The challenges that face the primary school teacher in coping with grief and loss in a multicultural setting.

By

Carmelita McGloughlin

Supervisors:

Dr. Carol O'Sullivan

Dr. Patricia Kieran

Master's Degree by Research and Thesis

Faculty of Education

Mary Immaculate College

University of Limerick

June 2017

"When little people are overwhelmed by big emotions, it's our job to share our calm not join their chaos."

L.R. Knost

ABSTRACT

Death is a fact of life. The primary school teacher is often at the forefront of the child's life and therefore has to be able to help a child who has suffered a bereavement to cope with this loss. During my teaching years, my years of supervising/mentoring students on school placement and my years of facilitating bereavement support groups, I became aware of the fact that, often, people are not comfortable talking about death, dying, grief and loss.

Thanatology, or death education, focuses on the human and emotional aspects of death. Whereas there is a general agreement amongst parents and educators that there is a place for death education in our schools, there are conflicting attitudes regarding the type of approaches which should be applied and their relevance and appropriateness to the age and developmental stage of the child.

Research has shown that teachers do not feel adequately prepared to cope with grief and loss in the classroom. This study investigates the question of grief and loss from the perspective of the primary school teacher and attempts to assess what key initiatives are required to improve the preparation of the teacher to face the challenges posed by these issues when they arise in a school setting. This research aims to address this situation, initiate meaningful discussion and identify possible solutions.

Few studies have examined the cultural differences that impact on the teacher's or child's understanding of grief and loss. Death education in Ireland cannot be considered without taking into account the possible cultural and religious differences within the now culturally diverse classroom.

The study considers the impact of the growing multicultural school environment and how that also impacts on the challenges to, and responses of, the teacher.

The findings are expected to provide some new insights into how Initial Teacher Education and Continuous Professional Development could encompass new approaches to improve the preparation of teachers and develop their capability of dealing with grief and loss in the multicultural classroom.

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this project is entirely my own work other than the counsel of my supervisors and that it has not been submitted for any academic award, or part thereof, at this or any other educational establishment.

Signed: _____   Date: _____

                   Author

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis would not have been possible without the help, support and guidance of many people.

Firstly, I would like to express my gratitude to Dr. Carol O'Sullivan and Dr. Patricia Kieran for the interest they took in this area of research. Your unwavering encouragement, advice, direction and expertise has been invaluable to me. Your feedback, which was always so detailed, has been invaluable to this research. I greatly appreciate that you gave me a sense of confidence in my knowledge. I sincerely thank you both and I have enjoyed our many Skype conversations.

Thank you to the technical/ communication staff at MIC who enabled our Skype meetings.

I want to sincerely thank each and every participant who gave of their time to be involved in this research: the participants in the pilot questionnaire, questionnaire, interviews and Teacher X. Thank you are for your honesty, wisdom and insightful sharing of your experiences.

I would like to thank those involved in the Compassionate Communities Project, Milford Care Centre who advised me during the conception of this research.

Friendship is tested through many experiences and proof-reading a thesis is surely an extra mile… thank you Eileen, Nessa and Therese.

A special word of thanks to my four wonderful daughters, Maria, Margaret, Sarah and Elizabeth, for their belief in me, their encouragement, their proof-reading, their advice and their constant support.

Last but most especially, I want to thank Tim who has lived through the ups and downs of this journey. Your patience, moral support, reassurance, proof-reading and not least your cooking has kept me focused on completing this research. I am forever grateful to you for enabling me to complete this thesis. "Thank you for bringing me!".

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

LIST OF APPENDICES

ABBREVIATIONS

ADEC	Association for Death Education and Counselling
ASCO	American Society of Clinical Oncology
BCE	Before the Common Era (instead of BC)
BESP	Bereavement Support Education Programme
CAMHS	Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services
CCP	Compassionate Communities Project
CE	Common Era (international dating system)
CSO	Central Statistics Office
CPD	Continuous Professional Development
DCU	Dublin City University
DEIS	Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools
DES	Department of Education and Skills
ECCE	Early Childhood Care and Education
ESRI	Economic and Social Research Institute
HSE	Health Service Executive
ICBN	Irish Childhood Bereavement Network
INTO	Irish National Teachers Organisation
IHF	Irish Hospice Foundation
IPGCE	International Professional Graduate Certificate in Education
ITE	Initial Teacher Education
MIC	Mary Immaculate College
MIREC	Mary Immaculate Research Ethics Committee
NCCA	National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
NEPS	National Educational Psychological Service

SPHE	Social, Personal and Health Education
US	United States

CHAPTER 1 : INTRODUCTION

1.1 INTRODUCTION

It is a truism that as long as there is life there will be death. Within western society, death is constructed as a loss. As such, loss impacts on our human condition and stirs an emotional response whatever the age. The purpose of this chapter is to provide the background to the context of this thesis. It will outline the research questions and the approach that was devised to undertake the study. Firstly, an explanation of the research problem will be provided and the rationale for exploring the topic of grief and loss in the primary school will be presented. Secondly, the aims and objectives of the research, the research question and the embedded questions to be addressed will be highlighted. Thirdly, this chapter will also provide an overview to the structure of the thesis.

1.2 RESEARCH PROBLEM AND RATIONALE FOR STUDY

> Bereavement is one of the most distressing events that a young child can experience, and it presents many unique challenges for primary schools as they seek to respond effectively.
>
> (Porter 2016, p.11)

Death has been referred to as a taboo subject in society (King-McKenzie 2011; Holland 2008) and adults try to shield children from the realities of death (Charkow 1998). However, this is an almost impossible task. Research by the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) *Growing up in Ireland* (2014) revealed that in Ireland, 2.2% of nine year olds have experienced the death of a parent, 1.1% a sibling, 7% an aunt or uncle and 6% a close friend. By the age of nine, 28% of Irish children have lost a grandparent. Based on these figures, as a child spends a significant amount of time at school, it is imperative that teachers should be adequately equipped to deal with the topic of death both proactively and reactively.

My rationale and inspiration to investigate this topic was ignited by a number of factors. Having worked as a Primary School teacher, I was acutely aware of the many demands on the classroom practitioner. The challenges for the teacher in coping with the child who is grieving are many and varied. This grief can stem from many aspects of the child's life — for example death, loss through separation and divorce, loss of life style due to changed circumstances, or even the loss of a loved pet. The demands on the classroom practitioner in responding to grief and loss in the classroom are significant, both in respect of practical skills and appropriate emotional responses. As an Initial Teacher Education (ITE) School Placement Mentor/Supervisor and Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Placement Mentor/Supervisor, I have also become conscious of the need to ensure that the teachers of the future are being appropriately formed and prepared to meet the needs of children experiencing grief and loss. It is hoped that this research can contribute to the growing bank of knowledge in how to effectively ensure best practice in the area of ITE.

For many years, I worked as a bereavement support volunteer with Milford Care Centre facilitating groups of bereaved adults, many of whom were parents of young children. In the course of this work, it became apparent that many of these bereaved adults were seeking additional support and understanding for their children from their teachers and schools. Often, the response of the class teacher was not adequate in the eyes of the parent. I also worked as a Development Worker for the Compassionate Communities Project (CCP) at Milford Care Centre, Limerick. The aim of this ongoing project is to support people in the Mid-West of Ireland to think a little differently about death, to encourage people to plan ahead, talk with others and offer practical support within the community to those facing the end of life. Through this work, I interacted with some primary schools and a College of Education, and again, the challenges that face the primary school teacher in coping with grief and loss were

apparent. On many occasions, teachers, lecturers and pre-service teachers expressed their nervousness with regard to talking openly about death. This work further provoked my interest and passion in extending the knowledge and understanding of the primary school teacher in the area of death and dying. I hope that some of the findings of this work may lead to the creation of greater confidence and ultimately efficacy on the part of the teacher.

As is confirmed in the latest census, (Central Statistics Office (CSO) 2016), Ireland is now a multicultural society comprising of the indigenous population as well as EU citizens, non-EU citizens, asylum seekers and refugees. According to the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA 2005) the term multiculturalism describes a society where disparate cultures exist together but may not interact. However, the NCCA (2005, p.3) describes interculturalism as "a belief that we all become personally enriched by coming in contact with and experiencing other cultures, and that people of different cultures can and should be able to engage with each other and learn from each other". These two different standpoints, interculturalism and multiculturalism, were considered in the initial stages of this research. According to Levey (2012, p.218) "interculturalism places more emphasis on the importance of dialogue and communication among groups than does multiculturalism". The premise of NCCA (2005) that "an intercultural education is valuable to all children in equipping them to participate in an increasingly diverse society" cannot be denied. However, for the purpose of this thesis, it is clear that the concept of a many cultured, 'multicultural', classroom needs to be addressed. In reality, the Irish classroom is one of multi-cultures. Interculturalism is an aspiration that is a work-in-progress, an ideal that accommodates and recognises the diversity of cultures, the multiculturalism.

Intercultural Education in the Primary School was published by the Irish National Teachers Organisation (INTO) in 2004 reflecting the perceived need to support teachers in addressing

issues, e.g. language, culture, religious differences, arising from the increased cultural diversity in the classroom. In 2005, the NCCA published *Intercultural Education in the Primary School-guidelines for schools.* These guidelines aimed: "to contribute to the development of Ireland as an intercultural society based on a shared sense that language, culture and ethnic diversity is valuable" (NCCA 2005, p.5). These initiatives point to a growing awareness within the education community regarding the challenges that the teacher may face in a culturally diverse classroom. However, the topic of death, grief, loss or bereavement do not feature within these documents, despite the undisputable fact that death is unavoidable and a part of all of our lives, beliefs, customs and rituals. Bereavement is not an aspect of diversity education explored in this document. The fact that the cultural profile of the Irish primary school has significantly changed since the publication of these guidelines (2005) needs to be taken into account.

The conference theme for the Association for Death Education and Counselling (ADEC) 37th annual conference in San Antonio April 2015 was *Honouring Diversity-Dying, Death and Bereavement in a Multicultural world.* The fact that the multicultural world took centre stage at such a prestigious conference inspired my thinking on the theme of the multicultural classroom and further motivated me to pursue this research. This conference theme suggests that the current research climate is ripe for continued discussion regarding the needs of children on the topic of death, dying, grief and loss, within this increasingly diverse and multicultural world.

As the profile of the Irish primary school evolves, it has become evident amongst educators, that the traditional model of predominantly Catholic Church patronage should be addressed. The Forum on Patronage and Pluralism in the Primary Sector (Coolahan et al, 2012) recommended the development of a primary school curriculum in *Education about Religions*

and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics. Consultation on this proposal was initiated in 2015 and the final report on this consultative process was published in February 2017. The aim of the proposed ERB and Ethics curriculum would be to help "children to know about and understand the cultural heritage of the major forms of religion, belief traditions and worldviews which have been embraced by humankind" (NCCA 2017). Although it is not the remit of this thesis to comment on the findings of this consultative process, the very fact of its existence further underlies the relevance and the importance of the research that I have undertaken.

To date, little research has been published that focuses on the challenges that face the primary school teacher when coping with grief and loss in the multicultural classroom. So, the relevance of this study, by investigating the topic of grief and loss in the Irish classroom that is culturally diverse, is, I believe, both timely and of great significance for the future curriculum development within the Irish primary sector and ITE, especially at this time when the NCCA are working on a revised curriculum.

All of these factors legitimise my rationale to conduct this research and have influenced the research questions that are identified in the following section.

1.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In undertaking this research, my aim was to understand more clearly the challenges that face the primary school teacher when coping with grief and loss in the classroom and to contribute to the debate regarding death education in the Irish multicultural classroom. To achieve this aim it was necessary to initially research the growth and development of thanatology. Following that, I looked at the impact and implications of grief and loss in the school environment and the implications for the now culturally diverse classroom in Ireland and how

teachers can best respond to the needs of the children in their care. In order to gain the necessary knowledge and understanding the study addressed the research question:

- What are the different skills that teachers need in order to cope with the sensitive areas of grief and loss within a multicultural classroom setting?

This was further broken down into three embedded questions:

- Are the Colleges of Education equipping future Primary School teachers to meet these challenges?

- What curricula and pedagogical frameworks are available at both local and national level?

- How relevant to this discussion is the growth of multiculturalism in Ireland?

1.4 STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS

Literature relevant to the topic is examined in **Chapter 2** and this provides insights into previous research undertaken in this field of interest. Having identified the research question and embedded questions, firstly, an extensive literature review (in excess of 350 papers were examined dating from 1912-2016), was conducted within the field of thanatology. A number of key themes were identified and researched:

- The birth and development of Thanatology

- Children and death

- The role and responsibility of the teacher

- Cultural implications

- Initial Teacher Education (ITE) /Continuing Professional Development (CPD) and the current Irish situation

- Conclusions drawn from literature review

Chapter 3 presents the methodology utilised and tools used for the data collection and justifies the use of mixed method research. Having completed the literature review, and following a review of some literature on research design and methodology (Marshall and Rossman 2006; Bell 2010; Creswell 2010) it was decided that both questionnaires and interviews would be the most appropriate data collection tools for this study. This was to ensure validity through triangulation of data. The chapter outlines how the questionnaire was constructed and distributed. It also outlines a series of eight one-to-one interviews that were conducted with a combination of teachers and service providers. The selection process for these participants is described. The chapter then indicates how reliability and validity of the data was measured throughout this research. The limitations of this research is overviewed and analysed and finally ethical issues are considered and assured.

Findings and Analysis from the Questionnaires and Interviews are outlined in **Chapter 4**. The overarching aim of the questionnaires and interviews was to elicit information from the participants in relation to their opinions and perceptions regarding the challenges that face the primary school teacher when coping with grief and loss in the classroom, with particular interest in the growing multicultural profile of the Irish school. *Survey Monkey* was used to distribute, collect and analyse the questionnaires. *Nvivo for Mac* software was used to aid the analysis of the one-to-one interviews. The themes that were identified in the questionnaires and interviews are then presented. This chapter concludes with the findings when the analysis of the questionnaire and interviews are combined.

Chapter 5, the discussion, begins with a summary of the research problem. The data from the literature review, questionnaires and interviews are triangulated and discussed. Thus,

similarities and differences between the findings of this research and previous research are compared and contrasted. A number of conclusions, as derived from the results and findings, are presented and discussed.

Finally, in **Chapter 6,** as a result of the findings of this research a set of recommendations are presented. These recommendations could contribute to further research and developments that could be of benefit to the various stakeholders- teachers, schools, parents, children, government and service providers in the area of bereavement and death education.

1.5 CONCLUSION

This chapter provides an outline for the rationale and background to this research project. The research was undertaken in order to explore the challenges that face the primary school teacher when coping with grief and loss in the classroom, both from a proactive and reactive perspective. The increased cultural diversity within the Irish primary school classroom provides significant new avenues for consideration both at ITE and Continuous Professional Development (CPD) level for Irish teachers. Much has been written about grief and loss and the effect of the death on both adults and children. However, few studies have examined cultural differences that will impact on the child's understanding of grief and loss and the resulting challenges for the teacher. In the following chapter, the literature review, the work of other researchers in this area will provide insight and information that will serve as a launch pad for the field research.

CHAPTER 2:   LITERATURE REVIEW

2: 1 The birth and development of Thanatology

2:1.1   Introduction

Many theories and studies have been completed to analyse and explain Thanatology (the study of death), along with the human reaction to death, dying, grief and loss. As a starting point for this research, I explored an extensive range of literature dating from 1918-2016. Publications reviewed encompassed the topics of Thanatology, Grief Work, Children's understanding of death, death education /the role of the teacher and some relevant literature on cultural differences when coping with grief and loss. In order to be as informed as necessary, I accessed information from a wide range of sources including Mary Immaculate College (MIC) Library and ADEC website which gave me access to Omega-*Journal of Death and Dying and Death Studies*, Online Databases including Academic Search Complete, Google Scholar, Sage Journals Online and Taylor and Francis Online. Whilst the majority of these publications were written between 1970 and 2016, the relevance of Freud's *Mourning and Melancholia* in 1918 could not be ignored.

Although the literature covers Thanatology from a wide variety of theories, this study will primarily focus on challenges that face the primary school teacher in Ireland in addressing this topic in a growing culturally diverse society. Subsequently, data and statistics on Irish population trends will be included in this thesis.

The purpose of this literature review is to evaluate the content of written material in this research area and assess its meaning and application from the perspective of a Primary School teacher coping with grief and loss in the teaching and learning situation in the multicultural Irish classroom.

I have adopted a thematic approach for this review. The main themes that are deemed relevant at this point are as follows:

- The birth and development of Thanatology

- Children and death

- The role and responsibility of the teacher

- Cultural implications

- ITE / CPD and the current Irish situation.

2: 1.2 The Birth and Development of Thanatology

Definitions

In order to set the scene for this research it is important to outline and examine some relevant definitions.

Thanatology is the study of dying, death, and grief which focuses on human and emotional aspects of death. This study encompasses thoughts, feelings, attitudes and events regarding death and dying. Thanatology takes an interdisciplinary approach. "The aim of thanatology is to construct a scientific comprehension of death, its rites, and its meanings" (Fonseca and Testoni 2012, p.157). The term 'thanatology' meaning the study of death, is of Greek origin and was coined in 1912 by Roswell Park. In mythology, Thanatos (death) was the son of Nyx (night) and Chronos (time) and was the twin brother of Hypnos (sleep) (ibid). Ancient Greeks used *thanatos* as a generic word for death (DeSpelder and Strickland 2007). The Japanese word for thanatology is *shiseigaku,* which means the study of death and life (ibid). Many Japanese traditions promote continuing bonds between the living and the dead, through specific rituals where the living facilitate a smooth passage for the deceased to the afterlife. An interesting definition of Thanatology, given by Kastenbaum (1993, p.76), refers to "the study of life with death left in" concurs with the Japanese culture. It is notable that according to *Glosbe* - the

multilingual online dictionary, the translation of thanatology in Irish is *'báseolaíocht'* literally

meaning the science of death, which places Thanatology into the realm of science and indicates

the need for a more detailed academic analysis.

According to the *Encyclopaedia of Death and Dying* (2001), the term death education refers to:

> A variety of educational activities and experiences related to death and embraces such core topics as meanings and attitudes toward death, processes of dying and bereavement, and care for people affected by death.
>
> (Encyclopaedia of Death and Dying)

These definitions illustrate that the term is complex and multivalent thus, it is evident that death

studies and reflections on death should integrate the concepts of life and death. To understand

Thanatology and its relevance, it is important to come to an understanding of the pertinent

terminology. The definition and interpretation of the words *bereavement* and *grief* are often

confused.

Bereavement according to Kirwin and Hamrin (2005, p.67) is the "internal process of having

lost a significant other". When speaking of bereavement, it is often assumed that it relates

solely to death. However, losses can pertain to other experiences such as divorce, emigration,

unemployment or the loss of a loved pet (Goldman 2004; Akerman and Stratham 2011). An

individual's response to bereavement may be influenced by many factors such as age and stage

of development, gender, history of loss and/or trauma, the status of the relationship with the

deceased, type of loss (e.g., anticipated, violent, or traumatic), as well as religious and cultural

issues (Barrett 1995; O'Brien and McGuckin 2013). This study is restricted to bereavement

caused by the death of a loved one or someone significant in the life of the bereaved. My

experience as a teacher, School Placement tutor and my years of involvement with

Bereavement Support groups provoked my interest in this topic and suggested to me that this

was an area that needed to be examined in greater depth in the Irish context, as has been

outlined in Chapter 1:2.

Grief is defined by Wolfelt (1983, p.26) as the "emotional suffering caused by a death or bereavement". It can therefore be considered as the effect that loss has on the individual. "Grief generally follows bereavement; grief being a normal, healthy, and appropriate response to loss" (O'Brien and McGuckin 2013, p.4).

Mourning is often described as "grief gone public" (Wolfelt 1983, p.27). Mourning involves funerals and memorial services depending on the different cultural traditions. Herman Feifel noted that if the bereaved attends to one's mourning and grieving in an appropriate manner, then the dead are allowed to die and the bereaved enabled "to redefine and reintegrate oneself into life" (Feifel 1977, p. 9).

From Freud to the present day, there has been a hypothesis that the bereaved need to work through their loss to progress healthily to live the next phase of life without their loved one (Bonanno and Kaltman 1999). This, referred to as *grief work*, has been described by Charkow (1998 p. 119) as "the activities that are involved in working through a loss". This aspect of the research will be referred to later in this review.

2: 1.3 The philosophers and death

The science of Thanatology may be relatively new, but there has always been an interest in death, particularly in the world of philosophy. The early philosophers and poets were perplexed by the very idea of death. Socrates (470-399 BCE) pondered the immortality of the soul, urging us to study death if we wish to enjoy life. He regarded the "investigation of death" as one of the central concerns of philosophy, while Schopenhauer suggested that all religions and philosophies are supposed to help human beings face death (Puolimatka and Solasaari 2006, p.201). As well as this, the theme of death was always present in the letters of Seneca

(4BCE-65CE). "Death: There's nothing bad about it at all, except the thing that comes before it—the fear of it" (Seneca 65CE).

Though often credited with being the founder of thanatology, Herman Feifel (1915-2013) is clear in his recognition of the fact that the 'death awareness movement' can be traced back to Copernicus (1473-1543), Galileo (1564-1642), Kepler (1571-1630) and Descartes (1596-1650) who all contributed to the debate. Descartes, in his theories, separated the mind from the body, and so postulated the freeing of science from its domination by religion. Feifel (1998) suggested that this stance gave permission for the body and its functions to be viewed and studied in a scientific manner.

2: 1.4 Introducing thanatology

According to Pine (1977), the history of thanatology can be divided into 3 periods: exploration (1928-1957), development (1958-1967) and popularity (1967-1977). Since 1977, thanatology has continued to grow as a multidisciplinary science.

Freud's essay entitled *Mourning and Melancholia* (1917) has been credited with beginning the scientific writing on grief (Bowlby 1962; Howarth and Leaman 2001; Parkes 2002). In reflections on *War and Death* (1918) Freud argues for the removal of the taboo on death as a first step in order to create a support in life which would prepare for death. He proposed that grieving is a process during which energy is withdrawn from a loved one, after which it is directed elsewhere. "When the work of mourning is completed" Freud wrote, "the ego can become free and uninhibited again" (p.245). Parkes agreed that Freud's contribution to the the psychoanalytic theory of depression was significant but pointed out that "it was not until the end of the second World War that its relevance for bereavement was given further attention" (Parkes 2002, p.370).

In 1944, Lindemann wrote about healthy reactions to bereavement and how problems that arise when this reaction is delayed or distorted may be treated. Lindemann, though himself a psychoanalyst, paved the way for bereavement counselling, as he believed that grief work could be done by non-clinicians. The role of non-clinicians in facilitating and supporting the bereaved is an area where I have significant experience as a result of my work as facilitator for bereavement support groups and is of particular relevance to the classroom environment. I will return to this important topic later. (Chapter 2:1.11)

Between 1940 and 1970, several papers were published in the field of thanatology. The most notable of these are from Anthony (1940), Nagy (1948), Solnit and Green (1959) and Rothenberg (1967). However, Herman Feifel (1915-2003) is recognised by Hannelore Wass (2004) and many others (Balk 2004 and Lamers 2012) as being the first modern death educator. Feifel believed that the study of death should be considered in a multidisciplinary way that should be scientific in nature.

In 1956, at the Annual Meeting of the *American Psychological Association*, Feifel organised a scientific symposium titled *The Concept of Death and its relation to Behaviour*. Feifel and his supporters were disappointed that the official journal of the *American Psychological Association* refused to review the proceedings, which could only be viewed as a clear reluctance on the part of this community to be publicly involved in the thanatological discussion at that time. Physicians were particularly reluctant to become involved in thanatology, which has in part been attributed to their training which "tends to link death with failure" (Schowalter 1986, p.158). Gawande underlines this premise:

> The shock to me therefore was seeing medicine not pull people through. I knew theoretically that my patients could die, of course, but every actual instance seems like a violation, as if the rules I thought we were playing by were broken.
>
> (Gawande 2014, p.7)

To further underline this position of the psychology/medical community, in 1974, Vaisrub wrote an article in the *Journal of American Medical Association* titled: *Dying is worked to death.* This rebuff did not deter Feifel:

> Most overriding for me, however, was the conviction that in the last analysis all human behaviour of consequence is a response to the problem of death. It is the key issue in life.
>
> (Feifel 1998, Videotape Archives)

Feifel went as far as suggesting that, due to the universality of death, death education was as necessary as, and perhaps even more important than, sex education. In retrospect, this symposium has been recognised as a "powerful and consequential educational act" (Wass 2004, p.290). It took more than two years to identify a willing publisher for those proceedings which "speaks not only to the prevailing silence on the subject of death in the 1950s, but also to Feifel's strength of conviction and determination to break the taboo" (Wass 2004, p.290).

Since the late twentieth century, Feifel's determination has persisted and over the intervening years there has been a substantial increase in publications on the topic of thanatology. In *The Meaning of Death* (1959), Feifel lays down the challenge for us to acknowledge our personal mortality. He suggests that this is essential for a meaningful life. Feifel often pointed out that, "Death, once seen as a door to the hereafter, became a wall" (Feifel 1998) indicating that the taboo around death had created a barrier even in discussing it, and restricting any form of engagement with death as a subject. Lamers (2012, p.69) stated that this book, which is still considered an important resource: "opened discussion, formerly closed, about dying and death; it was multi-disciplinary, authoritative and at times provocative; and it asked more research questions than it answered". I understood the relevance of this point of view when working in bereavement support and as a development worker with CCP at Milford Care Centre. I will return to this work in greater detail later in the review (Chapter 2: 5.5).

The second volume of Feifel's landmark book, *The Meaning of Death,* contained an epilogue

pointing out Feifel's fear that to date the focus on death and dying in literature dealt mainly

with the experience of the dying person:

> He called for an expansion of focus within the field to encompass consciousness of death across
> the life span and to foster a vision of our place in the universe to guide us in facing and
> integrating the certainty of death.
>
> (Attig 2004, p. 341)

2: 1.5 The growth of thanatology

Daniel Leviton (1977) proposed three goals of death education:

(i)   primary prevention which would prepare for future death occurrences;

(ii)   intervention which would help to face personal aspects of death;

(iii)   rehabilitation which would direct understanding and learning from death events.

 In many ways, these terms can be confusing as undoubtedly, in the natural course of events,

death cannot be prevented. However, it can be assumed that Leviton's goal, when referring to

prevention, was ultimately to prevent death related fears. Leviton was first to address the

rationale for teaching children about death. At this time, it was only being realised that

children, too, experienced and suffered from grief. Hence, programmes for children began to

be established.

Since the 1950s, thanatology has become somewhat acceptable as a science. Bowlby, whose

seminal work *Attachment and Loss* was published in three volumes in 1969, 1973, and 1980,

greatly extended the understanding and importance of the bonds that tie people together and of

the consequences when separations and losses occur. This study on attachment and loss, in the

early 1960s and later the investigation by Parkes (1970) into spousal bereavement, contributed

significantly to the discussion. According to Harris (2009), Bowlby connected his original

theories regarding attachment and loss with his observations regarding grief and bereavement.

Bowlby and Parkes broke down the grief response into four phases or stages of grief:

(1) numbness (2) yearning (3) disorganisation and despair and (4) reorganisation.

Harris (ibid) further observed that Bowlby and Parkes did not consider these stages to be

sequential but could overlap each other depending on the circumstance of the bereaved

individual. This aspect of sequential mourning will be discussed later in this review (Chapter

2:1.8).

Fulton and Owen (1987) linked the growing interest in thanatology with a decrease in

traditional religious beliefs and the increasing trend to substitute science with religion. Fonseca

and Testoni further asserted that:

> beginning at the end of the twentieth century, thanatology turned the philosophical, poetic, and
> secular debate on death into a scientific field of study that touches on other realms of interest,
> such as philosophy, psychology, medicine, sociology, anthropology, nursing, bioethics, history,
> architecture, education, archeology, and law.
>
> (Fonseca and Testoni 2011, p.159)

These researchers were in no doubt regarding the correlation between "the declining

involvement in structured religions and the emergence of thanatology as a science" (ibid

p.165). They perceived that previously effective death rites were no longer adequate responses

to the modern approach to mourning and to expressing feelings of grief. Fulton and Owen

(1987) and Jalland (2013) also make convincing statements regarding the demise of religion.

This was a time of transition for many communities. New customs and rituals that would take

contemporary feelings and behaviours into consideration were not yet available (Elias

1982/2001). Kastenbaum (1995) also commented that the death system was going through a

period of great upheaval and adjustment. All of this explains the growth of thanatology and a

growing interest in death. More recently, in 2015, Wittkowski *et al.* (2015, p. 454) link the

theories of attachment by suggesting that: "stated in terms of attachment theory, although the

attachment to God has weakened somewhat in many Western societies, humans remain

attached to their own lives". It is reasonable to expect that if there is no attachment to God and no attraction to the afterlife, then humanity will naturally cling to what is known and tangible. Historically, death was a family and community affair. It was considered a comfort to the dying that they were surrounded by family and friends. Children were also included in the experience. In this it was hoped that death was not a lonely experience. According to Elias (1982/2001), both the dying and their relatives were comforted by being able and present to share this momentous experience. The progress of science and medicine has resulted in a preoccupation with physical perfection as well as increased life expectancy. According to Fonseca and Testoni (2011, p.158): "our inability to cope with death grew in direct proportion to our capacity to postpone it". Towards the end of the nineteenth century, more and more often death occurred in the sterile atmosphere of a hospital ward. Thus, for many, death became something to be feared. The dying event at this time lost much of its sense of ritual and ceremony (Aries 1974; Gawande 2014).

In parallel with this loss of ritual and ceremony, the necessity to address the death topic became more relevant and important. Noppe (2007) pointed out that as it was becoming evident that death and previous rituals surrounding this inevitable event were being neglected, researchers and educators were moved to stimulate discussion and promote the possibility of death education. Death education is a central aspect of this research and will be dealt with in greater detail throughout the thesis.

2: 1.6 Journals

Scientific journals on death were established in recognition of the growing interest in developing and sharing knowledge related to thanatology. The journals *Omega: Journal of Death* and *Dying and Death Studies* (originally named *Death Education*), were the pioneers in

the area, first published in 1970 and 1977 respectively. By 1990, these two academic journals had published over 1,000 professional papers on death, dying, bereavement and related fields (Fulton, personal communication to Lamers, 2011). In 1996, the European journal *Mortality*, was first published. Neimeyer (2004, p.489) suggests that there had been over 4,000 publications in the previous 20 years on "topics such as death attitudes, end-of-life care and grief". Undoubtedly, interest in the area of thanatology was growing and research into the human response to death and dying was expanding. However, it is interesting to note in the study done by Wittkowski *et al.* (2015) into publication trends in thanatology that the lowest frequency occurred regarding death concept in children at 2% of the publications reviewed over a nine-year period.
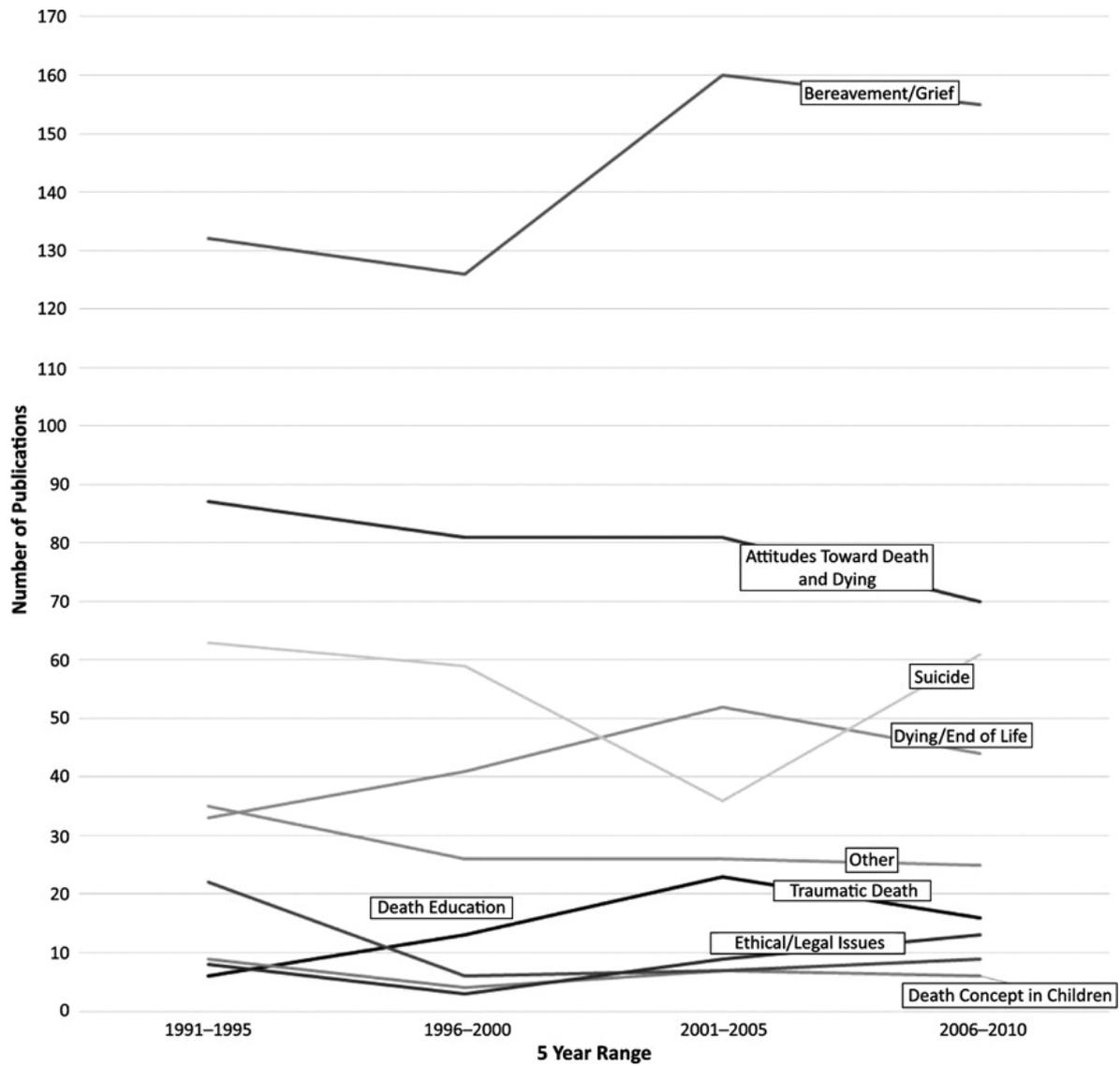
Figure 2.1: Number of publications from 1991 to 2010 by article content over time from Wittkowski, J., Doka, K., Neimeyer, R. and Vallerga, M (2015) 'Publication Trends in Thanatology: An Analysis of Leading Journals', *Death Studies*, 39(8) 453-462.

2: 1.7 The birth of Hospice

By the middle of the twentieth century, others were concentrating on the more specific issues

concerning the terminally ill and their care as well as the experience of grief. In 1967, Cecily

Saunders founded the first hospice, St Christopher's Hospice in London. The mission of the

Hospice movement was to introduce a better quality of care for the terminally ill, "bringing

together scientific data, palliative care, and humanity at the end of life" (Fonseca and Testoni

2011, p.161). Feifel supported the idea of the hospice as a unifying force and endorsed

Saunders' statement that "Hospice is hard (i.e., scientific) medicine with a human face"

(Lamers 2005, p.70). Over forty years after the publication of *The Meaning of Death,* Feifel

emphasised the humane treatment of dying persons: "We're not just treating a (diseased) liver;

we're treating a human being" (1998, Videotape Archives).

2: 1.8 Seminal work of Kübler-Ross

Dr. Elizabeth Kübler-Ross was concerned by the lack of understanding and standards of

practice regarding death and dying. She was encouraged by the hospice care movement. Two

years after the foundation of the first modern hospice, Kübler-Ross published her book *On*

Death and Dying. While researching this book she interviewed two hundred dying patients to

establish what they knew of the experience of being near death. Kübler-Ross emphasised the

universality of fear of death. Fonseca and Testoni outline the thinking of Kübler-Ross when

they say that:

> The more we have denied death and have tried to distance ourselves from it—
> institutionalising and thus depersonalising it—the more we have suffered emotionally and
> the more death has become a subject that is suppressed in our society.
>
> (Fonseca and Testoni 2012, p.162).

As a result of her research, Kübler-Ross, developed her now famous five stages of death:

denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance. It is obvious that Kübler-Ross was

strongly influenced by Bowlby and Parkes. However, the academic tension that subsequently

ensued is underlined by Bowlby and Parkes when they publicly declared their dissatisfaction

with Kübler-Ross (Bowlby and Parkes 1970). Parkes reechoes this agitation when he wrote:

> Her claim in *On Death and Dying* to have discovered the 'stages of grief' fails to mention that these stages were originated by James Robertson and John Bowlby (1952) in their studies of children separated from their mothers, and applied by Bowlby and myself (Bowlby & Murray Parkes, 1970) to the reactions of adults suffering bereavements.
>
> (Parkes 2013, p. 95)

Through this research, I noted that the universality of the stages of grief, as outlined by Kübler-

Ross has been questioned by many (Corr 1993) and these stages have never been verified

regarding children. I will return to this important issue later (Chapter 2:2.2). Despite this,

regarding Kübler-Ross, Schowalter (1986 p. 157) stated "her work did to a certain extent

legitimise the study of death and dying". Perhaps the greatest value of Kübler-Ross' work was

not in categorising the stages of dying but in creating space for a humanistic approach to death

and end-of-life care (Fonseca and Testoni 2011).

Despite Bowlby and Parkes (Chapter 2:1.5) believing otherwise, for many years mental health

professionals conceptualised these stages as occurring sequentially (Heath and Cole

2012). However, by the end of the twentieth century, Worden (1996) and Wolfelt (2002)

changed this concept to thinking in terms of tasks of grief. Heath and Cole (2012 p. 245)

outlined this clearly "Unlike linear stages, tasks of grief do not occur in an orderly sequence but

are viewed as challenges which may arise simultaneously or independently of one another".

These tasks involve (1) accepting the reality of the loss, (2) experiencing the pain of grief, (3)

adjusting to a new reality and (4) investing in new relationships (Wolfelt and Brock 2002).

These tasks will be further discussed later in the literature review (Chapter 2: 2.4).

V. R. Pine (1977) suggested that there were two different approaches. He referred to the work of Kübler-Ross as applied death education whereby the focus was on the management of dying or adjustment to life of the bereaved. On the other hand:

> the pure approach involves educating people about attitudes towards death, understanding grief and mourning, euthanasia and suicide, the effects of parental death on children, and the meaning of one's own death.
>
> (Dennis 2009, p. 197).

2: 1.9 Death education

Death education can occur both formally and informally. Formal death education programmes, which ideally, take into consideration the needs of any age group, may be very structured in approach. Methodologically, there are two approaches to death education; the didactic method and the experiential method. The didactic method can involve formal lectures and presentations which are primarily aimed to improve knowledge. This can include lectures/classes and the use of audiovisual presentations. The experiential approach involves actively involving the participants and encouraging expression of feelings which allows for the modification of death-related concerns (Howarth and Leaman 2001). Group discussions, role-play and a variety of other exercises are used in this approach. According to Knight and Elfenbem (1993), the latter approach has been found to have greater success in easing and modifying death related anxieties. However, most educators use a combination of the two methodologies (Howarth and Leaman 2001). They can be presented in modular form or incorporated into specific areas of a curriculum. The informal approach to death education for children can happen naturally within the home or school setting when 'teachable moments' are exploited to extend understanding, which will be addressed later in this literature review (Chapter 2:3.9).

In 1969, Fulton established the Centre for Death Education (now the Centre for Death Education and Bioethics) at the University of Wisconsin, La Crosse. A year later, the first conference on death education was held at Hamline University in St. Paul, Minnesota, USA. This emergence of the perceived need for death education moved in parallel with the hospice movement (Pine 1986). According to the *Encyclopaedia of Death and Dying* (2001), death education can be appropriate in both the professional and private domain. It can give support to professionals, as they progress in the area of research and clinical practice. It can provide knowledge and understanding of the process of coping with grief and loss in private lives.

ADEC was formed in the United States in 1976. This association is an international, non-profit making organization, which is dedicated to promoting excellence in death education, care of the dying, grief counselling and research in thanatology. The first college courses in death education became available in the 1960s in the US. Progress in the medical and nursing training is evident with over 90% of students attending Medical and Nursing schools in the US now taking courses related to end-of-life issues (Fonseca and Testoni 2011). Initially, thanatology course content varied greatly depending on the disciplines within which they were offered. For example, courses in "sociology focused more on cultural and social influences and customs, whereas courses in psychology emphasise the experiences and dynamics of dying, bereavement and attitudes towards death" (Howarth and Leaman 2001). Over time, colleges and institutions have adapted the courses to take into account the multidisciplinary nature of death education.

Through this research, I have become aware of a controversy that has been unfolding regarding the efficacy of these death education courses and the ensuing results.

- The research of Mullins and Marriam (1983) and Hayslip and Walling (1985-86) uncovered an increase in death anxiety amongst participants in death education courses.

Knight and Elfenbein (1993) also reported that twenty-nine of the students who partook in a Death and Dying course had heightened anxieties levels regarding death;

- Many researchers, including Watts (1977), Waldman and Davidscoffer (1983-84), Tausch (1988), Lockard (1989) and Glass (1990) found a reduction of death anxiety amongst students who had attended a death education course;

- Pettigrew and Dawson (1983) and Glass and Knott (1984) reported no significant change.

This would suggest that different individuals have different responses to a course in thanatology. The effect of personal experience was underlined by Knight and Elfenbein (1993). They reported the fact that when two participants in their study revealed significant death-related experiences to the class participants, there was a definite effect on the group. The group leader, in this instance, had to adjust some of the course to facilitate the evolving needs of the group. Undoubtedly, this underlines the importance of the maturity of the course leader. This must also be applied to the class teacher and further underlines the need for appropriate training which will be the subject of further discussion in this thesis (Chapter 2: 3.6).

Feifel (1915-2003) explored the distinctive death attitudes of religious versus non-religious persons. Initially, he concluded that: "the religious person, when compared to the non-religious individual, is personally more afraid of death" (1959, p. 121). However, in a later study, Feifel and Brancsomb (1973) found that there was no significant difference in attitude between those that were classified as religious and those classified as non-religious. Later research by Knight and Elfenbein found that participants who had religious beliefs generally tended to have less death-related anxieties: "This is parallel with the findings of Westman and Brackney (1990)

and Westman and Canter (1985) who reported that those who were more religious reported lower death anxiety" (Knight and Elfenbin 1993 p.423).

This indicates a complexity when commenting on the relationship between death anxiety and religion. This complexity and the added component of cultural considerations will be explored later in this literature review (Chapter 2:4.4).

2: 1.10 Grief Work

As interest in thanatology increased, there was a growing conviction that grief work was a requirement for the bereaved to return to a healthy approach to life. Stroebe (2001, p. 855) acknowledged that: "according to our Western culture, we need to confront such a loss, go over the events before and at the time of death, focus on memories, and work towards detachment from the deceased". Growing from the psychoanalytic perspective of Freud (1917-1957), the emerging consensus was the necessity to avoid complicated grief reaction by bringing into reality the magnitude and reality of the loss (Stroebe 2001).

However, I note that a further controversy has developed, regarding the question of over-emphasis on the necessity for all bereaved to be involved in grief work and indeed its value. Stroebe (2001) argues that there is a paucity of empirical evidence to prove that working through grief is totally effective as a means of coming to terms with loss. She also points out the fact that different cultures have varying beliefs regarding bereavement. "There is no convincing evidence that other cultural prescriptions are less conducive to adaptation than those of our own" (Stroebe 2001, p. 855). This controversy and the correlation with cultural diversity will be taken into consideration later in this research review (Chapter 2: 4.3; 5.3).

2: 1.11 Support for the bereaved

With the growing interest in thanatology came the development of many mutual and self-help groups and literature for adults. Many hospices internationally became involved in community orientated services and outreach services. In Limerick, Ireland, MCC is an example whereby volunteers are trained to facilitate bereavement support groups. These groups are open to adults who are grieving the death of their spouse, their parent or their child. The support groups are often facilitated by non-clinicians as referred to in Chapter 2: 1.4 as proposed by Lindemann (1944).

The CCP, a further initiative of Milford Care Centre, aims to support people in the Mid-West to think a little differently about death, to encourage people to plan ahead, talk with others and offer practical support within the community to those facing the end of life. Recently, the CCP has launched the first course in Thanatology in the Mid-West region of Ireland.

During 2009 and 2010, the Irish Hospice Foundation (IHF) held a series of public meetings to assess the needs of people regarding death and dying in Ireland. As a result of these meetings the *Think Ahead* Booklet was developed. *Think Ahead* booklets, aimed at guiding people in discussion about death and dying and recording their care preferences, were distributed to doctors' surgeries, libraries, schools, as well as many local organisations.

Further evidence of the ongoing growth in the interest in death-related matters can be taken from the fact that there are now thousands of books, journals, webpages and on-line support services that focus on death, dying, grief and loss. The international reaction and acclaim for the book and subsequent dramatisation of *Tuesdays with Morrie* is further indication that the general public are interested in this topic. In 2016, the Limerick based CCP funded the *Kicking the Bucket* Project. This was series of art workshops where the participants worked on pieces relating to death and their personal interpretation of grief and loss. These workshops

culminated in a public exhibition of the completed works, including a coffin, a veil for a corpse and funeral cookies. A broadcast documentary, which followed the progress of the project through the four-month creative process received high acclaim and interest (*Kicking the Bucket* 2016, RTE Radio 1, 26 Nov, 14.00 hrs.). *Kicking the Bucket Again* involved further workshops and the creation of multi-media pieces of work that are currently on public exhibition in Limerick City Gallery of Art.

Clearly, thanatology know-how has improved, however, the accumulated knowledge on death, dying, and grief has yet to be fully applied to the education of groups, such as school-age children and older adults (Wass 2004). As the focus of this research is the challenges that face the teacher of primary school children, the following sections will review grief and loss from the perspective of this age group.

2:2 Children and death

2: 2.1 Children and death

Children are no different from adults in that they are confronted with death in many different forms, from a favourite pet dying, to TV images of crashed planes and terrorist attacks. However, research into the impact of death on children is significantly less than into that of adults, particularly in the Irish context (O'Brien and McGuckin 2013). During this research, I noted differing opinions as to whether modern society exposes children more or less to death than did previous generations. Wass (1984a) contends that in previous times, death was accepted in rural life as part of everyday life, animals died, human life expectancy was shorter, and people were waked at home. Willis (2002, p.221) also referred to the fact that for previous generations "the natural cycle of ageing, illness, and death was accepted and understood by all family members". On the other hand, modern society, through TV, Internet, YouTube and Facebook, has brought death into the family living room. For many children today, death has become an accepted part of life, but unfortunately for different reasons. Costa and Holliday concur, stating that:

> Although life expectancy has increased and people are living longer, death as a result of violence is a fact of life for these children, who often must witness and cope with the death of a loved one from shooting, stabbing, or drug overdose.
>
> (Costa and Holliday 1994, p. 206)

Yet, it seems that our society is nonetheless fearful of death and avoids the subject whenever possible (Charkow 1998). Literature suggests that this avoidance seems at its greatest where children are concerned (Bowie 2000). Many researchers (Schoen *et al.* 2004; Holland 2008) suggest that modern society tries to protect children from the emotional aspects of death, perhaps because there is a belief that children cannot comprehend its meaning. Wolfelt (1991) refers to this as a grief avoiding culture. Previous research has emphasised that children do

understand death to varying degrees, however, as stated by Bowie (2000, p.22) *"many adults do not feel it is an appropriate subject to discuss with them, either at home or in school".* Papadatou *et al.* (2002) report that healthy grieving of a child who has been bereaved is largely achieved through the supportive adults in their lives. They state:

> The needs of bereaved youngsters are better met in an accepting and caring family environment which allows open expression of feelings and concerns, and promotes sharing of personal experiences.
>
> (Papadatou *et al.* 2002, p.324)

With this in mind, it is important to consider how the developmental stage of the child is significant when addressing the issue of grief and loss.

2: 2.2 Developmental Considerations

Over the years, as research in thanatology has developed, opinions regarding the age that children understand the concept of loss has changed. Freudian theory claimed that the ego of a child was so undeveloped that children were unable to comprehend a loss and, therefore, experienced little or no grief. However, early work attributed to Nagy (1948) proposed that there are three distinct stages of a child's understanding of the death process. At Stage 1 (ages 3 to 5 years), the child typically thinks that the person who has died has merely moved and is living in another place. Nagy suggests that at Stage 2 (ages 5 to 9 years), the child believes that death may be avoided entirely. By Stage 3 (ages 9 to 10 years), Nagy suggested that the child realises that death is permanent, cannot be avoided, and affects all living things. Although Nagy did recognise that children had some understanding of death, she suggested that death education was not appropriate before the age of nine, as in her opinion, the child before this age cannot yet comprehend the "irreversibility" of death. On the other hand, almost twenty years after Nagy's assertion, Wolfenstein (1966) believed that grief is not experienced until

adolescence, when an awareness is developed of the differences between thoughts, feelings, and emotions. A note of caution was given by Corr (2010), by advising against the use of stage theories to oversimplify children's understanding of death. This emphasises the importance of listening carefully to individual children, to ease their concerns and to thus answer their questions honestly and age-appropriately

Bowlby's study (1960) on childhood mourning vehemently contradicted this idea of postponed grief and asserted that children as young as six months old grieve as painfully as adults, and often go through the same basic grieving process. He was of the view that children could mourn a death in either healthy or unhealthy ways, just as adults do. Bowlby argued that this outcome depended on the quality of certain environmental factors in the family life of the child, typically the relationship between the child and the deceased person, the emotional and psychological support from surviving adults, the communication within the family about the death and its impact. He also regarded the participation of the child in funeral rites, and the extent of the child's network of support from extended family and others, as paramount to healthy grieving.

Wolraich *et al.* (2000) followed Bowlby's line of thinking and suggested that children actually begin to develop a very crude awareness about death as early as infancy. Yet, Furman, (1964) and Kübler-Ross (1983) both believed that the beginning of an understanding of grief and death happened around 3 to 4 years of age. The relevance of this, with regard to this particular study, is evident when we realise that children in the early to senior primary classes do experience grief and loss

According to Willis (2002, p.224), children between the ages of 2 and 7 are "egocentric and often given over to magical thinking". Therefore, it is important that adults use definite and understandable language when describing the death of someone significant in the life of a child

of this age. Children may verbalise the word 'dead' but have little understanding of its

meaning (Costa and Holliday 1994). Most primary school children will fall into Piaget's (1929)

Stage of Concrete Operations, which commonly includes children from the ages of seven to

twelve years. At this stage of development, the child is usually curious and seeks information

about all life events, including death. At this point in life, it is common for the child to express

thoughts and fears about death and the child "can conceptualise that all body functions stop,

and begin to internalise the universality and permanence of death" (Goldman 2004, p.169).

The implications of this for the primary school teacher are significant. The teacher can expect

to be questioned by their pupils on matters regarding death and dying and therefore needs to be

open to and prepared to provide age and stage appropriate answers. By the age of seven the

average child accepts that death is inevitable and that all people, including themselves, will

eventually die. Cruse Bereavement Care, UK, which is the leading national charity for

bereaved people in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, caution that this understanding can

increase a child's anxieties regarding the possible deaths of other people who are significant in

their lives. As Piaget (1929) proposed, children vary in their rate of growth in all areas of

development: emotional, cognitive, physical, and other abilities. Personal experiences also

have a bearing on how a child might cope with the concept of death (Lawhon 2004).

2: 2.3 How children conceptualise grief

If we accept that children do experience real grief, it is important to develop an understanding

of how death is conceptualised by children. Knowing how children's notion of death is

constructed provides parents and teachers with important information and helps them respond

more sensitively to what children might feel and experience (Willis 2002).

Doka (1995) proposed that there are four general concepts involved in a child's understanding of death:

(1) *Universality*: As children develop and mature, they begin to realise the universality of death: "that all things must die and that one cannot avoid death or predict when death will happen" (Busch *et al*. p. 414). This means that the child is coming to the realisation that death is inevitable, it is universal. In this way, the child is learning that every living thing eventually dies. According to Corr (1995), it is important that the class teacher is aware whether this level of understanding has been reached by the children in his/her care.

(2) *Irreversibility*: Doka (1995) suggests that this means that young children often do not understand that death is not something that can be fixed or reversed:

> "Since children base their understanding on experience, most have seen something that is broken being mended or glued back together. The fact that death is permanent is often not within their comprehension".
>
> (Willis 2002, p.221).

This means that as the child develops it now becomes clear that death is permanent, which allows the child to proceed along the path of bereavement. Gibbs *et al.* (1985) found that differing cultural and religious backgrounds impacted on a child's understanding of irreversibility. This finding is most relevant to this particular research.

(3) *Non-functionality*: The third concept of non-functionality is difficult for a child to comprehend. This concept requires the child to realise that once a living thing is dead, all of its bodily functions cease. This can be overwhelming for the child, as now it is clear that the body of the deceased will no longer function, a great finality of the situation has dawned on the grieving child.

(4) *Causality*: Doka (1995) suggests that the fourth concept of a child's perception of death involves the child coming to an understanding of how a person has come to die. The child

needs to come to the realisation that there are some things that happen over which we have no control. Adults need to assure the child about this. Otherwise, children may harbour feelings of guilt and may think that they were in some way responsible for a death, which in turn could result in feelings of remorse and guilt (Schonfeld and Kappelman 1992).

 Willis (2002) pointed out that these four components relate directly to the developmental level of the child at the time the death occurs. It is considered that by the age of 12, the child will have reached an understanding that death is permanent (Busch and Kimble 2001; Slaughter and Griffiths 2007). These concepts of understanding death were considered by Nagy (1948) to be generally sequential. However, as pointed out by Holland (2008), it cannot be presumed that each child will respond in a similar way. Age, experience, personality, the context of the loss, and as has been mentioned, the different belief systems within the family culture, all impact on a child's response to death.

A further consideration, regarding children and mourning is the fact that, as outlined by Willis (2002), the grieving process is much different for children than it is for adults. In order to understand how grief is experienced by children, it is important to note some of the differences between child grief and adult grief. McGlaufin (1990) contends that children's grief is usually cyclical. As the child grows developmentally, it may happen that previous feelings are recycled and aspects of the death reaction relived. Cruse Bereavement Care urges us to realise that children often revisit the occasion of the death and review their response to the loss as they develop and mature. The organisation also points out that children do not have the capacity to focus on grief for long periods of time as adults do. Play then becomes a distraction and allows the child to temporarily escape from the reality of the situation. Some parents and teachers may not understand this and assume that this is an indication that the child has coped well and moved on. Willis suggests that in general, children are less capable of expressing themselves and may not be able to voice their needs:

> Children are often confused and do not really understand why they feel the way they do. They often exhibit unacceptable behaviours, which in reality are just expressions of their confusion.
>
> (Willis 2002, p.222)

It is reasonable to suggest that adults have life experience which help them to understand and hope that as time progresses, the impact and effect of the death will ease. Children will not always understand this, the concept of the healing power of time can be beyond their comprehension. Willis (2002, p.222) also pointed out that: "adults usually have some form of built-in support system and can gain some level of closure from the rituals involved in the death process". This underlines the importance of including children in the funeral or other rituals related to mourning as this may help the child to assimilate the situation (Wolraich *et al.* 2000).

2: 2.4 Tasks of mourning

Similar to adults, it has been proposed that there are definite tasks for mourning for the child. A stark warning is provided by Cruse Bereavement Care: "Trying to ignore or avert the child's grief is not protective, in fact it can prove to be extremely damaging as the child enters adulthood" (http://www.cruse.org.uk/Children/children-understanding-death).

Wolfelt (2002, p. 657) very specifically outlined six tasks for children who grieve:

(i)   Acknowledging that death is a reality;

(ii)   Facing painful feelings of loss with the emotional support of others;

(iii)   Integrating memories of the deceased person in current and future thinking;

(iv)   Redefining oneself and relationships after the death;

(iv)   Defining new meaning in one's life by coming to terms with, and making sense of, the death;

(v)   Developing new relationships, while strengthening ongoing supportive relationships.

Considering these tasks, it is clear that children, just like adults, need a supportive environment to facilitate their grief work. Braund and Rose (2001) found from experience that this was an environment where children can talk about their loss, ask questions and express their fears and worries. It is important to remember that children who have experienced a significant loss may not process this grief in a linear manner. "The tasks may surface and resurface in varying order, intensity, and duration" (Goldman 2004, p.173).

2: 2.5 Further considerations and implications

According to Webb (2010) as well as the loss of loved ones, death often precipitates a myriad of changes within the family unit, as well as possible changes in routine. Changes may occur that result in the child's support system being unable to meet, or be aware of, the immediate needs of the child. Ward (1993) proposes that children's grief is often not recognised because the grief of parents or other family members is so overwhelming. Anthony (1972) wisely suggested that by learning to understand the child's concepts of death, adults can help reduce death anxiety. According to Papadatou *et al.* "The mourning process is best understood within the context of the child's family and social system, which includes the school community" (Papadatou *et al.* 2002, p.325).

The implications for the primary school teacher need to be considered. Wass and Shaak (1976) suggested that children have a natural propensity to pursue the search for the meaning of life

and death. Therefore, we can expect children to ask questions to ease their curiosity and reduce any death anxieties. Through this literature review, it is clear that we cannot shield our children from the realities of death. As adults, we need to create a comfortable atmosphere to allow children to ask the inevitable questions. If this is left until a traumatic event happens in the child's life, we have left it too long. Noppe (2007b) commented that many parents think that discussion regarding death should take place in the home, with parental control. However, as Noppe goes on to suggest, this very often is a topic that is strenuously avoided in the home.

Daniel Leviton, in the 1970s, first outlined the rationale for teaching children about death. Many years later, Hopkins leaves us in no doubt by saying: "As educators we have no choice about whether or not children receive death education; our only choice is how developmentally appropriate that education will be" (Hopkins 2002, p.40).

The next section of this literature review will outline the role and responsibility of the teacher and challenges faced when coping with grief and loss in the classroom.

2.3 The role and responsibility of the teacher

2.3.1 Loss in the life of the primary school child

> Research by the ESRI (Growing up in Ireland) demonstrates that 2.2% of nine year olds have lost a parent, 1.1% a sibling, 7% an aunt or uncle and 6% a close friend. By the age of nine 28% of Irish children have lost a grandparent.
>
> (Irish Childhood Bereavement Network, 2014)

These statistics have already been referred to in this thesis (1:2), however their significance warrant further consideration. Based on these figures, it must be considered, therefore, that every class teacher, during the course of their teaching life, will encounter many and varied forms of grief and loss within the classroom. Despite these figures, little research is available regarding the management of grief and loss in the Irish classroom. Few studies have to date been published on attitudes to death education in an Irish primary school setting (McGovern and Barry 2000; O'Brien and McGuckin 2014). Willis (2002) contends that because death is a sombre topic with many different emotions attached to it, people are afraid to discuss it openly. Wass (1986) suggested that it takes a national trauma for death to be discussed in school. This literature review explores whether this is a harsh observation or a frightening truth.

2.3.2 Teachers' understanding of a child's grief

Throughout this review, we find evidence that children experience real grief when bereaved, yet as suggested by Holland (2008) some teachers may still fail to understand this concept. The teacher may be of the opinion that children are too young to grasp the reality of the event. Holland also observed that some teachers may consider the resilience of the child sufficient to cope without adult input. In the Irish context, McGovern and Barry (2000, p. 325), found "both

teachers and parents, particularly men, reported being uncomfortable talking to children about death". Moran Stritch remarked, when referring to third level students:

> Their reluctance to talk about death, its universality, permanence and ultimate meaning in our everyday lives, as well as the way in which people confront and manage grief, seems to stem from the Irish inclination to "just get on with it".
>
> (Moran Stritch 2009, p.4)

Mahon *et al.* (1999a) attribute this reluctance to the fact that talking about death with a child has previously been considered to be unhealthy and could result in the child being fearful and developing an unacceptable interest in death. In actual fact, it can be agonisingly hard and very upsetting for the child if their loss is not acknowledged (Milton 2004). Children at this vulnerable time need the benefit of an understanding teacher, who will allow the child to talk about the loss and who will listen keenly to gauge the child's feelings and concerns. Dyregrov (1991, p.81) listed five main reasons for considering the teacher as an important resource when death affects a school:

1. teachers know the individual child and their personality;

2. teachers know the culture within the class;

3. teachers are experts in providing children with knowledge, more so than psychologists and psychiatrists;

4. teachers have knowledge about involvement pedagogies and know how to help children use a variety of expressive means to deal with critical events;

5. teachers are well known and trusted by the children.

Through the reviewing of relevant literature, it has been found that these factors have been both

supported and questioned. There is overall agreement that during a time of crisis, the child will depend on a someone who they trust and this very often is the class teacher (Mahon *et al.*1999a; Lowton and Higginson 2003; Milton 2006; Heath and Cole 2012). Heath and Cole (2012) suggest that children can learn how to manage and express their grief through the example of the class teacher. Bibliotherapy, the use of literature to help children explore the meaning of grief and loss, has been proposed as an effective tool used by the teacher (Klingman 1980; Heath and Cole 2012). However, contrary to the assertion of Dyregrov (1991), teachers do not always have complete knowledge regarding the belief system of the pupils in their care (Milton 2004). Papadatau *et al* (2010, p. 327) found that: "Educators acknowledge their lack of knowledge and skills, and express a need for specialized training".

The teacher without doubt plays a pivotal part in the life of the child, however the teacher is just one component within the school community. The role of the school will now be examined.

2: 3.3 School Protocol

> The role of the school extends beyond a responsibility of addressing educational policies, and that whilst curricular content is important, the role of carer must be a primary concern.
>
> (Reid 2002, p.194)

The child is part of the school community and whatever affects the child may have an impact on peers, teachers and the wider school community. A supportive school focuses not just on the needs of individuals, but also on the needs of the school as a whole.

In their submission to the Oireachtas Committee on Health and Children, Irish Childhood Bereavement Network (ICBN) (2014) suggested that:

> The Department of Education should promote a whole school approach to support a bereaved child. This would include incorporating children's grief into professional training and providing accessible continuing professional development.
>
> (ICBN 2014)

Children spend a large percentage of their waking hours in school and therefore, it is of paramount importance that the class teacher and school community take the death issues into account. Yet, Bowie (2000, p.24) found that death did not feature in the annual forward plans of most teachers suggesting: "this points to a general lack of knowledge and understanding of the benefits in addressing death naturally within the curriculum". Mahon *et al.* (1999, p.100) commented that despite that fact that there has been "an incredible expansion of interest in, and consumption of information about death" there still remains "a paucity of school based interventions about dying and death". In 2014, the ICBN underlined the need for modules to be developed as part of Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) focusing on death education for children and in the ITE curriculum to enable teachers to deal with issues around death effectively.

However, according to Lowton and Higginson (2003, p.737), "time and curriculum pressure are two of the most significant obstacles to dealing with grief". This problem of time and curriculum pressure in the primary school is currently being addressed in Ireland through a consultative process. The NCCA (2016b) have published an executive summary on *Proposals for structure and time allocation in a redeveloped primary curriculum.* Irish primary teachers, like many of their international counterparts, have reported curriculum overload. Time constraint has been further exacerbated in the Irish primary school with the development of the *Literacy and Numeracy Strategy: The National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy among Children and Young People, 2011-202*0 which was launched in 2011. Whilst this strategy is laudable, the increased curriculum time allocated to English and Mathematics inevitably has compromised the available time for SPHE.

Inclusion of death education should be addressed in school policy, classroom management and curriculum planning. McGovern and Barry (2000) found that schools need support and advice on the preparation of appropriate bereavement policies. They proposed that these policies could be specific to death or contained within the Critical Incidence Policy. "Knowing that there are standards and procedures in place would help all staff to be more confident in approaching pupils" (Mc Govern and Barry 2000, p.249). In Ireland, the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) plays an important role by working with schools in planning for and supporting schools and teachers around critical incidents. NEPS also promotes mental health and wellbeing in schools.

Rowling (2008) suggests that a public health approach regarding grief and loss needs to be adopted by our schools. The Health Service Executive (HSE), the national body tasked with healthcare management, states:

> A Health Promoting School is one in which the whole school community comes together to promote the health of everyone by developing policies, practices and a supportive environment that will enable sustainable change.
>
> (HSE 2013)

These sentiments are echoed by McLoughlin (2012) and the CCP at Milford Care Centre. It is heartening that O'Brien and McGuckin (2013, p.1) found through their research that: "schools are positive, supportive, and proactive". They further observed that these schools also expressed the need for greater support in terms of: "policy, curricula materials, practice direction, staff support, and Continual Professional Development (CPD) programmes".

Teachers need practical support within the school system. For example, records that are passed between classes should include any incidents of bereavement to ensure continuity of care (Holland 2008). It is also helpful if schools create links with the bereaved child's family to better understand and help that child in school (Charkow 1998). This will be referred to later in

45

this literature review regarding the implications of a multicultural classroom (Chapter 2: 4.7). Practical support may also need to be given to the class teacher by colleagues if the teacher is overwhelmed by a particular situation, e. g. doing lunchtime supervision so that the class teacher can avail of respite. Teachers should ensure that they can turn to their own support network with whom they are comfortable discussing their personal thoughts and emotional reactions to a situation of loss in the classroom (Milton 2004).

2: 3.4 A place of stability

Children rely on the adults in their lives for stability (Kahn 2013). The family is usually the source of this support. However, as previously addressed in this review, often, due to the intensity of their own grief, the significant adults in the child's life may not be able to support the grieving child. "Most deaths that affect children will also have a significant impact on parents" (Mahon *et al*. 1999a, p.100). The teacher and school is a constant in the life of the child and therefore, it is of great importance that they rise to the challenges posed by a bereavement (Dopp and Cain 2012).

Holland (1993, p.415) refers to this as "the second secure family". The school can provide a haven for the child away from the intensity of the sadness that may be in the home at this time. Frequently, the grieving child feels most comfortable talking to the teacher who interacts with him/her on a daily basis (Reid and Dixon 1999). Kahn further underlines this by saying that: "Teachers are in a unique position of providing objective, consistent and safe environments for students to explore their feelings during times of crisis" (2013, p.99).

Ideally, the class teacher of the primary school child is in a position to provide immediate and ongoing support to help the child cope with their grief. Thus, teachers can have a positive influence on the child at this difficult time (ICBN 2014).

2: 3.5 Challenging Role

Most teachers understand the importance of the school for children who are grieving the loss of someone special in their lives (Dyregrov *et al.* 2013). Yet, as Edgar (1994, p.38) suggested the very topic of death sends educators into shock and counsellors into a "*crisis-mode*". Through this literature review, it has become evident that there are many reasons why a teacher would avoid the topic of death and dying in the classroom. Despite the fact that teachers frequently have to cope with grief and loss in the classroom, as has already been observed, there are concerns about the degree to which teachers feel they are adequately trained or prepared for this challenge. Several researchers (Reid and Dixon 1999; McGovern and Barry 2000; Holland 2004; King-McKenzie 2011) reported that many teachers who participated in their surveys feel that their ITE has insufficiently prepared them to approach and appropriately support students who are struggling with grief. Differing parental approaches to the topic has also been found to be a deterrent (King-McKenzie 2011). Many teachers express the fear of upsetting a child. Milton (2004, p.59) suggested that: "Because teachers have incomplete knowledge about the loss experiences of members of their class they may be hesitant to talk about loss and grief for fear of upsetting the children".

In order to further the development of death education in the classroom, we need to establish and address within the education system the reasons why teachers feel inadequate in this area. Researchers have found the following reasons for the perceived inefficacy of teachers:

- Personal and cultural barriers that inhibit many teachers from feeling comfortable about discussing issues related to bereavement with students who have experienced tragic loss (Cullinan 1990);

- Fear of increasing students distress (Milton 2004);

- Feeling ill-prepared or untrained to manage the ranges of emotion that children might express (Reid and Dixon 1999);

- Time and curriculum pressure (Lowton and Higginson 2003).

These deterrents clearly illustrate a need to increase teachers' capacities for understanding and responding to the needs of grieving children.

2: 3.6 Effective training and preparation

Interestingly, Atkinson (1980), in comparing teachers' responses to hypothetical situations with their real reaction to bereaved children, found significant differences between teachers' knowledge of what should be done and the actions that were actually taken in the classroom. Despite receiving training on the awareness of the needs of grieving school children, which significantly increased the level of knowledge, there was little improvement in the level of comfort when discussing death (Hare and Cunningham 1988). Based on the findings of their study, Hare and Cunningham concluded that skills training in this area, aiming to increase knowledge for teachers must be more concrete and applied than theoretical. Teachers certainly require some form of skills training on how to cope with death in the classroom. It is important that the teacher can both teach effectively on the topic of death and also cope with death and

bereavement. This training should raise awareness, knowledge and understanding of support agencies, resources and literature on this area (Eiser *et al.* 1995).

However, knowledge and skills are not sufficient. Teachers also need to address their own fears in order to feel prepared to face the challenges that they meet when coping with grief and loss in the classroom (ibid). Kübler-Ross (1993) suggested that, as humans we naturally try to avoid questions regarding death, until it is forced upon us. She proposed that it will be only possible to change things when we can start to ponder and realise the inevitability of our own death. Cullinan (1990) expanded on the importance of the teacher's ability to come to terms with their own mortality, to ensure being an effective agent for the grieving child. In general, the classroom teacher is not trained in the management of their own grief (Reid and Dixon 1999). Teachers who experience death anxiety are less likely to be able to comfortably cope with the challenges faced when a pupil is bereaved (Kahn 2013). Bowie (2000, p. 25) states boldly: "the person who attempts to deal with a child's feelings about loss has . . . to be comfortable within himself about death". This can be seen to be fully aligned with the aforementioned statements of both McGovern and Barry and Moran Stritch.

The teacher is often emotionally affected by the loss that the child is experiencing and sometimes assumes that they have to hide their emotions in order to manage a class. The role of the teacher can thus be conflicted, particularly if their grief is hidden or disenfranchised. Disenfranchised grief is considered to be grief that cannot be expressed publicly (Rowling, 1995; Lenhardt, 1997). Rowling (2008) remarks that often the class teacher has a fear of "*breaking down*" in front of the class. A traumatic event affecting the class community can result in intense emotional responses from the teacher that are new and disturbing for both the teacher and children. Grief in the classroom may result in this conflict of role, in which being in control of the situation and being fully human and aware of heightened emotions are

necessary (Rowling 2008). Preparation for this does not typically happen in ITE as will be discussed later (Chapter 2: 5.1).

2: 3.7 Holistic support from the Teacher

It has been suggested by Cullinan (1990) that children are susceptible to many complications - academic, emotional and social- if they do not experience a safe and supportive classroom environment when they are grieving the loss of a loved one. This may even result in more complex mental health issues as the child grows into maturity. Papadatou *et al.* (2002) remark that in their research they found that most teachers were aware and responded accordingly to the child's response to grief and noted any changes in academic performance and general behavioural changes. According to O'Brien and McGuckin (2014), over 50% of teachers involved in their research were of the opinion that there was a correlation between bereavement and its impact on educational attainment of their pupils.

It is important that the educator is aware of the common signs of mourning in children. Wilken and Powell (1991) included anxiety, sleep difficulty (especially nightmares), sadness, longing, anger, acting out, and physical complaints as typical signs of mourning. The child may have difficulty in maintaining focus and anger may result in bouts of aggression.

Certain calendar events can trigger a reaction from the bereaving child and the teacher needs to have an inbuilt awareness to these occasions. If, for example the teacher is enabling the children to make Father's Day cards, he/she needs to have some mechanism to facilitate a child who has been bereaved. The UK charity, Winston's Wish, which is dedicated to supporting children after the death of a parent or sibling, provides suggestions on their website to enable the child remember and commemorate their loved one.

The ICBN outlines clear guidelines for the teacher when helping a child to cope with the death of a loved one. The teacher is advised to acknowledge what happened and ask the child if there is any way that he/she can help. It is important for the teacher to be flexible and understanding at this time. ICBN suggests that a supportive environment where routine is maintained is beneficial in the circumstances (ICBN 2014).

It is important that the teacher is honest in all dealings with the child regarding death. Teachers need to be good listeners but they also need to be able to use the appropriate language regarding grief and death (ICBN 2014).

Crase and Crase (1995) further underline this by suggesting three functions that are important for the teacher:

(1) To help the child feel safe and to acknowledge the reality of the death;
(2) To promote an inviting environment where children can talk about their feelings;
(3) To provide appropriate learning opportunities and curricular materials about death.

Thus, school becomes a key element in the life of the grieving child (Reid, 2002). Bibliotherapy, as has already been mentioned (Chapter 2:3.2) in the classroom can be a great therapeutic source (Heath and Cole 2012). Sharing stories can create an atmosphere where children can talk about death comfortably. This also provides the whole class with an opportunity to develop a life skill to cope with any losses they may confront in the future.

2.3.8 Classroom dynamics

When a child has experienced the death of a loved one, the teacher needs to take into account the effect this has on the general classroom atmosphere and its implications for the academic, behavioural and emotional well-being of all the pupils. There will be a variety of responses

from the children as, even though all may be the within the same age group, as already been discussed (Chapter 2:2.2), the developmental stage of the child is not linear.

Peer support can also be a great source of comfort to the bereaved child. Children can help each other in coping with loss but the teachers do need to monitor this also as Worden (1996) suggested that sometimes in school, children may be teased about the death of a parent, which undoubtedly causes further stress.

Based on my literature research, there is a definite argument in favour of death education, in some form, in the primary school. However, in Ireland, there is, as yet, no overall, coordinated approach.

2.3.9 Death education

Throughout this research, the value and importance of death education in the classroom has been explored and outlined by many experts in the field. However, the concept of formal death education, like sex education, remains a controversial issue that generates varying responses such as the reluctance on the part of teachers, due to perceived lack of training. Some researchers (Gordon and Klass 1979; Howarth and Leaman 2001) refer to parents' resistance to death education in the classroom and being disenfranchised due to religious beliefs. Gordon and Klass suggest that the religious element of death education could be completed in the home. There is a school of thought that regards death education as the role of the parent despite the fact that, according to Fonseca and Testoni (2011, p.164), the subject of death is usually met with silence in the home. Lee, Lee and Moon (2009, p. 255) claimed children often are exposed to "misguided, false or abstract information about death from various media". Therefore, it is of great importance that parents and teachers assist in the children's

understanding of death. This suggests that formal death education with an age appropriate programme would unlock the key concepts for children, which, according to Knott (1979) are: information sharing; values clarification and coping behaviours.

Educating children about death will empower them. We can prepare children for later losses by teaching them this information before they need it. If we wait until a child is faced with the death of a close relative or friend, we have waited too long (Schonfeld and Kappleman 1992).

Research has underlined the value of including death education naturally throughout the curriculum. The primary school curriculum, in particular, provides many opportunities where children can be taught about certain aspects of death. The SPHE Teacher Guidelines (1999) outline that the curriculum:

> provides particular opportunities to foster the personal development and well-being of the child and to help him/her to create and maintain supportive relationships and become an active and responsible citizen in society.

> (SPHE in the Primary School 2009, p. 3).

Opportunities are afforded to the teacher through the SPHE curriculum to introduce the topic of grief and loss in the classroom. In the programme for first and second class, *Strand Unit: Growing and changing*, there is focus on the fact that at this age the child is beginning to understand that reproduction, birth, life, growth and death are all part of a life cycle. In third and fourth class, *Strand unit: Myself and my family,* presents to the child the fact that families often undergo planned or unplanned changes that may be pleasant or difficult- including the death of one member. Strand unit Myself and my family in fifth and sixth class examines some factors that can affect family life such as illness and bereavement.

At an early age, children can be encouraged to talk about death of their pets, the death of the autumn leaves and the cycles of life. The teacher should take advantage of spontaneous class

discussions. However, there does need to be a conscious effort to follow this approach. Just as with all other topics, the way the teacher presents the subject of death to children can be a "constructive or destructive experience" (Bowie 2000). It can have an enormous impact on the child's future attitude to death, dying, grief and loss. In her commencement address *"Dancing the Circle"* at the Cambridge School, Mary Aswell Doll (1991) reminds us that:

> Death indeed highlights life. Life is not as organised as a set curriculum...Nor is death as end-stopped as we fear. We are all on journeys, destinations, unknown. What better opportunity for students to begin to come to terms with life than by writing about the dying they have experienced along the way. We need death in our lives to define our living.
>
> (Mary Aswell Doll 1991, p. 13-14)

2: 3.10 External Support

As commented on earlier (Chapter 2: 3.3), schools often need and request the support of external agencies in their quest to prepare for and respond to traumatic events that impact on the school community. According to Rowling (2008, p. 244), various appropriate agencies need to "work strategically to achieve a holistic public health approach to bereavement in school communities."

Proactive partnerships between parents, teachers, other school personnel, health care providers and some voluntary bodies may be beneficial to all. This theory was further confirmed by McGovern and Tracey (2010). They found that schools do seek assistance from external agencies at time of crisis. Rainbows Ireland, for example, reported that they regularly receive calls from teachers seeking advice on bereavement issues. Rainbows, which was founded in USA in 1983, provides support for grieving children as they confront a significant loss. Through a twelve week programme, which is tailored to fit specific age groups, Rainbows

enables children to better understand and express their feelings. Rainbows Ireland runs courses throughout the country, although the vast majority are held in primary and secondary schools.

ICBN has developed a resource of six animated films to help to enable teachers to support a bereaved pupil in their class. ICBN is also progressing the development of bereavement education to teachers through summer CPD courses. The CCP at Milford Care Centre, Limerick has worked with teachers and schools to help guide and support the classroom teacher in coping with grief and loss.

In the UK, Cruse:

> Provided the opportunity to develop a network of bereavement care across the whole of the United Kingdom, training members of the caring professions as well as volunteer counsellors in the skills of bereavement care.
>
> (Parkes 1986, p.187)

There will be further commentary on how external agencies can be of support to the teaching community later in this literature review (Chapter 2:5.5).

This section has investigated the role, responsibility and response of the primary school teacher and the whole school community in coping with grief and loss in the classroom. It has been established that there are many challenges that face the teacher throughout a teaching career. Irish society in 2017 embraces many different cultures and religions. In the following section I will explore whether this produces a further challenge for the teacher when coping with grief and loss.

2.4 Cultural implications

2: 4.1 What is Culture?

> Everybody has a culture. It is the package of customs, traditions, symbols, values, phrases and other forms of communication by which we belong to a community. The belonging is in understanding the meaning of these cultural forms and in sharing values and identity. Culture is the way we learn to think, behave and do things.
>
> (Task Force on the Travelling Community 1995, p.5)

Culture can often be thought of merely in terms of different national customs and practices. However, as outlined by Moore and Woodrow (1998, p.1) the word culture needs to encompass the "beliefs, attitudes and behaviours of diverse ethnic groups, clans, tribes, regional subcultures or even neighbourhoods". Religion and ideological tendencies also are a factor to be considered. Even though there may be many common principles within cultures, many diversities exist also. In the same document, Moore and Woodrow (1998) also cautioned against generalisations when they pointed out that although people apparently belong to a particular culture, they may differ in views and behaviour. According to Walters (2010, p. 6), "individuals are shaped by their culture, but are not determined by it". How an individual behaves and how their culture of origin dictates may differ greatly. The man who wants to cry in a culture where 'big boys don't cry' is one example given by Walters. Vygotsky (1978) stressed that we can only fully understand the mental functioning of an individual by first exploring their social and cultural origin. This view is supported by Valentine in observing that:

> The dynamic, creative and improvised ways in which people relate to their culture can only be captured through listening closely to individual narratives. Only then does it become possible to see how bereavement fits into the daily business of living.
>
> (Valentine 2009, p.10)

Historically, until the late 20th century, Ireland's population profile was sometimes described as mono-cultural, with the existing ethnic minority of the travelling community being barely

acknowledged (Boyle 2000; National Consultative Committee on Racism and Interculturalism 2003). However, we cannot ignore that diversity of population is not of recent origin in Ireland. As illustrated by Kieran (2011), since the Middle Stone Age, Irish life has been influenced by foreign invasions from Celts, Danes, Normans, and Vikings. Nevertheless, this Irish community was mainly white and Christianity dictated the norms and policies of the society.

As is confirmed in the latest census, (CSO 2016), Ireland is now a multicultural society comprising of the indigenous population as well as EU citizens, non-EU citizens, asylum seekers and refugees. *'Multicultural'* and *'intercultural'* are words that are often now used to describe these changes. According to the NCCA (2005), the term multiculturalism describes a society where disparate cultures exist together but may not interact. However, the NCCA (2005, p.3) describes interculturalism as "a belief that we all become personally enriched by coming in contact with and experiencing other cultures, and that people of different cultures can and should be able to engage with each other and learn from each other".   This research project considered the relevance of divergent thoughts and beliefs regarding the perception that "interculturalism places more emphasis on the importance of dialogue and communication among groups than does multiculturalism" (Brahm 2012, p.218). However, the views of Brahn (ibid) that multiculturalism need not exclude "an emphasis on intercultural discursive exchange, indeed, quite the opposite" were taken into account.

As has been outlined in the Introduction of this thesis, the word 'multiculture' is deemed to describe more accurately, for the purpose of this research, the challenges faced by the teacher in coping with 'many' or 'multi' cultures. When considering the cultural traits of a population within this research the words of Lickiss (2003, p.14) take on great significance: "Culture is a system of shared ideas, concepts, rules and meanings that underlies the way we live — and approach death".

2: 4.2 Culture and Death

Loss by death is without doubt a universal experience. However, the manner in which we approach and cope with death can be coloured by many variables such as personality, life experiences, culture, world view and religious background (Bonanno 2001; Lickiss 2003; Holland 2008). It is important to note again that culture and religion are considered to be separate influences. Rosenblatt (1993) observed that cultures differ both in how death is defined and in how death should be appropriately addressed. Leviton (1977, p.45) pointed out "death means different things to different people". This implies that grief is shaped by its social context. Every culture provides its own answers to the questions regarding death and the resulting bereavement and mourning. Within every culture, individuals adopt responses to meet their own unique needs and beliefs (Fonseca and Testoni 2001). Rosenblatt (2001) nominated possible aspects of the bereavement experience to help discern cultural differences. These, as outlined by Chan *et al.* (2005), are "understanding of what has been lost with a death, death rituals, constructions of a survivor's ongoing and future relationship with the deceased, as well as the expression of grief itself".

2: 4.3 Cross-Cultural Understanding

Bordere (2009, p.1) states: "Cultural consciousness entails an appreciation and awareness of diversity, a mindset that is no doubt a central part of our journey through grief with families". Much of the research in the area of thanatology has been based on Euro-American culture. Rosenblatt (2008) suggests that this may not be typical of different cultures. For example, Chinese tradition encourages the bereaved to focus on reconnection with the deceased while grief is perceived as a collective process in the Maori culture in New Zealand (Wong 2010). In some cultures, extended family members play a very significant role in a child's life and as a

consequence of this, the death of a relative who is not a first-degree relative can still have a profound effect (Salloum 2008).

The ADEC 2015 conference *Honouring Diversity — Dying, Death and Bereavement in a Multicultural World* indicates the recognition internationally for the need for a greater understanding amongst professionals regarding the diversity in rituals and traditions related to dying and death. In 2016, a conference was held at De Montfort University, Leicester, UK, titled *Understanding Multicultural Grief in a Changing World*. This growing interest in the implications of a diverse society for death related issues further underlines the importance of this research thesis.

 The key to cross-cultural understanding of grief, as proposed by Walter (2010), is to ask questions which will inform the bereavement support practitioner and the educator. It must not be assumed that each individual practitioner knows the various divergences of even their own culture of origin. Within each culture there may be many subcultures with unique traits. Based on this fact, it is important that there are not generalisations about how people from certain cultures may react to death and loss. Cohen (2011) cautions against the presumption that a family's personal culture may not always follow the exact values or rituals of the culture of origin. Acculturation is: "the process of adopting the cultural traits or social patterns of another group" (dictionary.com). Personal beliefs and ultimately expressions of grief may be altered from the culture of origin. According to Cohen (2011, p.128) there may therefore be "complete alignment, some connection, or a complete lack of connection among the child's, the parents', and the broader community's cultural values".

Rosenblatt (2001) considered that the aim of cross-cultural studies should be to examine and classify the varying responses found in different cultures and thereby gain a sympathetic appreciation of how death is experienced and expressed. Klass (1999), who was somewhat

critical of Rosenblatt's earlier work of 1976, thought that any cross-cultural study of grief is complex due to the fact that grief reactions are complex both in individuals and in communities. He considered the first task in cross-cultural study should involve an effort to understand one's own tradition.

In Chapter 2:1.10, the question and controversy surrounding Grief Work was discussed. Margaret Stroebe (1992) suggested that the absolute necessity of grief work had to be questionable given the diverse patterns of grieving in different cultures. Commonalities of behaviour exist but death evokes different patterns of mourning depending on the cultural setting.

2: 4.4 Culture and Religion

Religion plays a major role in the way in which we deal with death. Religion can provide explanations that give believers the sense that they understand the meaning of death (Parkes *et al.* 1997). Puolimalka and Salasaari (2006) underline this concept by proposing that all religions of the world strive to answer questions and problems regarding death. All religions have some reflective approach to the afterlife. Klass (1999) also is of the belief that every culture's religious world provides explanations and appropriate approaches for coping with death and bereavement. However, on the other hand, it was noted during this research that Jallard (2013, p.16) is of the opinion that: "even Christianity and the churches offered little leadership for the bereaved until the publication of C. S. Lewis's book, *A Grief Observed*, in 1961". Lewis's autobiographical account of his experience and reaction to the death of his wife illustrates the complex processes which the human brain and mind undergo over the course of grieving.

Walters (2010, p. 8) suggests that: "Every culture entails a belief system or systems, which may or may not be religious…religion is cultural, but religion is not culture; it interacts with culture". The rituals surrounding death of a Muslim in Abu Dhabi may differ from that of a Muslim in Ireland. The funeral of the Catholic in urban UK may differ from the funeral of the Catholic in rural Ireland.

When discussing how religion and culture influence how individuals cope with grief and loss, ethnicity should also be taken into account. Ethnicity, according to the Oxford Dictionary (2016) is: "the fact or state of belonging to a social group that has a common national or cultural tradition: the interrelationship between gender, ethnicity, and class". Ethnicity may be part of culture but we cannot assume that it is everything (Walter 2010). For example, the third generation of Irish who emigrated to USA may well respond more to American customs than Irish customs. The inverse can also be true and thus the phrase 'more Irish than the Irish themselves' may be addressed to some of the immigrant population in Ireland. Very often the migrant family, over time, blend into the culture of the adoptive country. A family with members from two or more cultural backgrounds may develop its own set of rituals and customs (Walter 2010).

2: 4.5 Rituals and Customs

Many researchers (Rosenblatt 2001; Walters 2010; Oyebode and Owens 2013) agree that societies have reacted to the great impact of death and built their own narratives and rituals to help the community to come to terms with their losses. As previously outlined, cultures differ in their response to death. Therefore, the resulting rituals and customs vary depending on cultural traditions and religious beliefs. This puts an onus on those, including teachers, who provide support for the bereaved, to identify and appreciate what is expected or required by the

person's culture. Respect should be shown for each individual family's cultural background. In Ireland, for example, attention should be paid to the specific beliefs and rituals surrounding a death in the Traveller Community and for children within that community (McQuillan and Van Dorslaer 2007). The '*Month's Mind Mass*', which is a Mass celebrated about one month after a person's death, in memory of the deceased, is a typical ritual for an Irish Catholic family. However, as well as this, the Traveller family ritual may include a religious rite on the ninth day as this day is considered to be the day that the soul enters heaven (McQuillan 2013). Rituals to mourn the dead that are normal in one culture may seem unacceptable to another and thus it can be challenging for the teacher to know how to be sensitive to a bereaved child from different cultural backgrounds.

The American Society of Clinical Oncology (ASCO) points out that:

> Rituals provide a sense of routine and normalcy. Rituals and customs provide a set of directions that help structure the time surrounding death. Also, it directs   people's roles during this time.

(ASCO 2015)

This not only helps those who are directly bereaved but also provides ways for the community to be involved and provide support for the bereaved. Feifel (1977) considered the importance of the funeral and ritual in order for the realisation of the death to take root. He refers to the value and wisdom of the '*Irish Wake*' where stories are shared about the person who is being mourned. Gelcer (1983) voiced concern that a decrease in religious practice in modern society can result in greater difficulty in adjustment for the bereaved and an uncertainty about how mourning should take place. Coupled with this is the impact of a growing multicultural society, whereby members of one ethnic or religious group may not be familiar with the rituals and traditions of their neighbours.

The child's role in rituals surrounding the death of someone significant in their life varies depending on the ethnic and religious group to which they belong (Mevin and Lukeman 2000). This undoubtedly has implications for the primary school teacher.

2: 4.6 Culture and a Changing Ireland

In 2011, Cullen, Senior Statistician at the CSO, while commenting on Profile 7, *Religion, Ethnicity and Irish Travellers*, stated: "This report again underlines the fact that Ireland has an increasingly diverse population where changing cultures and religious beliefs play an important part" (CSO 2011). The CSO plan to publish this information on the 2016 Census on 12th October 2017.

In the twenty years between 1991 and 2011, there was a significant increase in the non-Catholic population of Ireland. This was attributed a growing number of the population with no religion as well as an increase in religions of immigrants from Eastern Europe, Africa and Asia.

> The proportion of the population who were Catholics continued to decline in 2011, to reach its lowest point at 84.2 per cent…Of the 3.8 million Catholics in Ireland in 2011, 92 per cent were Irish while the remaining 8 per cent belonged to a range of nationalities…There were 49,204 Muslims in Ireland in April 2011, a sharp rise on five years previously. Ireland's Muslim population included 8,322 primary school aged children.
>
> (CSO 2011)

There were 900 Hindu children of primary school age between 5 and 12 at this time also. The total number of Irish Travellers enumerated in April 2011 was 29,573, accounting for just over half of one per cent (0.6%) of the total population. The figure represents a 32% increase on 2006 (22,435). Ten percent of primary pupils and seven percent of post-primary pupils are categorised as non-Irish national or Newcomers (GOI 2009).

As the profile of the Irish primary school evolves, it has become evident amongst educators that the traditional model of predominantly Catholic Church patronage should be addressed. The

Forum on Patronage and Pluralism in the Primary Sector (Coolahan *et al.* 2012) recommended the development of a primary school curriculum in *Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics.* Consultation on this proposal was initiated in 2015 and the final report was published in February 2017. According to the NCCA the consultative team:

> engaged with a wide range of stakeholders during the consultation process. The target audiences included teachers, schools, parents, children, education partners, patrons, NCCA school networks, children's advocacy groups and members of the general public.
> (NCCA 2017, p.5)

The aim of the proposed ERB and Ethics curriculum would be to help children to gain an understanding of the cultural heritage of major world religions, belief traditions, rituals and worldviews (NCCA 2017). According to the NCCA (2016a), the INTO broadly supports the inclusion of ERB and Ethics in the primary school curriculum:

> In order to acknowledge the diversity within primary schools and to ensure that all children access a broad and balance curriculum, it is time for the State to provide a curriculum in ERB and Ethics for all pupils. Learning about ethics is important for all pupils as is the development of modes of ethical behaviour.
> (NCCA 2016a)

Although it is not the remit of this thesis to comment on the findings of this consultative process, the very fact of its existence further underlies the relevance and importance of the research that I have undertaken. However, it was interesting to note that within the final report there was concern expressed that "some themes outlined in the proposals may be too sensitive for young children, *'the journey of life and death'* being highlighted as an example" (NCCA 2017, p.116). The question remains whether these concerns are fueled by concern that a Catholic teaching regarding death might be compromised or rather the very idea of a specific death-related module on the curriculum.

Multicultural Ireland is a fact of life, an Ireland now exists with different views, changing belief systems and evolving rituals surrounding death and grief (Moran Stritch 2009). The

impact of this on the primary school teacher is without doubt significant and needs to be considered.

2: 4.7 Culture and challenges in the multicultural classroom

As global interdependence and movement of population grows, it might be assumed that education regarding cultural differences and death would become increasingly important. In 2005, the NCCA published *Intercultural Education in the Primary School-guidelines for primary schools*. At the time this was viewed as a progressive move in recognizing the cultural changes happening in the Irish primary school classroom. Yet, this document, as revealed in Chapter 1:2, does not refer in any way to bereavement. Wittkowski *et al*. (2015) reveal that relevance of these death-related cultural differences has not been reflected in scientific literature. The National Cancer Institute (USA), as recently as 2014, contended: "there are many aspects of grief about which little is known, including the role that cultural heritage plays in an individual's experience of grief and mourning". This lack of understanding is likely to have an impact on how the primary school teacher responds to the children in their multicultural classroom. The rituals surrounding mourning, as we have seen, are inherently connected to the culture of the particular family. It is very important for teachers to understand the family's culture in order to provide meaningful support. Cohan and Mannario (2011) caution that even though the educator may know that a family belongs to a certain ethnic group, this does not automatically imply that this family adheres to typical cultural values around mourning rituals and bereavement of this group (Chapter 2:4.4). As well as this, another challenge facing the teacher is to set aside one's personal persuasions in order to understand different beliefs. According to Tramonte (1996, p.4), this can be achieved by exploring firstly one's own belief system around grief and loss: "self-knowledge is a prerequisite to effective

interpersonal intervention". This has been discussed previously in this literature review (Chapter 2: 3.6).

Children learn to grieve by observing older members of the family or wider circles of friends who are grieving the loss of a loved one (Heath *et al.* 2008). In terms of responding to death and loss, young people are influenced by the culture of the wider society in which they live. If a death is not discussed openly with children and if there is an air of secrecy, Lowton and Higginson (2003) confirmed that, indeed, this 'veil of silence' is usually transferred to the classroom situation. In other words, if death is surrounded by this 'veil of silence' it is likely that it will influence how the young react or respond to death both at home and at school.

Teachers hold a very important role when it comes to coping with a grieving child in a culturally diverse classroom. The teacher knows the individual child and their personality (Reid 2002). McGovern and Tracey (2010, p.239) suggest that this role of support from the teacher has increased in Ireland due to what they refer to as "cultural change of attitude to death and mourning and the steady decline of traditional rituals". On the other hand, Kahn's study (2013) revealed that some teachers were concerned about "trespassing into private territory around religious or cultural beliefs". One teacher who contributed to Kahn's study, in contrast with the opinion of Reid (2002), was anxious about not sufficiently knowing the cultural background of the bereaved children.

In May 2017, the Teacher Education Policy in Europe (TEPE) conference was held in Mary Immaculate College, Limerick. This annual conference is a platform whereby teacher educators, educational researchers, policy makers, teachers and practitioners from Europe come together to share ideas and policies. This year the theme was *Education for All: Issues for Teacher Education*, aiming to examine the diverse range of learners and the role of teacher education. One of the sub-themes of the conference was *Initial teacher education for all:*

attracting, supporting and preparing a diverse student teacher population. Currently, the profile of the primary school is typically white, female, Roman Catholic/Christian and from a middle-class background (Devine 2005). There is a strong argument in favour of the Colleges of Education in Ireland attracting a culturally diverse cohort of students in ITE to help create an all-embracing education system

It cannot be denied that schools play an important part in creating a society where positive attitudes exist towards people of different cultural, religious and ethnic backgrounds (NCCA 2005). Therefore, it is important for the primary school teacher to avoid stereotyping different cultures and religions and to develop in their students an appreciation of other cultures. At the TEPE Conference 2017, a paper was given by Irish researchers Dr. Aoife Lynam and Prof Conor Mc Guckin: *Bereavement and SPHE in the Classroom: How can Irish Educators Support Grieving Pupils?* Again, the issue of time allocation within the curriculum needs to be addressed in order to facilitate the positive opportunites afforded through the SPHE programme.

In the primary school classroom, the SPHE curriculum encourages opportunities to cultivate an awareness and sensitivity towards the diversity and differences that characterise the society in which children live.

> Through SPHE children can become aware of some of the prejudices and attitudes that impinge on the dignity of others. They are given opportunities to develop an understanding of their own culture and traditions, and equally to acquire a growing appreciation of the positive contributions made by different groups in society.
>
> (INTO, 2004)

It should be noted that the Religious Education (RE) programmes in Ireland also provide opportunities for the teacher to address issues regarding grief and loss. The new programme, *Grow in Love*, which was launched in 2015 aims for greater inter-religious learning. Ultimately, this should develop an awareness throughout the community regarding cultural diversity and death rituals. The programme that it is replacing, *Alive O,* was very strong on

Christian rituals for remembering the dead and included classroom strategies of memory boxes, designing memorial cards for sacred spaces, holding prayer services for dead relatives and chatting about loss in a Christian religious context. *Grow in Love* has yet to be extended to the senior classes in the Irish Primary school and therefore its potential contribution to extending inter-religion learning cannot yet be evaluated.

The challenges facing the teacher can be daunting, but knowledge and understanding contribute to coping skills. ASCO advises the practitioner to actively find out more about the customs and mourning practices of a person from another culture. Cohen and Mannarino (2011) suggest that the teacher or school could ask individual families to provide information about their particular cultural practices. The Colleges of Education are faced with a challenge to prepare student teachers during ITE to teach in Irish multicultural classrooms with sensitivity in relation to the identity, curricular and pedagogical challenges that face all their pupils (Campbell 2009). A research study undertaken by Campbell with a group of newly qualified teachers at secondary level found: "their lack of previous experience of interacting with people from other cultures and their lack of understanding of the variety of lived experiences of their pupils and in many instances of the various mother tongues, proved challenging for them" (Campbell 2009, p.114).

Teachers and children in the multicultural classroom can have different styles of both nonverbal and verbal communication (Alsubaie 2015). Various words can have different meaning for different people. Teachers need to be provided with professional development opportunities to equip them to work within the multicultural context. This would preferably happen within the period of ITE (ibid), however CPD is a positive option (Chapter 2:5).

There is undoubtedly a relationship between education and culture (Alsubaie 2015). The education system internationally, and specifically with regard to this study in Ireland, needs to

adapt to the growing culturally diverse classroom profile. Through this research, it is evident, with regard to grief and loss, teachers need to understand both the cultural and religious context of the family. It is only in this way that interventions can be appropriate and valuable to the children in question. This is the only way that death education whether formal or informal can be effective. By embracing a variety of cultures, the teacher can be instrumental in giving his/her students an understanding that will enable them to understand and support their peers when coping with bereavement.

The next section of this literature review will examine the educational supports and skills training in grief and loss available to the Irish primary school teacher.

2.5 Initial Teacher Education (ITE) / Continuing Professional Development (CPD) and the current Irish situation

2: 5.1 Initial Teacher Education and Continuous Professional Development

There are virtually unanimous indications from international research that a lack of training and confidence is prevalent regarding coping with grief and loss in the classroom and this has been referred to already in this literature review (Chapter 2:3.3; 3.5; 3.6). O'Brien and McGuckin reported:

> Among a sample of educators in the US, it was discovered that 40% had received little training in grief with only 21.6% indicating that they had received more than two days of training about suicide.
>
> (O'Brien and McGuckin 2014, p.161)

Holland (2008) agrees with this finding and his research identified a significant 'training gap' resulting in children not always receiving the help that they need when coping with grief. Teachers are often unsure of what to do or say, and thus may try to avoid the issue. Strong support for the development of some form of death education in the school curriculum can be found in the research of McGovern and Barry (2000). However, they too identified the need for further training and ongoing support for teachers in practice as a necessary part of the preparation phase. Perry (2004) outlined the fact that teachers who perceive their training to be inadequate cannot effectively respond to the needs of the grieving child.

Ideally, to integrate death and dying in the school curriculum, death education should be a part of every teacher education preparation program. O'Brien and McGuckin (2014) found a lack of confidence among educators when considering how they might support bereaved pupils. Lack of training and lack of government support were voiced as deterrents to the teachers' positivity regarding death education.

Primary school teachers are in a unique position to support the grieving child, as already outlined, yet they are not receiving the vital training at ITE or in the form of CPD. According

to McGovern and Barry (2000, p.332), 90% of participants in their study "agreed that further training for teachers would be desirable to undertake the teaching of death education". Mechanisms need to be put into place to provide the necessary education and support for our children regarding grief and loss. Teachers need support through training both at Initial Teacher Education and through CPD.

2: 5.2 Teachers' requirements

Skills training is clearly needed to develop understanding and awareness of loss and bereavement and its wider effects on children (Rowling & Holland 2000). This is not typically included in ITE. Through training, teachers can develop an understanding of the effects of bereavement on children. This in turn can help the class teacher to better understand the pupil's behaviour in the classroom and respond accordingly (Goldman 2004). All teachers need to be educated in bereavement, grief and loss. In addition, if we are to develop a death education curriculum, teachers' skills need to include:

• Confrontation of personal mortality and comfort with the topic of death;

• Knowledge of the subject matter and commitment to keep up with new developments;

• Ability to develop objectives consistent with the needs, interests, and educational levels of learners;

• Familiarity with basic principles of learning and instruction;

• Knowledge of group dynamics;

• Skills in interpersonal communication and, when necessary, in identifying students' needs for support and counselling (Howarth and Leaman 2001).

Ideally, this knowledge and skills should be well integrated and make use of the various cultures and traditional religious practices within the community. Teachers who were involved

in the research by McGovern and Tracey outlined their requirements to equip them to face the challenges of grief and loss in the classroom:

> This included loss, grief and bereavement textbooks; children's books on loss; training courses for staff; resources available for teachers; structured school guidelines on bereavement policies; and better access to psychological services.
>
> (McGovern and Tracey 2010, p.250)

2: 5.3 Personal considerations

Some research (Holland 2008; McGovern and Barry 2000) reveals that knowledge and skills-based training alone, does not fully prepare the teacher to cope with the challenge posed when death is an issue in the classroom. There is a further aspect of training that needs to be addressed and perhaps of greatest importance: the teachers' personal reactions, understanding and emotional maturity regarding death. Teachers need to first address their own fears and feel totally comfortable about the subject to be confident when raising the issues surrounding death (Chapter 2: 3.6). Teachers who are unable to respond to pupils' concerns may care, but they may be unable to help because they have not fully dealt with their own grief reactions and the ways in which loss has altered their perceptions (Reid 2002). Unresolved losses or insecure attachments in the teacher's personal life could hinder their effectiveness in coping with grief and loss in the classroom according to Worden (1988) and echoed by Reid (2002).

Some researchers feel strongly about the importance of grief work, which was to referred earlier in this research review (Chapter 2: 1.10), in order to be effective in supporting the bereaved. Edgar and Howard-Hamilton (1994) underline the theory that teachers interested in teaching a death education programme should plan to spend up to six months cognitively processing their own feelings and experiences with death as well as preparing the materials needed for the programme. Teachers often have to draw from their own personal experiences with grief and loss in the absence of adequate training (Kahn 2013). Losses experienced in childhood and even adulthood can enable the teacher to sensitively respond to the grieving

child. However, Kahn also found that in some cases, the burden of a previous loss can affect

objectivity in the classroom. Moran Stritch suggests when exploring the possibilities of death

education for the helping professions, including teachers, that there should be a two-sided

approach: "A chance to explore and deal with one's own personal experience of loss, and a

grounding in the ideas and models that are available to help people who are struggling" (Moran

Stritch 2009, p.4).

2: 5.4 CPD

Undoubtedly, it would be beneficial if students, during their time of ITE, received some death

education training before graduation. However, the gap can be filled through CPD where

teachers can develop the necessary skills. Some courses could be provided within a particular

school community. In-house training courses have the added value of opening doors of

communication within the staff. According to Reid (2002, p.203): "An education team that is

enabled to talk about death amongst themselves is more likely to develop channels of

communication within their classrooms". This would also help underline the importance of

coping sensitively with bereavement and loss throughout the whole school community.

Holland (2008) suggests that whilst it is important for some awareness building to occur at ITE,

teachers may benefit even more from refresher courses in the area of grief and loss.

In 2010, McGovern and Tracey reported that of the primary schools surveyed in the Galway

(Ireland) region, only three percent reported having the opportunity to attend or be represented

at a conference or training day in the area of bereavement. Surprisingly, in 2013, O'Brien and

McGuckin found within their research participants that: "More than two-thirds of schools

(67.8%, n = 135) indicated that their staff had received training in the area of bereavement and

loss" (p.11). Questions arise regarding this disparity. Has the availability of courses grown in

a dramatic fashion? Or does the location of the available courses have an impact on this

statistic? This research has revealed that in Ireland, the courses available are located in the greater Dublin area, Limerick and Cork. However, in 2014 (p.271), O'Brien and McGuckin noted: "while teachers may be looking for information, appropriate material may be hard to source".

Reid advised that there should be a working partnership between relevant agencies and schools:

> Where all of these work together, then benefits are seen in reduction of stress in staff and children, a less harrowing grief in those who have suffered loss, and some positive experiences despite the traumatic situation.
>
> (Reid 2002, p. 202)

Carroll (2010), cited by ICBN 2014, observes that services such as Rainbows, Seedlings and Seasons for Growth are the most prevalent providers of training and support for schools in Ireland. Milford Care Centre and the CCP in Limerick, provide support to communities and schools in the area of Grief and Loss. In 2011, the CCP worked on developing a death education programme for primary schools. One local school was involved in the development phase fueled by the enthusiasm of the manager, principal and class teacher. However, the actual module was not executed due to inappropriate timing.

Teachers traditionally take summer courses to enhance their skills in a variety of subject areas. During this research, I have examined several brochures and webpages advertising the courses for summer 2016. I failed to find a single title course that contained the words *'bereavement' 'grief' 'death' 'loss' or 'death education'*. One College of Education provided a course "SPHE in the context of a health-promoting school". A specific topic to be addressed during this week is '*Grief education (introduction to Compassionate Communities concept and training in Zippy's Friends resource)*'.

ICBN strongly suggests that:

> Education efforts should span from public and community initiatives (developing community awareness of children's grief through media and community education) through to formal

professional and volunteer curricula for developing competence to support bereaved children.

<div align="right">(ICBN 2014 p.10)</div>

<div align="center">75</div>

Particular emphasis should be focused on schools. Research indicates that many schools seek help from other agencies in times of need. In this way, schools and teachers may respond appropriately and confidently to grief and loss in the classroom. Reid (2010), proposes that specialist training for at least one member of the staff would provide a source of support and advice for teachers.

2: 5.5 The Irish situation

As part of this research, the universities with ITE programmes were contacted regarding the provision of bereavement education. The following information as shown on Table 2.1) was provided by the Colleges of Education.

Table 2.1 Provision of bereavement education at ITE in Ireland

Colleges of Education	Bereavement Education
Institute of Education Dublin City University	2nd year students receive a basic SPHE curriculum course (between 18-24 hours). As well as general sessions on inclusion and positive relationships, there is a specific session (2 hours) on feelings and emotional literacy. Elective courses with B.Ed. 3s (42 students in current cohort) and PMEs, has is a focus on bereavement and loss on this course (2hour session), and reference the work and resources of the Irish Childhood Bereavement Network. Students are given a list of resources for use in the primary school as part of the session and students are given an opportunity to look at the resources and critique them.
Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education, Maynooth University	All students attend a course (18 hours) on the B.Ed. year 4 and the PMED year 2 called *'Challenges in Pupil Care'*. It covers a range of issues including bereavement. During the SPHE module, the students are encouraged to bring the feeling of 'loss' into any module on 'feelings' in the classroom, appropriate to the stage of development of the children. A further relevant course is called *'Social Construction of Identity'* where narrative theory is used to look at the stories that are in circulation around children in school and how reputations build. Structured conversation is used to illustrate how to help children see themselves through other peoples' eyes, which can help to remember and talk about someone who has died.
Mary Immaculate College, University of Limerick	All students undertaking the B.Ed./B.Ed. in Education and Psychology /PME programmes receive Bereavement Education as part of SPHE. This provision explores bereavement in a general sense, first of all, and facilitates the students' reflection on their own experiences and on their attitudes to discussing bereavement. The students are introduced to the Compassionate Communities initiative and, in particular, the *Let's Talk* series. The programme then focuses more specifically on the bereaved child. Children's understanding of death is explored and the role of the school and the teacher in supporting a bereaved child is outlined. Students undertaking an elective in SPHE are provided with the opportunity of visiting the Children's Grief Project in Limerick and of learning about the support provided by this initiative to bereaved children. There is a designated Health Promotion Committee which includes bereavement education and support as part of its focus.

These three institutions are examples of how ITE is progressing and extending their

programmes in the area of educating the teachers of the further in the area of death education.

The revised Walk Tall programme (2016) is a resource for the primary school teacher

which supports the ideal of SPHE and now covers many aspects of the SPHE curriculum.

This updated programme aims to give the students confidence, skills, attitudes and

knowledge to make healthy choices in their lives through a variety of active learning

strategies, all of which facilitate engagement and enjoyment by pupils. Through this

programme, in first class, story is used to enable the child to explore the life cycle and is

recognised as a means to support a child who may have experienced bereavement. The

programme provides age appropriate death education guidelines. It also recognises the fact

that the teacher needs to be sensitive regarding the different death beliefs within the

culturally diverse classroom. (PDST, Walk Tall, SPHE Curriculum, Dublin, 2016)

As mentioned earlier in this review (Chapter 2:3.10), in 2015, ICBN launched *'Listen with
eyes, ears and heart'* a resource to help schools and teachers support a bereaved pupil in their
class. This animated resource was developed by ICBN members from Rainbows Ireland,
Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education in Maynooth University, The
IHF and an independent bereavement specialist. *'Listen with eyes, ears and heart'* provides six
pillars of advice for teachers which are in accordance with many researchers (Holland, 2003;
Milton, 2004):

> (1) Acknowledge what happened;
> (2) Ask the child how you can help;
> (3) Be flexible and understanding;
> (4) Create a supportive environment;
> (5) Maintain routine;
> (6) Listen with eyes, ears and heart.

Listen with eyes, ears and heart' is available on www.childhoodbereavement.ie. At the launch

of this resource, the National Director of Rainbows Ireland, Anne Staunton, said that Rainbows

Ireland often receives calls from teachers seeking advice on the best way to handle a child's bereavement:

> The reality is that there are many bereaved children in classrooms all over Ireland. We get many calls from teachers who feel they don't know what to say to the child and are afraid they will do more harm than good…This resource is to help them in that moment and to enable them to support a bereaved pupil in their class. Children are with their teacher for a long period during the day and the teacher can be a positive influence for that child during a difficult time.
>
> (Anne Staunton, Rainbows Ireland, 2015)

Rainbows Ireland is a national support service for children and young people who have been affected by a loss throughout the death of a loved one or parental separation or divorce. There are an estimated 3,000 trained volunteers (mostly teachers) with up to 20,000 children and teenagers accessing the service each year.

To further confirm the experience of Anne Staunton, Milford Care Centre's social work service, in Limerick, reports that it is often contacted by teachers following a death within the school community. As a result of this, Milford Care Centre, through the work of the CCP, piloted a five-hour experiential workshop to help teachers "normalise the experience of grief and loss, empowering them to provide support to pupils following bereavement" (Rhatigan *et al.* 2015). The evaluation of the workshop revealed "a reduction in death anxiety and an improvement in self-reported confidence for teachers who participated" (ibid).

CCP also developed a series of short films 'Let's Talk'. One of the films, *Bobby's Story,* is focused on communicating with children about illness and death. The series is used at MIC as an educational tool in bereavement studies at ITE. Milford Care Centre also facilitates the Bereavement Support Education Programme (BESP) which, over the course of twelve weeks, provides information and education about bereavement. BESP addresses personal, social and cultural issues. This is a valuable support for members of society as well as the school community. Milford Care Centre offers a wide variety of education programmes related to bereavement support. A further development in 2016 was a new 14-week pilot education

programme introducing participants to Thanatology. Throughout this course, participants explored the many complex ways that people respond to grief and loss.

The IHF provides a variety of training options from post graduate to one day workshops on specific bereavement related issues and e-learning courses. In addition, there are some UK-based organisations providing online resources on dealing with bereavement in schools e.g. seesaw.org.uk; winstonswish.co.uk and *How to teach…dealing with bereavement:* An overview and other resources by *The Guardian.*

In January 2017, it was announced that ICBN has developed, in draft format, *Standards for supporting children who are bereaved in Ireland.* The aim of this document is to provide a nationally accepted, practical guide for those who are providing support for bereaved children. The work of ICBN includes *Bereaved Children's Week* with events organised in many parts of Ireland including talks in libraries, parishes, schools, information stands, coffee mornings and a remembrance event for local communities.

Many organisations also provide direct support for bereaved children. The Children's Grief Project in Limerick provides a confidential support service for children and teenagers who have been affected by loss through death, separation or divorce.   Milford Care Centre offers a variety of services for children including individual sessions as well as bereavement support groups. Barnardos Children's Bereavement Service is a service for children and young people who have lost someone close to them through death.

Throughout this literature review, there are multiple references to the fact that there is an international reluctance to engage in meaningful discussion, education or personal development regarding the human response to death and dying. However, a major development is happening in Limerick, Ireland. In 2016, the CCP at Milford Care Centre launched their quest to become the first Compassionate City in Ireland and one of three in the world, alongside Seville in Spain and England's Bradford. A Compassionate City is a place where citizens are supported in the

event of illness and loss; in all strands of society-schools and workplaces; in all cultural and spiritual forums. If selected, Limerick will establish a Compassionate Cities Charter that will aim to publicly recognise and support, through institutions like schools and workplaces, people with life-threatening or life-limiting illness, their caregivers and the bereaved. According to the draft Charter: "Our schools will have annually reviewed policies or guidance documents for dying, death, loss and care" (The Compassionate City Charter 2016).

2.6. Conclusion

In conclusion, this extensive literature review has examined the birth and development of thanatology, children and death, the role and responsibility of the class teacher, multicultural implications and skills training through ITE and CPD and the Irish situation.

Many relevant studies in the area were examined. Through interpreting the literature several notable themes, concepts and controversies emerged that will now be succinctly outlined:

1. The growth and importance of thanatology is now internationally recognised. However, there remains an underlying reluctance to discuss human mortality openly and in particular with children.

2. Some researchers point to the fact that death was more a part of the acceptable life experience of the child in pre-industrial times, while others suggest that death is now an everyday reality brought into homes and schools through multimedia and social media.

3. Researchers generally agree that children cannot be shielded from the realities of grief and loss. There will be a variety of responses from the children, as even though all may be the within the same age group, as we have seen, the developmental stage of the child is not linear. However, debate continues regarding when children can understand death and how the topic of death and dying should be addressed with children.

4. Fulton and Owen (1987) linked the growing interest in thanatology with their perceived decrease in traditional religious beliefs. Again, differing opinions emerged regarding death attitudes of religious versus non-religious persons.

5. A critical analysis highlighted controversy and tension between Bowlby and Kübler-Ross regarding the five stages of grief. The five stages of grief have gained international recognition, however Corr (1993) exposes the fact that these stages have not been verified regarding children. In fact, the universality of the stages has been brought into question.

6. The reviewed literature outlines conflicting theories regarding the efficacy of death education programmes. It can be concluded that both course method and content, as well as the personal experience of the participants influence the end result.

7. *Grief work* for the bereaved to come to terms with experiences of grief is viewed with varying belief regarding its necessity and benefit.

8. The essential role of the teacher in their role of support for bereaved children has been affirmed by many researchers. The literature review confirmed the unique position of the teacher in creating a safe environment while the child grieves the loss of a loved one, while also providing knowledge and emotional intelligence in preparation for the universal experience of death.

9. The research has shown that teachers do recognise the need to develop confidence when supporting a grieving child. However, virtually all researchers highlighted the fact that teachers, particularly males, do not feel confident while supporting a grieving child nor adequately trained to include death education within the curriculum. Development of a death education program is not seen as a pressing issue within the Irish education system.

10. The problem of time and curriculum pressure in the primary school is a real issue for the primary school teacher which is being currently addressed in Ireland through a consultative process. The introduction of the *Literacy and Numeracy Strategy* (2011) has increased the time constraints and decreased the opportunity to introduce death education in the classroom.

11. The gap in skills training which would enhance the self-confidence of teachers is evident and documented. Throughout this literature review strong evidence emerged that death education does not play a significant part in ITE. There is clearly a need to address this situation both in ITE and with practicing teachers. However, Hare and Cunningham (1988) note that despite some teachers receiving some training to enhance their skill and increase

their confidence, there was still little improvement in their comfort level in discussing death. This may be attributed to the theory that one's own mortality and attitude to death needs to be addressed before true comfort and confidence can be achieved.

12. It is widely agreed that schools should have some policy document in place to provide guidance to the teachers in the event of a death that impacts on the school community. Without specific guidelines from government, schools may need support and advice on the preparation and implementation of bereavement policies that embrace a multicultural society.

13. This literature review supports the introduction of death education in the primary school, whether formal or informal. However, in Ireland, there is still no overall coordinated approach and there is little evidence of a move to develop a formal death education programme.

14. The profile of Irish society exhibits increasing multiculturalism and therefore there is a growing diversity in Irish schools. However, this review affirmed that there is a distinct lack of research regarding the nature and challenges that face the primary school teacher when coping with grief, particularly in the multicultural classroom in Ireland. There is limited evidence of a conscious effort to recognise the extra challenges posed by the growing diversity in the Irish school. This research points to the fact that due to the change in cultural diversity in Ireland, the challenges for the primary school teacher have expanded.

In conclusion, the reviewed literature has provided a pathway for further research. Through the course of interpreting the available literature, I reached a set of key research questions that will be developed in forthcoming chapters. In the following chapter, the methodologies undertaken in this study will be outlined and the data collection tools and data analysis methods used will

be explained. This research will complement the research already undertaken in this field and

provide discourse on previously unexplored perspectives and the limited body of literature.

CHAPTER 3:   METHODOLOGY

3: 1 Introduction

In this Chapter, the rationale for the approach that was taken and the methodologies utilised are outlined. This chapter also provides details of the instruments used and the data collection process. Some background information regarding the participants and how they were approached to contribute to the research is included. Details are provided of how the data was triangulated and how every effort was made to achieve a non-biased study. Difficulties and limitations that were encountered are also described. Ethical issues that were found to be pertinent to the study are outlined.

3: 2 Purpose/background to the research

This research was prompted by personal experience, which confirms Creswell's pronouncement that "research problems are found in personal experiences with an issue, a job-related problem, an adviser's research agenda, or the scholarly literature" (2007, p.102). During my time as a primary school teacher, my subsequent years as school placement mentor/tutor and my extensive experience as a bereavement support facilitator at Milford Care Centre, I became very aware of the challenges that face the primary school teacher when faced with grief and loss in the classroom. This realisation was further confirmed when I worked as a development worker for CCP at Milford Care Centre. During my time working on this project, I was in contact with many schools in the Limerick area. The purpose of the project was to enable and empower the community to cope with grief and loss and to support one another during times of grief (www.compassionatecommunities.ie). This concept of community included the school population. *Café Conversations* were held in schools and in MIC. A *Café Conversation* brings together any group of people to very gently help each other to talk about feelings regarding death, dying, loss and care (www.compassionatecommunities.ie/#!Café-Conversations). On many occasions, lecturers, teachers and student teachers expressed their

nervousness around talking openly about death. One school in the Limerick area was particularly interested in piloting a death education programme with 5th class (Chapter 2: 5.4). Meetings were held with parents and teachers. An outline of four class sessions was designed and agreed on. However, eventually it emerged that the community, teachers and parents, did not feel that it was appropriate to proceed, as this area of education was very new and challenging.

In the literature review, the added challenges of a growing multicultural society with differing beliefs and codes of behaviour has been explored. Hand in hand with my personal experiences, the changing profile of Irish society as confirmed in the latest census (www.cso.ie) and growing pluralism all dictated that multiculturalism in its various guises should also be taken into account. The possible added challenges arising from a culturally diverse classroom in the area of grief and loss has been virtually ignored to date in available Irish research. These cumulative experiences formulated the present research question:

- What are the different skills that teachers need in order to cope with the sensitive areas of grief and loss within a multicultural classroom setting?

In addition to this the embedded questions asked were:

- Are the Colleges of Education equipping our future Primary School teachers to meet these challenges?

- What curricula and pedagogical frameworks are available at both local and national level?

- How relevant to this discussion is the growth of multiculturalism in Ireland?

As outlined in the literature review, according to Wass *et al.* (1988), there is often acute fear amongst teachers when faced with the reality of grief and loss in the classroom. The literature review has exposed the fact that internationally, teachers do not feel that they have received adequate training during their ITE.

3: 3 Relevance of the research

Throughout this research project the four aspects of social research as purported by Clough and Nutbrown (2012) were maintained. Research should be *persuasive, purposive, positional and political.* In the context of the challenges that face the primary school teacher when coping with loss in the multicultural classroom the *persuasive* element of the research endeavours to convince relevant authorities and service providers of the intrinsic value of bereavement support for both teachers and children. The research is both *purposive and political* in calling for the empowering of teachers through appropriate education and skills training.

 As is verified in the literature review, thanatology has been the focus of many researchers particularly since the 1950s (Fonseca and Testoni 2011). However, as was expressed by O'Brien and McGuckin (2014), there is a dearth of research into how children are affected by death and the role of the class teacher. This is particularly true within the Irish context with a paucity of available published studies. McGovern and Barry (2000), McGovern and Tracey (2010) and O'Brien and McGuckin (2014; 2015) are notable exceptions who have contributed significantly to published Irish research. However, within this context of loss, there is an aspect of Irish society that now needs to be addressed and that is the growth of multiculturalism as well as the ever-changing attitudes of the Irish nation towards the Roman Catholic traditions, specifically in this context, regarding death dying, grief and loss.

From the *positional* aspect, it is believed that this research has the potential to inform the policy makers in the education domain as well as encourage the necessary adjustments or to take a new approach to the challenges that face the primary school teacher when coping with loss in the multicultural classroom. The purpose of this research is to help develop and strengthen an advocacy role on behalf of children, who, as we have read in the literature review, are often considered the forgotten mourners.

The study's goals focused on identifying possibilities for strengthening teachers' sense of efficacy in response to the challenges presented by grieving children in the multicultural classroom. The experience of teachers and relevant agencies gave a clearer understanding of the internal and external challenges that impact on the implementation of training and best classroom practices in response to the needs of grieving children.

3: 4 Research Design

"Research designs are plans and procedures for research that span the decisions from broad assumptions to detailed methods of data collection and analysis" (Creswell 2009, P.3). According to Creswell, research design is the entire process of research, from conceptualising a problem to writing the narrative (2007). The researcher must think through the project from conception to birth. Once the idea has been coherently formulated, the process of gathering and interpreting information needs to be precisely planned. Kelly outlines three principles of good research:

> clearly conceived question, problem or hypothesis; robust data analysis which will address the research question and the approach taken should be in line with ethical research practice.

(Kelly 2004 p.130)

The term 'paradigm' is used by researchers to describe the way that we think about and carry out research. According to Creswell (2009), a paradigm outlines a position on how a study is conducted. The type of paradigm utilised needs to be considered carefully in order to answer the chosen research questions effectively. Three types of design were considered for this research: quantitative, qualitative and mixed methods. Quantitative data is usually presented in the form of numbers and statistics. This data can be illustrated in chart and graph form which give the reader a clear pictorial representation. Qualitative research, on the other hand,

89

involves the researcher interacting with participants through interviews, focus groups and questionnaires with an open-ended component. According to Mason, qualitative research aims to produce rounded and contextual understandings on the basis of rich, nuanced and detailed data. There is more emphasis on 'holistic' forms of analysis and explanation in this sense, than on charting surface patterns, trends and correlations (Mason 2002). Not all researchers would fully agree with this statement. Silverman (2000) cautioned that this type of research tended to be descriptive and subjective, depending on individual opinions and the interpretation of the researcher. Because there are perceived faults in both quantitative and qualitative methods, Bell (2010) encourages a mixed-method approach. Bell further suggests that by triangulation, the researcher views questions from different perspectives, thus giving a greater breadth to the analysis and leading to a more solid conclusion. According to Howitt and Cramer (2011, p 277), "Triangulation can be seen as a combination of concurrent and predictive validity". Through triangulation different perspectives can be gained to either confirm or challenge the findings of the research.

As Denzin and Lincoln claim: "All research is interpretative; it is guided by the researcher's set of beliefs and feelings about the world and how it should be understood and studied" (2011, p.13). Creswell (2009, p. 5) encourages the researcher to clarify the "larger philosophical ideas" or worldview proposed in the study. A Social Constructivist Worldview, which has a broadly mainstream qualitative approach (Robson 2011), was deemed to be most appropriate approach for this study. According to Robson (2011, p.24): "Social constructionism indicates a view that social properties are constructed through interactions between people, rather than having a separate existence". In this research, I engaged with individuals and through open-ended questions enabled the participants to share their world view regarding the challenges that face the primary teacher in coping with grief and loss in the classroom. Through one-to-one interviews, I came face to face with the participants, which enabled me to clearly interpret,

clarify and ensure I had good understanding of the experiences they were describing though reviewing with them any ambiguity that may have arisen from their responses. Robson (2011, p. 9) contends that: "The process of qualitative research is largely inductive, with the inquirer generating meaning from the data collected in the field".

Following a review of some literature on research methodology (Robson 2011; Marshall and Rossman 2006; Bell 2010; Creswell 2010) it was decided that both questionnaires and interviews would be the most appropriate data collection tools for this study. This chosen strategy constitutes a mixed method which was used to embrace as many factors as possible within the timeframe and limitations of the study. Creswell suggests that combining evidence from more than one source should lead to greater depth and therefore more substantial conclusions (ibid). At the outset of the research, I had also proposed (see MIREC, Appendix I), to hold focus groups involving participants of a grief and loss workshop. However, early in the project, it became clear that this would not be possible due to issues of confidentiality. I had also proposed the involvement of parents who had been involved in the planning of a pilot death education programme, but this too was hindered due to issues of sensitivity and confidentiality. On reflection, the addition of both of these components, while valuable, would have majorly impacted on the timeframe of the project.

A mixed method approach can be used to incorporate quantitative and qualitative data. The study design consisted of three significant parts: literature review, questionnaires and interviews. The literature review, questionnaires involving teachers and interviews involving both service providers and teachers together provided an opportunity for triangulation that, according to Kane and DeBrun (2001), ensured there would be stronger findings from the diverse set of data. The questionnaire and interview questions were specifically designed to

achieve the goals of this research by contributing to answering the research question and the embedded questions. This study, by incorporating the views of participants, the review of literature and the interpretation of these by the researcher, indicates a possible call for action. This will be addressed more fully in a later chapter.

3: 5 Instruments

3: 5.1 Questionnaires

The questionnaire is a widely used and useful instrument for collecting survey information, providing structured and often numerical data, being able to be administered without the presence of the researcher, and often being comparatively straightforward to analyse (Cohen *et al.* 2007).

 Bell (2010, p.10) described the questionnaire as an instrument "to obtain information which can be analysed and patterns extracted and comparisons made". One of the many benefits of the questionnaire is that it can be completed in the privacy of the respondents' environment. Based on this knowledge, a pilot questionnaire was designed which was influenced by observations and unanswered questions in the literature review. The purpose of the questionnaire was multifaceted to determine:

(1) demographic information;
(2) school type;
(3) teachers' experience of loss in the classroom and bereavement interventions;
(4) opinions on formal death education in school;
(5) additional challenges in the multicultural classroom;
(6) levels of training in the area of grief and loss.

Cohen and Manion (2007) recommend that data collection instruments should be piloted so that the researcher is informed regarding the length of time the participants take to complete the

questionnaire and test that all questions are clear and understandable. The researcher can then adjust the questionnaire if deemed necessary. The pilot questionnaire was subdivided into three sections:

(i)   General Information;

(ii)   School Profile;

(iii)   Bereavement and bereavement education.

In March 2016, this questionnaire was distributed by email to ten teachers (both practicing and retired, including one teacher who had trained in Ireland, taught in Ireland and the UK and now teachers in the UAE) and six responded. Bell (2010) suggests that the pilot study should involve a group of participants who have similarities to those who will be involved in the research. Some chose to decline to be involved in the study but did not proffer any particular reason. There were some minor changes made to the questionnaire, mostly typographical errors and increased clarity was required for one question. One respondent took an excessive amount of time completing the questionnaire but offered an explanation by way of the fact of an illness. However, to ensure that the questionnaire could be completed within fifteen minutes, a further two questionnaires were distributed and this confirmed that the questionnaire could be completed in a reasonable length of time.

This time input by the majority of the respondents meets the recommendations of Versa Research (2009): "Research shows that data quality declines on surveys that are longer than 20 minutes, so a good rule of thumb is to aim for a survey that takes no more than 15 or 20 minutes to complete". Several of the participants at the pilot phase expressed difficulty with the particular format of the questionnaire so this problem had to be addressed as all computer programmes were not compatible. Importantly, to avoid bias, the information received from

the pilot phase was not included in the final data nor were any of these participants involved in the final questionnaire.

It was decided that Survey Monkey would be the most efficient and user-friendly method of distribution of the questionnaire, as expressed by some teachers. The questionnaire could be answered by the participants in their own time. The final questionnaire (see Appendix C) maintained the three sections as described above. The question types included multiple choice and open-ended questions with different response formats. These formats included descriptive responses to open-ended questions and some *Yes* or *No* choices. Spaces for descriptive responses were available on the questionnaire for comment where relevant or desired by the participant. The context of the questionnaire was explained as part of the larger research study. As an online approach (Survey Monkey) to the questionnaire was selected, a cover letter explaining the research was not possible. However, at the start of the questionnaire, information was included (see Appendix B) and participants were requested to acknowledge their consent (see Appendix C). The first two questions involved the participants reading the information sheet and acknowledging consent to participate. Only one participant failed to indicate if they had read the information sheet, which may have been an oversight as all participants indicated their consent to be involved in the research.

In total, the questionnaire consisted of twenty-five questions, many of which gave the participant the opportunity to give qualitative responses. This aimed to give the participating teachers a forum to voice their individual opinions and experiences.

There are natural limitations to the questionnaire as the researcher does not have control over how the respondents understood or interpreted the questions. In order to further explore the research question and embedded questions, the interviewing technique was employed.

3: 5.2 Interviews

Interviewing is a common form of data collection in qualitative research. This, according to Moser and Kalton (1971, p.271) can be "a conversation between the interviewer and the respondent with the purpose of eliciting certain information from the respondent". Interviews help to create a coherent picture. "Through qualitative interviews you can understand experiences and reconstruct events in which you did not participate" (Rubin and Rubin 2005, p.3). Kane and O'Reilly-De Brún suggest that "interviews can give greater depth, you can encourage people to expand on their answers and cross check information" (2001, p.266). The purpose of one-to-one interviews in this research was to generate further data from service providers and teachers and explore their experiences regarding the challenges that face the teacher in coping with grief and loss in the culturally diverse classroom in greater detail. Semi-structured interviews were used. An interview schedule was designed and available for the interviewee to see prior to the interview (see Appendix D).

The primary research question sought to establish the skills and challenges that face the primary school teacher when coping with grief and loss in the classroom. This research project addressed both the case of the death of a significant person in the life of a pupil as well as the universal need to cope with grief and loss. The interview questions were influenced by the research questions, literature review and questionnaires. The questions were designed in a manner that would elicit information from interested agencies on their experience from working with both teachers and children and from teachers on their experiences in the classroom regarding the topic of grief and loss. The thrust of the questions remained the same for all participants but the emphasis and direction of the interviews differed depending on the experiences and differing perspectives of the interviewees.

3: 6 Participants

Having completed the literature review, a selected number of schools in the Mid-West region in Ireland were personally approached regarding participating in the questionnaire. Teachers are the main service providers in this study through their interactions with grieving children and therefore have a unique perspective on grief. According to Kahn (2013 p.38): "the teacher's voice is the most essential source of data for an exploration of the complexities that contribute to efficacy when responding to the needs of grieving children in the classroom".

As already seen in the literature review:

> Perceived self-efficacy is concerned with people's judgements of how well they can organise and execute, constituent cognitive, social and behavioural skills in dealing with perceived situations.
>
> (Bandura 1985, p.467)

The initial plan was to confine the study to a small group of teachers in DEIS schools (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools) in Limerick. On reflection, it was decided that this was too limiting and therefore the schools approached included DEIS, large suburban, urban and rural schools. The initial contact was with the principals of three schools, firstly by email and followed with a personal visit to the schools. All principals were willing to encourage their teachers to complete the questionnaire. However, it was interesting to note that one principal did state "we are very lucky… none of that here… the teachers may have difficulty in completing the questionnaires".

This initial group could have involved approximately sixty teachers. It was decided to extend this and two further schools were approached by email, but several emails produced no response. In order to extend the research field, an individual teacher, known personally, with over 25 years of experience, was approached and she agreed to participate. This teacher contacted a further fifteen teachers. Here snowball sampling was utilized, as through this several teachers were contacted and asked to forward the link to the survey. In snowball

sampling, the researcher identifies an initial source of information and this person is asked to recommend others working or knowledgeable in the area under research (Cohen *et al.* 2011). In total, these contacts provided 74 potential participants. This cohort of teachers would have been exposed to similar, if not always the same form, of ITE. The participants teach in schools which represented a socioeconomic cross-section of Irish primary school communities

The first set of questionnaires were sent out on 23rd.May 2016. In the initial stage ten responses were received. It was then decided that the target participants should be extended. In May 2016 three Education Centres were emailed and asked if the link to the Survey Monkey could be sent to their members. One Education Centre replied immediately to indicate their willingness to do as requested. The other two centres were subsequently contacted again by phone. One centre explained that it was against the policy to forward this type of request but I was assured personnel would forward the link to colleagues in a private capacity. Several efforts were made to contact the third centre by phone but to no avail. At this stage, there were twenty-one responses. The response to the questionnaire, though apparently low was in line with the predications of SurveyGizmo:

> Surveys that you distribute internally (i.e. to employees) generally have a much higher response rate than those distributed to external audiences (i.e. customers). Internal surveys will generally receive a 30-40**%**response rate (or more) on average, compared to an average 10-15% response rate for external surveys.
> (https://www.surveygozmo.com/survey-blog/survey-response-rates/)

I then approached the co-ordinator of summer courses for teachers at a College of Education and requested to be able to address some teachers who were attending these courses. This request was granted and I outlined the focus and purpose of the study. The link to the Survey Monkey was given to the seventy-five teachers (fifty-three females and twenty-two male) who attended the courses. This direct intervention resulted in one further response. I was surprised at the poor response specifically from the teachers who attended the summer course as they were personally informed about the research. The reason for this can only be speculated on. Is

there an overall lack of interest in addressing the topic of grief and loss in the classroom?

Perhaps it was simply that the teachers at this time perceived themselves to be on holidays from

the stresses of the classroom. However, it can be considered that the relatively small number of

participants is not relevant in this research as according to the University of Texas response

rates are less significant if the purpose of the questionnaire is to gain insight

(https://facultyinnovate.utexas.edu/sites/default/files/response_rates.pdf).

Initially, **t**he criteria adopted for interviewees dictated that those who participated were

involved in work dedicated to childhood bereavement and loss or worked for an organisation

that supported bereaved children in some way as well. Seven individuals from a variety of

service providers in bereavement education and support were contacted, six females and one

male. All were willing to participate and be interviewed in a one-to-one situation, however one

participant had to subsequently withdraw due to a family bereavement. Logistical problems

prevented one other from participating. Four social workers and one qualified teacher who is

now involved in a child bereavement service were initially interviewed. It was then decided

that it would enhance the research if there was some teacher involvement in the interviewing

process as well as the questionnaire. Based on the interest in multiculturalism within this

research, two teachers who are teaching in multicultural settings were approached and agreed to

be interviewed. The eighth participant, who is a qualified teacher and now lecturing on an ITE

programme, offered to be interviewed due to an interest in the project. Multiple professional

backgrounds helped enrich discernment of the qualitative data. It gave the research a wide

scope of experience and understanding. The interviewing instrument of this thesis thus

involved eight participants, seven female and one male.

Table 3.1 illustrates the profile of the participants involved in the interview process.

INTERVIEWEE	NUMBER	SECTOR
A, B and C- Social Workers	3	Bereavement Support
D- Social Worker	1	Child Bereavement Support
E-Director of child bereavement service	1	Child Bereavement Service
F and G- Teachers	2	Primary School-multicultural
H- University Lecturer	1	ITE

A further potential interviewee (Teacher X), who teaches in a multicultured/ multidenominational, setting was unable to participate due to personal circumstances but agreed to provide a document outlining a personal experience of the challenges that face the teacher in coping with death in the multicultural classroom. This was received towards the end of the time of research (see Appendix H) and will be referred to in Chapter 5.

Each interview took approximately forty-five minutes. Consent forms (see appendix C) were completed by all participants. The interviewees were provided with information on the project (see Appendix B) prior to the meeting. The questions posed were influenced by the literature review and responses to questionnaires.

I personally conducted the interviews. Robert-Holmes (2005) suggested that the interviewer must be empathic, respectful, sensitive and able to understand social situations, in order to develop the skill of knowing how and when to probe for information. Marshall and Rossman (1999) propose that the interviewer should have excellent listening skills, have the ability to interact skillfully with people, frame questions clearly and probe where appropriate for further information.   Based on background and experiences in the area of education and bereavement support, I felt capable and confident of fulfilling these requirements.

All interviews were recorded and transcribed later. This allowed me to listen to and discern the interview with greater accuracy. The transcripts were sent to all participants to be reviewed to ensure the interpretation was accurate and reflected the various points of view of each participant. Each participant confirmed the accuracy of the transcripts. When analysing the interviews, it was found that all participants answered all of the questions.

Nvivo software was used to assist the analysis of the interviews. This software supports qualitative and mixed methods research and assisted in the organizing, analysing and interpreting data received through the interviews.

3: 7 Reliability and Validity

According to Bell, "*reliability* is the extent to which a test or a procedure produces similar results under constant conditions on all occasions" (2010, p.119). Robson (1995) advised qualitative researchers on the importance of conducting thorough, careful and honest research. It is important that this is illustrated clearly to any reader of the research. One way to ensure research reliability is to 'triangulate' the data through the use of several data sources. Denzin (1989, p 934) who was among the first researchers to develop the concept of triangulation, states: "in triangulation, a researcher deploys "different methods"-such as interviews, census data and documents -to "validate" findings". By combining more than one data collection and

analysis instruments, it was aimed to overcome any possible bias that might result if only one instrument had been used. Patton (1980) states clearly that "triangulation is a process by which the evaluator can guard against the accusation that a study findings are simply an artefact of a single method, a single source, or single investigator's bias" (1980, p.332). Pole and Lampard (2002) assert that triangulation can also highlight interesting contradictions. In this study, the use of triangulation produced data from various sources which enabled checking and cross-referencing.

According to Creswell (2009, p 190), qualitative *validity* "means that the researcher checks for accuracy of the findings by employing certain procedures". The strength in the argument lies in the fact that the findings are accurate from the point of view of the researcher, the participants and the subsequent readers of the study. Creswell (2009, p.191) underlines the importance of "trustworthiness, authenticity and credibility".

Tashakkori and Teddie (1998, p.81), suggest that the subjective opinions of respondents "is not actually an index of the validity of the instrument, you have to use other strategies to determine the validity of your measurement". With this in mind, the pilot of the questionnaire was conducted in advance, which contributed to the validity. Instructions for the questionnaire were clear and unambiguous. The interview schedule was prepared based on the research questions and the same topics were explored with all participants. All of the interviews were recorded and subsequently transcribed. This ensured ability to assess nuances as they arose. There are some possible disadvantages to the interview process, e.g. the possibility that the familiarity with the interviewer could affect the respondents' answers by portraying a bias. The tone in which the questions are asked may also influence the responses. However, the professionalism of the participants involved in this particular study minimised this possibility and the use of triangulation further contributed to reliability.

In this study, the use of service providers and teachers in the interviews and the teacher participants in the questionnaire gave credence which Tashakkori and Teddie describe as using: "experts to help you judge the degree to which a particular measurement instrument seems to measure what it is supposed to measure" (1998, p.81). Coding was used to interpret the data in an unbiased fashion. Nvivo software was used to assist this coding and analysis of the interviews rendering an unbiased analysis. The Word Frequency was used to list the most frequently occurring words used by the interviewees. The Word Cloud displays words in varying font size, with larger font for words that occur more frequently. This enabled me to identify possible themes at an early stage of the project. Hierarchy charts, also a feature of the Nvivi software, provide a visual image of hierarchy, which also facilitates the identification of patterns in coding or view the attribute values of cases and sources (help-nv11.qsrinternational.com/desktop/concepts/about_hierarchy_charts.htm). The tree map (Chapter 4:3) shows hierarchical data as a set of nested rectangles of varying sizes.

3: 8 Limitations of research methods and study

This study is limited by its scope. As a small scale, exploratory study, the extent to which it can provide far-reaching conclusions is limited. According to Pole and Lampard "being realistic about research means recognising and working within constraints" (2002, p.19). One such constraint relates to the time frame associated with this research. However, these time constraints did provide important milestones which is a positive impetus (ibid). The primary data was gathered from April 2016 to January 2017. The number of interviews scheduled was limited by the constraints of time. Each interview took approximately one hour, though one particular interview took almost two hours. The transcription of each 1-1 interview was time consuming. It is estimated that each hour of interview took six hours to transcribe. The data summary and analysis could only be embarked on when this was completed.

The number of respondents to the questionnaire was disappointing and it has to be considered that those who chose to participate may hold a favourable view towards the topic. Admittedly, the use of focus groups would perhaps have further contributed to answering the research questions, however, this was not possible on this occasion. This will be proferred as a suggestion for further work in the area.

3: 9 Ethics

Before beginning this research project, ethical approval was sought and was granted by the Mary Immaculate Research Ethics Committee (MIREC). It was agreed that in the course of this research, all data would be stored securely on a password-protected laptop. The confidentiality of participants was guaranteed. Paper data would be locked in a filing cabinet in a locked office space. The data from the research project will be stored for the duration of the project plus three years to allow for dissemination of the findings.

Questionnaires were clearly explained to both the pilot group and the final participants, as was the voluntary nature of the study. A Participant Information Sheet was included at the start of the questionnaire. This gave a brief overview of the research project and suggested the benefits of the research. All respondents to the questionnaire indicated that they had read the information and indicated electronically their consent. The participants were advised of the right to withdraw. Anonymity was maintained at all times in the recording of the data.

All interviews followed the ethical guidelines set around the four principles of: *respect, competence, integrity and responsibility*. The interviewees were held in great *respect* at all times by taking into account the advice of Bell (2010) that it is the responsibility of the researcher to explain to participants as fully as possible what the research is about, why their input is important to the research and how the information will be handled. Based on this, all interview participants read the Participant Information Sheet and signed consent forms. The

participants were facilitated in the venue and time that suited them best. Given the sometimes-difficult nature of the subject matter, a high degree of sensitivity was ensured in all interviews. I felt *competent* in managing any potential sensitive situation based on previous experience as a bereavement support worker. *Integrity* was maintained throughout the process and at no time were one participant's thoughts or comments discussed with another participant. I accept *responsibility* for accurate analysis of the interviews and the correct and agreed dissemination of any information received during this research.

3: 10 Conclusion

This chapter discussed in detail the purpose and relevance of this research project. The research design, the instruments utilised and the rationale for adopting this approach was outlined. The associated ethical considerations were summarised. The validity of this particular research design for this project was ensured and consolidated by the use of both quantitative and qualitative methods. The triangulation provided through the literature review, questionnaires and interviews provided depth and enhanced the legitimacy of the research findings and conclusions. Some possible limitations of the research were identified and will be discussed in greater detail later.

The project design succeeded in extending our knowledge and understanding of the challenges that face the primary school teacher when coping with grief and loss in the multicultural classroom. The overarching aim of this study was to elicit information from participants in relation to their attitudes, feelings, opinions and perceptions regarding the challenges that face the primary school teacher when coping with grief and loss in a multicultural classroom. The following chapter will analyse the data received throughout the study.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

Questionnaires and Interviews

.

4: 1   Introduction

This chapter outlines and provides analysis of the findings of this programme of research on what is believed to be the first of its kind to focus on the increasing challenges faced by the now culturally diverse primary school sector in Ireland when coping with grief and loss. The purpose of this study is to explore and examine the different skills that teachers in the primary school sector need in order to cope with the sensitive areas of grief and loss within a multicultural classroom setting. The research also sought to establish whether the Irish Colleges of Education are equipping future Primary School teachers to meet these challenges. A further object of the investigation was the examination of the curricula and the pedagogical frameworks that are available at both local and national level to support the primary sector. The impact of the growing rate of multiculturalism in Ireland is also explored.

The research was organised as follows:

- Literature review;
- On-line questionnaire;
- One to one interviews.

The Literature Review and associated findings have been presented in Chapter 2. In this chapter, the on-line questionnaire will firstly be analysed, then the interviews will be analysed and in the final chapter, these will be triangulated to combine the two sets of data and the literature review. This will set the stage for further discussion and provide a more complete exploration of the potential of the study to influence future policy regarding how teachers can be supported in addressing the challenges they face when coping with grief and loss in the multi-cultural classroom.

4: 2 On-line Questionnaire

The data and analyses are presented in relation to twenty-two returned questionnaires (a response rate of 14.76%). For each question the responses are reported and analysed both quantitatively and qualitatively where participants made relevant comments. This approach of including pertinent quotes from participants identified through thematic analysis is recommended by Braun (2006).

The data from the questionnaire was evaluated using Survey Monkey which is an online software service providing customizable surveys and data analysis. By visually inspecting the data and comments in great detail it was possible to conduct a descriptive analysis to determine the general trends.

Section 1 (questions 3-4) established a profile of the participants, requesting the participants to provide some general information which revealed that 19 (86.36%) participants were female and 3 (13.64%) were male. This gender imbalance can be partly explained by the fact that, according to the figures provided by the Department of Education and Skills (DES) for the school year 2011/2012, 86% of primary school teachers in Ireland were female. The gender imbalance may also be a reflection of the findings of McGovern and Barry (2000) that female teachers are more comfortable in talking about death than their male colleagues.

The age profile ranged from 25-64. There were no respondents in the 18-24 grouping which suggests that all participants are likely to have had have had at least two years teaching experience based on a typical exit age from college of 22 years. However, this cannot be totally assumed as some of the participants could have been mature entrants to teacher training. Three participants (13.64%) were aged 25-34; four participants (18.18%) were aged 35-44;

thirteen (59.09%) participants were aged 45-54 and two participants (9.09%) were aged 55-64.

Q4 What is your age?

Answered: 22   Skipped: 0
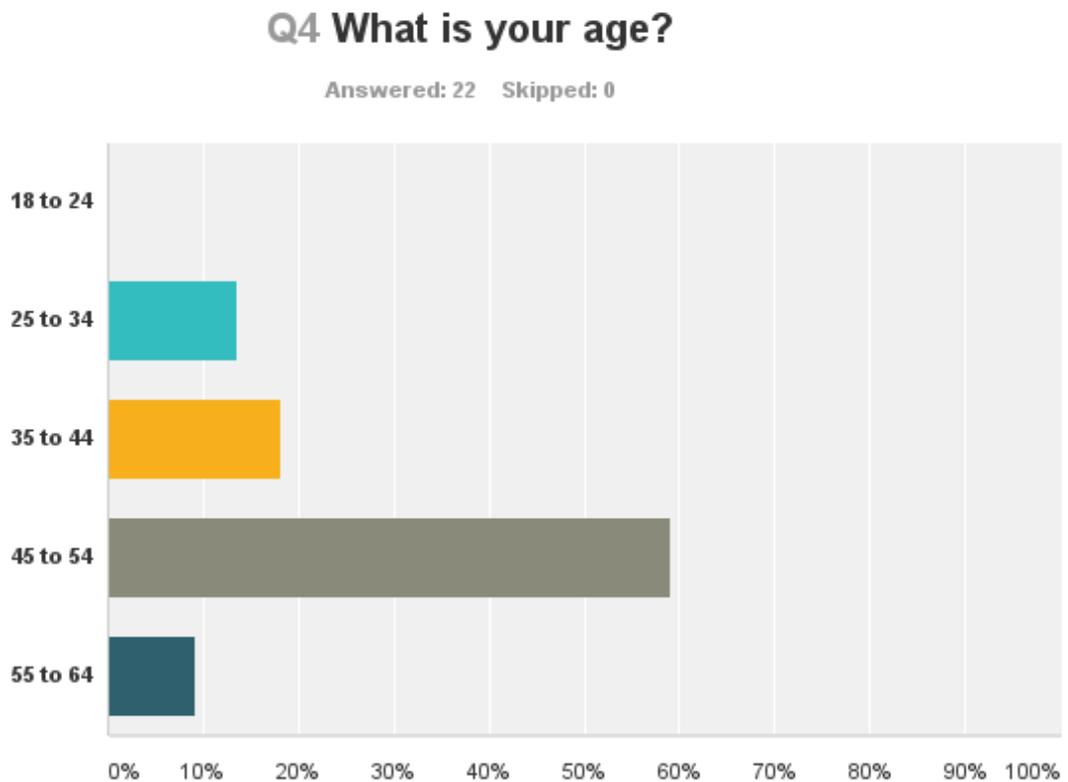
Therefore over 50% of the participants were aged 45-54.

Figure 4.1 The age profile of the participants.

Section Two requested information on the school profile of the participants. The greatest number of participants (45.45%) were teaching in a co-educational situation. There were no participants teaching in an all-boys school. One of the participants acknowledged to be a retired lecturer for ITE. Two schools were identified as having a multicultural profile.

Q5 Section 2: Your School:Please provide
details of your school profile:(please tick as
many as apply)

Answered: 22   Skipped: 0
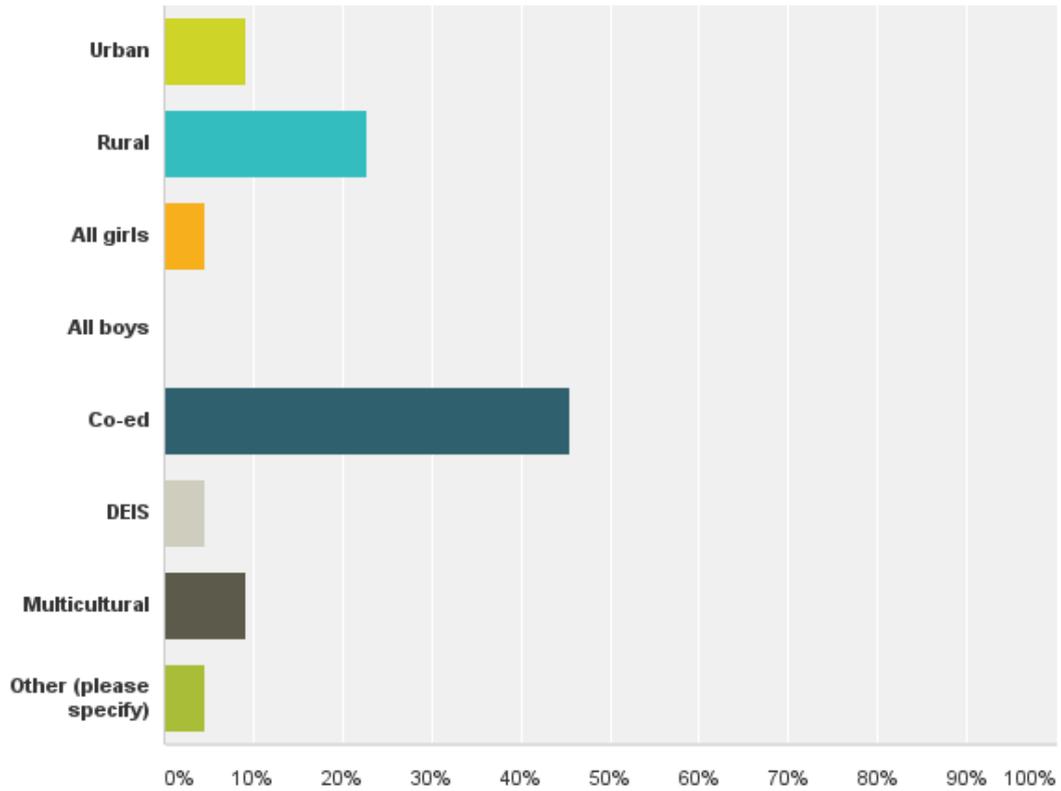
Figure 4.2: The school profile.

The respondents were advised that they could tick as many boxes as may apply, but all ticked only one box- which proved to be significant when the next question was analysed.

When it came to the next question **'If you have described your school as multicultural, please provide examples of cultural diversities within the school population'** it emerged that six participants confirmed that their schools were indeed multicultural.

A teacher from a rural school (Respondent Number 16) stated that: "Polish, Bangladeshi, Moroccan and other ethnic minority children attend our school". A DEIS school (Respondent

Number 5) had on roll: "RC, Sikh, Muslim, non-believers". According to respondents from co-education schools (Respondent Number 2): "We have many faiths in our school and children whose family have no faith. We have children from the Catholic, Orthodox, Buddhist, Muslim, Jehovah's Witness faiths" and (Respondent Number 1) said their school had: "All religions. Catholic, Church of Ireland, Muslim, Hindu".

The participants (Respondent Number 11 and Respondent Number 8) who identified the profile of their school as multicultural stated the children came from a "wide range of different race/religion" and "Indian, African, Philippine, Pakistan".

It was established that 50% of the respondents were in direct contact with pupils from diverse cultural backgrounds. It was interesting to note that no respondent referred to children from the Traveller community, despite the fact that according to the DES (2017):

> In 2015/2016, there were 8,207 pupils in mainstream primary schools who identified as members of the Traveller community. This equates to 1.5% of all mainstream pupils.
>
> Department of Education and Skills 2017, p.2

 It is clear from these additional commentaries that the profile of the Irish primary schools surveyed covered a wide international community.

Question 7 requested the participants to identify the school patronage and this emerged to be predominately Catholic (90.91%). This is interesting data based on the multicultural population of many of the schools participating on the survey.

Q7 Please describe your school patronage:

Answered: 22   Skipped: 0
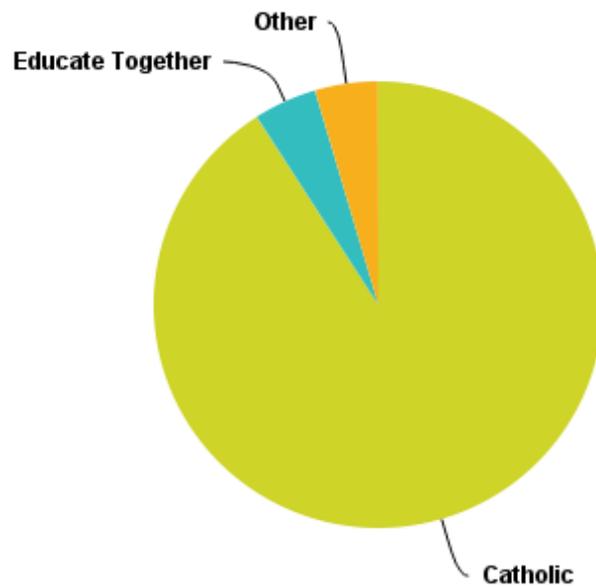
Figure 4.3: The predominance of Catholic patronage in the schools surveyed.

Section 3 of the questionnaire was concerned with bereavement and bereavement/death education. In these questions, the participants were invited to outline and acknowledge their personal attitudes and experiences regarding bereavement in general and bereavement/death education.

This section was aimed at determining:

    (i)   the level of grief experienced in the classroom environment;

    (ii)   the level of prior training;

    (iii)   the confidence level of the teacher regarding the challenges when coping with grief and loss in the classroom.

The first question in this section asked the participant **'Do you find it difficult to talk about death and loss personally?'** Three teachers responded 'yes' while nineteen (86.36%) responded 'no'.

However, when asked in the following question **'Do you find it difficult to talk about death and loss professionally i.e. in the context of your school?'** the statistics altered when seven (31.82%) replied 'yes' and which brought down the number of 'no' to fifteen (68.18%). This reluctance to discuss death in the professional context is expected and in agreement with many researchers as was seen in the literature review (Chapter 2: 3.5; 3.6). O'Donnell (2017) in the recently published report on a report on how the Irish civil service deals with dying death and bereavement among its own members, found that there was an overall hesitancy around talking about end of life. Rowling (1995; 2008) observed tension amongst teachers around the issue of control of personal grief reactions and considered this a matter for health and safety in the school environment. Milton (2004) suggested that cultural barriers may also inhibit the teacher from discussing death-related issues.

Question 10 asked **'In your experience as a principal/assistant teacher, is the topic of bereavement /loss/death addressed formally in your school through a death education programme?'** One participant (Respondent Number 21) replied that: "Rainbows is run as an after-school programme". However, all other respondents (95.45%) replied that they were not aware of any formal programme being provided by the school. These responses are open to interpretation. At first glance, it can be accepted as an accurate picture of the Irish primary school as there does not exist a formal death education curriculum per se. However, it is interesting to note that in responding to this question, no participant recognized the role of SPHE in teaching about loss which is referred to in several strands of the current curriculum.

The RE programme Alive-O also provides opportunities for the teacher to address issues regarding grief and loss in a formal way.

The responses to question 11, **'Do you think there should be a specific time given to death education in the curriculum?'** indicated uncertainty amongst the teachers. Seven teacher answered 'yes' (31.82%) while another seven answered 'no' (31.82%). This left eight respondents who chose to comment rather than opt for 'yes' or 'no' answer. The following are direct quotes from these participants`:

Table 4. 1: Respondents' comments on whether death education should have a specific time allocated in the curriculum.

Respondent No.	Comment
21	Yes, we need to speak about death when it happens to other teachers / pupils in the school. But in normal circumstances it should be part of the SPHE programme.
19	I think it should be addressed formally and informally and embedded in other subjects i.e. history, v art, drama etc.
4	All pupils face loss during their primary years and will need coping skills.
17	Not unless a situation arises that requires it. A sort of "go to" bank of resources.
15	If a child wants to speak about it or I feel a child wants to then I will engage with the child one-to-one. I wouldn't see the point in having 'death' on the curriculum.
16	Depending on the circumstances I definitely think an emergency school policy should be in place where children feel safe to grieve.
7	But only as needed.
6	Teaching about death would be very abstract. I think it would be very difficult to teach skills to cope with death as death and grieving are very individual.

These comments were analysed thematically in order to gain greater insight into the thoughts of the respondents. The first three of these comments suggest that the respondents were positively

inclined towards specific time being given over to death education on the curriculum. Only one of the respondents used the word 'formally' and one respondent suggested it happen as part of SPHE. The comments 'informally', 'as it happens' 'not unless the situation arises' 'only as needed', while not outright negative reactions, suggest there was a sense of uncertainty regarding the wisdom or willingness to dedicate a specific time to death education in the curriculum. McGovern and Barry (2000) found that 50% of the teachers who participated in their questionnaire believed that death education should be taught to children over the age of eight, which, although an age element was not included, is somewhat endorsed in this research.

The question **'In your opinion, is there a right time to initiate a discussion about death and dying with children?'** resulted in 13 (59.09%) replying 'yes' while 9 (40.91%) replied 'no'. Some of the comments suggested that 'teachable moments' should be used to talk to children about death informally; religion, history, visual art, drama were areas that all suggested as possible conduits. This viewpoint was explored in the literature review (Chapter 2: 1.9; 3.9). Six respondents referred to discussing death with children when a death affected the school community. One teacher (Respondent Number 15) suggested that: "Talking about 'death' in a de-contextualized setting would lead to more ambiguity about it, especially with younger children". Two respondents referred to talking about death in older classes while one (Respondent Number 21) said: "I think that I would keep it from young children as long as I could". Two respondents clearly believed in addressing death formally.
(Respondent Number 19) stated: "Formally it should be a taught as a specific strand / subject without religious element. Also, it should be discussed as a 'teachable moment ' at any time as the topic arises".
The responses to this question further underline the thinking of many of the respondents that the topic of death could wisely be addressed when a death has affected the school community

or as a result of 'teachable moments', for example when a child's pet dies or an international tragedy, while others voiced real concerns about the wisdom of talking to children about death. The age group of the children is significant for some of the respondents. This reluctance to talk to children about death has already been referred to in the literature review. As Charkow suggested:

> adults try to shield children from the realities of death. Many people think little children won't understand death and will just become confused and upset. They want to protect children and think talking realistically about death with them will cause the children to suffer unnecessary pain or make them grow up too fast.
>
> (Charkow, 1998, p.117).

Question 13 asked the teachers **'Is there any situation where you consider discussing death and dying to be inappropriate?'** This question resulted in nine (40.91%) 'yes' replies and four (18.18%) 'no' replies. The remainder 40.91% chose to comment rather than commit to a definitive 'yes' or 'no'. The majority of comments suggested that there were definite situations where discussing death and dying was inappropriate. One teacher (Respondent Number 17) expressed concern in discussing death "maybe a family member's suicide where the child is unaware that it is suicide, when classmates are (aware)". This is undoubtedly a challenging situation for the class teacher and it is of great importance that the school respects the ethos and beliefs of each family. For some, suicide still carries a stigma and the parent cannot be disenfranchised in their role as prime carers of the child. Three respondents were concerned about causing distress to the children and thus increasing children's anxiety by discussing death. This illustrates further the research of Holland (2008, p.416) who found: "In my research, teachers were 'wary of causing an upset' and although they wanted to support bereaved pupils they were unsure as to how to help".

Also, this has been the experience of Anne Staunton of Rainbows Ireland (2014): "We get many calls from teachers who feel they don't know what to say to the child and are afraid they will do more harm than good". Age appropriateness was again expressed as a concern. The

literature review (Chapter 2: 2.2; 2.3) outlined the often-conflicting views of researchers regarding the developmental stage of children and addressing death issues. In their written submission to the NCCA (2016b) regarding the proposals for a curriculum in Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics, the INTO expressed concern that the proposed module '*the journey of life and death*' could be too sensitive for young children. Another participant considered it inappropriate to discuss death if a child has been recently bereaved. However, one teacher (Respondent Number 19) considered that: "Even for sensitive days, when a board member, child, parent dies, it should be talked about in a respectful and sensitive manner". An analysis of the last three questions shows evidence of the lack of consideration amongst the majority of the participants for the use of SPHE or RE as conduits for death education. SPHE was mentioned once in question 11 and RE was mentioned once in question 12. The significance of this will be addressed later in this thesis.

Question 14 asked '**What are the challenges that are faced by the teacher in the classroom regarding death and dying?'** One participant declined to answer this question. The other 21 responders expressed a wide expanse of challenges. As the answers to this question were qualitative, it was possible to code and thematically analyse the comments. The comments of the teachers provided good insight into the everyday concerns of the teacher when facing the challenges of grief and loss in the classroom. The emotional intelligence and varied maturity within the classroom poses a challenge for many teachers. Differentiation and accommodating the unique reactions of each child was expressed as a concern. These challenges are very real and testing for the teacher as has already been explored in the literature review (Chapter 2: 2.2). (Respondent Number 21) stated:

> Everybody responds differently to death. It is difficult to predict the behaviour of a child who has to cope with it unexpectedly. Children sometimes do not know how / what they are feeling and cannot express what they are feeling.

This thought is in agreement with the findings of Willis (2002) as mentioned in the literature review (Chapter 2: 2.3). Some participants were challenged by the varying attitudes, experience and belief systems of the parents. Parents' attitudes to how and when a child should be introduced to the topic of death varies greatly and this ultimately poses a challenge for the teacher. It is difficult for the teacher to know what all children in the class have been told at home about death and dying. According to Jones *et al*. (1995, p.371): "Thus, understanding parents' attitudes toward death education must be a matter of concern for educators".

The need for sensitivity was voiced by six respondents and this pertained to children's fears and feelings, not causing upset, and personal issues of which the teacher may not be aware. (Respondent Number 10) stated: "Being sensitive to bereaved children, pitching any response to grief appropriately, not upsetting/frightening other children unwittingly". According to Holland (2008, p.415): "A sensitive teacher who is able to acknowledge the needs of the pupil and help them through the mourning process is crucial in helping children to adjust to a loss through death." Dyregrov *et al.* (2013) believe that a sensitive teacher can help a child achieve academic potential even in the face of a significant loss in their lives. Hare and Cunningham (1989) found that teachers who are sensitive towards a child's grief can help the child work through the tasks of mourning as outlined in Chapter 2: 2.4.

The language of loss can vary in different cultures which can pose a further problem for the teacher (Chapter 2: 4.7). Jones *et al.* (2015, p.47) suggested that: "attention should be paid to the complexities of the bereaved child's life, as well as the meaning that their family, community or culture attributes to the bereavement". Two teachers considered it a challenge to use the correct and appropriate tone and language to fit specific situations. Participant Number 3 recognised the challenge of: "Using the appropriate tone and language to fit the specific situation". This need for correct use of language has been referred to in the literature review (Chapter 2: 3.7). Yang and Chen (2002, p.144) remarked that: "it is important to understand

the feelings children have, how they perceive such an event, and what kind of language they use in talking about the reality of death".

This questionnaire has revealed that a further challenge for the teacher can be the fact that they may not be privy to the personal lives of the children and their experiences around grief and loss. Kahn (2013) found during research that some of the participant teachers also expressed this anxiety of not knowing the background of the child and the family belief system regarding death.

Two participants mentioned suicide and its increase in Irish society as being a challenge. The European Child Safety Alliance Report (2014) (www.childsafetyeurope.org/) found that Ireland has the highest rate of suicide in young females across Europe and the second highest rate of suicide in young males.

One participant was concerned about introducing death to a child that has never experienced it while another teacher expressed as a challenge the fact that it can impact on their learning and interactions. According to Papadatou *et al.* (2002, p.324): "Findings suggest that most educators are perceptive of children's grief responses and changes in academic performance and behaviour". This negative impact on student's academic performance has been highlighted in the literature review (Chapter 2: 3.7; 3.8).

Two teachers mentioned lack of training as a challenge. (Respondent Number 6) stated: "We are untrained for such circumstances and how we deal with it in a class situation may be very inappropriate to how death should be addressed". This perceived lack of training has been addressed in the Literature review (Chapter 2: 3.9; 5.1) and will be further explored in question 20 and in the analysis of the one-to-one interviews.

The participants were next asked **'Do you feel that you are well equipped to cope with these challenges?'** In answer to this question, five (22.73%) respondents replied 'yes' and eleven

(50%) replied 'no'. A further six participants chose to comment. These comments were examined and revealed that four of the respondents indicated that they did feel equipped to cope with the challenges faced when dealing with the issues surrounding death and dying. It emerged from this question that the respondents' years of experience in the classroom are directly related to their confidence in being equipped to cope with the challenge of coping with grief and loss in the classroom. One participant (Respondent Number 21) said: "Yes, because we have had to deal with it in our school. I have taught 34 years and this year… we have had a parent, a child and a member of staff pass away".

This is somewhat at odds with the findings of Mahon e*t al.* who stated:

> The large number of teachers in this sample, who, despite teaching for a mean of fourteen years, still described themselves as not qualified indicates that, for the subject of death, experience is *not* the best teacher.
>
> (Mahon, Goldberg and Washington 1999, p. 115).

Two of those who commented were emphatic that they did not feel equipped. (Respondent Number 6) stated: "No. Is anyone well equipped when it happens?" When the thrust of the comments was included in the statistical analysis, it emerged the 40.91% of participants feel that they are equipped to cope with the challenges that are posed when coping with grief and loss in the classroom while 59.09% of the participants do not feel adequately equipped. According to Papadatou *et al*. (2002, p.335) "Most participants perceived their role in supporting a bereaved student as significant, but the large majority felt inadequately prepared to assume such a responsibility. Based on the literature review, it is somewhat surprising that the number who do not feel equipped is as low as 59.09%.

The next question posed was: **'Do you think that there are different or additional challenges to be faced in the multicultural classroom regarding death and dying?'** Again, some of the respondents made comments rather than specifying if they thought the

119

multicultural classroom posed different challenges. However, 13 participants (59.09%) had the view that there were different or additional challenges. The comments which referred to differences and ensuing challenges can be summed up in the following response. (Respondent Number 19) observed: "As stated we have multiple belief systems so generics-respectful death language should be used. Also, knowing and researching the individual / pupil's belief system will allow teachable moments" (sic). This challenge regarding different belief systems has been discussed in the literature review (Chapter 2: 4.4; 4.5) and underlined by ASCO (2016): "It may be difficult to know how to be sensitive to a grieving person from a different cultural background".

According to my analysis, less than 13.64% respondents believed that there were **no** different challenges to face in the multicultural classroom. However, one participant (Respondent Number 15) held the opinion that: "Death is death. The science of death is the same for all cultures. How each culture responds to it is different but the teacher just needs to be sensitive and clear". Two respondents were unsure as they were not teaching in a multicultural setting.

According to the responses to question number 17, 72.73% of the participants have supported a child, during their teaching career, who experienced a significant loss through death. (Respondent Number 15) supported: "Children whose brothers and sisters died at birth. Children who have lost parents, grandparents, uncles, aunts. Children who are in care and 'grieve' for their family unit, even though their parents have not died". Another teacher (Respondent Number 6) reported that a child in her class died and her sister was also in that class. The list of situations described included for Respondent Number 5: "Siblings death, mothers and fathers' death, grandparents". (Respondent Number 4) experienced: "Pupils dealing with loss of parent by suicide, cancer. Pupil dealing with loss of class mate". This expansive list further outlines the frequency of losses experienced by a teacher during the

course of their career. The statistics regarding the incidence of loss in the life of Irish children as outlined in the literature review (Chapter 2: 3.1) and provided by ESRI also confirm these statements.

The questionnaire then asked **'What guidelines/ policies are in place in your school around death/dying/bereavement?'** Eighteen participants replied to this question. Three (13.64% of total participants) respondents were unsure if there were any guidelines/policy in place. Seven (43.75%) said that there was no policy in place. Six (27.27%) of the teachers work in schools with a Critical Incident Policy in place. Two teachers referred to availing of the services of Rainbows, while a further three contacted National Educational Psychological Services (NEPS) in the event of an incident. The DES guidelines were employed by one school while a counsellor comes in to another school (Respondent Number 8) "to help the child and the class through discussion". Some schools availed of more than one service.

In their research, O'Brien and McGuckin (2013) reported that 75.9% of the schools in their study did **not** have a bereavement policy in place. This current research and the response from the questionnaires indicates that there may be some slight increase in the schools with policies or guidelines in place since 2013. However, it should be taken into account that O'Brien *et.al*. (2013) included post-primary schools as well as primary schools in their research, which could sway the results. Also, it is noted that O'Brien and McGuckin surveyed schools through the participation of principals rather than individual teachers as is the case in this research, which may also impact on perceptions.

One teacher (Respondent Number 12) commented that there was "none formally but an awareness through caring principal and learning support team". Another teacher (Respondent Number 15) commented that there was "No policy. Just common sense".

When asked in question 19 whether this policy (or lack of) worked well the previously mentioned teacher (Respondent Number 15) remarked: "Yes, if you have common sense and sensitivity". Six participants skipped this question. When the researcher analysed this, it was found that this was due to the fact that there was either no policy in place in their school or else the teacher was unsure if a policy existed. Seven (31.82% of the participants who answered this question) felt that the policy worked well, whereas two (9.09% of the participants who answered this question) did not think it worked well. A further three comments were positive, bringing the satisfaction level of the teachers regarding policies the school, when the comments were analysed, to 45.45% of the participants who answered this question. Two participants were unable to answer the question, while one respondent (Respondent Number 5) commented that "Support from NEPS is not always available when needed". According to the NEPS website:

> In the event of a critical incident within a school, NEPS will await a request from school authorities before offering support. NEPS during 2008 provided all schools with updated advisory material to assist them to organise for and cope with the different challenges presented in this context.
> (http://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Services/National-Educational-Psychological-Service-NEPS-)

The next question moved onto the experience during teacher training and satisfaction rate.

'Was there adequate preparation/training given during your ITE experience to equip you to support children in the area of death and dying?' Fifteen (68.18%) of the respondents replied 'no' to this question, one (4.55%) replied 'yes' and the remaining five chose to comment. When the comments were analysed, a further five teachers were adamant that they had not received adequate training at college level. This brings the percentage to 90.91%. In the absence of formal training one teacher (Respondent Number 21) drew on personal experience: "Life experience has been the best education". Only one teacher said that 'yes' there had been adequate preparation at ITE, however, it was interesting to note that when this

individual's questionnaire was further examined the same teacher did not feel well equipped to cope with the challenges that are faced by the teacher in the classroom regarding death and dying.

This acknowledgement of lack of adequate training during ITE has been outlined in the literature review (Chapter 2: 3.9; 5.1) and has been reported by many researchers (McGovern and Barry, 2000; Holland, 2008; Kahn, 2013; O'Brien and McGuckin, 2014). It emerged, in the final analysis, that 95.45% of the participants did not consider that they had received adequate preparation and skills training at ITE level
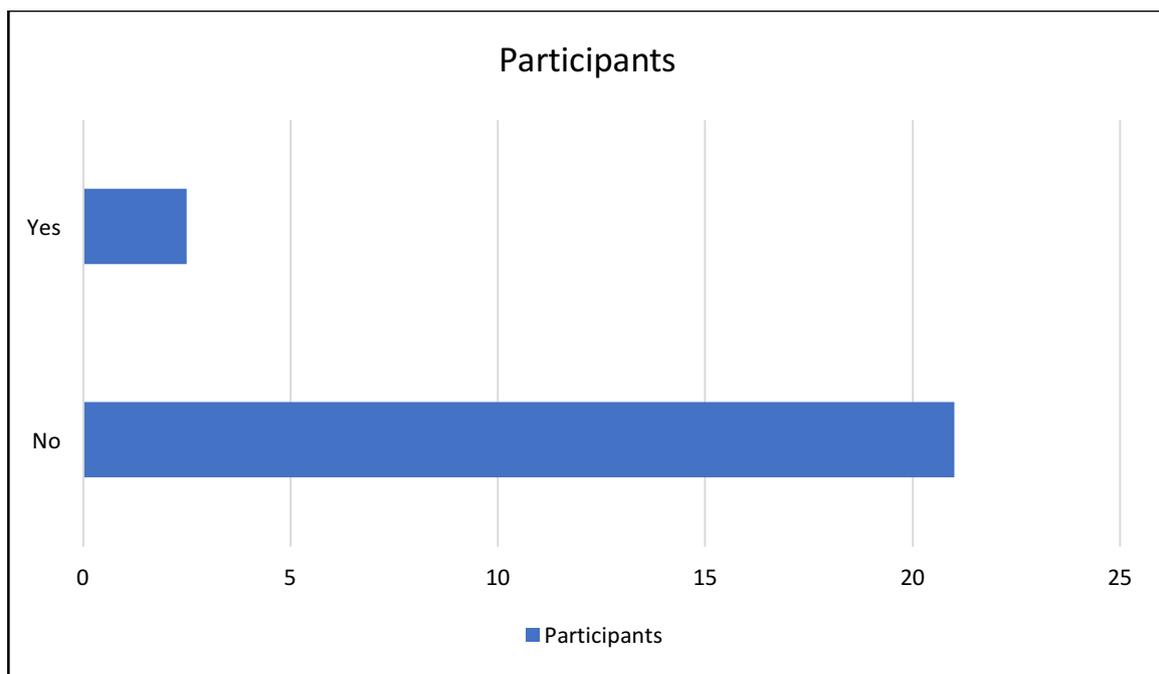
Figure 4.4: Dissatisfaction rate with regard to ITE in the area of death and dying.

Question 21 asked the participants **'Have you had any post-graduate/in-career development in the area of bereavement and loss?'** One teacher respondent had completed a course in Thanatology. All others (95.45%) responded in the negative.

These figures regarding post-graduate/in-career development, are in stark contrast with the findings of O'Brien and McGuckin (2013) who reported that 67.8% of the schools participating in their study indicated that their staff had received training in the area of bereavement and loss. However, again, it must be taken into account that O'Brien and McGuckin's survey included primary and post-primary schools and that "due to the unequal numbers of responding primary and post-primary schools, all data analysed is presented without distinction of the two sectors" (O'Brien and McGuckin 2013, p.12).

One participant (Respondent Number 15) made the interesting comment: "There are other, more pressing, everyday school matters, like teaching and learning". This reference to curriculum overload is in agreement with that of the INTO and as described in Chapter 2: 3.3 the issue is being currently investigated by the NCCA (2016b).

According to the responses to question number 22, exactly 50% of the respondents had looked for sources of information or resources on the subject of death, dying, grief and loss. Those who had looked for information or resources were then asked if they had experienced any challenges in sourcing such information. Four (33.37% of this group) experienced difficulty, while seven (66.63% of this group) were able to source material with varying levels of success. One teacher (Respondent Number 5) commented that: "It's usually catholic-based and this is not always the best for the situation". This further underlines the growing challenges within a growing multicultural community. Another teacher (Respondent Number 1) commented on the fact that there was: "Difficulty in accessing NEPS and Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) support. Good online resources". The literature review highlighted the fact that there is an increasing number of resources available to assist the teaching community in coping with grief and loss in the classroom (Chapter 2: 3.10)

When asked **'Do you consider that additional courses would help you to be better prepared to cope with children who are experiencing grief and loss?'** a resounding 100% answered in the affirmative with comments to underline the conviction of thought. The comments included the need for initial teacher education to include training in how to cope with death and dying. CPD was also suggested as a possibility as a whole school exercise.

Table 4.2 Comments on CPD

It's vital that all teachers and initial teacher education should have this as a given.
Yes, because we would then understand the language we would need to use in such circumstances.
It would make a suitable whole school CPD topic.

However, one participant (Respondent Number 15) was unsure about prioritising this area of study: "Yes, but with CPD so critical there are other areas where teachers need to up skill first, like the teaching of science, maths, cross curricular links, deep learning etc. etc.". Mahon *et al*. (1999), Lowton and Higginson (2003), and Potts (2013) all referred to this crowded curriculum and the resulting time pressure which can impede the development of a death education programme.

The final question of the questionnaire asked the participants **'do you think it would be beneficial if this course should address some personal losses of the participating teachers?'** Eleven (50%) responded 'yes' while six (27.27%) responded 'no'. The remaining six made comments, all of which were generally positive with varying degrees of conviction. Two participants considered that the main focus should be on children. Other respondents were

cognisant of the emotional aspect of personal grief. The reasons for participants' hesitancy in exploring their personal losses can be linked with the belief of Kübler-Ross (1993) regarding our natural tendency to avoid facing our personal mortality. It is also interesting to note that 4 (18.18%) of the participants find it difficult to talk about death and loss professionally but do not think that it would be beneficial if proposed courses addressed some personal losses of the participating teachers.

The comments as a whole give an insight into the considerations of the participants.

Table 4.3: Considerations of participants regarding personal losses and CPD

Yes. Teachers probably need to learn how to cope with their losses before they try help children cope with theirs
It might prove invaluable in the future as all experience loss at some time in their lives
Only if the participating teachers would like them addressed. Death is such a personal journey
When talking about loss one is drawn to thinking about family members who have died. The focus would have to be kept on how to help the children cope with loss
Generally, but not the main emphasis

These comments bear out what has already been discussed in Chapter 2: 3.6 of the literature review, demonstrating the perceived need for the teacher to address personal losses in order to improve their capacity for understanding and responding to the needs of bereaved children. These insights from the participants are in agreement with Moran-Stritch:

> Death education for the helping professions should be approached from both sides: a chance to explore and deal with one's own personal experience of loss, and a grounding in the ideas and models that are available to help people who are struggling.
>
> (Moran-Stritch 2009, p.6)

The content of the questionnaire will be added to that of the interview analyses in order to gain

a comprehensive understanding of the overall research findings.

4: 3 One to One interviews

> Analysis entails classifying, comparing, withering and combining material from the interviews to extract the meaning and implications, to reveal pattern, or to stitch together descriptions of events into a coherent narrative.
>
> (Ruben and Ruben 2011, p.201)

In order to begin to analyze the content of the interviews, it was decided to establish the dominant words throughout the interviews. As a starting point, this was achieved by doing a Word Frequency query on Nvivo for the 50 most common words used. The Word Cloud (see Chapter 3:7) below illustrates this first result.

Figure 4.5. The most commonly used words during interviews

This illustration clearly emphasises the importance of some of the key words in the research question: *teachers, school, children, death, need, talk, bereavement, loss, grief,* and *challenges*

being the ten most frequent words used. Interestingly, the word fear does not appear on this list which is surprising given the frequency of the concept of fear, in many guises, within the literature review.

As described in the Methodology chapter (Chapter 3:7), the interviews were each coded initially by hand and subsequently with Nvivo software. Thematic analysis is a method used for 'identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within the data' (Braun 2006, p.79). The dominant themes that emerged were: multiculturalism, challenges, death education, needs of the child, skills required, personal losses, teacher education, teachers, openness, policy, external organisations, formal death education, attitudes, informal death education, teacher's aids, negativity, parents, subject areas, death education experiences, CPD, positivity, difficulty in talking about death and ITE.

This set of themes was deemed too cumbersome to analyse efficiently and therefore the themes were amalgamated to produce a more manageable thematic structure. Six dominant themes emerged:

(1) Teachers;

(2) Schools;

(3) Teacher Education;

(4) Multiculturalism;

(5) Needs of the Child;

(6) Parents.

This is clearly illustrated on the Hierarchy Tree Map below.

The tree map shows hierarchical data as a set of nested rectangles of varying size. This enable the researcher to explore coding and make comparisons. Larger areas displayed at the top left

of the chart indicate most frequently occurring themes, smaller rectangles displayed toward the bottom right indicate less frequently occurring themes.
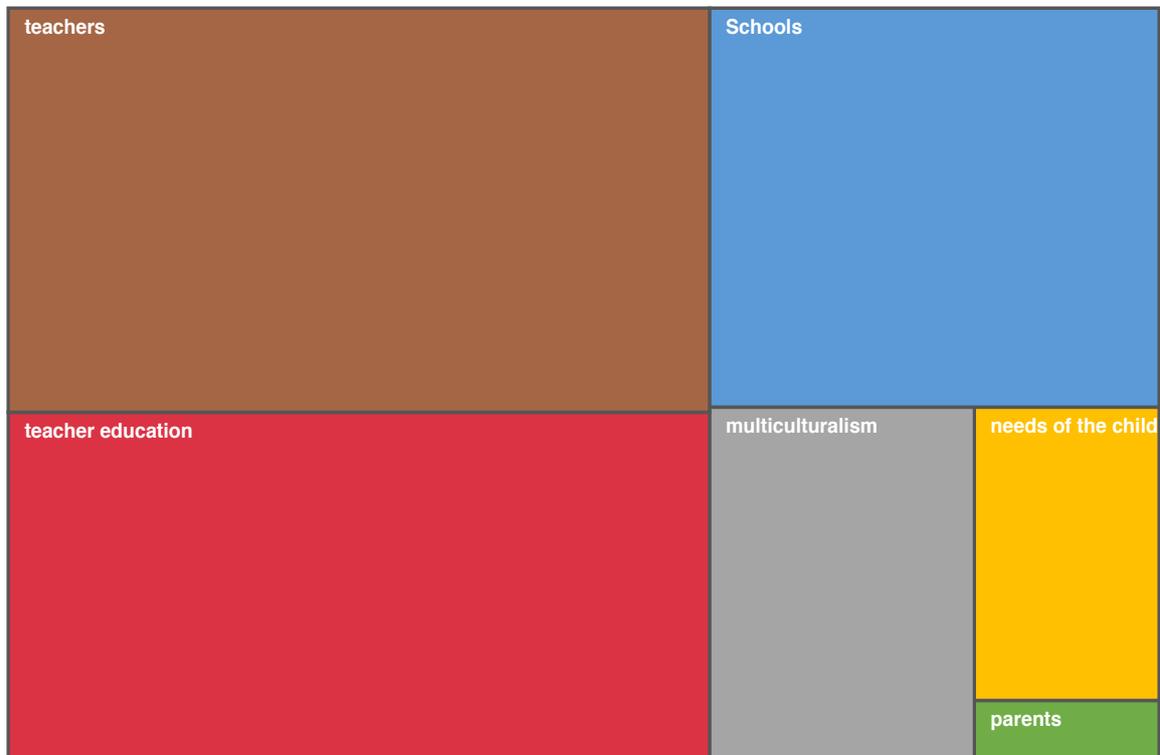
Figure 4.6 Tree Map illustration provides visual representation of emergent dominant themes.

The research question: **What are the different skills that teachers need in order to cope with the challenges when faced with the sensitive areas of grief and loss within a multicultural classroom setting** was then examined through the lenses of the interviews. It was important to establish whether or not the themes reflect the focus of this research question in addition to the embedded questions:

- Are the colleges of education in Ireland equipping future primary school teachers to meet these challenges?

- What curricula and pedagogical frameworks are available at both local and national level?

- How relevant to this discussion is the growth of multiculturalism in Ireland?

(see Appendix F for sample interview; Appendix G for excerpts from all interviews)

When the coding was completed and the closely-related codes merged, it became evident that the words 'skills' and 'challenges' and their implications recurred frequently across the interviews. According to Mindtools.com "Facing a challenging task without the required skills could easily result in worry and anxiety". Skills are needed to meet the challenges and challenges require skills to cope and be effective while coping with grief and loss in the classroom. According to Dyregrov *et al.* (2013, p.132): "If teachers either do not have the skills or are unsure about their skills, it may lead to avoidance of contact and conversations".

It is interesting to note that the two practicing teachers were clear and precise on their view on the skills that are required of the teacher. They used the words *empathy, compassion, patience, listening and the importance of giving time.* According to Interviewee G: "I think you have to be a compassionate person, I think you have to be patient and a good listener".
Interviewee F stated: "Empathise…listen… and just give time to that child…instead of 'come on we don't have time for this'…" This is fully in accordance with the counsel of O'Brien (2013) that: "Supporting a child through grief requires three simple human attributes: *honesty, patience, and empathy*".

Several interviewees suggested 'understanding' was an important skill. Participants in the questionnaire also referred to 'understanding'. Mahon *et al.* (1999a) stressed this need of an awareness and understanding on the part of the teacher regarding the grieving process of a

child. This term 'understanding' covers many challenges including an informed approach on how grief might manifest itself in the child as well as a fundamental knowledge of language that is appropriate to the age and stage of development of the child (Busch and Kimble 2001). This further confirms the belief of Holland (2008) who suggested that some teachers may not fully understand the impact of loss on a child as mentioned already in the literature review (Chapter 2: 3.2). Interviewee A summed it up by saying:

> A level of understanding about the experience of grief, grief as an experience…grief and the normal life experience as opposed to a problem. It can be problematic, but it's not a problem…So, it would be helpful for teachers to understand about that as a process and about what it is like as a normal process.

This participant also expressed the importance of the role of the teacher in helping the child to "understand what they are going through…and maybe help the child reframe what they are going through…so by having an understanding of something doesn't take it away but makes it more manageable…". This has been referred to in the literature review (Chapter 2: 3.4).

> A sensitive teacher who is able to acknowledge the needs of the pupil and help them through the mourning process is crucial in helping children to adjust to a loss through death.
> (Holland 2008, p 415).

Some of the interviewees also referred to the teacher as a person who needs to have an openness to the topic of death, be able to hold emotions and have a sense of self-awareness Interviewee H stated: "so they need to be able to hold their own emotions and keep them on hold while totally attend to the child or children…". This controlling of emotions can create tension in the life of the teacher when there is need for the teacher to control personal feelings in order to be in control of the situation. Rowling (1995) writes about the 'Disenfranchised grief of the teacher' (see Chapter 2: 3.6).

When asked about the challenges that face the teacher the interviewees outlined a range of perceived obstacles for the teachers when coping with grief and loss.

(i)   Fear of saying something wrong: There was expressed both a lack of knowledge on what to say as well as a strong fear of saying something that would upset the child in the event of a significant loss. This fear, which is international, was highlighted in the literature review (Chapter 2: 3.5);

(ii)   Lack of training: All teachers interviewed acknowledged that they did not receive adequate skills training during ITE. Service providers also spoke about the fact that teachers had voiced anxiety. Lack of training has featured throughout this research, in the literature review, questionnaires and interviews;

(iii)   Interpreting the child's behavior: This challenge stems from the need to understand the child's grief as well as lack of skills training. One participant referred to the difficulty of coping with a child whose grief is manifested through inappropriate behavior and maintaining professional demeanour. Kahn (2013, p.12) referred to the fact that "Maladaptive behaviours that might be observed and misunderstood in the classroom can include anger, withdrawal, inattention, impulsivity, disorganization, defiance, and other manifestations that can interfere with academic and social functioning in school and manifest as mental health concerns later in life";

(iv)   Understanding grief in children: A service provider referred to the lack of understanding of the fact that it is normal for a child to grieve a loss and the importance of allowing this to happen. Lawhon (2004) underlines the belief that teachers who understand the process and impact of grief for children can provide the support that is necessary for normal grief reactions;

(v)   Teachers personal challenges regarding talking about death: Unresolved personal issues around grief in the life of the teacher can pose a challenge. Participants acknowledged the need for teachers to be comfortable when talking about death.

Cullinan (1990) and Reid (2002) both refer to the detrimental effect of a teacher's unresolved grief on the effective managing of a bereaved child;

(vi) Classroom dynamics: The challenge of coping with a large number of children while supporting a grieving child was expressed. Kahn (2013) acknowledged that "issues related to grief and loss do not enter the classroom in isolation" and the importance of keeping in mind the differing responses from children;

(vii) Differing beliefs within families: The challenge of multiculturalism and differing family belief systems was recognized as a real challenge for the class teacher. This view was endorsed by Oyebode and Owens (2013). They outlined the death responses of different cultures and the need for those in a supporting role to focus on the uniqueness of the grief. Interviewee B (see Appendix F) clearly outlined the challenges for both the teacher and the service provider regarding differing belief systems: "They were from another country but described themselves as Catholic, but their belief system wasn't around heaven and what it meant for the soul that had gone away, nowhere near to what I would have understood from my own Catholicism…And in a way, I wasn't able to support them in a way that I ordinarily would";

(viii) Time restraints: Both service providers and teachers recognized the fact that the school curriculum as well as increased administration work does not leave much room for death education. Potts (2013) referred to the time constraints of a very full curriculum as being an impediment to the teacher and this pressure of time was referred to by a participant in the research questionnaire;

(ix) One interviewee reported that in some cases the family do not want to report a death to the school due to historical breakdown in meaningful communications between the family and the school. Interviewee B: "if there has been a problem in the past

134

and relationships are not good between the family and the school…". Undoubtedly, this can potentially cause a problem for both the teacher and the bereaved child;

(x)   According to interviewee B, children are more likely to be bullied because they are bereaved. … "generally, around the age of 10. Younger children tend to be kinder… younger girls might give a card or a gift to a child who has been bereaved…. But when you get into that competitive age… around 10… children often maybe when Father's Day coming up 'ha… you don't have a father'…And its cruel what you hear… but it is another reason to be bullied. It's really sad…and it just compounds something". Peers tease some school age children because their loss makes them different. Kirwin and Hamrin (2005) found that peers sometimes tease those who have been bereaved.

Appendix E illustrates further these obstacles and challenges as expressed by the participants.

It is interesting to note that all of these challenges were expressed in various ways within the responses to the research questionnaire and also identified in the literature review and will be triangulated in the concluding chapter.

However, it is noted through these interviews, that all respondents had extensive awareness of the needs of the child, though lack of confidence in responding to the needs were evident. This is similar to the findings of O'Brien and McGuckin (2013). In agreement with some of the challenges expressed, Cullinan (1990) linked the efficacy of the teacher in coping with a grieving child with their personal inability to come to terms with their own death fears. As outlined in the literature review (Chapter 2: 3.6), it is significantly important for the teacher to have addressed personal issues regarding death and ensuing fears. The questionnaire analysis

also referred to the relevance of this for the teacher to effectively support the grieving child as well as provide a healthy ongoing learning atmosphere.

The possible impact of the 'multicultural' classroom on the class teacher when coping with grief and loss was included in the primary research question. This was addressed in the interviews by asking what the additional challenges the teacher might face in a growing multicultural society. NVivo was used to establish the most prevalent words used by the participants when referring to these possible extended challenges faced by the teacher in a multicultural setting.

Using NVivo, the theme 'multiculture' was analysed and the frequency of words related to multiculture were extracted. The words *children, culture, understand, beliefs, Irish, Muslim* and *Catholic* are all significant.
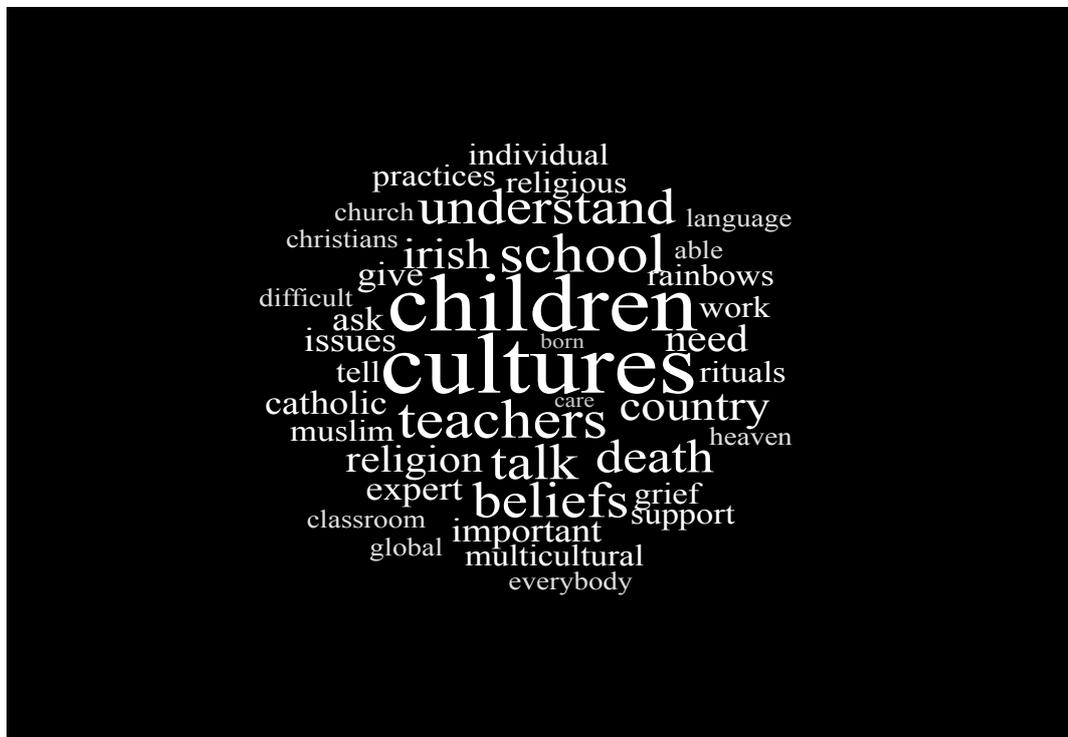

Table 4.7 *Comments by interviewees regarding the significance of the multicutural factor*

Interviewee B suggested: "It's almost like it's another layer added." While interviewee E described it three times as a minefield: "My experience and it's one of the issues we have around children from different cultures…it is a minefield on several levels…It is a minefield…an absolute minefield".

The truth behind this comment has been outlined in the literature review and throughout the extensive reading done for this research. Haine *et al. (*2008) were aware that very little research had been done regarding cultural differences in children's bereavement experiences. Klass (1999) referred to the complex nature of cross-cultural grief reactions. As has previously been stated (Chapter 2: 4.7), the National Cancer Institute (2014) acknowledged that the role of heritage in the human reaction to grief and loss needs to be explored more extensively. Interviewee C showed concern about the origin of the child and raised consciousness regarding immigrant children: "Inevitably it makes a huge difference particularly depending on what has literally been the journey from country of origin to Ireland". This participant spoke further of the need to recognize the many life- changing experiences of the immigrant child. This fact was outlined by Melvin and Lukeman (2000):

> If a family is living away from their culture of origin, particularly if newly arrived and isolated from others of their community, its members may experience an additional sense of loss and bewilderment. These feelings may arise from being separated from familiar and supportive systems and from the different formalities surrounding the management of a death in the new culture. Children may not understand the way the adults they love are behaving or what is expected of them. Furthermore, they may have little support from the wider community or peer group at school who may be from different cultures. Access to someone who can help them make sense of what is going on around them may provide the best support to bereaved children in such a situation.
>
> (Melvin and Lukeman, 2000, p.530)

The multicultural thread of this research will be further analysed when addressing the embedded questions.

The eight interviews referred to the needs of the child, though there was no direct question posed regarding these. This inclusion of the needs of the child are very relevant when talking about how the class teacher copes with grief and loss. The needs of the grieving child are many and often complex. The literature review (Chapter 2: 3.7) outlines some of these needs, as do the participants in the questionnaire. The words *listen, understand, awareness, environment, flexibility* all are commonly used and relevant. Dyregrov *et al.* (2013) found an increasing lack of flexibility within the school system as a source of constraint. Yet, as has been established in the literature review (Chapter 2: 3.7), it is important to re-establish a routine for the grieving child (Milton 2004; Baggerly and Abugideiri 2010; ICBN 2014). The necessity to take into account the particular developmental stage of the bereaved child has been comprehensively discussed in the literature review (Chapter 2: 2.2). This is also important when the teacher is incorporating death education, whether formal or informal, into the curriculum. According to Hopkins (2002 p.42), it is necessary for the teacher to "provide developmentally appropriate learning opportunities that allow children to discuss death".

Table 4. 4 Some of the needs of the child as expressed by the interviewees:

We need to listen to the child.
We need to be guided by their needs.
We need to understand the importance of routine, the place of school in the life where everything else is changed.
What children will need and what children will need at different developmental stages as well and that all would have to be factored-in.
All any child needs, is one supportive adult in their life.
There are various factors for any child that influence how they are…the remaining carer…what are the family circumstances…previous losses.
It is quite normal that children grieve, but we seem to have a problem that children grieve and we want to make it better.

Interviewee B encourages the teacher to deal with a grieving child individually and cautioned against:

> a classroom intervention around grief generally in a way hoping to flush the child out…. I don't think that is helpful either…it is almost like ambushing children really, and you are ambushing vulnerable, upset, grieving children around the topic, I really don't think it is the best way to approach a sensitive issue to do it in that way.

Mahon *et al.*(1999a) referred to this as a 'reactive response' whereby the teacher invited the bereaved child to explain their recent absence to the class.

In some way, this has been contradicted by other interviewees who observed that there are children whose grief is ignored by the class teacher, mainly due to lack of awareness of the correct approach. Interviewee E expressed the worry that: "They (teachers) very often ignore it… which cause problems… there is no procedure in place for when the child is returning to school…no child should have to walk through the door, particularly after a significant bereavement and to sit down as if nothing had happened" (Appendix G).

Holland (2008) also found through his research that a child returning to school after a bereavement felt ignored and isolated. "Teachers may be unsure about how to broach the topic of loss, this leading perhaps to them ignoring the child and acting as though the death never occurred" (Holland 2008, p.419). This, again indicates the need for the school to provide a safe environment for the grieving child. A balance needs to be reached whereby the loss is acknowledged and the child is afforded the privacy that may be needed.

Interviewee B also cautioned that very often a child will hide emotions and portray an air of composure. This is echoed by Schoen *et al.*:

> Interpreting the grief response of 7 to 11 year olds is puzzling. Children may disguise their pain with a façade of independence and coping or they may erupt with emotional signs of distress.
>
> (Schoen, Burgoyne and Schoen 2004, p.145)

This 'silence' may also be attributed to the fear of being teased that has already been referred to in this chapter.

The interviewees were asked '**whether the Colleges of Education are equipping our future teachers to meet the challenges of coping with grief and loss in the classroom'**. Interestingly, the eight interviewees approached this question from different perspectives. The participant social workers referred to both their own perception and that of teachers they had encountered. The qualified teachers referred to their personal experience at ITE and the college lecturer outlined how teachers are currently being prepared.

The interviewees were asked: '**Do you think that teachers are receiving adequate training to cope with grief and loss?'** The important role of ITE was expressed by participant C who considered the necessity for the graduating teacher to have an awareness of the vulnerability of a child as the consequence of a significant bereavement. Both of the teachers who are currently practicing acknowledged that there was little or no input into bereavement education during their ITE. Interviewee H stated: "I can't remember any mention either…maybe, it just didn't hit the radar then… There was nothing done in the college" (Appendix G). Throughout the literature review (Chapter 2: 3.5) and the analysis of the questionnaires, this fact has been a common finding. O'Brien and McGuckin (2014) pointed towards international research and the indication that there is a lack of training for teachers and thus lack of confidence is widespread. Interviewee E, who taught for many years, agreed that "there was a very large deficit at teacher training". However, Interviewee E pointed out that historically, the teacher was primarily concerned with curriculum content and classroom management. Holland (2008, p.411) concurred: "There once was a time when it would not have been unusual for many teachers to see their role purely as 'teaching children' and not to perceive that they had any

direct role in the well-being of their pupils". This, perhaps, in some way explains the perceived historical lack of adequate preparation to cope with grief and loss in the classroom.

Interviewee E went on to paint a positive picture for the future: "I am aware that all the Irish teacher training colleges now have modules on bereavement and loss and the wider difficult issues that are presenting in school populations". Interviewee H confirmed this positive development regarding current ITE. During the interview, this participant outlined the input on one ITE course in Ireland where three relevant courses are taught: SPHE, Social Construction of Identity and Challenges in Pupil Care. The extent of the provision of bereavement education currently offered at ITE has been referred to in the literature review (Chapter 2: 5.5). It can be deduced from the comments on ITE that there is a change in mindset amongst the educators and the importance of educating the Irish teachers of the future on how to cope with grief and loss is being recognised. Historically, teachers may not feel that they have been adequately prepared but in the future teachers should be more confident and competent.

However, all this may depend on the attitude of the student teacher and while interviewing the participants two very different experiences were expressed. Interviewee H was very positive about the attitudes of the students: "I would say that students are very appreciative of this work…They are very interested…". Interviewee E found the students that she encountered were: "Interested… to put it mildly…they just lap this up".

However, interviewee D has had some contrasting experience: "To go back to the student teachers…at times I find I can get frustrated… would be very few questions… fear I would say… I present basic case studies…very thought provoking…but it's kind of…I don't know what it is…" A similar experience was documented by Interviewee B: "I had people who spoke the whole way through it…I had people who fell asleep…seriously…there was very little

interest…I did a fair amount of preparation…I did it several times and I was appalled really at their lack of maturity… lack of interest in the topic…maybe it was the timing…but they were told they had to attend…it was a mandatory slot…but they just weren't interested…but I suppose, it just wasn't relevant for them". The frustration of both these participants was evident in both tone of voice and body language.

Interviewee E elaborated her thoughts on this: "Because students have so much information to take in, that that information will only become relevant to them when they encounter a bereaved child… otherwise they are not really going to take that in or absorb it or think it useful until they need to use it". This is in agreement somewhat with Neimeyer (1988) who believed that teachers needed to have personal experience of a significant bereavement to fully understand and support the grieving child. Interviewee A further emphasised this by reflecting on how experience increases confidence and competence.

This research finding reinforces the need to address the embedded question: **What curricula and pedagogical frameworks are available at both local and national level?**
The current positive development in curricular input at ITE has been outlined, but based on some negative attitudes portrayed by students and the fact that a large percentage of practicing teachers (as was seen in the questionnaire analysis) did not benefit from bereavement education at ITE, it is important that our practicing teachers are given appropriate frameworks and support in order to cope with grief and loss in the classroom. This was explored with all of the interviewees.

Interviewee A when referring to ITE said: "I think the basic training that teachers get is only part of it…But if you only wait to train the new teachers…what about the thousands of existing

teachers…so CPD is very important" which highlighted the need for CPD in the area of grief and loss. This need for in-service training in death-related studies has been discussed in the literature review (Chapter 2: 5.4) and was agreed to be a positive intervention by participants in the research questionnaire. In 1993, Holland identified a 'training gap' in the area of child bereavement and subsequently developed *'Lost for Words'* which he describes as 'loss-awareness' training package, available internationally.

ICBN, which has been referred to extensively in the literature review, is an Irish organisation which provides education and training programmes for professionals, including education on bereavement and childhood bereavement. Interviewee E outlined some of the work done by ICBN but expressed a real concern regarding the difficulty of serving the whole of Ireland. The constraints of budget and manpower are significant barriers in providing this CPD throughout the nation. This problem was also expressed by Interviewee A whose organization had difficulty in providing training for teachers due to lack of capacity to deliver the service.

Children's Bereavement Week is now an annual event organized by ICBN. In 2016, there was a focus during this week on teachers and according to Interviewee B the workshop for teachers was very well attended which confirms the interest of teachers in developing their skills and knowledge regarding bereavement and loss in the life of the child. Holland (2008, p.415) found that "teachers consistently over time rate the area of loss and bereavement relatively highly as an issue in school, but some of them feel that they lack the skills to support bereaved children". Interviewee H outlined courses that she had availed of in the Dublin area. These included a course provided by a Dublin-based hospice, Basic Counselling Skills Course, Family therapy and a post-graduate course at Trinity College. However, the location and time commitment of these courses would prohibit the majority of teachers from participating. It is

interesting to note again that only one of the teachers who participated in the research

questionnaire had received CPD in bereavement and loss. All of these teachers are resident

outside the greater Dublin area. In the Limerick area, Milford Care Centre is recognised as one

of the major providers of courses in bereavement education. These include Bereavement

Support Education Programme and a pilot Thanatology Course (2015). These were outlined by

some of the interviewees (see Appendix G).

Milford Care Centre has also been involved in facilitating a day of bereavement education

during summer courses at a College of Education. Interviewee A outlines this experience and

the challenges faced by the facilitators (see Appendix G). The course had both didactic and

experiential content with the participants being given the opportunity to look at their personal

grief experiences. However, some of the participants found the experience challenging which

had an impact on the success of the workshop. This experience is interesting to the researcher,

as previously in this thesis the question of addressing one's own personal attitude and

experiences and fears regarding death were discussed (Chapter 2:5.3; 4:2). Apparently, some

of the participant teachers of this course were hesitant to expose their personal experiences.

However, Interviewee A expressed some positivity: "I should also say too though in doing this,

where some people started and were extremely anxious and probably very resistant because of

their anxiety, when they had gone through the process, were actually very glad that they had

done it". The Compassionate Communities Project at Milford Care Centre, according to

Interviewee C, has taken the initiative and approached teachers and schools in the project area,

encouraging a proactive approach to grief and loss. A further development was noted in that as

a result of the Haddington Road Agreement, (the outcome of negotiations between public

service management and unions, which took place in May 2013) teachers are required to work

some extra hours which includes CPD. Some of the interviewees were involved in providing school staff with training in bereavement support.

All interviewees involved in bereavement support have responded to emergency calls from schools. Interviewee B referred to a regular type of panic call from schools. Interviewee C reported that: "Over the years yes, when there have been particularly tragic losses in school either by a parent or the loss/death of a child through accidents, the teachers will often ring our service and ask for support". This approach was acknowledged by teachers participating in the research questionnaire who referred to contacting NEPS and CAMHS. Interviewee B considered that teachers are more reactive than proactive and thus it is on a 'need to know' basis that they react to grief. This was further explored by Interviewee C who compared the reaction of teachers to a specific real need as opposed to the suggestion that it might be appropriate to think ahead and be prepared for situations of grief and loss that may affect the school community. This concurs with King-McKenzie who stated:

> Death and dying has become a taboo subject as people are afraid and cannot comprehend what lies beyond it. People are scared that if they acknowledge death or that merely mentioning the word might bring about their own demise.
>
> King-McKenzie, 2011, p.511

On-line support is becoming a growing resource for teachers as indicated by many of the interviewees and teachers participating in the questionnaire. The supports referred to include the ICBN Website where various leaflets are available, '*Listen with eyes, ears and heart*' a video produced by ICBN as well as the CCP Facebook page, the CCP *Let's Talk* series and international websites. Interviewee H points out that: "The feedback from Hospice and from Rainbows is that teachers are looking for something that they can access immediately".

The question of policies within the school structure to support teachers was discussed by some of the interview participants. The comments also reflected in some way the previous insight

145

that as humans we tend to avoid the subject of death until it arrives at our door. According to

Bowie (2000) the topic of death is considered to be 'morbid' and 'too depressing'.

Table 4.5 The opinion of the interviewees regarding bereavement policies in school

You know that schools will only write a policy when they come up against it.
There are guidelines out there for schools but a lot of schools just don't have any policy.
There is a lot of little things that you can do to be prepared…unless its enshrined in policy, it is not going to happen.
So, there is no procedure in place for when the child is returning to school.
You see some schools would say they have no role here because it is not coming from on top…so they say…that is not my role.
I think what can be really helpful and empowering is having guidelines. Certainly, guidelines are enormously helpful, about what is helpful to do and what is not.
I suppose my concern would be that there isn't a consistent need identified for a corresponding response so that whatever happens, it is kind of locally determined.
That was a policy in the school…but it was a policy that was just developed as it happened.
It definitely is not in the agenda of the Teaching Council to be talking to children about death.

These comments are indicative of the lack of consistency within the Irish education system in

dealing with grief and loss both when a bereavement occurs within the school community and

as a curriculum subject. This ultimately has a bearing on the approach within each individual

school regarding death education. This lack of standardization was echoed in the responses to

the questionnaire. As seen in the literature review (Chapter 2: 3.3) many researchers have

called on the need for schools to be supported and guided in the development of policy

documents on bereavement and loss in the school.

The topic of death education was addressed with all participants. The interviewees were asked if they thought there should be a place for death education within the school curriculum and whether it should take on a formal module or be informally introduced where appropriate. All interviewees agreed that it was important that children should be exposed to some form of death education. However, when it came to the idea of a formal death education module there were differing opinions. According to Interviewee B, death education should be formally taught in the school in an age-appropriate manner rather than in a reactive manner when a crisis occurs. "This would be helpful and then children would hear and learn about death in a non-crisis time, when they are not affected by it". Interviewee G was positive about the concept as it would provide children with appropriate language and knowledge. As has been already explored in the literature review and questionnaires, the current curriculum in SPHE affords opportunity for the teacher to formally introduce the topic of death, grief and loss.

However, interviewee C voiced a real concern regarding the possibility of some teachers discomfort in talking about death:

> I often feel that death education and working around grief and loss is not dissimilar to what is required for sex education and that there are very, very strong similarities between the two. So, if somebody has issues and is uncomfortable in aspects of sexuality then they are not the right person to be teaching children around sex education because they will pass this on to their students and I think the same is true around grief and loss".

(Interviewee C)

Many researchers have drawn this parallel between sex education and death education (Pine 1977; Bowie 2000; Jackson and Colwell 2001; Holland 2008). This statement indicates further the need for the teacher, if involved in death education, to have explored, addressed and come to terms with their own fears regarding death.

The informal approach to death education was preferred by most participants. This approach has been encouraged by many researchers and educationalists (Devlin-Friend, 2006; Lowton Higginson, 2003). According to Jackson & Colwell, (2001, p 322): "As death is inevitably a

147

feature of life, it seemed to us that if there were a way of introducing talk of death into the curriculum as an ordinary part of daily life". The opportunities for informal death education are numerous within the present school curriculum.

Table 4. 6 Some of the ways that teachers can introduce some aspects of death, dying, grief and loss, as suggested by the interviewees.

I'm not sure about formal death education modes, I would prefer to see it integrated through SPHE… through history so that it doesn't become a separate subject…now we're doing the death because, death is part of life.
And I know people talk about …well about not putting into curriculum but using existing curriculum to highlight issues around death and dying you could use English and whatever children are doing in classroom to talk about illness or loss or anything.
Perhaps in a historical context… I don't know, I don't know the best way.
We are talking and asking that question in ICBN really… The problem of making it a module is it won't be a compulsory module… so therefore people will avoid it…
I think it is more important that in schools the teachers would have some training about loss and where death education and death in the curriculum could be part of it.
Yes, it is already in the curriculum.
The way I look at this is we are reading books with children…World Wars are full of death. In Science, we are doing life cycles. So, these are all opportunities to link other subjects with SPHE.
I think we can be open to that when it happens incidentally.
I have seen teachers reading books with children class books...books that relate to characters dying… I can see the conversations it brings up during a lesson.

The responses to the final embedded question: **How relevant to this discussion is the growth of multiculturalism in Ireland?** was referred to already but needs to be explored further. The interviewees were asked to comment on whether the now culturally diverse Irish classroom

posed a further challenge to the teacher when coping with death. The thoughts of the two practicing teachers are significantly relevant to the Irish situation.

Interviewee F who teaches in a multicultural situation remarked: "It is definitely difficult to understand where every child is coming from…and especially with the different cultures…for example…with Islam…I have a couple of Muslim children in the class… some are really strict Muslims…and other are just practicing basics…so, just knowing where you are with them is quite difficult and making sure that you are saying the right thing or not saying anything". This is confirmed by ASCO (2015) in saying:

> People adopt the beliefs and values of their culture to meet their unique needs and their current and past experiences. As a result, grief responses within a culture vary from person to person.

> (www.cancer.net)

Interviewee G, who has experience teaching in a school with a religious ethos and now teaches in a multicultural, non-denominational school, recognizes the need within this current situation for sensitivity regarding everyone's culture and religion:

> I have been in both…Yes, it just seemed easier when it was a religious school…most of the children had the same faith…But (when a teacher died) it was like a vacuum over here you couldn't say anything …you can't upset the other cultures.

Further insight into the complexity of challenges was voiced by Interviewee C who referred to the fact that although at present most Irish schools are under the patronage of the Catholic church, the schools are being populated by children from many different spiritual traditions (Appendix G). Interviewee H put a burden of responsibility on the shoulders of the teachers who claimed they could not cope with further challenges posed by the culturally diverse nature of the classroom due to lack of expertise: "I say to them 'nobody can be an expert, but of course you will learn, and it is your duty to learn more about culture'".

Regarding this changed school environment, Interviewee H had words of advice. She emphasised the need for teachers to talk to the family to gain an understanding of their particular belief system. It is important not to give a different story regarding death other than their family tradition to the child. The teacher needs to work with the language of the family. In certain circumstances the teacher needs to come out of their own frame and realise that the needs of the child come first, a teacher "should not introduce beliefs that run counter to the beliefs of the family and confuse the child". This hypothesis was also referred to in the literature review (Chapter 2: 4.5) and also was expressed by teachers participating in the researcher questionnaire. Cohen and Mannarino encourage the teacher to:

> Ask for the family's assistance in educating school professionals. The student and family are the experts about their own cultural practices and mourning rituals. By asking the family for information, professionals not only learn about diverse cultural practices, they also open the door to understanding and trust.
>
> (Cohen and Mannarino 2011, p.128)

Interviewee B spoke from the perspective of bereavement support and differing belief systems that can exist within the same religion. On one occasion, due to this the interviewee admitted: "And in a way, I wasn't able to support them in a way that I ordinarily would". (Chapter 2: 2.3; 4.1; 4.4; Appendix F).

It is interesting to note that again, little reference was made by the interviewees to the Irish Traveller community and their specific belief systems and death rituals. However, according to one interviewee, the Traveller community do not generally participate in programmes delivered by Rainbows Ireland. Based on experience, Interviewee E realised that "they deal with death in a very different way. They would never be relying on anyone outside … they have their own rituals" (see Appendix G).

Overall these interviews were informative and relevant to the research project. The demeanour of the interviewees was positive and in every case the wellbeing of the child was an evident priority. There are two quotes that underline this:

"A good teacher can make a child's life... a bad teacher can mar it... Teachers are hugely significant life shapers for young people"

"Teachers can make or break an experience of death for children...and I don't say it lightly".

4.4 Conclusion

This research project used a mixed method approach as outlined in Chapter 3. The questionnaires and interviews sought to further explore the research question and subsequent embedded questions which were initially investigated in the literature review. The findings of the questionnaires and the interviews have been analysed in detail in this chapter. The overarching aim of the questionnaires and interviews was to elicit information from the participants in relation to their opinions and perceptions regarding the challenges that face the primary school teacher when coping with grief and loss in classroom, with particular interest in the growing multicultural profile of the Irish school.

The findings and proposed recommendations of this research will be discussed and analysed in detail in the next chapter. However, to conclude, this chapter reveals the findings when the analysis of the questionnaire and interviews are combined:

- The gender of the Irish primary school teacher is predominantly female;
- The patronage of the Irish primary school is predominantly Roman Catholic although there is a growing multicultural school population;
- The majority of teachers surveyed did not find it difficult to talk about death in a personal capacity but are less comfortable talking about death in a professional capacity;

- Death is a fact of life. The majority of teachers have had to cope with a bereaved child in their classroom;

- The researcher observed from the questionnaires and speaking with teachers and service providers during the interview process that the skills required from a teacher who is coping with a bereaved child include empathy, compassion, patience, listening and the importance of giving time. The need for sensitivity was frequently mentioned. A sensitive teacher can help a child understand the grief process;

- The qualitative data from the questionnaires and the interviews has shown that many teachers stated that understanding the grieving process of the child is considered of great importance. It is evident that teachers are concerned about upsetting children and fear approaching the topic of death in an appropriate manner. Both teachers and service providers considered the age and maturity of a child to be important when considering death education. Emotional maturity and different levels of development within a typical class creates a challenge for the teacher when addressing death issues;

- There is a reluctance to talk to children about death, as adults feel the need to protect innocence. While the literature review documented the increasing interest in Thanatology internationally, it also recognised the hesitancy amongst some people in discussing death with children. Concerns were voiced by both participants in the questionnaire and interviewees about causing distress to the children and thus increasing children's anxiety by discussing death. This illustrates further the research of Holland (2008, p.416) who found: "In my research, teachers were 'wary of causing an upset' and although they wanted to support bereaved pupils they were unsure as to how to help". Findings from the questionnaires suggest this is consistent with the thinking of some teachers: "I think that I would keep it from young children as long as I could" (Respondent 21). Teachers also have a fear of upsetting the child or saying the wrong thing at the wrong time. This reluctance to discussing death was linked to both the age of maturity of the children and basic lack of skills and confidence in the area of bereavement on the part of the teacher. It was considered inappropriate to talk to a child about death if suicide was the cause of

a death;

- From the interviews and questionnaires it is clear that academic performance as well as the general behaviour of a child can be impacted by a significant death. This can pose a challenge for the class teacher;

- Self-awareness and the need to keep personal emotions on hold can cause stress for the teacher. It can create a sense of disenfranchised grief. Unresolved personal issues around grief in the life of the teacher can pose a challenge;

- There were conflicting opinions regarding whether the teacher should acknowledge the child's loss publicly or whether this could be considered an infringement of the personal life of the child;

- The vast majority of participants in both the questionnaire and interviews are of the opinion that teachers not receive adequate training during ITE to cope with grief and loss in the classroom. As a result of this, the majority of teachers do not feel equipped deal with these challenges;

- However, it was found that currently the Irish Colleges of Education provide students with relevant modules in the area of grief and loss in the life of the child. There was ambiguity amongst the interviewees regarding the attitude of students to this area of study;

- Comments from the teachers involved in this study highlight that in their schools' curriculum constraints are a deterrent to developing a death education module. Lack of flexibility within the school system was voiced as a block to engaging in death education. Class size can be an issue and impede the teacher in supporting a grieving child;

- Data analysis revealed that the majority of teachers who responded to the questionnaire did not have experience of any CPD in the area of grief and loss. All of the participants in this research project agreed that teachers would benefit from and would be interested in participating in In-Service training. There are some courses available but not nationwide. The majority of participants considered that it would be beneficial if there was a personal development element in potential CPD in bereavement and loss. However, the main emphasis should be on the child and loss. Some teachers would

153

argue that classroom experience is the best form of training;

- Data from the questionnaire and interviews highlighted that there is an overall lack of policy regarding bereavement and death within the Irish primary school system. Service providers are often approached by schools when a crisis arises. It is clear from comments that there are no directives and policy support from the Department of Education and Skills relating to the specific area of bereavement and loss support, although there are guidelines available to support schools coping with a critical incident (Responding to Critical Incidences – Guidelines for Schools: DES, 2007). The fact that some participants were unsure if a bereavement policy existed within their schools makes disturbing reading;

- The vast majority of participant teachers considered that their schools do not have a formal death education programme. There was uncertainty amongst the participants of both the questionnaire and interviews whether there should be a formal or informal death education programme within the school curriculum. Some participants suggested that death could be discussed informally in 'teachable moments' or through curriculum subjects that could be used for the purpose of death education. Every instrument of this research highlighted the fear of upsetting children as being a constant concern of the teacher. Respondent Number 6 to the questionnaire expressed this concern: "I'm not sure how you would integrate death into the curriculum without it causing distress to the children" which echoes the findings of Holland (2008) and the experience of Rainbows Ireland;

- The multicultural classroom creates greater challenges for the teacher as expressed in both the questionnaires and interviews. Differing belief systems pose a challenge for the teacher. This is both created by a multicultural classroom as well as differing attitudes to death within families

- The language of loss can vary within cultures;

- Teachers are not always privy to the possible diversities in the private life of a child and this can be a cause for concern.

Chapter 5 will examine these findings in detail and will elicit recommendations, conclusions and possible future research that could be carried out.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

5: 1 Introduction

The intent of this study was to establish the challenges that face the primary school teacher in coping with grief and loss in the multicultural classroom and to examine if these teachers are being given adequate training at ITE. An additional goal was to investigate whether there are existing support frameworks within the primary sector.

A multi-method approach was adopted through:

- An intensive literature review;

- A questionnaire completed by teachers;

- Interviews with both service providers and teachers.

These questionnaires and interviews and the experience of Teacher X (see Appendix H) yielded rich data in relation to the attitudes and perceptions of both teachers and service providers. This study set out to identify how the insights and experiences of teachers and service providers could be utilised to provide an effective response to grief and loss in the classroom. Through triangulation, the findings combine to present a comprehensive picture of these challenges faced by the primary school teacher in coping with the topic of death.

While the previous chapter presented and discussed the research findings from the questionnaires and interviews, the current chapter considers the implications of the findings that emerged during the total data analysis of this study. A number of conclusions will be presented and discussed as derived from the results and findings.

These will be followed, in Chapter 6, by a set of recommendations aimed at the various stakeholders- teachers, schools, parents, children, government and service providers- with the hope that the research presented in this work on this important topic will stimulate further

discussion and may influence the development of an appropriate and culturally embracing policy on bereavement for the Irish primary school.

Finally, recommendations will be presented for further research and development in the area of death education.

5: 2 Summary of the Problem

Death is a reality and teachers are inevitably, during their careers, going to encounter children who are coping with the loss of a loved one. Furthermore, children are naturally curious and want to know the facts of life and death (Jackson and Colwell 2001). The topic of death in the life of the child therefore cannot be ignored, whether as a response to a bereavement or as proactive death education. The literature review confirmed that researchers into child development are generally in agreement that children cannot be shielded from the realities of grief and loss. Historically, exposure to death was an acceptable part of everyday life as more often than not, since death happened in the home, children were naturally exposed to the life cycle. Now, in the era of mass technology, death is an everyday reality bringing into our homes and schools tragic international events and high-profile deaths through multimedia and social media (Chapter 2: 2.1)

The findings of the questionnaire revealed that 72.73%, (which at almost 3 in 4 is a very high percentage), of the participant teachers have taught a child who experienced a significant loss through death during their teaching career. This figure highlights the absolute necessity for the teacher to be confident in their role as a holistic educator. It has been well reported in this thesis that unacknowledged grief can have a detrimental effect on the child's wellbeing (Lenhardt 1997) and that bereavement can have a knock-on effect on many aspects of the child's life including academic performance, sociability and general wellbeing. Thus, there can

be no doubt about the significant role of the teacher in providing effective support for the bereaved child.

5: 3 Summary of results

The previous chapter was concerned with the presentation and analysis of data collected. As has already been outlined, the profile of the participants in both the questionnaire and the interviews was primarily female. This reflects the gender balance within the Irish primary school sector, notably that 86% of primary school teachers in Ireland were female in the 2011/'12 school year. This gender imbalance is also found within the Social Work profession: "evidencing that the percentage of male social workers employed in Ireland in 2005 was 16.8% while females constituted 83.2% of the workforce" (Myres 2010, p.43). Therefore, it can be considered that the findings of this research are not gender biased but accurately reflect the thinking of the Irish primary teaching community and service providers regarding grief and loss in the classroom.

As was outlined in detail in Chapter 3, the response rate to the questionnaire was almost 15%. However, the most surprising element of this was the fact that having addressed seventy teachers attending a summer course, there was only one who participated in the questionnaire. This raises significant questions about whether there is an overall lack of interest in addressing the topic of grief and loss in the classroom that needs to be investigated through further research. Are teachers overwrought and overburdened and therefore unable to address this challenging issue? Does it point to a hesitancy in facing personal mortality and death-related issues? However, it has to be acknowledged that the findings of this research indicate a significant interest on the part of the participant teachers to become more competent and confident in coping with death related issues in the classroom (Chapter 4:2; 4:3).

The age profile of the questionnaire participants ranged from 25-64, with in excess of 68% between 45 and 64 years of age. This high concentration of older participants may be coincidental; however, it has to be taken into account when analysing the findings. It is interesting to note that since the ITE of this older age group, the primary school curriculum was transformed (1999) and the focus on SPHE has increased. Therefore, it is possible that this age profile may influence the attitudes, experiences and understanding towards bereavement, loss and death education of this cohort of participant teachers.

The patronage of the schools of the questionnaire participants underlined the dominance of the Catholic Church in Irish education:

> The vast majority (96%) of primary schools in Ireland are owned and under the patronage of religious denominations and approximately 90% of these schools are owned and under the patronage of the Catholic Church.
>
> (Department of Education and Skills 2013)

This issue of patronage of Irish primary schools which was referred to in all three aspects of this research (Chapters 1:2; 2.:4.6; 2:5.5; 4.2 and 4.3) is currently under review (Coolahan *et al.* 2012). However, the relevance to this study is significant, given the ever-increasing cultural diversity in the classroom and hence the differing belief systems. This raises the question of the ability of teachers in schools under Catholic patronage to respond to and explore the bereavement process of multicultural children.

5: 4 Skills

According to the Oxford Dictionary (2016), the word 'skill' means: "the ability to do something well; expertise". Throughout this research, from the literature review, questionnaire

and interviews and contribution from Teacher X (Appendix H), I was concerned to identify the skills that the primary teacher required in coping with grief and loss in the classroom. This in many ways appeared straightforward with a range of aspirations such as *'empathy',* *'compassion', 'patience', 'listening ear' and 'sensitivity'* considered as important skills. However, the findings have shed light on the fact that the answer is far more complex than a list of words. Skills involve the *ability* to do something well and demonstrate *expertise.* The documented data from the literature review, questionnaires, interviews and Teacher X revealed the following implications and challenges.

On a very positive note, the findings suggest that teachers and service providers have the needs of every child at heart (Rowling 2008), whether bereaved or coming to terms with the fact that death is a reality, and they understand the importance of school for grieving children (Dyregrov *et al* 2013). According to Interviewee D: *"After parents, teachers are the next most important people…They tell teachers when they are sad"* (Appendix G).

In order to meet the child's needs, the teacher needs to realise and acknowledge that children do experience grief (Milton 2006). The necessity for the teacher to have a comprehensive knowledge of the subject matter was highlighted through this research and deemed of great importance. Willis (2002) underlined the importance of knowing how the idea of death is constructed in the mind of the child. During the interview process, again, it was underlined that the teacher needs to have a level of understanding regarding grief and the child : "grief as a normal life experience as opposed to a problem" (Interviewee A, Appendix G). Freud (1918) and Bowlby (1960) both believed that grief is both a normal and healthy reaction to death. However, in light of the findings of this research, normal grief reactions may be culturally influenced. Weeping and wailing may be the 'normal reaction' within the family of one

bereaved child, whereas accepting the loss with quiet dignity may be the ethos of another family.

The experience of grief, as has been explored in the literature review, is influenced by the non-linear developmental stage of the child (Willis 2002). This was confirmed by respondents to the questionnaire where differentiation and accommodating the unique reactions of each child were expressed as a concern when coping with grief and loss in the classroom (see Appendix E). The literature review documented the *Stages of Grief* (denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance) as proposed by Kübler-Ross. However, it was noted that the theory of these stages has been brought into question as grief does not always progress in an orderly fashion, furthermore, regarding children, these stages have not been adequately verified. However, it cannot be denied that a myriad of new emotions and feelings are part of the grieving process. Some respondents referred to their experience that "sometimes children do not know how / what they are feeling and cannot express what they are feeling" (Respondent 21), an observation that tied in significantly with the literature review (Chapter 2: 2.3). Willis (2002) believes that children can learn to talk about their feelings. This further adds to the challenges faced and the skills required from the teacher. Teacher X (see Appendix H) illustrates how in a class situation, the teacher can meet these challenges:

> I began by empathizing, trying to show them that they – and we – were all in the same position, all feeling the same loss. As I discussed my own experience of death, they began to open up and ask questions. Next, I addressed the specific loss of the student in question by asking them to share memories, shifting the perspective from the teacher to the student. By the end of the class, I felt that a common sense of togetherness in loss had been established.
>
> (Teacher X, Appendix H)

The literature review exposed some controversy surrounding the efficacy of *Grief Work* (Stroebe 2001). The literature review unveiled that children need to work their way through and find a way to resolve their grief (Chapter 2: 2.4). The classroom can provide an inviting,

secure environment to aid this process (Charkow 1998). Interviewee A referred to how the teacher can "help the child reframe what they are going through…so by having an understanding of something doesn't take it away but makes it more manageable". A supportive environment at school is created where the child can talk about their loss, ask questions and express their fears and worries (Braund and Rose 2001). Many of the participants in both the questionnaire and interviews highlighted this concept. Teacher X (see Appendix H) outlined very clearly how a class of bereaved children was enabled to work through their grief. This safe environment was described by Kahn (2013, p.99) as a place where children can explore their feelings during "times of crisis".

Grief in the classroom can have such an effect on the teacher that roles are conflicted (Chapter 2:3.6): the teachers needs to be able to both hold control and acknowledge emotions (Rowling 2008). Interviewee H endorsed this view: "so (teachers) need to be able to hold their own emotions and keep them on hold while totally attend to the child or children". The challenge here is for the teacher to be able to maintain composure and at the same time allow the children to see the human side of grief (Rowling 1995). This skill may need to be learned by experience or acquired in workshops providing appropriate experiences through role play as suggested by Interviewee F (see Appendix G). This conflicted role of the teacher was expressed by Teacher X, whose experience of coping with death in the classroom is expressed in Appendix H:

> Staff had been advised to show strength, not to become too emotional in front of the students, so as to provide a "frame" in which they could find security. The students were looking at me, their teacher, for answers, but they were answers I could not give them. To complicate matters, many of them were from different countries and were of different religious and cultural backgrounds. It became clear to me that, in such extreme circumstances, the standard student-teacher model would no longer suffice, a new method would be required.
>
> (Teacher X, Appendix H)

This teacher, when faced with the death of a student, had to creatively find a way to support his pupils. Another significant implication of this is that the teacher who is coping with grief in the classroom needs to be supported by colleagues and management.

A recurrent theme in much of the literature pointed to the need for the teacher to address unresolved personal grief. Many of those who participated in the questionnaire and interviews concurred with Howarth and Leaman (2001) regarding the importance of the teachers in facing their own mortality and being comfortable with the topic of death.

Some teachers participating in the questionnaire were in agreement and aware of the need to learn how to cope with their personal death issues before they try to help children cope with their losses. This need for teachers to be comfortable when talking about death was also endorsed by some interviewees. According to Interviewee C: "I would actually prioritise their own comfort and understanding and self-awareness of grief and loss as being absolutely essential because if somebody is going to struggle with aspects of their own experience of loss, then that would significantly hinder their capacity to respond to the children in the classroom" (Appendix G). This importance of the role of the class teacher in supporting a bereaved child confirms findings by Cullinan and reported in the literature review (Chapter 2: 3.2).

> Teachers will be better able to aid children with the grieving process if they can transcend the fear (so prevalent in our culture) of experiencing the reality or pain of loss.
>
> (Cullinan 1990, p.149)

However, it is important to note that this sentiment was not unanimous amongst the questionnaire participants with one teacher's hesitancy being indicated by saying "Death is such a personal journey" (Respondent Number 6). Cullinan (1990) referred to the 'personal' barrier that may inhibit a teacher addressing the death topic (Chapter 2: 3.5).

The general classroom atmosphere can be affected by the death of a significant person in either the life of a child or the school community. This may manifest itself in many ways: academic, behavioural, emotional (Bowie 2000; Chapter 2.3:8). There is general agreement amongst researchers that the academic performance of a child can be negatively affected in many ways by the death of a loved one (Papadatou *et al*. 2002; O'Brien and McGuckin 2014). The possible challenges for the teacher in coping with these changes in the bereaved child were highlighted through the literature review (Chapter 2: 3.7; 3.8) as well as in the responses to the questionnaires and in the interview process as reported in Chapter 4 . One interviewee endorsed this: " to connect with the child who is struggling. It's very, very difficult because, if you have a child who has very challenging behaviour… it's about trying to not meet that with anger back … to meet it with understanding" (Interviewee E, Appendix G).

Significantly, worrying documented data from the interview process confirmed the findings in the literature review (Chapter 2: 3.8) that in some cases, the bereaved child may suffer from the mocking of peers. Interviewee B (see Appendix F) emphasised this concern as already referred to in Chapter 4:3. It has to be of great concern for the teacher that a child could be isolated due to a significant bereavement. The class teacher needs to be aware of this form of bullying which needs expertise and appropriate skills training to be addressed confidently (Worden 1996). Interviewee B acknowledged that : "teachers have the capacity to reassure children, to make it easier for them and to give them a place of understanding for kindness. They have a capacity… but they don't all use it" (Appendix F).

'*Sensitivity'* was a skill that many participants in both the questionnaire and interviews considered to be important when coping with grief and loss in the classroom. It has been highlighted by Holland (2008) that there are particular events during the school year that

demand this heightened sensitivity from the teacher. Holland (2008) describes this as a 'weather eye' whereby the teacher supports the child during specific events, e.g. birthdays, anniversaries, father's day, mother's day. Bereavement is an enormous and vital experience for children and unfortunately it is not always handled well by teachers and schools.

This *'sensitivity'* also extends to the fact that some children do not want to talk about a recent bereavement in their lives (Worden 1996). Interviewee B's experience in working with bereaved children also confirmed this fact and linked it to the possibility of being teased for being different. This finding is somewhat conflicted with the opposite fact that some children need to talk about their loss and the sensitive teacher needs to allow this to happen and listen carefully to gauge the emotional wellbeing of the child. Milton advises that:

> By being available, by offering the child the opportunity to talk and by really listening to the child's feelings and concerns without being judgmental, teachers provide the child with much needed support.
>
> (Milton 2006, p.59)

This aspect of the role of the teacher was also referred to by Interviewee E:

> I would think that most teachers would know if a child is upset or if something happens and they have an innate …they usually say: "are you OK?'… or whatever. But when it comes to particularly bereavement they don't know what to say. They very often ignore it… which cause problems. So, you have a mother ringing in to say… 'My child went back to school and nobody said anything'…".

Children at this time need the eyes and ears of an understanding teacher. On the one hand, some of the participants in the questionnaire agreed that it is important to talk to children about death: "Yes, we need to speak about death when it happens to other teachers / pupils in the school" (Respondent 21). However, on the other hand, a whole class intervention was found to be a threatening environment for some bereaved children. This was expressed by Interviewee B (Chapter 4:3; Appendix F) who referred to a whole class intervention as "ambushing vulnerable, upset, grieving children". These conflicting viewpoints again indicated the complex nature of bereavement and the challenges faced by the teacher. Clearly, a balance

needs to be achieved and there is, therefore, a significant challenge for the teacher to correctly interpret the needs of the child and then act in an appropriate manner that will effectively support every child in their care.

It was considered to be a challenge, by some teachers, to use the correct and appropriate tone and language to fit specific situations. This need for correct use of language has been referred to in the literature review (Chapter 2: 3.7). Busch and Kimble (2001) referred to the importance of using age and developmentally-appropriate language when talking to children about death.

Whereas this research was not focused on any particular cause of death, suicide was referred to by some of the respondents to the questionnaire. As has been outlined in Chapter 4, the incidence of suicide is high in Ireland and undoubtedly the heretofore reticence around the topic can be a challenge for the teacher and school community. Some teachers acknowledged their anxiety in coping adequately and sensitively in a situation where suicide has been the cause of a death that may affect the school community. As was reported in the questionnaire and interviews, some families choose not to tell a child that a death has been the result of suicide and this level of secrecy can prevent the teacher supporting the bereaved child. Participant Number 17, when asked if there was any situation where discussing death and dying was considered to be inappropriate, replied: "Maybe in the case of a family member's suicide where the child is unaware that it is suicide, when classmates are (aware)". This collusion was echoed by Interviewee E: "parents do different things… some parents tell children others don't and then some of the pals know and tell them out in the yard" (Appendix G). Traditionally, there was a taboo around discussing death by suicide in Ireland, but this reticence may also be due to the particular culture of the family. However, this lack of honesty with the child can have a two-fold negative effect. According to many researchers (Bowlby 1980; Charkov 1998;

McGovern and Tracey 2010), accurate information about a death is paramount for the mental health of the growing child. From the perspective of the teacher, this veil of secrecy exasperates the desire to support and care for the grieving child. The importance of honest communication with children is vital as excluding a child from the truth can ultimately effect the child's trusting nature (Traeger 2011).

This section has outlined the findings of the research regarding the skills that are required of the teacher in coping with grief and loss in the primary school classroom. Through the literature review, questionnaire, interviews, and the experience of Teacher X, it was clearly established that the ability to do this job needs to be acquired through education and skills training. The evident fear of doing and saying the wrong thing when addressing death needs to be addressed. Teachers need to be confident that they can effectively support the children in their care through all aspects of life and death:

> Man, often becomes what he believes himself to be. If I keep on saying to myself that I cannot do a certain thing, it is possible that I may end by really becoming incapable of doing it. On the contrary, if I have the belief that I can do it, I shall surely acquire the capacity to do it even if I may not have it at the beginning.
>
> Mahatma Gandhi

5: 5 Initial Teacher Education (ITE)

Data obtained from all three aspects of the research, literature review, questionnaires, interviews and the experience of Teacher X increased the significance of the first embedded question: Are the colleges of education equipping our future primary school teachers to meet these challenges? Throughout the literature review, researchers shed light on the fact that internationally, teachers do not feel adequately prepared to support a child who has suffered a significant loss through death (McGovern and Barry 2000; Holland 2003; Kahn 2013), nor do

teachers feel confident around the death education topic (Engarhos *et al*. 2013). It was also evident that the very topic of death causes a level of stress in the teaching community that cannot be ignored (Bowie 2000; Milton 2004). Without adequate education regarding death, dying , grief and loss in ITE, this anxiety may never be erased. Evidence revealed that over 95% of the teachers who participated in the questionnaire did not consider that they were prepared on graduation from ITE to cope with grief and loss in the classroom. This is consistent with the findings of Irish researchers McGovern and Barry (2000) and O'Brien and McGuckin (2013). This gap in skills training was considered highly relevant by the interviewees. The participant teachers acknowledged that they had received no input in bereavement or death education at college level. The documented data in this research indicates that service providers also have regularly encountered teachers who have expressed anxiety regarding their perceived lack of skills training in this domain. During the course of this research, the age profile of the participants was noted and highlighted the fact that during their era of ITE the curriculum for SPHE was not as significant as at present. The possibility of this having an influence on these findings should be considered. The increased emphasis on SPHE at ITE has been acknowledged and outlined, however, the data reported in this research, which highlights the lack of skills training regarding bereavement, cannot be ignored.

The literature review (Chapter 2: 5.3) exposed the connection between self-efficacy and the teacher's personal response to the death question. The views of researchers in respect of teachers' needs to address their own fears, emotions, and responses to death in order to effectively respond to the death question in the classroom has been referred to previously in this Chapter (5:4). This raises the question in respect of how colleges of education provide opportunities for personal development as part of ITE. Nonetheless, Galende (2015) suggested that potential teachers do not even have a chance to reflect on grief and loss in the classroom

due to the pressure of curriculum subjects during ITE. Health Education is a feature in all

third-level colleges and based on my experience could be used effectively in this regard

through Café Conversations (Chapter 3: 2).

However, as was depicted in the interviews, historically, teachers were 'trained' to impart

knowledge and manage the classroom (Holland 2008). Interviewee E explained: "You didn't

see your role very much in terms of difficulties that come and the struggles that go on in their

lives…. Your role was much more around the classroom management… the whole curriculum"

(Appendix G). Dyregrov (2013) surveyed a group of teachers in Norway regarding their

attitudes and thoughts about grief in young people and how they look upon their supportive

role. It was found that these teachers did not consider themselves to be psychologists, nor did

they consider that they should be and by implication, there should be limitations on their role.

This is somewhat in line with the thinking of the questionnaire respondent who commented

that: "There are other, more pressing, everyday school matters, like teaching and learning"

(Respondent Number 15).

Respondent Number 21 in the questionnaire remarked that: "Life experience has been the best

education" when referring to bereavement education at ITE. Significantly, this is in agreement

with some of the findings of Kahn (2013) who observed that teachers often have to draw from

their own personal experiences with grief and loss in the absence of adequate training (Chapter

5.3). This may point to the resourcefulness of the teaching community while Brown (2012)

suggested that it was appropriate for the teacher to develop personal skills when coping with

grief and loss due to the impossibility of one set of guidelines suiting all situations.

Thus, in this study I believe I have answered the embedded question very clearly that teachers historically have not been adequately prepared to cope with grief and loss in the classroom. Nevertheless, considering the importance of ITE, it is encouraging to have found that there is a seed change happening in the Irish colleges of education. ITE now provides a growing level of information, training and experiences that will assist the future primary school teacher in supporting the children in their classes around the issue of death (Chapter 2: Table 2.1). Future research will be needed to assess the long-term effect of this increased focus on grief and loss in the classroom. Based on the findings from my study, this is a very welcome development.

In the short term, it is important to note that this research, in interviewing facilitators of modules focusing on bereavement and loss, found that there are conflicting attitudes within the student body towards these modules (Appendix G). Two of the interviewees who conduct some of these courses reported a high level of interest amongst the students and used positive language to describe this: *'interested', 'appreciative' 'huge openness'*. In direct contract to this, two other interviewees have had negative experiences with students. These interviewees have been involved with pre-service teachers on several occasions and expressed great frustration at the apparent lack of interest in the topic. The negative language in this case included: *'few questions', 'fell asleep', 'very little interest', 'lack of maturity', 'lack of interest in the topic'*. As has already been considered, this lack of interest may stem from the fact that the average age group and level of maturity of the ITE student creates a sense of irrelevance regarding coping with loss in the classroom (Neimeyer 1988). On the other hand, it cannot be ignored that the low response rate from teachers to participate in this research gave credence to the belief of Kübler-Ross that we as humans have a natural reluctance to engage in death-related topics and thus teachers need to be facilitated in developing their skills in this area. However, as previously outlined and endorsed by the interviewees unresolved personal issues

around grief in the life of the teacher, fear of death and personal taboos all can pose a challenge (Chapter 2: 5.3).

5: 6 Curricula and pedagogical frameworks

Having established that primary school teachers, both internationally and nationally, do not feel that they have received adequate preparation during ITE to cope with grief and loss in the classroom, it became obvious that this gap in knowledge and skills needed to be addressed. The second embedded question asked: What curricula and pedagogical frameworks are available at both local and national level?

According to Dadds, CPD:

> attends to the development of teachers' understanding of learning, to their sense of voice, their judgement and their confidence to cultivate inner expertise as a basis for teaching and for judging outsider initiatives.
>
> (Dadds 1997, p.31)

The findings discussed in the previous section clearly indicate a need to support and target teachers' professional development in the area of death education. Questionnaire responses revealed that in excess of 95% of the respondents had not availed of any form of post-graduate/in-service development in the area of bereavement and loss. This overwhelming majority has to be considered to be highly relevant to the findings of this research. It cannot be construed as lack of interest on the part of the teachers. It needs to be taken into account that participants of the questionnaire may not have had the opportunity to avail of relevant courses. As reported in the literature review, McGovern and Tracey (2010) found that only three percent of primary schools surveyed in the Galway (Ireland) region had the opportunity to attend any training in the area of bereavement. This is inconsistent with the findings of O'Brien and McGuckin (2013) who found that 67.8% of the schools participating in their study indicated that their staff had received training in the area of bereavement and loss. However, as has

already been noted, the O'Brien and McGuckin study included both primary and secondary schools, and therefore it can be considered that the opportunities for skills training in the secondary school sector may be greater.

Significantly, this current research also documented the lack of relevant summer courses available to the teaching community in Ireland. ICBN provides education on bereavement and childhood bereavement and although it is a national organization, the interview process revealed that due to practical difficulties, the group cannot serve the whole of the country with skills training. A workshop delivered by ICBN in 2016 during Children's Bereavement Week, according to an interviewee member of ICBN was "very well attended by teachers". This is consistent with the findings of Holland (2008) who found that teachers consider the area of grief and loss an important issue within the context of the school. However, the fact that this workshop was held in Dublin inhibits many teachers across the nation from benefiting from this experience and subsequently the knock-on effect is limited. Findings from this research indicate that the bulk of relevant courses and skills training take place in the greater Dublin area, Limerick and Cork. Milford Care Center is the main provider of courses in bereavement studies in the Midwestern region of Ireland. It is notable that these courses are not embedded in state provision. It was also revealed through the interview process that lack of resources is hindering service providers in the provision of courses on bereavement and loss for the primary school teacher. Yet, it has to be noted that there is a positive development through the ICBN and Children's Bereavement Week 2016 when several events were organized nationwide.

On the subject of CPD in the area of grief and loss, one respondent to the questionnaire considered that teaching and learning (curriculum subjects) posed a greater CPD need than training in bereavement and loss. This attitude can be linked with the curriculum overload

problem that was referred to in the literature review and research findings (Chapter 2: 3.5; 4.2; 4.3). However, this negative response is in stark contrast with attitude towards CPD of the majority of participants in this research. McGovern and Barry (2000) found that 90% of participants in their study considered that training in the area would be desirable.

In the absence of post-graduate/in-service development in the area of bereavement and loss, 50% of the participants in the questionnaire confirmed that they had sought information or resources on the subject of death, dying, grief and loss. There were conflicting experiences regarding the availability and suitability of these resources. Some participants referred to the relevant on-line resources. It was interesting to note the comment of one participant: "It's usually catholic based and this is not always the best for the situation". When analysed, this particular teacher is teaching in a DEIS school under Catholic patronage with children from Sikh and Muslim families. The complex nature of the multicultural classroom again is evident.

It is interesting to note, that 100% of the teachers considered that CPD would be helpful and appropriate within the whole school context. The *Café Conversation* concept was described in Chapter 3 whereby a group gathers to very gently help each other to talk about feelings regarding death, dying, loss and care. During my time working on the CCP, I facilitated such a group in a primary school. This is not skill training, though it certainly aids the personal and professional development of the teacher, opens communication between teachers regarding their death experiences and ultimately can provide a healthier approach to grief and loss in the classroom. A further development was noted in that, as a result of the Haddington Road Agreement (2013-2016), teachers are required to do extra hours CPD. Some of the interviewees were involved in providing school staff with training in bereavement support and I had personal experience that confirmed the benefit of this use of time (Chapter 2: 5.4).

Some respondents to the questionnaire were in agreement that it would be beneficial if CPD would address some personal losses of the participating teachers. However, others considered that the course content should focus on the child. This could be construed as hesitancy by these teachers to address personal issues within a professional setting. Interestingly, through the interview process, this reluctance was further confirmed. It was reported by a service provider who has facilitated some workshops for teachers, that when it became apparent to participants that the content of the training would involve experiential learning, that the participants articulated a high level of resistance. However, this interviewee was confident that many of those who were initially reluctant did benefit from the experience (Appendix G). Inconsistencies in research findings regarding the efficacy of death education at college level were discussed in the literature review (Chapter 2: 1.9). Researchers reported positive results from participants on death education courses regarding achieving knowledge of the subject matter, though the level of changes in death fears and anxieties were variable. An experiential rather than didactic approach was more likely to result in decrease of fears (Knight and Elfenbem, 1993).

Regarding frameworks at a local level, it was established that in the Limerick area, Milford Care Centre provides a Bereavement Support Education Programme and a pilot Thanatology Course was held in 2015. The CCP has also developed five-hour experiential workshop. This was piloted with a group of teachers in 2015. The service providers reported that: "the intervention is acceptable and demonstrated both a significant reduction in death anxiety and improvement in self-reported confidence for teachers who participated" (Rhatigan *et al.* 2015). Additionally, in the Midwest Region the Children's Grief Project, based in Limerick, provides a safe and supportive place for children and young people and their families who are grieving.

Support is also available to teachers to help assist children to cope with loss. These programmes, however, are embedded in the voluntary sector and whilst they receive government funding, they are not services that are available nationally and may be perceived as a luxury resource for teachers in the Midwest region.

The study revealed the increased use of technology as a resource for teachers. In the Irish context, leaflets are available on the ICBN and CCP websites. The '*Listen with eyes, ears and heart'* video produced by ICBN has already been discussed. *Let's Talk* leaflets and *Let's Talk* films are another resource produced by the Compassionate Communities Project. Internationally, Winston's Wish, Seesaw and Cruse all provide relevant information for teachers. Interviewee H pointed out that : "The feedback from Hospice research and from Rainbows Ireland is that teachers are looking for something that they can access immediately".

The literature review, questionnaire responses and interviews all recognised the value and support to teachers and school of external agencies. Several researchers (Rowling 1995; McGovern and Tracey 2010) pointed out the need for external agencies and school communities to work together to achieve a public health approach to bereavement. This study, through the questionnaires and interviews, highlighted the fact that schools rely on the advice and support of external agencies during times of crisis regarding bereavement affecting the school community. This is further endorsed by ICBN's belief, as outlined in the literature review, that education efforts need to span from public and community initiatives (2014). Positive steps to achieve this were made by ICBN holding a *Dialogue Day* with key stakeholders in the education sector to look at the needs of bereaved children in the classroom. Rainbows Ireland, Milford Care Centre, CAMHS and NEPS were referred to by both teachers and service providers, in the questionnaire responses and interviews. There were some

difficulties reported by teachers in the response rate from some external agencies. One respondent to the questionnaire voiced the concern that: "Support from NEPS is not always available when needed". Capewell and Beattie (1996) suggest that partnership between schools and external agencies contributes towards the lowering of stress for both teachers and pupils. This research underlines the fact that the teaching community does recognise the value of partnership in addressing death issues.

Essentially the expertise of voluntary agencies in providing training and information needs to be on two levels. At the outset, involving such service providers in curriculum development for teacher training would ensure the ideas are embedded in ITE at an early stage. Subsequently these service providers can then continue to provide support and advice to teachers in practice on a less formal basis. By putting the response to death and dying as a core value within ITE and CPD, teachers in practice will have the confidence and knowledge to seek advice and guidance in responding to such issues when they arise in the classroom.

5:6.1 School Policy

Findings from the literature review (King-McKenzie 2011) and both the questionnaires and interviews confirm that there is predominantly reactionary rather than proactive approach to bereavement within the teaching community when it comes to death-related issues. Participant 6 outlines this reactive approach: "We invoked the Critical Incident Policy and worked off these guidelines. We contact the NEPS and the school's psychologist came and guided us through the process. I had to inform the class that the child had died and was very grateful for the support of the psychologist". This prevalence of a reactive approach can be linked to the question of policies within the school structure regarding bereavement, grief, loss and death education. The comments from both the questionnaires and interviews regarding the lack of

any school policy to respond to death and dying again reflected in some way the previous insight that as humans we tend to avoid the subject of death until it arrives at our door. Data obtained through this research regarding the existence of an actual policy within schools on bereavement in the participants' schools is somewhat ambiguous. Some of the questionnaire respondents were unsure whether a policy existed while some reported that there was no policy in existence, and others referred to the Critical Incident Policy and to the involvement of Rainbows and NEPS in the event of a significant bereavement. When analysed, it was found that less than 50% of the participants were satisfied with this situation. This implies that the majority of teachers are **not** satisfied with the existing situation. The research found that there are some guidelines (NEPS; ICBN; Rainbows) available to teachers in Ireland, but, as also exposed by O'Brien and McGuckin (2014), there are no specific policy documents produced by the DES. This leads to a lack of consistency and lack of standardisation which was evident in the responses to the questionnaire. Clearly, the absence of a unified approach is exacerbated by lack of government policy. This lack of government policy leads to a fragmented and ad hoc response, varied from school to school.

It was noted through the literature review and interview process that neither the DES nor the Teaching Council are actively involved in developing policy documents on grief and loss in the classroom. "It definitely is not in the agenda of the Teaching Council to be talking to children about death", according to Interviewee H (Appendix G). Data obtained also uncovered that in the *Primary School Wellbeing Document* (2015) there is only one mention of bereavement, which indicates that bereavement is not enshrined in procedures and death education does not appear to be a high priority within national initiatives. This consolidates the findings of Mahon *et al*. (1999a, p.103): "Confronted with death, many teachers and other school personnel feel frustrated and helpless, because of a lack of protocol or planned interventions". The data found

through this research is consistent with McGovern and Barry (2000) who highlighted the need

for schools to develop a bereavement policy to increase the confidence level of teachers in

coping with bereavement in the classroom.

These findings on the lack of policy lead me to examine whether there is an appetite amongst

teacher to address grief and loss within a death education framework.

5:6.2 Death Education

As has been outlined in the literature review and through the interview process, death education

within the classroom framework can: "help children develop realistic and healthy attitudes

about death, be more sensitive to the pain of others and develop more effective coping

strategies" (Ayyash-Abdo 2001, p.428). However, there are inconsistences in this regard from

both the findings of previous researchers and this research. It has been observed that some

schools of thought consider any form of death education to be the preserve of parents due to

cultural and religious beliefs (Gordon and Klass 1979; Howarth and Leaman 2001). This was

also a consideration of some of the participants of the questionnaire and interviews. This

viewpoint can prove to be both a real obstacle and also justification for teachers to avoid death

education in the classroom. It also points to the necessity of involving the parent body in any

development of a death education policy. My experience in developing a pilot death education

programme (Chapter 2:5.4; 3:2) and the resistance that was encountered illustrates the fact that

death education is challenging for everyone in the school community- teachers, principals,

management and parents.

The age and maturity of the child has historically given rise to debate regarding the

appropriateness of death education (see Chapter 2: 2.2) and how children conceptualise death.

However, it is my belief that this research highlights the need for death education to be addressed in some form in the primary school, even at a senior class level. However, the ERB and Ethics wisdom of the proposals to include a module entitled: *The journey of life and death,* for 3rd-6th classes has been questioned in the written submissions (NCCA 2016a) Some of the participants in the questionnaire also referred to age-appropriate issues. According to Participant 4: "Junior classes are not ready for general discussion lessons and should receive help at home first".

An issue that arose through the interviews and that was also referred to in the literature review (Chapter 2: 3.8) was the teasing or indeed bullying of bereaved children, which according to the interviewee, typically happened around the age of ten (see Appendix F). Again, this disturbing fact indicates a need for children to be given an understanding of the impact of a bereavement. Through an appropriate death education programme, children can be given knowledge, understanding and skills that will enable them to sensitively respond to their peers in the event of a significant bereavement.

In the absence of national policy it becomes the task of the school to integrate death education into the curriculum. However, the teachers in this study were conflicted in their opinions regarding the inclusion of a specific time for death education in the school curriculum. Over 30% of the respondents to the questionnaire did *not* think there should be specific time give over to death education. This was not consistent with the findings of McGovern and Barry (2000). However, when the responses were further analysed, it emerged that there was strong approval for the use of 'teachable moments', for example when a child's pet dies or a bereavement affects the total school community. This question of formal or informal death education was examined and again there were found to be differing viewpoints. Lee *et al.*

(2009) referred to the dichotomy of opinion regarding a formal or informal approach. The

concept of a formal death education curriculum was explored through the literature review,

questionnaire and interviews. Knott (1979) extolled the benefits of introducing a formal death

education module within the curriculum. Respondent Number 19 was in no doubt about the

importance of a formal approach: "Formally it should be a taught as a specific strand / subject

without a religious element". Some of the interviewees also expressed a belief in the value of a

formal programme rather than a reactionary approach when a crisis occurs. Interviewee B

urges that:

> It should be a part of what schools do anyway rather than in a reactive way… I think it
> should be a natural part of what schools offer. This would be helpful and then children would
> hear and learn about death in a non-crisis time, when they are not affected by it… given
> information that they can store up and file and then if something happens that they have some
> knowledge.
>
> <div align="right">(Interviewee B, Appendix F)</div>

However, the findings of this study indicate that an informal approach to death education is the

preferred option. The questionnaire revealed that "teachable moments" should be used to talk

to children about death informally; through religion, history, visual art and drama being

suggested as possible conduits within the existing curriculum. The experience of Teacher X

(see Appendix H) illustrates how the teacher can effectively use Drama and creative writing to

support the pupils in expressing their grief:

> Instead of being addressed directly, the experience of loss was dealt with through the
> curriculum. First, students read a novel together which addressed the subject; then, they were
> asked to write an essay about "loss". In order to avoid any undue pressure, they were told they
> could write about anything from lost keys to a lost friend. Almost all of them took the
> opportunity to articulate their own personal experiences. Finally, when the time was right,
> students were asked to collaborate in a creative project that would honour the memory of their
> friend. A poem was written; a theatrical performance was staged.
>
> <div align="right">(Teacher X, Appendix H)</div>

As highlighted in the literature review the primary school curriculum affords many such opportunities where children can be taught aspects of death (Chapter 2: 1.9). The SPHE curriculum is aimed at enabling children to develop personal skills as well as promoting mental health and well-being. SPHE also enhances the children's awareness of the cultural diversity of our society. This possible use of SPHE in the area of death education was also confirmed in the questionnaires and interviews: "But in normal circumstances it should be part of the SPHE programme" (Respondent Number 21). Science and history were also suggested as possible conduits, for example Interviewee H advised: "I would prefer to see it integrated through SPHE, through history so that it doesn't become a separate subject…now we're doing the death because, death is part of life". SPHE is a tool to nurture the child's sense of identity and belonging which is significant when addressing the area of grief and loss. It should not be considered that SPHE is merely a classroom subject, but the ethos of SPHE should permeate the whole school system. The core values of care, support, listening and communication that are already within the SPHE curriculum are pivotal for the bereaved child's well-being.

As has been outlined previously, the NCCA is in the process of developing a curriculum in Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics as "important aspect of a child's education involves learning about and understanding the lives, values and traditions of friends, classmates and members of the wider community" (NCCA, 2015). The proposed theme for third to sixth class titled: *The journey of life and death* referred to above would afford opportunities within the classroom to address different beliefs, rituals and customs pertaining to grief and loss. The new Religious Education programme in Ireland, *Grow in Love*, (Chapter 2: 4.7) also provides opportunities for the teacher to address issues regarding grief and loss. The previous programme, *Alive O,* also addressed the topic of Christian rituals for remembering the dead in the month of November. It remains to be seen as to how comprehensively the newly

proposed changes will streamline responses of grief and loss into the curriculum. Nonetheless, these can be considered positive developments by virtue of the fact that there are growing opportunities to address the death question within the curriculum. This research clearly established the positive value of the use of bibliotherapy in the classroom. According to Heath and Cole (2012, pp.243-262): "Stories shared in classroom settings help facilitate communication about death, reduce isolation, and model desired behaviour". This was further endorsed in the interview process where the power of bibliotherapy was highlighted. Interviewee G acknowledged the value of bibliotherapy: "I have seen teachers reading books with children…class books…Books that relate to characters dying… I can see the conversations it brings up during a lesson" (Appendix G).

 I have shown that 'informal' death education can be achieved but this requires a willingness from the teacher to create the opportunities. One interviewee described how a teacher introduced the subject of death throughout her plan for a specific week (see Appendix G). Whereas this could not be described as 'informal' or 'formal', it was using the existing curriculum to inform, guide and educate the pupils. Leviton (1977, p.41) suggested that "formal and informal death education, like education about human sexuality, should be developmental and systematic".

A further impediment regarding the introduction of death education in the primary school was found in all three aspects of this research. The results from this study show that time constraints are an issue for teachers who feel pressures to deliver an over-crowded curriculum. Lowton and Higginson (2003) referred to this time and curriculum pressure which is an issue being reviewed by the NCCA. Respondent Number15 highlighted this by saying that: "There are other, more pressing, everyday school matters, like teaching and learning…there are other

areas where teachers need to up skill first, like the teaching of science, maths, cross curricular links, deep learning etc. etc.". On the basis of their own experiences, both teachers and service providers revealed that an already over-crowded curriculum and administration demands are further stumbling blocks for death education in the classroom. The introduction of the *Literacy and Numeracy Strategy* (2011) is perceived to be adding to the time pressure and is limiting the scope for the development of death education either formally of informally embedded within appropriate subjects.

Class size was referred to in the interview process as a problem for the teacher. However, it was a surprising element of this research that this issue of class size was not more commonly referred to as a challenge for the teacher participants of the questionnaire. Dyregrov *et al.* (2013) considered that lack of flexibility within the school system presented a challenge for teachers in their support for a grieving child. This again could be considered a planning and policy issue. It is clear that in order to implement any kind of death education programme, either formal or informal, there needs to be collaboration between schools, parents and the DES.

5.7 Cultural diversity

On 22nd April 2017, Ireland gained 3,000 new citizens from 120 different countries. Since citizenship ceremonies were first introduced in June 2011, a total of 124 ceremonies have been held and a total of 76,000 applicants have received their Certificate of Naturalisation. In total, people form 178 different countries have become Irish citizens since 2011.

(Russell, C. The Journal.ie, 2017)

The changes in the profile of Irish society must influence the approach we take to addressing the challenges of grief and loss in the classroom. The literature review (Chapter 2:4) dealt in great detail with the impact of a changing society, however, it was noted that there is a lack of

published research on the challenges that cultural diversity pose (Klass 1999; Haine 2008; NCA 2014). Specifically, there is a noticeable gap in published research regarding how a culturally diverse classroom impacts on the challenges that face the Irish teacher when coping with grief and loss. Teacher X (see Appendix H) was aware of the challenges of supporting a multicultural class in their loss of a peer:

> To complicate matters, many of them were from different countries and were of different religious and cultural backgrounds… Most challenging, however, was the necessity of taking into account the various religious backgrounds which respond in very different ways to death… At the same time, it was important to maintain focus and discipline in a way that respected the different religious backgrounds
>
> (Teacher X, Appendix H)

This research aimed to start to fill this gap and extend knowledge and understanding of the topic.

Evidence from the questionnaire outlined the multitude of cultures and religions that are now populating the Irish primary school: "Polish, Bangladesh, Moroccan and other ethnic minority children", "RC, Sikh , Muslim , non-believers", "many faiths in our school and children whose family have no faith", "Catholic, Orthodox, Buddhist, Muslim, Jehovah's Witness faith", "All religions. Catholic, church of Ireland, Muslim, Hindu", "Indian, African, Philippine, Pakistan" and "wide range of different race/religion". Over 85% of respondents believed that the multicultural classroom creates more significant challenges for the teacher. It is interesting to note that **no** respondent to the questionnaire referred to children from the Irish Traveller community being components of the multicultural classroom. The Travellers community are large part of Ireland's diverse cultural community making up 10% of the primary school population. Their specific beliefs and rituals regarding death need to be accommodated and understood by the primary school teacher.

Each aspect of this research highlighted the challenges posed for teachers by the different

attitudes and belief systems of families and differences of thought on how to introduce the death topic to children (4:3; 4:4). One of the interviewees expressed clearly the challenge of even the different approach within families of the same religion (4:3; Appendix F). Jones *et al.* (1995) recommended that educators must gain an understanding of parents' attitude towards bereavement and the child's education. The comments of some interviewees confirmed this responsibility of the teacher to become knowledgeable regarding the cultural and religious practices of the children. According to Interviewee H: "the other thing is not to give the children a different story to what the family does" (see Appendix G). It was suggested that the teacher and school needs to make a concerted effort to communicate with each family to establish their belief systems. Barrett (1995, p. 87) advises that: "Sensitivity to differences in culture, age, gender, and the type of loss must be recognized". As was found in the literature review (Chapter 2: 4.3), two significant conferences have been held internationally with the aim of increasing the cultural competence of professionals while supporting a multicultural society through grief and loss. The findings of this research from the questionnaire and interviews is also consistent with the findings of Cohen and Mannarino (2011).

A further concern expressed by participating teachers was the language of loss and how it varies within different cultures and religions. Milton (2006, p.59) suggests enlisting the help of parents to "explore these cultural and religious differences together thus developing more understanding of each other". This again emphasises the importance of involving parents in issues regarding grief and loss and was expressed by questionnaire participants (4:2). One interviewee stressed the importance of building:

> collaborative relationships with the parents…collaborative relationship where there is real respect…where the teacher knows that this parent actually knows this child a lot better than you do … To move out of the 'expert' position and to take a one-down position and really listen to the experience of the parent. We need to talk to the parents.
>
> (Interviewee H, Appendix G)

Data also recorded the need to respect the individual family backgrounds. Cross-cultural understanding was explored in detail (Chapter 2: 4.3) in the literature review. The Irish Traveller community and their particular rituals around death (McQuillan 2013) was documented in the literature review. The study revealed through interview process that children from the Traveller community do not generally avail of programmes delivered by Rainbows Ireland (Chapter 4: 3; Appendix G). The teacher needs to be familiar with the traditions and death belief systems of the children in their care in order to provide relevant, effective and sensitive support for bereaved children. This need for cross-cultural understanding increases the challenges faced by the teacher when coping with grief and loss in the multicultural classroom.

While the majority of the participants considered cultural diversity to be a further challenge, it should be pointed out that one questionnaire participant considered that: "Death is death. The science of death is the same for all cultures" (Respondent Number 15). This, it has to be said, is inconsistent with all other participants and in particular with the interviewee who described the multicultural factor as a 'minefield' (Chapter 4: 3; Appendix G).

There was found to be a link between the decline in religious influence and the increase in thanatology as a science (Chapter 2: 1.5). In Ireland, the declining involvement in structured religion is confirmed in Census 2016, which uncovered a 73.3% increase in the number of Irish people with 'no religion'. In the context of death, this is significant, as according to Knight and Elfenbin (1993) religious beliefs can be instrumental in lowering levels of death anxiety. This is consistent with evidence from a participant in this study who found that, when teaching in a school with a religious ethos, there seemed be a greater level of comfort and support in the case of a bereavement within the school community (Chapter 4: 3; Appendix G).

It has been mentioned how the Religious Education programmes (*Alive-O and Grow in Love*) in the Irish primary school provides opportunities for the teacher to address issues regarding grief and loss. However, it was interesting to note that few teachers involved in the study highlighted the potential use of the RE programme in the schools in the area of death education. This may be indicative of the changed profile of Irish society. In Ireland's growing secular society religion is decreasing in significance. However, over 90% of primary schools are still under Catholic patronage, yet the 2016 Census data shows that Islam, Orthodox Christianity and Hinduism are the fastest growing religions. Teachers in schools need to be familiar with death rituals and beliefs surrounding death in diverse belief communities.

The findings of the present study underscore comprehensively and convincingly the increasing challenges posed by a classroom of diverse cultural experiences.

In the final chapter, I will propose recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 6   CONCLUSION

6: 1 Recommendations

Based in the analysis and conclusions of this research, a number of recommendations are now presented for the benefit of many stakeholders -teachers, schools, service providers parents and most especially children. The limitations of this research has already been discussed (Chapter 3: 8), however, the significance of this research cannot be denied. It is true to say that the use of focus groups would perhaps have further contributed to answering the research questions and I suggest their usage in further work in the area. However, this was not possible on this occasion.

1. Initial Teacher Education

All aspects of this research pointed to the fact that, internationally, teachers agree that their ITE did not provided them with the skills to cope with the challenges of grief and loss in the classroom. As reported in Chapter 4, in excess of 95% of participants of the questionnaire and 100% of interviewees reported that ITE has insufficiently prepared them to approach and appropriately support students who are struggling with grief. This data is consistent with the findings of several researchers (Reid and Dixon 1999; McGovern and Barry 2000; Holland 2004; King-McKenzie 2011). This deficit must be addressed by the educators of ITE as Perry (2004, p.65) stressed: "responders cannot effectively execute their jobs if they perceive that their training has been inadequate". There is a clear need to develop skills and interventions for teachers and those studying to become teachers. This training and education could include:

1. A broad-based knowledge of childhood bereavement;

2. Developmental considerations;

3. How children conceptualise death;

4. Tasks of mourning;

5. How to create a safe environment;

6. Classroom dynamics in the event of a bereavement;

7. Modelling appropriate response;

8. Death education;

9. Resources available;

10. External agencies;

11. Cultural diversities;

12. Personal response of the teacher to death.

It has been noted that in Ireland currently, students at ITE are being given some education and experiences in the area of bereavement. This is a very positive development and the effectiveness of this should be measured by future research. Nonetheless, based on this research, the lack of maturity of some pre-service teachers may indicate the need for alternative training in the form of CPD.

2. Continuous Professional Development

Based on the findings of this research, there is a strong recommendation for the provision of CPD for the primary school teacher in the area of grief and loss. According to ICBN (2014): "the Department of Education should promote a whole school approach to support a bereaved child. This would include incorporating children's grief into professional training and providing accessible continuing professional development". The findings of this research indicate limited evidence of this recommendation being incorporated into policy development. The lack of available courses was outlined and needs to be addressed by the DES in collaboration with the relevant organisations (e.g. NCCA; Teaching Council; INTO). These potential courses must be available to teachers nationwide. Resources, both financial and personnel, needs to be provided to the services providers so that they can be facilitated in developing a world class bereavement education service for primary school teachers.

Workshops could be organised as part of a whole-school development plan.   It is a recommendation of this research that the DES allocate sufficient funding for these workshops. The current DES budget highlighted the ongoing commitment to supporting literacy and numeracy. This needs to be extended beyond these subjects. The Teacher Centres located in each county could act as conduits and facilitators for these workshops, availing of the expertise of organisations such as ICBN, Milford Care Centre, Rainbows and NEPS. Access to appropriate CPD would ensure that the expertise of the teacher is developed. The courses should ideally cover the topics as outlined for ITE.

The findings of this research indicated that through ITE and CPD, awareness, knowledge and understanding of support agencies, resources and literature on this area would be achieved (Eiser *et al.* 1995). Resource packs, leaflets and information, including information on ICBN ('*Listen with eyes, ears and heart'*), CCP (*Let's Talk series*), Rainbows and all agencies should be made available to pre-service and in-service teachers.

3. Policy

The inclusion of death education and how to support bereaved children should be addressed in school policy, classroom management and curriculum planning. In 2014, the ICBN underlined the need for modules to be developed as part of SPHE focusing on death education for children and in the ITE curriculum to enable teachers to deal with issues around death effectively.

This thesis revealed that there is unanimous agreement for an urgent need to address school policy in Ireland regarding death education and coping with grief and loss in the classroom. I recommended that the DES and the Teaching Council, as a matter of urgency, in conjunction with the teachers and service providers and parents, become actively involved in developing policy documents on grief and loss in the classroom.

The declining involvement in structured religion (see Census 2016), has implications for the Irish primary school as religion no longer provides a ritual structure or support mechanism for many children who are bereaved. Furthermore, the issue of 96% Roman Catholic patronage remains to be resolved in order to embrace the culturally diverse school population. McGovern and Barry (2000, p. 332) referred to the: "homogeneous nature of Irish society with regard to religion and school education policy". In light of the ever-changing profile of Irish society, the implications for the primary school ethos needs to be readdressed.

A public health approach, as proposed by the HSE (2013), to promote the health of everyone by developing policies, practices and a supportive environment should be adopted by schools regarding grief and loss. NEPS currently plays an important role by working with schools in planning for and supporting the school community around critical incidents. I believe that this role could be extended to supporting, via the schools, broader preparation for all bereavement and loss.

School policy also needs to include practical support for the teachers within the system. As a consequence of this research, I recommend that a system is put in place in each school whereby the records of children, including any incidents of bereavement, would be available to all who are directly involved with individual children in order to ensure continuity of care. School policy should also include provision to ensure care of the teacher in a situation of particular stress related to a bereavement. The personal wellbeing of the teacher needs to be considered and provided for within school policy.

4. Death Education

The concept of death education in the primary school, both formal and informal, was closely examined throughout this study. Based on all the findings, through the literature review, questionnaire and interviews, it has been demonstrated that there is strong evidence for the need for some form of death education in the primary school. Children cannot be shielded from death (Wass and Shaak 1976; Chapter 3: 6). There is urgent need for a coordinated approach.

There is some argument in favour of a formalised death education curriculum subject. However, the climate for this would not appear to be ripe at present. The topic of death can be wisely addressed through 'teachable moments', however, and the findings of this research clearly indicate the possibility that current practice is *ad hoc*. Therefore, there is need for a more defined approach. I strongly recommended that the current curriculum would be used to integrate elements of death education in a natural fashion, e.g. SPHE, R.E., Science, Literature. Bibliotherapy, the use of literature to help children explore the meaning of grief and loss, has also been proposed as an effective tool to be used by the teacher both through the interview process and literature review (Klingman, 1980; Heath and Cole 2012; Appendix G). However, this still demands a conscious effort on the part of the class teacher to prepare material rather than expecting bereavement education to happen without putting in the conscious preparation that is required around all areas of the school curriculum.

5. Multiculture

This study has endorsed the belief of several researchers (Rosenblatt *et al*. 1976; Fonseca and Testoni 2011, 4:2; 4:3) of the importance of cultural awareness on the part of professionals when working in the area of death education. Nevertheless, there is a need for a deeper

analysis of the situation. There is extensive research available on thanatology, death education, bereavement and loss. However, there have been few published studies that address the specific situation in the Irish primary school with its growing diversity of cultures and the attendant challenges and opportunities that this poses for the primary teacher. The NCCA (2005) *Intercultural Education in the Primary School* needs to be updated as guidelines for the primary school. Dialogue needs to be promoted.

ITE needs to play a greater part in the preparation of future teachers in coping with grief and loss in a multicultural classroom. McGovern and Tracey (2010) suggested that multiculturalism and diverse cultural experiences in the schools' system could be addressed in ITE. This research recommends that this is a matter of urgency regarding cultural interpretation and belief systems regarding grief and loss. It is recommended that teachers be knowledgeable about a child's cultural background, giving respect for individual differences in grieving children. It is beholden on all who are interacting with children to have, at the very least, a broad understanding of the different cultural beliefs, customs and rituals when a death occurs.

6: 2 Further Study

- The thrust of this study could be repeated with a larger cohort of teachers and service providers in different schools throughout Ireland, as conclusions drawn above are limited by the small scale and length of the study. A more thorough understanding of teachers' experiences and concerns is needed and would greatly benefit the whole school community. Focus groups would further enhance future research.

- In a society that is changing so rapidly, it is extremely important to address the impact of this within the primary school classroom . Therefore, it is recommended that a large-scale survey of the different challenges that are faced in the multicultural setting should be conducted.

- This research suggests the value of a cross cultural comparison of how children are exposed to and relate to death. Information concerning parental beliefs and values and whether there are different procedures in place for grieving children, could be investigated in order to influence education policy.

- Further study could be related to the role that religion plays in death attitudes from a traditional Roman Catholic/ Christian standpoint as well as the current diversity of religions and the growing population with 'no religion' (Census 2016) in Ireland.

- It is proposed that research is needed to establish how current ITE programmes in the area of bereavement and loss are impacting on the confidence and effectiveness of the teacher in coping with grief and loss in the classroom.

- This research investigated the impact of multiculturalism on the primary school classroom with regard to grief and loss. Interculturalism in the primary school is the aim and aspiration of the DES. The scope of this thesis did not address the diversity of culture that exists (or does not exist as the case may be) within the pre-service teacher population. This is recommended as important future researcher material

6:3 Concluding Remarks

This research was undertaken as a consequence of personal interest in the area of grief and loss. My experience as a teacher, ITE Work Placement Tutor, Bereavement Support Facilitator, Compassionate Communities Project worker, parent and grandparent has alerted me to the fact that death is an issue that we all must face and children are not exempt. As adults, it is our natural reaction to protect children from sadness and pain, but protection does not mean lack of openness. Teachers take on the role of protecting the children in their classroom. They are acting 'in loco parentis' with legal and moral obligations; teachers by nature are caring and concerned for the well-being of the children in their care.

My purpose for this research project was to open up the discussion of death education and how it might provide life skills for children in the event of any bereavements they may face. Many sources describe the needs of grieving children. Resources giving advice to teachers are widely available, yet all evidence points to the fact that teachers do not feel confident in talking to children about death. Less than 5% of participants in this research have had the opportunity to avail of CPD in the area of grief and loss. The topic of death causes stress in the teaching community. Teachers need support to work on their own grief experiences in order to attain confidence as well as competence in coping with bereavement in the classroom. Curriculum overload and time constraints are a very real cause of pressure for the primary school teacher. The changing profile of the Irish classroom due to the ever-growing cultural diversity needs to be intrinsically linked to this discussion. Nonetheless, there is limited evidence of a conscious effort to recognise the extra challenges posed by the culturally- diverse classroom. Teachers now need to be knowledgeable about the multiple cultures, rituals and belief systems of their pupils and families.

Towards the concluding months of my research an event came to my attention that brought

together in reality all of the understanding that I had gained through the literature review, questionnaires and interviews regarding the added challenge to the teacher in coping with grief and loss in the classroom. A young boy collapsed and died during football training. He attended a multicultural, non-denominational school. The boy's teacher (Teacher X) in the school that the boy attended is known to me personally. I spoke with the teacher several times about the challenges that he faced in coping with this bereavement. The content of this thesis became a reality (see Appendix H).

This death happened at the start of a weekend and there were a series of text messages to the teachers, but as *school protocol* was not clearly defined, this teacher was unclear regarding a *bereavement policy*. The teacher was emotionally shattered by the loss of his pupil but on returning to the classroom had to 'hold it together' for the sake of the class… *disenfranchised grief*. He described to me the varying levels of distress and understanding of grief within the class, underlining the necessary *developmental considerations*. The importance of maintaining routine and providing *a place of stability* was clearly important for the wellbeing of the pupils. In this case, the teacher adopted a *holistic approach*, he acknowledged the great loss, encouraged the pupils to talk and used the combined creativity of the class to remember their friend. This also enabled the children to work through the *tasks of mourning*. However, one of the greatest challenges to this teacher was the multicultural class and the diversity of religious beliefs and rituals of the pupils and their families. This in itself impacted on *classroom dynamics* and it became imperative that both the teacher and students would grow in *cross cultural understanding*. The teacher described to me the compounded challenges of differing rituals and the role of the teacher. In some cases, the teacher, in solidarity, will attend a funeral, in other situations, this is neither possible nor appropriate. It has become evident to me that it is beholden on the class teacher to be aware and knowledgeable regarding the *religious beliefs, rituals and customs* of their pupils' family. Although this event involved children of an older

age-group, I believe the experience contributes significantly to the overall thrust of this research. The challenges that this teacher faced confirmed the triangulated findings of the literature review, questionnaires and interviews and therefore endorsed the overall relevance and importance of this research project.

As was acknowledged in the opening chapter, interculturalism, rather than multiculturalism, is the objective of the NCCA (2005). This is indeed laudable and should be the inclusive model to be adopted in our country of diverse culture. However, it must be concluded that the current classroom of children from many different cultures and traditions is both significant and relevant to the overall discussion of this thesis regarding the challenges that face the primary school teacher in coping with grief and loss in the multicultural classroom.

On a very positive note, the resourcefulness of Teacher X exhibits an example of how and what can be done by the teacher to support the bereaved in their care and help the children reframe what is happening in their lives. It is my expressed wish and hope that the educators and policy makers of this nation that was traditionally noted for its scholarship, would consider, reflect upon, discuss and take action from the significant and relevant findings of this thesis.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Bibliography

Abdel-Khalek, A. (2004) 'The Arabic scale of death anxiety', *Death Studies,* 28 (5), 435-457.

Akerman, R. and Statham, J. (2011) *Childhood bereavement: a rapid literature review,* London: Childhood Wellbeing Research Centre.

Albom, M. (1997) *Tuesdays with Morrie,* New York: Doubleday.

Alston, M. and Bowles, W. (2003) *Research for Social Workers: An Introduction to Methods.* Canberra: Allen & Unwin.

Alsubaie, M. A. (2015) 'Examples of Current Issues in the Multicultural Classroom', *Journal of Education and Practice*, *6*(10), 86-89.

American Society of Clinical Oncology (ASCO) (2015) *Understanding grief within a cultural context* (online), available: www.cancer.net (accessed 19 Nov. 2016).

Andrews C. and Marotta, S (2005) 'Spirituality and coping among grieving children: a preliminary study', *Counselling and Values,* 50(1), 38-50.

Anthony, S. (1940) *The child's discovery of death,* New York: Harcourt Brace.

Anthony, S. (1972) *The discovery of death in childhood and after,* New York: Basic Books.

Archer, J. (2001) 'Broad and narrow perspectives in grief theory: Comment on Bonanno and Kaltman', *Psychological Bulletin,* 127(4), 554-611.

Aries, P. (1974) *The Western attitudes toward death: From the Middle Ages to the present,* translated by P. M. Ranum, Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press.

Association for Death Education and Counseling (2015) *Honouring Diversity –Dying, Death and Bereavement in a Multicultural World- Conference programme* (online) available www.adec.org (accessed 15 May 2015).

Attig, T. (2004) 'Meanings of death seen through the lens of grieving', *Death Studies,* 28, 341-360.

Atkinson, T. L. (1980) 'Teacher intervention with elementary school children in death related situations', *Death Studies,* 4(2), 149-163.

Aynsley-Green, A., Penny, A. and Richardson, S. (2012) 'Bereavement in childhood: risks, consequences and responses', *BMJ supportive and palliative care,* 2(1), 2-4.

Ayyash-Abdo, H. (2001) 'Childhood Bereavement: What school psychologists need to know', *School Psychology International*, 22(4), 417-433.

Baggerly, J. and Abugideiri, S. E. (2010) 'Grief Counselling for Muslim Preschool and Elementary Children', *Journal of Multicultural Counselling and Development,* 38 (2),112-124.

Baker, J. E. (1992) 'Psychological tasks for bereaved children', *American journal of orthopsychiatry,* 62(1), 105-116.

Balk, D. E. (1999) 'Bereavement and spiritual change', *Death Studies,* 23, 485-493.

Balk, D. E. (2004) 'Recovery following bereavement: an examination of the concept', *Death Studies,* 28(4), 361-374.

Balk, D. E. (2004) 'Death and its meaning: Introductory statement from the guest editor', *Death Studies,* 28, 287.

Bandura, A. (1983) 'Self-efficacy determinants of anticipated fears and calamities', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 45(2), 464-469.

Barber, E. (2014) *Is daddy coming back in a minute*, TedX Talks (online) available youtube.com (accessed 10 January 2017).

Barrett, R. K. (1995) 'Children and traumatic loss' in Doka, K.J. ed., *Children mourning, mourning children,* Washington, DC: Hospice Foundation of America, 85-88.

Barrett, R. K. and Heller, K. (2002) 'Death and Dying in the Black Experience', *Journal of Palliative Medicine,* 5, 5.

Bell, J. (2010) *Doing your research project: A guide for first-time researchers in Education and Social Science,* 4th ed. London: Open University Press.

Berg, C. (1978) 'Helping children accept death and dying through group counselling', *Personnel and Guidance Journal*, 57(3), 169-173.

Beyea, S. C. and Nicoll, L. H. (2000) 'Collecting, analyzing, and interpreting focus group data', *Acorn Journal, 71*(6), 1278-1283.

Black, D. (1998) 'Coping with loss: Bereavement in childhood', *British Medical Journal*, 316, 931-933.

Black, S. (2005) 'When chidden grieve', *American School Board Journal,* 192 (8p), 28-30.

Bonanno, G. A. (2001) 'New directions in Bereavement Research and Theory', *American Behavioural Scientist,* 44, 718-725.

Bonanno, G. A. (2001) 'The crucial importance of empirical evidence in the development of bereavement theory: reply to Archer', *Psychological Bulletin,* 127(4), 561-564.

Bonanno, G. A. and Kaltman, S. (1999) 'Toward an integrative perspective on bereavement', *Psychological Bulletin,* 125(6), 760-776.

Bordere, T (2009) 'Culturally Conscientious Thanatology', *The forum, Association for Death Education and Counselling*, 35(12), 1.

Bouchard, G. (2011) ' Qu'est-ce que l'interculturalisme / What is Interculturalism ?' *McGill Law Journal/Revue de droit de McGill*, *56*(2), pp.395-468.

Bowie, L. (2000) 'Is There a Place for Death Education in the Primary Curriculum?', *Pastoral Care in Education,* 18:1, 22-26.

Bowlby, J. (1960) 'Grief and mourning in infancy and early childhood', *Psychoanalytic Study of the Child,* 15, 9-52.

Bowlby, J. (1969) *Attachment and loss:1*, London: Hogarth.

Bowlby, J. (1963) 'Pathological mourning and childhood mourning', *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association, 11(2), 500-541.*

Bowlby, J. and Parkes, C. M. (1970) 'Separation and loss within the family', in Anthony, E.J. and Koupernik, C.M., eds., *The child in his family*, Chichester**:** Wiley, 197-216.

Boyle, P. (2000) 'Multicultural health care', *World of Irish Nursing*, 8 (7), 14–15.

Braun, V. (2006) 'Using thematic analysis in psychology', *Qualitative research in psychology,* 3(2), 77-101.

Braund J. and Rose, J. (2001) 'Bereavement education for childcare professionals', *Journal of Child Health Care,* 5(2), 66-70.

Brahm Levey, G. (2012) 'Interculturalism vs. multiculturalism: a distinction without a difference?' *Journal of intercultural studies*, *33*(2), pp.217-224.

Brown, E. F. and Goodman, R. (2005) 'Childhood traumatic grief: An exploration of the construct in children bereaved on September 11', *Journal of Clinical Child and Adolescent Psychology,* 34(2), 248-259.

Brown, E. (2012) *Loss, change and grief: An educational perspective*. London: Fulton.

Busch, T. and Kimble, C. (2001) 'Grieving children: Are we meeting the challenge?', *Paediatric Nursing,* 27(4), 414-418.

Capewell, E. and Beatie, L. (1996) 'Staff care and support' in Lindsay, B. and Elsegood, J., eds., *Working with children in grief and loss,* London, Harcourt Brace.

Campbell, M. (2009) 'Ireland's multicultural classrooms and initial teacher training: the convergence of culture and pedagogy' paper presented at *Annual Conference for National Academy for the integration of Research, Teaching and Learning. Dublin* 111-115.

Carverhill, P. (2002) 'Qualitative research in thanatology', *Death studies,* 26, 195–207.

Carroll, B. (2010) *Audit of Childhood Bereavement Services in Ireland* unpublished thesis (M. Sc.), Irish Hospice Foundation/ Royal College of Surgeons Ireland.

Central Statistics Office (2011) *Census 2011* (online) available www.cso.ie. (accessed 12 Oct 2015).

Central Statistics Office (2016) *Census 2016* (online) available www.cso.ie. (accessed 5 May 2017).

Chan, C., Chow, A., Ho, S., Tsui, Y., Tin. A. and Koo, B. (2005) 'The Experience of Chinese Bereaved Persons: A Preliminary Study of Meaning Making and Continuing Bonds', *Death Studies,* 29(10), 923-94.

Charkow, W. (1998) 'Inviting children to grieve', *Professional School Counselling,* 2 (2), 117-123.

Childers, P. and Wimmer, M. (1971) 'The concept of the death in early childhood.', *Child Development,* 42, 1299–1301.

Churchill, L. (2003) 'Thanatology: its end and future' in Corless, I., Germino, B. and Pittmon, M., eds. *Dying, death and bereavement: A Challenge for a living*, 2nd ed., New York, Springer, 345-356.

Clarke, A.M., Bunting, B. and Barry, M. M. (2014) 'Evaluating the implementation of a school based emotional well-being program: a cluster randomised controlled trial of Zippy's friends for children in disadvantaged primary schools', *Health education research,* 29(5), 786-798.

Clough, P. and Nutbrown, C. (2012) *A student guide to methodology,* 3rd ed., London Sage.

Cohen, L., Manion, L. and Morrison, K. (2007) *Research Methods in Education*, 5th ed., London: Routledge.

Cohen, J. A., and Mannarino, A. P. (2011) 'Supporting children with traumatic grief: What educators need to know', *School Psychology International,* 32(2), 117–131.

Compassionate Communities Project (2013) *Let's Talk* (video) Milford Care Centre available: https://www.compassionatecommunities.ie/video-reel (accessed Dec 2013).

Condon, J. (2015) 'The multicultural classroom: how can our schools ensure a more stable, diverse society', *The Irish Times*, 24 Feb.

Coolahan, J., Hussey, C. and Kilfeather, F., (2012) 'The forum on patronage and pluralism in the primary sector', In *Report of the Forum's Advisory Group*, (online) available: www. education.ie.

Corr, C. A. (1993) 'Coping with dying: Lessons that we should and should not learn from the work of Elisabeth Kübler-Ross', *Death Studies,* 17, 69-83.

Corr, C.A. (2002), 'Teaching a college course on children and death for 22 years: as supplemental report', *Death studies,* 26, 595-606.

Corr, C. A. and Balk, D. E., eds. (2010) *Children's Encounters with Death, Bereavement and Coping,* New York: Springer.

Costa L and Holliday, D. (1994) 'Helping children cope with the death of a parent', *Elementary School Guidance and Counselling,* 28 (3), 206-214.

Crase, D. R. and Crase, D. (1995) '*Responding to a Bereaved Child in the School Setting*' US: Department of Education.

Creswell, J. W. (2007) *Qualitative inquiry and Research design*, 2nd ed., California: Sage.

Cruse Bereavement Care, *Children's understanding of death* (online), available: http://www.cruse.org.uk/Children/children-understanding-death (accessed January 2016).

Culhane, H. (2009) 'Group work with bereaved children', *Bereavement Care*, 23 (2). 22-24.

Culhane, H. (2015) 'The art of listening to children who have experienced loss through bereavement', *Inside Out,* 77, 30-39.

Cullinan, A. L. (1990) 'Teacher's death anxiety, ability to cope with death, and perceived ability to aid bereaved students', *Death Studies*, 14, 147–160.

Cunningham, B. and Hare, J. (1989) 'Essential elements of a teacher in-service program on child bereavement', *Elementary School Guidance and Counselling*, 23, 175-182.

Dadds, M. (1997) 'Continuing professional development: nurturing the expert within', Journal of In-service Education, 23(1) 31-38.

Darmody, M. and Smyth, E., (2017). Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics (online) Available: www.esri.ie (accessed May 2)

Davis, C. G and Nolen-Hoeskem, S. (2001) 'Loss and Meaning: How do people make sense of loss?', *American Behavioral Scientist*, 44, 726-741.

Denzin, N. K and Lincoln, Y. S. eds. (2011) *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research,* California: Sage.

Department of Education and Skills (2009) *Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) in the Primary School* (online) available: www.education.ie (accessed February 2017).

Department of Education and Skills (2013) *Schools and Colleges* (online) available: www.education.ie › Home › Schools & Colleges › Information. (accessed April 2017).

Department of Education and Skills, *Literacy and Numeracy for learning and life. The National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy among Children and Young people 2011-2020* (online) available: https://www.education.ie/.../Literacy-and-Numeracy (accessed June 2017).

Department of Education and Skills (2016) *Responding to critical incidents: NEPS Guidelines and Resource Materials for Schools* (online), available*:* www.education.ie (accessed January 2017).

Department of Education and Skills (2015) *Well-being in the Primary School: Guidelines for Mental Health* (online), available: www.education.ie (accessed Jan 2017).

Department of Education and Skills (2017) *Number of Pupils who are Members of the Traveller Community* (online), available: www.education.ie (accessed May 2017).

DeSpelder, L. A., Strickland, A., Balk, D., Wogrin, C., Thornton, G. and Meagher, D., 2007 'Culture, socialisation, and death education', *Handbook of thanatology: The essential body of knowledge for the student of death, dying, and bereavement*, pp.303-314.

Devine, D. (2005) 'Welcome to the Celtic Tiger? Teacher responses to immigration and increasing ethnic diversity in Irish schools', *International Studies in Sociology of Education*, *15*(1), pp.49-70.

Devlin-Friend, N. (2006) 'Bereavement in primary education', *Bereavement Care*, 25(2), 31-32.

Dillenburger, K. (2005) 'Bereavement; a D.I.S.C analysis', *Behaviour and Social issues,*14(2), 92.

Diminich, E. D. and Bonanno, G. A. (2014) 'Faces, feelings, words: divergences across channels of emotional responding in complicated grief', *Journal of abnormal psychology,* 123(2) 350-361.

Dennis, D. (2009) 'The past, present and future of death education' in Corless I. ed., *Living, Dying, Grieving.* Burlington, M.A: Jones & Bartlett Learning, 197-206.

Dixie R. Crase & Darrell Crase (1982) 'Parental attitudes toward death education for young children', *Death Education,* 6(1) 61-73.

Doka, K. J. ed., (1995) *Children mourning, mourning children,* New York: Taylor & Francis.

Doka, K. J. (2007) 'Historical and contemporary perspectives on dying', in Balk, D. ed., *Handbook of thanatology,* London: Routledge, 19-25.

Doll, M. A. (1995). *To the lighthouse and back: Writings of teaching and living.* (Vol. 19) New York: Lang.

Dopp, A. and Cain, A. (2012) 'The role of peer relationships in parental bereavement during childhood and adolescence', *Death Studies*, 36(1), 41-60.

Doyle, S. (1989) 'Preparing for Bereavement: A Primary-School Topic', *Education and Health*, 7 (4), 76-80.

Dyregrov A. (1991) *Grief in Children: A Handbook for Adults.* London: Jessica Kingsley.

Dyregrov, A., Dyregrov, K. and Idsoe, T. (2013) 'Teachers' perceptions of their role facing children in grief', *Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties,* 18(2), 125-134.

Dyregrov, A., Dyregrov, K., Endsjø, M. and Idsoe, T. (2015) 'Teachers' perception of bereaved children's academic performance', *Advances in School Mental Health Promotion,* 8(3), 187-198.

Economic and Social Research (ESRI) (2014) *Growing up in Ireland* (online) available: www.esri.ie/growing-up-in-ireland/ (accessed Feb 2016).

Edgar, L. V. (1994) 'Non-crisis death education in the elementary school', *Elementary school guidance and counselling,* 29(1), 38-46.

Eiser, C., Havermans, T., Rolph, P. and Rolph, J. (1995) 'The Place of Bereavement and Loss in the Curriculum: Teacher's Attitudes', *Pastoral Care in Education,* 13 (4), 32-36.

Elias, N. (2001) *The loneliness of the dying*, translated by E. Jephcott, New York: Continuum. (original work published 1982).

Encyclopedia of death and dying (online) available: www.deathreference.com/Da-Em/Death-Education.html death education (accessed October 2015).

Engarhos, P., Talwar, V., Schleifer, M. and Renaud S. J. (2013) 'Teachers' Attitudes and Experiences Regarding Death Education in the Classroom', *Alberta Journal of Educational Research*, 59 (1), 126-128.

Faas, D., Darmody, M. and Sokolowska, B. (2016), 'Religious diversity in primary schools: reflections from the Republic of Ireland', *British Journal of Religious education*, 38(1), 83-98.

Fahy, T. (1983) *'Death, bereavement and health education'*, Ireland: Health Education Bureau.

Feifel, H. (1959) *The meaning of death*, New York: McGraw-Hill.

Feifel, H. (1969) 'Attitudes toward death: A psychological perspective', *Journal of consulting and clinical psychology,* 33(3), 292-295.

Feifel, H. (1977) 'Death and dying in modern America', *Death Education*, 1(1), 5-14.

Feifel, H. and Branscomb, A. (1973) 'Who's afraid of death', *Journal of Abnormal Psychology*, 81, 38-45.

Feifel, H. (1977) 'Death in contemporary America' in Feifel, H. ed., *New meanings of death*, New York: McGraw-Hill. 3-12.

Feifel, H. (1998) *Videotape International Work Group on Death, Dying and Bereavement,* Videotape Archives Accessed May-July 2011 by Lamers.

Florczak, K. (2008) 'The persistent yet ever-changing nature of grieving and loss', *Nursing Science Quarterly*, 21(1), 7-11.

Florian, V. (1985) 'Children's concept of death: An empirical study of a cognitive and environmental approach', *Death Studies*, 9(2), 133-141.

Florian, V. and Kravetz, S. (1985) 'Children's concept of death: A cross-cultural comparison among Muslims, Druze, Christians and Jewish in Israel', Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology, 16(2), 174–189.

Fonseca, L.M. and Testoni, I. (2011) 'The emergence of Thanatology and current practice in Death Education', *Omega Journal of Death and Dying*, 64(2), 157-169.

Fox, S. S., (1985) *Good grief: Helping groups of children when a friend dies*, Boston, MA: The New England Association for the Education of Young Children.

Freud, S. (1957) 'Mourning and melancholia', in Strachey, J., ed. and trans., *The standard edition of the complete psychological works of Sigmund Freud,* London: Hogarth Press (Original work published 1917).

Freud, S. (1918) 'Our Attitude to Death', translated by Brill, A. A. and Kutter, A. B. in *Reflections on War and Death II*, New York: Moffat, Yard & Co. New York: Bartleby. com, 2010.

Fulton, R. and Owen, G. (1987–1988) 'Death and society in twentieth century America.', *Omega: Journal of Death and Dying,* 18, 379–395.

Furman, R. (1964) 'Death and the young child: Some preliminary considerations', *Psychoanalytic Study of the Child,* 19, 321–333.

Furman, E. (1978) 'Helping children cope with death', *Young Children,* 33(4), 25-32.

Galende, N. (2015) 'Death and Its Didactics in Pre-School and Primary School', *The Proceedings of 3rd World Conference on Psychology and Sociology,* 185, 91-99.

Gawande, A. (2014) *Being Mortal,* London: Profile Books Ltd.

Gelcer, E. (1983) 'Mourning is a family affair', *Family Process*, *22*(4), 501-516.

Gibbs, S. E. C., Sharp, K. C., and Petrun, C. J. (1985) 'The Effects of age, object, and cultural/religious background on children's concepts of death', *Omega,* 15(4), 329-346.

Glass, J. C. (1990) 'Changing death anxiety through death education in the public schools', *Death Studies,* 14(1), 31-52.

Glass, J. C. and Knott, F. S. (1984) 'Effectiveness of a lesson series on death and dying in changing adolescents' death anxiety and attitudes towards older adults', *Death Education,* 8(5-6), 299-3.

Glosbe, Multilanguage dictionary (online) available: https;//glosbe.com (accessed 2015).

Goldman, E. E. (2000) *Life and loss: A guide to help grieving children,* 2nd ed., New York: Taylor & Francis.

Goldman, L. (2004) 'Counselling with Children in Contemporary Society', *Journal of Mental Health Counselling,* 26(2), 168-187.

Gordon, A. and Klass, D. (1977) 'Goals for death education', *School Counsellor*, 24, (5), 339-347.

Gordon, A. K. & Klass, D. (1979) *They need to know: How to teach children about death.* Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Gould, J. B. (1994) 'A picture is worth a thousand words: a strategy for grief education', *Death Studies,* 18(1), 65-74.

Government of Ireland (2009) The Minister for Integration's speech (Lenihan) as quoted by the Department of Education and Science during their consultative forum on devising an Intercultural Education Policy. Dublin.

Greenberg, M. (2002) 'Good grief: The different ways to cope after loss', *Psychology Today*, 36(1), 44.

Haddington Road Agreement (2013-2016) Public Service Stability Agree (online) available: www.per.gov.ie/en/haddington-road-agreement (accessed Feb 2017).

Haine, R. A., Ayers, T. S., Sandler, I. N., & Wolchik, S. A. (2008) 'Evidence-based practices for parentally bereaved children and their families', *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice,* 39(2), 113-121.

Hall, C. (2014), 'Bereavement theory: recent developments in our understanding of grief and bereavement', *Bereavement Care,* 33(1), 7-12.

Hare, J. and Cunningham, B. (1988) 'Effects of a child bereavement training program for teachers', *Death Studies,* 12(4), 345-353.

Harper, C., Jones, N. and Marcus, R., 2013 *Research for development: A practical guide*. CA: Sage.

Harris, T. (2009) 'John Bowlby revisited-a retrospective review', *Bereavement Care*, 28(1), 27-30.

Hayslip, B. and Walling, M. L. (1986) 'Impact of hospice volunteer training on data anxiety and locus of control', *Omega,* 16(3) 243-254.

Health Service Executive (2013) *Schools for health in Ireland: Health Promoting School Framework* (online), available: https://www.healthpromotion (accessed Jan 2017).

Health Service Executive (2016) *Health Services Intercultural Guide: Responding to the needs of diverse religious communities and cultures in healthcare settings* (online), available: www.hse.ie/eng/services/pubications/SocialInclusion/InterculturalGuid (accessed Sept. 2016).

Heath, M. A., Leavy D., Hansen K., Ryan K., Lawrence L. and Sonntag A. G. (2008) 'Coping with grief: Guidelines and resources for assisting children', *Intervention in School and Clinic*, 43(5), 259–269.

Heath, M. A. and Cole, B. V. (2012) 'Strengthening classroom emotional support for children following a family member's death', *School Psychology International,* 33(3), 243-262.

Hedayat, K. (2006) 'When the spirit leaves: Childhood death, grieving and bereavement', *Journal of Palliative Medicine,* 9(6), 1282-1291.

Higgins, S. (1999) 'Death education in the primary school', *International Journal of Children's Spirituality,* 4 (1), 77-90.

Hogan, D., Halpenny, A.M. and Greene, S. (2002) 'Children's Experiences of Parental Separation', *The Children's Research Centre*, University of Dublin, Trinity College, Dublin.

Holland, J. (2003) 'Supporting schools with loss: "Lost for Words in Hull", *British Journal of Special Education*, 30(2), 76-78.

Holland, J. (2004) 'Lost for words in Hull' *Pastoral Care in Education,* 22 (4), 22-26.

Holland, J. (2008) 'How schools can support children who experience loss and death' *British Journal of Guidance & Counselling*, 36(4), 411-424.

Holland, J. and McLennan, D. (2015) 'North Yorkshire schools' responses to pupil bereavement', *Pastoral Care in Education,* 33(2), 116-128.

Homedes, N. and Ahmed, S. M. (1987) 'In my opinion... death education for children', *Children's Health Care*, *16*(1), 34-36.

Hood, S. (2015) 'The relevance of culture in evaluation and assessment: a personal journey', *Inaugural lecture, DCU* (online) available: https://www.dcu.ie/eqi/news/2015/mar/stafford-hood.shtml (accessed March 20).

Hopkins, A. R. (2002) 'Children and Grief, The Role of the Early Childhood Educator', *Young Children*, *57*(1), 40-48.

Howarth, G. and Leaman, O. eds. (2001) *Encyclopedia of Death and Dying,* London: Routledge.

Howitt, D. and Cramer, D. (2011) *Introduction to research methodology in psychology.* (Ebook) Harlow: Prentice Hall, 2011

Hsu, M. T., Kahn, D. L., Yee, D. H and Lee, W. L. (2004) 'Recovery through reconnection: A Cultural design for family bereavement in Taiwan', *Death Studies,* 28(8), 761-786.

Hulbert, F. (1999) 'Teaching about loss, change and bereavement in the primary school', *Journal of Progressive Judaism'* 13, 79.

Hurd, R. C. (1999) 'Adults view their childhood bereavement experiences', *Death Studies,* 23(1), 17-41.

Irish Childhood Bereavement Network (ICBN) (2014) *Submission to the Oireachtas Committee on Health and Children – Public hearing on End-of-Life Care,* (online), available: http://irishchildhoodbereavementnetwork.ie (accessed May 2016).

Irish Childhood Bereavement Network (ICBN) (2015) *Listen with eyes, ears and heart'* (online) available https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WZTjPCaTxYc (accessed 2016)

Irish Hospice Foundation (IHF) http://hospicefoundation.ie (accessed January 2016).

Irish Hospice Foundation (IHF) hospicefoundation.ie/programmes/public-awareness/forum-on-end-of-life (accessed October 2015).

Irish National Teachers Organisation (1998) *The Challenge of diversity* (online), available: https://www.into.ie/roi/Publicataions/PublicationsPre2000?TheChallengesofDiversity1998.pdf (accessed April 2017).

Irish National Teachers' Organisation (2004) '*Intercultural Education in the Primary School*', (online) available: www.ncca.ie (accessed March 2016).

Irish National Teachers' Organisation (2011*) Facing the Challenges in Literacy and Numeracy* (online) available: https://www.into.ie/ROI/Publications/InTouch/.../FacingtheChallenges_Sept2011.pdf (accessed June 2017)

Irwin, J. (2010) Interculturalism, ethos and ideology. Barriers to freedom and democracy in Irish primary education. *REA: A Journal of Religion, Education and the Arts*, *6*(2), pp.450-68.

Iwaniec, D. and Pinkerton, J. eds. (1998) *Making Research Work: Promoting childcare policy and practice.* Chichester: Wiley.

Jackson, M. and Colwell, J. (2001) 'Talking to children about death.', *Mortality,* 6(3), 321-325.

Jalland, P. (2013) 'A culture of silent grief? The transformation of bereavement care in 20th. Century England', *Bereavement Care*, *32*(1), 16-22.

Jerome, A. (2011) 'Comforting children and families who grieve: Incorporating spiritual support School', *Psychology International,* 32(2) 194–209.

Jones, A.M., Deane, C. and Keegan, O. (2015) 'The development of a framework to support bereaved children and young people: the Irish Childhood Bereavement Care Pyramid', *Bereavement care*, 34 (2), 43-51.

Jones, C., Hodges, M. and Slate, J. (1995) 'Parental support for death education in the Schools', *The School Counsellor*, 42(5), 371-376.

Jordan, J. R. (2000) 'Introduction: Research that matters: bridging the gap between research and practice in thanatology', *Death Studies,* 24(6), 457-467.

Kahn, G. S. (2013) *Bereavement in the classroom: How teachers respond to grief at school*, (Doctoral dissertation, Northeastern University) College of Professional Studies Northeastern University Boston, Massachusetts.

Kane, E. and O'Reilly-De Brún, M. (2001) *Doing your own research*. London: Marion Boyars.

Kastenbaum, R. and Costa, P. T. (1977) 'Psychological perspectives on death', *Annual Review of psychology,* 28, (1), 225-249.

Kastenbaum, R. J. (1993) 'Reconstructing death in postmodern society', *Omega Journal of Death and Dying,* 27(1), 75–89.

Kastenbaum, R. J. (1995) *Death, society, and human experience,* 5th ed., New York: Merrill.

Kelleher, A. (2016) *The Compassionate Communities Charter* (draft).

Kelly, M. (2004) 'Research design proposals', in Seale, C. ed. *Researching Society and Culture,* 2nd ed., London: Sage.

Kicking the Bucket (2016) Documentary (radio) RTE Radio 1, 26 Nov, 14.00 hrs.

Kieran, P. (2011), 'Children negotiating their own beliefs: the religious education of young children in families in the republic of Ireland', *Journal of Religious Education* 59(3), 50-60.

King-McKenzie, E. (2011) 'Death and Dying in the Curriculum of Public Schools: Is there a place?', *Journal of Emerging Knowledge on Emerging Markets,* 3(1), 29.

Kirwin, K. and Hamrin, V. (2005) 'Decreasing the risk of complicated bereavement and future psychiatric disorders in children', *Journal of Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Nursing,* 18(2), 62-78.

Klass, D. and Goss, R. (1999) 'Spiritual bonds to the dead in cross-cultural and historical perspective: Comparative religion and modern grief', *Death Studies*, 23(6), 547-567.

Klass, D. (1999) 'Developing a cross-cultural model of grief: the state of the field', *Omega,* 39(3):153-178.

Klass, D. (2001) 'Continuing bonds in the resolution of grief in Japan and North America,' *American Behavioral Scientist*, 44(5), 742-763.

Klicker, R. (2000) A student dies, a school mourns: Dealing with death and loss in the school community. New York: Brunner-Routledge.

Klingman, A. (1980) 'Death education through literature: a preventive approach', *Death Education*, 4(3), 271-279.

Knight, K. and Elfenbein, M. (1993) 'Relationship of death education to the anxiety, fear and meaning associated with death', *Death Studies,* 17(5), 411-425.

Knott, J.E. (1979) 'Death education for all' in Wass ed. *Dying: Facing the facts*, Washington, DC: Hemisphere pp.385-403.

Kübler-Ross, E. (1983) *On children and death,* 1st.ed. New York: Simon & Schuster.

Kübler-Ross, E. (1993) *On death and dying*, New York: Collier Books (Original work published 1969).

Lamers, W. M. (2005) 'Hospice and its implications for the physician and patients in dealing with end-of-life issues', *Practical Pain Management*, 1-7.

Lamers, W. M. (2012) 'Herman Feifel: The meaning of death', Mortality, 17(1) 64-78.

Lawhon, T. (2004) 'Teachers and schools can aid grieving students', *Education (Chula Vista)*, 124(3), 559.

Lee, J. O., Lee, J. and Moon, S. S. (2009) 'Exploring children's understanding of death concepts', *Asia Pacific Journal of Education*, 29(2), 251–264.

Lenhardt, A. M. C. (1997) 'Disenfranchised grief/hidden sorrow: Implications for the school counselor', *School Counsellor,* 44, (4), 264-270.

Leviton, D. (1977) 'The scope of death education', *Death Education,* 1(1), 41-55.

Levey, G.B (2012) 'Interculturalism vs. Multiculturalism: A Distinction without a Difference?', *Journal of Intercultural studies,* 33 (2), 217-224.

Lewis, C.S. (1961) *A grief observed*. London; Faber and Faber.

Lickiss, N. (2003) 'Approaching death in multicultural Australia', *The Medical Journal of Australia,* 179(6 Supplement), 14-16.

Lindemann, E. (1944) 'The symptomatology and management of acute grief', *American Journal of Psychiatry,* 101(2), 141-148.

Lloyd, R., McLoughlin, K., McGloughlin, C., Macken, C., Richardson, M. and Rhatigan J. 'Digging a hole… planting a seed… water it and watch it start to grow, grow, grow', *BMJ Supportive & Palliative Care*. 5.

Lobar, S. L., Youngblut, J. M. and Brooten, D. (2006) 'Cross-cultural beliefs, ceremonies and rituals surrounding death of a loved one', *Pediatric Nursing*, 32(1), 44–50.

Lockard, B. E. (1989) 'Immediate, residual and long-term effects of a death education instructional unit on the death anxiety level of nursing students', *Death Studies* 13(2), 137-159.

Lowton K. and Higginson, I. J. (2003) 'Managing bereavement in the classroom: A Conspiracy of silence?', *Death Studies,* 27(8), 717-741.

Lytje, M., 2013 'Handling bereavement in Danish schools–A system at a crossroad?', *Bereavement Care*, *32*(3), 131-139.

McGlaufin, H. (1990) *How children grieve: Implications for counselling*. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. 326789).

McGovern, M. and Barry, M. M. (2000) 'Death education: Knowledge, attitudes, and perspectives of Irish parents and teachers', *Death Studies*, 24(4), 325-333.

McGovern, M. and Tracey, A. (2010) 'A comparative examination of schools' responses to bereavement and the associated needs of the school community in Galway, west of Ireland and Derry, Northern Ireland', *Pastoral Care in Education* 28(3), 235-252.

McGuire, S. L., McCarthy, L. S. and Modrcin, M. A. (2013) 'An ongoing concern: Helping children comprehend death', *Open Journal of Nursing*, *3*(03), 307.

McLoughlin, K. (2012) 'Establishing a children's bereavement network: A scoping study', *submission to the Oireachtas Commmittee on health and Children-public hearing, End-of-life Care.*

McQuillan, R. R. (2013) 'Travellers and End of Life Care'*, submission to Hospice Foundation* (online), available http://hospicefoundation.ie/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/Regina-McQuillan-St-Francis-Hospice-Submission.pdf. (accessed November 2016).

McQuillan, R. R, and Van Doorslaer, O. (2007) 'Indigenous ethnic minorities and palliative care: exploring the views of Irish Travellers and palliative care staff', *Palliative medicine*, 21(7), 635-641.

Mahon, M. M., Goldberg, R. L. and Washington, S. K. (1999a) 'Discussing death in the classroom: beliefs and experiences of educators and education students', *Omega*, 39(2), 99–121.

Mahon, M. M., Goldberg, E. Z. and Washington, S. K. (1999b) 'Concept of death in a sample of Israeli Kibbutz children', *Death Studies,* 23(1), 43–59.

Marshall, C. and Rossman, G. (1999) *Designing Qualitative Research* 3rd.ed. London: Sage.

Mason, J. (2002). *Qualitative Research,* London: Sage.

Melvin, D. and Lukeman, D. (2000) 'Bereavement: A framework for those working with children', *Clinical Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, *5*(4), 521-539.

Metel, M. and Barnes, J. (2011), 'Peer-group support for bereaved children: a qualitative study', *Child and Adolescent Mental Health,*16(4), 201-207.

Mindtools. com. Flow Model-Time Management Training (online), available https://www.mindtools.com>time management (accessed March 2017).

Miller, J and Glassner, B (1997) 'The 'inside'and the 'outside': Finding realities in interviews' in Silverman D. ed., *Qualitative research*, London: Sage, 99-112.

Milton, J. (2004) 'Helping primary school children manage loss and grief: Ways the classroom teacher can help', *Education and Health,* 22(4), 58-60.

Modood, T. and Meer, N. (2012) 'Rejoinder: assessing the divergences on our readings of interculturalism and multiculturalis.', *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, *33*(2), pp.233-244.

Moore, C. and Woodrow, P. (1998) 'Mapping Cultures–Strategies for Effective Intercultural Negotiations', *Track Two* 7(1), 1-11.

Moran Stritch, J. (2009) 'Dealing with death vs Getting on with it: an argument for Death Education in Irish Life', *A submission to the Irish Hospice Forum on End of life.*

Moser, C. A. and Kalton, G. (1971) *Survey Methods in Social Investigation,* 2nd ed., London: Heinemann.

Mullins, L. C. and Merriam, S. (1983) 'The effects of short-term death training program on nursing home nursing staff', *Death Education* 7(4), 353-368.

Myers, N. (2010) 'An Exploration of Gender-Related Tensions for Male Social Workers in the Irish Context', *Critical Social Thinking: Policy and Practice,* 38-58.

Nagy, M. (1948) 'The child's theory concerning death', *Journal of Genetic Psychology,* 73(1), 3–27.

Naierman, N. (1997), 'Reaching out to grieving children', *Educational Leadership*, 55 (2), 62-65.

National Cancer Institute at the National Institutes of Health (2014), '*Grief, Bereavement, and Coping With Loss–for health professionals,* (online) available: https://www.cancer.gov/about-cancer/advanced-cancer/caregivers/planning/bereavement-hp-pdq (accessed Feb 2016).

National Consultative Committee on Racism and Interculturalism (2003) *Travellers in Ireland: An Examination of Discrimination and Racism* (online) available at: http://www.ncri.com (accessed 28 Nov 2016).

National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) (2005) *Intercultural Education in the Primary School* Dublin: NCCA.

National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) (2010) *Curriculum overload in primary schools* Dublin: NCCA

National Council for Curriculum Development (NCCA) (2012) *The Primary Classroom-insight from Growing Up in Ireland study* (online), available: www.ncca.ie/en/The_Primary_Classroom_ESRI_January_18_2012.pdf (accessed April 2017).

National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) (2015) *Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics in the Primary School: Consultation Paper* Dublin: NCCA.

National Council for Curriculum Development (NCCA) (2016a) *Consultation on the proposals for a curriculum in Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics, Written submissions (*online) available: ncca.ie/consultation/erbe (accessed 18 May 2017).

National Council for Curriculum Development (NCCA) (2016b) *Proposals for structure and time allocation in a redeveloped primary curriculum: For consultation (*online) available: ncca.ie (accessed 19 May 2017)

National Council for Curriculum Development (NCCA) (2017) *Consultation on the proposals for a curriculum in Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics: Final Report*

National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) (2014) *Services* (online), available http://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Services/National-Educational-Psychological-Service-NEPS-/Critical-Incidents (accessed March 2017).

Neimeyer, R. (1988) 'Death anxiety' in Wass, H., Berado, F. and Neimeyer, R. eds. *Dying: Facing the facts*, 2nd ed., New York: Hemisphere

Neimeyer, R., Wittkowski, J. and Moser, R. (2004) 'Psychological Research on death attitudes: An overview and evaluation', *Death Studies,* 28(4), 309-340.

Neimeyer, R. A. (2000) 'Searching for the meaning of meaning: Grief therapy and the process of reconstruction', *Death Studies*, 24(6), 541-558.

Neimeyer, R. A. (2015) 'Assessing a Buddhist treatment for bereavement and loss: The Mustard Seed Project', *Death Studies,* 39(5), 263-273.

Neimeyer, R. A. (2004) 'Research on grief and bereavement: evolution and revolution', *Death Studies*, 28(6), 489-490.

Nias, J. (1997) 'Would schools improve if teachers cared less?', *Education* 3-13, 25(3), 11-22.

Noppe, I. C. (2007) 'Historical and contemporary perspectives on death education' in Balk, D. ed., *Handbook of thanatology,* London: Routledge, 329-335.

Noppe, I. C. (2007b) 'Life span issues and death education' in Balk, D. ed. *Handbook of thanatology,* London: Routledge. 337-343.

NVivo for Mac. QSR International www.qsrinternational.com/nvivo-product/nvivo-mac.

O'Brien (2013) 'The Forgotten Mourners'The Journal (online) available: Journal. ie (accessed 2015)

O'Brien, A. and McGuckin, C. (2014) 'Grieving students: The response and support of educators in Irish schools', *Journal of Postgraduate Research, Trinity College Dublin*, 13, 159.

O'Brien, A. and McGuckin, C. (2013), 'Bereavement: How Guidance Counsellors Can Support the Grieving Student' Published by the *National Centre for Guidance in Education (NCGE)* as an article for the School Guidance Handbook.

O'Brien, A. and McGuckin, C. (2013) Bereavement and Grief Support for Students: The response of Irish Schools, *Trinity Education Papers.*

O'Donnell, M.L. (2017) *Finite Lives: a report on how the civil service deals with dying death and bereavement among its own members* (online) Lenus, The Irish Health Repository (2017), available http://hdl.handle.net/10147/583483 (accessed 5 June 2017).

Oxford Dictionary (2016) https://en.oxforddictionaries.com.

Oyebode, J. R. and Owens, R. G. (2013) 'Bereavement and the role of religious and cultural factors', *Bereavement Care, 32*(2), 60-64.

Painter, K. (2012) 'Grieving children don't always find help in schools', *U. S. A. Today,* 9.

Papadatou, D., Metallinou, O., Hatzichristou, C., and Pavlidi, L. (2002) 'Supporting the bereaved child: Teacher's perceptions and experiences in Greece', *Mortality,* 7(3), 324–339.

Park, Roswell (1912), *The Evil Eye, Thanatology, and Other Essays*. R. G. Badger Appeared first in the *Journal of the American Medical Association,* April 27, 1912

Parkes, C. M. (1986) *Bereavement Studies of grief in adult life,* 2nd ed., London: Penguin Books.

Parkes, C. M., Laungani, P. and Young, B. (1997) *Death and bereavement across cultures*, New York: Routledge.

Parkes, C. M. (1997) 'Help for the dying and the bereaved' in Parkes, C. M., Laungani, P. and Young, B. eds., *Death and bereavement across cultures,* New York: Routledge. 206-21.

Parkes, C. M. (2000) 'Comments on Dennis Klass article "Developing a Cross-cultural Models of Grief"', *Omega: Journal of Death and Dying* (OMEGA 39: 3, pp. 153–178, 1999) *OMEGA-Journal of Death and Dying, 41*(4),323-326.

Parkes, C. M. (2002) 'Grief: Lessons from the past, visions for the future', *Death Studies*, 26(5), 367-385.

Parkes, C. M. (2013) 'Classics revisited. Kubler-Ross, on death and dying: a reappraisal', *Mortality,* 18(1), 94–97.

Patton, M.Q. (1980) *Qualitative Evaluation Methods,* London: Sage.

PDST, Walk Tall, SPHE Curriculum, Dublin, 2016

Pennells, M. and Smith, S. C. (1995) *The forgotten mourners: Guidelines for working with bereaved children,* London: Jessica Kingsley.

Perry, B. D. (2001) 'Death and loss: Helping children manage their grief', *Early Childhood Today*, 15(4), 1-3.

Perry, R. V. (2004) 'Disaster exercise outcomes for professional emergency personnel and citizen volunteers', *Journal of Contingencies & Crisis Management*, 12(2), 64-75.

Pettigrew, C. G. and Dawson, J. G. (1979) 'Death anxiety: State or trait?', *Journal of clinical psychology,* 35(1), 154-158.

Piaget, J. (1929) *The child's conception of the world*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Pine, V. R. (1977) 'A sociohistorical portrayal of death education', *Death Education* 1 (1), 57-84.

Pine, V. R. (1986) 'The age of maturity for death education: A socio-historical portrait of the era 1976–1985', *Death Studies,* 10(3), 209-231.

Pole, C. and Lampard, R. (2002) *Practical Social Investigation; Qualitative and Quantative Methods in Social Research.* Essex: Pearson Education Limited.

Porter, J. (2016) 'Bereavement in the Primary School: A critical consideration of the nature, incidence, impact and possible responses', *The STeP Journal Student Teacher Perspectives,* University of Cumbria Vol 3 (1) 11-17.

Potts, S. (2013) 'Least said, soonest mended? Responses of primary school teachers to the perceived support needs of bereaved children', *Journal of Early Childhood Research* 11.2 (2013): 95-107.

Prichard, S and Epting, F (1992) 'Children and Death: New Horizons in Theory and Measurement', *Omega* 24, (4), 271-288.

Puolimatka, T. and Solasaari, U. (2006) 'Education for death', *Education philosophy and Theory,* 38(2), 201-213.

Rainbows Ireland (online), available: http://www.rainbowsireland.com/ (accessed 17 June 2016).

Reid, J. and Dixon, W. (1999) 'Teacher attitudes on coping with grief in the public- school classroom', *Psychology in the Schools*, 36(3), 219-229.

Reid, J. (2002) 'School Management and Ecosystemic Support for Bereaved Children and their Teachers', *International Journal of Children's Spirituality*, 7(2), 193-207.

Reisler, R. (1977) 'The issue of death education', *The School Counselor,* 24(5),331-337.

Rhatigan, J., Richardson, M. and McLoughlin, K. (2015) 'Compassionate classrooms: supporting teachers to support children living with grief and loss', BMJ, 5 (1).

Roberts, C. (1981) 'Helping children cope with death', *Educational Leadership,* 38(5), 409-412.

Roberts-Holmes, G. (2014) *Doing your early year's research project: a step-by-step guide*, London: Sage

Robson, C. (1997) *Real world Research: a resource for social scientists and practitioner-researchers,* Oxford: Blackwell.

Rosenblatt, P.C., Walsh, R. P. and Jackson, D. A. (1976) *Grief and mourning in cross-cultural perspective*, New Haven, CT: HRAF press.

Rosenblatt, P. C. (1988) 'Grief: The social context of private feelings', *Journal of Social Issues*, 44(3), 67-78.

Rosenblatt, P. C. (1993) 'Grief: The social context of private feelings', in Stroebe, M., Stroebe, W. and Hansson, R. O. eds., *Handbook of bereavement: Theory, research and intervention*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 102–11.

Rosenblatt, P. C. (2001) 'A social constructionist perspective on cultural difference in grief' in Stroebe, M. S., Hansson, R. O., Stroebe, W. and. Schut H. eds., *Handbook of bereavement research,* Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 285–300.

Rosenblatt, P. C. (2008) 'Recovery following bereavement: Metaphor, phenomenology, and culture', *Death Studies*, 32(1), 6–16.

Rosenthal, N. (1978) 'Teaching educators to deal with death,' *Death Education*, 2(3), 293-306.

Rothenberg, M. B. (1967) 'Reactions to those who treat children with cancer', *Pediatrics,* 40(3), 507-510.

Rowling, L. (1995) 'The Disenfranchised Grief of Teachers', *Omega,* 31(4), 317-329.

Rowling, L. and Holland, J. (2001) 'Grief and school communities. The impact of social context, a comparison between Australia and England', *Death Studies,* 24(1),35-50.

Rowling, L. (2008) 'Linking spirituality, school communities, grief and well-being', *International Journal of Children's Spirituality ,*113(3), 241-251.

Rubin, H. J and Rubin, I.S (2011) *Qualitative interviewing: The art of hearing data,* London: Sage.

Russell, C (2017) 'Photos: Meet some of Ireland's newest citizens, *The Journal* (online), 22 April, available: www.thejournal.ie (accessed April 2017).

Salloum, A. (2008) 'Group Therapy for Children After Homicide and Violence: A Pilot Study', *Research on social work practice,* 18(3), 198-211.

Schell, D. and Seefeldt, C. (1991) 'Development of a Death Anxiety Scale for Children', *Omega* (Westport), 23(3), 227-234.

Schoen, A. A., Burgoyne, M. and Schoen, S. (2004) 'Are the developmental needs of children in America adequately addressed in the grieving process?', *Journal of Instructional Psychology,* 31(2), 143-150.

Schonfeld, D. J. and Smilansky, S. (1989) 'A cross-cultural comparison of Israeli and American children's death concepts', *Death Studies*, 13(6), 593-604.

Schonfeld, D. J. and Kappelman, M. (1992) 'Teaching Elementary Schoolers about Death', *Education Digest*, 58(4)16-16.

School Development Planning Initiative (2002) *School Development Planning Information for Boards of Management* (online), available: www.sdpi.ie/SDPI_BOM_A4_bw.pd (accessed Jan 2017).

Schowalter, J. E. (1986) 'Twenty Years of Pediatric Thanatology', *Children's Health Care*.14 (3),157.

Schultz, K. (1999) 'Bereaved children', *Canadian Family Physician ,*45, 2914.

Seneca, L. A. (65 AD) translated by Robin Campbell (1969). *Letters from a Stoic* London: Penguin.

Sharp, J. (2012) *Success with your education research project*. London: Sage.

Shaughnessy, M. F. (2011) 'An Interview with David Schonfeld: The Educator's Role in Helping Children with Grief', *North American Journal of Psychology*, 13(2), 275.

Silverman, D. (2000) *Doing qualitative research: A practical handbook*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Silverman, P. R. and Worden, J. W. (1992) 'Children's reactions in the early months after the death of a parent', *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry,* 62(1), 93–104.

Silverman, P. R., Nickman, J. and Worden, J. W. (1992) 'Detachment revisited: the child's reconstruction of a dead parent', *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 62(4),494–503.

Silverman, P. R. (2000) 'Research, Clinical Practice and the Human Experience: putting the pieces together', *Death Studies*, 24(6), 469-478.

Slaughter, V. and Griffiths, M. (2007) 'Death understanding and fear of death in young children', *Clinical Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, *12*(4), 525-535.

Solnit, A. J. and Green, M. (1959) 'Psychological considerations in the management of death on paediatric hospital services', *Pediatrics,* 24(1), 106-112.

Speece, M. W. and Brent, S. B. (1984) 'Children's understanding of death: A review of three components of death concept', *Child Development,* 55(5), 1671–1686.

Strack, S. (2003) 'Herman Feifel (1915-2003)', *American Psychologist,* 58(10), 865.

Stroebe, M., Gergen, M., Gergen, K. and Stroebe, W. (1992) 'Broken hearts or broken bonds', *American Psychologist,* 47(10), 1205-1213.

Stroebe, M. S. (1992) 'Coping with bereavement: a review of the grief work hypothesis', *Omega; Journal of death and dying,* 26(1), 19-4.

Stroebe, M. (1993) 'Coping with bereavement: A review of the grief work hypothesis', *Omega-Journal of Death and Dying*, *26*(1), 19-42.

Stroebe, M. S. (2001) 'Bereavement research and theory: Retrospective and prospective' *American Behavioral Scientist*, *44*(5), 854-865.

Stroebe, M. S. (2002) 'Paving the way: From early attachment theory to contemporary bereavement research' *Mortality*, *7*(2), 127-138.

SurveyGizmo, (2015) *What's a good survey response* (online), available: https://www.surveygozmo.com/survey-blog/survey-response-rates/(accessed April 2017).

Swain, H. L. (1978) 'Childhood views of death', Death Education, 24(4), 341-358.

Tariq, M (2012) 'Rejoinder: Assessing the Divergences on our Readings of Interculturalism and Multiculturalism', *Journal of intercultural studies*, 33 (2), 233-244.

Tashakkori, A. and Teddie, C. (1998) *Mixed Methodologyy*, London: Sage Publications.

Task Force on the Travelling Community (1995) *Report of the Task Force on the Travelling Community: executive summary*, Dublin: Government Publications Office.

Tausch, R. (1988) 'Reappraisal of death and dying after a person-centred behavioural workshop', *Person-Centred Review*, 3, 213-228.

The Dougy Center for Grieving Children and Families (n. d) How to help a grieving child. (online), *available: http://www. dougy.org/grief-resources/how-to-help-a-grieving-child/*. (accessed May 2016).

Tracey, A. and Holland, J. (2008) 'A comparative study of the child bereavement and loss responses and needs of schools in Hull, Yorkshire and Derry/Londonderry, Northern Ireland', *Pastoral Care in Education*, 26(4), 253-266.

Traeger, J. (2011) 'Supporting your grieving child', *Journal of Palliative Medicine*, 14(1), 116-117.

Tramonte, M. *(*1996) 'Culturally diverse beliefs concerning dying, death, and bereaveme*nt*: A school psychologist's intervention challenge' Paper presented at the Annual Convention of the National Association of School Psychologists (28th, Atlanta, GA, March14,1996).

Traynor,C. (2015), 'The religious and lay of the land: school ethos in flux' The Irish Times (online), 5 May, available: http://www.irishtimes.com/news/education/the-religious-and-lay-of-the-land-school-ethos-in-flux-1.2195585 (accessed January 2017).

Tuohy, D. (2008) 'Educational needs of nurses when nursing people of a different culture in Ireland', *International nursing review*, 55 (2) 164-170.

University of Texas, *Response rates* (online) available https://facultyinnovate.utexas.edu/sites/default/files/response_rates.pdf (accessed April 2017).

Vaisrub, S. (1974) 'Dying is worked to death', *Journal of American Medical Association*, 229(14), 1909-1910.

Valentine, C. (2009) 'Continuing bonds after bereavement: a cross-cultur*al perspective', Bereavement Care, 28(2)*, 6-11.

Versa Research, (2006), *How to estimate the length of a Survey*, (online) available: www.versaresearch.com. (accessed January 2017).

Vygotsky, L. (1978) 'Interaction between learning and development' *Readings on the development of children,* 23(3), pp.34-41.

Waldman, D. A. and Davidshoffer, C. (1983-84) 'Death anxiety reductions as the result of exposure to a death and dying symposium', *Omega,* 14(4). 323-328.

Walter, T. (2010) 'Grief and culture: a checklist', *Bereavement Care*, 29(2),5-9.

Ward B, (1993), *Exploring Feelings, Loss and Death with Under Elevens,* London: Jessica Kingsley.

Wass, H. (1984 a) *'*Concepts of death: A developmental perspective', in Wass, H. and Colt, C. eds., *Childhood & death,* Washington, DC: Hemisphere, 3-24.

Wass, H. (1984b), 'Parents, teachers, and health professionals as helpers' in Wass, H. and Corr, C.A. eds., *Helping children cope with death: Guidelines and resources*, 2nd ed., Washington, D.C: Hemisphere, 75-130.

Wass, H. (1986) 'Memorial', *Death Studies, 10(2), 93.*

Wass, H. (2004) 'A Perspective on the current state of Death Education', *Death Studies*, 28(4), 289-308.

Wass, H., Berardo, F. M. and Neimeyer, R. A. (1988) 'Dying: Integrating the facts.' in Wass, H., Berardo, F. M. and Neimeyer R. A. eds., *Dying: Facing the facts Washington,* DC: Hemisphere. 395-405.

Wass, H. and Shaak, J. (1976) 'Helping children understand death through literature', *Childhood Education,* 53(2) 80-85.

Watts, P. R. (1977) 'Evaluation of death attitude change resulting from a death education instructional unit', *Death Education*, 1(2), 187-193.

Webb, N. B. (2010) *Helping bereaved children: A handbook for practitioners,* 3rd ed., New York: Guilford.

Wells, R. (2007) *Helping children cope with grief: facing a death in the family,* London: Sheldon Press.

Wenestam, C. G. and Wass, H. (1987) 'Swedish and US children's thinking about death: A qualitative study and cross-cultural comparison', *Death studies, 11(2), 99-121.*

Westman, A. S. and Brackney, B. E. (1990) 'Relationships between indices of neuroticism, attitudes toward and concepts of death and religiosity', *Psychological Reports*, 66(3).1039-1043.

Westman, A. S. and Canter, E. M. (1985) 'Fear of death and concepts of extended self', Psycho*logical reports*, 56(2), 419-425.

White, E., Elsom, B. and Prawat R. (1978) 'Children's conception of death', *Child development,* 49, 307-310.

Willis, C. (2002), 'The Grieving Process in Children: Strategies for Understanding, Educating, and Reconciling Children's Perceptions of Death', *Early Childhood Education Journal,* 29(4), 221-226.

Wilken, C. S. and Powell, J. (1991) *Learning to live through loss: Helping children understand death,* National Center for Childcare. Manhattan, KS: Kansas State University Cooperative Extension Service.

Winston's Wish, *Support for Schools,* (online) available http://www.winstonswish.org.uk (accessed September 2016).

Wittkowski, J., Doka, K., Neimeyer, R. and Vallerga, M (2015) 'Publication Trends in Thanatology: An Analysis of Leading Journals', *Death Studies*, 39:8, 453-462.

Wolfelt, A. (1983) *Helping children cope with grief,* New York: Routledge.

Wolfelt, A. D. (1991) *A Child's View of Grief*, Fort Collins, CO: Companion Press.

Wolfelt, A. D., and S. E. Brock (2002) 'Children's grief' *Best practices in school crisis prevention and intervention,* 653-671.

Wolfenstein, M. (1966) 'How is mourning possible?', *The Psychoanalytic Study of the Child,* 21, 113–123.

Wolraich, M. L., Aceves, J., Feldman, H. M., Hagan, J. F. Jr., Howard, B. J., Navarro, A., Richtsmeier, A. J., and Tolmas, H. C. (2000) 'The paediatrician and childhood bereavement', *Pediatrics*, 105(2) 445-451.

Wong, PTP, Reker, GT, Gesser G, (1994) 'Death Attitude Profile-Revisited: a multidimensional measure of attitudes towards death' in Neimeyer, R. A. *Death Anxiety Handbook: Research, Instrumentation, and Application,* New York: Taylor and Francis, 121.

Wong, M. (2010) 'Chinese children's understanding of dea*th', Australian Journal of Early Childhood,* 35(2) 63-71.

Worden*, J. W. (1996) Children and grief. When a parent dies,* New York: Guilford Press.

Wortman, C. B. and Silver, R. C. (1989) 'The myths of coping with loss', *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology,* 57(3), 349-357.

Woythaler-Runestad, C. (2015) *No child should ever grieve alone* TEDxLincoln available on https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YR9eokO8cFA (accesses March 2016).

Yamamoto, K.; Soliman, A.; Parsons, J and Davies O.L. (1987) ''Voices in unison: stressful events in the lives of children in six countries', *Journal od child psychology and psychiatry,* 28, 855-864.

Yang, S. C. and Chen, S.F, (2002) 'A phenomenographic approach to the meaning of death: A Chinese Perspective', Death Studies, 26(2), 143-175.

Zembylas, M. (2003) 'Emotions and Teacher Identity: a poststructural perspective', *Teachers and Teaching: theory and practice,* 9(3), 213-238.

APPENDICES

Appendix A   Cover letter

Participant Information Sheet

What is the project about?

Key Research Questions:

What are the different skills that teachers need in order to cope with the sensitive area of Grief and Loss within a multicultural classroom setting?

Are the Colleges of Education equipping our future Primary School teachers to meet these challenges?

What curricula and pedagogical frameworks are available at national level?

Who is undertaking it?

My name is Carmelita McGloughlin and I am a Postgraduate student attending Mary Immaculate College. I am presently completing an MA by research in the Faculty of Education under the supervision of Dr. Carol O'Sullivan and Dr. Patricia Kieran. The current study will form part of my thesis.

Why is it being undertaken?

Coping with Grief and Loss in the classroom is something that every teacher has to face. This aspect of the teacher's life has become even more challenging with our ever-growing multicultural society.

What are the benefits of this research?

Few studies have examined cultural differences that impact on the child's understanding of grief and loss. This study aims to examine the relevant issues and contribute to the international discussion.

Exactly what is involved for the participant (time, location, etc.) The participant will be asked to complete a questionnaire.

The participant may be asked to participate in a Focus Group.

Some participants will be asked to participate in a 1-1 interview.

Right to withdraw

Your anonymity is assured and you are free to withdraw from the research at any time without giving a reason and without consequence.

How will the information be used / disseminated?

Summary data only will appear in the thesis, individual participant data will not be shown.

How will confidentiality be kept?

All information gathered will remain confidential and will not be released to any third
 party.

What will happen to the data after research has been completed?

In accordance with the MIC Record Retention Schedule all research data will be stored for the duration of the project plus three years.

Contact details:

If at any time, you have any queries/issues with regard to this study my contact details are as follows:

Carmelita McGloughlin

carmelitamcgloughlin@mic.ul.ie

00-353-87-2367829

If you have concerns about this study and wish to contact someone independent, you may contact:

Mary Collins,

MIREC Administrator

Mary Immaculate College

South Circular Road

Limerick

061-204515

mirec@mic.ul.ie

https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/3XDMBWQ

Appendix B   Consent form

Research Study on the challenges that face the Primary School teacher in coping with Grief and Loss in a multicultural setting.

Informed Consent Form

(i)   I have read and understood the Participant Information Sheet.

(ii)   I understand what the project is about.

(iii)   I know that my participation is voluntary and that I can withdraw from the project at any stage without giving any reason and without consequence.

(iv)   I am aware that my results will be kept confidential.

(v)   I have read this form completely, I am 18 years of age or older and am happy to take part in the study.

Signed : _____   Date : _____

Appendix C   Questionnaire

Section 1 : General Information

3. What is your gender?

Female

Male

4. What is your age?

18 to 24

25 to 34

35 to 44

45 to 54

55 to 64

Section 2:   Your School

5. Please provide details of your school profile:(please tick as many as apply)

All girls

Multicultural

Co-ed

Rural

Urban

All boys

DEIS

Other (please specify)

6. If you have described your school as multicultural, please provide examples of cultural diversities within the school population.

7. Please describe your school patronage:

Catholic

Educate Together

Other

Section 3: Bereavement and Bereavement Education

8. Do you find it difficult to talk about death and loss personally

yes

no

9. Do you find it difficult to talk about death and loss professionally i.e. in the context of your school

yes

no

10. In your experience as a Principal/assistant teacher, is the topic of bereavement /loss/death addressed *formally* in your school through a death education programme?

yes

no

If yes, please provide details:

11. Do you think there should be a specific time given to death education in the curriculum?

yes

no

You may expand your answer here:

12. In your opinion, is there a right time to initiate a discussion about death and dying with children?

yes

no

You may expand your answer here:

13. Is there any situation where you consider discussing death and dying to be inappropriate?

yes

no

You may expand your answer here:

14. What are the challenges that are faced by the teacher in the classroom regarding death and dying?

15. Do you feel that you are well equipped to cope with these challenges?

yes

no

You may expand your answer here:

16. Do you think that there are different or additional challenges to be faced in the multicultural classroom regarding death and dying?

yes

no

You may expand your answer here:

17. In your teaching career, have you had to support a child who has experienced a significant loss through death?

yes

no

You may expand your answer here:

18. What guidelines/ policies are in place in your school around death/dying/bereavement?

19. In your opinion, do these policies/guidelines work well?

yes

no

You may expand your answer here:

20. Was there adequate preparation/training given during your Teacher Education College experience to equip you to support children in the area of death and dying?

yes

no

You may expand your answer here:

21. Have you had any post-graduate/in-career development in the area of bereavement and loss?

yes

no

You may expand your answer here:

22. Have you ever looked for sources of information or resources on the subject of death, dying, grief and loss?

yes

no

23. If you answered Yes to Q.22, did you experience any challenges in sourcing such information?

yes

no

You may expand your answer here:

24. Do you consider that additional courses would help you to be better prepared to cope with children who are experiencing grief and loss?

yes

no

You may expand your answer here:

25. If your answer to Q 24 is Yes, do you think it would be beneficial if this course would address some personal losses of the participating teachers?

yes

no

You may expand your answer here:

Appendix D   Interview questions

- o In your experience, do teachers have difficulty in talking about death?

- o From the perspective of a class teacher what are the skills that the class teacher requires when coping with grief and loss?

- o In your encounters with colleagues, what challenges have teachers voiced?

- o Do you consider Initial Teacher Education prepared you adequately to cope with grief and loss in the classroom?

- o In your professional capacity, what are the challenges that the teacher might face in a growing multicultural society?

- o Have you sought any training from exterior organisations? If so have they provided suitable training?

- o What is death education from the perspective of a primary school teacher?

- o Can you elaborate on any Death Education experiences that you may have been involved in?

- o Any further observations or comments?

Appendix E   Obstacles and challenges as expressed by the interview participants

Obstacle/ Challenge	Comment
Fear of saying something wrong	C. The main one is about not wanting to do harm, not wanting to make a situation worse, being concerned about what they might say and not wanting to say the wrong thing and that is very often a recurring theme among teachers. H. The predominant thing I hear is: 'I don't know what to say?'… so, I will say nothing in case I get it wrong' B. So, it is almost like 'because I don't know anything, I don't want to go there, because I don't want to upset the child, so I will leave it alone'. And hope it works out… G. I have heard teachers in the staffroom say: "I am not prepared for this", "what do you say", "do you say-ah yes Grandma has gone to heaven?" Ah, it's just very difficult. E. Not to be afraid of stepping out of line, or crossing boundaries…What on earth do I say here without making it worse?
Lack of training	A. Teachers have spoken about the lack of training. B. I suppose the reports that I have heard is they don't get any training. G. In my experience, I am going back a while, I do not remember covering anything to do with death. I wish I had really because I think we be should trained for it… especially with so much terrorism, for example the shootings in Paris…we were all sent emails in school about it, the kids were talking about it… How do you explain that? F. Same with the teaching assistant … the International Professional Graduate Certificate in Education … nothing, nothing is mentioned.

Interpreting the child's behaviour	B. I think interpreting their behaviour. 'What should I say?' 'What should I not say?' 'Should we say a prayer?' 'Should we not say a prayer?' 'Should we address an assembly?' E. A child who has very challenging behaviour…trying to not meet that with anger back… to meet it with understanding.
Understanding grief in children	D. I think the challenge for teachers is to understand that they should grieve, it is normal…it's the challenge to understand that children do grieve and we need to stay with them… but it's not about…'oh no, no don't be crying… A. …the lack of familiarity with grief as an issue E. The awareness around areas of loss and the difficulty…What does children's grief look like? How does it present in the classroom?

Teachers personal challenges regarding talking about death	H. What compounds it for teachers is that not only have they their own challenges about talking about death, managing themselves around the conversation. It is that they feel this huge responsibility for all these children on top of whatever comfort or discomfort they have around the topic. E. Teachers immediately, I did it myself, close up… D. So, that's a challenge … unresolved issues around loss… caused a trigger… teachers bereaved in childhood. That is another big challenge. If you think about adults… they don't want to talk about death… A. I think it's that very first point I made of confidence… competence in themselves about what is grief and how do I deal with it
Classroom dynamics	A. The challenges of dealing with an individual child in the classroom… when you have got multiple other children in the classroom to take into account as well…So it's balancing the needs of the one as against the needs of the group… it's a very practical, very logistical challenge. F. But it is difficult when you have got 20 other children gathered round…saying: 'what's wrong, what is wrong with her?'… It is just trying to get that moment … space to grieve…
Differing beliefs within families	F. And then there is the question of multiculturalism… everybody has such different beliefs… E. Lots of issues handled in different ways… parents do different things
Time restraints	D. A lot of teachers say to me that: 'we haven't got the time'. I hear teachers talking about all the paper work etc.

238

	A. The big problem is curriculum space… I'm not an insider…but as a parent you want them to get an education.
Lack of collaboration between parents and school	B. But also, I suppose parents don't often, don't always keep the school informed with what is happening, particularly if a death is unexpected.

APPENDIX F   Sample Interview

Interview with B. 10. 08. 2016

Q.1 The skills required to cope with grief and loss

Carmelita:

From the perspective of the Social Worker involved for many years in Bereavement Support work, what do you think are the skills that the class teacher requires when coping with grief and loss in the classroom?

B:

I suppose for me Skills and Knowledge go hand in hand for teachers and the knowledge base around grief generally and children's grief specifically. It is probably the starting point, because no matter what skills you have, if you don't know or understand about grief your skills really are useless. I suppose skills … around observing, listening, having empathy and wanting to understand grief generally but also 'what is grief like for this child'? 'what is their story?' and how might it be impacting. Not taking general information and thinking, 'I know what it is', 'I know what is going on here'. Be given to probe very gently a bit about 'What is the grief experience for this child today?' Because there might be also siblings in the school who are reacting very differently. We can't make assumptions for children that they are reacting in any particular way or this is how grief is for them. And I think, having an interest… and I think teachers that I have come in contact with are interested and are certainly concerned about bereaved children. They certainly may feel under skilled and don't have the confidence to approach the issue. This is probably something that hinders them.

Q. 2 Are teachers adequately trained to cope with grief and loss?

Carmelita:

And why do you think that is that teachers feel unequipped?

B:

Well I suppose the reports that I have heard is they don't get any training. So, it is almost like 'because I don't know anything, I don't want to go there, because I don't want to upset the child, so I will leave it alone'. And hope it works out…

Or another approach that I have encountered as well is rather than deal with an individual child, that there would be a classroom intervention around grief generally in a way hoping to flush the child out…. I don't think that is helpful either.

I don't think it meets the needs of the child because very often children don't know that something like that is going to happen, the bereaved child is probably not given the choice if they want to take part in it or not because it is just presented to everyone.

Carmelita:

240

And would you have come across children who have actually expressed that they have had this experience?

B:

Yes… it is almost like ambushing children really, and you are ambushing vulnerable, upset, grieving children around the topic, I really don't think it is the best way to approach a sensitive issue to do it in that way. Because I suppose it is not like any other topic. I think it is a topic that children need to learn about. I think you need to educate… it is part of what we do in bereavement education. But it is because of the nature of it that I don't think it is ok to do that when a child is grieving without giving them the choice or their parents…without highlighting beforehand that it might be coming up

Q.3 What is death education from the perspective of a Social Worker

Carmelita:

So, there are obviously two issues there. There is the grieving child who is now in the classroom and there is the 'normal 'class situation. So, do you think there is room for a death education programmed?

B:

Yes… Absolutely

Carmelita:

And how do you think that could or would or should be conducted?

B:

It should be a part of what schools do anyway rather than in a reactive way… when something happens… now we need to introduce it to help this child. I don't think that is the right way to introduce it… I think it should be a natural part of what schools offer. This would be helpful and then children would hear and learn about death in a non-crisis time, when they are not affected by it… given information that they can store up and file and then if something happens that they have some knowledge.

Carmelita:

And would you ever have been called in to get involved in or do you think it should be just part of the school curriculum?

B:

We have been actually invited…more so in the past few years around Haddington Rd hours where schools are looking for something to do and maybe have had some experience of bereavement and we were invited into schools to do an education slot with the teachers.

And as part of the Irish Bereavement Network there is a children's bereavement week. Last year in Dublin they focused on teachers, the Workshop for teachers was very well attended.

Carmelita:

So, the will is there generally…At these sessions, what kind of a sense do you get from the teachers? Is everybody on board?

B:

No…I think some people are more comfortable with the issue. I think some people wish you wouldn't talk about it and leave it alone… its nothing to do with us…and I think they are afraid of it because they are very well intentioned. They don't want to upset a child more than they are and don't want to be a part of upsetting a child because they feel that they are not really skilled, they don't know enough, they don't know what to do.

And there can be a sense of 'if it's not broken, don't fix it… why do we need to talk about this? aren't we doing ok?'

That's the thing about children…they are devils for pretending they are ok, when really, they are not. But I think a lot of difficulties children show in classroom. Teacher often observes changes in behaviour, in their work. And I think there can be potential for very good collaboration between parents and teachers… but it doesn't always happen.

Carmelita:

Why?

B:

Relationships sometimes…

But also, I suppose parents don't often, don't always keep the school informed with what is happening, particularly if a death is unexpected.

I think it is probably easier in rural communities…the teacher may be living locally, or they may know the parents or the person who has died. They may have known the person, gone to the funeral, seen the child and when that happens, when the child comes back to school, all that ground work has been covered… so they are not starting at ground zero… When the child comes in the next day…what am I going to do… so that can be easier. But sometimes when we are working with people in the palliative phase, we often ask… 'Have you been in touch with the school? Have you told them? Have you kept them up to date?'… often, they just don't think about it. Or, if there has been a problem in the past and relationships are not good… there may be an element of…'no I'm not doing that'. Older children often don't want a school involved, don't want the school to be told because they just want to be normal.

Carmelita:

When do you think that kind of transition happens?

B:

Adolescence… secondary school is where I have encountered it most. So, they don't want a parent to tell the school about a death is going to happen and if it is a city school where teachers mightn't have heard the death happened sometimes unless particularly don't want to school to be told…. I remember having a child, an adolescent, but very mature, and his mother died and it was announced over the school PA system the morning he went back to school that his mother had died…. he was devastated. Mistakes like that don't happen maliciously … the school thought that it would be supportive to him, that everyone would know… it was the opposite of what he wanted.

Q.4 In your encounters with the teaching community, what challenges have teachers voiced?

Carmelita:

So, the challenges… obviously, skills and knowledge… are there any other challenges that teachers or children have voiced?

B:

Yes, I think interpreting their behaviour…'What should I say? What should I not say? Should we say a prayer? Should we not say a prayer? Should we address an assembly?' That kind of thing…

And I suppose, not having a guideline… these are good practices when the child comes back on Tuesday and have been bereaved. There are guidelines out there for schools but a lot of schools just don't have any policy. It is just now in their remit to have put any thought into it. And then it becomes very knee-jerk whenever anything happens …there is panic… and we get the panic calls. We get calls like… 'Johnny's father took his own life on Friday, he is coming back to school on Tuesday… what are we going to do? Tell us please!' That is why the resource from ICBN is so important.

Carmelita:

Has there been a good take-up on this resource?

B:

Huge… I suppose any resource … and when we get calls from schools, there is something else… they might have 3 or 4 children in different classes… but wanting to know 'what's ok'. That is a challenge for teachers because if you don't have encountered a problem with something, you don't see there is a lack of policy.

Q 5 Do we, as a society have difficulty in coping/reflecting on personal loss

Carmelita:

Teachers coping with their own loss… is that a separate issue or is it going to impact on how they cope with loss in the classroom?

B:

I think no matter what your position, if you haven't thought about your own losses, if you haven't examined them in some sense… not that everyone need therapy… but if you have had something happen to you early in your life and you have parked it… if something happens and a child is bereaved in a similar way, at a similar age… it can, I suppose, tap into a person's own grief and you can get ambushed by your own grief.

So, it is a part of it and it is a part of the awareness to be considered, particularly if they have had a loss of parent earlier in their life, or a very close friend. So, I think its relevant but I'm not sure that there are opportunities for that, or if it is recognised… certainly in the training that we do on the Bereavement Support Education Programme, we have the weekend where the participants have an opportunity to look at their own losses and teachers often come to that course. Because, if we are in any position of

supporting bereaved…children or adults…we need to have given some thought to our history of loss, and where might that creep up on me.

Q. 6 In your professional capacity, what are the challenges that the teacher might face in a growing multicultural society?

Carmelita:

Do you think it is an extra challenge for the teacher when we consider the growing multicultural society?

B:

I think it is. It is almost like it is another layer added. And my sense is that we haven't hit the reality of this yet. … teachers understanding grief generally, teachers understanding children's grief… I think until we have some consistency across the board… that teachers are in that zone, that they understand, are interested, respond appropriately …and I think we have now this other flap of a layer then, because we need to understand individually…

I think we can understand cultural issues… but culturally what the death means, how this child has interpreted it, what the death practices were, the rituals…It is very individual again.

I suppose worst thing we can do is to give a bit of information around cultural differences or practices around death and assume that we know what it means for Johnny. Because then we are back to getting it wrong. And I have done that myself.

Carmelita:

Do you think this is going to be more of a challenge in the years to come? Would you have come across many non-Irish / different cultures / different religions… even here in Milford?

B:

Yes, and that number is increasing for us.

Carmelita:

And would you see any difference in the cultural reactions?

B:

I think there is a difference in grief systems.

I remember we had 2 little girls whose mummy died and they described themselves as Catholic. So, I thought… ha-ha… I know this type of bereavement… I've done it. So, I went back to do my bereavement follow-up. And my bereavement follow-up of talking about the person, encouraging them to remember her, and what she was like and the funeral and all of that. I got as sense as it was going on … this isn't going right. What is going on here? And what they were able to tell me, in their religion, or their sense of Catholicism was that to talk about and to keep taking about the person wasn't to let them rest. So, by me saying 'talk about your mother'…actually, their sense was that I was actually disturbing her or they were disturbing her in heaven.

Carmelita:

That is fascinating. And as you say… it shows a huge new layer… so the modern profile of the Irish bereaved has changed… not just the Muslim coming into the country but many other facets…

B:

They were from another country but described themselves as Catholic, but their belief system wasn't around heaven and what it meant for the soul that had gone away, nowhere near to what I would have understood from my own Catholicism.

But also, hundreds of children I have met here are Catholics. And in a way, I wasn't able to support them in a way that I ordinarily would. And the fundamental part of the work is talking about the person. So, it had me stuck. But it has stayed with me … I was fine in there with my assumptions and I was completely wrong.

Q.7 Have teachers sought any training from your organisation? If so have you or would you provide such training?

Carmelita:

Regarding the training and education at Milford, would you find many teachers signing up for courses?

B:

I think we would certainly have 1 or 2 in a group of 20 per year. My memory is that we used to have more. Whether or not teachers have more access to online education around bereavement, maybe the Irish Hospice Foundation is doing more, I'm not sure.

Carmelita:

Were you any way involved in the Thanatology course?

B:

Yes, I did the children's slot on that.

Carmelita

Did any teachers take part in that?

B:

I can't remember actually. I just met them one evening.

I suppose my view of it … from providing education that is open to everybody… is that teachers are more reactive in looking for their education than proactive around children's grief. They will come and ask for input when something has happened, when they need it, as opposed being aware of it being a general issue that would be helpful to the staff.

Carmelita:

Tell me about your involvement with ITE.

B:

We were invited by a lecturer to talk to maybe 4th years…very close to 'going out'. And I think we had really the graveyard shift… in 2 senses…4 o'clock on a Thursday which is 1 thing…. that probably can't be avoided…but I think in terms of where they were in their course… their heads were full of

doing… I had people who spoke the whole way through it… I had people who fell asleep…seriously… there was very little interest… I did a fair amount of preparation…I did it several times and I was appalled really at their lack of maturity… lack of interest in the topic… maybe it was the timing… but they were told they had to attend… it was a mandatory slot. They could be excused if they were recently bereaved themselves and had a very good reason not to attend… but they just weren't interested…

Carmelita:

Any questions from the students?

B:

Ach…they were doing their assignments at the back… honest to God…because they were so close to whatever deadlines due or they were going out on placement… this was a box ticking exercise…

Carmelita:

Did you talk to the lecturer in charge about it?

B:

I did.

Carmelita:

Was there any significant reaction?

B:

She heard it… I left after that and it stopped. I don't know at the moment. I think a colleague has been in touch…

The only tiny bit of response was from a girl who had been bereaved herself…. She was interested but that was in a group of 40 or whatever the size of the group was…I remember the room was a good size… but I suppose, it just wasn't relevant for them.

Carmelita:

That is interesting really… because I wonder if there was a module at Initial Teacher Education would it be beneficial in the classroom situation?

B:

I don't know. Because students have so much information to take in, that that information will only become relevant to them when they encounter a bereaved child…and they may not have that in their career for maybe 10 years…and that information is long gone… so I think it could be… they are not really going to take that in or absorb it or think it useful until they need to use it.

Carmelita

So, how can we equip teachers?

B:

I think it is when they are in their posts… and maybe having… there is never a simple response to a complex problem… maybe having a module or a training day… maybe a half day once a year for teachers until you cover everybody and also having resources… once there is that kind of information

available for schools, it will encourage them to think about the issue… what they need for their school and their staff… having access to online information that they can tap into.

Teachers often ask us to give them information that they can give to parents… and there is a lot of information out there…They could have a wee resource pack when needed… it is just a case of being prepared and then having someone to support them with a bit of guidance when something does happen…. because we can all download information but when we are in a crisis, we don't want to read a book. We want someone to tell us what to say. So, I suppose there are different things that are needed…. different responses.Q.8 Can you elaborate on any death education experiences that you may have been involved in?

Carmelita:

And, regarding death education in the actual classroom have you ever been involved in that … or has your organization?

B:

I haven't … no I have… but it was for Secondary school… I did a few slots in a secondary school in a different county…not for younger children. I know there was an attempt made here that didn't work out. I know my own children, in their school, the older children… there is some form of death education for older children in the primary school in Ennis. I know because my child was 8 at the time, as was his friend who had an older sibling in 5th/6th class. They had some talk on suicide. My young fellow at 8 was asking what is suicide? So, his questions came through that source. I don't think it was because there was a death in the school.

Carmelita:

Was it a positive for our son?

B:

It was… but I suppose because I was happy enough to answer the questions in a way that was appropriate to his age. He is a very bright chap, he is curious. So, I was ok to talk to him about how people sometimes take their own lives, it's a way some people die. But it would be a pity if I couldn't in the job I'm in… but not all parents are in the death business! So, it was ok for me but I don't know if other boys were going home to their parents saying 'what is suicide?'

Carmelita:

I think it's interesting … I presume that the class teacher got permission from parents… but the knock-on effect down the line cannot rely be controlled.

B:

You can't account for it. Because, I know one mother who would have been quite cautious with her daughter…she knew it was happening and she would be cautious because she minds younger children so she would be concerned that her daughter would be chatting about it. And that is the thing about death education, isn't it? It is about educating children about death in non-crisis times. And that is a perfect moment there… now it did spark off questions… about 3 months later he wondered 'when is

granddad going to die?' Granddad is a young 72… but it was good… but it's my comfort. Everyone is different… you don't know what you are into…. their history of loss… you don't know what is going on in other people's lives.

Q.8 Any future comments?

Carmelita:

Have you any further thoughts or comments?

B:

I suppose my concern would be that there isn't a consistent need identified for a corresponding response so that whatever happens it is kind of locally determined. So, when we get a call from a school, we can respond in as much as we can… we go out or whatever but not every area geographically has a service… so people in that way are geographically disadvantaged.

Carmelita:

And is that where the Child Bereavement Network is hoping to help?

B:

That is one of the aims … to improve access for bereaved children all over the country and access to information. But I think TEACHERS CAN MAKE OR BREAK AN EXPERIENCE OF DEATH FOR CHILDREN.

Carmelita:

That is a very strong statement

B:

It is…I don't say it lightly. I think if we can do anything to empower teachers to be compassionate towards bereaved children, that is what we should be doing. And I always say that no matter what we do for grieving children, if we don't feel that we have got the skills…

Sometimes as teachers, I think, they feel that they have to do everything… you don't have to do everything…but I always say that your starting point should be kindness. Be kind towards bereaved children… that might be all that we can do. And I think that is the unfortunate thing… children come here with very poor experiences in the classroom… having been treated more harshly, been treated unfairly, not been listened to… been expected to function in the same way…been criticised, been singled out. And children don't want to be singled out.

Carmelita:

Is this more acute in the primary school classroom?

B:

That's right. And Primary school children are more likely to be bullied because they are bereaved. … generally, around the age of 10. Younger children tend to be kinder… younger girls might give a card or a gift to a child who has been bereaved…. boys also report that they don't talk to a parent but will talk to a friend. But when you get into that competitive age… around 10… children often maybe when Father's

Day coming up 'ha… you don't have a father'…And its cruel what you hear… but it is another reason to be bullied. It's really sad…and it just compounds something. And, I think teachers have the capacity to reassure children, to make it easier for them and to give them a place of understanding for kindness. They have a capacity… but they don't all use it.

Carmelita:

Thank you, B for giving me so generously of your time.

APPENDIX G   Excerpts from interviews

Q. 1 In your experience, do we as a society and teachers in particular have difficulty in coping/reflecting on personal loss?

Interviewee A: I think where its different for teachers is that they may be in the classroom situation… where they have a number hours per day and per week…captive with a group of children… some who will have had bereavement experiences and they can't get away from that situation…… if there are things that we feel difficult or if there are issues that that we feel uncomfortable with… we can adopt an avoidance strategy for them…
But in the classroom situation, you can't avoid a child who is grieving and what's happening.

Interviewee C: I would actually prioritise their own comfort and understanding and self-awareness of grief and loss as being absolutely essential because if somebody is going to struggle with aspects of their own experience of loss, then that would significantly hinder their capacity to respond to the children in the classroom… And then, really to be able to see grief and loss within the context of the normal lived experience of all creatures on this planet, its natural, its normal… having a framework into which they are going to look to find ways of communication and ways of interacting with the children around this.

Interviewee D: So, that is a challenge … unresolved issues around loss… caused a trigger… teachers bereaved in childhood.

Interviewee F: As teachers, I don't think we have actually sat down and had a conversation about death even though in the last few years the school has had some situations that would call for that… But we haven't actually sat down in the common staff room or wherever to discuss it formally or informally particularly… But the children were talking about it amongst themselves… and the parents thought that we were talking about it in class and there was a sense for them that: "we don't want this descriptive … this much description". But we hadn't been talking about it… the children were talking about what they had seen at home.

Interviewee G: Yes, definitely…I think it is awkward. People don't want to say… it depends on the teaches personality as well and their experience. But generally, I find teachers in the schools that I have worked in find it difficult.

Interviewee H: I think people do… not everybody does… There is no story that treats all…

It is something that people don't have the words for it…It is strange because we are in an Irish culture where we have all sorts of rituals around death which can be very community orientated and very healing…but sometimes maybe in the urban environment… I don't know, it can be very difficult situation… People can have a fear that if we talk about death everyone will tear up… which there is nothing wrong with… of course you don't want to be doing it in every situation…We have a bit of sensitivity around talking around death… which is another layer on top of the experience of death, I think, in Ireland… I think it probably wasn't there in Ireland if you go back a couple of generations.

Q. 2 The skills required to cope with grief and loss

Interviewee A: Teachers need to have confidence… more specifically in the classroom…people need to have some sense of comfort… A level of understanding about the experience of grief, grief as an experience…grief and the normal life experience as opposed to a problem. It can be problematic, but it's not a problem. Within this, teachers need to be aware … What are the component parts of it? How does it manifest itself?... so that they understand what is happening is as a reflection of the grief and not a free- flowing problem or a behavioural problem or a boldness problem…
I think that teachers have to have a capacity, have to be very tolerant , patient…they have to be able to have very good listening skills but sometimes recognise what they are listening to isn't a verbal communication, it's a behavioural communication…so they need to be able to interpret correctly what the child is communicating…… given that the child may not always communicating verbally…and then they need a way of working with the child … making contact with the child…They need to help the child understand what they are going through… and maybe help the child reframe what they are going through…so by having an understanding of something doesn't take it away but makes it more manageable…

Interviewee D: After parents, teachers are the next most important people…They tell teachers when they are sad… teachers I would say need to listen… It is quite normal that children grieve, but we seem to have a problem that children grieve and we want to make it better.

Interviewee E: There are children in every school both Primary and Secondary that are bringing a lot of baggage to school. And as you are aware children carry multiple losses, can have multiple losses and situations going on in their life… It is very, very difficult because, if you have a child who has very challenging behaviour… But it is about trying to not meet that with anger back … to meet if with understanding… How to build that relationship and not to be afraid of stepping out of line, or crossing boundaries… 'What on earth do I say here without making it worse?' …, to empower schools to know what is within their boundaries, be able to do … to make that school, a whole school, a supportive school environment… Lots of issues handled in different ways… parents do different things… some parents tell children others don't and then some of the pals know and tell them out in the yard … I think

they lack is the awareness around areas of loss and the difficulty… it's an awareness building within the school environment… Not to make them skilled counsellors or practitioners, but to know what to do and what to say and what the issues are and what to expect… They very often ignore it… which cause problems… there is no procedure in place for when the child is returning to school…… I'm not talking about a policy that is going to gather dust… but these situations are prepared for. So maybe there is a designated staff member who will contact the family… in every situation it is different… but just general guidelines around what should be done… that no child should have to walk through the door, particularly after a significant bereavement and to sit down as if nothing had happened. There are various factors for any child that influence how they are … the remaining carer… what are the family circumstances…previous losses… what stage the child is at… what is the child's personality … are they positive or are they very negative … do they have a natural resilience that may be shaken but can be nurtured along.

Interviewee F: Empathise…listen… and just give time to that child…instead of 'come on we don't have time for this'… But it is difficult when you have got 20 other children gathered round…saying: 'what is wrong, what is wrong with her?'…It is just trying to get that moment … space to grieve…

Interviewee G: I think you have to be a compassionate person, I think you have to be patient and a good listener.

Interviewee H: What compounds it for teachers is that not only have they their own challenges about talking about death, managing themselves around the conversation… It is that they feel this huge responsibility for all these children on top of whatever comfort or discomfort they have around the topic. So, it is a very different situation for teachers… The sense of responsibility for children that compounds this for teachers… First is they need to be centred in themselves… they need their own self-awareness… they need to understand their own emotions and be able to accept their own emotions… So, it is not going to be helpful for them if they are worried that will tear-up… because then they are focused in on themselves.
They need to be emotionally intelligent themselves in the sense that they can manage their own emotions. Secondly, they need to be able to hold their own emotions and keep them on hold while totally attend to the child or children… And the third thing they need to do is to build collaborative relationships with the parents…collaborative relationship where there is real respect…where the teacher knows that this parent actually knows this child a lot better than you do … To move out of the 'expert' position and to take a one down position and really listen to the experience of the parent. We need to talk to the parents,
We need to listen to the child,
We need to be guided by their needs,

We need to be responsive,

We need to be flexible,

We need to understand the importance of routine, the place of school in the life where everything else is changed… we do all that

Q. 3 In your encounters with the teaching community, what challenges have teachers voiced?

Interviewee A: In the workshops that we have done, teachers have spoken about the lack of training for instance, the lack of familiarity with grief as an issue, the challenges of dealing with an individual child… So, it's balancing the needs of the one as against the needs of the group… it's a very practical, very logistical challenge

Interviewee C: The main one is about not wanting to do harm, not wanting to make a situation worse, being concerned about what they might say and not wanting to say the wrong thing and that is very often a recurring theme among teachers…, guidelines are enormously helpful, about what is helpful to do and what is not… But in terms of the actual capacity to communicate, that's always going to come down to the individual, that will always come down to general communication skills but also a person's own experience… training and support and guidelines empower teachers

Interviewee D: I think people want to make it better… the challenge for teachers is to understand that they should grieve, it is normal…unlike adults, they will act out, because they are unable to verbalise what they are feeling. They might get angry and fight with some of the other children, they might become withdrawn… school lessons may get worse…, that is a challenge … unresolved issues around loss… caused a trigger… teachers bereaved in childhood… A lot of teachers say to me that: 'we haven't got the time'…

Interviewee G: I think it is quite a hidden thing. I have heard teachers in the staffroom say: "I not prepared for this"; "what do you say"; "do you say-ah yes Grandma has gone to heaven?" Ah, it's just very difficult. And some teachers express that they have no beliefs and they are working in a religious school and they say: "Well I can't say, Grandma is gone to heaven, because I don't believe in heaven". There is a dilemma and often it's just something that is left and hope for the best that it doesn't come up too much.

Interviewee H: The predominant thing I hear is: 'I don't know what to say?'… so, I will say nothing in case I get it wrong'. So, there is a belief that there is a right thing to say

Q. 4 Are teachers adequately trained to cope with grief and loss?

Interviewee A: I think the basic training that teachers get is only part of it…

But if you only wait to train the new teachers… what about the 1000s of existing teachers… so CPD very important…So, to think about young people coming out of teacher training college or existing teacher who never had any training… what needs to happen to equip them to have the confidence, the competence and the ability…to be able to dialogue and facilitate children to have conversations with children around these issues.

A good teacher can make a child's life… a bad teacher can mar it… Teachers are hugely significant life shapers for young people.

Interviewee C: That is really where it needs to start… there should also be a piece about how is a child vulnerable as a consequence bereavement and loss and the family dynamic…

Interviewee D: …teacher education college… I do a PowerPoint presentation, I do some theory on normal grief reactions and then I do case studies and then I ask 'Any questions?'…at times I find I can get frustrated…There would be very few questions… a fear I would say…

Interviewee E: I'm speaking, having trained a long time ago…Were we ever trained around that? And I certainly can put my hand up and say: 'no it wasn't really addressed'… It is superficially addressed through the SPHE programme but there was never a culture certainly… You didn't see your role very much in terms of difficulties that come and the struggles that go on in their lives…. Your role was much more around the classroom management… the whole curriculum… Through the work with ICBN …I am aware now that all the Irish teacher training colleges now have modules on bereavement and loss and the wider difficult issues that are presenting in school populations… They have the language. It is about being very concrete and giving them the skills to say to the child… 'I know things are difficult at the moment for you…Do you need to talk about it? Do you need any help? You know that I am here and that I understand'… (The students) are interested…is to put it mildly… they just lap this up… anywhere I did it there was a huge openness to it.

Interviewee F: Not really…… nothing… is mentioned… You learn by default, don't you… as a teacher…as a teacher and through your experiences and saying the wrong thing…and realising something isn't working… I don't think a vast amount of time or resources need to go into it… just maybe an afternoon training…perhaps someone to one … or role playing… it could be done very inexpensively

Interviewee G: In my experience, I am going back a while, but I do not remember covering anything to do with death… I think we be should trained for it… especially with so much terrorism, for example the bombings in Paris… we were all sent emails in school about it, the kids were talking about it… How do you explain that? …… In our school (primary) we have a team of counsellors… it is kind of their job…

teachers say "get the counsellor in" if we see any grief, anything in a child… its "call the counsellor" … I think the teachers need some training too but an ongoing help is great from the counsellors. They really help… they approach a lot of things through animals, pets, elephants… and elephant when it loses one of its family… they stand and mourn together … all that sort of thing. So, they approach it with literature… emotional literacy…

Interviewee H: Currently One would be SPHE… picture books in SPHE… using picture books to integrate language, language development in SPHE… Social Construction of Identity…narrative theory to look at the stories that are in circulation around children in school and how reputations build… Challenges in Pupil Care… attachment theory and attachment in the classroom…life circumstance that effect children…bereavement.
Historically… I can't remember any mention either…maybe, it just didn't hit the radar then… There was nothing done in the college

Q. 5 In your professional capacity, what are the challenges that the teacher might face in a growing multicultural society?
Interviewee C: Inevitably it makes a huge difference particularly depending on what has literally been the journey from country of origin to Ireland… one of the places that that has to be managed in frontline with our support services is in schools. Schools very often are left dealing with these situations… when we were monochrome, homogeneous, Catholic, white, mostly conformist … all of the different spiritual traditions people are bringing along with them… different cultural practices… and again, whilst our schools are under the patronage mostly of the church, of the Catholic church… then how is that managed? So that brings another complexity to it.

Interviewee E: I don't think we have ever had a traveller child in a Rainbows group …They deal with death in a very different way. They would never be relying on anyone outside … they have their own rituals. My experience and its one of the issues we have around children from different cultures… it's a mine field on several levels… First of all, children from other countries generally don't have the language… different religions and how they look at death … all very, very different and they don't necessarily talk about it…… it's a minefield… an absolute minefield … that different cultures have different views on death and the after-life and that teachers should always ask and respect the belief systems of families of the children in their classroom/school environment.

Interviewee F: Yes, definitely…it is definitely difficult to understanding where every child is coming from… and especially with the different cultures… for example…with Islam…

I have a couple of Muslim children in the class… some are really strict Muslims…and other are just practicing basics…so, just knowing where you are with them is quite difficult and making sure that you are saying the right thing or not saying anything.

Interviewee G: You have to be extremely sensitive to everybody's culture, everybody's religion so it is very broad and it is different when in a religious school… Yes, it just seemed easier when it was a religious school and when you could give the children that comfort … like 'she is in heaven now'… most of the children had the same faith…But it was like a vacuum over here… you couldn't say anything … you can't upset the other cultures… that is just the way it is out here.

Interviewee H: I think what is important in terms of bereavement again.
Teachers can feel: 'ok, I'm not an expert in all religions, so therefore I can't cope with intercultural issues'… and I say to them 'nobody can be an expert, but of course you will learn, and it is your duty to learn more about culture' … But you remember the family who come in who are bereaved, that is their individual living-out of a complex intersection of culture and religion.
So, you don't have to be an expert on all culture and their beliefs around death… all Christians don't do the same thing in death…And what is important is that you know how to talk to the family… So, you could be an expert on Buddhism and Islam and somebody comes in and they are Sheik family… so what is important is that you talk to the family and ask 'what is appropriate for me here? Should I be at the funeral? Should I visit the home? What do I need to understand for your child around this?' … I suppose the other thing is not to give the children a different story to what the family does. If the family are not believers, don't give them the story about heaven. If you know that the family are Christians and genuine Christians and attending church and that is their belief system… then of course you talk about heaven. You work with the language of the family. It is perfectly ok to say to the family: 'what is your understanding? How do you want me to talk to the child?' … There is a lovely book called 'I Miss You' and in it people have different beliefs about what happens after death and I think in a multicultural classroom, that is what we have to say. I think we have to say we have different set of beliefs about a lot of things. This is the kind of conversation we have to have at a global level. We have to try to make sense of this in some way.

Q. 6 Teachers seeking training from exterior organisations
Interviewee A: I suppose while I was clear what we were asked to do and the person who was asking us was clear about what we were going to be doing…I am not convinced that the teacher participants had been fully communicated with as to what they were coming into and we had made it clear that what we were going to be doing was not just a didactic explanation of something… but we were basing it around… part of it was going to be experiential… well they didn't appear to understand always that what we were going to be asking them to do was to be looking at their own grief experiences… and that

proved very, very challenging for some people… I should also say too though in doing this, where some people started and were extremely anxious and probably very resistant because of their anxiety when they had gone through the process, were actually very glad that they had done it.

Part of the reason being is just capacity to deliver…

Interviewee C: Over the years yes, when there have been particularly tragic losses in school either by a parent or the loss/death of a child through accidents, the teachers will often ring our service and ask for support… in the Compassionate Communities Project we went out and initiated the conversations with teachers and in schools. So rather than waiting for a certain set of circumstances needing to be managed, it was like asking people to think ahead… First stage would be to ask what has happened that has caused teacher to look at this … so there might be a very relevant set of circumstances. Find out what they are already doing, how they…to what extent are they following any guidelines or have any policies in place around supporting children with grief and loss…and then we would cater… we have the capacity, to cater… to put a programme together. bereaved children is slightly different to meeting the needs of bereaved adults. So, what children will need and what children will need at different developmental stages as well and that all would have to be factored-in.

Interviewee D: PowerPoint presentation, stages of grief, examples of children grieving, what you can do to help the child… that whole thing about listening and not changing the subject.

Interviewee E: Every day… all the time…school principals… And we have done with the ICBN… we have done a summer course for teachers. We have piloted teacher training in one of the Teacher Education centres. We are also developing a Website. We have a video… At this stage, the ICBN have made contact with various education stakeholders and are actually having a meeting 16th Nov to try and open up exactly what we are talking about now and to influence some of the decision makers and the policy makers… You see some schools would say they have no role here because it is not coming from on top…

Q. 7 What is death education from your perspective?

Interviewee A: Regarding death education in the school… the big problem is curriculum space… as a parent you want them to get an education. There are opportunities within the curriculum

Interviewee D: Of course, there is (a need for death education). Then you normalise it… In Ireland of today, there are still some children who are not taken to funerals…There are still some children who are not told.

Interviewee E: Well, you see, I don't know what you mean by death education… In terms of say outlining or giving an understanding of what is needed at a funeral … I think I would probably be against it as a stand-alone issue… the curriculum to do with SPHE and all the books that the schools are using and if you sift out all the material there about how things change and grow, I think that is a safer way to include it and to build and to make sure you make the reference from the natural world into the human world… It can be done incidentally through a story or through some other form of communicating without having it called

It doesn't have to be a Module on death or a module for children… it is already in the curriculum… Teachers will shy away from it… So, I would see the training as bringing that more… bringing that out into the open … and make sure its mentioned in your policy somewhere… And science, there is scope…. I would see that is what should be brought out… not some module …Use the opportunities that you have every day…

Interviewee F: I think it would be very difficult to introduce… I don't know…. It is difficult… because, you just have to careful that you don't impose … and that it is just that you are informing that this is what some people do… you have got to give a broad spectrum… For me… we talk about living and non-living… we do living and non-living topics… say, we have to classify why is a cat living… because, it is born and it dies…and it has babies and it grows and needs nutrition. We do touch on death in that sense… What would be interesting would be to talk and ask "what do you think about death?" as opposed to you transmitting information in a multicultural society… "what can you tell me about death?" "what do you know about death?" as opposed to us giving the information…

Interviewee G: I suppose you need some training, you need some skills to present the programme …then you have to be ready for what reaction you get… I'd say it depends on the character…There is always a certain number of teachers who are matter-of-fact and don't do emotions. There are those who are more emotionally involved with their children.

I can think of some members of staff in our school who would be wonderful at it and other who would run a mile from it. I think if it was compulsory it wouldn't be a bad thing…

I think it would be good for the children to have the language and to learn all about it… even if it is in a fun way though stories …art… A teacher in school did something on death…

I think it was because one of the children's grandparent died and she was very upset about it.

…decided to read a lot of stories about pets dying and people dying and she said that she had an awful lot of tears, some of the children just burst into tears.

Interviewee H: I think it is neglected…I think there is something about the western world that we try to pretend that we are all powerful and in control… I think in a way indigenous communities, rural communities are in some way much more in touch with the life cycle…

It definitely is not in the agenda of the Teaching Council to be talking to children about death… The way I look at this is we are reading books with children … nearly every school reads The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas… that is full of death… World Wars… full of death…

In Science, we are doing life cycles… So, these are all opportunities to link other subjects with SPHE… The problem of making it a module is it won't be a compulsory module… so therefore people will avoid it… I think it is more…Wellbeing guidelines… In the Wellbeing document that came out in 2014/15… there is one line about bereavement … I think it is more important that in schools the teachers would have some training about loss and where death education and death in the curriculum could be part of it. ICBN is looking at do we could develop what we have got so that teachers on the ground are more supported…

Maybe policy is the way to go really…I'm not sure about formal death education modes, I would prefer to see it integrated through SPHE, through history so that it doesn't become a separate subject…'now were doing the death'… because, death is part of life.

Q. 8 Can you elaborate on any death education experiences that you may have been involved in?

Interviewee A: Bereavement Support Programme…… a Pilot Thanatology Course. The only other way we are involved is through the Compassionate Communities Project and using the Website and Facebook and running Cafe Conversations with people looking at what makes difficult to talk about death… I think that is hugely different in terms of how things are received and how things are engaged with when it is a response from a request as opposed to 'this is really something that would be very helpful for you when you are faced with a situation' … its huge. And in fact, I would say it's the two opposite ends of the continuum.

Interviewee C: a local college… thanatology course…Death cafes… Compassionate City Charter which is in the process

Interviewee D: The Principal asked me would I come to talk to her 6th class around bereavement…he questions were superb

Q. 9 Any further comments?

Interviewee A: I think the job that teachers have and the expectations on them is really challenging… expectations massive…

Any teacher who wants to do something about this as an issue… if they only began with themselves and began to ask themselves: 'what has my experience been?'… 'what helped me?'… 'what made it difficult for me?'… 'what would I like the next time?'

Interviewee C: So, what is it that every teacher should have at their disposal when faced with the inevitable? I'd say that what I would wish for is that they would have a comfort and a confidence in their capacity to support and hold their pupils as they begin to understand and manage what is a very significant part of the human condition as 8 year olds, as 10 year olds, as 15 year olds in a way that will build the pupils resilience. And in order for that to be the case the teacher needs to feel confident, they need to have given some consideration to this subject, they need to have an awareness around the subject, they need to know what is evidence based good practice.

Interviewee D: I've been working with children for years…In my opinion they don't need counselling, they need support… But we need to truly listen, to be truly present…

Interviewee E: There is a growing awareness in schools that issues become quite complex for some children and that schools are not equipped to deal with it… Not to make them skilled counsellors or practitioners, but to know what to do and what to say and what the issues are and what to expect… I would think bereavement also needs to be put into school policy… I think it needs to be highlighted much earlier on… no point in highlighting it when it has happened …

Interviewee G: I have seen teachers reading books with children…class books…Books that relate to characters dying… I can see the conversations it brings up during a lesson.

Interviewee H: I would say that students are very appreciative of this work… When students wrote about loss… if that student had experiences significant losses as a child and were now reflecting on it from the perspective of being a teacher… they were always distinctions…
Insider knowledge of understanding about the kind of sensitivity that is needed.

Appendix H **Teacher X** <u>My experience of loss in the classroom</u>

I would consider myself an experienced teacher, someone who has always been able to adapt to any classroom situation. However, I have never found myself at such a loss as when I was confronted with death in the classroom. A student had died suddenly over a weekend and I was tasked with leading the class back into face an empty desk on the Monday morning. I had tried as best I could to put a plan in place but, once inside the classroom, it became quickly apparent that there was no rule book which could have prepared me. Staff had been advised to show strength, not to become too emotional in front of the students, so as to provide a "frame" in which they could find security. The students were looking at me, their teacher, for answers, but they were answers I could not give them. To complicate matters, many of them were from different countries and were of different religious and cultural backgrounds. It became clear to me that, in such extreme circumstances, the standard student-teacher model would no longer suffice, a new method would be required.

I normally place great value on using identification and personalization as a basis for establishing a trusting relationship between student and teacher. So, I began by empathizing, trying to show them that they – and we – were all in the same position, all feeling the same loss. As I discussed my own experience of death, they began to open up and ask questions. Next, I addressed the specific loss of the student in question by asking them to share memories, shifting the perspective from the teacher to the student. By the end of the class, I felt that a common sense of togetherness in loss had been established.

In the weeks which followed I was faced with a number of obstacles: how to continue with lessons without ignoring what had happened; how to address the loss without upsetting the students and causing them to lose focus or enjoyment; most challenging, however, was the necessity of taking into account the various religious backgrounds which respond in very different ways to death. Together with the students I created a new approach to lessons based on a central principle: work would continue but the empty seat would not be ignored. Each class was divided into three parts, what I introduced as the three "Fs": 1. Friend: time dedicated to remembering and discussing their classmate; 2. Focus: time dedicated to curriculum; Fun: alternative exercises that would give the students a sense of relief from both 1 and 2.

For 10 minutes at the start of each class students would engage in small group discussion around the question "how have you been doing?" with the teacher circulating. This seemed to have been helpful as they gradually began opening up about their feelings. A common concern was their anxiety over when they might be ready to move on and return to their studies. This was further complicated by differences in religious backgrounds: some were ready to move on immediately while others clearly needed more time to grieve. For the teacher, it became a delicate balancing act between giving students an outlet to express themselves in class (tears were shed on many occasions) and maintaining focus on lessons (stage 2). This demanded an increased level of engagement and empathy on my part: I tried to continuously relate to the students, in order to reaffirm their trust in the classroom environment and reaffirm the security it provided. At the same time, it was important to maintain focus and discipline in a

way that respected the different religious backgrounds. To make this balance possible I made a point of ending the class on a positive note, by allowing the students to engage in alternative exercises. This, I felt, was crucial for the sheer escapism it provided from both the pressure of school work and the memories of what happened.

Given these obstacles, over time the three components of the class (three "Fs") gradually merged together: instead of being addressed directly, the experience of loss was dealt with through the curriculum. First, students read a novel together which addressed the subject; then, they were asked to write an essay about "loss". In order to avoid any undue pressure, they were told they could write about anything from lost keys to a lost friend. Almost all of them took the opportunity to articulate their own personal experiences. Finally, when the time was right, students were asked to collaborate in a creative project that would honor the memory of their friend. A poem was written; a theatrical performance was staged.

Concluding comments

Having directly experienced loss in the classroom, I now feel strongly about the potential of the classroom itself as a place where loss can be directly addressed. My aim was to integrate the loss into the classroom, first by giving it a distinct place within the group, then by incorporating it into lessons, and finally by harnessing its creative potential. Initially, speaking together with the students was important; but as the collective response gave way to more personal reactions, various obstacles and cultural differences demanded a more nuanced approach. At this point,

writing became a vital tool as it allowed for these obstacles addressed in a way that did not

disrupt the grieving process. Alongside this, the shift from directly confronting the issue to

addressing it indirectly through lessons allowed for an important shift in focus from a collective

to individual responses. The group project then allowed for a return to the collective in a way

that rose above the particular obstacles in question. Overall, I feel that three particular areas of

focus were required of me as a teacher: an increased level of engagement with students through

more personalization/identification/empathy; an increased effort to maintain a strong

framework within which students could continue to work; a willingness to provide students

with an outlet from both school and life, by allowing them to smile and laugh.

Appendix I

<table>
<tr>
<td rowspan="2">COLÁISTE MHUIRE GAN SMÁL
OLLSCOIL LUIMNIGH
MARY IMMACULATE COLLEGE
UNIVERSITY OF LIMERICK</td>
<td>Mary Immaculate College Research Ethics Committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MIREC-3: Application Form</td>
</tr>
</table>

Instructions:
Complete all relevant sections of this form. The information provided must be comprehendible to non-experts.
Attach a copy of all relevant documentation to the application. Failure to provide the necessary documentation
*   will delay the consideration of the application.*
*   If the applicant is a Research Postgraduate Student their Supervisor(s) must sign Section 4 of this form.*

1a	**Title of Research Project**

The challenges that face the Primary School teacher in coping with Grief and Loss in a multicultural setting with particular reference to the 10-12 year olds in 4 schools in the Limerick area.

1b	**Brief Outline**

Key Research Questions:
What are the different skills that teachers need when coping with the
sensitive area of Grief and Loss within a multicultural classroom setting?
Are the Colleges of Education equipping our future Primary School teachers to meet these challenges?
What curricula and pedagogical frameworks are available at national level?
What lessons can be learned from the experience of the Compassionate Communities' (Milford Care Centre, Limerick) proposed Death Education programme in a Limerick school?

2	**Proposed Start Date**	**Month**	September	Year	2015
	Anticipated Completion Date	**Month**	August	*Year*	2017

3	**Project Investigators**				
3a	**Principal Investigator**				
Name	Carmelita McGloughlin				
Faculty	Education				
Department	LSRE				
Position	Research Student		Subject:	Education	
Qualifications	Teachers Cert, Teachers Diploma, Diploma Systemic Family Therapy				
E-mail:	carmelitamcgloughlin@mic.ul.ie		Phone:	00353872367829	
3b	**Other Investigators (use additional sheet if necessary)**				
Name	Qualifications & Affiliation		Signature		
3c	**Foresight**				
N/A					
3d	**Ethical Guidelines / Ethical Clearance from Another Source**				
Are there Ethical Guidelines to which you must adhere in your field of study? If yes, please specify below:			Yes X	No	

The project will involve the expertise of educators from both third and first level, parents who were involved in the pilot Death Education project at a local school, participants from the Working through Grief and Loss Workshops and personnel from the Compassionate Communities Project, Milford Care Centre. This will be conducted through questionnaires, focus groups and individual interviews. Each perspective respondent will be asked to indicate their approval in advance of the data-gathering element of the research and permission will be sought that their view may be cited anonymously. In the course of this research, all data will be stored securely and the confidentiality of participants will be guaranteed.

Given the sometimes-difficult nature of the subject matter, a high degree of sensitivity will be ensured in all interviews.

-Information sheets will be distributed to all participants

- Informed Consent forms will be distributed to all participants.

- No rewards or incentives will be offered to the participants

Confidentiality and anonymity of the participants will be assured

Participants informed of their right to withdraw without any reason being provided

Data and information will be stored in a locked cabinet in a locked office space and electronic files will carry a password login.

Do you require Ethical Clearance from another source? If yes, please specify below:	Yes	X	No	
Compassionate Communities Project, Milford Care Centre, Limerick. Permission				

4	Supervisor(s)			
To be completed in cases where the applicant is a research postgraduate student. I hereby authorise the Principal Investigator named above to conduct this research project in accordance with the requirements of MIREC-6 and I have informed the Principal Investigator of their responsibility to adhere to the recommendations and guidelines in MIREC-6.				
Name **Co-supervisor 2. Patricia Kieran**	**Department LSRE**	**Date 16 September 2015**	**Signature**	

5	Study Descriptors			
Please mark the terms that apply to this research project with a ✓				
Healthy Adults	x	Vulnerable Adults		
Children (< 18 yrs)		Vulnerable Children (<18yrs)		
Physical Measurement		Psychological Measurement		
Video Recording/Photography		Voice recording	X	
Questionnaire/Interview	x	Observational		
Physical Activity		Record Based		
Project is Off-Campus		'Other' descriptor(s) not named here		

Please specify 'Other' descriptor(s	

6	Project Design and Methodology

6a	Rationale, Purpose and Benefits of Research Project

Death Education (thanatology) focuses on the human and emotional aspect of death. This involves "acquisition of knowledge…clarification of meaning and attitudes towards death." (Herron Feifel 1959 "Both parents and teachers reported high level of understanding of the nature of children's grief and strongly supported the view that death should be discussed with children before they encounter it." (McGovern and Barry, 2000, p325). The educator needs to have an understanding of the many beliefs, traditions and rituals that they may encounter. Few studies have examined cultural differences that will impact on the teacher's or child's understanding of grief and loss. "There has been a huge transformation in schools during the past two decades in Ireland…Gone are the monochrome school classes to be replaced with multicultural, multi-ethnic groupings that reflect the change composition of our society." (Condon, John. Irish Times 14 May 2014). This study aims to examine the relevant issues and contribute to the international discussion. Following this study, it is hoped that the research will be used to suggest how Initial Teacher Training and Continuous Professional Development of primary school teachers can equip our professionals to cope with grief and loss within the multicultural setting.

6b(i	Research / Data Collection Techniques

Questionnaires will be distributed by the Researcher to the teachers identified and their assessment of how they cope with losses experienced by the children they teach will be analysed. Qualitative research will be enacted through semi structured interviews with members of the Compassionate Communities Project. These interviews will last around 30 minutes each. A focus group involving teachers (5) who participated in Working through Grief and Loss Workshops, that were facilitated through the Compassionate Communities Project at Milford Care Centre, will be facilitated by the Researcher. A focus group with teachers and parents involved in pilot Death Education programme at a local school will also be facilitated by the researcher. 5, people would be expected to take part in this group

6b(i	Research Methodology

This is a mixed method study.
Literature review: Death Education will be investigated from different cultural perspectives.
The course content of relevant subject area, i.e SPHE and Religion in teacher education colleges will be examined. Relevant personnel will be approached regarding participation in the research. Questionnaires will be designed, distributed and analysed. Interviews will be conducted. Focus Groups will be convened.

6c	Steps taken to Minimise Risk

In the course of this research, all data will be stored securely on a password protected laptop. The confidentiality of participants will be guaranteed. Paper data will be locked in a filing cabinet in a locked office space. Given the sometimes-difficult nature of the subject matter, a high degree of sensitivity will be ensured in all interviews.

6d	Location(s) of Project

The schools will be located in Limerick. The Researcher is currently located abroad and will be for most of the duration of the research.

6e	Questionnaires and Interview/Survey Questions

See attached.

7	Participants

7a	How will potential research participants be identified and selected?

Teachers of 5th and 6th class in the designated schools will be contacted and invited to participate.

Parents from the school who were involved in the Compassionate Communities Pilot Death Education Project will be invited to participate. Members of the Compassionate Communities team at Milford Care Centre will be invited to participate. Some participants from the Working through Grief and Loss Workshops will be also invited to participate.

7b	*To be completed in cases where the applicant intends to recruit students that they teach as research participants.*				
	Does the proposed research necessitate the participation of your current student cohort?	**Yes**		**No**	
	If you have indicated that the proposed research necessitates the participation of students that you teach ple: provide:				
	A rationale as to why it is necessary that students that you teach participate in the research.				
	Details of the steps you will take to ensure that participation is voluntary and that participants may withdraw at an time without consequence or fear of consequence.				
7c	**How many participants will be recruited?**				

15-20

7d	**Will participants be reimbursed for taking part in this research proje** If YES, please attach the details to this application.	**Yes**		**No**	X
7e	**Will incentives / inducements be provided to participants for taking p in this research project?** If YES, please attach the details to this application.	**Yes**		**No**	X
7f	**Will Recruitment Letters/Advertisements/e-mails, etc. be used to recr participants?** If YES, please attach the details to this application.	**Yes**	X	**No**	
7g	**Will a permission form be used to document permission to conduct th research within an institution?** If YES, please attach the details to this application.	**Yes**		**No**	X

8	**Confidentiality of collected data and completed forms (e.g. informed consent)**
8a	**What measures will be taken to ensure confidentiality of collected data?**

Questionnaires will be explained as will the voluntary nature of the study. The participants will be advised of the right to withdraw. Anonymity will be maintained at all times in the recording of the data.

8b	**Where and how will the data be stored / retrieved?**

Electronic data will be secured with a Password. Paper data will be locked in a filing cabinet in a locked office space.

8c	**Who will have custody of, and access to, the data?**

The Project investigator, Carmelita McGloughlin.

8d	**For how long will the data from the research project be stored?** *(Please justify)*

For the duration of the project plus 3 years to allow for dissemination of the findings.

9	**Information Documents**		
	Indicate which of the following information documents are applicable to your Research Project by ticking eithe Yes or No in the checklist below. Attach a copy of each applicable information document to the application.		
		Applicable Please ✓	
	Documents	*Yes*	*No*
	Participant Information Sheet	X	
	Parent/Responsible Other Information Sheet		
	Participant Informed Consent Form	X	
	Parent/Responsible Other Informed Consent Form		
	Questionnaire (or sample)	X	

10	**Declaration**

The information in this application form is accurate to the best of my knowledge and belief, and I take full responsibility for it. I undertake to abide by the ethical principles outlined in the MIC Research Ethics Committee guidelines. If the research project is approved, I undertake to adhere to the study protocol without unagreed deviation, and to comply with any conditions sent out in the letter sent by the MIC Research Ethics Committee notifying me of this. I undertake to inform the MIC Research Ethics Committee of any changes in the protocol. I accept without reservation that it is my responsibility to ensure the implementation of the guidance of MIREC as outlined in MIREC-6.

Name (Print) _____ **Signature** _____ **Date** _____

From: Mary Collins
Sent: 12 October 2015 16:50
To: Carmelita McGloughlin
Cc: ResearchOffice - Mary Collins
Subject: MIREC Review

Dear Carmelita,

The review of application A15-046 is complete and you have been granted ethical clearance.

Attached is MIREC 4, for your records.

Best wishes,

Mary Collins

Mary Collins
Higher Executive Officer / Ardoifigeach Feidhmiúcháin
Research & Graduate School Office/ Oifig Taighde & Scoil na gCéimithe.
Mary Immaculate College / Coláiste Mhuire gan Smál
South Circular Road / An Cuarbhóthar Theas
Limerick / Luimneach
Tel/Teil: 061 204980

_____