GRIEF AND LOSS LIVES IN SCHOOLS
Chetwynd Secondary School – A Case Study

MURIEL LOUISE GANTON

B.A., University of Victoria, 1995
B.Ed., University of British Columbia, 1996

A Project
Submitted to the Faculty of Education
of the University of Lethbridge
in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree

MASTER OF EDUCATION

LETHBRIDGE, ALBERTA

January 2003

I dedicate this work to

Mom and Dad

I love you for always believing I could do this,

And for always being there.

Brent

No matter what you are always first in one way,

You are the best brother a girl could ask for!

Burke

Who would never let me quit, fed me, loved me,

And put up without a dining room table for three years.

I love you all.

Abstract

Grief and loss has an impact on students in schools. This project combines qualitative and

quantitative research into an action research case study. A small high school in northern

British Columbia is the location of the project. Areas of literature research include:

models of grief and loss, models of grief and loss specifically for adolescents and

children, grief and loss (death) education, support groups, helping relationships, grief and

loss teams, community building in schools, and the sharing of craft knowledge. Data

collection techniques include: interviews with students and teachers following interview

blueprints, two focussed discussions with different classes, and exit slips. Data analysis

uses a three-phased coding process. Three main themes from data collection are: grief

and loss, support systems and relationships, and future directions and

personal/professional growth. Some of the findings show: a difference in the ways that

teenage boys and girls deal with grief and loss, ideas for implementation of grief and loss

education for students and teachers, student concerns about support groups, and

validation that community building in schools is essential. Grief and loss lives in schools,

it is time that all schools do something to acknowledge the needs of grieving youth, and

communicate with youth to find out the students individual needs while grieving.

Acknowledgements

"Flowers leave part of their fragrance on the hands that bestow them." Chinese Proverb

To the staff and students at Chetwynd Secondary School who allow me to share in their lives and teach me new things each day, I appreciate the common spirit we share. I thank all who participated in this study through interviews, focussed discussion, and encouragement to learn more about the needs of our school community.

Thank you to Shawn Roberts for editing suggestions and help with my constant use of the drop-in quote!

Thank you to Dr. Cynthia Chambers for introducing me to journaling and for all of your assistance in the completion of this project.

To Dr. David Townsend, my advisor, a huge thank you for encouraging me to continue in this process. I am thankful for your enthusiasm and dedication in ensuring all of us from the Dawson Creek Cohort complete our degrees!

Table of Contents

List of Tables

Table

List of Figures

Introduction

Background

During the 2000/2001 school year (September 2000 to June 2001), a small

community in northern British Columbia faced a series of tragedies, including several

instances of both parental death and disintegration of family units due to break-up or

divorce. After that year, I realized the importance of re-examining the student needs at

Chetwynd Secondary School (C.S.S.) in relation to their experiences of grief and loss.

This project outlines a series of activities and educational opportunities aimed at

identifying ways teachers can help adolescents who are grieving. Modern adolescents

now live in a time when loss and grief have become things to be hidden (Miller, 2000, pp.

225-226). Although grief and loss are a part of life, I believe that support for students

who have experienced a loss has not been consistent over the long term in my school.

During my last six years at C.S.S., I have often pondered the grief that students

face on a daily basis and the skills they employ to cope. As a counselling educator, I have

been greatly touched by such experiences of loss and have evaluated many of my own

responses to it.

The fabric of the school in which I work has been torn and mended many times.

The fragmentation, separation, and reintegration which continue to be part of each loss

led to new knowledge and commitment which, in turn, often brought about positive

responses. However, there was also evidence that other responses were negative and

involved suppression of emotion. I wanted to address the levels of support offered for

students. I believed that a process needed to be initiated that brought research on and

1

knowledge of grief and loss to the school. I felt that the school needed to offer more support for students, including providing opportunities for students to discuss the emotions that they were experiencing. More support was required after the initial incident. To increase the emotional well-being of students, ways needed to be found to bring students into settings where their feelings could be disclosed in healing-oriented discussions.

Classroom teachers are the "front-line workers" who often have the opportunity to start these discussions. This project's purpose was to find out how these discussions could begin and, in instances where they failed to occur, how teachers could be assisted with strategies to initiate those discussions.

Project Description

This project grew out of my concern that, as a school, C.S.S. needed to look at the manner in which it supported grieving children.

The first component of this project began with an assessment of resources at C.S.S. currently available for students experiencing grief and loss. Originally, I intended the case-study method to focus on two forms of loss: the death of nuclear family members, and the circumstances of divorce or break-up of the family structure. A series of individual interviews and focussed discussions were held with students; teachers were interviewed individually. The purpose of these interviews was to gain an understanding not only of the resources in place but also the techniques, strategies, and observations of those who work and live in the C.S.S. I hoped these interviews would indicate how teachers, as individuals, deal with their own losses, as well as what resources they could provide for students. The interviews with students were planned so I could discover their

knowledge and experiences with grief and loss, and their perceptions of support systems currently available to grieving students. The intent was to use this information in the development of material and resources necessary for the creation of a teacher-based Grief and Loss Team (G.L.T.) at C.S.S.

The second component of this project involved analysis and reporting of data. Narrative inquiry and concept-analysis strategies were central to this portion of the project. Once the interviews and focussed discussions were completed, the material needed to be collated or presented in a form that indicated of what participants believe and feel would be useful for implementation at Chetwynd Secondary.

My original intention was to combine what I had learned from the school participants with literature, such as Sally Downham Miller's *Mourning and Dancing for Schools*, to develop new strategies to use with people experiencing grief and loss. Part of this work was to involve a small volunteer group of staff members who would participate in a series of focus-group sessions on the topic of grief and loss. An additional focus for this team would have been to provide support for students in the weeks and months after critical-loss incidents. This component has yet to be developed because the focus of the project quickly became data collection and data analysis, which included an extensive literature review. It is now my intention to use the recommendations coming out of the analysis to bring forward ideas for staff development and training in the next school year.

Review of Literature

The literature discussed in this review has been selected to provide validation for the merit of researching the following questions: (1) How can teaching staff help students at Chetwynd Secondary School cope with issues of grief and loss? (2) Do teachers and students hold the same beliefs or perceptions about grief and loss?

Research on grief and loss in the K-12 school system is extensive but deals mostly with crisis management. Much of this work focuses on helping students to grieve losses from specific events. Recent research reflects the need for the education system to provide support that is more continuous. The information in the preliminary review below will assist in the development of a relevant and timely case study at Chetwynd Secondary School (C.S.S.). In examining the research relevant to the above topics, I reviewed the following areas:

1. Grief and Loss

2. Definitions of Grief and Loss

3. General Theories and Models of Grief and Loss

    a. Elisabeth Kübler-Ross

    b. Nancy Reeves

    c. Dora Black

4. Age Specific Models

    a. Adolescents and Development

    b. Models of Grief and Loss for Adolescents and Children

5. Grief and Loss in Secondary Schools

    a. What to be "Looking" for with Adolescents and Grief

      b. Teaching Teachers about Grief and Loss

      c. Grief and Loss (death) Education for Students

      d. Student-Support groups

      e. Helping Relationships within Schools

   6. Building Community in Schools

   7. Craft Knowledge and the Reflective Practioner

Grief and Loss

To begin this exploration of researchers' ideas, theories and beliefs in the areas of grief and loss, I had to understand the terminology used to describe the concepts at the centre of the research. These are explained through several definitions. Then, the history and main theories of grief and loss are presented and the merits and disadvantages of several main theories are explored. As this case study focuses on the adolescent as a social group, there is a short description of developmental theories, theories related to reactions of children and adolescents in the grieving process, and specific descriptions of what views and beliefs young people develop around death and grief. Specific skills, models and ideas related to education for both teachers and students in the areas of death education, support groups and teacher teams are also examined.

Definitions of Grief and Loss

Various respected scholars in the areas of grief and loss propose several key definitions. The words which will be defined are bereavement, grief, loss, and mourning. An authoritative definition for each of these words, as well as both an explanation of how the word will be used in the rest of this literature review and also how it will be used in the actual study, is provided in the following sections.

To begin, it is important to understand how the term *bereavement* is used in literature. Corr (2000) defines bereavement as "the objective state of having suffered a significant loss" (p. 21). Rando's (1984) definition is almost identical to Corr's (p. 16). Goldman (2001) defines it as a "state of having lost something, whether it is a significant other, significant things, or our own sense of will" (p. 6). For the purposes of this study, Goldman's definition will be used.

The term *grief* is used in many ways in the research literature about loss. Different theorists and researchers include different components and different emotions in their definitions. Some of the most prominent researchers have different views on the elements of grief and the ways in which each individual will experience it. To begin, James, Friedman, and Matthews (2002) have defined grief as "the conflicting feelings caused by a change or an end in a familiar pattern of behavior" (p. 7). They have further stated that "grief is the normal and natural reaction to loss. Of itself, grief is neither a pathological condition nor a personality disorder" (James, Friedman, & Matthews, 2002, p. 10). Grollman has defined grief as "not a disorder, a disease, or a sign of weakness. It is an emotional, physical, and spiritual necessity, the price you pay for love. The only cure for grief is to grieve" (1993, p. 6). The Dougy Center, The National Center for Grieving Children and Families centred in Portland, Oregon, has characterized grief as "the internal anguish bereaved persons feel in reaction to a loss that they have experienced" (1998, p. 2). In 1984, Theresa Rando, a clinical psychologist, defined grief as

> the process of psychological, social, and somatic reactions to the perception of loss. This implies that grief is (a) manifested in each of the psychological, social, and somatic realms; (b) a continuing development involving many changes; (c) a

natural, expectable reaction (in fact, the absence of it is abnormal in most cases);

(d) the reaction to the experience of many kinds of loss, not necessarily death

alone; and (e) based upon the unique, individualistic perception of loss by the

griever, that is, it is not necessary to have the loss recognized or validated by

others for the person to experience grief. It is also hypothesized that grief is a

product of biological evolution that has adaptive value (Averill, 1968). By making

separation from the group or from its members an extremely stressful event, it

helps assure group cohesiveness. (p. 15)

Although Rando's definition is very informative and the others have interesting elements

and information, the definition I have chosen for this case study from Nancy Reeves, who

states:

Grief involves your total reactions and responses to any loss, not just

bereavement. Grieving occurs for some aspect of every major life change. Even

extremely positive changes mean some letting go, some goodbyes. By allowing

yourself to acknowledge and feel all meanings of a positive change, you can

integrate the newness in your life more thoroughly. (2001, p. 17)

This definition is valuable because it is easily understood and provides for many different

events in one's life to be sources of grief. I particularly like how it states that losses can

occur even during positive changes in one's life.

The term *loss* also has many different meanings. Earl Grollman (1993) describes

loss as "something you feel when you become separated from someone or something you

care a lot about" (p. 3). Nancy Reeves describes loss in the following manner: "loss

occurs any time you feel diminishment or restriction. At any given point in your personal

history, a small or large loss is probably part of the living tapestry of your life" (2001, p. 17). The two main types of losses that will be the focus of this project are parental death and family break up or divorce of parents. However, there are many other losses adolescents face and may need to be addressed in the research findings of this project. James, Friedman, and Matthews (2002) describe other important losses children will likely face. They consider the death of a pet or a grandparent as being one of the first losses with which a child might contend. Other traumas include the family moving, the death of friends and relatives, and debilitating illnesses of children or their caretakers (p. 5).

Mourning, or "the process of separating from the person who has died and adapting to the loss" (Worden, 1991, cited in Trozzi & Massimini, 1999, p. 10), is considered the over-arching term when discussing the actions of a person after a loss. Goldman has described mourning as "taking the internal experience of grief and expressing it outside of ourselves. It is the cultural expression of grief as seen in traditional or creative rituals" (2001, p. 6). The Dougy Center (1998) uses a similar definition but expands on it by stating that all children may grieve, but that does not mean that they will mourn, or at least do so in a fashion that is evident to those outside themselves (p. 3). Kalish (1985) describes mourning as "the overt expression of grief and bereavement" (p. 182). For this project, the definition by Charles Corr (2000) offers more than just a ritualised external component to mourning. This definition gives a wider picture to the process. Mourning is "the conscious and unconscious intrapsychic processes, together with the cultural, public, or interpersonal efforts, that are involved in attempts to cope with loss and grief" (pp. 21-22).

General Theories and Models of Grief and Loss

The false belief that time heals is probably the single largest impediment to recovery from loss of any kind. (James, Friedman, & Matthews, 2002, p. 9)

Throughout history, there have been many theories about grief and loss. Some researchers and theorists describe the manifestations of grief, while others theorize about the stages of grief progression and resolution. Rando cites some influential theorists including Sigmund Freud, 1917; Erich Lindemann, 1944; Bowlby, 1980; Engel, 1964; Kübler-Ross, 1969; Worden, 1982; and Parkes and Weiss, 1983 (Rando, 1984, pp. 23-28). Kalish (1985) adds to that list names such as Bromberg and Schilder (1933), Elliot (1933) and Hall (1915) (p. 12). It actually was not until the late 1950s that research in the area of death, dying, and grief was applied to bring about change in the practice of people in the health field (Kalish, 1985, p. 12). There was a development of a "death awareness movement" (p. 13). Kalish proposes that this was started by a collection of articles: *The Meaning of Death*, published by Herman Feifel in 1959 (1985, p. 12). A popular magazine then printed an article by a young psychiatrist by the name of Elisabeth Kübler-Ross. She continued her interest in the subject when she wrote her landmark book, *On Death and Dying*, in 1969 (Kalish, 1985, p. 13).

One could spend a great deal of time outlining the various theories and stages set by the many practitioners and researchers who study this field. Only five theories will be explored here. Stage theory, made popular by psychiatrist Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, is probably one of the most famous of all theories. Every psychology student is introduced to her theory and memorizes the stages that all mourners are supposed to pass through. However, she is not the only proponent of a stage approach to explain the process of

grieving. Another less well known stage theory has been proposed by Averill. It consists

of three stages: shock, despair, and recovery. Colin Parkes' theory, also not widely

known, suggests four stages: numbness, pining, depression, and recovery (Kalish, 1985,

p. 184). Kübler-Ross's theory will be looked at in closer detail because it offers excellent

descriptors and popular themes discussed in most related research. A second theory,

developed by Nancy Reeves, a clinical psychologist from British Columbia, Canada, will

also be explored. Hers is a process-based theory that includes information on, and

explanation of, events people could experience in times of crisis and loss. A third

researcher, Dora Black (1989), provides an excellent diagram model of the inter-

relationships often present during the bereavement process (Brown, 1999, p. 11).

Elisabeth Kübler-Ross. Dr. Kübler-Ross created a five-stage theory for dying

patients. These five stages are also used to describe similar reactions in people who

experience grief; the survivors of the lost loved one. She contends that there are five

stages of grieving. The first stage is *Denial and Isolation.* The denial is the belief that the

event or circumstances that people find themselves in is not the reality. This denial is

protection by the body so that the stress can be accommodated over time. Similarly,

isolation is a defence mechanism also (Kalish, 1985, p. 132). It allows the person to be

able to talk about his or her illness as if it is happening to someone else. As Kübler-Ross

states, the person can "face death and still maintain[ing] hope (Kübler-Ross, 1969, p.

37)" (Kalish, 1985, pp.132-33).

Kübler-Ross' second stage is *Anger.* The anger that the person expresses can

either be directly or indirectly vented. It can include "rage, envy and resentment" (Kalish,

1985, p. 132). The third stage is *Bargaining.* In this stage, the person promises to make

things different if pain will be taken away or the disease will be cured. This can be a promise to end something, or change behaviours. The fourth stage is *Depression*. At this point, the person realizes that all of the first efforts have failed and that there is no denial that death or loss will occur. The fifth and final stage of Kübler-Ross's theory is *Acceptance*. In this stage, people have dealt with their feelings and accept that death will come (Kalish, 1985, pp. 132-133).

Kübler-Ross's work has helped families and patients who face death and dying. There have been many theorists and researchers who have based their research on her work. This does not mean, though, that there is no controversy surrounding her work. James and Friedman (1998), for example, have observed "one result of Dr. Kübler-Ross's work is that many people now tend to apply the concept of stages to other aspects of human emotion. Grief, which follows death, divorce, and other losses, should not, however, be regarded in terms of stages" (p. 11). James and Friedman also comment that people who have suffered losses are hardly ever in a stage of denial. They believe the person is well aware of the death or other loss (p. 12). Rando (1984), also, views the model of Kubler- Ross as problematic:

> To use the Kübler-Ross schema as an example, to try and push patients through the stage of Depression in order to get them to Acceptance is doing them the grossest misservice, since their individual needs are not being attended to... (p. 29)

In defense of Kübler-Ross, Harrison Owen (2000) writes that her theory follows stages and ends up with

predictable results….my experience has been that significant ending, in any area

of life, produces the same reactions and results for those involved. Whether we

are talking about the death of a loved one, or the death of a corporation, it is all

death, and the reaction is identical. (p. 65)

Kübler-Ross has accomplished much with her theories and has brought valuable

resources, interest, and insight into the world of the dying and the grieving. Her

techniques do not allow for the reality that each person must deal with death and the

processes of grieving in their own ways, that grieving is not a step-by-step process. The

approach taken by Dr. Nancy Reeves seems to allow for that individual journey.

Nancy Reeves. "The grieving process is like a spider web. Every strand is

connected, yet we can't tell beforehand which strand will be more appropriate to travel

on. One implication may not be grieved for years" (Reeves, 2001, p. 29).

Unlike the theory proposed by Kübler-Ross, the ideas and beliefs about grieving

and loss presented by Nancy Reeves allow for individuals to deal with their experiences

and express their own needs in the ways that they have always done so. If a people

usually confront issues in a certain manner, that would be how they would most likely

deal with the situation they presently find themselves confronting, whether it be a

personal loss or one experienced by a family member. Reeves describes grief, not by

steps but, as an integrated process involving many elements.

Grief hurts. It is a holistic process, involving emotional, physical, spiritual, and

mental dimensions. As a result, pain is felt in all these areas. The purpose of the

grieving process is to heal, and the pain, strange as it may sound, is helpful to that

healing. (Reeves, 2001, p. 25)

With grieving, there is no set path, or set way for things to happen. Reeves sees the process as being fluid. It activates when a person needs to deal with certain issues that arise. By allowing the grief process to happen naturally, people will be able to move out of the intense loss sooner (Reeves, 2001, p. 28). Not only does the loss itself need to be addressed; but also there are other, numerous implications that will need to be understood and dealt with. Reeves describes the eight of those implications as follows:

- Intrapersonal- How does the situation affect his or her sense of worth and how they see themselves?

- Interpersonal- How will relationships be impacted? What relationships may end, and what new ones begin?

- Financial- Does this change the way money is allocated? Both increases and decreases in income can have an effect.

- Roles- Is there a change in who does what?

- Status- Because of the new "conditions" is there a change in one's position in a community, place of work, or family?

- Physical and psychological status- How do past events, and ways that those either have been integrated or not, influence the resilience of the person in the current circumstance?

- Time- There is never a good time for a loss. There will be other things that may need to change as a result of it.

- Type of loss- There is no easy answer to say how long or how big a loss will be for another person. What *"meaning"* a person assigns to the loss will usually determine the process. (Reeves, 2001, pp. 25-26)

Adjustment to the implications above is part of the grieving process. The individual needs

to deal with those issues and adapt to the changes that are occurring because of the loss.

There will be symptoms that will make people attend to the loss and start working

through their grief (Reeves, 2001 p. 26). Some of the normal symptoms are emotional,

mental, physical and spiritual (Reeves, 2001, p. 27). As well, people will almost certainly

be grappling with what philosophers describe as the "ultimate concerns:" mortality,

isolation, freedom, and meaninglessness (Reeves, 2001, p. 44).

In order to explain how one uses energy during the adjustment process after

experiencing a loss, Reeves designed an "Energy Management Model" (Reeves, 2001, p.

34). It is not a set model that one goes through in "a sequential manner. As new

implications or intense emotions are experienced, one will move back and forth through

the circles" (Reeves, 2001, p. 34). In Figure 2.1, a copy of her Energy Management

Model is presented. Reeves defines

> 'energy' as the force that allows us to be and think and do. Energy can be viewed
>
> as a circle. Some have bigger circles than others, but for everyone energy is finite.
>
> Going past energy limits means needing more rest later (Reeves, 2001, p. 33).

Figure 2.1 Energy Management Model
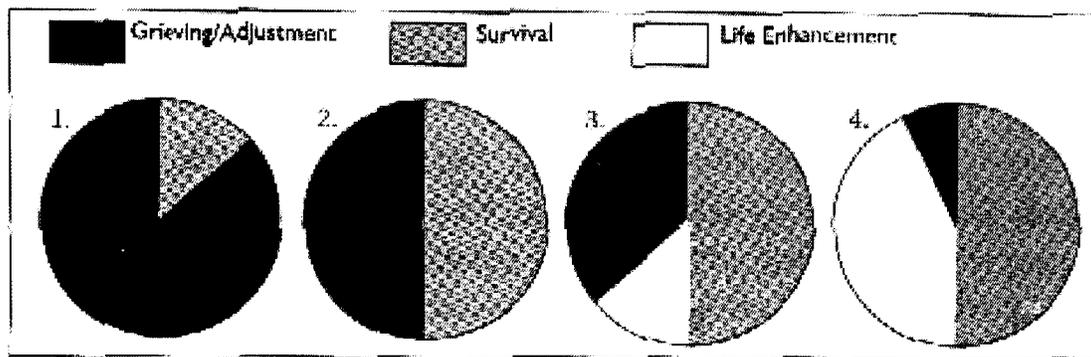
Note. From: *A path through loss: A guide to writing your healing and growth.*

Kelowna, B.C.: Northstone. Copyright 2001 by Northstone.

In Circle One of the model, most of a person's energy will go into grieving. A

person will be dealing with the implications of the loss and the symptoms that come with

the loss. Only a small part of a person's energy will be available for survival. Survival

includes looking after oneself and performing such tasks as eating and sleeping (Reeves,

2001, p. 31). In Circle Two, people will be more able to focus on survival, but the

grieving still takes up a great deal of their energy. They may feel even worse than they

did at first because the shock is wearing off and they are beginning to feel the stress even

more than before (Reeves, 2001, p. 33). In Circle Three people begin to engage with

others again. They will begin to have "life enhancement" (Reeves, 2001, p. 34). Life

enhancement involves looking beyond the pain and engaging in what others are involved

in. For example, they begin to want to know about how someone else is doing (Reeves,

2001, p. 34). People will once again have "energy for play" (Reeves, 2001, p. 34).

Finally, in Circle Four, there is still a sliver of energy used for grieving, but this may only

involve reminiscing and connecting with better times (Reeves, 2001, p. 34). In summary,

Reeves presents a model that recognizes each individual's personal experience with the grieving process.

Dora Black. The 1989 work of Black (as cited in Brown, 1999) has provided a comprehensive model for describing the bereavement process. I believe that it pulls the work of Reeves and Kübler-Ross together into an easily understood diagram (See Figure 2.2). There is interaction between three main components of the grieving person: the whole person, the environment, and the circumstances of the bereavement (Brown, 1999, p. 11). This model takes into consideration the many different elements that can be present when one faces a loss.

Figure 2.2 Inter-relating Features in Bereavement
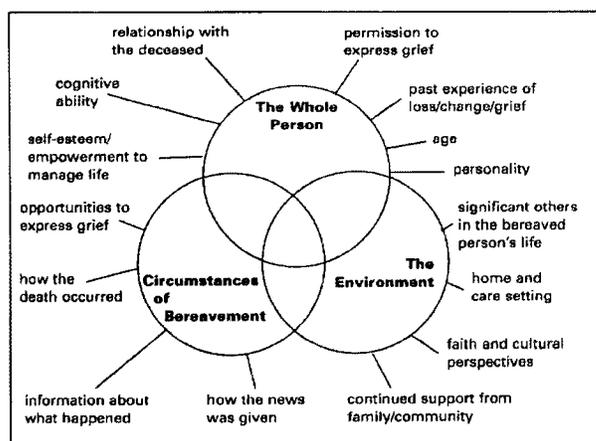
Figure 1.2 Inter-relating features in bereavement

Note. From: *Loss, change and grief: An educational perspective.* London: David Fulton. Copyright 1999 by David Fulton.

Generally, grief and loss models for adults and adolescents have been described as being similar. However, there is an abundance of literature on the different ways people respond to grief at different levels of their development. For the purposes of this

project, adolescents and the models of grief associated with their specific age and developmental stages will be explored.

Age-Specific Models

Adolescents and development. Adolescence is a time of great change. There have been many theories of development which have included specific stages for both adolescents and children. Development will be explored here only as a means to support and give understanding to the base on which research on adolescent grief and loss models builds.

Piaget describes adolescence in his theory on the development of logical thought. Part of Piaget's premise is that adolescents are egocentric. This means that they think in terms of how things will impact upon themselves. Thoughts of the needs of others are not always present (Knowles & Reeves, 1983, p. 17). Part of this is also what David Elkind calls the "personal fable." Young people have the belief that events such as death will only happen to others. It will only be something they will have to face or deal with when they themselves are old (Knowles & Reeves, 1983, p. 17).

Another famous psychologist, Erickson (1963), promotes a theory of psychosocial development. His theory argues that

adolescents pass through clearly delineated stages in which specific types of conflicts are resolved. The way in which adolescents resolve these conflicts will influence their adult personalities. He views personality as developing throughout the life span with adolescence being a particularly decisive period for forming an identity. Life holds in store for us over the course of our development predictable psychosocial crises. These crises do not pose a threat of catastrophe but rather

they represent turning points or 'crucial periods of increased vulnerability and heightened potential.' The resolution of these crises can result in a new balance of forces within the individual. Failure to negotiate these crises presents limitations to the individual's capacity for further development. (Hayes 1981 as cited in Elder, 1990, p. 92)

Erickson's model fits with many models of grief as they are explained in the literature. It supports the belief that either burying or not dealing with issues can lead to many future difficulties.

Balk's 1995 work (as cited in Balk, 2000) describes three phases of adolescence: early, middle, and later adolescence. As they move through these phases, youth go through the developmental tasks of finding their path for employment, becoming independent and keeping friendships and relationships (Balk, 2000, p. 38). The phase of early adolescence happens between ten and fourteen years of age. It consists of puberty, body changes, the refining of social skills with people, more academics, more time with peers, and independence from parents (Balk, 2000, p. 30). The phase of middle adolescence occurs between fifteen and seventeen years of age. It is characterized by more decision-making capabilities, more time with peers, working outside of the home, and gaining identity. The third and final phase happens from eighteen to twenty-two years of age. It involves independence, leaving home, establishing close relationships, and the ability to think more abstractly (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Perry, 1970 as cited in Balk, 2000, p. 38).

Balk's model describes some clear characteristics of the teen years. The difficulty that I have with the model is that the ages are too restrictive. Many adolescents, for

example, have very close "dating" relationships, which are quite serious, at very young ages. Alternatively, the work of Coleman in 1980 (as cited in Elder, 1990) "describes adolescence as being a complex and contradictory stage of development, encompassing many opposites and extremes. . . There is a preference now for viewing adolescence as a transitional process rather than a stage" (Elder, 1990, p. 91).

Adolescent development is a continuum of skill development. There are times when one is weak, and others, when one is strong. The age or the set sequence may not be the same with each person. I like to think that the door is always open for future growth. Mental and physical activity, along with social interaction, play a role in how people can abstractly interpret the world. The lack of good nutrition, and low self-esteem, and high levels of physical or emotional stress on the body are important in the stages of development; they can produce amazing differences in development among individuals.

Teenagers, as do all humans, take on new roles in society as their lives progress and different environments become part of their individual lives. Many teenagers have developed the ability to think beyond the messages given by others. A role of responsibility, however, leads people to see themselves as connected and related rather than just separate entities. Many teens can identify with being a member of groups and the processes which allow them to developmentally engage (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986, p. 8). Insight and role models help one improve his or her functioning at any given time. Some of the affective factors shared by teenagers who have a healthy outlook are acceptance of others and of themselves, altruism, and the ability to bond with other people. Some shared behavioural factors include the ability to test reality and use the processes of "ventilation," the ability to "blow off steam" in a

"context in which one can still feel accepted" (Corsini & Wedding, 2000, p. 10), and "interaction," the ability to admit something is wrong (Corsini & Wedding, 2000, p. 10). In all of these examples there is an assumption of positive self-esteem.

As children, we learn from our families a form of the scientific method by copying behaviours of role models and, by using those behaviours or coping mechanisms, correctly or incorrectly, applying them to other situations. In learning about grieving, young people learn a great deal from those around them. Being exposed to healthy grieving practices (e.g. talking about the loss, sharing and respecting emotions) could help them in future dealings with loss. Teenagers have a strong desire to belong to a group. Therefore, being aware of the impact of modelling from the peer group is critical to any analysis or discussion of their interactions. In the school, by watching their communications and struggles, I can see how the quiet ones make attempts to be included, how some play peacemaker, and how students from five different grades form a family that watches over some of the weaker members. Some of the actions may seem so small, but the effect can have such amazing results and meaning. One step forward, even a small one, can create change. When it comes to grief and loss, the support or interaction from peers could make all the difference. Understanding how they process grief will be key in addressing their needs. As Adams and Deveau (1995) have concluded,

> adolescence is a time of many changes and transitions when teens struggle with parents and society's expectations, and strive for independence and freedom to make their own choices and decisions. We must acknowledge the fact that the loss of sibling, parent, or even close friend may have profound effects on their developmental needs and their abilities to cope when they feel compromised or

overwhelmed. A significant loss may threaten their self-image and generate fears associated with existential concerns about life beyond death. (p. 2)

Models of grief and loss for adolescents and children. " Bereavement presents the prototypical life crisis. For adolescents, this crisis places severe obstacles to fulfilling necessary developmental tasks" (Balk, 2000, p. 39).For many years, theories of death, dying, and how people handle loss have generally followed the same model for all age groups. In light of recent events in schools, the media, and the times we live in, there has been an increase in attention to research on how children and adolescents experience grief and loss. No longer is it assumed that all people will experience loss in the same way. Models of adolescent and child responses to grief have developed, and there has been a breaking down of the myths associated with children and adolescents and the ways that they deal with stressful events. Trozzi and Massimini (1999) describes three myths perpetuated by modern Western society: death is not a part of living, children do not mourn, and that we can protect our children by shielding them from loss (p. 6). It is important for adults to understand that how they express grief and interact with children during times of extreme emotional stress plays an important role in helping to promote a healthy response to loss.

One theory of grief specifically aimed at children and adolescents is a three-phased theory that was proposed by Bowlby in 1969. Bowlby extended Freud's (1917) theory and included information on how children will react to grief (as cited in Brown, 1999, p. ix). Bowlby "described powerful bonds of affection between children and their adult carers which are fundamental to feelings of well-being and safety. If the bond is broken or threatened, Bowlby believed this results in acute anxiety and grief" (as cited in

Brown, 1999, p. ix). The three phases he outlined are protest, disorganization, and restructuring (Brown, 1999, p. ix). Brown (1999) cites several other theorists such as Kasterbaum (1999) and Anthony (1973) who created similar models (p. ix). Kasterbaum extended Freud's theory by extensively studying how young children deal with separation, while Anthony described sorrow and fears of children in relation to death (as cited in Brown, 1999, p. ix). Nagy and Feifel describe adolescence in their research as: a time when there is a fearful fascination with death, where there is an understanding of death not unlike adults. Also, adolescents engage in strong and often powerful emotions, describe death as an enemy and as a loss of themselves. Adolescence is a time when limits are tested, where teens are almost "playing chicken" with their lives (as cited in Sims, 1990, pp. 34-35). I believe these theories help to stress once again that each experience with grief and loss will be experienced by each person differently, and those differences need to be respected and addressed individually.

Fox (1988) (as cited in Trozzi & Massimini, 1999) has described four tasks of mourning seen in children. She outlined the four tasks as "*understanding* what caused the loss, *grieving* or experiencing the painful feelings associated with the loss, *commemorating* the value of the loss, and *going on with life* by accepting and integrating the loss psychologically and emotionally within themselves" [italics in original] (Trozzi & Massimini, 1999, p. 10). Fleming and Adolph (1996) and Fleming and Balmer (1996) present a developmental model for understanding adolescent grief and loss. They link bereavement with developmental tasks of the three stages of development for adolescence and describe critical issues that teenagers may encounter (as cited in Balk, 2000, p. 42). They discuss five core issues: learning about the predictability of events,

acquiring mastery and control over their lives, a sense of belonging becomes more important in relationships, realizing that fairness and justice are not always present in life, and developing self-confident behaviours and feelings (Balk, 2000, pp. 42-47). These explanations about grief and loss help adults remember the difficulties associated with that time of life. Remembering that adolescence is tough at the best of times can play a vital role in any relationship developed, or developing, with an adolescent.

The Dougy Center has described some of the effects of death on the development of preteens and high-school students. In the discussion on preteens, it is noted that the process of independence is impacted. Many young adolescents are treated as if they are younger. "They want very much to be like their peers and not to be treated differently just because of the death in their family" (Dougy Center, 1998, p. 16). A typical high-school student is described by the Dougy Center in the following manner:

> High school students are often philosophical about life and death and believe that death won't happen to them. While functioning at the formal operations stage of cognitive development, they appear to use 'adult approaches to problem solving and abstract thinking in dealing with their grief...' (Dougy Center, 1998, p. 17).

The Dougy Center's work is based on twenty years of working with grieving children, teens, and their families. They base their approach to working with young people on actual experience with thousands of people and knowledge and skills they have gleaned from the children they serve. Some other "hands-on research" out of British Columbia, Canada has some helpful perspectives. Although Knowles and Reeves (1983) is an older reference, they tackled many of the same issues found in current research. In the following quote they discuss the importance of an adolescent's ability to think

abstractly. "Just as adolescents come to be able to 'think about thinking' they can take themselves as objects of thought and develop some perspective of time, including becoming old, sick, or approaching death" (Knowles, & Reeves, 1983, p. 51). They also bring up the egocentric nature of teenagers and describe teenagers' need to have a death or other loss not change others' perception of them (Knowles, & Reeves, 1983, p. 51).

We have been told for many years that all individuals will deal with death differently, and, as an educator, it has become evident to me over years of practice that teenagers themselves will be different from day to day, even from minute to minute. Trozzi and Massimini (1999) describe the grief process in children and:

> kids experience grief differently. *Unlike adults, children grieve in spurts.* They have a limited capacity for tolerating ambivalent feelings and a lower threshold for psychological pain than adults have; therefore, one minute they can be angry or sad, and the next they can be happy and content, forgetting their grief entirely.
>
> We can describe their grief as *sad, mad* and *bad.* [italics in original] (p. 35)

Silverman (1999) and Worden (1996) stress the importance of neither undermining nor dismissing the importance of assisting and aiding children in the grieving process. They say "children and adolescents do experience and express grief, but often in ways that may be more intermittent and drawn out over a longer period of time than is typical for most adults" (Corr, 2000, p. 28). Parents, educators, and members of communities must begin to take grief experiences of youth more seriously. If an adolescent does not go through the tasks or processes of mourning, the loss may not be successfully resolved (Rando, 1984, p. 162). This can "be dangerous because it can change their whole way of life and cause emotional and physical upsets" (Allen, 1990, p. 40). Brown (1999) also supports

this belief (p. 26). Research and advice on ways to help abound. Some important aspects to keep in mind when assisting young people will be discussed in the next section.

Grief and Loss in Secondary Schools

What to be "looking" for with adolescents and grief. With teenagers, it is often difficult to ascertain if there really is something wrong. They often may be moody, may express some impolite statements, and may withdraw from their families and turn to their peers for support. There are numerous signs to be watchful for and numerous ways that schools can be involved in the process. The role of the helping relationship and educational practices will be discussed further in some of the following sections. This section examines some of the reactions to grief, investigates further the concepts of grief, and analyzes some of the myths that need to be addressed so that grief can be worked through in healthier ways.

Educators often do not have access to the whole child; how children interact at home or what supports are available outside of the school, may be unknown to us. Nevertheless, they do have the ability to employ keen observations. James and Friedman (1998) have described some things to watch for: reduced concentration, a sense of numbness, disrupted sleep patterns, changed eating habits, and a roller coaster of emotional energy (pp. 13-14). As the models previously examined have shown, it becomes obvious that children will not be acting the same way all the time. In fact, a student may experience grief in waves and deal with things slowly having, as most people do, both good and bad days. Remember that "grief does not have an end point" (Dougy Center, 1999, p. 13). The Dougy Center (1998, pp.6-8) describe some other things for which teachers specifically should watch for in a grieving child:

- Academic: a loss of concentration; a drop in grades; work is not handed in, or is done in much poorer quality; frequent absence; and perfectionism.

- Behavioural: the student is aggressive, disruptive, or non compliant; is taking risks; and is suffering in isolation.

- Emotional: the student is mired in depression, displays the seven stages, shows no emotion about the event, or asks continuous questions about the death.

- Social: the student withdraws from friends and school, there is a change with their relationships, and is acting out sexually.

- Physical: the student has illnesses, accidents, sleep problems, eating changes, and lower energy.

- Spiritual: the student displays anger, confusion, and talks about the meaninglessness of the future.

This listing of responses could be very useful to a classroom teacher. Sometimes educators do not take the time to think of all of the possible things that could be causing a child to behave differently.

So, what needs to happen differently? While an awareness of grief and loss and the influences that educators have on children is important, knowing what some of the basic tenets of "good grieving" are, and having patience, are critical. The Dougy Center (1998, pp. 3-5) describes six basic concepts of grief:

1. Grief is a natural reaction to loss.

2. Each student's grief experience is unique.

3. There are no "right" or "wrong" ways to grieve.

4. Every death is different and will be experienced by students in differing ways.

5. The grieving process is influenced by a multitude of factors.

6. Grieving never ends. It is something the student will never "get over."

Some other interesting things to watch for are "s.t.e.r.b.s" (short term energy-relieving behaviours). These are energy releasers that build up in children. They may have short-term relief but they do nothing to get rid of the pent-up stress in the child. Common "s.t.e.r.b.s." children will turn and are abusing food, drugs and alcohol. Other "s.t.e.r.b.s." include: displays of anger, engagement in fantasy such as games and movies, isolating tendencies, increasing exploration of sex, exercising, and excessive shopping (James, Friedman, & Matthews, 2002, pp. 84-86).

Educators also must remember that death and dying are not the only losses young people experience. A range of losses affect children such divorce. It has been described in the following way, "Robinson (1991) describes divorce as a slow and turbulent bereavement...Divorce nearly always leave a legacy of anger, guilt and shame where individuals lose their self-esteem and their lives are turned upside-down and inside-out" (Brown, 1999, p. 66). Divorce seems commonplace, and many adolescents say that all their friends have gone through it, but there is still a need to address it as an important loss. In fact, some authors speculate that it is more traumatic than the death of a parent. Adler and Wingert (1997) describe their beliefs in the following way:

> The death of a parent can have devastating psychological consequences including anxiety, depression, sleep disturbances, underachievement and aggression. But, so can a lot of other things, and losing a parent is actually less devastating than divorce. 'We know that children tend to do better after a parental death than a

divorce,' says sociologist Andrew Cherlin of Johns Hopkins, 'and that's a

stunning statistic, because you'd think death would be harder.' (p. 59)

Divorce can be very traumatic for adolescents, as the whole structure of the family

changes. Moreover, fluctuations in that family structure may occur over years and the

situation can change moment to moment. Brown (1999) describes some of the

consequences which may result after divorce and loss. Adolescents may not be pleased

with the situation and may cut themselves off from their parents. They may be very upset

and the support they receive from their families may be very unstable (p. 71). Boys,

according to Nord's study in 1989 (as cited in Brown, 1999), may also be affected for a

longer period of time than girls in families that have gone through a divorce (Brown,

1999, p. 71).

In addition adults responsible for adolescents must be prepared for more serious

pathologies to which grieving sometimes can lead. Some symptoms to look out for would

be when children use only one grieving behaviour for all situations, when they use self-

destructive or alienating behaviours, and when these behaviours are present over a long

period (Knowles & Reeves, 1983, p. 35). Children need routine. This is especially

important during the grieving process. School may be one of the safest places for

grieving students because they know what to expect. As Reeves (2001) suggests in the

following statement:

> Children, especially, need routine during the grieving process. School, sleepovers
>
> with friends, sports and other activities can feel like emotional anchors in the
>
> chaos of grief...A great deal of energy is going into the healing process so it is
>
> impossible to keep the same pre-loss routine. (p. 28)

Often, educators can take their lead from the child. They need to remember that there is not one way only to deal with every situation. Knowledge of the processes of grief and loss can only provide a base, a starting point. Authentic communication and caring are always valuable ways to offer support for others in times of stress. Not everyone will behave in the same way, given similar circumstances.

Teaching teachers about grief and loss. "Education is not a process of filling a vacuum or remediating a deficit, but of providing the conditions in which people can develop their full potential" (Pratt, 1994, p. 14). There must be a clear focus when teaching about grief and loss. In David Pratt's book, *Curriculum Planning: A Handbook for Professionals*, he contends that "curricula need to be planned not only for the present, but for the future, which entails social and technical forecasting" (1994, p. 1). Information presented must address the needs of the participants as people. Not only will educating teachers about grief and loss help them to deal with their own losses, but it will also encourage them to assist students, friends, and family. Even the small acts teachers can do for others will count when a crisis is faced (Kübler-Ross, 1983, p. 152). It is evident that teachers need to have skills and resources on hand; they are often the ones first involved in helping students. Stevenson (2000) explains the need for teachers to be trained in the following way:

> Death or loss education is not just for children; it must also include professional staff as part of the target audience. Many educators - both classroom teachers and counsellors - do not understand how grief affects children. They are not aware that grades often fall after the loss of a loved one, or that such a drop can take place even years after the loss when children muster their strength to postpone

their grief...How often do educators try to deal with the manifestations of

unresolved grief without touching the real cause - the pain of the earlier loss?....

If schools are to play a positive role in helping students to cope with the losses

they will inevitably encounter - or with the deaths of loved ones which may occur

- we must take action before such a loss occurs and not after the fact. (p. 197)

In essence, this need is summed up in the statement by Miller (2000) that "[p]eople who

work in schools see the effects of grief played out over time and watch helplessly the

decline in student learning and involvement" (p. 116).

As mentioned earlier, while there are many myths about grief, there are also many

strategies that have been promoted as enabling individuals to live through grief and loss

experiences. However, in the ways that most educators deal with those experiences in

schools, little has changed over time. As James and Friedman (1998) point out:

Loss is inevitable. Sometimes loss is even predictable. In spite of these truths, we

receive no formal training in how to respond to events that are guaranteed to

happen and sure to cause pain and disruption. We are even advised not to learn

about dealing with loss—or at the very least not to talk about it. (pp. 24-25)

Educators need to become more comfortable with helping students who experience grief

and loss. Educators discuss difficult topics daily, this is one that needs to be added to the

list. When speaking of educators in general, it could be said that:

we have become as comfortable as we can get, speaking about communicable

diseases. So, if we become comfortable talking about these very difficult,

sensitive, and even controversial subjects in public schools, why not break ground

in this new frontier?" (Miller, 2000, p. 233)

Not only are grief and loss issues like the death of a grandparent needing to be discussed, but students need to be able to talk about complicated grief as well. Many students have difficult lives; there are numerous issues which complicate the grieving process, including abuse, family break-up, and suicides and homicides. Goldman (2001) argues that "educators need to develop curriculums that include definitions of each type of complicated grief. These curriculums should include prevention, intervention, and postvention strategies and techniques for school systems" (p. 164). Education is the first step in bringing information to the forefront and unlocking another taboo subject; school personnel may be one group who can do it.

Grief and loss (death) education for students. "Learning doesn't take place in isolations from kids' feelings. Being emotionally literate is as important for learning as instruction in math and reading" (Karen Stone McCown, cited in Goleman, 1995, p. 262). There is ample advice that students need skills and access to grief and loss education. Goleman (1995) states "by leaving the emotional lessons children learn to chance, we risk largely wasting the window of opportunity presented by the slow maturation of the brain to help children cultivate a healthy emotional repertoire" (p. 286). Kalish (1985) offers a more pessimistic view: death education may be beneficial to people but it cannot help to reduce fear or give people so much information that they will not feel grief in the event of a loss (p. 300).

What is death education? Stevenson (2000) defines it "as a formal curriculum that deals with dying, death, grief, and loss and their impact on the individual and humankind" (p. 199). Several models have been developed to help students understand stress and the difficulties that could be faced in a crisis situation. Moos and Schaefer

(1986) created a model that was presented to college students and involved two parts: a teaching component about grief and loss, and a time when people could talk. The data collected showed benefits from the meetings but indicated that students would benefit from continued support (Balk, 2000, p. 42). Others see the benefits as much more positive. Stevenson (2000) sees support groups as an aid for future losses: they are a way to help expand communication, allow students to work on their academic skills and increase knowledge, encourage techniques to lessen anxiety and fear of death, develop capabilities to have some level of personal control over aspects of life, remind and teach that life is a gift, and nurture the participant to value the diversity and culture of others. Finally, they also may have some therapeutic results (pp. 199-203).

Because many adolescents are pulling away from their parents and other caring adults, and forming closer relationships with their peers, Balk (2000) suggests that we should help all young people to learn to be supports for one another. He contends:

> More than anything, we could provide help by teaching non-bereaved peers how to listen attentively and how to remain courageous in the face of another adolescent's pain. Rather than waiting to assist bereaved adolescents, a stronger preventative approach is to help more adolescents become skilled at being supportive of friends and acquaintance in distress. (p. 48)

Student-support groups. Baxter and Stuart (1990) provide a good starting place for structuring a support group:

> The basic goals for forming a support group are to first acknowledge the bereaved student and to provide emotional support during the academic year. The groups provide acceptance and understanding of the grief process by introducing students

to other students in similar circumstances. The group leaders act as liaison

between students and staff and assist students to specifically identify problems

that can be solved by using a variety of techniques. (p. 122)

The issue of support for students has become a focus for schools as they explore better

ways to provide a good environment for learning and a place for interaction. Schuurman

(2000) offers five reasons why grief groups can work. They help students to learn the

following: that the things they are experiencing are normal grief reactions, that others

have similar experiences, that others care about them, that what they feel is important,

and that there are ways that they can express their grief that will be helpful to them (pp.

167-169). Some added benefits of being in a group might include gaining maturity,

development of strengths and coping skills, and an understanding that grief takes a long

time to work through (Allen, 1990, p. 39).

Some ways that the school could support these groups would require the school,

the home, and any feeder schools to provide information to school staffs. Some additional

ways to identify grieving students include the following; irregular attendance; notes for

excused absence to attend funerals; and names forwarded by students, teachers, feeder

schools, media, and hospital departments (Baxter, & Stuart, 1990, pp. 121-122). A

support group for students needs consistency, persistency and integrity in the process.

Earl Hipp (1992), in his book *A Caring Circle: A Facilitator's Guide to Support Groups*,

discusses what to keep in mind when forming a group. Some of the challenges that a

group could face include non-participation, emotional-over-involvement (taking on some

of the problems), and a lack of preparation or training in the issue (such as sexual abuse).

Another "trap" is trying to fix all of the problems students present (Hipp, 1992, pp. 18-

19). He does not discourage people from helping; he encourages people to go forward with understanding, and with a system in place for referrals to other agencies and professionals, if needed (Hipp, 1992, p. 19).

Helping relationships within schools. "In the web of life, nothing living lives alone" (Wheatley, 2002a, p. 89). The relationship between teacher and student is the most important component of education. A good teaching environment involves trust, respect, and commitment from both people. Authenticity of purpose and action is essential. Noddings' 1984 study describes three ways to *practice an ethic of caring* (as cited in Henderson, 1992, p. 2). The first is *confirmation*, which is engaging with the student to help them find their best selves. The second is *dialogue,* which is being able to talk about one's thinking and feelings. The third is *cooperative practice*, which is where teachers work in cooperation with students and move beyond sharing subject-specific knowledge (Henderson, 1992, pp. 3-4). Many authors emphasize that the student-teacher relationship must be built on trust. Satir (1988) describes the relationship process in the following manner "instead of surrounding the adolescent with a lot of restraints and restrictions, concentrate instead on developing a relationship based on honesty, humour, and realistic guidelines. More than anything else, adolescents need sensitive, flexible relationships with trusted adults" (p. 321).

Students have a need for someone to "be there for them." Teachers are often in a supportive, caring role. Brown (1999) suggests there are three roles that a teacher may assume as a "supportive-carer." They are a capacity to:

- Convey to the child his/her uniqueness or worth

- Perceive what the child may be experiencing and to convey understanding sensitively.

- Convey genuine concern. (p. 90)

According to Goleman (1995), being able to relate is "the ability to engage with others based on an understanding of being understood by and understanding others" (p. 194). By building relationships with and amongst teachers and students, a process of healing can be present for all involved. Helping others can also help us heal as we empathize with others and their difficulties (Goleman, 1995, p. 70) . I will end this discussion with a quote that summarizes the important factors of any helping relationship:

> But supporting children is not just about 'doing' – it is about 'being' present and in touch with the child at their point of need. However, when we are perceptive enough to determine the child's point of need, this can cause us to reflect on our own vulnerability. (Brown, 1999, p. 90)

Building Community in Schools.

"Community, like love, carries risks of dependence, exploitation, and loss. Yet it makes no more sense to reject community than to shun love and intimacy. We need to approach both with a combination of hope and wisdom" (Bolman & Deal, 1995, p. 110). A sense of community, or belonging to an entity larger than oneself, is important. In a school community, belonging, or simply feeling that someone cares, is very important. A sense of community, and the culture that grows from it, help to describe the members of the collective group.

In the educational literature of the last decade, many authors have offered definitions of the term *community* and its related elements. Barth (2001) describes

schools as places "full of adults and youngsters who care about, look after, and root for one another, and who work together for the good of the whole in times of need as well as times of celebration" (p. 12). Not only does Barth place importance on the interactions of people within a school but he also sees it as a living entity. He writes, "I believe that schools are lighthouses. I believe that every school harbors within its walls the capacity for grown-ups and students to become inventors.. to engage in authentic change... The school that becomes a self-renewing enterprise will shape its own future" (Barth, 2001, p. xxiv). Within the lighthouse, each person has a responsibility and a role. The school is able to expand and grow only because of the people willing to move forward. Barth (2001) believes that "every member of a community holds some responsibility for the welfare of every other, and for the community as a whole" (p. 13).

Hill and Celio (1998) described good community development in schools using the following characteristics: (1) small school size, (2) personalization, (3) high expectations for all students, (4) teacher collaboration, (5) aggressive leadership, (6) simplicity of curriculum (7) consistent standards of behaviour and effort, and (8) family and peer support (Sergiovanni, 1999, p. 4).

Peter Senge (2000) describes community as "a group of people or relationships within an organization – as a community of practice" (p. 461). Senge believes that people can learn together and grow together. Sergiovanni (1994) describes the school community as a mixture of or melding of the people in the setting; it is "the tie that binds students and teachers together in special ways, to something more significant than themselves: shared values and ideals" (p. xiii). The school community involves "a collective conscience, which is composed of three moral elements: duty, attachment, and

self-determination" (Sergiovanni, 1994, p. 64). When discussing such difficult topics as grief, it is important that there be a sense of community not only within any given class, but in the school as a whole. Sergiovanni argues that each member needs to be able to be supported, and ties need to be present to pull people together to create community. In a community, the whole is greater than the sum of each of the parts.

The culture of schools is another important influence on change and growth. Peterson and Deal (1998) define culture in the following manner:

> Culture is an underground stream of norms, values, beliefs, traditions, and rituals that has built up over time as people work together, solve problems, and confront challenges. This set of informal expectations and values shape how people think, feel and act in schools. (p. 1)

Within that definition, there are some other terms which need to be defined. When they discuss beliefs, they are commenting on "how we comprehend and deal with the world around us" (Peterson & Deal, 1999, pp. 26-27). When they discuss the values of those involved, they describe them as "the conscious expressions of what an organization stands for" (Peterson & Deal, 1999, p. 26).

Another definition of culture by Scheir (1985) is "a pattern of basic assumptions invented, discovered, or developed by a given group as it learns to cope with problems... that has worked well enough to be considered valid" (as cited in Peterson & Deal, 1999, p. 314). Sergiovanni (1994) notes that Emile Durheim proposed that humans have a basic need to belong, to be connected to each other, and to identify with a set of norms that gives direction and meaning to our lives (p. 63).

The community and culture of schools in times of stress or difficulties should support individual members in need. Barth (2001) describes some of the difficulties associated with schools that do not discuss problems or have topics which are seemingly taboo. Some times the difficulties that schools face are never discussed. Barth refers to these as *non-discussables*: "non-discussables are subjects sufficiently laden with anxiety and taboos that these conversations take place only in the parking lot" (Barth, 2001, p. 9). Many schools that do not engage in discussion of certain topics can become unhealthy. Schools may not be places where healthy discussions take place. Barth observes that "the health of a school is only proportional to the number of non-discussibles...the more the non-discussibles; the more pathology in the school culture" (Barth, 2001, p. 9). Schools can learn to overcome the non-discussibles and start the process of discussion of different topics. Several researchers and educational leaders have ideas about how these changes can start.

Peterson and Deal (1999) discuss the importance of community when stress and difficulty become parts of everyday occurrences. They state that,

> [s]chools run largely on faith and hope. Students and teachers do not leave their humanity behind when they come to school. They need special moments in the daily grind to reflect on what's really important, to connect with one another, and to feel the common spirit ... (p. 32)

Planning events within the school day and scheduling discussion with students and staff is important. Building connections amongst staff and students is important. It is something that the leaders of the school must do, "drawing people together to mourn loss

and renew is a significant part of a leader's culture- shaping role" (Peterson & Deal, 1999, p. 99).

Ignoring the problems or events in the lives of those who attend and work in a school is not conducive to building community. All members need to be able to connect with others in the building and build relationships which can propel them through difficult times. Sergiovanni (1999) describes the importance of these relationships in the following way:

> Connections and commitments are the means by which students and adults alike
>
> find sense and meaning in their lives and find the resources needed to persist
>
> when times are tough… to meet life's challenges, and to be successful with life's
>
> endeavors. (p. 1)

The final discussion themes for this literature review are those of craft knowledge and reflective practice for teachers.

Craft Knowledge and the Reflective Practioner

> We 'cannot be truly human apart from communication…to impede
>
> communication is to reduce people to the status of things.' (Paulo Friere cited in
>
> Wheatley, 2002a, p. 26)

Communication and reflection play a critical part in bringing about change and the development of new habits. For Barth (2001), personal reflection is seen as very important. It is how we learn from experience and it "contributes to the refinement of subsequent action and to the building of a repertoire of professional craft knowledge" (p. 74). Barth (2001) defines craft knowledge as "a massive collection of knowledge and learning of those who live and work under the roof of the schoolhouse…" (p. 56). It is the

knowledge that each individual has gained through interaction and practice. This knowledge builds as people discuss and learn from one another. For Barth, craft knowledge is "something much more than telling of war stories. It is a description of practice accompanied by an intentional *analysis* of practice…These hard-won learnings are the gold nuggets we mine from the gravel of our experience" [italics in original] (Barth, 2001, p. 57).

Each teacher who participates in individual reflection and collaborative reflection gains insights that might otherwise be missed (Barth, 2001, p. 62). Discussion and conversation amongst staff has "the capacity to promote reflection, to create and exchange craft knowledge and help improve the organization" (Barth, 2001, p. 68). When group reflection is used, everyone gains direction and begins to look at the needs of others (Jarvis, 1995, p. 63). Through these discussions, people learn more about themselves and how they can integrate learnings into their practice (Jarvis, 1999, p. 57).

It is possible that purposeful reflection can lead to greater collegiality. Little (1981) has stated that collegiality has four main aspects: (1) talking about practice, (2) observing others in practice, (3) collaboration on curriculum, and (4) teaching each other what they know (cited in Barth, 1990, p. 31). This reflection and collegiality can bring about an enhanced sense of community amongst staff and could lead to better service for, and attention to, students. Wheatley (2002a) describes this sense of community in the following way:

> Thinking together, deciding what actions to take, more of us become bold. And
> we become wiser about where to use our courage. As we learn from each other's
> experiences and interpretations, we see the issue in richer detail. We understand

more of the dynamics that have created it. With this clarity, we know what actions

to take and where we might have the most influence. (p. 26)

Summary

The themes presented in this literature review explore some of the interest that

exists in helping schools and society embrace the needs of students and schools to deal

with loss. The research on grief and loss shows that there are many different approaches,

definitions, and beliefs about who should be involved and to what degree. Grief and loss

education (death education), support groups, and grief and loss training offer other

valuable ideas for improving resources for students. The research on helping

relationships, although limited, has developed from other areas, such as counselling

models, and relates to specific roles in schools.

This literature review identifies a need for schools to work with all the

stakeholders in order to support students. Reflective practice literature supports

examination of individual practice and sharing of craft knowledge. This process may lead

to developing increased teacher sharing of craft knowledge. It also addresses concerns

that reflection and overall school growth can help tackle issues which are often not

discussed openly or reviewed with all members of the school community. It addresses a

need for school communities to become more cohesive in offering assistance to all of

their members.

Methodology

Main Research Questions:

1. How can the teaching staff help students at Chetwynd Secondary School cope with issues of grief and loss?

2. Do teachers and students hold the same beliefs or perceptions about grief and loss?

Secondary Questions:

1. In what ways does the staff at Chetwynd Secondary School support students who experience loss?

2. How can teachers assist students who have experienced loss?

3. Are there gender differences in the ways students and teachers respond to grief and loss, and or how they see important issues being addressed?

4. Do staff and students at Chetwynd Secondary School have a "healthy" sense of community?

5. What are some of the features of helping relationships that have been developed?

6. Is training in supporting individuals who experience grief and loss something in which teachers will engage?

7. Is there a secondary gain for teachers in learning these skills that will assist them in addressing their own responses to loss?

8. What are some future goals of teachers and students for dealing with grief and loss?

Outcomes:

Through this study, I will:

1. Learn from students what would be or has been helpful for them in the school setting. I will obtain this information through interviews, focussed discussions, and exit slips.

2. Learn from teachers what they perceive as the present strengths and weaknesses of response plans at Chetwynd Secondary School for responding to children who experience grief and loss.

4. Apply concepts read or learned about, and share that learning with interested staff and students, in workshop or focussed discussion format.

5. Summarize the data, discuss the findings, and propose future directions for Chetwynd Secondary School.

6. Apply concepts and future directions to the situations the school may face in our school community.

7. Encourage reflection, for staff and students, on current practices and future growth.

Overview

In order to begin answering the above questions, I adopted the following assumptions. First, that educators in our school community may not know how our schools support students who experience loss or may not be aware of either the resources available or the needs of students. Secondly, that there must be alternate ways of helping students who have experienced loss; I would like to use this research project to begin to find some of those ways. Thirdly, that many different factors will have an influence on this project. One of the strongest factors is my own experience with grief and loss and how it

influences my interpretation of data and events. Finally, each individual uses many different strategies and frames of reference to deal with his or her experiences with loss.

Description of Methodology

> Of course, intellectual learning includes the amassing and retention of
> information. But information is an undigested burden unless it is understood....
> And understanding, comprehension, means that the various parts of the
> information acquired are grasped in their relations to one another -- a result that is
> attained only when acquisition is accompanied by constant reflection upon the
> meaning of what is studied. (John Dewey, as cited in Nelson, 2001, p. 10)

In conducting the research for this project, I used both quantitative and qualitative research methods. Interpretive social science was used as the aim is to "understand and describe meaningful social action" (Neuman, 1997, p. 83) as it pertains to grief and loss. Meyers (1997) depicts Kaplan and Maxwell's description of interpretive research from 1994 in the following way: "Interpretive research does not predefine dependent and independent variables, but focuses on the full complexity of human sense making as the situation emerges" (p. 4). I employed both types of research in order to diversify the usefulness of the results. Qualitative data collection was chosen for this project because it allows "more emphasis on tacit or intuitive knowledge...[s]uch knowledge must be given legitimacy because of the complexity of the situation and the fact that much of the interaction with the subject occurs at a subjective or intuitive level" (Borg & Gall, 1989, pp. 386-387). The other benefit to this form of research is that one may reform hypotheses and include new questions to study as one moves forward into data collection and analysis (Alasuutari, 1995, p. 169). Quantitative approaches have allowed for the

display and the analysis of themes in the findings and discussion components of the project. This form of data formulation should provide the reader with clear pictures of the data collected. The main methodological components that were used are: action research, case study format, thematic coding, and narrative inquiry. The challenge of this project was to create quantitative and qualitative methods that complemented one another and allowed me to gain an accurate picture of current experiences so that support for students at C.S.S. could be enhanced.

Action research. The project was based on action research, as it helped to bring the process of investigation full circle. In the *Action Research Guide for Alberta Teachers*, it is suggested that, "action research encourages teachers to share experiences about how they have worked through an educational concern" (Alberta Teacher's Association, 2000, p. 6). The techniques for action research differ quite widely. Donald Schön's vision (1983, 1987 as cited in Newman, n.d.) "sees practice-as-inquiry conducted principally to inform and change on-going practice. For Schön, inquiry occurs when the practitioner reflects both while engaged in action and subsequently, on the action itself" (Newman, n.d., p. 2). Connelly and Clandinin (1988) define action research in the following manner: "[a]ction research consists of deliberate experimental moves into the future, which change us because of what we learn in the process" (p. 153). By using these methods, I anticipated that the research would either lead to proposals for changes or to affirmations of the way C.S.S. supports students who experience grief and loss. The process described in the *Action Research Guide for Alberta Teachers* by Townsend was used. Townsend's process from 1999 includes the following stages: (1) defining the focus or problem, (2) collecting information, (3) making sense of the

information, (4) sharing information (done informally with some staff), (5) planning action (creation of the project proposal), (6) taking action (reflection on situation) (7) collecting data (student, teacher interviews, and focussed discussion with students) (8) analyzing the data collected in the interviews, focussed discussion and exit slips, (9) assessing the information collected, and 10) publishing information which includes decisions about future actions. (Alberta Teachers Association, 1999, pp. 14-15).

Case study. The case study approach required me to look critically at C.S.S. and the policies and procedures currently in place for helping children who experience grief and loss. These existing structures must be acknowledged. Case studies, as defined by Peter Jarvis (1999) include both "the *process* of learning about and researching the specific phenomenon or phenomena under investigation and about the *product* of that learning and research"[italics in original] (p. 77). Some of the evidence used for this case study includes: interviews, focussed discussion, exit slips, coding, concept analysis, and discussion of findings. According to Yin (1994), a range of evidence allows for better quality of the final product (p. 92). Not all research supports the use of the case study. In using a case study there can be "oversimplification, exaggerations of facts and interpretations of selective facts; they are unscientific, opportunistic, and unrepresentatative and they are partial accounts masquerading as full accounts" (Jarvis, 1999, p. 82). The overarching benefit, however, is that patterns will emerge and contribute to the uniqueness of the situation and school (Jarvis, 1999, p. 86).

Interviews. To gain an accurate assessment of the current practices at C.S.S., I have used as one of the primary data collection procedures interviews with ten students and seven teachers (see Appendix A for student blueprint and Appendix B for teacher

blueprint). Yin (1994) believes that interviewing participants is useful, if only "to corroborate certain facts that you had already think have been established (but not to ask about other topics of a broader, open-ended nature)"... (p. 85). The interviews in this study were also intended as "a search-and-discover mission" (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995, p. 2). I wanted to use the interviews to find out what others in the school believed, and what they felt would be beneficial future directions. The interviews followed a pre-set format with some flexibility for structure. This allowed for probing questions to be added that accessed information that could not be gained by using other research methods (Borg & Gall, 1989, p. 452).

Student and teacher interviews were conducted with volunteer participants. I solicited student volunteers by making short presentations to classes. Students willing to participate were asked to consent to the interview procedures, and to have parent permission forms signed, and only then were interview times set. Student volunteers were selected from each grade, eight through twelve. The interviews were audiotaped and then transcribed. Unlike quantitative interviews, they included open-ended questions which allowed the student or teacher volunteers to openly share their views. It can be said that "interview participants can be likened to practioners of everyday life, constantly working to discern and designate the recognizable and orderly parameters of experience" (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995, p. 16). Some concerns become evident when using interviews. There is concern that the information, once filtered by the interviewer, may change the nature of the participants' sharing. As well, the equipment used during interviewing can be problematic. Often the needs of the interviewee may not even be met (Creswell, 2002, p. 205). These interviews were used to focus the discussion section of

this project. Data gathered through the interviews was searched with the hope that they

would provide future directions. As Yin (1994) points out in the following quote,

interviews are a necessary component of any case study approach:

> Overall, interviews are an essential source of case study evidence because most
>
> case studies are about human affairs. These human affairs should be reported and
>
> interpreted through the eyes of specific interviewees, and well-informed
>
> respondents can provide important insight into a situation. They can also provide
>
> short cuts to the prior history of the situation, helping you to identify other
>
> sources of evidence. (p. 85)

Focussed discussions. After completion of the interviews, some focussed

discussions involving two classes of students took place. These discussions employed

conversational methodology (Nelson, 2001, p. 7). The discussions followed an interview

blueprint (see Appendix C) and were conducted in the classrooms. A model set out by

Kreuger (1988 as cited in Lewis, 1995) was used. The group engaged in "carefully

planned discussion designed to obtain perceptions in a defined area of interest in a

permissive, non-threatening environment" (Lewis, 1995, p. 2). After the focussed

discussion students completed exit slips (see Appendix D). These exit slips were given to

get feedback on the process.

Participant observation. The observations recorded in the interviews and focussed

discussions allowed for intensive documentation of each participant's views. Being

actively involved in the school and with students allowed me to employ "a special mode

of observation in which [I was] not merely a passive observer. Instead, [I] assume[d] a

variety of roles within a case study situation and .. actually participate[d] in events being

studied" (Yin, 1994, p. 87). The observations recorded also encouraged reflection on the procedures and organization of the project.

Analysis and discussion."...[T]he way of teaching demands a long journey that does not have any easily identifiable destination...It is a journey that I believe must include a backward step into the self and it is a journey that is its own destination" (R. Tremmel, as cited in Leitch & Day, 2000, p. 179). Throughout the project, information was collected through interviews, focussed discussions, and student exit slips. These sources of evidence were incorporated into a case study database (Yin, 1994, p. 98). This database was maintained separately from the final product and contained all of the raw data and observational information. In separating research material and the final product, I wanted to retain the evidence and use it in the "development of converging lines of inquiry, a process of triangulation"... (Yin, 1994, p. 92). A file system for the database involved colour-coded themes formed from the various research method collections (Yin, 1994, p. 98). Each piece of data collected was labelled as to the source (exit slip, discussion, interview, or discussion group), using fictitious names to preserve the identity of the source.

The data collection method used in the initial coding followed a process suggested in Neuman (1997). The process included types of data coding methods as described by Strauss, 1987 (as cited in Neuman, 1997, p. 422). The first component involved open coding. This type of coding required the assignment of themes in order to collate the collected data into concept groupings. Concept grouping helped to bring "themes from deep inside the data" to the forefront (Neuman, 1997, p. 422). The second component involved axial coding. Axial coding begins with the concept groups and delves into the

raw data to bring all components together. It "stimulates thinking about linkages between concepts or themes, and it raises more questions" (Neuman, 1997, p. 423). The third component was selective coding, which is a final scan of the data to ensure it was thoroughly analysed. (Neuman, 1997, p. 425).

Once the coding and collation of the raw data was complete, the information was presented in the findings section of the project. This section focuses around themes, perceptions, and opinions from both student and teacher perspectives. All findings relevant to the research questions and outcomes are presented.

Narrative discussion was used in the discussion section of the project. Narrative discussion "is a written passage in a qualitative study in which authors summarize, in detail, the findings from their data analysis" (Creswell, 2002, p. 274). The five main components included are a summary of the research question and method, a discussion about the results of the study, comparisons to literature found in the research, limitations of the study, and implications or future directions which are suggested and could be implemented.

Findings

Overview

The coding and thematic formation of the data initiated development of a series of

themes and sub-themes based on information collected in both the student and teacher

interviews and the student-focussed discussions. In each level of the coding, some initial

structures were temporary and flexible, and some elements of each thematic grouping

were fairly fluid. In part, because of the arrangement of questions in each of the

blueprints (see Appendices A, B and C), responses to the main questions for each

participant group, upon analysis, led to the formation of common themes.

The thematic groupings for interview and focussed discussion data were

organized to include responses from each question that focused on that particular theme

or sub-theme (see Appendices A, B, and C). To ensure that each thematic grouping

related directly to what was discussed in each interview or focussed discussion, coding

analysis was used. The findings are presented in the following format:

1. Thematic groupings for student interviews and focussed discussions

2. Thematic groupings for teacher interviews

3. Findings for student interviews and focussed discussion

4. Findings for teacher interviews

The findings are initially presented by thematic groupings and by sub-theme. Each of the

sub-themes includes information gathered from the blueprint questions. The number of

occasions certain items appeared in the blueprints is clearly laid out. Exploration of this

information includes sample quotes from participants to illustrate specific elements of

each area in the findings. The thematic groups for both student data and teacher data are outlined in the following format.

Thematic Groupings for Student Interviews and Focussed Discussions

Three main thematic groupings from student interviews and focussed discussion were created and then categorized further into several sub-themes. The groupings are detailed as follows.

Thematic Grouping One: Grief and Loss

Sub-themes:

- Losses people experience

- Individual experiences related to grief and loss (*student interviews only)

- Definitions of grief

- Responses to grief and loss

Thematic Grouping Two: Support Systems and Relationships

Sub-themes:

- Characteristics of helping relationships

- Support and relationships in the school

- Peer and family support

Thematic Grouping Three: Personal Growth and Future Directions

Sub-themes:

- Student input on education and support groups

- Student input on future directions specific to C.S.S.

Thematic Groupings for Teacher Interviews

Three main groupings were also created from the teacher interviews. They parallel the

groupings derived from student interviews and focussed discussions, with a few subtle

differences. The thematic groupings are as follows.

Thematic Grouping One: Grief and Loss

   Sub-themes:

- Losses students may experience

- Definition of grief

- Responses to grief and loss

- Personal experiences related to grief and loss

Thematic Grouping Two: Support Systems and Relationships

   Sub-themes:

- Characteristics of helping relationships

- Role of teachers, counsellors, and other school resources

- Peer and family support

Thematic Grouping Three: Professional Growth and Future Directions

   Sub-themes:

- Teacher input on training for teachers

- Teacher input on education and support group development

- Teacher input about future directions.

Student Interview and Focussed Discussion Findings

   A series of ten interviews and two-focussed discussions were conducted with

students at Chetwynd Secondary School. Student participation in the individual interview

process included ten students from grades eight through eleven. Six of the interviewed students were female, four were male. The first focussed discussion involved ten students in a grade ten through twelve elective class. The second focussed discussion involved ten students in a grade eight elective class. The interview and focussed discussion blueprint both follow a similar or, in some cases, identical line of questioning (see Appendices A and C for blueprints of interview and focussed discussion questions).

Thematic Grouping One: Grief and Loss

Sub-theme: Losses people experience. In student interviews, the most common references to loss were to the death of family members. There were eight references to family members in general and three specifically to loss of parents through death. The second most common response was the death of a pet. Five references were made to the loss of a family pet. The next losses expressed most often were the loss of friends through death and divorce of parents, each with four responses. Several other responses ranged from suicide of friends, grades dropping in school, loss of parents' employment, illness of self or others, and loss of school activities because of the teacher-job action. In both the males and the females who responded, the focus was mostly around the importance of family and friends and the seriousness of those losses to people in their age category.

Sub-theme: Individual experiences related to grief and loss. When students were asked about their own personal experiences with loss, three of the students responded that they had not experienced any personal losses in the past two years. The losses expressed by the remaining seven students are categorized in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1 Interviewed students' experiences with loss	
Loss	Number of references
Close family friend	4
Divorce or separation of parent	3
Family member	1
Suicide of friend	1

Seventy percent of the interviewed students had dealt with some form of loss over the past few years. These losses were described as being very difficult by several students. One of the most moving descriptions was of the loss of a friend to suicide.

It was hard, we wanted to talk about it, but it was hard to talk with our really close friends because they did not know him like we did. They did not find it really that sad. So, it was really hard and I always think I am over it but obviously talking about it now you can tell I am not. Even though you did not know him, or anything, it is easy to talk about it, it makes me feel better...

Another powerful description was that of a student in response to the death of a very close family friend: "I found when I came to school after she died I was drawing a blank. I was just not able to think like I normally could...School was pretty far down my list." The descriptions of loved ones, and the students' experiences, were very moving. The words used to describe loss also demonstrated a good understanding of the components of grief.

Sub-theme: Definition of grief. When students gave their definitions of grief, some common themes developed. Most of the definitions incorporated the loss of

something important, changes in behaviour, and displays of emotion such as anger, frustration, sadness, confusion, disbelief, revenge and depression. Some interesting definitions included the responses that grief "is havoc" and that it is "losing something very close to you and having to deal with it in your every day without it. It is trying to get by and needing that extra help from other people to get you through." These definitions show both basic understanding of the processes of grief and also some of the basic elements of an individual's responses to grief. A closer look at those student responses follows.

Sub-theme: Responses to grief and loss. Students described their responses to grief and loss in a variety of ways. The questions that were used to generate these descriptions included the following.

- "What are some of the ways people may react or express themselves after a loss or while grieving?"

- "Can you experience feelings of loss or grief over things that are positive changes in your life? (e.g. leaving home to strike out on your own).

- "What are some of the changes that occur?"

Table 4.2 is a listing of the most common descriptors used in the students' definitions of grief and loss. Some of the descriptors that were given only once or twice, and are therefore not included in the table, include suicide, a drop in grades, denial or pretending nothing is wrong, and turning to drugs and alcohol. Although these descriptors were mentioned infrequently they could be considered to blend with some of the other descriptors presented in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2 Student descriptors for the reactions of grievers	
Descriptor	Number of References
Anger	4
Avoidance (hiding, staying away)	9
Crying	3
Depression ("feeling down")	6
Not looking after themselves	4
Talking with people (listeners, good friends)	5

Through their responses to the questions, it became apparent that students could see many visible characteristics of grievers. It also appeared that they differentiated between two categories of people and how they grieve. The following description is an example of that distinction:

> Some people seclude themselves away from everyone and lock everything away inside, and don't talk to anyone. Some people are very vocal about it and talk about it, and really help with the process by talking about it. Some people cry, others pretend that nothing happened, and others go through denial and pretend nothing happened.

Most of the students included some events that are generally considered to be positive, such as leaving for university, as having negative effects on them. One student described it in this manner:

Probably people really stress over change and things like that even if it is a positive change. Going away to school, a bigger and better school is probably going to having grieving associated with it. It probably depends upon your outlook and who you are...

The main point that the students emphasized was that all change was scary and that the loss of the familiar was difficult to accept. In addition, four participants, both male and female, addressed a difference in how males and females would deal with grief. They suggested that girls would be more apt to talk and seek comfort while boys would retreat inside themselves.

Thematic Grouping Two: Support Systems and Relationships

When I began this project, I wanted to focus on offering support for students in the school. As I began to interview and expand my literature search, it became apparent that there is quite a sophisticated support structure for adolescents. When discussing the importance of school relationships, students identified several standard themes, and consistent opinions on the role of the school. They also showed a comprehensive understanding of the role of peer and family support. The key elements and characteristics of the helping relationship became important factors in exploring how support systems for students develop, grow, and are maintained.

Sub-theme: Characteristics of helping relationships. Many students characterized a helper as someone who would give comfort and listen, but not demand, or ask a million questions, or give opinions. One student suggested a helper should have a "a small degree or large degree of patience, faith, and understanding." In all of the discussions of helpers,

whether they be teachers, friends, or family, trust and a willingness to be there in any capacity when a need arises were considered essential.

Sub-theme: Support and relationships in the school. When students discussed ways that teachers and school staff could help in crises or difficulties, there were obvious differences in the amount of support different students wanted. This seemed to be related to differences in the students' desire for teachers to be involved in their lives outside of the classroom. Included in the interviews were questions about the ways that teachers help and also the ways that they hinder relationships with students. Some of the ways teachers help are that they show understanding and give "leeway on schoolwork," respect the student and give the space needed, provide distractions and "normalcy away from the crying and sadness at home," and provide a "comfort zone"- a place where students can enjoy school, teachers, and friends.

Student opinion was split on the question of classroom teachers helping students who experience grief. Six of the interviewees wanted teachers to be approachable in the event the student experienced a loss. One of the affirmative comments was in response to a situation a student had experienced at another school: "I would probably have liked [counselling] with one of my own teachers rather than just someone that they brought in for just one day." Four of the students said that teachers being approachable was not really necessary. Two out of the four who did not think it was necessary believed it was a good idea only if the teacher were trained in counselling. Another student brought up a valuable point about the time that a teacher would need to engage with the student: "I do not think that teachers should be trained... they should be trained to look for signs, so they can refer them to the counsellors...I mean, what are the other students in the class

doing?" Some other concerns raised included the lack of anonymity when a student talks to a teacher, and distrust of teachers due to teacher protocols to report abuse to the Ministry of Children and Families.[1]

Students report teacher-student relationships to be very important to both teachers and students in Chetwynd Secondary School. Teachers in the school were described in the interviews and focussed discussions as being "always there" and "interested in things outside of school," as "looking like they are having fun," as being able to "give good advice," as willing to "take the time to notice," and as being willing to find someone who can help if they cannot. A telling statement about the nature of the teacher-student relationship came from a female interviewee:

> You can joke with them and never have to feel uncomfortable talking about anything, it is very straightforward and honest. I see it a lot here. The teachers treat the students with a lot of respect and, in turn, the kids treat teachers with respect.

That does not mean, though, that students did not feel there could be improvements in the ways that teachers dealt with students during difficult times. Table 4.3 outlines student beliefs about areas in which teachers should improve.

Table 4.3 Student examples of things teachers should not do	
Example	Number of References
Draw attention in front of class	5
Ignore the problem completely	1
Negative approach	2
Not understanding pent up emotions	2
Label a student as "trouble"	3
Suspect without checking things out- "they think they know what's going on"	3

In comparison to the positive comments, the complaints were much fewer. Students felt that the teachers are generally excellent in any circumstance. Out of the responses from the individual interviews, three students said they could not think of anything teachers were doing that was not helpful. When asked if the school had enough resources in the way of staff and resources, five students were happy with the resources in the school while five were unsure. The main resources mentioned were the following: the teachers and counsellors; resources, books and access to the internet; support staff; the school's Learning Resources Team (LRT); lunch-hour supervisors; native support workers; and their peers. Counsellors were seen as being supportive by "always having their doors open," by "having a safe room," and by being able to "listen." One student summed up the school environment in the following way:

I think because we are such a small town almost everyone, teachers, counsellors, principals, vice principals, friends, anyone who walks down the school, can help.

I think so, because you know everyone on such a personal basis. Not only because you see them at school but you see them lots outside of school all the time. That is an advantage of a small school and you feel comfortable with everyone.

Sub-theme: Peer and family support. In the discussions of support that students receive from other than school personnel, the focus was mostly on their peer groups. However, some students noted the importance of talking with family members. The questions, "Have you counselled, discussed, counselled with or supported friends who have or are experiencing loss? If yes, please explain, and if no, explain why not" brought about a great deal of discussion. Every student, whether in a focussed discussion or an individual interview, seemed to have an opinion on this question.

Another interesting development was that all four of the males in the individual interview commented that they probably would not talk to their friends. One male interviewee explained his hesitance in the following manner.

I don't know why, I just felt I could not talk to them. I feel that they feel the same that they cannot really talk. My friends are more like we just want to have fun, we just don't discuss too many personal things. We mostly keep it to ourselves…I share it [problems] with my mom. I talk to her when I have a rough day.

Another male student said "we usually talk about what we do, not about our problems."

The girls, on the other hand, responded much differently. Of the six girls interviewed individually, five said that they talk to their friends about their problems and, in turn, help them when needed. Only one of the girls said she would not discuss things with her friends: "I tell most of my problems to my parents, or to my step-sister, but she is not really a teenager anymore. She just listens really well." The other five-female

individual interviewees and students in the focussed discussions named various reasons why this occurs. Some felt that they were more comfortable with their peers because they had experienced things together, and that their friends "know by the gestures you make that you want to be alone. They will come back later when it is the right time." A few other relevant quotes from the data follow:

> Kids do share. I find with the friends that I had they really did. I would think with guys it would be really different. They would not talk about emotional things but with the friends that I had they really really did. They would let me talk really openly with them. It probably really depends on the group of friends that you have. They just have to be open and have experienced it before, and my friends have always helped.

Another student discussed her popularity as an advice giver.

> In my case, I am kind of the doctor with all of my friends. Everybody, even people I never talk to, call me on my phone and ask me for advice. Kids my age tend to go to their friends much more then they would go to their parents, counsellors or teachers.

In their peer relationships, the girls in this study tend to discuss their problems more than boys. They discuss most things with their friends, not just loss issues. Some of the boys are more likely seek out adult females with whom they can discuss their problems, rather than involving their friends.

Thematic Grouping Three: Student Input on Future Directions for C.S.S.

Before developing serious plans to implement programs into classes, or develop support groups, professional staff need a clear understanding of what students know,

believe, and expect. In order to gain such an understanding, I asked students about several different areas: grief and loss education, support group development, and the prioritising and targeting of services. In addressing future actions and directions for the school, students offered many new insights and suggestions.

Sub- theme: Student input on education and support groups. Generally, students felt that having grief and loss education in the school would be helpful. Some thought it would be helpful "because we all grieve" and "it would probably be good if friends knew how to deal with it." Others felt that it should be available, but would not be something in which they would be interested in being involved. Four students said that if training was offered in the school, they would take it.

In response to the development of a support group, six of the individual interviewees said they felt the idea had both good and bad aspects. Four said that it was a good idea, but two of the four said that they would never attend. Some of the students who disagreed with the development of a group felt that there were too many risks associated with a support-group structure. There was great concern that the people in the group would not respect their privacy and would tell others the information they heard. As well, there was considerable mistrust of the motives of others in joining a support group structure. Some students felt that they would be fodder for the rumour mill. However, these same students did have some great suggestions for new ways for the school to support students in need.

Sub-theme: Student input on future directions. Several students expressed their pleasure that someone was asking for their ideas. Students felt that family death and divorce were very important things for which the counselling department should be

watchful. Several comments were similar to the following: "I think death is what should be concentrated on, because some people just don't deal with it." Another student commented on the importance of helping students whose families had experienced a divorce or family break up.

> I would say family break up would be the one you would want to focus on.
>
> Because even if you experience a loss, if you have a good family they can help
>
> take you through. I know I can, because my family helps me make it through it.
>
> But, if you have a broken family, then that would be very traumatic.

Some students felt that the school should focus more on stress management. Four students, in both individual and focussed discussions, expressed a desire to learn more about ways to manage stress. They commented on the stress placed on them to meet or exceed expectations and to be successful. Both male and female students felt that assistance with stress management was important. They emphasized a need for it, especially for senior students. As a part of this, another male made a comment that the school needed to work on introducing anger management into the school and creating a place where students could go if they needed to "cool off." Girls mentioned several other areas that need development, specifically regarding skills to help deal with gossiping, bullying, and teasing.

An area of concern that came up in one of the focussed discussions and in two of the interviews was the teacher-job action. Students were feeling stressed by not having the same support from teachers and availability of teachers for help as was previously available. As well, another student mentioned how it was affected him through the loss of extra-curricular activities. One individual explained it as follows:

How I see it, the teachers feel that is all on them like it was all about them. It was all about the money. They do not see how it has affected us. They think they do but they don't. We are sad and depressed. We sit there in class and cannot get help after school. So, we go home and then fail the test the next day. I do not think that teachers understand that.

Teacher Interview Findings

Teacher interviews followed a set interview blueprint (see Appendix B). Seven teachers were interviewed. The interviewees were four male and three female teachers from Chetwynd Secondary School. The teachers ranged in experience from having greater than twenty years to less than five years of classroom experience. The data collected are presented using the themes created through coding analysis.

Thematic Grouping One: Grief and Loss

Sub-theme: Losses students experience. In the teacher interviews, one of the first questions was, "In your opinion what are the most serious losses that students experience?" When teachers discussed the types of serious losses that students experience, many used their own experience with students in schools as the basis for their discussion. Table 4.4 is a listing of the losses that were mentioned most frequently.

Table 4.4 Teacher descriptions of serious losses for students	
Example	Number of references
Death of friends	6
Death of grandparent	2
Divorce	4
Death of family member (not parent)	3
Friends moving or loss of friendship	2
Parental death	7

It appears that the death of those close to students is recognized as the most serious of losses teachers have seen students face. Teachers continued by describing the process people go through after a loss. This process is evident in the definitions of grief that they shared.

Sub-theme: Definitions of grief. Teacher definitions of grief contained many of the same components as those found in the student definitions. All of the teachers referred to grief as a loss of "something." Some of the elements common to their definitions included anger, sadness, helplessness, lack of control, and withdrawal. An interesting addition included the thought that grief was when "things are conspiring to get you." Others included observations of the impact of grief on sleep patterns and eating habits, as well as grief's ability to "change personalities." A unique definition given was that grief "is a high speed of emotion where you really have difficulty dealing with the direction that your emotions are taking you." All of the definitions given showed an

understanding of a wide range of elements that may be present in an individual's experiences with loss.

Sub-theme: Responses to grief and loss. Before asking teachers to go directly into a discussion of grief and loss in schools I wanted to know if teachers believed that this was something the school dealt with properly or if it even was relevant to the classroom setting. Six of the seven teachers said that grief and loss had an impact in the classroom. One wanted it clarified that grief was not something that happened all the time. Table 4.5 lists some of the most common descriptors of grieving given by teachers.

Table 4.5 Teacher descriptors for the reactions of grievers	
Descriptor	Number of References
Anger	1
Attendance	4
Behaviour	2
Complete dysfunction	2
Crying	2
Depression (sadness)	2
Lack of concentration on studies	4
Numbness	1
Withdrawal	4

In the teacher responses, the main areas of concern for the classroom teacher revolved around the change in attendance, the lack of concentration, and the withdrawal of students during classroom activities. They also made comments about watching for

similar changes in friends of the student who has suffered and been affected by the loss. Several of the teachers also recognized differences in the ways that male and female students dealt with their grief. One such observation follows:

My personal observation is that girls do not deal with it as well as guys. Now that may be that they are expressing their grief more than the guys. In general, boys seem to act in a more normal way sooner than girls do.

Such gender differences were mentioned twice and focussed on the fact that girls tend to express their loss in an outward fashion, whereas boys were less likely to be observed grieving openly.

Sub-theme: Personal experiences related to grief and loss. In response to the question, "Do you believe your personal experiences with loss help you when dealing with students experience loss, explain?," all of the teachers believed that their personal experiences could help them when dealing with students who had experienced losses. The teachers said they felt increased empathy, and indicated a willingness to share their own history, if appropriate. They also saw the creation of a "common bond" amongst people who had experienced similar losses. One teacher said that you "learn something from every experience." A number of the teachers discussed how, as students, they had experienced their own losses, and how their relationships with their teachers, at the time, helps to direct how they now work with students.

Some important points relating to differences between cultural groups were also expressed. One participant noted that "we all have our different ways and different belief structures. Even cultural expectations may be different. Some families may wail and weep and others do not even discuss it." Another teacher, describing how cultural barriers

could hinder communication, observed, "In some cases ...if you are not in that culture sometimes it is difficult to be able to respond appropriately." This raises some valid points about the need to understand the support systems which are in place for students, and increase teacher awareness of them.

Thematic Grouping Two: Support Systems and Relationships

In interviewing teachers about the support structures for students at C.S.S., I focussed on several key topics, including: resources in the school; ways teachers helped students who were having difficulties in classes; teachers as support for students; and the assistance to students from peers, family, and community. Out of the information collected, I have developed three sub-themes: the helping relationship, the role of the school, and the support of peers and family.

Sub-theme: Characteristics of a helping relationship. Teachers specified some important ways that they and others interact and connect with students. Some of the methods that they described as helping connect with students included offering a safe location, listening, offering encouragement, being caring, encouraging acceptance, and recognizing that in a small community there is a connection among all its members. Other means included giving students an opportunity to know that "they will not have to go through it alone. Offering to help students to fight the system, that there is someone that will be there to be able to bend with them, to help them get through it." Participants emphasized that a teacher's role includes being a caring individual in the lives of students.

Sub-theme: Role of teachers, counsellors, and other school resources. Table 4.6

presents teacher's perceptions of the support and resources available in the school to help

students deal with grief and loss.

Table 4.6 Teacher descriptions of school resources for students (grief and loss)	
Resources	Number of references
Administration	1
Adults in general	7
Counselling	6
First Nations Liaison	3
Library resources and counselling room	1
Native support workers	2
Friends	3

Five of the seven teachers expressed an interest in helping students who are having

difficulties. For example, one teacher said that "if I think it is something that I can deal

with, then I will try to find out what the problem is. If not, I refer to another person on

staff." These teachers were all willing to refer to others if they felt they needed assistance

with a student. In the school, these teachers directed resources to students they felt were

in need. One teacher, again, talked about the importance of having someone to help with

First Nations students:

> I have noticed a huge difference between when we are …dealing with a First
>
> Nations loss, versus a non-First Nations loss. We tend to have in our school, in
>
> our school in particular, when a First Nations student is suffering a loss or death

of a family member there is a larger impact because of the communal nature that they have. And, that we have so many people directly related to each other in our school, it seems to be of far greater impact when a member of the First Nations community passes on.

Some other descriptions of ways that teachers would intervene included finding an opportunity to talk to students without drawing attention to them, informing the counsellor, and asking the student to "tell me what is happening, or by asking if there was something they should know to help explain their classroom behaviour." Another teacher would leave "it open to them, to let them tell me what they want to." When discussing the role of counsellors in helping students when it came to grief and loss, one teacher believed their main responsibility to be as follows:

> I guess [the counsellors] are the people that will be spear-heading the help. They are the people with the most training, be the most qualified to be giving the help. But they are also going to be reliant on other people to keep them informed because they may not always be informed about what is happening with all four-hundred students in the school. So, I think they would be the organizers and provide guidance.

Another teacher described the role of the counsellor as the person who makes initial contact with the student. Counsellors can act as a go between for students in distress so that, as one teacher said, "everyone is more aware." This teacher went on to add that, more importantly, counsellors "will keep in contact with the student in order to be there a month or two down the road. They will let them know that for however long, they will be available."

Out of the seven teachers interviewed, five believed that, in some cases, teachers were the only source of support for students. What follows is a typical observation:

There are students right now that coming to school is all they have. That is where they get their strength and support and that's where they know that people care about them the most. They know if they come to school and they are hungry, someone will find them food, and if they need a hug someone will give them a hug or if they have a rash someone will tell them what it is. Some do not get that at home.

In all of their answers, teachers discussed the importance of forming a connection with the students we teach. The teachers indicated a desire to be understanding, empathetic, and supportive. They also wished to help students stay focused on their school activities.

Sub-theme: Peer and family support. Peers are very important for students. All of the teachers noted that the peers spend a great deal of time helping their friends, and, in some cases, helping those who are only their acquaintances. The support was described in this manner: "I think they have a huge support system within the students, the rest of their friends, even acquaintances. Being such a small community, chances are when something impacts one person, it will impact more than one." Teachers had mixed feelings about the adequacy, skill level, and benefits of the support students received from their friends. Some of the comments on this topic were as follows.

They do it [support, counsel] all the time because they talk all the time. They are in each other's faces and each other's business all the time. You find some kids that try to fix things for other kids, or they are meddling in other kid's affairs

whether they want them meddled in or not. Probably their friends are their first line, and then we adults fall somewhere along that line, way down the line. Another teacher described peer interaction as "the blind leading the blind."

One teacher commented on a difference in the way that girls and boys deal with the losses that they experience. This teacher felt that younger females tend to "group" around the individual who is hurting, unlike the males who do not engage with their peers.

> It is almost a strong empathy thing. … younger females in our school, they are more giving of their time and they will try to help the person who is feeling bad. I do not see that as much with the males. The males, when they are upset or grieving, they either keep it inside or leave the building and deal with it in different circumstances. They do not deal with it in a public manner like I see the girls in our school deal with it.

There were also suggestions about ways students could be supported by their peers, which would lead to healthier and safer practices than those in which they currently engage. One teacher observed:

> Students support one another to the best of their ability. I think the underlying thing is that some kids would like to or benefit from some peer training in that area….I think with the grieving process not many kids had any formal training on how to help someone who had experienced a loss. The only ones who were really helpful where the ones who had already gone through a loss of some type in their lives.

Thematic Grouping Three: Professional Growth and Future Directions

Decisions about what actions or directions the school community, and more specifically, the counselling department, could be assisted by the information and ideas provided by participants in this study. Teachers were asked about the types of training they have received in areas of grief and loss, whether there was any personal interest in further training, and what they felt the school should be offering to students in the way of education and support. The teachers were asked what they thought of the development of resources for students, including the development of a teacher grief and loss team as support groups for students. A final question in this set asked if they had ideas for implementing support in the areas of grief and loss or if there are other targeted areas which needed to be given higher priority. The following sub-themes provide an analysis of the data gathered.

Sub- theme: Teacher input on training for teachers. Teacher education does not prepare teachers to deal with grief and loss. Only one of the teachers interviewed received training during formal-teacher education. One of the teachers received training from the school district on grief and loss; another gained some training through a community agency. A fourth teacher described some "unofficial" training as "actual experience in the classroom dealing with it, or advice given to me by people with more training in it." When teachers were asked if they "believe having more information about how to talk with and work with people who have experienced loss would be helpful," five of the teachers believed more training would be helpful. The other two teachers were concerned that training would not prepare them because they may not use it very often. They felt that, "like any skill, if you do not use it you will lose it." The teachers that liked

the idea of training felt that "extra information is always helpful," that "you need to have some strategies," and that "if we had the tools to do that, we would."

Sub-theme: Teacher input on education and support groups. Education for students in the areas of grief and loss was supported by all but one of the teachers. The teacher who disagreed felt that we already have a packed curriculum with too many things to teach, that students could use their family as a sounding board, and would have some other supports they could access in times of need. This teacher stressed that, in schools, "you are in a catch-22" with too much to teach and too little time. The other teachers disagreed on the amount of education necessary and the format that it should take. Several teachers believed an educational component could be included within the Career and Personal Planning curriculum; another thought development of group discussions would be good with a person who had some "method to their madness;" and two felt that access to either printed resources or help-phone numbers would be an adequate start.

When teachers were asked about creation of a support group for students, five thought that it was something to look into while two felt that it was not something C.S.S. needed. One teacher felt that a group would need to be developed only if the students requested one, that students may not talk in a group setting, and that it would be something that we could entertain as a one-time event after a crisis. Some of the benefits of having a group included a belief that students would talk more openly with their peers and that it would offer another avenue through which to get help. One teacher summed up the benefits by stating:

I think that our culture and our society just tends to not talk about death. You are just supposed to forget and move on. That is the impression I am getting. I think a lot of kids would benefit from just being around people who have experienced similar things, or at least to have an environment where it is safe to talk because maybe at home they are not allowed to. Maybe this is a way for them to talk and discuss…be able to deal with it healthily and help others down the road.

Most of the teachers believed there could be other options for students. There was a desire to give students access to information and ideas. There was a belief that knowledge is powerful. One teacher respondent noted: "Before serious things happen, [students] need to know that the grieving process is normal and that they are normal."

Sub-theme: Teacher beliefs about future directions. Teachers, when asked about prioritising help for students, felt that students suffering from grief and loss should receive priority from the counselling department. Most teachers said this should consist of checking with the students initially and then occasionally returning to see them. It was stressed that there needs to be more checking in with the kids, even if that only involves reminding kids that the door is always open and that help is available if they need it.

When asked about future directions for the school in this area, teachers had a few ideas about ways that support could be offered to the students. The first was an informal place for teachers and students to be able to interact with a "coffee-shop mentality." The second was to have two full-time counsellors, one male and one female. The third was a more accurate system for sharing information if there was an illness or death in a family so that teachers had access to that information in a timely manner. The fifth was a plan to make sure that the students affected by loss would be checked on to determine their

status. The sixth suggestion included discussions on grief and loss being developed as part of the CAPP 11 and 12 programs since students need to have access to the information before leaving school.

Summary

In this findings section it is evident that the use of thematic groupings and sub-themes created by using a coding system have allowed for student and teacher data to be presented in a manageable format. As well, the themes of grief and loss, support systems and relationships, and personal growth and future directions encourage comparisons between student and teacher perceptions and beliefs. The findings presented require wider discussion and analysis in some areas. Some topics support research discussed in the literature review, while others bring forward a need for further research or interpretations. The discussion chapter, which follows, will bring the findings, the methodology, and literature reviewed together.

Discussion

Upon my examination of the interview and focussed discussion comments and interpretations of support given to students in the present at Chetwynd Secondary School, and the suggestions given by both students and teachers there is confirmation of some of my pre-project beliefs and the need to reconsider others. Many of the findings are consistent. Others suggest the need for further exploration in several topic areas. In this chapter, topics will be discussed in the order they appeared in the findings section. These topics will be related back to areas of research from the literature review. The topics will be as follows:

1. Grief and Loss

2. Support Systems and Relationships

3. Personal and Professional Growth

4. Future Directions

Grief and Loss

Connections between the literature reviewed and the data gathered from the participants in this study were often quite similar. However, definitions of grief and loss varied from researcher to researcher and from participant to participant. As Reeves (2001) wrote, "grief involves your total reaction and responses to any loss" (p. 21). I soon discovered that everyone had their own reactions and responses and therefore some unique definitions. The similarities in the definitions included the belief that grief involved the loss of something significant. Both research studied and the data collected described grief as a change, significant enough, that one would need to integrate it into

life. Many of the definitions also included elements, which would impact upon an individual for both the short and long term.

In the definitions and examples of the reactions and actions of grievers, the number of people who used the terminology found in Dr. Kübler-Ross' stage theory supports the research she completed. Kübler-Ross based her stage theory on information collected from many interviews with people who were or had experienced loss (see pp. 10-11 of this document). A number of students and teachers used the terms *anger*, *denial*, and *acceptance*. Student and teacher respondents also addressed *avoidance* as a way people reacted after a loss. This *avoidance* matches with Kübler-Ross' idea of *isolation*. There were nine references of *avoidance* as a reaction to loss by students, and teachers referred to this issue of *withdrawal* five times. This made me wonder if people had been exposed to the stage theory and remembered the sequencing of those stages, or if respondents were using their experiences or those of others to describe what happens when a loss is experienced. Either way the repeated use of Ross' terminology is noteworthy.

Another common thread throughout the descriptions was the role of depression in response to a loss. For example, one student described it as "hitting the bottom, and rebounding back to some new place, which takes as long as it takes." Many of the respondents embraced elements found in Reeves (2001) Energy Management Model (Refer to Literature Review, pp. 14-15). As one teacher described it, during times the person just seems lost, they are just operating in survival mode. I felt this was significant because it may mean that one of the best ways to help students is to continue a familiar routine with them. It is also important to remember what is "life enhancement" for one,

may be survival for another. Reeves describes this divergence of individual needs in the following statement: "For me, grooming is life enhancement, for a teenager it is survival" (2001, p. 36).

In some respects, the young adults interviewed for this study agreed with Reeves' belief that children will follow the models given to them with regards to grief and loss. "Children are often more realistic about loss than adults are. And they watch us to see how to heal…Although implications and intensity will vary from loss to loss, each of us tends to follow the style of grieving we learned as we were growing up" (Reeves, 2001, p. 37). The descriptors and reactions of both the teacher respondents and students linked back to the ways that the community, culture, and influential adults express grief. These respondents addressed the issues of *avoidance*. Many adults have a tendency to avoid expressing grief outwardly or in the view of the children in the home. This avoidance may encourage young people to bury grief, because that is what is modelled to them by adult caregivers.

In gathered data there was also awareness that grief is based upon "the unique, individualistic perception of loss by the griever, that is, it is not necessary to have the loss recognized or validated by others to experience grief" (Rando, 1984, p. 15). One area where I saw this was when students discussed the loss of a pet as a devastating loss; it was second only to the death of a family member or friend. In the teacher data, there was no mention of the death of a pet, as being a major loss students would experience.

A final theme in this area was the difference in the ways that grief is expressed by males or females. These differences were shown extensively in both student and teacher data. In most of the research that I have accessed for this project, there is very little

expression of a difference in the ways that male or female youth express grief. One of the main references is Nord (1989) who stated

> that divorce takes a far heavier toll on children's self-image and their ability to sustain male and female relationships than has previously been believed. Furthermore, there seems to be increasing evidence that boys and girls are affected differently; the long-term effects on boys apparently being greater. (Brown, 1999. p. 71)

Another view on this was Edward Deiner who found "that women, in general, feel both positive and negative emotions more strongly than do men" (Goleman, 1995, p. 50). Unfortunately, there is not any direct reference to boys and girls grieving differently. This may change as there has been a proliferation of media attention and research to how teenage boys and girls think, behave, and interact differently. William Pollack's (1998) "boy's code" from his book *Real Boys*, begins to tackle these gender differences. Part of the code involved four rules identified by David and Brannon. The four rules include: the sturdy oak, give 'em hell, the big wheel, and no sissy stuff (pp. 23- 24). If this code holds true then boys are not "allowed to explore these emotional states and activities, boys are prematurely forced to shut them out, to become self-reliant" (Pollack, 1998, p. 24). This in turn leads boys to not display their emotions for others to see. Pollack (1998) also believes "because society trains boys to cover their sadness, it becomes very difficult for others to know when a boy is not doing well emotionally" (p. 306). Research by Pollack is also being supported by the others such as Kindlon and Thompson (2000), authors of *Raising Cain: Protecting the Emotional Lives of Boys.*

Support Systems and Relationships

When discussing support for grieving teens both teachers and students believed a supporter had to be someone a student could trust. The students discussed the importance of school being a place where there is constancy, a place where they would continue with some normalcy. The majority wanted their teachers to have the skills to help if called upon, but wanted teachers not to take over areas outside of their positions. One student said they felt a teacher should "take the time to notice if a student is not feeling good. Stop them when no one else is around so they could talk if they wanted." Black's figure 2.2 (Refer to Literature Review, p. 16), shows how elements in both relationships and support can be components of the three interlocking aspects of bereavement. When one grieves there are inter-relating and overlapping elements of the person, the environment, and the circumstances of bereavement which lead back to relationship building and connections to support. Whether it is the grieving person's level of self-esteem, the way they are informed of the loss, or types of support they are given by their community and family, the experiences of the bereaved need to acknowledged.

Many of the students and teachers also discussed the importance of the size of the community and the cohesiveness which was brought about because many people have shared experiences. One teacher described this in the following manner:

I think [students] have a huge support system within the school. They have their friends, even acquaintances. Being such a small community chances are when something impacts one person it will impact more than one. I think the community has a huge impact on how they get through it.

With the discussions of community, culture became a focal point. Several teachers stressed the importance of being able to meet the needs of students from First Nations communities. In C.S.S., there is a First Nations Liaison coordinator and several First Nations Intervention Workers. One of these youth workers covers the role of lunch supervisor as well. These workers provide additional support for students. This helps as students can interact with others in a context outside the classroom, or counselling office. In October of 2002, the First Nations Coordinator began to address the role of grief by hosting a workshop of the Rainbows grief program for youth. First Nations elders and a variety of other community members where engaged as facilitators.

When it comes to support systems, again a gender difference was evident. Males often did not discuss their problems with their peers and sometimes not with adults at all. The girls tended to verbalize their problems and talked all the time. Most of the girls said that they tended to talk with their friends more than parents. The boys tended to talk to an adult female, mainly their mothers, if they talked at all. Both teachers and students observed this difference.

The discussion of support systems in the focussed discussion groups and interviews brought up an overwhelming trend of peers helping one another. This trend, although found mostly with girls, brings about a need to learn more about how youth and their support networks. Trozzi and Massimini (1999) suggest this in the following: "although adolescents want the perogative to spill their emotions over into caring and supportive adults, they want us to respect their need to grieve in their own way and with their peers" (p. 39). There was also concern that the inexperience of peers when a loss occurs could be damaging. Allen (1990) described that as follows:

Teenagers give out all kinds of signals that they are experiencing difficulty

adjusting to a death, and yet adults and friends are not prepared to address them.

The grieving adolescent who returns to school following the death of a loved one

is subject to considerable social pressure to demonstrate a resolution of the grief,

and to do so according to an unrealistic time table...If adequate support systems

were available and ...schools were prepared for grieving students, a multitude of

situational stresses could be faced or avoided. (p. 39)

Personal and Professional Growth

Education and personal growth- students. The ideas of teaching grief and loss

(death) education and creating support groups for students were received well by both

teacher and student participants. There was some debate about who should participate in

and create a curriculum of death education for students. Both teachers and students were

unsure of the ideal format. Whether there was a blanket approach to the dissemination of

material or a teaching of material to a target group, was unclear. Finding a way to contact

the ones who need it would involve a blanket approach, because often those who are

experiencing grief are not voicing it to adults, or not voicing their anguish at all. I believe

that no one person is immune to grief.

Students may not participate in a unit or lesson on grief because they do not

believe they have lost anything significant. The interviews, though, showed me that

students have all experienced some losses and they needed to understand what was

happening to them or to offer support to peers or loved ones. A description by Sims

(1990) of the importance of knowledge in this area is:

Crisis and trauma, celebration and change do not bring about vast changes in the personality or make-up of a person. I did not grow taller or shrink because of my experiences...We cannot change what happens to us, but we *can change how we deal with those things that happen.* I am not a victim of life. I may not always be pleased or joyous with the choices I have, but I am aware that I do have choices, and that knowledge is my power. [italics in original] (p. 37)

A promising way to offer grief and loss education is through a workshop format utilizing focussed discussions in conjunction with analysis of the effects that grief has on individuals. Then healthy coping mechanisms can be explored. This would be one way to improve student access to support during times of need. One student described this structure of a focussed discussion group as helpful. "I liked the group because of the way we were able to get every question answered and because we were respectful to one another."

A curricular activity teaching students about grief and loss can help the school community by providing students an opportunity to talk about one of the "*non-discussibles*" (Barth, 2001, p. 9). Many times students feel isolated from the school community. They may feel disconnected and alienated from the other members of the community when they do not get to voice their opinions and frustrations. This education may also help both girls and boys who lock away their feelings. A student described how the focussed discussion allowed for more sharing: "I liked the encouragement that was given to get emotions out, because what most kids do is hide their feelings." This may allow students to seek out assistance to aid their healing process. By opening the door, we can allow students to relate to and with others.

Beliefs about the usefulness of support groups showed a split amongst participant groups. Teachers had mixed reactions about a support group, but generally felt that they could be useful and were worth considering as options. One teacher described the importance of support groups this way:

> I think that our culture and our society tends not to talk about death...I think a lot of kids would benefit from just being around people who have experienced similar things, or at least have an environment where it is safe to talk.

Students agreed that a support group structure had potential. What surprised me was the reluctance of the students to say they would participate in a support group. Many of the students expressed concern that the other people participating in a support group may be there for ulterior motives (Refer to Findings, pp. 65-66). There was a fear that the group may gossip about the problems discussed.

Piaget's egocentric thought may help to explain the reluctance to be in a support group. A description by Knowles and Reeves (1983) states that "many adolescents become very aware of their personal characteristics...and may conclude that others share this concern" (p. 17). A child may also fear a group will require them to give up the little control they feel they have, or they may feel that being in a group leads them into the unknown. As well, guilt or blame could keep a child from expressing their true feelings (Knowles & Reeves, 1983, p. 18), and that may be a defence mechanism to protect them. Reeves (2001) also believes that this relates to one of eight implications (Refer to Literature Review, pp. 13-14) that needs to be addressed when a loss is experienced. The notion of status could be very important to a teenager. I believe that the young person would want people to relate to them in the same way as they had been before the loss

(Reeves, 2001, pp. 25-26). Coleman's (1980) view of adolescence as "a transitional process rather than a stage" (as cited in Elder, 1990, p. 91) forces one to carefully approach teenagers in a support group. The maturity level of each member needs to be supported with skills and a structure to ensure group members are ensured of confidentiality and safety.

Professional growth- teachers. Professional development in the areas of grief and loss for teachers also had interesting results. A number of teachers had not been exposed to any information about grief and loss. Teachers commented that they were learning as they experienced situations in their classrooms, and through discussion with others. I was encouraged that many teachers were using each other as resources. This sharing of "craft knowledge" and sharing of experiences is an excellent model for growth.

Finding ways to allow teachers to share that information on a regular basis is an important element of any grief and loss training. The idea of creating a grief and loss team following the model created by Dr. Sally Downham Miller still appears the best method to follow, as it helps to encourage collaboration. The collaboration between teachers also begins an important sharing of the beliefs and values which allow for healthy development of school culture (Peterson & Deal, 1999, pp. 26-27). As part of this school growth, teachers can lead the way to encourage all members of the school community to engage in healthy discussion of topics usually avoided. Giving students a voice in the school community is a goal that could be facilitated by teaching staff. Students then can be involved the allocation of available resources. Students and teachers can also share history and needs that may not be identified without input from all

community members. The notion of this type of sharing of craft knowledge is exciting and engaging.

Future Directions

Many of the ideas presented in the discussion section come directly from the participants at Chetwynd Secondary School. Four areas appeared in the findings quite often.

First, the students need to have more of a voice in the school decision-making. A community where all members have a voice will help to improve the culture of the school. As a student commented, "everyone has an opinion about something." It is time to look at those opinions more closely. As teachers we also must be aware of the effects of the nondiscussables. The teacher-job action during the 2001/2002 school year was rarely discussed with students but had a profound effect upon them. This is an example of when a discussion format would have been beneficial for all concerned.

Second, students who have experienced a loss must be re-engaged with the counselling department regularly. A priority of checking with students after a loss will remain, but checking with them in the months and years after a loss also is important. They need people to remember and engage with them about their losses long after the crisis management took place. A system to keep records on the losses may also be something to be implemented so difficulties may be addressed sooner, rather than labelled as behaviour issues, or non-performance.

Third, there are several topics requiring future research. I would want to have included. The focussed discussion format was an excellent way to access student views, should be considered for use in future projects with students as well as teachers. This

research could be expanded to include groups of parents, and support staff. The focussed discussion format gives everyone the opportunity to be heard by, and to share ideas with a larger group.

Finally, I would include more emphasis on the role of community in the creation of a healthier school culture. I believe grief and loss underlies many of the problems in schools. I think in the past years many of those issues have gone underground. Many issues that are difficult to discuss are rarely addressed by groups of the school's community. Wheatley (2002b) describes the ideal community growth: "people learn best in community, when they are engaged with one another, when everyone is both student and teacher, expert and apprentice, in a rich exchange of experiences and learnings" (p. 10). This emphasis on exchange will help encourage an even healthier school community.

Conclusion

A review of the main research questions for this project will help to condense the main points from the research and data collected for this project. The first question was as follows:

How can the teaching staff help students at Chetwynd Secondary School cope with issues of grief and loss?

From the information collected from participants and research there are several ways teaching staff at Chetwynd Secondary can continue to support students. The main ways include:

- listening to students

- offering a routine

- addressing academic concerns individually with a student after a loss

- letting a student grieve in their own ways and on their own timeline

- watching for signs that a student does not appear to be engaging in a healthy recovery and get assistance for them

- allowing peers to help one another by giving them the skills and knowledge to do so

- be tolerant of the different ways of grieving

- encouraging and offering students ways to help develop a positive school culture by participating in reflection and practices with the whole school community

In response to the question:

Do teachers and students hold the same beliefs or perceptions about grief and loss?

Several issues were raised. Overall, teachers and students do hold many of the same perceptions and beliefs about grief and loss. Teachers and students in this study have a fairly good grasp of the needs of students around grief and loss. It is evident to students that the teachers want to be understanding and supportive. Only a few areas need changing. The first is in the validation of losses. Sometimes losses are not always considered from the point of view of a male or female between the ages of 13-19. Sometimes the individual's experiences and connections to the loss are not always considered valid. Second, I believe teachers and students need to continue to change the rules that operate making it difficult for boys to express emotion. The differences in how males and females deal with grief and loss needs to be addressed as a school. The third is the development of a community culture.

Since the start of my quest to learn more ways to help Chetwynd Secondary School students who have experienced grief and loss, the political, economic, and social structure of schools in the province of British Columbia has changed. The philosophy of our teachers remains focussed on students and their needs within our classrooms. However, new challenges, some of which include larger class sizes, less support staff, smaller school budgets, fewer specialist teachers, and changes to reporting procedures, ensure that teachers in this province who are already stretched thinly will face greater exigencies. Almost certainly, their contact with individual students will be reduced.

The system and community, of which Chetwynd Secondary School is a part, faces daunting challenges. It is clear that the losses that people experience come in many

different shapes and sizes, and the response to them is as individual as our fingerprints. We may have similar components that formulate a "grieving process," but this does not mean that a time-line or an understanding of the emotions or triggers for new waves of grief, will be present or visible in us all.

Overall, I believe this project shows a school that has a history and future that encompasses a diverse population. Together we can continue a journey towards a hopeful future. If we do not, we are leaving valuable life lessons to chance.

Helping children find ways to live with loss and to work through grief and giving them hope can reduce some of the tragedies that occur in our school families. (Miller, 2001, p. xvi)

References

Adams, D. W., & Deveau, E. J. (Eds.). (1995). Introduction. In Adams & Deveau (Ed.),

Beyond The Innocence of Childhood (Vol 3), (pp. 1-4). New York: Baywood

Publishing.

Adler, J., & Wingert, P. (1997). How kids mourn. Newsweek, 09/22/97, 130, (12), p. 58,

4p, 3c. Retrieved February 7, 2000, from EBSCO database.

Alasuutari, P. (1995). Researching culture: Qualitative method and cultural studies.

Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publishing.

Alberta Teachers Association. (2000). Action research guide for Alberta teachers.

Edmonton, AB: Alberta Teachers Association.

Allen, L. A. (1990). Working with bereaved adolescents. In J. D. Morgan (Ed.), The

dying and the bereaved teenager (pp. 39-41). Philadelphia: The Charles Press.

Balk, D. E. (2000). Adolescents, grief, and loss. In K. J. Doka, (Ed.), Children,

adolescents, and loss: Living with grief (pp. 35-49). Washington, D.C.: Hospice

Foundation of America.

Barth, R. S. (2001). Learning by heart. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Barth, R. S. (1990). Improving schools from within: Teachers, parents, and principals

can make the difference! San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Baxter, G., & Stuart, W. (1990). Bereavement support groups for secondary students. In

J. D. Morgan (Ed.), The dying and the bereaved teenager (pp. 121-124).

Philadelphia: The Charles Press.

Belenky, M. F., Clinchy, N. R., Goldberger, N. R., & Tarule, J. M. (1986). *Women's ways of knowing: The development of self, voice, and mind*. New York, NY: Basic Books.

Boleman, L. E., & Deal, T. E. (1995). *Leading with soul: An uncommon journey of spirit*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Borg, W. R., & Gall, M. D. (1989) *Educational research: An introducation* (5th ed.). New York: Longman.

Brown, E. (1999). *Loss, change, and grief: An educational perspective*. London: David Fulton.

Connelly, F. M., & Clandinin, D. J. (1988). *Teachers as curriculum planners: Narratives of experience*. Toronto: The Ontario Institute for Studies in Education.

Corsini, R. J., & Wedding, D. (2000). Introduction. In R. J. Corsini & D. Wedding (Eds.), *Current psychotherapies*. (6th ed.) (pp. 1-15). Itasca, IL: F. E. Peacock.

Corr, C. A. (2000). What do we know about grieving children and adolescents? In K. J. Doka (Ed.), *Children, adolescents, and loss: Living with grief* (pp. 21-32). USA: Hospice Foundation of America.

Creswell, J. W. (2002). *Educational research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Merrill Prentice Hall.

The Dougy Center. (1998). *Helping the grieving student: A guide for teachers*. Portland, OR: Western Lithograph.

The Dougy Center. (1999). *35 ways to help a grieving child*. Portland, OR: Western Lithograph.

Elder, S. L. (1990). The impact of major life transitions on adolescent development. In

J. D. Morgan (Ed.), *The dying and the bereaved teenager* (pp. 90-97).

Philadelphia: The Charles Press.

Fitzgerald, H. (2000). *The grieving teen: A guide for teenagers and their friends*. New

York: Fireside Books.

Goleman, D. (1995). *Emotional intelligence: Why it can matter more than I.Q.* Bantam

Books.

Goldman, L. (2001). *Breaking the silence: A guide to helping children with complicated*

grief-suicide, homicide, AIDS, violence and abuse (2nd ed.). New York: Brunner-

Routledge.

Gordon, R. (1980). Interviewing Strategy, Techniques and Tactics. In Mazarek, R.,

Education 5400 Supplementary, ICTR & D, 2000: Faculty of Education:

University of Lethbridge.

Grollman, E. A. (1993). *Straight talk about death for teenagers: How to cope with losing*

someone you love. Boston: Beacon Press.

Henderson, J. G. (1992). *Reflective teaching: Becoming an inquiring educator*. New

York: Macmillan.

Hipp, E. (1992). *The caring circle: A facilitator's guide to support groups*. Center City,

MN: Hazelden Information and Educational Services.

Holstein, J. A., & Gubrium, J. F. (1995) The active interview. *Qualitative research*

methods series 37. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

James, J. W., & Friedman, R. (1998). *The grief recovery handbook: The action program for moving beyond death, divorce, and other losses* (Rev. ed). New York: Harper Perennial.

James, J. W., Friedman, R., & Matthew, L. (2002). *When children grieve: For adults to help children deal with death, divorce, pet loss, moving and other losses.* New York: Quill.

Jarvis, P. (1999). *The practioner-researcher: Developing theory from practice.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Johnson, D. W., Johnson, R. T., & Holubec, E. J. (1992). *Revised advanced cooperative learning.* Edina Minnesota: Interaction Book Company.

Kalish, R. A. (1985). *Death, grief, and caring relationships* (2nd ed.). Monterey, CA: Brooks/Cole Publishing.

Kirk, W.G. (1993). *Adolescent suicide: A school-based approach to assessment and intervention.* Champaign, IL: Research Press.

Klindon, D, & Thompson, M. (2000). *Raising Cain: Protecting the emotional lives of boys.* New York: Ballantine.

Knowles, D. W., & Reeves, N. (1983). *But won't granny need her socks? Dealing effectively with children's concerns about death and dying.* Dubuque, IA: Kendall.

Kübler-Ross, E. (1983). *On children and death: How children and their parents can and do cope with death.* New York: Touchstone Book.

Leitch, R., & Day, C. (2000). Action research and reflective practice: Towards a holistic view. *Educational Action Research, 8* (1), 179-193.

Lewis, M. (1995). Focus group interviews in qualitative research: A review of literature. *Action Research Electronic Reader.* [On-line], xx. Available:

http://www.cchs.usyd.edu.au/arow/reader/rlewis.htm (accessed Jan. 27, 2002).

Meyers, M.D. (June 1997). "Qualitative Research Information Systems." [On-line], xx. Available:

http://www.auckland.ac.nz/msis/isworld/#Overview%20of%20Qualitative%20Research (accessed Jan. 27, 2002).

Miller, S. D. (2000). *Mourning and dancing for schools: A grief and recovery sourcebook for students, teachers, and parents.* Deerfield, FL: Health Communications Inc.

Nelson, J. (2001) *The art of focussed conversation for schools.* Gabriola Island, BC: New Society Publishers.

Neuman, W. L. (1997). *Social research methods: Qualitative and quantitative approaches* (3rd Ed). Boston: Allyn Bacon.

Newman. J. M. ("n.d."). *Action research: A brief overview.* [On-line]. xx. http://www.home.istar.ca/~jnewman/Aroverview.html (accessed on Nov. 18, 2001)

Owen, H. (2000). *The power of spirit: How organizations transform.* San Francisco: Berret-Koehler.

Peterson, K. D., & Deal, T. E. (1998, September). Realizing a positive school climate. *Educational Leadership, 56* (1). Retrieved on June 25, 2002 from http://www.ascd.org/safeschools/el9809/petersoninfluence.html

Peterson, K. D., & Deal, T. E. (1999). *Shaping school culture: The heart of leadership.*

    San Francisco: Jossey Bass.

Pollack, W. (1998). *Real boys.* New York: Henry Holt.

Pratt, D. (1994). *Curriculum planning: A handbook for professionals.* Orlando, FL:

    Harcourt Brace.

Rando, T. A. (1984). *Grief, dying, and death: Clinical interventions for caregivers.*

    Champaign, IL: Research Press Company.

Reeves, N. (2001). *A path through loss: A guide to writing your healing and growth.*

    Kelowna, BC: Northstone.

Satir, V. (1988). *The new peoplemaking.* Mountain View, CA: Science and Behaviour

    Books.

Senge, P. (2000). *Schools that learn: A fifth discipline fieldbook for educators,*

    parents, and anyone who cares about education. New York: Doubleday.

Sergiovanni, T. J. (1994). *Building community in schools.* San Francisco: Jossey Bass.

Sergiovanni, T. J. (1999, September). Refocussing leadership to build community. *The*

    Highschool Magazine, 7 (1). Retrieved on July 15, 2002, from

    http://www.nassp.org/publications/hsmag/sergiovanni.htm

Shuurman, D. L. (2000). The use of groups with grieving children and adolescents. In

    K. J. Doka (Ed.), *Children, adolescents, and loss: Living with grief: Part II:*

    Clinical approaches with children and adolescents (pp. 167-169).Washington,

    D.C.: Hospice Foundation of America.

Sims, A. M. (1990). Who am I now? A sibling shares her survival. In J. D. Morgan (Ed.), *The dying and the bereaved teenager* (pp. 33-38). Philadelphia: The Charles Press.

Stevenson, R. G. (2000). The role of death education in helping students cope with loss. In K. J. Doka (Ed.), *Children, adolescents, and loss: Living with grief* (pp. 197-214).Washington, D.C.: Hospice Foundation of America.

Trozzi, M., & Massimini, K. (1999). *Talking with children about loss: Words, strategies, and wisdom to help children cope with death, divorce, and other difficult times.* New York: Perigree Books.

Wheatley, M. J. (2002a). *Supporting pioneering leaders as communities of practice: How to rapidly develop new leaders in great numbers.* Retrieved on July 15, 2002 from http://www.margaretwheatley.com/articles/supportingpioneerleaders.html

Wheatley, M. J. (2002b). *Turning to one another: Simple conversations to restore hope to the future.* San Francisco: Berrett Koehler.

Yin, R. K. (1994). *Case study research: Design and methods* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Websites

School District 59 website [on-line], xx. Available: http://www.sd59.bc.ca (accessed on November 14, 2001)

B.C. Ministry of Education. Ministry of Education Website [on-line], xx. Available: http://www.gov.bc.ca/bced/ (accessed November 14, 2001)

Appendix A

Student Interview Blueprint

Note. Questions will be the same are the same as those in the focussed discussion

blueprint (see Appendix C) except for the questions that are in *ITALICS.*

Introductory Statements:

Thank you for allowing me to interview you for this project. As you know, I am

Mrs. Ganton, a counsellor and teacher at C.S.S. I am also a Masters of Education student

through the University of Lethbridge in Alberta. I am completing this interview as part of

a final research project for my degree. You were chosen using random selection for this

interview. I would like to get some student input for a pre-assessment of the role of grief

and loss in the school.

As mentioned in our previous conversation and in the consent letter, this

interview will be audio taped for transcription purposes. Are there any questions about

the taping? If you wish to look at the transcript when it is complete you are more than

welcome. Anything you want removed will be. I would like to assure you that every

effort will be made so that all of the information collected in this interview will remain

anonymous. All of the names and other identifying features will be removed before it is

presented to anyone else. Remember, if you wish to stop at any time we can do so. If you

want clarification on a question just ask. Thank you once again for your assistance with

this project. *Do you have any concerns or questions about the process before we begin?*

Interview Blueprint:

Theoretical Issue	Relevance	Interview Question
Review of planned discussion	Establish comfort level and review roles/expectations	Scripted introductory statement includes the following questions: 1.As mentioned in our previous conversation and in the consent letter, this interview will be audio taped for transcription purposes. Are there any concerns with that? *2. Do you have any concerns or questions about the process before we begin?*
Comfort with the question and answer format, background information… What is grief and loss?	Finding out what the student feels is important with regard to the topics, as well as determining the language they use to describe it.	*3. What grade are you in, and what classes do you have this semester?* *4. How would you describe your academic performance at school?* 5. What are some examples of losses people may experience? *6. How do you define grief?* 7. Can you experience feelings of loss or grief over things that are positive changes in your life? (e.g. leaving home to strike out on your own). What are some of the

		changes that occur?
		8. What are some of the ways people may react or express themselves after a loss or while grieving?
		9. What are some of the ways people can help those who have experienced a loss?
		10. *In the past two years have you experienced a death of a family member or has there been a divorce in your immediate family? A. If yes, can you explain how the experience affected you?*
		B. If no we will continue
Determining role of the school	Should schools be involved in helping students and if so in what ways	11. How can schools help students who experience loss? 12. Should classroom teachers be able to help students who experience loss? If yes, how? If no, who should?
Skills and resources for students, who are in need, are they available?	See what the student finds helpful, and what he or she knows is available in the way of support at	13. What resources are in the school to help students who are experiencing difficulties? 14. Are there enough resources in the school to help students who are in trouble? Explain.

	school.	
When discussing teachers what is the current state at C.S.S., and why	To find out what students believe is most helpful and why it is helpful.	15. What does a good relationship with a teacher look like? 16. Can you discuss personal issues with teachers? If yes, what are the characteristics of those teachers with whom you talk? 17. Without naming them, can you think of any teachers you would talk to if you experienced a loss? If there are some, in what ways would they help you? And, if no, why not? 18. Are teachers doing things that are not helpful? Give an example or explain. 19. Are there any actions teachers and other staff take to help students who have experience loss?
To determine if future anticipated actions will fit with student needs	Find out from students what they believe is an important next step...	20. Have you counselled, discussed, counselled with or supported friends who have or are experiencing loss? If yes, if no explain why not? 21. Would training for you, as a student, in grief and loss education be helpful?

		Explain…
		22. *If training were available would you be interested, and if so, how much training would you like?*
		23. What role do you see the counselling department playing in helping students?
		24. What things can counsellors do to help students who have experienced loss?
		25. Do you believe that a support group for students in the school would be helpful? Why or why not?
		26. Which students do you believe need the most help? Would it be those who have experienced loss due to death or divorce family break-up or ones with other issues? Explain…
		27. Do you have suggestions for ways that students who experience loss may be helped?
Wrap up the interview, and address any concerns	Allows the interviewee the opportunity to ask and voice	28. Are there any questions related to this topic that I missed and you would like to discuss?
		29. Is there anything else you would like to

	questions…	add or discuss?

Note. Format adapted from Gordon, R. (1980). Interviewing Strategy, Techniques and

Tactics. In Mazarek, R., *Education 5400 Supplementary*, ICTR & D, 2000: Faculty of

Education: University of Lethbridge.

Concluding Procedure:

After the last question, I would turn off the audio recorder and thank the student again for

their time, and let them know how we could proceed if they wished to see the transcript

and how I would give them access to the final paper.

Appendix B

Interview Blueprint Script for Teachers

Introductory Statements:

Thank you for volunteering for this interview. As you may know I am a Masters

of Education student at the University of Lethbridge in Alberta. I am completing this

interview as part of a final research project for my degree. I would like to get some

teacher input for a pre-assessment of the role of grief and loss in the school.

As mentioned in our previous conversation and in the consent letter, this

interview will be audio taped for transcription purposes. *Are there any questions about*

the audiotaping? If you wish to look at the transcript when it is complete you are more

than welcome. Anything you want removed will be. I would like to assure you that every

effort will be made so that all of the information collected in this interview will remain

anonymous. All of the names and other identifying features will be removed before it is

presented to anyone else. Remember, if you wish to stop at any time we can do so. If you

want clarification on a question just ask. Thank you once again for your assistance with

this project. *Do you have any concerns or questions about the process before we begin?*

Interview Blueprint:

Theoretical Issue	Relevance	Interview Question
Learning about the background of the interviewee	Please note the introductory statements will be made and then the	1. Do you have any concerns or questions about the process before we begin? 2. How long have you been teaching? 3. What grades and subjects have you

	interview will happen. This is used to help the interviewee ease into questioning.	taught?
How do different people define and understand loss.	To gain an accurate portrayal of other teachers in the building.	4. In your opinion, what are the most serious losses that students experience? 5. How do you define grief? 6. Do you believe grief and loss have an impact on students in your classroom? In what ways? 7. Do you believe your personal experiences with loss help you when dealing with students who experience loss? Explain. 8. What resources are in the school to help students who experience losses?
Are student problems coming into the classroom, and what role do teachers play	Classroom teachers have access to students daily and in more ways then any other school personnel, this line	9. If a student is having difficulties in your class how do you deal with that situation? 10. Do you believe that teachers, in some cases, may be the only source of support for a student? 11. Do you believe, as a classroom teacher,

	of questioning seeks to find out how teachers respond to student needs.	that it is important to be able to talk with students about losses in their lives? Explain.
Do teachers have training to help students, and also to know if they would be interested in more?	Whether teachers feel they are given training for helping students.	12. What have you received from your teacher education preparation or the school district that helps you to assist children who experience loss? 12.b If so, does this training help you to approach students who have experienced losses? Explain. 13. Do you believe having more information about how to talk with and work with people who have experienced loss would be helpful?
What do classroom teachers see as needs for students?	To find out how teachers feel about students needs and their views on proposed activities	14. Do you believe that students counsel or support their friends who are having difficulties due to grief and loss? Give an example if you can. 15. Do you believe there should be a set structured group for students who have experienced loss? Explain.

		16. Do you believe that students who have experienced loss due to death or family separation should receive priority from the counselling department? Explain…
		
		 17. Do you believe that students should have access to grief and loss education, if they request it?
		
		     a. What format do you think that education should take?
		
		     b. If not, why?

Where should the counselling department go	What do teachers see as being the role of the counselling department, and information from their expertise, as a classroom educator to create a support network?	18. What role do you see the counselling department playing in helping students? 19. Do you have suggestions for ways that students who experience loss may be helped?
Wrap –up of the interview.	To give the interviewee an	20. Are there any questions related to this topic that I missed and you would like to

	opportunity to explore any issues that they feel were important but not covered	discuss? 21. Is there anything else you would like to add or discuss?

Note. Format adapted from Gordon, R. (1980). Interviewing Strategy, Techniques and Tactics. In Mazarek, R., *Education 5400 Supplementary*, ICTR & D, 2000: Faculty of Education: University of Lethbridge.

Concluding Procedure:

After the last question, I would turn off the audio recorder and thank the teacher again for their time, and let them know how we could proceed if they wished to see the transcript and how I would give them access to the final paper.

Appendix C

Focussed Discussion Blueprint

Introductory Statements:

Good afternoon, as you all know I am Mrs. Ganton. I am one of the counsellors here at the school. I would like to start by thanking you for helping me with this research. In our previous discussion I talked with you about having a focussed discussion on "How the school, (C.S.S.), can help students who have experienced grief and loss."

I am completing this case study project as part of my Masters in Education through the University of Lethbridge in Alberta. I hope to use part of the information from this discussion to plan ways the school can improve or change the support provided to students who experience losses. My initial focus is on grief and loss that comes with the death of an immediate family member or divorce or break-up of the family unit. That does not mean though, that I do not want to discuss other issues around loss and grief. I want to know what you as students believe is happening and what you believe is important.

As mentioned in our previous conversation and in the consent letter, this interview will be audio taped for transcription purposes. Are there any concerns with that? I use the audio recording to ensure I don't miss any important points! If you wish to look at the transcript when it is complete you are more than welcome. Anything you want removed will be. I would like to assure you that every effort will be made so that all of the information collected in this discussion will remain anonymous. All of the names and other identifying features will be removed before it is presented to anyone else.

Remember, if you wish to stop at any time we can do so. If you want clarification on a question just ask.

As we are in a classroom setting, and there are quite a few participants, I would like to ensure that we have some guidelines for how this discussion will take place. I will be asking a series of scripted questions and asking for your input. If you do not understand the question please let me know and I can reword it. If you would like to respond please raise your hand. Each of you will have an opportunity to add to the discussion if you wish. Remember, there are no silly questions or answers, so please treat all of the people in the room with respect and give support and encouragement when appropriate. Are there any other suggestions or other guidelines we need to put in place?

Let us begin!

Focussed Discussion Blueprint:

Theoretical Issue	Relevance	Interview Question
Review of planned discussion	Establish comfort level and review roles/expectations	Scripted introductory statement, includes the following questions: 1.As mentioned in our previous conversation and in the consent letter, this interview will be audio taped for transcription purposes. Are there any concerns with that? 2. Are there any other suggestions or other guidelines we need to put in place?

What is grief and loss? Are these responses something schools should be dealing with?	Finding out what the students feel is important with regard to the topics, as well as determining the language they use to describe it.	3. What are some examples of losses people may experience? 4. What is grief? 5. Can you experience feelings of loss or grief over things that are positive changes in your life? (e.g. leaving home to "strike out on your own"). What are some of the changes? 6. What are some of the ways people may react or express themselves after a loss or while grieving? 7. What are some of the ways people can help those who have experienced a loss?
Should schools be involved in helping students.	Ask students what they need...	8. How can schools help students who experience loss? 9. Should classroom teachers be able to help students who experience loss? If yes, how? If no, who should?
Skills and resources for students who are in need, are they available.	See what the students find helpful, and learn what resources they know about.	10. What resources are in the school to help students who are experiencing difficulties? 11. Are there enough resources in the school to help students who are in trouble? Explain.

When discussing the role of teachers, what is the current state at C.S.S., and how do student perceive the current support.	To find out what students believe is most helpful why it is helpful, and also what is not helpful.	12. What does a good relationship with a teacher look like? 13. Can you discuss personal issues with teachers? If yes, what are the characteristics of those teachers with whom you talk? 14. Without naming them, can you think of any teachers you would talk to if you experienced a loss? If there are some, in what ways would they help you. And if no, why not? 15. Are teachers doing things that are not helpful? Give an example or explain. 16. Are there any actions teachers and other staff take to help students who have experienced loss?
To determine if future anticipated actions will fit with student needs	Find out from students what they believe is an important next step...	17. Have you discussed with or supported friends who have or are experiencing loss? If yes, if no explain why not? 18. Would training for you, as students, in grief and loss education be helpful? Explain... 19. What role do you see the counselling

		department playing in helping students?
		20. What things can counsellors do to help students who have experienced loss?
		21. Do you believe that a support group for students in the school would be helpful? Why or why not?
		22. Which students do you believe need the most help? Would it be those who have experienced loss due to death or divorce family break-up or ones with other issues? Explain...
		23. Do you have suggestions for ways that students who experience loss may be helped?
Wrap up the interview, and address any concerns	Allows participants the opportunity to ask and voice questions...	24. Are there any questions related to this topic that I missed and you would like to discuss?
		25. Is there anything else you would like to add or discuss?

Note. Format adapted from Gordon, R. (1980). Interviewing Strategy, Techniques and Tactics. In Mazarek, R., *Education 5400 Supplementary*, ICTR & D, 2000: Faculty of Education: University of Lethbridge.

Concluding Procedure:

I would like to thank you for your time. If you have other things you would like to add or discuss personally, I will be available. If you wanted to discuss the findings from the research project I will be in contact with you in the fall of 2002. Thank you once again for your assistance and excellent participation. Could you please complete the exit slip (see Appendix D) being handed out so I can critique the execution of this discussion and make improvements for further study?

Appendix D

Exit Slip

Focussed Discussion

Student Name _____ (optional)

1. Please list three things you learned from today's discussion.

2. Do you believe the idea of a focussed discussion is an appropriate way to discuss the topics of grief and loss?

3. Are there any things you really liked about today's discussion (at least one) Explain why.

4. IS there anything you would do, or would like to see happen differently next time a discussion like this takes place?

5. Do you have anything you would like to add that did not come out of the discussion?

Thank you for your time!

Sincerely Louise Ganton

Masters of Education Student

University of Lethbridge

Teacher, School District 59

Footnote

1. There was concern that teachers would report to parents, or other teachers. In British

Columbia, there are protocols in place to protect children from abuse and perceived

dangers.