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Untangling the Phenomenon of Teacher Anxiety During the COVID-19 Pandemic: Voices of Secondary ELA Teachers

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Untangling the Phenomenon of Teacher Anxiety During the COVID-19 Pandemic:

Voices of Secondary ELA Teachers

by

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of the requirements for the degree of
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DEDICATION

To my Caden and Cody, you are my why. Thank you for teaching me patience, which I have translated to all areas of my life. You both are the bright light that has kept me going and fighting to be the best version of myself. I hope my efforts and grit have shown you that you can do hard things. Mama loves you, always.

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needed rants helped me in more ways than one. I cannot wait to wear our robes to Hogwarts at Universal to celebrate.

My second family, my cheerleaders: Thank you for supporting me throughout this journey; I couldn't have done it without you. My parents, you have taught me from a young age how to work hard. You have always believed in all my adventurous ideas and cheered me on along the way. Thank you for loving me unconditionally. To my husband, you have now also received your doctorate degree with me. You have been a peer reviewer and stats tutor on late nights, weekends, and vacations. You have continuously told me that I did not need to be the smartest in the room; I just needed to work the hardest. Your work ethic and perseverance have always inspired me. Thank you for being my best friend. I love you, always.

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ABSTRACT

Hybrid simultaneous teaching, surgical masks, Lysol wipes, and uncertainty capture the zeitgeist of teaching during COVID-19. This study builds on teachers' daily stressors in the classroom. Many shifts in education that never seemed possible created angst and anxiety in the classroom (Cupido, 2018; Dubey and Pandey, 2020; El Rizaq & Sarmini, 2021; Zuo et al., 2020; Garcia and Piotrowski, 2022). Teachers entered the 2020-2021 school year having to learn many firsts.

The purpose of this study was to understand the interplay of work-life lived experiences of secondary English teachers with moments of anxiety during the COVID-19 pandemic. Using a post-intentional phenomenological approach, I framed my study using the philosophies from Vagle, Van Manen, Schön, and Seidman. The following questions guided this study: (1) What was it like to teach secondary English with moments of anxiety during COVID-19? and (2) How does teaching during COVID-19 affect your teaching pedagogy? The participants are teachers of English in the United States teaching in grades 6-12 (secondary) from ages 20-69 years old. Participants in this study taught English during COVID-19 while experiencing moments of anxiety.

This study had a unique way of identifying specific moments that caused anxiety for my secondary ELA participants. Each participant engaged in this study, and I found the following from my three participants: (1): Teaching English during Covid was exhausting and created anxiety; (2): Teaching ELA was Ineffective and Caused Anxiety; (3) Teaching English during

Covid was overwhelming, and (4): Changes during Covid created moments of anxiety; (5) Stakeholders produced moments of anxiety while teaching English, and (6): ELA assessments were anxiety-producing. The experiences shared by my three participants shed light on the voices within the classroom, which created moments of anxiety. The experiences and findings from each of my participants it was clear that there were specific moments that were more anxiety-producing, which led me to my implications of how we can better support the needs of teachers. The following implications were discovered from this study: (a) Stakeholders need to be empathetic and supportive; (b) ELA teachers need better support; and (c) Changes should happen in stages. This study did not generalize to a larger demographic; however, other ELA teachers might be able to connect and relate to the findings and stories of this study.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

On March 13th, 2020, the day before spring break, students and teachers at my public high school left without knowing they would not return. There were many unknown factors about the COVID-19 virus as it became more widespread. This affected millions of students and teachers as schools were forced to shut down. COVID-19 required teachers to change the way they teach completely. Teachers entered the 2020-2021 school year having to learn many firsts. They were instructed to create a hybrid face-to-face and online-digital learning environment while mastering many new platforms, such as new curricula, digital platforms, standardized testing, and COVID-19 procedures. Shifts in education that never seemed possible created anxiety and teacher burnout (Pressley, 2021). Teachers tried to guide students through this pandemic by giving them support and reassurance, and suddenly, teachers shifted to being front-line heroes, a role they might not have been ready for nor wanted.

Previous studies have shown that teachers experience many stressors in their profession (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Pressley, 2021; Klingbeil and Renshaw, 2018; Montero-Marin et al., 2021). During the COVID-19 Pandemic, the teachers who returned to a "new normal" did not see a reduction in the number of stressors (Pressley, 2021). The purpose of this study is to understand the lived experiences of secondary English teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic through reported accounts of feeling anxious. I was inspired to pursue this project based on the number of good teachers leaving the teaching profession during the pandemic. According to the Learning Policy Institute (2018), shared through Pressley (2021), "Prior to the COVID-19

pandemic, close to 8% of teachers were leaving teaching…" (p. 325). This study will present the reality of what teachers are facing in the classroom in hopes that stakeholders will gain empathy for those in charge of creating an environment of safety and learning. I want teachers to thrive, and I hope the findings in this study catalyze change.

This chapter explores the statement problem, background, and definition of terms to provide a foundation for the reader. Chapter Two reviews scholarship surrounded by how anxiety has been defined and studied through multiple lenses, such as medicine, culture, and education. Chapter Three introduces each of my research participants. Chapter Four discusses the research methodology I utilized for my study. Chapters Five shares my findings and the arrival of each of the findings presented. In Chapter Six, I discussed the commonalities of all my participants, the phenomena, and how teacher anxiety was defined based on the findings of my study. Chapter Seven reviews the implications and shares my discussion. Chapter Eight presents my recommendations and possible future research opportunities. Finally, in the last chapter, I discuss the final takeaways from this study.

Statement of Problem

While previous scholarship digs deep into the stressors in the teaching profession, no literature represents English teachers' experiences as they face moments of anxiety in school during COVID-19. There is a gap in the literature on the well-being and feelings of anxiety of teachers in the classroom, and this study helps close that gap. Specifically, moments of anxiety in secondary English teachers have not been represented and warrant further research.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study was to understand the interplay of work-life lived experiences of secondary English teachers with moments of anxiety during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Research Questions

The following questions guided this study are:

1. What was it like to teach secondary English with moments of anxiety during COVID-19?

2. How does teaching during COVID-19 affect your teaching pedagogy?

Theoretical Framework

The underlying premise of reflective practice is that any reflection requires thought which leads to action dependent on the result of the thinking that occurred (Smith 2003). I built my study around two theoretical frameworks: (1): Theory of Reflective Thought and Action (Dewey, 1910, 1933) and (2): Schön's Theory (Schön, 2000). I provided a chart to help conceptualize how these theories were utilized throughout my study (figure 1).
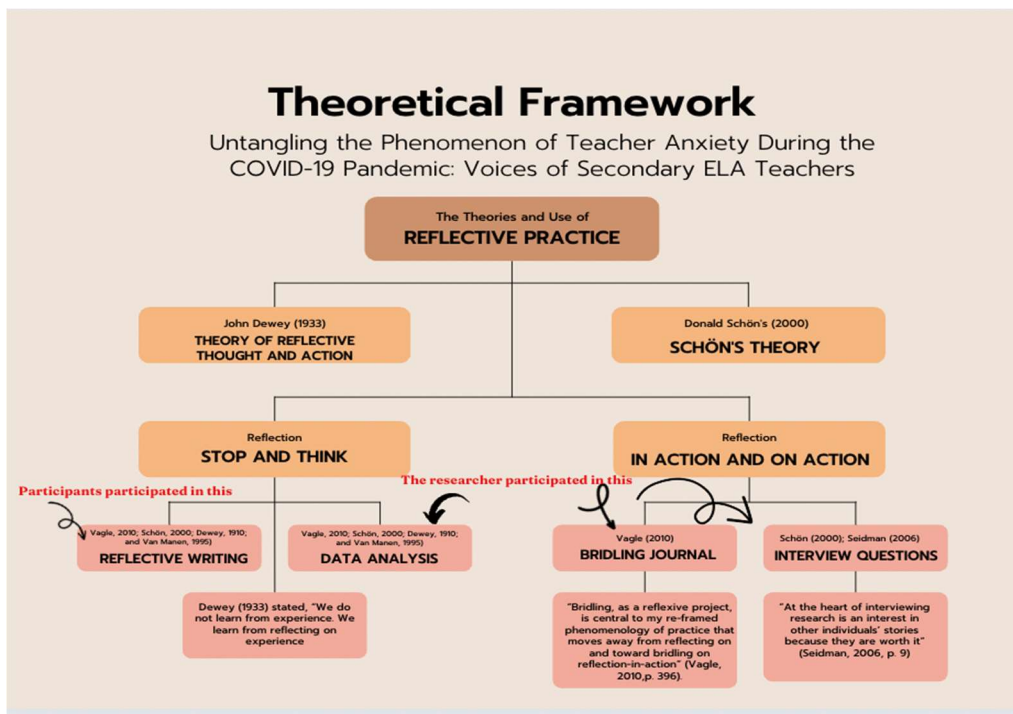
Figure 1: Theoretical Framework

The first is John Dewey's theory of reflective thought and action. Dewey (1933) stated, "We do not learn from experience. We learn from reflecting on experience." Dewey believed that reflection is complex and requires several steps, which Van Manen (1995) cited:

(1) 'perplexity, confusion, doubt' due to the nature of the situation in which one finds oneself; (2) 'conjectural anticipation and tentative interpretation' of given elements or meanings of the situation and their possible consequences; (3) 'examination, inspection exploration, analysis of all attainable considerations' which may define and clarify a problem with which one is confronted; (4) 'elaboration of the tentative hypothesis suggestions'; (5) deciding on 'a plan of action' or 'doing something' about a desired result (Dewey, 1973, pp. 494—506).

This theory was used throughout the bridling process and data analysis to determine the findings. As I combed through the data, I was able to create clarifying and more in-depth questions about the participants' experiences by taking them back to specific moments from their first interview. This was centered around a phenomenological approach and Seidman's (2006) approach of interviews to gain a deeper understanding of one's experience. Using this theoretical framework, I was able to probe and explore the participants' experiences to arrive at my findings. This theory is supported by Max Van Manen (1995) and his epistemology of reflective practice. Van Manen (1995) believed that "*Contemporaneous reflection in* situations allows for a 'stop and think' kind of action that may differ markedly from the more immediate 'reflective' awareness that characterizes, for example, the active and dynamic process of a class discussion, a lecture, a conflict situation, a monitoring activity, a one-on-one, a routine lesson, and so forth" (pp. 34). Not only was contemporaneous reflection used in my bridling journal after interviews, but it was also part of the reflective writing prompt given to all participants after the second interview.

Another theory that framed my study was Schön's (2000) theory about reflection. Donald Schön's theory follows the theories of Dewey. Schön explored reflection in action and on the action. Reflection in action is about the experience as it is happening, and "on action" is what happens after that experience. It is easy to make an immediate decision if reflection happens during the experience. One can reflect on an experience in hindsight and decide how to handle it differently and what to change. Vagle (2010) analyzed Schön phenomenology in practice and discussed the idea of intentionality in phenomenology being how "…we find ourselves being in relation to the world through our day-to-day living (p. 394)." Through this study, it is the idea of how we find ourselves in relation to each other (e.g., the researcher and participants). Schön's theory was vital in the bridling process because it held me accountable when reflecting "in action" during the data analysis. For example, I was actively writing in my bridling journal after each interview to journal about things that the audio did not capture. In addition, it helped me memo my thoughts, feelings, and reactions about the experiences each participant shared. Schön's reflection-in-action is an "on the spot" type of reflection that occurred while taking margin notes of my interview data (second read). I discuss the bridling journal more in chapter four and provide examples of how I did this (See Appendices E – G). Moreover, after each initial interview, the journal helped me with how I structured my questions for my second interview, which is supported by Schön's reflection-in-action. For example, I brought participants back to specific moments from the first interview for them to reflect and tell me more about their experience.

As Vagle (2010) reframed much of Schön's theories about reflection, he states, "Bridling, as a reflexive project, is central to my re-framed phenomenology of practice that moves away from *reflecting on* and toward *bridling on* reflection-in-action" (p. 396). Reflection helps process

feelings and actions, which leads to new information being gained and phenomena revealing themselves. Schön's theory was consistently used as I created questions for my participants and crafted my important question for the reflective writing. Participants were asked to stop, think, and reflect on their experience teaching secondary English during the pandemic and write about it. *When you reflect on these experiences now, how do you feel you have grown or changed as an individual, ELA teacher, and/or professional?* (Vagle, 2010; Schön, 2000; Dewey, 1910; and Van Manen, 1995). This is further later explained in the methodology and findings section of this study.

Significance of Study

Hybrid simultaneous teaching, surgical masks, Lysol wipes, and uncertainty capture the zeitgeist of teaching during COVID-19. This study builds on teachers' daily stressors in the classroom. Teachers already face many stressors, and many obstacles have made it difficult to create a digital learning environment and teach face-to-face synchronously while also dealing with a global pandemic. Many shifts in education that never seemed possible created angst and anxiety in the classroom (Cupido, 2018; Dubey and Pandey, 2020; El Rizaq and Sarmini, 2021; Zuo et al., 2020; Garcia and Piotrowski, 2022). Much attention was focused on students' mental health and safety yet disregarded how teachers cope and adapt. I used specific literature to showcase how anxiety has been defined and studied. In addition, the literature revealed the lack of support and resources available to teachers. Specifically, ELA teachers are responsible for planning, assessments, grading pieces of writing, leading discussions, readings, and writings about difficult and sensitive topics while also dealing with added pressures. How I tailored my initial interview questions revealed the reality and phenomenon of what the teachers are experiencing. This study shares the voices of teachers because they need help, too.

Researcher Positionality

A vital component for a researcher is to understand their positionality and personal ideas, beliefs, and cultural background. Presently, I am situated economically in the upper middle class. I am a White woman who is rooted in Hispanic and Italian heritage. Formerly, I grew up with a working-middle-class family on the outskirts of Tampa, Florida. I was fortunate in my education and was able to attend "A" schools, which were in predominately White upper-class neighborhoods. Yet, I was the first person in my family to attend and graduate from college at a four-year university. My trajectory to where I am now as an educator was unconventional, and I did not intend to be in this profession.

At the young age of twenty-two, I was a full-time teacher and cheerleading coach who had a lot to learn. My initial thought about teaching was the one-size fits all approach. I based my opinion on how students learned or "should" learn on my own learning experiences growing up in school. Since then, I have taught at various schools with diverse backgrounds in different states. While most of my teaching experience comes from the high school level, where I taught a variety of levels of Intensive reading and English courses, I also taught advanced placement classes, such as AP Language and Composition, and honors classes. In my most recent role as the Literacy/Reading Coach, I worked with students, teachers, and other stakeholders in the district on teaching, learning, testing, pieces of training, and different curriculum needs. While in this position, I realized my next move was to the university. During my time teaching at the university, I worked with pre-service teachers to create future writing lessons for their classes. Because the district was teaching virtual and face-to-face classes, preparing these pre-service teachers for various teaching environments was important.

Throughout the pandemic, it seemed that even veteran teachers felt it was their first year of teaching, so they relied on trial and error. According to the Learning Policy Institute (2018), shared through Pressley (2021), "Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, close to 8% of teachers were leaving teaching…" (p. 325). During the pandemic, most teachers in the county where I teach were not allowed to work from home even if they were labeled "high-risk" or lived with someone high-risk. Instead, we were given a warning sign to place outside our door that displayed our personal information, such as "Proceed with caution. This person is high-risk." This sparked conversations and inquiries as to why an individual was high-risk, which is personal and can be embarrassing to some teachers. The only options were to continue working, go on leave, or resign. As a current instructional leader in a large district in the Southwest part of Florida, I have personally seen the struggles as teachers attempted to settle into teaching in a different environment. Seeing these struggles sparked my inquiry into this important study.

Definition of Terms

Anxiety: is considered a negative emotion because it is characterized by worry, apprehension, and/or fear. Pam (2013) defines negative emotion "as an unpleasant or unhappy emotion evoked in individuals to express a negative effect towards an event or person." Anxiety is a mental state characterized by intense tension, worry, or apprehension relative to something adverse that might happen in the future (Saviola et al., 2020).

Free and Reduced Lunch (FRL): Free and reduced lunch for low-income students

General Anxiety Disorder (GAD): GAD can be characterized by persistent and constant worry about everyday situations. People suffering from GAD (about 3.1% of the U.S. population, ADAA, 2021) might worry about things that do not seem warranted to others. People with GAD

are unsure of how to stop the worry, and their level of anxiety can be mild to severe. They are constantly anxious and have difficulty sleeping, concentrating, and relaxing.

Panic Disorder: Panic attacks are an intense and sudden experience of fear and anxiety when there is no apparent cause or real danger. While panic attacks are not life-threatening, one could feel as if they are having a heart attack or dying because of the severe symptoms of rapid and short breathing, increased and rapid heart rate, nausea, trembling and/or shaking, chills, and/or heart flashes. There is a sensation of losing control and not knowing what to do when someone is experiencing a panic attack.

Separation Anxiety Disorder: Separation anxiety disorder (SAD) is the fear of being away from loved ones.

Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder: Obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) is a type of anxiety disorder characterized by obsessions or compulsions. The obsession can be intrusive thoughts or images that trigger anxiety and/or compulsions. The compulsions can be characterized when an individual feels the need to repeat the same behavior. OCD affects people of all ages, and stressful events can trigger OCD but do not cause it. A few common symptoms of OCD include but are not limited to the following:

- Obsession:
    - fear of germs,
    - having things in symmetrical and "perfect" order, and
    - aggressive thoughts toward others or self.
- Compulsion:
    - excessive cleaning or hand washing,
    - compulsive counting, and

o   ordering and/or arranging things in a particular way.

The Pool: If a teacher's position is cut, they are placed in the "pool," they are eligible to transfer to another school or teach a different subject.

State Anxiety: "…temporary reaction to adverse events…" (Saviola et al., 2020, p. 1).

Trait Anxiety: "A more stable personality feature, defined as a constant individual difference related to a tendency to respond with concerns, troubles, and worries to various situations" (Saviola et al., 2020, p. 1).

Teacher Anxiety: Teacher anxiety could feel like a full-time job with intrusive thoughts of fear, worry, and fixation on the unknown. Teacher anxiety is an emotion one feels in the classroom (Beilock et al., 2010; Keller et al., 2014).

Hybrid Learning/Teaching: This is a mix of digital and face-to-face instruction happening at the same time. This type of learning was popular at the beginning of the 2020-2021 school year when students had the ability to choose what learning style would be the safest for them.

Synchronous Learning: This learning happens when students are on a schedule where they log in on their digital device at a specific time and participate in a real-time online classroom.

Asynchronous Learning: This learning allows students to view instructional material online at their own pace.

New Teacher: one to three years of teaching experience in the classroom.

Professional Development (PD): educators can expand and/or deepen their teaching skills by engaging in innovative techniques based on emerging research.

Veteran Teacher: More than three years of teaching experience in the classroom.

Teacher Talent Developer (TTD): supports and provides professional development to teachers and schools.

Summary

This chapter explored the background and purpose of the study, the significance of the study, my research questions, and essential definitions utilized throughout. Chapter Two provides relevant and seminal scholarship about anxiety and the ways it has been studied and defined through multiple lenses: (1) medicine; (2) culture; and (3) education. In addition, this chapter describes pandemic teaching and the lack of support for teachers. Chapter Three introduces each of my participants along with how they were selected. Chapter four discusses the research methodology used for my research study, including my coding cycle and data analysis. In Chapter Five (Sections I – III), I review my findings from each participant's experiences teaching secondary ELA with moments of anxiety during the COVID-19 Pandemic. Chapter Six discusses the commonalities and themes of my three participants. Chapter Seven lists my implications and discussion. Chapter Eight shares my recommendations and potential further research. Lastly, I close with Chapter Nine with my final takeaways.

<div align="center">**CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW**</div>

Introduction

Teaching English is hard, and teaching during a pandemic was extra hard. As I open this chapter with my literature review, I provide a literature map to help conceptualize the connections with the theory and scholarship I encountered throughout my research (figure 2). As you continue to read my literature review, you may use this map as a visual guide. In this literature review, I outlined what teaching during a pandemic was like and how anxiety has been defined and studied throughout the years.

Teaching During a Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic was an unexpected and disruptive event that led to sweeping closures of economies and societies throughout the world. Every country around the world was affected in all areas. The education systems were shut down to alleviate the spread of the virus.
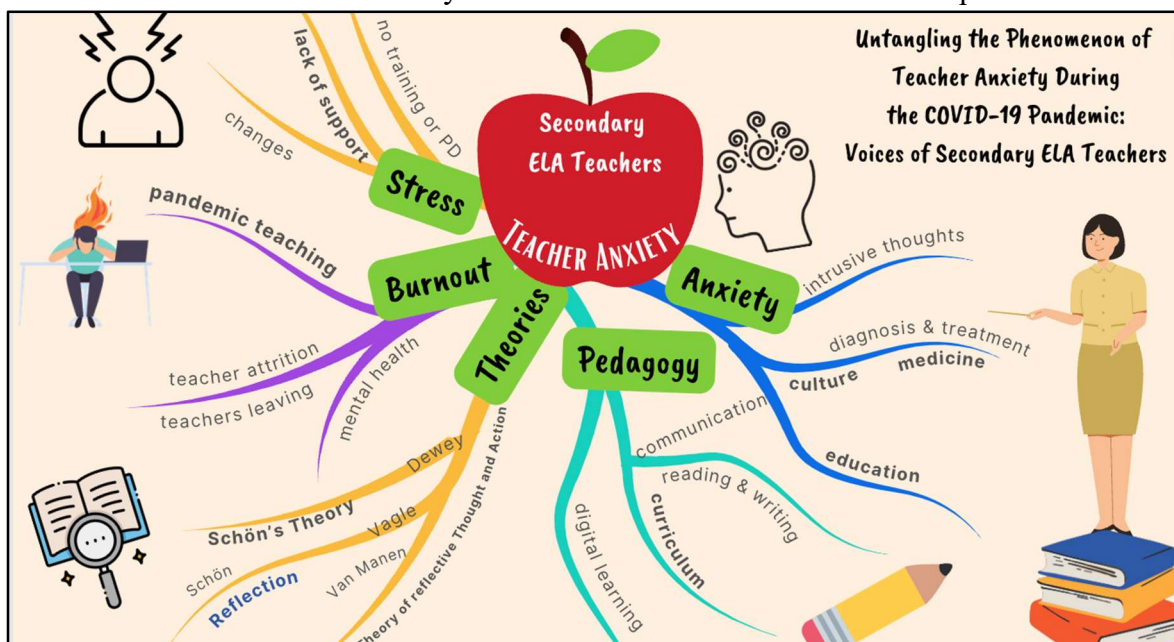
Figure 2: Literature Map

In a matter of days, teachers prepared to teach one hundred percent online, which has yet to be done. While the entire globe had to encounter its challenges, there were common problems with online learning, such as lack of preparedness, access to technology, paradigm shift, and overall stress and anxiety from the pandemic (Cupido, 2018; Dubey and Pandey, 2020; El Rizaq and Sarmini, 2021; Zuo et al., 2020; Garcia and Piotrowski, 2022).

There are consistent and pervasive everyday stressors that contribute to teacher burnout and have negative effects in the classroom. During a traditional school year with face-to-face instruction, teachers incur numerous challenges that impact their pedagogy and mental health (Jennings and Green-berg, 2009; Pressley, 2021; Klingbeil and Renshaw, 2018; Montero-Marin et al., 2021). A meta-analysis by Klingbeil and Renshaw (2018) synthesized 29 studies of mindfulness-based interventions' effects on teachers (PreK-secondary). Their study concluded mindfulness-based interventions (MBIs) positively affect teachers' well-being. The extension of Klingbeil and Renshaw's (2018) study proved that MBIs effectively decrease stress and promote teacher well-being. These studies provide a synthesis of the foundation of the challenges that teachers are currently facing yet lack the impact that it has on their pedagogy.

Teaching during the pandemic brought new stressors to teachers as the workload increased, and the pressure to provide more quality online instruction increased (El Rizaq and Sarmini, 2021; Garcia & Piotrowski, 2022; and Kainama & Hendriks, 2021). Garcia & Piotrowski (2022) shared the experiences of two professors who are knowledgeable in digital literacy and shifted to online learning. They revealed the experience of a professor, Meredith, experience teaching her spring semester class after the extended spring break:

> Forty minutes later, I walked into the classroom with an anxious undercurrent
> buzzing beneath the surface. Some students were pacing at the back of the class,

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firing questions off one after another; others sat quietly, unsure what to ask. We

spent the first half of the class processing the announcement and what it wasn't

saying but likely meant-no more in-person classes for the semester and the second

half making sure everyone could log in and post to the interactive platforms I had

set up, which were not in common use on my campus (Garcia & Piotrowski,

2022, pp. 149).

During the two-week spring "break," this professor prepared the rest of the semester to have a

flexible online space for learning. Most students were muted during the live Zoom lectures, and

only a couple actively participated, which was the only obstacle this veteran online professor

faced. Garcia & Piotrowski's (2022) study and previous research emphasize the students and

their learning experience; however, the focus is not on the teacher's well-being. My study brings

to light English teachers' challenges and anxiety during COVID-19. While no one could predict

a global pandemic, teachers were not well equipped to embark on a different and complex

teaching environment (Pressley, 2021). While other teachers might be able to connect to these

experiences, my study reveals the realities of secondary English teachers during this difficult

time.

Anxiety: How Anxiety Has Been Defined and Studied

Anxiety is defined as the body's response to stress, fear, and uncertainty. It is integral to

multiple anxiety disorders, such as panic disorders, phobias, social anxiety disorders, obsessive-

compulsive disorders, separation anxiety disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and

illness anxiety disorder. In addition, anxiety can be a momentary (state anxiety) or a lingering

and/or long-lasting (trait) feeling or emotion (Holland, 2020; Nydegger et al., 2019; Beck et al.,

2001; Ghinassi, 2010; Pam, 2013).

Previous research has detailed general anxiety, anxiety symptoms, and anxiety treatments. However, other scholars have not addressed or defined the specific way teachers have experienced anxiety, especially during this pandemic. However, research has characterized teacher anxiety as an emotion one feels in the classroom. Teacher anxiety is best illustrated as a feeling like a full-time job with intrusive, persistent, and (at times) anticipatory feelings and emotions of fear and uncertainty (Cupido, 2018; Frenzel et al.; Malik, 2015; Sinclair, 1987; Zuo et al., 2020 Beilock et al., 2010; Keller et al., 2014; Ferguson et al., 2012; Holland, 2020; Nydegger et al., 2019; and Kainama & Hendriks, 2021).

Anxiety Through Multiple Lenses

To situate this study, I reviewed scholarship on anxiety in medicine, culture, and education. Limited research has been conducted on this topic. Also, learning about teacher anxiety could benefit future research and potentially help with the constant changes and demands initiated by school districts.

Anxiety and Medicine

Researchers have examined how anxiety affects the brain to provide diagnosis and treatment. There is a variety of categories of anxiety that have been studied to provide awareness and treatment for human beings. However, a noticeable gap in these inquiries is the root cause of why secondary English teachers are experiencing anxiety. In this section, I will break down how anxiety has been defined and studied through medicine,

Sigmund Freud was the first to scientifically describe the characteristics of anxiety as a feeling of imminent and pressing danger that could be based on objective or moral risks, which Saviola et al. (2020) share. Anxiety is considered a negative emotion because it is characterized by one being worried, apprehensive, and/or fearful (Gitelson, 1937; Pam, 2013). A more detailed

description of the characteristics and sub-categories of anxiety is also described into two categories: "state anxiety" and "trait anxiety." State anxiety can be described as a temporary reaction to difficult events, while trait anxiety is a more consistent and constant attribute one responds to with concerns and troubles. State anxiety is known to be more of a momentary intense emotion. For example, suppose a basketball player fouls another player during a game. In that case, the fouled player will receive a free-throw shot, which could bring intense anxiety before shooting, especially if it ends the game. This state of anxiety is common in sports, and the feeling of anxiety will shortly pass.

Conversely, trait anxiety lingers and is part of a person's personality; the anxiety could be heightened depending on the environment. One example of this is a teacher who is generally anxious or has an anxiety disorder might have an increase in anxiety about the cleanliness of their classroom because of the increase of positive cases of COVID-19 at their school site. This sort of anxiety can last for a long duration of time and can affect or disrupt a person's day-to-day activities. I wonder if these categories of anxiety affect secondary English teachers.

While a single test cannot diagnose anxiety, other assessments are utilized to determine whether an individual has an anxiety disorder. Some anxiety symptoms are increased heart rate, difficulty breathing, trouble concentrating, and difficulty falling and/or staying asleep. It is essential to recognize the different types of anxiety to gain empathy for one's experiences and have a foundation of understanding. People suffering from anxiety often use medication or participate in therapy to treat their symptoms. While there are many benefits to these treatment options, there is still a need to determine the root cause. How anxiety has been studied through medicine is helpful to teacher anxiety because it provides a foundation for specific anxiety disorders that teachers might relate to. Moreover, the studies conducted through medical lenses

do not address what is causing teachers to have anxiety or other alternatives to cope. Anxiety is a common emotional disorder, and researchers have positioned how anxiety works in the brain but not how the teaching profession affects anxiety. This study, however, looks at how anxiety functions in social interaction between teachers and stakeholders or students in a secondary ELA environment.

Anxiety and Culture

The stigma of how people in society view anxiety can be detrimental to people who suffer from anxiety. The misconception is that anxiety is a sign of personal weakness, and people believe anxiety is not an actual medical illness (Reavley and Jorm, 2011). To provide context for the foundations of teacher anxiety, it is important to note previous research on this topic. While no one could predict a global pandemic, this is an event that educators worldwide are still facing. According to Sinclair (1978), minimal research has been conducted about anxiety within education and lacking in building a theoretical framework.

In the mid-1980s, researchers noticed an increase in inter-correlations between self-reported depression and anxiety instruments. This study was conducted (Beck et al., 2001) because of previous research describing one part of the overall phenomenological experience that involved anxiety and depression. Therefore, the researchers' aim of their study was to provide a universal picture of what they call "subjective" experiences, which involve anxiety and depression, by conducting an empirical study to help better explain previous research. The researchers conducted a two-regression analysis to explain which cognitive variables were predictive of either negative (NA) or positive affect (PA). The results indicated that there was a statistically significant prediction of NA. This study did utilize a variety of assessment instruments to conduct their studies, such as the Beck Anxiety Inventory (BAI), Cognitions

Checklist (CCL), and the Penn State Worry Questionnaire (PSWQ; Meyer, Miller, Metzger, and Borkovec,1990).

Gretarsdottir et al. (2004) studied the nature of anxiety in old age because few studies have yet to address that demographic. In addition, there was not much research that specified specific anxiety disorders. Lawton, Kleban, & Dean (1993) was one of the first studies to explore anxiety disorders by looking at three age groups: young (18-30 years old), middle-aged (31-59), and older individuals (60 plus). In this study, the researchers concluded that a negative emotional state, such as anxiety, was higher in younger adults than in older individuals. There was a consensus in the literature presented that the occurrence of anxiety was much lower for the elderly, and younger adults reported more frequent worries (an indicator of anxiety), specifically about family and finances. This is a concerning statistic for the younger demographic of teachers if anxiety disorders also correlate with teaching.

There are a variety of cultural reasons and factors that influence anxiety disorders in society. There has been limited research on people with General Anxiety Disorder (GAD) symptoms during the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, Cordaro et al. (2021) conducted a quantitative study to assess GAD among people in the United States during the COVID-19 pandemic. This study used multiple surveys to measure individuals' anxiety levels during COVID-19. The comparison analysis showed a high prevalence rate of individuals in the U.S. population with GAD and without GAD before the COVID-19 pandemic and between the two-week period when this study was conducted. GAD symptoms were more prominent in females under 44 years old with minors in the household. With 76% of teachers in the United States being female, the results from this general population study indicate a high probability of teachers experiencing symptoms of GAD (*Characteristics of Public School Teachers* 2019).

People living in dangerous situations or having increased stress are more likely to have GAD (Cordaro et al., 2021). Similarly, when a natural disaster occurs, there is a higher rate of GAD. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, anxiety was the most prominent mental health issue in the United States, and Cordaro et al. (2021) characterized people with GAD as "walking wounded" because of their excessive anxiety and uncontrollable thoughts of worry and without being treated, could be chronic. With the COVID-19 pandemic and other societal issues, GAD has not declined. Moreover, participants who demonstrated symptoms of GAD had an increased level of perceived stress and loneliness, were in poor physical health, had strains in their relationships, and had poor mental health (Ghinassi, 2010; Cordaro et al.,2021). The level of concern may have increased as the COVID-19 pandemic progressed, especially with individuals who display various symptoms of GAD.

Anxiety and Education

Before the 1960s, little research had been conducted about anxiety in teaching. Yet, the research that has been completed shows the impact and effects anxiety has on education. Empirical research has shown the impact anxiety has on teachers and their effectiveness and attrition (Sinclair, 1978; Keavney and Sinclair, 1987; Saviola, 2020, Pressley, 2021). Sinclair and Ryan (1987) used an analysis of correlations to evaluate the association between measures of teacher effectiveness and teacher anxiety scores. Correlations between these measures were computed, and statistically significant findings showed that the higher level of teacher A-State, the less effective the teacher appeared. Their results showed a possible link between teacher anxiety could interfere with student performance, and there was a close relationship that was computed to measure teacher effectiveness perceived by students.

While literature communicates stressful indicators in education and on teachers, such as stress, the data presented in the literature about teacher anxiety is scant. In the Journal of Teaching and Learning, Ferguson et al. (2012) published a study about predicting teacher anxiety, depression, and job satisfaction. One of the aims of their study was to identify which occupational factors were a predictor of teacher anxiety and depression. The stress factors from this study indicated three prominent factors that accounted for teacher anxiety: workload, student behavior, and employment conditions. While teachers have little to no control over these three factors, support systems are needed to alleviate teachers' anxiety.

Although stress and anxiety cannot be eliminated, the idea of teachers appearing "perfect" could be part of the school's culture while navigating a worldwide pandemic. Cupido's (2018) phenomenological study looked at anxiety among college professors. Four themes were presented as to why they felt anxious: (1) their pursuit of tenure, (2) fear of displaying vocal insecurities, (3) their road to achievement and success, and (4) the feeling of needing to appear "perfect." College music professors are not the only ones having to perform on a stage – teachers are on stage every day in front of an audience. While being on the stage and attempting to appear "perfect," teachers also had a huge shift from face-to-face to online teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic while facing their own anxiety. Another study by Zuo et al. (2020) about simultaneous online and face-to-face teaching in China was relevant to what is going on with teaching today. Being forced to change a teaching style is difficult enough; it is even more challenging during a pandemic. The study in China presented many challenges with simultaneous online teaching, such as technical difficulties and feeling insecure about being ill-prepared to teach online. Professional development has been prominent in teaching methods; however, online instruction is new to many veteran teachers, which has caused teachers to leave

the profession, go on leave, or have anxiety. Not being able to control the uncontrollable in your classroom can be highly stressful. Yet, teachers must remain robotic "…the anxiety experienced by singer-teachers may well be exacerbated by the need to appear perfect in a professional setting" (Cupido, 2018, p.17).

Anxiety has been studied and conceptualized through different medical, cultural, and educational lenses. This work, conducted by other practitioners over different periods, and using various methods, has firmly established the mental and physical effects that anxiety can have on individuals. Various studies indicate which stressors were the cause of teacher burnout, which included anxiety as a prominent factor (Presseley, 2021; Cupido, 2018; Zuo et al., 2020; Ferguson et al., 2012; and Kainama & Hendriks, 2021). Various studies have proven that teachers are struggling, yet, it has yet to illustrate the entire story. The stories from my participants give a deeper look into what it is like to teach during the COVID-19 pandemic and how it impacted their teaching pedagogy.

Lack of Support

Research and innovative practice continuously think about what is best for students without first considering the teacher. Most of the research surrounding education during the COVID-19 pandemic has been centered around students (Cupido, 2018; Dubey and Pandey, 2020; El Rizaq and Sarmini, 2021; Zuo et al., 2020; Garcia & Piotrowski, 2022; Moran, 2022). Stress, anxiety, and other mental health problems are not issues that only students are facing; these are human being issues.

Teachers are the ones who must lead by example, yet the emphasis has always been on the student's mental health (Administrator, 2022; *School mental health training for teachers leaves room for improvement - child trends;* and Solodev. Resiliency & Mental Health

Resources). In fact, as of 2021, mental health training is being implemented in three states (Florida, New York, and Virginia) that mandate students receive annual training and resources about mental health. Currently, the students required by law to receive this training are for grades 6-12 in Florida, K 12 in New York, and 9-10 in Virginia. The rationale for the implementation of this training is students' busy schedules, lack of self-care, high demands, and pressures from day-to-day academic endeavors, maintaining social relationships, personal life stressors, and not feeling safe (Hood, 2019; Mueller, 2021; Promoting student mental health 2021). While this rationale is evident through statistics of high suicide rates (30% annual increase) and the upward rate of students identifying mental health concerns, this is also a problem for all human beings, which include teachers-our and frontline responders (CDC, 2019). Often, English teachers are the first to know if a student is struggling because of the heavy amounts of writing and discussions in ELA classes. The texts that English teachers utilize throughout the year bring up heavy topics for all humans-not, just students. Teachers need to be able to thrive in their environment.

Even though there has been more attention to mental health in schools, resources and training deployed for use by teachers focus on educating, coping skills, and prevention for the benefit of students (Administrator, 2022; *School mental health training for teachers leaves room for improvement - child trends;* and Solodev. Resiliency & Mental Health Resources). While greatly needed, it does not address the mental health needs of the teacher. Following the school shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida 2018, the Florida Department of Education (FLDOE) created a training program for students focusing on mental health. In addition, in 2020, Ron Desantis, Florida's Governor, signed a law, Law SB7012, Substance Abuse, and Mental Health, that mandates schools to create and implement an

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approved plan for mental health services. According to Hillsborough County Public Schools (Mental Health Plan, 2020), they published their Mental Health Plan as part of their plan for the 2020-2021 school year that evidence supported the need for mental health training in many areas (i.e., mental health awareness, SEL curriculum, SEL strategies, etc.). These professional developments benefit the students, and there are currently no services or support for teachers set in place by the FLDOE.

Summary

As outlined in the literature above, there is not much support for teachers dealing with anxiety during the COVID-19 pandemic. This is supported by both statistics highlighting that upwards of 30% of new teachers exit their careers within five years and teacher testimonies. With the COVID-19 Pandemic, teachers' voices need to be documented, which this study will provide. While it will not directly correlate teacher attrition to anxiety, it will record the lived experiences that warrant further research. This descriptive study will take a deep dive into what secondary ELA teachers are experiencing through the COVID-19 Pandemic to illustrate the moments of anxiety they face.

CHAPTER THREE: PARTICIPANTS

Introduction

In the previous chapter, I outlined seminal and important scholarship that I utilized for my study. Now, I will reveal the selection process to obtain participants and provide a more profound introduction to my three participants.

Participant Selection

The main criteria for my study were that each participant was to be a secondary English teacher who taught during the COVID-19 Pandemic. I was specifically interested in knowing more about teachers' experiences teaching ELA while having moments of anxiety. To find participants interested in my study, I sent a recruitment email and flyer to English teachers and department heads at a large school district in the southwest part of South Florida. From this, four teachers contacted me about being interested in participating in my study. In this study, I utilized purposeful sampling to choose participants willing to share their experiences. With purposeful sampling, while the risk of bias is high, it did allow me to access a specific group, secondary English teachers. This type of sampling aimed to help me answer my research questions and collect data from respondents who met my criteria. One of the participants (Ms. J) I know through teaching. I previously worked with Ms. J, where we taught the same prep in the same hallway for three years. I was unsure if Ms. J wanted to participate in my study, but I extended the invitation to her, and she kindly accepted. A few other teachers I know well, along with Ms. J, also sent my invitation to other potential participants they know. For this study, three participants were fully engaged. One participant was eager to participate but changed professions

throughout the process and was not able to complete my study. Once the participants accepted their invitation, they were given written consent to participate. Once I received their consent, I scheduled their interviews.

Through this process, I met two new teachers, Mr. S, and Ms. W. There were three participants who fully completed this study, one man and two women. Each participant was a secondary ELA teacher at the beginning and during the COVID-19 Pandemic. I chose not to give names to my participants to eliminate assumptions or curiosities about each participant. As you meet each participant in my study, you will only see initials not associated with their name. A summary of my participants is showcased in Table One, which gives a holistic look at each participant.

Table 1: Summary of Research Participant

Participant	Gender & Pronouns	School Demographics	Number of years of teaching secondary ELA at the time of the interview	Position at the time of the interview
Mr. S	Man (he/him)	Suburban, affluent, enrollment size ~2400 students with around 20% of students on free or reduced lunch.	28 years	English Department Head, ESOL Fuse teacher, English IV Fuse, and Resource Teacher
Ms. J	Woman (she/her)	Urban, enrollment size ~1300 with more than 80% of students with free or reduced lunch.	15 years	Instructional Support Teacher
Ms. W	Woman (she/her)	Urban, enrollment size~ 2200 students with around 60% of students with free or reduced lunch.	2 years	English I Honors, Creative Writing, Journalism, and yearbook/newspaper advisor

I chose to introduce each participant using a narrative framework because my research has a natural storyline. The findings of my study naturally unfold a story of what my participants

experienced, and a narrative approach allows the chronology of phenomena to be told effectively (Weaver-Hightower., 2018). Now, you will meet each of these participants.

Mr. S

Our first secondary ELA teacher was Mr. S, a 53-year-old white man (he/him/his). At the time of his interview, he was in his 28th year of teaching, and he had taught at a variety of different schools. Most recently, he was teaching at a suburban high school in Florida, with an enrollment of around 2500 students. The school was situated in an affluent neighborhood. His responsibilities included teaching a variety of classes, such as Fuse English (a mix of students from both general education and exceptional student education)[1] and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL). In a Fuse English class, students are part of general education and receive services from the ESE department. Students who were part of the ESE Department had Individualized Education Plans (IEP) and specific accommodations that were legally required to be met each day. In addition, these fuse classes also had another teacher in the room to support and ensure accommodations were appropriate and being made. At the time of this interview, Mr. S explained the toughest year with twenty-two ESE students with specific IEPs and one student on the spectrum. Mr. S wore many hats throughout the day, and at the time of this interview, he was an English and ESOL teacher, Teacher Talent Developer, and Resource teacher, as well as the English department head at his school. He woke up each day at 4 am to start his day and worked throughout his lunch to get things done that could not be done at home.

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[1] Fuse Teaching: Students with disabilities are placed in general education classes, and the teacher prepares lessons for students with various needs and accommodations.

Mr. S desired to better himself in his profession continuously and took pride in excelling at what he does. He described himself as being the "best student" in the room. He always strove to be a star student and do well in his profession, even if that meant he was in survival mode; he stated:

> I mean from other people, but for me, survival mode for other people, it's I'm gonna work to contract, and you know, screw it. It doesn't matter what needs to get done. I'm not doing it. So what that turns into is Mr. S feels like he's gotta do it. So, it's got to get done. Survival mode for me is not doing all the self-care things that I know I probably should do to feel better and just working, I feel like for me. That's the only thing that I can do, and it just turns into a cycle of I'm always tired, so I can't get the work done. So I, you know, quit going to the gym. I stopped walking outside and quit going to the pool. I was supposed to go to four concerts this month, but I only went to one; I was either too tired or had work to do so."

Prior to Labor Day weekend, he mentioned that he lost his mother and had a difficult time grieving her death because of the anxiety of not performing well at his job. He described it as the last bit of toothpaste in a tube that someone was trying to squeeze out: exhausted and with nothing else left to give.

Ms. J

The second participant was Ms. J, a 36-year-old Hispanic woman (she/her), and at the time of this interview, she was in her 13th year in the district. During her time in the classroom, she taught various ELA courses and grade levels in middle and high school settings. Ms. J taught regular and honors English classes in addition to fuse classes (ESE and general education

students), Advanced Placement classes, and ESOL. After a full day at school, Ms. J is also a night-school teacher. She would teach English to adults twice a week at night at the same school where she works during the day. At the time of this interview, she stopped working in the classroom and is now in an instructional support role at an urban high school in Florida, with an enrollment of around 1300 students.

One word that captures the essence of Ms. J is resilient. While she was consistently and persistently feeling anxious each day, she still showed up for her students and did her best to provide them with the best education:

> "How can I survive the next eight hours or if it's a Monday or Tuesday, you know, 13 or 14-hour days. And it always goes back to the kids. I liked the kids and liked being a teacher inside my classroom. I used to feel like no matter what craziness was happening in the school or in the district, in my classroom, I felt like I was in control."

During the 2020 – 2021 school year, Ms. J had a difficult time walking into school. She spent time in the school parking lot listening to worship music, praying, crying, and motivating herself to enter the double doors to sign in each morning. She mentioned, "I could really pinpoint because all of it felt like, I mean, I would literally be crying on the way to work and have to talk myself into walking in…like, hey, you need this job. You need this income. You can't just quit." Ms. J was recently medicated for her anxiety because she was having panic attacks before going to school.

Ms. W

The last participant is Ms. W, a 23-year-old white woman (she/her), and at the time of this interview, she was in her second year teaching freshmen English, creative writing, and

journalism. She is also over the yearbook and newspaper at her high school. The high school where she teaches can be described as suburban and has around 2200 students. She currently has a second job at a pet store where she is able to save extra money to make ends meet and do something less challenging than her full-time job. Ms. W shared that she believes she has always had problems related to her anxiety, and during her first two years of teaching English, it became worse. Also, she was diagnosed with Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD) during her time teaching. Ms. Discussed her overwhelming fear of failing, "There's just lots of expectations and a fear of like serious ramifications if those expectations are even slightly missed."

Ms. W can be described as empathetic because she allows them to lean on her when they need someone to talk to about their own struggles. She often carries the weight of others on her shoulders, which she says causes her anxiety. In addition, Ms. W affirmed that she wants what is best for her students for them to be successful with literacy skills, "I do a lot of writing, and to me, that's more important than them being able to circle letters. I'm trying to integrate more."

Summary

In this chapter, I outlined how I picked my three participants and introduced each of them. The three participants for this study were: Mr. S, a veteran English teacher; Ms. J, a veteran English teacher; and Ms. W, a newer English teacher. Each participant wears multiple hats throughout the day as they all have other responsibilities. In the next chapter, I reveal the steps and process for my research methodology.

CHAPTER FOUR: METHODOLOGY

In the opening chapter of this dissertation, I introduced the purpose and significance of my study. In the second chapter, I revealed important and relevant scholarship that is surrounded by anxiety and the lack of support for teachers. In the third chapter, I introduced my participants and how they were selected. In this chapter, I elaborate on my modes of inquiry to understand my participants' experiences with moments of anxiety at school. While seeking to examine the moments of anxiety secondary ELA teachers faced during the COVID-19 Pandemic, I had to be intentional when choosing an appropriate methodological framework that supported my interests in teachers' lived experiences. This chapter includes clarification on the term 'teacher anxiety, introduces the roots and origin of phenomenology, the phenomenological framework utilized in this research, the rationale, the context of this study, the interview protocol, bridling journal, member checking, data analysis, coding cycles, reflective writing prompt and the rationale, and limitations and delimitations.

More About the Term Teacher Anxiety

Before I dive into my method and rationale for this study, it is important to clarify the term teacher anxiety. I often use this term throughout this dissertation to discuss the experiences of my participants. Holistically, I was interested in knowing more about the experiences of secondary ELA teachers teaching with moments of anxiety. Attention to how teachers navigate both their professional and personal lives with moments of anxiety during COVID-19 may create

a better of the realities and challenges inside the ELA classroom. I was especially invested in finding out what participants consider teacher anxiety. Participants were asked to define it as well as to explore the physical and emotional attributes of what it means to have teacher anxiety. In chapter six, I outline the steps I took to create the definition of teacher anxiety as well as define it based on the scholarship I reviewed and the findings of this study.

Phenomenology

Phenomenology explores how human beings experience the world by making sense of individual and shared experiences (Patton, 2015; Soule and Freeman, 2019; Freeman, 2013; Vagle, 2018). Phenomenology was established by a German philosopher, Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), who scrutinized Positivism. He believed the essential structures of phenomena are revealed in the consciousness (Soule and Freeman, 2019). His approach to phenomenology is descriptive, where he focuses on the interconnectedness in which the phenomena appear from the data. For the analysis, Husserl utilized bracketing, a three-level process in which the researcher synthesizes the data and comes to an understanding of what the data is revealing. Researchers who use bracketing will place their ideas, assumptions, and prejudices in quotation marks to distance themselves from the data. On the other hand, Heidegger (1889-1976), Husserl's student and critic, believed, "The modes of being of phenomena are constituted within particular meaning-contexts" (Soule and Freeman, 2019, p. 858). His mode of phenomenology is interpretive phenomenology, a competing research approach. Heidegger (1927/1998) claimed this about his approach to phenomenology, "…to let what shows itself be seen from itself, just as it shows itself from itself" (p. 30). Soule and Freeman (2019) explained Heidegger's assertion of the phenomenon of being self-showing. Heidegger compares his assertion to a fever. A fever is not something that can be visible, even though fevers have a multitude of symptoms and can

indicate an underlying condition or illness. Therefore, one will bring awareness to what is not seen. A more modern approach and my research method, post-intentional phenomenology, was developed by Mark Vagle (2011) who deemed phenomenology a human science. Vagle aimed to combine essential elements from Husserl, Heidegger, and modern-day philosophers. Post-intentional phenomenology does not bracket data but bridles it. During the bridling process, the researcher is consistently and persistently close to the data as they scrutinize and explore the phenomenon and its meanings. Bridling has been adopted by Karin Dahlberg (2006), and researchers are actively checking their own biases, prejudices, and assumptions throughout the research process. In this way, the researcher can check their understanding and daily interactions with the data, and one way to do this is through a bridling journal. Throughout my study, I was an active participant in the bridling process, and I was able to journal my thoughts and feelings throughout the entire research process.

Methodological Approach

In this descriptive study, I chose post-intentional phenomenology to examine the interconnected phenomenon of teaching with anxiety during COVID-19. This method was chosen over other qualitative and quantitative approaches because I wanted to gain a comprehensive understanding of the essence of the phenomenon through the accounts of the lived experiences of the Secondary ELA teachers and their moments of anxiety during COVID-19. Vagle's (2018) advice about understanding phenomenology is to pay attention to allowing the phenomena to expose themselves instead of trying to dictate what someone is studying. In addition, Vagle suggested remembering the importance of manifesting because it helps us consider how we find ourselves experiencing the world (Vagle, 2018, p. 49). Throughout the bridling process, I was engaged and close to the data, which helped with crafting questions while

reflecting on my experiences. It was important that my study participants owned their narrative because it is their lived experience, and their story is non-negotiable. Meticulously listening and remaining open during each interview and member checking consistently was an active part of ensuring each participant's story was being told correctly.

The Rationale for Using Post-Intentional Phenomenology

Post-intentional phenomenology is the most appropriate method for this study for several reasons. I am interested in knowing and understanding the teachers' intentional relationship with the world and each other during the COVID-19 Pandemic. Through the framework of reflection developed by Schön, he used language to help others frame their realities with the reflection-on and reflection-in. Through this, the phenomenological notion of how meaning comes to be between subjects (i.e., participants) and the world (Vagle, 2010, p. 397). The study of post-intentional phenomenology is how phenomena come to be in relation to the world, which is why teachers' experiences were important and relevant to this research methodology.

Data Collection and Procedures

Researchers and investigators must monitor their data collection, processing, and analytical procedures as truthfully and completely as possible (Patton, 2002). To conduct an ethical study, the data collection and procedures involved multiple steps to ensure confidentiality and minimize risks. Before contacting potential participants, I gained approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the University of South Florida. This was the first step of starting my study, and I obtained this approval in May 2021 (Appendix A). For this study, I collected two rounds of interviews, with each interview lasting no longer than one hour, and a reflective writing piece. Study participants were engaged in the project for five weeks. The interviews were online using a digital platform, Microsoft Teams.

Participants and Sampling

Participants are teachers of English in the United States teaching in grades 6-12 (secondary) from ages 20-69 years old. Participants in this study taught English during COVID-19 while experiencing moments of anxiety. I aimed to have between three to five participants in this study, and I was able to interview and collect data fully from three participants successfully. Patton (2002) claims there is no limit or rule for sample size in qualitative research. Moreover, it was critical to have meaningful, in-depth interviews to allow phenomena to reveal themselves through human experiences.

Phase 1 of Data Collection

In Phase I of data collection, I obtained volunteer English teachers by distributing a recruitment flyer (Appendix B) via social media and email. Then, I emailed (Appendix C) secondary English teachers by reaching out to the department heads at each school site in a local school district. I captured various demographics, such as age, gender, race, ethnicity, years of teaching experience, type of school, and school size.

Confidentiality was an utmost consideration in the study. Each study participant completed a written and verbal consent (Appendix D) that explicitly stated the study's purpose, procedures, and risks. For the interview process, participants gave verbal and written consent to me. The interviews were not conducted without this waiver. The participants who wished to volunteer to be interviewed emailed me directly. Verbal consent minimized the number of locations where the interviewee's name was linked to the process. Names and emails of participants who were interviewed were kept separate from the audio recordings of those interviews to protect the identities of the interview participants.

Interviews

   I chose to interview secondary English teachers about their experiences of teaching during the COVID-19 Pandemic because I wanted to hear their stories and experience from their perspective. In the initial interview, I gained context about each participant about their experiences of teaching during the COVID-19 Pandemic. I aimed to have quality interviews with in-depth experiences shared, and I completed the interviews for all participants in five weeks. My recruitment flyer contained inclusion and exclusion criteria, and I screened potential participants to ensure they met the criteria for my study. Teachers who were interested in being part of my study responded to my invitation and wanted to share their experiences. Four teachers responded to my invitation; however, one teacher left the profession, and she was unable to move forward with my study.

   The one-on-one interviews with participants who volunteered were audio recorded, and I downloaded a transcript after each interview. Because of the COVID-19 Pandemic, I ensured the safety and reduction of Coronavirus transmission by making face-to-face interviews optional. All three of my participants chose to be interviewed online using Microsoft Teams. I collected data from interviews via Microsoft Teams and collected reflective writing pieces to code and analyze my data to triangulate the data. In the appendices section, I introduced my recruitment email and the interview protocol I used to conduct this study.

 I. Recruitment Email (Appendix D)

   The invitation email was sent to potential participants in this voluntary study.

 II. Interview Protocol (Table 2)

   I created a table of interview questions to help me with each interview. I did not use all questions for each participant; instead, I allowed the interview to take its course organically and

used these potentially paraphrased questions as an unstructured guide to facilitate each interview.

I designed my interview questions to be conversational (Patton, 2002). In this way, I did not ask

questions in a specific order, and I allowed the interview to naturally guide me to one of these

questions I wanted to know more about. Using a post-intentional phenomenology framework, the

bridling process was consistently and persistently utilized throughout the research to minimize

my biases, assumptions, and prejudices. I explored the lived experiences of the participants and

how it differs from others to understand the phenomenon.

My study participants completed two rounds of interviews. The first round of interviews

lasted 60 minutes; each participant's time varied in the follow-up interview. For the second

interview, the following length of time occurred for each participant: Mr. S (45 minutes), Ms. J

(54 minutes), and Ms. W (43 minutes). After each participant's second interview, I provided

them with an optional reflective writing task. Each participant fully completed each part.

Considering my theoretical framework, I crafted their prompt based on Schön's reflection-on-

action to think about their teaching experience during COVID-19. The prompt was given to each

participant in advance. They answered this question, "When you reflect on these experiences

now, how do you feel you have grown or changed as an individual, ELA teacher, and/or

professional?"

The purpose of giving the participants an open-response question is to provide a different

outlet for participants to reveal their experiences. If they felt uncomfortable discussing it in

person, they could have potentially been more inclined to share it through their writing. Some

experiences that are revealed through the interview could have been triggering and difficult for

participants to talk about; therefore, having the opportunity to feel in a safe and comfortable

space to write about it was beneficial and therapeutic for the participants. One of my participants

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has kept in touch with me and told me she felt like a weight was lifted off her chest by participating in this study. She wanted someone to listen to her and care, and by being a participant in this study, she felt seen and heard. The challenges facing teachers and their students are significant, and reflection is a key component of coping and learning. Schön's theory was also a driving force with the reflective writing component that was utilized as an important data piece to triangulate my data.

The Rationale for Interview Procedures

Interviewing is an important part of this study, so I could gain an understanding of the lived experience of what teaching was like during COVID-19 for secondary English teachers. Seidman (2006) stated, "At the heart of interviewing research is an interest in other individuals' stories because they are worth it" (p. 9). I adapted Seidman's (2006) three-interview series to conduct my face-to-face interviews with participants. Seidman coined phenomenologically based interviewing, which combines life-history interviewing and in-depth interviewing based on assumptions drawn from phenomenology. In this approach, the interviewers primarily ask open-ended questions, encouraging participants to reconstruct their experiences with the specific topic of inquiry. This interview method consisted of three series of interviews: (1) establish the context of the participant's experience; (2) participants reconstruct the details of that experience; and (3) the participants reflect on the meaning of their experience. I was able to use an adaption of this method to conduct my own study.

The spacing and time of the interviews are important. Seidman suggests the researcher have 60–90-minute interviews and space each interview from 3 days to a week apart. The entire process should not take longer than three weeks to complete. I ensured the timing was consistent for each participant, and I successfully interviewed each participant within a three-week time

frame. I allowed them more time to complete the reflective writing piece because they all had a lot on their plate, and I did not want this study to be an added pressure. Seidman (2006) believes spending time and building rapport with the interviewee makes a good interview. In addition, listening is a vital component of interviewing. The interviewer should be open and listen closely to the study participants so they can fully comprehend the study participant's narrative they are sharing, which is supported by Vagle (2018). Because building rapport and listening is a huge component of my interview process, I designed my interview questions to be more conversational (Patton, 2002). Therefore, some questions arose during the conversation and differed for each participant. Still, some questions that are shown in the interview protocol were asked to build rapport with the participants and understand the background of their experience(s). The interview protocol is also a guide of topics I wanted to know more about, and the pre-phased questions were possible ways to ask participants about their experience(s) with anxiety and the ELA curriculum. These questions were not a script, nor did they need to go in a linear order; they were topics that I wanted to ask each participant, and I decided at that moment which questions were asked based on the interview.

Modes of Inquiry

A goal for interpreting the data is to minimize the researcher bias, and phenomenological interview questions encourage open-ended and limited questions to learn about each participant's lived experience. This way, I was able to listen to the participant's experience by limiting questions in an unstructured questioning framework. By asking open-ended questions, I engaged with the phenomenon of Secondary English teachers and their moments of anxiety during the

Table 2: Interview Protocol

Interview Protocol-Potential Questions
- Where do you teach?   - What level grade do you teach?   - How long have you been teaching?   - Are you a secondary (6-12) English teacher?   - How old are you?   - What do you T as? What are your pronouns?   - About how many students are enrolled at your school?   - Would you describe your school as rural, suburban, or urban?
- Have you ever experienced anxiety associated with your teaching?   - How would you describe anxiety?   - How do you know when you are anxious?   - What does it feel like to be anxious?
"Well, as you already know, I'm very interested in understanding more about the experiences of educators who are dealing with anxiety working in a high-demands environment. Why don't you tell me a little bit about a time recently when you became particularly anxious related to your work or professional life?"
- Do you remember a moment in your classroom or in your office during this period of anxiety that sticks out as being particularly difficult?   - How did this moment of anxiety compare to other times when you felt anxious about something related to work?   - Were there other times when you felt anxious about something similar?   - What do you think made this moment especially anxiety-producing?   "I'm going to list some types of interactions that might or might not have been anxiety-producing for teachers during the pandemic; do any of these stand out for you?"   - Interactions with students   - Interactions with teachers   - Interactions with colleagues   - Interactions with parents   - If not, was there some other interaction related to your work that felt particularly anxiety-producing for you during this time?
- How does Covid-19 change the dynamics in your classroom?   "I'm going to list some aspects of teaching, and I wonder if you felt anxious about any of these, in particular":   - Planning   - Instruction   - Assessment   - Reflection   - If not, was there some other aspect of teaching that felt particularly anxiety-producing for you during this time?   - How, if at all, has the anxiety changed your teaching because of COVID-19?

Bridling Journal

For the data analysis, I utilized a process commonly used in phenomenology, bridling, which allows researchers to work with the theory, not just in it. Bridling is similar to bracketing, yet it involves extending the focus on one's perceptions, which Karin Dahlberg (2006) supports. When a researcher is bridling, they are actively and persistently scrutinizing the phenomenon and its meaning. Moreover, the researcher believes the phenomenon is connected to other phenomena and the researcher themselves. During the bridling process, the researcher must question and probe their understanding of the phenomena to minimize bias, assumptions, and prejudices. After the initial interview, I openly read transcripts of the interviews without taking notes to get attuned to the data. Then, during the second read-through, I took margin notes, which was imperative for crafting follow-up questions for the second interview. The follow-up questions are for clarification and a deeper understanding of the participant's experience. Throughout the interviews, I probed and questioned participants by asking altering questions such as, "Have you experienced this in another way…" or repeating their responses to ensure credibility and lessen the ambiguity of their responses. In this way, I was able to able to explore the participants' experiences and establish a distinction between my own experiences as well of other participants.

My bridling journal gave me the opportunity to be reflexive and reflective throughout my research journey. I wrote statements in a journal to limit reflexivity throughout the research process. Vagle suggested, "Writing in a bridling journal early and write in it often…as a space to wonder, question, think, contradict yourself, agree with yourself, vent, scream, laugh, and celebrate" (2010, p. 17). Through this reflexive process, I reflected and remained open from the beginning of the study till the end. This process is supported by Schön's foundation of reflection on reflection-in-action because bridling is consistently reflecting in action. This ensured that I

was open to all phenomena that manifested themselves. The bridling journal was also beneficial because it allowed me to wonder, question, think, and be honest and vulnerable with myself. This journal was especially helpful to me during my analysis because I had moments where I was triggered by reliving my participants' experiences. During the COVID-19 Pandemic, I was also an English teacher and literacy coach, experiencing similar feelings and emotions during that time. I had moments where my chest was tight, I had difficulty focusing, and I was concerned about my own breathing. It was uncomfortable. I provided examples of my bridling journal below (see Appendix E, F, and G).

Data Analysis

"We must pay attention to how, in what way, we make phenomena and their meanings explicit. Since every phenomenon of the world is related to everything else in the world, it is sometimes complicated to see" (Dahlberg, 2009, p. 15). Dahlberg described how the researchers are actively involved in the research process; they are not disconnected. Through an open bridling approach, I was able to connect theories from Dewey and Schön to reflect during the research process. Moreover, using an inductive analysis approach, I was able to arrive at each finding. My analytic progress was tedious, rigorous, meticulous, and systematic. My analysis relies heavily on an inductive, phenomenological approach that led to the themes of this study (Dahlberg, 2009; Grbich, 2013; Patton, 2002; Sibeoni et al., 2020). In the section below, I outlined what each coding cycle entailed, emphasizing the data collection and analysis of the research process.

Coding Cycles

When I first transcribed the interviews, I included all filler words such as "like," "right," and "umm" to capture everything they were telling me. During the first round of coding, I captured when my participants took a long pause when their body language changed when they had moments of silence, and any exasperated breaths. This allowed me to see how the phenomena were arriving to full fruition. In addition, it guided me for my second interview because it was an experience I needed to know more about to allow the phenomena to expose itself fully. However, for the purposes of sharing the experiences of my participants, I eliminated these filler words to have the reader focus on the essence of the stories of each participant and to minimize any distractions.

I analyzed transcripts for each of my three participants. Each participant engaged in two separate interviews that lasted up to one hour per interview. This interview structure was an adapted approach from Seidman's (2006) protocol of interviews. During the first round of coding, I used my two focus questions to guide me through the coding process:

1. What was it like to teach secondary English with moments of anxiety during COVID-19?
2. How does teaching during COVID-19 affect your teaching pedagogy?

First Coding Cycle

As I went through my first round of codes, I generated codes that discussed teaching ELA with moments of anxiety. I used my interview protocol (Table 2) to help me with the coding process as well. For example, *what was it like to teach secondary English with moments of anxiety during COVID-19?* I created one that described how they experienced anxiety, which contributed to how I defined teacher anxiety. I asked specific questions such as:

o Have you ever experienced anxiety associated with your teaching?

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- o How would you describe anxiety?

- o How do you know when you are anxious?

- o What does it feel like to be anxious?

Ms. J, my second interviewee, Ms. J, stated:

> **Ms. J:** In general, anxiety can be just a feeling of nervousness. Sometimes it's an overwhelming feeling that you either didn't do the right thing or that what you were doing in class didn't work. Sometimes it's a feeling of dread coming back because the previous day didn't go well. So I guess it's like, it's mostly feeling discomfort and a little bit of like, I don't know what to do next.

I pulled out words that stuck out from this response (i.e., nervousness, overwhelming, dread, and discomfort). These words allowed me to arrive at the findings, and I coded this response as teaching is overwhelming. Relating this response to my next research question, how does teaching during COVID-19 affect your teaching pedagogy? I developed codes based on my participant's responses; Ms. J continued with:

> **Ms. J:** But I feel like if COVID wasn't really a thing right now, I don't know if suddenly changing the curriculum, but it stressed me out as much if that makes sense, it down, but when you're adding, you know, packed classes, no socially distancing students not wearing masks correctly. Now you have changed the way our email is, so we no longer have one email system we used to use you just implemented a new one. You changed how we did grades from one system to a whole new system. And then now you've also changed our curriculum. It's very hard to feel like you can get a footing… I think when you added all of that together, it created such an environment of anxiety…"

Second Coding Cycle

I continued these coding steps for both interviews. After the first interview, I relied heavily on words and moments that stood out to ask follow-up questions. I created a legend to help visualize my coding process. If a word was repeated often during the interview, I coded it blue, and if a word or phrase stuck out during the interview, I coded it as green, which is seen below (Table 3). This visual was helpful when I created follow-up questions for the second interview. For example, a word that was common in Ms. J's response was "change," and I wanted to know more about that as it played into her moments of anxiety in the classroom. For the second interview, it was important for me to bring Ms. J back to this moment for her to reflect on that experience and provide me with an in-depth insight into that moment to allow the phenomenon to expose itself. Moreover, it was a way to member check to ensure the validity of the first interview. The table is seen below:

The repetition of the word 'change' was used consistently throughout her responses. I looked specifically as to what was changing to create codes. These codes include: *many changes were happening at once; constant changes led to anxiety; the district was changing a lot at once." Many changes were happening at once; constant changes led to anxiety; the district was changing a lot at once.* To clarify, for words that were used repeatedly in my participant's response, I highlighted those words in blue, and words that stuck out to me were highlighted in green. For each participant, I created a table to showcase my coding process (see Table 4). The word "change" was noticeable in Ms. J's responses, so I looked more closely at the word change in her response and analyzed what was changing and created follow-up questions for the second interview to find out more about these changes (See Table 3).

Final Coding Cycle

Through my final coding cycle, I looked at "golden lines" that stuck out in each interview. When I say golden lines, I mean lines that must be included to tell each participant's story; these lines were a vital part of the narrative that encompasses the heart of this study: reflection. Each participant had to be vulnerable in each interview and their reflective writing response when they stopped to think about these moments of anxiety while teaching secondary English. In my coding cycle, I highlighted these golden lines in yellow (see Table 3) to show the lines that stuck out more than other words and phrases in their responses.

As I was coding each participant's response, I was also creating a master chart of all the phenomena (see Table 4). Using a phenomenological and reflective framework, this chart was a way for me to capture everything on one list. It was important for me to remain open and reflexive during this process. This was why my bridling journal and member checking were a vital part of my study. I would revise my data and table often throughout this writing journey to ensure that I was telling each participant's story.

Table 2: Coding Cycle

Question	Quote	Words	Phenomena
Why don't you tell me a little bit about a time recently when you became particularly anxious related to your work or	Ms. J: So last year when I was still part-time in the classroom, it was the second semester of school so we were at the end of January, and I was feeling very overwhelmed with just the stress of no longer having an assistant principal of magnet curriculum. So last year, even though I was only working as a magnet lead half of the time, I was basically doing the job of a full-time person. Going into the year, we lost our former APMC to another school, so I was feeling extremely overwhelmed. And	Overwhelmed Forcing Anxiety Change Curriculum Flip flop	The demands on teachers were overwhelming. This teacher wanted to quit. The curriculum was heavy.

professional life?	then, inside the classroom…my classroom always became a dumping ground for the more challenging students. And so my classes were huge. And then we had a teacher quit. And they ended up forcing me into a T-payroll position after I'd already turned it down. And so I almost quit; it was just so overwhelming. And I was just so full of anxiety that it was very hard to get up in the morning and go to work and then perform as a functional human being at work. **Follow-up Question: So you mentioned a lot of changes that happened this past year. Would you say that those changes were part of you feeling anxious throughout the school day or going to work, as you mentioned, like crying in your car? Do you feel like the changes that were going on in the district were part of the reasons why you felt so anxious?** Absolutely. I feel like I'm a person who is not good with change. I've gotten so much better over the years with being more flexible. But I like my routine to stay the same. So I'm like okay; you need to change one or two things; not a big deal. I'll go with the flow. But when you're literally changing everything that you feel like you know, in a time where everything already feels so unsure. It just makes for me, I mean, I don't know how you have a good, good outcome with that. Thankfully I work with really great people who are very supportive as far as colleagues go, and you know, if you have a question, my department head is really awesome. You know I have friends that can show me. I have this one friend who used to work at another school, and you know she helped me with Canvas. And so I feel		The curriculum did not have much wiggle room for anything else. The curriculum did not flow. They took out all the fun parts. Teaching the curriculum The curriculum changes created anxiety.

| | like I wouldn't look at it as admin-level help; I would look at it as colleague help. But even with that, you know, I only had three classes this year. My role is split, where I'm actually half the day and the second half I'm doing. I'm a teacher, and I've been really blessed with not having to do any simultaneous or eLearning classes. And so I could not imagine having to also add that to my plate. I think I probably would have put this year. That was just too much. But I feel like all the ==changes== it does definitely didn't help the process at all. And I did feel like it made it more stressful and harder to communicate and harder to keep up with grades and all the fun things that go into being a teacher. | | |

Coding Legend

==Repetition of Words==
==Words that Stuck Out==
==Golden Lines==

Member Checking

To ensure validity in the data, member checking is a vital component of the process. Motulsky (2021) states, "Member checking, or participant feedback, has become so widely and consistently recommended as a validity or trustworthiness check that it almost seems to have become a requirement for rigorous qualitative research (p. 389)." After an interview is conducted, I provided each participant a copy of the original transcripts of their interview to verify their accounts of their story, which will be the final step in validation before conducting the second interview. During the second interview, I provided excerpts from the first interview to ask clarifying questions to get an elaboration and a more in-depth account of their experience(s).

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There was a potential threat of participants revisiting their data and my interpretation of the phenomena. Participants potentially could have wanted to overemphasize a particular concept, word, or phrase because they might feel compelled to think it is important or relevant to the study. The second interview was important for member checking and clarification. "A successful interview constitutes asking questions and illuminating the participant's experiences until both parties feel satisfied that a shared understanding has resulted" (McConnell-Henry et al., 2011, p. 33). For the second interview, I used the data from the first interview to craft probing and clarifying questions, such as:

- Tell me more about…

- How did that make you feel?

- What were you thinking at that point?

- Describe the environment.

- Have you experienced this before? In a different way?

- What did you do?

In addition, I implored using paraphrasing in the second interview for clarification and to continue to build my credibility with my participants. Moreover, Paraphrasing is a way for the participants immediately confirm or deny the accounts of the researcher's interpretation, which was essential in understanding the phenomena. Finally, the participants revisited their experiences from the two interviews. I provided each participant with a prompt that they used to reflect and write about their experience(s). This prompt was emailed to each participant following their second interview with me. Based on their personal experiences from the transcripts, they answered this question: *"When you reflect on these experiences now, how do you feel you have grown or changed as an individual, ELA teacher, and/or professional?"*

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Master List of Participant Phenomena

• Many changes were happening at once.
• Constant changes led to anxiety.
• The district was changing a lot at once.
• Curriculum changed.
• How we taught changed
• The learning platforms changed.
• Teaching while being anxious means putting on a mask.
• Teaching had added pressures.
• Teaching was overwhelming.
• Anxiety was taking over her body.
• Anxiety took over her body, and it was overwhelming.
• All the changes were producing stress.
• Challenging students made it difficult.
• The curriculum was heavy.
• The curriculum did not have much wiggle room for anything else.
• The curriculum did not flow.
• They took out all the fun parts of the curriculum.
• The curriculum did not have much wiggle room for anything else.
• Digital literacy was a dumpster fire.
• Knowing the ELA standards seemed to be more important.
• The district would not show up, and I did not feel valued.

Reflective Writing Prompt

        The reflective writing piece was an optional part of the data collection, which was analyzed through the same steps as the interview. The reflective writing piece of this research is a way for teachers to reflect on their teaching practice and a way to cope with their challenges of teaching (Shoffner et al., 2010; Hallman and Burdick, 2011; Greene, 2011; Rogers, 1967; Flavell, 1978; Schön, 2000; Dewey, 1910, 1933; Costa and Kallick, 2008; Van Manen, 1995; and Vagle, 2010). The reflective writing piece was potentially beneficial and therapeutic for participants to release their emotions and feelings about their experiences. If a participant was uncomfortable verbalizing their experience in person, the reflective writing piece was another space for them to share their lived experiences. In addition, I wanted this to be an option and not a burden for my participants. This was optional if they wanted to share more than our two interviews allowed. All three participants completed the reflective writing after their second interview with me. Lastly, the reflective writing prompt was another way to triangulate the data.

The Rationale for Reflective Writing

        I am a proponent of reflection. When I was a full-time English teacher, I consistently utilized reflective writing to engage my students with various literacy genres in my classroom. Reflection helps process feelings and actions, which leads to new information being gained and phenomena revealing themselves (Dewey, 1910, 1933; Schön, 2000; Van Manen, 1995; and Vagle, 2010). In addition, my work as a literacy coach was to create professional developments, which included reflective writing opportunities for teachers to gain insight into assessment data and teaching strategies to improve their practice. It was important for me to create my interview questions in a reflective manner for my participants to dig deeper and take the time to think

about their experiences. By doing this, I was able to thoroughly understand their stories for phenomena to expose themselves through their interviews and writing.

Limitations and Delimitations

Limitations in this study include generalizability, low sample size, the participant's willingness to participate and share their experiences while being fully transparent, and researcher bias. The goal of phenomenological studies is never to generalize to a demographic, yet the experiences can be generalized because others are able to connect to the experiences of others. While participants dropping out of any study is inevitable, there was a benefit of being part of this study. Out of the participants who volunteered, no one left the study, and all three of them were able to complete all the tasks. Participants potentially benefited from reflecting on how suffering from moments of anxiety during COVID-19 has influenced their teaching. In addition, they may have found it therapeutic to share their story or find comfort in knowing that other teachers have experienced something similar. I acknowledged my own bias and kept a journal to be reflective and reflexive throughout the process. Because qualitative research is personal, Patton (2015) emphasizes the importance of being reflective and reflexive, "Learn about yourself and your analysis processes, both cognitively and emotionally (p. 523).

Because anxiety is associated with negative feelings and emotions, the way I framed my interview questions was framed to illicit fewer positive experiences. As previously stated, anxiety is characterized as a negative emotion because it is characterized by being worried, apprehensive, and/or fearful (Gitelson, 1937; Pam, 2013). These experiences are limited to my participants, and this is not comprehensive to how all secondary English teachers feel or experience anxiety, especially during and throughout the COVID-19 Pandemic. This study did

not generalize to a larger demographic; however, other ELA teachers might be able to connect and relate to the findings and stories of this study.

Lastly, there are a couple of delimitations for this study. The study is limited to interviews and a reflective-writing prompt; only high school English teachers were eligible for this study. Yet, other teachers might have similar experiences to the participants in my study.

Summary

In this descriptive study, I utilized a post-intentional phenomenological framework that considers the assumptions of the theoretical framework (Reflective Theory and Schön's Theory). This was the most appropriate approach for the scope of this study because it centers around the lived experiences of participants for a phenomenon to reveal itself. In addition, the study focused on how humans experience the world by making sense of shared and individual experiences (Patton, 2015; Soule and Freeman, 2019; Freeman, 2013; Vagle, 2018). The study utilized purposeful sampling to choose participants who were willing to share their experiences teaching with moments of anxiety during the COVID-19 Pandemic. In-depth interviews were conducted for each participant following the interview approach by Seidman. For the last step, I collected a reflective writing piece from each participant to triangulate the data. All participants submitted a reflective writing piece, which was utilized to triangulate the data. Through these efforts, this study was beneficial in understanding the realities of what is occurring in the classroom and filled a gap in understanding teacher anxiety.

<p style="text-align:center">CHAPTER FIVE: FINDINGS</p>

Introduction

In the previous chapter, I detailed my steps and rationale for conducting this study. Using a phenomenological framework, I developed my questions to be open and conversational in order to understand each participant's story and guide me to the phenomena I listened carefully and openly while creating a safe environment for participants to share their experiences. Using Seidman's adapted approach to conduct a 3-step interview, I built rapport with my three participants, reconstructed their experience with in-depth questions to gain a deeper understanding, and lastly, allowed them to reflect on their experience through writing. The reflective writing was structured around theories that Dewey (1910, 1933) and Schön (2000) supported. I detailed my steps for my data collection to ensure an ethical and sound study. Lastly, I outlined my coding steps and data analysis. In this chapter, I will reveal the themes from my coding cycles as well as the steps I utilized to get to the phenomena. Each participant has separate findings that are revealed in their individual sections.

Section I: Mr. S and a Tube of Toothpaste

Getting to know my first participant, Mr. S, was insightful and eye-opening, as in learning the realities of what teachers are dealing with in the classroom. Mr. S has 28 years of teaching experience and has witnessed as well as lived moments of anxiety teaching ELA during the pandemic. At his school, he wears many hats. Mr. S is the English department head and has twenty-four teachers in his department, which means he manages schedules, substitute coverage, books, and supplies and delivers professional development for his department. In addition, he is

Participant	Gender & Pronouns	Number of years of teaching secondary ELA at the time of the interview	Position at the time of the interview	Findings
Mr. S	Man (he/him)	28 years	English Department Head, ESOL Fuse teacher, English IV Fuse, and Resource Teacher	(1): Teaching English during Covid was exhausting and created anxiety; (2): Teaching ELA was Ineffective and Caused Anxiety.

also the resource teacher on campus and creates and helps with schoolwide professional development opportunities and monthly Professional Learning Community (PLC) meetings for 130 teachers.

I will share the two themes discovered while conducting my data analysis on Mr. S: (1) Teaching English during Covid was exhausting and created anxiety; (2): Teaching ELA was Ineffective and Caused Anxiety. I will now share excerpts from the interview relevant to my findings.

Teaching ELA was Exhausting and Created Anxiety

During my first interview, I gained context of who Mr. S was, his teaching background, and fundamental information on his definition and characterization of anxiety. Across the responses shared with me, Mr. S. detailed moments of teaching English during Covid that were exhausting, which is shown below:

Jenise: Why don't you tell me a little about recently when you became particularly anxious about your work or professional life?

Mr. S: "Prior to Labor Day weekend, I ==lost my mom==. ==I kept going== because things needed to get done at school. I would wake up each day at ==4 am== and get things done at home that ==couldn't get done at school.== There is no way I could only work to contract hours. There were so many things to do, and I was ==constantly== ==exhausted.== It was a lot, and it was ==constant.=="

The golden line that needed to be addressed was the loss of Mr. S's mom. His mom's death occurred toward the beginning of the school year, and what stuck out was when he stated, "I kept going…" (highlighted in green). Other words and phrases that stuck out more than others (also in green) were "4 am; couldn't get done at school; and constantly exhausted." The word "constant" was repeated twice in this excerpt, displayed in blue. In the second interview, I wanted to know more about his schedule and his reasoning for it. I looked at these repetitive words, words and phrases that stuck out, and golden lines to craft follow-up questions and bring my participants back to specific moments. This is what Mr. S had to say about his daily schedule:

> **Mr. S:** There are things that have to ==happen== at school that can't happen at home, and if it can ==happen== at home, then I try to do it at home, planning for class. Grading things that don't have to ==happen== at school, I try to do at home or when I get to school. I need time to talk to people that you know won't talk to me after school hours or talk to kids, especially with the ESOL students. I have to go to classes, pull them out, ask them questions, test them, things that can't be done at home and the jobs hard enough. You don't have enough time during the day anyway, so that tries to free up some of the time. But I just ==don't say no==. So when people ask for favors or they ask for help. I stopped what I was already doing.

Help them, and then I'm further behind. And that's just been a constant struggle, and I hate asking for help as one of my least favorite things because ==I should be able to handle it all==. So my co-teacher partner has been really good at forcing me to stop, and she takes over, and she handles things that I want to do. And I'm getting better at realizing it doesn't have to be me. I don't have to be the one to take the copy paper to the copy room. If I'm doing five other things that only I can do. Other people can actually do those things, so I feel worthy when I am helpful and when I'm serving people so. That's the why. And I know all of it. That's the part that sucks… it is when you're smart, and you actually have been through counseling, and you're self-aware, and you realize that ==80% of why your life is hell is your choice.==

This response revealed the word happen (repeated three times in blue), meaning time and place. Mr. S reiterated that this was a schedule he had to stick to in order to get everything done during the day. This clarified his reasoning as to why he had to wake up early to get things done at home that was feasibly possible to be done at school. A golden line from this excerpt was, "I don't say no." If something needed to be done, Mr. S made sure it happened, even at the expense of his own mental health. He does not like asking for help or taking things off his plate; he just gets it done no matter what time of day. Fortunately, his co-teacher had helped him alleviate this added pressure and helped him not take on too many tasks. He mentioned that "he should be able to handle it all," which is what stuck out in the green highlight. Also in green is "80% of why your life is hell is your choice." While Mr. S admits to knowing this about himself and has gone through counseling, seeing him take the blame was interesting. From the interviews with Mr. S, it was clear that teaching English during Covid-19 was exhausting and led to moments of

anxiety. This brought me to another question that related to the theme of teaching secondary

English being exhausting, which illustrated the changes going on in the district being particularly

difficult. Please note that I blacked out any identifying information for anonymity, as seen

below:

> **Jenise:** Do you remember a moment in your classroom or in your office during
>
> this period of anxiety that sticks out as being particularly difficult?
>
> **Mr. S:** "So this was during smart start week when we had those three weeks
>
> where we were at home, and nobody knew what was actually going to happen.
>
> You know, would we start in the building and everybody was waiting for that
>
> meeting and the superintendent ███████ making his announcement. That day that
>
> he made the announcement, my friend decided that she was going to go on leave.
>
> She was waiting for that announcement to come. She had a small child and large
>
> health concerns, but everybody was worried back then. Nobody knew what
>
> COVID was gonna do, so she didn't want to be in the building. And since she was
>
> gonna have to be in the building, we didn't have enough reading courses for her to
>
> be home full-time. She took leave, and then a couple of weeks later, when they
>
> came through with the whole, we're gonna cut 1000 teachers. One of the solutions
>
> was to cut my friend, who was on leave, and I was already teaching two of her
>
> classes anyway. The reading coach had picked up three of her other classes. So,
>
> since her schedule was taken care of, it just made sense to cut her rather than a
>
> body that was in the building.

As seen in the response from Mr. S, teachers were at home waiting for three weeks and were left uncertain. He refers to the three weeks before the 2020 – 2021 school year started. The golden line, "…nobody knew what was actually going to happen," confirms the many moments of waiting that were occurring during this time. Teachers were waiting to hear if they were coming back, what that would look like, and how they would instruct their students. These answers all came down to one important announcement. The superintendent needed to address these questions, so teachers could move forward. What was repeated in the response (blue highlight) was, "Nobody knew." No one knew what exactly COVID-19 was or was going to do. The level of uncertainty brought moments of anxiety, and those moments were exhausting. Mr. S informed me that his best friend left during this time, and he picked up some of her classes.

Arrival at Finding

Teaching during this time was exhausting and led to many moments of anxiety for Mr. S. Thinking of his daily schedule and the extra demands placed on him led to him being consistently tired and having anxiety. During the time of the COVID-19 Pandemic, there was a lack of support for teachers. As previously stated in my literature review, a lot of the research surrounding education during the COVID-19 Pandemic has been centered around students (Cupido, 2018; Dubey and Pandey, 2020; El Rizaq & Sarmini, 2021; Zuo et al., 2020; Garcia & Piotrowski, 2022; and Moran, 2022). Both students and teachers experienced stress, anxiety, and other mental health problems during this time. Yet the emphasis and focus of support were on the students.

Discussion

If the teachers were not doing well, it would be difficult for the students to do well. As seen from Mr. S's findings, exhaustion led to moments of anxiety. Mr. S did not mention when

he could process his emotions and grieve his mother's death because he had to "keep going."

While this must have been difficult, he felt compelled to keep to his routine and work more than

his contract hours allotted. The teacher in the study endured what he perceived as implicit

expectations, which shifted the role of an English educator into someone with superpowers. The

role of an educator is dehumanized because it suggests that you must take control of every

situation and push yourself past your limits in order to do your job well. While Mr. S admits that

he is self-aware of his personal choices to help others because it brings him self-worth, I also

wonder if the high-demands environment was a catalyst for him to feel the need to work

constantly. Moreover, it reminds me of Cupido's (2018) study that examined anxiety among

college professors. The findings of Cupido's (2018) study showed that these professors had

added pressure and anxiety by the feeling of needing to be "perfect," which reminds me of Mr.

S's work ethic. The idea of teachers appearing "perfect" could be part of the school's culture and

outside pressures.

Teachers were leaving the profession, whether it was by choice or not. I specifically

remember waking up one morning to find out my position as a literacy coach was cut, and my

husband was the one to deliver the news to me. He was reading the morning paper and turned to

me and said, I think you have been fired." I was then given three new English classes to teach in

the middle of the year in order to save my position. Exhausted. Thinking about how I was not the

only one to pick up new classes, learn a new curriculum, and add extra students, assessments,

grading, and planning were too much. Personally, I decided to take a leave to go teach at the

University of South Florida because I was exhausted and did not feel valued. To be clear, I loved

my job, but I felt like no one in the district cared about me. I could not help but cry when Mr. S

shared the story of his colleague who taught English and decided to take a leave. I wrote about

this in my bridling journal after Mr. S's interviews because it moved me. And to how Mr. S

received his description: simple. During my first interview with Mr. S, I asked him, "How would

you describe anxiety?" and he responded, "It feels like the last bit of the toothpaste in the tube

that someone is trying to squeeze out." This affirms that teaching is exhausting, which was a

cause of the anxiety Mr. S experienced.

The level of uncertainty was high, and teachers were asked to do more. Mr. S had to pick

up two of his friend's classes. It is challenging to get a grip on what your year is going to look

like ad get a footing when teachers must do more and they are exhausted. Smart Start week

occurred to acquaint teachers and students with the new teaching and grading platform, Canvas. I

wonder how the level of exhaustion during this time of uncertainty was influenced by the

changes, which brings me to the second theme: Teaching English during Covid was ineffective.

Teaching ELA was Ineffective and Caused Anxiety

While many changes were happening during this time, planning and assessments were a

large component of what was anxiety-producing for Mr. S. I listed aspects of teaching English

and asked him if he felt particularly anxious about any of the following: planning, instruction,

planning, and assessment. This is what he had to say:

> **Mr. S:** There's just too much to do with the new curriculum. I had been teaching
>
> springboard since 2015 with my co-teacher partner, so we had it. I mean, we had
>
> it down. I could do it in my sleep. It's not that I wouldn't adjust plans, but you
>
> know you teach Othello 7 times. There are not that many surprises that are going
>
> to come up. Do you know what I'm saying? But with Study Sync being a garbage
>
> fire, technology-wise, and a brand-new curriculum and having to plan that and
>
> plan prep for ESOL. And my planning for a 50-minute class usually takes at least

50 minutes per class. It's very structured, and I think about breaking it up, even though it's a 50-minute period, so. When it's all done, you can just copy it from Canvas. You did it last year; that's very different from sitting down on the weekend and having to plan the whole week, having never taught it before.

As seen in blue, "curriculum" was mentioned twice in Mr. S's response. Mr. S described the technology part of the new curriculum as being a "garbage fire" (highlighted in green). While he acknowledges that the technology component of the new curriculum, Study Sync, is the issue and not the content itself, it does cause moments of anxiety when technology does not work. Since Mr. S was serving as the Teacher Talent Develop and the English Department Head, he was well equipped to help others navigate the digital literacy component of Study Sync. I wondered how effective the digital component of this curriculum was for student success when there were nuances with the platform. When I asked him how this compared to other moments of anxiety while teaching English since 2020, he responded, "They were all difficult, but teaching the sophomore reading class that way was almost impossible. After the first interview, I crafted questions to help me arrive at the findings. Therefore, I needed to know more about his sophomore reading class and bring him back to this moment. Using Schön's reflection-in-action is an "on the spot" type of reflection, and I asked him to reflect and tell me more about his sophomore reading class:

> **Mr. S:** Yes, having to teach face-to-face and online simultaneously was a disaster. I had a sophomore Intensive Reading class, which was an important year because it was a benchmark year. I had 22 students in that class, most of whom had IEPs, and one student was on the spectrum. I could not see everyone on the screen, which was extremely difficult. We were reading an important text, "A

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Letter from Birmingham," and going back and forth, seeing the teacher's face, and the text was ==simply not effective.==

This was during the 2020 – 2021 school year when many students and teachers were being quarantined, and learning was hybrid, meaning online and face-to-face instruction was happening simultaneously. Teaching seminal texts, such as a Letter to Birmingham, did not have the same effect on the students of Mr. S. Teaching literacy skills to improve student success, especially in an intensive reading class, is important. Unfortunately, ineffective teaching and learning are detrimental to students. Part of the teaching and learning being ineffective was the level of change and uncertainty that teachers were facing. Mr. S continued why these moments were anxiety-producing: "I spent hours trying to figure out the unknown. We continuously pushed and asked for answers about ==assessments== and could never get a straight answer over the summer before the 2020- 2021 school year started. ==Everything was last minute, and it felt like WWII.==" To me, with my years of experience teaching English, it is important to have time, support, and a plan. Not knowing what will happen next is anxiety-producing and does not help with best practices for teaching English.

Arrival at Finding

The second theme that arrived from Mr. S's interviews was that teaching English during Covid was ineffective and caused moments of anxiety. Previous research showed a strong impact of anxiety on teachers and their effectiveness and attrition (Sinclair, 1978; Keavney and Sinclair, 1987; Saviola, 2020, Pressley, 2021). Before I dive into this, it is important to note that many changes were happening at once during this time of uncertainty. Mr. S discussed that he was the

support system on campus to help others at his school navigate the changes. While no one knew what Covid was going to do, it was also difficult to master the new changes when there was a high level of uncertainty. For example, at the start of the shutdown, teachers were learning a new platform, Zoom, along with how to teach English in a virtual space. Mr. S took the role of an expert and was able to support teachers during this time.

Discussion

There were too many moments of uncertainty and changes happening all at once. Mr. S described how difficult it was to teach during this time, especially in his sophomore reading class. For students who are in the 10th grade in the state of Florida, it is a benchmark year for literacy. The state assessment determines whether a student will graduate from high school. Students in an intensive reading class, such as the one Mr. S taught, struggle with literacy skills and were intentionally placed in that class for extra support with literacy and test-taking skills. If students are not enhancing their skills, they will have difficulty passing the benchmark assessment, which jeopardizes students when it comes to graduating. As someone who has taught tenth grade for numerous years, there is extra pressure to ensure your students perform well on these benchmark assessments. If students did not do well, I felt guilty for them not performing well. In addition, these test scores are a large component of a teacher's end-of-the-year evaluation and the school grade. The pressure, stress, and anxiety for students to perform well are high. Mr. S stated that he spent hours trying to figure out assessments with so many changes and uncertainty happening all at once, which led to anxiety for him. As previously stated, previous scholars have demonstrated that teacher anxiety impacts the effectiveness of teaching and presented indicators of teacher anxiety (Cupido, 2018; Dubey and Pandey, 2020; El Rizaq & Sarmini, 2021; Zuo et al., 2020; Garcia & Piotrowski, 2022; and Moran, 2022). The

responses and themes from this study do show the ineffectiveness of teaching English with moments of anxiety during the COVID-19 Pandemic.

Reflective Writing

For the last task, Mr. S was given a prompt in advance to reflect and respond to "*Do you remember a moment in your classroom or in your office during this period of anxiety that sticks out as being particularly difficult?*" The response to this question can be seen below.

> **Jenise:** "When you reflect on these experiences now, how do you feel you have grown or changed as an individual, ELA teacher, and/or professional?"

> **Mr. S:** When I think back to the beginning of COVID and how things have changed, I remember clearly the moment that it became different. I was at my parents' house in Charlotte, caring for them after my dad's knee surgery. We had been exclusively on the computer since March of 2020, and the boss said she had something to tell us. We all logged into Zoom and lost the glue that had held us together – my principal was transferred to another school. Immediately after that, we had the "Smart Start," where we delayed opening waiting for the state and the district to make up their minds about eLearning, and then we had our first deep personnel cuts.

> The people who were left had to work twice as hard and learn new platforms (Canvas was rolled out) and teach students who weren't really there even when they were there.

People quit volunteering to help we went into survival mode. It just kept getting worse, and the chaos was multiplied, and the communication became more siloed and fractured, and morale disintegrated. My friends started leaving the profession, or at least the district, or began quitting before we even knew what that was.

Through it all, I kept hoping that we could get back to where we were, but now, with Study Sync and Synergy being so clumsily rolled out, with materials not appearing, and with change after change happening at the last minute with no communication as we move to the new standards, I have become not just less proud, but ashamed of who we are. I was intensely proud of the community we built at my site and of the network of dedicated professionals who supported us downtown. Now I just see people who are marking time and who say no a lot.

I am jaded, but I am not going to give up. I don't care that they don't read my Team's messages or listen when I try to give them information that could make their jobs easier. I can't save or help them all, and certainly not if they are constantly convinced they are too busy.

The main change in myself is that the joy I used to have in my job is mostly gone. I don't feel effective as a leader. My team is fractured and isolated and has given up on going above and beyond. There is no vision and sense of belonging. I work all the time, and I don't feel it has much of an impact.

But I keep moving forward. It is what I know. I don't feel anxious or depressed about it any longer – it is what it is. I try to be present and helpful and do what I am asked to do, no matter how ridiculous it is.

I have relationships now with directors and important people downtown that happened during COVID and have continued as my roles have expanded. I appreciate those things, and they would not have been possible if we hadn't moved to Zoom and Teams as our way of work.

I wish I could say I was hopeful, but I think that has been placed by a sense of resignation to our fate and acceptance that I am choosing to stay. There are still small ways I make a difference.

Section II: Ms. J – Because of Covid

Ms. J, a veteran and highly effective English teacher at the time of this interview, recently removed herself from the classroom completely because the negatives outweighed the positives. She revealed that she was diagnosed with Polycystic Ovary Syndrome (PCOS), a hormone disorder, and was dealing with physical and emotional symptoms during the COVID-19 Pandemic. She shared that she gained a lot of weight, was constantly exhausted, and was battling depression. Ms. J was put on anxiety medication shortly after the initial Covid shut down in March 2020 because her anxiety and depression were much worse. I will now reveal two themes in Ms. J's chapter: (1) Teaching English during Covid was overwhelming, and (2) Changes during Covid created moments of anxiety.

Table 6: Summary of Ms. J and Findings

Participant	Gender & Pronouns	Number of years of teaching secondary ELA at the time of the interview	Position at the time of the interview	Findings
Ms. J	Woman (she/her)	15 years	Instructional Support Teacher	(1) Teaching English during Covid was overwhelming, and (2): Changes during Covid created moments of anxiety.

Teaching ELA was Overwhelming and Produced Anxiety

Much of Ms. J's interviews started and ended with the phrase "because of Covid." Most of what Ms. J dealt with in the classroom was challenging and limited "because of Covid." Many of her responses dealing with anxiety and teaching English fell back on classroom management and behavior. When asked about a moment she became anxious about something related to her work or professional life, she responded with the following:

> **Ms. J:** So last year, when I was still part-time in the classroom, it was the second semester of school, so we were at the end of January, and I was feeling very overwhelmed with just the stress of no longer having an assistant principal of magnet curriculum. So last year, even though I was only working as a magnet lead half of the time, I was basically doing the job of a full-time person. Going into the year, we lost our former APMC to another school, so I was feeling extremely overwhelmed. And then, inside the classroom…my classroom always became a dumping ground for the more challenging students. And so my classes

were huge. And then we had a teacher quit. And they ended up forcing me into a

T-payroll position after I'd already turned it down. And so I almost quit. It was

just so ==overwhelming==. And I was just so full of anxiety that it was very hard to get

up in the morning and go to work and then perform as a functional human being

at work.

To me, it is clear that Ms. J wears multiple hats throughout the day and is one of the go-to

people to ensure things get done. A word that was mentioned multiple times in her response was

overwhelming. There were more added responsibilities, pressures, and changes that created a

large amount of anxiety. After going through my first round of coding, I wanted to focus on the

golden line; my *classroom always became a dumping ground for the more challenging students.*

To clarify what she meant and gain a better and more in-depth understanding. Therefore, in the

second interview, I created a follow-up question about this specifically

>**Jenise:** So you mentioned that your classroom was the dumping ground for
>
>challenging students always. Tell me more about that. Like what?

>**Ms. J:** I mean, I don't know if I had like a moment. I've always been ==given more==
>
>==challenging students==. Okay, so I always preferred to teach regular classes over
>
>honors over AP. I've taught honors, I've taught AP, I've taught fuse, I've taught
>
>support. I've taught all the classes and enjoyed teaching AP, but the students that
>
>I've always preferred when it comes to freshmen have always been regular
>
>classes. And so I don't mind knowing going into knowing that teaching a regular
>
>class, you're going to have more behavioral issues than you might have in honors
>
>or AP. And I don't mind that, like I have really great classroom management. I've

always been given the harder students I know I can handle them. It was just

harder the things that I would do for classroom management, and I wasn't doing

them in the same way because of COVID. Like I was constantly circulating or

circulating around the room. I would stand next to those kids that were maybe

trying to act up. I was constantly doing things where they were getting up and

moving around or where they got to work. With a partner or, you know, keeping

the class very interactive. But because of COVID, I didn't want to walk up and

down aisles. I didn't want to put them in partners; I didn't want them to get each

other sick. You know, I was also thinking, like do they live with a grandparent at

home? I would hate that they're taking something home to their grandparent. I

wouldn't let them walk around the room; I didn't want them touching things. So it

caused things to be a little bit more challenging; the way that I taught was not the

same anymore. So I also feel like in the past, usually, if you made connections

with your students, you're able to have a better handle on classroom management.

But I was I wasn't making the same type of relationships. I didn't want to be near

anyone. I also think that that also was what added to the stress and behaviors in

the classes, so I don't know if it was like one specific moment. It was just like,

ongoing, the same cycle. Yeah, so behaviors would have been stopped within like

the first few weeks. It took longer. I wasn't okay.

Ms. J revealed that she has always had struggling students and has preferred to work with

these students over others. She felt that she has always had great classroom management, but

because of Covid, it was more difficult to manage her classroom. As she mentioned in blue, she

did not want several things to happen that would normally occur during a "normal" year. Ms. J

mentioned the same cycle repeating, and I wanted to know more about that to get a better understanding.

Ms. J explained how she was forced to take a T-payroll in the middle of the year. A T-payroll is an additional class a teacher takes while losing their planning period. While they get paid extra for taking on an additional class, they must add extra students, grading, planning, and instruction; they no longer have time dedicated to planning or no break. Ms. J said she was adamant about not taking it and repeatedly told her administration no, but they insisted that she must take it. Ms. J detailed this experience:

> Ms. J: So my classes were huge. And then we had a teacher quit. And they ended up forcing me into a T-payroll position after I'd already turned it down. And so I almost quit. It was just so overwhelming. And I was just so full of anxiety that it was very hard to get up in the morning and go to work and then perform as a functional human being at work.

Arrival at Finding

Overwhelming was a common word brought up during Ms. J's interviews, which parallels Mr. S constantly being exhausted, which led to anxiety. As previously stated, Ms. J was wearing many hats throughout the school year, and she was a highly effective veteran teacher who was great at her job. When she mentioned the overwhelming feeling that she was experiencing, she felt unsupported and unsafe. Each and every time she turned, she felt like something was changing or something was being added to her plate. This was physically and mentally taxing on Ms. J's body. Ms. J shared that in the year of the 2020-2021 school year, she was almost admitted to the hospital, "I almost ended up having a heart attack. I was very close to being hospitalized on Thanksgiving of that year." As previously stated, Ms. J had panic attacks

in her car before walking into work each day. She would be shaking and crying while trying to convince herself to get the courage to walk inside. She would listen to worship music and talk to herself, saying, "You can do this; you need this job."

Discussion

I cried after hearing about the struggles teaching had on Ms. J's health and knowing that she needed this job in order to live was a double-edged sword. I was mad. The findings of this study suggest that teachers put their role as a teacher before their own mental and physical health. I do not believe a place of work should cause an intense amount of anxiety that compromises one's health. I wonder how our district and schools could support teachers and alleviate these added pressures and changes.

Changes During Covid Created Moments of Anxiety

The second theme from Ms. J's responses was: *changes during Covid created moments of anxiety*. The word "change" was consistent throughout the interviews with Ms. J. During my first interview, I needed to gain context about what it feels like to have anxiety, and Ms. J responded, "It sucks." I wanted to know what specifically sucked, and I needed her to tell me more about it. Ms. J dived into all the changes occurring during this time as well as the issues she grappled with in the curriculum:

> Ms. J: Sure, so I'm trying to keep my answers professional. They changed, okay,
> the district implemented it a couple of years ago pre-AP curriculum. It was these
> separate booklets that did not go into our overall curriculum. They were
> supplemental, but you had to teach it kind of thing. So, they did not align their
> pre-AP correctly with the way the curriculum used to be, so before we would do
> short stories To Kill Mockingbird poetry than Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet

pre-AP, they had to kill Mockingbird, and Romeo and Juliet, flip flop. So instead of changing pre-AP, they decided hey, let's just redo the whole ==curriculum== and move Romeo and Juliet to the second quarter instead of the fourth quarter and To Kill a Mockingbird from the second quarter to the fourth quarter. ==They took out poetry and stuck in an argumentative essay. So, the== ==curriculum== ==doesn't really flow together anymore.== Before, when we would do Romeo and Juliet, doing a whole unit of poetry and talking about literary devices and ending with like the sonnet. The kids were really prepared to go into Romeo and Juliet. Doing it in second quarter. I still feel like their brains are not capable over yet. Um, they, it took them a lot longer to get a hang of it than it has in the past. And like I said, I've taught all levels of ninth grade, and all levels have been successful with it. And then, for example, the unit that they put with argumentative essays. Some of the personal stories or personal essays that they have the kids looking at talk about World War Two and the Great Depression. Well before, when we would have done To Kill a Mockingbird, we would have gone all over that. So then they would have had some context going into this. But now, we don't do that; you must front-load all this stuff before you can do it. They skipped that part. So I don't really feel like the ==curriculum== flows very well together. It was not very well, you know, thought through. And then, plus, you know, ==I still believe that school should be fun, and they took out all the fun parts.== So they took out the unit on poetry and the Film Unit. The kids used to love that they took out poetry which the kids love that so I've been trying to incorporate poetry, like once a week, so

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they still get that. The ==curriculum== is ==very heavy==, so it doesn't give a lot of ==wiggle room==.

The word "curriculum" was highlighted in blue seven times during this interview. Ms. J did not agree with the curriculum changes that were made at the time because "they" (the district and state) took out all the fun parts. She described the curriculum as being heavy and not allowing wiggle room for anything else. Ms. J incorporated poetry into her English class to engage students with literacy. Ms. J said, "I still believe that school should be fun, and they took out all the fun parts." To me, it sounds like Ms. J had extra pressure and added stress trying to carve out time to make English fun and engaging for students. To clarify the response from Ms. J, I reflected on what was happening in her initial interview and brought her back to the question and response from the first interview to ask her more about this experience of anxiety.

Jenise: Can you tell me more about that?

Ms. J: Absolutely. I feel like I'm a person who is not good with ==change.== I've gotten so much better over the years with being more flexible. But I like my routine to stay the same. So I'm like, okay, you need to ==change== one or two things: not a big deal. I'll go with the flow. But when you're literally ==changing== everything that you feel like you know, in a time where everything already feels so unsure. It just…I mean, I don't know how you have a good outcome with that. Thankfully I work with really great people who are very supportive as far as colleagues go, and you know, if you have a question, my department head is really awesome. You know I have friends that can show me. I have this one friend who used to work at another school, and you know she helped me with Canvas. And so I feel like I

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wouldn't look at it as admin-level help; I would look at it as colleague help. But even with that, you know, I only had three classes this year. My role is split, where I'm actually half the day and the second half I'm doing. I'm a teacher, and I've been really blessed with not having to do any simultaneous or eLearning classes. And so I could not imagine also having to add that to my plate. That was just too much. But I feel like all the changes it does definitely didn't help the process at all. And I did feel like it made it more stressful and harder to communicate and harder to keep up with grades and all the fun things that go into being a teacher.

Arrival at Finding

Changes were happening constantly and quickly, and Ms. J affirmed, "That was too much." Throughout both interviews, she mentioned the changes happening because of Covid, which brought a lot of anxiety. She believed the changes added more stress and took the fun things out of teaching. With her split schedule, she was able to teach half of the day, and fortunately, she did not have to have a hybrid classroom. However, the changes caused her anxiety and the anxiety she was experiencing led her to take medication daily.

Discussion

Teacher autonomy was not present. I wondered if this was a contributing factor to moments of anxiety. Ms. J could not control the changes occurring with the curriculum, and it caused moments of anxiety. Every single time I read through Ms. J's response; I can't help but feel overwhelmed by all the changes. It is triggering because I remember trying to navigate all the changes consistently and persistently being thrown at English teachers during this time. During this time, I was the literacy coach for my school and a curriculum writer for the district. I

was supposed to be the supportive cheerleader to get our teachers through this time of uncertainty and fear. This was extremely difficult. Ms. J stated she is normally good with change and can go with the flow, but this was different; she mentioned, "But when you're literally changing everything that you feel like, you know, in a time where everything already feels so unsure. It just…I mean, I don't know how you have a good outcome with that."

As previously stated in my literature review, studies revealed that teachers experience many stressors in their profession (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Pressley, 2021; Klingbeil and Renshaw, 2018; Montero-Marin et al., 2021). During the COVID-19 Pandemic, the teachers who returned to a "new normal" did not see a reduction in the number of stressors (Pressley, 2021). Looking at Ms. J's responses, the added pressures and stressors she endured during teaching produced much anxiety, and she started taking medication. I followed up with Ms. J, and since leaving the classroom, she is no longer taking anxiety medication. However, she emphasized that she is now more anxious than before, "My body seems to handle stress and anxiety much more poorly now after being in a long-term, highly stressful, and anxiety-triggering environment." If it costs your mental or physical health, it is too expensive. Teachers should not have to go through this.

Reflective Writing

In this final section of Ms. J's chapter, I will leave you with her writing in response to the reflective question: "*When you reflect on these experiences now, how do you feel you have grown or changed as an individual, ELA teacher, and/or professional?"*

> **Ms. J:** I feel like I am more hesitant to take extra things on. My first
> thoughts are always, "How much stress will this add to my life, and how
> will this affect my mental health?" My teacher anxiety has hindered

growth in my career my feelings toward education have drastically

changed. My zeal and love for education are no longer there, so much so

that I am ready to leave the profession. Anxiety surrounding COVID,

being in the building during that time, how the district and my

administration handled the situation, etc., has left emotional scars that

cause me to not look at this job the same. Although I no longer take

anxiety medication, overall, I have become a much more anxious person.

My body seems to handle stress and anxiety much more poorly now after

being in a long-term, highly stressful, and anxiety-triggering environment.

Section III: Ms. W and Her Buried Emotions

At this point, you have met Mr. S and Ms. J, who shared their stories of teaching

secondary ELA with moments of anxiety. Between both participants, I introduced four themes:

(1) (1) Teaching English during Covid was exhausting; (2): Teaching English during Covid was

ineffective; (3) Teaching English during Covid was overwhelming, and (4): Changes during

Covid created moments of anxiety. Now, I will introduce you to my last participant, Ms. W, and

share her experiences with teaching English during the COVID-19 Pandemic. As stated, Ms. W

was in her second year of teaching high school English. She also had different roles on campus,

such as newspaper and yearbook sponsor. In addition, to make ends meet, she worked a part-time

job at a pet store. There are two themes discussed in detail from my data analysis for Ms. W: (1)

Stakeholders produced moments of anxiety while teaching English, and (2): ELA assessments

were anxiety-producing.

Participant	Gender & Pronouns	Number of years of teaching secondary ELA at the time of the interview	Position at the time of the interview	Findings
Ms. W	Woman (she/her)	2 years	English I Honors, Creative Writing, Journalism, and yearbook/newspaper advisor	(1) Stakeholders produced moments of anxiety while teaching English, and (2): ELA assessments were anxiety-producing.

Stakeholders Produced Moments of Anxiety

Part of Seidman's approach to interviews is to gain context and build a relationship with the participant. Ms. W was open and willing to share at the beginning of the first interview. She shared how pleasing parents and administration are part of the moments of anxiety that she faced. When I asked Ms. W contextual questions about where she taught and how she described the anxiety, she jumped into how stakeholders affected her anxiety. The example below illustrates how I arrived at this finding. As a reminder, during my coding process, I created a legend for this process. You will see in the example below that words and phrases that stuck out were highlighted in green, repetitions were shown in blue, and the golden lines were in yellow.

Jenise: How would you describe anxiety?

Ms. W: So I'm actually ==diagnosed with a general anxiety disorder== that I've had pinpointed back since I was a little kid. But ==teaching== has definitely ==exacerbated== it and shown me that there are new avenues of it that I didn't know existed until I started ==teaching==. How ==teaching==, in particular, affects my anxiety is definitely parents… are a big thing, ==pleasing== administration, trying to keep up with all of the, I don't wanna say impossible, but incredibly ==difficult tasks== that they ==keep piling on us== is also a lot. I'm just trying to be there for my students and feel like I'm not mediocre or a terrible teacher, I have that ==crisis at least once a week== or I'm the worst teacher ever, and it brings me a lot of anxiety.

Arrival at Finding

Looking back at Ms. W's response, this excerpt repeated teaching (highlighted in blue) three times. Teaching produced anxiety, especially with trying to please parents and the administration. For Ms. W, the difficult and added tasks, parents, and administration exacerbated her anxiety. From her response, the act and art of teaching were not the issues; everything surrounding teaching created these moments, which parallels the experiences that Mr. S shared. Ms. W affirmed that she would have a crisis at least once a week because of these moments of anxiety. The questions in the second interview were reflective, and participants were brought back to specific moments. Therefore, in the second interview, I brought her back to this response from her first interview and asked her to tell me more about these experiences. The exchange of this follow-up is demonstrated below:

> **Jenise: How did this moment in anxiety compare to other times when you felt anxious about something related to work?**

Ms. W: Not kid-related, but just people's standards and ==expectations== in general, ==not upsetting administration==. They're another stakeholder in addition to the parents. They really emphasize that we have to know the standard numbers when the district comes in. So we can tell them exactly what numbers are doing and things like that. ==And there are just lots of== ==expectations== ==and a fear of serious== ==ramifications if those== ==expectations== ==are even slightly missed, unintentionally.==

The word expectation is repeated three times (see blue highlight) in this expert. The anxiety Ms. W was by expectations of stakeholders and fear of serious ramifications if those expectations were not met. Following my coding cycle and reflecting on what was happening in these interviews, I arrived at this theme *Stakeholders Produced Moments of Anxiety.* It is clear from Ms. W's responses that she has low self-efficacy. As previously stated, self-efficacy indicates one's behavior and belief that one can perform a specific task (Bandura, 1977). If an individual has low self-efficacy, they are hesitant or unwilling to perform a task due to fear of failure. My time spent with Ms. W revealed her low self-efficacy, which was a cause of her anxiety, and she confirmed with this golden line, "==And there's just lots of== ==expectations== ==and a fear== ==of serious ramifications if those== ==expectations== ==are even slightly missed, unintentionally.==" She revealed more about the fear she experienced: "…they're very flimsy on their word. They'll be, oh, we're coming; you better know the standards. They'll create all this stress for us, and then they won't show up. And it's… they don't care. And so that's very disheartening, too, to be honest."

Discussion

Personally, I believe memorizing and reciting ELA standards does not equal good teaching. While it is important to know your content and what standards need to be taught, re-

taught, and assessed, it does not need to be a point of creating anxiety for teachers. I find it interesting that Ms. W was afraid and believed serious ramifications would happen if teachers were not able to meet the stakeholder's expectations. To me, it creates an environment that is not conducive to teaching.

It is well-known that we currently have a teacher shortage, and this is not just a county problem; it is a national problem. As a teacher, you should feel supported and cared for, and you should not be working in an environment that is full of fear. I am not claiming that stakeholders are the reason for a teacher shortage, but I wonder if it could be a contributing factor. Ms. W's responses brought up my reasoning for leaving, which was feeling like the district did not value me. While stakeholders were a part of producing an amount of anxiety, another part of teaching English that was anxiety-producing was assessments, which brings me to Ms. W's final theme.

ELA Assessments Were Anxiety-Producing

I listed some aspects of teaching that might have been anxiety-producing during the COVID-19 Pandemic. The four aspects I mentioned were planning, instruction, assessment, and reflection. During the first interview, Ms. W quickly answered and stated that assessments caused much anxiety for her. After I gained context of Ms. W's answer to my questions, it was important to bring her back to that moment to reflect on her response and elaborate during the second interview. I asked her to tell me more about it, and she described how students were disengaged, and she believed that their digital devices were to blame. The exchange of this example can be seen below with the same color legend utilized during my coding cycle.

Jenise: In the first interview, I listed some aspects of teaching that might have made you anxious as it pertains to teaching English. You mentioned that assessments caused you a lot of anxiety. Can you tell me more about that?

Ms. W: Yes, ==assessment== caused a lot of anxiety for me before COVID and at the height of the pandemic. We already had issues with this generation making an effort to read and then taking reading ==assessments== and doing well on them and studying for them, and ==they're so wrapped up in their phones.== ==Assessments== in terms of multiple-choice about books that we've read and things that I knew a lot of them already weren't reading, so I knew some of them were already gonna fail ahead of time, and ==I didn't mean that to be pessimistic==. It was just by observing them and then. Post-pandemic or post-height of the pandemic, they developed even worse work ethic skills, and they read less. Even though they had more time at home, they were on their phones more and texting friends since they couldn't see them in person. So that kind of made designing ==assessments== even more difficult.

Arrival at Finding

Ms. W talks about engagement, which I believe can be difficult when teachers are working on assessments. Ms. W stated that it was difficult to design assessments because students seemed to have developed even worse literacy skills since the start of the COVID-19 Pandemic. Listening to Ms. W revealed her feelings and anxiety toward assessments, and I could tell she was struggling. She often paused and took deep breaths when talking to me about it. It reminded me of a power struggle that she was having with the students, her own teacher autonomy, and the assessments. In her explanation as to assessments being difficult, I was able to sense the defeat in her voice, and she just seemed exhausted as she continued:

> I know they won't read at home, and I know most of them won't study at home, and it's really sad. But… I don't know. I feel some things are a little futile at this point, and I just have ==to adapt and find a different way to assess their knowledge==

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than the traditional way of just. You read this book now, study for a few days and then take this multiple-choice quiz, and they don't pay attention. So I have to focus more on the skills that they're learning from the reading as opposed to the content of the reading itself. You know, essentially, it was a ==lost year== for some of them during COVID when they were doing eLearning. So I have this immense anxiety that puts this great pressure on me to make sure that there are filling in those ==gaps a==nd learning the new content.

Discussion

To me, it is clear that Ms. W wants to do the best she can for her students, even in a time that had much uncertainty. She wants to fill in the gaps for students, which adds pressure and produces anxiety for English teachers. This finding is similar to what Mr. S experienced as well. Exhaustion from the unknown and assessments was common and now wanted. Learning to navigate new platforms, new content, and new assessments is a lot in one year, and throw in a pandemic; it is simply too much. The themes of this study remind me of Ferguson et al. (2012) study about predicting teacher anxiety, depression, and job satisfaction. The findings in Ferguson et al. study revealed three prominent factors being problematic: workload, student behavior, and employment conditions. While Ms. W was doing her best, she still felt guilt, and she also thought she was not doing enough to close the gaps for her students, which was anxiety-producing. Thus her anxiety created low self-efficacy as well.

Ms. W did not want to be pessimistic, but it was clear to me that she was exhausted from the same ongoing cycle. Student engagement was tough, especially during a pandemic, yet assessments were still a vital component of measuring student proficiency and success. However, Ms. W struggled to make it meaningful and purposeful during this time of uncertainty, especially

when students were checked out. Ms. W was battling with the mandated assessments and trying to create purposeful assessments for her students.

Reflective Writing

For the final step, I collected a reflective writing sample from Ms. W's experiences. As a reminder, this prompt was given to each participant in advance and was supported by Schön (2002) and Dewey's (1910, 1933) theories of reflection.

Jenise: When you reflect on these experiences now, how do you feel you have grown or changed as an individual, ELA teacher, and/or professional?

Ms. W: Juggling an anxiety disorder—which has been exacerbated by the additional challenges imposed upon us by the pandemic--and the responsibilities of a first-year teacher (when I started teaching last year) has been a strenuous task, to say the least. However, it is a task that has generally had a positive impact on me, as I am certain that the challenges I have faced have molded me into a more patient, understanding, and level-headed individual and educator.

For example, being a second-year teacher tests me daily, as I must prioritize my students' needs above mine. I have learned to quickly stifle an anxiety attack using healthy coping mechanisms (i.e., steadying my breathing, accepting and pushing away troubling thoughts, etc.) to handle any chaos in my classroom. Students can only be kept safe and learn if they have an alert and active teacher. This has especially been crucial during the COVID-19 Pandemic, as I have had to keep track of both typical classroom management duties and remembering to mind my seating charts (for contact tracing), ensure all students were wearing masks during

countywide mandates, monitor activities to ensure students were staying roughly 6 ft apart from one another, etc.

CHAPTER SIX: COMMONALITIES- TEACHER ANXIETY

In this chapter, I am going to reveal each participant's response that contributed to my definition of teacher anxiety. I provided responses that were a vital component in creating this definition, as well as important readings that were a part of this definition. As stated in previous chapters, these findings were developed from interviews, participants' writing responses, and scholarship about anxiety and teaching. While these results were not surprising to me, it warrants future research. I am specifically interested in how my participants experienced moments of anxiety while teaching secondary English during Covid to better understand the realities inside the classroom.

For this study, I was particularly interested in understanding more about the experiences of secondary English educators dealing with anxiety working in a high-demand environment. For me to gain insight into their experiences and to develop a definition of teacher anxiety, the responses to my interview questions guided me throughout my analysis. My first few questions deal with the mental and physical attributes of anxiety: (1) How would you describe anxiety? (2) How do you know when you are anxious?; and (3) What does it feel like to be anxious? As detailed in the responses below, it is apparent how my participants experienced anxiety. Below you will find the responses from my three participants:

Question 1: How would you describe anxiety?

> **Mr. S:** "It feels like the last bit of the toothpaste in the tube that someone is trying to squeeze out."

Ms. J: This year, it's a lot better since going full-time magnet lead. I always dealt with anxiety, but during COVID, I ended up having to go on medication for it. I was having panic attacks going into work every day. Not only did we not know what COVID was and the extent of what it could do, and how long it was going to be around, but just with all of the added pressures from the district and the continuing added pressure from the school, it was just overwhelming.

Ms. W: So I'm actually diagnosed with a general anxiety disorder that I've had pinpointed back since I was a little kid. But teaching has definitely exacerbated it and shown me that there are new avenues of it that I didn't know existed until I started teaching. How teaching, in particular, affects it definitely parents are a big thing, pleasing administration, trying to keep up with all of the, I don't wanna say impossible, but incredibly difficult tasks that they keep piling on us is also a lot. I'm just trying to be there for my students and feel like I'm Not mediocre or a terrible teacher, I have that crisis at least once a week, or I'm the worst teacher ever, and it brings me a lot of anxiety.

All three participants tied teaching into their description of anxiety. This was one of the first questions I asked, and I found it interesting to see how all three of them immediately connected it to teaching. When Mr. S described himself as a bottle of toothpaste, and someone was squeezing the last bit out of him, it was evident that the added responsibilities and pressures were contributing to this feeling of anxiety. At the time of this interview, Ms. J left the classroom completely to become a full-time magnet lead at her school, and she also describes the added pressures from the district and her school as factors of her being anxious. Finally, Ms. W

revealed that added pressures from stakeholders, such as parents and administration, were difficult and anxiety-producing. To build to my definition of teacher anxiety, *added pressures from stakeholders* play a large part.

Question 2: How do you know when you are anxious?

> **Mr. S:** "The chest gets tight, blood pressure, the face gets red, heightened irritability.

> **Ms. J:** I couldn't function. I was crying every day. I was shaking.

> **Ms. W:** So definitely, the physical symptoms are big, stomach aches. The difficulty is eating and feeling nauseous. Heart palpitations, racing thoughts. And the inability to control my breathing, just things like that.

All three participants described physical symptoms when asked this question. The inability to control intrusive physical symptoms was a commonality between all three of my participants. I added *intrusive physical symptoms* to my working definition of teacher anxiety.

Question 3: What does it feel like to be anxious?

> **Mr. S:** "Frustrating and overwhelming. You feel like there's a crushing burden, and you can't breathe. It's suffocating. You feel like you're drowning.

> **Ms. J:** It sucks. My heart starts racing. I start to get sweaty. It's hard to breathe. My thoughts get really jumbled. I get really paranoid like I don't want to touch anything. My OCD starts to kick in my cleaning OCD starts to set in. So I don't want to touch anything. I don't want anybody breathing in my area. I don't want to be around people. If I'm in my car, I don't want to get out of the car.

Ms. W: it feels uncontrollable at times. Sometimes I just let it get so out of hand. I will say it is it. When I'm in the classroom, it doesn't feel as uncontrollable. Believe it or not, my priority is the kids. So I shove it down and don't let them see what's going on. I have to be there for them. But. It feels kind of scary and out of control.

Each participant illustrated out-of-control feelings of anxiety, and words that stuck out were *suffocating, drowning, paranoia, scary, and uncontrollable*. Both Mr. J and Ms. J said that it was difficult to breathe when they felt anxious, while Ms. W struggled to hide those feelings in front of her students, which she labeled as scary and out of control. These out-of-control feelings of anxiety were happening while they were in their classroom or before they entered the building. As. Ms. J stated she had difficulty getting out of her car. I labeled these as two things that will contribute to my definition of teacher anxiety: *uncontrollable feelings of anxiety; burying feelings of anxiety while teaching*.

From this study and previous scholarship, I was able to develop a definition of teacher anxiety, which has not been clearly defined. I used themes from my three participants' responses to my questions from their first interview, where I was able to build the context of who they are, build rapport, and get a baseline of their experiences of moments of anxiety while teaching secondary English during Covid-19. The three contextual questions asked during the first interview were: (1) How would you describe anxiety? (2) How do you know when you are anxious?; and (3) What does it feel like to be anxious? From those three questions, I arrived at the following themes:

- *added pressures from stakeholders*
- *intrusive physical symptoms*

- *uncontrollable feelings of anxiety*

- *burying feelings of anxiety while teaching.*

When asked about the relationship between anxiety and teaching, participants shared their experiences while being open and vulnerable, which was helpful while developing this definition of teacher anxiety. Previous scholarship has not defined the specific way secondary English teachers have experienced anxiety, especially during this pandemic. However, research has characterized teacher anxiety as an emotion one feels in the classroom. Teacher anxiety is best illustrated as a feeling like a full-time job with intrusive, persistent, and (at times) anticipatory feelings and emotions of fear and uncertainty (Cupido, 2018; Frenzel et al.; Malik, 2015; Sinclair, 1987; Zuo et al., 2020 Beilock et al., 2010; Keller et al., 2014; Ferguson et al., 2012; Holland, 2020; Nydegger et al., 2019; and Kainama & Hendriks, 2021). Tying in scholarship and my findings, I developed a definition of teacher anxiety:

Teacher anxiety is an intrusive and uncontrollable physical feeling of fear and uncertainty caused by added pressures from within the classroom as well as stakeholders.

CHAPTER SEVEN: IMPLICATIONS AND DISCUSSIONS

Implications

The intent of this study was to explore the experiences of secondary ELA teachers who were having moments of anxiety during the COVID-19 Pandemic. Specifically, I wanted to know what it was like to teach secondary ELA with moments of anxiety during the COVID-19 Pandemic; and (2) How does teaching during COVID-19 affected their pedagogy? As a descriptive study that is bounded in a post-intentional phenomenological framework, I sought to explore the experiences of secondary ELA teachers, and this study shared how these participants experienced a shared phenomenon, teaching ELA during COVID-19, and how these experiences altered, shaped, or untangled their worldviews (Vagle,2010; Van Manen, 1995).

What was beneficial with the findings of my study is that I was able to identify specific moments that caused anxiety for secondary ELA Teachers. Looking back at the experiences and findings from each of my participants, it was clear that there were specific moments that were more anxiety-producing, which led me to my implications of how we can better support the needs of teachers.

Empirical research has shown the impacts anxiety has on teachers and their effectiveness and attrition (Sinclair, 1978; Keavney and Sinclair, 1987; Saviola, 2020, Pressley, 2021). My findings show that teaching ELA during the Covid-19 Pandemic was exhausting, ineffective, and overwhelming, which created moments of anxiety for ELA teachers. If the teachers are anxious, they lose the ability to teach effectively, and this impacts how students learn. If teachers leave, students do not have a strong and effective teacher to guide them to master critical skills in and

out of the classroom. Looking more closely at my findings, the implications of possible outcomes warrant more research and change.

Stakeholders Need to be Empathetic and Supportive

What is the focus? School leaders and other stakeholders need to prioritize what is important at their school and cancel out the other noise. Stakeholders get caught up in the nuances of the day-to-day grind and increasing their overall school grade, and they lose sight of what matters. Teachers matter. If the teachers are heard, and stakeholders are able to listen to the realities of what is going on in the classroom, teachers will have a more positive experience. When stakeholders support teachers, it is best practice to communicate so that teachers feel supported and heard.

The experiences of my participants align with other studies. For example, Ferguson et al. (2012) found predictors of teacher anxiety and depression. The stress factors from this study indicated three prominent factors that accounted for teacher anxiety: workload, student behavior, and employment conditions. Stakeholders should be empathetic and tactful to minimize the anxiety teachers are enduring. In my study, my participant, Ms. W, shared how anxious she felt with stakeholders, such as school and district administrators. She was fearful of not having specific ELA standards memorized when they came to observe her. Stakeholders need to be tactful when addressing teachers because it creates anxiety. Stakeholders are producing fear and leading teachers to believe that serious ramifications are to happen if they are not able to recite specific standards. Teachers are not robots. They are human and should be treated as such, so they can take care of themselves and their students. Let teachers do their job in a safe and welcoming environment. Reciting ELA standards is not effective; good teaching is effective. If stakeholders do not consider the pressures, added workload, and environment, they could lose

even more teachers. The Florida Department of Education spelled out that there were 9,000 teaching vacancies in August of 2022. If we do not take better care of teachers, we will lose more.

ELA Teachers Need Better Support

Education has always focused on the students and not the teachers. Most of the research surrounding education during the pandemic has been centered around students (Cupido, 2018; Dubey, D. P. & Pandey, D. D., 2020; El Rizaq & Sarmini, 2021; Zuo et al., 2020; Garcia & Piotrowski, 2022; and Moran, 2022). Stress, anxiety, and other mental health problems are not issues that only students are facing; these are human being issues. Klingbeil and Renshaw's (2018) study proved that MBIs effectively decrease stress and promote teacher well-being. Their study is an extension of a meta-analysis of 29 studies statistically proving that MBIs have a positive impact on decreasing teacher stress and increasing teacher well-being.

Teaching ELA is stressful, and my findings revealed the experiences of anxiety-producing moments. My study showed that the lack of support was specific when more anxiety was produced during the pandemic. Teachers know what they need, and stakeholders need to listen. When surveys are rolled out to teachers, they complete them, yet the results are not always executed. Having teachers' complete surveys without results makes them feel defeated and unheard. Teachers are the experts in the classroom, which is why they are certified and continuously grow in their profession with various professional developments.

Moreover, ELA teachers engage in various writing genres. They are usually the first to know about something happening with a student because of their class's writing and discussion component. ELA teachers are consistently engaged with receiving personal information, and it can be difficult to process and know the best way to handle difficult situations. Mental health

training is typically rolled out in ELA classes, and students and teachers are talking about heavy topics, which can be anxiety-producing. Having support to know how to deal with sensitive topics in the classroom or having proper resources is needed.

Change Should Happen in Stages

Speaking of change, too much change at once creates moments of anxiety and unnecessary stress. Less is more. If the state or district wants or needs to roll out new platforms, assessments, and/or curricula, it should happen in stages, not all at once. During this time, our world was turned completely upside down, and as stated in my literature review, there were many problems with online learning, such as a lack of preparedness, access to technology, a paradigm shift, and overall stress and anxiety from the pandemic (Cupido, 2018; Dubey and Pandey, 2020; El Rizaq and Sarmini, 2021; Zuo et al., 2020; Garcia and Piotrowski, 2022). During the 2020 - 2021 school year, Canvas was the new platform for grading, material, and online classrooms. Having a more reliable platform is great. However, learning a new platform over the summer before school started was unnecessary. There was still a level of uncertainty about what and how teachers and students would return to school that year; then, teachers had to quickly be trained on how to use Canvas. Along with learning this platform, there was a new curriculum and assessments happening all at once. There was no time to process all of the changes that were happening, and it was challenging for teachers to get settled with what and how they were teaching. Therefore, rolling out changes in stages is less overwhelming, and it gives teachers time to process.

Discussion

Teachers are experiencing many moments of anxiety, and teachers are leaving. If this does not change, I worry that more teachers will be part of the large number of teachers leaving,

which will eliminate more teachers being face-to-face with students in the classroom. With teachers leaving, students will not get a quality education with an effective or highly effective teacher. Addison Davis, Superintendent of Hillsborough County Public Schools (2022), reflected on the teacher shortage happening in Schools prior to the start of the 2022 - 2023 school year, "That is a large number of students who do not have or may not have a highly qualified skilled teacher in front of them every single day." Teachers are leaving, and students are left with a substitute to educate our students who may or may not be certified. It is worrisome to have poor quality education and its potential damage to students. How and when can teachers truly prepare students for life if teachers leave?

Recently, I sat in a department head meeting where we were discussing units for next year. Like many others in the district, our administration asks for teachers to complete a survey of what they want to teach the following year and include a rationale. I see some room for improvement from our stakeholders. In a time where teaching has become an undervalued profession and there is a nationwide teacher shortage, asking them to rationalize their job is not supportive and demoralizing. Instead, asking teachers to reflect and collaboratively provide solutions to better their teaching practice is conducive to a supportive working environment. As a literacy coach, I showed the data and supported teachers. While a teacher might not disclose what is happening behind closed doors, it is important to remember humanity and empathy. My participants attributed the emotional pain and stress they experienced caused moments of anxiety. Mr. S confirmed that anxiety felt frustrating and overwhelming, Ms. J justified her moments of anxiety as a result of all the changes happening at once, and Ms. W reiterated that pressure from stakeholders resulted in her feeling anxious. Teachers are treated more like robots than humans, which is overwhelming

and leads to anxiety. It is highly concerning the lack of respect teachers will continue to ingest if there is no positive change.

It is important that we do not pathologize teachers but instead look at these moments of anxiety and fix them. While phenomenology does not generalize, it does, however, offer powerful data that illustrates step-by-step detail in the moments of these experiences that others can relate to. These experiences can be generalized, and people can say, yes, me too; or that is exactly how I experienced this. Therefore, it needs to be addressed to support teachers, so they can support, grow, and nurture their students. In the next section, I dive into recommendations and potential future research.

CHAPTER EIGHT: RECOMMENDATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

These recommendations are to help guide and transform schools for a better tomorrow. We cannot repeat the past if we have learned anything these past few years.

If it Costs Your Mental Health, it is Too Expensive

My three participants shared their experiences of teaching secondary English and how they have struggled with moments of anxiety. They illustrated the physical and emotional pain they each endured during Covid. In my literature review, I discussed empirical research about anxiety in teaching. Previous research shows how strong anxiety impacts teachers and their effectiveness and attrition (Sinclair, 1978; Keavney and Sinclair, 1987; Saviola, 2020, Pressley, 2021). My study also demonstrates how secondary English teachers are struggling and how it has an impact on their mental and physical health.

As previously illustrated in my literature, teachers do not have enough support. The professional developments benefit the students, and there are currently limited services or support for teachers (Administrator, 2022; *School mental health training for teachers leaves room for improvement - child trends;* and Solodev. Resiliency & Mental Health Resources). We must take better care of our teachers if we truly have students' best interests in mind. To put it simply, there will be no teaching and learning if there is not enough attention to teacher well-being and healthy habits to teach with moments of anxiety. It is abundantly clear from the findings in this study that English teachers received added pressures and changes that fed into their moments of anxiety in the classroom. For example, Ms. W stated, "How teaching, in particular, affects my anxiety is definitely parents… are a big thing, pleasing administration,

trying to keep up with all of the, I don't wanna say impossible, but incredibly difficult tasks that they keep piling on us is also a lot." Ms. W is one example, and I am sure that other people can relate to her experience. Teachers should not be worried about pleasing others; they need to focus on the students and do what is best for them. Ms. J elaborated in both of her interviews how the curriculum and demands from the district were constantly changing, which led to moments of anxiety. Ms. J struggled some mornings to simply get out of her car and walk into work. She had to listen to worship music and talk to herself so she was able to muster the energy and courage to face another day.

I think it is beneficial to look at the role of a teacher and find a way to let them teach. While this is easy to say, it is not easy to execute. Teachers have too much on their plate, and not by choice, and trying to learn new digital platforms, extra planning, and grading, juggling multiple hats throughout the day needs to be reconsidered. I am afraid we will lose more great teachers if something does not change. Teachers should not need to wake up at 4 am to complete their "daily" workload, cry in their car before walking into the building, or be afraid of making mistakes. ELA teachers engage with journaling and a lot of personal writing from students; in general, they receive a lot of personal information. Moreover, ELA is a core class that all students must take in order to graduate. Not every student is excited or interested in ELA, unlike other elective classes, which brings an onset of other potential challenges. Because every student is required to take an ELA class, if mandated state or district training is needed, it usually happens in a student's ELA class, which takes away time from the required curriculum. For example, the FLDOE passed a law that every student in a public school setting, grades 6-12, is required to participate in a five-hour mental health training each year. This instruction is a mixture of heavy topics, videos, and discussions that the teachers and students collaboratively

participate in for five hours. Five hours is five days of missed curriculum instruction in the ELA classroom, and this does not include the multiple days of testing that students are required to do each year. Therefore, ELA teachers may experience anxiety in a different way from other content teachers.

I believe including English teachers in the conversation on how to support their needs in order to reduce their moments of anxiety would be a starting point. We need to support teachers, especially now. The accounts of these teachers' experiences revealed that teachers need support and time to process changes.

Supportive Professional Developments

Professional developments are imperative. When districts create professional development, they should consider implementing dynamic and meaningful pieces of training to leave teachers feeling inspired. Adding in supportive professional development (PDs) would be beneficial for teachers. These PDs should be purposeful and impactful. I have sat through many PDs where I was talked to the entire time, and I needed to learn how to implement what was taught in the PD in my own classroom. Teachers should feel inspired and motivated after they leave a PD.

With education evolving each year, teachers should have the skills and tools they need to feel successful in their classrooms. A professional development that would be impactful for teachers and students would be a collaboration with ELA grade and content-level groups. Teachers should be able to grapple with their own materials and tools that they will use in the classroom with their students. Professional development should be differentiated based on the needs of the teachers. New teachers might need more fundamentals, and veteran teachers might need something a bit more innovative. Regardless of what teachers need, they should be able to

determine the what and the how. ELA teachers experience various reading and writing genres in their classes, so having a collaborative environment to support teachers is best. Moreover, demo versions of a digital platform are suitable for modeling, but teachers should be able to engage with a platform or material they will use.

Often, PDs will give access to a demo version of a platform during training, which does not always mimic the teacher version. It is important that teachers are able to engage with their own teacher version of a digital platform, so they can begin to structure and organize the platform to fit the needs of their students to achieve student success. Another point, it is important that these nuances and any difficulties with digital platforms are resolved before rolling them out to teachers and students. It is near impossible to successfully implement a digital platform that has kinks in the system or does not mirror what the demo version illustrated in prior training. It can be overwhelming, stressful, anxiety-producing, and it is not effective. With mandated state and district testing being online, ELA students are practicing their literacy and digital skills on online platforms that are supposed to enhance and sharpen their skills, so it is crucial that teachers and students are given the proper support and kink-free resources to fulfill these needs.

The role of reflection should be part of professional development. Oftentimes teachers are caught up with the daily grind, and they do not have time to reflect on what is working and what is not. Therefore, allowing time and space for teachers to reflect in a safe environment would be beneficial and possibly therapeutic. Supporting teachers with what they already do and what they are expected to do needs to be part of the change.

Future Research

  Since the goal of phenomenology is to share experiences, and it gives a more in-depth understanding of how others experience the world. Phenomenology does not generalize to a demographic, even if others can relate to the experiences shared. This study is a catalysis for more research that is needed in this area. While this study specifically focuses on the experiences of Secondary ELA teachers, it would be interesting to see how other teachers experienced moments of anxiety while teaching during the COVID-19 Pandemic. I am wondering how constant changes and demands on teachers caused them to leave the profession. We are just starting to scratch the surface of structural issues in schools, and more research is needed in this area.

CHAPTER NINE: FINAL TAKEAWAYS

My participants' stories changed me. They changed me. At the beginning of this study, I did not know what to expect or the potential impact that this study would have on others and myself. My family, colleagues, and friends, who are not closely attached to this study, have been asking questions about my research and what I plan on doing with it. This is a difficult question, but as my dad would say, you are a social justice warrior. And because that is who I am, that means taking care of teachers.

The Start of Something New

Maya Angelo (1993) said, "History, despite its wrenching pain, cannot be unlived, but if faced with courage, need not be lived again. Based on the findings of my study and what we have all learned in the past few years, is to grow from our experiences to build a better tomorrow. We cannot change the past, but we can learn and not allow those to experience the same stress, anxiety, and pain.

I believe storytelling saves lives, and I hope that reading the stories and experiences of my participants ignites something in you to want more and better for our teachers. I know these experiences have forever changed me because they matter. I hope we listen to the experiences of Mr. S, Ms. J, and Ms. W. and think about using their stories as a catalyst for a better tomorrow.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: CITI Certificate

CITI PROGRAM

Completion Date 22-Oct-2019
Expiration Date 21-Oct-2022
Record ID 33726658

This is to certify that:

Jenise Gorman

Has completed the following CITI Program course:

Not valid for renewal of certification through CME.

Human Research
(Curriculum Group)
Social / Behavioral Investigators and Key Personnel
(Course Learner Group)
2 - Refresher Course
(Stage)

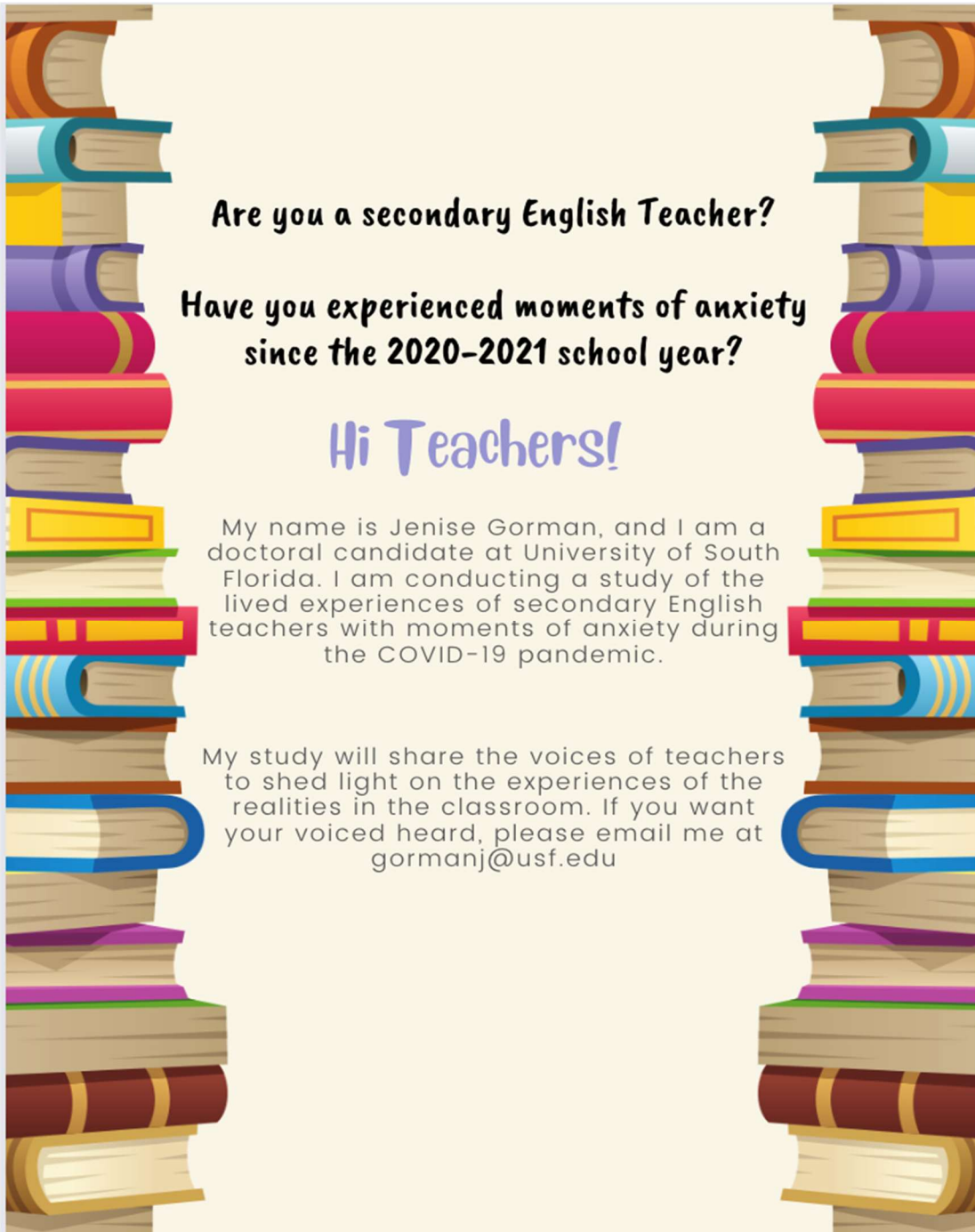Under requirements set by:

University of South Florida

CITI
Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative

Verify at www.citiprogram.org/verify/?w9a152bef-0be1-4962-a87e-1b07d9fa09fb-33726658

Appendix B: Recruitment Flyer

Are you a secondary English Teacher?

Have you experienced moments of anxiety since the 2020-2021 school year?

Hi Teachers!

My name is Jenise Gorman, and I am a doctoral candidate at University of South Florida. I am conducting a study of the lived experiences of secondary English teachers with moments of anxiety during the COVID-19 pandemic.

My study will share the voices of teachers to shed light on the experiences of the realities in the classroom. If you want your voiced heard, please email me at gormanj@usf.edu

Appendix C: Verbal and Written Consent

Script for Obtaining Verbal Informed Consent
Information to Consider Before Taking Part in this Research Study
Title: *Untangling the Phenomenon of Teacher Anxiety During COVID-19*
Study # _____

Overview: You are being asked to take part in a research study. The information in this document should help you to decide if you would like to participate. The sections in this Overview provide the basic information about the study. More detailed information is provided in the remainder of the document.

Study Staff: This study is being led by Mandie B. Dunn who is a Professor at/in University of South Florida. This person is called the Principal Investigator. Other approved research staff may act on behalf of the Principal Investigator.

Study Details: This study is being conducted through an online survey and virtual or face-to-face interview. The purpose of this study is to understand the lived-experiences of secondary English teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic through consistent and persistent accounts of anxiety. If selected after volunteering to be interviewed, participants will be interviewed either face-to-face or a virtual platform, such as Zoom or Teams. Interviews will last approximately 1 hour. The interviews will be audio-recorded.

Subjects: You are being asked to take part because you answered a survey about this topic and indicated in that survey that you would like to volunteer to be interviewed more in-depth about your experiences. I am asking you take part in this study because you have indicated that you have an experience of having anxiety while also teaching through COVID-19.

Voluntary Participation: Your participation is voluntary. You do not have to participate and may stop your participation at any time. There will be no penalties or loss of benefits or opportunities if you do not participate or decide to stop once you start. Your decision to participate or not to participate will not affect your job status, employment record, employee evaluations, or advancement opportunities.

Benefits, Compensation, and Risk: is no cost to participate. All participants will benefit from reflecting and sharing on how suffering from anxiety during COVID-19 has influenced their teaching. Participants may find it therapeutic to share their story or find comfort in knowing that other teachers have experienced something similar. This research is considered minimal risk. Minimal risk means that study risks are the same as the risks you face in daily life.

Confidentiality: Even if we publish the findings from this study, we will keep your study information private and confidential. Anyone with the authority to look at your records must keep them confidential. We will do our best to keep your records private and confidential. We cannot guarantee absolute confidentiality. Your personal information may be disclosed if required by law.

Certain people may need to see your study records. The only people who will be allowed to see these records are: The Principal Investigator, members of the research team, and The University of South Florida Institutional Review Board (IRB).

Your personal information collected for this research will be kept as long as it is needed to conduct this research. Once your participation in the research is over, your information will be stored in accordance with applicable policies and regulations. Your permission to use your personal data will not expire unless you withdraw it in writing. You may withdraw or take away your permission to use and disclose your information at any time. You do this by sending written notice to the Principal Investigator at the following address: 4202 E. Fowler Avenue, Tampa, FL 33620.

While we are conducting the research study, we cannot let you see or copy the research information we have about you. After the research is completed, you have a right to see the information about you, as allowed by USF policies.

If you have concerns about the use or storage of your personal information, you have a right to lodge a complaint with the data supervisory authority in your country.

If you have any questions, concerns or complaints about this study, call Mandie Dunn at 813 974-3533. If you have questions about your rights, complaints, or issues as a person taking part in this study, call the USF IRB at (813) 974-5638 or contact the IRB by email at RSCH-IRB@usf.edu.

Would you like to participate in this study? **Jenise Gorman will record if verbal consent is given**

Appendix D: Recruitment Email to Potential Participants

Recruitment email to potential participants

Dear,

I hope this email finds you well. I am writing to ask you to participate in an education research study. My name is Jenise Gorman, and I am a doctoral student in the English Education program at the University of South Florida. I am working with the Principal Investigator (PI), Dr. Mandie B. Dunn on this study.

The focus of this study is on teachers' voices and their experiences on how they navigated teaching during COVID-19. In this study, I plan to shed light on the mental health and anxiety of teachers during COVID-19. I aim to have five secondary English teachers between the ages of 20-69 years-old to participate in the study.

Participation in this study is voluntary. It includes:

- two interviews that will last no longer than one hour.
- One writing sample to a response to a prompt that will be given in advance.

If you are interested in participating in this study, please complete the survey by either scanning the QR code or clicking on the link below. If you have any questions, please call or email Jenise Gorman: 813-240-0175, gormanj@usf.edu, the Co-Investigator, and/or the PI, Dr. Mandie B. Dunn, mdunn8@usf.edu .

Sincerely,

Jenise Gorman

Jenise Gorman

Appendix E: Bridling Journal- Ms. J (During and After Interview One)

1 October 2022

Ms. J talked about anxiety, and she mentioned how bad it got. She had to go on medication and was having panic attacks. This is extremely sad…I need to know the details of this.

She cried often and had to talk herself into getting out of her car and going to work.

Every time she mentioned another change, she emphasized it. She would do this by exhaling deeply and loudly. Her body language screamed exhausted and frustrated by the rolling of her eyes and drooped shoulders.

Talking a lot about classroom management and the environment in her room… "dumping ground"

She needs to vent and get things off her chest…she gets emotional and more exasperated when talking about the changes going on in her classroom.

Having to learn and navigate new systems and platforms was difficult.
        Knowing what was difficult and how this effect of her anxiety is important

Functional Human beings…need to know more about this.

She was extremely worried about her students getting sick or herself. The way she taught English was completely different.
        I need to ask her more about these experiences in the second interview.

I would like to know if she has someone to talk to about this at work. It seems like she is relieved to talk to someone that will listen. I can relate…I feel like I must bottle in so much at work and put on a brave face.

I remember seeing much resistance at school during the start of the 2020 – 2021 school year. I was worried about my own family, and teaching in an environment where I could not properly space out students was hard. The CDC suggested 6 feet apart…there was no room for that in my room. I remember it was impossible to find Clorox wipes and Lysol spray…I wanted plexiglass between the students and me, which was not allowed. I did not feel safe. I wonder if she felt like a robot…having to produce her best teaching while also experiencing her own anxiety. Need to ask more about the changes. She hinted about the curriculum and district changes, but I want to see what else she has to say about this.

Possible Questions Round 2:

1. **I want to bring you back to a moment. You mentioned crying in your car…can you tell me more about that?**

2. **Can you tell me more about being a functional human being? What do you mean by this? Can you tell me more about this?**

3. **You mentioned a lot of changes that happened this past year. Would you say that those changes were part of you feeling anxious throughout the school day or going to work, as you mentioned, like crying in your car? Can you tell me more about that?**

Appendix F: Coding Table with Journal Notes-Mr. S

Question	Quote	Words	Phenomena
Interview 1: How would you describe anxiety?	"It feels like the last bit of the toothpaste in the tube that someone is trying to squeeze out." *Jenise: Wow…this is the best analogy to capture how he felt. I am sure others felt the same. The way he described this was so vivid, and I am sure he has more to say about this. I will ask other questions in the 2ⁿᵈ interview.*	Squeeze Last bit	Exhausted Overwhelming Not in control
Interview 2: Tell me more about the anxiety you faced in the classroom	OK. Yeah, it's coincidental cause we're reading the metamorphosis by Kafka, and I was having the kids journal about what they thought their worst day ever felt like. And I said, don't tell me the story. You give me the adjectives. So we made a class list, and they were spot on. This is important. A text in the ELA classroom was triggering…	Worst day Spot on	Anxiety was connected to the text in the classroom
Interview 1: How do you know when you are anxious?	"The chest gets tight, blood pressure, the face gets red, heightened irritability.	irritability	Anxiety has physical pain
Interview 1: What does it feel like to be anxious?	"Frustrating and overwhelming. You feel like there's a crushing burden, and you can't breathe. It's suffocating.	Frustrating Overwhelming Can't breathe Suffocating Drowning	

	You feel like you're drowning."		
Interview 1: Why don't you tell me a little bit about a time recently when you became particularly anxious related to your work or professional life?	"Prior to Labor Day weekend, I lost my mom. I kept going because things needed to get done at school. I would wake up each day at 4 am and get things done at home that couldn't get done at school. There is no way I could only work to contract hours. There were so many things to do, and I was constantly exhausted. It was a lot, and it was constant."	Loss of a loved one 4 am Constantly exhausted	
Interview 1: Do you remember a moment in your classroom or in your office during this period of anxiety that sticks out as being particularly difficult?	"Yes, in 2020, my best friend at school was cut from her position. She then went on leave. That was hard." "So this was some during smart start week when we had those three weeks where we were at home, and nobody knew what was actually going to happen. You know would we start in the building and everybody was waiting for that meeting and the super intendent ▇▇▇ making his announcement. And the day that he made the announcement, my friend decided that she was going to go on leave. She was waiting for that announcement to come. She had a small child and large health concerns, but everybody was worried	Hard Cut Waiting leave	Lonely Teaching during this time was difficult and too much uncertainty.

	back then. Nobody knew what <mark>COVID</mark> was gonna do, so she didn't want to be in the building. And since she was gonna have to be in the building we didn't have enough reading courses for her to be home full-time. She took a leave and then a A couple of weeks later, when they came through with the whole we're <mark>gonna cut 1000 teachers.</mark> One of the solutions was to cut my friend, was on leave, and I was already teaching two of her classes anyway. The reading coach had picked up three of her other classes. So, since her schedule was taken care of, it just made sense to cut her rather than a body that was in the building. And then in the pool, she picked up a job but stayed on leave and then got a job at the private school and then literally the week before preplanning. this year there was a vacancy at ▉▉▉▉ and now she's over there. She'd transferred and got a job over there, so she's back in the system and she's right across the street, which is cool. But that was what happened. **Jenise: I want to know a little bit more about your anxiety during this time**		

	with your best friend being cut. Mr. S: Yeah. And it wasn't just her. I had another one Same exact situation. ==Tiny kid== ==at home, and she resigned.== She couldn't take a leave. She had already taken maternity leave she had her second kid. So. Yeah, that was that was bad it was like ==my 2 closest friends at school gone==. And. Yeah, it was. It was hard. I was very glad that my co-teacher partner stayed. As we're close too, but losing both of those people and having everybody start circling the wagons and just going into survival mode==. And no, I'm not== ==going to do anything extra.== ==It was hard.== ==It's really hard.==		
Interview 1: How did this moment of anxiety compare to other times when you felt anxious about something	Yes, having to teach face-to-face and online simultaneously was a disaster. I had a sophomore Intensive Reading class, which was an important year because it was a benchmark year. I had 22 students in that class,	Disaster Hybrid simultaneous	The style of teaching was a disaster during this time and not effective.

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related to work?	most of whom had IEPs, and one student was on the spectrum. I could not see everyone on the screen, which was extremely difficult. We were reading an important text, "A Letter from Birmingham," and going back and forth seeing the teacher's face and the text was simply not effective.		

Appendix G: Bridling Journal- Mr. S During Interview One

Anxiety:
<mark>I Felt toothpaste and something squeezing you</mark>
The chest gets tight, blood pressure, the face gets red, heightened irritability, and frustrating

Prior to Labor Day weekend:
Lost his mom the second week of school
Jenise: This is so so sad…I never want to imagine this.

<mark>Get up at 4, works through lunch</mark>

<mark>Moments when there is so many things to do, too exhausted</mark>

<mark>2020 up in the air, bff class got cut, and all the impossible, car line 7 hours, no sleep, quarantined simultaneous teaching</mark>

<mark>He was quarantined and still had to teach from home 9 days.</mark>
Jenise: this seems extremely difficult. How does one do that? I remember having planned days off and spending hours preparing for my absence. Coming back to work was hard, too. Too much to catch up on and grade, especially with writing.

Department head and resource teacher: he mentioned putting others before himself…need to know more about that.

<mark>Interactions with teachers and colleagues: the specific moment that sticks out?</mark>
- The marriage broke up in 2015
- Married the media specialist
- Works together
- Share a child together
    - *Jenise: I think this is so difficult…and during a pandemic.*