DEDICATION

THIS WORK IS DEDICATED TO MY SISTER IN LAW AND FRIEND

RACHEL PINK

Life is not the same without you. You were a loyal, trustworthy friend and I miss you. I appreciated your love and enthusiasm. I admired the simplicity and strength of your faith, your unquestioning trust in God and your unfaltering integrity. I can honestly say I enjoyed every moment I spent with you and valued every word we shared. You were an extraordinary person. Being with you, in your last days, was a privilege beyond belief. Thankyou for the laughter and the tears.
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ABSTRACT

The child's experience of re-entry into school after the death of a parent, and aspects that help and hinder that process, were explored within this research. Semi structured interviews with seven adults, parentally bereaved as primary school aged children, established a base for subsequent interviews with nine recently parentally bereaved children, their families and teachers.

Findings revealed that parentally bereaved children, upon re-entry into school, feel different, often describe themselves as being 'inside a bubble' and have a survival tendency to daydream. Expressed strongly is their desire for normality at school, within which a need for non-public nurture exists. School is often seen as a safe place away from the trauma of the new home environment.

Effective two-way communication between the school and home needs to be established by the school to effect the best re-entry and ongoing support for the child. The teacher plays a key role in communication with the family and child and in provision of initial support and ongoing monitoring of the child's well-being. The majority of schools are seen as inadequately prepared for supporting parentally bereaved children and need to consider staff training and pro-active planning in order to facilitate the best re-entry possible.

The loss of a parent in a child's life is traumatic. Bereaved children who work through the process with the best outcomes and have less chance of being at risk, are those who are supported within an environment that provides love, respect, security and open communication. The grief of our children deserves significant input in order for those supporting them to achieve the most desirable outcomes.
INTRODUCTION

It is only in the past thirty years that children's reactions to bereavement have been studied more systematically within a developmental context. Until recently, it was assumed that children did not necessarily participate in a grief process and had the resilience to bounce back from the loss of a significant person in their lives. A developing body of knowledge makes it very clear that children, from a very young age, participate in the grief process as actively as adults do and are often deeply affected by such loss. Children exhibit emotive, cognitive, physical and behavioural reactions to grief, variable in intensity and duration and strongly related to their social and familial context. There is still much to be learnt about children's grief but it is clear that children cope best within a safe environment, where they are supported and encouraged to grieve actively. (McKissock 1998, Worden 1996)

Birth of an Idea

As a younger person, my experience of grief and bereavement stretched little further than the death of my grandparents and the seemingly impersonal way that their lives were concluded. The lack of acknowledgement and emotion for people who had played key roles in my life, stuck in my mind as I learnt that death was not to be talked about and was an aspect of life to 'get over' and 'move on from'. I remember waking one night, nine months after the death of my grandmother, sobbing for her loss and searching for her photo, as if being able to see her would ease the pain. Part of me realising how good it was to cry for her, another part surprised at the fact that I was still to 'get over it'.

In later years, I had the privilege of experiencing how others celebrated the death of those they loved. Experiencing different cultural views on death and grief, attitudes towards the body and funeral and mourning practices allowed me to expand my understandings. Being able to look at death from the perspectives of others contributed personally to an increased confidence and awareness of death, its tragedy and the riches and possibilities that can arise from it.
Rachel

I have dedicated this work to Rachel. She was my sister in law and my friend. Her faithfulness in friendship, her ability to empower others, the flair with which she lived life, her gentleness and her strength were attributes I greatly appreciated. Rachel was diagnosed with cancer after the birth of her second child and, although she bravely fought the disease with every ounce of energy she possessed, it became evident that this was a battle she was not going to win. I had the distinct privilege of spending the last month of her life, 24 hours a day, alongside her. During that time I wrote a diary of my experiences with her. It speaks of her physical deterioration and her almost unaltering emotional strength:

Saturday June 24

'Rachel is amazing - so brave and yet in so much pain. I am starting to know what she needs at different times and differentiating between actual pain and anxiety. It is challenging for her. She is strong yet fragile. Sometimes needing a hug and some quiet words, sometimes medication, sometimes space and cool air, sometimes a prayer. Sometimes she needs you to hold her hand and say nothing. At times it is a case of trying until you find the right one.'

Friday June 30th

'I lift up the children so Rachel can hold them. They seem oblivious of her discomfort, perhaps because they are young, but I wonder what is going on in their minds. I am helping her more with the absolute basics, which I think she is resigned to. We work together to maintain her dignity. She is wonderful to care for! What a privilege. It is an amazing feeling to be completely trusted by someone you love, who has become so reliant on you. I sit beside her and watch her. We have increased her medication and yet it does not seem to make much difference. She remains brave and positive for 95% of the time. Her strength becomes ours.'
Friday July 7th

'We are so acutely aware of each second with Rachel - how she is, how she feels, what she needs. Is she asleep, awake, dozing, breathing? It was such a difficult night. Rachel, so obviously in pain and discomfort, only dozed for about an hour. I stayed in the room tonight. We took turns to be up with her, moving her around the room in an effort to make her comfortable. She somehow managed to get through the night.'

Rachel died two days later, leaving behind her husband, her son aged four and her daughter aged one. To watch and support a person from life into death had a profound impact on my attitude towards both life and death. My journey has taken me to a place of realising that death is certainly not something to 'get over'. Rather it is part of life, not to be feared or ignored but to be faced and accepted.

In the days following Rachel's death, my focus turned to supporting my niece and nephew. Caring for them, while caring for Rachel, had allowed a close and constructive relationship to blossom between us and I began to realise the reality of their loss. Their father, lost in the sharpness of his own grief, was unable to provide the emotional and practical care they needed and at times the children appeared lost in a myriad of activity and people.

It was here that my questions originated about their grief as children and what lay ahead for them as a consequence of the loss of their mother. I recognised their need for a trusted and caring adult in their lives who would take time to explain what was happening, talk about their mother, listen to their thoughts, and maintain some sense of normality until their father had the emotional strength to resume that role. My teaching background prompted me to start making connections with the school environment and the possible need for a similar approach in the classroom when a child enters or re-enters school after the death of their parent.

The seeds of this work were thus planted and two years on I have sought to discover answers to some of the questions that originated as a result of Rachel's death.
Watering the Seeds

I began to talk about my ideas and questions with those around me and experienced a raft of different reactions. Some comfortable enough to listen to my thoughts and perhaps offer suggestions, but many who were decidedly uncomfortable, said very little and almost winced when I used the words 'death' or 'dying'. Incredulity at my intention to delve into the area of childhood bereavement became an expected reaction and I soon learnt to 'read' people, decide on their level of comfort with the subject of death and act accordingly. Those close to me, who had so graciously listened to my story, provided me with great encouragement to pursue the answers to my questions. I soon learnt that negative reactions and barriers would become the norm in my work and I had to keep looking for alternative routes to achieve my goals.

Those working in grief counselling provided the greatest encouragement. A consistent concern from this group of people was the dearth of research undertaken in the area of children and bereavement. My initial literature searches exposed the availability of theoretical literature and material based on personal experience of bereavement and grief while highlighting the noticeable lack of research based literature. The reasons for this became more obvious as I moved further into my work and started to meet the barriers and challenges of linking and interacting with recently bereaved families and children at such a critical time in their lives. Those who provided the links also did an admirable job of protecting the bereaved and initially treated me with an appropriate amount of uncertainty until I was able to prove my intention was authentic.

My focus on children re-entering school after the death of a significant person was applauded by this group of people who seemed encouraged by my intended research. Research they deemed as essential for both teachers and caregivers, who hold the somewhat unenviable task of supporting children through this critical time of their lives.

Teachers were equally as supportive. Those I spoke with, as the seeds of this work began to take root, described the need for such support. None of these teachers,
including the teacher participants in the research itself, remember any formal training in supporting children dealing with death or loss. Their stories reflect my own experiences. I completed my training well equipped to teach children to read and write but ill equipped to support children in bereavement and grief situations. When such occurrences arose in my classroom, as they inevitably did, I drew on gut feeling, my own and that of my colleagues, in an effort to provide the best for the child or children in need.

The lack of awareness and confidence held by teachers in dealing with issues of death, bereavement and grief, coupled with my observations of my niece and nephew after Rachel's death, prompted me to focus on re-entry into school after the death of a parent. School is a pivotal arena in a child's life within which such a 'critical' loss in a child's life must be acknowledged and supported. Doka describes school as the hub of a child's life and believes...

'...it has become incumbent upon the school to serve as a strand of stability for children... Since the school is a vitally important part of life from age five upward to eighteen, it becomes evident that the school must be prepared, willing, and able to respond to critical loss situations that involve the lives of students. (Doka, 2000a:78)

Teacher's awareness and attitudes towards issues of death, grief and bereavement have a significant impact on their confidence in dealing with it in the classroom. The broad range of levels of confidence that teachers express are both culturally and experientially determined. Responding after the event is more difficult if death has not been a part of the learning environment already experienced. Generally schools and teachers deal reactively with each death that occurs case by case. This approach means that few schools have an established plan to deal with children's bereavement and many don't provide or encourage professional development. Holland (2001) discovered strong connections between the lack of policies and systems in schools, an ad-hoc approach to bereavement and the lack of teacher expertise. He describes the importance of teachers feeling skilled and schools having policies and procedures established before the crisis of a death occurring.
Gathering children's experiences and views on their re-entry into school therefore became vital. To be able to make practical suggestions to teachers about how to support a parentally bereaved child returning to school, I needed to discover children's experiences and what they deemed to be important. I needed to discover the children's point of view.

The questions unfold

Initial questions, which would underpin my work, began to emerge. Most importantly I wanted to discover the stories of recently bereaved children. Based on their context, what was their experience of returning to school after the critical loss of a parent? I wanted to ascertain what aspects of their return had been challenging or difficult and what aspects had been helpful. Identifying how normal they wanted school to be and how much acknowledgement of their bereavement they sought amidst that was crucial to understanding their perspective. I needed to compare their stories with the theory and ascertain whether they matched or whether a key component was missing in supporting and understanding children returning to school after such a critical loss.

In order to approach these children with some degree of confidence, I identified the need to interview adults who were bereaved as children. I was interested in their memories of re-entry into school. Like the recently bereaved children, what were the supportive and challenging aspects of their return? I was particularly interested in the memories that were most vivid as these may provide clues to the stories of the children more recently bereaved. How similar or different would the stories of these adults be to the children who were recently bereaved?

I wanted to discover how teachers welcome back these children and what level of confidence they operate with. What strategies are teachers implementing and what challenges do they face? I realised I needed to ascertain the perspective of parents of recently bereaved children on the return of their children to school. What aspects did they find supportive and what did they require from schools? I was interested in how they viewed their role in their children’s re-entry into school and where their responsibility lay.
The re-entry of a child into school after the fundamental life change caused by the death of a parent demands appropriate and planned support. I was seeking to find out if this was occurring for children and if not, what needs to occur to meet the challenges this situation poses.
DISSENTATION FRAMEWORK

Structure

This dissertation begins with a thorough review of related literature. In order to provide the reader with a sound base upon which to understand the findings, I have investigated historical and contemporary understandings of grief, children's grief and their reactions, the impact of the death of a parent during childhood and children's re-entry into school.

The literature review is followed by a section on the research process. Following a discussion of the chosen research approach is a description of the ethics of bereavement research and the ethics of working with children. The adult participants are then introduced followed by the child participants, their families and teachers in family groupings. Following this, the data gathering and data analysis procedures are described and the trustworthiness of the research is considered in light of the approach.

The findings are then presented in five sections, representing the emerging themes. The findings are discussed in relation to related literature and implications for teacher are suggested. A conclusive statement is presented which includes implications and recommendations for future research and some personal reflections on the project.

Definitions

Bereavement, as used in this dissertation, refers to the state of losing a significant person. Grief encompasses the emotional response to such a loss and incorporates both psychological and physical aspects. Both these terms are conventionally used in relation to death. The term mourning, although similar in accepted meaning to grief, refers to the social expressions and practices of grief, often culturally constructed and maintained. Within some literature, mourning is used in the context of the above description of grief. I have indicated where this occurs. (Stroebe, M.S. et.al, 2001)
The concept of *re-entry* into school refers to the process of the child’s return to school after the death of their parent. This includes the interactions and occurrences surrounding the day of return and during the first month of the child being back at school. The *surviving parent* refers to a parent or caregiver who has taken responsibility for the care of a child who has lost a parent through death (Holland 2001).
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Searching for appropriate literature to support, challenge and clarify this research has been a difficult task. The dearth of quality research aimed at understanding children and their grief process is obvious. Although research has been undertaken that focuses on related issues, much of the existing work centres around grief in general rather than specifically within the context of childhood.

I begin my review by outlining the development of understandings of bereavement and grief beginning with a historical perspective and moving toward more contemporary understandings. This provides a base upon which I then explain the development of awareness of children's grief and the current perspectives of children's re-entry into school.

Historical and contemporary perspectives on grief

Current authors, including Young & Papadatou (1997) and Silverman (2000a), have stated that in sharp contrast to perspectives on death widely held in the middle ages, contemporary western culture has turned death into more of a taboo topic. They describe how death, once an accepted part of life controlled and with full ritual participation by both family and community, has gradually become feared, usually professionally managed and often hidden. Terminology of death is rarely used and an uncomfortable silence often shrouds its existence. In contrast with many cultures, the western approach to death is viewed by some authors as irrational where open grieving is not generally acceptable and death is almost ignored. Adler & Wingert (1997:58) describe it as the 'antiseptic suburban culture of midcentury' and use Rando's term of 'the first death free generation'. (Holland 2001, Silverman 2000a, Young & Papadatou 1997)

Christian (1997b) believes that within the last ten years, the globalisation of peoples and ideas, the increase in visibility of violence and the rise of drug resistant and immune deficiency diseases have impacted on the status of death, reversing some of these trends. She surmises that 'death will again (sic) become a part of the lives
of many children and families - just as it was before the medical and technical advances of (last) century' (1997b:34). Although this area lies outside the scope of this dissertation, in order to comprehend our current thinking on the grief process which has come to be considered as normal, it is necessary to understand the context of grief from which it arose. (Holland 2001)

Historically, the grief process was seen as one of detachment from the deceased, letting go of the past and moving on. Continuing a bond with the deceased was seen as problematic, termed 'unresolved grief', and viewed as pathological. Any attempts to maintain ties with the deceased were discouraged and clinical techniques made every effort to ensure that attachment to the deceased was severed. Disengagement, or detachment, from the relationship to the deceased became the goal of grief and was the dominant theory throughout the majority of the 20th century. (Silverman & Klass, 1996; Worden, 1996)

The widely held notion of bereavement as a process of detachment, had its beginnings in the work of Freud early in the 20th century. Within his thesis 'Mourning and Melancholia', he described the process as 'decathexis', where individuals gradually sever their attachment to the deceased in order to establish new attachments. Freud proposed that relationships were established for a purpose, usually to meet personal needs such as security and intimacy, and that when the relationship ends physically, it is severed through the grief process. He also suggested a distinction between 'normal' and 'pathological' grief. (Furman, 1974; Manderson, 1999; Silverman, 2000a; Silverman & Klass, 1996; Worden, 1996)

Freud's personal experience with grief, later in his life, did not coincide with his earlier theories. As a result of the loss of his daughter, Freud concluded that grief was a process that could never be completed, that his earlier assumptions were incorrect and that the void left by a significant person could never be completely filled. Within a letter to a bereaved friend, Freud wrote,

'Although we know that after such a loss the acute state of mourning will subside, we also know we shall remain inconsolable and will never find a substitute. No matter what may fill the gap, even if it be filled completely. It
nevertheless remains something else. And actually this is how it should be. It is the only way of perpetuating that love which we do not want to relinquish.' (cited in Bowlby, 1980:23)

Despite publishing his changing theory, the Freudian belief of cutting attachments in order to establish new ones endured and became the ongoing basis for Psychoanalytic bereavement theory. (Furman, 1974; Silverman, 2000a; Silverman & Klass, 1996; Worden, 1996). Disregard for these new ideas re-occurred throughout the development of psychoanalytic bereavement theory. Silverman & Klass describe it as:

The post Freud paradigm for understanding grief has maintained the idea that the primary goal of grieving is to cut the bond with the deceased so that new attachments can be formed. As we examine the history, we find that phenomena indicating that survivors do maintain bonds with the deceased have been rediscovered many times, but each time the insight fails to be passed on and incorporated into the next generation of research and theory. (Silverman & Klass 1996:7)

Although maintenance of the relationship was identified, it was recognised and viewed as allowable, only as an initial stage of letting the deceased go. Later various researchers, within psychoanalytic theory, including Bowlby (1973), Parkes, (1967, as cited in Furman, 1974), Pincus (1974) and Takha (1984, as cited in Silverman and Klass, 1996), conjectured about an ongoing bond of relationship between the person and the deceased but this was never consolidated within the dominant theory (Silverman & Klass, 1996).

Following Freud, psychoanalytic theory continued to focus on the relationship between the person and the deceased. In 1940, Klein (as cited in Furman, 1974) followed in Freud's footsteps, describing grief as a pathological state not unlike that of manic depression. Klein's work was later supported and furthered by Raphael (1984), in her conjecture that those who suffer pathological grief have not yet developed a sense of security obtained through establishing a relationship with a new love object.
Lindemann, 1944 (as cited in Parkes, 2001), although more narrow in his viewpoint, contributed greatly to contemporary understandings of 'normal grief reactions'. His work reflected the belief that there was a normal pattern to grieving and any variation from the norm was seen as problematic. He described digressions from the norm as 'formes fruste' and devised a simple treatment by which bereaved people could function within the 'normal' pattern. Lindemann's acknowledgement of 'chronic grief' as a precursor to psychiatric disorders was a minor part of his work. As discussed later in this review, Parkes (2001) and Anderson (as cited in Parkes, 2001) both undertook subsequent studies that supported the notion that bereavement could result in psychiatric disorders.

**Attachment Theory and Stage models of Grief**

In an attempt to revamp psychoanalytic theory, Bowlby developed his theory of attachment and loss in the grief process based on the development of children's attachments to significant people in the early years of their lives. Bowlby maintained Freud's view of grief as severing the bonds with the deceased and saw the final stage of that process as full detachment from that person. (Bowlby, 1969)

Published in three volumes of work between 1969 and 1980, Bowlby's attachment theory became popular with child development academics. His initial theories around bereavement, however, were based on studies of children who were deprived of their mothers under traumatic conditions, rather than on children suffering loss through death. Bowlby suggested that the mourning process was similar to the anxiety felt by young children when separated from their mothers. The process was described as a series of static stages: *protest*, likened to separation anxiety, *despair and yearning*, likened to grief and mourning and *detachment*, described as a defensive process. Bowlby's personal grief experiences in later life, like Freud, altered his perspective. In his last volume of work, he challenged Freud's frame of reference and acknowledged the work of Parkes, his contemporary, but failed to address or alter his own theories. (Bowlby, 1973; Bowlby, 1980; Parkes, 2001; Silverman and Klass, 1996)
Working from the same basis of attachment and loss as Bowlby, Parkes developed his theory of the grief process as the vehicle for ceasing attachment. He initially found no purpose in maintaining any form of bond with the deceased after the initial stages of grief. Silverman and Klass (1996) describe Parkes' assumptions as:

'...ethological - that is, grief was understood as a preprogrammed set of behaviours cued by a specific environmental stimulus...Parkes understands the interaction with the inner representation of the dead to be an important element of the early stage of grief as it (sic) opens the way for the survivor to relinquish the attachment to the deceased... He sees no useful place for interaction with the dead after grief is resolved.' (Silverman & Klass 1996: 11)

In later research, Parkes and his colleagues began to see evidence of longer term maintenance of bonds with the deceased. Described as an 'unanticipated phenomenon', it was accepted as compatible with Parkes' theory, rather than a basis for the alteration of theory. Followers of the Parkes/Bowlby theories maintained the 20th century theory that the purpose of grief was to break the relationship with the deceased and establish new attachments (Silverman & Klass 1996).

Continuing interactions with the deceased are viewed by Raphael (1984) as hallucinatory. Influenced by Bowlby's theories, Raphael describes the protective nature of such interactions, from the reality of death. She retains Freud's earlier ideas of decathexis as an initial part of the grief process and believes that eventually new attachments will be formed. Raphael asserts the existence of a 'right way' to grieve, a way described by Manderson (1999) as resulting from 'western Individualism and current management ideology' (Manderson 1999; Silverman & Klass 1996).

Building on the stage theories of Bowlby and as a result of one of the most famous studies in the latter half of the twentieth century on terminally ill patients, Elizabeth Kubler-Ross introduced and explored five linear stages of grief. These stages, initially recognised by Kubler-Ross as the grief process of terminally ill people, were later transposed to those grieving for someone else. Despite the fact that this was
not Kubler-Ross' intention, the stages impacted strongly on popular opinions of grief and became widely accepted. Kubler-Ross, in her publication entitled 'On Death and Dying (1969), outlined the five stages as; 1) Denial and Isolation, where denial of the death is used as a buffer between shock and gradual acceptance and the bereaved feels isolated or isolates themselves from having to face the reality of the death. 2) Anger, at the dead person, at God or at others when the death becomes a reality, 3) Bargaining, about other life issues, postponing events or setting deadlines often with God, with oneself or with others. 4) Depression, as ramifications of the loss become clearer. 5) Acceptance of the reality of the death, often void of feelings and where the bereaved still requires support.

Within her writings, Kubler-Ross related how she consistently observed people moving through these stages in a linear fashion. However, such stage approaches to grieving, although initially widely accepted, do not allow for individual difference and context. Currently there is little support for stage theories of grief as individuals do not exhibit the same responses in the same order. Rather it is more broadly accepted that the bereaved move in and out of stages and exhibit a wide variety of responses, which cannot be framed in a linear fashion. (Kubler-Ross 1969, Kubler-Ross 1981, Silverman 2000a, Ministry of Education 2000, Worden 1996) Thus;

'...many grieving people, both adults and children, never feel that they have achieved "acceptance" of their loss, in the sense of getting over it and forgetting. They may, however reach a point where they no longer feel that their grief is disabling for them and where they are able to approach their life more positively. In this way, they are able to accept their loss as part of who they are in their new life. (Ministry of Education 2000:7)

In 1974, Furman recognised the relevance of social context for understanding the grief process of individuals. She describes the importance of the character and personality of the bereaved as well as the impact of the environmental circumstances in determining an outcome of either normal or pathological grief development for individuals. Doka (2000a) discusses the social and cultural influence on grief processes. Like Raphael and Furman, he acknowledges the norms established by society for the grief of individuals and suggests the
importance of rituals in grief. His focus on disenfranchised grief points to the social 'sanctioning' of grief for individuals within certain contexts and settings. (Doka, 1989; Doka, 2000a; Furman, 1974)

The influence of the social and cultural setting on the grief of individuals has become more apparent in recent literatures. Holland (2001) depicts grief as a universal human characteristic, culturally determined as normal or pathological. Like Parkes, Holland includes the specific social setting and the individual characteristics of the bereaved as determinants of the grieving process. The influence of cultural and social norms on individuals, the acceptance of what is allowable in grieving and determinants of what is connected to grieving are also acknowledged by Catlin (1993), Doka (2000a), Oltjenbruns, 2001; Parker (1995), Rosenblatt (2001), Safonte-Strumolo & Dunn (2000), Tramonte (1996), and Young & Papadatou (1997). Grief reactions differ greatly within and between societies and cultures and need to be understood within their cultural context. We risk viewing them as pathological by measuring them against our own standards if we do not acknowledge this.

Continuing Bonds

It wasn't until the early 1990s that the body of evidence supporting the maintenance of relationship between the bereaved and the deceased was strong enough to precipitate change within grief theory. Rather than a process of detachment from the deceased, bereavement is described as a process of altering and retaining the relationship with the deceased, despite their absence. Silverman (2000a&c), Silverman & Klass (1996) and Worden (1996) describe this as a process of actively constructing an inner representation of the deceased, a representation that alters and develops with the child's development and maturation. Rather than a process of letting go of the deceased, grief is viewed as a process of moving on while continuing and developing a relationship bond.

The Massachusetts General Hospital/ Harvard Child Bereavement Study, undertaken in Boston in the late 1980s and early 1990s, was a turning point in these new understandings of grief. This study, co-principaled by Silverman and Worden,
was a longitudinal prospective study of the impact of a parent's death on children aged six to seventeen. Based on the children's memories, feelings and behaviours, it was apparent that the child participants maintained a relationship with the deceased, and held an inner representation of them. (Silverman & Klass 1996, Silverman & Nickman 1996 and Worden 1996). They propose that continued involvement and interdependence needs to be valued and explain this as;

'Memorializing, remembering, knowing the person who has died, and allowing them to influence the present, are active processes that seem to continue throughout the survivor's entire life...While the intensity of the relationship with the deceased may diminish with time, the relationship does not disappear.' (Silverman & Klass 1996:17)

Rosenblatt & Elde (1990), as quoted in Silverman & Klass (1996), point to the importance, within the grief process, of families in grief maintaining and developing connections with the deceased. Klass, Silverman & Nickman (1996) and Worden (1996) also suggest bereavement as a process of adaptation and change as opposed to a psychological state that has an end point. They propose;

'...that rather than emphasizing letting go, the emphasis should be on negotiating and renegotiating the meaning of the loss over time. While the death is permanent and unchanging, the process is not. (Silverman & Klass 1996:19)

They recognise that people are changed by the experience and do not get over it. Silverman (1996b), along with academics such as Abraham, Schafer and Volkan, as cited in Silverman & Klass (1996), suggests that the bereaved identifies with the dead person. This is further described as a process of learning from the dead person and being enriched by who they were when they were living.

Task Models of Grief

Linked to the results of the Child Bereavement Study, they describe five tasks used to establish the connection with the deceased and reach a point of accommodation of the deceased within the life of the bereaved. 1) *Locating the Deceased*, in a distant place, 2) *experiencing the deceased*, believing they were being watched by them or feeling their presence, 3) *reaching out to the deceased*, eg: talking to them, visiting the grave, 4) *waking memories*, of activities and events done together and 5) *linking objects*, either given or self chosen that link the child to the deceased. The tasks are able to be visited and revisited by the bereaved in any order throughout the grief process.

Stroebe et al. (2001) advocate the 'multidimensionality' of bereavement reactions, rather than stages or phases, as being well accepted. Edelman (1994) suggests that grief moves more in cycles, than in stages, and is more seasonal in nature. As a result of her research with women who had lost their mothers, she describes grief as...

'It's not linear. It's not predictable. It's anything but smooth and self-contained. Someone did us all a grave injustice by first implying that mourning has a distinct beginning, middle and end. That's the stuff of short fiction. It's not real life.' (Edelman, 1994:5)

Bonnano (2001a & 2001b) and Bonnano & Field (as cited in Stroebe 2001) provide a critique of the 'Continuing Bond' premise. They suggest that the assumed purpose of a continuing bond with the deceased is not necessarily useful for the bereaved. Bonnano and Field identify aspects of the concept that they suggest may be maladaptive, causing complications due to over-dependency on the deceased. In such cases the need for detachment may arise. As an alternative, Stroebe (2001) suggests the importance of finding meaning in the loss. The suggestion is made that finding meaning may be part of a new framework for understanding grief, requiring further research to ascertain its relevance.

Bonnano (2001a, 2001b) cautions against turning bereavement into a theoretical process and describes grief as a 'normal, albeit painful, human reaction to a difficult stressor event' (Bonnano 2001b:719). The low occurrence rate of chronic grief
reactions and the sizeable minority of individuals who display minor reactions to
grief, make a significant contribution to the shift in perspective from a pathological
viewpoint to grief being a normal process within our lives. Like Parkes, Laungauni &
Young (1997) and other theorists referred to earlier, Bonnano (2001b) points to the
need for greater understanding of the cultural context of grief and the impact of
personality on individual grief reaction.

Bonnano (2001b) and Stroebe (2001) advise caution in consistently encouraging
people to grieve. Their research identified the balance required between active grief
and taking a break from the strains of confronting grief. Bonnano suggests that
sporadic denial in grief can serve a purpose and that avoidance is not necessarily
related to delayed grief. Thus, Bonnano views allowing a child to deny the
bereavement at times, as an acceptable part of the grief process.

Children's grief

Acceptance of the premise that children have the capacity to grieve only occurred in
the latter half of last century. Until the 1970's a common western approach was to
exclude children from death, possibly in an attempt to protect them from the pain of
the loss. Bowlby's review of the consequences of parental loss and homelessness
on children, in 1953, transformed this field of research and was instrumental in the
development of attachment theory. Based on Bowlby's work, Ainsworth (as cited in
Parkes, 2001) outlined four patterns of secure and insecure parent - child
attachments, believing that they played an important part in understanding
subsequent reactions to loss. The work of Wayment & Vierthaler (2002) supports
this notion. (Bowlby, 1969; Oltjenbruns, 2001; Parkes, 2001)

Furman (1974) extended thinking on children's grief by considering the age and
developmental stage of children as well as personality and environmental
circumstances. Contrary to opinion at the time, Furman expressed the need to
appreciate the unique impact of each death in understanding a child's grief. Raphael
(1984) concurs with Furman, believing that the family context and pre-existing
relationship structures play an important role in determining a child's grief process.
The grief undertaken by a child is only able to occur at a point in the child's
development when they becomes capable of understanding it. Klein (as cited in Manderson, 1999) believes that early mourning is revived whenever grief is experienced in later life.

Normand, Silverman & Nickman (1996) furthered the concept of the task model in their assertion of four ways that children connect with the deceased person. Similar to Ainsworth and Wayment & Vierthaler (2002), they believe the prior relationship or attachment with the deceased impacts on the type of connection created. 1) Dealing with a ghost, a fear based view of the deceased now being a ghost, 2) preserving memories of the deceased, a connection based on past memories, 3) interactive relationship with the deceased, where the child perceives the deceased to be active in their lives and 4) becoming a living legacy, internalising the deceased's values and behaviour as a way of remaining connected. They describe these connections as changing and developing over time, with some children progressing from one type to another and some children remaining the same. Tyson-Rawson (1996), as a result of her study on adolescent females who lost their fathers through death, supports Norman, Silverman & Nickman (1996) when she suggests that;

'...the distress of bereavement is ameliorated or resolved only when the bereaved has been able to create a new representational structure within the internal working model.' (Tyson-Rawson 1996:144)

Contemporary theory proposes that the process for children takes time and is an ongoing process that occurs as the child develops and matures. In this way children grieve sporadically. Their periods of intense grief are shorter but their grieving period is longer, often life long. Oltjenbrun (2001) proposes that children cannot grieve for long periods of time and therefore will move in and out of grief as a measure of protection. Dyregrov (1991) agrees, viewing this as necessary for the child to cope with the extremity of the situation. Edelman (1994) describes children's grief as...

'...mourning in bits and pieces, with bouts of anger and sadness punctuated by long periods of apparent disregard.' (Edelman 1994:7)
According to Buchsbaum (1996), the process cannot be fully worked through until the child reaches adolescence, when they have the psychological capability of an adult. Wells (1998) and Fitzgerald (1992) also view the process as ongoing, occurring over a number of years and, like Buchsbaum, view it as being especially prevalent at the time of important dates and events, when the deceased's absence is felt more profoundly. Huntley (1991) suggests that very young children, who have difficulty expressing their grief at the time of the death or who do not have any support to actively grieve as they develop, may deny the death. At some point these children will need to deal with their grief and express their feelings. Silverman, in describing how this process begins shortly after the death, advocates that;

'Children find many ways of staying connected when one of their parents dies. Their parent is no longer present in their lives, and they cannot interact with him or her on a daily basis. They are, however, continually constructing and reconstructing a new or altered attachment to the deceased. They find a place in their lives for the deceased in a way that gives them comfort and frees them to go on with their lives. The past serves as a prologue to the future. It gives it direction and roots.' (Silverman 2000a:105)

Oltjenbrun (2001) describes the phenomena as the 'grief and regrief phenomena' where children move through stages where the context of understanding an earlier loss changes over time. Within their maturing understanding comes the ability to 'regrieve' the loss with a more mature perspective. (Christian 1997b)

Silverman (2000a), Silverman & Nickman (1996) and Tyson-Rawson (1996) discuss the gap left by the deceased within a family situation. Children lose not only the person themselves but also the role that the deceased played in the children's day to day lives. Silverman & Klass (1996) suggest that where the surviving parent or parents are also grieving for the deceased, the child suffers a double loss. McKissock (1998) describes this grief as multi-faceted and explains the insecurity this can cause without adequate support.

William Worden (1996), based on data from the Child Bereavement Study, promotes four 'tasks of mourning' which he believes apply to all bereaved children
within the context of their cognitive, emotional and social development. Worden's tasks are neither limited nor static and can be revisited by the bereaved in any order as they work through their bereavement process, providing for the variability apparent between bereaved children. Worden believes that children need to 1) accept the reality of the loss, 2) experience the pain and emotional aspects of the loss, 3) adjust to an environment in which the deceased is missing and 4) relocate the dead person within their lives and memorialise them. Christian (1997a) refers to Doka in suggesting that children also need to grasp four concepts about death; irreversibility, finality, inevitability and causality. She presents these as stages related to the age of children.


'find a new and appropriate place for the dead in their emotional lives - one that enables them to go on living effectively in the world.' (Worden 1996:15)

Although children will negotiate these tasks in their own way, Worden suggests that children require constructive help with the process. Areas of vulnerability, available support and the social and cultural context will impact greatly on the process undertaken by the child.

Just as there are a variety of perspectives on the way that children grieve, it is vital to recognise that each child's bereavement process and reactions will be different. This review will now focus on the specific reactions to grief that children can exhibit and then look at these in an age related framework.

**Children's grief reactions**

Children who have lost a significant person through death, will react in differing ways. They may exhibit many or few of the following reactions to death and these will occur at varying times throughout the process. Buchsbaum (1996), Christian

Shock and denial are recognised by Duffy (1995), Huntley (1991), Jewett (1994) and Wells (1998) as common responses to death by children, providing a sense of reprieve from information too enormous to comprehend. Wells (1998), Furman (1974) and Duffy (1995) view despair as a possible step on from denial and recognise the possibility of this leading to depression. Kubler-Ross (1969&1981) aptly describes the anger reaction of children to death. Wells (1998) and Huntley (1991) support Kubler-Ross' ideas and explain how children can display anger at the deceased, other significant people or God. Silverman (2000a) disagrees with this, proposing that the anger is aimed at everyone else apart from the deceased. Silverman does agree that anger is an action that arises from feelings and, like Huntley (1991) identifies the need for children to explore their anger. Worden (1996) suggests that the anger reaction may be related to the feeling of abandonment and where the child is not helped to work through their anger, there may be a tendency toward delinquency.

Feelings of panic or uncertainty about the grief of others or the future, can cause anxiety for children. Friendships, family functioning and practical needs, including money, school, clothes or food, are common foci from which anxiety can arise. Wells (1998), Duffy (1995), Huntley (1991) and Jewett (1994) point to the need for communication and reassurance as a result of this reaction. Fear of their own and others death is discussed as a common grief reaction by Huntley (1991), Wells (1998) and Worden (1996). Huntley (1991) describes how children may withdraw from people they love as they are afraid to lose them. Avoidance of new attachments can occur due to this fear of further loss.

occurred. Considering what they did or did not do that could have prevented the death is a common reaction. Often described as more prevalent in children at the ages of five to seven, this reaction sees children blaming themselves for the death. Silverman (2000a), believes that the concept of guilt as a grief reaction is not as strong as a majority of writings suggest.

As the security of the child's world has been disrupted, there may be a tendency to revert to earlier behaviours. Huntley (1991) and Jewett (1994) suggest that appropriate support, consistent routines and expectations are important for children exhibiting regression. Duffy (1995), Huntley (1991) and Jewett (1994) explain children's separation anxiety, tearfulness and clingy attachment to other people they love as a reaction to the death of a significant person. The need for clear explanation of what will occur each day and discussion of change in routines is paramount for the child's security, as bereaved children do not generally respond well to continuous change.

Sleeplessness, bedwetting, hunger, sore stomach, increased heart rate, tension, sweating, shortness of breath and dizziness are some of the physical reactions described by Duffy (1995), Huntley (1991), Jewett (1994), Silverman (2000a) and Worden (1996). These reactions were most commonly seen early in the grief period or at significant occasions or dates. Data collected as part of the Child Bereavement Study confirmed that somaticisation and actual illnesses occurred more in bereaved children than in non bereaved children. A tendency towards a short attention span and hyperactivity were also identified (Worden 1996).

Although not strongly represented in other contemporary or historical literature, the Child Bereavement Study points strongly to the reaction of sadness and loneliness. Silverman (2000a) and Worden (1996), supported by Jewett (1994), describe the emptiness felt by children soon after the death. A preoccupation with the deceased can also exist where children may need to withdraw from things or people and spend time thinking or talking about the deceased. This notion is supported by Duffy (1995), Huntley (1991), Furman (1974), Jewett (1994), Normand, Silverman & Nickman (1996), Tyson-Rawson (1996) Silverman (2000a) and Worden (1996).
Worden's (1996) research proposes a negative effect on self-esteem and self-efficacy for some participants following parental bereavement. He believes that evidence of long term consequences of bereavement is not conclusive and cites research displaying more evidence of depression and panic attacks than anxiety disorders, suicide or conduct disorders. This premise has arisen from data drawn from the Child Bereavement Study. Raphael (1984) cites a variety of suggestions made of long term effects on children who suffer significant childhood bereavement, including ill health, psychosomatic effects, psychiatric disorders and most commonly depression. She suggests caution, proposing that a majority of the studies are retrospective, include methodological problems and therefore are non-definitive.

**Age related grief reactions**

As children up to the age of three have difficulty grasping concepts, Silverman (2000a&c), Brown (1999), Huntley (1991), Kubler-Ross (1969), Leming & Dickinson (1990), Mckissock (1998) and Duffy (1995) see very young children as having no differentiation of understanding between death and going away. Huntley (1991) Kubler-Ross (1969) and Raphael (1984) describe the toddler's pre-occupation with separation and Silverman (2000a) builds on this by suggesting death has no meaning at this age and it is the idea of loss that toddlers attempt to grasp. Silverman (2000a) describes how children of this age will often ask for the deceased and will use play and language to visit the deceased. They gradually realise that the person will not return and accommodate this information. Bedwetting, irritability, confusion, changes in eating and sleeping patterns, withdrawal, stomach upsets and unexplained crying are common signs of grief at this age (Duffy, 1995; Kubler-Ross, 1969, Mckissock, 1998 Raphael, 1984).

According to Duffy (1995), Brown (1999), Fitzgerald (1992), Huntley (1991) and Mckissock (1998), children from three to six years are uncertain about the permanence of death and believe that death is avoidable and reversible. The concept of forever is not within their grasp and the expectation exists, voiced or unvoiced, that the person will return. Silverman (2000c) agrees with this premise and suggests that these children focus on the death as a separation. They want to know where the deceased is and if they will return. Mckissock (1998), Silverman
(2000a) and Worden (1996), identify the need for these children to talk about the deceased and memories of events. Common reactions to grief at this age include internal stress and confusion, rough play, taking on the role of the deceased, nightmares, changes in eating and sleeping behaviours, clinginess and complaining. (McKissock 1998, Huntley 1991) Taking responsibility for the death as a consequence of something the child did or did not do was found to be common at this age by Silverman (2000a), McKissock (1998), Huntley (1991) and Raphael (1984).

Children from six to twelve years of age are in a state of rapid change. They are beginning to think logically and symbolically and retain inner mental representations of people and objects. Raphael (1984) describes the concept of death at the end of this period as almost equivalent to that of adults. Silverman (2000a), Brown (1999), Duffy (1995), Dyregrov (1991), Fitzgerald (1992) and Huntley (1991) point to the fact that the concept of permanence of death is now able to be grasped and the reactions to death tend to be more matter of fact than emotional. Conversely, Silverman (2000a) also identified a tendency to become more emotional, more curious and to ask retrospective questions. McKissock (1998) describes the developing ability of these children, to express their grief. Silverman (2000a) points to the challenge these children can be to understand, as they become aware of their own mortality but often retain an inability to clearly articulate their inner thoughts and feelings. Huntley (1991), Duffy (1995) and Fitzgerald (1992), discuss the development of the fear of death within this age group. This fear includes the death of themselves or the death of others. Other reactions, identified by Huntley (1991), Duffy (1995), Fitzgerald (1992) and Silverman (2000a&c) include withdrawal, changes in eating and sleeping patterns and insecurity. Fitzgerald (1992) proposes that guilt is apparent through this age group, although this is not strongly supported by other authors.

Adolescence (twelve to seventeen years) is an uneven, challenging period. Adolescents are developing the ability to think abstractly, express their feelings, reflect on their own behaviour and feelings and accept another point of view. Relationships are identified as being changeable and reciprocal and the loss caused by the death of a significant person in an adolescent's life, is recognised specifically.
Silverman (2000a&c) points to the idea that death creates a vacuum in the lives of adolescents, that they are aware of what they have lost; parent, friend, sibling, confidante or role model, and that the bereavement can have a profound effect (Fitzgerald 1992).

Silverman (2000a) discusses the impact of gender within adolescence. Information from the Child Bereavement Study, pointed to the premise that girls were more emotional in their grief while boys tended to be more constrained. Parkes, Laungani & Young (1997), in their study on bereavement across culture, suggests that this response may be culturally bound and indicative of the cultures represented within the Boston sample. McKissock (1998), Fitzgerald (1992) and Huntley (1991) describe the changeable nature of adolescents in grief. Mood swings, refusal to cooperate, bad behaviour, anger and challenging death (including risk-taking, drugs and reckless driving) can be indicative of grief. Adolescents may question their own existence and fantasise about their own deaths. Huntley (1991) describes a tendency of grief to adversely affect the future perspective of the adolescent.

**Death of a parent during childhood**

When a parent dies, life irreversibly changes for the child. A vital part of the child's life is missing and their journey involves a complex adjustment process that remains with them for the rest of their lives. Death of a parent during childhood can have devastating consequences. Johns (2000:85) aptly describes it as 'critical loss'; Raveis, Siegel and Karus (1999:165) define it as a 'profound psychological insult that threatens a child's social and emotional development'; Kastenbaum (2001:14) believes the loss of a parent 'has the most profound and enduring influence on children' and Sheras (2000:275) believes 'it shakes children to the core and causes them to doubt the reliability of most everything'.

Parentally bereaved participants in the work of Holland (2001), report a feeling of powerlessness after the death of their parent and being let down by the adults around them, frequently facing a 'wall of silence'. Edelman (1994) in her work with *Motherless Daughters* and Manderson (1999) in focussing on *The Death of the Mother*, both support Holland's findings. Doka (2000), Furman (1974), Oltjenbruns (2001), Raveis, Siegel & Karus (1999), Silverman (2001a & 2001c) and Worden (1996) discuss the importance of open communication between the bereaved child and supporting adults throughout the process.

Key mediating factors identified by Worden (1996), and supported by Holland (2001), Doka (2000) and Silverman (2000), which influence how children will adapt to the death of a parent include:

- The death and the rituals surrounding it.
- The relationship between the child and the deceased before and after death.
- The functioning and parenting ability of the surviving parent(s)
- Family influences eg: size, structure, solvency, communication and support.
- Support from peers and others outside the family.
- Characteristics of the child including age, gender, self-perception and understanding of death.

Worden's findings, supported by parallel work carried out by Normand, Silverman & Nickman (1996) and Holland (2001) depict more behavioural and emotional problems identified in children who had lost their mother than those who had lost their father, particularly where the child was female. These children tended to exhibit higher levels of anxiety and misbehaviour with lower self-esteem and self-efficacy and were more likely to suffer from depression and neurotic behaviours later in life. Rutter (as cited in Holland, 2001) found that bereaved children were twice as likely to suffer a psychiatric disturbance later in life and Bowlby (1973) found that bereaved children were more disposed to clinging behaviours later in life. Worden (1996) found that the number of children 'at risk' of suffering depression or exhibiting neurotic behaviours doubled in the second year of grief when compared with the first year, illustrating a latent effect of the loss on these children. As discussed,
Raphael (1984) is cautious about such long-term effects, believing that the individual child with sensitive support can 'master' the trauma.

The importance of a significant person to facilitate the bereavement process for children became obvious in the results of the Child Bereavement Study. Interviews with 125 parentally bereaved children participating in the study suggest that the significant person should actively encourage the child to grieve and establish and maintain open communication. Silverman & Nickman (1996) and Worden (1996)

Providing mementos for the child and talking with the child about the deceased parent, including memories and significant events were deemed valuable in this process. Maintenance of memories and relationships in this way is also strongly advocated by Buchsbaum (1996) and Tyson-Rawson (1996). Furman believes...

'...when a child's parent dies, he (sic) faces an incomparable stress which threatens the further development of 'his personality. This danger can be diverted if the child can be helped to mourn 'his' parent as fully as possible.' (Furman 1974:11)

Worden (1996) and Tyson-Rawson (1996) develop this further by describing the importance of a secure nurturing environment with continuity and routine. Like Raphael (1984), they view the context within which the bereaved child lives as a strong indicator of how they will cope with the process. Factors such as lack of support, family tension, constant uncertainty or change become negative stressors that add to the burden and heighten the child's tendency to be 'at risk'.

Worden (1996), Silverman (1996) and Furman (1974) propose that the functioning level of the surviving parent is the most powerful predictor of a child's adjustment to the death. Bereaved children will be less likely to suffer emotional or behavioural problems if discipline is administered consistently and if the surviving parent perceives the child's needs and reactions in a way similar to the child. If the surviving parent utilises a passive coping style and provides inadequate support, again the tendency for the child to be 'at risk' will increase. Worden (1996), Silverman & Nickman (1996), Buchsbaum (1996) Tyson-Rawson (1996) and
Normand, Silverman & Nickman (1996) agree that active coping approaches to bereavement lead to the best outcomes for children.

Edelman (1994) aptly describes the sting of death on a child thus…

‘Death loses its romanticism when you’re introduced to it so young. It’s no longer the portentous visitor who rides in on the dark to carry loved ones away. It becomes hard and factual, an event instead of an abstraction.’ (Edelman 1994:232)

Re-entry into school

Research based literature about children’s re-entry into school after the death of a parent is minimal. The topic is discussed within the writings of theorists and practitioners but there is little empirical evidence of the event. Aside from Furman (1974), most of the literature has been written within the last two decades, reflecting the growing awareness of children’s grief.

For a majority of children, as suggested by Grollman (2000), school is described as a second home. Johns (2000) believes it is the hub of a child's life and advocates its importance in the role of grief support. Blackburn (1991), Charkow (1998), Fitzgerald (2001), Holland (2001) and Johns (2000) advocate that school can provide a safe, stable environment for the bereaved child, within which the child can experience normality. Holland (2001) found that the normality is sometimes achieved by school's inaction but advocates a constructive approach to supporting the re-entry of a bereaved child. Fitzgerald (2001) discusses the recent increase in awareness of children’s grief within a school context. She explains…

'We now recognize that children derive much of their sense of well-being from school and that school plays a vital role in establishing what is normal, setting boundaries and creating community awareness.' (Fitzgerald 2001)

Despite the rise in awareness of the needs of bereaved children, a majority of schools are not proactive in their support, preferring to rely on a reactive, individual

‘...seemed to value flexibility within a bereavement response, but surely this could be retained within a formal procedure? An advantage of having a procedure in place is that it can be formulated over a period, with input from all staff, rather than being a response to a crisis. The procedure could provide a structure to be drawn on as a framework at times of crisis, yet still retaining the ability to react to each bereavement individually.’ (Holland 1993:293)

The role of the teacher in the grief process of a bereaved child is described as vital by many authors including Blackburn (1991), Crase & Crase (1995), Farmer & Peterson (2002), Greenberg (1996), Holland (2001), Johns (2000), Silverman (2000c) and Stokes, Wyer & Crossley (2000). Leckey (1991) in her work on attitudes and responses to death education of 158 teachers in 27 Belfast Primary Schools, found that 78.3% of the teachers believe they have a key role in the child’s grief process. 72% of them had taught a bereaved child yet 70% of the schools had no formal grief programme. McGovern & Barry’s (2000) work with 142 Irish teachers found that 35 % had cared for a parentally bereaved child. In Edelman’s work with ‘Motherless Daughters’ (1995) 13% of the participants in the study identified a teacher as being the significant adult in their initial years of grief. Teachers themselves identify the importance of their role. Participants in a study by Sexson & Swain (1993) believe a key part of their role was to provide a sense of ‘normalcy’ for children amidst the turmoil of the death.

Confidence levels amongst teachers about dealing with death, grief and loss vary greatly. McGlauflin (1998) believes there is a continuum of openness amongst the staff and children within a school, from those who are quite comfortable with death
to those who are more awkward. In order to establish a school where grief is dealt with openly, all places along the continuum need to be accepted as a starting point. As identified by Christian (1997), Grollman (2000), McGlauflin (2002), Holland (2001), Velazquez Cordero (1996) and Westmoreland (1996), varying levels of teacher confidence impact on the support able to be offered to the bereaved child returning to school. McGovem & Barry propose...

‘While the majority of studies suggest that parents and teachers are supportive of death education programs in theory, it appears that personal attitudes and anxieties concerning death and dying significantly influence their level of support’ (McGovern & Barry 2000:326).

McGovern & Barry (2000), found that females tended to be more comfortable with supporting bereaved children within their classroom than males. Like Fitzgerald 2001, they encourage teachers to explore their own culturally determined loss history in order to begin to understand the grief of others. Tootill & Spalding (2000) note a recent increase in teacher confidence and belief in the importance of grief education. A key determinant in teacher confidence is the knowledge, experience and training a teacher has had in the area of death. Provision of training for teachers, is identified in both empirical and theoretical literature, as a strongly emerging need. Holland (2001) found that teachers...

‘...will do what they perceive to be the best to support their pupils at the time of crisis, but may lack the necessary skills. The Humberside studies found that many teachers were neither adequately trained nor comfortable with the role of supporting bereaved children' (Holland 2001:42).

'...it becomes critical that we, as professionals working with children and families, understand the phenomenon of loss and provide appropriate supports and interventions when loss and separation impact on those for whom we care.' (McCue 1995:1).

Death education, described by Stevenson (2000) as the 'formal curriculum that deals with dying, death, grief and loss and their impact on the individual and on humankind, can play an important role in helping children to examine loss and grief before it occurs. Also termed, 'grief education', 'change and loss education' and 'bereavement education', the value of discussing the impact of death within the school as part of the curriculum rather than in response to a death is described as invaluable. Supported by Charkow (1998), Holland (2001), Jewett (1994), McCue (1995) and McGlauflin (2002), Stevenson believes effective death education can lead to better coping with future losses, improved communication, lessened degrees of death-related fear or anxiety, greater appreciation of other's viewpoints and an increased feeling of personal control. He considers our schools have been 'charged with educating the whole child, not some type of disembodied intellect' (Stevenson 2000:205).

Prior to the return of a bereaved child to the classroom, it is viewed as important for the teacher to prepare the class. Honest, adequate communication about the death is necessary, particularly where the death has been unexpected. Provision of strategies as to how to interact and respond to the child can help peers to feel more comfortable with supporting the child's return to school (Fitzgerald 2001, Johns 2000, Silverman 2000, Stevenson 2000, Holland 2001).

Reid & Dixon (1999), in looking at teacher attitudes to coping with grief, found that 70% of teachers were more comfortable talking with the class about the death prior to the bereaved child's return as opposed to talking to the class with the child present. Holland (2001) supports Reid & Dixon and advises teachers to inform the child that they have told the class. Jewett (1994) believes...

'Talking to the other children about what has happened before the bereaved child returns to school, explaining how to comfort and welcome the child

40
back, and responding to their fears, curiosity and concerns can do much to ease the grieving child back into a school routine' (Jewett 1994:19).

Quickly establishing effective two-way communication between the home and the school is a key component of the re-entry to school. Holland (2001) explains that the surviving parent, deeply affected by the death, does not have the emotional capacity to undertake this and therefore relies on the school. Dyregrov (1991) emphasises the importance of the teacher making the initial contact and ensuring that the communication is ongoing throughout the process.

Two-way communication allows the teacher to 'learn the facts', as suggested by Fitzgerald (2001), while providing valuable information to the surviving parent about the child at school. Sexson & Swain (1993) agree, suggesting that adequate information about the death from the child's family is vital in deciding how best to facilitate the return to school. Velazquez-Cordero (1996) believes schools need to establish contact with the family, organise a home-school conference to plan the child's return and be in the position to provide or suggest resources or support contacts. Including the family and the child in the return to school is also advocated in the writings of Charkow (1998), Crase & Crase (1995), Furman (1974), Grollman (2000), Silverman (2000c), Stokes, Wyer & Crossley (2001) and Westmoreland (1996).

The actual return of the child to school requires careful handling by the teacher. Holland (2001) suggests careful planning of the first day back keeping in mind the need for normality. Christian (1997a) supports Holland, in advocating a well organised first day back with clear structure and expectation, in order to provide a safe environment, as 'normal' as possible for the bereaved child.

To avoid the adult 'wall of silence', so often mentioned in the experiences of bereaved children within his study, Holland encourages the extension of open, careful communication with the child and a gentle subtle approach to their support. Teachers, in putting up a 'wall of silence', did not talk directly about the death of the parent with the bereaved child at all. The language of death was not used and the child did not feel comfortable to broach the subject with the teacher. Holland &

Charkow (1998), Grollman (2000), Leckey 1991, Selekman (2001) and Westmoreland (1996) emphasise the need for the teacher to be available when the child wants to talk and note the importance of taking time to listen. McCue (1995) and Selekman (2001) note the importance of teachers inviting the child to ask questions and remind teachers of the likelihood that some of the child's concerns may be very practical. Fitzgerald (2001) encourages the use of the language of death when talking with children. Actually using the words 'death', 'die', 'dying' and 'dead' is preferable for children as they address the reality of their experience.

A variety of views exist on discussing the death with the class while the child is present. Dyregrov (1991) suggests a carefully planned whole class meeting after the child's return while McCue (1995) and Silverman (2000c) highlight the importance of identifying and respecting the child's wishes of wanting or not wanting public acknowledgement or discussion. Holland (2001) cautions the teacher about making the death too public with the child present and Blackburn (1991) points to a probable upset in equilibrium if it is openly discussed in the classroom.

Empirically discovered feelings of parentally bereaved children returning to school include isolation, stupidity, fragility, relief, fear and being ignored (Holland 2001 & 1993, Sexson & Swain 1993 and Thomson & Payne 2000). The feeling most often described by children on returning to school is that of being different, often in a 'glass bubble'. Abrams (1992) aptly describes her own experience thus...

'Surrounded by college friends, I felt incredibly lonely, shut inside a glass bubble, unable to reach the world and unable to be reached by it' (Abrams 1992:71).
Reactions to parental bereavement of some children, noted in Holland's studies (2001 & 1993) and supported by Sheras (2000) include disruptive behaviour, anger, crying, withdrawal, depression, moodiness, sadness, insecurity, obsessive behaviour, increased absence, daydreaming, lack of concentration or decline in performance in schoolwork. Dyregrov (1991) discusses the need for teachers to give allowance to the bereaved child, in response to these.


In acknowledgement of Jewett's belief that the transition back to school is extremely difficult, Dyregrov (1991), Jewett (1994), Johns (2000) and Silverman (2000) suggest the establishment of a pre-designated place where the child can go if they need time out. The strain of academic requirements on a bereaved child within a school day can sometimes overwhelm and a preplanned 'escape' is important.

Alongside the importance of significant adults for the return to school, is the importance of the child's peers. Charkow (1998), Grollman (2000) and Sheras (2000) discuss the role that a child's peers can play. Stokes, Wyer and Crossley (2001) suggest the value that can emerge from linking bereaved children together and describe the peer learning and support that can occur from the sharing of similar experiences.

Memorialising the death within the school or classroom is valued by writers such as Charkow (1998), Goldman (1996), Grollman (2000), Holland (1993), McGlaufflin
(2002), Sheras (2000), Stokes, Wyer & Crossley (2001) and Westmoreland (1996). Ways suggested include planting a tree in honour of the deceased, displaying a piece of written or art work or having a photo of the child’s family in the classroom.

Holland (2001), Sheras (2000) and Velazquez-Cordero (1996) consider ongoing monitoring of the child is vital for their wellbeing. Fitzgerald (2001) and Grollman (2000) suggest teachers watch for the child taking on the identity of the deceased, hyperactivity, angry outbursts, lack of affection, a fixation on death, self-isolation, not eating or sleeping well, decline in grooming, frequent crying, feelings of guilt, denial of the death and substance abuse. Teachers need to be aware of the warning signs to watch for and be prepared to access professional help where necessary.

Related literature is available which focuses on re-entry into school after traumatic brain injury and diagnosis of cancer. This literature points to the importance of establishing clear home-school communication, preparing school policies, writing and monitoring an individual education plan, providing training for teachers and the importance of the guidance of professionals in children’s re-entry to school. It is interesting to note the similarity between these ideas and the ideas emerging in literature discussed within this section. (Clark, 1996; Cook-Cottone, 2000; Doelling & Bryde, 1995; Farmer & Peterson, 1995, Prevatt, Heffer & Lowe, 2000, Sachs, 1980; Sexson & Madan-Swain, 1993; Tootill & Spalding, 2000 and Worchel-Prevatt et.al., 1998)
METHODOLOGY

This research sought to discover responses to the following questions:

1. What is the experience of returning to school after the death of a parent like for a child?
2. What aspects help and hinder this process?
3. What are the implications for adults, including teachers and family members, for their role in effectively supporting the child's return to school?

In order to provide some response to these questions, I decided to talk to recently bereaved children, their families and their teachers. The empirical base for understanding what children's experience of school re-entry after parental bereavement might be like is limited. Therefore I decided to interview adults, parentally bereaved as children, before I could establish how I would approach working with the children themselves.

Based on the outcomes of my conversations with these adults, I then interviewed recently parentally bereaved children. In an effort to create a context for understanding the child, I involved the surviving parent, in most cases the siblings, and the teacher current at the time of death. Stroebe, Hanson, Stroebe and Schut (2001) emphasise the need to include children in research and the need to place their grief within the family context. My decision to work directly with bereaved children initially emerged from the lack of children's voice included in both historic and contemporary child bereavement literature. This notion is strongly supported by a variety of writers, notably Lewis & Lindsay (2000), Lloyd-Smith & Tarr (2000), Smith, Taylor & Gollop (2000) and Gollop (2000). Smith, Taylor & Gollop (2000) suggest that...

'Applying post-modern theory to the understanding of the impact of trauma on children's lives suggests that a useful starting point is the child and the subjective meaning(s) which he/she attaches to his/her experience...We have much to learn from children.' (Smith, Taylor & Gollop 2000:9)

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The Research Approach

The nature of the grief of children calls for a sensitive and flexible approach to its exploration. I was seeking to grasp the viewpoints of children and adults, on children's grief, amidst their individual contexts. I wanted to discover the stories of bereaved children in order to make some sense of what their collective experience might convey. It became apparent that a qualitative approach to this work would be most appropriate. Such an approach would allow for the 'meaning' of the participant's stories to emerge in an effort to make sense of their experience. Bogdan & Biklen (1992) and Taylor & Bogdan (1998) emphasise the importance of both meaning and process in understanding human behaviour.

My decision to utilise a qualitative approach was also influenced by other writers. Stroebe, Hanson, Stroebe and Schut (2001) encourage such an approach to broaden understandings of childhood bereavement and enable the researcher to take into account the familial and cultural context of the child more easily. Neimeyer & Hogan (2001) point out that the use of the qualitative approach is in its 'germinal' stage within bereavement research. Like Stroebe (2001), they value qualitative and quantitative approaches but believe that qualitative studies...

"...begin to paint a picture of bereavement that is far more complex and less tidy than that suggested by the artificially simplified and controlled canvasses of quantitative questionnaires." (Neimeyer & Hogan 2001:113)

Silverman & Klass (1996) describe how a qualitative approach allows the researcher to report on what the bereaved are actually experiencing and the way they make meaning from that. Jones & Tannock (2000), who have undertaken qualitative research with bereaved children themselves, believe it is time to 'jettison' structured interviews and questionnaires and explore alternative ways of seeking children's perspectives.

An analytic inductive approach based on the work of Glaser & Strauss' (1967) the 'Grounded Theory' approach (as cited in Bogdan & Biklen 1992), underpins much of this work. This method discovers concepts and theories directly from data rather
than from the research or theory of others. As suggested by Bogdan & Biklen (1992) and Taylor & Bogdan (1998), I did consider the theoretical and empirical work of others in the latter part of my research. This literature provided a context for my work, broadened my thinking and challenged my biases.

I chose to use in-depth interviews as the prime data gathering tool. As Cook (2001) describes, interviews allow for direct response to intensely personal experience and the opportunity to intervene or conclude if stress is induced. Research induced distress is discussed by Bogdan & Biklen (1992) and Jones & Tannock (2001) where they caution researchers about participants having to relive traumatic experiences. They stress the importance of correct ethical behaviour.

**Ethics**

Ethical approval to undertake this research was given by the University of Canterbury Human Ethics Committee on March 8th, 2002 and by the Christchurch College of Education Human Ethics Committee on March 25th, 2002. Realising that the ethics process could be fraught with difficulties, I consulted widely with grief professionals and colleagues and endeavoured to ensure that I had considered all ethical aspects required to undertake such research, before I submitted my application for approval. As I had planned to interview adults parentally bereaved as children before interviewing parentally bereaved children themselves, the University of Canterbury asked me to resubmit my revised set of children's questions before I began to work with them. This was subsequently submitted and approved on May 15, 2002.

The ethics attached to a field of study such as thanatology are complex. This coupled with the ethics of including children as participants necessitated a thoroughly grounded approach to the research. To ensure anonymity, names used within this paper have been chosen by the participants for use within the project.
Ethics of bereavement research.

Cook (2001) highlights the need for bereavement researchers to be acutely aware of their ethical responsibilities, more so than within many less sensitive topics. Throughout the process, in consultation with the project supervisors and grief professionals, I made every effort to uphold the ethical standards suggested by writers such as Bogdan & Biklen (1992), Cook (2001), Jones & Tannock (2000), Silverman (2000c) and Stroebe, Hanson, Stroebe & Schut (2001). Clear standards are described by these writers for protecting the dignity and well being of the participants, providing adequate support for research induced distress and ensuring rigor in matters of access, informed consent and confidentiality.

From the outset of this research, I was aware of the challenge that access to child participants could pose. In setting a context for my research, I had many conversations with grief counselors, currently working in funeral homes, to discuss the value of this project. While strongly supportive of the implementation of my idea, they appropriately acted as gatekeepers for the parentally bereaved children they had contact with and cautiously offered their support in providing access to the children under their care. I discovered the same natural protective tendency with the teachers and surviving parents and had to work hard to build trust and prove my integrity with these potential participants. My experience mirrored Masson (2000) and Smith, Taylor & Gollop's (2000) experience of 'gatekeepers' sheltering children from potential harm and valueless research and testing the motives of those who seek access.

Like the Harvard Bereavement Study, but in conflict with the thoughts of Cook (2001), access to parentally bereaved children for this research was essentially facilitated through the grief counselors from two funeral homes. I valued the gatekeeper role of these people, trusted them to make good decisions about appropriate participants and appreciated the fact that as a known professional, they could make the initial approach to each family. Cook (2001) believes that such access can place extra stress on the bereaved as they may feel obliged to participate in appreciation of the support they receive from the counselor. Aware of this possibility, I made a concerted effort to ensure that each participant was fully
aware of the right of withdrawal at any stage throughout the process. One family decided to withdraw on the day of our initial meeting, citing that the death ‘all just felt too raw and too hard’. The wellbeing of those participants far outweighed the needs of this research and I was pleased that they felt comfortable enough to action their decision.

Informed consent, where individuals make an informed choice as to whether they wish to participate in an investigation, seemed more straightforward for the initial adult participants than for the bereaved parents and children. Cook (2001), Gollop (2000), Jones & Tannock (2000), Lindsay (2000) and Masson (2000) question whether the recently bereaved, particularly children, can actually be informed when giving consent. Cook (2001) questions the emotional capacity of the bereaved to give informed consent and agrees that care needs to be taken to ensure that children do not feel obligated to participate. Careful and thorough description of the nature of the project became a constant at the outset of each interview.

It is also valuable to give thought to the potential and perceived benefits for participants. Four out of the seven initial adults articulated how much they valued the opportunity to tell their story. Three of the four surviving parents expressed the hope that their involvement in the research would have benefits for them and their children. Two of those parents hoped to learn something from their involvement and all of the four parents wanted to know if their bereavement experiences and responses were comparable to those of other participants. Parkes (2001) proposes that involvement in bereavement research should include positive outcomes for participants. Jones & Tannock (2000) discuss the similarities between research and therapy and Cook (2001) describes the benefits of bereaved people having the opportunity to share their story.

An aspect expressed by seventeen of the twenty participants was the opportunity their participation presented to help others in their situation. These participants described the support and empathy gained from those who had suffered significant bereavement and now it was their turn to support others. Cook (2001) described the belief held by participants in a 1995 study, undertaken by Cook & Bosley....
‘that their willingness to share their stories of sorrow as part of a research project would educate others and promote understanding of the impact of death on survivors (Cook 2001:132).

Recent bereavement research direction points to the inclusion of the cultural and familial context of the participant. Initially, I had considered working with one child per bereaved family but after reflecting on initial literature and consulting with bereavement experts, I chose to work with whole families, not interviewing preschool aged children. Stroebe, Hansson, Stroebe & Schut (2001) believe that setting a child’s grief in context increases our understanding of how grieving parents and siblings help or hinder the course of grief. Capturing the experience of whole families provided a broader context for the children’s individual grief and allowed me to grasp the idea, presented by Taylor & Smith (2000), that children’s views of bereavement may differ vastly from their parents.

Realisation has emerged of the necessity to include diverse samples of participants in bereavement research. Diversity of culture is described by Stroebe, Hansson, Stroebe and Schut (2001) and Parkes (2001) as a focus for consideration in participatory and methodological aspects of research. Eight of the twenty participants in this research identify as being Maori, the indigenous people of New Zealand. I believe this adds richness to the outcomes and deepens the significance of the findings for the New Zealand setting.

Death, from a Maori perspective, is viewed as part of life. It is an event shared by all members of an extended family and tribal group. Children are not shielded from the occurrence, rather they are fully involved and welcomed as part of the ‘tangihanga’ (funeral process). As with many indigenous people groups, the body of the dead person is often kept at home or laid in the main building at the tribal marae (meeting ground) until the burial. Over this time, the casket is usually open for the bereaved to ‘korero’ (talk) and ‘tangi’ (cry) with the body of the deceased and their family, farewelling them before the burial. Death is an open topic of discussion in the presence of children and open grieving for the deceased is a ‘normal’ part of the process.
In planning this project, I needed to consider if I was adequately 'qualified' to undertake it. The nature of bereavement research requires skills and sensitivities that I had started to gather through experience and interactions with the bereaved. My discussions with grief counselors encouraged me to pursue the project. The fact that each of the participant families would have direct access to bereavement support, ensured a safer approach to their wellbeing. I was careful not to appear to be a grief expert within the interviews and avoided offering any suggestions of a therapeutic nature. None of the twenty participants appeared to need professional support as a result of my work with them.

Above anything, my earlier experiences of supporting those that are significantly bereaved had taught me that the grief process is variable, unpredictable and immeasurable. What I had considered to be 'normal' did not exist and I learnt to have no expectations of what a person's grief might entail. In starting this work however, I was aware that I would bring my own biases to it. In an attempt to limit the effect of my opinions and expectations, I contributed little of my own ideas within interviews, planned systematic data analysis and asked five of my participants to read their interview transcripts as an accuracy check. Taylor & Bogdan (1998) suggest the importance of the researcher 'owning up' to their perspective early in the research.

I did not consider the possible impacts of the research on myself as the researcher until early in the project. A grief counselor suggested that I remain open to the possibility of needing support myself, a notion that I was unsure if I would need. Jones & Tannock (2000) advise bereavement researchers to be 'meticulously prepared to deal with their own emotions'. Although I have not accessed support of this nature as part of this project, I advocate their view of its importance.

On many occasions throughout this research, I have reverted to intuition in ethical decision making, interactions with participants and considering findings. This intuition has often been further supported by conversations with grief experts or by subsequent participants. I would encourage those interested in further bereavement exploration not to discount their intuitive reactions but to value these amidst the myriad of ideas that present themselves.
Ethics of interviewing children.

The privilege of interviewing children about aspects surrounding the death of their parent requires sensitivity and flexibility. Establishing a relationship of trust between the researcher and the child, as discussed by Gollop (2000), is paramount to the success of the interview. Time and genuine interest must be invested in order to establish a situation where the child is willing to share feelings and experiences. Such vulnerability demands careful preparation and consideration of ethical safety.

Rather than imposing an adult perspective on children's grief experiences, I chose to listen to the voices of recently parentally bereaved children themselves. In order to ensure 'credibility' of the interview guide, I used the findings from interviews with adult participants as a basis for deciding what to include in my interviews with children (Neimeyer & Hogan, 2001).

Familiarity of setting for children with appropriate adult support is emphasised by Gollop (2001) and Jones & Tannock (2000). The setting was chosen by each participant family and in all cases, except one, the child participants were interviewed in their own homes, with their surviving parent present. One child was interviewed in my home, in the presence of his uncle and younger sister. Gollop (2001) and Jones & Tannock (2000) outline the importance of interacting with children in an environment where they feel most comfortable.

In conducting an interview with children, I viewed the encounter as more of a conversation. After establishing rapport with the child, I reminded them that their participation at any point was optional and then reiterated the purposes of the research. Negotiating the interview process with the child, to ensure they understood what was going to happen, was vital for their sense of security. A key component of success with eliciting information from children is to work towards a balanced relationship where the researcher is not in control and the child feels free to say what they want to. I was aware of the impact on what children did say, of their parent or relative being close by, often within earshot. The emotional safety of these recently bereaved children was paramount to my concern and their honesty at
times surprised me. The presence of the parent may have influenced the children's responses but I didn't note any nervous reactions to the parent's proximity.

Children need the choice to opt out of any activity or question at any point. A variety of age appropriate activities including paper, pens, tactile items, picture books on death issues and prepared activity sheets (see appendices G & H) were organised for each interview. The importance of these alternative activities and unstructured materials for play is suggested by Garbarino & Stott (1989), Jones & Tannock (2000), Lewis & Lindsay (2000), Smith, Taylor & Gollop (2000) and Tonkin (1995, 1997, 2001). Although these items were not used in every interview, having these items visible and available contributed to the establishment of trust and sense of security.

The use of age appropriate language and avoidance of suggesting ideas to children were important aspects of working with these child participants. A 'naïve' approach by the researcher is suggested by Gollop (2000) as being the most inductive to children articulating their stories. I avoided repeating my questions with children in an attempt to steer them away from trying to provide a correct answer and made it obvious by my responses that I was learning from them.

The Participants

The Adult Participants

I began by advertising for participants who had lost a parent through death while they were of primary school age, through the internal newsletter at the Christchurch College of Education. I had two direct responses from colleagues, both agreeing to be participants. Lara, whose father died when she was twelve and Huia, whose mother died when she was nine. One indirect respondent to the advertisement chose not to be involved, expressing how the invitation to participate in the research had exposed some 'raw areas' of grief.

Five more adult participants were accessed more informally, as a result of interactions about my research. Dean, a participant personally known to me,
deliberated over his involvement for some time before deciding to participate. His father had died when he was eleven years old and the challenge of facing the loss again needed consideration. Isobel, also personally known to me, volunteered as a result of an informal discussion I had with her about my work. Isobel's father had died unexpectedly when she was eleven.

Debbie was introduced to me by a grief counselor I was working closely with on issues of access to children. Both Debbie's parents died when she was a child, her mother when Debbie was eight and her father, unexpectedly, when she was nine. The final two participants, Pip and Michael, were initially approached by colleagues. Pip's mother died when she was twelve years old and Michael's father died when he was eight. Of these seven adult participants, Lara, Huia and Pip are teachers, a factor that I believe strengthens the findings as they were able to respond within the context of the classroom environment.

I am aware that the sample of adult participants was accessed in a variety of ways including personal contact, response to an advertisement and two participants accessed through a snowball effect, using secondary contacts. As my purpose for interviewing these adults was specific to the preparation for working with children, I did not view this as an issue of concern.

**The child participants, their families and teachers**

Access to recently bereaved children had been my underlying concern from the outset. Counselors, teachers and colleagues I spoke with assured me that this would not be problematic but my 'gut feeling' proved true. Access became my greatest challenge.

Early in the research, I requested assistance with access to children through various grief professionals. The responses of these nine professionals was varied, six cautiously committing to giving my request some consideration and three responding with positive commitment. It was in conjunction with these counselors that I set the parameters of what recent parental grief entailed. We agreed to a timeframe of the death of the child's parent occurring between six and twenty four
months prior to the first contact. This would provide some space from the initial shock of the death but still allow for memories of re-entry into school. I limited my study to primary school aged children in line with the adult participants I had spoken with. This decision, seemingly appropriate early in the research, was soon challenged.

I met with Lois Tonkin, a recognised expert in the grief of children, to discuss my work. Our discussion was fruitful and I came away with renewed enthusiasm and two key pieces of advice. Firstly, never to make assumptions about how children grieve and secondly, to recognise the vast difference in responses and confidence levels of teachers towards death. Lois strongly believed that I would be successful in accessing children as participants and reiterated the importance of the research.

I provided written information about my research, letters for potential participants and consent forms to those counselors who offered support (see appendices A, B & C). Two of the counselors had tentatively suggested families who may be interested in participating and I agreed to wait while they made the first approach and let the families consider the invitation. Waiting, following up, phoning and re-phoning became the norm. I was aware that I was asking counselors to undertake tasks above their already heavy workload and was often torn between phoning them to find out about potential participants and allowing them space. Their professional integrity was strongly evident in the ethical way in which they approached the task of helping me to secure access while retaining their gatekeeper role.

**Participant Families**

**Terry, Carolyn, Anne and Thomas (Ms Brown, Ms Reid, Mr Small)**

Accessing my first participant family changed the journey of the research. Introduced to me by one of the grief counselors, this family allowed me the privilege of sharing the significant loss of their father and husband, six months prior, to cancer. Carolyn, aged 15, Anne aged 13, Thomas, aged ten, their four year old brother and their mother, Terry, were enthusiastic about their involvement. My decision to interview only the primary school aged children in each family altered as I sat with this family and realised that excluding Carolyn could be detrimental for her
and would limit the context of my findings. The importance of working with whole families became established. My experience of the Maori perspective on death stood me in good stead for my interaction with this family, as being Maori was intrinsic to their approach and experience.

At the first meeting in their home, we discussed the purpose of the research and each member of the family, apart from the four-year-old, agreed to participate. I initially interviewed Terry and Anne. Terry's detailed description of the death of her husband provided a context for understanding the grief of her children. The benefit of interviewing the parent before the child was evident and became the premise for my work. I made a further appointment to return to their home, three days later, where I interviewed Carolyn and Thomas.

Anne had talked about two teachers who had been key in her re-entry to school, Ms M. and Mr S. I interviewed Ms M. by phone, as she had moved away from Christchurch and interviewed Mr S. in my office. Thomas' teacher, Ms R, taught in a Maori immersion setting. It was valuable to meet with Ms R. in her classroom and discuss Thomas' return within a Maori context.

**Tom and Josh (Mrs Murray)**
The second family, also identifying as Maori, includes Josh, aged six and his father, Tom. Josh has a younger sister, aged four. Their wife and mother died of cancer two years prior to my interview. The inclusion of this family, personally known to me, pushed my parameters out even further. Josh was a pre-schooler at the time of his mother's death and he started school six months afterwards. I became interested in what that experience would be like and after some deliberation, decided that the inclusion of Josh's experience could enhance the findings.

I interviewed Josh in my own home, with his uncle and younger sister present. Josh interacted with the activities and resources and responded openly to my use of the picture book 'Tom's Story' (Hager 1995). This book is about how a boy called Tom, and his family, learn to be happy again after Tom's father dies. These alternative activities helped him to relax and allowed me to chat with him in a more informal way. Josh's teacher from the previous year, Mrs M, was interviewed by phone. I
undertook this interview the day following my conversation with Josh. Josh was the only child I interviewed before the parent and Mrs M was the only teacher interview that had occurred before my discussion with the surviving parent. As Josh was personally known to me, I had enough awareness of his situation to set his responses in context. If I had not known Josh, I would have reversed the order of interviews.

The interview with Tom, Josh’s father, also occurred in my home. Tom was articulate about his experiences and seemed able to reflect on these with a good deal of clarity. He was an example of how participants learn while they are talking as well as sharing their experiences, identifiable by comments such as ‘I didn’t realise I thought that about that’ after aspects of his conversation. Despite the fact that the intention was not to provide support, it appears that the interviews are helpful. It is the opportunity for people to talk about the death of a significant person to someone who is interested that seems to be valuable.

**David and Danny (Mrs Aldridge)**

Danny, aged nine, Sarah, aged seven and their father, David, were introduced to me through a grief counsellor. Twelve months prior, their mother and wife died of cancer. I interviewed Danny and David in their home after our initial meeting. Sarah decided not to be involved. Mrs A, Danny’s teacher, was also interviewed by phone, as she lives in another city. Danny chose to draw a picture of his family while he and I were talking. He took a lot of time over the drawing and wanted reassurance that I would look after it when I asked him if I could take it with me. The drawing is discussed later in the paper (see appendix H).

Finally, I had two families simultaneously offer to be involved. I would have preferred the participation of just one more family, but it felt ethically unsound to decline an offer of involvement. I realised that these people were agreeing to become vulnerable to someone they didn’t know. The counsellors had worked hard on my behalf to access these people and turning them down was not an option.

Interestingly both families had teenage children as well as primary school aged children and both particularly asked for their teenagers to be involved. Each family
was seeing their participation as being helpful for them, reminding me of my ethical responsibilities and the fact that the importance of the people far outweighs the importance of the research.

The mother of one of the two potential families rang on the morning of our planned initial meeting, to let me know that they were unsure about their involvement, explaining that her son was going through a very tearful time. She was disappointed about this as he had not talked much about the death and she was concerned about his wellbeing. We decided that a decision to withdraw was the best under the circumstances. I made a commitment to keep in contact with her about the outcomes of my work.

Andrew, Nora, Jerome, Natalya and Jason (Ms Chalmers, Mr Deans)
This decision left me with my final family, who were introduced to me through a grief counsellor. The death of their mother and wife was the most recent of the four families, occurring eight months prior. Nora, aged 16, Jerome, aged 12, Natalya, aged ten, Jason, aged nine and their father, Andrew, welcomed me openly into their home. Jason was initially reticent about his involvement but agreed to participate after I explained the purpose of the work in child appropriate language. I interviewed Andrew and Nora during my first visit to their home and then returned to interview Natalya, Jerome and Jason. As with the first family, I only included the teachers of the primary school aged children. Natalya’s teacher, Mr D, and Jason’s teacher, Ms C, were enthusiastic about their involvement, with both interviews occurring at their respective schools.

Data Gathering

Data gathered was gleaned from the stories the participants told in interviews conducted over a period of nine months. Each interview expressed the unique experiences and memories of the participant. The interviews, although based on the interview guides (see appendices D, E & F), were flexible in nature and often the participant would take control of the direction. I was consciously aware of allowing the participant to tell their story while ensuring I was able to gather the data pertinent to my focus. Towards the end of each interview, I ensured that we had
discussed the points on the interview guide and offered an opportunity for the participant to add any further information either then or by contacting me later.

All interviews, except one adult and those undertaken by phone, were recorded and transcribed. I completed the transcribing for the seven initial adult interviews myself. This allowed me to review the content of the conversations while reflecting on my interviewing style. Due to time constraints, the transcribing of the interviews with the surviving parents, the children and their teachers, was completed by a research assistant. With more time available, transcribing these myself would have allowed for deeper processing and familiarity with the data, as suggested by Bogdan & Biklen (1992). Aware of this, I decided to read and re-read each interview as the transcripts were given to me before I began data analysis.

**Interviews with adults, parentally bereaved as children**

I had at least two conversations with each initial adult participant prior to the interview, provided a copy of the research information and consent form (see appendix A) and arranged a suitable time and place for the interview to occur. All participants except one gave their permission for the interview to be taped and transcribed. At the outset of each interview, I explained the research again, clarified their participation and discussed confidentiality. Each participant signed the consent form and chose the name by which they are known within this work.

Interviews conducted with these adults occurred in a range of participant chosen settings. The first two interviews with Lara and Huia, occurred on the college campus. Interviews with Pip, Michael and Isobel occurred in the participant's homes and the interview with Dean was undertaken by phone. As Dean lives overseas, the interview was followed up by emails and subsequent phone calls. My final interview, with Debbie, was conducted at a food hall in a local shopping mall.

Unexpectedly, the data gathered from these adult participants provided a strong base for subsequent data gathered from children and their families. I had not envisaged how valuable this initial data would be and a new question arose. How similar or different would the children's experiences be to the memories and
experiences of these adults? I made subsequent changes to the interview guide that I had prepared for children. This involved making the questions more focussed and including a wider variety of activity and choice for the children in the interview.

**Interviews with children and their families**

Following the interviews with the parentally bereaved adults, I began my work with parentally bereaved children and their families. Access to these families, as previously described, was through grief counsellors who had chosen appropriate participants, in line with our prior discussions about the parameters of the research. These families had suffered the death of one of the parents within the last 18 months and had children of primary school age. They also were deemed to be stable enough to participate in this research. This was a decision made with the judgement of the grief counsellors.

The counsellors provided each family with a copy of the purposes and nature of the research that I had constructed and gave them time to consider their possible involvement. Once they had agreed to participate, the counsellor then passed their contact information on to me. I then made initial contact with each family by phone. I had at least two conversations with each surviving parent participant prior to meeting the family in their home. The first meeting in the home was purely to establish a relationship between myself and the family members and to ensure that the family was fully aware of the process they were to be involved in. I made it clear that they could withdraw at any time and answered any questions the families had. These initial meetings were on a relaxed basis and I made every attempt to establish a relationship of trust and respect through careful explanation of my motivation and purpose for the work.

Once we had discussed the above, I provided another copy of the research information and consent form (see appendix A) and arranged suitable times for the interviews to occur. All interviews were held in the participants homes. At the outset of each interview, I explained the research again, clarified their participation and discussed confidentiality. Each participant signed the consent form and chose the
name by which they are known within this work. All participants gave their permission for the interview to be taped and transcribed.

Interviews with the surviving parent took the longest, often up to two hours. The opportunity to share their story with a genuinely interested adult was appreciated. I began each interview with the initial questions in the interview guide and the participants then tended to take over. I needed to allow these participants to share their story in order to develop a context within which I could grasp the issues of their children's return to school. The effects of the familial and cultural context were evident in their responses.

The children's interviews were the shortest, lasting between 20 and 45 minutes, as they gave more straightforward responses to the questions. They required the most structured approach, where I often had to reword questions or prompt a response. The children tended to take their lead from me and I worked hard to discover an individual trigger that would allow them to take more control of the conversation. For example, Danny talked expressively about his mother when he related to events and activities that they had done together, while Natalya was most expressive when she related issues to her interactions with friends. Each interview was vastly different in emphasis and structure and it was imperative to adjust the method to suit the child, as suggested by Garbarino & Stott (1989). The availability of resources and alternative activities (see appendix E) was beneficial in the interviews with Danny and Josh, the youngest two participants, whereas the interviews with Carolyn and Nora, the oldest two, required an approach similar to that used with adults.

**Interviews with teachers**

I made initial contact with the teachers of the bereaved children at the time of re-entry, after gaining approval from the children and the surviving parents. All initial contact was made by phone and each teacher contacted agreed to participate in the research. Following the phone contact, I sent each teacher a copy of the research information and consent form (see appendix A) and arranged a suitable time and place for the interview to occur. All teacher participants gave their permission for the interview to be taped and transcribed. At the outset of each interview, I explained
the research again, clarified their participation and discussed confidentiality. Each participant signed the consent form and chose the name by which they are known within this work.

Of the seven interviews conducted with teachers, three were conducted in the classroom, one was conducted in my office and three were undertaken by phone, due to the teacher living outside of Christchurch.

The interviews with teacher participants were structured around the interview guide (see appendix F). They varied in length and provided data in relation to the individual children’s re-entry into school as well as the generic concepts held about supporting bereaved children in the school setting. Interviewing each teacher allowed me to triangulate information provided by the children and their families. The teachers tended to take control of the interview and easily moved into discussing ongoing support for the child. I often had to redirect their conversation to the process of re-entry into school but their wider responses provided context for the re-entry process.

Mr D, Natalya’s teacher and Mr S, Anne’s teacher, had both lost a parent as a child. There was an empathy and an understanding in their conversation that differed from that of their colleagues. Ms R, Thomas’ teacher, brought a relaxed awareness of death to her conversation, based on the Maori context of death as a normal part of life.

The purpose of the series of interviews was to gather ‘rich data’ filled with examples, stories and details that would provide a description of the children’s re-entry into school. Bogdan & Biklen (1992), Neimeyer & Hogan (2001) and Taylor & Bogdan (1998) describe the importance of gathering ‘rich data’ in order to create ‘thick description’ of the social behaviour in focus. ‘Thick description’ portrays the meanings and interpretations relevant to those involved in the events. My emphasis within the interviews on encouraging the participant to take control and the flexibility of the interview structure was an attempt to ensure that ‘thick description’ could be achieved.
I focussed on learning from the participants and made every attempt not to instruct or suggest ideas. The opportunity to evaluate my approach from the initial recordings showed that I had a tendency to do this. I was able to adjust my approach in subsequent interviews.

**Data Analysis**

A modified 'constant comparative' method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), was used as the data collection and analytic strategy. Within this method, the researcher codes and analyses the data as it is collected, devising concepts and theories and pursuing emerging ideas with new participants. The constant comparative method is widely recognised and discussed by writers including Bogdan & Biklen (1992), Gay & Airasian (2000), Maykut & Morehouse (1994) and Taylor & Bogdan (1998).

At the outset of this research, I was unaware of what children's experience of re-entry into the classroom after the death of a parent would be like. In a sense I was starting with a blank slate but I was aware of the influence of my experience as a teacher and the discussions with colleagues. The data was therefore analysed inductively. Bogdan & Biklen (1992), supported by Maykut & Morehouse (1994) and Taylor & Bogdan (1998), describe inductive analysis as when researchers...

'...do not search out data or evidence to prove or disprove hypotheses they hold before entering a study: rather, the abstractions are built as the particulars that have been gathered are grouped together. (Bogdan & Biklen 1992:31)

Maykut & Morehouse (1994) outline four steps within data analysis; 1) Discovery, 2) Refinement of Categories, 3) Exploration of relationships and patterns across categories and 4) Integration of data and writing up the research. Data analysis within this dissertation is aligned to these four steps.
Discovery
Ideas and questions started to emerge as I conducted and considered the data from the initial interviews. I recorded these thoughts in a journal and added to them as I conducted further interviews and integrated the responses.

A coding process was used to organise the data. Bogdan & Biklen (1992), Lawrence Neuman (1997), Maykut & Morehouse (1994), Neimeyer & Hogan (2001) and Taylor & Bogdan (1998), amongst other authors, discuss the importance of categorising material within a formal and flexible coding system. Categories or codes were created through bringing together all the data bearing on major concepts and propositions. Frequency of occurrence determined the strength of each category and negative cases are included. The coding system is structured on the initial questions of the research, in an effort to build a picture of what some of the answers may be.

Incipient codes arose from interviews with the adults parentally bereaved as children. These encompassed eight main ideas, descriptions of long term effects and advice for teachers. Strong similarities of experience and memory are apparent in the data gathered from these interviews, leading to the early establishment of codes that developed into mainstays throughout the research. Some codes were tentative and their importance was not realised until later. For example, communication between the home and school was only mentioned by one adult participant and did not arise as a strong pattern until later in the research.

The eight main ideas that arose early in the research as a result of the initial interviews with adults, include;

1. School being seen as 'normal' and as a 'safe place', apparently not dependent on whether the child likes school or not. 
2. The 'bubble' effect, 'surreal' feeling and a 'distance' between the bereaved child and the classroom setting, people and activities. A feeling of difference that underpins these experiences.
3. Normality and Nurture - wanted by participants within the school and classroom setting.
4. Bereaved children doing what they are told by adults, rather than being involved in the process. No-one talking to them.
5. Children very protective of the surviving parent.
6. Other significant adults clearly remembered who nurtured and spoke about the death.
7. Other children taking everything at face value.
8. Concerns about practical things - who will now provide for events, significant days and basic needs.

Other effects discussed by the adult participants included growing up quickly, a lost childhood, guilt, the realisation that life is short, that life goes on and a feeling of depression. I placed these ideas into a category of 'Looking back' so that I could consider their importance within the research.

Refinement of Categories

Integrating data from the children's stories challenged the initial codes and brought a new perspective to the coding structure. The children supported much of what had been shared by the adults but also introduced new concepts and patterns that contrasted with some key adult conclusions. During the interviews with children and their families, my coding list developed to a group of 57 codes (see Appendix I). Emerging themes began to take shape from these codes. They strongly reflect my initial list but differ in the depth of meaning in each theme. These new themes included:

1. The Bubble: Bereaved children, both the child participants and the adults interviewed who were bereaved as children, described the feeling of ‘being inside a bubble’ for a period of time after they returned to school. This theme includes the concepts of being 'looked at', of 'feeling different' and 'daydreaming'.

2. The Dichotomy: Participant bereaved children want and value the 'normality' of school. Within this they want the loss of their parent to be acknowledged in some way. Concepts included under this theme include school being seen as a 'safe
place' and children as providing face value reactions while some adults do not know how to deal with death.

3. The teacher/ the school  The teacher is usually the key person who facilitates the return to school. The teacher's role during the time before the death varies greatly as does the confidence of the teacher to deal with death and loss education. Concepts included under this theme include 'preparing the class', talking with the child', 'monitoring the child', 'being available', 'giving space', 'other significant adults' within the school and involvement in 'change loss and grief education'.

4. Looking Back  Conversations about experiences of parental bereavement in hindsight that impacted on school re-entry include the concepts of 'life being short', 'growing up quickly', having practical concerns' and 'being protective of the surviving parent'.

The perspective of the participant parents and teachers altered the coding structure again and a key theme of 'Home - School two way communication' emerged from my work with these later participants. Parents and Teachers spoke strongly about the importance of having good channels of communication. This theme gradually became a major finding in this work.

As I read each transcript, I divided it into units of data in relation to the codes. As new ideas emerged, I created new codes and modified existing ones to suit the data. I cut each transcript into the units of data and filed the units in folders. Any section of the interview that did not fit directly into a code, was stored in a miscellaneous section. This section contained parts of the interviews which were unrelated to the topic. Initially I stored anecdotal stories in this section but later drew these out into their own code before using them in the data analysis. Filing all data under codes in this way allowed me to create an 'audit trail' (Maykut & Morehouse 1994) that supports the trustworthiness of my work. All data is accounted for and was easily accessible for the data analysis.
Exploration of relationships and patterns across categories

As the research progressed, overriding concepts began to emerge from the coded material. The more I read the data, the clearer these became and relationships between certain categories became apparent, uniting them into concepts. I considered these concepts in relation to the outcomes of the relevant literature I had started to read. I spent a considerable period of time studying themes and relating different pieces of data to each other before I was able to arrive at the generalisations evident in my findings. The concepts included under each final theme kept changing over the course of the research. For example, the continuous links between concepts such as 'the bubble', 'feeling different', 'daydreaming' and 'feeling distant' did not become apparent until I read and re-read the data. I had them sitting as separate concepts for quite some time within the process until I was able to see how the participants continuously linked them together. The time spent studying and reading the transcripts contributed to these changes and resulted in a set of generalisations that strongly reflect the memories and experiences of the participants.

As I started to group the codes together into larger themes, as suggested by Maykut & Morehouse (1994), I began to structure 'propositional statements' for each of my main categories, summary statements grounded in the data. These propositional statements are used in my findings to introduce each theme.

Memos

Throughout the process of data gathering, I created memos to record my experiences and the development of ideas and abstractions. The process, suggested by Bogdan & Biklen (1992), Lawrence Neuman (1997) and Taylor & Bogdan (1998) involves the documenting of concepts, themes, anecdotes and hunches in the form of analytic memos and recording the process in the form of methodological memos. Although my methodological memos thoroughly recorded my process from the start, I did not begin to record my speculation on ideas that were emerging until I had completed the initial interviews with adults. I now appreciate the importance of recording the mental connections you are making from
the outset and found the writing of analytical memos easier as the research progressed.

Reading and re-reading the memos and transcripts allowed me to plan for subsequent interviews. I was able to test the emerging themes and plan specific questions about aspects I was considering. I noticed negative cases of some themes and was able to consider the context for why these might have occurred. I started to build up a picture of the outcomes and become aware of the biases that I was bringing to my work. Data from the children challenged my thinking and I found myself discarding some pre-conceived notions I was initially unaware of. For example, the importance placed on the teacher talking about the death publically with the class, strongly suggested by parentally bereaved adults, is not supported by parentally bereaved children.

Related literature
Towards the latter stages of data gathering, I began to access literature relevant to my research. Literature containing current and historical perspectives was discovered through library databases, recommendations from those I spoke with and bibliographies attached to the works of contemporary writers.

Databases used through the University of Canterbury library include Education Complete and Social Science Plus (with Proquest support), ERIC, Index New Zealand, Infotrac and Psycinfo. Databases used through the Christchurch College of Education library include Masterfile Elite and Professional Development Collection. My key search terms were children, death, bereavement, grief, school, re-entry, adult, parent, teacher and communication. I also used cancer, separation and divorce in order to access research that included these topics in the context of re-entry to school. Very little empirical research has been undertaken that specifically focuses on my topic and I had to search within related issues and include theoretical literature from reputable authors.

Integration of data and writing up the research
The analysed and filed pieces of data, identified themes, memos and journal notes written during the research process became the basis of the writing stage. These
documents coupled with the associated literature were the mainstay of the communication part of the process. As the report was written, the learning continued, the themes altered and I made new discoveries. The process of intensive review of gathered data and ideas was vital in attempting to ensure that the final product best met the needs of its audience.

**Trustworthiness of the research**

Although I discuss the findings of this research in relation to other research, and make suggestions for teachers as a result, I am not implying that these findings are generalisable. Rather, I view this work as a gathering of the stories and experiences of a specific group of participants that may generate understandings about the complexity of their situation for other practitioners and authors.

I have been keenly aware of my own biases throughout the work and have taken care to ensure my findings are strongly grounded in my data. From the outset, I have maintained an audit trail of the gathered data. Every piece of data is accounted for within the coding system, participant transcripts have been self-checked and I have followed up and clarified anything I have been uncertain about.

Throughout all stages of the process a research supervisor, experienced in qualitative methodology, has monitored the research. Regular meetings have occurred where collaboratively we have discussed themes and hunches, moderated the methodology and where the researcher contributed valuable suggestions for the journey of this work. A second supervisor, experienced in the area of death and grief, has reviewed the inclusion of literature and suggested ideas for inclusion. Ongoing discussions with grief professionals, participant review of transcripts, consideration of negative cases, comparison with relevant literature and consistent review of my methodology throughout the process contribute to the credibility of my outcomes.
FINDINGS

Major themes that emerged from the data analysis are arranged under five headings. I will discuss each of the five themes before examining them in light of the literature and looking at their implications. The five themes that arose include; 1) *Everything's different*, where the participants describe a range of feelings and experiences that caused them to feel as if everything at school had changed. 2) *Normality and Nurture: The Dichotomy*, where participants describe the need for subtle nurture within the valued normality of the classroom. 3) *School - Home Communication: The Partnership*, emphasising the importance of effective two-way communication between school personnel and the child's family. 4) *The significant role of the teacher*, emphasising how important the teacher's role is in the wellbeing of the returning child. 5) *Looking back*, which addresses issues raised by the adult participants such as having to grow up quickly, learning that life is short and juggling with the 'missing piece' of the deceased parents absence, in light of the return to school.

**Everything's different**

The belief that everything is different, throughout the process of returning to school after the death of a parent, was categorically reported by all participants. The words 'different', 'everything's different', 'everything has changed' and 'nothing will ever be the same again' were consistently used as participants began to describe their experiences and memories of their return to school. This description of difference was often linked to being 'inside a bubble', 'daydreaming' and being aware of the space given to them, particularly by teachers. The links between these ideas, evident within the participant's stories, created this unanimous theme of difference.

Sometimes a sickening realisation upon re-entry and sometimes a known aspect in the buildup to returning to school, the participants describe an often frightening awareness that they, and everything around them, are different. Lara expresses strong memories of the feeling...
...self-conscious - I don't want people to look at me differently - I want to be the same...I felt different, I felt like I must have looked different or acted different and I wanted to suppress any difference. I felt - don't talk to me about it, don't make an issue of it, it might be a form of denial of the reality of it. I don't know.' (Lara)

Dean remembers...

'...waiting outside the classroom. I knew everybody was told about Dad dying. I don't know how but I did know that. It was different. The teachers were taking time out to talk to me...you know, you were important, something had happened to you. It was definitely different' (Dean).

In this instance, the feeling of difference for Dean arose from the way he was treated by the teachers. Like Lara, participants express a self awareness of being different and an uncertainty about what might eventuate from that. Carolyn felt nervous about going back to school...

'...because of what people were going to say and what I was going to do. And if I was going to burst out in tears in front of people.' (Carolyn).

Josh, who started school six months after the death of his mother, linked his feeling of difference to the fact that...

'Mummy wasn't at school like the other Mums. It was just me and the other Mums were there...I don't know um, it was difficult.' (Josh)

Following this response, I asked Josh to show me how he was feeling at the time, by pointing to a sheet of faces with various expressions (see appendix G). He pointed to the top left face (sad) and the bottom right face (perplexed) while saying 'Sad...mmm...sad'.

Lara remembers 'going back to school and being very self conscious that everyone was looking at me'. This feeling of everyone looking, whether real or perceived, is
common throughout the memories and experiences of the participants, particularly in relation to the first day back. The feeling of difference underpins much of the experience of the initial days at school. It contributes to feelings of nervousness and distance and the need for space. As Thomas describes...

‘Sometimes I felt like I was different - like it would never be the same again. It felt like I was somewhere else sometimes and my teacher just let me do that. I think that's good to let us do that cos sometimes it's just too hard’ (Thomas).

Inside the bubble

Described by every parentally bereaved participant upon re-entry into the classroom is the feeling of being distant from the classroom environment including peers and teachers. Likened to being inside a bubble, participants feel they can't quite connect with people and those around them cannot quite connect with them. Speech and ideas seem to take a considerable amount of time to get through and there is almost a tangible space between them and what is happening in the classroom. This surreal feeling is reported as lasting anywhere from two weeks to three months and longer. Each of the parentally bereaved adults discussed this feeling early in their interviews, describing it clearly as an uncomfortable feeling but one they could do nothing about. Carolyn remembers ‘...my mind was in a different land and my body felt just really weird’ and Huia explains...

‘I felt like I was in a bubble, I felt like I couldn't quite hear anything, everything looked greyer, I was aware of feeling completely out of myself and as if I was sitting watching and not participating. I watched people's lips moving and I could sort of hear them but at the same time, there was a delay before the meaning would get through’ (Huia).

Daydreaming

Linked to the feeling of distance is an increase in the levels of daydreaming within the classroom noticed by both teachers and participants. Daydreaming is reported
by the participants to begin or increase after the death in comparison with prior to the death. Carolyn talks about daydreaming 'kind of like once in a while' after thinking of her father, where 'I just sit there and look at one thing and I can feel water coming to my eyes'. Thomas is able to articulate how thinking of his father triggers his new behaviour of daydreaming.

'I started to daydream sometimes and now I still do. The teachers do kinda' let me do that but I don't think it helps me with my work. I never daydreamed before Dad died but I do now. I just start thinking of him and then I have to blank out everything else. I go into my daydream thing and it is like I am not at school. Then I realise someone is talking to me and I have to stop it.' (Thomas)

Some of the adult participants linked the increase in daydreaming at school, in the early days after the death, to longer term consequences for achievement. After the death of her father, Isobel remembers that...

'At school I became a real daydreamer. From that point on my learning went downhill. I remember always sitting at the back by the window so that I could stare out. I was in my own little world' (Isobel).

The teacher participants noticed the increase in daydreaming for the children in their care and the need to make some allowance for this. The emotional energy expended on grieving and facing the death of their parent is exhausting for any bereaved person. For a child returning to school, the demands of the classroom context are seemingly too much at times and the natural reaction appears to be to periodically shut down and psychologically remove themselves. Danny's teacher, Anne, talks about his tendency to daydream...

'He did have times when he was absolutely away with the fairies and not aware at all of what was happening with the class or the work. I just didn't care. There were some times when I pulled him up on it and refocused him a bit but not much in those first few months. He just needed to be left I think' (Anne).
Space - perceived and real

The participants, both adults and children, report a sense of space given to them by teachers. They describe how they were given a lot more leeway within the classroom in terms of behavioural and academic expectations. This 'space' is sometimes articulated to the child but often is not. The adults, parentally bereaved as children, tend to report the space as being an unsaid aspect of their return to school whereas those more recently bereaved are more likely to describe the space as an offered or negotiated part of their school re-entry. The space encompasses aspects such as freedom to choose to participate or not participate in certain classroom activities, choice about completing homework, less emphasis on responding to questions or participating in discussion in class, freedom to 'tune out' within class time and more allowance for undesirable behaviour.

Mr D, Natalya's teacher, describes the importance of ensuring that the child is fully aware that they have the space to take time out within the school day. Although he has not clearly articulated this to Natalya, he describes an awareness that exists between himself and Natalya...

'...yes I said she can have some space if she needs it, probably subconsciously. I am not putting pressure on her to work flat tack, she wanted extra homework...I said to her there's more to life than hard work' (Mr D).

Ms R has taught Thomas, now ten, as part of the whanau class since he started school. Like Mr D, she realises the value of giving allowance and of informing other teachers in the school to ensure that the allowance is school wide. Michael expresses the hope that teachers are becoming more aware of what children need on their return to the classroom. He suggests...

'Just be normal and talk about it. Include the child and take the pressure off. At this time, the academics of life are not important. Just being in the room, accepted and supported' (Michael).
The children express their appreciation of the space that is being offered to them and describe how it contributes to their sense of security. Their comments include...

'I remember not being told off if I ignored him or didn't do my work' (Huia).

'(The) teacher didn't care so much about my homework or if I finished things. Sometimes I would just not finish anything and be thinking about something else' (Danny).

The space, whether perceived or real, was reported by all of the parentally bereaved adults and children. Significantly, the adults reported it as being perceived and not communicated whereas the recently bereaved children reported it as being both communicated and perceived.

**Normality and Nurture: The Dichotomy**

Participants describe a strong need for 'normality' at school. The normality involves inclusion in the same classroom programme, being treated similarly to other children and a reliance on routines and classroom management to provide a sense of security within the school and classroom environment. Within this need for normality, participants describe a strong need for subtle appropriate nurture from school personnel. The need for acknowledgement of the death of their parent within the school setting is equally matched to the described need for normality.

The need for normality and nurture occur simultaneously and present a challenge for both the bereaved child and the teacher. The child participants consistently report that they want school to be normal, just as it was before their parent died. Within that they want some acknowledgement of their loss and the understanding that they are able to go to a trusted adult if they deem it necessary. Ms R, Thomas' teacher, believes that...

'...sometimes they probably don't want the heart to heart and to be made to bring the feelings to the surface and other times they might want to talk about
something so they usually give you a hint or a clue, they say something in response or you just catch (him) on the quiet when he's on his own...and if he wants to talk about it he will take it up.' (Ms R)

Danny describes things at school upon his return as...

'...Sorta' normal and sorta' different. I liked it that way. It was a relief to go back cos' the kids were just the same to me and they knew that Mum had died and I think my teacher had talked to everybody about Mum dying...that was a good thing.' (Danny)

As I will discuss later, not every child wants the teacher to share the death of their parent with the class, as Danny did. The key factor in the stories of the participants is the need for security within the school context. The coexistence of normality and nurture appears to be an important component of achieving this.

Normality

The significant need for normality at school, including consistent classroom routines, teacher expectations and being treated the same as other children, appears to stem from the dramatic change in the home context for most parentally bereaved children. This need is explicit in conversations with the child and adult participants, without exception. Danny remembers that...

'...being at home was really hard cos' it was so sad to be here but I knew at school it would be normal and so I wanted to go back'. (Danny)

Andrew describes Jason's need for complete normality at school. Jason's teacher, Ms C, tried to talk about the death of his mother with him at their meeting before his return to school. Andrew knew that his son 'didn't want that at all' and explained how 'sometimes he doesn't want to talk about it at home either'. Both Jason and Danny are very clear about the importance of school being normal and prefer no public acknowledgement of the death of their respective mothers. David, Danny's father
suggests that 'teachers need to make things just safe and normal for the kids coming back into school'. The term 'normal' is used by all of the parentally bereaved participants to describe their contextual need upon school re-entry.

The shortest length of time that lapsed before a participant returned to school was one day. Michael remembers wanting to go back straight away 'as it provided stability and normality' and to be 'away from the intensity of home'. Nora, Natalya, Jerome and Jason, had five weeks of their summer break before their return, the longest length of time. Six of the participants returned after one to two weeks and two participants did not remember how long it was before they re-entered school. Three of the bereaved participants were told to go back by their surviving parent and 13 were able to choose the timing of their return.

Despite this mixture of details surrounding the bereaved participants return to school, they all expressed how normality is a key component within it. Some of the participant's descriptions of this include....

'I wanted to return to school as soon as I could. School would be normal and I needed to be away from home where life was very abnormal...Most teachers didn't say too much and that was O.K. It is important that things are just normal and not everyone talks about it.' (Anne)

'I just want it to be normal like the other kids.' (Natalya)

'I just wanted them to be normal. I remember why can't they just be normal. It is so important just to be straight about it with children.' (Dean)

'When you're Dad dies, you can't hide, but at school they soon lose interest in that. School was a safe environment. You're one of 35 there. At home I was one of two and I couldn't hide. School was just normal...It was normal functioning. I wasn't bursting into tears or anything it just felt normal and I could function there....School was a familiar routine - it was normal! The teacher would ask me to write a story, do my homework. Thank God it was
normal. Routines. You see you've lost the whole thing - all your routines and you want familiar things back.' (Dean)

'I would think that children would feel like they are different to everyone else because they have lost a parent, the last thing kids want is to be different.' (Ms C)

Without exception, 'safe', 'normal' and 'routine' classroom practices are wanted by the parentally bereaved participants I spoke with. This aspect was underpinned by a more subtle, but equally important, issue of nurturing. As Isobel describes...

'...I did want the normality of the classroom too. It is two things at once really. Wanting both normality and nurturing. I wanted to be nurtured a bit more. I was given so much space and it was almost too much and I was very alone in it.' (Isobel)

Nurture

To varying extents, the participants express the importance of having adults in the school monitoring them through the re-entry to school and the bereavement process. They appreciate knowing they can go to speak with these adults when necessary and the participants appreciate the periodic checks that teachers subtly make on their wellbeing, through a quiet comment or facial expression.

An interesting difference arose between the perspectives of the parentally bereaved adults and those of the recently parentally bereaved children. The adults remember little or no nurturing and describe how much they would have appreciated far more than what they received. Isobel describes the need to ensure that nurture is evident within the running of the classroom 'otherwise a child can feel alone in it'. Debbie recalls...

'I remember feeling very sad all the time. It was sad time. I was wanting acknowledgement and attention more than anything...I wanted a bit of fussing and something to make me feel special' (Debbie)
Michael discussed...

'I wanted to be special too. There were times when I just wanted to yell about my father. How could they just go on and be normal and yet that was exactly what I wanted. I wanted to be special and normal all at the same time.' (Michael)

The child participants are aware of the need for support but often do not require more than the knowledge that it is there. They prefer that acknowledgement is never made public and that a teacher or other significant adult 'knowing' about their loss is enough. Nora's experience of returning to school included an awkward meeting with the school counsellors. Nora was called out of class to meet with the counsellors for an unknown reason. She found herself in the midst of an embarrassing situation where neither of the counsellors talked about her mother's death but expected her to talk about it. Nora became understandably upset at having this situation thrust upon her. She describes the constructive relationships that exist between her and two other teachers. The mutual respect and trust that has been established in these self chosen relationships provides Nora with the opportunity to access such support if she sees it as necessary.

The participants appreciate a sense of ongoing subtle nurture. Michael explains how...

'...it would have been good if the teacher asked me how I was now and then, without all the class being aware of it. Just so I knew someone was onto it really.' (Michael)

Josh wanted the teacher to talk with him about how he was 'just some of the time' and 'just with me'. Thomas describes how teachers need to...

'...talk with you and ask you how you are sometimes and let you have some space to stop working sometimes. My teacher - I didn't really know her until
after my dad died and she was really lovely and let me just do what I needed.'

(Thomas)

Jerome appreciates knowing that the counsellors are available to him but is certain he will never go to them because 'I just don't have any problems'. Like Jerome, the other child participants bring a more matter of fact approach to their situation. The adult participants' response to the importance of nurturing tends to be more emotional and may reflect an adult perspective on death. Of the adult participants, Michael and Dean's descriptions of the nurture they sought are more like the children. Michael explains...

'It would have been good if the teacher had asked me how I was now and then without all the class being aware of it. Just so I knew someone was onto it really. (Michael)

The importance of the 'nurturing' teacher or adult being chosen by the child is strong. It may not be the classroom teacher who fulfills this role. In Debbie's story it is the dental nurse, in Pip's an itinerant teacher and in Michael's it is the school secretary trusted to take the role. Jason naturally linked with his teacher, reflecting the trust that has been established through the whanau context of his classroom environment and the fact that Jason and Ms R talked about death before, during and after the death of his father. Like Natalya's description of the subtle support offered by her teacher, the most appreciated support, by the participants, is respectful and non-intrusive.

School as a safe place

Alongside the normality that school can offer parentally bereaved children lies an aspect of safety. School is often described as a safe haven away from home providing security and comfort amidst the trauma of significant bereavement. Safety is also recognised by children whose parents are sick, either at home or in hospital, before they die. Of the eleven deaths experienced by the participants in this project, only two were unexpected. Pip, an adult participant, describes how she would 'arrive
as early as possible and stay as long as possible (because) Mum was home for all of that time’. School is a safe escape from the turmoil at home. Pip remembers...

‘biking to school with my friends and crying and them asking what was wrong and me saying I’m not allowed to tell you. As far as I know, no teachers were contacted, no-one knew that my mother was dying. An itinerant teacher knew Mum was sick...She went about finding out what was up, she was a good point of contact... school became a really safe place at the time’ (Pip)

Huia holds an opposing perspective. School, prior to the death of her mother, had not been a safe environment and therefore did not provide a safe haven for her re-entry. She explains...

'School was the most hostile environment of all my areas. I was so embarrassed about going to school - like guilty - I was so self conscious, I had fears like am I going to start crying...like will I wet myself, I don't know why but I was so scared. (Huia)

Huia’s understanding of death is embedded in a Maori perspective. She describes the comfort provided in believing that her mother is now amongst ancestors. As a child, her safety was provided by her belief and experience that 'in Te Ao Maori (The world of the Maori), I wasn't an orphan. (It was) completely different'. Family (Whanau), in a Maori context, encompasses extended family members within which the responsibility for and care of children is shared. Where school was unable to provide safety for Huia, she was able to access this through her family.

**Face Value Reactions**

Participants speak appreciatively of the face value reactions from other children to the death of their parent. Apart from two instances, where participants felt uncomfortable from reactions by their peers, the parentally bereaved participants spoke highly of their friends' acceptance and ability to move on. Other children are portrayed as being more comfortable and less emotional with talking about death
than adults and frequently 'got over it' more quickly. This contributes to the normality of school, previously described, and therefore is appreciated by the bereaved. The teacher participants recognise the value of the low-key approach offered by the child’s peer group. Josh’s teacher, Ms M, identified the ‘matter of fact’ approach of other children. She notes the ‘tremendous empathy for Josh’ and suggests that they may be responding to the fact that ‘he was matter of fact and up front with them.

Josh is the only participant who voluntarily shared the story of his mother’s death with the class. Other participants did not share their experience with their peers at all, yet still received the same face value reactions from their classmates. Participants report...

"They (the children) just said that they knew about Mum dying and then that was it and we were just normal like school stuff.' (Danny)

'The other kids were just normal. It was good - they'd say stuff but not being awful - they just wanted to know and then it would be O.K....The kids got over it much quicker than the adults.' (Thomas)

"The children were what they had been the week before. (They) apologised occasionally, 'Oh sorry I forgot', then it was done and over but adults were not like that. (They were) uncomfortable!' (Huia)

Some participants experienced inappropriate reactions from their peers. Dean remembers taunting that occurred and Natalya mentions the unwanted questions sometimes asked by her peers. The participants overwhelmingly focus on the accepting, almost neutral approach, extended by other children and believe this contributes to the normality of returning to school. They also mention children’s use of the terminology of death. The words ‘dead’, ‘death’ and ‘die’ are more freely used by children than they are reportedly used by adults. The bereaved participants value the use of the language as it does not lend itself to miscommunication or awkwardness for them.
School-Home Communication: The Partnership

An theme that emerged strongly in the latter part of the research is the importance of two-way communication between the school and home. The importance of schools and teachers establishing effective and ongoing communication with the surviving parent is seen as paramount in the re-entry process. As I worked through the series of interviews with the participants, I became more intrigued at how this process is viewed. This idea did not emerge within the interviews with the parentally bereaved adults.

The teacher's perspective

The teachers view the responsibility for establishing and maintaining communication between home and school as part of their professional responsibility. They become aware that the surviving parent does not have the emotional energy to take on the responsibility. After the death of his wife, Tom remembers...

'I would just lay down on the couch and fall asleep. It was extreme emotional tiredness. I just didn't want to think about the fact that (my wife) was gone. I used to wake up sometimes and Josh used to just curl up beside me or he would lie on top of me or he would have gotten' a blanket for me and then he would have gotten' under the blanket on the end of the couch just so that he could be close to me...but I just couldn't do it' (Tom)

In response to this realisation, the participants recognise the importance of the school making early contact with the family in order to ascertain the circumstance and decide on the best course for re-entry. Ms M believes that...

'...it is up to the teacher to make contact with the parent to find out the context. The parent has enough to deal with and is trusting the teacher to help in this way.' (Ms M)
As Ms M suggests, one purpose of the communication is to develop the teacher's understanding of the context that the child is returning from. She sees it as absolutely critical that the teacher knows this in order to do the best they can.

'I needed to know what the father was like, what the grandmother was like, etc. to understand (Josh) a bit more. I could just see that there was so much more to him than what we were seeing.' (Ms M)

The participants acknowledge that as grief is different for everyone, the teacher needs to talk to the parent about the process and find out how the child is reacting. Two way communication allows the parent to monitor their children while providing vital information to allow the teacher to provide the best care in the classroom.

The teacher participants discuss a mixed approach to the time before the child's return. Ms M. recalls the inadequate contact made by the school after the death of Josh's mother. She made a conscious decision to contact the family and find out as much information as she could before Josh entered her class. Conversely, Mrs A. did not have contact with David or Danny before Danny returned to school. She believes that she should have...

'...arranged to talk with Danny before he came into the class. That is the bit I would change. I all of a sudden realised that he was there and my chance to talk first and reassure him was gone. I think I would meet them first before they came into the room and bring them back. Otherwise, too overwhelming I think. He seemed embarrassed and uneasy and maybe I could have helped that a bit.' (Mrs A.)

Danny was scared about returning to the classroom. His perspective was similar to Ms A.s...

'...All the kids just went quiet and me and Dad just waited for the teacher. When she came in, Dad talked to her and she was really lovely. She tried to talk to me about Mum but I just wanted her to talk to Dad.' (Danny)
Pip believes contact with home needs to be reasonably frequent but Ms M's experience, as a young teacher, was that of 'third hand' information filtering through. In retrospect, she now sees value in taking the responsibility of establishing communication as it avoids the possibility of working in the dark. Like Ms M, Mrs A feels she relied on Danny's father to call her. She intends to make more effort to do that in future, even if it is just to say 'Hey everything is going OK.' Ms M also believes she should have made more contact with Terry, about Anne's progress because parents want to know how their children are getting on but often won't follow through and ring to find out.

**The Parent's perspective**

The four parent participants initially believed that the responsibility to establish home-school communication lay with them. Within each interview, the perspective of the participant shifted as they considered the role of the teacher and reflected on their emotional well being during the time of their child's return. A lack of confidence in taking an active role in home-school communication is evident in the parent's comments.

Tom and Andrew describe the importance of the school determining how the surviving parent and child are before re-entry into school and suggest the value of an initial meeting. Both surviving fathers had less than satisfactory experiences of school to home communication and on reflection would have appreciated a more proactive approach by the school.

Tom initially believed that the responsibility was 'definitely mine' but remembers assuming that the school knew about Josh's situation. At no stage did he push for support for Josh as he presumed that was something the school would do. He later viewed it as 'probably a joint responsibility because the school can only go so far as I give them information.' Aware of the myriad of things that teachers have to deal with in the classroom context, Tom believes that specifically determining how the parent and child are is paramount to supporting the child and he advocates including the child in the process.
The experience of communication instigated by the school for these participant families is minimal. Andrew had four children returning to three different schools. He made the initial contact with each school to inform them of the death of his wife and to discuss his children's return. He describes the communication from schools as poor and remembers how he...

'...didn't have any idea as to what it was they were intending to do or what they would do differently, if anything.' (Andrew)

It was not until the first parent interviews, 'quite a way into the year', that he received some feedback as to the children's wellbeing. He was advised 'if you want to discuss something then call us'. Andrew explains that when you are dealing with so much emotionally, having to call teachers is just another thing to do. He appreciates his conversations with the actual classroom teachers and expressed his frustration at having to talk with staff who do not deal directly with his children, especially when dealing with a secondary school setting.

Terry reiterated Andrew's interest in the wellbeing of his children at school. Teachers made initial phone calls to her but these were not maintained. She describes how her children seem to be coping but she would have appreciated an update from a teacher.

David describes how the communication 'can't be one way or it won't work'. The teacher needs to communicate with the parent and the parent has equal responsibility to communicate with the teacher. He describes it as a partnership. He appreciated the initial calls made by his children's teachers and talks about the few phone calls he made in return. He believes the...

'...communication home to school and back is really important. Knowing what is going on is vital for us all. Knowing that your child is in a safe place is also really important. You so hope that they are safe there and they are cared for. You trust the teacher hugely with that.' (David)
The wider community

In two instances, the communication channels operated on a more extended platform incorporating the wider community. Thomas' family experienced holistic support and communication through the Maori 'whanau' context. Ms R discusses...

'...there's a big kumera (sweet potato) vine that everybody knows. One day Terry dropped Thomas off late and I chatted to her...from there I kept in touch with her and let her know several times if there is anything I can do to help in any way or ask the staff members or other parents, someone would be able to do what she wanted to do and then the families that are close to her, they got in there and were doing the outside (support) but we were happy to do anything.' (Ms R)

The important role played by other families in Thomas' case is replicated in Josh's experiences. Josh's teacher, Ms M, describes how other parents in the class were tirelessly supportive. This genuine support was not suggested or arranged by the school. Other parents made sure that Tom knew of Josh's requirements each day, as they did not wish to see him disadvantaged in any way. Tom expresses his appreciation of this at a time when he was unable to cope with the daily requirements of his two children.

Two way communication between the school and home is seen as essential for effective re-entry. Where the communication extends to incorporate others, the wellbeing and awareness of context and needs can extend with it.

The significant role of the teacher

Jack of all Trades

According to the teacher participants, caring for a bereaved child is viewed as part of the job, just as they care for children from a myriad of other challenging contexts. With everything that happens in a classroom, the teachers see themselves in the role of 'Jack of all Trades' for the children in their care. The bereaved child is 'one in
30' within a group of children with varying needs and the teachers role is to decide what is going to work best for all.

The lack of preparation for working with bereaved children in their initial training is evident in the reflections of the teacher participants. The teachers describe their tendency to rely on their intuition. Mr D and Ms C refer to their use of 'gut feeling' in working with bereaved children and the reliance on personal experience of death and loss in understanding children. The variable levels of confidence expressed in dealing with death would suggest that variable levels of support are being offered.

Only one school represented in this research has a current grief education programme, including training for staff. Other teachers have implemented, or are aware of, the 'Change, Loss and Grief' module provided by the New Zealand Ministry of Education, but voice their need for training for effective support for bereaved children. Where there is no grief education programme, the school's approach is seen as more reactive than proactive. Ms R warns 'against relying solely on what it says in a book'. She recognises the support a resource can provide, particularly for teachers with little experience working with grief, change and loss but advises teachers to start with the child, recognise what they want and build from there.

Deciding what approach best suits the individual is described, by the teachers, as being their responsibility. Mrs A. gradually relaxed in her approach to supporting Danny in the classroom. She believes that...

'...you need to relax and let it happen. I wouldn't try and structure the grief in the room. I would let it happen a lot more naturally and as it arose rather than stress about if we had talked about this or not and whether there had been enough opportunities. That is too exhausting. As a teacher you just have to do the best you can and model good grief practice - whatever that is!' (Mrs A.)
Ms R. explains how death is a natural part of the classroom that Thomas is in. When there is a tangi (funeral) at the local marae (meeting ground) the children in the whanau (family) unit are taken to it...

'When (name) died, we took our whole unit down and sang to them and so they've always been a part of that whole process and it is a healing time. I believe that plays a big part...because there's not only an opportunity to grieve, its all the laughter and the singing and the stories and the celebration of life.' (Ms R.)

Thomas' smooth and comparatively uneventful re-entry into school reflects the openness with which death is included in the context of his classroom is of the proactive nature as discussed above.

Preparing the class

An important task to be undertaken, before a parentally bereaved child re-enters school, is to inform the appropriate children and staff. Adult participants are aware that their class knew of the death before they returned. This was more closely linked to the fact that the death occurred within a small community, rather than the fact that the teacher had spoken with the class. The other four adult participants, whose classes were not prepared, vehemently believe teachers need to tell the class about the death and let the bereaved child know that the class has been informed. They suggest that the knowledge that children are aware of the death takes a lot of pressure off the bereaved child having to 'tell' others. Although Isobel's teacher was very compassionate, she remembers that...

'He didn't talk about my father dying and the children were not told. It was not discussed and if it had been discussed in the class, that would have helped so much. I needed acknowledgement about the fact that my father had just died....It needs to be acknowledged in class. Out in front of everybody. Not carrying a secret. It shouldn't be a secret and I always felt like I was carrying a secret.' (Isobel)
Pip would have preferred that the children had been told before she returned to school in order to avoid some uncomfortable situations. Pip shares

'I was really anxious about going back to school and who would know and would they ask me and what would I say. Only one or two kids knew, their families were friends of my parents. I remember one child saying to me 'What did you do in your holiday?' And me saying 'Oh nothing much, my Mother died.' Bit of a conversation killer really - poor child.' (Pip)

Huia believes teachers need to share it immediately with all the children. She remembers how...

'. . .it became something that was 'Oh her Mother's died' (whispered) but there was no evidence that the teacher had said to the children that my mother had died. The ones who knew were the ones who were really close friends and neighbours' kids. It was definitely secret. Not open and shared. It needs to be for all cultures. It's not private and untouchable now. I'm pretty sure that if it had been addressed by the teacher, my response would have been to blush and to cry and say nothing but then you see that's appropriate and long term is better.' (Huia)

The perspective of the child participants was different. Most of the child participants know that the teacher discussed the death with the class, prior to their return, and express their appreciation of that occurring when they were not there. Conversely, Natalya and Jason returned to school aware that only some of their classmates knew of the death. They prefer it this way and clearly state that they would not want the whole class to know. It is evident that the recently bereaved children want more privacy around their bereavement in comparison with the memories of the adult participants. Danny explains that his teacher wanted to talk about the death with him present. He recalls how the...
'(teacher) wanted to talk about it and I didn't want to but we did. Sometimes I just wanted to run away and I just wanted it to be normal. The other kids were always normal.' (Danny)

Interestingly, Danny also suggests that ensuring the whole school know about the death would be helpful as he would not then have to tell anyone himself. The contrast between the public acknowledgement of the death that the adult participants believe should occur and the private approach sought by he children is strong. This may reflect the difference between the perspectives of children and adults or may be a reflection of the changes over time in attitudes to death.

Pip believes a recent increase in confidence, when dealing with death, may have affected what happens in schools. She believes that it is important to talk openly with the class and give them strategies to help support the child on their return...

'...it’s significant that you make sure that their friends know. Not all the details. Perhaps talking to the class before the child returns about what they should do...My impression is that probably for most people now, the whole death issue is much more acceptable to talk about and everything, to participate in.' (Pip)

Dean, like Pip, sees no downside in telling the class about the death. Ms A prepared the class as fully as she could before Danny returned. Danny’s class knew that his mother was sick and was going to die. Ms A talked with them about the death and describes how they...

'...thought about some things that Danny might need when he came back. The children were very matter of fact about it really. It surprised me but then I thought that they probably wouldn’t really grasp what had happened and how big that was for Danny. We had talked about it at least three times before he came back to the classroom and Danny’s Dad had phoned to tell me when he was coming back. So we were as ready as we ever were going to be.' (Ms A)
Ms A's approach stands in stark contrast to that of the teachers of the parentally bereaved adults. Their experiences reflect the stance of death 25 to 40 years ago, where a blanket of silence about death was more prevalent. None of the adult participants remember adequate acknowledgement of their loss before their re-entry and they carry stark memories as a consequence. The teacher participants report quite a different approach. Apart from one teacher, they all prepared the class before the child's re-entry, to some extent. They express the importance of acknowledging the individual context of the child in deciding how to undertake this.

Let's talk about this

The teacher and child participants believe that prior to, during and after re-entry to school the teacher needs to establish appropriate communication with the parentally bereaved child, on the child's terms. Establishing this communication is appreciated by the child participants when it is non-intrusive and respectful. Any attempts to discuss the death of the parent that are too public without prior agreement, that do not use the right language or that are ill timed, leave the parentally bereaved participants feeling vulnerable and insecure.

Just as it is deemed important to prepare the class before re-entry, it is described by the teacher participants as just as important to prepare the child. Aspects to be discussed before re-entry, as suggested by the children, include agreeing on whether the death will be discussed publically, deciding on who else needs to know and discussing options for the child should the classroom context become overwhelming. It is also an opportunity, described by the teachers, to offer direct support and availability to talk. In the case of an expected death, as in the experience of Ms R and Thomas, it is seen as helpful to establish communication with the child over the imminent death as early as possible and maintain it through the process. Mr S's role in supporting Anne through the death of her father began...

'...towards the end of year seven when we heard that her father's health was failing and so the process really started then...I actually just kept an eye on her, just monitored her moods and if she looked a bit fragile, it was just a matter of making sure she knew she could come and talk to me...just making
sure she didn’t feel lonely. We had a bit of a support group just with myself and some of her friends and Anne.’ (Mr S)

Anne returned to school on the Monday after the funeral of her father. She remembers Mr S approaching her early and asking her what she needed. The recently parentally bereaved child participants talking about their teachers approaching them in this way became a pattern within the data.

The child participants appreciate the care offered to them by their teachers but often initially want to be left alone and allowed to talk when they want to. The importance of communication being on the child’s terms is vital and was strongly evident in conversations with the children. Reflecting on how she supported Danny’s re-entry into school, Ms A considers that she would still make the offer of talking but ‘back off a bit at the start’ as the pressure to talk if they don’t want to is too much. She believes they need to feel comfortable to talk about their parent when they are ready ‘and if they aren’t then just wait and give them time’. In discussing the death with the child and other children, Ms A suggests…

‘...it is really important to model to the other children the importance of talking about grief and loss. I mean there’s absolutely no way, if I’m honest, no way I wouldn’t talk about it with them. How draconian! Providing opportunities for talking is really important but you can’t get upset or nervous if it doesn’t work first off, just wait and give time. They need that.’ (Ms A)

The child participants articulate the importance of availability of adults to talk with. In comparison with the adults and teachers, who want open discussion of the death within the classroom, the children are more loathe to have the death discussed publically and prefer communication to be established with key adults only. The adult participants had been told as children that death was not to be talked about. This may account for their strong belief that it needs to be openly discussed in the class.

The child participants are adamant that they do not wish to talk about the death of their parent publically at school. Josh initially discusses his acceptance of the
teacher talking to him 'just some of the time but not with everyone there, just sometimes with me'. Later in his interview he mentions that talking about his mother is something that happens at home and not what he wants at school. He describes the type of support he wants from school as '...looking after us, caring and loving and playing'. Conversely, Carolyn accesses the school counselling support system as she trusts them and feels more comfortable talking with them and is able to 'let it all out' more comfortably than talking at home. Her reasoning for this was...

'...because I knew that they would help me and stuff. When I first went there, they said that anything said in this room would not leave and I trusted them and nothing I have said has got around.' (Carolyn)

The teacher participants are aware of the need for trust and report the subtle ways in which they support the parentally bereaved children within the classroom. Mr D's approach to supporting Natalya's re-entry is the most subtle. Mr D was maternally bereaved as a child and brings a degree of empathy to the situation, which Natalya is fully aware of. Remembering his abhorrence of public discussion of his mother's death makes him more cautious in dealing with bereaved children and justified his decision not to tell the whole class before Natalya's return. Mr D believes that it is often a quiet word or 'just a little moment that passes as you are looking at each other' that can provide support rather than planned discussion. He is careful with issues of safety and explains that 'it's never easy for a bloke in these issues. The women teachers have girls cry on their shoulders... the children themselves put the barriers up. Mr D discussed the probability of unexpected emotional responses with Natalya and provided a way of removing herself from the classroom when necessary. Natalya describes Mr D's approach as...

'I sort of knew that he didn't mind me talking about it and that I could come whenever I felt like it. He was kinda' funny, he's not one of those strict, weird teachers.' (Natalya)

Interestingly, Natalya is the only child participant who considers that it would have been 'O.K.' to talk about the death of her mother in the classroom, with the proviso that she had been consulted. Classroom acknowledgement of the death is clearly
not wanted by the other child participants. Jason's response to being questioned about this was a categorical 'No'.

It took Ms A some time to realise that Danny preferred to be left alone. She was 'all ready with the support and the listening ear' but found that he was most comfortable being in the midst of whatever was happening. She reflects...

"He didn't want to be different and the times we talked about it in class, I don’t know… I think it was more for the other children and me than for him… Maybe I needed to think that I was doing the right thing.' (Ms A)

Ms A is beginning to question what she knows about open communication with bereaved children...

'…you get told that this should be open and overt but I don’t know if they want that. Danny did want his Mum acknowledged but it ended up being more just small mentions and very natural occurrences than actual planned 'lessons' or 'discussions'. It was different than I had imagined. I thought that it would be much more planned, dealing with this, but it was better unplanned… than me trying to force it. (Ms A)

The cautious, respectful approach appreciated by the participants can develop trust with the teacher or significant adult in the school. Being able to make a connection like this with a bereaved child is seen as significant by the participants and may be evident in a look, an exchange or a piece of schoolwork. Ms A recalls how 'out of the blue' Danny handed her his writing...

'It was all about his Mum dying and the day she died. It took me all my time not to cry. It was so badly written but so incredibly important to me that he had done that… It was like he was actually trying to say OK - you are a part of this for me and I might like to talk with you or make some sort of link. Up to then it had been really hard.' (Ms A)
Keeping an eye out

Once the child has re-entered school the importance of monitoring the child on an ongoing low key basis emerges. Just as the participants value establishing communication, on their terms, they also wish the ongoing monitoring of their well being to be subtle and agreeable to them. The teacher participants report that it is easy for the teacher to assume that as time passes, the child moves on, but in reality this does not occur and monitoring is as vital as the initial communication.

Ms R makes herself stop within the 'busy buzz and check is he OK? Ask a question or (give) a pat on the back'. Valued by both teachers and children in the whanau setting, giving a child a hug is normal behaviour. Ms R recalls how Thomas would...

'... talk about his Dad from time to time. You could tell sometimes he would have some flat times or (be) feeling a bit down and you'd see him a bit reflective and you'd just go up and give him a bit of a hug and a bit of an uplifting korero (talk).'{ (Ms R)

Ms M and Lara favour a deliberate approach to monitoring a bereaved child as opposed to being too fluid or reactive. Ms M believes it is necessary to approach the child at least once a week and Lara encourages teachers to make deliberate analysis of the child's emotional and social well being. Pip suggests that teachers need to confidently follow through on suggesting professional counselling for identified children, where the need becomes apparent.

The children note the subtle approach with which their teachers are monitoring them. Natalya describes Mr D as 'just keeping an eye out' on her and Jason notices the support 'just when I was a bit sad so that I could get on with it'. Consistent, careful monitoring of the bereaved participants by the teacher is an important component of their wellbeing.

The adult participants recall the myriad of practical concerns apparent to them from the time of death, right throughout their time at school. Questions such as 'what's going to happen to me?', 'who will look after me after school?', 'how will we have
enough money to live?’, ‘who will make my lunch?’, ‘who’s going to buy my uniform?’ and ‘who will take me to swimming?’ can crowd bereaved children’s minds from the time of death. The participants often did not share their questions with adults, believing them to be inappropriate or unimportant but on reflection believe that having those questions answered would have been helpful. Pip remembers...

‘Probably if someone had talked to me, the things I was concerned about would have been ‘What’s going to happen for me after school?’, ‘What’s in place for me at high school?’, and unusual things like ‘What are we going to do about Christmas?’ They were Mum’s things! I had a lot of questions going around in my head and I didn’t ask anyone ‘cos we were told not to talk about it. (Pip)

Practical concerns expressed by the adult participants and some of the child participants were common themes throughout the interviews. The value of the teacher monitoring them in a broad sense is expressed clearly. Pip went on to say...

‘I think it’s important for teachers to know how significant they could be, even six months later...I’m thinking about the things like ‘I don’t know if I went to school clean and tidy as I could have been and if I always had the things that I needed. Things like lunch. Monitoring those things would be really important.’ (Pip)

Looking back....

The adult participants, parentally bereaved as children, reflect on their journey through life since the death of their parent(s). Collaboratively, they voice a perspective on their experience that is without opposition. Within their conversation they highlight long term effects that are of significance to teachers. These effects initially did not appear to have a strong relationship to the purpose of this research but after some consideration and much of my reading, they became of significant importance to teachers who are looking at the whole development of the child.
These effects are important for teachers to keep in mind while they facilitate the initial school experiences of the bereaved child.

The Missing Piece

The loss of a parent is a lifelong experience, revisited at each significant date and life event. Grief around that loss is described as unpredictable and often hits just when you least expect it. Participants express how seemingly insignificant matters can trigger memories that overwhelm and remind them of the pain of their loss. Debbie recounts the more recent death of her dog as 'devastating' but believes it is the death of both parents as a child that made it so intense. She explains...

'Your grief can hit you on the strangest days. I went with my daughter to school and it just hit me that she was then the same age and I was really upset. I didn't face my parents' deaths until the birth of my daughter then it just hit me. I was a mess and have been dealing with it ever since then....things trigger you like our neighbours' 18 year old daughter dying. Seeing her body set me off.' (Debbie)

The participants describe their experience of grief and re-grief as being one that has hit at the oddest times. Aside from expected events like weddings, Christmas, birthdays and births and deaths, people who resemble the parent, words commonly used by the parent, pieces of music and places they went together will trigger a range of memories. Memories will flood their minds amidst seemingly unrelated contexts and emotion 'sneaks up' uninvited and can sabotage seemingly normal situations. They remember this occurring throughout school and describe how although the shock subsides, the loss never does and it becomes something you learn to live with. The memories and emotion were a constant throughout school and have continued to be throughout life.

Debbie describes dealing with the death of a parent within childhood as 'The Missing Piece'.

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'When your parents die, it is like a jigsaw and someone has gone like that (holds a piece of paper out flat and bumps the bottom of it with her hand). All the pieces go and you are searching, trying to find something or someone to fill that gap for the rest of your life. You realise that you can never fill that piece - it's The Missing Piece.' (Debbie)

Michael illustrates it as being like a 'Bag of Marbles'.

'When one of your parents dies, while you are young, your life is like a bag of marbles that someone pours out and you spend years trying to gather them up again. I don't know if you ever gather them all up again.' (Michael)

These analogies are an attempt to illustrate how the first years after the death are spent attempting to get all the pieces of life back in the right places and it takes years to come to the realisation that one piece is irreplaceable.

Growing up quickly

The adult participants explain how the day of their parent's death seemed like the end of their childhood. Life tended to become more solemn and they were often required to take on extra responsibility or fend for themselves in areas previously overseen by the deceased parent. For some, the nurturing feeling of home life ended and fun became almost non-existent. They began to see life as far more serious and recognise that their loss extended more broadly than the death of their parent. The expectation and realisation that life goes on regardless of such a traumatic event became apparent early in the process. Lara remembers that life didn't stop at all. A roster of duties was established for the running of the farm they lived on. She recalls how she...

'...had to grow up very quickly...Mum used to talk to us about everything. Talked about the realities, the finances. I remember going to the bank manager with her, the cattle sales with her. I lost my childhood very quickly.' (Lara)
Pip believes the death of her mother almost signified the end of her childhood. She recalls...

'...My childhood was absolutely wonderful and I never wanted to grow up and...just like that, I didn’t have a choice.' (Pip)

In talking about Nora’s reaction to the death of her mother, Andrew describes how she has...

'...picked up more responsibility at home and I think she feels a sense of responsibility for the others, she has filled in a lot of gaps when I have been held up at work or whatever. Her freedom to come and go is less.' (Andrew)

Teachers note this in their description of the tendencies of bereaved children toward a more sombre approach to participating in classroom discussion and activities. Ms A describes how...

'Sean seemed to grow up very quickly. He became quite serious at school for a while, understandably so...how deeply private the feelings were.' (Ms A)

Participants talk of the tendency to take on the role of the deceased and internalise their grief. Expressed as a way of supporting and protecting the surviving parent, this internalisation and fortitude is reflected as having negative outcomes for the grieving child. Dean recalls that one of his reactions to the death of his father was to...

'...take on the role of the male in the family. Not quite a child and not quite a man but I knew I took it on. My mother talked to me about this a few times and let me know that it was not expected and it wasn’t my role but I did do that. It was real role confusion... I know that I internalised my grief and dealt with it in my own way. I’m not saying that was necessarily healthy but that is what I did. I redrew the lines of my life and operated within those. I was pretty stoical about the whole thing. All the anger and hurt was internalised and I was not often emotional.' (Dean)
The male participants recall taking on the role of their father within the home after the death. Although not an expectation from their mothers, they describe this as a natural reaction and one within which a certain degree of protection for their mother existed. Protecting the surviving parent in some capacity is apparent in the stories of most of the parentally bereaved participants. Lara did not talk to her mother very much about the death of her father because 'you sort of take on this protective thing for your other parent.' Like Michael, Lara kept most of her grief experience to herself.

Life is Short

Growing up quickly is coupled with a cognisance that nothing is certain, that life is short and nothing should be taken for granted. Learning to deal with loss is viewed as a positive outcome of childhood bereavement and the participants talk about life as being vital and the need to live it to the full. The temptation to participate in risk taking behaviours, in response to this, is recalled by participants. Michael describes the 'attraction of pushing the boundaries' prevalent throughout his teenage years and speculates on the link between this and the death of his father.

Huia reflects on how her mother's death has influenced her philosophy on life...

'I would rationalise - if you don't take the chance, it's gone tomorrow. People do die you know. It's still something that gets me. Don't put it off. It has strongly affected me at a philosophical level.' (Huia)
DISCUSSION

The findings suggest some responses to the questions asked by this research. The perspectives of the participants raise several issues that may help us to understand and support the parentally bereaved child returning to school. This discussion is an attempt to consider the findings in relation to the literature reviewed earlier.

The significance of the school

School is a vital aspect in the lives of children. It occupies a large amount of their time, provides educational and social opportunities and offers a sense of community outside that of the family. Schools act in support of their pupils and are therefore in a prime position to provide constructive assistance for a parentally bereaved child.

The findings of this dissertation are supported by the literature in the suggestion that schools, therefore, need to be in a position where they can respond to children's bereavement in a proactive way. They need to be prepared to support children before significant death occurs. As reported by Holland (2001), schools generally do not have systems in place to react to the bereavement of their children. The findings reiterate this by describing the 'reactive' way in which the schools respond to the occurrence of a significant death. Johns (2000) believes it is part of the school's role to serve as a 'strand of stability' for children. He describes how school...

'...fosters self esteem, builds character, and provides an environment of security where students can make choices with the support of the adults around them.' (Johns 2000:78)

A further pattern emerging from this work is the value of a reactive response to the bereavement of individual children, coupled with a planned school wide approach. This is supported by the findings of Holland (2001) where he advocates the use of both proactive and reactive strategies. Such an approach is also suggested in literature relating to children's re-entry into school after significant crises other than
death, such as traumatic brain injury, chronic illness and cancer. A proactive approach prior to the return of the child is a recommendation of these findings. Clark (1996), Doelling (1995) and Worchel-Prevatt et.al. (1998) support this emerging theme through their suggestion of collaborative school wide planning before the child's re-entry, with the involvement of external professionals where necessary.

A dearth of training, information and awareness of support agencies available to teachers to help in the support of bereaved children, is evident within the findings of this research. A planned school wide approach is therefore deemed as necessary. Holland (2001) points out the fact that external support is not as prevalent in bereavement support as it is for other traumatic events. Therefore it is important for the school to access up to date information on supporting bereaved children and to ensure that staff are adequately prepared to follow the programme set in place.

Because the expressed levels of confidence and experience vary, amongst those involved in this dissertation, the need for effective training for all school personnel is a clearly expressed pattern arising from the findings. In order to provide appropriate support for bereaved children, adequate training in understanding bereavement and ways to deal with it in the school setting is sought. Holland's (2001) findings reiterate this.

The findings also suggest the value of establishing a school environment where children and adults feel safe about discussing death, grief and loss. School wide training is seen as a key tool to develop this. McGlaUflin (1998) suggests that schools need to build a climate within which children are comfortable to share their loss. She believes all staff within a school need to be knowledgeable about the grief process, be open to the grief process and be able to integrate the grief process into their daily operations.

Education about change, loss and grief, as part of the school curriculum, is a valued theme arising within the findings as a way of preparing children for possible loss. Recent literature strongly supports this notion. Holland (2001) advocates 'loss' education as a necessity for developing children's capacity to cope with bereavement and for opening up communication around the topic. As the
participants express within this work, he describes the 'wall of silence' that so many bereaved children experience on their return to school where adults are not confident or comfortable enough to talk about the death. He believes that...

'...if the issue is smoothly integrated into the curriculum, and mechanisms such as 'tutor time' are used to explore feelings, then the barrier of the 'wall of silence' reported by many volunteers could be reduced.' (Holland 2001:43)

The findings and literature suggest that such education could go a long way towards building confidence for both teachers and children and increasing the awareness of death as a non-taboo subject. Constructive communication about death within the classroom would enable a more effective response to a child suffering a critical loss such as the death of a parent. Holland (2001) discusses the opportunity for more effective support where death education has occurred.

The significance of the teacher

There is no doubt that the teacher can play a significant role in the grief process of the child. A strong theme emerging from the findings is the recognition of how important the teacher can be for the child’s wellbeing during the re-entry process and in providing ongoing monitoring. Silverman (2000c) describes the role as 'critical' to the child's coping strategies.

The findings, supported by literature, also suggest that teachers have the advantage of being able to support a parentally bereaved child, without feeling the critical loss themselves. Surviving parents tend to be emotionally distracted from dealing with their children, due to the severe grief they are undergoing themselves and do not have the resources to support their child in the way they want to. There is an awareness of the change in care offered by the surviving parent to the bereaved child but the children tend to say little as they attempt to provide support for their obviously grieving parent in return. Charkow (1998), Furman (1974) and Silverman (2000c) highlight the inability of the grieving parent to provide for the varying needs of their dependent children and point to the importance of other significant adults, including teachers.
The significant adult, not always the classroom teacher, is described within the! findings as someone trusted by the child who is often chosen by the child. The role of the classroom teacher is clearly important in the findings but other adults such as an itinerant teacher, the dental nurse and the school secretary are mentioned as being of equal importance in the re-entry process. These findings endorse the importance of grief education for the whole staff rather than just the classroom teachers. Significant adults within the school are viewed as important within a child's grief process by Johns (2000) and Sheras (2000). The literature is well aware of the potential of the teacher's role and encourages the teacher to recognise their import.

Raphael (1984) depicts bereaved children as 'marking time' until a significant adult enables them to express their feelings and facilitates their grief. Blackburn (1991) found that parentally bereaved children value the input from their teachers in this way. She believes that children's grief can be inhibited by the lack of a caring adult in the school setting who is able to help them to express it and...

'...in these situations a good relationship with an understanding teacher can be of enormous help to a child.' (Blackburn 1991:21)

The findings suggest that it is helpful if the teacher has explored their own grief experiences prior to working with the parentally bereaved child. The experiences of the participants within this study suggest that prior experience, confidence levels and understandings of death provides the base from which the adults function in relation to the bereaved child. Blackburn (1991) believes that...

'...teachers who are aware of their own feelings, and of what are likely to be the important issues for children, are in a good position.' (Blackburn 1991:21)

Christian (1997) and Grollman (2000) believe it is important for teachers to understand how their grief experience is culturally determined. Fitzgerald (2001) encourages teachers to explore their grief history quite specifically and McGlauflin (1998) encourages more confident teachers to share their own grief experiences with the class.
An emerging theme from the findings suggests that where the classroom teacher has explored their own grief history and has had some training in, or experience of bereavement, the support able to be offered is more likely to match the needs of the child. Teachers are encouraged by Holland (2001) to trust their professional judgement in deciding what is best for the child and ascertain if what the child wants best suits what the child actually needs.

Communication

It is clear from the findings that effective two-way communication between the school and the family of the bereaved child needs to be established as soon as possible after the death. Johns (2000) advocates the importance of finding out adequate information about the death in order for the school to plan for and provide appropriate support.

Evidence from the participants suggests that the teacher, or an appropriate member of staff, needs to establish this communication with the family. Dyregrov (1991) and Velazquez-Cordero (1996), extend this perspective to encourage an initial meeting between school personnel and the family, inclusive of the child. Crase & Crase (1995), Furman (1974), Stokes, Wyer & Crossley (2001) and Westmoreland (1996) confirm the value of including the family and the child in the re-entry planning. The findings validate this notion and express an appreciation of any contact made by the school to the surviving parent about the wellbeing and context of their children. The findings suggest that parents also need to be aware that they are a crucial part of the ongoing two-way communication on behalf of their child.

Participants recall minimal to no involvement of themselves or their families in their re-entry into school. This could be attributable to being unaware that it had occurred or being unable to recall it occurring. It may be an outcome of the 'wall of silence' approach to death at the time, as Holland (2001) found with his adult participants who were parentally bereaved as children. The recently parentally bereaved child participants describe memories of the teacher talking to their parent prior to re-entry but do not recall any involvement themselves.
Like the participant belief about the value of establishing good communication soon after the death of a parent has occurred, Dyregrov (1991) and Holland (2001) highlight the importance of ensuring communication with the child is established early and then maintained. The perspectives of the surviving parents support this as their experiences were far from adequate. The opportunity to provide good information to parents and to glean information to help understand the child, through effective ongoing communication, appears to be a crucial part of the school re-entry process.

The need for normality

Children returning to school, according to the findings of this dissertation, can be experiencing a range of feelings. The participants remember being fearful of returning and unsure of how they would be at school. The findings express anxiety about school re-entry and most participants remember feeling like they were being looked at. Most commonly expressed is the feeling of being inside a glass bubble, of being different and distant from those around them. These feelings are reiterated in the work of Abrams (1992) and Holland (2001).

Perhaps as a response to some of these feelings, an overwhelming need for normality on return to school is a strong emerging need. This is most strongly advocated by the child participants. One reason for this, as given by bereaved participants and described by Holland (2001), is that...

'...the positive benefits of school included providing an escape from the more problematic environment at home.' (Holland 2001:114)

This need for normality appears to impact greatly on the classroom environment necessary for the child’s return. Sexson & Madan-Swain (1993) believe that the child's teacher can become an important ally in the process by making a 'significant contribution to normalcy'.
Planning the first day back to be as normal as possible, as suggested by Johns (2000), appears to be a valuable starting point in supporting the child's return, as reiterated by the participants. Dyregrov (1991) agrees and suggests that what the child wants to occur on return, needs to be ascertained when the teacher and child meet prior to re-entry. Deciding how to prepare the class, how the child wants the death to be dealt with in class and establishing a safe place within the school where the child can go if they need time out, all need to be established before the child's return. Holland (2001) advocates this proactive approach between the teacher and the child to avoid an awkward lack of understanding on the child's return, as has occurred for some of the participants within this study. It is interesting to note that recognition of the more collaborative, subtle approach to acknowledgement of the death within the school and classroom, as suggested in the findings, is an important idea highlighted only by literature that has used children as participants. (Klass, Silverman & Nickman 1996, Holland 2001)

The adult participants, in stark contrast to their actual experiences, would have preferred a more open approach to talking about the death with the class than what they experienced. In contrast, the child participants want less public acknowledgement and are not overly concerned about whether the class has been informed or not. For them, perhaps the overwhelming need for normality overrides the convenience of other people knowing. Denial of the death of a parent by the bereaved child, within the school setting, may be attributable to the maintenance of normality and may explain why the recently parentally bereaved children are not as keen as the adult participants are to have their class know of the death. The variety of responses point to the importance of negotiating with the child what they want to occur within the classroom (Holland 2001).

It is apparent, according to the findings, that determining with a child what they want to occur, needs revisiting after their return. What the child wants may not necessarily be what they need and it is important to monitor their wellbeing in relation to the guidelines that have been established. Furman (1974) advocates a flexible approach with a parentally bereaved child, where communication with them about their requirements is important, but where the teacher uses professional judgement to help decide what is best for the child. Other writers, including Charkow
(1998), McCue (1995) and Silverman (2000c) advocate almost total respect for the child's choices. The findings support these authors in suggesting that what the child wants to occur allows for the most appropriate re-entry. Ongoing monitoring and professional judgement by the teacher about the wellbeing of the child, emerges as an important idea from the participants. This is supported by Furman (1974), Johns (2000) and Stokes et al. (2000).

The findings also suggest that maintaining expectations of the child's academic and social behaviour can contribute to a sense of normality. An expectation of the same standard of work as prior to the death is sought by parentally bereaved children. Holland (2001) advocates maintenance of this throughout the process as it ensures the child is not singled out as being different and provides normalcy.

From the findings, it appears that the decline in concentration and increase in daydreaming, prevalent in bereaved children's behaviour, can contribute to lower academic outcomes. The feeling of being inside a bubble seems to contribute to this. Abrams (1992) description of 'being unable to reach the world and being unable to be reached by it' after the death of her father is reiterated in the stories of the participants. The constant feeling of difference and distance throughout the experiences of the parentally bereaved is linked by the participants to lower academic outcomes as it interferes with the ability to concentrate on classroom tasks.

A pattern strongly reflected in the wishes of parentally bereaved children is the need for continuation with consistent expectations, routines and discipline. McGlaufflin (1998) sees these factors as...

'...comforting and essential to a child when their world has been turned upside down...Although griever need some room to be confused, dreamy and temporarily inefficient, they may also benefit from functioning as normally as possible.' (McGlaufflin 1998:5)

standards of quality but adjust expectations of quantity of work. The energy consumed by grieving and the coping behaviour of daydreaming impinges on how much a bereaved child can achieve. The findings express the space given to the bereaved children where it is deemed necessary. The bereaved participants express their appreciation for the understated way in which allowance tends to be given and received. Lack of awareness by the other children in the class, of the space given to the bereaved child, is common, as it is usually an unspoken thing between the teacher and the child.

Within the findings, allowance for bereaved children is expressed in the form of breaking down task instructions, giving more time to complete activities, asking for less activities to be complete, showing a little more tolerance of misbehaviour and less demands in homework. The decrease in expectation to participate in class discussion and the overlooking of some of their daydream behaviour is also noted. Adult participants remember the space as being there but not articulated whereas the child participants recall the space as being verbalised by their teachers. This may reflect the change in attitudes to death over time.

The need for nurture

Running parallel with the need for normality, the findings identify the importance of parentally bereaved children being nurtured and monitored throughout the school re-entry process. They emphasise the need to ensure that nurture is within the running of the classroom so that the child doesn't feel alone. Abrams (1992), after the death of her father remembers being torn between...

'...wanting life to resume as quickly as possible, wanting to stop thinking about death, pain and loss and, on the other hand, wanting to keep the dead person alive in some way...These two desires - to remember and to forget - can exist at the same time.' (Abrams 1992:74)

Nurture is described by the recently parentally bereaved child participants as being subtle and not delivered overtly within the classroom. The quiet, consistent approach to providing support to bereaved children often occurs in the small
comments made to children, through eye contact and facial expressions. The support offered by teachers and the ongoing nature of their monitoring for both emotional and practical aspects of the bereaved child’s wellbeing is clearly valued within this dissertation. The findings of both Holland (2001) and Silverman (2000c) support this theme.

A trusting and respectful relationship with a significant adult at school emerges, from the findings, as a need for parentally bereaved children. The need for trust is discussed by Holland (2001) and Johns (2000) as a key part of a child responding to ongoing support within the school or classroom. The nurture offered must be genuine and sensitive to the needs of the child. Most bereaved children will talk about their grief, but it does require adults who are genuine and will allow children to express it individually. McGlauflin (1998) suggests that...

’...Allowing a child to grieve means accepting the child’s grief, validating the process by listening, and offering nonjudgmental compassion. This may sound simple but it actually takes tremendous courage.’ (McGlauflin 1998:3)

In many cases, including the participants involved in this research, the child will not talk specifically about the death of their parent with the teacher. This does not nullify their need for nurture and monitoring. Silverman (2000) cautions teachers not to tell children how they should feel. Rather she suggests that the teacher should listen to and legitimate the child’s feelings while respecting what they are sharing. As described in the findings, a look, a comment or a caring question may be sufficient for the child. Deciding what approach best suits the individual child is clearly viewed as being the responsibility of the teacher.

A pattern emerging from the findings is the acknowledgement of the value of discussing the death with the child in language they can understand. Using the correct terminology for death is deemed appropriate and avoiding 'skirting around' the issue is important. The participants’ experience of adults, such as school counselors, unexpectedly attempting to discuss the death without mentioning it or using any appropriate language was disconcerting. Use of language such as ‘the
situation', 'passed away' and 'your loss' nullify the death and tend to encourage the bereaved child not to talk (Grollman 2000, Silverman 2000c).

Memorialising the parent within the school or classroom, as suggested within the literature for example Dyregrov (1991) and Westmoreland (1996), did not arise as part of the participant interviews. Activities such as planting, drawing, writing or creating something in honour of the deceased person, to be displayed within the school or classroom, can contribute to the sense of respectful acknowledgement of the dead parent. No participant shared any experience of this occurring but I am cautious to report that it did not occur. The possibility exists that some of the deceased parents have been memorialised but this did not form part of the participant conversations.

As in cases of other traumatic events, such as cancer diagnosis, traumatic brain injury and chronic illness, teachers are aware that they need to be monitoring the possibility that the child may need professional help (Cook Cottone 2000, Doelling 1995, Worchell Prevatt et. al. 1998). Being aware of and consciously looking for warning signs is part of the teacher's role that was mentioned but again did not emerge strongly from this research. Coupled with this is an awareness of what support is available and how to access it. This important component of a school training programme, emerged as a strong need for teachers. The challenge of maintaining ongoing monitoring of individual children, amidst the demands of the classroom teacher's role is a clear pattern that emerged from the data. Holland (2001) warns teachers against assuming that, as time passes, the child will be improving. The length of time taken to grieve varies greatly between children and such assumptions about their journey can be false.

**Aware of the long term**

The memories and reflections of the adult participants contain a clear recognition that the death of their parent forced them to grow up quickly and take on more responsibility. The new responsibilities and expectations placed on or taken by bereaved children, whether real or perceived, appeared to 'steal' their childhood. As a result of this, the findings suggest that a classroom teacher is wise to respect the
child's choices about what they take on but also to encourage them to be children. Ensuring the children participate in activities that are fun and encouraging them to move away from the serious persona they can adopt appears to be important. This finding is not strongly reflected in the literature. McKissock (1998) and Huntley (1991) do discuss this within their writings but as a possible grief reaction rather than having ramifications for the practice of teaching.

Conversely, the findings express the idea that bereaved children can respond radically to the realisation that life is short and needs to be lived to the full. Watching for extreme risk taking behaviour or fanatical responses to events poses the opposite challenge for teachers. Holland (2001 & 1993) noticed an increase in rebellious behaviour after the death of a parent, for some participants. Although not a strong finding within this study, it was mentioned by participants within their reflections and memories and is worthy of mention within this section.

Christian (1997) encourages teachers to watch bereaved children at play for these very behaviours. She believes that children's play can reveal a great deal about how they are dealing with their loss. Increasing aggressive play or decreasing social involvement can be signs of needing more specific support or may point to the need for professional help.

The anecdotal descriptions of the grief process likened to an endless attempt to find the 'missing piece' in life and a constant attempt to 'gather all your marbles' have strong links to the literature. Christian (1997) encourages teachers to recognise the child's need to fill the void left by their parent's death. The cyclical nature of children's grief and regrief means that children are likely to return to this behaviour. The teacher can help a child by finding appropriate activities, for example making music, singing, physical activity, talking or quiet time, and encouraging the child to undertake rituals within the school. Brown (1999), Christian (1997) and Silverman (2000c) suggest small rituals or memorials to help the child keep their relationship with the deceased can help the child through these periods of searching.
Schools as communities

The findings clearly support the notion that schools are an important part of the lives of the children they teach. They are seen as inseparable and therefore significant adults are advised to acknowledge and co-operate with others who impact upon the child. Inclusion of the wider community and recognition of the cultures represented within them, as represented in the findings, can involve other parents and caregivers, the child's peers and support agencies in the provision of care and support. Many of the bereaved participants discuss the importance of the community through the death and early grieving process and the significance of the cultural context of the child and the school.

Writers such as Catlin (1993), Holland (2001), Holland & Lundford (1995) and Safonte-Strumolo & Dunn (2000) highlight the growing importance, within literature, of taking into account the cultural and familial background of the bereaved in order to understand the findings. However, the literature makes little mention of the support of the wider school community in general. Sheras (2000) believes schools need to be personal and relevant in order that the best support can be offered. He challenges schools to show 'humanity' within their systems and encourage a personal approach where true feelings are able to be expressed. Such a personal approach would be strengthened by the acknowledgement and inclusion of what the school community has to offer and a sincere recognition of the cultural composition. Jewett (1994) also reiterates a community approach to childhood bereavement care. Although this was not the focus of this study, it would be interesting to discover the breadth of occurrence of this aspect across a broader range of participants.
CONCLUSION

Within this section I begin by presenting some implications for the practice of teachers and significant adults who support parentally bereaved children in their re-entry to school. I then discuss the limitations of this research and make some recommendations for ongoing research in the area of childhood parental bereavement. Lastly I have recorded my personal reflections on the research process.

Implications

School plays an important role in helping children cope with the death of a parent. In order to deal most effectively with children's loss, this dissertation recommends that schools and teachers need to be prepared to facilitate children's bereavement professionally and appropriately. Based on the findings discussed within this dissertation, and in relation to the literature reviewed, a number of implications for schools, teachers and surviving parents have emerged.

1. Provide training for school personnel: The discussion suggests that all personnel within a school should be adequately trained in understanding the dynamics of grief and ways to support a bereaved child. This education should include familiarity with childhood grief reactions, warning signs to be aware of, how to access support agencies and an introduction to bereavement resources.

2. Ensure a proactive planned approach: Alongside effective staff training, schools can put a collaborative school wide plan in place that can be put into action when tragedy strikes, rather than relying on reactive or emotional responses. Death needs to be communicated within staff and discussed openly and honestly as a role model for both adults and children.

3. Identify teacher confidence: Teachers need to be encouraged to identify their confidence level with death and to explore the impact of their cultural background on their experiences and understandings of death. This can provide
a starting point for ongoing development of confidence and awareness of death and bereavement.

4. **Recognise the importance of the teacher's role:** Teachers need to realise the critical role that they can have in the wellbeing of a parentally bereaved child returning to the classroom. With a relationship of trust and mutual respect, the teacher is more able to provide the most effective support for the child.

5. **Establish home - school two way communication:** According to the findings within this research, and strongly supported by literature, successful school re-entry requires a commitment to communication between the school/teacher and the family. Making contact with the surviving parent in order to access accurate and vital information about the child's context, both cultural and familial, needs to be initiated and maintained by the teacher. Parents need to understand how important they are in the process and be encouraged to participate as actively as their own grief will allow. Based on discussions with the family and child, the teacher can create an environment that facilitates the most appropriate support.

6. **Meet prior to school re-entry:** The teacher is advised to meet with the child and the surviving parent prior to re-entry to ascertain exactly how the return to school will occur. Discovering what the child wants on their first days back at school, how they want the death to be communicated, or not, and what type of support they want is crucial to establish before re-entry.

7. **Maintain routines and expectations:** The provision of consistent routines, expectations and discipline for the bereaved child can contribute to the maintenance of 'normality' for the bereaved child. Planning a well-structured first day back, that maintains the daily routines, is viewed as being more appropriate for bereaved children than too much flexibility. Allowing some leeway in quantity of work that needs to be completed, while retaining the quality, can be a way of giving the child some space within the demands of the classroom.

8. **Provide subtle nurture:** Within the daily routine of the classroom, it appears to be important that the teacher consistently nurtures the bereaved child in a subtle
and non-public way. Where prior discussion about this has occurred, the teacher and child will be clear about what has been agreed to. This may take the form of a quiet word, making eye contact over the day or establishing a weekly time to meet. It is important to avoid public acknowledgement without the permission of the bereaved child. Ongoing monitoring about the expectations of the child is also necessary in recognition of the changing needs of the child.

9. **Give the bereaved child some space:** It is advisable that the teacher provides leeway within the classroom expectations, where it is deemed necessary. The teacher can monitor how the child is coping within the class, discuss it with the child and adjust this to suit. This may relate to areas of quantity of work, time taken to complete work and allowance for out of character behaviour, for example daydreaming or over-reacting.

10. **Talk with the child:** Teachers can make it very clear to the bereaved child that they are available to talk about the death when the child needs to. Ensure the use of the specific language of death, including the words 'death', 'die', 'dead' and 'grief' are part of your conversation and avoid the use of euphemisms such as 'passed away' or 'loss'. This validates the death for the child and implies a level of honesty within the communication.

11. **Memorialise and ritualise:** Teachers can discuss, with the child, ways in which the parent can be memorialised within the classroom or school. Planting a tree or plant in the school grounds, writing poems or stories about the deceased, lighting candles for the deceased parent on significant days and having a photo of the deceased in the classroom can be ways of remembering the deceased parent, that support the child in their grief. As the grief process for children is cyclical, the establishment of small rituals to remember the parent within the classroom can provide ongoing support.

12. **Retain childhood:** In response to the tendency of parentally bereaved children to grow up quickly, the teacher can emphasise the importance of being a child and ensure that the child has fun during the school day. This can reduce the tendency towards seriousness in the bereaved child's behaviour.
13. **Monitor risk taking and anti-social behaviour:** Observing the bereaved child in the classroom and at play, particularly in the playground can be a valuable tool for assessing the well being of the bereaved child. If the child shows a tendency towards risk taking behaviours or becomes consistently anti-social, there may be a need to access professional support outside of the school.

14. **Involve the community:** Recognising the strengths and nature of the school community and identifying aspects of the community that could provide support to the bereaved child, the family and the school can be valuable. Other teachers can often provide constructive support and advice and provide a listening ear for the teacher. It is advisable to ensure that the parental death is communicated to relevant community personnel and ascertain the support that can be provided. Being aware of the cultural makeup of the community aids in identifying the child's context.

15. **Trust your intuition:** In supporting a parentally bereaved child within the school and classroom, teachers are encouraged to trust their intuition when making decisions about what is best for a bereaved child within any situation. A teacher's professional understanding, coupled with the use of intuition, will usually ensure the best decision is made.

Ascertaining the individual needs and context of the parentally bereaved child is important in providing the best support. The diverse 'faces' of grief evident in children challenge the teacher to find ways to best facilitate the child's process at school. Effective school re-entry must be dynamic and ongoing and requires continuous co-operation and commitment by the teacher, the child, the family and the school. Re-entry of a parentally bereaved child into school needs to be viewed as a joint venture.
Recommendations

It is important to consider the implications presented above in light of the limitations of this dissertation. Various aspects of this research limit the scope of the findings and I do not propose that the implications are generalisable across the majority of parentally bereaved children. Rather, I view the implications as a set of suggestions for significant adults in the lives of parentally bereaved children to consider, as they deliberate over how to support these children in their care. These implications have arisen from, and are representative of, the stories, memories and experiences of a small group of significantly bereaved children and adults.

Access to participants, for this research, was by no means random and, as described earlier, proved to be an ongoing challenge. The adults, parentally bereaved as children, were mainly accessed through internal advertising in a large tertiary institution, somewhat limiting the type of participant who had the chance to respond. The children and their families were 'approved' by grief professionals, in their 'gatekeeping' role, as being sufficiently stable to cope with their involvement, again limiting the type of bereaved family who could participate. The time frame and ethical access limitations of the research demanded that participant children and families would be accessed through grief counsellors. The limitations within that process may have impacted on the scope of the findings.

The timeframe established to work with each recently, parentally bereaved child and their family was limited by the time available to implement this dissertation. As I worked with each family, I realised how valuable it would be to spend more time with them, become more aware of their familial context before beginning the interview process and increase the time spent with each participant. Revisiting the participants over time would allow further clarification of emerging patterns and a deeper understanding of the process of school re-entry than that gained from one interview. A longitudinal approach to such work could only serve to enhance the findings and strengthen the implications.

Including observations of children actually re-entering school after the death of a parent and being an observer or a participant observer in the process would be
ideal. The ethical issues that arise with such involvement, however, and the challenge of access to participants so early within such a critical event in their lives would seem to preclude that from this type of work. The grief counselors were clearly opposed to involvement with bereaved families within anything less than six months of the significant death occurring. The passing of time may have impacted on the memories of actual school re-entry communicated by participants. The very nature of death will continue to lend itself to complications and challenges within issues of access and ethics.

Despite these realities, I encourage those seeking to further the understanding of children suffering bereavement, to persevere in their quest. Proving the integrity and purpose of your work in order to gain access to the bereaved may take time but can result in tremendously rewarding learning and development.

As the existing scope of contemporary research on children and bereavement is limited, it is obvious that further research is necessary. Worden (1996) expresses his belief that too much research has been cross sectional and therefore has missed the dynamics of the bereavement process as a whole. Research that is longitudinal in nature may provide greater insight, corresponding with the belief that bereavement is a process.

Historically, the majority of research focussing on children and bereavement has been quantitative. There is a need to develop further qualitative studies that focus on the progression through the bereavement process, rather than providing snapshots or measures of bereaved children without context. Including the familial and cultural background of children’s grief must be an aspect of further research in order to validate the implications of the research findings. Attempting to understand the grief of a child without context would seem worthless.

Further research is needed to elucidate the new understandings of children suffering grief. For example, focussing on facilitating the grief process within the school to support the continuance of connections to the deceased or assessing the impact of grief education. Large studies which use children themselves as the participants and
which include a variety of ages within their sample would be helpful to clarify issues raised within more recent work.

Developing the body of knowledge beyond the loss of a parent would enrich and extend contemporary understanding. Specific areas of focus could include grief-related interactions between the bereaved child and significant others, sibling and peer bereavement, a focus on adolescents and the role played by the community.

Expansion to include a variety of participants on children's bereavement reactions, as in this study, could enhance outcomes and providing a deeper understanding of the reasons why children react to bereavement in the ways they do. Inclusion of cultural context within each of these recommendations is of vital importance. Based on my experiences within this research, I could not validate any further research that does not recognise and describe the cultural and familial context of its participants. The very nature of death demands this from those who choose to work within it.

**Reflections on the process**

Throughout this journey I have learned a great deal about the grief and loss of children. I have seen and heard many faces of grief and felt the deep sense of loss of the parentally bereaved. I have been continuously amazed at the courage that children bring to their situation and appreciative of the resilience and emotion of adults parentally bereaved as children. The energy and integrity with which teachers, surviving parents and grief professionals support the children in their care is remarkable and serves as an inspiration to those who work with them.

The privilege of talking with people who were willing to share such a personal and painful part of their lives with me, is immeasurable. The participants told their stories with fervor and passion, each expressing the hope that sharing their story would be beneficial to others who may mirror their experiences. I had not envisaged the intensity of my interactions with them nor expected the strength of the findings.

The initial interviews with adults provided data richer than I had envisaged. I had not expected how strong the long-term effect of the loss of a parent on an adult was nor
imagined how vivid the memories and lifetime effects, recognised and discussed by these adults, would be.

I began the interview process with bereaved children and their families a little tentatively, unsure of my own reactions and aware of the advice given to me by grief professionals about monitoring my own wellbeing within the research. My professional training, experiences with the death of Rachel and subsequent interactions with my brother in law, niece and nephew, coupled with the initial adult interviews, provided valuable personal preparation for working with children and their families. I found my work with these families challenging and rewarding but felt comfortable about delving into some of the effects of the death of such a significant person in their lives.

My professional experience and personal love of interacting with children allowed my conversations with them to be extremely valuable. I was aware that they trusted me with their experiences and conscious of the responsibility I was taking on as they opened up such vulnerable areas of their lives. Children's face value reactions, honesty and lack of eloquence made the interviews poignant, constructive and sharp. I enjoyed encouraging children to explain their responses for me and appreciated the creative ways in which they used examples to convey their message.

The development of my own understandings about death and the grief process, throughout the implementation of this dissertation, has been strong. I have arrived at a personal conclusion that there is no such thing as 'normal' grief. Rather, I believe that grieving individuals experience the death of a significant person in quite different and unexpected ways. These out-workings of grief in the lives of bereaved individuals, I view as the many 'faces' of grief. Underlying these, however, there are strong similarities between the bereaved in expressed feelings and the deep sense of loss that I have had the privilege to witness. This underlying commonality I view as the 'guts' of grief. Rather crude terminology, but a word that expresses the depth of feeling and effect of the death of someone deeply loved.
Of utmost importance for me, throughout the process, is the realisation that the critical loss of a parent in a child's life is unmistakably life changing. Bereaved children who work through the process with the best outcomes and have less chance of being at risk, appear to be those who are supported within an environment that provides love, respect, security and open communication. I encourage further work into this valuable aspect of children's lives. The grief of our children deserves significant input in order for those supporting them to achieve the most desirable outcomes.
REFERENCES


Manderson, D. (1999) Discourses of Grief: The Death of the mother. Massey University,


Silverman, P. R. (2000a) Never Too Young to Know: Death in children's lives, New York, Oxford University Press


APPENDIX A

Christchurch College of Education
P.O.Box 31-065
CHRISTCHURCH
Phone: 348 2059 ext: 8458
Email: vikki.pink@cce.ac.nz

Dear

ADULT PARTICIPANT INFORMATION
'School re-entry after the death of a parent'

You are invited to participate as a subject in the research project, 'School re-entry after the death of a parent'.

The aim of this project is to discover the actual challenges and experiences of children integrating back into school after the loss of a parent through death. A key purpose, or outcome, of this is to then suggest ways that parents, teachers and caregivers can help children as they come back to school. These children are in a challenging situation and there is very little to support teachers and caregivers to prepare children for reintegrating into school and to provide tools for coping in this situation.

Your involvement in this project will be through participating in a 30 - 60 minute interview. The interview will focus on your memories of losing your parent through death as a child. We will focus on your return to school at that time, including what helped or hindered that process and what suggestions you have for parents, caregivers and teachers who support children in this situation. This interview will be tape recorded.

The results of the project may be published, but you may be assured of the complete confidentiality of data gathered in this investigation: the identity of participants will not be made public. To ensure anonymity and confidentiality, participants will not be referred to by name in any written documentation and all raw data will be destroyed at the end of the project. The only exception to this is if the researcher should believe that any participant is in danger. If this happens, professional ethics requires that this will be discussed with the supervisors for guidance. One of the supervisors will contact you to discuss what steps will be taken.

This project is being carried out as a requirement for a Master of Education degree by Vikki Pink, Senior Lecturer in Social Sciences at the Christchurch College of Education. The project is under the supervision of Karyn France, Senior Lecturer, Department of Education, University of Canterbury and Shirley Hulston, Lecturer, Department of Education, University of Canterbury. Should you have any concerns about the project, Karyn France and Shirley Hulston can be contacted on 366 7001.
The college requires that all participants be informed that if they have a complaint concerning the manner in which a research project is conducted, it may be given to the researcher. Or, if an independent person is preferred, to:

The Chair
Ethical Clearance Committee
Christchurch College of Education
P.O.Box 31 065
Christchurch
Phone (03) 348 2059

The project has been reviewed and approved by the University of Canterbury Human Ethics Committee. A consent form is attached.

Please feel free to contact me on 343 7780 ext: 8458 if you have further queries. My email address is vikki.pink@cce.ac.nz

Regards

Vikki Pink
Senior Lecturer in Social Sciences
School of Primary Teacher Education
Christchurch College of Education
ADULT CONSENT FORM

School re-entry after the death of a parent.

I have read and understood the description of the above named project. On this basis, I agree to participate as a subject in the project and I consent to publication of the results of the project with the understanding that my anonymity will be preserved.

I understand also that I may at any time withdraw from this project, including withdrawal of any information I have provided.

NAME (please print): ...........................................................

Signature: ...........................................................................

Date:..............................................................................
Christchurch College of Education  
P.O.Box 31-065  
CHRISTCHURCH  
Phone: 348 2059 ext: 8458

Dear

**PARENT/CHILD PARTICIPANT INFORMATION**  
'School re-entry after the death of a parent'

You and your child/children in your care are invited to participate as a subject in the research project, 'School re-entry after the death of a parent'.

The aim of this project is to discover the actual challenges and experiences of children integrating back into school after the loss of a parent through death. A key purpose, or outcome, of this is to then suggest ways that teachers and caregivers can help children as they come back to school. These children are in a challenging situation and there is very little to support teachers and caregivers to prepare children for returning to school and to provide tools for coping in this situation.

Your child's involvement in this project will be through participating in a 20 -30 minute informal discussion. The discussion will focus on your child's experiences of going back to school after the loss of a parent. This will include what went well, what was difficult and what suggestions they would make to help other children in a similar situation. The discussion can be undertaken either at school or in the home to suit your preference. A significant adult will be in close proximity while the discussion takes place. This may be yourself, a caregiver or a teacher. I would also like to be able to discuss your child's reintegration with their teacher. If you are agreeable, I would also like to talk with you about your child's experiences of returning to school.

The results of the project may be published, but you may be assured of the complete confidentiality of data gathered in this investigation: the identity of participants will not be made public. To ensure anonymity and confidentiality, participants will not be referred to by name in any written documentation and all raw data will be destroyed at the end of the project. The only exception to this is if the researcher should believe that any participant is in danger. If this happens, professional ethics requires that this will be discussed with the supervisors for guidance. One of the supervisors will contact you to discuss what steps will be taken.

This project is being carried out as a requirement for a Master of Education degree by Vikki Pink, Senior Lecturer in Social Sciences at the Christchurch College of Education. The project is under the supervision of Shirley Hulston, Lecturer,
Department of Education, University of Canterbury and Daphne Manderson, Christchurch Polytechnic. Should you have any concerns about the project, Shirley Hulston can be contacted on 366 7001.

The project has been reviewed and approved by the University of Canterbury Human Ethics Committee. A consent form is attached.

Please feel free to contact me on 343 7780 ext: 8458 if you have further queries. My email address is vikki.pink@cce.ac.nz

Regards

Vikki Pink
Senior Lecturer in Social Sciences
School of Primary Teacher Education
Christchurch College of Education
PARENT CONSENT FORM

School re-entry after the death of a parent.

I have read and understood the description of the above named project. On this basis, I agree to myself and my child / the child in my care being a participant in the project. I consent to publication of the results of the project with the understanding that anonymity will be preserved and the notes will be destroyed at the end of the project.

I understand also that I may at any time withdraw myself or my child from this project, including withdrawal of any information I have provided. I consent to the discussions being audio - taped.

NAME (please print): .................................................................

Signature:

Date:

Vikki Pink

Signature:

Date:
CHILD'S CONSENT FORM

School re-entry after the death of a parent.

1. Vikki Pink has talked to me and asked if she can talk to me about what it was like going back to school after my parent died. I understand that I may be asked to do some drawings and play some games as well as talk. I also understand that I do not have to do or say anything I do not want to.

2. What I say may be included in a project but will not have my name on it. Vikki will not keep any notes about me after the project is finished. Vikki's supervisors will read the report to decide how well she has written it.

3. If I change my mind at any stage, I don't have to continue.

4. I know that our talk will be tape recorded.

5. I am doing this to help Vikki with her University work. If Vikki thinks she can help me, she will talk about it with me and my parent.

I agree to take part in this project.

_________________________________________
Child to sign

_________________________________________
Vikki Pink

_________________________________________
Date

_________________________________________
Date
Appendix C

Vikki Pink
Senior Lecturer
Christchurch College of Education
P.O.Box 31 065
CHRISTCHURCH 8030
Ph: 3437780 ext: 8458
vikki.pink@cce.ac.nz

Dear

TEACHER PARTICIPANT INFORMATION
'School re-entry after the death of a parent'

You are invited to participate as a subject in the research project, 'School re-entry after the death of a parent'.

The aim of this project is to discover the actual challenges and experiences of children's re-entry into school after the loss of a parent through death. A key purpose, or outcome, of this is to then suggest ways that parents, teachers and caregivers can help children as they come back to school. These children are in a challenging situation and there is very little to support teachers and caregivers to prepare children for reintegrating into school and to provide tools for coping in this situation.

Your involvement in this project will be through participating in a 15-20 minute interview. The interview will focus on how you found the transition back into school for the child in your class/school who lost a parent through death. We will focus on what strategies you found successful and not successful and what suggestions you have for parents, caregivers and teachers who support children in this situation. This interview will be recorded if you are happy with that.

The results of the project may be published, but you may be assured of the complete confidentiality of data gathered in this investigation: the identity of participants will not be made public. To ensure anonymity and confidentiality, participants will not be referred to by name in any written documentation and all raw data will be destroyed at the end of the project. The only exception to this is if the researcher should believe that any participant is in danger. If this happens, professional ethics requires that this will be discussed with the supervisors for guidance. One of the supervisors will contact you to discuss what steps will be taken.

This project is being carried out as a requirement for a Master of Education degree by Vikki Pink, Senior Lecturer in Social Sciences at the Christchurch College of Education. The project is under the supervision of Shirley Hulston, Lecturer, Department of Education, University of Canterbury and Daphne Manderson,
Christchurch Polytechnic. Should you have any concerns about the project, Shirley Hulston can be contacted on 366 7001.

The project has been reviewed and approved by the University of Canterbury Human Ethics Committee. A consent form is attached.

Please feel free to contact me on 343 7780 ext: 8458 if you have further queries. My email address is vikki.pink@cce.ac.nz

I have recently interviewed Natasha Walters who is in your class this year. During the interview, Natasha mentioned you two or three times in connection with her re-entry into school. I would really appreciate being able to speak with you sometime over the next 2-3 weeks. I will call you early next week to see if you are keen to participate. If so, I will pop out to school to meet with you.

Regards

Vikki Pink
Senior Lecturer in Social Sciences
School of Primary Teacher Education
Christchurch College of Education
TEACHER CONSENT FORM

School re-entry after the death of a parent.

I have read and understood the description of the above named project. On this basis, I agree to participate as a subject in the project and I consent to publication of the results of the project with the understanding that my anonymity will be preserved.

I understand also that I may at any time withdraw from this project, including withdrawal of any information I have provided.

NAME (please print): .................................................................

Signature:...............................................................................

Date:.................................................................................
Appendix D

SCHOOL RE-ENTRY AFTER THE DEATH OF A PARENT

Interview Guide: Adult interviews

General Introduction

1. How old were you when you lost your parent?

2. Can you tell me about that time?

3. What are your most vivid memories of the time?

4. What can you remember about going back to school after your parent had died?

5. What were the challenging things about that? How did you react?

6. What things helped you when you returned to school?

7. What suggestions can you make for parents, caregivers and teachers who are supporting children through their reintegration into school?

8. Anything else?
Appendix E

SCHOOL RE-ENTRY AFTER THE DEATH OF A PARENT

Interview Guide: Child and Parent

1. Meet child first in home setting. Introduction and explanation of purpose of study. Consent form signed and any questions answered.

2. Meet to interview in home setting or setting chosen by child/parent. General talk about points of interest to child. Re look at the purpose of meeting and talking today.

3. If I ask you about something you don't want to talk about - that's fine.


5. I know that your ------- died recently. Can you tell me about that? What happened?

6. One thing I am very interested in is what is was like for you to go back to school after your --------- died. How did you feel?

7. What were the hard things about going back to school?

8. What things were helpful when you went back to school?

9. What about your teacher or other people at school?

10. What suggestions can you make to help another child who's mum/dad has died who is going back to school? What suggestions would you have for Tom in our story?

11. How could their parents, or teachers help them?

12. Anything else?

13. Your parent/caregiver will want to know how we went today. What would you like me to tell her/him?
Supporting activities for use when necessary depending on flow of discussion:

1. Paper and Felt pens/crayons. Can you draw yourself in the school/classroom?
2. Can you draw some of the things that would have been helpful for you when you came back to school?
3. Would you like to draw how you felt about going back at school? (Support sheets – body and face outline and faces (adapted from 'Something has happened').
4. Draw some things you have found hard about coming back to school on one side of the paper and the great things about coming back to school on the other side.
5. Can you think of some words that might describe how you felt when you came back? Write them on the paper. (Support sheet 'Here are some words about what happened.' from 'Something has happened')
6. Would you like to tell me a story about when you returned to school after your ...... died?
7. Koosh Balls, playdough etc. for use if necessary.

Comments: Tell me about that. That is really helpful.

I plan to integrate the activities with the questions. Each interview will be different as far as what I need to use with individual children. I will be required to monitor the well-being of each child throughout the process and use the activities and books as necessary.

I have chosen to undertake the interviews at home where possible as I believe this is the 'safest' context for most children. This decision will be made in conjunction with the parent and the child.

APPENDIX F

SCHOOL RE-ENTRY AFTER THE DEATH OF A PARENT

Interview Guide: Teachers

General Introduction

1. Can you comment on the reintegration of ____________ (bereaved child) into the school?

2. What strategies did you have in place before they returned?

3. What strategies were successful?

4. What strategies were not successful?

5. What suggestions can you make for parents, caregivers and teachers who are supporting children through their reintegration into school?

6. Anything else?
These were some of my feelings......
How I felt.....

How I felt.....
Something has happened. Here are some pictures about what happened.

Danny described this as his mum in the coffin. The blobs are the tears from all the people there. The person on the left is Danny's sister. Danny's father and him are on the right.
APPENDIX I

CODES

1. Death
1.a Unexpected
1.b Expected/Illness
1.c More open subject now
1.d Process - Involvement / cut off

2. Funeral
2.a Attendance
2.b Non attendance
2.c Feelings
2.d Choice

3. Parent/Caregiver
3.a Surviving
3.b Communication
3.c Protective ness
3.d Choices

4. Siblings
4.a Interactions/communication
4.b Different reactions

5. Home Setting
5.a Physical Environment
5.b Psychological Environment
5.c Significant days, events

6. School Setting
6.a Physical Environment
6.b Psychological Environment
6.c Safe place
6.d Whanau setting

7. Returning to school (safe, normal)
7.a Bubble/Distance/Surreal
7.b Everyone looking
7.c Want things to be normal, safe
7.d Want acknowledgement
7.e Chn face value reactions
7.f Other chn – no parents
7.g Space, allowance
7.h Feeling different

8. Suggestions for Teachers
8.a Time
8.b Listen and act upon child wants, Nurture
8.c Sensitive to individ. Context of child
8.d Deliberately analyse (counselling, life sk)
8.e Prepare class
8.f Don’t make assumptions
8.g Acknowledge different ways of reacting
8.h Discuss with child and class
8.i Monitor child (psych, physically)
8.j Home school communication
8.k Child just 1 in classroom

9. Teachers
9.a Communication / Interactions
9.b Relationship
9.c Other teachers / Principal

10. Significant adults
10.a Nurturing
10.b Not talking about it (not allowed)
10.c Doing what are told (Chn)
10.d Talking and decision making about chn no consultation
10.e Other parents
11. Other effects
11.a Grew up quickly – lost childhood
11.b Extra responsibilities
11.c Life is short
11.d Life doesn’t stop
11.e Practical concerns
11.f Guilty feelings
11.g Depressed
11.h Christianity

12. Suggestions for Parents
12.a Where possible say goodbye.