

**An exploration of school staff experiences
working with children who display test
anxiety.**

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Abstract

Test anxiety is relevant to many schools and local authorities. Schools are evaluated in terms of performance by test/exam outcomes and their position in league tables. This has resulted in an increased focus on test results and data. This research examines school staff experiences supporting children with test anxiety and strategies they find useful; how competent they feel in supporting them; what would help build their confidence and understanding of test anxiety; and how EPs can help them to support children with test anxiety. Current literature acknowledges the detrimental impact that test anxiety can have on children, however most of the research has been conducted with secondary school and university students. Furthermore, limited research explores the views of school staff. Much of the aforementioned research employed quantitative techniques and thus school staff experiences of test anxiety has not been explored. A social constructionist paradigm was adopted. To enable a deeper perspective of the phenomena, a qualitative research design was used. Fifteen school staff were selected from three primary schools within the same LA. Semi-structured interviews were used and the recordings were analysed using Thematic Analysis. The findings highlighted the detrimental impact test anxiety has on school staff and children and the high levels of pressure they experience. Barriers and strategies to identify and support children with test anxiety were recognised. There were mixed views on how competent school staff feel supporting children with test anxiety; it was highlighted that teacher training courses do not adequately prepare teachers to deal with mental health issues and test anxiety. School staff would like to see greater collaboration, and further support from the local authority, particularly in terms of funding and changing the narrative around testing. School staff had positive experiences working with EPs to support children with test anxiety although at times key adults were not included in meetings due to school demands. It was argued that school staff prioritise cognitive difficulties and statutory assessments over test anxiety for EP involvement. Areas were identified in terms of support school staff would like from EPs in order to support children with test anxiety.

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List of abbreviations used

ATL – Association of Teachers and Lecturers
ELSA – Emotional Literacy Support Assistant
BPS – British Psychological Society
CAF – Common Assessment Framework
CAMHS – Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services
CBT – Cognitive Behavioural Approaches
CBT – Cognitive Behavioural Therapy^[1]_[SEP]
CPD – Continuing professional development
DfE – Department for Education
DoH – Department of Health
EP – Educational Psychologist
EPS – Educational Psychology Service
HCPC – Health and Care Professions Council
LA – Local Authority
OFSTED - Office for Standards in Education, Children’s Services and Skills
PET – Processing Efficiency Theory
PM – Prime Minister
PSHE – Personal, Social and Health Education
P4C – Philosophy for Children
SEMH – Social Emotional Mental Health^[1]_[SEP]
SEN – Special Educational Needs
SENCO – Special Educational Needs Coordinator
SEND – Special Educational Needs and Disability
TA – Thematic Analysis^[1]_[SEP]
TEP – Trainee Educational Psychologist
UEL – University of East London
UK – United Kingdom
US – United States of America
WHO – World Health Organisation
WMC – Working Memory Capacity

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Overview

This chapter will discuss, the prevalence of test anxiety and its impact within national and local contexts (1.2); Mental Health and emotional well-being issues (1.3); the national media coverage and current research literature (1.5); links to the practice of Educational Psychologists (EPs) (1.5); the researcher's position and rationale of the research (1.6).

1.2 National context

Test anxiety is a contemporary issue relevant to many schools and local authorities. There has been an increase in the volume of students experiencing psychological distress as society has increased the amount of testing (Casbarro, 2005). Alongside bullying and transition, test anxiety has been reported as being one of the most important forms of stress experienced by students (Seiffge-Krenke, 1993). There is a prevailing belief that students who suffer from test anxiety are less likely to succeed in standardised achievement exams (Everson, Millsap, & Rodriguez, 1991) and that when compared to their peers who do not suffer from test anxiety, their overall performance is poorer, in spite of possessing the same ability (Seipp, 1991).

It has been reported by the Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL) that the mental health of children as young as six is being damaged by test anxiety. In a poll of 420 ATL members, nearly half of respondents said that pupils in their school had self-harmed and 89% said testing was the main source of stress. Furthermore, some staff were aware of pupils attempting suicide - 18 of these pupils were in primary schools (Association of Teachers and Lecturers, 2016).

Nevertheless, teaching staff expressed concerns in the ATL (2016) poll that the pressure placed on children by the end of primary school testing is excessive. "As head of school I am spending more and more of my time supporting children with mental health issues" reported the head of a Norfolk primary

school, who also responded that the member of staff with responsibility for pastoral care was "now snowed under" (Association of Teachers and Lecturers, 2016, para. 8). 73% of ATL respondents felt that young people are under more pressure now than two years ago and 82% felt that young people are more pressured now than 10 years ago (Association of Teachers and Lecturers, 2016).

The Department for Education has stated that it promotes greater use of counselling in schools and is improving teaching about mental health (Department for Education, Department for Health, 2014). However, in ATL's poll 21% said their school had no access to a counsellor and many others said their schools' counsellors were overloaded leading to unqualified school staff having to take on a counselling role. "Teachers are not social workers, psychologists or therapists but are increasingly expected to fulfil these roles," said a primary teacher from Somerset (Association of Teachers and Lecturers, 2016, para. 13).

The current governmental direction is towards performance-related pay for teachers. This has resulted in an increased focus on test results and data (Department of Education, 2014). The evaluation of schools is now based on how well they perform in tests and exams and their position in league tables. In simple terms, children are expected to produce better test results and the academic expectations of the new primary curriculum are even more demanding. In turn, this places not only young people but also school staff under great pressure to produce good test results for their own professional standing but also so that schools can be rated as performing well, for example in OFSTED inspections. The government set a floor standard of 65% for the new-style KS2 SATs and only 53% of children met the national requirements for reading, writing and maths combined. This highlights the national drive to do better and the pressure to raise standards must also be recognised (Burns, 2016).

Arguably, teachers face increasing pressure and scrutiny with professional accountability to the results of standardized tests. Donaldson (2015, p.10),

claims that one of the downsides of this degree of prescription and “increasingly powerful accountability mechanisms” is that the main task for many teachers has become “to implement external expectations faithfully, with a consequent diminution of ... responsiveness to the needs of children and young people” (Donaldson, 2015, p.10). However, high-quality teacher-student relationships is one of the fundamental components in facilitating the young person in their learning and encouraging them to be able to express any difficulties they experience. Many teachers in Hutchings’ research (2015), have reported that pressure to increase test outcomes, and the consequent demands on their workload and stress-levels, has had a detrimental impact on the quality of their relationships with their pupils.

Failing to recognise the early signs of test and exam anxiety could lead to serious mental health concerns. However, training for teachers to recognise these signs is not sufficient. Twiselton (2016, cited in Camden, 2016), an author of the Carter review of initial teacher training (ITT), said while training providers did cover mental health “in some form”, there was “variability in its extent” (Twiselton, 2016, cited in Camden, 2016, p. 8). This view is supported by Bailey (2016, cited in Camden, 2016), chair of the children and young people’s mental health coalition who stated that “teachers need to not only know about mental health in children but to be able to respond compassionately to the rising problem, which they are currently not prepared for” (Bailey, 2016, cited in Camden, 2016, p.8).

Furthermore, Hobby (2016, cited in Richardson, 2016), general secretary of the heads' union, National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT) said that lack of sufficient resources to support children experiencing mental health difficulties was reported by the leaders for 75% of schools. He argued that "although increasingly common inside secondary schools, almost two-thirds of primary school leaders say that it is difficult to access local mental health professionals" and added that “rising demand, growing complexity and tight budgets can get in the way of helping the children who need it most” (Hobby 2016, cited in Richardson, 2016, p.2).

Roche (2016), the CEO of the mental health charity Place2Be, argued that despite the fact that many schools are working very hard to support the diverse needs of their pupils, "teachers are not counsellors, and sometimes schools need professional support to make sure that problems in childhood do not spiral into bigger mental health problems later in life (2016, cited in Richardson, 2016).

In September 2016, Prime Minister (PM) Theresa May announced a new generation of selective schools, reversing Tony Blair's 1998 ban on grammar schools. Many people argue that the re-introduction of grammar schools will probably place even more importance on entry exams, which will consequently increase the pressure on school staff, pupils and their families to perform in exams (Stewart & Walker, 2016).

1.3 Mental health and emotional well-being

The term mental health is not completely clear-cut; according to the World Health Organisation (2012), mental health includes "subjective well-being, perceived self-efficacy, autonomy, competence, inter-generational dependence, and self-actualization of one's intellectual and emotional potential, among others" (p.6). Over the course of the past ten years, there has been a more prevalent usage of the term 'emotional well-being' (EW) within the language of mental health when referring to states of good mental health. For example, the World Health Organisation (2012) states that mental well-being is essential to good quality of life; emotional health and wellbeing among young people have implications for their self-esteem, educational achievement, behaviour, social cohesion and "future health and life chances" (p.6).

The notion that schools have a key role to play in both the promotion of mental health and early intervention work was introduced in the Green Paper for Every Child Matters (DfE, 2003). This idea was reinforced in the Children Act 2004 and continued through the substantial budget devoted to the Targeted Mental Health Services (TaMHS) initiative that was launched in 2008; the goal of employing such a large budget was to embed mental health services in schools.

Although the government has increased the importance on testing throughout the education system, there is, conversely, an acknowledgement of the importance of positive mental health and well-being and this is reflected in the paper on 'Mental Health and Behaviour in Schools' (Department for Education, 2014). Moreover, the category 'social, emotional and behavioural difficulties' has been replaced by 'social, emotional and mental health' within the special educational needs and disability code of practice: 0 – 25 years (Department for Education, Department for Health, 2014). This is indicative of the increased importance being placed on mental health and, consequently, schools may be more receptive to methods to help combat test/exam stress and anxiety. Mental health is consequently on the EP and school agenda, however, there is ambiguity in the anticipated role of different professionals (Roth, Leavey & Best, 2008).

1.3.1 'Transforming Children and Young People's Mental Health' (2017)

'Transforming Children and Young People's Mental Health' Green Paper (2017) was published after the study's systematic literature review was completed. The seven proposals in the paper include: £310m funding from DH and senior mental health leads (£95m); mental health discussions and Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) in classrooms - Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE) and Relationships and Sex Education (RSE); new research to fill 'evidence gaps'; quicker access to health services for pupils (four-week waiting time cap); training for teachers in mental health awareness.

Other proposed changes include: an emphasis on mental health needs for pupils with Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND); mental health awareness training delivered in schools; and teacher training changes (curriculum to address the impact of emotional problems, attachment issues and mental health on pupils' performance). Although currently under consultation, 'Transforming Children and Young People's Mental Health' (2017) barely mentions EPs.

1.4 National media coverage and current research literature

It appears to be a degree of disconnect between the way test anxiety is being talked about in the media and current research literature. The popular narrative in the media is one that is over-sensationalised, which focuses on the negative impact of testing on children and young people, ignoring research that does not support these views. Sensationalism is a kind of editorial bias in media where topics in news stories are overhyped to present impressions on events that are biased (Stephens, 2007). Some tactics include: deliberately appealing to emotions; and intentionally omitting facts and information (Stephens, 2007). Research that is contradictory to the popular narrative in the media with regards to testing, will be outlined and discussed in more detail in chapters 2 and 5.

1.5 Links to EP practice

According to the HCPC standards of proficiency (HCPC, 2015), part of the EPs' role is to offer interventions to help improve children and young people's well-being and therefore, it is important to be aware of the vulnerability of certain groups. Very little is known about school staff views on children who experience test anxiety, which highlights the importance of increasing the volume of research in this area. Therefore, this research aims to understand more about these views around pupil test anxiety, along with a critique of the range of strategies and interventions used.

There is a developing need to understand how school staff can support the emotional well-being of young people experiencing test anxiety and to clarify how EPs can support schools to be proactive. In order to promote the psychological wellbeing of children and young people, EPs are required to adopt a preventative approach (HCPC standards of proficiency 2b.4, 2012) and therefore, this research is highly relevant to their role. It is especially important now because of the increasing levels of children experiencing mental health difficulties; insufficient coping mechanisms for the pressures they face at school, particularly with test anxiety; and with front-line staff expressing concerns about their ability to cope with the changing needs of their pupils. In

order to adopt a proactive approach, it is important for EPs to understand the experiences of school staff supporting children with test anxiety.

1.6 The researcher's position

This research holds a social constructionist position and recognises the view that reality is socially constructed. The advantage of taking this approach is to elicit and capture a variety of constructions of school staff with regards to the research questions (for detailed analysis please see Chapter 3).

The theoretical direction of this research is centred on systemic foundations and is exploratory in its nature. The research intends to examine the experiences of school staff supporting children who display test anxiety with the view to inform future EP support to schools with regards to interventions and systemic work.

This research arose partly from my own interest in test anxiety and systemic work. My interest in this area stemmed from my own experiences with test and exam anxiety/stress; and from working as a teacher who did not have any training (only basic coverage during the PGCE programme) or school-wide direction/resources for this area. Furthermore, test anxiety and the associated mental health difficulties is a growing concern that has been under-researched, particularly in primary schools.

1.7 Summary

In summary, in recent years as there has been an increased emphasis placed on testing. School staff and children are being placed under increased pressure to perform well. This increased pressure may be linked to school staff and children feeling anxious/stressed about tests. The UK government is making some steps to address the issue (e.g. by introducing the 'Transforming Children and Young People's Mental Health Green Paper'), however, more needs to be done. This chapter has highlighted possible links to EP practice and the researcher's position. There has been limited research carried out with in primary schools, as will be highlighted in the systemic literature review in chapter two.

Chapter 2: Systematic Literature Review

2.1 Overview

This chapter initially looks at the theoretical conceptualisation of test anxiety (2.2-2.3); it will then outline the methods used in the systematic literature search, including the exclusion and inclusion criteria selected (2.4). A critique of the relevant articles will follow, including consideration of the findings in relation to the theoretical framework and strength of evidence. Exploration of the themes that emerge from existing literature will be summarised in order to justify the present research (2.5- 2.8), concluding with the chapter summary (2.9).

2.2 Theoretical conceptualisation of test anxiety

Test anxiety as a concept, and the resulting variable degrees to which people find examinations debilitating and distressing, is considered a situation-specific trait (Spielberger & Vagg, 1995). Both broad and narrow definitions of this general concept exist. For example, a fear of failure (focus on the judging of performance) or evaluation anxiety (placing test anxiety within 'sub-clinical' anxiety categories such as public speaking, sporting activities etc.) would be considered a narrow definition as the emphasis is on the social aspect of being judged by others. In contrast, Spielberger (1966) offers a broader definition with his concept of 'ego threat' which includes performance outcome, and fear of disparaging assessments by others, as a threat to self-esteem.

There are three components of test anxiety, as outlined by Zeidner (1998):

- Cognitive: negative and self-depreciating thoughts that materialise during the assessment (such as "my whole life will be a waste if I fail my exam") and the physical manifestations of such anxiety (e.g. difficulties in analysing/ comprehension of questions, struggling to recall facts);
- Affective: evaluation of ones' physiological condition (including tremors, and tension in muscles);

- Behavioural: procrastination in order to avoid working, unsatisfactory study skills.

In Zeidner and Mathews' (2005) self-regulative model, negative self-beliefs that are affirmed through metacognitive approaches, such as heightened attention, are believed to be the principle driving force behind short-term distress.

Conversely, distress of a more long-term nature is believed to be caused by maladaptive person–situation interactions such as avoidance (which can lead to skill degradation) or being on the receiving end of negative feedback from others. Lowe et al.'s (2008, cited in Putwain, 2008) biopsychosocial model suggest that proximal variables (those of an interpersonal or situational nature) combine with distal variables (such as study skills, intelligence and academic self-worth) to establish the extent to which anxiety may become debilitating at higher levels or indeed a facilitator at lower levels.

Whilst not accepted universally, the curvilinear relationship between test/exam performance and anxiety is the basis for the estimation of the biopsychosocial model. Alternatively, it has been proposed by others that there is independence between debilitating and facilitating exam anxieties, allowing students to be simultaneously low in one form while being high in another (Putwain, 2008).

2.3 Test anxiety or stress?

It should be noted that in a large number of cases that examination stress and test anxiety are treated as being identical. For example, the effect of examination stress on grades (in studies such as in Struthers et al., 2000, cited in Putwain, 2008) assesses students' experiences of worry in a manner such that it is virtually identical to how test anxiety would be perceived (Putwain, 2008). Furthermore, due to the nature of anxiety having a narrower definition than that of stress, it is entirely possible to perceive tests and examinations as being stressful purely through their own functions or properties, without ever referring to either perceived worry or arousal (e.g. Denscombe, 2000 cited in Putwain, 2008). During the interviews, the terms stress and anxiety were used flexibly by the researcher when referred to by the participants.

2.4 Literature review methodology

The basis of this research intends to explore school staff experiences supporting children with test anxiety and as such the literature search included initiatives around: the experiences of school staff of test anxiety and the wider area of mental health; the experiences of school staff identifying children with test anxiety and using effective coping strategies and interventions to support them; their perceived competence to support children who display test anxiety; and their experiences working with EPs to support this area of need.

Initially, the area of test anxiety was specifically considered, however a decision was made to broaden the search, bringing mental health within the research scope due to an increasing focus on mental health in schools and the subsequent link with test anxiety as discussed in the previous chapter. There was also a very limited number of studies considering school staff experiences supporting children with test anxiety.

Further to this, the number of studies exploring primary aged children was similarly limited, and as such a decision was made to include studies focusing on secondary schools and universities. It was also deemed pertinent that studies from the following geographic regions were included: Europe, USA, Canada, Australia as there are similarities in the regions' educational systems.

The on-line electronic databases PsychInfo, PsychArticles, Education Research Complete, ERIC, SCOPUS, Academic Search Complete, Child Development & Adolescent Studies, and British Education Index Complete were searched, being the most relevant sources of research for the current study.

The search included peer reviewed articles published after 2003 which was the year that Every Child Matters (DfE, 2003) was published, a key document introducing to the school agenda mental health promotion and early intervention. To identify any papers of relevance not identified by search terms, snowballing of reference lists were completed. Following the application of the inclusion and exclusion criteria, and the removal of duplications, 298 articles remained. Titles and abstracts were then checked manually, with 27 articles

found to be appropriate. These articles formed the body of the analysis, please see below search summary tables for illustration:

Table 1. Inclusion and exclusion criteria for Search 1

1st attempt

Search Date	11/11/16
Databases searched	PsycINFO, PsycARTICLES, Academic Search Complete, ERIC, British Education Index, Education Research Complete, Child Development and Adolescent Studies SCOPUS
Boolean phrase	"Test* anxiety" OR "exam* anxiety" OR "assessment* anxiety" or "Test*stress" OR "exam* stress" OR "assessment* stress" AND "teacher*" OR "pastoral*" OR "assistant*" OR "school staff*" OR "SENCo" OR "Head*" AND "perception*" OR "perspective*" OR "view*" OR "opinion*" OR "experience*"
Inclusion criteria	Peer reviewed academic journals
Exclusion criteria	Papers after year 2003
Results	N= 5
Articles used	N= 0

Table 2. Inclusion and exclusion criteria for Search 2

2nd Attempt

Search Date	16/02/16
Boolean phrase	“mental health” OR “well being” AND “teacher*” OR “pastoral*” OR “assistant*” OR “school staff*” OR “SENCo” OR “Head*” AND “perception*” OR “perspective*” OR “view*” OR “opinion*” OR “experience*”
Inclusion criteria	Peer reviewed academic journals
Exclusion criteria	Papers before year 2003
Results	N= 145
Articles used	N= 6

Table 3. *Inclusion and exclusion criteria for Search 3*

Search Date	11/11/16
Databases searched	PsycINFO, PsycARTICLES, Academic Search Complete, ERIC, British Education Index, Education Research Complete, Child Development and Adolescent Studies SCOPUS
Boolean phrase	"Test* stress" OR "exam* stress" OR "assessment stress* anxiety" or "Test* anxiety" OR "exam* anxiety" OR "assessment anxiety* " AND "impact" OR "effect" or "influence" “coping strateg*” AND "child*” OR

	"young person*" OR "adolescent*" OR "young people" OR "student"
Inclusion criteria	Peer reviewed academic journals
Exclusion criteria	Papers after year 2003
Results	N= 30
Articles used	N= 6

Table 4. *Inclusion and exclusion criteria for Search 4*

Search Date	11/11/16
Databases searched	PsycINFO, PsycARTICLES, Academic Search Complete, ERIC, British Education Index, Education Research Complete, Child Development and Adolescent Studies SCOPUS
Boolean phrase	"Test* anxiety" OR "exam* anxiety" OR "assessment* anxiety" or "Test*stress" OR "exam* stress" OR "assessment* stress" AND "intervention"
Inclusion criteria	Peer reviewed academic journals
Exclusion criteria	Papers after year 2003
Results	N= 71
Articles used	N= 6

Table 5. Inclusion and exclusion criteria for Search 5

Search Date	11/11/16
Databases searched	PsycINFO, PsycARTICLES, Academic Search Complete, ERIC, British Education Index, Education Research Complete, Child Development and Adolescent Studies SCOPUS
Boolean phrase	"Test* anxiety" OR "exam* anxiety" OR "assessment* anxiety" or "Test*stress" OR "exam* stress" OR "assessment* stress" OR "mental health" OR "wellbeing" AND (Educational Psycholog* OR Psychologist*) AND "teacher*" OR "pastoral*" OR "assistant*" OR "school staff*" OR "SEnCo" OR "Head*"
Inclusion criteria	Peer reviewed academic journals
Exclusion criteria	Papers after year 2003
Results	N= 47
Articles used	N= 5

Those articles meeting inclusion criteria are critiqued within four different topic clusters to provide an overview of the research conducted and the implications of their findings are considered (Please see Appendix A for the list relevant papers).

2.5 Topic cluster One: Test anxiety impact on children and young people

Connors, Putwain, Woods and Nicholson (2009) sought to understand the experiences of Year 6 students during their SATS in relation to the pressures/anxiety they experienced and used a mixed method study to do so. The researchers sought to examine the association between performance outcomes and SATs related anxiety. The pupils disclosed that they considered the work completed in relation to the SATs would assist them in preparing for more difficult work to come in secondary school, and thus some students felt the whole process of SATs to be beneficial. With regards to the pressure of SATS, some students confirmed that their performance may have been impacted negatively due to the pressure placed on them. They also advised that receiving a lower grade than they expected may result in negative self-perception. Pupils reported that being compared to siblings or family members, as well as their peers, had a negative effect on them. The results of the quantitative analysis highlighted that those with poorer SATs grades had displayed greater levels of self-reported test anxiety. This study did not examine the children's views on what may help them cope with exams, merely their views in relation to tests.

Remedios, Ritchie and Lieberman (2005) conducted a study with children taking the Transfer Test in Northern Ireland, a test sat by 10 and 11-year olds to assess a child's aptitude in relation to grammar school attendance. A control group, comprising students not preparing for the test, was also included. A questionnaire was completed by all students before and after the test which showed motivation levels. Once students had sat the test, there was a significant drop in interest for that particular subject. This drop was not found within the control group and highlighted that, although exams could be used to give an indication of a student's knowledge; there were potential counterproductive implications resulting in a reduction of a pupil's interest in the subject. Such limited interest could have also resulted in a decline in academic outcomes.

Though the study raised some interesting findings, there were no clear links drawn with test anxiety and stress. For example, motivation levels in pupils was the factor measured quantitatively as an indicator of anxiety, rather than an explicit measurement of test anxiety itself. It was therefore assumed that decreased interest in a certain subject is a result of exam stress. However, other factors aside from test stress may have resulted in this decreased motivation, such as the test process not being very child friendly or easily accessed.

Chamberlain, Daly and Spalding (2011) considered exam anxiety within A-level students. The sample involved 19 participants in the south of England and research was conducted using focus groups. The study revealed the existence of two types of anxiety for the students; pre-exam anxiety and exam day anxiety. The students conveyed their perception that revision was stressful and burdensome. It was also highlighted that, during revision time, they cannot focus completely on revision as they are still often being taught new material. They also felt that fear had a negative effect. However, most participants shared that a degree of anxiety helped their performance and was motivational. The students overall felt that some exam day anxiety can be helpful. The researchers thus argued exam anxiety may impact on students' preparations and that interventions could be put into place to help and support students in their preparation, as opposed to just interventions relating to taking the exam itself. This study investigated the exam experiences of students, which in turn generated excellent data from these young people themselves. Though the sample was small, the research did result in some interesting findings in relation to the views of young people regarding test anxiety. However, the fact that A-level age students may have developed more mature coping strategies and more opportunities to practice sitting tests/exams could have contributed to the more positive attitude towards the process.

It has been demonstrated previously by Putwain, Connors and Symes (2010) that, for students with test anxiety, there was less likelihood of performing to the same standards as students that did not experience anxious feelings. Putwain et al. (2010) argued that this was due to the inaccurate thinking patterns

suffered by anxious students, such as 'catastrophising'. Putwain et al. (2010) suggested that lower exam performance would be a result of these inaccurate thinking patterns. Data was collected from year 11 students due to be sitting their GCSEs. The findings showed that there was a distinct pattern whereby those students who reported more negative thinking patterns in relation to their academic studies also reported more symptoms of worry and bodily anxiety. Furthermore, the students with elevated negative thinking patterns ultimately achieved lower grades in the core subjects of English, Maths and Science when compared to their counterparts. The results corroborated their hypothesis that high test-anxious students were potentially suffering lower academic achievement than their peers who had low test-anxiety because of their own negative/inaccurate thinking patterns. However, Putwain et al. (2010) carried out a correlational analysis as opposed to also asking the young people their views on exam anxiety. In addition to this, there was no further exploration in terms of questioning the students as to what coping mechanisms may be useful to manage their test anxiety. Conversely, this study did propose some need for interventions as it showed lower academic achievement in test conditions, which could have been directly correlated to cognitive distortions. Interventions of a cognitive orientation could be utilised to impact on and correct those distortions, Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT) being one such example, and thus, through targeting and reduction of these distorted cognitions, an increase in academic achievement may be seen.

Some researchers have not found that poorer academic outcomes follow from high levels of anxiety. Burns (2004) conducted a study examining the relationship between students' anxiety levels, their performance expectations and their achieved performance. The sample comprised of American university students studying marketing. The results showed a significant correlation between levels of anxiety and performance expectations; namely that the higher the level of student expectation, the higher it was their level of anxiety. There was no evidence to support a negative relationship between exam results and exam anxiety and as such this study highlights that exam anxiety can impact positively on exam results and that exam anxiety is helpful to a certain degree. However, it should be noted that this study was conducted with university

students who may have been able to harness their own anxiety as a motivator, through an increased ability to control it. This is likely to be different for primary school age students who are studying for their SATs, as they do not hold the maturity or life experience of university students. This study also highlighted that young people could benefit from interventions, enabling them to be calm enough, in spite of a high level of exam anxiety, to have positive expectations of the outcome of the exam, at the time of the exam itself. There were limitations to this study, including the age, geographical location and educational level of the participants thus it is difficult to generalise the findings in relation to the UK education system and to primary age students. In addition to this, self-reporting was the method by which both number of hours studying ahead of the final exam as well as expected grades and as such it is difficult to ascertain the validity the data.

2.6 Topic cluster Two: School staff supporting test anxiety and mental health

A decision was taken to broaden the search to include the wider area of emotional well-being and mental health, given that this thematic area has been under-researched. Though the studies focus on different groups of participants, commonalities arise involving systemic level challenges, staff capacity and conceptualisation of test anxiety and mental health.

Research carried out by Putwain and Roberts (2012) explored the methods by which secondary school teachers attempted to increase engagement of their pupils' revision and exams. They found 67.5% of teachers felt students should be told that failure of their exams would result in them being unable to pursue further education. Putwain, Remedios and Symes (2015) argued that "fear appeals" were perceived as a motivational tool to encourage students to prepare and revise for their exams. Putwain et al. (2015) were concerned that the use of fear appeals in relation to exam preparation at school may increase exam anxiety and thus decrease engagement, as well as decreasing exam results. They concluded that the impact of fear appeals, and young people's perceptions of them, should be the subject of training for teachers. However,

only student questionnaires were used, as opposed to additional qualitative methods which would have permitted a deeper insight. This would have allowed for an understanding of young people's views on the pressure of "fear appeals".

Partridge (2012) explored six pastoral staff experiences of emotional well-being in a secondary school using a mixed method design with Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) semi-structured interviews, and Repertory Grid interviews. Partridge (2012) used a psychodynamic theoretical perspective to consider the methods that school staff could develop to understand both their own emotional response to mental health and the manner in which a sustainable, supportive school ethos may be fostered. The prevailing view was that individual interventions are less effective than a whole school ethos which promotes emotional well-being. A concern for the capacity of teaching staff was identified and that supporting young people in this area can be emotionally complicated. Recommendations were made in relation to utilisation of supervision and understanding of their own emotions via training around emotional wellbeing and mental health. A combination of consultations, training and group work could be key to the fostering of a supportive ethos.

In order to equip school staff with the tools to support pupils' mental health, clearer communication as well as external services' support are required; this stance is reflected in current literature. An example can be found in the study of Madge, Foreman and Baksh (2008), which highlighted that school staff sought more transparency in relation to CAMHS referral criteria, as well as the routes for re-referrals. The main limitation of this study centred around the presenting of a varied group of participants as a homogeneous unit – for example, when accessing CAMHS, the experience of the Behaviour Education Support Team will likely vary significantly compared with those of a junior school teacher. As the views were analysed and then presented, it was difficult to identify the need. A further limitation of this study is the focus on secondary school staff – the findings were less likely to apply in relation to primary school staff, given that they had more exposure to the differing referral channels.

Kidger, Donovan, Biddle, Campbell and Gunnell (2009b) explored the various systems that impacted on the support for young people, utilising an eco-

systemic framework, as well as acknowledging the governmental pressures in relation to the need for schools to improve academic achievement. Interviews were conducted with fourteen secondary school staff with three distinct initiatives being identified: developing models for young people with mental health difficulties; their emotional welfare; and the emotional and social aspects of learning. There were three themes that became apparent: a neglect of the teacher's own requirements with respect to emotional health, the prevailing perception that there was a reluctance by some members of the teaching staff to engage with young people with mental health difficulties and that emotional wellbeing and teaching were intrinsically linked.

The importance of whole school based-approaches were highlighted as key implications in the Kidger et al. (2009a) study, which included a focus on teacher support and collaboration as well as highlighting the need for increased clarification with regards to the meanings of both emotional well-being and mental health. Although it was recognised generally that academic output had a close link with mental health, identifying the resources required to meet both agendas was routinely perceived as difficult. Although the research highlighted various interesting points, some findings may not be as applicable in primary schools: there is more consistent and continuous presence of staff in each class compared to secondary schools, for example, having one consistent teacher per year group, and as such more opportunities exist for information sharing and continuity.

School staff had split opinions with regards to the optimum way to support mental health; most discussion was focused on managing mental health difficulties. Partridge (2012) argued that the importance of school staff being able to ascertain mental health needs through having sufficient knowledge was also a means of alluding to school staff's more holistic role and the need to build positive, trusting relationships with the students (Partridge, 2012).

A greater emphasis on managing mental health difficulties can lead to school staff feeling ill equipped and more overwhelmed (Madge et al., 2008). Teachers feel more confident in a listening environment with positive relationships and being able to communicate openly with young people (Madge et al., 2008).

The constructs held by school staff in relation to mental health, namely whether support should be promoting good mental health or managing mental health difficulties, shaped how and where they sought support for their own emotional needs and training. Staff were more able to reflect on their own mental health once they had been shown and understood that mental health is changeable and important for everyone, and thus they could request continuous development and supervision (Partridge, 2012).

2.7 Topic cluster Three: Test anxiety interventions used in schools

2.7.1 Test practice/study skills

Some researchers have hypothesised that practice or being taught study skills improves effectiveness in successfully completing test/exams. Agarwal, Antonio, Roediger, Mcdermott and Mcdaniel (2014) investigated whether retrieval practice, the use of practice tests or quizzes, reduced test anxiety. Their study comprised of 1402 students from the 11-18 age bracket. The students took part in practice tests once a week, however, they were not counted towards the student's grades. It was found that 81% of students stated that when sitting exams, they felt less anxious because they had previously taken the practice tests; it may follow that increased exposure to examinations resulted in a reduction in test anxiety. On the other hand, there was a reported increase in anxiety experienced as a result of the testing from 19% of the students. In spite of the large size of the sample, it is of note that the participants were all American public school students as opposed to mainstream school students and therefore, may have had practice taking more tests. In addition to this, the views of YP with regards to examinations were not collected. There was also no attempt to consult the 19% of students that reported increased test anxiety as to how their anxiety levels may be reduced in future.

2.7.2 Working memory interventions

Eysenck and Calvo (1992) developed a processing efficiency theory (PET) that suggested elevated worry levels which were connected to negative evaluation

decrease cognitive resources. Additionally, cognitions that were irrelevant to the task at hand (a feature often connected to heightened states of anxiety) were noted as limiting working memory capacity (WMC). It was argued that with this diminished capacity, it was more likely that there would be a decrease in task efficiency, coupled with an increase in the level of effort or time required to produce normal levels of performance in cognitive tasks; an effect that was also seen when undertaking complex tasks that had higher demands on working memory by default (Eysenck & Calvo, 1992).

Cognitive interference theories (e.g. attentional control theory, PET) proposed that high levels of trait anxiety predicted adverse effects on the execution of cognitive tasks, particularly those that place increased stress on cognitive resources. Owens, Stevenson, Hadwin, and Norgate (2014) explored an interaction hypothesis to determine whether a mixture of low WMC and elevated anxiety would forecast variance in demanding cognitive test scores. 96 adolescents in the 12-14 age bracket participated in the study, which gauged self-report levels of trait anxiety, cognitive test function and working memory. Their findings demonstrated that the interaction between anxiety and WMC accounted for a significant degree of variance in cognitive test performance. Trait anxiety was found to be unrelated to cognitive test performance in adolescents whom had average WMC scores. Conversely, those whom had low WMC demonstrated a negative relationship between trait anxiety and test performance, with the opposite being true for those with high WMC.

There are potential implications within these findings for interventions targeting anxiety in children. The results implied that individual variations in working memory should be considered alongside reduction of anxiety (Roughan & Hadwin, 2011 cited in Owens et al., 2014). Given that there was only a negative relationship between anxiety and cognitive performance for those adolescents in the Low WMC group, young people with poor working memory skills are likely to be those whom reap the most benefit from any intervention that aims to reduce symptoms of anxiety. As both working memory and anxiety (or associates of these such as temperament and behavioural inhibition) are known to develop relatively early in childhood, the researchers of the study proposed

that future studies beginning as early as 5 or 6-years-old are not only achievable but also desirable (Owens et al., 2014).

It was hypothesised by Mavilidi, Hoogerheide and Paas (2014) that the working memory of children and young people may be less impacted by negative thoughts by giving them the opportunity to have some time to assess the exam questions beforehand. In their study, 117 children aged 11-12 years were split into two groups and the pairs were matched based on their anxiety levels. The control group was given 4 minutes to solve their first problem, with the other 9 problems to be solved in a further three minutes. The experimental group, however, was allotted one minute for assessing all of the questions at the beginning of the exam and given three minutes to solve each problem. At the end of the test, participants were asked to fill in questionnaires identifying their anxiety levels. The results indicated that there was a reduction in exam anxiety for those students who were allowed to look ahead at the questions and they had an improved performance. It should be noted that this was a short-term solution; a more long-term intervention with the aim of imparting children and young people methods for managing anxiety levels before the exams needs to be considered.

A further working memory intervention was conducted by Ramirez and Beilock (2011) completed two studies with 9th grade students in which their hypothesis was that “choking” in a test could be negated by writing about their exam worries beforehand. It was their opinion that working memory could be freed up by completing this writing and allow the student to focus on the exam rather as opposed to worries. It was the intention of the researchers to establish if this group of students could have the exam outcomes improved via this intervention. Two different groups were used, one being an expressive writing group and the other being a control condition. Prior to the test, the expressive writing group were requested to write about their anxieties specifically relating to the exam, whilst the control group were asked to write about non-exam related things. Those individuals who had high levels of test anxiety in the intervention group, when compared to those with similar anxiety levels in the control group, had a higher level of attainment in the exams. A consequence of the students only

being asked to write about their anxieties and nothing else, was that there was no therapeutic intervention to be found in this study. Whilst the intervention group did benefit from increased exam performance, there was a lack of support given to the students in terms of anxious thought management. Given the already established effects of exam stress seen in children and young people there needs to be an increased focus on wellbeing support for children and young people, rather than a simple focus on improving test and exam results.

2.7.3 Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT)

There has been exploration by some researchers into how effective CBT can be when it comes to exam anxiety. CBT is an evidence-based therapy that, as the name implies, has both behavioural and cognitive elements (Cassady and Johnson, 2001). It has strong evidence relating to the alleviation of a range of mental health conditions in young people. The cognitive element allows individuals to work on their thought processes to help them lower their anxiety (Cassady and Johnson, 2001).

Cassady and Johnson (2001) explored the relationship between cognitive test anxieties (i.e. excessively worried thoughts, the perception of not being prepared enough, procrastination and worries relating to letting parental figures down). Two days before university students were due to sit an exam, they were measured in terms of exam anxiety. Those who were found to have elevated levels of exam anxiety produced lower grades from their exam than their cohorts who were found to have lower anxiety levels. They speculated that worried thoughts may occur during the examination as well as during revision. Unfortunately, there are difficulties in drawing generalisations from this research due to the study being conducted with non-UK based university institutions/students.

Dundas, Wormnes and Hauge (2009) carried out a study which, using university students as participants, sought to investigate the effectiveness of cognitive-behavioural group-based approaches. The research involved reducing physical symptoms caused by anxiety as well as combating negative thoughts

(which is important as such thoughts may impede participants from undertaking activities relating to exams, such as revision). There was a qualitative analysis of the intervention and it was discovered that the individuals were able to change their perspective in relation to the task of exams. For example, instead of viewing their whole future dependent on the result of one exam, they viewed the exam as a task requiring completion at that specific moment in time. Participants believed this change to their approach was a result of the intervention that they participated in. Therefore, the results of the study revealed that a reduction in anxiety could be obtained by reframing the task of exams and refocusing attention. Such research, whilst highlighting the effectiveness of cognitive behaviour principles interventions, involved university students, therefore stressing the need for such research to be embarked on with children. It should also be noted that the final two sessions consisted of self-hypnosis, but it was not readily apparent whether the success of the intervention stemmed from the CBT or the aforementioned self-hypnosis.

2.8 Topic cluster Four: School staff experiences working with EPs and external agencies to support test anxiety and other mental health difficulties

An analysis of six papers highlighted two main areas in this topic cluster, which may inform future research: the variety of methods in which EP input was offered and how providing support in schools could result in challenges for external services. In the majority of papers, input from an external service could often be limited as a result of friction between the various systems involved. The lack of resources proved to be a key challenge for both the school and the external service.

Rothì et al. (2008) conducted a study considering the perspective of teachers with regard to engaging with EPs to assist in the management of students with mental health difficulties. The participants (of which there were thirty that were interviewed, a relatively high number for a qualitative study) were recruited from schools from a wide array of areas of the UK, but it should be noted that only eight of them were from primary schools. It was found that many of them did not feel adequately prepared or qualified to deal with young people with mental

health difficulties, and more generally the staff in schools reported that they lacked the resources to enact those recommendations received from EPs (Rothì et al., 2008). They suggested that the lack of EP time and resources was resulting in EPs not having the capacity to see individual children and build a relationship with them over time. It was also highlighted by participants that greater levels of clarity, and increased continuity, would be required in relation to mental health and the EP's role.

Partridge (2012) demonstrated that school staff pinpointed supervision as being of the utmost importance and that those in the best position to offer this could be EPs as they had a clear understanding of educational settings and systems as well the demands placed on school staff. Training for staff to manage their own emotional welfare more effectively was also considered to be a worthwhile investment.

Rather than intervention of a therapeutic nature, Osborne and Burton (2014) investigated external support measures by assessing how effective the supervision by EPs was for 270 Emotional Literacy Support Assistants (ELSAs). This was achieved using a mixed-methods approach that utilised, descriptive statistics, questionnaires and thematic analysis. There were generally positive responses, with the majority feeling their supervision needs were being met and confirming a good relationship with their supervisor. Supervision was generally thought to be a useful platform for discussing cases, problem solving and sharing ideas. As a result, the majority reported better able to support pupils. This showed that external supervision could create a more viable provision model if teaching staff were able to engage in aspects of mental health with increased confidence.

Squires and Dunsmuir (2011) examined the experience of 24 Trainee EPs providing support for schools with CBT-based mental health schemes and focus groups in conjunction with using a computer programme called Architecture and Tools for Linguistic Analysis Systems (ATLAS) (Squires and Dunsmuir, 2011). It was noted that in multiple situations, the school staff sought aid from outside professionals to work directly with the young people to 'fix' problems, which in

turn gave teachers the ability to distance themselves from the problem in question (Squires & Dunsmuir, 2011). Some of the barriers to helping schools support mental health included: a lack of spaces provided in schools that could be used confidentially; a lack of clear structure provided to follow up after the intervention; a lack of clarity with regards to CBT training levels; uncertainty over professional territories; and a desire from schools to use their EP time in areas other than therapeutic work. One of the limitations of this study is that it was being centred around the use of both trainees and focus groups as both these types of participant may have felt less able or not as confident with expressing their own personal opinions honestly on topics, particularly if their own views were contrary to those of others around them.

Understanding the concept of mental health suffers from ambiguity, particularly in relation to the identification of those who are best placed to support. It has been found that mental health can be construed as an illness by school staff, and thus see the treatment of mental health as being beyond an EP's remit. The concept of mental health in medical terms therefore impacts on the type of support sought, as well as the expected result (Squires & Dunsmuir, 2011).

Hunter, Playle, Sanchez and McGowan (2008) highlighted that the gulf between policy expectation versus reality was a concern for teachers, who reported that despite new policies being introduced, mental health is a new area to them with new requirements, responsibilities and skills. Constantly changing expectations in this area then led to ambiguity in relation to job roles within external agencies. A limiting factor in effective working was found to be poor communication between services including the EPS (Atkinson, Squires, Bragg, Wasilewski, & Muscutt, 2013); and an absence of data in relation to the support offered (Atkinson et al., 2014; Squires & Dunsmuir, 2011). As a result, frustration and mistrust developed within the relationship between the school setting and the EPS (Rothì et al., 2008).

2.9 Summary

The literature suggests very limited research exists in relation to the views and experiences of school staff on test anxiety, particularly in primary schools, as well as which interventions they might find helpful to support children who experience such difficulties. As a result of this, the search was expanded in to include mental health and adolescents.

Some of the research did not take place in the UK and therefore there are implications about how generalisable it is. Furthermore, although the research for this thesis is focusing on school staff experiences in primary schools, the search included both secondary schools and universities. This was due to the paucity of research in the area, which highlights the limited research that has been completed in primary schools. For this reason, there are some generalisation limitations and concerns.

Overall, the research has demonstrated that there was an increased likelihood of negative thinking patterns and coping strategies that are less effective amongst students who suffer from test anxiety. In addition to this, these students tended to perform less well than their less anxious peers. It should however be noted, that a degree of test anxiety was found to be useful by some older students.

Research surrounding the reduction of test anxiety pointed to interventions such as CBT, working memory, study skills and relaxation techniques. There is a distinct limitation with this research at present, as those studies focused on interventions for test anxiety, have been undertaken with secondary school and undergraduate students for the most part.

There was a wide array of understandings held by school staff with regards to their role in mental health support, which had an impact on how willing they are to engage with it. There was a degree of uncertainty felt by staff as to their role in the support of mental health. This could lead to their seeking of further information and greater understanding of not only their role, but those of others around them. There was also a desire to obtain increased support for their own

understanding of mental health, in addition to improved transparency with regard to referral pathways.

When dealing with mental health issues became too overwhelming to manage, school staff resorted to using health professionals as a 'fire-fighting intervention' and sometimes misunderstood the role of the EP. Training, supervision, and time were all highlighted as perceived constraints which impeded their ability to support mental health. School staff offering to support mental health were faced with various challenges, indeed staff members' own wellbeing could have had an impact in relation to a student's mental health. It was reported that staff may also, when feeling out of their depth in a situation, withdraw support completely.

There were broadly two approaches which were adopted by EPs assisting schools in relation to test anxiety and mental health in general: an 'add on' service to that already provided by the school, working directly with the YP; or a systemic provision, considering the young people's needs more broadly.

In order to gather the views of a large sample of participants, quantitative methodologies are often most practical. However, the results can be restrictive, as it does not allow participants to indicate approaches and understandings of test anxiety outside of the behaviours indicated in questionnaires and surveys.

Before engaging in dialogue regarding provision improvements and resources, it would be helpful for future research to place in context the manner in which test anxiety is understood. These challenges are to some extent unresolved in the current literature and this is likely a result of the concentration on singular perspectives, which result in overly problem focused narratives. A comparison of the views of professionals from both inside and outside of the educational environment would be a beneficial focus for future research.

Chapter 3: Methodology and Data Collection

3.1 Overview

This chapter reiterates the aims of the current research and outlines the research design considered most appropriate to elicit answers to the Research Questions (RQs) (3.2). The epistemological and ontological position adopted is examined (3.3), justifying the research design used (3.4). The chapter details the procedures of sampling (3.5), data collection and analysis (3.6), highlighting the importance of quality research (3.7) and concludes with ethical considerations for the research process (3.8).

3.2 Research Aim

Existing literature has established that there are ambiguities in the understanding of test anxiety and mental health, as well as the expected roles of various professionals regarding their support of primary school aged children with test anxiety. This research is intended to add to the existing material in this area and facilitate further exploration of alternative methods for improving outcomes for children who experience such difficulties. This is particularly significant in the EP field as there currently exists limited UK based research, especially relating to primary schools.

The purpose of this research is exploratory and is conducted in order to determine the nature of the issue. The intention of an exploratory research is not to provide conclusive evidence, but to help gain a better understanding of the issue in question. For this reason, the researcher opted for a qualitative research, which will allow her to get a richer and more complex picture of the phenomenon under study (Robson, 2011). The current research analyses school staff experiences of test anxiety in relation to their perceptions of their own role regarding the support of children in primary schools, as well as the roles of others in this environment. Acknowledgement of the variations in such constructs may potentially elucidate this area, informing and impacting on future provision.

In qualitative research, it is fundamental to determine solid, unbiased research questions which differ distinctly from hypotheses, objectives or specific goals. The researcher firstly devised a central question and then carefully formulated associated sub-questions. It is critical that the questions are both general and also aligned with the developing attitudes of qualitative research so that the inquiry is not limited (Creswell, 2003). In qualitative research, unlike quantitative, it is permissible to adjust research questions during the study in a manner consistent with the assumptions of a developing theme. This research, explores the following questions:

- Central question: What are the experiences of primary school staff working with children who display test anxiety?
- Sub-question 1: What strategies and interventions help school staff identify and support children with test anxiety?
- Sub-question 2: Do school staff feel competent to support children with test anxiety?
- Sub-question 3: What would help school staff develop their confidence and understanding of test anxiety?
- Sub-question 4: How can EPs help school staff support children who experience test anxiety?

3.3 Ontological and epistemological position

Two researchers, investigating the exact same event, can subsequently produce hugely contrasting data depending on their chosen approaches, often directed by their own philosophical positions. There are two such philosophical approaches that may influence a researcher: an ontological position based on beliefs about the nature of reality; and an epistemological position based on what can be accepted as valid knowledge. Such positions are seen to be affiliated, and have been variably discussed (Creswell, 2009). The main point to highlight, however, is the intermingled connection between ontology and epistemology and thus consider whether a researcher's methodology is at all influenced by philosophy.

The fundamental concerns of ontological positions ought to be stated and justified first. Ontology can raise questions: Is there a true reality completely independent of our representations of it? What is the connection between reality and our observations of it? Potential understandings of ontological positions can range from relativist to realist (Willig, 2013). The 20th century philosopher, Kuhn (1962), popularised the concept of a paradigm as “a way to summarize researchers’ beliefs about their efforts to create knowledge” (Morgan, 2007, p.50). Depictions of one’s ontology and one’s epistemology is the most common way of defining one’s paradigm (Morgan, 2007). The initial planning stage, then, is crucial in establishing the researcher’s philosophical paradigm as this will guide and direct thinking and action, which will then shape the entire research design. The paradigms of positivism, pragmatism and critical realism are concisely explored before concluding that social constructionism is the adopted approach for the current research.

3.3.1 Social constructionism

The current research adopts a social constructionist paradigm, which purports that there are a multitude of socially constructed realities, which are dependent on experience, perspective and situation (Mertens, 2015). The advantage of taking this approach is to capture a variety of equally valid mental constructions of school staff. It is noted that some of these constructions may directly conflict with each other and, therefore, perceptions of reality may alter throughout the course of the study (Mertens, 2015).

The constructionist paradigm emerged from the philosophy of Husserl’s phenomenology and Dilthey’s study of interpretive understanding, called ‘hermeneutics’ (Clegg & Slife, 2009). Hermeneutics is the study of interpretation, the pursuit of meaning. Historians and biblical scholars use the idea of hermeneutics in their reasoning about documents to try to ascertain what the author was attempting to communicate within the realms of the specific time period and culture within which they were written. In research, the philosophy is used more widely as an approach to interpret the meaning of

something from a specific viewpoint or situation (Clegg & Slife, 2009). In contrast to the postpositive paradigm, constructionists thoroughly consider the reflexive implications, such as attending to what is not being said or asked – in short, what is omitted from the inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, cited in Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

Berger and Luckmann's (1966, cited in Berger & Luckmann, 1991), definition of the concept of social construction, begins with those in the social system who interact. Such interactions allow people to develop concepts in relation to the behaviour of others, which become habituate roles via repetition or frequent exposure. Increasing exposure of such roles to other members of society results in influencing society as a whole and eventually such roles and actions become entrenched and accepted as knowledge. Language is the method of transmission of this knowledge (Berger & Luckmann, 1966 cited in Berger & Luckmann, 1991). These experiences are then retained, becoming normalised or settled. The sharing of such experiences leads to intersubjective sedimentation, and these shared experiences are passed within an entire community, with language providing the ability to objectify new experiences, leading to incorporation into the prevailing body of knowledge (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, cited in Berger & Luckmann, 1991).

Within social constructionism, ontological issues are heavily deliberated, mainly as a result of conflict between relativist and realist positions (Burr, 2003). Social constructionism is critiqued by Bury (1986) via the example of disease, in which it is suggested that denial of true reality would be a feature of social constructionists thus implying disease is a mere social construction. However, others argue that social constructionism accepts the existence of disease, and poses the hypothesis that it is the discussion of disease which is socially constructed. As a result of such postulation, current literature takes the position that an objective reality is accepted by social constructionism (Burr, 2003). Nevertheless, it is difficult to truly know this objective reality, and the "idea that reality is somehow reflected in our talk and other symbolic systems" (Burr, 2015, p. 73) is problematic. One can know, however, the way that people's reality is constructed through language. Robson (2011) proposed that it is

difficult for those of the constructionist theoretical persuasion to reconcile with their model with the notion of an objective reality. In principle, the research is not dependent on a shared objective reality being experienced by participants, as for every participant there are just as many realities. Furthermore, there are a great many factors that have the potential to influence a participants' experience (and thus their reality) and any subsequent perceptions of said reality could alter their approach to supporting children who are experiencing test anxiety.

3.4 Research design

The views of school staff corresponding to test related anxiety/stress is an area which is lacking in research, as indicated from the literature review. Research that does exist is mainly based on an American context and school system, resulting in difficulties extrapolating the findings to a UK context. The research in question also utilized predominantly quantitative methods. Though quantitative research can be useful, it is the researcher's belief that qualitative research poses the potential to uncover richer and nuanced information pertaining to experiences and contexts. Furthermore, such quantitative research methods often assume a shared understanding of the constructs under examination. Such an assumption alone cannot be made regarding mental health and test anxiety, and as such the current study suggests this is a limitation in relation to some of the reviewed studies. Having studied the methodologies of previous research conducted, the researcher felt it would be beneficial to use a qualitative approach to understand school staff views and experiences of test anxiety.

Qualitative methods in this research have been applied in line with social constructionism principles; this assumes that examination of the interactions between participants and researchers will lead to information about how constructions or reality are formulated (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). This approach elicits multiple viewpoints when, combined with interactive dialectical methods, can lead to rich and broad data to answer the research question. The complexity and breath of such an inquiry means that research questions might

change in light of new and evolving data (Mertens, 2015). Qualitative research design leads to broader understanding of the complex picture of the phenomenon being studied compared with quantitative methods (Robson, 2011). The main attribute of the process is the exploration of the ways in which a group or a community (school staff) are able to share their realities and there is, as such, no importance placed on any objective realities which exist separately to the group dynamic (Gubrium & Holstein, 2000, cited in Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

3.4.1 Purposive sampling

The purpose of the current research is to simultaneously investigate the experiences and perspectives pertaining to a specific phenomenon, whilst also detailing how professional opinions vary across the spectrum. In order to facilitate this, it is necessary that the sample size be large enough to see an array of views emerge. Whilst the sample size need not be as rigid as that of a more quantitative framework, the size must still be considered carefully (Patton, 1990) as a larger sample size may lose some of the depth required from the interviews and analysis for this study to understand a psychological perspective in this area (Smith & Osborn, 2008).

To offset this, purposive sampling strategies were employed where a 'typical' sample was identified. Sample selection was via a maximum variation method, which was considered appropriate as the population group is relatively specific. The inclusion criteria included: school staff in KS2, teachers, SENCOs, pastoral staff, Learning Support Assistants (LSAs) and Teaching Assistants (TAs) in the same LA, who have experienced working with children during SATS. Exclusion criteria: newly qualified teachers (NQTs). Within this relatively homogenous group any emerging contrasts and variations in perspectives are interesting and warrant further exploration.

Discussions were held with schools' leadership about potential participants. As a starting point, the researcher initiated contact with three Special Educational Needs Coordinators (SENCOs) in three different schools within the same Local

Authority, to garner interest for the research. The response was positive, and consent was ultimately received from the head teacher, securing agreement to participate. An information sheet was provided for the school, outlining the main aims of the research (see Appendix B). The school SENCos selected possible participants who they judged would be suitable to participate in the research, based on the inclusion and exclusion criteria. The researcher settled on the figure of fifteen participants, as according to Braun and Clarke (2013) this would provide a sufficient range of views.

3.4.2 Data collection

The most popular means of collecting qualitative research include: interviews, observations and focus groups. Semi-structured interviews will be used in this research. The current research seeks to explore not only the meaning but also the application of test anxiety, via participants' experience of the school environment and individual understanding of others' roles. As such, descriptive information, in addition to an interpretative element (Kvale, 1996) was also helpful.

3.4.3 Interviews

When conducting interviews with individuals, Hesse-Biber (2014, cited in Mertens, 2015) researchers may employ a continuum of structures ranging from informal to formal. Generally, qualitative researchers favour the semi-structured or unstructured interview format. Some researchers begin with an informal structure to enable them to establish a positive relationship with participants before moving to more structure to elicit key information (Robson, 2011). Using open-ended questions allows the participant's worries and interests to emerge, providing a broader perspective for the researcher. For this reason, the researcher chose semi-structured interviews as she wanted to focus more on the meaning or construction of phenomena.

The researcher felt that the semi-structured interview will allow her the opportunity to clarify any issues arising and also not restrict freedom in

responding. To ensure that the interview remained focused, the researcher established some predetermined questions but also allowed the order to be modified, wording to be changed, questions to be omitted or additional prompting questions added and explanations given (Appendix D). Each interview was recorded with an audio device in order to capture a high level of detail. The interviews ranged from 30 to 55 minutes.

3.4.3.1 Interview considerations

Generally, it is the skill of the interviewer and the quality of the questions asked which determine the quality of the data collected. The interview process requires swift decisions on behalf of the interviewer in relation to the avenues they pursue, and their reasons for doing so. The interviewer may also attempt to verify their understanding of the subjects' answers and thus embark on anticipatory interpretation (Kvale, 1996).

These issues have predominantly been overcome in this research via thorough planning and a broad knowledge of the subject area. The researcher made only brief notes during the interview to prompt a return to specific comments without disrupting the flow of the interviewee. The relevant training on the doctoral psychology course has aided the researcher in ensuring the interviews were conducted appropriately. Summarising, steering, active listening and hypothesising (Egan, 2013) are applicable to both quality interviewing and EP practice.

Broadly, interview subjects can vary in their responses. The main difficulty faced in the current research was the variation in willingness of each participant to share personal opinions. A small number of the interviewees initially provided only factual information pertaining to their job role so the interviewer carefully elicited more in-depth reflections by asking prompting questions. However, Kvale (1996) argues that occasionally "the openness and intimacy of the interview may be seductive and lead subjects to disclose information they may later regret" (p.116). The researcher was therefore cautious to not push 'too far' with enquiries. The consent letter advises participants they may withdraw

information up to the stage of analysis, and this fact was referred to at the conclusion of each interview.

The interview process can, however, be a mostly positive experience for the participant, producing “catalytic validity” (Kvale, 1996, p. 116). Kvale (1996) argues that “just listening to what people have to say for an extended period of time, as well as the quality of the listening, can make an interview a unique experience” (p.116). The interviews in the current research provided space for participants to reflect on a topic they found stimulating, resulting in comments such as “it was great to think about all that” and “that really made me think”. It is also intriguing to note that participants reported becoming sure about their understanding of test anxiety as the interview progressed.

3.4.3.2 Pilot

A pilot study was used to ensure familiarisation with the structure and relevant language to be used with the research participants. It was also useful in that the quality of the questions were considered as well as identifying potential challenges with the interview schedule. Ultimately, this proved to be a very useful exercise as it indicated the phrasing in one of the questions could elicit responses which were not relevant to the research aim. Furthermore, as a result of the pilot, more detailed probing questions were added to the schedule to ensure the interview could be redirected if it were to stray off topic.

3.4.3.3 The interview schedule

The order of the questions is a significant consideration when devising the interview schedule. The initial question is designed to put the participant at ease, and ensure they feel comfortable with the subject area, and allowing them to establish their own view of ‘mental health and test anxiety’. A comfortable, coherent narrative is therefore created for the remainder of the interview. As per Smith and Osborn (2008) neutral, open questions that avoided jargon were

used to allow fuller, more detailed answers. The final schedule (Appendix D) was then memorised, enabling discussion to flow as naturally as possible.

Kvale (1996) suggested using the following types of questions, and such style of questioning was incorporated within the semi structured interview;

- Introducing questions, for example; “Can you tell me about ...?” “Can you describe... to me in as much detail”. The purpose of such questions was to elicit detailed, in-depth responses in relation to the participant’s experiences.
- In order to encourage a participant to extend their answer follow up questions were used.
- Clarification was achieved through the asking of further questions, listening to what was important to the participants, all the while keeping the research questions in mind.
- Probing questions, such as “Can you give me a more detailed description of?” and “Can you tell me more about that?” were used to help participants to elaborate and provide more detail to the answer that they have given. Such questions were vital in allowing the researcher to acquire rich, in-depth and meaningful data. They also provided further insight in to the world view of the participant.
- In order to assert whether participants had been correctly understood by the researcher, direct questions were used.
- Indirect questions were asked by the researcher. For example, “what do you think children need to help them to cope with tests?” The answer may help the participant to reflect on others’ attitudes, including potentially insight into those of the researcher.
- Interpreting questions, attempting to understand what the participants stated, included “You mean that.....?” giving the opportunity to the participant to clarify. Participants were also asked “Is it correct that you feel that?” This ensured they had an opportunity to reflect on both the question and their answer and allowed them the space to consider whether they wished to provide further details.

(Kvale,1996, p. 133-135)

3.4.3.4 The interview meeting

With the interview schedule written, it was necessary to begin preparation in other areas. Gaining a thorough knowledge of the area to be researched was vital; this included exploring the theoretical perspectives around test anxiety, consideration of the local and national context, and a familiarity the strategies currently used by schools. Armed with such knowledge, the researcher gained the confidence to follow up different thoughts presented by the participants. The researcher also considered what information could be shared at the start of the interview, given that some information about the purposes of the research can help put the participant at ease.

There were some unplanned questions included in the interviews, based on the responses given by the participants to the planned questions, and they were used both to obtain information relevant to the research and reassuring the participant of the researcher's interest in what they had to say (e.g. asking for more details about a successful intervention they used). Silence was also a useful tool, and this was used by the researched where appropriate, for example when the researcher felt the participant could expand on their thoughts or allowing them thinking time to gather their ideas. The researcher was always aware of non-verbal responses to participants and body language, whilst attempting to engage in active listening and empathy throughout.

The active role of the interviewer is one emphasised by Braun & Clarke (2013) with the acknowledgement that the participant and interviewer co-construct meanings. The researcher sought to check meaning with participants throughout by paraphrasing responses, and thus can potentially be seen as contributing to the co-construction process

An awareness of the potential psycho-dynamic processes between the researcher and the participant was very important when preparing for interview (Mertens, 2015). During this time, it was fundamental to plan to minimise the deployment of self and the impact of reflexivity (e.g. how to be friendly and not a friend to the participants) on the interview process. In addition, it was important for the researcher to plan for how to avoid giving cues or asking leading

questions and consider how to avoid situations that might lead the researcher to speak more than to listen.

3.5 Transcription

The transcription process for this study was completed in an orthographic style (Braun & Clarke, 2013) with a focus on transcribing spoken words (what was said, as opposed to how it was said). Orthographic transcription was used as the researcher's interest was the participant's responses subject matter, rather than how the response was said.

Transcription should not be perceived as a neutral process, and transcriptions themselves are not the original data, as the process involves a number of decisions and judgements (Kvale, 1996). The data's dependability was ensured in the following ways; the transcription was carried out by someone other than the researcher, in an attempt to bring in greater objectivity; the researcher also inspected each interview transcribed to ensure the accuracy of the transcription. As part of the transcriptions, any and all words and the majority of non-semantic sounds uttered during the interviews (such as "mm hmm" that were as a response that suggested agreement) were recorded. Anonymisation of data that could have been identifying was ensured in all cases. Please see Appendix F for a copy of an interview transcript, with all transcripts on the accompanying disc.

3.5.1 Critique of transcription

Lapadat & Lindsay (1999) acknowledge that various researchers have highlighted the methodological and theoretical issues relating to the transcription process. They argue that transcriptions by their very nature are not objective and thus cannot be considered neutral. Transcriptions are subject to interpretation based on the beliefs, knowledge and interpretations of the researcher. This is encapsulated by the fact that an interview contains not only verbal information, but is subject to other influences including the social

background of researcher and participant, the setting, and the nuances of social interrelation (e.g. body language and tone of speech). It was not possible to include all such information in each transcription due to time constraints, resulting in them being necessarily selective (Lapadat & Lindsay, 1999).

Such limitations are applicable to this study and to any analyses that are produced from the data. However, this is true to a lesser extent as the method of Thematic Analysis (TA) used in the current study to ascertain data patterns. As described below, TA is less focused on the way things are said and more interested in the subject matter of participant's responses.

3.6 Data Analysis

3.6.1 Identifying an appropriate data analysis approach

Thematic Analysis (TA) is characterised as a flexible approach, broadly summarised as a way to identify themes occurring in the data. It is useful in the management of large data sets, and often results in an accessible, coherent summary (Osborne & Burton, 2014), whilst maintaining rich data. This method was considered appropriate for the current study as it allows flexibility in examining the phenomenology of the language and data espoused by the participants via an inductive procedure, from which a ground-up mechanism allowed themes to emerge.

TA is a means for determining patterns and themes of meaning across a data set in relation to the research questions. Its key benefit is the ability to be flexible in the analysis because themes can be identified based on what is in the data, rather than applying a top-down approach. Alternatively, TA also allows the researcher to consider the data in relation to specific theoretical ideas and bring this into the analysis, too (Braun and Clarke, 2013).

3.6.2 Critique of thematic analysis

Braun & Clarke (2013) highlight some limitations of TA. Firstly, it tends to describe rather than interpret participant views. Interpreting is not always at the centre of every piece of research, however, and the research questions investigated in this research were more interested in exploring and analysing the direct experiences of school staff, rather than how they made sense of their experiences. TA also lacks the examination of the use of language captured in methods such as discourse analysis. However, this study was more interested in what participants said about their experiences, as opposed to analysing the language used to describe them.

TA can be considered an unspecified method, which can lead to ambiguity and a perceived lack of rigour. It can be seen as failing to offer a coherent method in its own right, whilst complementing all approaches to qualitative analysis. However, Boyatzis (1998) argues TA can be conducted in a consistent and reliable manner, and, to ensure a rigorous process, highlighted several decisions that ought to be considered during research design phase. Boyatzis (1998) suggests the adoption of a various approaches to TA, including prior-research-driven and data-driven, however it was the latter of which the researcher deemed to be most appropriate for the current research.

3.6.3 Stages of thematic analysis

The aim of TA is to make sense of what participants have said and why, rather than producing a simple summary (Willig, 2013) and further illuminate the social construction process (Joffe, 2012) making it particularly useful and relevant for this study. A theme refers to a specific pattern of meaning in the data. Themes can be implicit, or directly observable, largely dependent on the way in which the researcher interprets the data. This relates Willig's (2013) terms "empathic" (p.145) or "suspicious" (p.143) data analysis. The aim of empathic analysis is to understand the participant's experience from within. On the other hand, suspicious interpretation seeks to reveal a hidden truth in order to explain why something is a certain way (Willig, 2013). Empathic data analysis was the most

frequently used in this study, but suspicious interpretation was used in relation to aspects of the data that were thought to relate more specifically systemic issues around test anxiety.

Whether the data is deductive or inductive is a further distinction needed when constructing themes (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Inductive data derives from the raw data, whereas deductive data is structured around the theoretical underpinning of the research (Boyatzis, 1998). An inductive approach was used: the study utilised previous research as a framework for organising thinking and analysis and the researcher was open to new ways of thinking about test anxiety.

This research followed the phases outlined by Braun & Clarke (2006):

- Familiarity with the data was established through transcribing, checking for accuracy, reading and re-reading, and collecting initial ideas.
- Initial codes were developed by systematic consideration of compelling data, ending with collating data relevant to each code.
- Searching for themes via the collation of codes in relation to potential themes, and further categorisation into subsequent themes.
- Reviewing themes by checking whether the themes work in relation to the coded extracts and the entire data set, creating a thematic map.
- Defining and naming themes via ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme – highlighting the meaning and the essence of each theme, and the description.
- Report production, providing an account of the data. This included selecting extracts considered to be noteworthy examples, subsequent analysis of the extracts, and framing this in relation to the research question. (Braun & Clarke (2006)

On completion of the transcriptions, hard copies were used for manual analysis. Following this, the researcher found it easier to code electronically using NVivo (Appendix G). The researcher re-read the transcripts several times to gain a clear understanding about what the data means, reading the text analytically and critically whilst the research questions were kept in mind.

Initial codes were generated by targeting the longest interview transcripts for analysis, as they contained the richest data, thereby subsequent transcriptions could be analysed with reference to these codes. The majority of data extracts, even if they could be considered irrelevant to the research question asked, were systematically recorded and coded. This was felt necessary partly to ensure all aspects of the data were captured and nothing missed, and partly motivated in relation to the fairly broad research questions. Such an approach is referred to as inclusivity in complete coding (Braun & Clarke, 2013). An introductory list of codes was created by naming the clusters according to their meaning (Appendix E) and data relating to context was included in the initial code list. The codes themselves became progressively shorter as the analysis deepened.

Code assignment was completed via guide questions such looking at what is being described and how something is understood (Willig, 2013). Each code intended to reflect the theme of the text sections, and allowed recurring codes to be identified as worthy of further exploration (Willig, 2013). Coding was conducted using an inductive process at the onset; no interpretations were made and the data was taken purely at face value (Willig, 2013).

On completion of the initial codes, the transcripts were re-read by the researcher to ensure all relevant text was sufficiently coded, and to identify whether additional codes were needed. This review process allowed the researcher to consider in more detail the relationships in the data (between and within codes) progressing from specific to more general ideas, ultimately resulting in themes. Themes were created from those codes which were analogous, answering the research questions.

Provisional themes for the initial transcript, along with sub-themes, were produced following a review with the researcher's supervisor and peers. The remaining transcripts were analysed using the provisional themes, which also assisted in organising information. Systematic analysis was undertaken using the same method, namely the electronic recording of codes onto the relevant transcripts and some data extracts were coded more than once.

During this iterative process, individual transcripts were brought together to allow a holistic overview – the data was wide ranging and rich, thus the initial 7 themes expanded to 19 themes. Following review with the researcher’s tutor, the themes were once more refined to 14 themes (Figures 1-5), each with numerous subthemes.

Nvivo was used to visually map themes, facilitating a thematic map allowing the review and exploration of themes and subthemes, as well as revealing the connections and their prevalence (Joffe, 2012). This enabled the researcher to gain an in-depth understanding of the data, and construct a cohesive narrative. Such an approach is identified as a pattern-based analysis by Braun & Clarke (2013). It is based on the assumption of the importance of commonly recurring codes and themes across the data set.

Braun & Clarke’s (2013) “analytic sensibility” (p.201) was considered by the researcher throughout the process of TA. They contend that the researcher progressively develops this skill, which refers to “being able to produce insights into the meaning of the data that go beyond the obvious or surface-level content of the data, to notice patterns or meanings that link to broader psychological, social or theoretical concerns” (p.201). This is especially relevant with regards to the next stage of the research process: making sense of the patterns identified in the data by outlining and explaining the findings. This is described and discussed further in the findings and discussion sections in Chapters 4 and 5.

3.7 Quality of data collection

The criteria that ought to be used to judge the quality of qualitative research is subject to ongoing debate (Yardley, 2000). Researchers have queried whether the quantitative criteria of generalisability, reliability and validity are applicable (Yardley, 2000). This section will outline the criteria more applicable to qualitative research, used in the current study.

3.7.1 Dependability vs reliability

Tracking progress and keeping audit trails was of great importance, throughout the research process. Questions that needed to be considered included: can we depend on the results and, if the study was repeated, would we obtain similar results. Another key consideration was how the results would show stability over time and whether the emerging themes are revealing themselves to be appropriate to the inquiry. To aide research dependability, the researcher maintained a research protocol. A research diary was used throughout the research process from the planning stage to the final analysis and discussion, which specified each step of the research process to ensure that categories are used consistently (Mertens, 2015).

3.7.2 Credibility vs internal validity

It is crucial to take into account the correspondence between the way participants perceive their social constructs and how the researcher translates their viewpoint (Mertens, 2015). This effect can be heightened through lengthy and extensive engagement with the participants. Triangulation of information and participant checks can, therefore, be beneficial in ensuring that views tally. In order to gather as much description as possible, the researcher ensured that interviews were sufficiently lengthy enough to elicit such relevant and meaningful information. Participants were free to question and correct the researcher's assumptions, and this was brought to their attention by the researcher 'checking' information throughout the interviews, seeking verification. Credibility for this study was also sought by exploring the construction of themes with the researcher's supervisor and peers.

3.7.3 Transferability vs external validity

This is concerned with the extent to which the findings can be applied to other situations. This can be difficult in qualitative research, Fox et al. (2007) assert that generalization is not usually possible but the research of social constructions can illuminate individual situations. Mertens (2009) argues that

transferability can be achieved but it relies on having sufficient sample sizes and multiple cases and is further supplemented by the quality of data derived from 'thick description'. The use of multiple cases to strengthen transferability is proposed, and as such the researcher determined that 15 participants would be adequate to allow some transferability of data. The iteration by each participant of many of the themes reinforces this view.

3.7.4 Conformability vs objectivity

When considering the objectivity of the research findings, one needs to take actions to make sure that interpretations and data are not mere creations by the researcher but, indeed, both are as objective and accurate as possible. The researcher engaged in reflexive and critical discussion with her peers and supervisor to consider the impact of her belief systems and values on the research. In addition, a reflective diary was kept. By having transcripts reviewed in order to consider if the conclusions are explicitly supported by the methods and data, the researcher attempted to establish whether logic has been employed correctly (Mertens, 2015).

3.8 Ethical Issues

It is a requirement for all researchers to adhere to the principles of ethics found in 'The Belmont Report and also to their professional associations' codes of ethics (Mertens, 2015). The process of psychological research, including the researcher's relationship with participants, is prioritised by ethics (Braun & Clarke, 2013). An ethical stance was maintained by the researcher throughout the research process, and from planning through to write up. The ethical standards outlined by the British Psychological Society (BPS) Code of Human Research Ethics (2009) and Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) (Standards of Conduct, Performance and Ethics, 2012) were referred to throughout the research to ensure such ethical and risk assessment considerations were adequately met.

A research proposal and an application for ethical approval was made to the University of East London. Both the research proposal and ethics request were judged as ethically appropriate. Permission was also given to proceed by the Principal Educational Psychologist within the local authority, who accepted the research, conditional on receiving ethical approval from the academic institution.

The BPS maxim of maximising benefit and minimising harm (BPS, 2009) was given particular emphasis by the researcher. Though the researcher did not envisage any distress would be caused via participation, the personal nature of discussions relating to participants' experience of test anxiety could aggrieve them or cause emotional distress. Had this been the case, the interview would have been paused until the participant felt willing and able to continue, and appropriate support organisations would be suggested and signposted. However, no such situations arose during the data collection.

Five main ethical considerations in qualitative research practice are outlined by Willig (2013) and these considerations were adhered to in the current study, namely: informed consent; the right to withdraw; no deception, confidentiality / anonymity and debriefing.

3.8.1 Informed consent

As outlined previously, all participants in this research were subject to informed consent and an information sheet. The participants were also informed that they could withdraw at any point and that data will be compliant with data protection guidelines. All participants were debriefed on conclusion of the interviews.

Approval from the senior leadership teams at the schools from which participants were recruited was sought alongside participant consent. Interview space was found within the schools themselves, and participants took time away from their class to attend – approval from the school was therefore ethically appropriate.

3.8.2 Anonymity and data protection

To ensure participants felt comfortable and confidentiality was maintained, all interviews were conducted in private and safe places. The researcher has taken care to protect all research data, including taking steps such as password protecting any Word documents, such as interview transcripts, and ensuring participants' real names were not used. This will be deleted following a minimum period of five years. Audio recordings of interviews were deleted immediately after transcription, and the transcription service itself adhered to data protection procedures.

The participant information sheets ensured that data protection, anonymity and confidentiality procedures were clearly explained. All those involved in the research were advised that pseudonyms would be used and participants would have full anonymity. Should the research be published in an academic forum, additional anonymisation of the schools and local authority would be completed.

3.9 Summary

This chapter described the methodology of the research. An overview of philosophical positions in research was initially explored, and the researcher's position was outlined. A description of the approach adopted by the researcher and the philosophical underpinnings followed, leading to a discussion in relation to the steps of analysis and quality measures utilized to ensure a high standard, as well an exploration of the ethical considerations.

Chapter 4: Findings

4.1 Overview

The chapter begins with the process of generation of themes (4.2) and then looks at how themes were created to understand: the views and experiences of school staff working with children who display test anxiety (4.3); the strategies and interventions which help school staff identify and support children with test anxiety (4.4); whether school staff feel competent to support children who display these difficulties (4.5); what would help them develop their confidence and understanding of test anxiety (4.6); and how can EPs help school staff support children who experience test anxiety (4.7). The findings and implications will be discussed further in the next and final chapter (discussion).

4.2 Generation of themes

As explained in the previous chapter, codes that were similar in meaning were clustered together. Once the researcher had identified the patterns within the data, and identified themes, these were checked to ensure there was enough data within the theme for it to be called as such.

As part of the refinement process, subthemes were identified to ensure that the theme was representative of the data. Each theme was then examined closely; if a single theme did not represent all the data, subthemes were developed to ensure that the nuances within the theme could be understood. Braun and Clarke (2013) suggest that in thematic analysis, subthemes capture and develop one notable specific aspect of one theme, but share the central organising concept of that theme. The process of coding, identifying themes, collapsing themes and identifying subthemes was discussed with the researcher's tutor and peers as part of peer credibility checks.

As detailed in Chapter 3, because the data was rich and wide ranging, the initial 7 themes were expanded into 19 themes (Appendix E). After review with peers

and my academic tutor, these themes were again reduced to 14 overall themes, each with a number of subthemes.

4.3. Central Question: What are the experiences of primary school staff working with children who display test anxiety?

4.3.1 Thematic map: Central question 1



Figure 1. Map of themes constructed to understand the experiences of school staff working with children who display test anxiety.

4.3.2 Theme 1: Impact of testing on children

4.3.2.1 Subtheme CQ1a: Children feel pressurised because schools need to meet targets

Participants highlighted the pressure that schools place on children to meet targets, which is closely linked to national expectations and league tables:

“it would be argued that, you know, that’s the pressure that schools are putting on kids. They don’t need to be prepared for them in that way but unfortunately it become...we are compared with other schools and it becomes err important to get results that reflect actually how good your children are...” (Anna, lines: 16-20)

Holly spoke about how children can pick up on teachers’ anxiety: *“well when I first started teaching in Year 6, I was obviously quite anxious about the SATs and the children were very aware of it.”* (Holly, lines: 7-8)

Sarah reported that children can become bored and tired of the Yr6 main focus being on testing: *“I think more for me and my experience of it this year has been that the children have been bored of the...the way that we are teaching and they are sick of it”.* (Sarah, lines: 103-105)

Others stressed the point that children may feel pressured because the SATs results can affect their ability to join the secondary school or their choice:

“and for kids that... may want to get into certain secondary schools...then they then have to go and sit tests to get into their secondary school. I think then that affects them a bit more... For instance X School for Girls...you have got to set a certain... little test to get a place there I think”. (Karen, lines 76-82)

4.3.2.2 Subtheme CQ1b: Children's attitude towards testing can vary

Participants reported different attitudes to testing and stress levels. Some children can thrive under a testing situation and even exceed expectations, Anna stated that *"some children really enjoy the...the definitive targets and that end goal and they get really caught up in improving and improving and improving... and a few even exceeded our expectations."* (Anna, lines 9-11)

However, participants stated that many children start worrying about the SATs from a young age:

"I have a younger nephew who has just done his Year 2 SATs, and so even when he was in Year 1 he was crying to my sister saying that he didn't think he was going to pass his SATs next year. So when he was like 5 years old he was crying about his SATS which breaks my heart". (Laura, lines 127-130)

Participants reported that many children have a negative approach to SATs because they find it difficult to manage unhelpful thoughts, Maya reported: *"Maybe they are finding the classroom setting a bit more pressurised or the spotlight is a bit too much on them.... 'Oh, I am really feeling like I am going to fail everything'."* (Maya, lines: 46-48 & 72)

However, other children can have a more "laid back" attitude to testing and some may even look as if they do not care:

"some children err you wish actually, you know, their feathers were a bit more ruffled...because they are so laid back and casual you are like, 'Come on...don't you realise that this is really important guys', you know." (Maya, lines: 132-134)

Sam stated that this approach of "indifference" also suggests anxiety: *"similar behaviours can be exhibited in children who simply do that because of anxiety...not because they don't care".* (Sam, lines: 174-175)

4.3.2.3 Subtheme CQ1c: Correlation between test anxiety and attainment levels, SEN and EAL

High attainment

There were conflicting views on the stress levels that high attainment children feel during the SATs:

Sam argued that high attainment children do not find tests stressful, however, there is an element of perfectionism: *“with the highly able children...they don’t really find it that much of a stress...other than not getting it perfect...that’s where it is, you know...and their lack of resilience is shown in the fact that they have a competitive view of that...you know, the scores”*. (Sam, lines: 198-201)

Lisa spoke about the pressure that high attainment children put on themselves: *“I suppose the high achievers they sometimes maybe subconsciously put quite a lot of pressure on themselves to do so well and compete with the others that if they were to get a question wrong ...they might fixate or get stressed out about that...”* (Lisa, lines: 153-157)

Middle attainment

Some participants reported that middle attainment children felt pressure because they “know what they do not know” and have an awareness of where they are compared to other children:

“the middle section...are the ones that really feel the pressure because they know something is attainable but they know they are struggling to attain it ...and comparison happens ...and they can see their other classmates achieving ...they know they are not making it... and they want to and...yes, that’s the hardest to see...” (Anna, lines: 70-78)

Low attainment

There were conflicting views about the levels of anxiety/stress for low attainment children: *“the lowest of attainers, for me, seem to be oblivious. They*

just want to do it...they were excited and they thought they had done really well and they said it was really easy...I hope it's the case... there was an element of them not knowing that they didn't know it". (Sarah, lines: 112-115)

However, Sam reported that testing for the low attainment children can be a source of anxiety: *"I think those children... have spent the period... in schooling being constantly withdrawn and in support groups, for them...the test does become a source of anxiety. Because it's a bit like it's a final confirmation of not being able to do it...you know, there is nowhere else to go now". (Sam, lines: 193-196). Sam also mentioned the lack of support for these children and that "it's just them and their capacity to either remember or not". (Sam, lines: 197-198)*

Children with SEN and EAL

The needs of this group of children vary and their experiences of testing will be similarly varied. Some children need more breaks while other children that were not sitting the tests, are picking up on their peer's anxiety. Anna argued: *"it was just really important for them to...not hate the whole experience. That was literally the target for them..." (Anna, lines: 330-331). Anna also mentioned that even when children with SEN have breaks during testing, it is still a difficult experience for them.*

Donna stated that even when children with SEN are not sitting the tests, they still pick up on the anxiety of their friends: *"I would say even the children that are not sitting it...I think they pick up on the...I noticed a change in both of their behaviours in that week...maybe it's because they... were picking up on their friends anxiety..." (Donna, lines: 97-101)*

Susan argued that children with EAL coped well during SATs: *"The EAL children in my class this year, of which I have many ...are flying... maybe they have come from cultures which is testing as well?... I have got children who could barely speak any English when they came and they are catching up with everybody already in the year, you know. Because they listen and they don't stress". (Susan, lines: 146-149)*

4.3.2.4 Subtheme CQ1d: The competitive element of SATs and the role of social media

Participants argued that there is a competitive element to SATs. Susan stated: *“I think others... they are desperate for their score...and are highly kind of competitive...normally you have got a few that so desperately want to be at the top.”* (Susan, lines: 124-125)

Others argued that this element of competition is adding to children’s anxiety. Kim argued that: *“there is that awareness that they are put in quite a vulnerable position because you can see other children around you achieving a lot more and how does that reflect on you as a learner and how you feel about yourself”.* (Kim, lines: 61-64)

It was highlighted that children often associate SATs with how intelligent they are: *“they quite often make comments like ‘are we clever enough to pass our SATs?’”* (Laura, lines: 7-8). There is also an increased self-awareness of the levels the children work at: *“I know some schools are very much from Year 1...that the children can tell you...‘I am working at greater depth...I am expected!’ So it’s quite interesting when they start to form that realisation for themselves in Year 6”.* (Maya, lines: 233-236)

Some participants talked about the impact of social media on children's test anxiety. Holly argued that peers and social media put a lot pressure on children: *“they are going to have so many pressures from social media and peer groups...”* (Holly, lines: 262-263). Laura stated: *“it really stresses me out when the children come in and something has happened at the weekend over Snap Chat or something like that... I think that has a big impact on their SATs anxiety too”* (Laura, lines: 123-126).

Laura also talked about how children compare themselves to their peers on social media and this can be a source of anxiety: *“I think there’s so much more comparison between themselves and other people now. Things like social*

media...I feel it can be really unhealthy for them because they are so used to telling everybody everything... they would say that people were doing really well in this and then saying, 'Oh this was really terrible...'...and I think they pick up on that...but then they don't know the reality...so they believe what they hear." (Laura, lines: 104-110)

4.3.2.5 Subtheme CQ1e: Links between children's test anxiety and other mental health difficulties

Participants argued that more severe cases of test anxiety wouldn't exist in isolation, and that there may be other underlying mental health difficulties for these children. Maya stated: *"I would say you have some highly anxious children and so therefore when they are placed in a pressurised situation... that anxiety is heightened and it's more evident then... I would say children that do have anxiety issues do suffer of a level of test anxiety"*. (Maya, lines: 242-246)

Laura talked about how anxiety branches out into different areas: *"there's a child in my class who has anxiety about tests but has sort of OCD compulsions and things like that... So it does, it branches out into a lot of different areas I think"* (Laura, lines: 144-147). Donna spoke about the relationship between anxiety and worries: *"so the children who were most anxious are anxious in other areas of their life ...they are worriers so they would have worried about the SATs whereas before they worry about their friendship groups"*. (Donna, lines: 121-123)

Sam argued that attachment difficulties and dysfunctional family relationships are linked to low self-esteem and test anxiety:

"It's very rare that the SATs throws up an unusual event...Children that show anxiety were going to show anxiety...and you know it anyway... So those children for example who have attachment anxieties...because of dysfunctional, you know, family relationships or those for whom...for whatever reason their self-esteem is low or...lack confidence...they will then become anxious when

there is the knowledge that something is going to define them by how well they perform". (Sam, lines: 207-208 & 215-219)

4.3.3 Theme 2: Impact of testing on school staff

4.3.3.1 Subtheme CQ2a: Accountability and pressure levels

Participants stated that league tables have put a considerable amount of pressure on schools, turning testing into a very stressful period for school staff:

"I don't think there is a problem with them per se but I think the fact that league tables and schools are judged on...and that is a massive problem. I think that's the horrible side of SATs and that it's all about that now, not about the whole child and I firmly disagree with that philosophically ...education is changing by the week I think and we are being pushed into a bottle neck of actually a miserable job". (Susan, lines: 22-25 & 33-35)

Participants argued that teachers are trying to get as many children as possible at a certain level. Failing to do that will have a negative impact on school results and this is a great cause of stress for them, particularly for Year 6 teachers: *I don't like what I have become as a teacher possibly because of pressure from above... So that's really the main reason why I don't like them...because the tests themselves were not a big issue but it is what they do with them, you know, the results"* (Susan, lines: 41-45). This illustrates the pressures of accountability.

Ellie spoke about test result and the impact they have on performance management: *"everything is so results based and if they don't get a certain percentage of children to be passing at the level that they are supposed to be passing, then obviously that affects their entire performance management. So yes, I think that there's a secondary stress about their whole livelihoods and themselves and their careers". (Ellie, lines: 74-78)*

Donna spoke further about the feeling of being judged: *“I was in a four form... we all did our SATs and then when the results came in it was almost like a measure of what type of teacher you were, depending on the percentage...but actually it’s so...there are so many other factors...that it shouldn’t be.”* (Donna, lines: 31-35)

Participants reported that the Senior Leadership team (SLT) are under considerable pressure to meet national expectations, which will then determine the school’s position on league tables:

“I do think management feel the pressure a lot because ultimately, you know, if... the children in that Head’s school... are not meeting national expectations...they are under a lot of pressure from the council and things like that...so I wouldn’t want to be them (laughter)”. (Laura, lines: 69-73)

Others reported that members of SLT are feeling torn between numbers/statistics and keeping children’s stress at low levels: *“Umm...and then obviously being on the Senior Leadership Team there is...an overall awareness of data and results. So it’s like the two kind of flip sides of it, where there is a very kind of mathematical side where it’s all kind of the numbers of what we get and what that means for us as a school, but then also the very kind of human side and what that means for the children immediately”* (Kim, lines: 47-52)

The pressure on teachers is resulting in high staff turnover, Susan reported: *“I think for younger teachers that’s a real issue... I think we are going to lose really good people because they won’t want to do it anymore.”* (Susan, lines: 105-106)

4.3.3.2 Subtheme CQ2b: Difficulties school staff face during SATs

Participants argued that often there is a need for intense teaching to fill in gaps from previous years. Sarah reported: *“so I find them err the pace of umm teaching really intense... expect the kids to know... and if they don’t that’s quite stressful because there’s obviously gaps umm in their learning ...essentially the*

expectation is that I make up the curriculum they have missed as well as the Year 6 curriculum. So for some children you are expecting them to make up 2½ years worth of progress” (Sarah, lines: 6-8 & 24-27)

Sarah reported that she was upset about how the volume of work prevents teachers from offering emotional support to children: *“you don’t necessarily have the time after lunch to spend 10 minutes with a child who is upset because someone said something in the playground.” (Sarah, lines: 345-347)*

Support staff reported that one of the difficulties they face is that often they have to learn alongside children as they have been taught in different ways and that adds to their pressure. Karen stated: *“I was taught completely differently. So for me to try and help the children... I have got to sit in the lesson and learn along with them... So I think that’s the hardest part.” (Karen, lines: 16-18)*

Laura reported that anxiety from teachers and children is impacting on support staff: *“support staff pick up on the anxieties from teachers and from the children... in the SATs that we have just had, a lot of the support staff came out saying how tough it was...because the children would be sat there crying, saying that they can’t do it...begging for help...and they can’t do anything”.* (Laura, lines: 84-87)

Many participants found it quite difficult to balance reassuring children, while at the same time preparing them about SATs, highlighting how important they are: *“even though I can try and reassure them, they still have to sit the test...they still have to sit it in those conditions... they are still going to get a score and compare themselves to other people...that I can’t take away any...I can’t remove that”.* (Maria, lines: 102-105)

School staff reported that they try not to project their own stress on the children, as Ellie stated: *“I don’t think that... it’s helpful if you are all stressed out... and look like you can’t manage it and like it’s really overwhelming for you, how can you instil confidence in them” (Ellie, lines: 46-49)*

School staff also reported that they feel “burnt out” after the SATs and find it difficult to support children with transition activities and making lessons fun. Sarah reports: *“I find it hard to...to teach in this term ... I feel like I have given all that I could give and now, because it’s the transition term I have got to make it really fun and I have got to do all this great like stuff... it’s the weight of the workload...and doing it sustainably for the whole year to give the children the best. And because I demand that of myself it’s hard...”* (Sarah, lines: 224-227)

4.3.3.3 Subtheme CQ2c: School staff supporting Year 6 are feeling higher levels of pressure compared to other year groups

Year 6 school staff reported that they are feeling more pressure compared to the school staff from other years. Holly reported: *“I have taught in a range of year groups...you don’t have that pressure in other year groups...which isn’t really fair. I think most of it the pressure is on the Year 6 teacher”.* (Holly, lines: 43-46)

However, other year teachers reported that they are also pressured during SATs as they feel some responsibility for having taught the children in previous years. Laura, stated: *“and then there’s the worry that, you know, at the end of the year...if you are saying that they are not meeting where they should be...then the teacher next year either has to pick up on... and they can’t and then you are failing the children and the teacher next year”.* (Laura, lines: 55-60)

Some participants reported that they feel resentful for different reasons, Sarah stated: *“I can feel resentful that [other teachers]... they have an easier deal ...but they can feel resentful that Year 6 seems to be the most important and all the resource then goes in to Year 6. So there’s a sort of a double-edged sword I think in that sense.”* (Sarah, lines: 60-63)

4.3.3.4 Subtheme CQ2d: Personal investment of school staff

Many participants reported they feel personally invested in ensuring children perform well in SATs: Laura reported: *“I think sometimes that it might feel like a*

bit of a blow to those support staff because they do work really hard to try and get the children to a place where they can umm...and yes, sometimes they are not able to.” (Laura, lines: 78-81)

Some school staff reported that they are protective of their children and feel helpless when they cannot make the SATs a better experience for them. Kim stated: *“I think amongst the staff we all feel a bit like...protective...because we are concerned about how stressed they are going to be and umm...and very mindful of the fact that they are 11”.* (Kim, lines: 43-45)

Some teachers reported that they are stressed about the unpredictability of children's performance in SATs: *“there’s some children that perform very differently to how you expect...that’s always a real worry...have they slipped through the net...why?”* (Susan, lines: 49-51). They are worried that they didn't support them efficiently or identified difficulties earlier.

4.3.4 Theme 3: Impact of testing on the wider school

4.3.4.1 Subtheme CQ34a: Budget cuts have put a lot of pressure on schools

Participants highlighted that funding in recent years has decreased considerably, Sam reported: *“when SATs first began...there were SATs monies which were ring fenced which were for supply etc. to take people out of...you know...their normal day to day work in order to support children on a one-to-one or small group levels...more group situations...but that’s not funded extra anymore”.* (Sam, lines: 486-490)

Maya also reported that this reduced funding is having a negative impact on early prevention and identification: *“children are being flagged later then... so there is no early intervention... it’s a battle to make sure that those children get... their plans are put in place early.. Because you are having to prioritise on meagre budgets”.* (Maya, lines: 627-630)

Laura stated that funding generally goes for academic support rather than ensuring children feel happy and safe: *“the priority generally is towards academic support umm...which obviously is really important but I do have the mindset of, you know, if children aren’t happy and they don’t feel safe then they aren’t going to learn... So I do think it should be a priority that children”*. (Laura, lines: 213-218)

Others argued that budget cuts have reduced the involvement of professional agencies, with Maya reporting that: *“they have cut school umm budgets ridiculously to the bone... So lots of support that children...would not be readily available...speech and language, educational psychology, language and communication support umm...behavioural support/teachers”*. (Maya, lines: 622-625)

4.3.4.2 Subtheme CQ34b: SATs affect the whole school because of organisational requirements

There was a sense amongst most participants that the SATs impact school wide organisation; Anna stated: *“it purveys the whole school...because you are removing adults from other classes to help administer the tests... So it’s a... big event on the school calendar”*. (Anna, lines: 53-56)

Kim reported that *“everybody is really aware when the exams are happening that nobody leaves their classroom until a message goes round ...because you don’t want to make a lot of noise and you don’t want to disturb them because they are in different places around the building”*. (Kim, lines: 75-79)

4.3.4.3 Subtheme CQ34c: School staff collaboration and working with other schools

Participants reported that there is close collaboration between school staff. Jenni stated: *“we work with each other...we talk to each other when we are concerned about certain children ...we do talk to each other about tips or strategies”*. (Jenni, lines: 152-153)

Ellie talked about how school policy can help promote collaboration between school staff: *“I know that we as a school have a real policy that if we see any children that we think are vulnerable or going through a difficult stage, we will really highlight that to one another... So we are always constantly checking in with one another to know that everybody is on the same page and understanding”*. (Ellie, lines: 340-344)

School staff also reported close collaboration with pastoral staff and SLT, Maria stated: *“we have a learning mentor who I work closely with regarding the children...who experience anxiety or who are vulnerable... so I will talk to her like...as and when needed”*. (Maria, lines: 176-178). Laura reported that *“if there were any worries about children that particularly stood out for having such anxiety then I would always speak to the senior leadership”*. (Laura, lines: 257-258)

Participants reported that they do not work closely with other schools due to time constraints and budget cuts. Maya stated that *“there’s less of that now because of the cuts. So, yes...people haven’t got time. People are under pressure. Schools are under pressure... and you have to make a concerted effort I would say now...to keep in touch with schools and what’s happening in schools”*. (Maya, lines: 670-673)

Other participants highlighted that although it is useful to share knowledge on test anxiety with other schools, it may not be appropriate to work with them to support individual children, as Christine stated: *“we do a lot of work with our cluster schools on umm English, Maths, whatever, but I think we feel that we know our children best... I think... we need to be quite careful about that...because what works for us isn’t necessarily going to work for the school down the road”*. (Christine, lines: 132-134 & 143-144)

4.3.4.4 Subtheme CQ34d: School wide interventions and systemic considerations

Most participants stated that they have not come across a school wide intervention for test anxiety, Holly reported: *“no...we don't have a precise intervention...we identify children that we think would benefit from additional support”*. (Holly, lines: 145-146)

Sarah stated that the approach they use *“seems to be reactionary... it'd be good... catching them younger... I think they get too far along the umm the school... before someone realises actually something is quite badly wrong here”*. (Sarah, lines: 242-246)

Maya reported that currently there is less time for reflection and planning at a school level: *“I think there is less opportunity for professional dialogue or...reflecting on practice... how are we going to go about doing that umm as a team...as a school”*. (Maya, lines: 695-696 & 700)

Sam argued that if test anxiety is a persistent issue within a school, questions need to be asked on a systemic level as to why this is happening: *“unless of course there was a chronic problem within the school where there was an excessive amount of anxiety when that might then be...some question being asked about the way in which things are delivered in school”*. (Sam, lines: 460-463)

4.4 Sub-question 1: What strategies and interventions help school staff identify and support children with test anxiety?

4.4.1 Thematic map: Sub-question 1



Figure 2. Map of themes constructed to understand the strategies and interventions which help school staff identify and support children with test anxiety.

4.4.2 Theme SQ1.1: Identification of children with test anxiety

4.4.2.1 Subtheme SQ1.1a: Physical symptoms/body language

Participants reported that children with test anxiety displayed different physical symptoms and that they could identify anxious children by their body language. Jenni reported: *“well they are looking for umm...like eye contact with an adult sometimes... you see that they want to ask something... Sometimes it’s just a normal nervous thing of shaking their legs under the table, playing with their pencil and err...you just see that they are not focused on...the paper but looking around the class or just...trying to see how far other peers around them...”* (Jenni, lines: 108-112)

4.4.2.2 Subtheme SQ1.1b: Emotional responses/changes in children's behaviour

Many participants reported that before SATs they can see changes in children's behaviour with emotional responses and outbursts: *“I would say oversensitivity in other areas so, you know, if you’ve had a disagreement in the playground... something small but they take it really serious, you know, it’s a very dramatic reaction”*. (Kim, lines: 177-180) Ellie argued that some children display some aggressive behaviours while others can be fearful as a result test anxiety: *“You are going to maybe see some aggression, you are maybe going to see fear”*. (Ellie, lines: 105-106)

There is usually a peak of anxiety in the run up to and during the SATs; Donna reported: *“I just feel like it’s bubbly...boys in Year 6 I kind of feel ...any minute now could bubble over in terms of their emotions and they are crying easily or squabbling with each other...and the girls are quite anxious...I think probably a lot of them”*. (Donna, lines: 13-17)

Others reported that anxious children tend to approach school staff more often than they used to and/or they tend to display attention seeking behaviours: *“I have experienced another child who was just after me for extra questions and*

extra homework, and I know they haven't got a homework book. Can I have some homework and can I do this and can you check that and can you see this? So it's the... two extremes...in one sense total shutting down and then massive attention seeking". (Anna, lines: 115-119)

4.4.2.3 Subtheme SQ1.1c: Procrastination and avoidance strategies

Some children engage in avoidance strategies and procrastination when they are feeling anxious or stressed about tests, Maya reported: *"lots of the children procrastinate...so they...may be time wasters actually. It's sort of avoidance strategies ...instead of being on task". (Maya, lines:270-273)*

Sarah talked about disengagement as a defense mechanism: *" some who disengaged and had kind of presented with reluctance with a bit of an attitude towards them...more like, 'I don't even really care about them anyway' probably as a defence mechanism and that if I don't care then it doesn't matter if I don't do well". (Sarah, lines: 116-120)*

4.4.2.4 Subtheme SQ1.1d: Children worried about making mistakes/confidence issues

Participants reported that often children who experience anxious feelings about the SATs, are worried about making mistakes, Laura reported: *"They get really worried if they get things wrong, you know, sometimes they will come up and say, 'Can I do that again... because I was in a huff'... some of the children won't write anything for fear of getting things wrong". (Laura, lines: 24-26 & 155-156)*

Children may shut down and become withdrawn, Anna stated: *"others can get ...extremely quiet... and become quite introverted... A non-willingness to even talk about what is happening...just a shutting down...essentially". (Anna, lines: 12-13 & 114-115)*

Some participants argued that some children with test anxiety lack in confidence. Holly reported *“you can watch them...approaching a problem and they are just going round in circles when you have seen them do it umm in a straight forward way before. They are kind of...questioning themselves when they wouldn't normally...because of the pressure”*. (Holly, lines: 99-102)

However, Ellie stated that some children appear overconfident to compensate for any worries they may have about tests: *“they might not always display in like a fearful way... they might have almost like an overconfidence where they are trying to ... to almost like bridge the deficit I guess and sort of...like fake it... I think that a lot of people can tend to do that where they want to overcompensate and try and make sure that everybody else views them in a certain way”*. (Ellie, lines: 137-142)

4.4.2.5 Subtheme SQ1.1e: Feedback from parents and teachers

Children are sometimes reluctant to speak to school staff about any anxious feelings they may have in relation to the SATs so in these cases parents play a key role in communicating with the school. Kim reported: *“they might express a lot more at home...their parents might be coming in and saying as well, you know... ‘They have mentioned that they are worried about this when they are at home and they don't feel comfortable sharing that at school’. So it's a lot to do with the kind of home-school dynamic”*. (Kim, lines: 187-191)

Children with emotional needs who, in previous years, found different aspects of school life difficult and anxiety provoking, would be monitored by school staff. Kim reported: *“so it wouldn't be they are identified in Year 6, it would be a build-up of what they have shown throughout from what we know. Umm...so often children who do work with ‘X’ (Learning mentor) already ...who have kind of more emotional needs...get easily upset by things or are very anxious about change umm...or have kind of extenuating family circumstances. Umm those kind of children are the ones that we'd monitor and be...and have things in place before they get to Year 6”*. (Kim, lines: 166-171)

4.4.3 Theme SQ1.2: Difficulties supporting children with test anxiety

4.4.3.1 Subtheme SQ1.2a: Negative attitude to learning/internalising

Some children have a negative attitude to learning and find it difficult to change their mindset. Karen reported that *“it makes it difficult because there are some children who take the attitude that if they can’t get it, they are never going to get it”*. (Karen, lines: 125-126)

Ellie argued that some children are internalising difficulties: *“maybe internalising ...anything that is going to... pierce into that layer of vulnerability I think...you are going to see... anxious behaviour... Instead of going, ‘Oh, I don’t know that question, I am going to move on’... they are going to really let that get to them”*. (Ellie, lines: 102-104 & 121-123)

Others reported that previous experience of failure can make children even more anxious about SATs: Ellie argued: *“particularly if in... previous exams they have experienced a failure... you can kind of see... who is going to fall into that category of vulnerability...”*. (Ellie, lines: 116-119)

4.4.3.2 Subtheme SQ1.2b: Children may refuse help

Many participants reported that one of the greatest difficulties supporting children is that they may refuse help. Maya reported: *“Some children are like always, ‘I am okay’...you can see they are not okay, but ‘I am okay’ means I am... very closed and you can’t force it then, you know. You have to say that ‘I am here’ and maybe go about it in an indirect way”*. (Maya, lines: 393-396)

Ellie argued children can also be defensive: *“If you try and enter into their space and provide them with a series of solutions they can often at times be really defensive and really block it away”*. (Ellie, lines: 207-209)

Sarah talked about cases where children are in school environments where they fear to ask questions: *“then another part of it is detrimental because they*

fear asking for help I guess because they think, 'Oh maybe she has taught this just yesterday and I didn't listen and she is going to...' you know. So that's definitely a barrier to support". (Sarah, lines: 220-223)

4.4.3.3 Subtheme SQ1.2c: Unsupportive or overpowering parents

Parents that are unsupportive (e.g. not offering any emotional or practical support) or overpowering (e.g. setting unrealistic targets) can have a huge impact on the way children feel about SATs, Holly argued: *"and it's hard when you know that... there's such a spread of support at home... and you want to say that the person next to you is doing really well because...their mum sits down for an hour a night and helps them and ...we can offer you an hour a week". (Holly, lines: 128-131)*

Donna spoke about the pressure that sometimes parents put on children to perform well: *"I think some of them have got pressure from home...like, 'You have to do well in your SATs'... There are certain families, especially culturally, that they will have had a lot of sort of pressure on them to make sure they get the grades". (Donna, lines: 126-129)*

Sometimes stories children hear from their siblings can add to their stress, Kim reported: *"messages that come... from older siblings... don't always help...and those often are the strongest messages... I was sitting on the bus and I heard a girl talking to her older sister about the SATS and her sister was like, 'Well, if you don't do this, then when you get to Year 7 they are just going to say that you are stupid'..." (Kim, lines: 237-242). Kim also thought that it is difficult for schools to change these messages: *"it's always going to be hard for us to change that rhetoric". (Kim, lines: 242)**

Other times outside of school events can have an impact on children, Maya reported:

"It might be something... in their personal life... may have suffered a bereavement or something... and it's all coincided... if the child has had a crisis...for example we have just had like in London...we have had bombings,

we have had Grenfell...all of these things. We had a child...a young person that went and sat her exams straight after the Grenfell Tower..." (Maya, lines: 147-150 & 155-158)

4.4.3.4 Subtheme SQ1.2d: Time pressure

Other participants raised the issue of time pressure. Sarah talked about how time pressure limits school staff ability to effectively support children with test anxiety and wider mental health difficulties:

"...the thing about supporting children with mental health difficulties is time and it's investment... and it's very difficult in Year 6 to have the time to really give to a child needing it...and that's why it's good to have other people on staff to be able to refer children to them like, 'Right, you are experiencing some anxiety, I would love to send you to this person to have a chat about that'. ideally that would be my job and I would have time for that because that's really important to me and that's what I want to value, but I don't think the system allows for it." (Sarah, lines: 331-339)

4.4.3.5 Subtheme SQ1.2e: Changes within the school

Changes taking place within the school could make supporting children with test anxiety more difficult, Kim reported: *"things don't always go to plan, things change... and for children who are anxious... when there's a change it just kind of makes it worse"*. (Kim, lines: 232-235)

Sarah also talked about the effects of the high staff turnover within inner city London schools: *"they are transient...I am not around next year to fill in the teacher... and what they struggled with or what they did well with"*. (Sarah, lines: 251 & 255-257)

4.4.4 Theme SQ1.3: Helpful approaches, strategies and interventions

4.4.4.1 Subtheme SQ1.3a: Learning strategies, booster groups and practising past papers

Participants reported that advance preparation, mock exams and practising past papers have been helpful approaches. Jenni reported: *“if tests are practiced through the year, they know how it feels and how the whole process is happening and I think it knocks off the stress then”*. (Jenni, lines: 38-40)

Kim argued that *“the fact that they have the kind of mock week, not only is it good for the teachers... indicative of where everybody is, but it’s good for them to be like, ‘Ah, so this is where I am going to be sitting and this is the adult that I will be able to...ask questions to and this is what it’s going to feel like to then be working in complete silence’...”* (Kim, lines: 225-229)

Some participants mentioned the use of technology to support children with test anxiety, Anna stated: *“I believe it’s umm...you can track your heart beat on an iPad? You see it clips on to their earlobe just to make children aware of their breathing”*. (Anna, lines: 169-172) Maya reported: *“a little doodle pad to the side of them, you know We use voice recorders as well so that they can speak in to the little voice recorders and hear it back...you know hear their own voice back”*. (Maya, lines: 449-451)

Revision/ booster groups have also proved effective when supporting children: *“We do booster groups that are subject specific led by...like myself and the Head led a group each...this year after school...of specific children who...it was an anxiety issue rather than a...ability issue”*. (Holly, lines: 146-149)

Maria stated that for children *“who are lower down...we’ll give like extra sessions during assembly on spellings or like key Maths skills... to give them that intervention... which I think does boost their confidence”*. (Maria, lines: 121-124)

Revision strategies/Interventions Teacher

Participants reported that revision strategies and practising timings help children with test anxiety. Maya reported that it is *“revision strategies...really help them... if they don't know a question, don't sit there...to move on... so they are sort of coached through all of that ...we hope that they have got enough strategies so that actually I know what to do in this situation”*. (Maya, lines: 602-606)

Susan also argued that *“one of the main things that they learn is about getting used to timings... which are the questions to focus on and which are the ones to not worry about. Lots of strategies about not sticking with one question, to move on... Not worrying necessarily about finishing every question but look really at the points allotted”*. (Susan, lines: 115-120)

Intervention teachers can give children additional support and assist Year 6 teachers with SATs preparation. Susan reported: *“I mean we have got this year an extra teacher in Year 6... that person has helped them... she's given that extra nurture because there are only about eight of them”* (Susan, lines: 358-362). Sarah also stated: *“throughout the year I have had like an interventions teacher that's been given to Year 6... and so I think that's really helped me. Umm...in one way because she is another brain”*. (Sarah, lines: 75-78)

Working Memory Groups

The usefulness of working memory groups was also highlighted, Maya reported: *“I also do working memory [groups] which is very, very good for children who are... going to sit tests. So working memory workshops also help them umm... and I noticed they are less anxious about the SATs”*. (Maya, lines: 60-62)

4.4.4.2 Subtheme SQ1.3b: Pastoral support to promote well-being

Many participants talked about the importance of offering pastoral support and mentoring as well as actively checking with children. Kim reported: *“X's role as*

a learning mentor is really key because she can support specific children really well and give them strategies to cope, and also give them a kind of...a release and a place where they can be comfortable to talk about how they are feeling". (Kim, lines: 197-200)

School staff need to be approachable and to actively check with children, Maya stated: *"making sure as well that I am aware...and I have got sort of my radar on...(chuckles) on alert and I am checking and I am scanning for any children that may be struggling with the SATS period".* (Maya, lines: 50-52)

Likewise, Laura reported *"I...have an open door policy with our children that they feel they can always talk to me...and I would like to think that...they feel that... I am approachable".* (Laura, lines: 244-246)

Participants argued that giving children chances to be successful in other areas helps promote well-being, Anna reported: *"giving them the chance to be successful in other areas. We have a great artist in Year 6 at the moment and he was one who initially shut down and then became very needy and yes...he needed to get back to his art...like he needed to feel that there was something that he was good at...So it was kind of giving that time as well as asking for the focus on the literacy and the Maths".* (Anna, lines: 142-146)

Downplaying the tests also helps reduce some of the anxiety, Holly stated *"I mean we do keep re-emphasising that it's err it's a test of the school, not the child... if they are feeling anxious we would just re-emphasise...you know...and it's just about the opportunity to make progress but that's it...it's a snapshot".* (Holly, lines: 112-116)

Early intervention is also a key element in promoting well-being, Sarah argued: *"it has started to happen in Year 1. There is a lot more like...people flagging up issues and saying, 'This child needs some help and stuff'".* (Sarah, lines: 247-249)

Encouragement and letting children know that there is extra help if they need it has also been reported as a helpful approach in ensuring wellbeing, Karen reported: *“it’s lots of encouragement, extra help... I mean just letting them know that the support is there if they need it...and the teachers and the staff are all here to support them”*. (Karen, lines: 107-109)

Rewarding activities to break the preparation is very important, Maria stated: *“in the lead up to the SATs on a Friday afternoon we would go up to the heath to have some play time... to let off some steam for their hard work in the week...because I do recognise they are working really hard”*. (Maria, lines: 134-137)

4.4.4.3 Subtheme SQ1.3c: Calming strategies, meditation and breathing exercises

Meditation and breathing exercises are effective calming strategies, Sarah reported *“we would also do lots of breathing exercises and relaxation. We just played this Brian Eno... and let them relax and do some deep breathing... We did that before the SATs as well so that they came into a space of quite calm ...some kids really draw in breath and some kids who didn’t really care. So those ones that were...really engaging I sort of thought they were obviously experiencing more worry about it as well”*. (Sarah, lines: 156-165)

Having a quiet area and regular breaks also help children, Maya reported: *“we had a chill out room at lunch time where the Year 6’s could...come in and go out freely...and then on each wall we had a talking wall where they would just literally just scrawl their thoughts... but also... it gave me an opportunity to see... who was frequenting the chill out room as well”*. (Maya, lines: 159-165)

Lisa talked about the importance of having breaks: *“you know a lot of children I think they need movement breaks, water breaks... they need to stretch. I do believe in all that instead of just sitting there rigid for however long...especially the child I work with...because she can’t concentrate for that long”*. (Lisa, lines: 205-209)

4.4.4.4 Subtheme SQ1.3d: Whole class and small groups to promote resilience and change mindsets

Whole class

Utilising PSHE lessons to talk about feelings around SATs and Philosophy for Children (P4C) have all proved helpful in supporting children with test anxiety, Maria reported: *" I do a lot of PSHE work with my class on, you know, how you can manage your feelings about the SATs and other stressful times... Yes, so I would talk about managing emotions during stressful times and what you can do to help yourself...what you can do to help a friend"*. (Maria, lines, 42-44 & 131-132)

Holly talked the importance of resilience and positive attitude towards making mistakes: *"I mean we are not like a growth mindset school... but we do very much think about, you know, resilience, good mistakes and things like that. I think that's a massive area that we all need to think further about"*. (Holly, lines: 178-182)

Kim spoke about philosophy for children: *"philosophy for children... it's not really to do with the exams specifically but... a child's general confidence in class to share their ideas and their thoughts and speak and to be listened to and to be part of the community and I think that could be really beneficial"*. (Kim, lines, 299-302)

Small groups

Small groups are effective in supporting children with test anxiety and promoting resilience, Maya reported: *"they feel safe in a small resilience group setting and then we shift that...and we review that again... has that translated into the whole class now? Is this child doing better...?"* (Maya, lines: 537-539)

Christine talked about assertiveness skills groups: *"but we run also assertiveness skills groups for 12 of our kids and it...it's a big thing in that*

group. *What do you do when you are feeling anxious about the test? Tell us what your worries are...that kind of thing*". (Christine, lines: 63-65)

4.4.4.5 Subtheme SQ1.3e: Supporting children during and post SATs week

During SATs week support

Participants have identified different strategies to support children during the SATs week, Jenni reported: *"I'm trying to keep them calm by saying if they don't know how to answer a question...just move on to the next page... always do questions that you can answer and then you go back to the ones that you left out"*. (Jenni, lines: 119-122)

Sam argued that for children with more severe anxiety, it is better to take their tests in a quieter space with guidance: *"they need...basically to be removed from the situation... there's much more likelihood of them performing well... if they are not being assessed in the whole class situation...when they are away in a quieter space...in a smaller room... with a sort of one-to-one guidance or small group"*. (Sam, lines: 240-244)

Children with SEN may need additional preparation and arrangements, Lisa reported: *"we will need a movement break, you know. We might go and bounce a ball, we might take a walk around the school, we might just do some stretches on the spot ...and then possibly before an exam maybe prepping the children... Just let them know that... it's okay to feel nervous"*. (Lisa, lines: 210-215)

Post SATs support

Participants argued that it is important to talk to the children about test results, try to put them into perspective and to highlight that they are just a snapshot and may not be a true representation of their abilities. Sam reported: *"for those that have disappointed themselves and are aware of it, then really it is putting it in perspective really... I say, 'Well...we will just put into context with the teacher assessment that I am going to provide you. That doesn't match your general level of work ... The information that your secondary school gets from me about*

your general performance will clearly indicate that that is not a true representation in my opinion". (Sam, lines: 270-279)

Anna also talked about reassuring children: "we try and explain it to the children... 'This piece of paper doesn't reflect you...'. 'We want it to present you in a way that shows how great you are, but we know it's not the whole you.' How much they all...they take that on board it, you know, varies from child to child". (Anna, lines: 67-70)

4.4.4.6 Subtheme SQ1.3f: Working closely with parents

Participants stressed the importance of working closely with parents to support children with test anxiety: "parents offer...key information about home which you wouldn't necessarily have access to and... they can then support the work that you are doing. So I think it's really important to have parents on board...especially when there's anxiety, because they can do a lot of the talking keeping that...dialogue open ...the kids trust their parents the most". (Maya, lines, 300-305)

Jenni spoke about how children can behave differently at home: "but I think it would be helpful as well if umm parents would come back with something like what they experience umm...how their child behaves or what makes them feel stressed, what makes them feel more comfortable or relaxed. Because umm loads of children behave differently at home". (Jenni, lines: 191-194)

Kim talked about the importance of children receiving consistent messages from school and home: "I think it's about having that relationship with home because umm...because it's so important that they are not getting confusing messages about why they are doing these exams. Umm...and also so that the parents know how they can support them without making them feel under pressure". (Kim, lines: 191-194)

4.5 Sub-question 2: Do school staff feel competent to support children with test anxiety?

4.5.1 Thematic Map: Sub-question 2

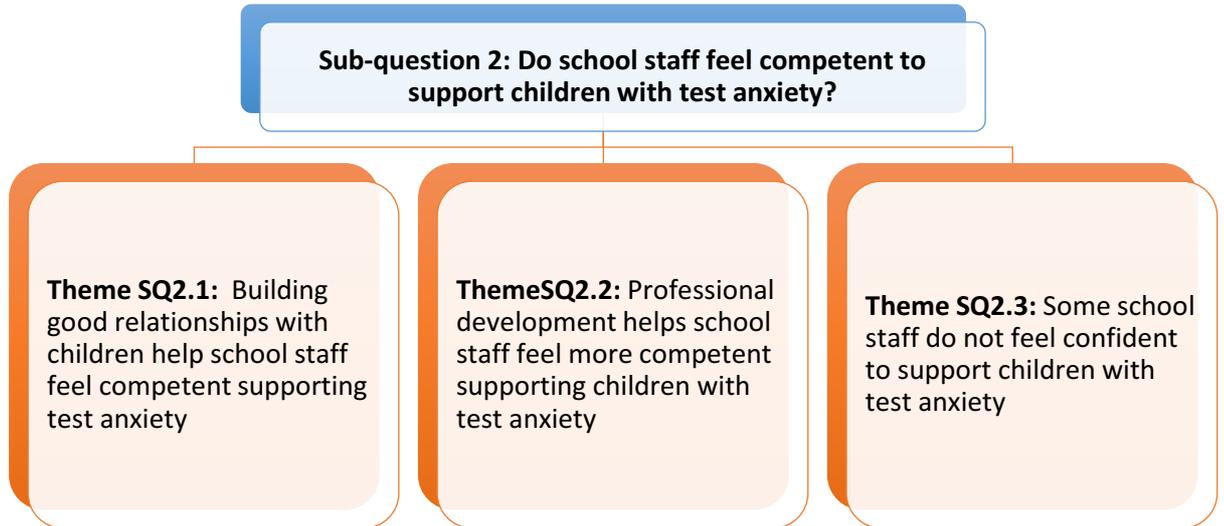


Figure 3. Map of themes constructed to illustrate whether school staff feel competent to support children who display test anxiety.

4.5.2 Theme SQ2.1: Building good relationships with children help school staff feel competent supporting test anxiety

It was argued by a few participants that they feel competent to support children with test anxiety only because of the relationship that they have built with the children and the number of years they have worked supporting them, Jenni stated: *"I do feel confident within the class because I have been working with the same children, same group of children for seven years, so I know them how...they have changed and...their weaknesses and their strengths...which helps"*. (Jenni, lines: 220-223)

Anna reported that she had concerns about whether children will be receiving the same support when they move to secondary schools: *"I think that's because*

it's based on our relationship...which we get to have in primary school as well... I am conscious that in secondary school they don't". (Anna, lines: 217-219)

4.5.3 ThemeSQ2. 2: Professional development helps school staff feel more competent supporting children with test anxiety

A few participants argued that they feel competent but only because of their own reading and further education, Ellie reported: *"I have never received any type of literature or anything like that. Everything that I have done has been either from my own prior knowledge or my experience or just as interactions on things that I have independently read". (Ellie, lines: 376-378)*

Sarah reported that she used her own initiative to develop her competent: *"myself went back and did a year of like counselling and sort of ...processing stuff which I think equipped me... to understand what's happening for people... comfort people or allow them to express themselves. So probably yes, but that's been on my own initiative". (Sarah, lines: 378-382)*

A few participants reported that a training course that they attended on mental health offered by the local authority helped them develop their confidence and understanding of mental health: Sam reported: *"I have actually been recently...on mental health training...identifying mental health issues with, you know, in young children...umm which reinforced and well enhanced my awareness of difficulties that children can have" (Sam, lines: 356-359). Donna mirrored these views: "I have been on mental health ...courses. I have done one...and the deputy head also did it with me umm... So that was...helpful". (Donna, lines: 206-208)*

4.5.4 Theme SQ2.3: Some school staff do not feel confident to support children with test anxiety

Other participants felt less confident supporting test anxiety, Anna stated: *"I don't always have a solution...you know they might be like, 'Well I am feeling really sad today, what can I do about?' and I only have suggestions okay...I*

don't actually know what should be done or, you know, what's been proven to help (Laura, lines: 188-191). Anna also argued that not having the right knowledge is a barrier to supporting children effectively and added: *"so yes... I am really conscious that teachers, I know this may not be what you need, but I am just really conscious that teachers end up doing a watered down version of what a specialist knows"*. (Anna, lines: 193-195)

Christine talked about how teacher training courses do not adequately prepare teachers to deal with mental health issues and support children with test anxiety: *"on a general basis I don't know whether typical teacher training prepares teachers for that..."*. (Christine, lines: 124-125)

Maria talked about the lack of training and the focus being on attainment: *"I haven't had any particular training to do with supporting children during exams... it's always been focused on getting them to hit the targets rather than helping them manage their emotions around it. It's always very like attainment focused..."* (Maria, lines: 192-196). Christine reported: *"I think definitely more needs to be done on training teachers because it is very dependent on how empathetic a teacher is and it shouldn't. There should be clear guidelines for how to support children"*. (Christine, lines: 127-128)

4.6 Sub-question 3: Sub-question 3: What would help school staff develop their confidence and understanding of test anxiety?

4.6.1 Thematic Map: Sub-question 3

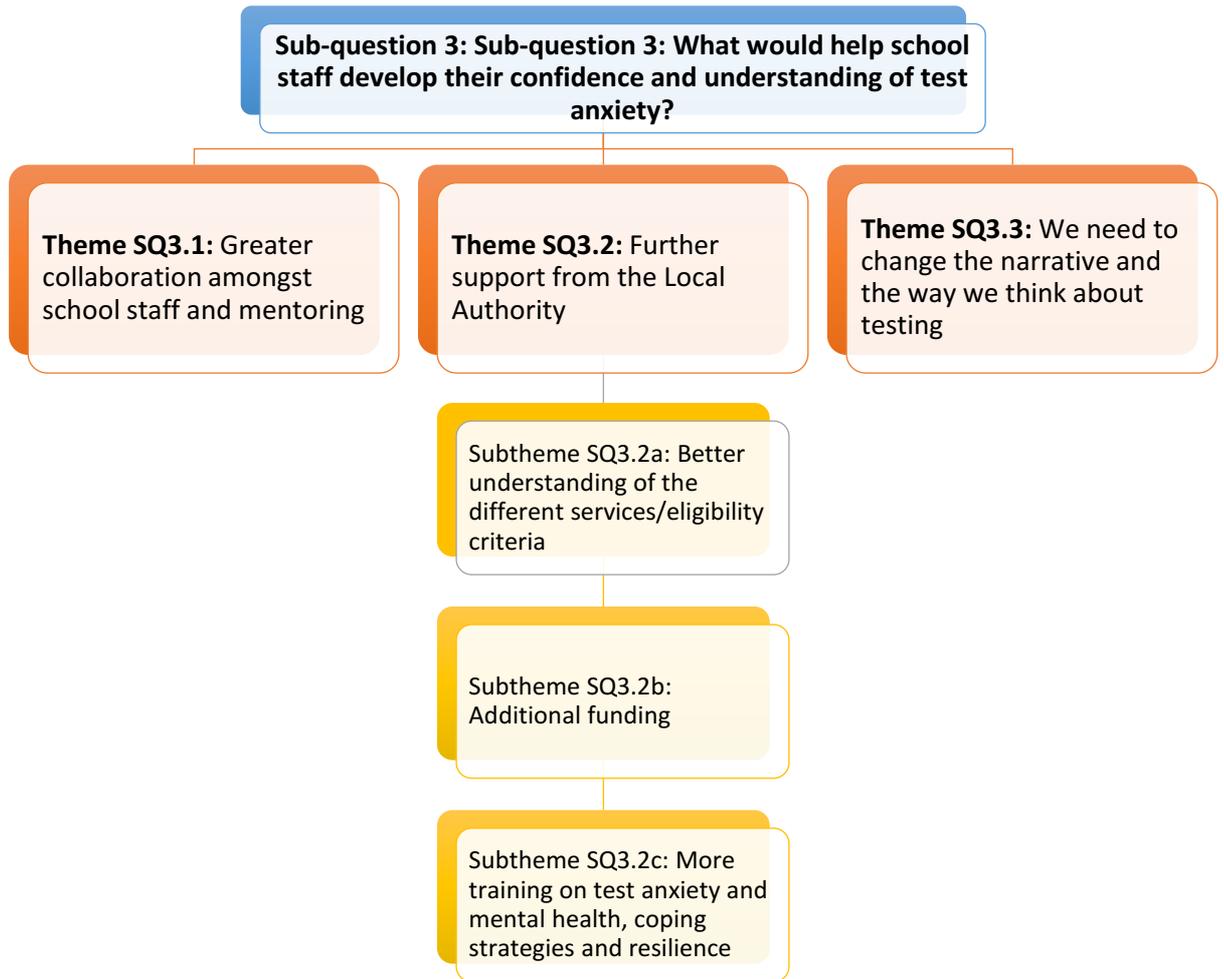


Figure 4. Map of themes constructed to illustrate what would help school staff develop their confidence and understanding of test anxiety.

4.6.2 Theme SQ3.1: Greater collaboration amongst school staff and mentoring

Participants would like to see greater collaboration amongst school staff, Sarah reported: *“planning days and things where you could look...like how do you*

debrief ... That would be great to have a collaborative website of the stuff that you could draw on for that...for that final term". (Sarah, lines: 392-395)

Participants argued that greater collaboration, better communication, more forums with other schools and sharing good practice would be helpful, Maya stated: *"it's important to have drivers and standards and also continuity across the board... So... a lot more linking up with other schools, which it used to be coming together...forums to share good practice/disseminate good practice". (Maya, lines: 822-825)*

Sarah also talked about collaboration with teachers in other schools: *"I think perhaps some sort of err again collaboration with other Year 6 teachers. Not just about moderation...not just about reading or Maths but about how to support children holistically...yes, that would be good" (Sarah, lines: 421-423).* Maria mirrored these views: *"I think it would be good to discuss with other more experienced Year 6 teachers about the culture in the classroom of making sure that children are pushing themselves to do their best". (Maria, lines: 199-201)*

Maya talked about the importance of mentoring: *"so that's where maybe things like mentoring will come in and dovetail and support that teacher to sort of alleviate some of that pressure and give the children that time that they need". (Maya, lines: 311-313)*

4.6.3 Theme SQ3.2: Further support from the Local Authority

4.6.3.1 Subtheme SQ3.2a: Better understanding of the different services/eligibility criteria

Participants would like to gain a better understanding of what the different services offer and their eligibility criteria, Ellie reported: *"well I know that there's a lot of services within X... But I think it would be... good to know exactly when those types of services can be implemented because often... you don't really know whether your child that might be stressed actually falls into that category ... for them to intervene". (Ellie, lines: 403-407)*

Ellie also reported that it would be helpful *“just knowing exactly what everybody does and having a very... clear structure of like... different initiatives that are available and maybe... different workshops... So it would be really good to have some type of ...I guess like informative booklet on just who everyone is, what everybody does and how we can access them”*. (Ellie, lines: 411-413 & 416-418)

Other participants talked about the need for more clarity on available training and interventions, Lisa stated: *“A bit more guidance... even booklets or, you know, where to go next... what to do...”*. (Lisa, lines: 324-326) Kim reported: *“I mean I have to say I don’t know what interventions are available...so I would like to know more about what we could be offering”*. (Kim, lines: 315-316)

4.6.3.2 Subtheme SQ3.2b: Additional funding

Most participants argued that having additional funding will increase their confidence and competence as they will be able to support children more effectively. Participants reported that there is not enough funding to cover for the adult support that children need, Holly stated: *“we need more people... That’s the biggest resource that... is most effective. You can give children one-to-one time... then that really helps them feel calmer about the situation”*. (Holly, lines: 164-167)

Participants also reported that they would like more funding for small group work, Sarah reported: *“I think small group things would have been great. Like to be able... to run... philosophy for children and... to be able to take them on experiences to show them that they are good at other things, you know, especially if they are not an academic person”*. (Sarah, lines: 358-361)

Others talked about more funding for resources, Maria reported: *“they are probably not adequate...especially for particularly vulnerable children”* (Maria, lines: 158-159). Maya also spoke about the need to purchase more resources: *“buying in resources...say for example you know, they say ‘Okay we need the*

latest version of Nessy Fingers'. 'Oh well we can't afford that...we will have to make do with what we have got'. You know all of these things put the children at a disadvantage...however...you still expect the children to attain highly".

(Maya, lines: 639-642)

4.6.3.3 Subtheme SQ3.2c: More training on test anxiety and mental health, coping strategies and resilience

Participants argued that mental health training is a very important area to gain more knowledge and understanding, Lisa reported: *"I think there's...always room for more training in mental health...always...there's just not the money at the moment... and I think all staff should...have more training in mental health. I think it's extremely important".* (Lisa, lines: 282-285)

Maya reported: *"putting mental health to the fore really... Because...I would say a happy child is a learning child... if a child is burdened down with worries and anxieties they are not going to be doing very well. So I feel that there needs to be a huge focus on empowering children and making sure that they have they've ...got a level of resilience as well... to carry them forward throughout their schooling and throughout life".* (Maya, lines: 826-832)

Others stated that training in preventative approaches, coping strategies and mindfulness would help them build school staff confidence when working with children with test anxiety, Laura reported: *"but things to do with, you know, mindfulness and coping strategies that the children could use. Because sometimes I think it's easy to sort of target and support the children who show these anxieties already, but there isn't that much support for the children to prevent the anxiety coming".* (Laura, lines: 305-308)

It was reported that it would be helpful to receive training that is delivered over a number of training sessions looking at real-life cases, Anna stated: *"would be looking at specific cases, so it didn't stay in the general but we could actually hone in on certain things...and maybe ones that had a bit of a follow up as well, so that, you know, first session there is a bit of an in between task to complete*

for the teachers...in thinking about one of their children...and then coming back to discuss it with a bit of evidence so it's more engaged, because otherwise it gets a bit fly-by-night". (Anna, lines: 311-316)

There were some concerns that school staff may be offered inadequate training with no follow-up support, Anna reported: *"my fear would also be, in the future, that we will be given a couple of training sessions and then teachers will be left to get on with it. In the way that we will be given, you know, prevent training and then somehow we are meant to identify err radicalisation, terrorism in school (chuckles) you know". (Anna, lines: 186-189)*

4.6.4 Theme SQ3.3: We need to change the narrative and the way we think about testing

Participants spoke about the need to have a mental shift in the way we think and talk about testing, Ellie reported: *"There needs to be some type of mental shift in the way that they are... coming into contact with the idea of testing... it's about tuning the wording before they approach a test and then after the test is finished... It's a lot of learnt behaviour over years and years and years that tests are kind of like a bad thing, whereas I think if the language associated with testing was changed a little bit, then I think that they would have a bit more of a positive response". (Ellie, lines: 10-13 & 16-18 & 30-31)*

Holly reported that we should not be so scared of tests and look for less daunting ways to approach them: *"So over the years I have seen actually some benefits to it that I didn't see before, and it has made me think slightly differently about testing and perhaps how we shouldn't be so scared of it and have shorter, more fun ways of doing it earlier in the school so it's less of a daunting ordeal". (Holly, lines: 23-26)*

Sam talked about the need to have resources that make the curriculum work: *"If all the focus is on making the curriculum good and providing resources that make the curriculum work...as opposed to providing resources for assessment, then... it reduces the emphasis...or lessens the stakes. So...for me ultimately it*

would make much more sense if national resourcing was put into actual teaching and learning and then sampling was done...of a fraction of schools each year...to show a national picture of performance and avoid the whole requirements of localised league tables which have ridiculous knock on affects...like house prices”. (Sam, lines: 424-431)

4.7 Sub-question 4: How can EPs help school staff support children who experience test anxiety?

4.7.1 Thematic Map: Sub-question 4

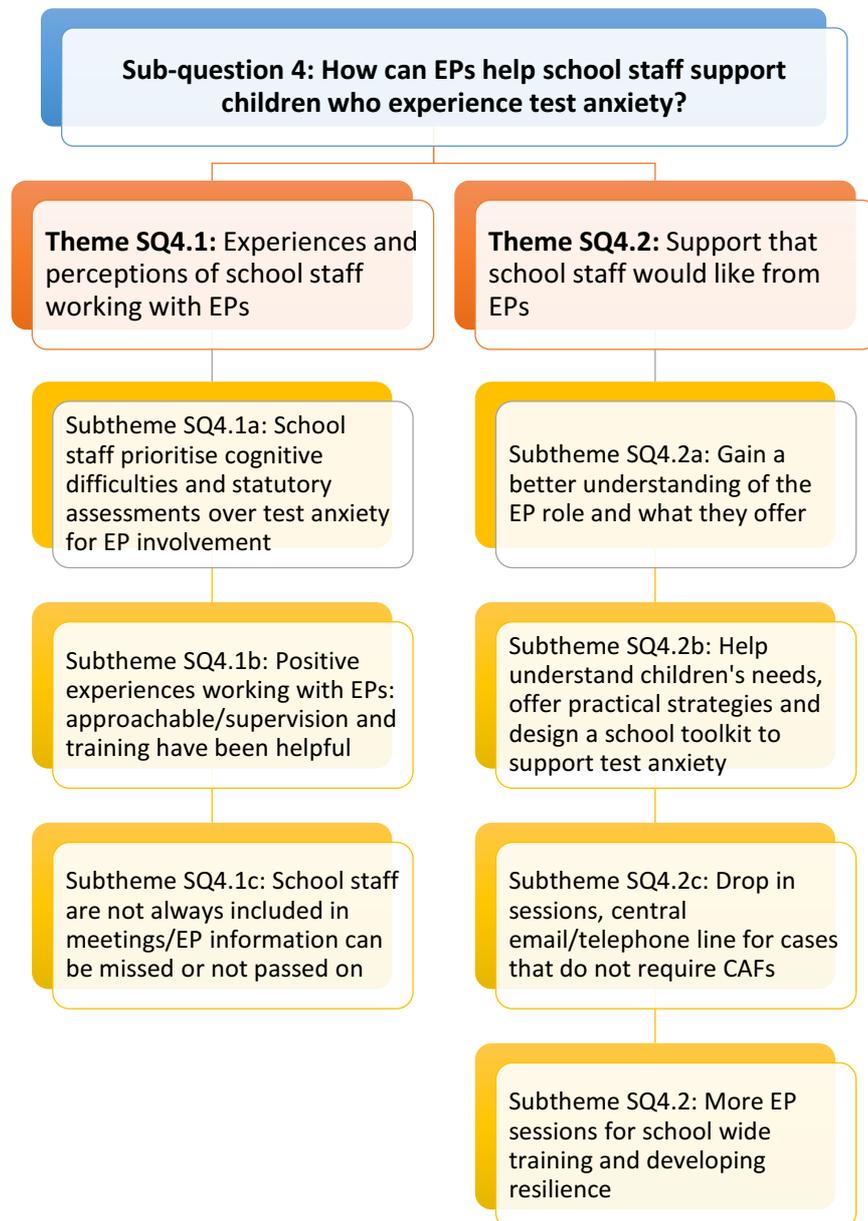


Figure 5. *Map of themes constructed to illustrate how can EPs help school staff support children who experience test anxiety.*

4.7.2 Theme SQ4.1: Experiences and perceptions of school staff working with EPs

4.7.2.1 Subtheme SQ4.1a: School staff prioritise cognitive difficulties and statutory assessments over test anxiety for EP involvement

Most of the participants reported that they tend to request EP involvement for children with cognitive difficulties rather than mental health issues. There was a perception that EPs do not cover the area of test anxiety. Susan reported: *“it’s not something I have used my ed psychs for actually really... I tend to keep the ed psych more with the educational side of things ... we have got a psychotherapist on...in house and umm we have got you guys”*. (Susan, lines: 332-333 & 336-337)

Maria stated that she would use EPs more for statutory assessment needs: *“I wouldn’t necessarily think of contacting an EP in that situation ...I would probably be trying to deal with it in school myself or talking to parents... I would probably see EPs as more dealing with children who have got like stated needs rather than maybe a need within a shorter period of time. I think that wouldn’t be something that I would consider necessarily”*. (Maria, lines: 213-218)

Others argued that the area of test anxiety is not seen as a priority for EP involvement, Holly reported: *“EP time would be consumed with kind of things higher up the priority list than that...but only because you would hope exam anxiety would be a short term...do you know what I mean?”* (Holly, lines: 238-240). Laura mirrored these views: *“to be honest I don’t really know of Ed Psychs being involved in...in supporting children in that way. I think perhaps it’s an area where it’s not seen as...a severity, you know, it’s not...it’s not a priority basically”*. (Laura, lines: 287-289)

4.7.2.2 Subtheme SQ4.1b: Positive experiences working with EPs: approachable/supervision and training have been helpful

Participants reported that they had a positive experience working with EPs and found them approachable. Maya stated: *“I am very fortunate that the EPs that I have worked with have been very accessible”* (Maya, lines: 771-772). Maya also reported: *“they are very good at... giving you options... So where you might come to a dead end...I have tried this...I have tried that... they say ‘Okay, well...you could maybe possibly think about trying this as well, and if that doesn’t work I would suggest...’ They are... good at doing that...giving you different avenues and different ways of looking at it...especially when you come to a dead end with a child or, you know, with a group”*. (Maya, lines: 780-787)

Participants found EP supervision and training helpful, Maya reported: *“I am quite fortunate in that my Head actually values my work and so therefore one of the things that...she has put in place with me is supervision and... now I am having supervision under the EPs... absolutely amazing... really, really useful”*. (Maya, lines: 791-793)

With regards to training, Maya also reported: *“the two courses that I run... the working memory that I spoke about and the assertiveness group ...I was trained up by the educational psychologists to run those... and really I haven’t looked back since then... an amazing EP”*. Susan stated: *“and that mental health lead by one of the...ed psychs...it was fantastic... and I do want to kind of spearhead it here”*. (Maya, lines: 707-708 & 717-718)

4.7.2.3 Subtheme SQ4.1c: School staff are not always included in meetings/EP information can be missed or not passed on

Participants argued that often the views from key support people that work with a particular child are not being included, Anna stated: *“if the EP comes in they spend time with the child...they will spend time with the class teacher... it would be good to get asked our views”*. (Anna, lines: 267-269)

Sarah reported that she is not always included in meetings with EPs because of Yr6 class demands *“I was not included on an earlier meeting for a child because they thought it was more important that I was in the classroom rather than being removed for one child”*. (Sarah, lines: 407-410)

Participants also highlighted that there is so much information schools already receive that EP advice can be lost, Anna stated *“I have spoken with her before regarding a child and she gave some ideas and some techniques... there is so much of weight going on around school that it can get lost I think”*. (Anna, lines: 277-280)

4.7.3 Theme SQ4.2: Support that school staff would like from EPs

4.7.3.1 Subtheme SQ4.2a: Gain a better understanding of the EP role and what they offer

It was evident from the participants' responses that, in some cases, they have an unclear understanding of the role of the EP. Although this was more evident amongst support staff, teachers also reported some ambiguity. Lisa reported: *“I don't actually...yes, possibly like to know, ... I have been seeing ed psychs and, you know, all these different outside agencies for years and I think they are fantastic and they really helped me and the child I work with. Sometimes it's quite hard to sum up what they do”* (Lisa, lines: 307-310). Sarah argued: *“Not much really. My experience of EPs has been that they have come and looked at like the way that they behave or the way that they engage with the learning”*. (Sarah, lines: 399-401)

A few participants, mostly support staff, reported that they would like to gain a better understanding of the role of the EP and what they offer. Karen reported: *“I don't know what the role of the...like yourself would be. So what is it that you offer to children? Umm...so it would be gaining knowledge to see what the educational psychologist offers to children, then I can say, ‘Well actually that would really work well with ‘X’ for instance in our class”*. (Karen, lines: 359-363)

4.7.3.2 Subtheme SQ4.2b: Help understand children's needs, offer practical strategies and design a school toolkit to support test anxiety

Many participants argued that they would like EPs to help them gain a better understanding of children's needs and offer practical strategies to support them. Maria reported: *"it would be useful just to have some information... about like what to look out for and how to make your classroom in your interactions...like more appropriate for those children ... and if children were still finding it very anxiety inducing, like being able to just chat with an EP kind of get some more ideas"* (Maria, lines: 224-229).

Similarly, Sarah stated she would like EPs to help her increase her knowledge of test anxiety: *"I think part of it is about knowledge. So it's what is actually happening for the child...scientifically. So it's explaining that... and how that would manifest in the classroom...and then small things that you can do to prevent it"*. (Sarah, lines: 416-419)

Participants reported that they would like EPs to help them build a staff toolkit, Kim stated: *"building a staff tool kit really and not just for the learning mentor, the SENCO, but for the class teacher because they are with the child for, you know, 90% of the time and for the TAs"*. (Kim, lines: 339-341)

Susan reported that it might be quite useful to create *"a checklist of what exam anxiety looks like in a child... just as a bit of a flyer... and maybe some pointers that, you know, we might think it's all...comes from within...but actually there can be basic things we are not doing...or we don't do because we don't think to do it...that can be a real help... anything that is...quick to read...quick to follow through"*. (Susan, lines: 315-322)

Others talked about EPs helping design a programme/schedule to support test anxiety, involving teachers, SLT and parents. Anna reported *"maybe sort of providing or helping to design a bit of a programme for them... as a whole week in terms of a schedule of things happening... it feels like it would be something that a class teacher would need to be involved in and other members of SLT"*

would need to be involved in... And... ideally the...parent potentially as well". (Anna, lines: 292-299)

4.7.3.3 Subtheme SQ4.2c: Drop in sessions, central email/telephone line for cases that do not require CAFs

Ellie suggested that it would be helpful for EPs *"to come in and to maybe just have a discussion about areas...we can all identify...or whether there's things that I didn't know about that that would be good...that maybe would give me more understanding in helping children. And equally to hear some stories of maybe children that they've worked with throughout an exam period...just from start to finish and how they got through that"*. (Ellie, lines: 384-390)

Christine would like to see a drop in service for cases that do not require CAFs: *"some kind of a drop in service so that staff who did have concerns...even if it was just a central email address...like I have got this child who is worried about this...can you give me some suggestions ...because sometimes it's not a serious enough need that you would write a CAF... Just some kind of an advice line or something... Sometimes it's quite freeing to know you are doing the right things or you might even try X, Y Z because this has worked in another school or something"*. (Christine, lines: 181-193)

4.7.3.4 Subtheme SQ4.2: More EP sessions for school wide training and developing resilience

Christine would like to see more EP time: *"if they were to give us a pot of money... I suppose it would probably pay for more learning mentor hours or an extra EP slot for individual cases or something like that"*. (Christine, lines: 224-227)

Participants valued training sessions delivered by EPs and would like to see more of them being delivered. Susan reported *"I think maybe an INSET would be, you know, staff training...Or even, you know, an evening of training ... A quick refresher"* (Susan, lines: 381-383). Similarly, Laura suggested: *"I mean I*

don't know if it's possible for Ed Psychs to do any training...a bank of places where you could go to get that sort of information. So...recommended websites or people to talk to that you could go to". (Laura, lines: 295-298)

Kim reported that she would like to see more EP time being used for school wide approaches to support test anxiety: *"not just for... specific children of concern but in a kind of more general school wide...this is how we support our school community... that would be really helpful". (Kim, lines: 347-349)*

Participants reported that they would like EPs to help schools develop children's resilience. Sam argued: *"developing resilience within a child in order to cope with, you know, the general vicissitudes of school life and what it means to meet a challenge. What... it might...feel to be wrong...you know, putting wrongness into context. So really in developing the idea of...which is also, you know, topical these days...the idea of, you know, of having an open mind rather than a closed mind...that kind of thing really". (Sam, lines: 466-471)*

4.8 Summary

The findings have been organised into an analytic narrative, which reflect patterns and commonalities across participants' views, which includes: the experiences of school staff supporting children with test anxiety; the strategies and interventions which help school staff identify and support children with test anxiety; whether school staff feel competent to support children who display test anxiety; what would help school staff develop their confidence and understanding of test anxiety; and how can EPs help school staff support children who experience test anxiety. Data gathered is broad ranging and rich, and relates to many issues raised in the literature review in Chapter 2. The next chapter will discuss how the findings answer the research questions in more depth, and will make connections between this study and previous research.

Chapter 5: Discussion

5.1 Overview

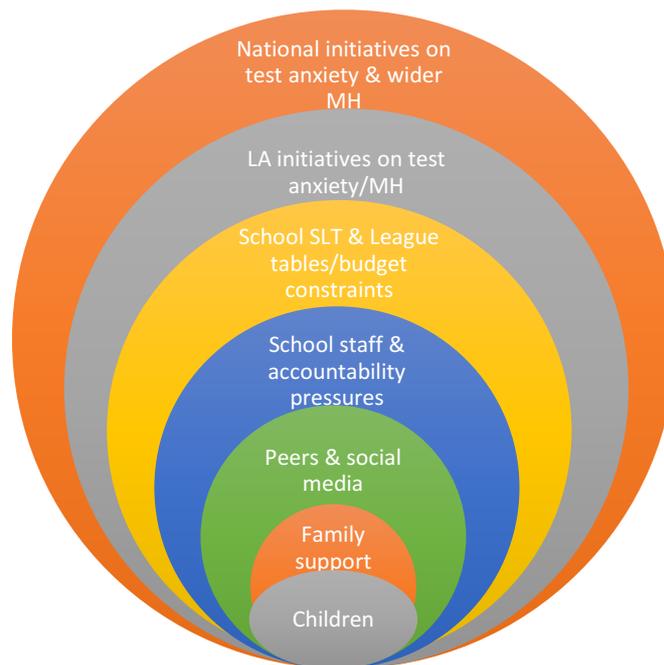
This final chapter will examine the findings in the context of previous research detailed in the literature review in Chapter 2 and consider implications. Each research question will be presented and examined and, in the course of doing so, both the socio-political context and the literature surrounding the research question will be taken in account, (5.2-5.6). This will be followed by the links with psychological theory (5.7), the implications of the findings for EPs (5.8) and potential limitations of the research (5.9). There will then be a reflection on the learnings that have transpired as a result of the research process and a discussion on issues of reflexivity (5.10). This will be followed with the conclusions drawn from this research (5.11).

A summary of the current study findings in relation to the research outlined in the systematic literature review chapter is detailed below for each research question:

5.2 Discussion of findings for central question: What are the experiences of primary school staff working with children who display test anxiety?

The majority of the data collected in the study was skewed towards answering the central research question, suggesting that school staff have very definite ideas about their experiences supporting children with test anxiety. The word “pressure” was repeated numerous times throughout the interviews and by every single participant. Senior management, teachers, support staff, parents and children are under considerable pressure about test results. The type of pressure differs for each group, however, this was a very definite and overarching theme.

A Systemic View of Test anxiety based on Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Model



(Olga Zacharaki, 2018)

Figure 6. A Systemic View of Test anxiety based on Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Model

5.2.1 Impact of testing on children

Participants highlighted the pressure schools put on children to meet targets linked to national expectations and league tables. Teaching staff also expressed concerns in the Association of Teachers and Lecturers (2016) poll that the pressure placed on children by the end of primary school testing is "excessive". Teachers and lecturers had a perspective that stress for young people is increasing (ATL, 2016). As testing has increased, so too has the number of students who experience test anxiety (Casbarro, 2005). The outcome of such pressures may result in children and young people facing

increasing levels of stress, which is the antithesis of the government's intention to improve their emotional well-being and mental health ('Mental health and behaviour in schools', Department for Education, 2014).

Research findings suggest that test anxiety can have a negative impact on SATs results. This view was supported by Connors et al. (2009) who found that with regards to the pressure of SATS, some students confirmed that their performance may have been impacted negatively, due to the pressure placed on them. The results of the quantitative analysis highlighted that those with poorer SATs grades had displayed greater levels of self-reported test anxiety. Putwain et al. (2010) found that high test-anxious students are potentially suffering lower academic achievement than their peers who have low test-anxiety because of their own negative/inaccurate thinking patterns.

However, school staff in the current study reported that there is a small number of children whose SATs results are in line with performance expectations or even exceed them, despite their test anxiety. Interestingly, this was supported by Burns (2004) who conducted a study examining the relationship between students' anxiety levels, their performance expectations and their achieved performance. The findings showed that there was no evidence to support a negative relationship between exam results and exam anxiety and therefore highlighting that exam anxiety can impact positively on exam results and can even be helpful to a certain degree. However, this study was conducted with university students who may have been able to harness their own anxiety as a motivator, through an increased ability to control it.

Participants in this study reported that children can have different attitudes to testing. They argued that some children can thrive under a testing situation, especially if they can see the benefits of going through this process. Connors et al. (2009) also reported that some pupils disclosed that they considered the work completed in relation to the SATS would assist them in preparing for more difficult work to come in secondary school, and thus felt the whole process of SATs to be beneficial. Contrary to this, it has been reported by the Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL) that the mental health of children as young as

six is being damaged by test anxiety. Interestingly, school staff stated that many children start worrying about the SATs from a young age, before they reach Year 6.

Putwain et al. (2010) argued that test anxiety is due to the inaccurate thinking patterns suffered by anxious students, such as catastrophising. Findings in this research supported this view as participants reported that many children have a negative approach to SATs because they find it difficult to manage unhelpful thoughts. However, school staff also reported that some children can have the opposite reaction to SATs. This was described as a more “laid back” approach to testing or “looking as if they do not care”. The participants questioned whether this approach of “indifference” may also suggest a degree of anxiety. Some school staff notice the signs of test anxiety more than others. EPs need to take this into account when they are working with schools to identify children with test anxiety and to design interventions and toolkits.

With regards to the participants’ views on any correlation between test anxiety and different attainment levels, SEN and EAL, the researcher received mixed responses. There were conflicting views on the stress levels that high attainment children feel about SATs with some participants reporting that they find it easy and that they “breeze through”. Others stated that it is a stressful experience for these children because they put a lot of pressure on themselves to perform well and set themselves high standards. It was reported that middle attainment children felt pressure because they “know what they do not know” and they have an awareness of where they are compared to other children. There were conflicting views about the levels of test anxiety for low attainment children and those with SEN and EAL - some children struggled more than others, depending on the level of need. It may be that further research needs to be completed in this area to gain a more in-depth understanding. School staff also argued that more severe cases of test anxiety wouldn’t exist in isolation to test anxiety in a child, and that often there are signs of a more generalised anxiety. It was also highlighted that in some cases there are additional underlying mental health difficulties (e.g. obsessive compulsive behaviour).

School staff argued that there is a competitive element to SATs amongst children, with this adding to children's anxiety. It was argued that pressure from social media is also seen as having an impact on SATs anxiety. However, a study conducted by Deloatch, Bailey, Kirlik and Zilles (2017), found that social media can have a positive effect on test anxiety. The study had students in one group post messages on social media asking for encouragement and support for an upcoming exam. Seven minutes before the exam, the students in this group read the positive responses to their request, while the students in another group participated in an expressive-writing exercise, writing about their thoughts and feelings. The control group studied during this time. The study found that only the students who read supportive social media messages had a significant decrease in anxiety levels and an increase on the simulated exam scores (Deloatch et al., 2017). However, this study was conducted with university students, who had more experience and had a more mature approach to using social media platforms.

Approximately one third of internet users are below the age of 18 (OfCOM, 2017). Despite the fact that most social media sites have 13 years as the official age limit, it is increasingly reported that children under 13 are accessing these sites (OfCOM, 2017). Much debate has been around the relationship between mental health and social media with a key message being that although social media can be a positive instrument for children and young people, it can also negatively impact on their mental wellbeing (Children's Commissioner, 2017). Despite this, there is no Government research yet on how social media impacts the wellbeing and mental health of younger children. This presents a major gap in our understanding, especially since half of 11 and 12 year olds are having social media users and have their own profiles (Children's Commissioner, 2017).

Frith (2017) conducted a study for the Education Policy Institute. The study's objective was to explore the effects of social media use on children aged 8-12 years old and the impact on their wellbeing and self-esteem. The research used qualitative methods, interviewing 32 children aged 8-12 across the UK. Findings highlighted that positive and negative influences. Social media was regarded as

having a positive effect on children's wellbeing, by enabling them to do things like staying in touch with friends. However, there was a negative influence on them when social media made them worrying about things that they had little or no control over. Younger children were more worried about things related to their families' use of social media, however, older children were more worried about peers and friendships.

5.2.2 Impact of testing on school staff

It was evident in the participants' views that school staff face increasing pressure and scrutiny in relation to professional accountability with regards to the results of standardized tests. In recent years, there has been a governmental shift towards performance-related pay for teachers. This has resulted in an increased focus on test results and data (Department of Education, 2014). Furthermore, schools are now judged and evaluated in terms of performance by test and exam outcomes and their position in league tables. School staff argued that this places not only children and young people, but also school staff, under greater pressure to produce good test results; for their own futures and professional standing i.e. OFSTED ratings (Burns, 2016).

School staff in this research reflected these views in their responses and argued that league tables have put a lot of pressure on schools, making SATs a very stressful period for school staff resulting in high staff turnover. It was highlighted that the Senior Leadership team (SLT) are under considerable pressure to meet national expectations, which will then determine the school's position on league tables. Members of SLT reported feeling torn between numbers/statistics and keeping children's anxiety/stress low. School staff reported that the pressure of testing is having a negative effect on their emotional well-being. Partridge (2012) highlighted a concern for the capacity of teaching staff due to the emotional complication involved in supporting young people in this area. Kidger et al. (2009b) argued that emotional wellbeing and teaching are intrinsically linked. He identified that there was a neglect of the teacher's own requirements with respect to emotional health.

Participants argued that often there is a need for intense teaching to fill in gaps from previous years and that children find this difficult. This was supported by Chamberlain et al. (2011) who found that students considered revision to be stressful and burdensome. It was also highlighted that, during revision time, they could not focus completely on revision as they were still often being taught new material.

Hutchings (2015) argued that high-quality teacher-student relationships is one of the fundamental components in facilitating the young person in their learning and encouraging them to be able to express any difficulties they experience (Hutchings, 2015). Many teachers reported that pressure to increase test outcomes, and the consequent demands on their workload and stress-levels, has had a detrimental impact on the quality of their relationships with their pupils. This was supported by the findings of this research which highlighted that the volume of work prevents teachers from building relationships and offering emotional support to children. Participants reported that it was difficult for them to balance reassuring children and at the same time preparing them for the SATs.

Remedios et al. (2005) argued that once students had sat the test, there was a significant drop in interest for that particular subject. This was also true for school staff in this study, who reported that they feel burnt out after SATs and find it difficult to make lessons fun. School staff reported that they feel personally invested in children's SATs outcomes. They are protective of their pupils and they feel helpless when they cannot make the SATs experience more comfortable for them. Others reported that they are stressed about the unpredictability of children's performance in SAT and they are worried that they didn't support them efficiently or identify difficulties earlier. This was supported by Kidger et al. (2009b) who argued that teachers' own requirements were often neglected with respect to emotional health and that emotional wellbeing and teaching were intrinsically linked.

Hobby (2016, cited in Richardson, 2016), argued that although it is increasingly common in secondary schools, two-thirds of primary school leaders reported

that it is becoming more difficult to access mental health professionals, and added that the rising demand, tight budgets and growing complexity can make helping the children who need it the most more difficult. This was supported by the study's findings, which highlighted that funding is generally provided for academic support rather than ensuring children feel happy and safe, and that budget cuts have reduced the involvement and input of professional agencies.

5.2.3 Impact of testing on the wider school

School staff reported that there is close collaboration between themselves and that school policy can help promote effective working relationships. They also reported close collaboration with pastoral staff and SLT. It was reported that schools do not work closely with each other due to time constraints and budget cuts. Others highlighted that although it is useful to share knowledge on test anxiety with other schools, it may not be appropriate to work with them to support individual children.

Participants highlighted that funding in recent years has decreased considerably, impacting one-to-one support and group interventions. The reduced funding is also having a negative impact on early prevention and identification.

Partridge (2012) argued that implementing individual interventions with children was not as impactful as fostering a whole school ethos where the environment puts more emphasis towards promoting emotional well-being. According to Kidger et al. (2009b) the importance of whole school approaches, which included a focus on teacher support, was highlighted as a key implication in their study. Most participants in the current study stated that they have not come across a school-wide intervention to prevent test anxiety but they would welcome any school-wide support. It was also argued that schools have a reactionary approach to test anxiety and there is less time for reflection and evaluation at a school level. Some argued the idea that if test anxiety is a persistent issue within a school, questions need to be asked on a systemic level

as to why this is happening. Schools are sensitive to this issue and this is an area where EPs could offer support by helping them think more systemically.

5.3 Sub-question 1: What strategies and interventions help school staff identify and support children with test anxiety?

5.3.1 Identification of children with test anxiety

Putwain et al. (2010) stated that children with test anxiety reported more symptoms of bodily anxiety. The participants in this study reported that children with test anxiety displayed different physical symptoms and that they could identify anxious children by their body language (eye contact, shaking their legs under the table, playing with their pencil and paper, looking around the class). The body is known to release adrenaline during states of stress or excitement and this results in physical symptoms that are associated with test anxiety. These include rapid breathing, an increased heart rate and sweating (Putwain et al., 2010). For many, these symptoms make focusing on test and exams impossible as they struggle to cope with them.

It was reported that some children with test anxiety engage in procrastination and avoidance strategies, while others were disengaged and pretended that they do not care as a defense mechanism. It was demonstrated by Putwain et al. (2012), that there was an increased likelihood of use of ineffective coping mechanisms amongst young people who suffer from test anxiety, one such technique being avoidance. On a related note, Vitasari et al. (2010), reported that the students felt inadequate preparation for exams contributed to the anxiety, although this may have been due to the anxiety itself. It is possible that heightened anxiety about the upcoming test led students to being unable to engage properly with their revision material as opposed to not preparing adequately due to being "lazy".

School staff reported that children who experience anxious feelings about tests are also often worried about making mistakes, and have low confidence and self-esteem. It was argued that they were shutting down, while others are over-

confident, as a compensatory strategy. It has been suggested by Putwain (2009) that confidence issues may arise due to the influence of resilience characteristics on cognitive and emotional reactions to exam related stress, pressure or threat. Consequently, individuals of a more resilient nature are less likely to have negative emotional reactions or negative cognitions in an exam scenario (Putwain, 2009). It is possible that having a higher level of resilience may allow individuals to sufficiently regulate or control negative emotions, restricting any detrimental impact on their own performance (Putwain, 2009).

School staff also reported changes in children's behaviour with emotional responses and outbursts (oversensitivity, dramatic reactions, aggression, fear) with a peak of anxiety in the run up to, and during, the SATs. Anxious children approach school staff more often than they used to and/or displayed attention seeking behaviours.

Participants highlighted that children are sometimes reluctant to speak to school staff about anxious feelings they may have in relation to the SATs so in these cases parents play a key role communicating with the school and vice versa. It was also reported that children with emotional needs who, in previous years, found different aspects of school life difficult and anxiety provoking, would be monitored by school staff, who would also keep close links with their parents. EPs can assist schools build effective communication channels with parents.

5.3.2 Difficulties supporting children with test anxiety

School staff identified a number of difficulties supporting children with test anxiety. Some children can have a negative attitude to learning and find it difficult to change their mindset, and thus internalise difficulties. Previous experience of failure can make children even more anxious about SATs. Interventions designed by EPs may need to concentrate in changing children's mindsets.

Unsupportive or overpowering parents can have a huge impact on the way children feel about testing. Sometimes stories children hear from older siblings

can add to their stress. Connors et al. (2009) highlighted that pupils in their study reported being compared to siblings or family members, as well as their peers, had a negative effect on them. Similarly, it was shown by Bonaccio and Reeve (2010) that anxiety about disappointing others was a key contributor to stress. They went on to speculate that “disappointing others” could more specifically be interpreted as disappointing their parental figures. This idea was echoed by Cassady and Johnson (2011) who proposed that worrying about letting down their parents and making them sad is a part of cognitive test anxiety. These fears may be rooted in the expectations that parents have of their children to perform well, which are also shared by parents with their children. Participants in the current study also noted that sometimes, outside of school, big events can have an impact on children (e.g. Grenfell tower, or a family bereavement). Most EP services have Critical Incidents teams or key EPs with such responsibilities that can offer expert advice in these events. An implication for EPs is that they may need to highlight these services to the schools and detail the advice they can offer.

5.3.3 Helpful approaches, strategies and interventions

Participants reported that advance preparation, mock exams and practising past papers have been helpful approaches. Similarly, Chamberlain et al. (2011) argued that exam anxiety may impact on students’ preparations and that interventions could be put into place to help and support students in their preparation, as opposed to just interventions relating to taking the exam itself. Agarwal et al. (2014) found that 71% of students stated that when sitting exams, they felt less anxious because they had previously taken the practice tests; it may follow that increased exposure to examinations resulted in a reduction in test anxiety.

Some participants mentioned the use of technology to support children with test anxiety. Stowell and Bennett (2010) hypothesized that test anxiety could be reduced and thus improve exam scores by utilising a series of regular online course exams. 69 Psychology students were asked to take classroom-based and online exams, using a counterbalanced crossover design. The results

showed that, when taking online exams, the students who usually suffered from high levels of test anxiety in a classroom-based exam experienced a reduction in their test anxiety. It is difficult to generalise from these findings though as the study was conducted using university students only.

Revision, study skills and booster groups have also proved effective when supporting children with test anxiety. Bonaccio and Reeve (2010) proposed using a combination of interventions – both therapeutic and for study skills (e.g. revision) could be effective in not only aiding the reduction of anxiety but in also ensuring that young people develop the requisite skills for exam preparation.

The usefulness of working memory interventions was also highlighted by school staff. The focus of these groups was based on strategies to support children with working memory (e.g. the use of mnemonics strategies). Owens et al. (2014) found that the anxiety and WMC interaction explained a significant amount of variance in cognitive test performance. They found that trait anxiety was positively related to test performance in adolescents with high WMC. Participants in the current study reported that the working memory intervention not only supported children with their recall skills but also helped with their test anxiety.

In the current study many participants talked about the importance of offering pastoral support and mentoring as well as actively checking with children. It was highlighted that school staff need to be approachable and actively check with children. School staff argued that giving children chances to be successful in other areas and downplaying the tests helped promote well-being. Providing children with rewarding activities to break the preparation of SATs is very important. Encouragement, letting children know that there's extra help if they need it has been reported as a helpful approach in promoting wellbeing, as is early intervention. This is area were EPs can work closely with schools.

Putwain et al. (2010) spoke about the usefulness of interventions of a cognitive orientation, which can be utilised to impact on and correct cognitive distortions. It was argued that through targeting and reduction of these distorted cognitions,

an increase in academic achievement may be seen. Dundas et al. (2009) sought to investigate the effectiveness of cognitive-behavioural group-based approaches. They found that instead of children viewing their whole future dependent on the result of one exam, they viewed the exam as a task requiring completion at that specific moment in time. Participants believed this change to their approach was a result of the intervention that they participated in. Interestingly, there was no mention of CBT to support test anxiety amongst school staff in the current study. Squires and Dunsmuir (2011) found that some of the barriers to helping schools support mental health included a lack of clarity with regards to CBT training. EPs need to be more proactive in communicating to schools the benefits of these approaches.

Participants argued that meditation and breathing exercises are effective calming strategies; having a quiet area and regular breaks also help children with test anxiety. A study conducted by Burns (2004) highlighted that young people may benefit from interventions, enabling them to be calm enough, in spite of a high level of exam anxiety, and to have positive expectations of the outcome of the exam, at the time of the exam itself. Mindfulness also has an evidence base in terms of reducing anxiety with young people and has been found to reduce anxiety in school children (Semple, 2010; Semple, Reid & Miller, 2005).

It was highlighted by school staff that utilising PSHE whole class lessons to talk about feelings and worries around SATs as well as Philosophy for Children (P4C) and small groups (resilience, assertiveness) have both proved helpful in supporting children with test anxiety. During these lessons, children are being taught about the journey of learning and how to put the SATs experience into perspective.

Ramirez and Beilock (2011) hypothesised that “choking” in a test could be negated by writing about their worries about the exam beforehand. Those individuals who had high levels of test anxiety in the intervention group, when compared to those with similar anxiety levels in the control group, had a higher

level of attainment in the exams. This approach was not highlighted by the participants of this study.

Participants have identified different strategies to support children during the SATs week (e.g. always answer first questions that children know). It was argued that for children with more severe anxiety, it is better to take their tests in a quieter space; children with SEN may need additional preparation and arrangements (i.e. water and movement breaks, bounce ball, walk around the school, stretches on the spot). Participants argued that after the testing period, it is important to talk to the children about test results, to try and put the experience into perspective. They highlight that the tests were just a snapshot and may not be a true representation of their abilities.

Putwain and Roberts (2012) explored the methods by which secondary school teachers attempted to increase engagement of their pupils' revision and exams. They found 67.5% of teachers felt students should be told that failure of their exams would result in them being unable to pursue further education and that "fear appeals" were perceived as a motivational tool to encourage students to prepare and revise for their exams. However, the researchers were concerned that the use of such strategies may increase exam anxiety and thus decrease engagement, as well as decreasing exam results. These "fear appeals" were not evident in the current research, however, this issue is more prominent in secondary schools.

It hypothesized by the researcher that these fear appeal stem from the wider political picture. In recent years, there has been a governmental shift towards performance-related pay for teachers and league tables, which could explain the pressure school staff are under for their students to perform well in tests and exams. This places not only children and young people but also school staff under great pressure to produce good test results for their own futures and professional standing. It is part of a systemic issue as governmental agenda, targets and league tables are acting themselves as "fear appeals" to schools' SLT, which are passed on to teachers and then to parents and pupils.

5.4 Sub-question 2: Do school staff feel competent to support children with test anxiety?

5.4.1 Building good relationships with children help school staff feel competent supporting test anxiety

It was argued by school staff that they do feel confident and competent supporting children with test anxiety but only because of the relationship that they had built with the them and the number of years they had worked supporting them. Kidger et al. (2009b) talked about the importance of school staff being able to ascertain mental health needs by adopting a holistic role and building positive, trusting relationships with the students.

5.4.2 Professional development helps school staff feel more competent supporting children with test anxiety

Some school staff argued that their own reading and self-funded further education, enabled them to feel competent supporting children with test anxiety. Many teachers reported that teacher training courses are not adequately preparing them to support children with test anxiety and wider mental health difficulties. They had to either self-fund and/or attend local authority-based training courses to develop their knowledge in this area. Failing to recognise the early signs of test anxiety could lead to more generalised mental health difficulties. However, training for teachers to recognise these signs is not sufficient. Twiselton (2016, cited in Camden, 2016), an author on the Carter review of initial teacher training (ITT), said while training providers did cover mental health “in some form”, there was “variability in its extent”. Further development of school staff will be discussed later, in section 5.5.2.

5.4.3 Some school staff do not feel confident to support children with test anxiety

Other participants, and particularly support staff, felt less competent to support children experiencing test anxiety and needed more support in this area. Not

having the right training and knowledge was considered a hindrance and a barrier to supporting these children. Rothi et al. (2008) found that many of the teachers did not feel adequately prepared or qualified to deal with children and young people with mental health difficulties. Hunter et al. (2008) highlighted that the gulf between policy expectation versus reality was a concern for teachers, who reported that despite new policies being introduced, mental health is a new area to them with new requirements, responsibilities and skills. The development of a toolkit could help school staff increase their confidence around test anxiety, this will be discussed in section 5.8.

5.5 Sub-question 3: What would help school staff develop their confidence and understanding of test anxiety?

5.5.1 Greater collaboration amongst school staff and mentoring

Participants reported that they would like to see greater collaboration amongst school staff (e.g. planning days, debrief sessions, collaborative website). Madge et al. (2008) also argued that teachers feel more confident in a listening environment, establishing positive relationships.

School staff also reported that they would like to discuss with other more experienced Year 6 teachers about strategies to support children. They would welcome mentoring opportunities to alleviate some of the pressures they face. Participants also argued that more forums with other schools as well as better communication and sharing good practice with schools and other services would be helpful. Atkinson et al. (2013) argued that a limiting factor in effective working was found to be poor communication between services including the EPS.

5.5.2 Further support from the Local Authority

Participants would like to gain a better understanding of the different services (e.g. different workshops, information booklets) the Local Authority offers and

the eligibility criteria. They would like more clarity on available training and interventions and the referral criteria. Similarly, Madge et al. (2008) highlighted that school staff sought more transparency in relation to CAMHS referral criteria, as well as the routes for re-referrals.

Most participants argued that there is not enough funding to cover for the adult support that children need, and they would like more funding for small group work and resources. Hobby (2016, cited in Richardson, 2016), general secretary of the heads' union NAHT, said that lack of sufficient resources to support children experiencing mental health difficulties was reported by the leaders for 75% of schools. ATL's poll highlighted that 21% said their school had no access to a counsellor and many others said their schools' counsellors were overloaded leading to unqualified school staff having to take on a counselling role. Rothi et al. (2008) argued that the staff in schools felt they lacked the resources to enact those recommendations they received from EPs.

Participants argued that mental health training is a very important area to gain more knowledge and understanding. Training in coping strategies and mindfulness would help build their confidence when working with children with test anxiety. They also stated that it would be helpful to receive training that is delivered over a number of sessions looking at real-life cases. There were concerns that school staff may be offered inadequate training with no follow-up support. These were valuable considerations for EPs when they are designing training sessions.

5.5.3 We need to change the narrative and the way we think about testing

One way in which test anxiety could be reduced would be to shift the narrative around the way in which tests are currently spoken about. It could be more prudent for teachers to focus on explaining to their pupils that tests are an opportunity to show off what they have learned, rather than the current fixation on stressing how important they are due to the impact they will have on children's future. If a whole-school approach is used to change how exams are spoken about this could help to reduce the dread felt about exams and could

lead to an improvement in young people's wellbeing.

An alternative method could be striving to understand the aspirations/goals of children and young people through working closely with them, which can be supported by EPs by using personal construct psychology and/or person-centred planning. Support such as scaffolding would enable children to think for themselves about how they need to go about themselves in order to realise their aspirations and ambitions.

5.6 Sub-question 4: How can EPs help school staff support children who experience test anxiety?

Squires and Dunsmuir (2011) reported that some of the barriers to helping schools support mental health included: uncertainty over professional territories; and a desire from schools to use their EP time in areas other than therapeutic work. This was evident in this research, as most of the participants reported that they tend to request EP involvement for children with cognitive difficulties rather than test anxiety or mental health difficulties. There was a perception amongst the school staff of the current study that EPs do not cover areas of anxiety and mental health. Others argued that they do not request EP involvement in this area of need, because it is not seen as a priority.

Partridge (2012) argued that school staff pinpointed supervision as being of the utmost importance and that those in the best position to offer this could be EPs. EPs have a clear understanding of educational settings and systems as well the demands placed on school staff. Participants reported that they have had a positive experience working with EPs and found them approachable. They found training delivered by EPs helpful and valued supervision they received from them. Osborne and Burton (2014) found that EP supervision was generally thought to be a useful platform for discussing cases, problem solving and sharing ideas. As a result, the majority of school staff felt better able to support pupils. This showed that external supervision could create a more viable provision model.

Participants argued that often the views from key support people that work with children seen by EPs are not included. Particularly, support staff and Y6 teachers are not always included in meetings with EPs because of SATs demands. Participants also highlighted that there is so much information that schools already receive from different services and that EP advice can be lost. This was an area of concern for the researcher, who will ensure in her practice as a qualified EP that: the right people attend consultation meetings or at the very least feedback and key information is being requested from them in advance of meetings; and that strategies and information sent to schools offer relevant information, with practical implementation suggestions.

It was evident from the participants' responses that, in some cases, they have an unclear understanding of the role of the EP. A few participants, mostly support staff, reported that they would like to gain a better understanding of the role of the EP and what they offer. Rothi et al. (2008) reported that in her study it was highlighted by participants that greater levels of clarity, and increased continuity, would be required in relation to mental health and the EP's role. Hunter et al. (2008) argued that constantly changing expectations in this area leads to ambiguity in relation to job roles within external agencies.

Many participants argued that they would like EPs to help them gain a better understanding of children's needs and to offer practical strategies to support them. Participants reported that they would like EPs to help them build a staff toolkit. Others mentioned drop in sessions and having a central email/telephone line for cases that do not require CAFs. It was stated that EP training was valued by school staff and that they would like to see more sessions being delivered. Others reported that they would like EPs to help schools develop children's resilience.

Most school staff reported that they would like more EP time for individual cases. Rothi et al. (2008) argued that the lack of EP time and resources was resulting in EPs not having the capacity to see individual children and build a relationship with them over time. However, Squires and Dunsmuir (2011) found

that school staff sought aid from outside professionals to work directly with the young people to 'fix' problems, which in turn gave teachers the ability to distance themselves from the problem in question. This is something that EPs need to be mindful of.

5.7 Links with Psychological Theory

5.7.1 Links with psychological theory of test anxiety

Emotionality and Cognitive Test Anxiety are commonly connected with test anxiety (Liebert and Morris, 1967; Cassady and Johnson, 2001). The term "Emotionality" refers to when an individual demonstrates increased levels of a variety symptoms to test/exam anxiety that are displayed through physiological manifestations during situations where the individual is being assessed. These can include: nausea, increased heart rate, experience of panic or dizziness. Emotionality was evident in this research; many of the research participants detailed these symptoms. Whilst there is evidence to suggest that emotionality is its own separate part of test anxiety and is strongly associated with lower exam performance, it should nonetheless be noted that when individuals show high levels of emotionality, this is only when they are simultaneously experienced increased levels of anxiety.

Initially conceived by Robert M. Yerkes and John Dillingham Dodson in 1908 (cited in Zeidner, 1998), the Yerkes–Dodson law is an observable relationship between stimulation/arousal and performance. It states that physiological or mental stimulation increased performance, but this effect does have limitations. Should the level of stimulation increase too much, the level of performance will subsequently decrease. In terms of a graphic illustration, the increased then decreased performance in relation to stimulation levels can be portrayed as a bell curve. This relationship between stimulation/arousal and performance supports the findings in this study.

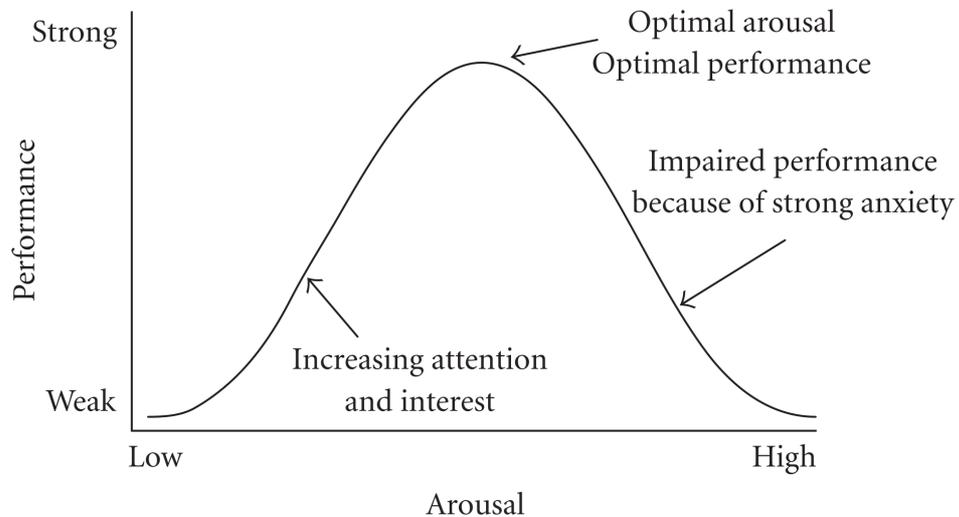


Figure 7. *Yerkes–Dodson Law*

A further factor considered is Cognitive Test Anxiety (Cassady and Johnson, 2001). This is principally comprised of an individual’s cognitive response to settings in which they are being assessed, and covers the periods before, during and after such assessments. Individuals who display high cognitive test anxiety are continuously managing thoughts in relation to the consequences of failure, comparison with their peers, low confidence levels, disproportionate worrying in relation to grades, perennially feeling underprepared for tests, and decreased self-worth (Cassady and Johnson, 2001). Such thoughts were evidenced in the views of the participants in the current study.

Eysenck and Calvo’s (1992) PET suggested elevated anxiety levels which are connected to negative assessment sap cognitive resources. Additionally, cognitions that are irrelevant to the task at hand (a feature often connected to heightened states of anxiety) are noted as limiting WMC. With this diminished capacity, it is more likely that there will be a decrease in task efficiency, coupled with an increase in the level of effort or time required to produce normal levels of performance in cognitive tasks; an effect that will also be seen when undertaking complex tasks that have higher demands on working memory by

default. The results in the current study are consistent with the PET framework; participants also highlighted that children with test anxiety often talk about “mental blocks” and “brain freezes” which may have an impact on their test performance.

Eysenck and Calvo's (1992) PET was further developed by Eysenck et al. (2007) into attentional control theory, which makes the assumption that worry impairs the efficiency of the function of the goal-driven attentional system, whilst also increasing the level of influence of the stimulus-directed attentional system on processing. As well as decreased attentional control, anxiety also leads to increased awareness of threat-based stimuli. Anxiety's negative effect on processing efficacy is dependent on two central executive roles that involve attentional control: shifting and inhibition (Eysenck et al, 2007). However, anxiety may not reduce overall performance efficiency in cases where it leads to compensatory approaches being used such as increased effort or enhanced usage of processing resources. It has been reported that in cases where an individual has poor working memory, that lower exam performance is associated with an increase in anxiety. Conversely, when working memory is of a good level, higher anxiety is more commonly linked to increased exam performance (Owens et al., 2014). This could potentially explain the reports from school staff that, while some children are stressed, some of them nonetheless thrive under test conditions.

5.7.2 Ecological systems theory

The outcomes of this research also link closely with systems theories. Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory specifies that the child is affected by everything in their surrounding environment and four environmental systems: the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem and macrosystem.

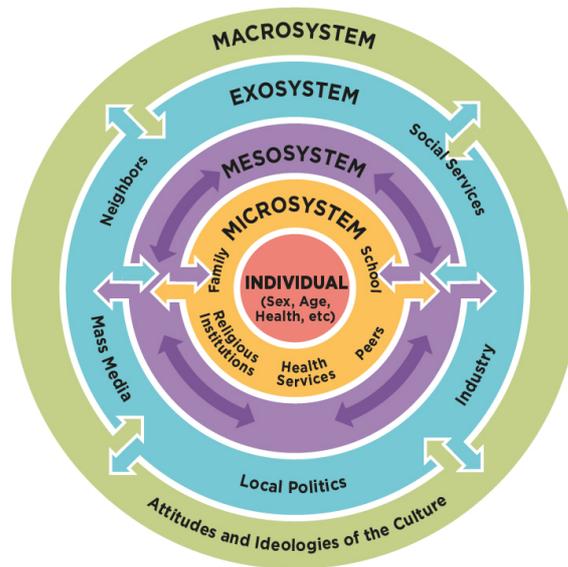


Figure 8. *Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Model (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).*

The microsystem is the one with which the child/YP engages with in the most direct manner, such as at school or at home as it includes not only the individual, but their friends/peers, school, family or caregivers, and community as a whole. The relationships found within this system are of a bi-directional nature i.e. the responses to those within the microsystem will in return influence the other party.

The mesosystem is the exchanges between the various elements of an individual's microsystem. Within the mesosystem lay the interconnections between the child's microsystems (such as the relationship between the teacher and parent) and where the microsystems exert influence on each other.

The exosystem is an environment that does not directly involve the individual but nonetheless influences them, for example the loss of a job by a parent. The macrosystem is the cultural setting of the individual and all other systems that influence them such as political systems, the economy and cultural values.

The EP works between these four systems, conducting training for professionals as well as consultations with teachers and parents. Beaver (2011) believes that the EP should work towards modifying the approaches and conduct of others within the microsystem in terms of how they engage with the young people. This would indicate that the EP's role is not only to engage with

the young people to ensure healthy development and learning, but also to systemically aid those who work closely with the young people to achieve this. In particular, this belief is echoed in the new SEND code of practice (Department for Education, Department for Health, 2014) which states that as an EP completes an assessment with the young people, that there should be a systemic process of consultation of other professionals involved with the young people.

There are evident connections between Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Model and the implications of this study. For example, EPs could call attention to methods by which parents and/or teachers can modify their own conduct and attitudes to reduce test anxiety, as part of their training or consultations. EPs can help skill-up school staff through whole school training as well as training key members of staff (e.g. ELSA training). EPs can also disseminate good practice through having key members of staff joining group interventions. Working systemically with schools to increase collaboration and communication could aid them in tackling a variety of the problems that facing them when it comes to test anxiety.

5.8 Impact on the researcher's practice

Within this section the researcher will discuss the implications of the study's findings for her own practice in the future. As a qualified EP, the researcher will endeavour to work with schools to modify the narrative surrounding testing and how it is thought and talked about. The researcher will promote improved levels of communication between parents and school staff, ensuring that the key role of the parents in the reduction of test anxiety is highlighted to schools. The researcher will work alongside schools to jointly solve the issue of how best to involve parents.

The researcher will proactively aid schools in attaining sufficient knowledge, tools (such as intervention programmes) through school-wide training. In addition, EPs can support schools to ensure appropriate pastoral input is provided, in order to not only support children who suffer from test anxiety, but

also other staff. Schools will be encouraged to promote well-being, for both children and school staff. Preventative structures, early intervention and person-centred consultations will be ever-present at the front of the researcher's practice. The researcher will work with primary schools to design a toolkit, which would be used as an early identification and intervention tool, with practical strategies to support children with test anxiety. The toolkit could include the following:

- General information/psychology of test anxiety.
- Tips to help school staff identify children with test anxiety (e.g. physical symptoms, unhelpful thoughts, work avoidance).
- Useful scripts to use with children before, during and after tests.
- Useful strategies for whole class support (e.g. growth mindset ideas and relaxation techniques).
- Useful interventions to support groups of children with test anxiety (e.g. study skills, working memory strategies and resiliency groups)
- Useful tips for parents to support their children at home.

Alongside schools, the researcher will assist in the provision of information to parents/caregivers regarding how best to support children throughout test periods. This could take the form of evidence-based interventions, training with the parents or simply an information sheet which could detail strategies for parents to adopt, that simultaneously support and encourage their children.

The current study underlines the significant role primary schools can play in supporting test anxiety and the wider mental health. However, in previous literature, it has often emerged that school staff are habitually uncertain as to what support other professionals can offer (Squires & Dunsmuir, 2011). Consequently, the researcher as qualified EP will ensure that there is greater clarity as to not only her role, but also the various routes to accessing services that would improve schools' confidence in supporting children's mental health and well-being.

School staff can sometimes seek to label difficult behavioural presentations or misinterpret indicators of mental health difficulties as bad behaviour (De Wit,

Karioja, Rye, & Shain, 2011). Both of these scenarios have the potential to produce less positive outcomes for children and young people (De Wit, Karioja, Rye, & Shain, 2011). The recent SEND Code of Practice (DfE & DoH, 2014) does not recognise “behaviour” as an area of need yet there is a rising importance for schools for insight into mental health. The researcher will ensure that there is modelling of more reflective and inclusive understandings of test anxiety, with the aim of aiding in the change of attitudes amongst school staff. Ultimately, this may improve the potential for whole school approaches to promoting resilience and increasing emotional wellbeing (DoH, 2015).

5.9 Limitations of research

The study has illuminated the scarcity of research in the area of test anxiety in primary schools in the UK, particularly from a school staff perspective. The sample size used of 15 participants, which was larger than that recommended by Braun and Clarke (2013) who argued that 6-10 participants should provide enough data to carry out a small qualitative research project. Careful consideration was given to the dependability and credibility of the study (Robson, 2011) with the inevitable shortcomings being acknowledged below. One of the main limitations of qualitative research is that it is difficult to generalise from the data as it is created from unique circumstances (Patton, 2002). The participants were recruited from a specific borough in the UK and therefore it may not be possible to generalise the results of this study beyond this local area. The implication that one can extrapolate from this, is that further research is needed in the area of test anxiety, from an educational psychology perspective, particularly within UK primary schools from around the UK. Future research could employ mixed methods approaches and/or include student voice in primary schools, both of which may help with the generalisability of the research findings.

Although TA is a relatively robust and systematic approach, it is more limited in higher level understanding. For example, Braun and Clarke (2013) acknowledge that TA lacks the assessment of the language used and potential

meanings of the way the participants express themselves. The current study does not propose to investigate the discourses of the participants, but some elements of the data may have been enhanced through such analysis, such as understanding the manners in which school staff view test anxiety.

5.10 Reflectivity and reflexivity

As the researcher-participant relationship is so critical in this research, it is necessary to examine the issues more carefully (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). One factor for contemplation is the notion of rigorous authenticity and trustworthiness. In order to achieve balance and fairness in the research data, researchers must seek ways to enable inclusive representation of the participant. These constructionist views were further supported by Lincoln (2009, cited in Mertens, 2015) but rapport, reciprocity and reflexivity were also included as more current additional criteria.

A caring attitude, researcher/participant equality, respect, rapport building, democracy, transparency, and commitment to social change are all important qualities highlighted by Creswell (2012). Throughout the interview process the researcher endeavoured to maintain these attributes, displaying a respectful and caring approach, and allowed participants to ask questions. Reviewing her interview style also enabled the researcher to reflect on the value of creating a rapport and expressing empathy. There were numerous occasions observed by the researcher where she could have probed for further information; as a result, in subsequent research she will endeavour to not be so quick with moving on during the consultation or information gathering process.

The concept of reflexivity is especially important within this process. For EP research, reflexivity issues attempt to ensure that the researchers are not placed in a position of privilege in comparison to their participants – either intentionally or unintentionally (Willig, 2013). Awareness towards the full spectrum of identities (theoretical, professional, institutional and personal) that may come into play during the research dynamic will help to achieve greater reflexivity (Willig, 2013). The downside of this increased awareness is that the

researcher was faced with the need to balance self-analysis against the requirement to attend to research participants which, at times, it was hard to achieve (Willig, 2013). The researcher positioned herself as non-expert, whose role was to facilitate participants in disseminating their perspectives.

Weber and Cooke (1972) describe demand characteristics involving the subject taking on a role in the experiment (or in this case, interview) and the relationship with the researcher. These include:

- The *good-participant role* in which the participant attempts to determine the experimenter's hypotheses and prove them. The participant does not desire to "ruin" the experiment.
- The *apprehensive-participant role* in which the participant is preoccupied with how the experimenter might perceive their responses, so much so that the participant ensures that they behave in a socially desirable way.
- The *negative-participant role* in which the participant tries to do the opposite of what the "good" participant would attempt to do; their goal is to give responses that go against what they have determined the researcher's hypothesis to be.
- The *faithful-participant role* in which the participant is more passive, following instructions carefully and/or making effort to ensure that their responses are honest in nature.

The researcher anticipated the natural occurrence of demand characteristics when carrying out this research. As such, participants were informed prior to beginning their interview that there were no right or wrong answers to the questions in an effort to make the school staff feel comfortable throughout the process. There was also a desire to reassure participants that the research involved no deception, thus the researcher was transparent in explaining the research's purpose. Furthermore, the participants were made aware that their responses would remain confidential and that names would be anonymised so that comments could not be tracked back to any individual.

It is inevitable that the subjectivity of the researcher will be called into question when engaging in qualitative research. Sword (1999) suggests that no research

is free from the personality of the researcher, their biases or their assumptions and they are unable to remove the self from those actions in which they are personally involved. The researcher has, through necessity, had to utilise certain approaches as well as being reflexive throughout the research, to attend to her traits as a researcher and allow the conclusions of this research to reveal themselves in as objective a manner as possible. The researcher has a diagnosis of specific literacy difficulties and as such, tests and exams have always been a stressful experience and a source of anxiety for her. For this reason, she was extremely careful during the interview process to preclude any projection of her personal experiences on to the participants as a result of asking leading questions or by making assumptions during the analysis of data. Reflexivity allowed the researcher to be critically reflective on the knowledge yielded, and her role in the production of that knowledge (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

The researcher found the most enjoyable aspect of the research was interviewing the participants. She felt privileged to be the recipient of some participants' personal thoughts and feelings. There were, however, times during the process at which the researcher found it difficult to separate the roles of researcher and TEP. If a participant was describing difficulties they were experiencing, it was difficult to remain solely in the role of data gathering rather than the researcher's more natural inclination to spend time recognising these difficulties and/or trying to find solutions to them.

A reflexive attitude was also sustained by keeping a log of the research process. The researcher found it to be effective using Gibbs' (1988) reflective cycle to guide her overall reflections. Frequent supervision sessions with her tutor were crucial to reviewing and discussion of her position as a researcher. There was also a degree of peer consultation during the research process, such as discussing the coding and interpretation of themes, which was carried out with other trainees through professional support groups.

5.11 Conclusion

This chapter has focused on an analysis of the research findings. The study was distinctive in that it investigated the experiences of school staff, who themselves were supporting children that struggled with test anxiety. The sheer complexity of the issues surrounding test anxiety is made apparent by the research discussed over the course of this thesis, implying that support for children will be of a similarly broad-ranging and complex nature.

From the findings of this research, it could tentatively be argued that a systemic approach is arguably the most effective method for EPs to tackle test anxiety. Using Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory places EPs in an ideal position to support schools in being proactive in this area. Ensuring that school staff are trained in the appropriate skillset through whole school training and setting up effective communication channels within schools are the ways in which this can be achieved, however this should not stop EPs working with both individuals and groups of children to support their test anxiety issues. Given the knowledge and skills that EPs possess in the fields of the psychology of groups, individuals, systems and organisations, these are evidently areas in which EPs can make a worthwhile contribution.

Overall, the researcher found the process of carrying out the research to be an extremely positive one as rich data was gained. The research highlighted the detrimental impact of the pressure of test anxiety on school staff and children; the difficulties identifying and supporting children with test anxiety; how competent they feel supporting children who display test anxiety; what would help school staff develop their confidence and understanding of test anxiety; and how EPs can help school staff support this area of need.

Some of the themes that emerged from the research were surprising to the researcher, specifically the strength of the narrative relating to the levels of pressure that school staff and children experienced and the impact on their well-being. It is the intention of the researcher to present the research's findings in a team meeting at their usual line of work within the local authority as well as

at a conference at the university of East London. Those schools whom participated in the research shall also be given training on the effective strategies to support test anxiety and stress that emerged from this research. A toolkit will be designed collaboratively with schools, which could be used as an early identification and intervention tool that can offer practical strategies to support children with test anxiety. The researcher will also look for opportunities to contribute with this study to policy initiatives at a local and national level.

This research has allowed the researcher to develop a much richer understanding of test anxiety and its impact on children, parents, school staff and the wider school environment. Approaching this study from a social constructionist perspective has strongly influenced the researcher's interpretations of events in her practice, challenging her to take a more critical stance towards knowledge that was previously taken for granted. The research process has emphasised the significance of understanding a variety of perspectives, which has subsequently allowed the researcher to reap richer insights as well as affording a renewed enthusiasm and appreciation of her upcoming role as a qualified EP.

5.12 Summary

The discussion section has assessed, in the context of both psychological theory and existing research, the meaning of research findings with regards to the research questions. The researcher described the reflectivity and reflexivity applied to the research process and emphasised the relevance of these findings to her own, and other EPs' and professionals' practice. There was a review of the limitations of the findings, steps taken to disseminate findings and a discussion of the implications there may be for future research.

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Appendices:

Appendix A: Research papers summary tables

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Appendix F: Example of interview transcript

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Appendix H: Evidence of ethical clearance

Appendix I: Risk Assessment

Appendix A

Summary - systematic literature review papers

Authors/Year	Title	Main Focus	Participants	Key Findings	Methodology
Agarwal, P. K., Antonio, L. D., Roediger, H. L., Mcdermott, K. B., & McDaniel, M. A. (2014)	Classroom-based programs of retrieval practice reduce middle school and high school students' test anxiety	The impact of exam practice on exam anxiety	1408 middle and high school students	For 72% of students retrieval practice made them less anxious about exams. Only 6% felt more nervous.	A survey looking at strategies the students implemented when studying.
Atkinson, C., Squires, G., Bragg, J., Wasilewski, D., and Muscutt, J. (2013)	Effective Delivery Of Therapeutic Interventions: Findings From Four Site Visits.	An exploration study looking at what is working well for four EPSs claiming to provide effective therapeutic practice.	4 PEPs, the number of Eps has not been indicated	Facilitators: Principle EP promoting approach. Supervision is being offered. Barriers: EPS service models, lack of training, limited school awareness of services on offer, and available physical space.	Qualitative design, semi-structured interviews, documentary analysis, interviews/focus groups. Thematic Analysis
Atkinson, C., Squires, G., Bragg., Muscutt, J., and Wasilewski, D. (2014)	Facilitators And Barriers To The Provision Of Therapeutic Interventions By School Psychologists	Looking at EPs' experiences of using therapeutic interventions in their day to day work.	455 Educational Psychologists	There are systemic barriers that make it difficult for EPs to carry out therapeutic interventions: schools are unable and/or unwilling to fund direct work, and clinical supervision is not often available.	Mixed method design. Online survey/postal vote option. Survey had quantitative and qualitative elements
Burns, D. J. (2004)	Anxiety At The Time Of Final Exam – Relationships With Expectations And Performance	How exam anxiety impacts exams	378 junior and senior students in Marketing classes.	The students that expected themselves to perform better had higher levels of anxiety, however, this did not negatively impact their grades as no evidence was found for this.	Two questionnaires used: - one with the anticipated grade that students expected to receive - the second asked students to evaluate their anticipated performance.
Cassady, J. C., & Johnson, R. E. (2002)	Cognitive Test Anxiety And Academic Performance	The relationship between exams, anxiety and academic performance.	168 undergraduates	Students with high levels of test anxiety performed lower than those with lower levels of test anxiety.	Cognitive test anxiety scale. The test procrastination questionnaire (TPQ).

Authors/Year	Title	Main Focus	Participants	Key Findings	Methodology
Chamberlain, S., Daly, A. L., & Spalding, V. (2011)	The Fear Factor: Students' Experiences Of Test Anxiety When Taking A- Level Examination	An exploration of students' views and experiences of exam anxiety.	19 A-level students	Most students felt that a degree of exam anxiety helped their performance. Students felt that exam anxiety may have a negative impact their ability to prepare for their exams.	Four focus groups
Connors, L, Putwain, D., Woods, K., Nicholson, L (2009)	Causes And Consequences Of Test Anxiety In Key Stage 2 Pupils – The Meditational Role Of Emotional Resilience	The causes of test anxiety and the impact that this has on KS2 children.	120 yr 6 pupils from three primary schools.	Higher levels of self reported test anxiety and lower levels of resilience were associated with poor grades.	Test anxiety was measured using the childrens test anxiety scale (CTAS) Resilience was measured using the Resiliency Scales for Children and Adolescents (RCSA). The qualitative analysis.
Dundas, I., Wormnes, B., & Hauge, H. (2009)	Making exams a manageable task	Examined if CBT can reduce exam anxious pupils.	36 university students	The participants described ways of reframing the task of exams such as chunking the work into different steps to make them more manageable.	Semi-structured interviews Grounded theory
Eysenck, M. W., Derakshan, N., Santos, R., & Calvo, M. G. (2007)	Anxiety and cognitive performance: attentional control theory	The study is concerned primarily with the effects of anxiety on cognitive performance. The emphasis is on anxiety within normal populations rather than within clinically anxious ones	In the great majority of studies, participants were assigned to low- and high-anxious groups on the basis of their test or trait anxiety scores.	In addition to decreasing attentional control, anxiety increases attention to threat-related stimuli. Adverse effects of anxiety on processing efficiency depend on two central executive functions involving attentional control: inhibition and shifting. However, anxiety may not impair performance effectiveness (quality of performance) when it leads to the use of compensatory strategies.	The theoretical framework provides the basis for several hypotheses, all of which have been investigated empirically. There are six main hypotheses associated with attentional control theory. Each hypothesis is discussed in the following section, along with the relevant findings.

Authors/Year	Title	Main Focus	Participants	Key Findings	Methodology
Hunter, A., Playle, J., Sanchez, P., Cahill, J., and McGowan, L. (2008)	Introduction of a child and adolescent mental health link worker: education and health staff focus group findings	The perspectives of CAMHS workers and secondary school staff regarding mental health link workers (MHLW).	11 CAMHS workers and 15 education staff	MHLW are perceived as improving the communication and understanding between services. Barriers identified: issues with information sharing and confidentiality; different management priorities; different terminology used by education and health staff.	Qualitative Action Research Data collection: Focus Groups
Kidger, J., Donovan, J. L., Biddle, L., Campbell, R., and Gunnell, D. (2009a)	Supporting adolescent emotional health in schools: a mixed methods study of student and staff views in England	Investigated the levels of emotional health provision in secondary schools and how staff and students view school-based emotional health provision and what they would like to see in the future. The study is drawing a distinction between the promotion of "emotional health" and prevention of "emotional disorder". The study highlights that whole school approaches focusing on promoting good emotional health are more effective than classroom-based interventions.	Survey: 296 Secondary Schools; 154 students aged 12-14 (focus groups); 15 staff interviews	Three areas where schools could intervene: emotional health in the curriculum; support for those in distress; and the psychosocial and physical environment (e.g. poor teacher-student relationships). Also, concerns about stigma if there is no confidentiality.	Mixed method design: Quantitative - survey Qualitative - student focus groups and staff interviews. Data analysis: statistics; TA
Kidger, J., Gunnell, D., Biddle, L., Campbell, R., and Donovan, J. (2009b)	Part and parcel of teaching? Secondary school staff's views on supporting student emotional health and well-being	The role of teachers in supporting the mental health of secondary school students. Three initiatives in schools are identified: EWB, developing models for YP experiencing MH difficulties and social and emotional aspects of learning.	Eight secondary schools, 14 school staff	Teaching and EW are inevitably linked; perception that some teaching staff are reluctant to engage; Teachers' emotional health needs are neglected. Implications: support for teachers; whole school approaches ; more clarity around the meaning of EW is needed.	Qualitative design Semi-structured interviews Data TA

Authors/Year	Title	Main Focus	Participants	Key Findings	Methodology
Madge, N., Foreman, D., and Baksh, F. (2008)	Starving in the midst of plenty? A study of training needs for child and adolescent mental health service delivery in primary care	An exploring of the views of school staff working with children, about primary care and support of YPs' MH issues	150 primary care personnel n= 122 Questionnaires and n=60 Focus groups	School staff require information on criteria for referrals to CAMHS, including how to prioritise cases; when it is appropriate to make a referral; what processes to follow after a diagnosis; close collaboration when working with CAMHS.	Mixed methods design. Questionnaires/ Focus Groups Quantitative analysis: SPSS Qualitative analysis: constant comparison procedure.
Mavildi, Hoogerhede and Paas (2014)	A Quick And Easy Strategy To Reduce Test Anxiety And Enhance Test Performance	Exploring the effect of allowing children to look ahead at the exam questions will have on test anxiety (therefore consumes less working memory resources).	117 primary school students	Allowing children to look ahead helps reduce anxiety and enhances performance.	The cognitive test anxiety questionnaire
Owens, M., Stevenson, J., Hadwin, J. A., & Norgate, R. (2014)	When does anxiety help or hinder cognitive test performance? The role of working memory capacity	The researchers tested an interaction hypothesis to determine whether a combination of high anxiety and low working memory capacity (WMC) would predict variance in demanding cognitive test scores.	96 participants 12-14 years old	The researchers found that anxiety-WMC interaction explained a significant amount of variance in cognitive test performance. Trait anxiety was unrelated to cognitive test performance for those adolescents with average WMC scores. Trait anxiety was negatively related to test performance in adolescents with low WMC and positively related to test performance in those with high WMC.	*Quantitative study *Statistical analyses *Self-report levels of trait anxiety: Spielberger trait anxiety form *Working memory capacity: AWMA and the CANTAB *Cognitively demanding tests: (WRAT 4) and (SPM)
Osborne, C., and Burton, S. (2014)	Emotional Literacy Support Assistants' views on supervision provided by educational psychologists: what EPs can learn from group supervision	An assessment of the effectiveness of EP supervision for ELSAs.	270 ELSAs	ELSAs feel that their needs are met through supervision from EPs; they value good relationships; and opportunities to discuss cases with other group members.	Mixed methods design Questionnaires and Descriptive statistics TA

Authors/Year	Title	Main Focus	Participants	Key Findings	Methodology
Partridge, K. (2012)	Exploring pastoral staff's experiences of their own emotional well-being in a secondary school	Supporting children and young people in this area can be emotionally difficult for staff because of the contradictory emotions that may be evoked. However, the experience appears to be different for participants.	6 pastoral staff	Implementing individual interventions with pupils is not as effective as creating a whole school ethos. Recommendations include: training around EWB; utilising supervision and understanding participants' own emotions; promotion of whole school ethos could be developed through training, group work and consultations.	Mixed method design Semi-structured interviews, IPA; Personal Construct Psychology (PCP), Repertory Grid interview
Putwain, Woods and Nicholson (2009)	Assessment and examination stress in Key Stage 4	The aim of this article is to build on previous work to explore some basic questions surrounding KS4 assessments from a student-centred perspective: (a) what factors lead to the development of assessments in KS4 to be perceived as stressful; and (b) what are the effects for the students concerned?	Thirty-four KS4 students were interviewed from six secondary schools	There are three key findings. First, stress was linked to the motivation to achieve and the fear of failure through esteem judgements and conditions of acceptance from important others. Second, the experience of stress was linked to a wider educational context including practices and policies pursued by teachers and schools. Third, a more specific state, examination anxiety, was associated with facilitating effects prior to examinations and debilitating effects during examinations.	Questionnaire about tendency to experience examinations and assessments as stressful and anxiety provoking. Qualitative: semi-structured interviews grounded theory.

Authors/Year	Title	Main Focus	Participants	Key Findings	Methodology
Putwain, D. W., Connors, L., Symes, W (2010)	Do Cognitive Distortions Mediate The Test Anxiety-Examination Performance Relationship?	Examination of the relationship between test anxiety and exam performance.	244 yr 11 pupils.	The pupils that experience exam anxiety and cognitive distortions are likely to perform worse.	Revised test anxiety scale
Putwain, D.W., & Roberts, C. M. (2012)	Fear and efficacy appeals in the classroom: the secondary teachers' perspective	Examination of teachers' views towards fear and efficacy appeals	234 secondary school teachers	Results showed that teachers held mixed views towards the use of fear appeals and their domain knowledge of fear appeals, but more homogenous views about efficacy appeals, reassuring messages and domain knowledge of efficacy appeals.	Survey statistical analysis
Putwain, Remedios and Symes (2015)	Experiencing Fear As A Challenge Or Threat Influences Attainment Value And Academic Self Efficacy.	An exploration of the impact of the use of fear as a motivator.	Self report data collected from 1433 students.	Fear appeal negatively impact pupils and increase exam anxiety/stress. The researchers recommend that teachers could benefit from training on the impact of fear appeals.	3 Quantitative questionnaires were used
Ramirez and Beilock (2011)	Writing About Testing Worries Boosts Exam Performance In The Class-Room	Writing about the test worries helps reduce "choking" during the examinations.	Study 1: 20 participants Study 2: 47 participants Study 3: 51 participants	Those with high levels of test anxiety in the intervention group outperformed the control group with high levels of test anxiety	"A standard measure of test anxiety" Maths accuracy
Remedios, Ritchie and Lieberman (2005)	I Used To Like It But Now I Don't. The Effect Of The Transfer Test In Northern Ireland. Pupils Intrinsic Motivation.	Investigates how exams can decrease interest in a subject.	66 pupils 10-11 year old	Exams can reduce interest in subjects.	Questionnaire to measure motivation
Rothi, D. M., Leavey, G., and Best, R. (2008)	Recognising And Managing Pupils With Mental Health Difficulties: Teachers' Views And Experiences On Working With Educational Psychologists In Schools	Investigating teachers' views on working with EPs to manage pupils with MH difficulties.	30 teaching staff: Head teachers SENCOs Teachers	Greater need for continuity - Shortage of EP time and resources - EPs unable to see individual children - Difficult for relationships to be built over time	Qualitative design. Data collection: Interviews IPA
Squires, G. and Dunsmuir, S. (2011)	Embedding Cognitive Behavioural Therapy Training in Practice: Facilitators and Barriers for Trainee Educational Psychologists (TEPs)	Exploring the experience of TEPs integrating their CBT training into practice.	24 TEPs	Barriers: Confidential space in schools - Schools do not want to use EP time for CBT interventions - Lack of structures in place following the intervention	Qualitative design Focus Groups, ATLAS computer programme

Appendix B

Participant information sheet

INFORMATION SHEET FOR PARTICIPANTS

UNIVERSITY OF EAST LONDON School of Psychology

Project title: An exploration of school staff experiences working with children who display exam/test anxiety.

My name is Olga Zacharaki and I am an Educational and Child Psychology Trainee at the University of East London.

Research Purpose

The aim of this research is to explore school staff experiences supporting children who display test anxiety - a contemporary issue relevant to many schools and local authorities. The research questions focus on school staff experiences using different strategies and interventions, how competent they felt they are they in supporting children who display exam/test anxiety, what would help build on their confidence and knowledge and, finally, how can EPs further assist them in promoting positive mental health.

What will I do at your school and how this will benefit you

Teachers (KS2), SENDCos/pastoral staff and Teaching Assistants (TAs) will be interviewed. The interview will last approximately 45 minutes. All participants will need to have experienced teaching/supporting children displaying exam/test anxiety at some point in their career.

The research findings will be shared with schools as well as with Camden's Educational Psychology Service. School presentations on research findings, useful strategies and effective interventions will be offered to participating schools.

Confidentiality

A tape recorder will be used to record the interviews, however, this information will not be shared with anyone. The only exemption that information will be shared is if the participant is at risk of harm.

Once the research has been completed, I will write about the findings, however, I will not use the people's names at all, nor will I use the name of the school. The participants will not be able to be identified through what they have said in my write up.

Participants can withdraw at any point in the process, if they feel they need to.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any further questions about this study; my contact details are:

Email: u0924471@uel.ac.uk Contact number: 

Alternatively, you can also contact my academic tutor if you have any questions or complaints:

Dr Miles Thomas - email: m.thomas@uel.ac.uk

Postal address: University of East London, Water Lane, London E15 4LZ

Appendix C

Headteacher and participant consent forms

CONSENT FORM - Headteacher

Name

.....

The purpose of this consent form is to state whether you give consent for your school to take part in the following research project:

Project title: An exploration of school staff experiences working with children who display exam/test anxiety.

1. I received and understand the information about the research project:

Yes No

2. I am happy for school to participate in the research project.

Yes No

Signature Date.....

Thank you

CONSENT FORM - Participant

Name

The purpose of this consent form is to state whether you give consent to take part in the following research project:

Project title: An exploration of school staff experiences working with children who display test anxiety.

1. I received and understand the information about the research project:

Yes No

2. I am happy to participate in the research project.

Yes No

3. I am happy for my responses to be audiotaped.

Yes No

Signature

Thank you

Appendix D

Semi-structured interview schedule

Interview Questions

Central question: What are the experiences of primary school staff working with children who display test anxiety?

1. How do you find the test period?
2. How do you think other school staff feel about tests?
3. How do you think children feel about tests?
4. Do children who experience test anxiety, also display any other difficulties/anxiety in other areas of school life? (prompting question: Can you give me detailed description? Do you have testples of this?)

Sub-question 1: What support strategies and interventions do they use?

1. How do you identify children that experience test anxiety?
2. What do you find helpful when supporting children experiencing test anxiety?
3. What makes it difficult to support them?
4. Is there a school wide intervention that you use?
5. Is there appropriate funding to support children experiencing test anxiety?
6. Do you have appropriate resources to support children with test anxiety?

Sub-question 2: Do school staff feel competent supporting children who display test anxiety?

1. Do you feel you are in a position to support children with test anxiety?
2. Do you feel confident in your knowledge of pupil test anxiety and mental health?

3. How competent do you feel supporting children who experience these difficulties?
4. How closely do you work with other school staff/pastoral/management to support children with test anxiety?

Sub-question 3: What would help build on your confidence and understanding of test anxiety?

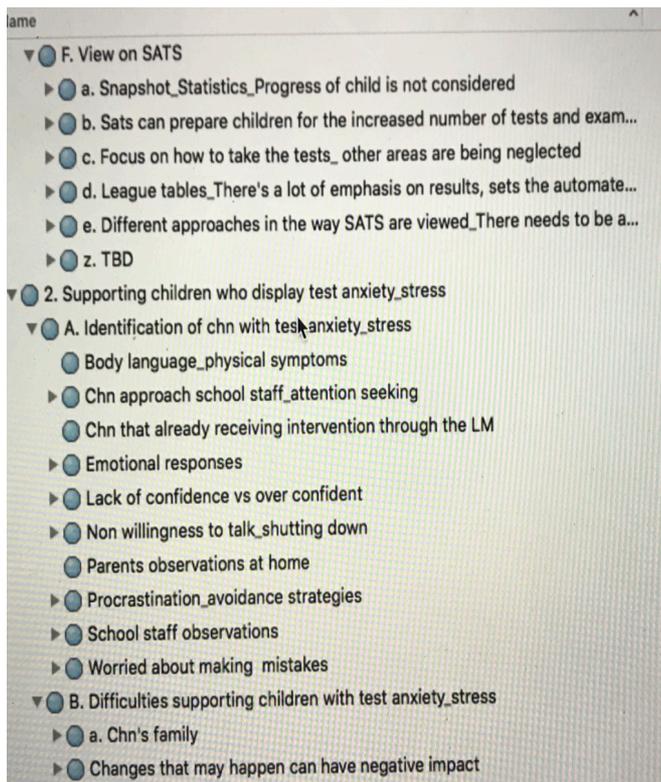
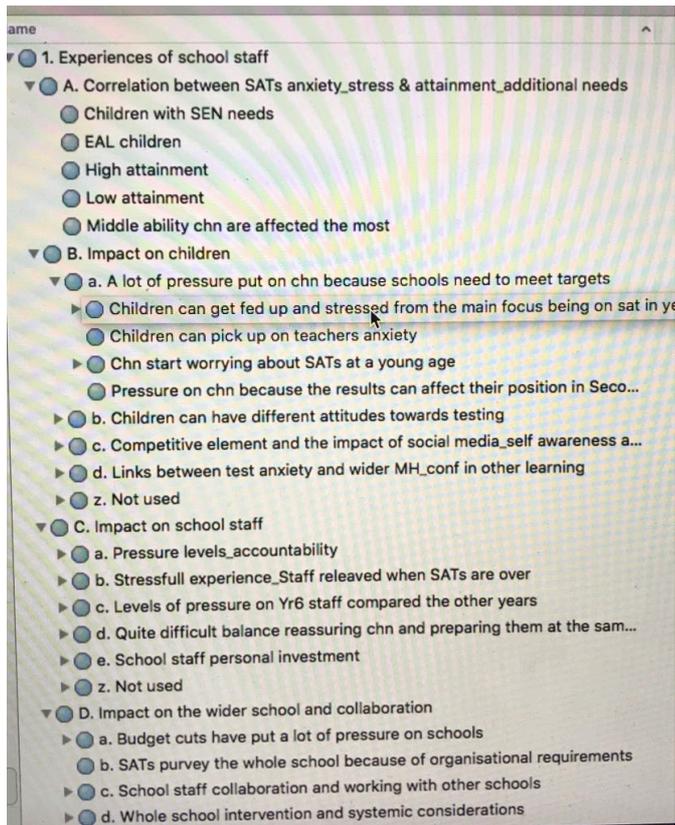
1. Do you feel you have the right tools and appropriate training to support children that experience test anxiety? (prompting question: Have you received any training/cpd in test anxiety? Can you give me detailed description?)
2. What support would you like to receive in the future in order to support these children?

Sub-question 4: How can EPs help school staff support children who experience test/test anxiety?

1. What do you know about the role of EP in supporting children who experience test anxiety?
2. Have you had any input from EPs?
3. How would you like EPs to help you support children who experience test anxiety?

Appendix E

Initial Themes and Codes from NVivo



- me
- ▼ C. Helpful approaches_strategies_interventions
 - ▶ a. Learning strategies
 - ▶ a. Promoting wellbeing and changing mindsets
 - ▶ Calming strategies_meditation_yoga
 - ▶ Pastoral support for chn_key adults_mentoring_just talking
 - ▶ Post SATs period support
 - ▶ Supporting chn during the SATs week
 - ▶ Whole Class and small groups
 - ▶ Working closely with parents
 - ▶ z. Not used
- ▼ 3. School staff confidence_competence varies
 - ▼ A. Confident because of own reading, personal experience and learning on...
 - ▶ a. Confident because of further education but needs to keep abreast wit...
 - ▶ b. Confident because of the number of years working as a teacher
 - ▶ c. Utilising personal and family experience of mental health
 - ▶ B. Confident because of the relationship she has with the chn
 - ▼ C. Mostly confident but need to refresh knowledge of how certain areas ar...
 - ▶ a. Not mental particularly confident about MH but have picked things up
 - ▶ b. Would feel more confident if more people in the school received some...
 - ▼ D. Not confident in their knowledge of strategies to support test anxiety
 - ▶ a. Concerns that school staff end up doing a watered down version of w...
 - ▶ b. No formal training
 - ▶ c. Teacher training courses are not adequately prepare them to deal wit...
 - ▶ z. Not used
- ▼ 4. Support school staff receive_would like to receive
 - ▼ A. Collaboration with school staff_website with useful info
 - ▶ a. Discussions with other members of staff help increase knowledge
 - ▶ b. Tch mentoring is helpful
 - ▼ B. More funding

- name
- ▶ b. Tch mentoring is helpful
- ▼ B. More funding
 - ▶ a. Funding goes for academic support rather than ensuring chn feel hap...
 - ▶ b. Not enough funding to cover for adult support chn need
 - ▶ c. Budget cuts have reduced the involvement of professional agencies i...
 - ▶ d. Additional funding would be allocated for additional EP sessions and...
 - ▶ Difficult to answer due to lack of knowledge of what is out there
 - ▶ e. More small group work like P4C
 - ▶ f. More resources
- ▶ C. More training
- ▶ D. Support school staff would like from LA
- ▼ 5. School staff experience working with EPs
 - ▼ A. Experience of school staff working with EPs
 - ▶ a. EPs have been approachable when school staff have concerns about c...
 - ▶ b. Tend to utilise EPs more for educational diff and CAMHs for MH
 - ▶ c. No experience working with EPs in this area, which is not seen as a pri...
 - ▶ d. EP have provided useful supervision and training
 - ▶ e. Not always included in meetings with EPs because of Yr6 class dema...
 - ▶ f. Unclear understanding of the EP role
 - ▼ B. Support school staff would like from EPs
 - ▶ a. Better understanding of chn needs and practical strategies
 - ▶ b. Design a programme to support test anxiety, involving tch, SLT, parents
 - ▶ c. Drop in sessions_central email_line on specific areas for cases do not...
 - ▶ d. Gain a better understanding of the EP role and what they offer
 - ▶ e. Help schools develop resilience
 - ▶ f. There is never enough training, would like to see more sessions
- ▶ 6. Mental Health
- ▶ 7. Miscellaneous
 - ▶ More whole class support for test anxiety for all children

Appendix F

Example of interview transcript

Name of Study:	An exploration of school staff experiences working with children who display test anxiety
Name of trainee:	Olga Zacharaki

INTERVIEW 5 I: Interviewer / R: Respondent

I:	Thank you for your participation... how did you find the testing period?
R:	I think they are always quite a stressful time because the emphasis is so much on the results and umm not really on the process. So I find them err the pace of umm teaching really intense. I am teaching really fast a lot umm... The content is umm is really full and I am at the stage where I just expect the kids to know...know it by then, and if they <i>don't</i> that's quite stressful because there's obviously gaps umm in their learning that I can't necessarily cover within one year. So I think it's quite a difficult time because umm you are umm really stressing umm the importance of them getting concepts but you are also not making the learning fun or engaging. So you just expect them to revise, revise, revise...and you expect it to be just as important to them but it's not really...they are children...kind of...'I don't really care' as much as we do (laughter). Yes...so...it's not my favourite time of year
I:	Do you feel under pressure about the SATs?
R:	Yes, definitely. I think it's umm...what I said to myself this year was that there were seven other teachers before me and I just kept saying that there were seven other teachers before me umm because there is only so much you can do and umm depending on a child and their learning needs and umm environmental context and all of the things that they have been exposed to, will depend on the academic ability and if they come to me not quite ready to be in the Year 6 curriculum then I have to...essentially the expectation is that I make up the curriculum they have missed as well as the Year 6 curriculum. So for some children you are expecting them to make up 2½ years worth of progress and you just can't do that and...luckily for me...the headship here understand that and have never pushed err that kind of umm expectation on to me but it's still there. Like if the results come back err and they are positive, that will be attributed to me and if they come back and they are negative that will also be attributed to me. Even though it's very much a team effort I think people can spearhead it to be the Year 6 teacher's responsibility. And you often hear people say things like umm, 'You're a Year 6 teacher, you must be good' you know like, 'Oh you must be a good teacher' because they imply that they put the their strongest teachers in Year 6 because it's the most important year and that's...you know...
I:	Do you feel like there is another layer of umm...
R:	Expectation?
I:	Expectation

R:	Yes...and that's a little bit difficult too because part of you becomes a bit resentful because you can see your colleagues who don't have to do as much monitoring and as much marking and as much umm pace I think within the classroom. The amount of work that we get through and the amount of umm stuff that we do within a day is really high and I can't really relax off until now, until this part of the year. So it's a really intense year I think and then you sort of...you see that your colleagues, they are a little less, you know, now doing lots of lovely trips and you kind of think, man that would be a great life (laughter)
I:	(laughter) Oh
R:	Yes
I:	Thank you
R:	That's okay
I:	So yes... you did mentioned a little bit about the school staff in other years but you think they also feel pressure about exams?
R:	I think when the exam week happens they do. I think that's because lots of their staff are taken. So, for example, like Year 5 may have a teacher...a teaching assistant that we need to support, so then we take them from them for that week and that sometimes has a negative impact on them and how they umm see their week or how they... I think in the same way that I can feel resentful that they've...it seems to me like they have an easier deal, I think they feel like...they can feel resentful that Year 6 seems to be the most important and all the resource then goes in to Year 6. So there's a sort of a double-edged sword I think in that sense. But I think umm they don't have as much pressure in terms of them doing well...that's on...that's me... I think...but they probably have pressure in umm that they have to be more generous with timing and resourcing and they are not allowed to be loud around the school or umm... Yes, they sort of seem to matter less those other years and to...you know...and so maybe in that way they feel like they don't have as much support perhaps
I:	Right... you spoke earlier about additional support that goes to Year 6 and that other year groups may feel resentful... is it during the SATs week or do you think that's over the year?
R:	Yes it's heightened in the week because basically it's all hands on deck but people can cope because they know that that's a week. Umm...throughout the year I have had like an interventions teacher that's been given to Year 6 which could have been used across the school probably, but for the morning she was just designated to be working in Year 6 umm...and so I think that's really helped me. Umm...in one way because she is another brain, she is another person and also if you don't get somebody who has a lot of initiative it's another job for me to kind of manage and make sure that they are on the same page and...so it can...yes... So I think that throughout the year...I don't know...it's probably fair here because everybody has a teaching assistant bar me by Year 6 by Year 6 but then I have the interventions teacher so...I probably have the higher level version of that umm so...yes... To me I don't think that they would feel pressure but they may
I:	Yes, thank you. Well what about children... how do they feel about testing?
R:	Mmm... This year was interesting for me because err they seemed really blasé about them and so I have done the test a couple of times, only once at this school, but it was my third SATs that I had done and so umm...yes. Some of these children felt very stressed, very pressured and it was

	<p>interesting that that was the high attainers that felt that pressure...umm the ones who were going to do well umm so I was reflecting on that, thinking the ones that should be worrying about it (chuckles) don't seem to care. Umm...and in the ones that were probably going to make it, and quite capably were really worrying about it and I think that's probably a sense of expectations on themselves to always be perfect and to always operate at this high level. Umm...but in the past I have been with kids who have, yes, really felt low afterwards, because I think they go into them thinking, 'Oh, okay I probably can' and then when they are exposed to the amount of things that they can't do feel quite worthless I think. Yes...so...and that's always hard, especially when you come in on the Monday and you do a really difficult reading paper and then you have to do the rest of the week. I think it can really knock their confidence and be...yes... I think more for me and my experience of it this year has been that the children have been bored of the...the way that we are teaching and they are sick of it</p>
I:	Yes... yes
R:	But we hang this thing over their head of like, 'Come on...only four weeks to go...there's your big exams...you've got it', you know, so they...they stay with it but they...it's relentless
I:	Yes...yes. So what about the children that would normally get additional support in a class?
R:	Yes, I...it's...and for the lowest of attainers, for me, seem to be oblivious. They just want to do it...they were excited and they thought they had done really well and they said it was really easy (chuckle)...I hope it's the case. Umm...so I don't...there was an element of them not knowing that they didn't know it umm and there was also I think an element of some who disengaged and had kind of presented with err reluctance with a bit of an attitude towards them...more like, 'I don't even really care about them anyway' umm probably as a defence mechanism and that if I don't care then it doesn't matter if I don't do well. Umm...there was one girl who basically had a little tantrum umm and kind of refused to carry on and then so we had to give her a little pep talk (chuckle) and she did in the end but...yes... I think that rather than it being an anxiety it presented itself as an anger...kind of...maybe stemming from anxiety or...yes...but
I:	Mmm...thank you. Now the children that... umm that experience this anxiety during the test period, do they display any other difficulties or anxiety in other areas of school life?
R:	Yes. One child does...she finds it difficult to umm moderate her feelings quite a lot and she checks in a lot
I:	Checks in?
R:	She checks in with me. So I have sent...set her off on a task. She will come back and be like, 'Should I put this here?' 'Is that good?' you know lots of different questions like that. Umm...she also finds like transitions and change really hard so she is finding it hard at the moment moving into secondary school and umm... and the other boy who was quite nervous was err lacks confidence I think. He has umm like a skin condition where...I am not sure what it's called...but you know when they lose pigment within their skin. Umm and so he wouldn't come swimming with us this week because that was more prevalent on his legs...he didn't want to show his legs. Yes, so he has err confidence based issues I think...and worries a lot and he is just

	quite reserved, but umm...yes...but then he is also really well adjusted and quite positive and so there can be two sides to him
I:	So umm...do you think that some of them are also displaying anxiety in other areas of school life...?
R:	Yes
I:	Yes. Thank you. Umm... how do you identify those children that stressed and anxious during the test period? What are some of the signs that you see when a child is stressed or anxious...?
R:	We would do...like every morning...like a rating from 1 to 10 on how we were feeling. Umm...and so I would watch for the...kids that were consistently below 5 and so, yes, anyone that was below a 3 I would then speak with them and like, 'How are we going and what can we do?'. So...but the majority of my class of 28 there are about three of them who felt below a 5...because everybody asked felt very positive about them. Umm...so that would be one thing that we would do and then we would also do lots of umm breathing exercises and relaxation. We just played this Brian Eno...he does like music for airports...it's like this...
I:	Yes, I like his music (laughter)
R:	Yes well too...me too (laughter). So we would just play this ambient music and let them relax and do some deep breathing and... We did that before the SATs as well so that they came into a space of quite calm and umm to try and help them do that...and then I think...and part of that you would see...some kids really draw in breath and some kids who didn't really care. So those ones that were trying...really engaging I sort of thought they were obviously experiencing more umm worry about it as well
I:	So there are some physical signs there for example breathing or...?
R:	Yes, and really umm whatever I would say they would be clutching on to, you know, they...what I...I held a lot of weight I think in terms of making them feel calm and safe, so yes... So those ones who I can see that were really engaging were that I...then made me think they are probably quite worried...yes
I:	Okay, thank you. Umm...what do you find helpful when you are supporting children with umm test anxiety?
R:	Yes...I...I find it helpful to umm minimise it really...to think of it as a week in terms of a year and to umm explain to the children that they're holistically way more than this and that the value shouldn't just be on this academic umm process. I think that we need to value a whole lot of talents and ranges. So I, in my mind, just think about things like that, think about umm what I...if I could have power and control over like each occasion in the government, I would think about that, about how we valued talents across a child rather than just narrowing in on Maths and umm English. Umm...I think it's helpful to have like reprieves from it, so to be like, 'Right we are going to work towards (this) and then Friday afternoon we are going to go to the park and hang out' and, you know... So there would be little things like that that I would try and give umm things to look forward to and things to work for and knowing soon this is going to be over. So little things like that to try and give them a break from the workload
I:	So do you find that you've got the time to do these things at the moment?
R:	I find...yes...because it's X school and because I am quite as...like a...experienced teacher within it, I'm err respected enough to be allowed to do that...so I can...but I don't know if I was a younger teacher or if I didn't

	have the same ability to articulate what I thought was needed, if that would happen. Umm...but because I can advocate for myself in the class it does (chuckles) happen
I:	Yes, so do you think that it very much depends on the teacher and their experience and how confident they feel they are...?
R:	Yes...and their leadership as well...how much the leadership umm valued what they had to say and trusted them...mmm
I:	Yes...thank you. Umm...I know we touched a little bit on that but what makes it difficult to support children with test anxiety...?
R:	It think it...for me it's the pressure that I am experiencing as well. Like umm...it's particularly difficult if I know that I have taught pronouns about six times (chuckles) in the year and they come to me, they are like 'What's a pronoun?' You now that's hard for me to manage my umm reactions to that. I am like, 'Why do you not know what that is?' (laughter) that's what I want to say rather than, 'This is what a pronoun is and how can we help you remember that?' because obviously they are not remembering it. Umm...and that annoys me because I value competency as a person anyway, so then when I know that I have exposed these children and in so many different ways and they haven't bothered to listen, that's how I feel, they haven't bothered to listen umm that's difficult, and I think that's a barrier to me being supportive because then they... In one way they know my expectations are very high and they need to be engaged in...in the lesson, because I think part of the culture of this school is the behaviour for learning isn't very strong. They are a little bit like, 'Feed me' you know rather than I will think for myself
I:	Right...
R:	Umm and so part of it is good and makes sense because they know that I will not tolerate that like, 'If you are going to sit in my lesson and not be part of it, don't bother' umm and then another part of it is detrimental because they fear asking for help I guess because they think, 'Oh maybe she has taught this just yesterday and I didn't listen and she is going to...' you know. So that's definitely a barrier to support as well and I am tired by the end of it, I just...I have got no more time. Like right I find it hard to...to teach in this term ... I feel like I have given all that I could give and now, because it's the transition term I have got to make it really fun and I have got to do all this great like stuff and I just think ...I just want to go on holiday... and not have pressure on me...
I:	Yes, yes
R:	Umm...so I think it's the...it's the weight of the workload and making it...and doing it sustainably for the whole year to give the children the best. And because I demand that of myself it's hard...because I don't want to do it (chuckles)
I:	Yes, yes. Thank you for that. Now is there a school wide intervention programme, to support children that experience test anxiety?
R:	Yes, not really.
I:	It could be at this school or another school that you worked before
R:	Yes
I:	Have you ever seen any kind of school wide intervention...?
R:	Yes...not really systematic
I:	Yes

R:	It seems to be reactionary to the child's needs umm...yes, and that is umm... Yes, that's...that's good I guess in a way but I think umm catching them younger is probably important. I think they get too far along the umm the school year or...like...at the educational years before they get...before someone realises actually something is quite badly wrong here. So umm there has...this school it has started to happen in Year 1. There is a lot more like...people flagging up issues and saying, 'This child needs some help and stuff' but I think...of these children that have come to me, who don't yet have any P Plan who need one and so that kind of thing. And I think part of the issue is within inner city London schools, staff is transient so...and I am leaving this year as well and so therefore the information... It's okay because then they are going as well so that's different but... Let's say I was teaching Year 5, the information that I have about those children, which is key, I don't then...there's not so much of a transition because I am not around next year to fill in the teacher...the new teacher on these kids and what they struggled with or what they did well with and....yes, so...umm. Yes I think that's a barrier too that that's the style of intervention it's because you don't have the narrative, because it keeps getting interrupted...yes
I:	Lovely, thank you. Is there appropriate funding to support children that experience test anxiety or stress?
R:	Is there a problem with funding did you say?
I:	Appropriate funding...
R:	Appropriate funding. Umm...I wouldn't be able to answer...I don't know. I feel like this school is umm in the Borough of X is quite strong in supporting children. Umm...and I think that they have like lots of CAMHS workers available and...but the thing is...is you can really refer them once and then they have their six weeks and then that's it...so it would be nice to have more of a follow up...umm...for certain children. The lower level, you know, the children that are suffering with anxiety and...and coping with transitions, you know, the ones who present with like massive behavioural needs obviously get seen too, but it would be just to value mental health a little bit more at this age I think would be really helpful...yes...and as if this was more funding it would be good but... Yes, so I think that sort of thing...I worked in X before here and I never really experienced any support for those kinds of children. We did have a mentor that we had employed but she had...so she again was dealing with people chucking chairs...you know, not children that had those sort of anxieties...mmm
I:	Lovely, thank you. Umm...are there any specific coping strategies that you used before that you found useful for children?
R:	I think for the lower level children it was all about expectation, all about encouragement and all about visual cues. So lots of umm equipping them with lots of revision, resources that they could use to then feel more prepared umm... I think lots of it was about...we did lots of umm discussions like around philosophy for children, following that framework...about failure, what does it mean to fail...is it the worst thing in the world to fail? So we try to downscale a lot of their reactions before...you know...and we still don't know what the results are so...that will be interesting. But I am hoping that when they come out that they will feel like, 'I have done my absolute best' and when we reflected on our SATs when we had finished umm that was the key question of like, "Can you say

	that you pushed yourself and that you tried the whole way through...and if you can then is that our definition of success?' and yes, so that's...so...umm...hopefully that works. I think it will be a different thing when they get their results and see...mmm
I:	Lovely... in terms of resources, do you feel that you have enough resources or appropriate resources to support these children?
R:	Yes, I think I have wasted so many trees, really
I:	(laughter)
R:	Because I have printed things off and umm and like basically lots and lots of old SATs papers, so that they were very familiar with them umm and they weren't going to be shocked when they...
I:	So was this a useful resource... past papers?
R:	Yes, because that really helped them know...that no, it didn't feel foreign when they saw it. Umm...yes...so I think yes, I definitely have. I think there is a...there is a feeling of loneliness and that when you are the only teacher and that comes in a X school. So I think for me it would have been great to have like a team teacher from the start of the year that I had the whole year umm in an ideal world, but I don't know who has the money for that but umm...yes. So I think...yes, I think the answer would have to be yes, that I did. I think again coming back to it being transient, so we split for Maths, we had two groups to try and cope with the demand of like the differentiation within the groups umm and the lower group had about four different teachers this year...so that wasn't productive and that will be something that we reflect on as...when we see the results, you know...there wasn't consistency across the year
I:	So what was the reason behind not having this...?
R:	Err well our headteacher left...so then our deputy
I:	Right, okay...so changes in the leadership team
R:	So she, our deputy head was the person who was taking them and was going to for the year and then she had to step into the role of the headteacher and then you are finding part-time people who are willing to do bits and pieces and...yes
I:	Yes...okay, thank you
R:	Yes, the staffing
I:	So in terms of, you know, yourself...how competent do you feel in your knowledge to support students that are, you know, umm experience err test anxiety or stress and the second part of this question is, how confident do you feel supporting children with mental health umm difficulties, you know, across...you know, different areas?
R:	Yes...the thing about supporting children with mental health difficulties umm is time and it's investment. So it's about what you value...I think...and it's very difficult in Year 6 to have umm the time to really give to a child needing it umm because you have to have a mindset of, 'We have got to get all of these kids across the line' umm and that's why it's good to have other people on staff to be able to refer children to them like, 'Right, you are experiencing some anxiety, I would love to send you to this person to have a chat about that'. Umm ideally that would be my job and I would have time for that because that's really important to me and that's what I want to value, but I don't think the system allows for it. Umm...I feel very confident in the way I would approach it though, in the way I would work with them. Umm...I have reached a lot of challenging children who have difficulties like

	that in consistency and relationship...I have proven to be really effective with them and really helpful so that they feel safe and they know who they can speak to. Umm...yes, but I think it's difficult in this year...especially towards this...when it gets and you get into the Spring term because you don't necessarily have the time after lunch to spend 10 minutes with a child who is upset because someone said something in the playground. You kind of have to expect them to be a little bit more mature than they are and cope with it themselves and umm... So if I...I don't they are old enough to be doing the SATs and to be coping with that kind of pressure yet but...I am just a teacher so (chuckles) just got to do the job
I:	So if you did have the capacity in terms of time, resources how would you like to support the children... you mentioned something about talking to them...?
R:	Yes, I think small group umm things would have been great. Like to be able to work in small groups with them, to talk about...to run small like philosophy for children things and...
I:	Yes ...yes
R:	Yes, targeted for them and to what they need umm... Yes, I think that would have been a really great thing to do. To be able to take them on umm experiences to show them that they are good at other things, you know, especially if they are not an academic person umm... Yes, that would have been really great to be more relational
I:	Thank you
R:	You are welcome
I:	So umm...yes, we may have touched on some these questions... umm how closely do you work with, you know, other school staff...pastoral and management...to support umm children that umm experience test anxiety?
R:	Yes, so 'M' was somebody that I would work with. I would refer someone to her and say, 'Look, can you do some stuff on transition with these children?' or 'Can you do some things about umm preparing for an exam?' and she would do...you know, she would do that for me. Umm and 'X' who is the headteacher would be really open to that as well...to helping kids or to releasing me so that I can help kids or...yes
I:	Thank you. Umm...so in terms of training, do you feel that you received appropriate training to support children who display test anxiety or stress? Umm...it could be, training at the university or part of CPD training?
R:	Yes...I think it is experience probably mostly that prepares you. Umm...I did training at university, I did it...I myself went back and did a year of like counselling and sort of umm...processing stuff which I think equipped me to...for there to understand what's happening for people or like and kind of comfort people or allow them to express themselves. So probably yes, but that's been on my own initiative
I:	Mmm...thank you...what support would you like to receive to develop your skills ...?
R:	Umm...I think school wide it would be good to have like a philosophy for children programme running throughout the school. That...I know that because I was trained in it at my last school but this school doesn't do it. So I think having a school that encourages creative thinking and critical thinking about issues would be really good. Umm...so I wouldn't necessarily say that that's me but that would be a school wide vision I think that would be really helpful. Umm...yes, and I think like if there were like planning days and

	things where you could look to this term of like how do you debrief, how do you umm...now then transition them into another set of expectations and pressure at a secondary school. That would be great to have a collaborative website of the stuff that you could draw on for that...for that final term
I:	Yes, lovely, thank you. Umm...now we are coming to the last set of questions. Umm...what do you know about the role of the educational psychologist supporting children that experience test anxiety or stress?
R:	Not much really. My experience of EPs have been that they have come and looked at like the way that they behave or the way that they engage with the learning
I:	Yes
R:	Yes...not about anxiety
I:	Thank you. Have you ever had any input from an educational psychologist?
R:	Umm I haven't but I have a meeting today (chuckle) with one err regarding a child in my class...okay (chuckles). Umm...yes, so...there's that aspect I think that I...but I haven't really... Like err one of the...because of the SATs I was not included on an earlier meeting for a child because they thought it was more important that I was in the classroom rather than being removed for one child. So it's that kind of situation that I was referring to earlier when you don't get to be able to invest in one child because they think the other 27 are more important. Umm...so yes...not really...I read reports and things but I haven't had any like personal input from them
I:	Yes...okay. Umm...how would you like EPs to help you support children experiencing these anxious feelings about tests?
R:	Yes...I think part of it is about knowledge. So it's what is actually happening for the child...umm...scientifically. So it's explaining that...like understanding that and how that would manifest in the classroom...and then small things that you can do to prevent...yes
I:	What support would you like to receive from the local authority?
R:	Yes, I think perhaps some sort of err again collaboration with other Year 6 teachers. Not just about moderation...not just about reading or Maths but about how to support children holistically...yes, that would be good
I:	Lovely. Thank you very much
R:	You are welcome

Appendix G

Examples of Nvivo coded interview transcript

<p>n the Year 6 curriculum then I have to...essentially the expectation is that I make up the curriculum they have missed as well as the Year 6 curriculum. So for some children you are expecting them to make up 2½ years worth of progress and you just can't do that and... luckily for me...the headship here understand that and have never pushed err that kind of umm expectation on to me but its still there. Like if the results come back err and they are positive, that will be attributed to me and if they come back and they are negative that will also be attributed to me. Even though it's very much a team effort I think people can spearhead it to be the Year 6 teacher's responsibility. And you often hear people say things like umm, 'You're a Year 6 teacher, you must be good' you know like, 'Oh you must be a good teacher' because they imply that they put the their strongest teachers in Year 6 because its the most important year and that's...you know...</p> <p>Great...yes...yes. Do you feel like there is another layer of umm... Expectation?</p> <p>Expectation</p> <p>Yes...and that's a little bit difficult too because part of you become a bit resentful because you can see your colleagues who don't have to do as much monitoring and as much marking and as much umm pace I think within the classroom. The amount of work that we get through and the amount of umm stuff that we do within a day is really high and I can't really relax off until now, until this part of the year. So it's a really intense year I think and then you sort of ...you see that your colleagues, they are a little less, you know, no doing lots of lovely trips and you kind of think, man that would be a great life (laughter)</p> <p>(laughter) Oh</p> <p>Yes</p> <p>Thank you</p> <p>That's okay</p>	<p>High attainment</p> <p>Low attainment</p> <p>Volume of work prevents tch to support chld with the emotional side of things</p> <p>Disengagement_refusal as a coping strategy</p> <p>Questions they may ask and language they may use</p> <p>Tch finding it to continue being supportive after failed attempts</p> <p>Experience and relationship with SLT impact on effectiveness</p> <p>e. Not always included in meetings with EPs because of Yr6 class demands</p> <p>d. Links between test anxiety and wider MH_conf in other learning</p> <p>a. Pressure levels_accountability</p> <p>Calming strategies_meditation_yoga</p> <p>Time pressure/limitations makes it difficult to support chn with test anxiety and wider MH</p> <p>Diff to support MH because of time & investment</p> <p>Interventions teacher</p> <p>h. Overworked_intense teaching_expectation to fill in gaps from previous years</p> <p>School staff can be resentful_diff for continuity</p> <p>Other yr teachers can be resentful as Yr6 a priority</p> <p>PAC could help boost chn's self esteem</p> <p>Cooling Density</p>
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<p>he SATs week or do you think that's over the year?</p> <p>Yes its heightened in the week because basically its all hands on deck but people can cope because they know that that's a week. Umm...throughout the year I have had like an interventions teacher that's been given to Year 6 which could have been used across the school probably, but for the morning she was just designated to be working in Year 6 umm...and so I think that's really helped me. Umm...in one way because she is another brain, she is another person and also if you don't get somebody who has a lot of initiative its another job for me to kind of manage and make sure that they are on the same page and...so it can...yes... So I think that throughout the year...I don't know...its probably fair here because everybody has a teaching assistant bar me by Year 6 by Year 6 but then I have the interventions teacher so...I probably have the higher level version of that umm so...yes... To me I don't think that they would feel pressure but they may</p> <p>Yes, thank you. Well what about children... how do they feel about testing?</p> <p>Mmm...definitely some of them do. This year was interesting for me because err they seemed really blasé about them and so I have done the test a couple of times, only once at this school, but it was my third SATs that I had done and so umm...yes. Some of these children felt very stressed, very pressured and it was interesting that that was the high attainers that felt that pressure...umm the ones who were going to do well umm so I was reflecting on that, thinking the ones that should be worrying about it (chuckles) don't seem to care. Umm...and in the ones that were probably going to make it, and quite capably were really worrying about it and I think that's probably a sense of expectations upon themselves to always be perfect and to always operate at this high level. Umm...but in the past</p>	<p>High attainment</p> <p>Low attainment</p> <p>Volume of work prevents tch to support chld with the emotional side of things</p> <p>Disengagement_refusal as a coping strategy</p> <p>Questions they may ask and language they may use</p> <p>Tch finding it to continue being supportive after failed attempts</p> <p>Experience and relationship with SLT impact on effectiveness</p> <p>Not always included in meetings with EPs because of Yr6 class demands</p> <p>Links between test anxiety and wider MH_conf in other learning</p> <p>a. Pressure levels_accountability</p> <p>Calming strategies_meditation_yoga</p> <p>Time pressure/limitations makes it difficult to support chn with test anxiety and wider MH</p> <p>Diff to support MH because of time & investment</p> <p>Interventions teacher</p> <p>h. Overworked_intense teaching_expectation to fill in gaps from previous years</p> <p>School staff can be resentful_diff for continuity</p> <p>Other yr teachers can be resentful as Yr6 a priority</p> <p>C could help boost chn's self esteem</p> <p>Cooling Density</p>
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High attainment	Lack of confidence vs over confident
Low attainment	
Volume of work prevents tch to support chd with the emotional side of things	
c. Levels of pressure on Yr6 staff compared the other years	
Disengagement, refusal as a coping strategy	Questions they may ask and language they may use
Tch finding it to continue being supportive after failed attempts	
SATs are mainly impacting Yr_6_staff can get resentful	
Experience and relationship with SLT impact on effectiveness	
e. Not always included in meetings with EPs because of Yr6 class demands	
d. Links between test anxiety and wider MH_conf in other learning	
a. Pressure levels_accountability	
Calmng strategies_meditation_yoga	
Time pressurereimulations makes it difficult to support chn with test anxiety and wider MH	
Diff to support MH because of time & investment	
Interventions teacher	
h. Overworked_Intense teaching_expectation to fill in gaps from previous years	
School staff can be transient, diff for continuity	
Other yr teachers can be resentful as Yr6 a priority	
P4C could help boost chn's self esteem	
Coding Density	
<p>ious. They just want to do it...they were excited and they thought they had done really well and they said it was really easy (chuckle) ...I hope it's the case. Umm...so I don't...there was an element of them not knowing that they didn't know it umm and there was also I think an element of some who disengaged and had kind of presented with err reluctance with a bit of an attitude towards them...more like, 'I don't even really care about them anyway' umm probably as a defence mechanism and that if I don't care then it doesn't matter if I don't do well. Umm...there was one girl who basically had a little tantrum umm and kind of refused to carry on and then so we had to give her a little pep talk (chuckle) and she did in the end but...yes... I think that rather than it being an anxiety it presented itself as an anger...kind of...maybe stemming from anxiety or...yes...but</p> <p>Mmm...thank you. Now the children that... umm that experience this anxiety during the test period, do they display any other difficulties or anxiety in other areas of school life?</p> <p>Yes. One child does...she finds it difficult to umm moderate her feelings quite a lot and she checks in a lot</p> <p>Checks in?</p> <p>She checks in with me. So I have sent...set her off on a task. She will come back and be like, 'Should I put this here?' 'Is that good?' you know lots of different questions like that. Umm...she also finds like transitions and change really hard so she is finding it hard at the moment moving into secondary school and umm... and the other boy who was quite nervous was err lacks confidence I think. He has umm like a skin condition where...I am not sure what it's called...but you know when they lose pigment within their skin. Umm and so he wouldn't come swimming with us this week because that was more prevalent on his legs...he didn't want to show his legs. Yes, so he has err confidence based issues I think...and worries a lot and he is just quite reserved, but umm...yes...but then he is also re</p>	

ment	Volume of work prevents tch to support chd with the emotional side of things
f pressure on Yr6 staff compared the other years	
ment_refusal as a coping strategy	
they may ask and language they may use	
g it to continue being supportive after failed attempts	
mainly impacting Yr_6_staff can get resentful	
and relationship with SLT impact on effectiveness	
ays included in meetings with EPs because of Yr6 class demands	
between test anxiety and wider MH_conf in other learning	
levels_accountability	
strategies_meditation_yoga	
Time pressurereimulations makes it difficult to support chn with test anxiety and wider MH	
Diff to support MH because of time & investment	
Interventions teacher	
Overworked_Intense teaching_expectation to fill in gaps from previous years	
F can be transient, diff for continuity	
Teachers can be resentful as Yr6 a priority	
help boost chn's self esteem	
Coding Density	
<p>Yes...the thing about supporting children with mental health difficulties umm is time and its investment. So its about what you value ...I think...and its very difficult in Year 6 to have umm the time to really give to a child needing it umm because you have to have a mindset of, 'We have got to get all of these kids across the line' umm and that's why its good to have other people on staff to be able to refer children to them like, 'Right, you are experiencing some anxiety, I would love to send you to this person to have a chat about that'. Umm ideally that would be my job and I would have time for that because that's really important to me and that's what I want to value, but I don't think the system allows for it. Umm...I feel very confident in the way I would approach it though, in the way I would work with them. Umm...I have reached a lot of challenging children who have difficulties like that in consistency and relationship...I have proven to be really effective with them and really helpful so that at they feel safe and they know who they can speak to. Umm...yes, but I think its difficult in this year...especially towards this...when it gets and you get into the Spring term because you don't necessarily have the time after lunch to spend 10 minutes with a child who is upset because someone said something in the playground. You kind of have to expect them to be a little bit more mature than they are and cope with it themselves and umm... So if I...I don't they are old enough to be doing the SATs and to be coping with that kind of pressure yet but...I am just a teacher so (chuckles) just got to do the job</p> <p>So if you did have the capacity in terms of time, resources how would you like to support the children... you mentioned something about talking to them...?</p> <p>Yes. I think small group umm things would have been great. Like t</p>	

Appendix H
Evidence of ethical clearance

School of Psychology Research Ethics Committee

NOTICE OF ETHICS REVIEW DECISION

For research involving human participants

BSc/MSc/MA/Professional Doctorates

REVIEWER: Dr Paul Penn

SUPERVISOR: Dr Miles Thomas

COURSE: Doctorate in Educational and Child Psychology

STUDENT: Olga Zacharaki

TITLE OF PROPOSED STUDY: An exploration of school staff experiences working with children who display exam/test anxiety.

DECISION OPTIONS:

1. **APPROVED:** Ethics approval for the above named research study has been granted from the date of approval (see end of this notice) to the date it is submitted for assessment/examination.
2. **APPROVED, BUT MINOR AMENDMENTS ARE REQUIRED BEFORE THE RESEARCH COMMENCES** (see Minor Amendments box below): In this circumstance, re-submission of an ethics application is not required but the student must confirm with their supervisor that all minor amendments have been made before the research commences. Students are to do this by filling in the confirmation box below when all amendments have been attended to and emailing a copy of this decision notice to her/his supervisor for their records. The supervisor will then forward the student's confirmation to the School for its records.
3. **NOT APPROVED, MAJOR AMENDMENTS AND RE-SUBMISSION REQUIRED** (see Major Amendments box below): In this circumstance, a revised

ethics application must be submitted and approved before any research takes place. The revised application will be reviewed by the same reviewer. If in doubt, students should ask their supervisor for support in revising their ethics application.

DECISION ON THE ABOVE-NAMED PROPOSED RESEARCH STUDY

(Please indicate the decision according to one of the 3 options above)

Approved with minor amendments

Minor amendments required *(for reviewer):*

Please obtain written consent from school for the researcher to conduct their work on the premises and also confirm that no additional ethics approval is required at their end.

Major amendments required *(for reviewer):*

ASSESSMENT OF RISK TO RESEARCHER *(for reviewer)*

If the proposed research could expose the researcher to any of kind of emotional, physical or health and safety hazard? Please rate the degree of risk:

- HIGH
- MEDIUM
- LOW

Reviewer comments in relation to researcher risk (if any):

Reviewer (*Typed name to act as signature*):

PP

Date: 21/02/17

This reviewer has assessed the ethics application for the named research study on behalf of the School of Psychology Research Ethics Committee

Confirmation of making the above minor amendments (*for students*):

I have noted and made all the required minor amendments, as stated above, before starting my research and collecting data.

Student's name (*Typed name to act as signature*):

Student number:

Date:

(Please submit a copy of this decision letter to your supervisor with this box completed, if minor amendments to your ethics application are required)

PLEASE NOTE:

*For the researcher and participants involved in the above named study to be covered by UEL's insurance and indemnity policy, prior ethics approval from the School of Psychology (acting on behalf of the UEL Research Ethics Committee), and confirmation from students where minor amendments were required, must be obtained before any research takes place.

*For the researcher and participants involved in the above named study to be covered by UEL's insurance and indemnity policy, travel approval from UEL (not the School of Psychology) must be gained if a researcher intends to travel overseas to collect data, even if this involves the researcher travelling to his/her home country to conduct the research. Application details can be found here: <http://www.uel.ac.uk/gradschool/ethics/fieldwork/>

Appendix I Risk Assessment

 UEL Risk Assessment Form			
Name of Assessor:	Olga Zacharaki	Date of Assessment	05.02.2017
Event title:	Scholl staff interviews required for thesis: An exploration of school staff experiences working with children who display exam/test anxiety.	Date, time and location of activity:	Spring Term, X Local Authority, 4 primary schools, hours between 8am and 4pm.
Signed off by Manager (Print Name)			
<p>Please describe the activity in as much detail as possible (include nature of activity, estimated number of participants, etc) If the activity to be assessed is part of a fieldtrip or event please add an overview of this below:</p>			
<p>Purposive sampling strategies will be employed where a ‘typical’ sample is identified. In this research, 14-16 teachers, SENDCos/pastoral staff and Teaching Assistants (TAs) will be selected from primary schools within the same Local Authority. Discussions will be held with participating schools’ leadership about potential participants. All participants will need to have experienced teaching children presenting with exam anxiety at some point in their career and will need to have taught for at least three years. To gain rich data, semi-structured interviews will be used. Measures, materials or equipment: semi-structured interview schedule; tape-recorder will be used to record the interviews. Participants will be fully informed about the research through a Participant Information sheet. A debrief sheet will be given to the participants at the end of the interview. All participants in this research will be subject to informed consent and they will be informed that they can withdraw at any point.</p>			
Overview of FIELD TRIP or EVENT:: N/A			
N/A			

<p>Identify school hazards</p>	<p>In case of a fire or any other emergency to know where the fire exits are and the standard procedure.</p> <p>Any routes that need to be avoided due to any potential building work or any other reason.</p>	<p>Researcher/participants</p>	<p>1</p>	<p>1</p>	<p>1</p>	<p>As the interviews will be conducted in the schools where the participants work, health and safety procedures of the particular school visited will apply. Ensure with participants that they have read and understood the school's Health and Safety policy.</p> <p>The researcher will read and familiarise herself with the Health and Safety procedures of the schools she is planning to visit.</p>	<p>Speak to school management about any areas/routes that need to be avoided in the school.</p>	<p>01.04.2017</p>
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Participants/ researcher emotional wellbeing	The participants/researcher could become upset by the interview process and suffer psychological effects.	Researcher/part icipants	1	1	1	Participants will be informed that they can discontinue with the interview if they need to at any point. They will be given time at the end of the interview to ask questions or raise concerns.	The researcher will offer details of a support organisation for school staff who feel that they need some additional support.	01.04 .2017
Data protection	Anonymity and confidentiality will be the highest priority.	Participants	1	1	1	Data gathering and storage will be compliant with national data protection guidelines. Data will be handled and reported in a way so that there can be no link made between the participants and the data. Participant confidentiality and anonymity will be protected by changing participant and school names. There will be no references to personal information that could potentially put the participants' anonymity in jeopardy such as number of years worked or gender.		01.04 .2017