, character, or setting. So, having multiple choice tests also causes Tasha's anxiety in the classroom to increase.

2. What are students' and parents' perceptions of the triggers of their anxieties in language arts?

Both Kori and Tasha feel like Tasha has internalized the pressure she feels in other aspects of her life, such as gymnastics, and placed that pressure on herself. Of course, her parents want her to be successful in school, but Tasha has a difficult time accepting that she may not know something. For example, Grand Charter Schools uses benchmark testing as a measure of students' growth and progress throughout the year. The test Tasha takes is designed for 2-5 graders. Each question a student gets correct causes the rigor of the test to increase. If a student misses a question, the test will ask a question over the standard missed with an easier question later in the test. Essentially, the test is designed to see where students are for their grade level.

Tasha took the same benchmark for third and fourth grade. Each time the test was being administered to Tasha, she would sit, stuck on multiple answers. A test that typically takes students about an hour to complete takes Tasha two and a half hours. Even when her teacher explains that the reason she may not know how to answer a question is because it could be above her grade level. That is how the benchmark test works. The explanation does nothing to dissipate her anxieties. She will sit, fixated on questions she has no idea how to answer.

3. What are students' and parents' perceptions of the manifestations of their anxieties in language arts?

When Tasha has experiences like benchmarking or actual state testing, her anxiety escalates. She feels frustrated. Tasha has described that "her heart feels like it will burst" when she allows herself to get worked up before a test or during specific questions on the test. Last year before Tasha took her third-grade reading test, perhaps the most impactful test of her educational career, the pressure facilitated Tasha's breakdown. She cried for days before the test, thinking she would do poorly and have to do third grade again. The teacher explained to Tasha that she was going to pass with flying colors. Tasha did not feel comforted by her teacher's confidence, but her teacher was right. She did pass with flying colors, being labeled "advanced" by state measurement standards in reading. Despite her success on past tests, she still feels anxious each time she is faced with a standardized assessment. She explained,

> I don't know why we have to be tested so much. When I know I am going to be testing, I can't sleep. I stay up all night, staring at my ceiling, trying to review in my head all the figurative language that I just learned or certain skills I struggle with. I just wish school would be more fun. It's fun when we aren't testing. My teacher even bought me and Ryan this complete art set with an easel and everything so we could paint. That was a lot of fun. Testing takes the fun out of school. It is something that is always in the back of my head.

Both Kori and her husband sometimes worry about the amount of pressure Tasha feels. They do acknowledge that some of the anxiety and the manifestations of Tasha's anxiety could be attributed to the attention they have given Ryan over the years. "Maybe she feels she has to be perfect or we will only see Ryan," Kori contemplated out loud. It seems that the pressure Tasha feels may overlap in a mesosystem between the microsystem of her family to the microsystem of her gymnastics team.

Steven's Story

Steven is tall, outgrowing his jeans that now look like high waters. He loves video games and can explain every mythological allusion in Pokémon and the Mario brothers' games, including all of the spinoff games such as Donkey Kong. Although he loves video games, he also loves the outdoors, especially riding his bike and bouncing on his pogo stick. He has exactly two friends who he likes to play with and Skype with occasionally. Steven is obsessed with critters and space. "I hate reading, but if I have to read, I would choose something about bats or supernovas most likely," Steven explained.

When Steven was two years old, Erica began noticing unique qualities about him that her two older children did not have. Firstly, Steven would not talk. It took exhausting amounts of effort to try to advance his language skills. Eventually, Erica explained, he did start using words, words he had completely made up. It was gibberish. The family had to figure out what words meant what because Steven also easily became uncontrollably upset. He would cry constantly about everything. For Erica, these symptoms were just the beginning of what would become a long journey of desperately trying to find programs to help Steven manage his irrational anxiety, dyslexia, and the meltdowns triggered by school.

When asked about school, Steven bluntly admits that he "hates it." Every subject in school makes him feel inadequate in comparison to his peers, but if he had to pick a favorite subject it would science. English class is his least favorite class. Steven explained, "English is the class I hate most because I have a hard time reading and understanding what's there, and it takes a really long time to read passages with not much results." Schooling has been challenging for Steven his whole life. He attended brick and mortar school in preschool, kindergarten, and first grade. After first grade, his teachers explained to his parents that he was not ready for second grade, so they decided to hold him back to retake first grade. He completed first grade again and then second grade. That's when Erica explains, "I knew Steven was not ready for the pressure of the third-grade reading test." It was at this point, his parents suspected that he was dyslexic and possibly on the autism spectrum. Steven's parents decided to try homeschooling.

Erica homeschooled Steven from 3rd grade through 6th grade. At that point, Erica felt the curriculum was getting too challenging for her to help Steven or his two younger brothers who had also been homeschooled during this time. After some research, Erica and her husband decided to try schooling at home through Grand Charter Schools. When asked about his preference of schooling, Steven explained,

> Oh, that's going to be easy, let's see. In public school, I really did not like my teachers or the other kids. Everyone was mean to me. I also didn't like having to sit in classrooms for so long. I also didn't understand why I had to do work at home after spending all day doing work at school. In homeschooling or schooling at home, I feel lonely sometimes. The solitude is tough. Sometimes there is work I don't understand, and my teacher can't always help me right away. Eventually, we get through it though. I mainly get bored being home all day.

While attending public school, Erica noticed that certain situations triggered the meltdowns in Steven. "Once," Erica recalls, "Steven was sent to the principal's office for something he adamantly denied doing," and the experience had devastating and lasting effects in

Steven's life and view of school." Steven explained one particular incident that caused him extreme anxiety. He said,

> I got sent up to the assistant principal's office for some reason. I don't remember, and when a teacher or someone in the office saw me, they told me to go back down to my classroom, so I went down to my classroom. At the door my teacher popped out and said, "You're supposed to be in the principal's office for lifting up your middle finger." At the time, I had no idea what lifting your middle finger meant and had no idea why I was in trouble or why people kept sending me back and forth. My teacher called the principal to come get me from class. It turned into a huge embarrassing scene that I still don't understand to this day. I was so frustrated and anxious when I got to the principal's office. No one would explain to me what was going on. My heart was beating so hard. I couldn't stop pacing around the room. I started crying. I didn't understand what was happening.

While attending Grand Charter School helped alleviate some of the stress and anxiety that Steven was experiencing, it did not make the anxiety disappear. One time at the end of seventh grade, Steven's teacher showed up two give him and his younger brother their last reading benchmark of the year. Erica forgot to tell Steven about the teacher coming over to give the benchmark exam, so he was completely caught off guard. Immediately, he had a meltdown. He began crying and reluctantly got out his computer. The teacher went and sat by him on the couch and told him everything was okay. She offered to come another day when he was more focused and mentally prepared for the task, but Erica felt it was a situation that Steven needed to learn to handle. So, they pushed forward with testing. The next time the teacher saw Steven for the math benchmark, which Erica and the teacher made sure he knew was coming, the teacher asked if he was feeling better. Steven explained,

> I am sorry I acted that way, but I felt that you and my mom were trying to trick me to take a test. I hate reading tests. I wasn't prepared to take it. I am so much slower than everyone else. I really try, too, but I just have a really hard time. That's why was crying. I knew it was going to be another test that I probably won't do good on because I have such a hard time with reading. I try my hardest. I promise.

Of course, his teacher accepted his apology and made sure he was completely aware of everything in the future. There would be no more surprises.

Erica is unsure what the future holds for Steven. She believes that he would not be able to survive in a public brick and mortar school because of the excruciating social anxiety he has, but the older Steven gets, the more she worries about him. His anxiety is getting worse about everything, not just school or reading. New triggers are activating his anxiety. Erica wonders if his age and hormonal changes are part of the problem. Either way, Erica, her husband, Steven's teacher, and Steven are all working together to find the best possible plan of action for Steven as he prepares to enter high school.

Steven's Paint-Write Activity

Steven was particularly excited about the paint-write activity. The writing, however, seemed like a consequence of him being able to paint. Steven is incredibly creative. He loves to build and create. He recently became interested in building computers and graphic design. For the writing portion of the paint-write activity, Steven decided to write a poem. He said, "I think a poem would be easier to write than a narrative. It would be shorter at least." Despite his belief that he was choosing the easier activity, his poem provided unique insight into his perceptions of anxiety. He wrote,

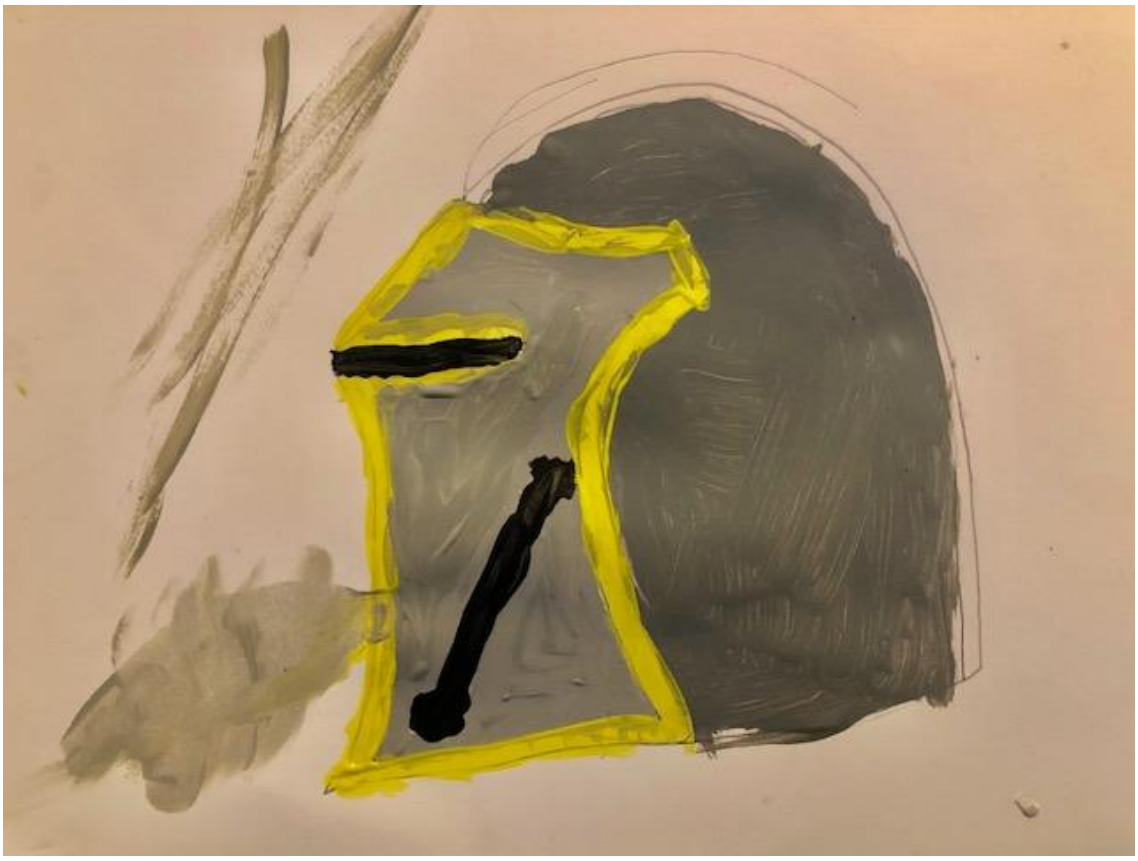
What it's like to be me
I constantly worry.
I know I am different,
But don't like to acknowledge it.
I try hard but always fail.
Reading makes me feel like a prisoner.
Why do people keep forcing me to read?
They don't seem to care about the pain.
The frustration.
I try.
The letters just look different to me.
The stories don't make sense.

Writing is painful, too.
I feel that anything I do is not good enough.
I know my brain is different.
I hear my parents talk about me.
I think people think I am weird.
I feel lonely a lot.
Not good enough.
Misunderstood,
Angry,
Anxious,
Frustrated.
Why do I have to be different?

When I showed the poem to Erica, she began to cry. The pain she felt because of the pain her son felt was almost tangible. She was proud that he composed such a beautiful, insightful poem. The content, however, was devastating. Erica said, "I never try to make him feel different. I never talk about him being different. He just knows. He is so smart, smarter than he gets credit for. I wish I knew how to help him better."

Steven was excited about the paints and brushes I brought for him. He loves creating. His painting is called *Warrior*. Steven loves building helmets from duct tape. He even made his entire Halloween costume out of duct tape. He did a phenomenal job and looked like a warrior. For the painting portion of the activity, he painted a warrior's helmet. Steven said of his painting,

> I've always wished I was strong like a warrior. I wished that no test or social activity would make me crumble the way they do. I chose to use grey as the main color because typically armor is silver. I wanted the outline to be gold, but yellow was the closest color. I feel like if I was a warrior, I wouldn't have anxiety. When I think of warrior, I don't think of someone who is scared or anxious about anything. A warrior is brave. My mind stops me from being brave. Thoughts are constantly swirling in my head. My doctor said I have irrational anxiety, but honestly, it doesn't matter what label you give it. It just sucks when everyone around you seems to have everything together, and I just hope that I get through each day without being worried about what people think of me or what bad stuff might happen to me or my family. The doctor suggested medicine to help me, but my parents don't want me on meds. They're strict about stuff like that.



Student Artifact 5: Steven's painting Warrior

Response to the Research Questions

1. *What are students' perceptions of their anxieties towards language arts?*

Steven is completely aware of his anxiety in language arts. He commented on it during the interviews and paint-write activity. His dyslexia causes him to have ongoing battle with reading, and he feels like he is losing that battle. He is completely unwilling to read out loud in front of anyone, even his teachers in a private setting. His anxiety has reached a point that is debilitating for him in English class. Steven implied multiple times throughout the various activities for the research study that he felt somewhat inferior compared to other students his age. He is not sure why he struggles so deeply when others seem to have perfect lives. There is an air of frustration that occurs when he brings up the anxiety he experiences. More than anything,

Steven just wants to be what he considers normal. Because he feels he is not normal, he feels like his peers are superior to him, like his challenges make him less than everyone else, causing him social anxiety and keeping him from trying new activities that may involve other students his age.

2. What are students' and parents' perceptions of the triggers of their anxieties in language arts?

Erica and Steven both recognize several triggers to Steven's English classroom anxieties. Reading is the most difficult obstacle that Steven has faced. He works tirelessly to improve, but he has learning disabilities that make improvement incredibly difficult. Because of his dyslexia, he always feels ill-prepared for any English assignment he is given. His anxiety is triggered anytime he feels pressure about reading, especially reading out loud and reading tests. Writing also causes Steven anxiety because his handwriting is barely legible, and he does not know how to type correctly despite trying multiple typing programs. Erica helps him when she can, but she fears she enables him and is not preparing him for life outside of their home. Because of his diagnosis of irrational anxiety, his anxiety can be triggered by just about anything. If Steven is going into a situation that he is not prepared for, he feels anxious. If he feels inferior to others in the same grade or in the same activities, like Boy Scouts, he feels anxious. Every day is a struggle for Steven. He never knows what the day will hold or how he could possibly react to different situations.

3. What are students' and parents' perceptions of the manifestations of their anxieties in language arts?

Steven's anxiety manifests in various way. Some of his responses may be from a combination of diagnoses that Steven has had or should have, according to Erica. When he is

anxious about English class, he tends to have complete meltdowns. Anything that involves reading and writing is incredibly challenging. He knows how to read. He knows how to write, but having to complete those tasks for a grade or in front of other people makes him lose control of his emotions. Losing his emotions just makes the entire situation worse because he becomes more anxious at the thought of people watching him, making fun of him, or thinking he is weird.

Steven also expressed other manifestations of his anxiety including increased heart rate, uncontrollable leg movement, feeling fidgety while trying to find distractions, and feelings of extreme frustration. Erica confirmed these and added that he also becomes a recluse when he is going through a particularly tough time. He will stay in his bedroom for hours, ignoring everyone in the house. She worries when he does this because she knows that anxiety is often comorbid with depression.

Daniel's Story

Daniel is shy until you get to know him. He is a sophomore at Grand Charter Schools, and like many high school students, motivation often becomes a factor in his weekly meetings with his teacher. Daniel explains, "I definitely procrastinate, but I always come through just in time."

Daniel comes from a loving home; however, he faces many of the struggles his mom did while she was growing up and going through her secondary education. Daniel's mom Olivia explained once that all of her experiences really shaped the way she raised her children. Olivia has always referred to herself as "outside the box." She explained that her different styles of learning often led her to be chastised by those in authority. She wanted to learn, but she rarely felt comfortable in classroom settings and eventually stopped asking for help to avoid the

scrutiny of harsh teachers who would tell her to sit down constantly or to get over whatever was upsetting her.

When it was time to send Daniel to school, Olivia's memories, as well as some negative memories her other children had experienced in various school settings made it difficult for her to be confident in her decisions about Daniel's education. During Daniel's Pre-K through second grade years, he attended a private Christian school, a decision made in hopes that he would receive a better education than Olivia or her older children had. She hoped that the Christian aspect of school would help protect him from bullies. Olivia wanted more for Daniel than she had growing up. She wanted him to experience acceptance, freedom, differentiation, happiness, and all the other positive attributes that education can offer but remained out of reach for Olivia.

Ironically, Olivia was Daniel's teacher during his time at the private school. During that time, she quickly realized that Daniel had learning challenges. He had difficulty grasping concepts that his peers seem to grasp with little difficulty. Soon, Olivia's own traumatic experiences were flooding her mind. She worried that the education system would fail her son in the same ways it had failed her. Olivia decided to share her concerns with her husband once they became more than she could bare alone.

The private school that Daniel was attending only took students through second grade. Daniel was finishing the second grade, and Olivia knew she would no longer be his teacher, ever-present to protect her son from the terrifying threats that Daniel experienced vividly yet remained invisible to most of his peers.

One night, Olivia cried to her husband, "They will eat him alive." Although he was not sure what she was talking about immediately, her husband soon figured it out. He tried to calm her fears, "He's young. I'm sure everything's fine. It's all in your head." His attempts failed.

"He's not. I'm not crazy. I know. I see every day. He's different." Olivia's husband quickly realized that her concerns stemmed from Olivia's own experiences as a child, and her fears for Daniel were legitimate. Calmly, her husband said, "It's okay if he's different. This isn't the 60's or 70's. This is the 21st century. Everyone is different."

While her husband's sentiment did calm her in the moment, her fears soon began bubbling to the surface again. As years passed, Olivia noticed that Daniel would become easily frustrated or agitated when he did not understand an assignment or if he felt his peers were judging him. He felt inadequate, ill-prepared, and anxious all the time. Daniel would begin to feel overwhelmed, and these periods of extreme stress would lead Daniel to shut off from the world. He would shut himself away in his room, avoiding as many people as possible, trying desperately to find excuses to remove himself from the educational setting.

Olivia's worries grew, but she was determined to find a place where Daniel would belong, where he would avoid the fate she endured. Olivia refused to let her son fall through the cracks of a broken educational system the same way she did. Daniel recalls the time in his life that he attended a traditional brick and mortar school for a short time. He recalls knowing he was different, watching his mother's turmoil, not understanding how to deal with the pressure he felt or the inadequacy that he was certain was real. Josh and Olivia both knew that a traditional school setting would only lead Daniel to experience intense pain and frustration daily, and they were right. School was not easy for Daniel, and that statement was never truer than his time in a brick and mortar public school setting. Some days, he could not seem to remember what he learned the day before. Most teachers want their students to build on knowledge from one day to the next, but for Daniel, that task seemed impossible most days, especially in his English class. Daniel was not a strong reader or writer. "One time," Daniel began,

> I was asked to read out loud in class. I said "pass" and the teacher flipped out on me. I wasn't trying to be disrespectful. I just don't like reading out loud in class. She didn't believe me at all and sent me to the principal's office as quickly as she could. I tried to explain to the principal that reading in front of the class makes me freak out, but he didn't seem to care. No one seemed to care. I was told to stop being defiant and given ISS (in-school suspension) for the rest of the day.

Of course, Daniel explained, "[he] felt like a failure." After he was sent to the office for not wanting to read out loud, he began to experience breakdowns more frequently. Teachers in his school constantly rolled their eyes at him instead of trying to figure out how they could help him feel smart. All Daniel experienced was negative reactions to the anxiety that was beginning to drive his decision making.

One of Daniel's greatest anxieties had to do with social interactions. Daniel explained, I have severe social anxiety that keeps me from participating in class discussions, group projects, and any other activity that required participation with other students." Teachers were not pleased, but Daniel could not control his panic. Each time he passed a student in the hallway, his heart race would increase and the need to avoid would activate. Each time he did not know the answer that he was asked to answer, his hands would sweat, and he would begin feeling angry and embarrassed. Each time he took a test, he would inevitably run out of time, causing his teachers to express more frustration towards him. Daniel constantly stayed after class, asking his teachers not to call on him and not to make him read out loud in class. He was never a strong reader, and on the occasion that a teacher did call on Daniel to read, he said his heart felt like it dropped from his chest, replaced only by untamable panic. Uncontrollable thoughts of dread led Daniel down a path in which his self-efficacy was swiftly replaced with self-doubt.

One day, Daniel wrote a poem in his English class. As he wrote, he thought to himself repeatedly how he would not be able to read in front of the class if chosen by his English teacher, something she did frequently (from his perspective). Daniel never considered himself a strong

writer, but he also was not one to simply sit in class and do nothing, so he cautiously completed the assignment. As if his mind was trying to warn him, he heard, “Daniel, please stand up and share your poem with the class.” He was mortified. His worst nightmare was coming true. He was physically shaking as he stood against his will. He tried to recite his poem; however, he fell mute. No sound would come out when he opened his mouth. Sweat dripped from his face as he stood frozen in front of his classmates and teacher. He had to decide quickly on how to proceed. He chose to flee. He grabbed his items, walked down to the office, called his mother to pick him up, and never stepped foot in his school again. The anxieties Daniel experienced in class became too much for the family to bear.

After his final traumatic experience in his English class, Olivia attempted to homeschool Daniel, hoping to protect him from the debilitating educational and social anxiety that he experienced in a brick and mortar setting. Homeschooling was only a temporary fix, though. Olivia feared that she was going to hold him back academically while trying to protect him from socially traumatic experiences. Daniel needed an educational experience that would challenge him, protect him, and allow him to explore his interests. He needed a platform to learn that would hold his attention or allow him to break free when he lost focus. He needed a place that would eliminate the overwhelming feeling of anxiety that Daniel experienced in school settings because when he felt overwhelmed, he gave up.

Olivia wanted to protect her son, but she also felt inadequate with the material she was teaching him, eventually reaching a point where she did not understand much of anything that was being covered in his curriculum. If Olivia did not understand it, Daniel definitely did not. He stopped even trying to understand. Olivia, with tears in her eyes, expressed her belief that she was completely out of options for Daniel, but her daughter told her about Grand Charter Schools.

She began to feel hopeful that Daniel would soar if he would attend school from home without the social anxiety or pressure to be like everyone else.

After three semesters at Grand, Daniel is doing better than he ever has in school. He said, "I love being online and learning at my own pace." He still feels anxiety when presented with assignments that involve novel reading or essay writing, fearing that he may not have the skills necessary to be successful; however, he has completed each assignment he has been given, surprising himself in many instances. Daniel, for the first time, feels like someone is paying attention to his needs when it comes to school. When Olivia and Daniel met his Grand Charter School teacher for the first time, the teacher explained that she wanted him to contact her at least twice a week, and she would do the same. Olivia thought to herself that Daniel would never actually follow through with those terms and conditions, but she was wrong. Daniel contacts his teacher nearly every school day because he finally feels comfortable talking with someone that he knows will not judge him or think he is weird or different.

Without anxiety controlling his life, Daniel is beginning to believe in himself. At first, Olivia was terrified that Grand Charter Schools would prove to be too hard for him, and she was also in denial about her fear of letting go of the protective shield that she had placed around him his entire life. To appease her own anxiety and the anxiety that Daniel felt about starting a new school, she did extensive research on what Grand Charter Schools was and if she really thought it could help Daniel. Soon, Daniel was enrolled, and his teacher went to their home, discussed goals, plans, past struggles, and past successes. Based on everything discussed, the teacher laid out an individualized learning plan for Daniel. Olivia and Daniel were both excited when the meeting ended. They were confident that Daniel would meet state standards and not remain behind his peers and that his learning needs would be met individually. He would never fall

through the cracks. Olivia said that his teacher protects him in the same way she would, while pushing him past his comfort zones in various classes. She is helping to build his confidence. She makes many gestures to be encouraging and help Daniel feel confident. She always communicates promptly. She makes him feel like he can conquer the world, or at least the assignments for that day. Every day, he checks his schedule to see what the teacher wants him to do, and he gets busy. He is displaying independence he has never possessed before. She really helps him figure things out. He is being weaned from the nest, but not left out on a limb by himself. Olivia and Daniel both believe that Grand Charter Schools is the only reason Daniel has made it this far.

Daniel tried to hide his anxieties for many years. He said they were even more severe than his mom realized. Now, however, he feels empowered. He still does not think he could survive at college because of the immense anxiety being around that many people would cause him; however, he does believe he could pass the courses now and is considering looking at online colleges. For the first time in his life, he is considering college because, through his journey, his self-efficacy has increased, and his self-doubt has decreased.

Daniel's Paint-Write Activity

For the paint-write activity, Daniel was happy to participate. He feels comfortable when working one-on-one with his teacher. He decided to write a poem as well because he was in the middle of the poetry unit of his English curriculum and thought he might be able to produce something he could be proud of.

Faceless
Darkness engulfed me each time I opened a book to read.
Every time I held a pen to write, my anxiety would stop me,
Like a man running in to a wall over and over again,
No matter what I did, I just could not break through.
I felt frustrated at myself for being weak.

I felt frustrated at my teachers for not understanding me.
I felt frustrated at my mom for being optimistic in situations we knew weren't positive.
My anxiety felt like chains around my wrist and ankles,
Keeping me trapped,
Unable to move past the triggers I experienced daily.
Unable to stop the manifestations that the darkness made me feel.
Misunderstood.
A faceless student, falling through the cracks.
Lonely.
A faceless student, falling prey to the predators within the school.
Confused.
A faceless student unable to control his own emotions.
Anxious.
Every day, fearing I may have my name called in class.
Tired.
Wanting to be the all-American boy parents dream about.
Different.
I am me.
Faceless.

Daniel's poem was incredibly powerful and moving. He had always described feeling inferior as a writer, but his poem's raw beauty and honesty gripped both his mother and teacher.

For his painting, Daniel created an image to represent the faceless student with whom he could too closely relate. Daniel explained his process and the results of his painting.

> At first, I was trying to use black paint to create a sense of chaos. It didn't exactly work the way I wanted, but I didn't scrap the whole project. My teacher told me to enjoy the process and not stress about the results. So, I tried. I have been actively trying to find ways to calm myself down when I am feeling anxiety triggered by English class assignments. After I realized the black color didn't look like I wanted it, I tried to think of what it did look like. I thought that it kind of looked like hair. Then, I reflected on my poem "Faceless," and that was the inspiration for the rest of my painting. I used a mixture of blues and greys to make the shape of a face underneath the now black hair. I was going to attempt to draw facial features, but then I stopped and really thought about what I wanted people to know about the struggles I have, and other students have had with anxiety. It's real and not taken seriously enough. So, I put a question mark on his face instead of eyes, nose, and a mouth. The painting represents every student who has felt invisible in their classrooms, walking through the halls of their school, feeling hopeless.



Student Artifact 6: Daniel's painting Faceless Student

Response to the Research Questions

1. *What are students' perceptions of their anxieties towards language arts?*

Daniel knows that English class is one of the primary triggers for his anxiety. Not only does he loathe reading out loud, he feels inferior in his writing skills. Also, English class requires more social interaction than most classes. It is a class that draws out vulnerabilities, sometimes putting them on display for others. The reasons many people love English class are the exact reasons that Daniel does not. He does not want to feel vulnerable. He does not want to engage in discourse with other students or teachers. He does not want to be called on to read out loud or share personal writing. Last year, he read *Animal Farm* by George Orwell (2012). He also

composed his first essay after he read the book, arguing about the dangers of power-hungry people. For Daniel, reading a novel and writing an essay were monumental accomplishments. He hopes to build on that spike of confidence he experienced as he continues through high school.

2. What are students' and parents' perceptions of the triggers of anxiety in language arts?

Daniel and Olivia know that reading out loud, sharing writing, being in groups for assignments, and having to share presentations in front of the class are all triggers for extreme anxiety in English class. If he were still in a brick and mortar school, Daniel does not believe he would have read *Animal Farm* or completed the argumentative essay. He would have avoided the assignment any way he could. All his English classroom triggers still exist, but he does not have to face them anymore because of schooling at home. Being around others exacerbates Daniels' anxiety, causing him to completely shut down and regress from any progress he has made. Olivia agrees with Daniel. She believes the only reason he has had success is because of his change in environment. He never feels stupid or inferior. His teacher makes him feel like he can do anything. He does not want to do everything he is supposed to, but it is not because of his anxiety. It is because he rather be doing other things he considers more fun.

3. What are students' and parents' perceptions of the manifestations of their anxieties in language arts?

The manifestations of Daniel's anxiety had extreme range. When he walked past classmates in the hallway, he would feel his heart beat increase. Once, it was so bad, he thought he needed to go to the emergency room. When he was asked to read in class, he would sweat and shake, feeling the panic rising and would simply refuse, seeming to be defiant instead of suffering from debilitating anxiety. When asked to share writing in class, all Daniel could do was flee. There was no fight or flight option in Daniel's eyes. There was only flight. His anxiety

would also cause him to experience bouts of depression, refusing to leave his room or engage with anyone, even his family. For a long time, anxiety and the manifestations of that anxiety controlled his life.

Addison's Story

As a child, Addison seemed easy going. She would sing and let people take turns holding her. One time, Addison was in her car seat being incredibly vocal, like always. Suddenly, a small voice said, "Momma, I need help." Suzanne, Addison's mother, turned around quickly and saw that Addison had a small pencil sharpener and had somehow cut her finger with it. Calmly, Suzanne bandaged Addison's finger and asked, "How did this happen?" Addison with rosy cheeks and big bright eyes said quite simply, "I wanted to see if she could sharpen her finger and write with it."

When Addison was in first grade, her teacher approached her mother, Suzanne, and expressed concern that Addison may have Attention-Deficit Disorder (ADD). Addison did not display hyperactivity typically associated with ADD but rather lack of focus. Suzanne quickly scheduled an appointment with Addison's primary care physician and began tests immediately. At that point in school, she was placed on a Response to Intervention (RTI) plan. The RTI program, as well as medication to help control her ADD, really helped Addison. By 5th grade, she was reading at a post-secondary level.

Unfortunately, Addison's ADD was not her only struggle. During sixth grade, Addison began to display symptoms of anxiety and depression. Her struggles continued throughout middle school. Despite her ADD, depression, and anxiety, Addison always did well academically. She loved and still loves to learn. Despite her academic success, Addison

withdrew from every social outlet. She begged and begged her parents to let her be homeschooled. Addison said,

> Some people think that my anxiety is a choice. I get told to get over it by people who don't understand me. Anxiety isn't a choice. I wish people understood how much I want to be like everyone else. I wish people really understood what it feels like to have something control your life so powerfully that it feels like you're physically being held down by something.

After much consideration, Addison's parents enrolled her in Grand Charter School. Honestly, it was an easy decision with Addison's persistence and various incidents that happened as she completed her 8th grade year. Addison had always loved English, but as she began to withdraw, she refused to participate in some assignments. One day, she came home incredibly upset, telling her mother that she was forced to read a poem out loud in class that day. She kept saying how stupid her poem was and how embarrassed she had been. She said she was never going back because her poem was not good enough. She said everyone else's seemed deeper than her poem, like the point of every poem is to be deep in some way. She convinced herself that she was not good enough

Unfortunately, her anxiety caused her to feel down about herself constantly. Any time she came home from an activity of some sort, she said she, "I convinced myself that I did not have a good time, even though I actually did." She tried desperately to avoid interactions with others outside of her immediate family, her Grand Charter School teacher, and her piano teacher. Sometimes, though, her anxiety is so destructive that she will not even interact with those she feels comfortable with.

Addison would flourish in a school academic setting, if not for the anxiety she suffers. She loves to learn and has always shown a passion for learning everything about the things that she is interested in. Suzanne believes that Addison can be successful and has been successful in

past situations in school until anxiety begins to overtake her mind and her emotions. When she allows anxiety to take over and negative thinking to rule her mind, she convinces herself she is failure. The unknown causes Addison the most anxiety. During her freshman year, she took physical science. The curriculum began addressing aspects of the world around Addison, including theories on the afterlife. She called her Grand teacher and begged for alternate assignments. She was crying. She said the science reading was making her sick. She could not handle the thoughts she was experiencing. She was not mentally prepared to tackle life's biggest questions.

Breathing, talking and just sitting in the same room as Addison calms her sometimes. Her parents make sure not to tell her to *buck up*, to *get over it*, or to *shake it off*. Suzanne said, "Sometimes, her anxiety is so strong that she cannot even pull herself out of bed in the morning. Anxiety has taken over Addison's life, and the family is not sure how to help.

Addison's Paint-Write Activity

Addison's favorite subject has always been English. She adores reading and wants to become a better writer but being in a brick and mortar setting paralyzed her, and all of her desires are second to her anxiety. For the paint-write activity, Addison wrote a poem, detailing the anxiety she feels and the manifestations of her anxiety.

Anxiety,
Like a car alarm that won't shut off.
Anxiety,
That bone-chilling feeling of getting into a cold pool.
Anxiety,
That feeling of dread in your stomach.
Anxiety,
Like chewing mint gum and then taking a drink of cold water.

Anxiety,
Feeling like you're on fire.
Anxiety,

Fighting the urge to pass out.
Anxiety,
Getting the wind knocked out of you.
Anxiety,
Being on your guard all the time.

Anxiety,
The mind-numbing panic.
Anxiety,
Too many thoughts at once.
Anxiety,
Wanting to scream but just being trapped inside your mind.
Anxiety,
Like all things is unpredictable.

But that unpredictability has been a constant theme for me.
A theme,
I wish I would change.
A theme,
To which no music plays.
The only sound is the beating of my heart.

A beat,
That keeps me alive.
But if it keeps me alive, why do I feel like I'm not here?
Am I but a shadow, lurking in the dark?
A shadow that longs to be in the light.

Am I just trapped inside my mind?
Waiting, longing, needing, to be in the light.

Anxiety has been the most destructive thing in my life.
It has manifested into a monster that I can no longer control.

So, what am I to do when I'm at the mercy of my anxiety?

Addison's beautiful poem painted a picture of the vulnerability she experiences as a result of her anxiety. It has destroyed part of who she is. To represent how anxiety makes Addison feel, she created a painting called *Frozen*. Addison explained,

> The reason my painting is called frozen is because that is how anxiety makes me feel. The blue figure in the center represents me as ice, stuck in the darkness that surrounds me. The darkness is metaphorical for the anxiety that controls me in life and keeps me trapped inside my mind, unable to flourish in to the person I want to become. Anxiety

> makes me feel like I am not good enough. It makes me feel like I am not prepared for school or life. It makes me feel like I can never have friends. I am just stuck, like a block of ice.



Student Artifact 7: Addison's Painting Frozen

Response to the Research Questions

1. *What are students' perceptions of their anxieties towards language arts?*

When Addison attended a brick and mortar public school, anxiety controlled her. She felt like she always had to be on guard, protecting herself from the stares and criticism of teachers, peers, and principals. In her classes, she felt "mind-numbing panic" at the thought of being in a room full of peers. She felt dread, wondering if she would be called on to read out loud in class or share personal feelings with others. Addison felt trapped inside her own mind when in English class, which caused her extreme anxiety because she did really love English. When she was

surrounded by her peers in class, however, her mind never slowed, and constant anxious thoughts flooded her mind. Am I good enough? What if I mess up? What if people make fun of me? Each day was different for Addison. She did not know what to expect from each unpredictable day. Addison's anxiety makes her feel like a stranger in her own body. No one understands her, and she does not relate to or understand others. These feelings caused problems for Addison in her favorite class. She regressed, her grades began to drop, and she wanted out. Out of school. Out of the hallways. Out of everything. The shadow of her anxiety had consumed her and had taken away all that she loved, including her English class. Addison said in her poem, "Anxiety has been the most destructive thing in my life." She asks, "What am I to do when I'm at the mercy of my anxiety?"

2. What are students' and parents' perceptions of the triggers of their anxiety in language arts?

Suzanne explained that Addison's anxiety has affected her whole family. Watching her go from an outgoing little girl to a teenager trapped by her own mind is devastating. Both Suzanne and Addison feel the main anxiety Addison suffers from is social; however, social anxiety may affect numerous areas of a person's life. That is exactly what happened to Addison, especially in regard to her English class. Reading and writing were not the causes of her anxiety. Her anxiety in English class came from the vulnerability, the possibility or criticism, the fear and concern of what her peers may think. She slipped away slowly and painfully from who she was and what she loved. Addison's anxiety is triggered by feelings of inferiority, social situations, and the possibility of judgement from peers.

3. What are students' and parents' perceptions of the manifestations of their anxieties in language arts?

For Addison, anxiety is constant and has manifested itself as a monster that Addison feels that she can no longer control. It never stops. She feels it in every part of her being. Her stomach physically starts experiencing pain as her anxiety builds. It leaves a bad taste in her mouth that will not seem to go away. She feels like she is on fire and may lose consciousness from the weight of the fear, the panic, and the dread that affect her because of her anxiety. When Addison experiences anxiety in public, it is like having the air knocked out of her lungs.

Collective Look at the Research Questions

1. *What are students' perceptions of their anxieties towards language arts?*

For students who participated in the current exploratory case study, anxiety seems to have become a normal part of life. Three major themes developed through the narrative analyses of the participants: unpreparedness and/or feelings of inadequacy, fear of judgement from peers or teachers, and social anxiety in the language arts classroom.

Students in my study all reported feelings of being ill-prepared for tasks and/or feelings of inadequacy in English. Some students felt that past teachers were at fault for their feelings of being unprepared. Being unprepared, then, led students to feel inadequate. These feelings of being unprepared and inadequate stem from the oppressive nature of the educational system these students were raised in. The five students in the study experienced education that focused on testing rather than their talents or needs (Giroux, 2011). They considered English an environment where they felt inadequate, like they were not as good as their counterparts, like they were falling through the cracks (Freire, 1972; 1993; 1998; Giroux, 1988; 2011; McLaren, 2007; Apple, 1996; 2000 Greene, 1973; 1988; 1995).

As a result of the negative experiences of their schooling environments in the past, participants felt that their perceived inadequacy in English class (i.e., secondary influence) and

poor preparation led to their English classroom anxiety. In addition, students whose parents felt ill-prepared to teach and were less involved in their student's academic choices were not as familiar with certain English classroom activities such as academic writing resources (i.e., exosystem).

When students felt unprepared or inadequate in English, they began to experience cognitive discomfort (Grupe & Nitschke, 2013; Stewart, et al., 2015; Wynne et al., 2014), physical discomfort (Bayat, 2014; Jahin, 2012), hindered performance (Al-Shboul & Huwari, 2015; Zorbaz, 2015), and waning motivation (Cocuk et al., 2016; Singh & Rajalingam, 2012). When students did not feel adequately prepared or on par with their peers, they saw themselves as less than capable. Their lack of confidence furthered their anxieties and doubt in themselves, causing an increase in their English classroom anxiety. When participants felt unprepared on a particular task in English, such as writing, feelings of internal and external tension would manifest because of their anxiety (Moons & Shields, 2015). Students would become frustrated beyond comfort (Moons & Shields, 2015; Yaman, 2014). The frustration students would feel as a result of their English classroom anxiety would often cause them to withdraw socially, sometimes even from their families.

According to Di Loreto and McDonough (2013), students with positive perceptions of their instructors who saw feedback as constructive were more likely to have lower levels of English classroom anxiety. Unfortunately, students who experience high levels of anxiety in the English classroom may have had negative experiences in English class in the past. These negative experiences may have stemmed from instructor feedback or perceived failures in English classroom activities. Students' negative experiences caused students to lack-self-efficacy and to retain a perception of inadequacy.

Each of the five participants reported a lack of self-efficacy to varying extents. Self-efficacy (Bandura, 1986) is the perception of abilities to perform actions at a particular level (Woodrow, 2011). For example, each student in my study felt that they were incapable of performing at the level of their peers in reading, writing, speaking, or testing in English class. Lack of self-efficacy influenced the students and choices they made. Students will attempt tasks they feel comfortable with or capable of; however, they will not attempt tasks in which they lack the self-efficacy and feel that the task is beyond their capabilities (Bandura, 1989; 1993).

Bong (2002) and Pajares (1996) found that there is a strong correlation between academic performance and the level of students' self-efficacy. Self-efficacy, it is important to note, is different than other terms such as self-doubt (Bong, 2002; Pajares, 1996). According to Valentine et al. (2004), self-efficacy focuses directly on students' perceptions of their abilities to perform tasks. For example, self-efficacy directly relates to whether or not an individual believes that they are capable of constructing a well thought out argument essay in English class; however, self-esteem is the perception of one's own self-worth (Valentine et al., 2004).When students reach the conclusion that they are inadequate to participate or complete assignments in English class, they lack self-efficacy. When students reported these feelings, their anxiety increased each time.

Students with English classroom anxiety feared judgement from teachers, peers, and even parents in some cases. In the classroom, students feared their perceived judgements from peers when asked to participate in classroom activities. They also experienced fear from teacher feedback. Feedback represents a "continuum" (Woods, 2015, p. 7). In order for students to accept feedback, they must understand what the feedback means and how to use it to improve. Once students with anxiety understand feedback from the teacher, they have to accept it and

decide to use it or not. Feedback -must be accepted in order to be used (Woods, 2015). A balance is needed “between the right amount of feedback and the appropriate dimensions, such as type, focus, depth, clarity, and delivery” (Woods, 2015, p. 7).

For many students, fear of feedback comes from writing in English class. Each participant in my case study struggled with writing in some way. Even Addison, an avid reader, admitted her struggle with writing. Teachers must help students understand feedback and let them know the intent is positive and constructive. One way to help students who experience anxiety is through metacognition, “how learners think about thinking. How learners think about thinking" (Stewart et al., 2015, p. 2). When students wrote and created art about their anxieties, they felt comfortable and were excited that their writing was being combined with art. Each participant said they have never had an English class who incorporated real painting into lessons. Some students went back to their writings after they were done with their paintings. They developed themes from their paintings into their writing. Students were experiencing the dynamic process of writing, a form of metacognition that helps students realize that writing is not a linear process. It is complex, but it can also be enjoyable (Stewart et al., 2015). Metacognition requires thinking and is a process of development. When students consider their writing habits, their metacognitive reflections may increase self-efficacy and reduce English class anxiety (Stewart et al., 2015).

According to Knappe et al. (2015), social anxiety is heightened during adolescence and so is the clinical form of Social Anxiety Disorder (SAD). Research has found several causes for social anxiety in adolescence, including genetics, temperament, family upbringing, maturation of the brain, negative peer interactions, and interpersonal victimization (Wong & Rapee, 2015). Steinberg and Monahan (2007) found that social anxiety is heightened by peers’ opinions and

evaluations, such as peer editing. Negative perceptions of classmates' opinions may be a potential risk factor for social anxiety in the classroom (Rapee & Spence, 2004).

For the purpose of this study, perceptions were key to answering the research questions. According to Kenny (1994), *metaperception* refers to an individual's perception of how other people perceive him/her. When students have a negative metaperception of how teachers or peers view them in English class, the perceived likelihood of criticism increases social anxiety (Clark & Wells, 1995; Rapee & Heimberg, 1997). Christensen et al. (2003) found students with social anxiety displayed both negative self-perception and metaperception. They found that the negative metaperception of the socially anxious participants were more a function of their own self-perceptions than actual negative perceptions by others (Christensen et al. 2003).

Using an imagined speech scenarios from an English classroom, Blöte and Westenberg (2007) examined perceived peer behaviors in a sample of adolescents who were 13–18 years old. The participants rated hypothesized negative and positive classmate behavior toward themselves, toward a peer described as highly socially anxious, and toward a peer described with low social anxiety. Through their study, Blöte and Westenberg (2007) found students with high anxiety believed they would be treated negatively by peers. Those with low or medium anxiety also believed that students with high anxiety would be treated the most negatively by peers. All subgroups perceived that having high social anxiety would be negative in regard to giving speeches in English class (Blöte & Westenberg, 2007)

Anxiety may be exasperated by English classroom activities such as reading out loud, participating in discussions, sharing personal writing, or testing. For Ryan, reading in front of others made him feel inadequate to his peers. Testing made him feel like he was on edge, unprepared for what was being asked of him. His little sister, Tasha, has anxiety often linked to

her struggle with perfectionism. When she feels like she does not know something, however, she often will contribute that to lack of preparation on the part of the teacher. Tasha's self-efficacy seems to directly corollate with her perceptions of her teachers and their ability to teach her well. The possibility of failure makes Tasha feel inadequate. Steven has a particularly difficult time in English class because of his dyslexia, his feelings of inferiority that comes with his dyslexia, and the anxiety his dyslexia makes him feel. Before he even walks in the classroom, Steven feels defeated. He feels like an "other." Daniel feels inadequate in English class primarily because of his lack of confidence in writing. Writing causes Daniel extreme anxiety. He does not want others to know how he feels. He wants to be left alone to do his work and to avoid the anxiety that controls him mind and body. For Addison, anxiety has always seemed like a monster that controls her life. The panic she would feel in the hallways of her brick and mortar school would make her feel ill and cause her to flee to somewhere she might feel safe. Addison loves English class, but the social anxiety she experiences makes her perceive a constant threat of judgement from others.

Addison is not the only student whose anxiety was due in large part to social anxiety. Apart from Tasha, all the students in the current study expressed that social anxiety impacts every aspect of their lives, especially English class. Despite their struggles, many students work to overcome their anxieties. Ryan sees a speech therapist, plays golf to relax, and does his best at every school assignment to ensure he never feels unprepared. Tasha's dedication to gymnastics is the primary way she works to alleviate her anxiety. Her perfectionism and competitive nature make her experience anxiety in the classroom but thrive in gymnastics. Steven is cooperating with his mom as she works to find resources and professional assistance for his irrational anxiety, dyslexia, and other disorders the family believe remain undiagnosed. Daniel does not

cope with anxiety quite as well as the other participants in the current study. Because of his mother's involvement and protection, he has not been placed in many scenarios that require coping mechanisms, so when he is faced with an anxious experience, he breaks down sometimes. He does, however, try to avoid situations that he knows will trigger his anxiety. For Addison, anxiety seems to pose the most consequence. She avoids social interactions with others to avoid feelings of uncontrollable anxiety; however, she also plays the piano. The piano is her therapeutic escape. She feels safe at her piano.

Each student perceives their anxiety differently, but all have experienced feelings of inadequacy and lack of self-efficacy. Each student perceives their struggle with anxiety to be at varying levels of severity, Addison's seeming the most severe and Tasha's seeming the least severe from how participants told their stories. No matter how severe, each participant in the current study has and continues to do what they can to decrease the amount of anxiety they feel in their English classrooms and other microsystems in which they are involved.

2. *What are students' and parents' perceptions of the triggers in the English language arts classroom that cause students to experience anxiety?*

Kori understands that Ryan and Tasha experience anxiety differently, including the triggers that enact their anxieties. For both Tasha and Ryan, feelings of inadequacy, lack of self-efficacy, and feelings of being ill-prepared for tasks create anxious feelings. For Ryan, feeling ill-prepared or inadequate is often because he believes his inadequacy to be true. For Tasha, on the other hand, her feelings of inadequacy or feelings of being ill-prepared are not necessarily her fault. More likely, she perceives her anxious feelings are a direct result of inadequate preparation from the teacher.

Kori recognizes, too, that Ryan suffers greatly from social anxiety that Tasha does not really experience. Social situations cause Ryan to feel anxious and often induces his stutter. Like Ryan, other participants reported that anxiety was induced in social situations, including the classroom. Erica explained that Steven's irrational anxiety is almost always comorbid with social anxiety. Because of various obstacles that Steven struggles with, many people in social situations view him and judge him unfairly, at least from his perceptions. To Steven, the judging and staring are reality. Olivia has never been able to send Daniel to a brick and mortar public school because of the social anxiety he experiences. Even thoughts of public situations can send Daniel spiraling into an anxious headspace. Erica worries about Daniel's mental health constantly and helps him to avoid triggers because no one was able to do that for her growing up.

Tasha does not experience social anxiety the way other participants do. Tasha's anxiety is different. According to Kori, Tasha places unrealistic expectations on herself in every aspect of her life, including the classroom. Tasha's desire to be the best in everything can make her feel anxiety, especially when she feels the stakes are higher, like state testing. State testing comes from educational systems within the exosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; 1992; 1999). The exosystem affects each of the participants' microsystems of schooling because of policies such as state testing (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; 1992; 1999). The techno-subsystem (Johnson, 2010) also actively contributes to students' anxieties. Many of the social anxieties that participants in the study perceived were because students believe they should be a certain way because of what they see in advertisements, on the internet, or on social media.

3. What are students' and parents' perceptions of the manifestations of their anxieties?

Ryan's stutter is the most obvious physical symptom of anxiety experienced by participants of the current study. Ryan's parents did not want him to have to live with his stutter,

but hoped he would learn to control it, so they were proactive in reaching out to professionals. In addition to his stutter, Ryan experiences an increase in heart rate when he feels anxious. Anxiety makes him feel ill—clammy head, red cheeks, and knots in his stomach. Ryan has many physical symptoms of anxiety; however, his sister Tasha has more mental manifestations. She begins to feel extreme levels of frustration, and eventually, the pressure to succeed may cause Tasha to break down and cry for days. Tasha lets the pressure of various microsystems—school, gymnastics, family—build up. She can release some of that pressure in gymnastics, but often, breakdowns will occur. Steven, also, will have breakdowns from anxiety; his, however, tend not to take much to build up. Even thoughts of English classroom will cause Steven to breakdown and cry. His breakdown then causes his anxiety to increase, making his crying more intense, increasing his heart rate, and making him flush. In addition, Erica explained that Steven's anxiety may be noticed through uncontrollable leg shaking.

Anxiety makes all the participants feel a lack of self-efficacy as a result of their English classroom anxiety. Ryan experiences anxiety when asked to read out loud because of his stutter, Steven because of his dyslexia. Tasha's lacks self-efficacy because she constantly feels ill-prepared, like she is not going to be able to succeed in everything. Steven and Daniel feel inadequate in English and lack self-efficacy in reading and writing activities. All but one student has manifestations as a result of social anxiety, including increased heart rate and feelings of panic and needing to escape. For Addison, reading and writing are fun, but being around people in English class is not fun and makes her feel incapable.

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Chapter 5

Discussion

Summary of Study

The purpose of this case study was to explore the perceptions of students and parents about anxiety in the English classroom. English classroom anxiety may include anxiety triggered by reading, writing, speaking, testing, or having social interactions. When I began my exploratory case study (Yin, 1984; 2008), my hope was to give students a voice to express the anxieties that plagued them in the English classroom. Critical theory seemed like a natural theoretical framework regarding giving students a voice to share their stories and their struggles with anxiety in the English classroom. The narrative analyses of students' stories gave students the power of their own stories (Freire, 1972; 1993; 1998; Giroux, 1988; 1992; 2011; Apple, 1996; 2000 Greene, 1973; 1988; 1995; McLaren, 2007).

The second theoretical framework of the study focused on Bronfenbrenner's (1979; 1992; 1999) Ecological Systems Theory, layers, and influence. The systems include a microsystem of direct contact, a mesosystem of linkages between microsystems, the larger social system or exosystem, and the cultural influence of the macrosystem. The setting of my study intertwined two microsystems within a mesosystem according to Bronfenbrenner's (1979; 1990; 1992) Ecological Systems Theory. As a part of the mesosystem layer, I was their teacher, and I was in their homes, a place that had become comfortable to me and them. The family, however, is a lifelong primary influence in these students' lives; whereas, my role as their teacher is temporary and secondary to the family's influence. According to Peel (2014), the family is a primary influence, and teachers are a secondary influence (Al-Shboul & Huwari, 2015; Kirmizi & Kirmizi, 2015).

This case study posed one primary question and two secondary questions. The primary question I aimed to explore was: 1) What are students' perceptions of their anxieties towards language arts? The secondary questions included 2) What are students' and parents' perceptions of the triggers in the English language arts classroom that cause students to experience anxiety? and 3) What are students' and parents' perceptions of the manifestations of their anxieties? While each research question was answered in accordance with each participant's perspective, three themes emerged amongst the participants: 1) feelings of unpreparedness or inadequacy, 2) fear of judgement from teachers, peers, or parents, and 3) anxiety induced by social encounters.

Implications for Teaching

The conclusions from my exploratory case study may contribute to pedagogy to help serve students who suffer from anxiety in their English language arts classrooms. Because the research answered questions about students' and parents' perceptions of anxiety in the English language arts classroom, I hope that practitioners will work to better know their students and understand the implications of certain activities for students with English classroom anxiety.

The current research gleaned theoretical insights through Critical Theory in education (Freire, 1972; 1993; 1998; Giroux, 1988; 2011; McLaren, 2007; Apple, 1996; 2000 Greene, 1973; 1988; 1995) which aims to help students overcome the oppression they may feel in schools, give students a voice, and provide equal opportunities for all students, no matter what struggles they may face. Also, through Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979, 1992, 1999), the study explored the impact of various layers of the theory, as well as what roles primary and secondary influences may play in students' English classroom anxiety. After conducting the exploratory case study, Bandura's (1989; 1993) Self-efficacy Theory proved to

also be insightful because participants of the study suffered from low self-efficacy which directly impacted their performance in their English classes.

Implications for teaching should be assessed based on the pedagogical praxis that teachers use in their classrooms. Knowing that students may experience anxiety when asked to read out loud, teachers should reconsider activities such as popcorn reading or calling on students to read for any reason without knowing how the student feels about such tasks. Forcing students to share vulnerable writing should also be reconsidered. Teachers must be innovative and discover praxis that encourages students and helps grow their self-efficacy. Practices that cause students to have fear or panic in classes are not being used effectively. Language arts is not the only class that anxiety affects. In math, students are often called to come to the board to work out a problem in front of the class, even if the student has no idea what they are doing. Experiences such as those can be completely humiliating and may cause students to experience extreme anxiety.

Perceptions of Researcher as Teacher

Just last week, I administered a 5th grade state science test. I always try to be silly for the students who get to testing early and must sit and wait. As I was talking with these 5th graders before testing, one little girl with glasses that took up most of her tiny face said, “This is my first year at Grand. I like testing here better. At my old school, I had to take anxiety medicine because I can’t be around a lot of people and testing makes me have panic attacks.” My heart broke, and in the moment, I was so thankful for Grand Charter Schools. Because the little girl has the option to school at home, she was able to stop taking anxiety medication.

Two days later, I was administering a 7th grade state math test. I went to the gym to call students back to room thirteen, and sitting in the middle of the gym, filled with uncomfortable

squeaky white chairs, was a small 7th grade boy who heard his room called. His head raised with no enthusiasm, and he used his left hand to try to hide that he was crying. His face was red. I could tell he was trying to pull himself together, which seemed to make more tears flow. I walked over and sat next to his mom and asked if everything was okay. She said, "These situations make him so anxious. He can't handle it." Again, my heart ached, and I decided to walk him to the classroom individually instead of with a group. I thought if I started chatting with him about something, maybe I could distract him and help him calm down a little. I asked him if he had a dog, and he said yes. I said, "What kind? Wait. Wait. Let me guess." He smiled, so I continued by guessing any breed I could think of. He started laughing. As we approached room thirteen, I shook my head and said, "I am never going to guess it right in time." He laughed at me and told me some fancy dog breed I did not recognize. He then went in to the classroom and sat at an open Chromebook. I asked where only he could hear, "Feeling better?" He said yes with a smile, and I went to gather more students.

Moments like those are moments where I see the need for an alternative to traditional education. Before I began working at Grand Charter Schools, I was not a proponent of charter schools. But now, I see pros of an establishment like Grand Charter School. Students who experience anxiety or have other circumstances that make attendance at brick and mortar schools impossible should have an option that still allows them the opportunity to receive a good education. Of course, students only experience a positive educational experience in the one-on-one model if teachers, parents, and students all work together. Grand Charter Schools uses a triangle to represent the model working system. For each student at Grand, every year begins with an Individual Learn Plan (ILP) and a meeting with their teacher. The ILP meeting is where the teacher reviews Grand Charter School policies about truancy, discusses the student's plans

for the future, engages the student in a personality test to discover what may be beneficial approaches to use in praxis, discusses and decides on curriculum, and completes the meeting with ordering the curriculum and technology needed with the student's Learning Fund. Students and parents know progress expectations. They are shown how to use the core curriculum chosen, as well as any supplemental curriculums that were ordered. Despite the significant amount of information, some students and parents simply do not hold up their side of the contract.

Typically, my littles (Pre-K– 8th graders) are much more diligent than my bigs (9th – 12th graders). One factor that seems essential in a student's success or lack thereof is parental involvement. Most of my bigs do not have the parental support that my littles have. With that said, I have a few littles whose parents are present, but not involved, leaving the littles feeling anxious and incapable.

Perceptions of Researcher as Mother

I have a 2 ½ year old daughter. My husband, who is a brick and mortar teacher, and I have had many conversations about sending our daughter to the school system of the district we live in or to Grand Charter Schools. As a mother, my daughter's safety is my ultimate priority, and I am devastated by the amount of tragedy young people in our country have experienced at schools, a place where safety should be guaranteed. Safety cannot be guaranteed, though. My husband works at a high school in Oklahoma's largest urban district, and he has already had three gun-related incidents on campus during the 2018-2019 school year. No one was hurt, fortunately; however, the threat is always there.

On the other hand, my daughter is a social butterfly. According to her doctor she is anywhere from 18 months to 24 months ahead developmentally. She is capable of full

conversations, creating and executing devious plans to get her popsicles, and already knows her alphabet and memorizes stories we make up, retelling them as she flips through the books she loves. I worry that lack of social interactions, clubs, sports, or other options that she may be interested in will not be available to her through online schooling.

Currently, too, Grand has no advanced placements courses; although, students may attend vocational schools or enroll concurrently through local community college, an opportunity that brick and mortar schools offer as well. As a parent, I also must consider the educational experience my daughter needs and the academic level of rigor that I want her to have. According to the Oklahoma State Department of Education's (2017) report card system, Grand Charter High School was given an F rating whereas the district my daughter would attend for brick and mortar was given a B rating.

As my daughter grows, I am sure I will go back and forth, considering all educational options and deciding what is best when it is time for school. I do not know if Grand Charter Schools is the path I will choose for my daughter right now, but I do know, as a parent, if my daughter grows up struggling with anxiety, bullying, being made to feel and believe she is inadequate in any way, falling behind because of unqualified teachers in the classroom, or other factors that motivate parents to choose online schooling, I will do what is best for her. If, at that time, my husband and I feel that Grand Charter Schools is the right choice, I will enroll her and make the Grand model of success work.

Limitations of Study

Limitations within a research study are aspects of the study outside of the researcher's control which may potentially affect the validity or reliability of the results of a study (Bauhoff, 2011). According to Marshall and Rossman (2016), limitations may explain "what the study is

and is not" to "avoid overweening claims about generalizability or conclusiveness" (p. 76). The current study contained limitations, potentially affecting validity of the findings and results. Data collection methods, such as interviews or other forms of self-reporting, may lead to inaccurate information. Participants may not fully retain memories from certain events being recalled, or certain events may be recalled by multiple participants in different ways (Bauhoff, 2011). Despite these common limitations of self-reporting, the current study aimed to explore perceptions of students and parents relating to English classroom anxiety, so self-reporting was necessary.

Bias is always a potential limitation when conducting a research study, especially when researchers are analyzing data (Yin, 2016). Through reflexivity, my self-evaluation throughout the research study created ongoing considerations of my and participants' worldviews and paradigms, creating narratives that promoted students' voices be the focus of the study (Balarabe Kura, 2012; Giroux, 2011, Freire, 1993).

In order to help manage any potential bias, an ongoing literature review was collected through the research process, placing the context of findings within current literature, studies, and theoretical foundations (Quick & Hall, 2015). Using narrative analysis also poses a risk. By using narrative analysis, the researcher may be limited in determining meaning (Quick & Hall, 2015). In the current study, I practiced reflexivity to maintain focus and reflect on the methods and possible biases within the case study (Riessman, 1993). Practicing reflexivity involves examining oneself as a researcher and the relationship I had to the study. It involves looking at assumptions and preconceived notions on the phenomenon being studied (Hsiung, 2010). The researcher must recognize their own biases or preconceived notions about what is or what may be so that those assumptions do not negatively impact the research findings (Hsiung, 2010).

Gough (2003) suggests reflexivity "facilitates a critical attitude towards locating the impact of research(er) context and subjectivity on project design, data collection, data analysis, and presentation of findings" (p. 22). According to Riessman (1993), even when a researcher practices reflexivity, meaning can still be "ambiguous" by arising from "a process of interaction between people: self, teller, listener and recorder, analyst, and reader" (p. 15). It is imperative for a researcher to listen directly to what participants are saying when telling their stories. Sometimes, however, researchers may not have direct access to hear from indirect participants, so interpretation may be necessary within a narrative analysis. Despite the possibility of ambiguity, the current study still maintained narrative analysis as the best approach because the research study aimed to understand the perceptions of others. Narrative analysis takes in to account that meaning is "fluid and contextual, not fixed and universal" (Riessman, 1993, p. 15). One other factor that may contribute to the limitations of the current study is the unique setting and context of Grand Virtual Charter School. Conducting the current study with participants who attend brick and mortar schools may have produced radically different findings (Johnson & Buko, 2013).

Conclusion

The current study implemented semi-structured and informal interviews to clarify statements, behaviors, and choices made by participants. The use of semi-structured interviews, observational data, student writing, and student artwork provided a deeper understanding of the anxiety students' experience in the English classroom. Participants in the study had low self-efficacy, affecting their perceived abilities and performance in English. Participants feared judgement or criticism from teachers, peers, and parents. Finally, all but one participant suffered greatly from social anxiety.

In order to have triangulation of data, multiple sources were collected: interviews, observational data, and student artifacts. Each source of data provided insight. Observational data allowed me to witness anxiety and pressure students feel from a firsthand account. Students also revealed their vulnerabilities with anxiety through writing and painting, creating a holistic view of what it was like to be a student who suffers with English classroom anxiety. While observational data took place over the course of seven months, interviews and the spontaneous paint-write activity took place over the course of three weeks. During week one, I conducted both parent and student interviews. During week two, I had students complete the writing portion of the spontaneous paint-write activity, and finally, during week three, students were able to provide visual representation of their struggles with anxiety through art.

Future Research

In the future, I would like to create a broader look in to students' anxiety in English language arts. As it is April, the testing season at Grand Charter Schools is wrapping up. For the first time in my career, I have seen multiple suicide notes written on students' testing scratch paper. I have seen students stare at their English essay prompts for over two hours, not typing a single word. I have had third graders begging their moms not to make them take the test. What I have witnessed during 2018-2019 testing has been revelatory. Educational systems should be able to assess students without inducing anxiety attacks, feelings of abandonment, or (in extreme cases) possible feelings of wanting to die.

I also want to study the impact the young adult literature (YAL) can have with students who suffer from anxiety or other mental illness. Would having a protagonist that struggles with anxiety help students in English class engage more in reading? Would it help students feel less alone, less different from their peers? There has been a massive influx of YAL with protagonists

with anxiety, depression, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, etc. Does that influx coincide with an increase in diagnoses?

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Appendix A

Parental Interview Questions

1. Tell me about _____ as a child.
2. Do you remember what his/her first word was?
3. What about their favorite book?
4. Tell me a funny memory you have with _____.
5. What do you believe are his/her special gifts?
6. What about weaknesses?
7. What is he/she like as a student?
8. Does he/she need lots of help or are they fairly independent?
9. What are some things _____ worries about?
10. What are some of the memories that come to mind as you think about _____'s past schooling experiences.
11. Have they ever talked to you about someone who makes a big difference in their life: a teacher or role model of some sort? (follow up number 10)
12. What about someone that has been a bad influence? (follow up for number 10)
13. Did he/she get good grades?
14. Was _____ social in school?
15. What do you think is the main factor in _____'s successes and/or failures?

Abstract B

Student Interview Questions

1. Tell me a little bit about yourself.
2. What was your most embarrassing moment?
3. Tell me about your friends?
4. Do you like school?
5. What is your favorite subject? Why?
6. What is your least favorite subject? Why?
7. What are three things you remember about school that are positive?
8. What are three things you remember about school that are negative?
9. Did you get good grades?
10. What do you consider one of your strengths?
11. What do you consider one of your weaknesses?
12. What would be a worst-case scenario day at school?
13. What would be your ideal day/school?
14. If your parents told you were returning to a brick and mortar school, how would you feel?

Abstract C

Spontaneous Paint-Write Activity

Paint Write Activity Session 1

(Approximately 45 minutes)

Today, I would like you to think of a time in English class that made you feel anxious. I want you to write about that experiences in any way that you would like.

- You can write a letter to a teacher, classmate, friend, etc. about the experience.
- You can write a poem about the experience.
- You can write a short story about what happened.
- You really can take whatever approach you'd like.
- Here are a few things to remember if you feel stuck:
    1. Keep your hand moving. Just write whatever comes to mind. If you want to clean it up later, you can.
    2. Don't get hung up on grammar/spelling/punctuation, etc. Again, you can clean it up later. The purpose is just to put your thoughts on paper.
    3. Don't overthink it. Just relax and enjoy the process.

(Advice adapted from Natalie Goldberg's *Writing Down the Bones: Freeing the Writer Within* page 8)

Paint-Write Activity Session 2

(Approximately 45 minutes)

Think about the story, letter, or poem you wrote. Now, make a visual representation of the emotions you felt. I've brought paint, paint brushes, and canvas for you to use. Be creative. Don't worry about the end product, but instead, focus on enjoying the process.

Conversations in Paint: A Notebook of Fundamentals will give you some ideas on how to incorporate emotions and mood into your art (pages 78-81). I also have some examples you can look through to better understand what I mean.

When you're done with your art, I want you to write a paragraph reflecting on what you created, why you chose the colors you did, etc. Remember, enjoy the process.

Appendix D

IRB Approval Letter

The UNIVERSITY of OKLAHOMA

Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects

Approval of Initial Submission – Expedited Review – AP01

Date: August 14, 2018 **IRB#:** 9515

Principal Investigator: Stacey Hughes **Approval Date:** 08/14/2018 **Expiration Date: 07/31/2019**

Study Title: Spiraling Down the Rabbit Hole: A Phenomenological Study of the Triggers, Manifestations, and Perceptions of Anxiety in 3rd through 12th grade Students in Reading, Writing, Speaking, and Standardized Testing in Language Arts.

Expedited Category: 6 & 7

Collection/Use of PHI: No

On behalf of the Institutional Review Board (IRB), I have reviewed and granted expedited approval of the above-referenced research study. To view the documents approved for this submission, open this study from the *My Studies* option, go to *Submission History*, go to *Completed Submissions* tab and then click the *Details* icon.

As principal investigator of this research study, you are responsible to:

- Conduct the research study in a manner consistent with the requirements of the IRB and federal regulations 45 CFR 46.
- Obtain informed consent and research privacy authorization using the currently approved, stamped forms and retain all original, signed forms, if applicable.
- Request approval from the IRB prior to implementing any/all modifications.
- Promptly report to the IRB any harm experienced by a participant that is both unanticipated and related per IRB policy.
- Maintain accurate and complete study records for evaluation by the HRPP Quality Improvement Program and, if applicable, inspection by regulatory agencies and/or the study sponsor.
- Promptly submit continuing review documents to the IRB upon notification approximately 60 days prior to the expiration date indicated above.
- Submit a final closure report at the completion of the project.

If you have questions about this notification or using iRIS, contact the IRB @ 405-325-8110 or irb@ou.edu.

Cordially,

Aimee Franklin, Ph.D.
Chair, Institutional Review Board