

WHAT ARE PROFESSORS DOING IN THE CLASSROOM THAT MIGHT  
ATTENUATE LEARNING ISSUES THAT CHALLENGE STUDENTS WITH POST  
TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER?

By

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A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

Capella University

December, 2012

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## **Abstract**

Many students enter the postsecondary classroom with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), but do not disclose their disability for fear of stigma from the school and the instructors they must face. For the past 7 years, this author has noticed that, when instructional designs incorporate practices that meet the needs and learning processes of the student when it is difficult for them to meet the goal of mastery, the subject matter to be learned can be successfully achieved. The purpose of this study was to examine the instructional design practices of postsecondary education, how those practices were developed, established, and implemented. The focus was to compare and contrast whether the established instructional designs could incorporate new instructional designs with the needs of the student with PTSD. New instructional designs were found that can be implemented within the classroom, and attitudes toward instructional design were surveyed to find the attitudes of instructors' approach to helping students within the classroom. The outcome of the survey findings found in this paper that was distributed to a select group of universities supported this author's assumption that, in general, university instructors care deeply about their students' learning the subject material presented in class. However, many of those instructors do not have a formal pedagogical base of knowledge in instructional design upon which they can draw.

## **Dedication**

To everyone in my life who has told me I could do anything and make a difference in this world. Specifically my Father, Stanley S. Force, who always told me I could follow my dreams because he believed I could accomplish them. My uncle, Dr. William Force of Vanderbilt University and George Peabody who urged me to never quit seeking knowledge no matter how old I am or how long it takes, and to Father Michael J. Sheeran, former President of Regis University, who never lost faith in me or my ability to always move forward through any adversity, who taught me how the power of faith can make change if we just believe.

## **Acknowledgements**

I am so very grateful to members of my family, friends, colleagues, Capella University professors, and very special mentors for they were the glue that lifted me up and held me together on this journey.

To Jonathan Gehrz, my Capella University advisor, who has been with me since the beginning. There are no words of gratitude I can say that will convey the debt owed to him for standing by me, holding me up, and helping me sort through the various challenges we have had to face together so that I could realize my dream of accomplishing my Ph.D. Thank you for not giving up on me.

To Dr. Howard Jacobs, my committee chair, who has spent the last few years teaching me what it means to truly become a scholar and has shown me how to become one. Thank you, Dr. Jacobs, for everything you have done for me to help me achieve this goal.

To Dr Elizabeth Bruch, who in a short time provided the most positive input needed so we could go forward in my desire to become a scholar. Your kindness will always be remembered and never forgotten.

To Dr. Peter Bemski, my constant resource and reminder of what it means to be a scholar and of my Jesuit roots. Your unflinching requirement for excellence combined with your endless supply of compassion and commitment humbles me. I hope I will be able to honor and pass on the lessons learned from you.

To Dr. Sharon Sweet, my editor, who helped me to find my voice. I would never have been able to achieve an understanding of the mechanics and necessities of scholarship without you.

To the all the members of my Regis University family, especially Dr. William J. Husson, Steve Jacobs, Ann Williams, Donnie Veasey, and the Librarians, Martin Garnar, Paul Maynes, Paul Betty, Tom Riedel, John Schmidt and Brooke Guifoyle. This dissertation would not be a reality without your support.

To my cousins, Rick and Diane Evans, thank you for all of the dinners, the dog sitting, and support. I could not have done this without your support.

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## CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

### Introduction to the Problem

In the postsecondary classroom of today, there are a large number of unidentified students with anxiety issues, and the number will continue to increase (Wilson, 2008). Challenges in the development of an inclusive classroom environment are being faced by instructors all over the county from the influx of those students who have been to war or survived a catastrophic event. According to Wolanin and Steele (2004), the number of students with disabilities in a classroom has tripled over the past 20 years. In a study conducted by Myers of 61 graduate programs, which included all aspects of those university populations, students, leaders, and administrators were asked if there was a need for disability education. Based on the responses ( $N = 784$ ) to the survey, 71% reported a need for a course to address the issue of disability in their degree program (p. 163). Statistics from the U.S. Census Bureau (2001) indicated that over 9% of college students in the United States have documented self-disclosed disabilities. With the documented increase in this specific student population demographic, it is likely that instructors will face unidentified students with a type of defined disability. Whether it is a medical disability, or psychological disability in their postsecondary classroom, it is definitely in the realm of possibility. The important question is whether or not instructors are prepared to include those students within their existing classroom instructional design. Myers (2009), a known theorist in the developing field of universal instructional design (UID), suggested that “the attitudes of people without disabilities have created the

structures, relationships, and institutions that marginalize and exclude persons with disabilities and shape the meaning of disability” (p. 18).

The focus of this study was to address the question, why appropriate instructional and classroom design, for those with a psychological anxiety disorder like Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), is necessary in the classroom today. The purpose of this research was to understand what challenges instructors face in the classroom, when they address those students who are challenged, and what could be done to attenuate changes in teaching practices that will create a more inclusive classroom.

### **Background of the Study**

A review of how instructors can develop enhanced classroom environments for students is not new to the literature. Brookfield (1987) and Tinto (1993) are two theorists who have written extensively on: (a) the facilitation of postsecondary learning, (b) the catalysts behind an enriched learning environment, and (c) why students choose to stay in one environment over a different learning environment. The findings from Brookfield and Tinto’s research indicated that those classroom instructors, who develop positive learning environments so that students may develop their self-worth, will help their students engage in the development of critical thinking processes. Thus, the need to develop critical thinking in the classroom environment is related to Tinto’s premise that a student, who feels valued and engaged, will then feel a stronger relationship to his or her institution, and there will be a decrease in attrition.

The issue of how an optimum classroom situation should be developed for students without known challenges is not new to education. As far back as the 15th

Century, St. Ignatius of Loyola declared to the Society of Jesus that all impediments be removed from the classroom so a student could concentrate on the lessons to be learned (Kolvenbach, 2005). An important question is how does a teacher react to and develop support for students who are diagnosed with PTSD or other variant structures of anxiety disorders? Does instructor bias prevent inclusive instructional design?

The focus issue, which was examined in this dissertation, was what pedagogical techniques were utilized by instructors at Catholic Universities in order to attenuate and address the needs of students with PTSD within a classroom, whether or not those students have self-identified to the school disability office as needing additional consideration. A survey was conducted to obtain instructors' input about their approach. What is known to this point is that, unless a student follows the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA; 1990) guidelines of disclosure for anxiety disorders, such as PTSD or any type of learning disability, a student, who needs various accommodations will not be given any additional consideration within the classroom without self-disclosure. The purpose of this dissertation was not to explore the nature of the ADA, nor was it to define the extensive history and complex issues of learning disabilities in the classroom. The focus of this dissertation was to develop a grounded understanding of how PTSD challenges postsecondary teachers faced by students who have this disorder within the classroom, and how Catholic universities within the U.S. approach the instructional designs of the classroom to be inclusive of students who have difficulty within the classroom.

What is not fully understood is how the instructors of postsecondary institutions can attenuate learning issues among students who may present learning difficulties within the classroom. As Brookfield (1995) observed, it is important that an instructor establish a positive learning environment through the use of various methods of instructional design so effective communication can be achieved by educators, who are not psychologists. The primary research question for this study was: What are professors doing in the classroom that might attenuate learning issues that challenge students with PTSD?

This question is inclusive of both traditional and nontraditional student populations in Jesuit universities. As Kolvenbach (2005) reported, Jesuit university instructors are to be particularly sensitive to student participation in the classroom from the Ignatian pedagogy of *cura personalis* which translates to the care of the whole person in a Jesuit classroom. Also, Kolvenbach emphasized the Jesuit emphasis in developing the need for reflective teaching in considering the students' performance in the classroom. There are hundreds of articles written on the definition of PTSD, how it is being treated specifically with military veterans, and there is some new research from the Veteran's Administration (V.A., n.d.) in regard to how members of the general population experience PTSD. However, there is minimal research concerning the approach of the learning process and inclusive classroom design for those students who have PTSD or another anxiety issue.

Currently, those, who have the courage to expose themselves to being marginalized and experience ridicule when they ask for assistance from disability

services, are the only ones who come forward to be served (Wlodkowski, Maulding, & Campbell, 2002). Perhaps, if there was an increased understanding of what triggers anxiety in the classroom, combined with sensitivity instruction for instructors and a clearly defined inclusive process of how to approach this type of student, more students would be willing to self-identify or maybe would not have to self-identify due to the provision of an appropriately designed classroom.

To address the importance of identifying the extent of this issue, in a survey, conducted by Wilson (2008), Chair of the School of Psychology for Capella University, surprising results were reported by returning service members from active duty. Based on the responses to this survey, Wilson found that more than two-thirds of the U.S. military service members, who were surveyed, responded that they would never seek help for psychological issues due to their fear of the stigma linked to having a problem in their lives. If this is the case, it is likely that members of other population groups are equally hesitant to disclose their issues with PTSD or other anxiety disorders in the classroom. Staff of the U.S. Census Bureau (2000) estimated the total U.S. population as approximately 308.4 million. Out of the entire U.S. population, the Census Bureau estimated that approximately 20 million have anxiety issues. Staff of the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH; 2009) estimated that there are over 20 million individuals, who are diagnosed with various types of anxiety disorders. Of the 20 million, it is estimated that 7 million are diagnosed specifically with PTSD. These numbers represent only the diagnosed cases. If the numbers are correct, then almost 7% of the total population in the U.S. experience anxiety disorders, and 2% are specific to

PTSD. The probability is that many teachers will have a student in his or her classroom, which will need a different interaction for students to succeed academically.

The question for this dissertation, What are professors doing in the classroom that might attenuate learning issues that challenge students with PTSD? was developed to initiate a dialogue about what is happening in classrooms to identify students who may be unable to fully function in their current learning environment. The inability to fully function could be caused by the presence of anxiety or other debilitating issues over and above the accepted level of anxiety within the fundamental learning process in the classroom. The question was focused to narrow the scope on how the extreme end of the spectrum for anxiety issues is addressed in Jesuit universities in the U.S. in order to determine what is being done or not done. Responses to this question were used to establish a baseline of knowledge and allow for the development of processes, which can be used by teachers in all disciplines to help their students overcome anxiety issues and successfully integrate into the classroom.

One way to look at the context for the problem is in how the learner and learner environment is defined. Pear (2001) defined learning as “a dependency of current behavior on the environment as a function of a prior interaction between sensory-motor activity and the environment” (p. 12). Tinto (1983) defined traditional learning environments as those environments where “skills are most effectively learned in a context that gives meaning to those skills as they might be required in a course situation or with regard to domain specific learning situation” (p. 183). In considering the adult learner, Wlodkowski (1999) maintained that it is difficult to isolate one definition for the



adult learner, except for one defining characteristic of pragmatism. The responsibility for individual learning rests solely on the adult learner to direct his or her own learning experience. According to Wlodkowski, despite the lack of a single comprehensive theory of adult learning, what does exist is a unifying assumption that adult learners are highly pragmatic.

If the adult learner is considered highly pragmatic, this may speak to the development of support programs for the younger traditional learner and the lack of support programs for the nontraditional adult learner (personal communication, W. Husson, Vice President, Regis University, September 9, 2009), even though the adult or nontraditional learners may be those who need occasional help because of their life experiences. An increased understanding of this problem could help teachers and student populations alike in regard to how the use of inclusive instructional designs could improve functionality in the classroom and decrease anxiety of performance. In Tinto's (1993) research on student attrition, he found that from "25 to over 50%" (p. 15) of the student population leaves its existing college. Such research findings could help the teacher learn to function at a higher efficiency and, in turn, it could support Tinto's premise that a truly engaged student, who feels valued, will be less likely to leave that institution.

### **Baseline Definition of PTSD**

Post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) has been associated primarily with individuals, who have served in the military or have been affected by the ravages of war. According to Kinchin (2007) and the staff of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

(USDVA) National Center of PTSD (2009), the definition of PTSD is the mental condition experienced when a “person has been exposed to an event which may be outside the range of normal human experience: an event which would markedly distress almost anyone. It is the normal human response to the abnormal situation” (Kinchin, p. 12). In addition, staff of the USDVA National Center for PTSD stated that “anyone going through a life-threatening event can develop PTSD” (p. 12). This is an important point, because the Veterans Affairs website definition includes all possible affected populations, not only those in the military.

On the anniversary date of September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001(9/11), a study, conducted by Farfel et al. (2008), was released by staff of the New York City Department of Health Registry in regard to the lingering effects of 9/11. The staff of this Registry tracked the health effects of 9/11 on the New York City residents who survived. Farfel et al. found that as many as 70,000 individuals, who were enrolled in the World Trade Center Health Registry as non-first responders, had been diagnosed and identified with PTSD symptoms, a direct result of the events of 9/11. With the expanded definitions of all researched databases and the confirmation of the Farfel et al. study, it is safe to conclude that PTSD is prevalent in the culture of the U.S. If it is prevalent in the culture, then, it is likely that it is present in the classroom.

Based on the statistics presented by Farfel et al (2008), the focus of this study was to search and examine through a survey for instructional strategies that are effective or, to put it another way, instructional strategies that are intentionally developed to be inclusive

F or students who have PTSD and that will be effective with other types of anxiety disorders as well.

### **Statement of the Problem**

It is not known whether or not instructors use instructional strategies that are inclusive of all students, disabled or not. There are numerous articles written on the definition of PTSD, how it is being treated specifically in military veterans, and new research is beginning to appear in regard to those persons in the general population who experience PTSD. However, there is a paucity of research findings in regard to the identification of those students at the onset of class who have PTSD or an anxiety issue or how instructional design has been developed to provide an inclusive environment for that student within the class structure.

The presence of anxiety in the classroom has been a concern of teachers since the time of Aristotle, which was personified currently in modern time by Senge's (1990) description of learning processes in *The Fifth Discipline*. Normal levels of anxiety are expected in the classroom for the learning process to occur, but a student may have lived through an experience that prevents him or her from being able to focus on learning. How does one, as an instructor, develop instructional design to include those students who have been diagnosed with PTSD but have not chosen to disclose their malady? Herein lies the question of an inclusive universal instructional design (UID).

Pear (2001) described the learning process as a two part function that connects behavior with learning. Behavior is defined as "any neurological activity that is typically but not necessarily measured or observed as motor activity" (p. 12). Learning is defined

as a “dependency of current behavior of the environment as a function of a prior interaction between sensory-motor activity and the environment” (p. 12). Over the past decade, the process of learning has been impacted by the introduction of technology and events within the culture (Felner, Seitsinger, Brand, Burns & Bolton, 2007). How can faculty make the requisite accommodations in order to serve all students so they may have the full benefit of the educational experience?

The focus of this study asks if instructional design strategies are being implemented to develop an inclusive learning environment for those with PTSD within the classroom. Post Traumatic Stress Disorder has been most commonly associated with individuals in the military, but what about nonmilitary citizens who live through extraordinary circumstances? Were not those student experiences just as horrendous and impactful and need the implementation of inclusive instructional design as well? At the time this researcher selected this topic, a review of existing literature through the Veterans Administration was conducted in order to determine what was available for the educator in order to help this student population. Supportive, empirical data were minimal in 2007. The only active database was at the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (2007). A section of their database was devoted to veterans diagnosed with PTSD and titled, the Public International Literature On Traumatic Stress (PILOTS). In the last 2 years, the Department of Veterans Affairs (2009) has launched a separate division of its database, identified as the National Center for PTSD, which includes PILOTS and other resources.

Recently, the staff of the National Center for PTSD (2008) started to look at the impact of PTSD on all populations, not just military victims diagnosed with the syndrome. In addition, they have added online educational courses, such as PSTD 101 (Hamblen, 2009) for health providers, teachers, and researchers. In the online class, the participant is walked through what PTSD is, how one is diagnosed with PTSD, the levels associated with PTSD, as well as, if not most importantly, the behavior associated with how to recognize a person, who experiences the effects of PTSD. This course is the first of its kind. From the perspective of a teacher, who views this course, awareness and sensitivity can be developed in order to address behavior exhibited by students in the classroom. This sensitivity could then help create the implementation of an inclusive positive learning environment that Brookfield (2005; 2006) discussed, which will allow the student a greater opportunity to learn and to develop higher levels of critical thinking.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the study was to define how university faculty uses instructional design to create an inclusive environment for students to subside anxiety in the classroom for those who have chosen not to identify their specific disorder. This current study was a qualitative study, which was based on grounded theory and utilized the emerging design approach. This design was chosen in order to show how Catholic university faculty develops instructional designs for students with PTSD who have not identified their affliction. In order to explore these common experiences of the student from the instructor's point of view and to develop theory, Creswell (2005) reported that a grounded understanding of what drives interactions within an environment should be

examined to develop an emerging theoretical base. This focus of this study was not on what is or is not being done in the classroom. The use of grounded theory provided the appropriate structure for this researcher to test the assumption that little to nothing exists.

As Creswell (2003; 2005) observed, grounded theory can be used to generate a new theory when existing theories do not address a problem. Creswell reported that this type of theory is grounded in the data to provide a better explanation for what fits the situation and is sensitive to the specifics of a particular situation rather than use of a previously developed theory that may not fit the specifics of the new data to be collected and analyzed.

The use of emerging design allowed the researcher to collect data and analyze the data, so that preliminary categories were identified (Creswell, 2005). This approach allows the researcher to be objective about the data that are collected. Creswell noted that use of the emerging data approach allows the researcher to constantly review what is discovered within the research process. Upon review of received data, the researcher was able to determine if a new direction needs to be refined into a different category or coding process, whether the new data reached saturation, meaning that the new data could not provide any new information or insights for the development of categories.

How university instructors develop inclusive instructional designs for students with PTSD is the heart of the central phenomenon that was explored within this study, which was also the central question to be answered. The initial participants of the study were the faculty of the 28 Catholic universities within the U.S. With the use of a qualitative software design package, the data were coded for emerging patterns.

According to Planty et al. (2009), a trends analysis was published by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). The focus of the Planty et al. study was on changes in the enrollment statistics in the years studied between traditional and nontraditional student populations. Planty et al. reported that “changes in enrollment relative to institution type can provide some indication of whether institutions are successfully reaching out to less traditional students in order to maintain or increase their enrollment” (p. 114).

Large fluctuations exist between public and private institutions, traditional and nontraditional programs, and 2 year and 4 year, as well as undergraduate and graduate programs. The conclusion of the Planty, Hussar & Snyder (2009) report was that the only “consistent enrollment decline in the study dates ranging from 1986 to 1992 was among the nontraditional characteristics identified for undergraduates with a GED or high school certificate completion” (p. 4). However, by 2009, the number of choices in nontraditional education increased; the culture has experienced numerous cataclysmic events from financial loss to varied experiences from war and weather events. Essentially, all individuals within the culture have felt the impact of these occurrences. The question is, how has the educational process changed within the classroom to be sensitive to help the student overcome the impact of these occurrences and be able to attain the ability to think more critically? Has instructional design changed to meet the challenges, which occur in the culture?

## **Rationale**

The rationale behind the study is to adapt the educational environment for the existing student population for the classroom of today, as well as the influx of military members as they return from the chaotic anxiety of a war zone. The rationale of the study will serve as a grounded context for the future examination of members in other population groups who have experienced a debilitating event. These individuals cannot control an anxiety response. Anxiety for these individuals may be enhanced by the stress experienced upon entry to a classroom environment, which will be directly related to a previous experience. If a teacher can be skillful, as Brookfield (2006) described, then sensitivity for the student can be present. Within that sensitivity then, “the teacher has a constant awareness of how students are experiencing their learning and perceiving the teaching” (p. 35).

## **Research Questions**

The central research question for this study is, what are professors doing in the classroom that might attenuate learning issues that challenge students with PTSD? A survey was sent to the 28 Catholic universities in the U.S. The survey questions were used to inquire about the approach of university instructors toward this subject matter. The process to be investigated is how the faculty of postsecondary institutions develops inclusive instructional designs for students who have PTSD in their classroom who have not self-identified to the disability services office of the institution.



## **Significance of the Study**

Examining the issue of anxiety in the classroom may be more important now than any time in recent history. The reintegration of veterans into society, the general populace who has dealt with the collapse of multiple industries, along with those who have experienced foreclosure or other significant life experience, are faced with the need to make significant changes in their lives. The findings from this study, along with subsequent research fueled by the study, could help to promote the development of new processes in support of transformative learning within the classroom. Myers (2009) brought this aspect to light in her work for a new vision of instructional strategies with the Center for Universal Design (CUD) located at St. Louis University. Courses at CUD are designed to be inclusive of all learning abilities in one classroom environment. In the abstract of her work, Myers proposed that a new vision for disability education, based on universal instructional design (UID) methodologies, can be moved away from the limiting learning models that are now used within the classroom. Also, she believes that, by the humanization of disabilities within the classroom, the benefit will be “critical for diminishing the excluded classroom into building the inclusive classroom environment and school educational community as a whole” (p.16). Myers explained her approach in disability awareness training with the question “Have you excluded anyone today?” (p. 16). Myers reported that in meetings with other higher education professionals, she frequently hears faculty members expressing boredom with the topic of disability education. This author believes that the boredom could be an indication of frustration and confusion in regard to how to approach this topic. Myers emphasized that there are

major gaps in the research in regard to how to bring equal and viable education to all participants who want to learn at the postsecondary level.

This researcher sent emails to Stephen Brookfield, Vincent Tinto, and Raymond Wlodkowski, to ask them if, in their opinion, there was a gap in the literature. Each theorist responded that, based on their knowledge, there is very little literature about how one should work with the student who needs special consideration. They reported that, in their experience, it was only after the students self-identified their issue to the teacher and provided a letter from the disability department, were any accommodations made for the student. Helping to fill this gap in the literature could help with issues of retention and attrition in schools. Myers recently stated in a personal conversation that, in her experience, the concept of UID and the development of an inclusive classroom are just being developed in the literature in regard to students with special needs or learning processes (personal communication, K. Myers, Saint. Louis University, June 6, 2011).

Staff of the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH; 2009) stated that “26.3 percent of Americans ages 18 and older suffer from a diagnosable mental disorder, 7.7 million of the 26.3 percent suffer from PTSD” (p. 3). At an American Counseling Association (ACA) conference, Daneker (2005) of Marshall University reported that individuals in the U.S. culture struggle with effective assessment and conceptualization of treatment for those individuals affected by trauma. Cower (2005) acknowledged a personal weakness, that is, her own complacency in regard to diagnosis and labeling had become “unintentionally disinvesting” (p. 63), and that she tended to group traumatized individuals into one category. If that is the case, how many students do not experience a

full educational environment because, stereotypically, instructors place that student into one group of trauma; thus, students, who could be easily served, fall through the cracks. There is the loss of the positive educational experience to the student and loss of the student population to the school.

### **Definition of Terms**

Post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), as defined by the staff of the National Center for Posttraumatic Stress (2008), is an anxiety based disorder which can occur after an individual experiences a traumatic event. These events can include exposure to traumatic events experienced in military service but, also, can be caused by exposure to: “(a) verbal or physical attacks, (b) natural disasters, or (c) serious accidents. It is not known why some individuals are affected by the disorder while others are not affected” (p. 1). The reality is that PTSD exists, and it is becoming more prevalent within the U.S. culture.

Universal Instruction Design (UID), as defined by Burgstahler and Cory (2008), is “the process of creating products (devices, environments, systems, and processes) which are usable by people with the widest possible range of abilities operating within the widest possible range of situations environments, conditions and circumstances, as commercially practical” (p. 12). Burgstahler and Cory reported that UID has two major components:

1. Designing products so that they are flexible enough that they can be directly used (without requiring any assistive technologies or modifications) by people with the widest range of ability and circumstances as is commercially practical, given current materials, technologies, and knowledge. (p. 12)

2. Designing products so that they are compatible with the assistive technologies that might be used by those who cannot efficiently access and use the products directly. (p. 13)

Another theorist in the field who is pioneering the definition of UID is Dr. Jean Higbee from the University of Minnesota. Higbee (2008) defined UID as,

it is not meant to imply one a “one size fits all;” instead the focus of UID is universal access. One goal of UID is to reduce or eliminate the need to provide customized individual academic accommodations, and particularly those that publicly identify or segregate student with disabilities. (pp. 1-2)

### **Assumptions and Limitations**

The assumption, which guided this study, was that there are learners in many classrooms, who are afflicted with PTSD or some similar anxiety disorder. The learner may be hesitant to self-disclose that he or she has this disorder due to a fear of being stigmatized. This fear is further enforced from the process of becoming protected from an institutional office of disability services. Currently, when a student seeks help, he or she must register and qualify with an educational institutional office of disability services. Upon being accepted by disability services, the student must be given consideration to enable him or her to participate in class in order to be successful within the learning environment. However, the extent of accommodation allowed is determined by the instructor. In accordance with the American with Disabilities Act (1990), each student must present a letter to the instructor in every class at the time of approval; thus, they are allowed special consideration for accommodation to complete their courses. The single act of disclosure to a teacher, who has not been trained to interact or recognize students with special needs can cause an experience of undue anxiety and prevent the student from being successful within the learning environment. Also, presenting a letter

to the instructor presents a dilemma to the teacher; does this letter of accommodations mean that he or she is expected to lower course standards in order to accommodate this student? The theory presented in this paper supports the premise that, if the postsecondary instructor is trained to be sensitive to issues of students with PTSD and be given inclusive tools to work with the student, that student's learning experience will not be diminished, and the teacher will not feel compromised in lowering his or academic standards.

Typically, the minimal accommodations provided to the student at this time will include extra time to complete class assignments and class exams. It must be reiterated that, what is allowed as an accommodation, is dependent upon what the disability is and the documentation provided to the school. In addition, accommodation can be very dependent upon the tolerance of the teacher toward the accommodation. Instructors, who do not know how to recognize a student, who truly struggles with the content of the class, due to the learning process being encumbered by the disability or a negative environment within the classroom, puts the student, the teacher, and the academic institution at a disadvantage. It should be a goal of the academic institution to keep a student enrolled in the institution and provide that student with a positive learning environment where critical thinking can occur. With the increased link of academic institutions with the government to offer programs to military personnel or the federal increase of funding toward disadvantaged population groups, might it not be prudent to prepare instructors for successful interaction with those students?

The limitations to this study were to determine what policies and knowledge of those policies were known by postsecondary instructors at Catholic universities, in regard to the treatment of students with PTSD within the classroom. The researcher's assumption for this research was that a survey asking instructors what they know and the answers given will reveal what is not known, which supports the qualitative nature of the study and the necessity to utilize grounded theory design to systematically design a process to examine the emerging data of what exists and what course of action could be developed.

A further limitation of this study was that the initial survey was distributed to 28 specific Catholic institutions within the U.S. to determine how they address this issue, not to any other Catholic universities nor private or public universities. Such a small sample size did not allow the development of a comprehensive benchmark as well as a "deep understanding" (Creswell, 2005, p. 54); notwithstanding, it will initiate the development of a grounded theory for further study as information is collected.

### **Conceptual Framework**

As was detailed in the definition of terms, UID is "the process of creating products (devices, environments, systems, and processes) which are usable by people with the widest possible range of abilities operating within the widest possible range of situations (environments, conditions and circumstances, as a commercially practical" (Burgstahler & Cory, 2008, p. 12). The assumption for this study was that very few instructors in Catholic institutions use this type of design in their classrooms at this time. To test the efficacy of this assumption for this qualitative study, the researcher distributed

initial surveys to the 28 Catholic Universities within the U.S. This allowed for a baseline of data collection within a relatively small population group. The relevance of the topic was linked to the students' experience in the classroom when they were challenged with anxiety issues, specifically PTSD. The purpose of the study was to define how university faculty uses instructional design to create an inclusive environment for students to attenuate anxiety in the classroom for those who have chosen not to identify their specific malady. An additional purpose of the survey was to elicit responses from the participants to establish what and how identification of students with issues are identified and/or managed within these 28 postsecondary institutions. It was the position of this researcher that little or nothing is being done at this time. If one has an issue that will prevent him or her from full participation in a class, that student must self-identify with the institutional department of disability services. No matter what the issue, the student must provide a letter to the teacher to document why he or she should receive special consideration. In accordance with the American Disabilities Act (ADA; 1990), they do not have to tell the instructor what their issue is, just that it is necessary to receive special consideration such as extra time, or materials presented in special formats such as the formats needed by students who have autism or dyslexia. The ADA was designed to prevent discrimination; however, the reality is that once a teacher is given notice of the special consideration, usually, two things happen. One, the teacher fully accepts that student into the class and gives him or her every opportunity to fully engage, or the notification will be considered by the teacher as a declaration of that student's inability to measure up to the teacher's expectations of how a student should be able to perform. In

asking a simple question of inquiry, the hope of this author is that teachers' awareness could be increased so all students could benefit from an enriched learning environment. Use of the system to be developed would not remove rigor from the classroom. The hope is that it would give tools to teachers who teach their specialty, their expertise, but are not trained in these types of classroom management techniques, as does Myers' (2009) system of disability awareness, which was referred to in her work.

An immense amount of information has been published about PTSD; however, very little has been published about the effects of PTSD in the classroom or how to engage with a student with PTSD or other variances of anxiety. There is little information about identification of the extreme end of the anxiety spectrum. This connotes a significant gap in the literature. The collection, organization, and analysis of the data from this study will allow the development of a conceptual framework of what exists and what is not known at this time about this issue.

The impact on the classroom, based on the findings from this study, could lead to notable changes within the classroom. Some of these changes could include an enriched learning environment leading to a more engaged and meaningful education experience in the classroom for both the student and the teacher. In addition, the improved learning experience could result in increased retention numbers within institutions. According to Tinto (1993), the more engaged and valued a student feels within the classroom, the less likely that student will leave his or her chosen institution.



Uchitelle (2007), in his examination of U.S. citizens, who have suffered the effect of layoffs throughout the last 20 years, reported that many have lost the feeling of security in the workforce. It is this author's belief that this sense of insecurity is carried directly into the dynamics of the classroom. The findings from this study could establish a baseline of information so that tools can be developed to allow educators to meet the needs of a changing educational environment.

Finally, the process in the examination of instructional design used in classroom with PTSD developed from the results of this study could help those individuals who teach in their field of expertise and provide them with a tool that will help them connect better with their students. The increased employment of adjunct faculty will not change; this practice is now ingrained within the fabric of U.S. educational institutions, and it allows institutions to grow and expand. However, when that teacher has no background in how to teach, the issue becomes how the institution retains unsatisfied students who cannot connect with the teacher. Numerous educational institutions have begun to offer online as well as site based options. If students are not satisfied with their classes, specifically with the instructors in charge of the educational experience, they will seek another institution where their educational needs are satisfied (Wlodkowski, Mauldin, & Campbell, 2002).

### **Organization of the Remainder of the Study**

This study is presented in the traditional five chapter model. Presented in Chapter 2, the Literature Review, are the topics of: (a) the progression and history of addressing learning disabilities in the classroom, (b) the definition and effect of anxiety from an

empirical study, (c) the definition of PTSD, (d) the process to identify the elements of PTSD, (e) what has been written about it in relation to the classroom, and (f) the examination of UID theory as it pertains to an appropriate instructional design for students with anxiety issues. Then, this author discussed how people learn with Pears' (2001) explanation in the scientific process of learning occurs for individuals. To build upon Pears' definition supplemental information from Driscoll's (2005) work focused on the psychology of learning for teachers to develop a scientific context of the learning processes. The melding of Pear's and Driscoll's work establishes a baseline of how learning occurs and what current theories in education contribute to the various attitudes in the classroom. This is important because the goal is to establish the efficacy and acceptance of changing foundational classrooms into a nonfoundational environment. Rarely do teachers give up the authority of the foundational classroom easily, but if foundational classrooms can be changed into a nonfoundational environment, perhaps a greater number of students could benefit. Also presented is the literature that describes PTSD within various cultures. Individuals in the U.S. relate PTSD with veterans coming home from a war; however, PTSD is prevalent in other segments of the population as well.

In Chapter 3, Methodology, a rationale for the qualitative research design utilizing the case study approach is presented. Also, information is presented about: (a) the sample, (b) data collection, and (c) data analysis.

The focus of Chapter 4 is on the analysis of data collected through a survey that was distributed to the 28 Catholic Universities in the U.S. The survey is open-ended,

which allowed the respondents the opportunity to share their context of the issue asked in the question. Also, the design of the questions allowed the respondents to expand upon their experience or insights in addition to the context of the question asked. Coding of the open question data allowed the author to develop initial categories and a grounded baseline for phenomena experienced within the U.S. Catholic University classrooms.

In Chapter 5, the reader is presented with a summary of the collected data. The analysis and conclusions from the findings allowed a grounded theme of the emerging patterns identified, and recommendations were made about how to proceed with further research.

## CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this dissertation was to define how university faculty uses instructional design to create an inclusive environment for students to diminish anxiety in the classroom for those who have chosen not to identify their specific disorder within the classrooms of higher education institutions. The findings were used to establish a grounded theory about what is or what is not being done to address this issue. Specifically, the focus of this study was to identify the instructional designs used within the classroom, which help to attenuate the issues of students with post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in Jesuit university classrooms in the United States. The findings could help the staff of institutions to identify those students who have various levels of anxiety disorders.

### Historical View

For the purpose of this discussion, in order to establish a baseline from the historical perspective of sensitivity to disabilities, the *Handbook of Learning Disabilities* (Swanson, Harris, & Graham, 2003), which was edited and coauthored by Swanson, was used to develop a grounded understanding of definitions used over time. The purpose in review and identification from the historical perspective was to review the developmental structure in order to show the restrictive attitude and difficulty in the development of resources toward this issue that has occurred over time.

The first examination and identification in the study of learning disabilities within the classroom started in what is regarded as the “European Foundation Period” (Swanson Harris & Graham, 2003, p. 17), which occurred between 1800-1920. Attention was given

to the occurrence of brain injuries and their effect on the corresponding performance of mental impairment in the functioning brain. The focus of this period was on language and reading development in response to a brain injury. Within this period, the term, “dyslexia” (p. 18), was introduced into the literature based on a German ophthalmologist’s observation of patients’ performance during examinations. This report seems to be the first to document awareness of learning issues present in society. However, conflict existed between theorists in regard to the reasoning about the afflictions or how to treat them.

The second period of development for learning disability awareness is referred to as the “U.S. Foundation Period” (Swenson et al., 2003, p. 18) that lasted from 1920-1960. It was thought that this period was the first in the marked transition in acknowledgement of learning issues. Again, as in the Foundation Period, work in the discipline was based primarily on the work of neuroscientists and a few enlightened educators, who began to chronicle their observances and outcomes about what was termed, remedial learners. The catalyst for awareness in this area, according to Swanson et al., was generated by laws passed in by 1918. The law dictated that, in every state in the nation, compulsory education was required for every child in the U.S. Educators were forced to acknowledge that not all children learn in the same manner. One of the enlightened opinions in 1937 is shared by present day theorists. The theorist, Samuel Torrey Orton (1939, as cited in Swanson et al.), found that, in his study of students with perceived disabilities, “IQ was not always reflective of true intellectual capacity especially in students with reading deficits” (p. 19). Orton went on to report what he believed to be a mixed dominance in

centers of the brain, and he recommended use of a multisensory approach, based on the recommended approaches of Fernald and Keller (1921, as cited in Swanson et al.).

Fernald and Keller were among the first to mention the use of multiphasic processes in order to address kinesthetic, visual, and auditory learning styles. As educators started to build a reserve of data about the learning processes of students observed, researchers started to look at disabilities in perceptions, especially perceptions in motor skills and attention spans of those being observed. Goldstein (1936) maintained that the treatment of learning disabilities was best conducted by observation of each individual's manifestations as a whole and then develop treatment, which was appropriate for each individual. Herein lays the conflict experienced to this day, what is the appropriate method to utilize in order to treat those with learning disabilities?

The "Emergent Period" (1960-1975; Swanson et al., 2003, p. 21) followed the U.S. Foundation Period. During this period, the term, learning disability, was used for the first time in an article by Kirk (1962). Kirk defined a learning disability as:

a retardation, disorder, or delayed development in one or more of the processes of speech, language, reading, writing, arithmetic, or other school subject resulting from a psychological handicap caused by a possible cerebral dysfunction and/or emotional or behavioral disturbances. It is not the result of mental retardation, sensory deprivation, or cultural and instructional factors. (p. 263)

This definition is still considered a standard definition for learning disabilities.

By 1968, staff of the U.S. Office of Education expanded on the same basic definition and added that "Children with disabilities do not include learning problems that are due to primarily to visual, hearing or motor handicaps, to mental retardation, emotional disturbance, or to environmental disadvantage" (p. 34). This definition is limited, in

that, the adult learner is not addressed, and emotional disturbance is not included. The question begins to surface in regard to the difficulty in understanding what challenges educators face and how to develop applicable learning strategies for individuals in varied demographics with PTSD or other significant anxiety disorders.

“The Solidification Period” (1975-1985; Swanson et al., 2003, p. 24) was a relatively calm period in comparison to previous periods in educational history or for those periods that were to come. A positive change came in 1977 when the staff of the U.S. Office of Education (as cited in Swanson et al.) further expanded the definition of learning disabilities to include “specific learning disabilities means a disorder in one or more of the psychological processes involved” (p. 24). This was the first evidence within the literature that acknowledged psychological processes which include PTSD.

The last defined period for education is the “Turbulent Period” (1985-2000; as cited in Swanson et al., 2003, p. 25), which was the phase where the definition of learning disabilities continued to be the same with additional definitions added by members of professional associations and government entities who sought to achieve clarity and consensus in regard to what a learning disability encompassed. Swanson stated, “the Turbulent Period has answered many questions. . . but has also highlighted pressing problems within the field. . . the discrepancy formula in identifying students with Learning Disabilities” (p. 27). Herein lays the difficulty, which has existed with the review of learning disabilities from a historical perspective. This researcher now understands the difficulty faced by faculty and students to find the common ground of structure so an enriched learning environment can be provided for all students. Perhaps

this conflict will be resolved by the new work being conducted in universal instructional design by Myers (2009), which ensures the inclusion of all students with various abilities in a classroom. Myers stated, in her new vision for disability education, that a focus on “minor actions can eliminate exclusion and are at the heart of a new vision for disability education that eschews the limitations framework and makes way for learning opportunities for all students” (p. 17). In the same article, Myers maintained that, despite passage of the laws that address the American with Disabilities Act (ADA), “the attitudes of people without disabilities have created the structures, relationships, and institutions that marginalize and exclude persons with disabilities and shape the meaning of disability” (p. 18). The remainder of this chapter is focused on the elements of PTSD in the classroom as well as the factors, which create barriers to learning for a student who is diagnosed with PTSD or other anxiety disorders.

### **What Is Anxiety in the Classroom?**

To understand the impact and effect that PTSD has on a student, one must examine the presence of anxiety within the environment. The effect of anxiety was found by Yerkes and Dodson (1908) to be directly proportional to the ability of students to engage in critical thinking in the classroom. Specifically, Yerkes and Dobson found that, when arousal increases past a specific point, performance decreases. Psychologists term this, the Yerkes-Dodson model. Similarly, Brookfield (1987) alluded to this type of interaction in his consideration of the development of critical thinkers in the classroom. The goal of this current study was to examine the issue of student anxiety in the



classroom, and why educators should acknowledge that anxiety in order to provide a more enriched environment for learning.

### **The Definition of PTSD**

In this section of Chapter 2, the myriad and varied aspects of PTSD as it appears in the classroom are discussed. To develop a baseline of inquiry, an examination of the existing resources was conducted. The largest source is in the Published International Literature on Traumatic Stress (PILOTS) database that is located at the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs website for the National Center for PTSD (2008). The purpose of this database is to establish a baseline of the data that have been collected. Reference to the importance of this database was identified in Carlson's (1996) work on trauma research methodology. The PILOTS database system is one of many that were considered here.

In addition, there is a baseline definition of PTSD, which was developed by the staff of the American Psychological Association (APA; 1994). According to the APA definition,

PTSD occurs following exposure to an extreme stressor in which individual's experience, witness or are confronted by an event which involves prolonged increased arousal, intense fear, helplessness, and horror, which is expressed through disorganized and agitated behavior. (p. 424)

This definition is parallel to the nature and intent of the definition found on the National Center for PTSD (2008) website. This definition for PTSD seems to be the general point of agreement between the different agencies who are involved in this issue. The scope of the population affected by PTSD was described in a publication by the staff of the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH; 2001), which provides a self-help guide in

how people can speak out for themselves. The guide takes the reader through several pages of questions in order to evaluate the number of occurrences that they thought could trigger the type of anxiety, which leads to PTSD. The NIMH staff stated that, “in any given year, 5.2 million Americans have PTSD” (see subheading of PTSD on website).

In addition, the NIMH (2009) staff reported that:

an estimated 26.2 percent of Americans ages 18 and older, about one in four adults, suffer from a diagnosable mental disorder in a given year. Nearly half of those who suffer with any mental disorder meet criteria for 2 or more disorders, with severity strongly related to comorbidity. . . out of the 26.2 percent 7.7 American adults age 18 and older or about 3.5 percent of people in this age group in a given year, have PTSD. PTSD can develop at any age, including childhood, but the research shows that the median age of onset is 23 years. About 19 percent of Vietnam veterans experienced PTSD at some point after the war. The disorder also frequently occurs after violent assaults such as rape, mugging, or domestic violence; terrorism; natural or human-caused disasters; and accidents.

The complexity of the PTSD issue was identified by Serlin (2008), a psychologist, in a Letter to the Editor in the *Monitor on Psychology*. She wrote about her concern about the study conducted by staff of the Institute of Medicine (2008, as cited in Serlin) in regard to the methodologies used by researchers to focus on evidenced based outcome studies for patients diagnosed with PTSD. Serlin’s concern was focused on the preconceived attitudes held by the researchers toward the treatment. She maintained that more attention was given to the approval of the approved methodologies than the diagnosis of the individualistic nature of the patient.

Also, Serlin (2008) noted that the issues for correct treatments were based on the definition of PTSD. She stated:

One problem is that the definition of PTSD is recent. It is mostly defined in concrete behavioral or physiological terms, and the research that captures these symptoms is reductionistic. Lost is the complex human phenomenon of PTSD; it is not a set of symptoms, but a lived experience that includes—as well as the physiological and psychological disruptions—disruptions in one’s world view, culture and sense of belonging, disruptions to a sense of meaning and coherence, and all kinds of collateral damage to family, friends and social contexts. The kinds of research that can address this multi-layered phenomenon are narrative, phenomenological, nonverbal and in-depth, single-case designs. Treatment must also reflect the multiplicity of the phenomenon. Recommended is a whole-person approach to trauma that takes into consideration existential, religious and cultural factors. (p. 4)

Basically, Serlin was a critic of the *cookie cutter* type approach to the treatment of PTSD.

Also, this approach could be similar to the nature of the traditional or nontraditional approach to teaching and student learning in the classroom. Not all students learn in the same manner. If a teacher is not sensitive to all types of learning styles in the classrooms, only a small percentage of the student population is served. Is this where consideration should be given to a process that could be developed for the teacher to provide sensitivity to all student learning processes in the classroom to create a more genuinely positive critical thinking environment?

Brookfield (1986, 1995, 2005) maintained that, in the most effective classroom, the student should experience an environment in which he or she can learn to develop the qualities of a critical thinker. The question is, are school staffs, specifically teachers, prepared to work with individuals, who are diagnosed with PTSD, and what benefit will it have if processes can be put in place to address this issue?

Over time, the discussion has moved from the acknowledgement that PTSD exists to what is PTSD, and the recently published literature represents the diverse ways in which PTSD exists for varied populations. The statistics from NIMH (2009)

demonstrated that there is a large need to not only work with individuals diagnosed with PTSD but many other defined mental disorders. This is a much larger issue than first examined. It is important to note the NIMH study statement that, only “6.6 percent of the 26.2 percent total population diagnosed with mental disorders are those with the most severe burden of illness” (see subheading of PTSD on website). Therefore, with an estimated diagnosis level of 26.2% percent of the population, who experience some type of mental health issue, it is likely that, in any classroom, a teacher will work with students who need consideration so their learning experience can be enhanced.

### **Elements of PTSD**

To address how to work with students diagnosed with PTSD, it is important to have an understanding about the physiological effect of PTSD on an individual and how it should be considered. Flouri (2005) examined the biomedical and social constructionist models as they are applied to the response to trauma. This author examined the prevalence and etiology of PTSD with emphasis on the biological and psychological correlations in children and adults. Flouri’s work supported that of Pert (1997), wherein Pert asked the question of why one feels the way one feels. Pert focused on how thoughts and emotions affect an individual’s health through the examination of biochemical links in the release of amino acids in the body, which are termed peptides.

In support of Pert’s (1997) research, Daneker (2005) studied the Hurricane Katrina survivors and reported that researchers are beginning to be able to understand the many different aspects of individuals’ symptoms when they are affected by trauma. Daneker noted that mental health care providers struggle with effective assessment,

conceptualization, and treatment of those affected by trauma. Also, Daneker stated that these providers need to approach a more “holistic process of assessment and approach to treatment that better helps counselors conceptualize the areas of difficulty for clients who have experienced a traumatic event by providing a new way of how they look at survivors of traumatic events” (p. 4). When the symptoms of trauma are recognized as a part of an individual’s current psychological makeup, one can refer back to Pear’s (2001) definition of learning that incorporates behavior, the process of learning, and the necessity of why sensitivity needs to be incorporated into the classroom in order for a positive critical thinking environment to occur.

Cower (2005) examined the available research on the treatment of clients with PTSD, specifically, the five powerful Ps which include: (a) people, (b) places, (c) policies, (d) programs, and (e) processes. These factors were referred to in an earlier research study conducted by Purkey (2000). Purkey examined the internal dialogue gaps that go on within a client’s or practitioner’s mind during a counseling session that may be harmful or helpful to the client. Purkey suggested that there is a gap between theory and practice, and that gap may be difficult to breach due to the predisposed attitudes of the practitioner. Cower maintained that Purkey’s premise was that he addressed the research and practice related to self-esteem but, also, this point was applicable to Cower’s research since her practice was not aligned with current research on PTSD at the time. The most important point about Cower’s research is that she admitted to “how her complacency of diagnosis and labeling had become unintentionally disinvesting in her work with PTSD clients” (p. 68). Cower’s self-realization of insights gained with patients diagnosed with

PTSD reaffirmed the relevance of Purkey's 5 Ps model that helped to change her established approach to a more holistic approach in the treatment of clients with PTSD. Based on this approach, Cower changed her practice from grouping all PTSD patients into one category to individual consideration of each patient separately. Cower explained that she did that because "responses to trauma as details of the traumatic experience will be unique to the individual and that the incidence of trauma is extremely high" (p. 65). Similarly, this approach could be applied to a student's learning experience in the classroom.

To defend the approach in the change of her practice, Cower (2005) used the statistics from a study conducted by Holmes (1998) about the reaction of boys to sexual abuse and the incidence of PTSD as well as an additional study from the U.S. Department of Justice (2001) in which the incidence of PTSD in girls was tracked. Holmes found that, not only do clients with PTSD re-experience their traumas; the triggers vary in type and number for each victim. The new data provided by the staff of the National Center for PTSD (2009) supported Holmes' findings. Cower acknowledged "that current methods used by her in her practice need to change to an environment of trust and rapport within a one-on-one relationship instead of grouping traumatized individuals into one category" (p. 67).

Cowers' (2005) insight mirrored Serlin's (2008) concern in her letter to the editor of the *Monitor of Psychology* journal in 2003. The concern has been a constant theme. It is an important issue in the establishment of the emerging sensitivity and openness to individuals with PTSD toward the course of treatment within the counseling

environment. Increased sensitivity can support the change of processes. Is the experience mentioned by Cower toward her patients an indicator that counseling and disability services in universities have grouped traumatized individuals in a similar fashion? The question to be asked by every educator is what are his or her preconceived expectations of how their student population should perform. The second question was, do those educators accept students who do not, necessarily, meet those expectations.

In Cowers' (2005) opening paragraph, she reported that she was examining her preconceived attitudes about the diagnosis or labeling of PTSD clients through a combination of various individual processes. Since Cowers' report in 2005, much has changed in the attitudes and approaches to PTSD; however, if that one therapist was just writing about her preconceived attitudes and approaches toward PTSD clients, what can be expected in regard to support from educators at institutions of higher education across the U.S. for all learners? This is almost an impossible question to answer without an examination of the attitudes and the emergence of PTSD in this culture.

Historically, PTSD has been known by many other terms as early as the American Civil war in 1862, when it was termed, a "Soldiers Heart," also known as the "Da Costa Syndrome" (Kinchin, 2007, p. 13). Other terminology, which Kinchin identified for the syndrome included: (a) Railway Spine, (b) Shell Shock, (c) War and Battle Neurosis, (d) Lack of Moral Fiber, (e) Battleshock, and most recently (f) Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) among others. This latter term was coined at the end of the Vietnam War. Kinchin stated that "almost all terminology comes from the personal situations experienced from the soldiers themselves and, throughout the years Veterans were

frequently diagnosed with personality disorders without any mention of PTSD from the early 1970s” (p. 13). Why is there such a high incidence of people in the U.S., who have experienced a traumatic event, and why is it so difficult to heal? Is the problem so extensive and exhaustive that no one can conceive of a system that will help these individuals? In the NIMH (2009) database, it was reported that 26.2% of the population suffers from some type of mental disorder. These numbers are too large to ignore.

Through this author’s observation, a combined effort of websites for the APA (2009), NIMH (2009), and the Department of Veterans Affairs National Center for PTSD (2009), a cohesive process of inquiry is being developed. However, who will address classroom management for students with PTSD or anxiety issues from the educational side? Perhaps, there may be a solution in Pear’s (2001) definition of learning when it is compared to the instructional models in the *Handbook of Learning Disabilities* (Swanson et al., 2003).

During each examined learning period stated previously, the issues of learning disabilities were approached differently in regard to identification and then the development of the process to work most effectively with learning disabilities. Interestingly, Swanson et al. (2003) quoted Sasso (2001) who described the issues that confront educators. Sasso stated that members of the educational field are:

wrestling with the debate between modernism and postmodernism, proponents of postmodernism view disability as a social construction based on incorrect, immoral assumptions regarding difference. They seek to create a caring society that values and accepts differences of any kind. Eschewing the need to pursue objective validation of teaching methods, postmodernism’s main effect has been to reassure aspiring cultural critics that they can play a significant role in the treatment of disabilities without having. . . to obtain relevant data to help the student become more functionally independent (p. 190). (p. 27)



In addition, Swanson et al. stated that “modernists, however, subscribe to a medical model that places the locus of disability within the individual. . . they look to empirical research to validate teaching practices. Teachers, therefore use research-based instructional techniques to enhance learner functioning and reduce differences” (p. 27). Does this statement apply to teachers who employ a methodology rather than teach to the student? This concern is similar to that of Serlin (2008) and Cowers (2005) in regard to the attitudes and treatment process for PTSD patients. The complexity of PTSD merits the modernist approach to the issue.

Cower (2005) and Serlin (2008) developed methodologies to address students’ problems, and these methodologies can be used to work with students. According to Swanson et al. (2003), in consideration of effective service delivery models, “effective teaching strategies and an individualized approach are the more critical ingredients in a special education. Neither of the methodologies are associated solely with one particular model of service delivery” (p. 120).

### **Strategies to Improve Postsecondary Learning**

Pear (2001) defined learning when he stated that “learning has to do with the manner in which an individual’s behavior is related to the environment” (p. 12). In addition, Pear stated that “environmental conditions can change so rapidly that behavior that once promoted survival may quickly cease to do so, and behavior that once lacked survival value may suddenly acquire it” (p. 13). Is this the situation in the classroom today? Is this not an opportunity to examine how learning theories have been developed

and how they must be examined in conjunction to what is present in the classroom of the future?

Driscoll (2005) described the process in the development of a learning theory as an eight element process, a “systematic and recursive process for building theory” (p. 5). The process within the elements starts with how one makes assumptions concerning the nature of knowledge, and how a person comes to know what he or she knows. The steps within the process then describe inquiry from: (a) discrepant events, (b) systematic observations, (c) analysis of reactions within the observations, and (d) the development of a working hypothesis from what is analyzed. The focus of the remaining three elements of Driscoll’s process to build a theory is: (a) test the hypotheses with research, (b) synthesize the results from the original hypotheses used for the development of the initial theory, and (c) then revise the original theory to match objective results to allow for further inquiry.

Driscoll (2005) pointed out in her example that the use of “consilience in developing theories about learning and instruction” (p. 8) can support the issue or theory and approach to an issue being examined can be quite different when it is dependent upon the discipline (e.g., psychology, anthropology, sociology) or the methodology to be used in the inquiry. Wilson (1998) defined consilience as a “jumping together of knowledge by the linking of facts and face passed theory across disciplines to create a common ground of explanation” (p. 8). In addition, Driscoll stated that:

The ongoing fragmentation of knowledge caused by adherence to different disciplinary assumptions is, Wilson (1998) argues, more of an artifact of scholarship than it is a reflection of the real world, and he makes a case for consilience. (p. 7)

Why is this important in regard to the topic of this chapter? It could result in the development of a new learning theory and tie into Meyers' (2009) proposal of a more inclusive instructional design. Driscoll stated that

to be a worthy competitor, any new theory must reinterpret all the previous findings as well as account for the anomalous ones that prompted its invention in the first place. This can occur on a limited scale within a particular theoretical orientation, as when cognitive psychologists propose new theories of long-term memory to accommodate research results not easily handled by the existing theory. It can also occur on a grand scale when researchers shift theoretical orientations altogether, adopting disciplinary assumptions that are incommensurate with the previous orientation. One cannot simultaneously believe that learning is entirely understandable in terms of external, observable events and believe that learning depends on internal thought process. (p. 7)

To build on Pear's (2001) definition of learning, Driscoll clarified that learning theory:

comprises a set of constructs linking observed changes in performance with what is thought to bring about those changes. Constructs refer to the concepts theorists invent to identify psychological variables. Memory, for example is a construct implicated in cognitive perspectives on learning. In other words, we look at the fact that people can demonstrate the same performance time after time and reason that they do so because they have remembered it. We have invented the concept of memory to explain this result. (p. 9)

Could this definition help to define how a current classroom can be observed and enhanced to allow for acceptance of an emerging epistemological process that will incorporate the different traditions to engage those, who have issues, and who struggle to grasp the information presented? If this logic is followed, a change of reference will be experienced by not only the learner but by the teacher as well. Driscoll stated that "changing one's frame of reference changes the nature of 'facts' interpreted within it" (p. 13).

An example of this can be associated with the implementation of the Brookhaven College (n.d.) Sensory Modality Preference Inventory survey, which is administered by this author in every class that she teaches. The purpose of this three page instrument is twofold, first, so the student understands his or her learning style and two, so the instructor is aware of the types of learning styles present in the class. There is no assumption that the class is dominated by one learning style. The results from the survey help to establish a baseline of the type of student in the classroom. By implementation of this device, information can be delivered successfully by the teacher with sensitivity and attention given to those individuals within the class who seem to find it difficult to grasp various concepts in the course. When the learning style is understood and when the information is presented in students' dominant learning style, it has been observed that anxiety is diminished, and there is greater comprehension of the information. Cranton (2006) stated, "the educator who is conscious of individual differences will become aware of how this manifests itself in empowerment efforts" (p. 132). The goal is for the teacher to work with the preference of the learner not against him or her. Is this where the learning environment becomes dependent upon the situation of the learner?

In examination of the situative perspective, Driscoll (2005) identified the key conflict.

Adopting the situative perspective changes the way researchers and educators view learning and instruction in very fundamental ways. This in turn changes the way assessment of learning is viewed. In fact, Greeno (1997) contended that the problem of assessment from a situative perspective is much harder "When students take tests they show how well they can participate in the kind of interaction that the tests afford" (p. 8), but test performance does not show very well how students have learned to participate in the social practices of a community. It is in the assessment that the learning process so heavily

emphasized by situated cognition theory conflicts with the products of learning. What products will serve as valid evidence of students' learning to participate appropriately in a community practice? (p. 178)

What is interesting is that Driscoll discussed students taking tests, but it does not take into consideration that not all learners can take tests. Driscoll's position supported Wenger's (1988) statement in regard to the learning process, in that, "education should be addressed in terms of identities and modes of belonging" (p. 263). From this perspective, it is necessary to "think of education not merely in terms of the initial period of socialization into a culture, but more fundamentally in terms of rhythms by communities and individuals continually renew themselves" (p. 263). Wenger did not identify the age of the learner he mentioned here and, if he included the adult learner in this definition, this is contrary to Wlodkowski's (1999) assumptions that, for adult learners, the learning environment is "pragmatic" (p. 99) and driven by their own volition.

### **Assessment and Strategies of Classroom Situation**

Driscoll's (2005) and Wenger's (1998) definitions take into consideration that any learner in classrooms today may need to have situational consideration so that his or her learning experience is enhanced. In this way, the student feels valued, engaged, and empowered; they can bond with other students and the teacher in their class, and Tinto's (1993) premise of retention is accomplished. As one example, Driscoll emphasized this point and quoted Greeno (1997, as cited in Driscoll), who addressed the establishment of learning goals for students in a mathematical classroom. The assessment, Greeno said, "requires that the way in which we categorize the person's performance captures the kind

of situation type in which the person's reading or mathematical activity is significant" (p. 8).

McLellan (1993) recommended the use of situational assessment, as originally proposed by Collins (1990), which can be adopted in a three part approach for assessment. This three part assessment process includes: (a) diagnoses, (b) summary statistics, and finally (c) the development of individual student portfolios. This methodology definitely impacts the work for the teacher; however, the use of current technological advances (e.g., learning systems) can notably enhance the teacher's ability to process large amounts of student data while the needs of the individual student is met. The three part technique should be used incrementally during the learning process.

Collins' (1990) three part assessment correlates with Brookfield's (1995) feedback process of collecting a survey from the student after every class. Does this then enable the student to become comfortable in his or her learning environment and be able to become a critical thinker, and the teachers accomplish the goal of becoming a critically reflective teacher? Can a hypothesis be formulated that consistent feedback from student surveys could lead to building a more engaged and empowered critical thinking collaborative environment?

Positive support for inquiry toward the validity of this process can be found in Driscoll's (2005) and Pears' (2001) work. For Pear, it is linked to his definition for learning. For Driscoll, associative processes in the brain are exhibited in her work on memory and associated brain structure, which is based on Squire and Knowlton's (1995) work related to memory, the hippocampus, and brain systems. The scaffolding of these

theories demonstrates the process, which occurs in the brain, from the initial intake of information into short or long term memory. The brain then decides whether the information is explicit or implicit, how that information is processed, and what part of the brain should be associated with the process.

The structure of this process originated with Schacter and Tulving (1994) in the development of their work to establish the major systems of learning and memory. Until Schacter and Tulving's work, Driscoll (2005) maintained that the research on learning, which was linked to the psychological aspects, was too confusing to establish a baseline for learning and memory in the brain. Schacter and Tulving, in their review of the research conducted on learning and memory, decided to establish a baseline for memory systems. They stated that "memory systems are not forms of memory or memory processes or memory tasks or expressions of memory" (p. 11). Instead, "a memory system is defined in terms of its brain mechanisms, the kind of information it processes, and the principles of its operation" (p. 13).

Development of these systems led to the establishment of the Learning Laboratory at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT; 2009), and the adoption of collaborative learning processes within the classroom. Can a case be made that, in consideration of all the elements stated above, that this is the process, which led Bruffee (1999) to establish his theories on collaborative learning? To further substantiate the necessity toward the development and support of positive learning environments, based on the combination of Pear's (2001) work on the science of learning, combined with Driscoll's (2005) description of how the learning process is affected by the psychological

environment, one can conclude the importance of such processes and their effect upon the student.

To continue the inquiry in regard to the importance of how environments affect performance within the classroom, one can review the social constructs, which impact the climate of the classrooms as addressed by Bruffee (1999). Bruffee described collaborative learning as a process that “Assumes a nonfoundational understanding of knowledge. . . Knowledge is a social construct, a consensus among members of a community of knowledgeable peers: a group of physicians or bankers or bakers together” (p. xiv)

In addition, Bruffee (1999) described how his process is primarily a way to help undergraduate students with a reacculturation process in regard to what to expect as a student, and how to engage with members of a classroom for a deeper meaningful learning experience. Although the focus of Bruffee’s work was on undergraduate students, his process can be applied to graduate students. The key is in understanding how the educational definition of foundational and nonfoundational learning environments applies to the current learning environment. In his postscript on graduate education, Bruffee stated that,

foundational beliefs underwrite authoritarian educational values that many in the profession condemn but have not abandoned in practice, while nonfoundational beliefs underwrite collaborative educational practices that few in the profession understand and resist. (p. 247)

In order to prepare the classroom for those who are returning home from war or just to incorporate a new sensitivity within the classroom environment, it might be advantageous for an educator to consider the use of a nonfoundational classroom



(Bruffee, 1999). In a nonfoundational classroom, the educator takes into consideration an assessment approach, which allows the teacher to understand the individualistic processes of the student. Use of this approach helps the teacher develop a new epistemological process that will incorporate the different traditions of learning to engage those with issues and provide a richer learning environment for all involved. Finally, in regard to the NIMH (2009) statistics, that 20.4% of the total population in the U.S. has some type of mental health issue, and the continued increase in the number of individuals diagnosed with PTSD, development toward a situational environment could be more of a necessity than an intellectual exercise.

### **Inclusive Instructional Designs**

To support and expand on the use of nonfoundational theory, universal instructional design methodology (UID) that includes the elements of nonfoundational theory were examined. This theory, UID, is based on the premise that if an appropriate instructional design is built into the class, this will allow inclusiveness within the classroom that matches the elements of nonfoundational theory. All students can then be served without having to disclose their issue within the classroom that prevents optimum learning process.

#### ***Definition of UID***

As stated previously, UID is “the process of creating products (devices, environments, systems, and processes) which are usable by people with the widest possible range of abilities operating within the widest possible range of situations, environments, conditions and circumstances, as a commercially practical” (Burgstahler &

Cory, 2008, p.12). Higbee (2008) stated the design was built “as an architectural concept, a proactive response to legislative mandates as well as societal and economic changes that called for providing access for people with disabilities” (p.1). As Brookfield has built his pedagogy in the development of positive classroom environments for critical thinking, the definition for UID by Burgstahler (2008) and Higbee (2008) is based on Chickering and Gamson’s (1987) seven principles in the development of positive classrooms. As Higbee (2008) stated,

UID has simultaneously broadened and focused our thinking. We think more broadly about the diversity of our students and how students’ social identities can shape their learning experiences, and meanwhile we are also more focused on how we can ensure that no students are excluded or marginalized. (p. 2)

**A brief review of disability theories.** Higbee (2008) identified five specific disability theories for education. These theories are: (a) the medical model; (b) the functional limitations model. (c) the minority group paradigm, (d) the social construction model and (e) the social justice model. In justification of the premise of this study, the context of the Social Construction Model and the Social Justice Perspective, defend the necessity for UID. Social construction is focused “on the source of the stigmatization and oppression experienced by individuals with disabilities, finding it in the norms of society that privilege certain ways of being over others” (p. 14). Or to put it another way, people are excluded from within the confines of what is considered normal if the dictates of the social mores do not acknowledged their challenges for the environment. This type

of model correlates with Freire's (2000/1970) principles in his work, *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.

The second theory is the Social Justice Perspective (Higbee, 2008). In the social justice model, the emphasis is on "the role played by privilege and oppression in determining the experiences of individual of disabilities" (p. 14). Advocates of social justice support the elimination of "ableism" which Higbee described as the "pervasive system of discrimination and exclusion that oppresses people with disabilities" (p. 15).

### ***Implementation of UID***

For UID to become the standard for instructional design, faculty must be open to the elements and the implementation of the design. As Aune (2000) stated, "In universal design, environments and activities are designed in such a way that they are accessible to anyone, regardless of the person's functional limitations" (p. 57). Why is this instructional design such a foreign concept of acceptance in education for many disciplines? Myers (2009) stated it best when she observed that "the attitudes of people without disabilities have created the structures, relationships, and institutions that marginalize and exclude persons with disabilities and shape the meaning of disability" (p. 18). According to Higbee (2008), "UID is still an ideal. Until it becomes a reality, institutions must assure that students with disabilities are provided equal educational opportunity" (p. 276).

### **PTSD in Diverse Population Groups**

Three pedagogies were examined to support the premise of this study. The first was Freire's (2000/1970), *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. The second pedagogy was

provided in Horsman's (2000) work, *Too Scared to Learn*, a treatise on women who have experienced violence and their learning experience in the classroom after that experience. The third pedagogy is based on the Ignatian Pedagogy, as based on the spiritual exercises of St. Ignatius Loyola (Kolvenbach, 2005).

In acknowledgment that other life experiences can cause PTSD, besides the experience of going to war in the military, Freire (2000/1970) maintained that the experience of poverty, living through and surviving it, can cause PTSD. Freire utilized the term, the *banking of education*, to explain the authoritative process of the classroom to the disadvantaged. He described that, through this authoritative, banked process, the *oppressors* within a society

minimize or annul the student's creative power and stimulate their credulity serves the interests of the oppressors, who care neither to have the world revealed nor to see it transformed. Thus they react instinctively against any experiment in education which stimulates the critical faculties and is not content with a partial view of reality always seeks out the ties of which link one point to another and one problem to another. . . the interests of the oppressors lie in "changing the consciousness of the oppressed," not the situation which oppresses them, for the more oppressed can be led to adapt to that situation, the more easily dominated. . . To achieve this, the oppressors use the banking concept (authoritarian) concept of education in conjunction with a paternalistic social action apparatus, within which the oppressed receive the euphemistic title of "welfare recipients." (p. 9)

Freire commented on the social order and the effect of dominance and poverty on the thinking process of the student. This can be correlated to the various definitions of PTSD that, in the continued experience of a successive and oppressive interaction, students cannot think for themselves and expand their knowledge base away from the oppressive environment. The action stymies growth or interaction. Freire wrote:

Oppression—overwhelming control – is necrophilic; it is nourished by love of death, not life. The banking concept of education, which serves the interests of oppression, is also necrophilic. Based on a mechanistic, static, naturalistic, spatialized view of consciousness, it transforms students into receiving objects. It attempts to control thinking and action, leads women and men to adjust to the world, and inhibits their creative power. (p. 4)

This is the key to the psychology of the oppressed; they feel they have no other course of action unless they acquiesce to their circumstances. This repetitive process leads to the development of PTSD.

Horsman (2000) addressed the effect of violence and trauma on women and that this effect has led to literacy problems. Horsman stated that,

it is particularly important to look at the impact of violence on learning in the area of literacy, not simply because there may be extremely large numbers of an adult literacy learner who have experienced violence, but also because literacy learning is likely to work as a particularly strong trigger for memories of violence for many women. . . not just literacy education but education at all levels is profoundly affected something that many assume should have been learned in childhood may pose a challenge to anyone – more so for a person struggling with their sense of self and low self-esteem – who may have also experienced violence or trauma. (p. 5)

How many times has an educator struggled with various students at one time or another who vie for control of the classroom with the teacher, when the teacher knows it is not because they really want control of the classroom, but they want to prove that they are worthy to be in the class?

The Ignatian Pedagogy was examined because its purpose is to approach each student on the basis of the whole person, *cura personalis* (Fleming, 2009). The focus of *cura personalis* is on the whole person and the development of function for that person as a whole contributing entity within the classroom, based on the writings of St. Ignatius of Loyola. In these writings from 450 years ago, St. Ignatius addressed only the education

of men. However, with the number of the 28 Jesuit institutions within the U.S. and the admittance of women within the institutions as students, the support for learners within the system has come to encompass the female student as well. Fitzpatrick (1933), in his translation of St. Ignatius' call to follow his 12 spiritual exercises, described the key to classroom development and stated:

Let the impediments which call the mind away from studies be removed, either of devotion or of mortification, which have been undertaken excessively or without due order, and also the responsibilities and external occupation which are assumed at home in the domestic duties, or outside in conferences, confessions and other functions concerning the neighbor; refuse these things as far as it is possible in the Lord. It is wise that activities of this kind be deferred, until the studies are finished, so that afterward they may prove themselves more useful to others with the help of the learning which they have acquired; especially when there are not lacking others who can exercise them in the meantime. Let all this be done with a greater desire for the Divine service and glory. (pp. 71-72)

Fitzpatrick set the tone for teachers of many generations to follow, to allow for learning in the classroom and make sure that the best possible learning environment is provided.

The Ignatian learning environment is focused on a nonfoundational learning environment that will enable each student to develop his or her own critical thinking. This treatise ties into Driscoll's (2005) and Wenger's (1998) definition of learning processes and takes into consideration that any learner in the classrooms of today may need to have situational consideration so the learning experience is enhanced. The students need to feel valued, engaged, and empowered; he or she need to be able to bond with the students and teachers in their class.

## **Conclusion**

To prepare for the survey, that will allow inquiry to other Catholic universities located in the U.S. in how instructional designs are identified for learners with PTSD, current and historical definitions of PTSD were examined. Current literature pertinent to the question of current process and attitudes toward PTSD were considered as well. Pear's (2001) definitions of the science of learning were used as a grounded definition of learning followed by Driscoll's (2005) definition of the psychology of learning. This established a baseline in understanding of what PTSD is, how it is linked with the learning process, and what obstacles the student with PTSD faces, as well as what the teacher must consider in order to engage the student with PTSD.

In Chapter 3, this author defines and explains the context for the methodology used to develop the survey instrument and conduct the study.

## **CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY**

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this study was to define how university faculty uses instructional design to attenuate learning issues in the classroom, specifically for those students who have chosen to not identify they have Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). The focus of the study was to find out how instructors create an inclusive environment for students to subside anxiety in the classroom and what familiarity the instructors have with training, which has been conducted by their school or acquired through their own volition.

### **Methodology**

Qualitative methodology was used in this study, surveys were sent to the 28 Catholic Universities within the United States, in order to develop a grounded base of the demographic, cross-sectional attitudes of faculty toward students with PTSD. This will help to explore the implementation, use, and bias of instructional design within their classrooms. The use of qualitative methodology was used to develop an emerging understanding of the collected data. This choice allowed sufficient flexibility to analyze the data as they were collected. To defend the decision to use qualitative methodology, one can cite Creswell's (2005) definition of qualitative research. Creswell stated that qualitative research "is a type of educational research [with] data consisting largely of words from participants. Analysis of this data describes and analyzes these words for themes, and conducts the inquiry in a subjective, biased manner" (p. 39). The words in this study are the responses from the institutional staff to the items in the survey as well



as the words of the survey itself. The participants in this study were faculty of Catholic postsecondary institutions in the U.S.

### **Setting and Population**

The purpose of the study was to determine how Catholic university faculty use instructional design to create an inclusive environment for students to reduce anxiety in the classroom for those who have chosen to not identify their specific disorder. For this study, in order to establish a base line of emerging data, the survey was sent to the 28 Catholic universities located in the U.S. The survey questions were designed to inquire about how the staff of these postsecondary institutions accommodates students, who experience anxiety in the classroom. Also, the responses from the survey were used to determine if there were any training programs within their institution to train these staff to address student issues with anxiety.

The bias of this study was reflected in the nature of the survey question responses, which may indicate that the faculties of these postsecondary institutions are not equipped to deal with the learning issues of a student with PTSD. Another variable that should be considered is the sample size of the survey, the 28 Catholic institutions within the U.S. The research data, that is, the participants' responses, were collected through the use of surveys distributed to the institutions. It is not known if faculty were the only recipients of the survey. The surveys were sent to the Provosts of the universities, who selected the respondents. Due to the confidential nature of the survey instrument in regard to receiving completed surveys, a mix of both faculty and administrators could have responded to the questions.

Open coding of the answers allowed this author the flexibility to develop base patterns of emerging theory as it occurred. In qualitative research, the investigator considers that the data being examined are something that is not known and seeks to understand the motivation for the change within the culture. Merriam (2002) stated that a “key to understanding qualitative research lies within the idea that meaning is socially constructed by individuals in interaction with their world” (p. 3). Both Creswell (2005) and Merriam defined and/or inferred the biased tendency/opportunity for the biased nature of qualitative research.

The participant in the research study and the researcher examine that individual’s experience within his or her own social context. The social context considered in this study is that the forces of nature within the culture (e.g., war, financial, or meteorological disasters outside of the classroom) are changing the nature of the classroom. Thus, these occurrences impede the educational process that allows the student to think critically or the teacher to pass on new information effectively.

Based on Creswell (2005) and Merriam (2002), it seems clear that the nature of qualitative research allows for a broad inclusion of assumptions; the collected data can be analyzed inductively. The use of inductive analysis will help to establish a possible hypothesis for certain themes. Also, there is flexibility in the assessment of the data because it is something that is not known. Merriam pointed out that the weakness of the qualitative study is based on the dependency of human biases from the researcher and the participant being studied. However, offsetting the acknowledged weakness, the strength of this method derives from the adaptive nature of qualitative research.

The design of this current was qualitative with the use of survey analysis to examine the processes to determine whether Universal Instructional Design (UID) is used as an instructional design in postsecondary classrooms. This design process provided the researcher with a baseline to develop emerging theory concerning the data collected. As Creswell (2005) maintained, the systematic purpose in utilizing this type of design, through open coding, allows the researcher the ability to form an “initial category of information about the phenomena being studied by objectively segmenting information” (p. 397). The use of open coding allowed the researcher the freedom to categorize the data to match the emerging results of research being examined. This design was chosen for the question that was asked, how faculty at Catholic universities identify students with PTSD and other anxiety disorders? This author wanted to explore the common experiences of university faculty staff to develop theory (e.g., Creswell) of what is or is not being done in the classroom. Since the qualitative methodology allows one to examine what is not known, the survey process was utilized to develop a grounded theory in regard to the data collected, which allowed the establishment of a baseline, upon which a theory or theories can be developed. The use of grounded theory provided the appropriate structure for this author to test the hypothesis that nothing is being done in the classroom at this time. As Creswell stated, “grounded theory generates a theory when existing theories do not address a problem” (p. 396).

### **Setting of the Study**

To conduct this study, the author contacted the Provosts of the 28 Catholic universities in the U.S. They were asked to distribute the survey to faculty in institution.

The goal of the survey was to reach faculty members; however, it cannot be confirmed that every survey was completed by a faculty member. A sample of the survey letter is in Appendix A. The use of this particular population group was to establish a grounded base so that the research would be open to the emerging results of the collected data. It was not expected that a maximal variation sample would be achieved. The purpose was to start with a small sample, because this study was exploratory in nature, and the findings could be used to start the discussion on this issue. The results helped the author to determine if further inquiry was warranted.

Currently, the issue is how faculty addresses the challenges, which students with PTSD or any other anxiety issue experience in order to succeed in the academic setting. The question was posed, what resources exist for university students to help them accomplish successful learning goals in the classroom? How does faculty in a postsecondary institution identify learners, who have trouble, other than the student's self-identification? How would a researcher determine the type of research methodology to examine this subject? The purpose of the question, as stated above, was to qualitatively explore what is not known about this issue. The questions were not addressed to students' experiences, but specific questions were asked of the institutional staff about what is used to identify students with PTSD. These data were examined for emerging patterns from the responses received from the recipients of the distributed surveys.

Analysis and interpretation of the data could result in a deeper understanding of the issue. In addition, it may be possible to identify a quantitative or measurable aspect

by the establishment of a baseline for the description of trends and relationships among variables that have not been considered in past studies. The goal of this research study was to record the responses in an objective and unbiased manner. As the results were tabulated for the practices of the universities surveyed, it was possible to determine whether this issue has been addressed appropriately or if it is possible to consider a new approach in the learning process. Creswell (2005) noted that quantitative research is used to help define possible trends or to explain existing relationships among variables.

Therefore, a qualitative research design was used as an exploratory tool to determine what was not known about a specific problem. This research study was an exploration of what is not known. Carlson (2003) stated that use of a qualitative methodology “in a qualitative study, the inquirer may generate a theory during a study and place it at the end of a project such as in grounded theory. Qualitative studies can place the hypothesis at the beginning that shapes what is looked at and the questions asked” (p. 119). The goal of this study was to establish theory to expose emergent patterns. However, the author’s bias helped to shape the study and design of the questions to be asked at the beginning of the survey process. Also, use of the qualitative methodology helped to establish a point of reference wherein a detailed understanding of a central phenomenon established a guide for further study.

In consideration of the research question, from identification of the problem itself, through the report and evaluation of the research results, it was clear that that this issue was remarkably appropriate for qualitative research. After review of the attributes of each research methodology, the qualitative methodology, based on a grounded theory

design to examine emerging patterns, was found to be most appropriate. After the responses were collected from the survey, a mixed methodology was utilized to link the results of the survey from the perspective of both qualitative and quantitative methodologies for an optimum understanding of the issue.

### **Instrumentation**

The purpose of the survey was to measure how instructors prepare the instructional design of a classroom and how they work with students who have PTSD. Also, the respondents were asked if they had any preconceived assumptions toward students with PTSD in their classroom. The final question addressed whether there were training processes provided to the instructor to help students with PTSD in their classroom. Essentially, with this survey, this author sought “attitudinal measures” (Creswell, 2005, p. 156) of how the staff of postsecondary institutions felt about students with PTSD, and whether there was a bias toward a student with PTSD and his or her potential performance within the classroom. It must be noted that the survey was not designed to track demographic data. The survey items were designed as open-ended questions. The goal was to obtain preliminary data from the faculty of Catholic universities to develop a baseline of information for this subject matter.

### **Question Construction**

The construction of the questions was simple and direct, and they were designed as open-ended questions. The advantage to the use of this type of question, as Creswell (2005) stated, is that “open-ended responses permit you to explore reasons for close-ended responses and identify people who might have attitudes that are beyond the

responses to close ended questions” (p. 217). Although the tabulation of responses could take longer to analyze, due to the mix of question structure, the benefit could be the emergence of overlapping or different themes that could generate further research on the matter.

There were seven questions; however, those questions leave room for the respondent to communicate a short yes or no answer or expand on his or her interaction within the classroom. Each question was designed so that the response to each question would not overlap. It was the author’s assumption that the type of response given would directly correlate to the awareness and sensitivity of the respondent’s familiarity with the issue being addressed. If nothing else, the question required the survey respondent to think about the occurrence of how students with special needs, PTSD in particular, are treated within their institutions. The survey questions were reviewed by: (a) Fr. Greg Konz S.J., Secretary of Education for the Jesuits; (b) Dr. Karen A. Myers, a theorist who has helped to develop UID; and (c) Dr. Peter Bemski, Regis University and committee member.

### **Data Collection Procedures**

The research questions were compiled in a brief survey. The process, which was to be investigated was; What are professors doing in the classroom that might attenuate learning issues that challenge students with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder? Since this investigation was is at the beginning of the process in order to establish a baseline to develop theory, the topic of the study was simply stated as reflected in the question above. The questions ask faculty what, if anything, is done in the classroom to improve

the educational experience of these students. The response would help to explain a process and develop a “general overview of the interaction and action of people” (Creswell, 2005, p. 411). No personal staff or university information was collected. Subsequent questions for the survey from the central question of inquiry for this paper were: (a) does your university have a process to work with students, who may have a disability other than self-identification with the disability services department of a university? (b) What are your preconceived assumptions of students with PTSD, who are present in your classroom? (c) Is self-identification to the disability service department of your university the only means by which the student can seek help? (d) What training about this process has been conducted with faculty? (e) What instructional approaches do you employ that might help to reduce student anxiety? (f) How are instructional strategies you use within your classroom learned? (g) What instructional approaches are employed that might help to reduce student anxiety?

It was anticipated that the number of responses to the survey would be fairly high. The survey was distributed through the Office of the Provost of the College for the participant institutions. Once an individual respondent completed the survey, it was returned directly to this author to analyze and tabulate the responses electronically.

### **Data Analysis Procedures**

The collected data were analyzed by use of a qualitative software package, which is designed for use with a survey questionnaire. Use of this software allows for the “efficient management of non-numerical, unstructured data with powerful processes for



indexing, searching and theorizing. . . which will provide a toolkit for rapid coding, through exploration and management of data analysis” (Creswell, 2005, p. 237). Also, the software can be used to “create text data matrixes for comparison” (p. 237) as responses are received and analyzed.

Utilizing the manner of systematic design was supported by Creswell’s (2005) definition of the methodology. Creswell “defines, systematic design in grounded theory emphasizes the use of data analysis steps in open, axial and selective coding, and the development of a logic paradigm or visual picture of the theory generated” (p. 397). This author implemented open coding; however, the collected data provided interpretation of emerging design so the analysis has a more fluid correlation so that she can “analyze it for preliminary categories, then look for clues about what additional data to collect” (p. 405). The categories of the collected data were constantly examined for emerging patterns within the coding that could be redundant. Once examined, overlapping patterns were identified, which allowed the researcher to collapse the individual codes into broad themes. Initial categories could be coded as yes/no answers to which one can decide that the survey questions have not been considered or, if they have been considered, the scope of the issue could be too complex for the institution/faculty to examine. In any event, as data were collected, they were constantly compared to the other answers from the institutions. It was anticipated that the responses to the survey would allow the development of a theory about the viewpoints of the staff of private institutions of higher education in regard to this specific issue. The results of the survey have revealed an interesting pattern of responses. The focus of this inquiry was on private Catholic

institutions. Subsequent studies could be focused on other types of private or public based institutions.

### **Ethical Issues**

Initially, the ethical considerations for this study included the surface aspects for approval from the Capella University Institutional Review Board (IRB) process to proceed. The IRB approval was necessary for the protection of the University, the researcher, and the participants (Carlson, 1996). Carlson's concern about the need to obtain approval is related to the potential underlying aspects of an ethical issue that could be a concern for the members of the IRB board in regard to research, which affects individuals affected by the trauma of PTSD. Clarification must be communicated to the IRB board that sensitive information about an individual is not required. The members of the overall governing board for the Catholic Universities were contacted, and permission was granted, by the Secretary of Education for the Jesuits. . A letter of approval was forwarded to the Capella IRB board. Upon IRB approval, the focus was on the recipients of the survey. Also, it was is important that the collected data would be treated with care and protected, once the analysis had been completed. As Carlson stated, "the researcher has been often viewed as a neutral stimulus, one whose unemotionality and adherence to standardized behavior insures that research will be conducted in an unbiased fashion" (p. 186). However, the researcher is human, which lends to emotional reactions. However, dealing with this particular dilemma, clarification can occur toward

the aspects of the study that has the potential to overcome researcher bias and enrich the research (Carlson), and which will add a wealth of information to the postsecondary community as a whole.

The surveys were not distributed to any member of a vulnerable population. Rather, the surveys were sent to university Provosts who distributed the information in regard to members of vulnerable populations. The survey questions were not used to inquire about the nature of any person's disability, in order to confirm PTSD, but how information is disseminated, if at all, to help that individual within the classroom and if any training occurs that will help teachers interact appropriately with students with PTSD. The survey, which was sent to these institutions, is provided in Appendix A. Assurances of minimal risk were given to the Provosts who received the survey. In addition, the following concerns were addressed and can be found within the survey:

1. an assurance statement to address the social responsibility of the study;
2. confirmation in regard to protection from harm or deceptive practices;
3. there was a guarantee of confidentiality and security of the data collected;
4. the survey respondent was advised of the option to withdraw from the survey process at any time;
5. identification of the possible benefits of the study for the community of teachers, students, and postsecondary institutions as a whole; and

6. the results of the study will be available to all participants in the study if they so desire (Colvin & Lanigan, 2005; Creswell, 2003; Finkelstein, 2009; Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2003).

This information was detailed at the beginning of each survey with an explanation of the purpose of the survey in the initial email sent to the appropriate administrator who then determined faculty participants. However, it is not known if the survey was completed only by faculty. Responses to the survey were received. However the identification of each respondent is not known.

### **Limitations of the Study**

The limitations of the study included various factors, which were dependent upon three main factors: (a) the bias of the author or the reader, (b) the size of the sample to be studied, and (c) the nature of the methodology.

The author's bias comes from a personal knowledge of the subject matter. It might be a challenge to meet Carlson's (1996) definition of unemotionality throughout the study when results are tabulated. The personal experience of having PTSD has affected the author's perspective toward the impact and challenges of how PTSD can affect learning processes for this author and for students of the author who have PTSD.

The reader's bias could be from the perspective, if they teach a discipline other than education, of not being aware of different learning types or issues that are present within the classroom. Thus, the need to address the conduct or treatment of students with various types of disabilities may be a new concept for them to consider. Also, the employment of affiliate faculty to support the expansion of postsecondary institutions is a

fact of life. Advertising is rampant from these institutions, as the staff attempt to attract students to learn from the experts who teach the necessary tools they will use to make their life better. The question to be asked is whether their life will be better and have the affiliate faculty been trained in how to manage a classroom or reach students who find it difficult to understand the information that is presented? The reader's bias may be based in his or her understanding of only a traditional foundation background for classrooms. Thus, he or she may not be able see the potential benefits that the results from this study may produce.

Also, the methodology chosen to be used in this study was qualitative, which is inductive in nature. This could lead to interpretive conclusions other than what the author intended.

Although, generally, qualitative samples are small (Creswell, 2005), there could be a bias in regard to where the surveys were sent. The sample for this study included faculty at the 28 Catholic universities sent through the departments of the Provosts. The bias is not in the number of schools contacted, but it could be in the type of schools to be contacted. The core values of the schools surveyed are based in the Ignatian tradition of *cura personalis* (Fleming, 2009), which translates to care of the whole person. These schools are private postsecondary institutions of higher education. The responses from these schools may show their bias through the established university value system, which could be quite different if the survey was distributed to state funded public postsecondary institutions. Creswell noted that quantitative research methodology is used to help define possible trends or to explain existing relationships among variables. Qualitative research

is used as an exploratory tool of what is not known about a specific problem. At this time, the inquiry was, not what was in place within these schools to define possible trends or existing relationships, rather it was to explore what, if anything, existed through the structure of the survey questions. The collection of data may help to ground a process and enable a baseline to be developed to determine which steps are needed to be taken for the future.

### **Conclusion**

According to Daneker (2005), “within the human experience, traumatic events will remain a common occurrence” (p. 2). Another avenue of research to consider in the examination of the need to define students, who have PTSD or other anxiety challenges, is the work of Tinto (1993). Tinto utilized a quantitative process to examine the assessment systems that university faculty use to track the reasons for student departure. Tinto identified that there was link between a student’s experiences within a classroom environment to the rate of student departure. Tinto reported that the occurrence of “student departure could be reduced, based on the overall positive experience in the classroom as well as positive interactions individually with faculty” (p. 216). Student persistence comes from the overall experience and relationship to the classroom environment and trust that is created between all participants. Tinto’s work reinforced the possible positive outcomes for university staff when they face student attrition with the research question proposed in this paper. The outcome from the research may result in tools, which would help university staff and faculty to identify what is being done at this time to identify students with PTSD. If nothing is being done, the process could help

to develop systems that could be utilized for the development of tool for the future. The presence of PTSD or other anxiety related disorders in the classroom is not uncommon. The findings from this research study could help establish a baseline of information so that instructors and institutional staff can work to develop a tool that will be beneficial to, not only the university, but the teacher and student. Tinto examined the intention and commitment of the student in relation to the occurrence of student departure. The impact of helping the teacher to identify a problem in the classroom could create a positive classroom experience for all involved that would possibly change the rate of departure from institutions of higher education. This would establish a baseline of knowledge so that future researchers can develop ethnographic and narrative research designs. The progression of research can then eventually shift from qualitative in nature to a mixed methods approach.

## CHAPTER 4. DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

The organizational flow of this chapter was to develop a schema of collected data answering questions posed to faculty concerning their use of instructional design to help students with anxiety in the classroom. Due to the nature of the study being qualitative, focusing on the development of grounded theory by use of open ended questions, answers given in the survey helped to develop an examination of bit strings of similarity of the survey question posed. Initial results from the survey were examined for coding of responses to develop a theme. The collected data were color coded to determine types of survey answers as a base grounding for positive, negative, specific, or nondescript answers. This can be found in the Table 1, the Roles and Perspective of Survey Participants. The remainder of the chapter was used to provide an examined sample of varied responses to the questions posed.

The focus of this dissertation was to develop a grounded understanding of how Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) challenges postsecondary teachers faced by students who have this disorder within postsecondary Catholic university classrooms. The choice of sending the survey to Catholic universities was determined due to the specific instructional design used within a noted university classroom. The instructional design, known as the Ignatian Pedagogy (Fitzpatrick, 1933), allows for consideration of the whole person's experience within the classroom (e.g., physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual factors). A significant element of the process within the methodology of the Jesuit pedagogy was identified by Fitzpatrick as, "all impediments be removed from the classroom so learning may occur" (p. 33). The premise of the



researcher was that in sending the survey to Catholic universities, the assumption could be made that the instructional designs were present within the classrooms or that faculty would be trained to have an implied sensitivity for students' learning processes. This is important as education goes forward in meeting the needs of students, who cannot function in a typically authoritative foundational classroom, which does not have an instructional design to meet the students' needs. If the assumption is true, that Catholic classrooms are sensitive to learning issues of students and a universal instructional design (UID) would be built into the instructional design based on the principles of the Ignatian Pedagogy, then that design should be reflected in the answers to the survey questions for this study.

What is not fully understood is how the instructors of postsecondary institutions can attenuate learning issues among students, who may present learning difficulties within the classroom. The survey instrument was created to ask seven specific questions. These question helped the researcher understand how instructors approach, use, and learn the instructional design within their classrooms. The focus of this dissertation was to develop a grounded understanding of how PTSD challenges postsecondary teachers. The important question to answer was how those teachers approach those students, who have this disorder within the classroom and how Catholic universities within the U.S. approach the instructional designs of the classroom, to be inclusive of students who have difficulty within the classroom. The rationale of the study can serve as a grounded context for future examination of other postsecondary institutions, and how the staff can approach instructional design for students who suffer from extreme anxiety. An

additional purpose of the survey was to elicit responses from the participants to establish how they approach students with issues in an established instructional design within these 28 Catholic postsecondary institutions. It was the position of this researcher, that little or nothing is being done in the classroom at this time in regard to the acknowledgement of a formal instructional design to better meet the needs of students with anxiety issues.

### **Initial Results from Survey**

The rate of participation in the survey was instructive, in that, there was a varied spectrum of responses to the questions asked. The survey was sent to 28 Catholic universities. Two schools declined by email to participate in the survey. Letters of consent can be found on file with Capella University. The analysis function of the qualitative survey instrument measured that the survey itself had 24 visits. The number of surveys, which the respondents completed, totaled 13. As the survey provided only open-ended responses, a total of 139 responses were coded. These responses coalesced with the author's assumption for this paper. Further analyses of the questions were examined in data collection.

This research study was based on the assumption that most instructors use an experiential approach toward the management of student classroom issues, and many have no formal knowledge base of instructional design, which should be used within the classroom. The subsequent seven questions were presented to find evidence of what is being done in the classrooms of the study.

1. What instructional approaches do you employ that might help to reduce student anxiety?
2. Does your University have a process of working with a student that may have a disability other than self-identification with the Disability department of your University?
3. Is self-identification to the Disability Service office of your University the only vehicle a student who is having issues has to seek help?
4. What are your preconceived assumptions of students' with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) coming into your classroom?
5. Has any training in your institution occurred concerning the structure of inclusive classroom environments?
6. What instructional approaches do you employ that might help to reduce student anxiety?
7. How did you learn instructional strategies you use within your classroom?

All questions were open-ended. Creswell (2005) stated that “open-ended responses permit you to explore reasons for close-ended responses and identify people who might have attitudes that are beyond the responses to close ended questions” (p. 217). Creswell went on to state that open-ended questions “defines, systematic design in grounded theory emphasizes the use of data analysis steps in open, axial and selective coding, and the development of a logic paradigm or visual picture of the theory generated” (p. 397).

Questions 1 and 6 were the same question. The primary reason for asking the question a second time was to give the respondent time to think about his or her approaches to students in the classroom environment. Most responses for Question 6 were referred back to Question 1. However, Respondent A stated in addition to the response in Question 1 that:

I used real world tasks and case studies, I try to make the classroom flexible and ask for feedback from students each week, I ask students to help me modify our goals to meet their objectives as well as those provided for the classroom, and I ask the students to provide weekly assessments of where we stand as a class. This is harder to do in the online classroom although I add lots more discussion and real world examples in the classroom than most.

Respondent B stated:

I employ a facilitative approach to teaching in that I encourage each student to share their insights on all issues. If a student is reticent to do so I will work with them on the side to draw out their concerns and adapt the process to accommodate their reluctance to participate.

Given a chance to discern their approach to the classroom in this specific sequential survey design, the respondents had the opportunity to think about their methodology to the instructional design of the classroom. Both respondents reported flexibility in helping students to overcome issues experienced in the classroom. The two answers also emphasized the importance of clear goals and expectations for the class and, if someone is challenged by the goals, both teachers work independently with each student until a comfort level with the material to be covered is achieved. Asking a specific question twice then enabled the respondents to discern and elaborate on their answer given in Question 1. The electronic survey was designed so that a respondent could not return to review a previous answer; the respondent could only advance to completion of the survey.

The general reaction of each survey participant was constructive in communicating the instructors approach to their classroom as noted in the subsequent examples. Most of the survey respondents appeared to answer the seven questions frankly concerning their attitudes toward student experience and instructional design. In Question 2, the respondent was asked if their university had policies other than identification through a Disability Services department. Question 4 asked if the respondent had preconceived assumptions of students with PTSD. These questions elicited specific reactions to the questions. An example of an answer for Question 2 was “not that I'm aware of” that their specific university had a definite process of working with a student that has difficulty within the classroom that has not disclosed a disability to their university disabilities office. Also, there were specific answers of, “to get accommodations, no, but I'm not aware of any other formal processes,” or an emphatic “unsure” or “don't know” were given as responses.

Question 4, which asked the survey respondent if he or she had any preconceived assumptions toward students who have PTSD, had several varied responses. The responses ranged from not knowing anything about PTSD, to assuming that those within the classroom with PTSD did not belong in the traditional classroom. One respondent even stated that:

I assume that a number of our students may suffer from some form of PTSD. I try to be aware of this issue but am not trained in spotting the signs of PTSD.

The initial results of preliminary data collected from the survey served to validate the working assumption of the author. This assumption was that most approaches to classroom anxiety, specifically PTSD, were answered as a developed process based

primarily from experiential knowledge on a case-by-case basis. In all 13 survey responses, not one response referred to a specific instructional design used within the classroom. Experiential knowledge, self-disclosure, or the use of support services which included the school office of disability services or counseling services known on each campus was the most often response in the development and implementation of a supportive classroom.

## **Data Collection**

### **Coding of Data**

To develop categories and themes of the data collected with the survey, a color coding system was used: (a) orange, did not know processes or instructional designs that would help a student; (b) green, knowledge and use of the disability services department at each school; (c) yellow, primarily positive answers with substantive knowledge of classroom procedure and experiential methodologies; (d) pink, a declarative statement either positive or negative; and (e) purple, knowledge of counseling services in addition to the disability services office. To understand the scope of answers to the questions, a sample of responses were chosen from the 13 completed surveys. These answers revealed a range of knowledge in regard to experiential classroom methods and certain biases to show the diversity of perspectives reported in the survey. The diversity ranged from one respondent, who marked N/A to all survey questions, to respondents who provided thoughtful and considered answers to the question posed.

Table 1

*Survey Participant Coded Answer Responses*

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Roles and Perspective of Survey Participants

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Research Analysis – Participant

Color	# of Statements	Response
Orange	33	Unaware, unsure, or doesn't know
Green	20	Knowledge of a disability services dept.
Yellow	84	Positive answers with substance of knowledge to classroom procedure and resources available.
Pink	2	Declarative statement
Purple	13	Knowledge of counseling services in addition to the disability services office

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The variety of responses as displayed in Table 1 began to show a theme within the respondent base. The theme of the answers showed that approximately 61% of respondents, who answered the survey, genuinely care about student performance within their classroom and try to find ways to help their students achieve success. However, 24% of the respondents had no knowledge of resources outside of the classroom or felt that students with PTSD would not be able to function within the traditional classroom. Of these 13 surveys received from the 28 Jesuit universities, which were use to measure seven opened ended questions, a total of 139 comments were color coded. Within the

seven survey questions, only 33 responses or 24% of the total survey responses recorded a negative response.

### **Response Sample Questions**

All 13 survey responses were reviewed and analyzed to develop a synthesis of responses for each question. Four specific respondent answers were chosen for all questions to reflect the depth and breadth of varied responses. Question 6 had only two responses of any note. The sample questions provided for a more comprehensive analysis and allowed this author to study the characteristics of the respondent through language used within the response. A one word answer did not allow the author to develop context to an answer of the various survey questions. The chosen respondent's answers allowed for the author to compare and contrast for process, bias, and experience.

**Specific answers to survey questions.** The following is a sampling of respondent answers. They are assigned alpha categorizations for each answer to differentiate them from respondent answers noted above.

Question 1: What instructional design do you employ that might help to reduce student anxiety?

- a. I disclose my personal anxiety disorder. 50% of Americans suffer from Anxiety or Depression at one point in time, and I let them know that I have a mild panic disorder. The very act of opening up often helps them. Other than that, I try to reduce the use of tests in favor for papers. I find timed tests more anxiety provoking than papers.
- b. I am fairly laid back in the classroom and I try to convey my flexibility in both face to face and online classes. I work at trying to put students at ease.



- c. Setting a classroom environment that is safe and accepting of all students. Norms/guidelines for expected respected behavior are reviewed with the class and referenced consistently as needed. Program expectations of respectful interactions are in the handbook and included on syllabi. Instructors model respectful interaction with students.
- d. A culture is necessary that respects the learner's self-concept and self-efficacy. Instructors are dedicated to nurturing the whole person and not just the intellect of the learner. Instructors provide feedback that recognizes efforts as well as achievements. Instructors encourage an atmosphere of caring and trust. Help students set challenging but attainable goals. Set expectations that are high, attainable, and supported.

The two respondent answers for (a) and (c) for Question 1 are interesting, in that, they revealed that they make a specific effort to disclose their disability or personal anxiety disorder to the students in their classes.

Also, the two answers for (b) and (d) are revealing. Respondent B reported that, if a relaxed classroom with avenues for flexibility is established, he or she will avert student anxiety within the classroom thus allowing learning to occur. This approach addresses accommodation of the three basic learning style modalities of: (a) visual, (b) auditory, and (c) kinesthetic learners. Within the detailed response is reference to “nurturing the whole person,” which ties into the principles of the Ignatian Pedagogy. While Respondent D was very detailed and articulate about how to set up a classroom environment, that is, a safe and accepting environment where expectations are made clear to the student through syllabi and vocal reinforcement.

Question 2: Does your University have a process of working with a student that may have a disability other than self-identification with the Disability Department?

- a. I believe that students must go through the office of disability services to get any accommodations.
- b. When a student comes into our office visibly upset or anxious, we have been advised to walk them over to the counselors. The counselors then hook them up with the department of disability services.
- c. Unsure.
- d. The normal course will be to self-identify and work with the disability department. If for any reason a student chooses not to do so, I will work with them if they contact me and ask for assistance, otherwise I may not be aware of their disability and not take it into account.

Respondent A stated that a student must go through the office of disability service (ODS) to receive any accommodations. Does this reveal a bias of the respondent that no accommodation would be given to the student if the student would not go through ODS? The brevity of the statement is too brief to make any conclusive decisions. However, the author does feel this statement reveals a preconceived attitude toward students who need accommodation.

Respondent B revealed that a course of action will be taken for a student, who exhibits visible signs of anxiety, and the student will be taken to various resources to avert the anxiety the student feels. Respondent C was unsure of what was available within the school, and Respondent D noted various actions to be taken with the student should he or she has any anxiety. Respondent D clarified how a student having difficulty in his or class would be treated and helped. This tells the author that this particular respondent is open to working with students, which is not as evident in the other answers.

Question 3: Is self-identification to the Disability Services office of your University the only vehicle a student who is having issues has to seek help?

- a. Yes
- b. No, the small class sizes and personal nature of Regis provides students with another pathway, the professors. I have walked at least 6 students to counseling and disability services in the last year.
- c. We have a university ministry office and a counseling lab in two different campus locations providing services - but students need to seek those rather than a normal process everyone pursues.
- d. Don't know.

The answers to Question 3 answers are interesting due to the diametrically opposed opinions. Respondent A reported that self-identification to an ODS department is the only way a student can seek help, but Respondent B noted that self-identification is not the only way a student can seek help.

Respondent C focused on the university ministries and counseling services provided for the student. Respondent D had no idea if there are any other resources for those who do not self-identify to ODS.

Question 4: What are your preconceived assumptions of students with PTSD coming into your classroom?

- a. traditional classroom setting is not conducive to learning
- b. I don't know that much, but I do have a friend that had a PTSD student threaten her in class.
- c. They can have hypersensitive reactions to course content that is similar or related to their trigger for PTSD - They can be successful with individualized attention and encouragement.
- d. I assume that a number of our students may suffer from some of PTSD. I try to be aware of this issue but am not trained in spotting the signs of PTSD nor in the best strategies to deal with these students.

Question 4 seemed to have been a sensitive issue for the respondents in their collective answers. Respondent A noted that the traditional classroom is not the place for those with PTSD.

Question 5: Has any training in your institution occurred concerning the structure of inclusive classroom environments?

- a. Inclusivity is discussed in tandem with diversity.
- b. ODS has held some workshops but not specific to PTSD. I'm assuming because this is not a common diagnosis in our population.
- c. Not at this time. The ODS for this campus is a three person office and does not have the capability of meeting student needs and develop training for faculty. However, the ODS conducted a recent AHEAD survey in which the feedback from several sources is the need to conduct more outreach to faculty as a group (ODS already consults with faculty one-on-one). Additionally, newly released AHEAD standards for documentation and accommodations in post secondary institutions (May 24, 2012) will pave the way to move toward universal design.
- d. None that I have attended. Unsure.

Respondent A reported and assumed that inclusivity is discussed in tandem with diversity. This is an assumptive process, that the scope of inclusivity can be understood within the context of diversity. The question to the respondent in a future survey would be to ask how the two concepts are communicated. Respondent B assumed that PTSD is not a common diagnosis in the U.S. population. This suggests an uninformed opinion about the scope of the population affected as noted by staff of the National Institute of Health (NIH; 2009) in their study on the predominance of diagnosis for anxiety disorders within the population. Respondent C provided detailed information about a survey

conducted in 2012 on campus to start to address the issue of outreach to instructors on a social constructivist level.

Respondent D reflected many comments made within the survey that he or she had not attended any training or did not know if any other resources are present for them to access.

Question 6: What instructional approaches do you employ that might help to reduce student anxiety?

- a. In addition to #1 above, I used real world tasks and case studies, I try to make the classroom flexible and ask for feedback from students each week, I ask students to help me modify our goals to meet their objectives as well as those provided for the classroom, and I ask the students to provide weekly assessments of where we stand as a class. This is harder to do in the online classroom, although I add lots more discussion and real world example in the classroom than most.
- b. I employ a facilitative approach to teaching in that I encourage each student to share their insights on all issues. If a student is reticent to do so, I will work with them on the side to draw out their concerns and adapt the process to accommodate their reluctance to participate.

Only two responses were selected as examples for Question 6. These were the only responses that did not state, Refer back to Question 1. The responses indicated that, given the opportunity, the respondents reflected on their instructional design policies and approaches within the classroom.

Question 7: How did you learn instructional strategies you use within your classroom?

- a. I have been teaching in higher education for over 20 years -- self taught, experiential learning, and training/professional development over the years.

- b. I initially learned by observation of colleagues when I was a new instructor. I've also attended faculty development seminars to get more ideas for engaging my students
- c. formal academic courses, ongoing faculty development training, mentors in the classroom, videotaping, and guided review of these.
- d. Reading, experience, conferences, observation, learning with and from colleagues, professional development.

Question 7 was focused on identification of instructional strategies used within the classroom. Most respondents referred to experiential processes, supported by training and professional observance of colleagues. The respondents felt these various techniques were enough to attenuate issues with students, who exhibit anxiety issues.

### **Conclusion**

The answers from the respondents were diverse and ranged from being totally unsure of policies and practice to other respondents' vast knowledge base of practices developed from experiential occurrences. These answers ranged from no knowledge of how to help a student with undisclosed anxiety to formal training on how to establish a sensitive and inclusive environment to address a student's needs. The answers do not indicate what detailed experience and knowledge with a specific instructional design the respondent relies upon to design the approaches used within the classroom. If formal instructional designs are being used, they were not identified nor mentioned by these respondents. The question to be asked for further examination, in a subsequent survey, would be what future respondents they feel their appropriate role in the classroom is in order to help students to be successful. Is it because these respondents are at a Catholic institution and that the Ignatian Pedagogy is automatically implied and built into the

instructional design of the classroom? It would require a subsequent survey that would focus only on how a teacher builds his or her instructional design.

### **Summary**

Those who choose to answer the survey gave the author a grounded base for further research studies. The demographics of subsequent research participants will be expanded to inquire about diverse approaches and additional instructional designs that may be identified to attenuate students with anxiety issues within the classrooms. Discussed in Chapter 5 are the possible meaning of survey responses, conclusions, and recommendations for further research.

## **CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Chapter 5 will reiterate the main emphasis for the study and then examine answers given by survey respondents for attitudes, revealing possible biases within the answers shared. Analysis of what was found in survey respondent answers, what the answers could possibly mean, what could be possibilities for further research and the authors conclusions will also be reviewed.

The question for this dissertation, “What are professors doing in the classroom that might attenuate learning issues that challenge students with PTSD”, was developed to initiate a dialogue about what is occurring in postsecondary classrooms to recognize students, who may be unable to fully function in their current learning environment. The inability to fully function could be caused by the presence of anxiety or other debilitating issues over and above the accepted level of anxiety within the learning process in the classroom. The question was focused to narrow the scope on the extreme end of the spectrum for anxiety, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), and how it is approached in the classroom for a specific university system in the United States. It is this author’s opinion and bias that, in general, the postsecondary classrooms in the U.S. are ill equipped to best meet the needs of a student when he or she does not fit the traditional foundational authoritative educational model. It was this author’s purpose to establish a grounded base to determine whether the author’s bias is justified through the respondents’ answers to the survey that was deployed throughout the nation due to the lack of literature addressing the subject matter.



Responses to the survey questions provided a baseline of knowledge to identify attitudes and processes used by teachers in all disciplines. This could be an indication that nearly all faculty desire to help their students overcome anxiety issues and successfully integrate into the classroom. For example, the answers to Question 3 from respondents A & B may reveal the nature of each respondent's attitude, bias, and approach toward student anxiety. This response is important, and it may reveal the attitude and assumption of the respondent. The assumption in this answer is that because they are in a Catholic school, the formal education of teachers in instructional design is unnecessary due to the nature of the instructional design philosophy of the school. The response implies that, just because an instructor is teaching at a Catholic institution, that additional training in formal instructional designs and classroom management are not needed. If this is the case then, why, as Tinto (1993) stated, are the attrition rates so high for students leaving college? As previously noted, the Ignatian Pedagogy emphasizes the care of the whole person and that "all impediments to the classroom be removed" (Fitzpatrick, 1933, p 33).

### **Summary of the Study Findings**

The findings from the seven research questions for the study provided an understanding of what is and what is not understood in consideration of working with students, who are diagnosed with PTSD or experience high anxiety within the classroom. These questions were:

1. What instructional approaches do you employ that might help to reduce student anxiety?

2. Does your University have a process of working with a student that may have a disability other than self identification with the Disability department of your University?
3. Is self-identification to the Disability Service office of your University the only vehicle a student who is having issues has to seek help?
4. What are your preconceived assumptions of students' with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) coming into your classroom?
5. Has any training in your institution occurred concerning the structure of inclusive classroom environments?
6. What instructional approaches do you employ that might help to reduce student anxiety?
7. How did you learn instructional strategies you use within your classroom?

The answers from the respondents were diverse. As detailed in Chapter 4, some respondents were totally unsure of policies and practice about how to address students who have anxiety issues in the classroom while others had a defined experiential approach in engaging students who are having issues. Some instructors reported that it was not their responsibility other than to direct students to the university disability services office. The majority of respondents communicated a broad knowledge base of practices they used to help students, which were developed from experiential knowledge or from attendance at professional development classes. These findings are varied and support the paucity of literature that exists in handling PTSD in the classroom. The survey answers will serve to help define a grounded base for literature to build upon.

Much was found in literature searches from the psychological aspect of approaching PTSD at this time but little was supported within the literature in how to approach solutions of helping students overcome paralyzing issues within the classroom from the educational point of view.

### **What Was Found**

The most interesting findings from the respondents' answers were their lack of identification of specific pedagogical knowledge for the instructional design of their classroom. Specifically, in Question 5, the respondents were asked if they knew or experienced any training for an inclusive classroom environment. A few of the respondents reported that they received training for anxiety in the classroom in their specific discipline. In Questions 6 and 7, they were asked to report the instructional approaches or instructional strategies used within their classroom. Most of the answers were related to an experiential based approach. One respondent reported 23 years of classroom experience and, therefore, had sufficient background to manage any situation, the most calloused answer was a respondent, who went through the entire survey and marked N/A on all the questions. One respondent came close to answering the questions with a specific pedagogical approach, but focused more on the psychological setting of a nurturing classroom that would be flexible to the students learning needs while decreasing anxiety. The answers to the survey questions reveal a definite knowledge of how pronounced anxiety is within the population of the United States. Also, the answers show a working knowledge of an instructor, who understands how to communicate to his or her students the expectations for the class. Thus, students feel comfortable to reveal

any difficulties they may face. One more important fact that these responses reveal is an emerged tacit knowledge of instructional design, so the course parameters can be flexible to meet the needs of a class. For the authority figure in the classroom to admit a weakness exhibits a working knowledge of principles for nonfoundational classrooms. The respondent, who approaches the classroom as a traditionalist or from an authoritative foundational perspective as the authority figure, does not allow for flexibility for student processes. This may be explained, as Tolman (1959) reported, that learning within the classroom can take place devoid of changes in behavior by the student or the teacher. The focus was to impart information to be learned to consider learned or latent learning behavior or patterns.

In question 4 Respondent A and B revealed specific attitudes toward the presence of those in a Classroom with PTSD. Respondent A felt the traditional classroom has no place for those with PTSD. This statement raises so many questions. Questions to be asked of the respondent in a latter phenomenological study would be to understand if this is a bias, to the point that the instructor believes students with PTSD cannot be taught? Does the respondent understand different learning processes or does the respondent read current research? Does the respondent understand how pervasive the numbers of those in society, according to the National Institute of Mental Health (2009), suffer from anxiety disorders and that they may have someone in every class who has an anxiety disorder? Do instructors understand that the bias of the instructor can be conveyed to the class either subliminally or overtly? Does the instructor consider that a student dealing with an

anxiety issue is fearful of engagement which disallows the ability of said student being able to show his or her intelligence for fear of the instructor's bias?

Respondent B of Question 4 revealed fear of dealing with PTSD. His or her inexperience with PTSD, combined with a coworker's negative experience with a student with PTSD, may suggest hesitancy if a student would self-identify the challenge with PTSD. Respondent C reported a working knowledge of process for students with PTSD. Respondent D assumed that, within the student population of every class, a student will have PTSD and focused his or her accommodation to match the specific needs of that student without knowing the specific challenge. The respondent made clear that, although accommodation is made for the student, the respondent does not have formal training in how to spot students with PTSD. This suggests to this author that the respondent is familiar with instructional design of a universally designed classroom. This affirmation suggests to the author that this respondent is open to learning specific information that will help a student with PTSD succeed within the classroom.

### **What Does It Mean?**

What the responses mean is that the attitudes of the respondents were diverse in regard to their knowledge of how to approach and work with a student who has issues. However, the focus was more on an experiential basis than a formal pedagogical basis. Attitudes toward instructional design were perceived as more of an issue for the class instructional designers rather than the teacher in the classroom. For the most part, the responses reflected genuine care for students with issues. However, the care in addressing those who have issues of high anxiety were focused more from what an

instructor feels is the correct approach than by use of specific experiential context to an individual person rather than use of an established pedagogical practice within the classroom.

Most of the responses reflected a sincere objective to establish sensitive and inclusive learning environments to address each student's specific needs. These responses correlated with the elements of universal instructional design (UID) in regard to the concept of social justice education theory (SJE) that Higbee (2008) addressed in her work. The SJE is correlated with the established pedagogical practices of the university, where a classroom setting is where "student empowerment refers to both the acquisition of knowledge and an understanding of what to do with that knowledge both in the students personal lives and in the greater society" (p. 27). It is this author's opinion that the majority of the respondent answers reflected a genuine sense of caring, even though they did not communicate formal knowledge of pedagogy. One respondent assumed that, because of the nature of the historical pedagogical practices of the school, those practices were written into the course design. That is an assumption that cannot be supported at this time.

What the answers do not tell is what detailed experience and knowledge with a specific instructional design the respondent relied upon to design the approaches used within the classroom. If formal instructional designs are being used, they were not identified or mentioned within the survey responses. The question to be asked for further examination, with a subsequent survey, should be focused on a definition of what an overlying assumption would be for future respondents to define what they feel their

appropriate role in the classroom is in order to help students be successful. It would require a subsequent survey, focused only on how a teacher builds his or her instructional design within the class. One respondent answered their survey in the context that inclusive instructional design was correlated only with diversity. This author can see where openness to diversity issues can lead to building an inclusive environment, but how does one know how to separate the specific variables of anxiety and diversity to each concept?

### **What Are the Limitations?**

Asking specific questions as to how an instructor considers or treats a student with anxiety issues within a classroom is a very disruptive process. For example, a respondent stated that faculty must have knowledge of the ODS office on their campus, but also made reference that their ODS office was only a three person office. The question for the author is, if the respondent is prevented from advancing services due to mentioning their limited staff do they feel only minimum support can be offered. Or are they stating that research must be conducted so that their office can grow to meet the restrictions prescribed to them by law of being in an ODS. This calls for further research into the subject matter.

Limitations to any study of this nature are whether an instructor will honestly admit he or she does not know how to deal with a student, outside of the limited established system of disability services. Another limitation could be if instructors in other disciplines, other than the field of education, understand and feel comfortable with

letting go of the context of the established traditional classroom format that has been developed for them by an instructional design team to serve the student needs.

For years now, schools have had instructional designers with fulltime and affiliate faculty teaching assigned classes. A teacher is given the syllabus, the inputs of the class are determined, the teacher has a set number of assignments to address mastery of a subject, and the student is educated. Or it is just assumed they are educated? Tinto (1993) wrote about a 50% attrition rate in the U.S. system of universities. If the student population was truly being served, would they leave college in such vast numbers? The question here is how can that defined system be flexible enough to serve the many students coming into the educational system, who have experienced extreme anxiety? In addressing the question of disruption in education, Christensen, Horn, Caldera & Soares (2011) conducted a study to explore how the present classroom would shift its current foundation. Christensen et al called for a shift in focus for greater definition on student outcomes: not instructor inputs. This is an interesting call for a change in postsecondary education that redefines the constructs of what consists and is defined within a quality education. This call is necessitated by current trends in education. Christensen et al gathered statistics that showed an alarming trend within education. He stated that:

in 2003, roughly 10 percent of all students within the United States were engaged in one online class. By 2008, participation in online learning increased to approximately 25 percent and was at 30 percent by fall of 2009. Projections by Clayton are that by 2014 growth in online student participation will grow to a projected 50 percent of all classes taken. (p. 3)

. . . at the same time Christensen states that, The United States population had the largest percentage of adults between the ages of 25 to 34 with a high school diploma taking online classes. . . but at the same time graduation rates have disparagingly stagnated in the United States. (p. 7)



Christensen et al emphasized that a current verifiable disruption is occurring with the statistics due to the development and implementation of online learning models vs. the traditional brick and mortar classroom where the teacher speaks to the student as the expert, instead of guiding the students as a guide and mentor to learn what is difficult. The disruption of online learning has caused a shift in students' learning process and instructors' teaching practices. Also, these shifts occur with the increased use of technology within the classroom to deliver educational products. Bergmann and Sams (2012) addressed this issue and noted that the increase in online learning provides for a different learning environment, where students can take their own time to examine and consider the material to be mastered. Might this not be part of how education could change to meet the needs of the student and eliminate the necessity of fractured disability services departments? It has been noted that many students do not disclose a disability or issue unless they are forced to, so they can survive a class. It has also been noted that more than two-thirds of the homecoming veterans from the current wars do not disclose that they have anxiety issues, because they do not want the stigma associated with being registered with a disability services department (Americans with Disabilities Act, 2009). Why not give the student a course in which the instructional design allows them "the basic tenants. . . with multiple means of representation, multiple means of expression and multiple means of engagement" (Bergmann & Sams, p. 67). The largest limitation to all of these questions rests in the existing mindsets of what educators across the U.S. believe a classroom should be and the accreditation limitations pressed upon them.

## **Suggestions for Future Research**

Further research could further address the assumptions and approaches of instructors' modality to their classroom in multiple university environments in the U.S. Another research direction could be in how open schools are to adjusting their instructional design to students with anxiety issues or are they interested more in class inputs or student outcomes. Whatever research is generated, it will be disruptive and challenge the common practices and educational accreditation policies that currently exist in this culture. Research would require a subsequent survey, focused only on how a teacher builds his or her instructional design within the class. An instructor could also use the Delphi Technique where the researcher would work in concert with instructional design experts within the school to design, promote and support enhanced perspective on would could be best practices with instructional design to meet their school students population needs. Another way of examining this problem would be to apply action research while working in concert with faculty to examine how faculty build their instructional design within a class and serve expose demographic research cycles providing institutions solutions for student issues.

## **Conclusion**

The purpose of this study was to examine how the structure of classroom instructional design practices were developed to meet the needs of students with issues, specifically PTSD. Findings from this study confirmed the author's impressions of what practices are present and being used in the classroom of the respondents. The development of institutional practices that were established at the onset of the educational

foundational period were examined. Such processes and procedures have matured through the emergence period to the current day. These practices addressed the understood elements, laws, and pedagogy of the classroom of the time. Little was found in the literature review in regard to students with anxiety issues, specifically students with PTSD. A subsequent focus, after establishing how classrooms were organized in the postsecondary classroom, was to examine obstacles or barriers for students who have to face and engage their learning environments to successfully complete a class to master information to be learned.

A survey was distributed to find out how instructors approached students with learning issues within their classroom who had not disclosed their issue with the school disability services office. One of the respondents exhibited a vast working knowledge of helping students with anxiety issues.

This author's conclusions from the survey responses are that most instructors are willing to accommodate a student so he or she will be successful within their classroom. However, many of the modern day classrooms are framed within a limited framework, whereby the focus is on inputs rather than student outcomes. If an instructor is challenged to deviate from established traditional classroom practices and is not knowledgeable about how to guide a student without fear of loss of control of the environment, the student's learning process will not be served. It is this author's opinion and experience that students want to learn. Students have a great desire to learn, except when the classroom structure disallows the learning to occur. At this time, the instructors of traditional classroom environments are challenged to identify and provide students,

who have the capacity, with the opportunity to learn effectively in a different modality. If education is to fulfill the needs of the ongoing incoming student population, who do not disclose a pronounced anxiety issue, but have the desire to work hard to learn, educational practices, the technology of the classroom and pedagogies will have to shift to meet the needs of the student. The time to eliminate the barriers to education is now.

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## APPENDIX A

### **Sample Survey Sent to Faculty of Catholic schools in the United States through Campus Provosts**

Researcher  
Capella University  
Doctoral Researcher  
[MFORCE@CapellaUniversity.edu](mailto:MFORCE@CapellaUniversity.edu)

#### **Survey to Faculty**

To Provost of the University

May 24, 2012

Dear....

I am seeking your assistance to help distribute a survey to your faculty. The purpose of this survey is to examine the instructional strategies presently used in the classroom by your instructors that utilize inclusive instructional design processes. The survey is seven open ended questions through Zoomerang (**please see link at bottom**) and should take one hour to complete. Please have survey's completed by June 15, 2012.

I am seeking your help in this matter due to the needs and changes of the incoming student population, specifically veteran and active military students who have not disclosed that they have Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome (PTSD). In a study conducted by a former department chair for Capella University, it was found that over 2/3 of the incoming military members are not disclosing that they have PTSD due to the stigma they experience in disclosing they have a disability. The seven open ended questions, have been designed to identify inclusive classroom environments where students who do not self identify that they have PTSD will have an inclusive instructional design that will help them achieve their goal of an education without disclosing their disability. The goal of this survey is to find emerging patterns of resources or attitudes contributing to the instructional design used within the classroom and the treatment of students who struggle within the classroom due to an issue of abnormal anxiety. The researcher feels that within the nature of the survey questions an understanding of attitudes towards instructional design will help impart a grounded understanding to provide a systematic sequential process in defending the hypothesis of the researcher which is that in using an inclusive universal instructional design approach to class instructional design the student's issues may be addressed without disclosure to a disability office. Survey questions are as follows:

1. **What instructional approaches do you employ that might help reduce student anxiety?**
2. **Does your University have a process of working with a student that may have a disability other than self-identification with the Disability department of your University?**
3. **Is self- identification to the Disability Service office of your University the only vehicle a student who is having issues has to seek help?**
4. **What are your preconceived assumptions of students with PTSD coming into your classroom?**
5. **Has any training in your institution occurred concerning the structure of inclusive classroom environments?**
6. **What instructional approaches do you employ that might help to reduce student anxiety?**
7. **How did you learn instructional strategies you use within your classroom?**

### **Assurances**

This study has been IRB approved by Capella University. It has been developed to establish a baseline for the process of defining what practices are in place to help students with anxiety issues. This survey is not asking you to divulge any information about your students. It will only address what resources are available through your University in helping students with anxiety issues. The privacy of your answer will only be seen by the researcher. At no time will the information gathered in the survey be shared with any other resource. Any data gathered in this survey will be used to defend the hypothesis of this study. Your specific school will be referred to in a generic sense. At anytime you may withdraw from the survey process. If you choose to withdraw from answering the survey, please communicate your response to the researcher, so the response for the school can be coded appropriately. The benefit from your answers will help us define ground and develop emerging patterns in how to enrich classrooms as a whole through teacher training and in building a greater sense of sensitivity within the classroom. Tinto (1993) stated that when a student feels valued and engaged there is a greater possibility of retention of students for that institution.

Your participation will be greatly appreciated in this process.

Sincerely,  
Marilynn E. Force  
Doctoral Candidate, Capella University

<https://www.zoomerang.com/Survey/WEB22FQCHVCXLG>



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## APPENDIX B

Letters of Consent are on file with Capella University