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Facilitating a creative pedagogical space to engage children with the topic of death and dying in schools

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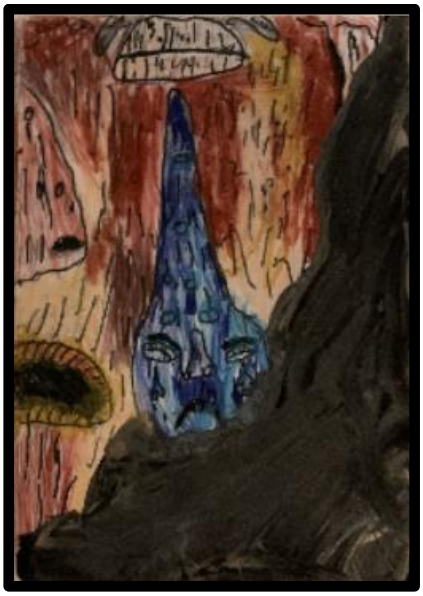

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Declaration of Author's Rights

This thesis is the result of the author's original research. It has been composed by the author and has not been previously submitted for examination which has led to the award of a degree.

Abstract

Facilitating a creative pedagogical space to engage children with the topic of death and dying in schools.

In recent years, a significant amount of attention has been drawn to the topic of death and dying in schools from a rights perspective: concerning how children's rights to be heard, to access information and receive timely support are not being met. From a practitioner enquiry stance, this study aimed to increase children's engagement with the topic of death and dying by encouraging their participation in research through creative methods. Challenges faced by school staff are outlined in my practitioner enquiry and, subsequently, a systematic review was undertaken with a focus on qualitative literature involving children aged 3-18 and creative approaches to engaging children with the topic of death and dying. This concluded ways in which a range of creative methods were used with children in contrast to conventional research methods that are unfamiliar to them. Drawing on creative methodologies, the data collection tools used in this study linked directly to children's classroom experiences. Resultantly, art, drama and music were used as creative methods to explore children's engagement with death. In a group environment, children's views were collectively considered through participative research design, methods and analysis. Thematic analysis was then used to discover prevalent themes from the creative data, and I worked with the participants to create a performance as part of this process. This approach resulted in a script which formed the basis of the findings. The findings indicated that children valued the opportunity to express themselves through the creative opportunities arising in the practitioner enquiry. This study outlines the quality dimensions of a pedagogic creative space that can be facilitated with children to explore topics such as death and dying. These include, not extensively: comfort zones, collaboration, elements of risk-taking in safe environment, non-judgemental practice and stimulating resources. When putting these recommendations into practice in a creative and pedagogic space, practitioners should consider the child's social world which will determine how they perceive death and process grief.

Acknowledgements

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I am grateful to the children who took part in this research study. It was a real privilege to work with them and I was greatly inspired. I would also like to thank East Renfrewshire Council for supporting this work.

I would like to give a special mention to Professor Kate Wall. A truly inspiring professor, Kate made me realise what I thought was not possible: being a full-time teacher and completing a doctorate. Thank you for believing in me and changing my perspective on research.

I dedicate this work to those special people I am grieving the loss of.

During the final stages of writing this thesis, my gran sadly died in July 2023. I hoped she would see me at the finishing line; she always said I would achieve my doctorate "with flying colours".

List of Contents

List of Figures

List of Tables

Chapter 1 Introduction

1.0 Chapter Overview

This thesis provides an account of a participatory research study exploring children's engagement with death using creative methods in a school setting. This chapter articulates how child bereavement is a prominent part of classroom life and, for practitioners like myself, illustrates the presence of unsettled grief in schools. It provides an overview of child bereavement in Scotland and delves into a disconnect between the high numbers of bereaved children in schools and the lack of support. Thus, this study draws together the research on bereavement in education that led me to a practitioner enquiry approach. My research questions are consequential of practitioner enquiry and my direct experience in the classroom. My theatre experience led me to seek creative opportunities for children[1] to express themselves as I accompany them in their process of grief, bereavement and loss. My interest in creativity and bereavement is longstanding, both personally and professionally, and this is explored throughout this chapter. By offering something of myself and my profession, I reflect on creative research and how this approach can uphold children's rights in relation to the topic of death and dying. I herein hope to make a contribution in that direction. Although this research is based in Scotland, the issues surrounding child bereavement are recognised globally. In this chapter, I reflect on my research aims, outline the structure of my thesis and explain the significance of the study.

Death is a very personal subject and I, therefore, write this thesis from an insider's perspective as a researcher who is also a: teacher, theatre director, school leader, family member, friend, and a bereaved person.

1.1 Being a Teacher in Scotland

At the time of writing this thesis, I have been teaching for almost seven years. From 2015 to 2021, I was a class teacher of children aged 5 to 12 years old. Every school year, my class included at least one child who had experienced the death of a parent or sibling. I was struck by the lack of school support for these children and the acknowledgment that was missing from staff and pupils alike. The expectations

[1] I use the term 'children' to refer to everyone who is under 18.

of teachers in Scotland are outlined in mandatory requirements for registration with the General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTCS) (2021). In which, being a teacher in Scotland is summarised to:

> Engaged, reflective, empowered and skilled teachers and learners acknowledge Scotland's place in the world, our history, our differences and diversity, our unique natural environment, and our culture based on social justice. Scotland's teachers help to embed sustainable and socially just practices in order to flourish as a nation (GTCS, 2021, p. 4).

The professional standards that are outlined by the GTCS are a commitment to the values of social justice, trust, respect and integrity. The very first standard highlights equal rights and how teachers should promote health and wellbeing of the children in their care. With this in mind, I am bewildered that neither bereavement, death nor dying appears in educational planning frameworks produced by Education Scotland. The guidance is a broad framework at national level and is not a statutory curriculum prescribed to schools that must be followed by individual practitioners. The terms appear vaguely in classroom resources and general supporting documentation around mental health and wellbeing; however, they do not appear in curriculum materials that must be used by Scotland's educators when planning. In fact, the terms 'loss' and 'change' are referred to in educational statements (see Education Scotland, 2009, p. 2) but these are widely interpreted. The ambiguity around these terms enables practitioners to teach the concepts without addressing death and dying.

Additionally, the topic is likely to be avoided due to the unpreparedness practitioners feel about addressing death in the classroom (Case et al., 2017). A recent study examining teachers' experiences dealing with bereavement in the classroom found that practitioners felt helpless, emotionally overloaded, anxious about the complex nature of relationships with families the topic fostered and needed more support from school leaders (Levkovich & Elyoseph, 2021). Despite the fact these issues remain unaddressed, the literature is still advocating for grief education in UK schools. A very recent study concluded that the topic is not adequately provided in schools across the United Kingdom (Dawson et al., 2023). This, ultimately, reflects my experience and that of many other teachers (Abraham-Steele & Edmonds,

2021). It is not good enough for schools to claim they do not have enough training, the curriculum is too crowded or it is not applicable to their children. The literature is clear that “grief education in UK schools is desirable, timely and actionable” (Dawson et al., 2023, p. 11). The need is there but this is not consistently translating into classrooms. Despite sufficient resources being available, effective teaching is missing (Abraham-Steele & Edmonds, 2021). This study aims to explore how practitioners can make space for this topic in schools. A range of resources are available, via bereavement charities for example, for teachers to implement in the classroom. This study does not necessarily add to these resources but focuses on how, in practice, teachers not only need to be informed about how and why to teach about death and dying, but also how to consider possibilities and understand the role of creative methods, thereby making a case that teacher’s pedagogical approaches are crucial.

In addition to direct teaching, caring for someone who has recently been bereaved is a natural response and a duty of care: something that should fall into the pastoral role of many teachers. It is particularly alarming that bereavement is overlooked in schools as recent figures show that approximately 4,700 children under the age of 18 in Scotland are bereaved of a parent each year (Childhood Bereavement Network, 2022). That equates to 90 children a week which is 13 every day (Childhood Bereavement Network, 2022). In 2011, as a pupil myself, my gran died suddenly from a heart attack. I took one absence and returned to school the following day. It was as if that was the only day I was allowed to grieve. In school, I felt I could not mention it or show any negative emotions. This, without doubt, played on my mind and making sense of this experience remains present in my professional and personal life, and which remains embedded within my research influences and bias. Perhaps, this experience triggered a traumatic response in me as I see many children today going through exactly that. I experienced a clear dichotomy between life in the home and life in school when bereaved, and this is similar to what children experience (Holmgren, 2021). With statistics showing a high number of bereaved children in schools, I worry about the support (or lack of) in place.

Being a teacher in Scotland should involve considering these powerful statistics on bereavement in childhood if teachers are to be truly respectful, tackle social justice

and bring about equality in the system. Making a professional commitment to learning and learners should consider grief as a barrier to wellbeing. If the child bereavement statistics in Scotland are upsetting and the mandatory requirements for teachers outline the need to care for children's health and wellbeing, then why is the topic of death and dying absent from classrooms?

1.2 Practitioner Enquiry

Longstanding has been the notion that research is restricted to academe (Gutierez, 2019). However, several lines of evidence suggest that teachers can be effective researchers (see, for example, Westbroek et al., 2022). The literature on research in education is well established and practitioner enquiry highlights several ways it can close the gap between theory and practice (Cordingley, 2015). Despite it being conveyed as a part of daily practice by many authors, there is still an acceptance of certain traditions and a view that practitioner enquiry takes excessive amounts of time and is 'pure' academic research (Wilkinson & Dokter, 2023). Much of the current literature pays close attention to the aims for improvement brought about by orchestrating education theory and practice (Gutierez, 2019). As such, a considerable amount of literature has been published on practitioner enquiry and this dates back to Dewey (1916) and Stenhouse (1975). The greater part of this work illustrates different models of practitioner enquiry, particularly in relation to professional development (see Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 2011; Lieberman & Miller, 1990), yet fails to explore it in practice. Ironically, the gap becomes double-edged. The impact of these models, in my own experience, results in unachievable and inconsistent approaches to practitioner enquiry being adopted. For example, I have found that an understanding of how teachers actively participate in enquiry is missing.

This construct was first articulated by Dewey (1916) as reflective thinking or enquiry, but from there on different approaches have been developed. Data from several sources has identified this new way of thinking about research still lacks coherence amongst teaching staff. Addressing this, Wall (2018) makes clear two distinct standpoints: enquiry as stance and enquiry as project. Practitioner enquiry as stance is a natural and necessary way of understanding new developments in education through questioning and investigation (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). In contrast, practitioner enquiry as project is a process of finding out often viewed as one-off task with a start and end point (Wall, 2018). The latter is much more common in the

literature, and unsurprisingly, in practice. Crucially, one standpoint is not better than the other, yet I would like to see more teachers engage with enquiry as stance in schools to meet the requirement of “hav[ing] a depth of knowledge and understanding of Research and Engagement in Practitioner Enquiry” outlined by the GTCS (2021, p. 7) .

As defined by Menter et al. (2011), practitioner enquiry is a way to approach an investigation with a clear rationale and opportunity to share findings more widely. This view often leads to school settings asking teachers to plan a project to carry out in their classes which is then received as an onerous task (Baumfield et al., 2013; McIntyre, 1997). Its value does outweigh any drawbacks; however, this can create a stigma around research in schools. To tackle this, and in accordance with Dimmock (2016), practitioner enquiry comes directly from classroom practice and engagement in evaluation; this makes it more popular as it should not be viewed as an additional task for teachers to add to their lengthy ‘to-do lists’. Using this approach, researchers have been able to illustrate how enquiry can be built into day-to-day practice. Wall (2018) discusses the importance of dialogue and how discussing what worked and what did not work in a lesson can lead to enquiry. In agreement to this, and as a way of addressing sceptical views, Hirsh and Hord (2010) argue that teachers should be involved in planning for enquiry through evaluative dialogue. This provides opportunities to tackle the surrounding issues which are highlighted in the research, including teachers not viewing themselves as researchers.

Most recent literature around practitioner enquiry appears to positively advocate for the model of research to be flexible and creative and pedagogically appropriate to the classroom context (Wall, 2018). I find this, as a teacher, very comforting amongst other competing classroom demands. Simply moving away from conventional methods of research is not the message, nor would it be appropriate. In line with the most up-to-date work on practitioner enquiry, teachers would benefit from understanding there are lots of types of research and accept it can be much more open in nature than traditional approaches such as questionnaires, interviews and observations (Wall, 2018). In my own experience, as a school leader, I have found that some teachers struggle to critically question their own practice and do not view themselves as academics. If how teachers perceive research remains traditional then the gap between theory and practice may not close. To reshape this, and reflect the evolving creative practices in research, dialogue can powerfully

empower teachers to take an enquiring stance. My belief is that practitioner enquiry is doable, and I attempt to show how it can be completed as, first and foremost, a teacher. Not all teachers, in fact the minority, will create a thesis to illustrate a particular moment in their enquiring stance. I do not intend to promote the doctoral journey as the way teachers should complete enquiry (albeit, it has promoted enquiry on many different levels); I aim to show how enquiry can enhance classroom practice and improve the lives of children in schools. I am not measuring or looking for the impact of a specific project on individuals. I am exploring research questions and engaging pupils in a topic to learn about their experience. This is my practitioner enquiry and I aim to encourage other teachers to take their own stance by starting with learners' needs so that the outcomes are useful (Hall & Wall, 2019).

1.3 Positionality and Reflexivity

Through practitioner enquiry, I have established my teacher-researcher identity. The importance of acknowledging 'where the researcher is coming from' is widely recognised in the literature (see, for example, Greene, 2014). The term 'positionality' describes the researchers' worldview and the position they adopt during a research study (Holmes & Gary, 2020). To describe my positionality, throughout this thesis I locate my beliefs, values and views about the research design, how it is carried out and its outputs. As I am part of the social world I am researching, I openly and honestly disclose my position as a teacher in the school the research was undertaken as I have, or may have, influenced the research. Reflexivity informs positionality. Thus, in being reflexive, I aim to consider my social, cultural and political context so as to be as transparent as possible about my position (Bryman, 2016). This is explored further in Chapter 3 where I discuss my research lens and methodology.

Holmes and Gary (2020) make it clear that positionality is never fixed. This resonates with me as a teacher. As I encounter many new initiatives and policies in education (it is never static), I find myself, and others, taking a view based on our own beliefs, skills and experience. Different trends in education are shaped by positions in different contexts and school improvement (Lipscombe et al., 2021): at the forefront you may find Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM) education, a poverty-related attainment gap, development of the future and skills of education for 2030, playful experiences, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) Inclusive Education… the list could go on. Each with their own agenda,

educational priorities are influenced by the personal experiences and values of those who engage with them. As I engage with this research in a school setting, my age, race, gender and career may have impacted the study due to possible associated hierarchies of power. Further to this, as will be discussed in the methodology chapter, I have worked with some of the children who participated in this study in a teaching capacity and therefore established relationships existed. When taking on the researcher role, I was very clear that I was still a teacher. Moreover, I made it apparent that I too was human (children can often think teachers are instructing robots) who also lived through bereavement. This brought to the table what Holmes and Gary (2020, p. 6) refer to as “lived familiarity”. My main purpose for this disclosure was to always remain transparent throughout the research process.

From communicating my position, many researchers would categorise me as an ‘insider researcher’ (Mercer, 2007); this is because I have access to the research site and participants out with the study (Bukamal, 2022). I see many problems with the insider-outsider debate and, like Chhabra (2020) suggests, it is more complicated than being one or the other. I discard much of the research which supports one or the other and support the lines of argument which value the researchers’ contribution from either perspective (Hult, 2014). I cannot claim to know my participants’ world completely and therefore I am not entirely an ‘insider’. Whilst I do have prior knowledge, I have much to learn, and a great deal is unknown. Having access to the children in the school community was beneficial and enabled me to ask meaningful questions and develop high-quality interactions because the trust was already established. These factors are often described as advantages of being an ‘insider-researcher’ (see Cormier, 2018; Greene, 2014; Holmes & Gary, 2020; Schiffer, 2020). Yet many would argue that there is a bias present and by being too familiar with the participants this could encourage them to hold back. In agreement with Merriam et al. (2001), the insider’s strengths become the outsider’s weaknesses, and vice versa. Much discussion around the advantages and disadvantages does not achieve anything and, in fact, more needs to be done to challenge the dichotomy that exists. I do not see one better than the other and notice the similarities when considering methodological issues.

Nonetheless, I do not set out to describe their differences and then position myself in one category; instead, I openly acknowledge my insider knowledge and my multi-layered identity (including age and race) that makes me an outsider. To ensure validity is strong in my study, I adopt a range of procedures because of my position. These are discussed, in detail, in Chapter 3.

1.4 My Classroom Experience

Recently, I came across Vincent Van Gogh's painting *'A Pair of Shoes'* (1886, see Fig. 1.1). This was significant to me for it represents a difficult passage through life and exemplifies my thinking. The painting illustrates the very nature of putting yourself in someone else's shoes that is important to the enquiry stance which I take.

Figure 1.1 'A Pair of Shoes' (Gogh, 1886)

Van Gogh's interests focused on capturing villagers during their daily work and this research mirrors that. This study aimed to meaningfully engage children with the topic of death and dying through creative methods and, due to my teacher-researcher positionality and practitioner enquiry stance, I reflect on what it was like to be in their shoes. Following this, I was able to formulate, in line with the literature, research questions and work with children to design the research.

I present a vignette as a way of showing how my classroom experience enabled me to take an enquiring stance. It has been reported that presented vignettes are becoming more common as a research method as they provide rich and detailed accounts (Sampson & Johannessen, 2020). Previous studies using vignettes have

demonstrated the need to do so cautiously; although credible, the technique can include harmful content that can compromise confidentiality (Sampson & Johannessen, 2020). This drawback also highlights the openness of vignettes and, if used appropriately, this can increase meaningful engagement with research. There use in social science disciplines is still limited and there is plenty of scope for them to help achieve a better understanding of the topic under research. My vignette, Luke's Story, explains the beginning of my practitioner enquiry journey in relation to child bereavement.

1.4.1 Luke's Story[2]

It would take too long to explain every situation I have found myself in with bereaved children as a teacher. My earliest memories are of teaching an 8-year-old boy whose dad died. I was buzzing around my classroom, playing music and singing gleefully without a care in the world. I was always a morning person and enjoyed setting up for the class coming in at 9am. This day, around 8.15am, I heard my name being called. I ran out of my classroom, panting and shaking, looking around to find the voice. I knew, from familiar tones, that it was my Head Teacher sounding concerned. She called, "I'm down here" and I peered over the balcony: finding her worried looking in the corridor below. If I had wings, I would have flown down instantly to find out what was going on. I rushed down to her office. In the background, I could hear my colleagues greeting me, but I was focused on only one thing. What had happened?

Seeking reassurance, I stared and listened eagerly. I did not in a million years expect this conversation to be about death. Yet, it was, and it was uncomfortable. The moment I heard that a child in my class experienced the death of his dad was unimaginable. The silence grew longer, and one single tear ran down my left cheek. That was the only way I could express my emotion at the time. The rest of the time was fraught with fear and shock before I returned to my classroom to welcome the children at 9am.

Sitting inside a room filled with fear and tension was deeply upsetting. The recollections ebb from my mind like snapshots that capture glimpses and glances of

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[2] *Note: Any names used are pseudonyms.*

what went on that day. The class entered the room and evoking mumbling sounds began to build. A strong smell of fresh air hit me as I opened the windows to cool down. It wasn't long before I was swarmed by children to tell me what had happened. As I stepped back, to take a moment, I fell backwards onto the chair. At this point, I was so overwhelmed I had to instruct the children to sit down. This only drew my attention to the empty seat. The ambient darkness and cold from outside seemed to make the situation worse. In an instant second, so many questions filled my head: What do I say? Should we talk about it? Do I move on and act as normal? Will the children get upset? What if Luke comes to school today? I started calling the children's names to see who was present. I called Luke's name and felt the silence tear into me. The children were grieving, and I was doing nothing about it. I had to do something even though I felt so lost and confused.

I looked up and Luke walked through the door. It was as if the room turned black and white; yet the memories I have are full of colour. Colour that is a frustrated red, a sad muted grey, an ice cold blue and a calming purple. Luke was fearful and unsettled. His eyes followed the ground to this desk. I placed my hand gently on his shoulder to tell him I was here. That one, small gesture was more powerful than any words.

I continued the day and treated everyone in a sensitive manner and with kindness. Every time he looked at me, my presence reassured Luke. Yet, I knew what I was doing wasn't enough. I assumed no one wanted to talk about death and it wasn't until the end of the day when I realised, I made a huge mistake. The children's lingering questions soon came to the forefront when I took the time to acknowledge how I felt about the death. By using the word 'died', Luke was able to acknowledge his grief. He sighed of relief and almost relaxed when the word was out in the open.

Uncomfortable questions followed but were addressed appropriately and I really began to see what was going on inside every child's head. I felt I could really understand what they were going through. I was not able to function with day-to-day activities that followed and couldn't remember what I was doing from one moment to the next. I was experiencing all sorts of daydreams thinking of Luke and his family and what they were going through. Fragments of memories of Luke's brother and dad filled my body with pain. It was all I could, and wanted to, think about even though it brought me so much stress.

I often felt myself sitting on the outside of my body and questioning my integrity: avoiding any conversation with other members of staff in case I was doing something wrong. It must have been obvious I was struggling to support Luke because I was so withdrawn and isolated. I felt like I carried the weight of the grief from 33 pupils. When speaking with Luke, he understandingly expressed: “I knew it was coming. Cancer is horrible.” I agreed and felt unsettled. I started to think I had failed Luke by not being there for him in the lead up to his father’s death.

There was a period where I felt as if I was sitting inside a nebulous that I call the “in between” phase: a timeframe between the initial shock and acknowledging grief. I look back and remember my quest for answers. My sheer panic was painted in dark greys, blues and black. I constantly looked for ways to help Luke and actions to take to help the situation. I almost felt I had to solve the problem of grief and make it go away. I rarely slept at night: overthinking what I should do next. I knew that this death was now a part of Luke’s identity, and I had no idea how to help him cope with this. It wasn’t long before it occurred to me that I was trying too hard. I was trying to fix something that couldn’t be fixed. I needed to be honest with myself and listen to what Luke wanted and needed. I openly identified that I do not know enough about children’s experiences when they are bereaved. By owning my areas for development, I felt a glimmer of hope and began my practitioner enquiry by challenging existing practices and trialling new ideas.

1.5 Shaping my Research

Notably, there could be an assumption that from Luke’s story alone I undertook a practitioner enquiry project. I wish to be clear that this was not the case. It was not the aim of this research to create an intervention to support children such as Luke and conclude on its effectiveness. Instead, I began taking my enquiring stance by acknowledging what was working and what was not in my own classroom practice. Importantly, there are many similarities between my vignette and the literature on child bereavement. There are a number of studies that suggest the benefits of peer support when a child is bereaved (Ellis et al., 2013); however, as was the case in my own classroom, peers can lack the skills and knowledge to support their bereaved friend (Stylianou & Zembylas, 2018). Furthermore, data from a range of studies normalised my emotional response to child bereavement as a class teacher (see Cohen & Mannarino, 2011; Levkovich & Elyoseph, 2021). Likewise, the evidence from McGovern and Barry (2000) suggests that talking about death in a classroom

can be uncomfortable; this was experienced first-hand. Data from various studies identifies the internalised behaviour present in adults when a child has experienced death (Szmigin & Canning, 2014). This can lead to doubt in what to do and say (as present in my vignette). It is reassuring that teachers, as part of their pastoral care role, can be sensitive to children's worries and an open response which listens to the child has been demonstrated to be effective in previous research (see Duncan, 2020b). My experience thus is typical of many teachers in classrooms today. The unprepared and unsupported feelings I had are a reality for many others. From this experience, I highlighted an area that did not go well in my own practice: supporting a bereaved child and his peers. I sought to bring about change in both the classroom environment and in my own practice. Thus, the thesis is orientated towards a pedagogical perspective rather than methodological approaches or therapeutic interventions. Children's engagement with death and dying as a topic is the main focus of this research, in contrast to processes of grief and bereavement which are recognised in scholarly activity in the field of death studies.

As will be discussed in Chapter 3, the research was based within my own establishment (the school that I worked in at the time) and the participants were children of that school community. Unlike school-based enquiries where the findings are generally shared amongst staff teams, this research was analysed and written up systematically and findings were disseminated much more widely. There is often a tendency for teachers to use traditional tools when engaging with practitioner enquiry. This may be because they view research as questionnaires and interviews, and data is often spoken about in relation to attainment statistics and figures. In a study by Wall et al. (2013), an important conclusion was drawn around the increased creative understanding of evidence in educational contexts yet the awareness of this is limited. For me, as a practitioner, I began thinking about the types of activities children engage with in school. This quickly shifted the focus from questionnaires and interviews and led me to consider the role of creative methods. I felt relief in the comfort and familiarity children would feel when engaging with these types of activities as it reflected the child-led nature already present in my school and this approach is supported in the literature around child bereavement (Mallon, 2011). Further to this, as a teacher, I felt much more confident planning for creative methods than utilising more conventional methods.

Creative research methods are supported by a rapidly growing body of literature (see, for example, Coemans et al., 2015; Kara et al., 2021). They have been found to facilitate expression and "enhance the potential for optimal therapeutic growth to occur" (Desmond et al., 2015, p. 442). For children, these approaches can be engaging and can facilitate imaginative practice (Adams, 2008). Engaging in any form of research can be a terrifying experience for children, particularly if it is on a sensitive topic (Desmond et al., 2015). As a practitioner, creativity is important to me as a means of fostering child-led experiences. In field of child bereavement, there is a dearth of research in this area, and this is discussed further in Chapter 2. Hence, there is a need for this study to explore the role of creative methods in creating a safe and nurturing environment for children to engage with death (Kershaw & Nicholson, 2011).

In similar studies where creative methods have been used with children, they are also investigative and exploratory in nature. The non-verbal techniques associated with creative methods are also deemed inclusive and the potential for children to communicate in a range of ways can promote healing and growth (Hecker et al., 2010). Many adults and children find it difficult to discuss death with others. Therefore, my decision to use creative methods in my enquiry was to promote artistic verbal and non-verbal expression in a secure and controlled way. By promoting children's narratives in this way, it was also a commitment to giving children a voice and this was, ultimately, a matter of rights (Clark, 2004). At the heart of teaching practice is children's rights, and this approach to participation viewed children not as passive victims, but as social actors who played a part in shaping the research (Lundy & McEvoy, 2012; Powell & Smith, 2009). As such, this study implemented a rights-based approach to research on children, about children, with children and by children. The United Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) brought the values of respect, inclusion, dignity, self-representation and expression to the forefront through Articles 12 and 13 outlined in Table 1.1.

Table 1.1 Definition of Articles 12 and 13 (UNICEF, 1989)

Article 12: Every child has the right to express their views, feelings and wishes in all matters affecting them, and to have their views considered and taken seriously.

Article 13: Every child must be free to express their thoughts and opinions and to access all kinds of information, as long as it is within the law.

In the children's rights paradigm, children are experts in their own lives (Clark & Statham, 2005). Through creative methods, valuable opportunities were created for children to secure the realisation of their rights. In Chapter 3, I discuss fully my methodological approach with clear links to pedagogy. Children's rights are at the heart of my practitioner enquiry stance as resulting from Luke's story was a need to uphold children's rights when they are vulnerable.

1.6 Bereavement during childhood: Prevalence, Impact and Support

1.6.1 Prevalence

As my research began to take shape, my teaching experience and practitioner stance required familiarising myself with childhood bereavement, including understanding prevalence, the impact on schooling and family life and support mechanisms. This set the context for my literature review, discussed in the next chapter. An exploration of child bereavement provided context to my enquiry and set out scope for my literature review.

In the UK, there is often said to be a taboo among adults about talking of death with children (Carter, 2016). However, this is beginning to change (Lytje & Dyregrov, 2023b). Undoubtedly, the COVID-19 pandemic has brought issues such as death, dying and bereavement to the forefront. Our world is still refocusing, repairing and rebuilding whilst living with the grief, and other contributing factors, the pandemic brought for all of us. Recent, pre-pandemic research showed that 62% of children in Scotland are bereaved of a close family member by the age of 10 years old (Paul & Vaswani, 2020). This, still, is an ever-evolving picture and likely to be an underestimate due to the pandemic. Since 2016, there has been an increase in childhood bereavement. This roughly equates to 600 more bereaved children a year than in 2016. That is, approximately, 10 more children each week: an increase of 2 bereaved children per day (Childhood Bereavement Network, 2022).

Estimations from the first 14 months of the pandemic conclude that around 1.5 million children worldwide experienced the death of a parent or caregiver (Hillis et al., 2021). The significantly high statistics of childhood bereavement emphasises the

need to recognise the impact of bereavement on children and to address issues around the approaches used to support those affected, where appropriate.

Noteworthy, much of the research around supporting child bereavement addresses death of a parent and sibling. Studies highlight that 3.5% of all 5 - 16-year-olds have experienced the death of a sibling or parent in the UK (Fauth et al., 2009). Widespread knowledge is that this equates to one child in every British primary and secondary class that has lived through the death of their parent, brother or sister (Mclaughlin et al., 2019). This, however, is not a true reflection and much is still unknown around the prevalence of bereavement in children's lives. Exact figures are hard to establish, and evidence does suggest there is an underestimation; in a sample of 2000 children, approximately 80% had experienced the death of a close relative or friend (Harrison & Harrington, 2001). Similarly, in a study involving 185 Scottish adolescents, 74% were bereaved and, of this, 11% reported exposure to a suicide death (del Carpio et al., 2020). Therefore, it is reasonable to conclude that not only are the numbers of bereaved children miscalculated in statistics, but the literature is also weighted towards parental and sibling deaths. This does not reflect the prevalence of death as children deceased of other close family members and friends go unreported. A clearer picture of what children are experiencing is needed to help professionals meet their needs more widely.

To fully understand the impact of bereavement, it is appropriate to discuss grief theories. Within the wider field of bereavement, the literature tends to focus on adults, and it is unclear how theories of grief also consider child development theories. The interconnectivity between children's grief and their stage of development is significant but is not the only factor to be considered. Children's exposure to death and their prior experience will impact their understanding (McPoland et al., 2023). Thus far, theory has concentrated on cognitive processes and the idea of *understanding*, but the social experience of death also interplays with this and should be presented (Scott et al., 2020). The literature has increased my initial understanding of grief theories that have emerged over several years, and this has enabled me to begin to support bereaved children in an informed manner. No theory is absolute, and it is unlikely that any bereaved person will follow the pattern of an individual theory as written (Dosser, 2016). This is in line with many authors, for example Stroebe and Schut (1999), who argue that grief is not linear or

staged. Furthermore, literature on child development supports this as it highlights caution around a one size fits all approach (Chen et al., 2022).

When supporting children following a death, a contemporary understanding of grief theory is crucial. When considering grief theory in relation to children, there are many age-appropriate factors. This includes how aspects of theory can be put into practice to help young people deal with their grief. Two of the most common bereavement theories used in practice when working with children include Worden (1991, 1996) and Bowlby (1980). Worden's model is four tasks of mourning to be accomplished by the grieving child. These are numbered and this should be interpreted with caution: thinking of children's grief in a simple linear pattern is problematic. The four tasks include: 1) To accept the reality of loss; 2) To process the pain of grief; 3) To adjust to a world without the deceased; and 4) To find an enduring connection with the deceased in the midst of embarking on a new life (Worden, 1991, 1996). Like this, Baker et al. (1992) outline a series of tasks for children to accomplish as they move through grief. Similarly, the theorists conceptualise bereaved children's grief process into a series of psychological tasks that must be accomplished. These time-related tasks involve understanding and self-protection; acceptance and reworking; identification and development (Baker et al., 1992). Again, although these may serve as useful frameworks, they can be incorrectly used to support children or understand their grief. For example, it could be assumed that a child should understand death then accept it. This is not necessarily the case and practitioners could think their role is to help the child accept the loss. This could be harmful and put children under unintentional pressure. Accordingly, bereavement theories should be understood alongside children's cognitive and social development.

On the other hand, Bowlby's *Theory of Attachment* (1980) is more about overlapping stages compared to that of Worden's phases. Parkes (1998) describes four stages of grieving as shock and numbness, yearning and searching, despair and disorganisation, and reorganisation and recovery. Many myths, such as children grieve through timely stages and children recover quickly from grief, should be challenged by practitioners (Fearnley, 2010). Even though many models on children's cognitive understanding of and emotional responses to death and bereavement do not outright reject a linear process, an awareness of the cyclical and continuous movement on children's grief should be present. Typical age and

development related perspectives are drawn up around child bereavement (see Di Ciacco, 2008). These rarely vary from source to source and only provide a very basic understanding. This suggests that more work is needed to capture children's experiences of grief by working directly with them. In time, this would enable practitioners to provide children with access to the most appropriate support: including using creative methods to improve their experiences.

Moreover, the works of the theorists illustrate different styles of thinking about grief. There is a clear difference in some theorists highlighting the process of detachment from the deceased to others focusing on a new normal. It is important to look at grief as a natural process of child development (Mallon, 2011). I have found the childhood development theories of Piaget useful in understanding how children experience grief. Although Piaget's work did not focus on children's understanding of death, many researchers have applied his theories to this topic (see Cotton & Range, 1990; Kane, 1979; Koocher, 1973). I build on this in Figure 1.2 which I have created by synthesising grief theories and applying it to the work of Piaget. Piaget's idea of schemata as a way to organise knowledge features the interconnected nature of experience and meaning (Piaget, 1963); although, it is heavily focused on cognitive functioning and fails to capture cultural and social factors (DeRobertis, 2021). Thus, this study focuses on sociological perspectives for understanding death in contrast to the dominant psychological literature in the field. It applies the conceptual framework of Bronfenbrenner's theory in later chapters to explore the interaction between children and various ecological systems.

Children's experiences of grief and their adaptation to loss sees them create a new mental and social representation of the world. Figure 1.2 highlights how models of grief could be viewed as cycles which merge and overlap: underpinning this is the structures of schemata and the process of adaptation. The outer cycle shows how Piaget's work is an important part of children's grief which is illustrated through overlapping circles. To create these circles, I have incorporated various grief theories. Often, new schema is created when a child experiences death for the first time as this is entirely new to them. When discussing children's grief, it is best to avoid using terminology such as 'different stages of grief' and instead think about the process involved when a child grows around grief (Tonkin, 1996). There is potential to misinterpret grief theories in relation to children, therefore Figure 1.2 shows how a child will incorporate death into pre-existing cognitive structures and

how these will change to accommodate new information. Equilibrium will set in when the child gets a balance between the new and existing life. This explains children's grief processes and highlights the importance of this study in acknowledging grief in classrooms as being timeless, alternating and ever evolving.

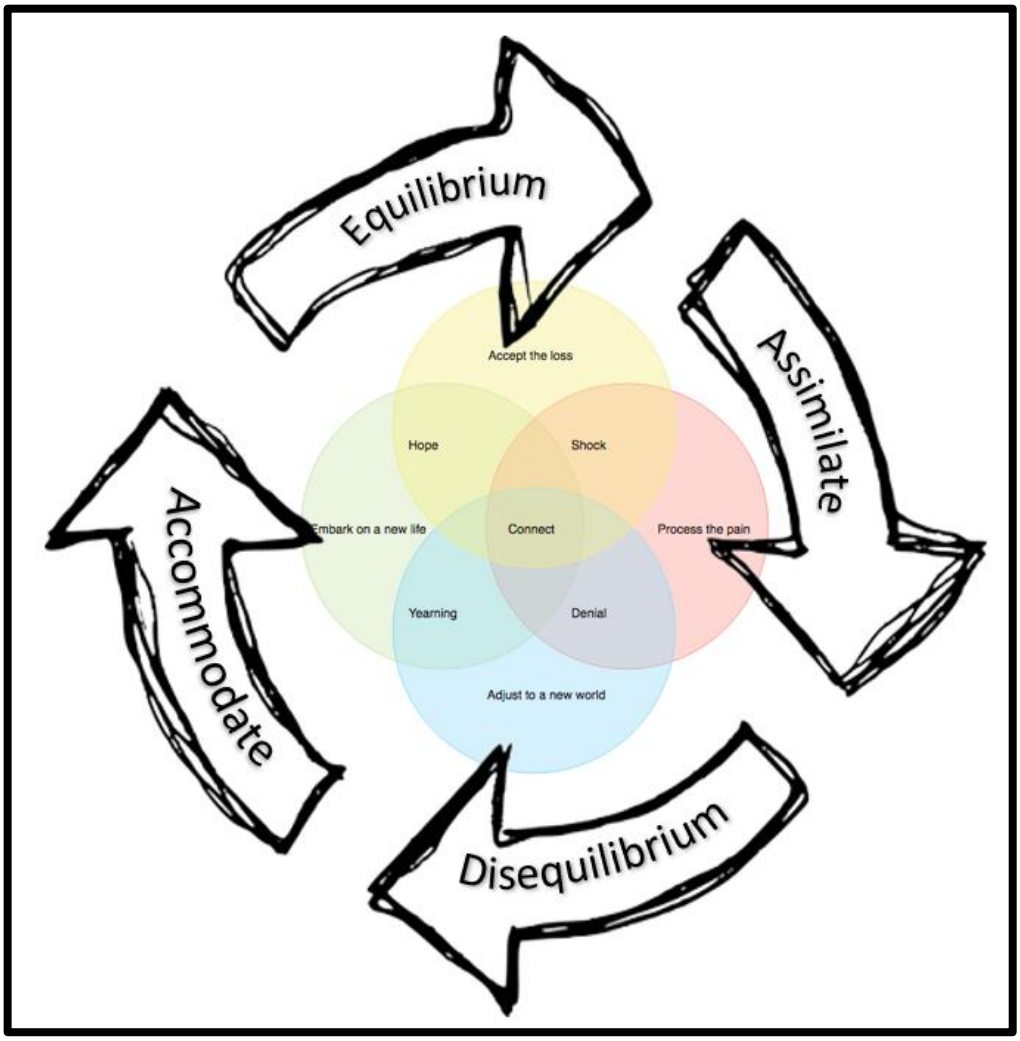

Figure 1.2 A grief cycle with adaptation of schemas

The previously highlighted prevalence of bereavement illustrated the significantly high number of children mourning and thus potentially experiencing the elements outlined in Figure 1.2. It was my intention to see how children's experiences really do reflect this and how their experiences are mirrored, or distorted, in the literature.

1.6.2 Impact

Living with grief can impact on children's lives in many ways. As such, several studies conclude there is a high risk of mental health conditions, such as depression and anxiety, when children experience the death of their parent or main caregiver

(Luecken & Roubinov, 2012; Nickerson et al., 2013; Silverman & Worden, 1992). This realisation of how death is interrupting and impacting on children's daily lives suggests an urgent need for support to be given to help children to learn to live with loss. Grief and bereavement are recognised as a natural part of life and death isn't something to be ignored by friends and teachers in classrooms and schools. Death should become a part of who children are and there should be time and a space to learn about grief.

Paul (2019) presents findings to illustrate how there are limited understandings of how children encounter death and this aligns with the context of this study which aims to use creative methods to increase opportunities for death to feature in children's lives. Bereavement brings about instability and some children become at higher risk of experiencing mental health problems; physical, emotional and sexual violence; family poverty; family separation; and many other negative socioeconomic impacts (Funk et al., 2018). People are often anxious or reluctant to talk about death and dying with children and thus they can often go unheard (Wray et al., 2022). This is worrying as there is also extensive research to confirm the negative impacts on educational attainment and achievement (Dyregrov et al., 2022). Additionally, there is sufficient evidence to suggest that bereaved children are at risk of earning lower incomes and having lower socio-economic statuses compared who those who have not experienced death (Dyregrov et al., 2022). It is well established from a variety of studies that school completion and school performance are negatively impacted by bereavement for some children (Burrell et al., 2020; Høeg et al., 2019; Kailaheimo-Lönnqvist & Kotimäki, 2020). Schools were found to be trying to address this by focusing strongly on attainment, yet teachers felt this took away from the psychological support that was really needed to address the issues (Dyregrov et al., 2015; Holland, 2008).

1.6.3 Support

In supporting children, it is essential that public health bereavement approaches break down barriers and explore ways to creatively meet the needs of grieving children. Several studies postulate this as a need for more psychosocial support groups or counselling (Bergman et al., 2017). However, there is a wider picture that needs to be addressed: responding to death is a public health issue (Paul & Vaswani, 2020) . Whilst targeted support may be required, there is a missing

opportunity for teachers to talk and teach about death and dying through the curriculum in a safe and nurturing environment (Dawson et al., 2023) . Largely, the findings are in favour of including death and dying in the curriculum (Rodríguez Herrero et al., 2022). A nurturing environment can help children overcome their anxiety when talking about death in the classroom and it can promote positive emotional responses to grief through guidance and support (Stylianou & Zembylas, 2018).

Particularly, to determine the impact of positively supporting a child at school when bereaved other factors must be taken into consideration. Their community, hospitals, hospices, family members, the media and workplaces may all play a role in a child's journey through grief. In Scotland, for example, the Scottish Partnership for Palliative Care (2018) set out public health approaches involving education, workplace culture, family networks, the media and community support. Public health approaches are also outlined in policies such as 'Living and dying well' (Donnelley, 2008) and this is well-evidenced in the literature (see Aoun et al., 2012; Conway, 2007; Rumbold & Aoun, 2014; Stjernswärd et al., 2007). In Scotland, a recent report was submitted to the Scottish Government with recommendations to make a difference to the lives of bereaved children (National Childhood Bereavement Project, 2022). The report recommends a structured approach to bereavement in schools, including: a policy, a grief curriculum, a 'ready-to-use' resource, and training. This is in line with the UK commission on bereavement's report (The UK Commission on Bereavement, 2022) and Scotland's first Bereavement Charter for Children and Adults (Scottish Care, 2020). Whilst these suggestions are welcome, there is more work to be done. There is a disconnect between these documentations and how they are put into practice. The 'how' needs to consider the views of children so this can be captured in policies. For the purposes of this study, resulting from a practitioner enquiry in a school setting, children's experiences were only related to education and school support as it was beyond its scope to discuss other influencing factors.

At a time where the UNCRC is continuously in the public eye, bereaved children have been falling under the radar due to a lack of understanding around how death is impacting children's lives (Harrop et al., 2022). With support being limited, these unnamed children are being overlooked and their best interests are not being acted

upon fully. There is scope to provide children with their entitlement to a voice so they can be better supported and informed around the topic of death and dying. Thus, this research study aimed to tackle this by researching children's engagement with the topic of death and dying through creative methods.

1.7 Structure of Thesis

This thesis is comprised of seven chapters, which I summarise below.

Chapter 1: Introduction

This chapter acts as an introduction to the research and provides a rationale for the study being carried out with a focus on practitioner enquiry. The value of the research is highlighted through a current examination of childhood development and grief theory. A focus toward a sociological perspective for understanding death, in contrast to the dominant psychological literature in the field, is highlighted. Further, the prevalence of child bereavement, its impact on home and school life and the lack of support for teachers suggests a need for this study. My child-centred approach is outlined alongside my commitment to using creative methods as a pedagogically appropriate tool throughout the enquiry.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter carries out a systematic literature review to examine the literature in relation to children, death and creative approaches. The literature included is qualitative, published after 2000, involved children under the age of 18 and had a creative element. The systematic review highlights the research around creative spaces for exploring death and dying with children. The literature included is mostly methodological in focus and a need to explore the quality dimensions of a pedagogic space is evident.

Chapter 3: Research Design and Methodology

Chapter 3 outlines the research methodology adopted in the study. Following a section on paradigms, ontology and epistemology, I explore participatory research with children. The next part justifies the creative methods facilitated in the study. Thereafter, a section details the data collection process using creative methods and explains the process involved in using thematic analysis (TA) and theatre as a data analysis technique with children. I discuss the ethical procedures this study adheres to which aimed to balance research competence and rigour with participation.

Chapter 4: Findings I

In this chapter, I present the research findings following TA of data from a creative workshop. A detailed, critical analysis of each theme is presented with reference to the data throughout. The analysis explores the key ideas relating to facilitating a pedagogical creative space. The findings are consistent with the existing literature highlighted in Chapter 2, and the analysis illustrates how they advance the research on facilitating a creative pedagogic space for children to explore the topic of death and dying.

Chapter 5: Findings II

A drama script is presented in the second section of the study's findings. I extended the TA process and engaged children in creating a theatrical-based research performance in the final phase. The script, which formed the basis of the findings, was devised with the children, and is presented in this chapter. The data generation in a creative pedagogic space informed the writing of the plot, characters and dialogue. The process involved in creating the script highlights an original way to facilitate a creative space for children to be actively involved in the analysis stage of my practitioner enquiry.

Chapter 6: Discussion

I discuss and further analyse the key findings and themes in this chapter as an outcome of my practitioner enquiry. The findings of this study highlight how creative methods can be used to engage children with the topic of death and dying in a pedagogical space. The discussion is specific to my own practice; however, it outlines key ideas for other practitioners to consider. The findings are discussed through a sociological lens as the data exemplifies the interactions between a child and various ecological systems.

Chapter 7: Conclusion and Considerations

Chapter 7 summarises my findings and draws conclusions based on my research aims and questions. The final chapter also sets out implications, recommendations and a need for future research to consider creative methods. I also consider the limitations and challenges of the study. This chapter concludes with a personal reflection from my position as an enquiring practitioner.

1.8 Value of the Research

This study is grounded in childhood studies and its overall significance has implications for policymakers, academics and those directly working with children. I found myself, as a teacher, in a vulnerable position: feeling unprepared and startled by my inability to support a bereaved child. My enquiring stance enabled me to relate my experience to that of other teachers through dialogue and has highlighted that it is not uncommon to encounter children who have experienced death in primary schools (Dawson et al., 2023). Across the literature, I found value in enabling children's voices to be heard in research through ethically justifiable ways such as using creative methods (Faldet & Nes, 2021; Lewis-Dagnell et al., 2023). My original review was the first to look at all creative elements in published research and concluded that creative methods are successfully applied to therapeutic work with bereaved children and highlighted an opportunity for creativity (in research methods) to be present in death studies involving children. Thus, I carried out a participatory study to capture children's experiences and subsequently increase the chances of improving their lives.

The core aim of this research was to explore children's engagement with the topic of death and dying due to its prevalence and the impact it can have on education. The way in which grief and loss can be explored through creative methods, and thus improve the way in which children encounter death, was shown in this study. Children's expression was facilitated through art, drama and music. The findings suggested that creative methods promoted high levels of motivation and engagement. This is very significant and illustrates how impactful innovative and creative methodologies can be. In respect to this, I make a unique contribution to the field. There is limited existing literature on the use of facilitating creative methods in the classroom to engage pupils with a specific topic. This study has addressed this gap, with a particular focus on death and dying, and showed that creative methods provide extensive qualitative insights into lived experiences and, with a focus on participation, can facilitate multiple levels of detail. This study uniquely concludes that creative methods are a way of creating change in the classroom. I recognise that this work is a step towards upholding children's rights and is only part of the longer journey ahead. The methods were therefore not only central to the creative process but also to the larger goal of authentically engaging children and

practitioners with the topic to spark ongoing dialogue and expression around death and dying.

Finally, this study found that paying close attention to the experiences of children may enrich and deepen the work carried out in schools to support bereavement. From this, I was able to offer advice on how practitioners can support children in schools on the topic of death and dying. Theatre, as a tool for social change, was found to foster a shared environment that children felt comfortable in despite being vulnerable. Creative approaches can be used in schools by practitioners to engage children with the topic of death and dying in pedagogically appropriate ways.

1.9 Chapter Summary

This chapter has illustrated the role of enquiry within my study. As a teacher-researcher, I have outlined my own experience in supporting a young child through bereavement and how this experience is mirrored across the literature. I provided an overview of the prevalence of child bereavement, discussed its impact, and explored grief theories in relation to supporting children. The foundations of this study were built from a practitioner enquiry stance. It is from here that my research questions were formed, in line with the literature. The next chapter outlines my approaches to reviewing the literature on the topic of child bereavement and illustrates how my thinking was informed before the data collection stage of the study. This enquiry stance remains pertinent throughout my thesis.

Chapter 2 Literature Review

2.0 Chapter Overview

In this chapter, I position death and dying in an educational context and focus on the literature which uses creative approaches to support children when they are grieving. This review focuses on school-aged children aged 3-18. I refer to my previously published work in this area (Duncan, 2020a, 2020b) which was undertook in the initial development stage of this study. Having reflected on my own experience and research, I decided to further my enquiring stance by questioning what children experience when they engage with death through creative approaches. Consequently, this chapter examines the literature in this area through a systematic review.

2.1 My Enquiring Stance and Previous Research

In 2020, I conducted a systematic review of the approaches used to support bereaved children (see Appendix 1). This had implications for schools and highlighted the similarities and differences of various approaches. However, this review was missing child-led research that used pedagogically appropriate methods to empower children. It highlighted a need for creatively designed instruments to enable particularly young, bereaved children to express their thoughts, feelings and ideas around death and dying. Having revisited my own experiences through a vignette and relating this to the wider literature, I have noticed that most studies focus on parental death, discuss impact of bereavement itself or a service and gather the views of parents or teachers (Brewer & Sparkes, 2011a; Costelloe et al., 2020; Dimery & Templeton, 2021). There is a lack of children's views being captured and an emphasis is placed too heavily on how adults should 'manage' children's grief. This has resulted in many superficial and limited implications. Thus, my aim for carrying out this literature review is to capture the findings of the studies which include a creative element as this is often under researched. This was in parallel with my position as an enquiring teacher focused on using methods, like those used in classrooms, that are child-friendly and age appropriate.

2.2 Systematic Literature Review

I chose to adopt a systematic review as a way of identifying all available studies related to my practitioner enquiry. A systematic review aims to aggregate, critically appraise, and synthesize all empirical evidence that meets a set range of eligibility criteria (Borenstein et al., 2021; Liberati, 2009). Unlike narrative and scoping reviews, which are focused on the general nature of research evidence (Gough et al., 2017; Pae, 2015), the systematic review answers an in-depth formulated research question to support evidence-based decision-making (Newman & Gough, 2020). Previous narrative and scoping reviews in this field have failed to demonstrate entirely reliable and accurate results due to lack of appraisal and risk of bias. Thus, this is an area I wished to address using the systematic review process to comprehensively search multiple sources for literature. Through a highly sensitive search strategy, I hoped to identify all available studies relevant to my enquiring stance which has resulted directly from my classroom experience outlined in Chapter 1. Perhaps the most thorough, systematic reviews, like umbrella reviews, must use quality assessments (Faulkner et al., 2022; Negarandeh & Beykmirza, 2020). This gave me confidence that the literatures' design and conduct were sufficiently robust for the results to be trustworthy, reliable and generalisable (Greenhalgh & Brown, 2017).

Descriptive and mapping reviews, albeit helpful for identifying patterns, would not have provided me with strong validity in my findings (Paré et al., 2015). Furthermore, a critical review would have enabled me to demonstrate the extensive literature available on this topic, but the results of this would not have informed my research design in line with my enquiring stance. All in all, as an underdeveloped field, a systematic review enabled me to find clear gaps in the literature in relation to creativity, death and children. Thus, I could place this thesis in an original domain to address the following question: What factors are important to consider when bereaved children engage with creative approaches? This shaped the design of the systematic review, particularly the inclusion criteria, quality assessment and way in which the findings from the literature were presented.

2.3 Literature Searching

The following presents my approach to searching the literature to answer the systematic literature review question: What factors are important to consider when bereaved children engage with creative approaches? A systematic literature search was conducted in the autumn of 2022. Four electronic databases were searched: British Education Index, Child Development and Adolescent Studies; ERIC; and PsycINFO. Search terms used across the databases included: bereavement, grief, death, school, creativity, art, music, drama and theatre. Combinations of these, as well as search terms related to children, were used. Specific examples are outlined in Table 2.1. In addition to this, reference lists, Google Scholar searches (first 10 pages) and SuPRIMO were used to identify new reports. Qualitative, peer-reviewed journal articles were included if they met the inclusion criteria. In comparison to my previous review, one additional criterion was added. This ensured creative approaches were an important element in the literature. The inclusion criteria of articles was (a) peer-reviewed and published after 2000; (b) published in the English language; (c) used qualitative methods of data collection; (d) involved bereaved children aged 3–18, or those working directly with them; (e) related to children grieving the death of a parent or sibling or other loved one; f) involved a creative element such as art, drama, poetry, music. All criteria had to be met for inclusion in the review. Notably, the papers identified replicated those of the original systematic review carried out in 2020; however, an additional criterion was added with a focus on creative methods and approaches. This was a result of the initial enquiry outlined at the start of the study (see Chapter 1). Creative elements included in the articles did vary. The included articles' creative element included creativity in research design, outputs, methods and analysis. By including research with creative elements in these areas, it generated studies with novel ideas and solutions to problems (Ulibarri et al., 2019).

Table 2.1 Examples of search terms used to identify literature

	child* or student*	death or bereavement or grief or loss	primary school or junior school or elementary school	creativ*	art*	music*	drama or perform* or theatre

Search 1	*	*	*	*			
Search 2	*	*	*		*		
Search 3	*	*	*			*	
Search 4	*	*	*				*
Search 5	*	*	*	*	*		
Search 6	*	*	*	*		*	
Search 7	*	*	*	*			*
Search 8	*	*	*		*	*	
Search 9	*	*	*		*		*
Search 10	*	*	*			*	*
Search 11	*	*	*		*	*	*

During the selection process, the title and abstracts of all retrieved studies were examined. Initially, 599 publications were collected from databases. Through Google Scholar and SUPrimo, 3 articles were retrieved. The 15 articles included in my systematic review published in 2020 were also considered for screening. In the early stages of the screening, 84 articles were removed as duplicates. 484 did not link to the research questions, 13 did not have a creative element, 1 was not peer-reviewed and 1 did not relate to bereavement. Thus, 34 were sought for retrieval. Although 34 articles met the inclusion criteria, 4 were not retrieved due to accessibility issues. All 30 articles were retrieved and read in full. The inclusion criteria were applied to the full text and a further 19 were excluded. 17 were not topic related, 1 was not qualitative and 1 did not involve children. The final set of 11 articles were included in this study. Figure 2.1 presents a Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Review and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) flowchart (Page et al., 2021) to illustrate the identification, screening and inclusion stages of this systematic review search. The 11 included articles are detailed in Appendix 2. When the selection process was concluded, the studies were prepared for analysis.

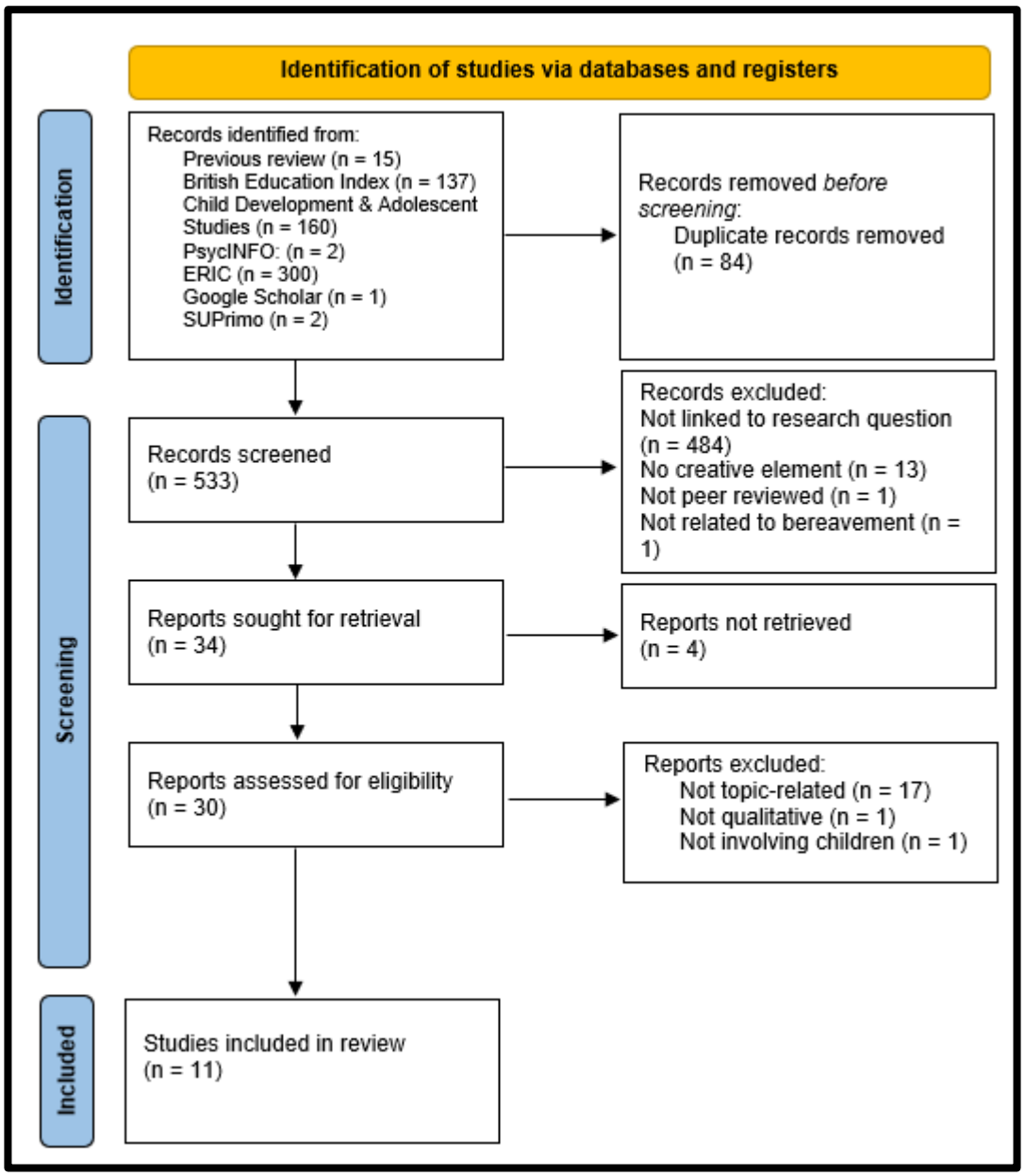

Figure 2.1 PRISMA diagram showing number of included articles

2.4 Data Extraction, Quality Assessment and Synthesis

The Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) guided the quality assessment of the studies included in this systematic review (see Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP), 2018). Studies were not excluded based on the quality assessment, as there was no evidence to suggest this would improve the quality of the review. I did not want to exclude studies with relevant results, particularly as all 11 studies included a creative element and this was imperative to the literature review research question. Once the quality was assessed, I used thematic synthesis to combine the studies and identify key themes. The use of NVivo, a computer

software, facilitated this method of synthesis. This approach is rigorous as it preserves an explicit and transparent link between conclusions and the text of the primary studies (Thomas & Harden, 2008). It comes under scrutiny by researchers such as Dixon-Woods et al. (2005) who argue that the method does not distinguish between 'data-driven' or 'theory-driven' approaches. However, to claim it lacks transparency is inaccurate, and it benefits from years of methodological development. Thus, I applied descriptive coding so I could map out the literature and test codes. I worked through each article chronologically and coded it. I organised these codes into descriptive themes then explored the patterns, similarities and differences across them. The descriptive and analytical themes were then assessed in line with the research aims.

2.5 Findings from Studies

A range of research settings were utilised across the studies. Five studies were related directly to schools (Bennett & Dyehouse, 2005; Holland, 2008; Kennedy et al., 2020; McFerran & Hunt, 2008; Willis, 2002). Four were linked to bereavement services and therapy (Arnold, 2020; Brewer & Sparkes, 2011b; Finn, 2003; Richardson et al., 2017) and two were carried out in the family environment (Andrade et al., 2018; Eftoda, 2021). Over half the studies focused on working with children and young people; a small number also collected data from other working professionals such as teachers, parents/carers, educational psychologists and therapists. Participants involved in the studies experienced deaths of a varying nature. Four studies detailed bereavement as 'varied' or, in some cases, details of the death were not provided (Holland, 2008; McFerran & Hunt, 2008; Richardson et al., 2017; Willis, 2002). Two articles worked with participants who lived through family death (Finn, 2003; Kennedy et al., 2020), one study was specific to death of a sibling (Andrade et al., 2018) and three focused on parental death (Arnold, 2020; Brewer & Sparkes, 2011b; Eftoda, 2021). One study researched the death of a pupil (Bennett & Dyehouse, 2005). Notably, the majority of studies involved a creative element in the research design and methodology. The included literature lacked creative approaches in pedagogic contexts when researching death with children.

From the studies, six main themes were identified as commonalties across the literature. These were: Freedom of expression; Layers of hidden grief; Emotional turmoil; Mental wellbeing; Building relationships and maintaining connections; and

Responses and needs of schools. Table 2.2 summarises these themes and signifies their representation in the articles. The creative elements were varied and included: personal narrative, art therapy, fables and stories, mindfulness, yoga, play, group counselling, music in schools and outdoor physical activities. Further details around the design of the studies can be found in Appendix 2.

Table 2.2 Themes from reviewing the literature

Theme	**Description of theme**	**Illustration**
Freedom of expression	When engaging with art during the grieving process, children had a positive experience. An openness was also fostered through music-related activities. Space, play and connecting with others were highlighted as factors contributing to healthy grieving yet drama activities (which facilitate this) were limited.	By equipping them with musical and therapeutic tools they had the opportunity to address the issues of belonging and grief and loss (McFerran et al., 2010).
Layers of hidden grief	Children's grief is personal, and time needs to be given to understanding and addressing grief. The language of grief is very rarely explored.	"The two staff teachers in Year 6 revealed that, in the middle of a mathematics lesson, children would suddenly, out of the blue, ask direct questions of them [related to death of a friend]" – Participant in study by Bennett and Dyehouse (2005).
Emotional turmoil	Emotions play a significant part in a child's journey through grief. Expression of emotion is key to healthy grieving.	Children can and do learn to talk about their feelings, although they may not use adult words or phrases (Willis, 2002).
Mental wellbeing	Children's mood changes throughout the grieving process. It was found to be particularly	A participant discussed at length how physical exercise in general had helped to enhance her

	unpredictable immediately following a death.	mental well-being after suffering from debilitating symptoms of depression and anxiety (Brewer & Sparkes, 2011b).
Building relationships and maintaining connections	Forms of support can exclude unintentionally. The most effective types of support were practical and promoted safety – physically and psychologically.	Each participant shared changes in their family relationships as well as through their interactions with friends (Arnold, 2020).
Responses and needs of schools	Generally, school staff do not take consistent approaches to bereavement. There is restricted awareness of strategies that can be used in schools when a child is bereaved. The need for a death curriculum is prominent.	Participants also acknowledged the need for teachers to have grief information and training (Kennedy et al., 2020).

2.5.1 Freedom of Expression

Results across a significant number of studies found that creative engagement through the arts invited healing responses that addressed the complexities of their grief. There was clear evidence to suggest value in spaces which were personal yet also encouraged social dimensions. One case study of three students (two boys and one girl) used a variety of art techniques including: drawing, painting, drama, music and collage (Andrade et al., 2018). Noteworthy, the data analysis was limited and not much information was provided in this study with regards to the impact of the creative methods. One participant's positive experience, however, was noted as "being able to demonstrate their fears, frustrations, and growth possibilities" (Andrade et al., 2018, p. 33). The participant found the creative practice was stimulating and enabled him to take risks in a safe and non-judgemental space.

Following a loss, five participants between 11 and 13 years of age took part in a case study by Finn (2003) using art to deal creatively with mourning. The children were able to demonstrate their fears, frustrations, and growth possibilities openly following their sibling's death. The nature of open communication facilitated by art is

also evident in research by Andrade et al. (2018) who illustrated the importance of the creative capacity. In discussing his painting, one participant (Rodrigo) explains: “The house needs to be painted. The tree is watered every day.” He expresses his awareness of being taken care of and his daily needs. Similarly, Isabela, another participant was terrified of losing parents after the death of her brother. She thought she may be abandoned and be without basic needs for survival. Her tree was dead in her painting because “it lacked water”. Finn (2003) also found art to be an ideal medium with therapeutic value which could address loss with children. In using art, participants expressed energy and emotion: they worked through a problem with creativity and joy.

Willis (2002) illustrated that art-making stabilises children’s relationships. Much of the art created by participants echoed the view that art has a great capacity to engage the senses, the body and the lived experiences of the individual. Children across studies voiced their enjoyment when expressing their feelings through writing or playing music. Evidence supported the use of improvisation and creativity through music-related activities. One study portrayed an openness that music fostered and how it encouraged young people to share their story who would have held back in other contexts (Willis, 2002). McFerran and Hunt (2008) found music to be particularly useful when supporting teenagers. The results of this study suggested music is non-threatening, accessible, familiar, and even attractive to young people. Children wanted opportunities to collaborate with their peers to share their work. In one study, a group of young people perform the following song at a whole school assembly:

“Even though I’m lonely
I’ve courage on my side
I miss you more each day
But I know I will survive (repeat)

Time has moved on
But you’re still on my mind
I know there’s still a part of me
That holds you dear inside
Not only the small things

There's a picture of you in my mind" (McFerran & Hunt, 2008, p. 48-49).

Results therefore indicated that music activities helped to foster healthy coping skills and support children therapeutically with their grief. Likewise, during an ethnographic study, nine young people bereaved between the ages of 3 and 12 were interviewed (Brewer & Sparkes, 2011a). These children were bereaved of one or both parents. The results highlighted the importance of giving children a sense of freedom. One participant expressed how they felt 'just kind of released'. Willis (2002) discovered music, alongside art and play, to be a medium where children created something meaningful to them in their natural world. Similarly, Bennett and Dyehouse (2005) brought to the fore the importance of space and how it can become dedicated to the deceased. Creative approaches were found to be useful for enhancing self-awareness and promoting self-expression. The literature also highlighted a need for more opportunities for children to come together as a group to share their experiences.

2.5.2 Layers of Hidden Grief

In a study by Eftoda (2021) grief was learned through observation. A parental death for one participant immediately felt he was to blame, and the child struggled to accept the loss. The author discussed how a child was put into a dilemma to shut down or act strong when they found out about a death. In one case study by Andrade et al. (2018), a child, Rodrigo, focused instantly on the need to protect himself. Two studies, Andrade et al. (2018) and Arnold (2020), identified 'symptoms' of grief. During the grief process, children may feel pain and are overwhelmed due to internal and external factors they are dealing with, including (not exhaustively): family grief, sadness, own feelings, changes, anguish and fear. This list was drawn from participants' suggestions following their experience of a sibling's death (see Andrade et al., 2018). When processing grief, most studies found that fears and worries became painful for children. Willis (2002) found that children don't always understand how grief changes in time. Reported in the findings was that children believe they should forget and move on. Participants in one study felt that it was unrealistic to expect children to 'move on with their life'. The way in which adults chose to use grief language with children in the studies was limited. Individuals in the studies often implied there was a 'correct' way to articulate grief. A Head Teacher in the study by Bennett and Dyehouse (2005) expressed: "…it is important

to let people move on" (p. 26). In contrast, a greater number of the studies reflected on living for the now and not committing to unrealistic expectations such as closure. There were significant findings related to talking about grief. When interviewing primary school children in a rural western educational context about grief, Kennedy et al. (2020) found that the process is not spoken about, and it is often silenced or sequestered in society. In one study, there was a consensus that metaphors were used when discussion around death, dying and bereavement took place (Brewer & Sparkes, 2011b).

2.5.3 Emotional Turmoil

The presence of intense emotions and feelings were present following the acceptance of a death in most studies involving children. Emotionality was found to be draining for a child during bereavement. In some studies, time alone did not attend to children's emotions. However, in the study by Bennett and Dyehouse, (2005), a quiet place in classrooms for children to be together or alone with their feelings was described as effective. Willis (2002) goes on to say that children can and do learn to talk about their feelings, although they may not use adult words and phrases. Most studies were clear about the fact that pressure should not be on children to articulate their feelings orally. Younger children in two of the studies struggled to express themselves compared to their older siblings. In particular, one child admired their older sister's ability to express herself spontaneously (Andrade et al., 2018). In a study by Willis (2002), children were found to escape feelings through play and then come back to acknowledge them. Arnold (2020) went on to discuss how feelings are generally spoken about during activities involving the creative process and artistic imagery. In the pilot study, self-acceptance was achieved when emotions were attended to, and no emotional chaos was present. Where emotions were not regulated, Finn (2003) found aggression and withdrawal to be problematic. However, the studies were found to problematise bereavement because of the emotional responses described by participants. These were generally labelled as negative. Attaching this meaning to emotions was found to be dubious and, in fact, children were said to be coping and still showed powerful emotions. Strong emotions did not always equate to a child who was struggling and finding it difficult to navigate through grief.

2.5.4 Mental Wellbeing

In most studies, distress was present following the death of a loved one. There was evidence of lower self-esteem and happiness in participants involved in Eftoda's (2021) autoethnography. This was similar to an 8-year-old participant who had mental health signs such as recurring thoughts of death, fear of being alone, voices in her head (Andrade et al., 2018). In one study, the health visitor believed they knew what was best for a grieving child. However, their approach caused stress and anxiety. Brewer and Sparkes (2011b) provided evidence of the benefits physical exercise can have on mental wellbeing. Participants expressed a reduction in depression and anxiety. Outdoor activities and physical challenges were explored and said to have benefits to grieving children's mental health; however, no direct evidence was given around how it improved wellbeing.

2.5.5 Building Relationships and Maintaining Connections

Across the studies, the forms of support varied. Mostly, adults were key in providing support to bereaved children: in one study participants were paired with a 'big buddy' who acted as their adult mentor. Other forms of study included peers and in the case study by Finn (2003) group work was used and children gained new perspectives on grief by listening to others. Findings indicated that when participants were surrounded by support and positivity there was evidence of reframing negative self-statements into positive self-talk. The information provided by Richardson et al. (2017) illustrated that psychological and physical safety are of utmost importance when providing any type of support. Children in some studies felt excluded at school and a sense of belonging needed to be developed. The facilitation of practical forms of support such as walking, and role play were welcomed by participants: these had benefits for self-care and family cohesion. Children felt uneasy when peers nervously laughed when death was spoken about in studies by Andrade (2018) and Brewer and Sparkes (2011b). There was a small evidence base to suggest that bereavement resulted in learning difficulties and low attendance. In some instances, support was not given, and complaints from the school were made to families instead.

The study carried out by Eftoda (2021) concluded that yoga and mindfulness could be used to teach self-regulation. A participant, who took part in mindfulness when bereaved, changed their mindset from fixed to positive inner dialogue. Brewer and

Sparkes (2011b) concluded that when children connect with others, this has a positive impact on their wellbeing. This, as described by participants in the study carried out by Richardson et al. (2017), provided opportunities for children to feel a sense of belonging, experience positive social norms and gain new friendships.

2.5.6 Responses and Needs of Schools

Across the studies, teachers referred to not knowing the 'right thing to say and do.' Kennedy et al. (2020) found that teachers are avoiding speaking about death. One parent explained: "it's such a complex, emotionally loaded discussion… that schools shy away from it" and her child, bereaved of his father, went on to say: "they mostly avoided me. I think they were just… they didn't know what to say…" (p. 141). Furthermore, the results of a case study by Holland (2008) highlighted a concern as staff do not acknowledge bereavement. Students in interviews following a parental death expressed that school was not effective in listening, acknowledging their loss and discussing support with their peers and offering death education (Eftoda, 2021). In many of the studies, school was identified as a potential helper for bereaved children. Participants in Holland (2008) acknowledged their role of simply "teaching children" (p. 411) has evolved and there is an increasing responsibility for welfare.

McFerran and Hunt (2008) backed a need for there to be clear support as expectations of teachers to address issues in addition to teaching are on the rise. The need for teacher training was present in the two most recent studies: Eftoda (2021) and Kennedy et al. (2020). There were mixed results around when training was best to happen and how this would fit into busy school life; however, there was no unwillingness across these three studies from teachers to participate in training. The possible need for schools to have an action plan for dealing with bereavement in schools is discussed in the literature. Eftoda (2021) described this as a 'response plan', however participants in this study were sceptical about this and the evidence to show how effective an action plan can be was weak. Only a small number of studies showed that bereavement policies are in place, but none incorporate death education into the curriculum. Child participants felt that they needed to know about death and preferably from someone who plays an important part in their life (McFerran & Hunt, 2008; Willis, 2002). There is a small evidence base to suggest that parents cannot provide adequate emotional support if they are dealing with their own grief (Andrade et al., 2018). Death education was outlined by a participant in the study by Kennedy et al. (2020) as an area for developing.

Studies indicated that schools may be the only safe place where a grieving child feels a sense of normalcy (Bennett & Dyehouse, 2005; Holland, 2008; Kennedy et al., 2020). Generally, when experiencing a death, child participants across the studies appreciated when the school provided routine, followed rituals and held ceremonies. Teachers in one study discussed how they tried to offer normality after the death of a pupil (Bennett & Dyehouse, 2005). Participants in Kennedy et al. (2020) asked for schools to take a critical stance and explore different ways of thinking or perceiving current processes. Further to this, the results in various studies echoed this idea and some schools offered peer support bereavement groups (Holland, 2008; McFerran & Hunt, 2008; Willis, 2002). These studies found that friends of bereaved felt anxious and needed to help their grieving friend but did not know how. Individual bereavement approaches in studies, such as time out cards and reduced days at school, were seen as temporary support mechanisms and participants looked for longer term, more sustainable support. Bereaved children in a study by Willis (2002) were found to be curious when talking about death. Notably, one participant did not feel comfortable talking to his teachers and classmates about his father's death. Data gathered in five studies discussed counselling services.

Participants, in a study by Bennett and Dyehouse (2005), felt that interventions often only addressed issues on a short-term basis. There was a demand for longer term needs to be addressed and two participants said school and family need to work together in this instance. One study described the school coming together as a 'village' and this sense of community was important (Eftoda, 2021). Overall, participants wanted to be listened to, offered time and space and their privacy to be respected. This suggests that schools have a significant role to play in a child's life when they are grieving. Factors include children's academic success, mental health and emotion regulation. The research also highlighted the importance of providing children with access to support in schools, including a teacher who can acknowledge the death, understand the pain the child may be experiencing and be available to listen.

2.6 Discussion of literature

As previously discussed, the aim of this review of literature was to systematically review data around creative-based bereavement support and death education for children. Although not all studies took place in school settings, there findings are relevant to this research. This was an original review and the first to look at all creative elements in published research. Despite creative approaches being a common method when working therapeutically with bereaved children (Griese et al., 2018), reviews have not systematically analysed creativity (in research methods) in child bereavement and educational research. The review did not evaluate the impact of creative interventions; it focused on findings from studies which included a creative perspective. The review found that the use of creative approaches to engage children with the topic of death is limited. Creative approaches were used to support children following a death, but this approach does not translate to opportunities for engagement with the topic in more natural, exploratory contexts. This identified a gap in the literature for this thesis to address.

This literature review suggests that, when grieving, it can be a natural reaction for children to feel unprotected and this is also present in grief theories (Parkes, 2002). This feeling of being unprotected has connotations of vulnerability and children may have fear of being abandoned by family and friends (Eftoda, 2021). Some of the studies suggested that grief is an illness (Arnold, 2020); I would urge that the term ‘symptoms’ should not be used when discussing grief with children to avoid confusion, misconceptions, and assumptions. The term is loaded with negative connotations and, contrastingly, I agree with authors such as Kumar (2021) who discuss the intensifying nature of grief processes. Unhelpful phrases in the literature have, ultimately, led to a long debate about how children should adjust themselves to live without the deceased. There is an opportunity for a misconception to emerge from the studies here: over time children will forget about the death and move on (it is almost like the symptoms will go away and they will be cured). It is crucial that those working with children are aware that grief is far more complex than this (Dyregrov, 2008).

There is, perhaps, a gap in the literature included in this study between what is known about grief theory for children (which is largely developed from adult experiences) and the data driven results. The changeability around children’s

reactions, for example, is missing when grief is explored and too much emphasis is placed on children being in one emotional state. However, wider literature beyond this systematic review confirms that children can almost immediately switch their attention and it is as if they are no longer grieving (Lytje et al., 2023). The cycles, tasks and stages of grief discussed by many theorists need to be related to the studies to fully grasp their findings and translate them to groups of children in creative contexts.

The studies in this systematic review regularly included children in rituals and facilitated creative ways for them to reflect on memories. This has been shown to help children physically feel connected with the deceased (Duncan, 2020b). Child participants in the studies were given opportunities to redefine their relationships with the person who died and the benefits illustrated suggest that those working directly with children should teach them to adjust to a new life without the deceased (Levkovich & Elyoseph, 2021). The continuing bonds theory focuses on maintaining a connection to the deceased (Millar & Lopez-Cantero, 2022). Although not explicitly referenced, this appeared in many of the studies. Across the studies, the ideas from this theory were put into practice through creative methods such as memory work, storytelling and artwork. Creativity was used as a healing process; however, this was inconsistent across the studies and this concept needs to be explored further.

To promote healthy grieving, the findings indicated that building relationships with significant individuals in the child's life was also crucial. This was underpinned by two, fundamental, aspects of continuing bonds: love and memories (Millar & Lopez-Cantero, 2022). The studies highlighted how adults could show love towards bereaved children and how they could facilitate creative opportunities for children to explore memories. The research articles concluded that creative approaches are a useful way to explore deepening connections. They helped children to understand how their relationships were changing: creative approaches strengthened connections between bereaved children, adults and their peers following a death.

Furthermore, the literature highlighted that children's expression of their grief does not necessarily have to be verbal, and a focus should be placed on how children choose to express their grief and what can be learned from this. As children learn to live with death, there becomes elements of hope: sometimes only a glimpse (Anastassiou-Hadjicharalambous, 2020). The suggestion from some of the studies

that children need closure is most likely muddled with self-acceptance here. Creative methods facilitated in the literature elicited ideas of what it is like for children to live with loss by providing an outlet for the participants. The direct and symbolic expressions of grief found in the studies are parallel to the unique developmental nature of children's understandings of and responses to death (Moody & Moody, 1991). An important conclusion that can be drawn from the literature, thus, is that children need not confront grief all at once; there is not necessarily a start point and an end point. The creative approaches should not be seen as a tool for closure as they were portrayed in some studies and, instead, should be facilitated to promote engagement which enables children to alternate between play and grief. Quality dimensions which were present in the studies and could be considered in a pedagogic space include: comfort zones, collaboration, elements of risk-taking in safe environment, non-judgemental practice and stimulating resources.

The role of the adult in ensuring grieving children are not overlooked was highlighted in the literature. In one particular study, however, the school complained to the surviving parent about the child's learning difficulties and how disruptive they were being (Andrade et al., 2018). In contrast, it has been show that working with the family should involve sensitive care (Garstang, 2019). It is likely that the school's response, in the case, would have intensified and prolonged family distress, including damaging the child's grief. Several studies revealed that clearer guidance is needed in schools to help them respond to death and to promote relationships with the families who are grieving (Dyregrov et al., 2013). This also extends to how schools encourage children's peers to be emotionally self-aware. Based on these findings, peer support strengths connections and normalises grief for children. Those around the children should be aware of choices in response to tiggers and be self-compassionate (Eftoda, 2021). Many environments in the studies were designed to promote healthy grieving and meet the needs of bereaved children in creative ways. Emotional development was facilitated through the creative methods. As a result, children's mental health was impacted and this was found to have an impact on schooling, attendance, suicidal thoughts and many other factors (Dyregrov et al., 2022). There was clear recognition across the studies of the opportunities in schools to address components of mental health linked to bereavement.

Death, in schools, was proven to a problematic topic in the studies. There was evidence to suggest it is often described as a taboo, and the difficulty for staff was in knowing how to respond (Rodríguez Herrero et al., 2022). Resultantly, practitioners in the studies were found to be silencing children and the bereaved are becoming marginalised. Research in this systematic review is on a micro level and the extent to which this is entirely generalisable is limited and instead emphasises what child expressed they would like in schools. The lack of training and a grief-related curriculum highlighted that teachers are reactive and dismissive rather than proactive. Many teachers, in the studies, were unaware of the number of grieving students in their classrooms (Lawrence, 2020) and without this knowledge they could not meet the needs of their learners. Lytje and Dyregrov (2023b) explain that this general failure is problematic and needs to be addressed before considering any means of support. As the literature in this review focused on specific circumstances where bereavement arose, it has demonstrated a need to shift the perspective to the topic of death more holistically. Therefore, childhood bereavement should be reframed as "...a universal issue that demands collective support and innovation, alongside specialist service provision, and in doing so position children more firmly within discourse related to public health approaches to death, dying and bereavement" (Paul & Vaswani, 2020, p. 2) What this means exactly for children and staff in schools, using creative methods, needs to be unpacked. Policy developments and death education resources have begun to shift attitudes towards the topic, yet still not much is known around the ways to facilitate children's engagement with death in creative ways. This provides a context for this study.

Promoting creativity was found to enable children's inner world to be stabilised so that they can feel again that life is worth living. The intuitive process elicited creative expression and symbolic memorial to the deceased from the child's perspective (Arnold, 2020). This suggests that creative methods can play a valuable role in raising the voices of children, particularly children who are underrepresented and thus unheard. Further to this, there was a presence of creativity in grief and children valued a 'hands on' and artistic response to death (Kennedy et al., 2020). Often practitioners wanted children to talk about their feelings, yet some children were unable, or not ready, to articulate this. The studies found other ways (like through art, drama and music) to facilitate expression, freedom and control. Notably, techniques using art and music were used much more consistently across the

literature. Specific studies explored these concepts individually; however, none of the included studies solely focused on the use of drama as a creative technique. This provided scope for this research to use drama with children, to explore their experiences of bereavement.

Overall, the literature review identified that creative approaches could encourage children to take ownership of the grieving process: they take control of their journey. Therefore, the creative capacity of children can be enhanced through collaboration and peer support. Creative opportunities, which facilitate these experiences, were found play a crucial role in helping children to process death and this has an important place in school, and home, life. Following a death, our natural instincts do not usually lie in tapping into creative capacities. However, creativity can help children to heal, and expression can be a form of self-care.

2.7 Gaps in the Literature

Undoubtedly, there is a plethora of research available in the field of child bereavement. The research tends to focus on services available to children following a bereavement. In my previous systematic review (Duncan, 2020a, 2020b), I concluded that more studies were needed in school settings focused on children and what matters to them. In this chapter, a new systematic review was conducted, and 11 studies met the inclusion criteria. Important themes across the studies related to grief theory, emotional response, mental health, support networks, schools and bereavement and creativity. Many studies put pressure on schools to train staff in this area. This literature review suggests that schools can do more but research needs to look wider than this and consider changes that are impactful with an evidence-based approach. Schools, and subsequently teachers, are under increasing demands and stresses. One must be mindful of saying the answer is to simply ask teachers to attend training. It is much more than this.

Currently, little research has been undertaken about the long-term effects of bereavement and longitudinal data that has tracked a cohort of children is hard to find. The studies outlined in this review provide an interesting insight into children's grief. However, I often wonder about the reasons for the lack of qualitative studies considering the experiences of children in relation to death, dying and bereavement. Maybe it is due to its sensitive issue and children being viewed as vulnerable; this also raises questions and concerns in the ethics realm. Most studies, sadly, did not

work directly with children and frequently gathered the views of caregivers, teachers, support workers and other adults. Recommendations and findings are helpful for adults to consider but they often do not filter down to make a difference to children's lives. To empower children, we must facilitate creative expression to help them tell their story.

Many studies took place in therapeutic settings and this, subsequently, created gaps in the literature. The presence of an academic researcher, unknown to the children, can seem intrusive and uninviting. Practitioners who work directly with children on a day-to-day basis are best placed to take enquiry-based research forward in this area. Research on schools and the topic of death, which is a growing field, tends to focus on how schools respond to death, such as the death of a pupil (for example, Bergman et al., 2017; Tiech Fire et al., 2022); although, a few studies relating to grief and loss in the curriculum are emerging (such as, Bowie, 2000; Doughty Horn et al., 2013; Rodríguez Herrero et al., 2022). In this literature review, I was hoping to find studies on the experience of pupils in schools when engaging with death and dying in creative ways. I also hoped to find more data on the delivery of a grief curriculum. Instead, I found a gap and a disconnect in the research. Predominantly, creative approaches were found methodologically and therapeutically in the studies: with pedagogy being an absent focus.

There is a clear need to explore children's experiences of death, dying and bereavement by moving away from conventional approaches to facilitating the use of creative methods. A particular area with limited research, despite the literature outlining the approach as useful and important, was the use of drama with bereaved children. This systematic review found studies to include the use of art and music techniques with children, however the use of drama and theatre was very limited. Thus, with very little evidence presenting on children's grief and the role of drama, this study aimed to empower children to become agents of change by not only raising the volume of the voices of children but capturing voices in a more meaningful way through theatre and performance.

In my own school and local authority, I have led the authority's bereavement, loss and grief group to create and put into practice a death education resource rooted in creative approaches. Developments were made with practitioners whilst I completed

this thesis. This enabled me to apply my knowledge and the ideas that evolved from this systematic review. Creative approaches were promoted in this resource, and this study will develop it further with reliable, robust findings. Whilst there is a limited amount of literature to support this work, it does not draw attention to the delivery of the curriculum and what approaches to take. Not much is said about creative approaches despite it being used in other areas including children who have experienced trauma, children with chronic illness, care experienced children and children's experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic (Desmond et al., 2015; Frels et al., 2009; Lomax & Smith, 2022; Mannay et al., 2019). The aim of this study was to add new knowledge to this gap.

2.8 Chapter Summary

This chapter reflects on, and reframes, previous research related to death, dying and bereavement by addressing the following question: What factors are important to consider when bereaved children engage with creative approaches? To consider all literature in the field would have been unhelpful as the goal of this systematic review was specifically to look at creative research around the theme of child bereavement. In answering this question, the study used a systematic approach to gather the most recent, peer-reviewed qualitative literature with highly reliable findings. After the initial screening of over 533 records, the use of specific inclusion criteria resulted in 11 studies being identified. Themes were: Freedom of expression; Layers of hidden grief; Emotional turmoil; Mental wellbeing; Building relationships and maintaining connections; and Responses and needs of schools. Although the findings were limited to qualitative studies published after 2000, important factors for schools to consider are raised and implications for policy and practice are suggested through the literature. Possible lines of inquiry were evident through visible gaps in the literature and the lack of research around creative methods, specifically drama, informed the research design which will be discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter 3 Research Design and Methodology

3.0 Chapter Overview

In this chapter, I outline the research design of this participatory study and draw on the strengths of creative methods to facilitate engagement with the topic of death and dying. By building on my enquiring stance and systematic review carried out in previous chapters, I begin by explaining the educational research dimension which this research is placed within and provide an overview of my ontological and epistemological framework. The research objectives and key questions are clarified through this lens, and I detail and justify my methodological stance: using creative methodologies in participatory research. I go on to explain the research design, methods, data collection and data analysis, including how I sought to ensure validity, reliability and trustworthiness. The chapter concludes with an exploration of ethical considerations and a summary.

3.1 Research Aims and Questions

Literature in education has suggested more research is required to involve children in the research process: giving them an opportunity to share their views on matters directly affecting them (Eliasson et al., 2023; Kirk, 2007; Undheim, 2022). Too often parents and/or professionals answer for bereaved children (Wickenden & Kembhavi-Tam, 2014); this research is wholly committed to creatively capturing what children have to say. Accordingly, this research aimed to create shared community experiences in a creative environment where children were encouraged to engage with the topic of death and dying. In doing so, it sought to reflect children's experiences of death and the power of creative methods for increasing their participation in research. From my enquiring stance, the following questions guided this study:

1. How can practitioners facilitate the use of creative methods to increase children's engagement with the topic of death and dying?
2. What value is there in creating a shared environment with children and their peers to express their experiences of bereavement?
3. What are the opportunities and challenges for using creative methods to involve children in the data analysis process in participatory research?

Research is needed with children to help practitioners understand more about the issues that affect them. This justified the child-centred nature of the research design. Many studies mediate children's input through adult caregivers, or are based on adults retrospectively telling their stories of the experience in childhood (Holland & Wilkinson, 2015). The questions were thus designed to be in the best interests of the children involved to provide opportunities for them to voice experiences of bereavement in open-ended ways.

The literature review has highlighted that there is a lack of opportunities in schools for children to engage with creative methods when exploring the topic of death and dying. Even though the systematic literature review carried out in Chapter 2 suggested that creative methods build positive relationships and are meaningful in gaining an understanding of participants' experiences from their perspectives, such approaches (particularly drama) have rarely been used in this field with children. There is a need to balance words with other forms of expression to support children's competencies and experiences (Hunleth, 2011; Tinkler, 2008). This research is necessary to reflect on the power of creative methods for increasing children's participation and opportunities to have a say on matters important to them (Hope & Hodge, 2006).

3.2 Research Design: Qualitative Research

Generally, qualitative research describes in-depth research about human behaviour (Lichtman, 2012). As the research questions for this study were focused on participants' engagement, a qualitative approach was deemed most suitable (Green & Thorogood, 2009). In this study, research participants were viewed as the experts due to the nature of the research questions resulting from the practitioner enquiry approach. The research design was rooted in participation and qualitative research was selected to provide deeper understandings. In educational research, qualitative research is less linear (Devers & Frankel, 2000). The decision to capture only qualitative data stemmed from my epistemological approach as I was not concerned about discovering facts. Rather, I was interested in new perspectives and new possibilities that both affirm and challenge existing work in a creative domain that is of growing interest to scholars. Further to this, qualitative research methods enabled me to exercise greater flexibility. The context would be completely lost if quantitative methods were used. The study aimed to tell the story of the participants: a

qualitative approach enabled the topic to be studied in detail (Aspers & Corte, 2019). This could have been very complex and chaotic due to depth and breadth of the data, yet that is a true reflection of real life and connects the study design and research questions.

The research did not aim to standardise, quantify, or measure; it sought to explain the social reality as it was perceived and created by research participants and thus was "…orientated to discovery rather than verification" (McLeod, 2003, p. 192) The study did acknowledge that "…research that generates ideas about what is possible is equally as valuable as research that tests or verifies what is known or believed to be 'factually true'" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 11). Etherington (2004) suggests the importance of subjective data: "What we have are the voices and experiences of our participants and ourselves, and a need to find new ways of representing them" (Etherington, 2004, p. 83). The subsequently designed methods, aimed at eliciting subjective data, facilitated a space for participants to deeply reflect on different experiences.

This research was interested in the beliefs and experiences of participants to develop an understanding around complex social phenomena, death and dying. I did not wish to regard children as objects or subjects of research, but to engage them as collaborators (Tisdall et al., 2008). This was achieved using qualitative and participatory methods to empower, rather than objectify, participants. Davis states that: "Rather than trying to achieve a 'gold standard' of complete participation, it might be more helpful to see how this fits with your research objectives, and your ethical principles" (Davis, 2009, p. 155). I, therefore, chose a qualitative research methodology as an ideal approach for understanding children's experiences and promoting their participation (Schelbe et al., 2014).

The value of qualitative research regularly comes under scrutiny usually suggesting it is of uncertain quality (Hammersley, 2007). It would seem that a set of quality criteria should be available for judging it (Smith & Mcgannon, 2018). This would, therefore, assume that such a clearly defined framework already exists for quantitative research and, should quality criteria not be used, the research is classified as poor quality. I add to this by questioning: does meeting a set of criteria prove its quality? I draw on a range of criteria as guidelines to assess the quality of

this study. Lincoln and Guba (1985), for example, have developed quality criteria for qualitative research; this study followed this to assess risk of bias and the reliability of results. It also considered different criteria to explore the issues of validity and reliability to make sound judgements about the quality of research (Hammersley, 2009; O'Reilly & Parker, 2013). Furthermore, Lafrenière and Cox (2012) have developed specific criteria for assessing the quality of creative research methods and this was especially important for this study. I used these authors' critiques as guidelines to inform my research design discussed below. The studies quality was further assessed through dialogue with my supervisors who work across the qualitative-quantitative divide and came forward with various viewpoints.

3.3 Educational Research: Paradigms, Ontology and Epistemology

It is argued that educational research presents two distinct views of interpreting reality: positivism and interpretivism (Basit, 2010). Researching paradigms offers a way at looking or researching phenomena: describing a worldview. This captures the researcher's beliefs about the world that they live in and want to live in, and the range of possible relationships experienced (Alhazmi & Kaufmann, 2022; Cohen et al., 2018; Kuhn, 1962). Robson and McCartan (2017) suggest that positivism might start with a theory for researchers to test a specific hypothesis by observing, experimenting on and interrogating subjects. Conversely, interpretivists focus on understanding the behaviour and perceptions (multiple and socially constructed realities) of participants (Creswell, 2007). Contrastingly, the aim is not to generalise but to capture different perspectives and look at the phenomenon from different angles. Thus, I adopt an idealism standpoint to emphasise that there is no single reality, but multiple realities based on one's construction or interpretation of reality (Slevitch, 2011). This study advocates that reality is viewed as an intersubjective creation (socially and psychologically) and the epistemological premise is rooted in idealism ontology meaning that no reality exists independent of our minds and claims of truth cannot be compared without interaction (Sale et al., 2002; Slevitch, 2011). My emphasis on process and meanings in qualitative research is expanded on below as I examine ontology and epistemology.

Ontology enables the researcher to examine underlying beliefs and philosophical assumptions about the nature of being, existence and reality (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). Ormston et al. (2014) identify three ontological positions: realism, materialism

and idealism. Realists view the world through an ordered system where external reality is independent of what people may think or understand it to be. Materialists attempt to understand the world through economic, social or physical means. Idealism supports that reality is dependent on the experiences of individuals. Thus, this studied was derived from the experiences of a group of participants. The research design was focused on creating a shared understanding of reality through peer and teacher-researcher relations.

Epistemology is "...the study of the nature of knowledge and justification" (Schwandt, 2001, p. 71). Positivism epistemology, therefore, assumes that only facts derived from the scientific method can generate knowledge claims. However, though constructivist learning theory is commensurate with knowledge-as-constructed, it emphasises that a constructivist epistemological stance views knowledge as reality that is constructed and reconstructed both individually from the sum of experience and in relationship (Birks & Mills, 2022; Bryant & Charmaz, 2019; Charmaz, 2006; Gergen, 2009). The focus, in this study, is not on the individual person but rather on the social interaction and expression in the creative environment. My epistemological stance means the study was focused on how belief about the world are social inventions that participants constructed and subsequently how this shared meaning was communicated. By positioning myself in this paradigm, I do not claim to provide the 'truth', yet I assert that the knowledge generated by this study from lived experiences is powerful and can have real influence on people's lives. The portrayed findings are merely the understanding that the participants and I have reached after a journey of exploring the phenomenon of death and dying.

Education, as a discipline, is not a process of knowledge acquisition viewed as a gnostic concept, but a transformational process of growth and holistic approaches to wellbeing (Budziszewska, 2021). It is "...a process of humanization as we create and reconstruct our very being" (Stoller, 2018, p. 60). In line with this, researchers within the discipline of education often sit within the philosophical dimension that education is not about preparation for life; it is life itself (Dewey, 1938). Knowing is a process of inquiry. By understanding the relationship between inquiry and the self, reflexivity becomes crucial in this research through the theory of knowledge. Dewey offers a proposition to argue that knowledge and experience are not coextensive (Dewey, 1910). Accordingly, "knowledge" is not the focal point of this research: "knowing" is

(Thayer, 1990, p. 446). Theory of inquiry suggests that knowledge represents the end of the inquiry yet knowing means inquiry in a world that is not static. In this study, through engaging with creative methods, participants made knowledge claims as they were engaging in knowing (inquiry). In educational inquiry, it is not the intention to "collect detached artifacts or pieces of the dead wood of the past [but to help children] to reach stability of beliefs rather than certainty" (Boyles, 2006, p. 65).

As such, I am a social constructivist with a transformative orientation who believes that lived experiences support humans to make sense of their worlds (Ellis, 2004). Rather than conducting this research from a neutral, impersonal, and objective place, the research was subjective and emotional, renouncing rigid definitions of what constitutes meaningful and useful research (Wilson, 2008). Conducting research in educational contexts is well researched and, as the research questions for this study focused on engagement and participation, it was aligned with a person-centred view of education discussed in Gray and Woods (2022). The research questions directed this study to be focused on a smaller number of participants where the analysis was focused on what could be learned from their engagement (Basit, 2010). Studies have shown that very quickly children learn they are part of a "kids versus grown-ups" dynamic (Greene & Hill, 2005, p. 11). Waterman et al. (2001) have suggested that the use of open-ended questions to capture children's experience and this view was reflected in the research questions. Further to this, a body of literature disagrees with the view that researchers can be entirely neutral in schools (like flies on the wall) (Greene & Hill, 2005). Mostly, research into children's experience is led by adults yet there are examples in the literature where children actively engage in research design (Brembeck et al., 2013; Caro et al., 2016; Cutter-Mackenzie & Rousell, 2019; Luchtenberg et al., 2020). The research design of this study aimed to give children autonomy through the methods and procedures as they researched the topic of death and dying.

Within the interpretative paradigm, this study recognised that each individual might experience a different reality and engage with the approaches divergently, yet a communal environment may help participants develop their understandings of self and others. This was evident in the systematic literature review and many bereavement interventions also adopt this group approach. The research questions were aligned to address the emotional nature of the topic and the design of the

study was based on conducting sensitive qualitative research. Unlike researching other sensitive topics, such as child abuse or racism, death and dying is a topic that all researchers will certainly encounter themselves (Borgstrom & Ellis, 2017): and for me, this is something I experienced as a child. I am, therefore, not removed from the subjects of inquiry and play a role in facilitating opportunities for the participants to engage creatively, as will be discussed below. Death studies have highlighted that the diversity of dying experiences is not reflected in work produced within the current field (Kellehear, 2009); therefore, my qualitative epistemological perspective captures how experiences are perceived and interpreted, thus contributing to this under-researched area. Furthermore, my ontological and epistemological stance deemed it would be unachievable for this study to be generalisable (Slevitch, 2011); my choice of qualitative methodology emphasises the transferability of the findings to particular settings.

Ultimately, my epistemology influenced my methodological decisions and choice of methods. Carter and Little (2007, p. 1320) demonstrate this by claiming that "methodologies justify methods, and methods produce knowledge, so methodologies have epistemic content." This is evident in the justification of my research questions, my enquiring stance and the way it has helped me determine my research design and analysis approach. It is important here to make a distinction between 'methodology' and 'method'. Some researchers attempt to define methods simply as a technique for collecting data (Bryman, 2016). I argue that it is much more than that and agree with authors such as Jörgensen et al. (2022) who advocate for methods to balance the needs of the researcher with the participants' rights. Methods, thus, become an ethically sound process that also influence recruitment and data collection strategies (Jörgensen et al., 2022). I openly share the belief that children are different from adults and to gain understanding of their experiences, it is important to use different methods: engaging them deeply with competence, knowledge, interest and context at an age-appropriate level (Einarsdóttir, 2007). On the other hand, methodology transcends method in that it promotes participation by encompassing both a family of methods and the thinking (Groundwater-Smith et al., 2015). For research with children, the methodology is the overarching paradigm that justifies how I perceived the status of children to influence the choice of methods (Punch, 2002). Thus, I go on to discuss my

methodology choices and then explore the children's involvement in shaping the methods.

3.4 Participatory Research with Children

The choice of methodology lay in viewing children as agents of change: in this case, participatory research. The decision to facilitate participatory research with children was informed by my enquiry approach outlined in Chapter 1. The practitioner enquiry stance highlighted the process in which I took to arrive at the key research aims and questions.

Participatory research is a methodology which is set against a backdrop of children's rights: respecting the 'voice' of children and often adapted by those interested in the lives, views and wellbeing of children (Kim, 2016; Lundy et al., 2011). The participatory research literature includes many different authors expressing the intellectual, ethical and practical agendas (Bradbury-Jones et al., 2018). The flexible and creative elements often open up this approach to much critique and criticism despite the inclusion of children being advantageous (Bailey et al., 2015). Taken together, all sections below detail how participatory research was fundamentally aligned with the research aims, questions and strategy. This research was interested in new meanings in children's lived experience. Despite the fact phenomenological approaches traditionally address questions regarding people's lived experiences (Bush et al., 2019; van Manen, 1990), I chose a participatory approach: this was more suitable as the aim was to facilitate engagement of a topic rather than to delve into the meaning of individuals' experiences which phenomenology would address (Creswell, 2007).

In line with conceptual shifts in the field of childhood studies (James & Prout, 1997), participatory research approaches help to shift perspectives of children as objects of research to children as agents who can contribute to the research process at various stages (Clavering & Mclaughlin, 2010). Children, who are conventionally researched on, can be involved in different phases of the study including research development, design, conduct, analysis and dissemination (Wilkinson & Wilkinson, 2017). This involvement from children shaped the study, meaning it was aligned with their values, principles and perspectives (Coyne & Carter, 2018). This was

particularly important in ensuring the study was credible in reflecting children's experiences.

It is argued that working with vulnerable individuals on a sensitive topic should consider informality, lack of hierarchy and trusting relationships as essential elements in research design (Powell & Smith, 2009). Yet, classifying children as vulnerable can be detrimental as this can often raise questions around children's role in research and it can underestimate the capabilities of them (Wright, 2015). However, in this case, I argue that children involved in this research were vulnerable due to topic of death and dying. Sieber and Stanley (1988, p. 49) define sensitive research as "studies in which there are potential consequences or implications, either directly for the participants in the research or for the class of individuals represented by the research." This definition, although accurate, is very wide and does not fully capture why it was appropriate to classify this research topic as sensitive.

Lee (1993) has developed this further with a specific focus on threat: "research which potentially poses a substantial threat to those who are or have been involved in it" (p. 4). Talking about death and dying may pose a threat to children because of the emotion and feelings it could provoke. However, it would not be appropriate to shelter children from this topic because it could hinder their adjustment to loss (Grigoropoulos, 2022). I argue, in line with the literature, that it is possible for children, of all ages, to be effectively engaged in research on sensitive issues (Noble-Carr, 2007). Yet, for this study, I still classified children as vulnerable to ensure that extra thought and consideration was given to ethical research practice. If they were given too much responsibility with regards to designing and carrying out the research or if poor relationships were developed, this could have caused harm. Thus, a participatory approach was implemented with rigorous ethical research practices which are discussed later in this chapter. In relation to the research design, decisions were made about *how* children were involved and *how* they participated in order to protect their safety, wellbeing, identity and sense of belonging (Hultman et al., 2020; Wilson et al., 2020).

Participatory research, as a methodology, can be employed to differing degrees as illustrated by the various models already discussed (Bergold & Thomas, 2012). It is

worth noting that there is an argument to suggest that participatory research can cause harm to mental health and be very stressful, particularly if children are given complete free choice (Wilkinson & Wilkinson, 2017). On the contrary, Gallacher and Gallagher (2008) suggest that some participatory research provides limited choice for children and little opportunities to exercise agency; generally, these studies are highly managed and initiated by researchers. When used effectively, participatory research can be an ethical form of research where collaboration is prioritised for data collection; the data is emotionally nuanced, original and the data output is argued as offering a true reflection of real life (Cornwall & Jewkes, 1995).

However, participatory research comes with many disadvantages. It is often carried out with a small sample size which means there is reduced representativeness; this emphasises the importance of participant attendance and can have time implications. The potential of using the methodology is often described in how it supports the values of empowerment (Veale, 2005). Still, this terminology is loaded, and many writers use it to describe data collection methods rather than the research process itself (see, for example, Kellett, 2011; Nastasi, 2014). Some authors view empowerment through the lens of adult researchers and therefore design methods that may promote voice yet do not give ownership and autonomy to the children. I did not view empowerment as a way of tackling 'power imbalances' like some of the literature suggests (Porter et al., 2010). Nor did I agree it was about getting children to participate fully without aid. I used this methodology to focus on building the individuals' capacity to exercise agency and make choices (Andersen, 2022). Through increased engagement, participation can empower (however partial this may be in reality).

Overall, there is a considerable body of literature arguing for greater involvement of children in decisions that affect them (see Hill & Taylor, 2004; Shier, 2001; Sinclair, 2004; Stafford et al., 2003). However, one must be mindful of how appropriate and necessary participation is to "...enable children to be heard without exploiting them, protect children without silencing and excluding them, and pursue rigorous inquiry without distressing them" (Alderson & Morrow, 2011, p. 12). The ethical and methodological choices made for this study aimed to be respectful of the sensitive topic, to address a power differential and reflect the creative nature of the research aims. My commitment to promoting children's participation aimed to build on their

self-esteem and to facilitate a more inclusive way of engaging them in the research process (Brady & Graham, 2018; Sinclair, 2004; Wilkinson & Wilkinson, 2017). Notably, the participatory element did not assume that this study was child-led. The research design carefully considered *who* was participating and *how* to ensure the creative methods promoted child-led participation (Lomax, 2012). As a methodology, participatory research connects research and action by building understanding from a collaborative, reflective and empowering position (Kleine et al., 2016): thus, guiding my awareness of children's competencies and their rights to participation.

3.4.1 Participation or Involvement?

Through the lens of participatory methodologies, children's involvement within the research process was promoted. In particular, this study was not fully participative as limitations existed. For example, the participants did not decide the topic, the range of methods, the research location, dates and timings. The reasons for these restrictions were threefold: firstly, as discussed in Chapter 1, the enquiring nature of the study began in the classroom and, following the systematic literature review, the topic was generated and creative methods were selected; secondly, there were complexities around practicalities and what was possible due to COVID-19; thirdly, this study was not funded, and no budget was available for space hire. It would have been unhelpful to strive for full participation as this was the first time many of the participants had engaged with research. Thus, guidance and reassurance were embedded throughout the process, and this was an important part of how I interacted with the children. Participatory research was selected as a methodology as it provided children with their entitlement to the right to freedom of expression. The aim was to create a safe space which laid the foundations for empowerment and captured the articulation of multiple voices (Veale, 2005). The extent to which this research was participatory lies within the collaborative, self-governed, practical, solution-focused enquiry which aspires to effect change (Dunn & Mellor, 2017). By exploring various models of participation, it will become clear where this study was situated.

In much of the literature, Hart's (1997) model of participation has been very influential in research involving children. It is particularly interesting that the *'Ladder of Participation'* was developed in the context of community projects (Hart, 1997). The ladder (see Fig 3.1) describes increasing levels of power, agency, decision-

making and control that adults can give to children. The creation of this ladder was in 1992 and as a relatively unknown field it was used as a directive tool (Funk et al., 2012). The rungs at the early stages of the ladder are considered 'non-participatory' and consist of manipulation, decoration and tokenisation (Hart, 1997). As this study was concerned with increasing engagement and active involvement, it was placed within the highest rungs and, therefore, adopted a participatory approach. The design of the ladder has been interpreted by some researchers as a measuring stick to assess the quality of the study (Bowler et al., 2021). By claiming to be at the highest rung, this does not guarantee the study is participatory as rungs 4 -8 simply highlight degrees of participation. Similarly, placement in a higher the rung does not correlate with the credibility of the research. Inclusion of children can see them being involved and not necessarily engaging. Specifically, involvement refers to a stable internal state of interest towards an activity whereas engagement considers the surrounding factors of behaviour, emotions, thoughts and environment (Steinhardt et al., 2022). To avoid confusion, I therefore decided not to use a hierarchical model with levels to be reached or to judge against.

More recently, a newer model, developed by Shier (2001), supplements Hart's Ladder of Participation and was designed to serve as an additional tool. This model was created to enhance children's participation in decision-making, in line with the UNCRC. In contrast to Hart's model, there is no equivalent levels of non-participation and instead Shier presents five levels of participation (see Fig. 3.2). Each level is broken down further to highlight differing degrees of commitment to the process of empowerment that may be present in studies. These stages of commitment are identified at each level as: openings, opportunities and obligations. I found Shier's (2001) pathways to participation more accessible and relatable because the distinguished levels directly affect the study (see Fig. 3.2). Therefore, I used Shier's pathways to achieve various levels of participation. For example, at level 1 I aimed to work in a way that enabled me to listen to the children by promoting dialogue and interaction. At level 2, I thought of ways to support the children to express their views. I came up with a range of creative methods to ensure a fair representation was present, as will be discussed below. Level 3 encouraged me to think about how I was going to take the children's views into account. Certain aspects of the study, such as planning, encouraged the participants to make key decisions. This opened the study to level 4, and inclusion

underpinned the process at all stages. Often, the research schedule, the methodological tools, research methods, analyse of data and dissemination approaches are decided by adults. Giving over that power is key in level 5 and children, in my own study, took responsibility of these so the power was shared.

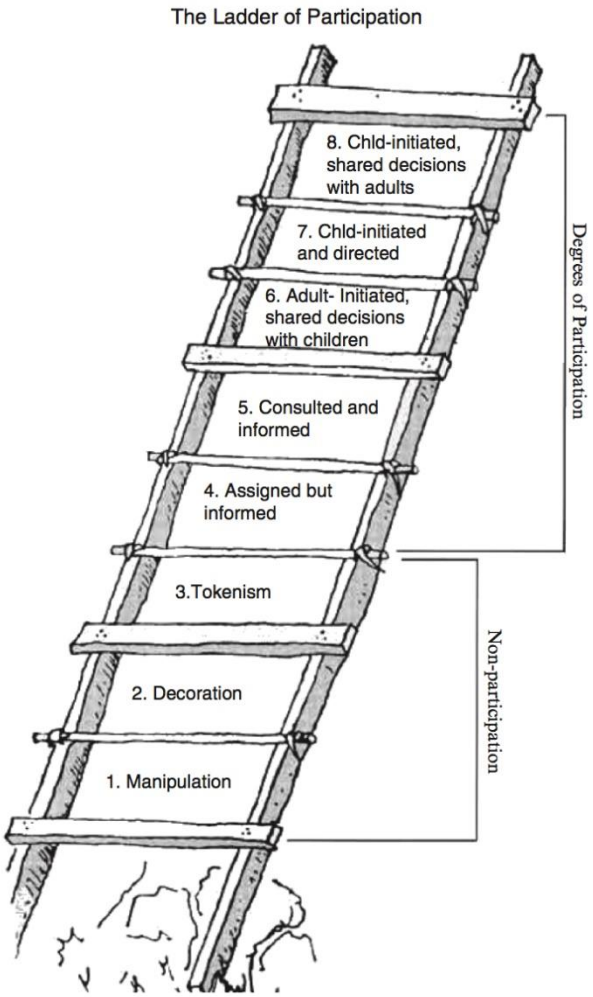

Figure 3.1 Ladder of Participation

Credit: Hart (1997)

It is worth noting that, although I found these models useful, I did not use them prescriptively and only for reference. It is not relevant to start at level 1 and complete each level individually. Throughout the process, I was able to use these as the research design and data collection developed. This enabled me to reflect on how I was promoting participation and take appropriate action to increase this.

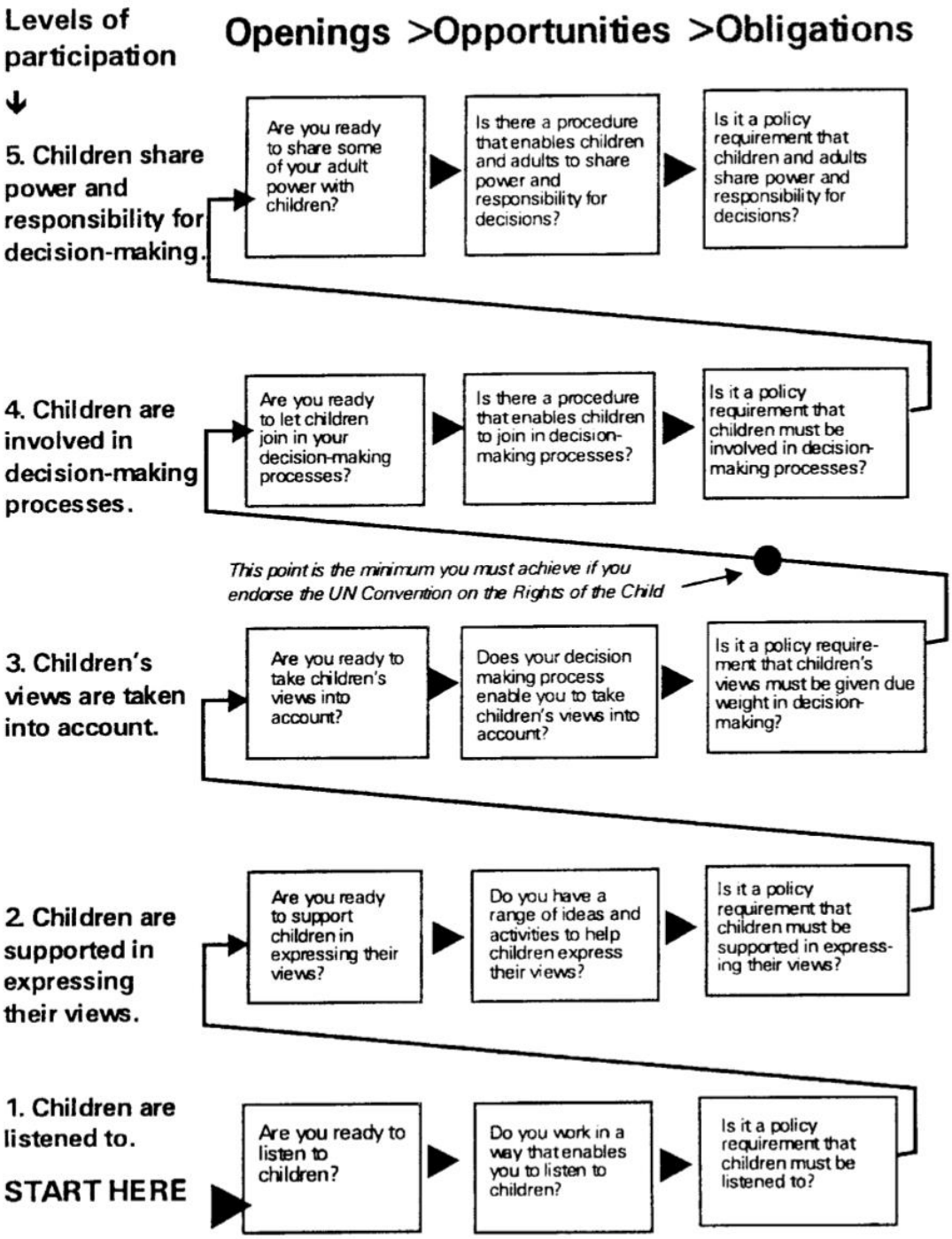

Figure 3.2 Pathways to Participation

Credit: Shier (2001)

As previously mentioned, children were given various opportunities to participate in the research and take part in decision-making at different stages of the research process. As a practitioner, I took responsibility for organising the logistics of the research and made use of the resources available to me. Being a teacher meant I had access to the school facilities, materials and personnel. Thus, I led aspects of the study including location and timings by liaising with staff to ensure it was possible to have access to classrooms and resources. As I was the only adult researcher involved in the data collection, restrictions were put in place around what creative methods could be facilitated due to issues around managing these. However, children were recognised as agents of change and contributed to different steps of the research process outlined in Figure 3.3. Children were actively included in this study by making decisions about how they wanted to be involved in the research process. During the early stages of the study, I discussed with them their rights to be listened to (Article 12) and their right to find out and access information (Article 13) (see UNICEF, 1989). At the introductory session, which is discussed later in more detail, we identified how they could get involved and I highlighted that participation was entirely voluntary (Hill, 2006; Morrow & Richards, 1996). Children had the option of selecting what creative methods to participate in and, following my literature review, I suggested art, drama and music due to available resources and spaces (Balen et al., 2006; Clark, 2010; Cook & Hess, 2007).

The participants agreed that opportunities for engagement in all three of these areas should be made available at the creative workshop on the research day. As will be discussed below in the data analysis section, some participants wished to engage with the research findings and dissemination of the results (Tisdall et al., 2008). However, not all showed an interest in this. The children wanted to include a sharing of their work to one another at the end of a creative workshop. Moving forwards, they agreed that those who were interested in analysing the data should be involved in this. Others chose to end their participation at this stage. Theatre was selected as a way of involving children in analysing the findings. Thus, children (if they chose to) took part in creative rehearsals to analyse the data through a devising theatre process. In the end, a script was created as a basis of the findings, and this was performed to an audience chosen by the children. This approach is discussed further in the data analysis section of this chapter.

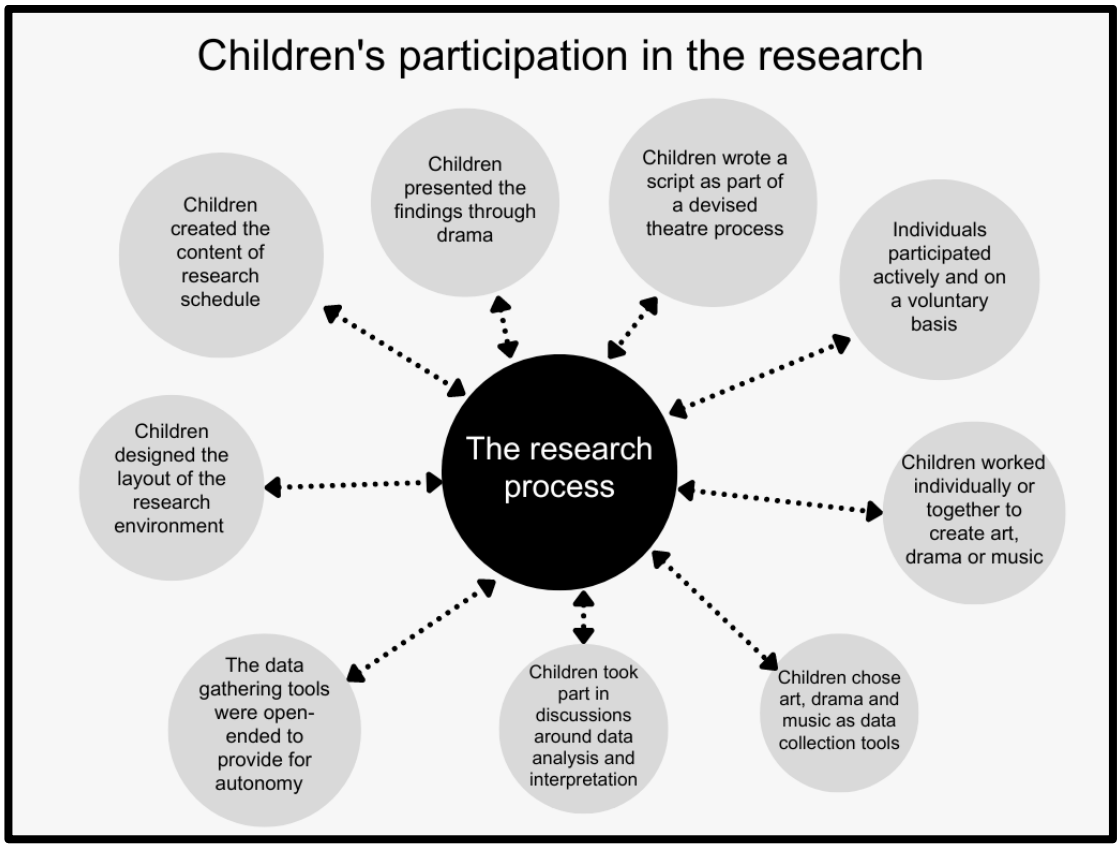

Figure 3.3 Children's participation in the research

Crucially, increased participation can make a powerful contribution to the children's rights culture (Lundy, 2007). This study was designed to inform understanding, develop practice and increase opportunities for participation. Participation was not, in this research, reliant on the skills or commitments of the children. Regardless of age, gender, ethnicity and many other factors, the participatory elements were flexible rather than relying on the children's ability to fit into adult decision-making processes (Toros, 2021). The UNCRC is clear that all children should be offered opportunities and be enabled to participate (Bouma et al., 2018). This has greatly influenced my research framework which brings to attention the dynamic nature of participation as something that is affected by multiple influences, including pedagogy. This will become evident as I now discuss the study context, participants (including recruitment), research methods and data analysis.

3.5 Study Context

The study was carried out in a primary school in Scotland. As previously discussed in Chapter 1, my enquiring stance began in the classroom. However, due to the

passage of time, I was not able to complete this study with the class outlined in the vignettes (see Chapter 1). Details of this are outlined below.

The local authority, in which the research was carried out, is one of 32 councils in Scotland and is part of the Greater Glasgow semi-rural area. The council is one of the most ethnically and culturally diverse areas in Scotland with significant Muslim and Jewish communities. Originally, I set out to do a series of sessions with children aged 9-12 from 3 different primary schools. Children who experienced a bereavement, such as the death of a relative or friend, were able to take part. However, due to COVID-19 and subsequent school closures, I was unable to take the study forward in this way. Alternatively, when appropriate, I carried out the research in one primary school.

The school where the research took place was one of the largest primary schools in Scotland with a school roll, at the time, of 741 pupils. The public school was co-educational, non-denominational and in an affluent suburb. When completing the study, I was a teacher in this school and had been for 5 years. Prior to my study, the school had not completed any work on this topic. In fact, I was unaware of how prevalent bereavement was in the school.

The local authority had a Bereavement, Loss and Grief Group which I was asked to join during my studies; however, I was not aware of their work prior to this and later found inconsistencies in how the group's work was disseminated to practitioners. In looking more widely, I have found this to be the case in other school and local authorities in Scotland. Many schools are undertaking a great deal of work in this area; however, it is not widely spread and only pockets of sector-leading practice exist. In response to this, the local authority I work in has created a universal framework for supporting mental wellbeing of children and young people. This initiative is now used consistently across the authority, and I am pleased to see death and dying feature in this. My role has developed and since undertaking this research, I have moved school in the authority and am now a promoted member of staff. In addition to this, I am the authority's *'Seasons for Growth'* co-ordinator, '*Give Us A Break'* trainer and member of the Bereavement, Loss and Grief group. By conducting the research in this context, I felt I could make a difference to a school in the early stages of developing this area. I was also grateful to be in a local authority

who fully supported this topic in school and thus promoted my work by giving me opportunities to share my findings and create resources for practitioners.

3.6 Participants

The study involved one primary school class. Due to the circumstances surrounding COVID-19, modifications to the research process were made and this impacted how participants were involved. There was a slight shift of focus in that all children were able to take part, including those who have not yet experienced bereavement. Table 3.1 summarises the changes made to the research study affecting the participants.

Table 3.1 Modifications made to the study during COVID-19

Change	Details
Location	The study was going to involve small groups of children from 3 local primary schools. However, children from only one school participated.
Age of Participants	The age range of the participants was originally going to be 8-12 years old. However, as children could not mix across different schools, stages or classes, the age range was limited to one primary school year (9-10 years old).
Number of Participants	Instead of working with small groups of 8-10 children, one complete class took part, and this meant the number of children involved was 29.
Location	A key part of exploring understanding and experience was the creative space (using creative methods). Most of the creative workshop took place outside in line with government guidelines and to minimise risk of spreading COVID-19. Where appropriate, certain aspects of the workshop took place inside.

Recruitment	An opt-out system was put in place for the class participating. This changed from asking participants to come forward if they wanted to participate. Children and/or their parent/carer could inform the school if they wished to withdraw.
Timings	The series of 6-8 workshops initially planned were condensed to one full day. This was to minimise the amount of time I met with the class and to avoid Track and Trace complications.

Following permission from the council to go ahead with the study, one Primary 6 class was selected to take part by the school's Senior Management Team. This class was selected randomly from four Primary 6 classes. Although the decision of which class were involved was out with my control, I specifically asked for Primary 6 children due to the prevalence of bereavement by this age highlighted in the literature (see Paul & Vaswani, 2020). I had not taught this class at the school and was not their class teacher at the time. Most of the children were aware of my role in the school, however I did not want pre-established relationships or familiarity to interfere with the research process. Table 3.2 provides details about each individual participant involved in the study. Before starting the research, I had access to the following information: child's name, age and gender. I was also informed of any additional support needs; however, I chose not to disclose this information based on confidentiality and to respect children's dignity.

During the recruitment process, an introductory session was delivered to the children in the class. At this point, I explained the research study to the children and discussed the Participant Information Sheet (PIS) (see Appendix 3). Children were also given a consent form to complete (see Appendix 3). Most children were happy to complete the consent form at the introductory session, but the option was there for children to take it away and think about it. After the children asked questions, their participation in the research process was explored in detail. They were able to make key decisions about how the study was carried out, when they were involved and how they participated. This was illustrated earlier when discussing the methodology. Further to this, the children were asked to design a space for the

creative workshop. This was entirely optional, and the approach is discussed below in the methods section.

Following this introductory session with the children, a Participation Information Sheet was emailed out to all parents/carers (see Appendix 4) inviting them to attend a meeting to find out more about the research. This was attended by a small number of adults (n=4) and held online via Google Meet due to government guidance restricting their access to the school. At the session, an opt-out procedure was also discussed, whereby parents/carers were able to email the school to withdraw their children.

All participants agreed to be part of the study and no parents/carers withdrew their children. Thus, 29 participants took part. This included 15 males and 14 females. The age range was from 9 years and 10 months to 10 years and 11 months. The study did not collect information around additional support needs, and this is further discussed in the limitations section. Of those who took part, 83% were known to be bereaved. However, this may be higher as this information was disclosed voluntarily by the children during the creative workshop. This highlights the significantly high number of bereaved children present in schools and this was considered when the data was analysed. During the creative workshop, participants chose which method to engage with. 14 participants chose to engage with art (48%), 11 with drama (38%) and 4 with music (14%). At the end of the creative workshop, children's consent forms were returned to them, and they were asked to notify interest by giving consent in writing on the form to be involved in the data analysis process. 8 participants showed interest. Their involvement in the research process is discussed later in the thesis.

Table 3.2 Information about participants

Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Bereavement	Chosen Method	Involved in data analysis?
Adam	10	M	No	Drama	N
Aliha	10	F	Grandparent	Art	N
Anna	10	F	Uncle	Art	Y
Ben	10	M	Gran	Music	Y

Cara	10	F	Gran	Drama	N
Charlotte	10	F	Gran	Art	N
Dylan	9	M	Dad	Art	N
Edward	10	M	Sister	Drama	Y
Emma	10	F	Gran	Drama	N
Evan	10	M	Gran	Drama	N
Finlay	10	M	No	Music	N
Fraser	10	M	Grandparent	Music	N
Freddie	10	M	No	Drama	N
Hafsa	10	F	No	Drama	N
Heather	10	F	Brother	Art	N
Isla	10	F	Great Grandparent	Art	Y
James	10	M	Mum	Music	N
Johnny	10	M	Grandpa	Art	N
Katie	9	F	Gran	Art	N
Leah	10	F	Uncle	Drama	Y
Lily	10	F	Gran	Art	N
Max	10	M	Papa	Drama	Y
Michael	10	M	Pet	Art	N
Olivia	10	F	Gran	Art	N
Orla	10	F	No	Drama	Y
Ruby	9	F	Gran	Art	N
Sam	10	M	Uncle	Art	N
Sebastian	10	M	Dad	Art	N
Sophie	9	F	Gran	Drama	Y

3.7 Research Methods

When qualitative approaches are used to understand children's worlds, child-friendly data collection techniques such as art, photography and digital technologies are becoming more common to allow adult researchers to access their worlds as opposed to conventional methods such as questionnaires, one to one interviews and focus groups (Flanagan et al., 2015; Kirk, 2007). Tools, such as interviews, focus groups and observations, were not appropriate in facilitating opportunities for

children to be active participants in line with the study's research questions and aims. To offer them the maximum opportunity to put their views forward, this study used creative methods. When using traditional methods, such as focus groups, there is danger of only representing the voices of the loudest, more confident participants who are talkative. I wanted to use creative methods to give all children the opportunity to be heard. The use of creative methods to collect data was not about eccentric and uncommon ideas (Kara, 2015). Instead, methods were identified as they seemed likely to lead to useful answers and address gaps in the literature evident through the systematic review in Chapter 2.

Creative methods have been utilised as a means to research and make sense of experiences and to communicate research findings to various audiences (Hawkins, 2020; Kara, 2015). The literature has shown that using traditional methods with children has, to some extent, been intrusive and alienating due to being unfamiliar and their style (Koro & Tanggaard, 2022). On the other hand, creative methods can reflect diverse explorations rooted in classroom activities and thus develop dynamic pedagogical approaches to facilitating pupils' creative process (Koro & Tanggaard, 2022; Vasquez et al., 2021). For this reason, the focus is not on the outcome being artwork, a piece of music or a drama performance, but rather a shift in viewpoint and expression of the participants through the methods: they come to understand their experience in a different way which might transform how they subsequently think and act.

Uncertainly, the use of creative methods places a question mark over the study's integrity, reliability, credibility and trustworthiness (Ash et al., 2018). This is due to authors claiming the methods are too open-ended and opposing in nature (Loveless 2019). Nonetheless, below I clearly articulate my purpose, process and potential benefits in using creative methods to counteract these arguments. I assert that the new questions and ways of thinking that creative methods encourage far outweighs any drawbacks.

It is argued that creative methods are appropriate to use with children to explore sensitive topics which promote high levels of emotion (Kara, 2015; Prendergast, 2009). For example, imagine being a 10-year-old child and being removed from a classroom to talk to a researcher in an interview about the death of a loved one. Rather, how would it feel for this child to paint a picture of their experience with their

classmates in their own classroom. Many children are confident in articulating their feelings, yet others prefer other means of expression. Thus, I do not argue that creative expression is superior to dialogue and, alternatively, draw attention to environment in which this engagement is facilitated. As Storr, psychoanalyst, (1997, p. 143) says:

> The creative process can be a way of protecting the individual against being overwhelmed by depression; a means of gaining a sense of mastery in those who have lost it, and, to a varying extent, a way of repairing the self-damaged by bereavement.

Creative methods can thus give children the freedom, safety and spontaneity to express themselves in other ways than verbalisation (van der Vaart et al., 2018). As such, they were well suited to this research because of the research questions, the sensitive topic, the participants and as a valid method in their own right.

Creative research methods can include a variety of creative media such as: writing, drawing, painting, collage, model-making, photography, music, drama and much more (Kara, 2015). Often used when people's thoughts, feelings and ideas are difficult to articulate in words, creative methods can be resources for self-expression and making sense (Blodgett et al., 2013; Kara, 2015). This is particularly successful when used with marginalised communities (Funk et al., 2012). Creative methods are underpinned by multi-layered methodologies and transformative research frameworks; thus, in line with the methodology outlined above. The methods are based on empowerment and participation (Blaisdell et al., 2018). However, using creative methods comes with many challenges; they are complex, difficult to interpret and the extent to which they are robust is regularly debated (Funk et al., 2012). Despite this, they can promote the values of equality, inclusion and social justice (Atkins & Duckworth, 2019). As this study sought to promote children's rights, it aimed to do so in a way that does not reduce or refine their voice to oral communication. The decision to use creative methods thus endeavoured to empower children to lead the data generation process and value their participation.

Through a participatory paradigm, creative techniques can be used to promote active engagement and they offer scope within the research for exploring, reflecting, sharing, revisiting and represent experiences (Cornwall & Jewkes, 1995; Wilkinson & Wilkinson, 2017). Creative methods employ different techniques including

approaches which use imagination, design, music or performing arts to research children's experiences and gain an insight into their world (Leavy, 2015). Such approaches have developed as:

> Researchers began to view their work as value laden, symbiotically linked with society and inevitably affected by the researchers themselves… researchers began to reach out beyond the bounds of conventional research to the arts, other research methods and technology, to find more useful ways to explore the world around us (Kara, 2015, p. 34).

Moving away from traditional research methods, creative methods can readdress the power imbalance between the researcher and the participants (children and adults). They can offer children the ability to be involved in the research at all stages, develop their own capabilities and maximise inclusion and self-expression through age-appropriate nonverbal means (Kara et al., 2021). This is further supported by Dunn and Mellor (2017, p. 294) who exclaim that "...some knowings cannot be conveyed through language." By using creative methods within participatory research, I therefore sought to enrich traditional (qualitative) approaches, such as interviews and focus groups, by using creativity to achieve a more comprehensive and realistic understanding of the phenomenon under study (Coemans & Hannes, 2017). Despite assertions that creative research may produce data which is not robust enough, lacking strength in objectivity, reliability and validity (van der Vaart et al., 2018), it is increasingly recognised that creative practice can be a form of research in itself due to outcomes produced and how these contribute to a research question (Sullivan, 2010). It could be argued that ethnographers are at the forefront of multi-layered methodologies using creative methods (Vannini, 2013); however, Gilles and Robinson (2012) do highlight the complexities and difficulties involved in these approaches (specifically around trust, confidentiality, sensitivity and anonymity). On the contrary, they also show what it has to offer with marginalised pupils in relation to individuality, spontaneity, collaboration and power-relations.

In the context of this particular research, it was evident that a creative approach mirrored best therapeutic practices and tools used to support those who are bereaved (Edgar-Bailey & Kress, 2010; Neimeyer & Thompson, 2014). The

literature review identified opportunities to use creative approaches and, as such, the research questions promote their use. Further to this, I did not feel it would have been age-appropriate to use conventional methods with children on a sensitive topic like death and dying. Crucially, a safe space was fostered for participants to express themselves (this is especially needed with topics related to trauma, depression and those that are difficult to verbalise (Askins & Pain, 2011; Coemans & Hannes, 2017; Dunn & Mellor, 2017; Mannay, 2015)). Using creative methodologies in this research study set out inquiry to stimulate the imagination and to connect oneself with the topic of death and dying.

The range of creative methods used in this study are discussed in detail below, including a justification of why they were used and an explanation of how they were used. I decided to employ the arts within the qualitative design as it is argued that children are visually literate and, in this way, research can be made more accessible to them (Morris & Paris, 2021). Creative methods treat participants as full, equal collaborators (Finley, 2008). The techniques were used to value a non-hierarchical relationship as there was no academic expert required to lead these methods; the children and I experienced these participatory methods as a group. I had previous experience as a drama practitioner for a theatre company and teaching the arts in a school. Therefore, using these approaches was not new to me: however, applying them in a research context with children was.

As with any research method, there were some pitfalls to consider. The use of creative methods can be very time-consuming, particularly during the data analysis stage. Further to this, using methods of this nature can refuse participation as some people may fear they are not a *'creative person'*. Often researchers distance themselves from creative methods because of the assumption that they are not artistically skilled (Cancienne & Snowber, 2003). However, the methods selected encouraged individuals with different interests and levels of artistic skills to take part. A variety of choices enabled participants to exercise their agency and creativity to the fullest. Below, I discuss how art, drama and music were facilitated as methods.

3.7.1 Art

Art can be used to help children connect with their emotions without the need for words (Edwards, 2014; McNiff, 1998). The focus was not on asking children to create a polished piece of art but rather on the engagement with the topic that took

place during the process. As a creative method, the arts can help children focus on emotional wellbeing and the use of art materials in a safe, collaborative environment can reduce anxiety (McGregor & Macaulay, 2009).

Children explored painting, drawing, collage and model-making to engage with the concepts of death and grief. Participants had open access to art materials (see Fig. 3.4) and autonomy over how they used these to share their story. During the process, children were asked to reflect on the meaning of their artwork and how this reflected what grieving meant to them (Jennings, 2014). Participants were asked to give their artwork a title and record (written or orally) a short description. The artists' description included details of what they had created, what it meant to them and how others may view it. When children presented their artwork to the group, I also recorded important observations.

Figure 3.4 Art materials available for the children to access

3.7.2 Music

Using music to improve physical and mental health is longstanding. Crozier (1997) states that: "There is clear evidence that music serves as a means of mood management in everyday life" (p. 71). Music often serves a purpose (such as, lulling a baby to sleep, for worship, to remember, to help us grieve and heal). As a therapeutic intervention, it has an important part to play in representing bereaved children's experiences (McFerran et al., 2010). Recent studies have shown that vulnerable young people engage with music more than their peers (McFerran & Hunt, 2008). This is likely due to the healing nature music can stimulate: assisting

children to work through their grief in a nurturing way (Hilliard, 2001). Music enables young people to connect with their emotions and explore ways of coping; this natural relationship has been used internationally (Dalton & Krout, 2005; Hilliard, 2007). Music, as a method in this study, was facilitated to empower children to tell their story.

Listening to music and song writing offered unique opportunities for children to express powerful emotions and share their journey with their peers. During the workshop, children had access to an audio streaming service and an online song maker. At the start of the creative workshop, participants were asked to reflect on death and dying and think carefully about what it meant to them. If they chose to engage with the topic through music, they were encouraged to express their voice in musical form. This was a very child-led approach and took the form of sharing stories, exploring feelings and expressing thoughts through arranging sounds and making up lyrics (if appropriate).

3.7.3 Drama

Creative methods can use various aspects of theatre and drama to facilitate imagination, insight, growth and storytelling (Beadle-Brown et al., 2018). This includes techniques such as (not extensively):

- Play
- Movement
- Voice
- Dramatisation and Performance

Through drama, children were given the opportunity to act out scenarios. The storytelling element in the drama reflected reality but was also fiction. Whether factual, imaginative or based or real events, storytelling plays a big part of therapeutic work (Freeman et al., 1997; Krause & Rucker, 2019). Children who used drama were able to take the topic to create a very literal piece of theatre or go down a more abstract avenue. In groups, the children improvised and wrote a selection of scenes to form a very basic script. They had the opportunity to rehearse this and then perform it to the whole group at the end of the day. Children used the outdoors to rehearse their performances and had access to props such as masks, chairs, suitcases, hats, flowers and gloves. When sharing their performances with their peers, children performed on an empty space (see Fig. 3.5). This method provided children with a physical space to act out a story with their peers. As a respected

method for working with children, drama encouraged the recreating of rituals and enactment of stories that are memories (Langley, 2006).

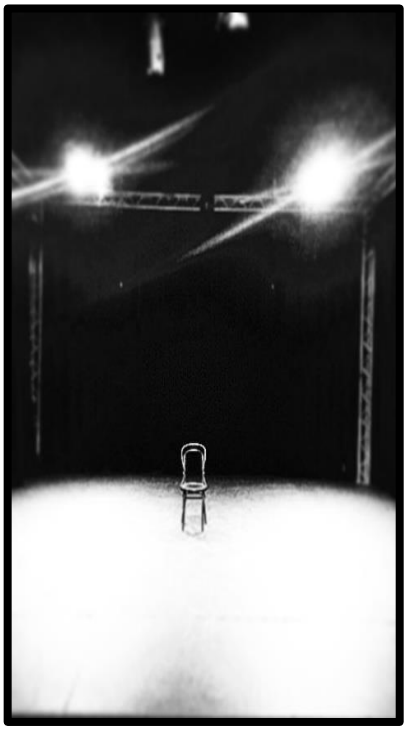

Figure 3.5 The stage area used by the children to perform

3.8 Data Collection

A creative workshop was facilitated for children to engage with the topic of death and dying through the methods of art, drama and music. The workshop element aimed to promote a sense of belonging through social interaction. Previous research on creative workshops included different artistic mediums such as photography, art, music, poetry and dance (Slattery et al., 2020). In this study, as previously discussed, the methods of art, drama and music were selected by the children during the introductory session with the class where they were also asked to design the research environment. At this session, the children were given a map of the outdoor area where the research took place and introduced to various creative methods. Most of the creative workshop took place outdoors to minimise the risk of spreading COVID-19. They were asked to draw their ideal environment setup (including listing materials) that would help them best to explore the topic of death creatively (see Fig. 3.6 for an example). A simple ‘think-pair-share’ strategy was used to collate ideas so children could engage with the task individually, build on their ideas with a partner then share with the whole class. At the end of the session,

the designs were displayed, and children were given a coloured sticker to vote for their preferred setup. The design with the most votes was implemented on the day. It included all three creative methods (art, music and drama) and additional areas for self-care. The areas, as named in the children's design, included:

- Red Zone: *A range of art materials were available for children to select.*
- Orange Zone: *Children experimented with musical instruments and music technology software.*
- Blue Zone: *Various drama props were set out and a large space was marked out for rehearsals.*
- Green Zone: *Children were keen to have an area where they could go for time out and to spend some time talking through their feelings. At this zone, the children asked for resources such as juice, chocolate, fidget toys and tissues.*
- Purple Zone: *To capture as much as possible, children wrote any powerful thoughts they had on a post-it note and added it to a display board. I added this zone in on the day as a great deal of children were eager to share their anecdotes and ideas with me and this demanded a lot of my time that I was unable to give generously.*

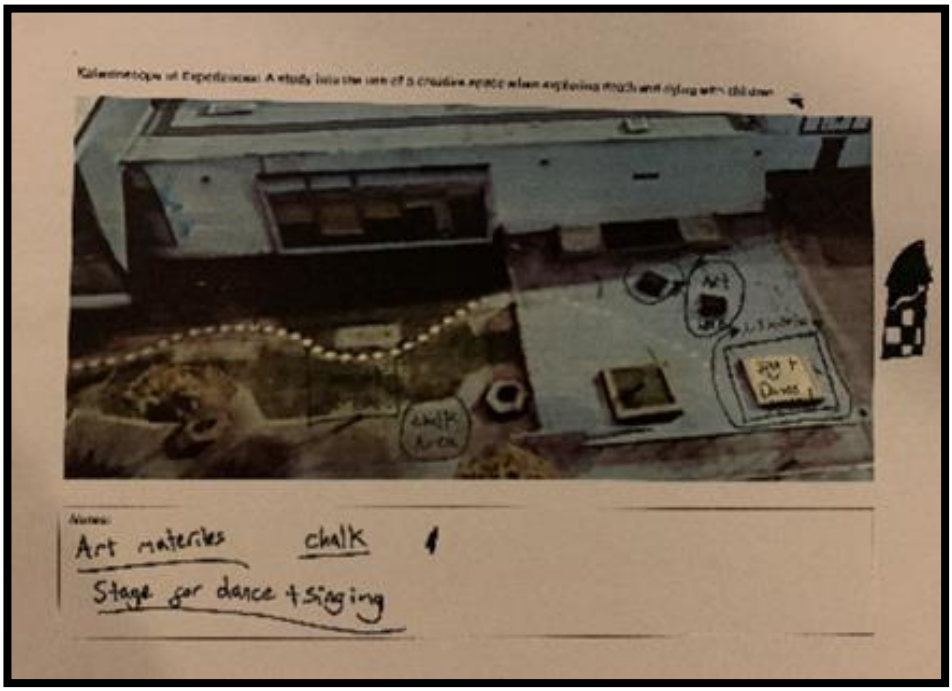

Figure 3.6 Design of the research space by children

The creative workshop took place over one full day: beginning at 9am and finishing at 3pm. The workshop commenced and finished with the whole class being

together. I started the day by introducing the key questions and asking the children to create the study schedule (Table 3.3). A rough outline was created prior to the research day for the children to add to. The children's decisions are highlighted in grey. Throughout the day, I managed the logistics, timings and organisation of the groups. Using creative methods with the children was no easy task. I spent a lot of time in the morning explaining expectations and answering questions. Following the warm-up activity, the children were given time and space to explore their own experiences through their chosen method. They were given specific instructions to help them reflect and to think about their feelings in the past, present and looking into the future. For example, the music group were encouraged to write down key words, phrases and sentences. One participant felt alone, and this became the theme of a song. I encouraged the participant to say the phrase 'I am alone' in a rhythm and then to add a melody. At this stage, I was able to ask the participant to develop the idea into verses and a chorus. This freed up my time to rotate around the art and drama groups. Splitting my time up evenly was messy. Children had open access to all resources, and this proved quite successful in facilitating a creative flow but less successful in providing structure. Thereafter, when evaluating my approach during the break, I decided to change my way of working and remained at the resource zone to help children as and when they needed it. This was particularly important for the children who seemed to not necessarily be enjoying the process and described 'being stuck'. I was able to guide these children through constructing a narrative, as I was very much involved with the children, and assist them in selecting materials to express this. This messiness was not a lack of motivation, or an inability to be creative (Eldén, 2013). This *was* children's voice and reveals the complexities in using creative methods.

Table 3.3 Research schedule created with participants

Open – 9am	Children took part in various drama games (see https://dramaresource.com/drama-games/ for ideas) The group explored the aims of the day and agreed the schedule. Children were introduced to the environment.

9.30am – 10.40am	Task 1 - Children created sketch-notes on the topic of death and dying. On a piece of paper, using a black pen, they were asked to include any thoughts, feelings and ideas. This included their own experiences, if relevant. This was a type of brainstorming activity for the children to develop initial ideas. Task 2 - Children then selected a creative zone to work at for the full duration of the workshop. The choice was art, music or drama. They began to plan and prepare at this area by getting the resources they needed to develop an idea. Children chose whether to work independently or in small groups. The task was very open-ended; however, to guide the children I displayed the question: 'Death. What does it mean to you?' Children were asked to plan a response through art, drama or music. Participants could use their sketch-note from task 1 to connect their ideas to larger concepts. The children returned to their classroom for a short break.
Break	
10.55am – 12.35pm	Task 2 (Continued) - To keep the creativity flowing, the children asked to continue working on their idea immediately after the break using their chosen method. Children created art, drama or music as a way of expressing their thinking. The children returned to their classroom for lunch.
Lunch	
1.35pm – 3pm	Children were given time after lunch to finish the creation process. Final products were displayed in the school's theatre space.

	At 2.30pm, the children came together to present or perform. Drama groups had the chance to perform on a stage. Music participants shared their compositions and those who engaged with art showed their artwork. Members of the class acted as the audience as their peers were presenting or performing. The sharing element was optional, although all participants chose to take part.
3.15pm - Close	At the end of the day, I led discussions to support the children in communicating their ideas and involvement in the process. As post-it notes were added to a display board throughout the day by the participants, I addressed these before bringing the day to a close. Finally, with the children, I reflected on next steps and explained those who chose to be involved in the next part of the study would help to identify common themes and analyse the data through theatre. The participants were asked to collect their consent forms and notify interest in being involved in the analysis process by writing a short sentence on it. If the children did not wish to participate in using theatre to analyse the data, no further action was required. Consent forms were collected in, and children were thanked for their participation thus far.

The workshop was designed to encourage voice and interaction: resulting in strengthened social and support networks (Slattery et al., 2020). Leavy (2015, p. 285) suggests that our best work happens when "…we accept and indeed embrace…messiness." The workshop reflected this creative process. Overall, I found the day very rewarding yet demanding. One of the biggest challenges was

capturing the full experience. As the only researcher present, I found my time was limited with each participant. Nevertheless, I used every minute to my advantage and visited each zone accordingly: engaging with the children by taking part, facilitating interaction and taking notes. When the group came together as a whole, I asked the children to communicate in a circle. This ensured the group could be managed calmly and understood more effectively.

Being in the school environment almost restricted the children as they thought there was a desired outcome that I wanted them to achieve by the end of the “lesson”. This is something I had anticipated and, thus, I promoted a power balance through the activities which encouraged shared ownership of elements of the study. Although I had the teacher “status”, the children were encouraged to lead the workshop. There was no textbook, no written questions to be answered or no still life object placed in front of the children that had to be drawn. At the end of the day, we had a range of data including paintings, drawings, clay models, play scenes, character monologues, props, music tracks and song lyrics. I began to realise how empowering this data was visually and how proud the children seemed of their work.

3.9 Data Analysis

The landscape of qualitative approaches to analysis is vast and diverse: overwhelming to the new researcher. There is no simple formula to follow as I moved from the data to understanding, explaining and interpreting new findings. From grounded theory to narrative analysis to discourse analysis, there are a plethora of ways to engage with qualitative data. Approaches are continuously evolving. This section outlines how I facilitated the use of Thematic Analysis (TA), incorporating theatre, to analyse data with a group of children. I reflect on six phases, including how we used the data in rehearsals to write a script and create a performance. In working with the data in this way, it added an extra layer of analysis to the TA and increased children’s engagement in research analysis. Notably, the method has been used in other fields and I used this to inform my own approach (see Gembus, 2018). After qualitative data was collected through the creative workshop in December 2021, a devising group was created to analysis the data. TA was used initially, involving the children to some extent, to guide this process and the group met in February 2022 to finalise the themes and structure of the performance. From May to June 2022, scenes were improvised, and the play was formed. The script was written up by the children, with my input, and at the end of

June 2022 the performance took place. The audience comprised of those invited by the participants, including friends, family members and teachers. Below, I detail how TA was facilitated with the children at the start of the analysis process to create concepts for the performance. Then, I explain how the process involved devised theatre. Below, in Table 3.4, is all list of all data sources analysed with the children.

Table 3.4 List of data sources for analysis

Creative Method	**Data Source**
Art	Drawings Paintings Clay models Written descriptions
Music	Lyrics Audio clips of arrangements
Drama	Scripts Props Photographs of rehearsals and performances
Writing	Post-it notes Fieldnotes

3.9.1 Thematic Analysis

TA is a well-used, popular method for analysing data, and focuses on "…interpretations of patterns of meaning across the dataset" (Byrne, 2022, p. 1393). The approach has clear procedures for theme development. This includes: familiarisations, coding, searching for themes, revising themes and reporting. As this technique has evolved, it is now called reflexive TA (Braun & Clarke, 2019). It can be used to analyse data related to people's experiences, views and perceptions. This method for analysis is also described as a useful starting point for those new to the field (Lester et al., 2020). Thus, I concluded that reflexive TA was the best approach to take for this qualitative study rooted in children's experiences. Careful consideration was given to discourse analysis and content analysis. However, this study did not focus extensively on language, and I felt such approaches may have removed the context from the data (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008; Rogers et al., 2016) By using reflexive TA, in line with the participatory and creative methodologies, the

themes derived from the analysis were data driven (this means they were grounded in data and the experience of the participants) (Sundler et al., 2019). As these were analysed further through theatre, it ensured the drama script was developed from the data. Noteworthy, other forms of analysis may support the use of theatre in the process; however, I chose TA as a meaningful approach to ensuring collaborative develop of data analysis with children and could produce immediate findings and informed interpretations of the data (Liebenberg et al., 2020).

Qualitative data analysis is a nonlinear, iterative process (Srivastava & Hopwood, 2009). Notably, for this study, the TA was approached in an inductive way: coding and theme development were directed by the content of the data. I concluded that this approach to TA was most appropriate to the study as it was driven by the data (and therefore child-centred). Secondly, in TA, a common approach of sorting and sifting can be used to identify themes (patterns of meanings). Under time constraints, this enabled me to delve into the data and fully understand it. Thirdly, this approach can be used with a range of data set sizes and with various kinds of data. This study generated a large amount of qualitative data. The data was also very diverse including artwork, recorded music, drama scripts and written post-it notes.

When considering a range of qualitative data analysis techniques, including the use of TA in studies involving creative methods, the disadvantages became apparent. I was fully aware that the flexibility in TA could lead to inconsistency and there could be a lack of coherence amongst developed themes (Holloway & Todres, 2003). I, therefore, addressed these critiques by making clear my position as a teacher to highlight that the study's empirical findings are underpinned by a practitioner enquiry stance. The data was analysed in discrete groups depending on the method of data collection, then across all groups and codes. This triangulation aimed to increase the probability that the research findings and interpretations were found to be credible (Nowell et al., 2017).This was furthered by a participatory approach which enabled me to check the findings and interpretations with the participants, as will be discussed below. In doing so, confidence can be placed in the truth of the research findings as participants believe they are a correct interpretation of their original views (Korstjens & Moser, 2018).

After the data was collected, an in-depth analysis was carried out using Braun and Clarke's six-phased process. I created Figure 3.7 to illustrate the process involved in this study at each of the stages identified by Braun and Clarke (2021). Notably, children participated to varying extents throughout each phase and this is discussed below. I adapted this approach by using theatre in phase 6.

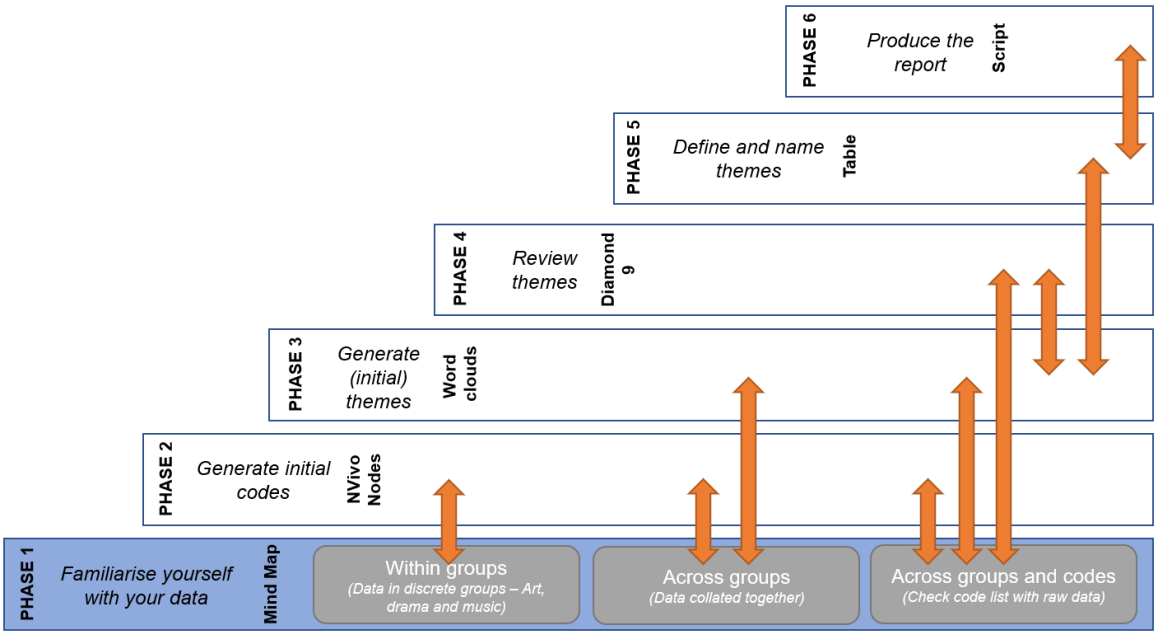

Figure 3.7 Data Analysis Process

Phase 1 | Familiarisation with the data

At this stage, I set about familiarising myself with the data generated from the creative workshop through mind-mapping. An example of a mind-map is illustrated in Figure 3.8. I immersed myself in the data: looking at each area separately then weaving it together. I began to delve deeply into the data and attached meaning to the artwork, drama scripts, music tracks, post-it notes and written reflections. At this point, all data was anonymised before being uploaded to NVivo. The data was organised into broad folders (art, drama, music and reflections) so I could begin initial coding. At this point, I took a note of casual observations of initial trends to extract the core story. Although I used NVivo to code the entire dataset and create nodes, the raw data was never out of my reach.

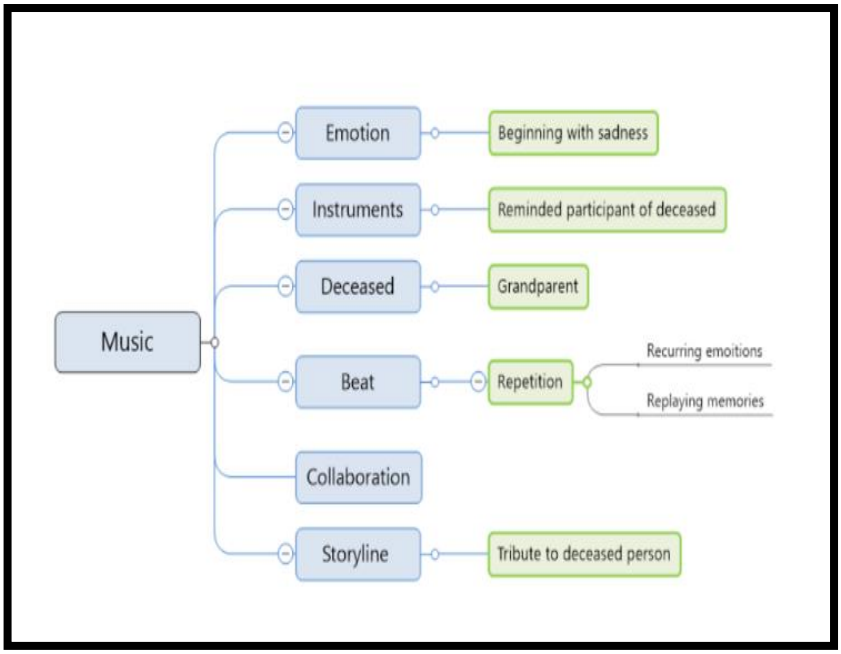

Figure 3.8 Example of mind-map created during familiarisation stage

Phase 2 | Coding

Coding is an important part of turning the raw data into a communicative and meaningful story (Skjott Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019). Once the data had been uploaded to NVivo, I began systematic coding. I identified important parts of the text, music or artwork and summarised these with key phrases/words. Figure 3.9 shows how the data was coded. In this example, the node ‘Curiosity’ was coded to a participant’s artwork. The questions asked in the artwork highlighted a desire to know more information. Similarly, in the drama dataset the characters in the script showed an interest in death and through music there were elements of suspension and tension. The list in Figure 3.9 shows how many times the theme was referenced and how many files this relates to. Codes enabled me to explore relationships and connections within groups and across groups. During the coding process, various nodes changed and evolved as the data was analysed. This ensured consistency over time.

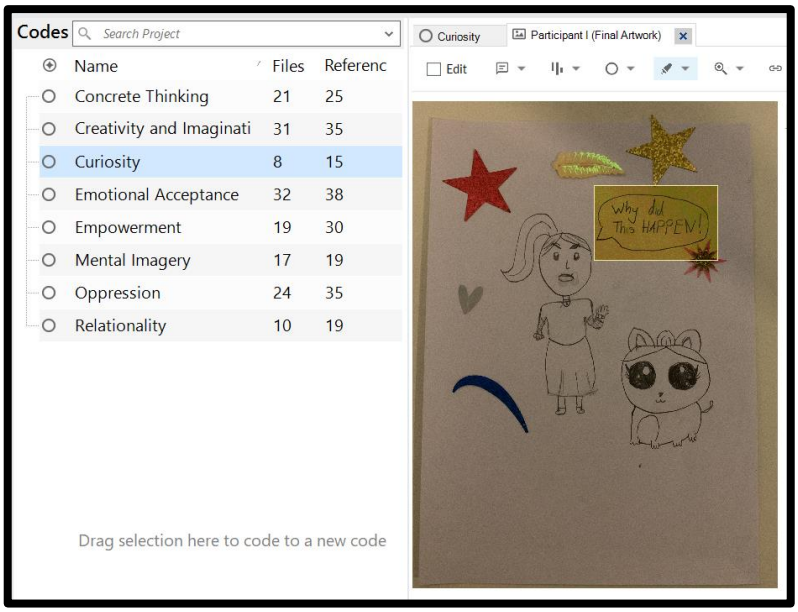

Figure 3.9 Example of how node was coded and referenced in NVivo

Phase 3 | Search for themes

After I established the codes, I then identified significant broader patterns of meanings. At this stage, these became possible themes. During this phase, the 8 children who had volunteered, and subsequently given consent, to be part of the analysis process became involved. Table 3.5 lists the children involved.

Table 3.5 List of participants involved in the data analysis process

Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Bereavement	Chosen Method	Involved in data analysis?
Anna	10	F	Uncle	Art	Y
Ben	10	M	Gran	Music	Y
Edward	10	M	Sister	Drama	Y
Isla	10	F	Great Grandparent	Art	Y
Leah	10	F	Uncle	Drama	Y
Max	10	M	Papa	Drama	Y
Orla	10	F	No	Drama	Y
Sophie	9	F	Gran	Drama	Y

The group, herein known as the devising group, took part in one analysis workshop before rehearsals. I created word clouds from codes to share with the children at the workshop to gather their views of possible themes (see Fig 3.10). I used words from

the mind-maps created in Phase 1 to make the word clouds. This was a way of providing the participants with a child-friendly, visual representation of the data that they could engage with (Croghan et al., 2008).

Figure 3.10 Word cloud created to search for themes

Phase 4 | Review themes

At the analysis workshop, the 8 children in the devising group shared their views on the word clouds and selected the most prominent words to become the themes. Refinement of the themes took place and appropriate changes were made, such as 'scared' and 'don't feel safe' were amalgamated to become 'fear'. The group then placed these terms in the formation of a 'Diamond 9' to facilitate discussion (see, for example, Fig. 3.11). A decision was made on establishing themes and subthemes from the 'Diamond 9' task. I then checked these against the original dataset, with a particular focus on the research questions, to assess for reliability and validity. At this stage, some themes were rejected. For example, 'difference' was not included as a theme after some discussion and debate. I encouraged the children to dismiss any themes that were not truly representative of the data. This also avoided having too many themes and the inclusion of themes that lacked coherence (Finlay, 2021). I regularly spoke to the children about the relevance of themes to all creative methods.

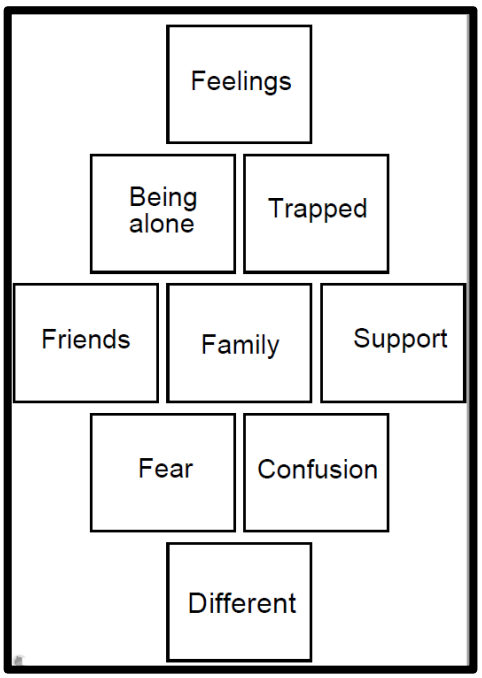

Figure 3.11 'Diamond 9' created by participants to review potential themes

Phase 5 | Define and name themes

I decided on a name for each theme to ensure they were concise, informative and memorable (Byrne, 2022). Each theme was analysed in detail and the scope was determined. A table in Chapter 4 (see Table 4.1) shows the themes with corresponding subthemes. All children involved in the analysis workshop agreed on the themes.

At this point in the analysis process, we diverted from Braun and Clarke's (2021) reflexive TA process. Instead of duly producing a report in Phase 6, the children and I devised a piece of theatre using the themes outlined in Chapter 4. This enabled us to delve deeper into the data and this is reflected in the discussion and implication chapters. The process involved in analysing the data using theatre is discussed below, including an outline of the opportunities and challenges. From the systematic review presented in Chapter 2, theatre was selected as it was found to be under researched in this context. Other methods, such as art and music, would have also been appropriate to utilise. However, given time constraints and resources available only one creative method was used in the data analysis process. The limitations of this are discussed in Chapter 7. Following the theatre process, a narrative of the themes was written up in Chapter 4 to capture the thinking behind the script which is presented in Chapter 5.

During the six-phase process, I encountered many challenges and limitations. During Phase 1, I found that I had a huge amount of data to familiarise myself with. This was extremely time consuming, however I found that organising my data into three strands (art, music and drama) helped me to structure my analytical process better. As I coded the data and searched for themes with the children, the process became very complicated. I created mind-maps and word clouds to organise my thinking and make clear links between the data and my codes, but to also engage children in the process of reviewing the themes. No guidelines dictated the minimum or maximum number of themes, and I found it particularly challenging advising the children on this. I encouraged children to think about each theme visually to show how it represented data which it was linked to. This provided coherence across the study and the use of visuals helped the participants to capture more meaning when naming the themes. Finally, I wanted to write up the report in an original and creative way. The children supported the choice of using theatre as an analysis tool, and subsequently, I looked to other fields to study how data could be staged and applied this within my own context. In the next section, I illustrate why this approach was integral to the study and explain the steps involved. This was an area of enquiry I chose to explore further and take the risk of experimenting with.

3.9.2 Theatrical Research-Based Performance

As discussed above, to facilitate the analysis of the data through theatre, and to support children, I chose reflexive TA as a way of bridging the gap between the raw data and starting the devising process. Theatre was used in addition to reflexive TA as a tool to promote engagement and deeper analysis of the data. The process involved in devising theatre enabled the data to be analysed with children and the final performance disseminated the findings. The children mostly used the themes from the reflexive TA during the process; however, the data generated from the creative workshop was never out of sight and displayed around the space. The devising process took place between May 2022 and June 2022. The 8 children from the devising group took part and met once a week (over eight weeks). All rehearsals took place at the school in a drama studio. Figure 3.12 outlines the children's involvement in each of the rehearsals and provides detail on how they were involved in the analysis and devising process.

Figure 3.12 Outline of rehearsals during the devising process

Researchers have taken an interest in theatre as a unique way of analysing data and disseminating findings to a wider audience (Rossiter et al., 2008). This approach to dramatising data reflects the work of writers such as Denzin (2000) and Saldaña (2005) who place increasing value on performances that are fictional, theatrical and stylised. Saldaña (2005, p. 1-2) states: “Ethnotheatre employs the traditional craft and artistic techniques of theatre production to mount for an audience a live performance event of research participants’ experiences and/or the researcher’s interpretations of data…Simply put, this is preparatory fieldwork for theatrical production work.” In an engaging and moving way, I sought to use the creative power of theatre as an interpretive, analytic tool with children. Donmoyer and Yennie-Donmoyer (1995) claim that when data is structured into theatre this is a form of analysis. When participants’ data is used to create a script, for example, this is an analytical act as new meanings are created by the act of finding an appropriate way to convey them. Notably, I did not encourage participants to strictly adhere to the data as a script, yet instead used theatre as a lens to view the data and the themes. There has been limited use of creative presentation of findings from qualitative research in education (Råbu et al., 2022). As this is a new approach to me as an early career researcher, I drew on a health context where a similar process has been adopted: Rossiter et al. (2008, p. 14), for example, identifies “theatrical research-based performance” as a genre creates performances with instrumental goals and use the power of theatre as an interpretive, analytic tool. This process, which I facilitated with the children, was important in helping to answer my third research question:

3. What are the opportunities and challenges for using creative methods to involve children in the data analysis process in participatory research?

The act of theatricalising the data allowed for a whole new form of interpretation and analysis (Rossiter et al., 2008). By using theatre’s fantastic and imaginative possibilities, the participants were able to understand the meaning behind the data. I describe this additional layer of analysis as the devising process below during which the script evolved. I also reflect on being true to the data and creating excellent theatre.

3.9.2.1 The Devising Process

The goal of this process was working together to create original theatre based on real-life stories and the imaginations of the participants (Kershaw, 2007). Similar to Nicholson's work, the play aimed to reflect current issues and was designed to have a positive social impact on the audience (Nicholson, 2011). I followed a similar process to other researchers such as Mitchel et al. (2006) who have created various research-based plays. Below I set out what was involved in the process, including: immersing in the data, exploring the data through improvisation and weaving the script together from the themes (Mitchell et al., 2006). Importantly, we did not start the rehearsals with a pre-existing script. Through devised theatre, the script was created through improvising and experimenting: spontaneous thoughts, ideas and experiences were encouraged (Lehtonen, 2012).

Games. At the start of the process, the devising group spent a lot of time playing drama games and taking part in activities to promote collaborative work, readiness, and discussion.

Ensemble Work. Time was given for the devising group to come together and to bond. Ensemble exercises included choral speaking, synchronised movements and singing together.

Improvisation. The devising group discussed possible scenarios and improvised these as scenes. There was a 'writer in the room' who captured the dialogue.

Emotion. In depth discussion took place around the overall beat and flow of the performance. The group felt the topic of death had connotations of darkness, crying and pain; however, they did not want the play to have a sombre feel nor lack energy and excitement. The group explored different emotions through voice, body language and facial expressions.

Space. The group explored physical proximity and how the audience could be part of the space and action. The participants began to sketch out possible set designs.

Creating characters. Characters were created for the play and their descriptions were written up. Actors began to walk, talk, and move like these characters. Character sketches and visual references were added to a storyboard map to communicate their appearance, personality, and background story.

Movement and music. Visual stimuli from the data were used to create physical theatre. Small sequences of movement were repeated, and music was added to set the mood.

Working from text. Members of the group performed small pieces of text that had been written up by the writer from improvised scenes and monologues.

3.9.2.2 Creating the Script

A play structure began to evolve, and a scene-by-scene breakdown was agreed by the group. A script was drafted during rehearsals and, ultimately, the children had to agree that it was true to the dataset and was reflective of their own experiences. The following principles were crucial when creating the script:

Roles within the group. The participants volunteered confidently to take on additional roles, including producing, researching, checking links to the reflexive TA themes and the raw data, directing and stage managing. Table 3.6 identifies the additional roles taken on by the children. All participants were cast in the performance and had a theatre-making role. This ensured the group felt they had full ownership of the performance. My role involved facilitating the process and overseeing the production roles.

Table 3.6 List of participants with theatre role

Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Bereavement	Chosen Method	Involved in data analysis?	Additional Role
Anna	10	F	Uncle	Art	Y	Script Supervisor
Ben	10	M	Gran	Music	Y	Props
Edward	10	M	Sister	Drama	Y	Writer
Isla	10	F	Great Grandparent	Art	Y	Scenery
Leah	10	F	Uncle	Drama	Y	Costume
Max	10	M	Papa	Drama	Y	Stage Manager
Orla	10	F	No	Drama	Y	Director
Sophie	9	F	Gran	Drama	Y	Producer

The creative environment. As the show began to emerge, we then created a busy, imaginative environment where the creativity could flow. The space was filled with the sketches, storyboards, images, props, written material, and visual material to help bring the vision alive. The script was followed precisely under the eye of a script supervisor.

Keeping notes. Throughout the rehearsal process, I took notes on the original script. Various photographs were taken for the purposes of reflecting on the process in relation to the overall aims of the research study.

Rehearsing. The cast regularly performed sections of the play to one another and asked for feedback. They had the chance to offer new ideas and insights. The rehearsal process promoted trial and error.

Production value. Towards the end of the process, we began to select materials to include in the performance. This included music, props, costume, and scenery. The children began to weave all the elements together for added production value.

Perform. In June 2022, the show was performed to a selected audience at the school. The performance was shown when no COVID-19 restrictions were in place. Figure 3.13 shows the stage which the children performed on. The performance was open for school staff, family members and classmates to attend.

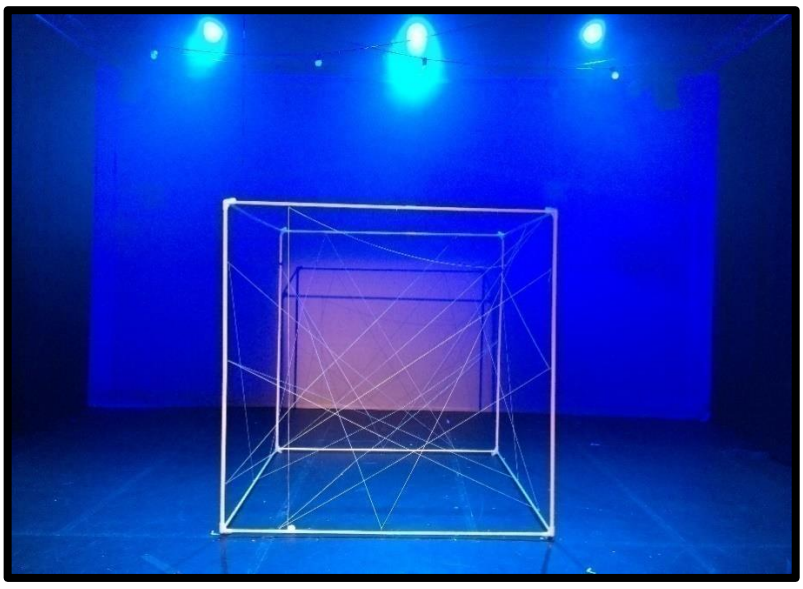

Figure 3.13 Photograph of staging from theatrical research-based performance

Overall, by structuring data into a piece of theatre, and consequently analysing it further, new perspectives on the topic under investigation were found. These are explored in Chapters 4 and 5 in line with the aim of this research study: to facilitate children's engagement with the topic of death and dying through creative methods, including theatre. This approach to analysing data was very complex and careful consideration was given to the presentation of findings. This thesis does not capture the excitement and nerves leading up to the performance on the night. It is difficult for the reader to *feel* the sultry temperature in the room as the lights shone down onto the stage and to *hear* the soft, hollow sounds which evoked feelings of sadness and loss. Theatre is very an 'in-the-moment' experience and describing the performance in words or showing photographs or a recording of the play would not achieve what we set out to do. Thus, I present the findings as a script and support this with discussion, in subsequent chapters, to highlight the opportunities and challenges of the approach. In doing so, I bring to the fore the quality dimensions of pedagogic spaces for exploring death found in the systematic review in Chapter 2. The literature influenced the design of the space and resultantly I ensured I had comfort zones, planned opportunities for collaboration, elements of risk in a safe environment and engaging resources which were freely available for children to access.

3.10 Ethical Considerations

The consideration of ethical issues was an ongoing, reflective process at the heart of this research study. Ethics is a vital part of research and robust considerations were taken to ensure the research design of this study was ethical. This study cautiously balanced rights to participation with rights to protection. The UNCRC has been instrumental in protecting children from harm and promoting provision of care and resources (Graham et al., 2015). Ethical research can benefit children. The nature of this study could have created vulnerability of the populations being researched (Borgstrom & Ellis, 2017). Thus, specific ethical procedures were put in place. The topic attended to and assisted in: coping with grief; communicating with gatekeepers; recruiting carefully and negotiating particular challenges due to the (perceived and actual) sensitivity around death and dying. This research was granted ethical approval by the University of Strathclyde Ethics Committee (see Appendix 5).

In various studies, death and dying was highlighted by pupils and parents as a sensitive topic (despite it not being highlighted by researchers) (Borgstrom & Ellis, 2017). Further to this, the methodological approach was crucial as sensitivity in research is not just about the topic under investigation (Vaswani, 2018). A topic such as death, dying and bereavement can be ethically and methodologically challenging at the best of times (Dyregrov, 2004; Stroebe et al., 2003). Therefore, the main ethical concerns including informed consent, risk to participants, and privacy and confidentiality were addressed in the design of the study (Park et al., 2022).

There is a clear argument around respecting children's rights and that their views should be given as much weight as those of the adult gatekeepers (Harcourt & Sargeant, 2011). Balen et al., (2006, p. 43) explains: "Young people … have the capacity to make a voluntary choice about involvement in research and it should be their informed consent that we are seeking, not the consent of their parents." Powell and Smith (2009) build on this by arguing that the "…biggest barrier to children's participation is the need in every case for an adult to consent to their participation." This study fully respected the rights of all children involved and, as all participants were under the age of 16, the role of the adult gatekeeper was taken into consideration. Participants could opt-out of the study at any stage; it was made clear that their initial consent was not definite. This approach was used in line with the pedagogic and enquiring aim of the research. As a participatory study, the opt-out (rather than opt-in) nature of the study maximised representation and empowered children as key decision-makers. By encouraging children to participate in creating new knowledge about themselves, they are also encouraged to take part in the processes used to regulate them (Gallacher & Gallagher, 2008). The opt-out technique mirrors the pedagogic approach in schools. School is, of course, compulsory and whilst this research was not, the approach taken was familiar to the children and participatory in that it involved action. In this sense, children could action a withdrawal if they wished.

Consent was sought from the children and parents/carers: both formally agreed the child's participation in the study. To support this process, there was a Participation Information Sheet for parents/carers and an opportunity for them to ask any questions about the study. Child-friendly consent forms and PISs were to the

children at the introductory session (see Appendices 3 and 4). When recruiting, children were told about: the aims of the research; what time and commitment was required; what they had to do during the study; who would know the results; how feedback would be given; and how confidentiality and trust would be fostered. After the introductory session, the children were given the option to 'go and have a think' in case they wished to opt-out. This helped ensure they were not in a context where they felt obligated to participate in the research. Furthermore, given the timeframe of the study, consent was kept a live issue through regular check-ins where the children were reminded that they could withdraw at any given time.

Previous research with children has also highlighted the importance of consent. In their special issues about positioning children as social actors, Wall and Robinson (2022, p. 4) express: "A key ethical dilemma presented by the UNCRC centres on ascertaining young children's consent (or otherwise) for participation." Further to this, Lomax (2015) highlights the need to balance children's decision to be "seen and heard" (p. 500) with the possible impact on them and the audience. Children's choice to participate may promote or silence their voice. A methodological approach incorporating an element of practitioner research enabled me to tackle some of these barriers as an insider familiar to the children and their families.

Furthermore, researching experiences of a sensitive topic may cause distress for some children and increase risk of harm to the participants (Silverio et al., 2022). However, crucial to this study was that working through grief can be healing and addressing the topic can build up resiliency to help protect children against adverse effects of bereavement (Stylianou & Zembylas, 2018). The creative methods used aimed to facilitate age-appropriate expression and conversations (Mallon, 2011). The creative methods were used to build trust and forge bonds between the group and researcher. However, I was fully aware that in using these methods, they may expose distressing or sensitive information (Funk et al., 2012). Therefore, children were closely monitored and observed during the session. If it was necessary, I intervened to provide support. In any uncertain circumstance, the group was paused so the situation could be dealt with.

When children were working creatively involving art, music and drama, clear boundaries were set to ensure distressing and inappropriate content was not

included. The participants were encouraged to express their pain, as part of the healing process, without it being too overwhelming. Where specialised help was required, children and their families were signposted to Richmond's Hope, Child Bereavement UK or Childline. Their information was readily available to participants and parents/carers on the PISs. This support ensured any risk to the children was dealt with appropriately as reflecting on experiences did arouse strong feelings and emotions. The study did promote the expression of emotion and how intense emotion could be managed. Children became emotional during the process and could ask to take a break at any point.

To safeguard the children, participants were made aware of procedures that would be taken if concerns were raised about their own or other people's wellbeing. This information was shared with the child protection officer at the school (Head Teacher). Throughout the process, I also prioritised my own wellbeing. This is a responsibility outlined in the British Educational Research Association [BERA] (2018) ethical guidelines. Taking regular time out to reflect ensured that I prioritised happiness and good health. Regularly, I sought support from my supervisors on an academic and wellbeing level.

Confidentiality was respected unless the information provided by the child concerned harm or abuse. The participants' privacy was upheld along with their rights to anonymity (BERA, 2018). In line with this, I ensured participants were not identifiable in the investigation outputs. All collected data was anonymised and any names used are pseudonyms. To safeguard all participants involved, a range of key factors were considered:

Access to data. The creators had access to their own research data.

Anonymity. Anonymity was fully offered, and research participants were not recognised from the theatre performance.

Assessment. Participants assessed the overall quality of the theatre performance before publication.

Authorship. The participants have ownership of the original data. The researcher has authorship of the performance and ensured that the participants were given credit.

Harms and Benefits. Participants were fully aware about the harms and benefits of having their own story performed in a fictional play. The researcher has also anticipated the harms and benefits for different audiences, when viewing the performance.

Integrity. The final performance was a genuine and respectful representation of the children's experiences.

In accordance with the Data Protection Act 2018 and the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR), participants and parents retained the right to request access to personally identifying or sensitive data that was stored in relation to them or their child. Any group data, such as script excerpts and props, was anonymised for the purposes of respecting the confidentiality of others. However, if data had been pseudo anonymised, it could not be withdrawn. After analysis, the data was destroyed.

3.11 Chapter Summary

This chapter has offered an overview of the research paradigms, methodology and methods of this research study, and explained the rationale for bringing together a participatory methodology and creative methods. Through a participatory lens, underpinned by the UNCRC, this chapter provided detail on how the research of children's engagement with the topic of death and dying and bereavement were guided by the research questions. My research framework is underpinned by the UNCRC, and my practitioner enquiry stance is an overarching part of the process. I connect methodology and pedagogy together through weaving together participatory and creative approaches.

I provided reasons for my methodological choices and justified how this study not only involves children but encourages participation. A participatory space in a qualitative study was implemented to provide deeper knowledge within the narrative that creative methods can encourage. My research framework illustrated this

connection. Qualitative data was drawn from a creative workshop and subsequently analysed by the participants using a theatrical research-based approach involving reflexive TA. I have explored creative methods throughout this chapter and highlighted how the study schedule, and other parts of the process, were led by the participants.

The initial analysis was based on reflexive TA: an approach that focused on identifying themes (patterned meaning) across the data. A six-phase process for *doing TA* was followed and this included an analytic method of using theatrical research-based performance. Appropriate steps have been taken to assess research quality through its relevance to practice: including the topic under investigation and the methodological approaches.

Special consideration of ethical issues was given alongside detailed planning of how the research would be carried out to maximise benefits and reduce harm (Davies, 1995). The ethical guidelines on anonymity, informed consent, confidentiality and transparency were adhered to consistently (British Educational Research Association [BERA], 2018). The research was granted approval from the University of Strathclyde's Ethics Committee (see Appendix 5).

The coming chapters present the research findings and explain the themes extracted from the data.

Chapter 4 Findings I

4.0 Chapter Overview

In this chapter, key findings arising from the creative workshop are presented following reflexive Thematic Analysis (TA) and theatrical research-based analysis. This chapter presents the themes from this process in narrative form. The four themes and thirteen subthemes are shown in Table 4.1. The research findings are split into two chapters. In this chapter, the themes are described in detail, where illustrative quotes are given in italics and examples of the creative methods are shared. In Chapter 5, I present the script which was devised and performed by the children during the data analysis stage.

Notably, not all creative methods are discussed within each subtheme. This is because equal weight cannot be given to each method due to different numbers of participants choosing to engage with art, drama and music. The methods were viewed holistically when answering the research questions and opportunities to examine the creative methods individually are discussed in Chapter 7.

Table 4.1 Themes and subthemes from data generated in the creative workshop

Theme	**Subtheme**	**Illustration**
Self-expression	Conversations about death and dying	*'Death is something you can't mention.'* (Jack)
	Intensive emotion and metaphoric association	Johnny felt *'stuck in a sad place'*.
	Fear of death	*'I feel scared because it is going to happen to me.'* (Finlay)
	The language of death and grief	*'It's like stairs, going up and down.'* (Sam)
Imagery and	The day of the death	*'I thought the vet was going*

Recollection		*to help him but surprisingly he died in my mum's arms.'* (Michael)
	Light in dark times	*'There can be some happiness even when things are bad.'* (Sebastian)
	Dealing with uncertainty	*'I couldn't do anything other than thinking about it.'* (Lily)
Empathetic Healing	The role of parents/carers and their grief	*'My mum and dad were struggling too.'* (Evan)
	Peer relationships	*'You should always have respect for others, you don't know what they are going through.'* (Freddie)
	Working professionals acting in the best interest of the child	*'I needed someone to talk to and I wish my teacher asked me about it.'* (Max)
Oppression	The negative impact of being silenced by adults	*'I feel ignored.'* (Emma)
	Searching for answers	*'Do you know why grieving happens?'* (Hafsa)
	Exercise of agency	*'I think teachers should do a bit more.'* (Anna)

4.1 Self-expression

'I felt sick like I was being hit by a hurricane' (Emma, aged 10. Her gran died of cancer).

The children were able to clearly express their experiences when provided with the opportunities to do so through art, drama and music. Opportunities for self-

expression lacked throughout their schooling as participants expressed this was the first time they engaged in creative tasks on this topic. The theme of self-expression highlighted the challenges children have when communicating about death and the opportunities for using creative methods to promote expression. The following subthemes are presented because of children's engagement with creative methods: conversations, intense emotion, fear of death and the language of grief. Where the use of art, drama or music has evoked findings, this is highlighted below. As children engaged with the topic in a creative way, the expression of their choices, actions and words was captured through the findings.

4.1.1 *Conversations around death and dying*

Art. All children working with art as a method (n=14) shared that death was a topic that was not often spoken about in their daily lives. Resulting from this, about one third of the participants felt uneasy when talking about death and some even questioned if it should be spoken about. A concern for some of the children, when talking about death, was how other people would react. At least two participants reflected on being bullied when they experienced a parental death. A small group went on to discuss whether people will be '*nice'* to you when you are grieving. Figure 4.1 shows two children discussing this idea whilst completing their artwork; they were seeking answers and looking for reassurance. The two girls spoke openly to one another about their experience of others being unkind towards them following a death. This dialogue was added to a post-it note on the reflection zone: *'I was embarrassed because people teased me and made fun of me'* (Anna, aged 10. Her uncle died by suicide).

All 14 participants engaging with death through art unanimously agreed through discussion afterwards that sharing their thoughts and stories made them feel better. It was clear that the participants in this study were not afraid or hesitant to engage in conversation on a personal and general level. High levels of engagement throughout the creative workshop showed children to be interested in sharing their experiences and finding out how others overcame challenges like their own.

On occasion, participants found themselves overwhelmed and stunned. Dylan (aged 9, whose dad died after a long-term illness) claimed: *'I don't really know what to say.'* He explained that when asked specific and direct questions, he froze and could not think clearly. In a relaxed environment, the children were comfortable

contributing when they wanted to. Children eased into conversations around pets and rituals and were not scared to show their emotions. Participants comforted each other physically or by telling their own story to show they understood how they felt.

Figure 4.1 Children discussing the topic as they painted

Drama. When conversations started most children spoke openly about their experiences and proceeded to engage in meaningful dialogue with others, including asking me if anyone close to me had died. The following conversation took place when a group were rehearsing their drama performance (Isla and Lily are both aged 10):

Lily: *Has anyone close to you died?*

Isla: *Not really. My Great Grandpa died but I didn't really know him.*

Lily: *My Gran died last year from Coronavirus. I hate Coronavirus.*

Isla: *Do you still feel sad?*

Lily: *Sometimes. I guess I just miss her.*

Children also regularly engaged in dialogue about characters in their drama scenes. When managing a stressful situation where a character was crying out for help, the participants unconsciously linked this to themselves. The actions, ideas and suggestions made were in fact experiences that had been lived by the group. The drama acted as a vehicle to enable the children to express their own ideas, yet in a way that was hidden (behind a character and an imaginary story). The use of drama techniques prompted discussion around what a character should do when they feel they are at breaking point.

The actors discussed how hard it can be to ask for help. One participant expressed he is often scared to ask for help because:

> *It isn't something people usually talk about in the classroom or ask for help with. People ask for help with maths, for example, but it's hard just going up to your teacher and starting to talk about death. They might not take you seriously* (Adam, aged 10. He has not experienced death of a close relative or friend).

The group believed the hardest part was initially asking for help. Once the conversation started, they felt the burden had been taken off them and the responsibility lay with the adult to help them talk about it. As they felt this was a significant turning point, they decided to end their drama scene with the main character asking for help: beginning that all important conversation. An excerpt from the children's script written during the creative workshop read:

> *The main character sits alone on the centre of the stage. She lifts her head and then approaches a friend.*
>
> The Person: *To audience.* What should I do?
> Hi Emily, can I talk to you… It's about my dad.
>
> *The stage goes into darkness.*

The participants expressed through the drama that the start of a conversation about death is always the worst part. The main character, 'The Person', struggled to start a conversation about death until the very end of the scene when they talked to a friend.

4.1.2 *Intensive emotion and metaphoric association*

Art. A strong element of self-expression coming through the data related to emotion. What was striking about the children's responses however was their use of metaphors to express themselves. Participants were not afraid to show their emotions creatively, particularly through art. The emotion which was portrayed was very intense as children labelled their emotions with words such as: *'trapped'*, *'feeling sick'* and *'lonely'*. Some participants chose to share their emotional journey through abstract paintings whilst others drew imaginary situations they found themselves in. Johnny, aged 10, whose grandpa died created a piece of art entitled '*A tear in a tear'* (see Fig. 4.2).

Figure 4.2 'A tear in a tear' by Johnny, aged 10. His grandpa died following an illness

Painting his sadness, Johnny expressed how the emotion surrounded him when his grandpa died. He felt like he was *'stuck in a sad place'.* The tear was cemented in a dark place and went everywhere with him. He went on to explain that sadness, to

him, was more than real tears: *'It's like I'm surrounded by a giant tear bubble that sometimes bursts then refills.'*

Other participants showed their vulnerability by drawing themselves in a metaphor. In the artwork below (Fig. 4.3) very little colour was used, if any, as the focus was on the subject matter. Both pieces of art used metaphors to express a sense of time and enormity from the child's perspective. Charlotte explained when sharing her work: *'I felt like there was a constant cloud above my head'* (Charlotte, aged 10. Her gran died unexpectedly.) That sense of being submerged was also discussed by another participant. Olivia had drawn herself at the bottom of the sea and described to the group: *'When I found out my gran died, I felt like I was drowning in deep, dark water…'* (Olivia, aged 10. Her gran died in an accident).

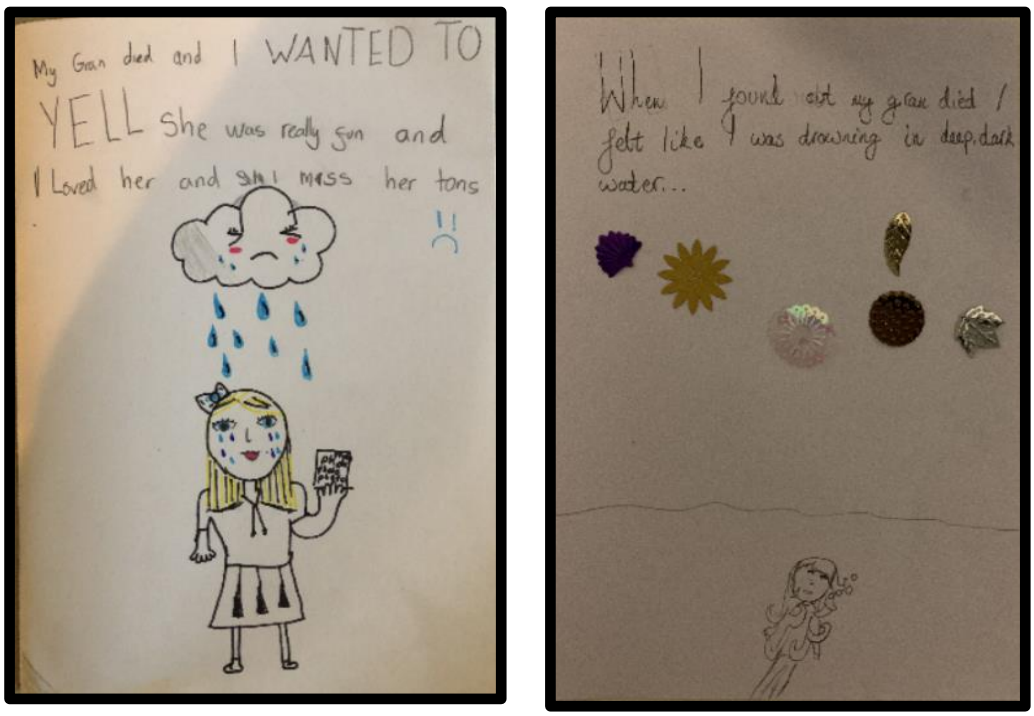

Figure 4.3 Participants' use of metaphors in their artwork

Drama. The idea of representing emotions with metaphors was also used in the dramas created by the children. One group created a performance entitled '*Trapped'.* It was based around one character's emotions and how they heard voices in their head. Two minds (one positive and one negative) battled each other to take control of the character. The minds in the performance wore masks (see Fig. 4.4) to

represent their emotions. The cast discussed how feelings were like masks and could be covered up, worn on the inside and out and multiple could be worn at the same time. Using the props in this way highlighted that children often conceal their emotions by portraying another. Further to this, the movement in the drama was fast paced, assertive and powerful: showing that emotions hurled and spun around in unexpected ways. When this happened, the character began to act as if he was fighting off the emotions. There was a strong sense of struggle present in that moment before the character fell to his feet, overwhelmed.

Figure 4.4 Masks used as props one group's drama performance

Music. Finally, through music, the participants selected various instruments to represent their emotions. Repetition of bars were used to show how emotions reoccurred regularly over time. Orchestration was used by the children to show how feelings interacted with one another and built up. Mostly, loud and harsh sounds were used, including the use of a crescendo to portray anxiety and reach a point of stress. Often, the music slowed, had lower pitch and long pauses to symbolise an emptiness felt by the children.

4.1.3 *Fear of death*

Music. Throughout the day it became clear that the participants engaging with music (n=4) were expressing a fear of dying: not just in relation to them dying but family members and loved ones too. It was highlighted in the lyrics that participants knew it was something they were going to experience eventually. Finlay (aged 10,

who had not experienced death) expressed: *'I feel scared because it is going to happen to me.'* His lyrics were:

'I am alone
We're not together.
I am alone
We're not together.

There's light in the darkness
We'll be side by side.
Because after all
Death comes to call.'

There was some agreement between the children and most of the participants worried about their close family members: *'I have a fear of death. I worry about my parents dying'* (Ruby, aged 9. Her gran died at home).

Art. A particular factor which arose from the paintings was illness. Children often assumed that long-term illness led to death. This was mostly when the cause of death was cancer. A group of children had experienced the death of a loved one due to cancer. This group of children also recorded in the reflection zone on post-it notes that they regularly thought about cancer affecting other family members and killing them (see Fig. 4.5). Most children accepted death was coming when someone battled a long illness.

Figure 4.5 Image of 'Thought Zone' where children recorded their views on post-it notes

Drama. The idea of 'battling' death came through in one of the drama scenes created during the workshop. Death was a character and was acted out by four participants, each with a mask. In the performance photograph below (see Fig. 4.6), death can be seen approaching a character from a distance.

Figure 4.6 Photograph from performance where Death approaches the main character

The presence of death was intimidating, and the main character was seen to attempt to hide away, but of course failed. Death was acted out as overpowering and frightening. The main character lost a battle and death took away what it came for. Children showed they struggle with the fact that death is inevitable yet do not always express this explicitly.

4.1.4 *The language of death and grief*

Drama. Children's use of language did not necessarily become a barrier, particularly when children were creating scripts for their drama scenes. The participants mostly spoke in narrative form, and this meant the use of language was natural. Words like *'love'*, *'loss'* and *'sorry'* were used without hesitation. On occasion, religion was reflected upon and children spoke about heaven as a place their loved one had gone to. Orla (aged 10 who had no experience of death) comforted another participant: *'They are still in your heart.'* This was a phrase that the child had heard themselves by their parents and found comfort in believing it to be true and sharing it with others compassionately. Similarly, peers were also heard to be reassuring

each other that their loved one: *'...is in a better place'* (Leah, aged 10, told her friend when talking about the death of her uncle). Such phrases had very personal meaning attached to them, and children used them in a positive way.

When sharing their experiences of grief with the researcher during an informal break, the participants' language used imagery vividly. Phrases such as *'it's like stairs, going up and down'* (Sam, aged 10. His Uncle died from a cardiac arrest) and *'it's infinite, you just keep on walking and walking and it never ends'* (Dylan, aged 9, whose dad died after a long-term illness) were used to describe the experience immediately following a death. There was a strong argument between the group that grieving was a long process: one which the participants felt they had no control over (and it never ended). I took the time to seek clarification over what was understood about grief and grieving. However, the responses from the children, at this stage, were limited and restricted to naming feelings. It was not clear if the children were not in the mindset to discuss at that point or whether they lacked the vocabulary to explain their own grief.

There was no doubt that COVID-19 was a big talking point and the first context in which a lot of participants had openly spoken about death. Due to the impact of the current climate surrounding coronavirus and its high media presence the children regularly used the words/phrases:

- *'Virus'*
- *'People are dying'*
- *'Illness'*
- *'It can kill you'*

Conversations also focused on isolation, being unable to see dying loved ones and how funerals were taking place with restricted numbers. Children were fully aware that death was spoken about daily in relation to the pandemic and were fully aware of what was going on and the impact this was having; yet rarely did they speak about it to an adult and instead said they felt more comfortable talking about it with peers.

Art. Notably, participants seemed more comfortable when completing a sketch-note to communicate their experiences of grief rather than speaking about it. An example sketch-note is shown in Figure 4.7.

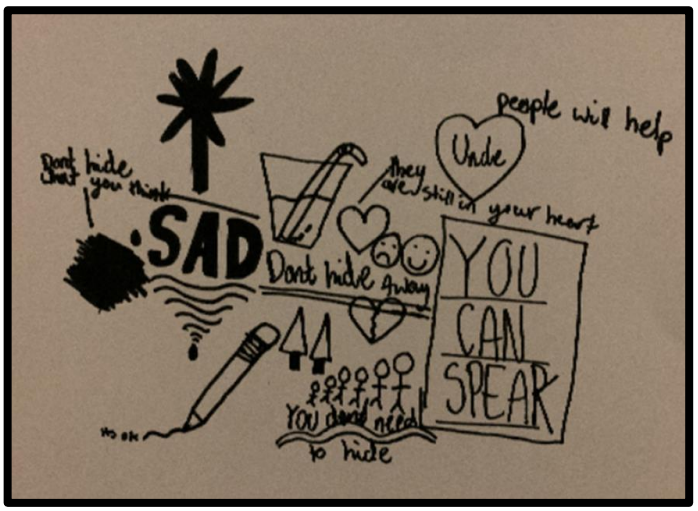

Figure 4.7 Sketch-note of participants grief and experience of death and dying

Many children expressed a situation where they felt they had to hide their grief. In the sketch-note in Figure 4.7, Anna addressed this and encouraged others to speak out. Having received help when she spoke out about a death in her family, Anna explained to her peers that people will help you if you can articulate your pain and *'come out from the shadows'* (Anna, aged 10. Her uncle died by suicide). Yet, it was clear that children struggled to articulate their thoughts, feelings and opinions due to language barriers (not knowing what to say).

4.2 Imagery and Recollection

'I used slow music because I am sad and feel like it's not going to be sunny again'
(Sam, aged 10. His Uncle died from a cardiac arrest).

The use of creative methods strongly encouraged children to conceive imaginary and recollected scenes. Through this powerful process important findings arose and gave an insight into the children's minds and their way of thinking. This theme highlighted how children relive the day of death, shows the vividness children can have of difficult times in their past and illustrated how they react during unpredictable times.

4.2.1 *The day of the death*

Art. Around 48% of participants chose to express themselves through art. In doing so, this involved visualising their own story and, if they had experienced death, remembering particular details. Most participants had very clear images in their

head when they were told about the death of their loved one. At least two participants were present when the death occurred, and they had strong memories of what was going on around them. Dylan could hear the siren of the paramedic in his head as he thought about his dad's death. Anna and Aliha spoke about their reaction to being told about the death and immediately remembered a distraction: Aliha talked about a rainbow appearing that day and Anna spoke about a teddy she received from her parents on the day her uncle died. Michael chose to recreate the image in his head by using plasticine (see Fig. 4.8). A model was created of the boy and his dog (Michael, aged 10. His dog died due to an illness).

Figure 4.8 Michael's creation of his dying dog at the vets

Michael told me:

> *The model is my dog sitting on his bed and I was petting him. Then he had to go to the vet. I thought the vet was going to help him but surprisingly he died in my mum's arms. I was really sad when I heard he died but even more sad when I heard he died in my mum's arms.*

A powerful model was created by Michael as a way of showing how he processed the death. When thinking about his pet, this image is recurring, and Michael feels a connection between him and his mum.

Further to this, Katie selected art to express how she felt on the day her gran died. She knew exactly what she was doing at the time and could remember her gran's pink outfit because *'[S]he always wore pink; it was her favourite colour'* (Katie, aged

9. Her gran died from cancer recurrence). Katie drew the memory of her by her gran's side as she died in a hospice (see Fig. 4.9).

Figure 4.9 Katie's drawing of her by her gran's side when she was dying

Drama. Sophie, Katie's sister, (aged 9, Her gran died from cancer recurrence) acted out a small monologue explaining to the audience that her gran had just died.

Me and Moo Moo were always together,
Like best friends.
We thought that you were clear,
But we were wrong.
When Moo Moo was asleep,
She died from cancer.

Creating images, albeit literally or mentally, was an important part of remembering for the children. When recollecting the day of the death, they reacted by showing acceptance to their own grief. When given these opportunities to explore their experiences imaginatively, I noted the children could mourn freely.

4.2.2 *Light in dark times*

Art. When expressing death as a concept, children often communicated through words and painting that death, as an experience, was mostly filled with darkness and finding the happiness was challenging. This was particularly clear through the art that the children created. Sebastian (aged 10, who had recently moved to Scotland with his mum and brother after finding his dad dead in their family home) painted his feelings following the death of his dad (see Fig. 4.10).

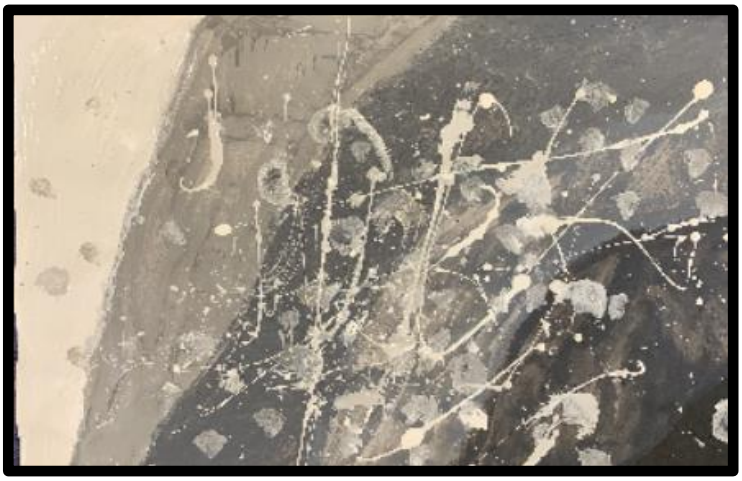

Figure 4.10 Painting of Sebastian's feelings following the death of his dad due to a heart attack

Sebastian explained that the use of grey shows his negative feelings. The splashes of white are because *'there can be some happiness even when things are bad'.* Like other participants, he associated black, grey and white with death. These natural colours suggested purity, fear and control. The children also justified their use of these colours as they signify being unemotional. Going from black to white, and vice versa, was seen as a journey by the children. One which they felt they were still going through. There were times when they felt they were really struggling and emotionally overloaded. Other times there was a sense of freedom when they felt they were coping and managing the situation in their everyday lives.

Music. Using music, a group of four participants created a music track to share their experience of dealing with death. Notably, the music was very sombre and soft. The creators believed the music takes the listener on a journey through a lived experience: from when the child was told of the death of a grandparent to living each day without them. Throughout the track there were moments of slow and gentle classical sounds. The music got deep and, although complex, was faint and calming. One child expressed they felt *'trapped in a bubble of worry and everything changed around me so quickly, but it was like I was stuck in the middle of it in a dark hole'* (Fraser, aged 10. He experienced the death of two grandparents in 6 months).

Drama. The children also showed how they were affected by death through drama. Using props, the participants showed the dark and light sides of their experiences. In

Figure 4.11 the children represented two sides to their story using candles and a mask.

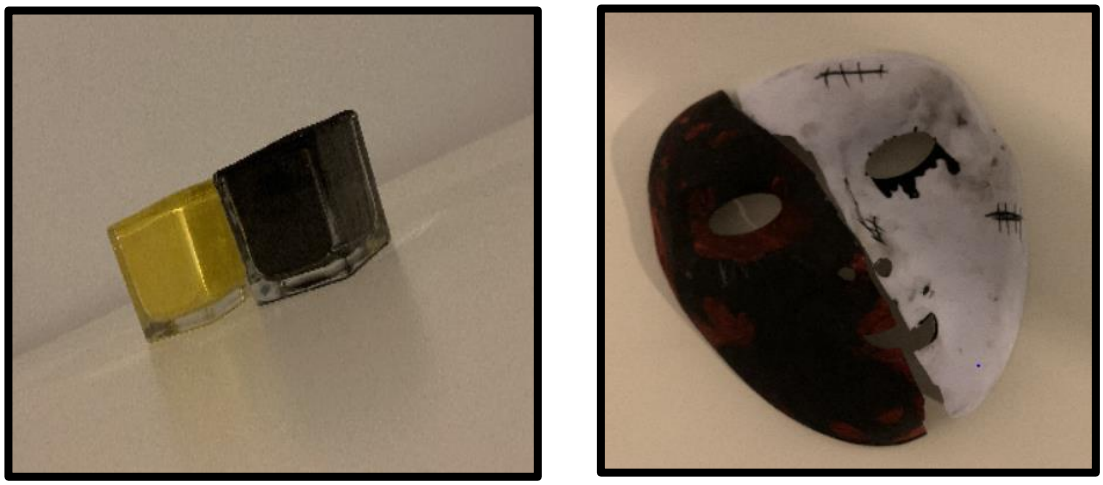

Figure 4.11 Children's use of props to show two sides to their story

In discussing their reasoning behind this they stated they wanted to express both positives and negatives. The positives related to having faith, treasuring special memories and finding moments of laughter. In contrast to this, the children experienced pain, anger and brief periods where they felt they lost control.

4.2.3 *Dealing with uncertainty*

Art. When exploring children's artwork, I found out that the short period of time following the death was filled with major changes. These included sleeping in different places, low attendance at school, inconsistent primary caregiver, missing clubs and limited contact with friends. These were described by the participants to cause anxiety. Most children spoke about losing sleep and/or crying themselves to sleep. In school, children felt sleep deprived and therefore could not concentrate. In addition to this, all children agreed their minds were filled with thoughts about the death: *'I couldn't do anything other than thinking about it'* (Lily, aged 10. Her gran died during the COVID-19 pandemic). Children noticed that those around them began to act differently; this included friends and family. They began to feel slightly unsafe and felt a lot of pressure was put on them to act *'normal'*. This led to three participants having what they described through their art as a *'melt down'*. Heather (aged 10, whose brother was stillborn) drew her immediate reaction when uncertainty began (see Fig. 4.12).

Figure 4.12 Heather draws herself having what she describes as a 'melt down'

Drama. Four male participants used physical theatre to tell a story about a boy who found himself feeling isolated following the death of his grandpa. Throughout the sequence, the main character was both physically and mentally hiding from the challenges he was facing. The drama group began to use voice, particularly volume, to show how many aspects of their lives began to overpower and silence them. In the end, the character was left alone, head down and hands collapsed together (Fig. 4.13). The writers told me that they wanted to get across how the character had no control over certain aspects of his life and did not know what to expect as each day passed.

Figure 4.13 A character is left alone feeling empty after fighting with his emotions

Music. Ben (aged 10, who was unaware of how his gran died) shared through music the confusion he experienced as he did not know what was happening. His music went back and forth between melodies. He explained: *'The different melodies show how this kept changing and so suddenly in my life. It wasn't just the death that changed.'* There were massive changes to his daily routine which he believed to be unavoidable. The uncertainty described by the children related to a range of factors including the global pandemic, finances, health and relationships. When thinking about this time in his life, Ben could recall the frequently longer periods he spent in his bedroom, alone.

4.3 Empathetic Healing

'If you tell people about it, you will feel so much better' (Edward, aged 10. His sister died of an infection).

The findings strongly suggested that children's experience of bereavement involved others, and not just themselves. When representing their stories through the creative methods, the children referred to the people in their lives who were present. In exploring their journey through grief, the participants communicated how others were able to understand them and help them through the healing process. Parents/carers were often grieving too, and this was clear in the findings. Not only did children seek support from their immediate family but also their friends. Connecting with peers following a death proved to be challenging yet meaningful for many of the children. It was appreciated by the children and their families when working professionals, such as teachers, who were a big part of their lives when the death occurred became a part of the child's journey: rather than shutting them out and acting like it did not happen.

4.3.1 *The role of parents/carers and their grief*

Drama. Most children involved in the study talked about their living parent/s having an active role in their lives when experiencing death. One group of children created a drama scene around a character being comforted by their parents. children were positive about the support they received at home and wanted adults to regularly check in with them. Evan (aged 10, whose gran died with dementia) wanted his

parents to talk more about the death but acknowledged: *'My Mum and Dad were struggling too.'* This was portrayed in the drama.

All children who chose drama as a method for expression (n=11) were clear about the fact that adults had a key role in communicating with the child about the death. Sophie felt very passionate about the fact that adults should not hold back any information and therefore acted this out through drama. One group created a scene to show that the bereaved character wanted to know immediately when someone in their family had died. This built up the character's trust with their parent in an open and honest way.

When creating scenes, children included most of their support network including parents. Within these, most parents were portrayed as being stressed and trying to keep a norm to everyday life. After a while, the parental figures in the drama began to struggle and did not spend time with their child, despite this being their wish. One character conveyed a parental figure who carried on with life as normal. The son expressed that he wanted the time and space to grieve with his mum when his dad died. The younger characters in the drama chose not to speak about the death to the adults in case it made them upset. Instead of speaking about death, they showed that they loved them, and it was comforting for these characters to be shown love back.

4.3.2 *Peer relationships*

Drama. The children in the drama groups explored trust regularly throughout the day. They often felt a bond when someone else in the group had a similar experience to their own. It was comforting for them to hear another child sharing a bereavement. Freddie commented on his friend's story: *'You should always respect others, you don't know what they are going through'* (Freddie, aged 10. He had not experienced death of a close family member). Children were able to normalise death for their peers.

Participants spoke about how they preferred working in a group setting. Three participants had been involved in the 'Seasons for Growth' programme at their schools and mentioned they enjoyed it due to its secure and supportive nature. This idea of connecting with peers was echoed by the whole group and all found it useful

when working together. One challenge was evident in relation to children talking to their friends that had recently been bereaved. Participants shared they were very keen to help their friend and ask about the death when they returned to school; however, they did not know how to do this and what to say. The children were not afraid to engage in conversation with their peers and to hear their story.

In a drama scene, the children highlighted how important it was to speak to someone, particularly a friend. From the child's perspective, it was noted that it is not always easy to do this and in fact opening up can cause negative factors such as bullying and teasing. In the script, a character named 'Happy 2' said:

'You need to talk about it. Let it out.
You'll feel better when you let it out.
Come on, you can do this.
We'll comfort you as much as we can.'

Children were fully aware of their right to share information freely yet reflected on the negativity around this. In contrast to this, another character (named 'Negative 3') insisted that the child kept their story to themselves because of the consequences that may arise:

'Don't talk about it or people will make fun of you.
Don't share.
Keep it to yourself since you will regret it if you share.'

It seems that, although sharing mostly leads to positive outcomes, some children have experienced negativity when explaining their experiences openly and a sense of shame became present. Children do not always feel comfortable talking about death to their peers due to the unpredictability of others' reactions.

4.3.3 *Working professionals acting in the best interest of the child*

Drama. Children involved in the drama groups who had a death in their immediate family felt schools did offer help by way of signposting. Teachers were portrayed as giving bereaved children advice on where to go for help. Over half of the individuals felt that staff in schools did not support them, particularly in the longer term (n=6).

Through drama, the children showed they wanted to share their story and remember their loved one at school. Most participants felt that their school did not play a part in their journey through grief, and resultantly many adults who could have played an important part in the child's life were missing. Max shared his views on how his school dealt with his recent bereavement:

> *Teachers should talk more. They didn't ask me how I felt or what was going on at home. I needed someone to talk to and I wish my teacher asked me about it* (Max, aged 10. His papa died suddenly of a heart attack).

Teachers, in the drama scenes, were held in high regard and other characters showed a lot of respect towards their advice. The children communicated that it was important to them that they were not *'put on the spot'* but were given the opportunity to speak out.

Art. Support from teachers generally varied. Children expressed through drawings that adults tended to apologise about the death and state something along the lines of: 'If you ever need anything, come and talk to me.' Anna (aged 10, whose uncle died by suicide) spoke about a lunchtime art club her teacher ran for her and some of her friends. She recreated some of the artwork she painted at this club. Anna described this as helpful, particularly in relation to helping her and her peers interact appropriately about the death. She expressed: *'It helped me talk to my friends about my uncle because I never spoke to them about it even though they knew that's why I was off school loads.'*

4.4 Oppression

'I feel like I can't talk about it, I shouldn't talk about it' (James, aged 10. His mum died in a car accident).

Children when bereaved felt a sense of vulnerability and a lack of protection. The findings illustrate a power imbalance experienced by children and provision of broader rights is needed. Many participants felt silence, both implicitly and explicitly, by adults and were not empowered: meaning they were looking for the answers. Often, children were masked from the issues and given no choice in the matters.

There seemed a lack of sense of agency through a lack of opportunities to exercise this.

4.4.1 *The negative impact of being silenced by adults*

Drama. There seemed to be a consensus across the drama group that the children were often silenced by adults. Even those children who felt adults had a positive impact on their experience felt that they were not given enough opportunities to have their voices heard. When creating the drama scenes, there were specific points when participants mentioned that they felt closed off from their parents: *'My mum and dad didn't understand how I felt'* (Cara, aged 10, who experienced the death of her gran) *and 'I feel ignored. I don't think they [parents] mean it but they don't really listen to me'* (Emma, aged 10. Her gran died of cancer). Other children, like Cara and Emma, felt unheard too.

Oppression was expressed strongly by the participants through drama. The protagonist in one group's performance was silenced by adults, their emotions and death (as a character). Many groups portrayed voices in their head that resulted from the actions of adults unintentionally silencing them, including: *'Be alone,' 'Keep it to yourself,'* and *'Don't talk about it.'* The drama showed how a child felt upset and intimidated by the decision an adult made to not include them (see Fig. 4.14). Exclusion can come in many forms, including teachers not talking about death, parents not proving information and by being emotionally overwhelmed. They felt that not all their rights had been upheld. Key aspects here are protection and opportunities.

Figure 4.14 Children showing how they felt silenced during their experience of bereavement

Generally, the children did not feel they could express themselves freely. A child's mask was painted with a hand covering the mouth (see Fig. 4.15). When asked to explain it, Evan said:

> *It is because we are silencing the boy in the story. He feels sad but he can't share that with anyone because no one asks him about it so it's like he isn't meant to speak about it. The main character in the story just decides it is best to keep quiet and let adults deal with their grief because, I guess, that is more important* (Evan, aged 10. His gran died when he was 9 years old).

Figure 4.15 Masked child in drama performance with hand painted over mouth

The idea of adults being supreme was also portrayed through movement in the group dramas. Mostly, children were physically positioned at a lower height to adults. The children showed a clear power differential and divide between adults and themselves. A grieving child was shown to be alone, with lower status and less power. She was excluded from a bigger group of adults (see Fig. 4.16). The group explained: *'Cara [the main character] is sitting by herself and the adults are all standing up talking about her. It's to show that the adults are big and have all the power and the children have to go along with the adults.'*

Figure 4.16 A grieving child was seen to have less power and influence than adults

The character expressed that she did not want to be treated differently from adults.

4.4.2 *Searching for answers*

Children shared the many questions they had when they experienced a death in various ways throughout the creative workshop. This included through post-it notes at the reflection zone, during discussion points and when explaining their creative work. They found themselves to be very curious about the topic and wanted to learn more. The need to ask questions about the death seemed to be a means of reassurance for the children. By asking questions, the children felt they could come to terms with the death. They asked questions in different ways, including through the creative methods. In the space, the participants asked questions very naturally and inquisitively. These included:

Why me?
What does it mean to people when I support them?
Do you know why grieving happens?
Were they meant to die when they did?
Why did this have to happen to me?
Is there one way to express yourself?
What do I say to someone who asks me about my dad?

Drama. The discussions which stemmed from the dramas were honest and anecdotal. It seemed that the children were very clear about the finality of death. Many expressed: *'I will never see them again'* (*Emma, aged 10, whose gran died of*

cancer) and *'It's part of life'* (Hafsa, aged 10, had no experience of death). When a death happened, a character shared that they were shocked but did believe what had happened.

Art. Ruby explained: *'I felt confused because I didn't understand'* (Ruby, aged 9. Her gran died at home). Following the death, she wanted to make meaning and understand more about the circumstance. Charlotte's painting was called: *'It was my fault'* (see Fig. 4.17). She explained: *'I don't know what made her die so suddenly. I worry it was something I did'* (Charlotte, aged 10. Her gran died unexpectedly).

Figure 4.17 Charlotte's painting: 'It was my fault'

When children were creating their artwork, it emerged that some information surrounding the death was concealed from them. They shared that they felt isolated. The participants felt that their parents often did not talk to them about the death and were therefore keeping information from them. When parents, and adults alike, did not talk to the children they felt disadvantaged and not fully aware of the death. This made them feel uneasy, left out and they struggled to comprehend the reasoning behind this. Three participants who had experienced the death of their grandparent were not aware of how they died: *'I don't know how the death happened'* (Katie, aged 9)*, 'I'm not sure how they died'* (Aliha, aged 10) and *'I don't know how she died'* (Olivia, aged 10). Through discussion, the participants expressed that they

wanted to know and be clear about when the death occurred and how it happened. Aliha felt this was important information that should not have been kept away from her. She created a piece of art to share her experience of not knowing about her papa's death until one month later (see Fig. 4.18).

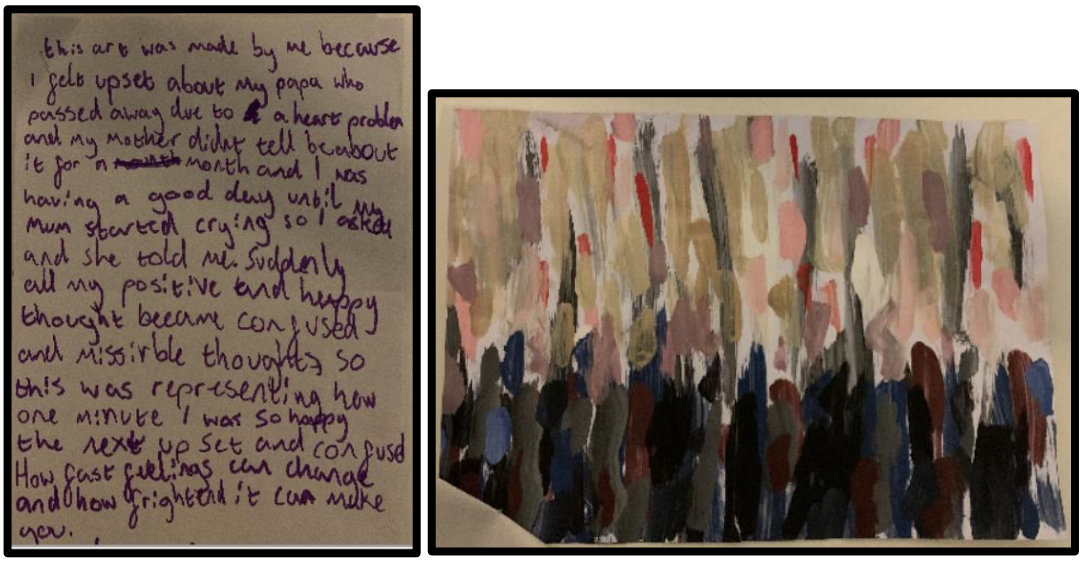

Figure 4.18 Aliha's expression of how she felt when masked from death

To accompany her painting, she wrote:

> *This art was made by me because I felt upset about my Papa who passed away due to a heart problem and my mother didn't tell me about it for a month and I was having a good day until my mum started crying so I asked and she told me. Suddenly all my positive and happy thoughts became confused and miserable thoughts so this was representing how one minute I was so happy the next upset and confused how fast feelings can change and how frightened it can make you* (Aliha, aged 10. Her papa died of a heart attack).

4.4.3 *Exercise of Agency*

Drama. Children felt valued when they were listened to and given control on how to express themselves. The children raised concerns through drama over choices being made on their behalf and how this made them feel. The drama participants shared that they wanted to be involved in discussions related to the death. They felt that adults tended to speak about the deceased when they were not present in the

room. This was illustrated in a scene where a family made the decision that a character was not to attend a funeral. The script read:

Mum: *You're going to school tomorrow whilst we are at the funeral.*

Child: *But…*

Mum: *No. It's best for you to keep your mind busy. It's too old for you anyway.*

Children appreciated when adults allowed them to make choices such as going to the funeral, taking time off school and when to tell their friends. Rather than being *'stuck in the middle'* this gave the children control over their own situation. The idea of being involved seemed to comfort and compensate for the fear of the child feeling it was their fault. Max described how he was given information regularly, opportunities to ask questions and could show difficult feelings. He felt less overwhelmed, a sense of stability and loved.

Art. When sharing their thoughts on the creative workshop, it prompted discussion around the role of schools. A group of 5 participants who were working on their artwork spoke and agreed that schools should do more to educate children about death, dying and bereavement. Anna (aged 10, whose uncle died by suicide) explained: *'I think teachers should do a bit more and talk to the child. Ask them what they felt like and what is going on at home because it's better to talk to someone and keep it in.'* In response, many participants explained that this research study was the first time the topic was addressed in an educational context.

4.5 Chapter Summary

The analysis in this chapter explored key ideas relating to a facilitating a pedagogical creative space for children. Whilst the findings in this chapter are in some ways consistent with the existing literature outlined in Chapter 2, they advance the research on facilitating a creative pedagogical space for children to explore death and dying. In this research, children spoke, drew pictures, painted, created music, wrote lyrics and acted out their experiences of death. The study showed how creative methods can increase children's engagement with the topic in schools. In

addition, the methodology also helped to extend existing research. The participatory approach allowed for a more nuanced and contextual understanding of children's experiences that, as argued in Chapter 3, is missing from extant literature. The analysis approach focused on promoting participation and increasing opportunities for children to be involved at all stages of the research process. The creative data formed by the participants provided opportunities to reflect on their experiences of death and dying. Different findings were generated through the use of creative methods, and in part revealed the participants' experiences of death. However, the data generated did not just describe children's previous experiences but also suggested new connections. This methodological insight is explored further in Chapter 5 and 6.

Chapter 5 Findings II

5.0 Chapter Overview

This chapter presents the script which was developed during the theatrical research-based analysis. As outlined in Chapter 3, the data generated through the creative methods was analysed using reflective Thematic Analysis (TA). The themes and data were then further analysed in a participatory approach which facilitated an opportunity for the children to devise a piece of theatre. By the end of this process, a script was created. This was a result of trialling improvisations, experimenting with movement sequences, and testing out ideas through rehearsal techniques. The children created four characters for the performance. Table 5.1 outlines details of the characters.

Table 5.1 Character descriptions

Character Name	**Character Description**
Jack	A 12-year-old boy grieving the death of his father. He is transported into another world and is confronted with his fears.
Nimbus	Nimbus is an extraordinary cloud-like creature appearing in Jack's vision. Covered in mist, the creature is uncouth, shapeless and vagrant. Yet, when you look more closely, this creature is friendly and empathetic.
Mother	After Jack's father dies, his mother supports him in every way possible with battling with her own grief.
Teacher	Jack's teacher is a caring, loving and confident women. She struggles to attend to Jack's feelings following his family death.

A short synopsis is documented below to provide a context of the play:
Jack is a twelve-year-old boy who experiences the death of his father. On his way to school, he discovers the curious presence of Nimbus. Nimbus creates powerful and colourful memories in Jack's head and helps Jack to work through his grief. Ashamed and frightened, Jack does not tell anyone about Nimbus and the emotional journey he goes on. Back in school, Jack's friends make fun of him for talking to an imaginary friend. It is then that Jack comes

face to face with his fear: Death. Nimbus leaves and Jack finally feels free. He proudly tells his story and encourages growth in others.

Although the script was performed to an audience, this thesis does not capture this data. The process involved in creating theatre generated a manageable amount of data to answer the research questions. The opportunities for future research to explore the experience of live theatre are outlined in Chapter 7. Furthermore, I chose not to include a recording of the performance as research has shown that the problem of a digital presence is that it threatens to disrupt the epistemology of theatre and performance studies (Bay-Cheng, 2023). I believe, particularly for this study, that the reality of a camera would not be the same as the eye and filming the performance would have resulted in a loss of aura (De Brogniez & Vandenbulke, 2023).

5.1 The Script

This research privileged children as creators. The basis of the study was the acknowledgment that children were key contributors. In carrying out this research, I was aware that children were already being tasked with various drama tasks in schools and this was a significant factor in my choice to include the script, devised and written by the children, in this thesis. Bearing this in mind, when children were asked to sign the consent form to be part of the devising group, I explained carefully to them (and their parents) that their work would be published in the final thesis, if we all agreed to this. None of the children (or parents) raised concerns about this decision. On the contrary, the children were very excited about participating and publishing their work. Ultimately, the decision to include the play script was ethical and highly appropriate: in line with the study's methodological approach. Children were researchers in the sense that they were involved in the analysis process and created work for publication. As part of this, children were making decisions on what to include, when to include it, how to write it up and what to not include. The inclusion of the script in the research highlights the importance of working with the creative child in participatory ways to direct us in how to understand and interpret their stories. The relational experiences involved in devising a script show the importance of how pedagogical spaces can be valuably aligned with a research process guided by an ethic of care. These interactions brought about generative and

transformative research moments that came to underpin the script created by the children.

Trapped

Scene 1 – Life Goes On

'In the End' by Linkin Park plays. *A young boy, Jack, is lying on the stage. A giant cube is positioned in the centre of the stage. Its sides, except from the front, are projection screens. A spotlight slowly appears on him. There is a burst of action as various characters rush around him. The following dialogue takes place over the music:*

Mother: Jack, Jack… get up!

Barista: *To Teacher…* One latte, enjoy!

Teacher: Thank you! Have a nice day.

Nana: *On the phone…* Is he up yet? He's really letting this get to him.

Mother: I don't know what else to do. He just needs to get on with it.

Child: Do you think Jack will come to school today, Mum?

Parent: I think he'll need to take some time off. Losing his Dad is very difficult. He'll be so upset.

Child: What will I say to him when he comes back to school?

Parent: Don't worry about that. You are better not saying anything.

Mother: Jack, please, get up! You are going to be late for school.

Jack: I don't want to go to school.

Teacher: *Entering the school.* Morning!

Head Teacher: Good morning, Ellen. Did you hear about Jack?

Teacher: It's so sad, isn't?

Head Teacher: I'll keep in touch with the family.

Mother: Are you having breakfast, Jack? You must eat something.

Jack: I can't do this. I don't want to do this.

Mother: Jack!

Jack: What?! I'm not hungry!

Mother: You must eat something. You need to look after yourself, Jack.

Jack: Just leave me alone. I'm going to school now. Goodbye.

Mother: I'm just worried about you. Have a good day. I love you.

The chaos continues around Jack as everyone acts out their morning routine.

Jack: I feel sick.

Mother: I can't do this.

Teacher: I'll try to be there for him.

Nana: Everything will OK.

Head Teacher: Life goes on.

Jack and Mother: I feel…

Teacher and Child: He must feel…

All: Trapped.

Blackout. The music cuts.

Scene 2 – Nimbus Appears

Jack is alone. An unusual character appears from the haze in the distance. Jack begins to take his anger out on a tree.

Nimbus: Don't do that. The trees don't like it.

Jack: I'm sorry. I didn't know.

Nimbus: No. I don't suppose you did.

Jack: Who are you?

Nimbus: I might ask you the same question. I have never seen you before. Still, in answer to you, I am Nimbus. I have no other name, or none that matters.

Jack sits in silence, confused.

Nimbus: And now, it's your turn. What's your name, and what are you doing here? Did you come to… grieve?

Jack: No, well what do you mean? My name is Jack. I came through the tree trunk, I think. There was a hole, but it disappeared.

Nimbus: You came through the tree? From where did you come?

Jack: My house. There was a little gap in a corner, and I found a way through from there to here. I was on my way to school. I thought I heard my father's voice, and I followed it. But it couldn't have been, he's dead. And now the way back is gone.

Nimbus: You can stay with me. We'll talk about your father.

Jack: Why would I want to talk about my father?

Nimbus: Because he's dead.

Jack: Exactly. There's no point.

Nimbus: You have a lot to learn.

Jack: Like?

Nimbus: Coping, grieving, remembering, managing your emotions, learning to live with death… the list is endless.

Jack: No one has ever taught me, have they? Death is something you can't mention. *He mimics 'death' as if it is a scary being.*

Death is lonely.

Nimbus: It's not lonely when I'm here.

Jack: You are kind of annoying. Just leave me alone.

Nimbus: You are in a deep and dark place now. And you can't get rid of me. I follow you everywhere, always beside you, above you, below you, inside you. I am that feeling that something unpleasant is going to happen. I am like that dark cloud in the sky. We should be friends.

Blackout.

Scene 3 – A Red Memory

Jack is daydreaming. Nimbus watches closely. 'Time to Say Goodbye' by Lauren Aquilina plays.

Jack: I remember it well.

Nimbus: The day he died?

Jack: When I had to say goodbye. I remember every single detail. The room was dark and cold. Dad was wearing his blue pyjamas.

A flashback sequence begins. A figure to represent Jack's father appears on the projection screens.

Jack: I'm afraid. This is really hard. Why don't you stay? I don't want you to go.

Jack hugs the fatherly figure.

Nimbus: It ended with you holding on tight to your father.

The flashback ends.

Scene 4 – Death is Uncomfortable

Jack: I could smell the bitter antiseptic and taste the cleanliness. All I could hear was a murmur of electronic devices. My eyes were fixed to my dad.

Nimbus: You do remember it well.

Jack: Why are you making me do this? This doesn't feel right!

Nimbus: You don't want to remember?

Jack: No! It's too soon. You are making it awkward. Stop talking about death.

Nimbus: Why not?

Jack: Because you shouldn't! People don't talk about it. They tell you not to. I feel uncomfortable.

Nimbus: Uncomfortable you say? About something that everyone faces at some point in their lives.

Jack: That's not the point. You don't understand.

Nimbus: Oh, I do. I know what it feels like.

Jack: You don't know what it feels like for me.

Nimbus: I am here to listen. This is your story after all.

Jack: What story?

Nimbus: There once was a boy who lost his father.

Jack: He isn't lost. He is dead.

Nimbus: He was stolen away from him, piece by piece. The boy became more and more afraid of finally losing him entirely. He wanted him to stay. He could not bear to think of a life without him.

Jack: Stop! I don't want to hear anymore.

Nimbus: After every storm, a tree takes deeper roots. May you stand as tall as the redwood, live gracefully as the willow and may you always bear fruit all your days on this earth.

Jack: Why are you talking about trees? *He laughs.*

Nimbus: The stories you are telling are memories that have survived because they are very powerful indeed. They are both an escape from reality and an alternative reality themselves.

Jack looks at the projection screens.

Nimbus: Sometimes the thin wall separating the two becomes so thin and brittle that the two worlds start to blend into one another.

Scene 5 – An Orange Memory

The projection screens fill with orange.

Nimbus: Why did the orange lose the race?

Jack: I don't know.

Nimbus: It ran out of juice. *S/*he *laughs hysterically.*

Jack: Orange is my favourite colour. It was my dad's too.

Nimbus: It's a cheerful colour. Optimistic and energetic.

Jack: My Dad was full of energy. He would jump around, scare me and race me across the grass.

Nimbus: He must have been a very warm person.

Jack: He was. He was very fun.

Nimbus: He gave you confidence…

Jack and Nimbus: To succeed.

They share a smile. The orange disappears.

Scene 6 – Battling to Understand

Nimbus: Nothing can be perfect. Nothing is perfect. My life is very monotonous. I am a little bored.

Jack: This isn't about you. It's about me. I want to understand. And I can't because you are here. I want you to go away. Leave me alone and give me time. Give me time to understand and think. I can't cope anymore.

Nimbus: You must be very patient. Let me teach you. We grieve because we love. First, you will sit down at a little distance from me, like that, in the grass. I shall look at you out of the corner of my eye, and you will say nothing. Words can be the sources of misunderstandings. But you will sit a little closer to me, everyday…

Time passes. Nimbus and Jack move closer and closer together.

Now, you can go look at that rose. You will now understand that is your rose and it is unique in all the world. You will love that rose.

Jack: This is my rose. For you, Dad. I have made Nimbus my friend now. He is unique in all the world. This rose for you is beautiful, but empty. An ordinary passer-by would think that my rose looked like a thousand other roses. But it is more important: because it is for you that I have watered it; that I have cared for it.

Jack/Nimbus: Because it's my/your rose.

Blackout.

Scene 7 – A Yellow Memory

Jack: Do you want to play hide and seek?

Nimbus: You count. I'll hide.

Jack: My Dad used to always count. I would hide under the stairs, in the same place every time. He would pretend he didn't know where I was.

Nimbus: I'll count. You hide.

Nimbus begins to count and Jack hides. There is a 'hide and seek' sequence over the music 'Somewhere Only We Know' by Lily Allen.

Jack stops playing the game and rests.

Scene 8 – It is Confusing

Jack: I don't understand. This story doesn't make sense. Death never makes sense.

Nimbus: For it is not a story.

Jack: I just want to understand why my dad died. And if I can't do that, I want to go home.

Nimbus: Everything you can imagine is real.

Jack: It's not true! It's all made up. It's all lies. I just want to get out of here!

Nimbus: It is as if you are lost in your own words…

Jack: It's not exactly clear, is it? 'I'm sorry for your loss', 'They've gone away', 'It's time to say Goodbye and move on' – I don't even know what Goodbye means any more. People don't make it easy with the words they choose. One minute I'm told he's gone to sleep, then I'm told he has passed away and I'll get over it. Get over what? My Dad? And forget about him. It's like they are avoiding the situation. He deserves honesty. He has died and that's OK, people can say that. But why are they so afraid of using the word 'death'. It isn't something to shy away from. I'm proud of living through the death of my dad. I want people to know he has died and remember him.

Nimbus: Remain brave and strong for just a little longer. Your wings will show you what you can become, Jack. The roots are there to remind you where you have come from. It will all make sense.

Blackout.

Scene 9 – A Green Memory

A silhouette appears on the projection screens. Jack hugs it.

Jack: A hug is a special thing,
That took place every time we saw each other
A Hug
Before I went to sleep
A Hug
When I went to school
A Hug
The warmth of his body
When pressing against each other,
A Hug

The rush running through us
It felt electrifying
A Hug
It was calm
A Hug
The feeling of time started to sit still,
For just that few seconds longer,
A Hug
It was unspoken, there were no words
A Hug
Until the next time…

A smile
A tight squeeze,
All of this,
Is the hug we share.

Scene 10 – There's No Way of Knowing

Jack: Did I say the right thing?

Nimbus: There's no way of knowing the right thing to say.

Jack: It's like you can't describe it. You tell me to keep going but I just do not know how to carry on.

Nimbus: Just let it out.

Jack begins to express his grief through his body to 'The Beginning of the Twist' by The Futureheads.

Nimbus: Few people could have achieved what you have managed to accomplish.

Jack: I am happy to be here.

Pause.

Jack: This story has value to *me.*

Nimbus: It will not be useless to anyone else.

Jack: But it's about me.

Nimbus: I gave you what you desired.

As a child you saw things only in black and white, good and bad, what gave you pleasure and what brought you pain. Now you see everything in shades of grey. You are willing to decide what is right and wrong. Regrets can cloud your memory and now you seek to blame yourself for being weak.

Jack: What can you do to me that you have not already done? Is this what death feels like? Am I dying?

Nimbus: Remember and remember well: You are braver than you believe, stronger than you seem, smarter than you think and loved more than you know.

Jack: I think I have read a story like this once before.

Nimbus: Everything belongs in your world. The magic is a result of the words chosen by the authors of you.

Jack: Yet again, I don't understand. But it seems like this story is lasting forever.

Nimbus: Forever is sometimes just one second.

Blackout.

<u>Scene 11 – A Blue Memory</u>

Jack is sad.

Nimbus: You look sad. Like a tear may fall down your cheek.

Nimbus draws the outline of a tear on the stage.

Nimbus: When the voice within you says cry, paint your tears.

Jack begins to paint his sadness live on the stage. The song 'Sad Song' by We are the Kings plays.

They sit and admire Jack's artwork.

Scene 12 – Unanswered Questions

Jack: Can I ask you a question?

Nimbus: You just asked me one.

Jack: Another one.

Nimbus: Was that another one?

Jack: You just asked me a question.

Nimbus: Go on.

Jack: Why do people die?

Nimbus: Do you know why you are here?

Jack: I was asking the questions! Not you!
Look, how can I get you out of here?

Nimbus: You can't. You see, you still have questions.

Jack: Well, what is death? You haven't answered that question yet.

Nimbus: It isn't my job to answer your questions but to guide you.

Jack: Are you dead?

Nimbus: Am I? Am I dead? HELP! HELP!!!! I'M DEAD.

Jack: No, you can't be. Dead means your body stops working. Someone who is dead can no longer breathe, move, eat or drink. You still have feelings.

Nimbus: Phew! I'm not dead. Or maybe I died and came back to life?

Jack: You can't do that. I do wonder why people die.

Nimbus: Many people die because they're old but not everyone who dies is very old.

Jack: My dad wasn't old.

Nimbus: Someone's body might be damaged, or they might have a serious illness that causes them to die.

Jack: I wish people didn't die.

Nimbus: It is the only thing we can be certain about. People will die. And when someone dies nothing can bring them back to life.

Jack: Where do they go? Will I always feel sad? What if I never feel happy again? Will I ever forget my dad?

Nimbus: Oh! One question at a time.

You see, after death no one can be certain what happens. Different people have different ideas and beliefs. As for your sadness, it won't last forever. It's like jumping in puddles.

Nimbus takes Jack's hand, and it is as if they are jumping in and out of puddles.

This one is sadness. This one is anger. This one might be happiness. But you might jump back into sadness then happiness then sadness again. You will laugh, you will cry, you have fun, and you will never forget the person who has died. You might feel less upset or learn to avoid the puddles sometimes. But you can always jump in!

Blackout.

Scene 13 – An Indigo Memory

Jack opens his school bag and pulls out a letter. 'Stella Del Mattino' by Ludovico Einaudi plays.

Nimbus: What's that?

Jack: It's a letter. Open it if you want. It's from my dad.

Nimbus: Your Dad?

Jack: He wrote it for me.

Nimbus: Read it out.

Jack: Dear Jack, I am probably just a memory now, but you must know that I miss you. I miss your smile, your laugh, your cry. I have missed hugging you, telling you off and kicking a football with you. I will always be there for you, Jack. I am very proud of you. Promise me that you will be yourself, be kind to your friends and look after our family. I'm proud of you, boy. Love you forever, Dad.

Nimbus: That's a very special memory.

Jack: I'll keep it forever.

Blackout.

Scene 14 – Where Now?

Nimbus: I am glad that you have found the answers. Now you may go back home.

Jack: Not to all my questions! I don't want to leave just yet.

Nimbus: I, too, am going back home today. It is much farther. It is much more difficult, and I am afraid. Little man, I want to hear you laugh again.

Jack: The thing that is important is the thing that is not seen. It is just as it was with the flower. If you love a flower that lives on a star, it is sweet to look at the sky at night. All the stars are a-bloom with flowers...

Nimbus: Yes, I know.

Jack: And at night you will look up at the stars. My dad's star will just be one of the stars. And so, I will love to watch all the stars in the heavens. They will all be our friends. And, besides, I am going to make you a present.

Jack laughs.

Nimbus: I love to hear that laughter.

All these stars are silent. You, you alone, will have the stars as no one else has them. In one of the stars, your dad shall be. In one of them, I shall be laughing. And so, it will be as if all the stars were laughing, when you look at the sky at night. You, only you, will have stars that can laugh!

Now, you must leave… It's time for me to go. If you stay too long, you will suffer.

Scene 15 – A Violet Memory

Jack: But I have one more memory to share with you.

A family photograph appears on projection screens.

Nimbus: Your family. Remember, memories live on forever. Keep them alive – sharing them, mould them, talk about them, paint them, sing them, act them out! Treasure them, but don't keep them quiet.

Fade to blackout.

Scene 16 – In School

Teacher: Good morning, everyone. I hope everyone is well. And, Jack, you too. I'm sorry… *Pause.* Now, moving on.

Jack: *To Nimbus* Did she just say my name?

Why is everyone looking at me?

Nimbus: Because you are talking to yourself.

Jack: I'm talking to you. Tell them to stop staring.

Nimbus: I'm *your* cloud. Not there's.

Jack: Why is everyone staring at me? Is it because my dad died?

Child: *Gasps.* Did he just say died?

Teacher: Jack. I hope you are doing OK. But remember, we don't talk about *that* at school. People might get upset. You know I'm here if you need me but it's best not to talk about it in front of the class.

Jack: I feel so powerless.

The school bell rings, and the class leave.

Scene 17 – Death is Present

Jack is alone in the classroom. Death appears.

Jack: Why are you here?

Death: Because you understand now. But they don't. You can help them.

Jack: How?

Death: Tell them about your experience. Don't be afraid. Sometimes adults think they know what's best, but they don't ask the children. So, tell them what it's like to be a child and to experience the death of your dad. He'd be proud.

Death exits.

Nimbus: That's a sign that my time is up. You've faced your fear. Death. Goodbye, Jack.

Jack: Wait… thank you.

Nimbus: What for?

Jack: For being that 'dark' cloud that everyone needs. You've shown me the light.

Nimbus: I guess my job here is done. I may be back.

Jack: Why are you going?

Nimbus: And now here is my secret, a very simple secret: It is only with the heart that one can see rightly; what is essential is invisible to the eye.

Jack: What is essential is invisible to the eye.

Nimbus: It is the time you have wasted for your rose that makes your rose so important.

Jack: I knew this day would come.

Nimbus leaves. A school bell rings and there is an assembly set up.

Nimbus: Endings are the hardest parts to write. This is because they are false. Nothing truly ends; it transforms. Still, the novel must have a last page, the poem a final line.
And in the darkness, Jack closed his eyes, as all that was lost was found again.

The characters close their eyes.

Blackout.

Scene 18 – Free

Jack is standing on a podium in front of the school. 'Somewhere Over the Rainbow' by Israel Kamakawiwo'ole plays.

Jack: Do you ever get the feeling of being trapped? You know what's right, and yet it feels wrong. Change is due. We will all experience death. Most of us probably have already, and yet we don't learn about it. In fact, we can't really talk about. We must wait. We are hidden from it. Can we only cope when we are adults? Let's not wait until tomorrow to deal with this. Let's do it now. Let's stand up. We have the right to be heard and to express our feelings. We need to support each other. Our family, our friends, our teachers – we are all in it together. I want

to be heard. Many people have been here and haven't been heard. So, let's make a difference today because we need it. The first step is to talk about death. And then you can make a stand for everyone. You can change this. Nothing changes if it isn't challenged. Let's challenge it so we can proudly remember our loved ones, share our experiences, express our feelings, and explore what death means. I want to make my dad proud. But I can't do this alone. I need you to help me. Whether you are my teacher, my friend, my mum, my sister, the stranger on the street, the person I pass on the way to school… Look out for me. Look out for each other. Don't ignore death. Don't be scared of it. Don't turn away and pretend it doesn't happen.

Change is a part of life; let's not get trapped in it. Growth is our hope.

Music up. Fade to black.

The end.

5.2 Chapter Summary

This chapter presented a play script created within a participatory research approach, in response to a research question. It highlights how the initial research questions facilitated the creative data generation which then informed the writing of plot, characterisation, setting and dialogue. The script illustrates how a piece of theatre can be devised to effectively analyse research data co-constructively. The knowledge occurs in the act of reading, and subsequently later reflection and discussion in Chapters 6 and 7. The script is a different way of coming to understand the themes present in the creative data. Furthermore, it informs the reader of the lived experiences that may never have been understood. The play script was produced with a participatory research framework and can also be seen to disseminate finding in the context of the children's narratives. As Baker (2018) expresses: "The script on the page is also a participatory space" (p. 167). In that, collaboration is crucial: this participatory act is not only dependent on performing the script, it also happened in the act of writing and reading.

Chapter 6 Discussion

6.0 Chapter Overview

In this chapter, I identify the contribution this study has made as an outcome of practitioner enquiry. Accordingly, the chapter begins by discussing the key findings explored in Chapters 4 and 5. I have displayed these, in Figure. 6.1, creatively and visually in accordance with this being a creative study and for ease of reference. I discuss and situate the findings within the wider theoretical, methodological and practice landscape, identifying the significance of the findings considering what was already known and what was discovered. New knowledge and understanding are presented with reflection on the research questions, design and findings. Key methodological and theoretical contributions are then outlined.

Figure 6.1 Themes and subthemes from Chapter 4 displayed creatively

6.1 Discussion of findings

This research aimed to understand how practitioners can facilitate the use of creative methods to engage children with the topic of death and dying. This study sought to create a shared environment for children to express their experiences of bereavement. Furthermore, the systematic literature review found that children's voice in death research is significantly limited. The findings, in line with the research aims, have indicated the direction to go in with increased knowledge of children's experiences and perceptions: suggesting what is working well and what may require attention and action as a result of the enquiry.

In Chapters 1 and 2, a practitioner enquiry stance was outlined to explain the systematic approach taken to review the literature. The systematic review reflected on, and reframed, previous research related to death, dying and bereavement. To consider all literature in the field would have been unhelpful as the goal of the literature review was specifically to look at creative research around the theme of child bereavement. The systematic approach gathered the most recent, peer-reviewed qualitative literature with highly reliable findings. In doing so, visible gaps became apparent and the lack of research around creative methods, specifically drama, were highlighted. This led to the proposal of three research questions and, subsequently, the development of a unique methodology that was designed to facilitate meaningful opportunities for participation. The study revealed important findings about children's engagement with the topic.

This study is in line with theoretical findings around the complexity of grief (see Millar & Lopez-Cantero, 2022; Tonkin, 1996), and also the shift in academic discourses in relation to the reformed sociology of childhood in the 1990s. There was an emergence of children's rights discourse and sociological interests in childhood. The findings concur yet extend the view of grief in children's social worlds. Creativity encouraged children to explore their behaviour, relationships and coping mechanisms. It has a place in schools: in an educational and research context. A significant finding which I add to theories of sociology is the importance of creative participation as a group approach when facilitating opportunities for children to engage with the topic of death and dying.

6.1.1 Creativity and Death

The findings suggest that creative methods are a useful tool for self-expression, particularly when working with children. Through art, drama and music the participants were able to connect with themselves and their feelings around death and bereavement. All children were able to gain from the emotional exploration the creative methods facilitated as illustrated by the subtheme intense emotion and metaphoric association discussed in Chapter 4. Engaging with creativity as a means of emotional expression can promote healthy grieving (Edgar-Bailey & Kress, 2010), and it was clear that an approach which elicited emotion powerfully was beneficial to the children's journey through grief. For example, the theme imagery and recollection suggested that when children were given the space and freedom to use their intuition, in creative ways, it became apparent that they could communicate naturally and on their terms. Through this means, children were able to gain a deeper understanding of themselves as the findings suggested they were able to articulate what grief meant to them, their understanding of death and how they both connect.

The findings indicated that creativity encouraged the children to relate to each other, address the challenges they faced and remember the past in the present moment. Although the literature highlighted it can be difficult to express very powerful and intense emotions (see Lytje & Dyregrov, 2023b), this study found that creative methods can help children to share their emotions. In this case, it opened a way for children to express their ideas about bereavement and to find inner strength in peer interaction as portrayed through the theme of empathetic healing. Children's attitudes towards death do reflect that of the wider society and the death taboo (Paul, 2019). However, the creative opportunities used in this research study were able to break the norm and engage children with the topic of death. This is an important contribution this research makes to theory, particularly around the concept of "death ambivalence" developed by Paul (2019, p. 566). Death ambivalence recognises the presence and absence of death in children's lives and illustrates how they are both attracted and averse to death (Paul, 2019). This was evident in Luke's story discussed in Chapter 2. In this enquiry, these opposing experiences were found under all four themes: self-expression; imagery and recollection; empathetic healing; and oppression. This study adds to the theory of death ambivalence by suggesting that creative methods support connectivity. The children were able to

openly share their views and experiences: connecting with death in a creative space. This developed an attraction and began to overcome any aversion.

The notion of expression of emotion has a long history in the literature (see Collingwood, 2016; Goodman, 1976; Tolstoy & Maude, 1962). This enquiry also found that works of art communicate emotion (Round et al., 2017). Specifically, the emotion in this study was found to be present in the work, the artist and the audience. When working with children, the importance of expression is a matter of rights (Gillett-Swan & Sargeant, 2018). Children, of all ages, are not given enough opportunities to express themselves, connect with their emotions and exercise their creativity (Vygotsky, 2004). The Scottish curriculum's Health and Wellbeing area does state it aims to: "develop the knowledge and understanding, skills, capabilities and attributes which they need for mental, emotional, social and physical wellbeing now and in the future" (Education Scotland, 2009, p. 1). However, the findings of this research suggested that most children were not given opportunities to experiment with their emotional wellbeing and to learn about intense emotions in situations such as death. As Goleman (1996, p. 78) states: "students who are angry, anxious or depressed do not learn; people who are caught in these states do not take in information efficiently or deal with it well". Children need support to name their emotions, release and overcome them (Segal, 1984): this enquiry illustrated how creative methods, in a particular context, can promote this.

A key finding of this research study related to how creative methods encouraged children to explain their thinking through emotional responses. In doing so, this highlighted the barriers that can exist around language development, particularly the language of death and grief. The participants, as young as 9 years old, were able to link colour and emotion (for example, painting red tears). In a shared environment, emotional reasoning perspectives became apparent. The findings captured children's ability to use creative methods to express behaviours, contextual information and memories complementing emotional reasoning literature (for example, Verduijn et al., 2015): thus, enabling children to make reasonable and adaptive inferences and predictions about their own and other people's internal states. This suggests that creative methods in a pedagogical space helped children to navigate their internal and global social world when exploring death and dying. This brings to the fore Bronfenbrenner's (1979) model as discussed in Chapter 2.

The children were able to express through art, drama and music that adults can misinterpret their emotions and they can jump to the wrong conclusions or have assumptions. This came to light under the theme of oppression in the findings. Children were supported to articulate their experiences of death when given creative tools. The characteristics present in children's artwork, music and dramatic representations can narrate their stories to help adults, and their peers alike, understanding their emotion, particularly when experiencing death, dying, and bereavement. It was evident that the participants' stories portrayed through the creative methods were filled with worry and fear; yet this research backed the literature to suggest that when grieving the death of a loved one, children can find creative expression uplifting and encouraging (Hedtke, 2002). The findings reflect a complex interplay between emotions and the multiple facets of children's lived experiences, and this supports a shift away from a language-orientated sociological curriculum. This focus towards a creative curriculum is well documented in the literature with benefits including learner engagement, intrinsic motivation and social identity (Cremin & Chappell, 2021). This research supports the need for attention to be on the creation of the necessary support pedagogical climate for fostering creativity (Swanzy-Impraim et al., 2023), specifically when children engaging with the topic of death and dying. Ultimately, the findings suggest a focus on bereaved children's expressive competencies in creative ways is helpful for their emotional and social expression and development. By doing so, self-expression and worth are valued and fostered in practice.

6.1.2 Children's Social World

Generally, the research found that children are open to allowing adults and peers to enter their social worlds. The participants were not afraid, despite several barriers, to share their experience and found comfort in having a listening ear. Well-established research outlined in the systematic review carried out in Chapter 2 states that children want a space to express their grief as it is important to their healing and acceptance (Kennedy et al., 2020). This study illustrates that children welcome adult and peer presence to help them with the grieving process. The enquiry highlighted a focus on sociological perspectives rather than psychological. Engaging creatively with the topic of death, and in a shared and pedagogical environment, gave children a sense of *grieving together* and this normalisation of death reassured the children on their journey. There was a slight contradiction

experienced by the children as they wanted to be accepted for how they felt on an individual basis, and they wanted to feel similar emotions to their peers. When children grieved together, the findings suggest that they felt accepted and reassured. This normalised their reaction and provided them with an opportunity to learn from one another and to experiment with their developing grief in a non-judgemental way.

To illustrate the study's contribution to theoretical perspectives, I engaged with Bronfenbrenner's Ecological System (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Powerful experiences shared commonly in the research study suggested children deal with uncertainty when exploring death and dying. This is particularly true in literature that explores the impact of COVID-19 and its impact on children's trauma, loss and grief (Fitzgerald et al., 2021). Uncertainty arose as participants engaged with the creative methods due to a range of factors changing in children's lives, such as school absence, accommodation, parental work, daily routines and end-of-life celebrations. Many sociological models link very closely to the participants' description of grief and their experiences, presence or absence, of death in their everyday lives.

The findings of this enquiry highlight an interaction between children and various ecological systems. Therefore, I created Figure 6.2 to show how the influence of the topic of death and dying can be seen fluidly by different people and professionals and the themes of this study are woven throughout each layer. The surrounding structures highlight the opportunities for children to collectively engage with the topic in a creative and pedagogic space. This is a striking finding which highlights the importance of facilitating creative participation in a quality space using the dimensions outlined earlier in Chapter 2, including: comfort zones, collaboration, elements of risk-taking in safe environment, non-judgemental practice and stimulating resources.

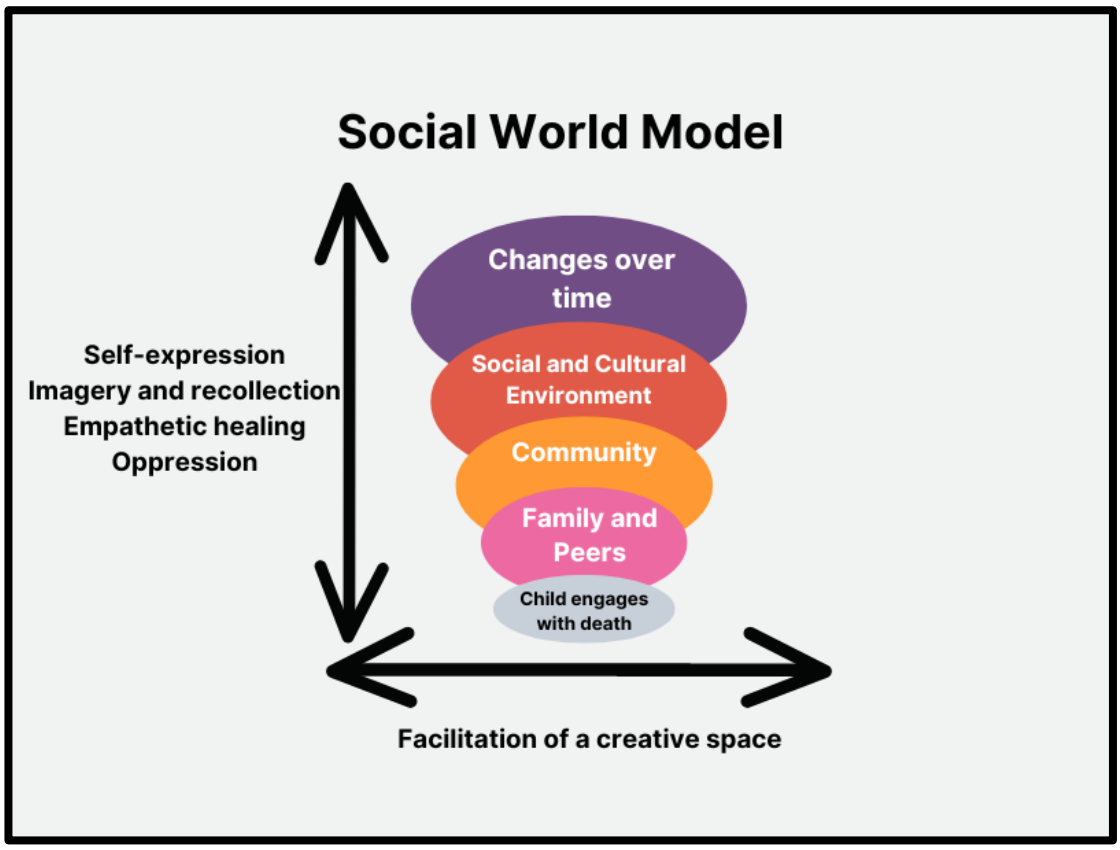

Figure 6.2 Social world model created from findings and influenced by Bronfenbrenner's Ecological System (1979)

The child is placed at the centre and their engagement with death is a nested arrangement of structures. The first level relates to the child's immediate environment including close family members and peers. Relationships can be extremely beneficially nurturing, or detrimental to the child's development. The second level encompasses the interactions between the child and the community. This primary influence stems from the child's connections to the different parts of the child's life such as schooling. In the third level, the child's in-direct environment pertains more to the cultural and indirect influences affecting their development. In the final level, changes over time influence the child's environment. Across each of the levels, the themes of self-expression, imagery and recollection, empathetic healing and oppression are present and should be considered. My model highlights that by facilitating a creative space in schools, they can offer potential support for their pupils. This theoretical position provides a structure to the factors in a child's social world which may affect their development.

Unsurprisingly, as a part of the child's social world, schools are in a strong position to educate children around the topic of death and dying due to the significant amount of time pupils spend at school. Not only does this require expertise and training, but it also takes more than reactive action and the highlighted need for a school bereavement policy which the literature suggests (see National Childhood Bereavement Project, 2022). This study suggests that a creative approach may be helpful, and this could be adopted in schools due to the resources available and opportunities to upskill staff. The findings have shown how children, in schools, can support each other but practitioners need to encourage this by facilitating collective engagement. Schools, in general, fail to engage children with the topic of death and dying (Friesen et al., 2020); and thus, the collective engagement facilitated in the study does not currently happen. This study found that facilitating creative opportunities for children to engage with death is invaluable: children gained skills in coping, being empathetic and managing emotion through artistic expression. The findings show that death can feature in a school's curriculum in a safe and useful way. Creative methods are a feature to include when design the curriculum to include the topic of death and dying. The study showed that children, mostly, lacked an understanding of death as a concept due to an absence of opportunities to explore the topic in their daily lives.

The absence of death in schools is fairly consistent within recent literature which advocates for grief education (Dawson et al., 2023). The benefits of engaging children with the topic through creative methods should be of interest to governments, policy makers and practitioners. As it stands, current policies are vague and do not explain *how* to engage children with death in schools. The phrasing of 'change and loss' in curriculum guidance can be interpreted in very different ways. Current government action seems only to signpost on the *Education Scotland* website. However, there is a burgeoning area of literature which suggests supporting practitioners to facilitate engagement, and consequently learning and teaching, needs to go beyond this (Rodríguez Herrero et al., 2022; Wango & Gwiyo, 2021). It is noted that a recent National Childhood Bereavement Project took place and the report was published in 2022 (see National Childhood Bereavement Project, 2022). However, progress following this is yet to be made.

This study demonstrated that by facilitating creative opportunities, children felt they had permission to share their knowledge, views and ideas about death and grief. It also provided children with their right to access information which is their entitlement. The findings have revealed important factors that could be embedded into policy to support practitioners achieve this. These are discussed further in Chapter 7 but can be summarised as the role of the adult in facilitating a creative pedagogical space for children to share, explore and express their experiences of death and dying.

Adults, in schools, can act as part of the child's social world with the appropriate guidance and support to implement the points raised above by using this enquiry as a starting point to bring about change.

6.1.3 The importance of empowering children

This research has revealed that children, to an extent, may feel unheard in relation to their views about death and creative methods provided an opportunity to share ideas and for them to be heard by others. Children are positioned within the literature as vulnerable and thus extra protection is needed (Bagattini, 2019; Gheaus, 2018; UNICEF, 2020). Further to this, the case could be made, that children, when grieving, are an oppressed group. These results further support the idea of expanding their protections and opportunities as "recognizing children as an oppressed group may create emphasis and urgency surrounding children's issues…" (Barth & Olsen, 2020, p. 6). Oppression resulted from adults not respecting, protecting and fulfilling children's rights. For example, making decisions about attendance at a funeral without consulting the child. Careful interpretation is needed here as children in this research may not be as oppressed as other groups.

However, a similar finding where children meet many of the criteria used to determine which groups are oppressed is in a study by Barth and Olsen (2020). Children are described as being vulnerable to discrimination and particular measures, such as the UNCRC, are established to avoid mistreatment (Barth & Olsen, 2020). I take this finding further, with caution, and this study suggests that bereaved children are oppressed due to being excluded and prevented from accessing social and educational support. This intriguing result can be explained by the way in which creative methods opened opportunities for children to hold adults to account and communicate their voice: views, decisions and purpose.

New initiatives, underpinned by creativity, could provide increased protection for children, and promote their voice in new ways. Empowering children can begin in schools and thus education opens an opportunity to tackle the notion of children as an oppressed group (Bešić, 2020). Tackling death requires a public health approach as it is a legal duty for all public bodies to promote children's rights and, within this, Scottish education should safeguard and protect children whilst enabling them to create the potential for change. A rights-based approach to education is defined by the General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTCS) as: "The articles of the UNCRC ensure that children are protected, have the opportunity to participate and are provided for – these are known as the '3 Ps' (Participation, Protection and Provision)" (General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTCS), n.d., p. 2). Schools should strive to facilitate opportunities for children to exercise their freedom of expression and they should respect the child's increasing capacity to make their own choice when engaging with death and dying (see, UNICEF, 1989).

6.1.4 Children's agency in research

The empirical findings of this research have revealed how practitioners can facilitate the use of creative methods to increase children's engagement with the topic of death and dying. In conducting this research, participatory and creative methodologies were used with children from a primary school in Scotland. There is potential for the approach used in this thesis to be adopted and used to increase children's engagement in other contexts, for example in inclusive education. Across the literature, there were a wide range of participatory techniques facilitated and focus on creative methods was beginning to emerge (Kara et al., 2021). The methodology, and subsequent analysis of data, developed in this thesis was original and unique.

Using creative methods with children is a growing interest and this research specifically expanded this approach to the analysis stage. By being participatory, it enabled children to be involved at most stages of the research process. Children planned the creative workshop and took the lead on how involved they were. Crucially, the arts-output did not distracted from the research findings (Bartlett, 2015). This was a difficult balance to achieve; albeit the aim in using arts techniques in this research was different from using them in the arts. Children were, for the most part involved, in the data analysis process; this is usually where studies lack

participation from children. As a methodology and data analysis technique, theatrical-based research is meaningfully applied when engaging in topics with high-level emotion (Heyward, 2010; Pestana et al., 2020). The creative approaches were instrumental to this research and provided extensive qualitative perspectives from the children, with a focus on participation, revealing multiple levels of detail. High levels of motivation and interest in the creative process, and consequently with the topic under investigation, were observed. Art, drama and music all provided incredibly useful opportunities for reflection in a pedagogical environment. Therefore, the methods facilitated in this research study are a valuable contribution to participatory and creative research methodologies in research. There is great potential for these to be used in schools, with children, on a range of topics but particularly death, dying and bereavement.

This study facilitated a novel creative data analysis process embedded in participatory research. Theatre was used as a tool to tackle important barriers to participation. Children's active participation in data analysis is limited in research (Coad & Evans, 2007). Thus, I drew on literature, such as Ventä-Olkkonen et al. (2022), which advocates theatre as a practical approach to engaging children in research. Furthermore, drama approaches have been used for empowerment within social work and counselling, and theatre is incorporated into children's learning and educational activities and methods (Ventä-Olkkonen et al., 2022). Many studies, however, do not scrutinise the use of theatre as a method in the context of data analysis. Thus, I applied it to the data analysis process through participatory research in this study.

Drama was applied to engage children in active collaboration to increase their engagement and participation. The process involved in devising theatre, as a tool for social change, was found to build a shared environment that increased children's participation and expression of thought about the topic of death and dying. It provided a creative space for reflection to gain new knowledge and perspectives during the data analysis process (Hassi et al., 2015). The study valued theatre for creative research design and, as a result, there were many emerging opportunities and challenges. The process helped to reduce power imbalances between the children and myself, it challenged my representations of children's experiences,

enabled them to express their voice and this will, hopefully, influence policy and practice in education.

This research demonstrated that a range of creative methods can enable silenced groups of people to share their ideas about death and bereavement and, in doing so add their voices to society. The script, created by the children during the analysis stage, was written to increase the opportunities for participants to be involved in co-analysis. The findings show that many adults turn away and do not interact with children when they talk about death. This study confirms that developing a script and participating in theatre can be an effective way to express the need for change, communicate ideas around a theme and to recreate children's stories. This is in line with the literature (see Moore, 2012) which asserts that plays set in imaginative contexts (within which truths lie) can enable children to process their traumatic experiences, work through the pain of a loss and begin to build trusting relationships. This study acts as an example of how creative methods can work within schools in accepting, non-judgemental ways whilst also adhering to boundaries and school rules. It also aligns with the role of the teacher and illustrates the importance of listening to and essentially supporting teachers in their work. This approach requires robustness and clear recommendations and implications for schools are outlined in Chapter 7. Collaboration, physical and social experiences are at the heart of a shared environment in theatre work.

Children's expression through art, drama and music suggested that death is not a taboo for them, albeit it remains so between some adults and children. This means children are given little opportunities to talk about death, personal recent bereavements and work through their grief. The inevitability and fear around death seems unaddressed in schools as children were questioning this and looking for answers. This research has found creative methods to be a way of getting children to connect with this topic whilst tackling any barriers, such as language and communication. It is time to explore death in schools by facilitating a creative space so children can learn **about** death, be supported **through** a death and be prepared **for** death.

6.2 Conclusion

Following the use of creative methods with 29 primary school children, the data analysis process was completed as a TA and involved the children creating a drama script. Across this study, there were four prevailing themes, and this chapter discusses these findings.

Firstly, the results considered children's self-expression and how creative methods play a role in creating pedagogical spaces for communication. This research illustrated how practitioners can use creative methods to meaningfully engage children with the topic of death and dying. This research highlighted the need for schools to build on children's curiosity and understanding of death and dying. Ultimately, all adults (including professionals) are responsible for empowering children through upholding their rights. To ensure children are not oppressed, whether it may be through being silenced because a death taboo exists or having no choice over what they are involved in when a loved one dies, creative practices can be used to give children a better knowledge and understanding of death and to foster freedom of expression, safety, comfort and love.

Theatre was used, in this research study, as an analysis tool to connect emotionally and cognitively with the data. This promoted informed opinions through a participatory approach in relation to the data findings under consideration. Ethical issues must be recognised when using theatre as a tool for analysis, particularly when working on sensitive issues with children. Not only should this consider the impact on the audience but the potential harm the process may have on the participants. Children who participated in the theatre-based research were afforded the same informed choice process and protections regarding their participation as persons in the creative workshop. Using theatre as a tool for analysis and dissemination has the potential to bring about change within communities (Rossiter et al., 2008). This tool was able to reach out to audiences in a thought-provoking and powerful way, unlike other analysis and dissemination techniques. Theatre-based research was used to engage a wider audience including those with no prior knowledge of the topic under investigation. This captured a widening participation from disadvantaged communities. Theatre, in this study, encouraged: emotional connectedness, real-life stories and dramatic techniques (such as music, physical theatre, lighting). Theatre can act as a vehicle to drive people towards topics that

are often avoided. It also aims to effectively target people who can begin to make changes. This includes participants, non-professionals, and professional theatre facilitators, as well as members of the public. The community stories shared in this study were original work and, through theatre, inspired social change through powerful emotion. The findings are meant to be alarming and enlightening at the same time. The play, although at the end of this research study, is only the beginning for the audience.

This study has found that drama and theatre can assist in creating a quality space and, as an analysis tool, can bring about new meaning. Drama can be used to reach out to wider audiences and send clear messages to encourage others to make a difference to help improve the lives of the participants. When writing the discussion of this study, I was also directing the musical 'Matilda' with a group of young people. In doing so, one line from the show particularly resonated with me. The line '...his daughter never said a word, as she didn't want to add to her father's pain' played over and over in my mind. Every time I watched the performance, I was left thinking how damaging it can be when we do not encourage children to talk about death. We cannot go back and change every situation, but we can bring about social change by challenging the 'norms' in the future.

6.3 Chapter Summary

This chapter has discussed the findings as an outcome of my practitioner enquiry. I highlighted how creative methods can be used to engage children with the topic of death and dying in a pedagogical space. Although the discussion is specific to my own practice, it outlines ideas which other practitioners may wish to use. Theatre was found to be an effective way to analyse data with children. This worked well because, as a teacher-researcher, I followed my genuine interests and strengths, and I would encourage other practitioners to do similar.

The findings are discussed through a sociological lens, and I do not draw on psychological theory as the data illustrated the interactions between children and various ecological systems. By placing the findings in Bronfenbrenner's model (1979), I illustrated the important of engaging children with the topic of death in a pedagogical space as a significant part of child development. The data captured a system of relationships affected by the participants' surroundings, including

environment, family, peers, school and cultural beliefs. The children in this study engaged with the surrounding structures of their social world and this can be considered by other practitioners facilitating a creative pedagogic space for children to explore death.

The next chapter discussed the important implications, future research, conclusions, and my personal reflection.

Chapter 7 Conclusions and Considerations

7.0 Chapter Overview

To conclude the thesis, this chapter provides a summary of the key findings. I reflect on the research questions: following which summarised findings specific to each question are explained. The chapter then proceeds to present the implications resulting from this study regarding a) death in schools b) children's rights c) creative methods and d) using theatre to analyse data with children. Limitations of the study are also explained prior to possible future research avenues being discussed. The chapter ends with concluding remarks.

7.1 Summary of Study

The need for this study emerged during my time as a class teacher in a primary school. At the time, there were children in my class who had experienced bereavement. My lack of knowledge, confidence and skill were the main reasons for wanting to bring about fundamental change and thus I started my practitioner enquiry journey. The school's reaction to a child being bereaved of a sibling triggered an emotional response in me and I set out to significantly improve the quality of pupils' experiences in school and beyond. My experience was very similar to that of others in education. From my initial systematic review in 2020 of the literature around approaches used to support bereaved children, I recognised that more studies were needed in school settings focused on children and what matters to them. This review highlighted a lack of creatively designed instruments being used to enable children to express themselves freely. Tools and data gathering instruments used in practitioner enquiry can be traditional and I wanted to explore age-appropriate ways of collecting data that reflected to classroom experiences.

Thus, I completed a systematic review in the autumn of 2022 with a focus on creative elements, such as art, drama, poetry and music, in the literature. 533 records were screened initially then eleven articles were selected to be part of the study after satisfying the inclusion criteria and being quality assured. Six themes were examined, including: Freedom of expression; Layers of hidden grief; Emotional turmoil; Mental wellbeing; Building relationships and maintaining connections; and Responses and needs of schools. I found there was a further gap in the relevant

body of empirical research using creative methods, particularly drama and theatre; no studies have used theatre and performance, in this field, with children to analyse data. Notably, the method has been used in other fields and I used this to inform my own approach (see Gembus, 2018).

As a data gathering tool, creative methods are child-centred and suitable for maximising children's participation in research (Fargas-Malet et al., 2010). In this study, they demonstrated the value of creativity and the arts for exploring sensitive and taboo topics with children (Kara et al., 2021; Mannay, 2015). Therefore, this study sought to creatively engage child with the topic of death and dying through participation and realising their rights. This study answered the following research questions:

1. How can practitioners facilitate the use of creative methods to increase children's engagement with the topic of death and dying?
2. What value is there in creating a shared environment with children and their peers to express their experiences of bereavement?
3. What are the opportunities and challenges for using creative methods to involve children in the data analysis process in participatory research?

In a participatory paradigm, creative methods were utilised with a view to engaging children with the topic through death and dying. This study embraced the messiness in the creative challenges. The methods and methodologies maze strengthened the fluid relationship between the participants and I. Bakhtiar et al. (2023, p. 25) states that "participatory research is a popular choice for those researching particularly vulnerable or marginalised children because it explicitly acknowledges the unequal ways in which some types of knowledge are legitimised and prioritised." This qualitative methodology allowed for flexible research design to capture how social experiences were lived (Silverman, 2013). Four key findings were discovered: self-expression; imagery and recollection; empathetic healing; and oppression. The study involved 29 children aged 9 to 10 and applied a creative approach. Informed by the UNCRC, the aim of the study was to promote children's voice in creative ways. The emergence of children's rights discourse and a new perspective on the sociology of childhood repositioned children as social agents (see James & Prout, 1997), and methodological shifts towards innovative research methods and

techniques of analysis have responded to this reconceptualization of childhood. This study was aligned with this movement and offers new insights into childhood studies. The methods were chosen by the participants (art, drama and music), the research schedule was fully managed by the children, and they designed the research space.

Methods rooted in children's participation used creativity to build capacity and increase involvement in a pedagogical space. Research question 1 was addressed through analysis of data from the creative workshop. The data was rooted in art, music and drama and outputs were extremely child-led. Question 2 was explored through data linked to the creative workshop and focused on the shared environment created when children engaged with creative methods. Finally, the data used to answer research question 3 comes from the devising theatre process and the script created by the participants. When the participants engaged with the creative methods, opportunities provided a degree of flexibility, adaptability and openness. They were found to be an excellent way of engaging children in a non-traditional manner which was developmentally and age appropriate.

7.2 Children's engagement with death and dying as a topic: key findings

This thesis reported findings of a variety of creative methods used in a primary school to engage children with the topic of death and dying. The study's key findings in relation to the research questions were:

Research Question 1: How can practitioners facilitate the use of creative methods to increase children's engagement with the topic of death and dying?

The findings of this study agree with the literature around the importance of engaging children with death and dying through creative methods. By using these methods in a pedagogical space as part of a practitioner enquiry, this research offers originality. Whilst there is evidence to suggest children are becoming more involved in co-leading research, there is still inadequate representation of their voice in some areas (Murray, 2019). My own experiences in the classroom and, consequently, my enquiring stance have led me to a participatory research study. By undertaking a systematic review of the literature, I found that there was a gap in using creative approaches to explore experiences of death and dying with children.

Most current bereavement theories referred to in the literature included Worden (1996; 2009) and Bowlby (1980). Much of the developed theories are based on adults' experiences of grief, with some considering children. The continuing bonds theory is particularly relevant when working with children as it focuses on maintaining a connection to the deceased (Millar & Lopez-Cantero, 2022). This study found that when children engaged with creative methods it helped them express memories of a loved one who had died. The data suggested that creative tasks opened up memories as many children chose to tell stories and explore their feelings through art, drama and music. Creativity played a significant part in building trust and a safe space and, although this study did not evaluate the impact of therapeutic programmes, it does acknowledge the therapeutic value and healing in some of the activities.

Creative intuition was valued by the children as a way of expressing themselves. The study found ways children could represent their experiences of death through creativity. Art, as a form of expression, was found to promote freedom and control simultaneously. When children used art to express their story, fears and frustrations became apparent: rising to the fore. The art provided opportunities for the children to reveal their struggles and share these collectively. Similarly, children felt they could tell their story through music and, as a means of support, it was accessible and appealing. The positive aspects of engaging with music when exploring death included feeling a sense of belonging, dealing with uncertainty, addressing positive social norms and working together. When engaging with drama methods, the children expressed they felt an emotional connection with the deceased. They also developed confidence, self-expression and communication skills. The importance of using drama with silenced groups was acknowledged as it is a tool that can bring about change. This finding is reassuring, and the study found drama to have an instrumental value: bringing together the two distinct worlds of theatre and the social.

According to the data, we can infer that children's grief is complex. When creative methods were used by children to explore grief, universal realities were observed. Strikingly, this study found that grief within children can be silent. It is often thought that grieving causes noise and agitation. Yet, this study found a stillness and softness to children's grief portrayed through the creative methods. The most

important finding is that creative methods encourage engagement. Children need, and require, the space to be creative. It was reported by the children that by facilitating creative methods in a space that promotes self-awareness, children felt nurtured, loved and that someone was listening to their story.

It is, therefore, most likely that such a connection exists between creative methods and children's rights. The UNCRC outlines four articles that are 'General Principles'. These are:

1. Non-discrimination (Article 2)
2. Best interest of the child (Article 3)
3. Right to life survival and development (Article 6)
4. Right to be heard (Article 12)

(UNICEF, 1989)

Creative methods can play a fundamental role in realising children's rights. children should not be discriminated against because of circumstances surrounding a death. Similarly, action should be taken in the best interest of the child, and this should prioritise their development. By facilitating engagement of the topic through creative methods, children shared their thoughts, feelings and ideas confidently and this increased opportunities for them to feel heard. Thus, the findings suggest there is a need to go beyond "having conversations". The implications below outline how this can be put into practice. Whilst dialogue is not undervalued and can be powerful, creative methods opened more opportunities for self-expression and for children to exercise agency. Art, drama and music were dynamic and transformative; children expressed a willingness to participate with these methods. Freedom, emotional channelling and deep connections were found to be present in children's representations of death through creative methods.

Research Question 2: What value is there in creating a shared environment with children and their peers to express their experiences of bereavement?

Engaging with others was a significant component relating to the value of creative methods when expressing bereavement. Creative methods appeared to facilitate authentic self-expression and when stories were shared in this way, children were

empowered to express openly. When explaining their journey through art, drama or music, children shared intense emotion through group or paired work. Initially, there was hesitation and anxiety began to set in as children felt uneasy communicating about death. After breaking down these barriers, children's participation was maximised through a shared environment. As death is rarely spoken about in a school context, this provides some explanation as to why the participants were initially hesitant and felt out of their comfort zone. However, the use of creative methods increased engagement and opened the possibility of challenging assumptions. Strong emotions were present when children used art, drama and music to convey their ideas.

Moreover, creative methods encouraged children to manage intense emotions collectively as a group. One of the issues that emerged when children engaged with creative methods was a sense of vulnerability. However, the shared environment protected children by enabling them to empathise with one another and to be supportive. Creative methods were found to be healing and the products of the art, drama and music were symbolic of emotion. The process was cathartic and creative methods provided opportunities for the children to immerse themselves in group activities in an environment that promoted emotional release. In this environment, children began using the language of death much more freely as the artistic element enabled them to remove the first person and express themselves from a different viewpoint. This was evident when children shared their work with one another and articulately confidently their story. This took away a pressure that existed when children were asked directly to speak about their experiences and, in contrast, created a positive, nurturing environment. This has important implications for those working directly with children on this topic and these are discussed below.

Whilst grief is individualistic, this study can conclude that death in children's lives is a shared experience: family and friends were highlighted as a significant part of the grieving process and should be included when focusing on the totality of a child's grief. Additionally, the theme of empathetic healing was present when children engaged in creative tasks as a group. When sharing their stories, participants not only made connections with the deceased, yet also with those present in the space. The creative expression allowed for a better understanding of children's connection with death. The shared experiences added to a growing body of literature around

peer support for bereaved children (see, for example, Elsner et al., 2021; Gregory et al., 2022). In an environment where children can engage with death and dying creatively, they feel sense of belonging and part of a community their peers. This suggests the strong value of facilitating participation in a child's social world to explore death with children: encouraging their empathetic expressions and promoting inclusion.

In Chapter 4 and 5, a key finding presented that bereaved children are an oppressed group. Recognition of children as an oppressed group could help expand their protections, opportunities and the resources available. Children do not fully experience the right to information and expression; thus, their silence speaks. This raises intriguing questions regarding the nature and extent to which children's needs are met. Dishearteningly, children portrayed loneliness through art, drama and music and explained they felt they were tackling bereavement alone. Nevertheless, this study found value in using creative methods to address a power imbalance. In a group setting, children alluded to feeling in control and empowered to lead change when given the opportunity to express themselves freely. The importance of conceptualising participation, not simply as a set of methods but as a methodological commitment, was evident using creativity. The value of this was rooted in honesty, inclusivity and, importantly, the relationships that were built between children and their peers. This study promoted a fundamental shift in children's position within educational research and these findings will help others to find new ways of using shared environments to encourage freedom of expression.

Research Question 3: What are the opportunities and challenges for using creative methods to involve children in the data analysis process in participatory research?
By using theatre as an analysis tool, children had the opportunity to increase their self-awareness and gain confidence to act. Through music, text and movement, the participants shared their experiences of death. The themes generated from the thematic analysis were used by the children to create a script. Using theatre in this way provided the children with the time to resonate, reflect and respond. Throughout the process, the children took on various roles such as improvising scenes, writing in the rehearsal room and creating character costume sketches. The children were the key decision makers.

As has been previously noted, theatre can bring people together and this was evident as children felt they were with others who went through a familiar and traumatic situation. Theatre helped all children express themselves through collaboration, physical and sensory experiences. Using this approach as an analysis technique encouraged flexibility, adaptability and openness. Research-based theatre was found to be a valuable and creative analysis tool: providing opportunities for participants to use the data to create a script. In doing so, new meanings were created across the dataset and participants took ownership of the data. It is possible to draw similarities here with theatre being used in other fields to analyse and perform the data. It was evident that there is a growth of interest that seeks to engage children in data analysis. This study has highlighted, through opportunities and challenges, the potential this approach has for empowering children. However, the success of this will be dependent on the development of participation approaches which both engage and facilitate meaningful input from children.

I believe this can be a very successful way to approach data analysis and I found this worked well because, as a teacher-researcher, I attempted to follow the genuine interests of the children: ensuring they were fully motivated for this work. Through collaborating the children seemed to enjoy developing this piece of theatre and bringing the data to life. Involving children in the data analysis process can be demanding, and they can find it particularly challenging as the process is not straightforward and must be age appropriate. Overall, theatre was found to be a successful tool in tackling barriers to participation in the analysis process. It facilitated positive engagement with the data, and consequently, with the topic of death and dying.

7.3 Implications for Policy and Practice

Creating a shared environment to engage children *with the topic of death and dying through creative methods*

Participation + Expression + Value + Choice = Empowerment

I wrote this section as both a researcher and teacher. It was important to me to share my findings with schools, organisations, and academics so that children's

voices can be heard. I hope that this brings about change in how death, dying and bereavement is taken forward in schools. I would like to encourage others to engage more with creative methods to better understand children and meet their rights. I recommend that a 7-point model is used: The Creative Space (see Fig. 7.1).

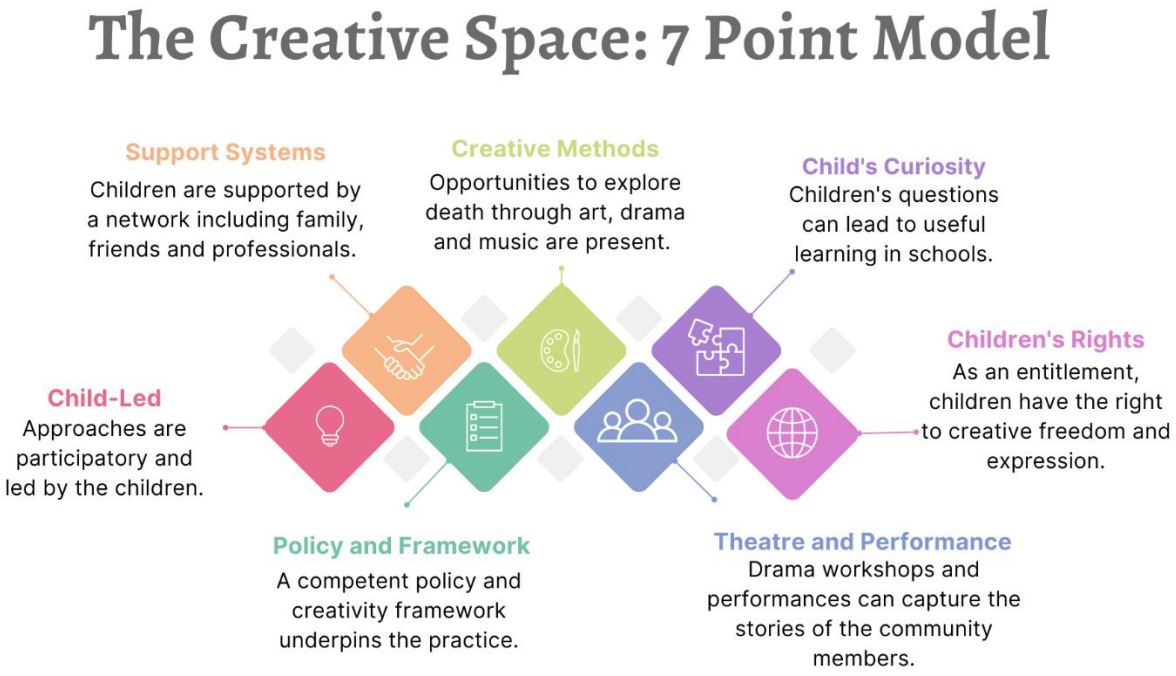

Figure 7.1 The Creative Space: A 7-point model for bereavement in schools

Children should be at the heart of every approach taken in schools. This includes children bereaved and those that have not experienced death. Participatory approaches, as facilitated in this research study, should help to encourage pupil voice, exploration and critical engagement. Peer learning is an important aspect of child-led approaches and encourages problem-solving and support-seeking strategies in helping children to cope with bereavement. The data generated from participatory approaches will enrich practitioners' understanding of how children have experienced death from their own perspective. This places value on listening to the views of the children in creative pedagogical spaces.

When children experience death, this can affect their relationships with those around them. To help stabilise this, an approach should focus on fostering a positive network of family members, friends, professionals and members of the community. This could consider a sociological model, like the 'Social World Model' outlined in

Figure 6.2 (see Chapter 6). School communities should aim to foster positive relationships amongst children and encourage peer support. Staff should be given clear guidance on their role when a child in their class has been bereaved. This should include how staff can link up with other professionals and specialised support services. Schools should facilitate group bereavement work including a range of programmes and activities to promote social, emotion, mental and physical wellbeing. An understanding of the short-term and long-term impacts of bereavement could form part of teachers' professional development. Whilst additional training may be useful, it is not compulsory. With specific guidance and resources, staff can support children effectively. Misconceptions such as 'children are too young to grieve' and 'they'll get over it and move on' should be challenged. Professionals should enter the support relationship with the assumption that children have their own unique grief story to explore. The support systems in place are paramount to providing a safe space for bereaved children to express, work through, and cope with their grief.

Many online resources recommend that schools use *'A Bereavement Charter for Children and Adults in Scotland'* to write a bereavement policy (Scottish Care, 2020). A bereavement plan is often suggested to schools to help them to respond to a child who is bereaved (Lytje & Dyregrov, 2023a). However, I am very sceptical about this as no checklist will meet the needs of every bereaved child. A policy should better place teachers to support child bereavement by offering guidelines, signposting training and outlining key theories. Thus, schools may be able to provide this support in a reactive way but also normalise death by discussing it with children before they encounter it. In a 'Context and Implications' paper, I outline useful links that may be helpful for staff to refer to when creating a policy (see Duncan, 2020a).

Based on the findings of this research, elements of bereavement policies can be implemented in a creative pedagogical space. A framework using the four themes from this study (self-expression, imagery and recollection, empathetic healing and oppression) could be used to develop this space. Appendix 6 outlines an example of a framework I developed in line with East Renfrewshire Council's bereavement policy for teaching staff. A more creative and meaningful focus on emotional literacy in specific life events is required to ensure the Scottish system is *'Getting it right for every child'* (GIRFEC) (Scottish Government, 2022).

Creative methods can be used to engage children with the topic of death and dying. This could include, and is not limited to, art, drama and music. When using creative methods, practitioners should be prepared to embrace the messiness involved in the process. Activities developed in this enquiry promoted children's imagination through open-ended tasks. Children's curiosity should be developed through creative activities which naturally involve problem solving. When planning for creative tasks, facilitators should consider how they are centred around change for better and nurture self-confidence: including their own capabilities. An example of a creative resource I created was in partnership with Screen Scotland. A short film, entitled 'Archie', helps children to deal with death and is accessible online with a practitioners' guide. There should be more opportunities for practitioners to upskill in facilitating creative pedagogical spaces for children to explore death in line with the curriculum goals.

Theatre and performance can be used to analyse data with groups of children. Schools are data rich and opportunities should be built in to generate creative qualitative data through practitioner enquiry. Subsequently, this can be used to write a script and create a performance. It could also be used to plan drama workshops for the children to participate in where they explore the main themes. My chapter, to be published in the *Handbook of Creative Data Analysis* (edited by Helen Kara, Dawn Mannay and Alastair Roy) in 2023, captures the application of theatre and performance in data analysis. Schools should provide more opportunities for children to engage with inspirational and powerful theatre so that children can express their views, be heard and influence decisions. Below I outline key factors to consider when using theatre with children to explore death and dying. However, it should be noted that this can be adapted and focus on other sensitive themes and vulnerabilities.

Work around the topic of death and dying often discusses a 'safe space' for children to go to. This depicts an environment where the young person can feel confident being themselves and is not exposed to harm nor is judged for what they say or do. It is important that the theatre space used to perform in enables the children to feel a similar way. The space where the play is performed should be mutually agreed with the actors and should be relaxed, informal and encouraging. Being on a stage can

be daunting and therefore a more welcoming and friendly environment does not add any stress to the performers.

A studio theatre set up works best for performances that share data reflecting real-life stories. A smaller, more intimate performance space gives actors the chance to connect with the audience. It also ensures the audience can deeply engage with the content of the show and interact emotionally. An in-the-round-stage, which is positioned in the centre of the audience, was found to be useful for audience involvement and when considering the impact the play would have on them.

Performances that resonate with their audiences mean the data is relatable and can be emotionally connected with. The script should be designed to elicit self-knowledge in both the performer and the audience. Theatre as a dissemination tool should provide the audience with an ability to see their surroundings from a new perspective, and to understand how the issues addressed in the play are affecting those around them. This ultimately opens scope for self-improvement. Communication is key in performance and once the data is communicated, it is also important to ensure the audience respond appropriately. The platform created by theatre enables the children to express how they are oppressed and show that working together to bring about change can empower individuals within society.

Theatre helps to share findings in a way that inspires and motivates its audience to make change. This art form can spark creativity by giving new insights and leaving the audience with a hunch to create solutions and improve the lives of people within their community. If performances can reach the emotions of the audience and put forward new narratives, the actors become catalysts for collective empowerment.

In the study, the children were keen to ask questions about death and dying. They felt schools could do more to support this interest, including teaching them about the topic much more widely. Teaching should take place proactively, and not just in response to death as it presents itself. The *Health and Wellbeing* area of *Curriculum for Excellence* is an ideal way to deliver this. This would achieve the outcomes related to ‘change and loss’ although they do not explicitly mention death and dying. Schools should seek guidance on which content they should cover and work with all stakeholders, including parents, educational psychologists, social workers and

health teams to create lessons. School-based practitioners can design a creative pedagogical space and implement a curriculum to maximise support. Compassion is listening to the voices of the unheard and acting appropriately: this includes hearing their silence (Lytje, 2018). It is also worth considering asking children who have been bereaved what they would like the content of these lessons to be. Professional development could help to give staff more confidence in delivering this topic. In my role as a Principal Teacher, I have created lesson guidance for staff. An example of this is in Appendix 7. I advocate that children feel that they greatly benefit from learning about death and bereavement, and I shall encourage schools to take a whole-school approach like my own.

At the heart of any policy and practice implications should be children's rights. These are universal and apply to every child. Although the creative space approach specifically promotes certain articles, it must be taken into consideration that all the articles of the UNCRC are linked and should be read alongside each other to provide the full range of a child's entitlement to dignity. Children's rights are inalienable and inviolable. They have the right to be listened to and properly involved in decisions about their education and support: including the school's approach to child bereavement.

The 7-point approach enables practitioners to implement a creative space for exploring death, dying and bereavement with children in schools. Its aims are to tackle social inequality through:

Creating a shared environment to engage children *with the topic of death and dying through creative methods*

Participation + Expression + Value + Choice = Empowerment

Through increased opportunities to freely participate in self-expression activities, children will feel valued. All in all, enabling them to be agents of change and to positively impact their future by ensuring equitable outcomes for all.

7.4 Limitations and Challenges

It is important to recognise the limitations of any piece of research. In this study, only one school in East Renfrewshire, Scotland was involved. This small study had 29

children who took part. Although the class was selected randomly, the school was not as, at the time, I worked as a teacher in the school. I had worked with some of the children prior to the research, but never taught any of the children. Due to the small number of participants included in this study, it does not make generalisable claims which might be expected in quantitative studies. Furthermore, the school was also in an affluent area, and I could not draw conclusions across socio-demographic variables.

COVID-19, undoubtedly, impacted on my research and limited my findings. Extra precautions were taken in line with government guidance published at the time and this created barriers around face-to-face contact with participants and their involvement. New plans were drawn up in response to the pandemic and alterations made which deviated from the original intentions of the study. Albeit I took time to realign the study's aims and objectives to ensure strong credibility, confirmability, dependability, validity and transferability following any changes made. These were approved by the University of Strathclyde Ethics Committee. If I were to undertake the study again, I would revert to having the creative workshops over a series of weeks, rather than condensing into one full day. This would ensure participants could spend more time engaging with their chosen methods in a less intense and restricted environment.

Previous research has shown various models of grief and evaluated the effectiveness of different bereavement interventions. However, very little research is child-centred and focuses on death as a holistic topic experienced by all. This study addresses the lack of involvement children have in research and gives them a voice both in terms of communicating their experiences of death and engaging with the topic in a shared, creative environment. Encouragingly, creative methods were found to enable children to express freely, and the creative process ensured the children were protected from harm, and it empowered them to bring about change. However, this has come with many limitations and challenges. Not all creative methods were explicitly documented within each subtheme. The number of participants engaging with each creative method (art, drama and music) was inequal. Furthermore, limitations are recognised in using theatre as a participatory analysis tool. Other methods, such as art and music, could have been facilitated in the data analysis approach. As this study only focused on the use of theatre in the

analysis process, it is unable to conclude the opportunities and challenges of other methods although there may be similarities. Overall, there is much debate surrounding qualitative creative methodologies: discussing its quality and trustworthiness. This research was scrutinised at various points throughout its design and development through supervisions and by professionals to whom I was accountable (including the Ethics Committee, University staff and Council staff).

This research study was performed to a limited audience because I did not have access to a budget or resources to perform it on a larger scale. The final performance was a celebration of the children's work and was used to bring the study to a close. It was not used as a data gathering technique and the impact of the performance on the audience and children cannot be concluded. Most people who attended the performance had some sort of connection (family member, teacher, friend) to the participants. A more representative sample would have been possible if the play was funded and performed on a larger scale. In future studies using theatre, I would recommend gathering the views and reactions of the audience members and performers to capture the full experience.

As this research was participatory, the participants shared their interpretations of the findings. Further to this, my time to engage with the data was limited as I was a sole part-time researcher. I chose to maximise my time with the children and utilised their expertise in the data analysis process. Considering my theatrical background, I was able to confidently apply a technique which used theatre as an analysis tool. However, it is noted that my performance background may act as a bias and my positions of director and teacher may have created power imbalances despite the participatory research design. Prior experience is not a requirement for researchers wishing to use creative methods, particularly theatrical techniques. Therefore, there are ample opportunities in communities for researchers to link up with theatre groups, drama workers or directors/writers to avoid any biases.

7.5 Next steps and future research

Studies in the field of child bereavement have addressed: evaluation of specific intervention programmes; impact on attainment; and school's responses to a death. However, there appears to be a lack of studies that consult children on their experiences of bereavement. Many studies mediate children's input through adult caregivers or are based on adults retrospectively telling their stories of the

experience in childhood. This thesis indicated that children's views are valuable and a matter of upholding their rights.

It is recommended that future research with children, particularly on sensitive issues, should use creative methods. A participatory design has been advocated and should be used more; the methods adopted in this study could be modified by researchers and practitioners. As noted earlier in this chapter, this research focused on a limited age range. Participants were between the ages of 10 and 11. Further research is required to establish how these methods could be used to engage with younger and older children in a pedagogic space. Subsequent research should also consider children with additional support needs who experience bereavement. By working in different areas across Scotland, and beyond, researchers may gain different insights. Moreover, longitudinal research is required to explore the impact of participation overtime, with a specific focus on ethical practice.

Two key findings from this research which I would like to develop as an enquiring practitioner are: using theatre to analyse data and placing death in the Scottish curriculum. I would like to revisit some of the data from this study to create performances and disseminate the work more widely with permission from the Strathclyde University Ethics Committee. This was not possible in the study timeframe for my Doctorate in Education and with the funding available, but in the future it may well be.

7.6 Personal Reflection

My own experience of teaching a child whose sibling and dad died was heart-breaking. Not long after, I began my journey to find research that would help me to support this child. Now, this is the path I have ventured down.

Undertaking this enquiry has been challenging and rewarding; I have struggled along the way. Working my way through this wooded forest has brought many twists and turns, with sightings of the end of the path but also many demoralising returns down the same path. I have taken on challenges that I never thought I would, including publishing two articles and a book chapter and becoming a reviewer for two different journals. The hardest part was, of course, time. How do you find the time to write a thesis as a full-time teacher? I often ask myself how I did it. And I am

very proud that I never lost sight of my day job and incorporated this work into my teaching.

The impact of this doctoral study is likely to last for my lifetime. The memories and stories will stick with me forever. It really has been an emotional rollercoaster and I do not stop thinking about the difficulties death has caused some of the participants. Returning to the core aim of this study of engaging children with the topic of death and dying, I consider this has been met through the facilitation of creative methods in a pedagogical space.

I have been greatly inspired by Ness' book *'A Monster Calls'* (Ness, 2011) and later film and theatre production. The story is of love, loss and hope. It taught me that we share the experience of death and that we are not alone. Death is something we cannot ignore and must face together.

"There was once an invisible man who had grown tired of being unseen. It was not that he was actually invisible. It was that people had become used to not seeing him" - (Ness, 2011, p. 107).

Figure 7.2 'A Monster Calls' stage production

(Credit: Manuel Harlan, Bristol Old Vic)

It is now my task to share the findings of this study with others to ensure people do not turn away from death. I will continue to be a practitioner enquirer: striving to learn more, encouraging others to do the same and aiming to make a positive difference to the lives of all children.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 – Published Articles (2020)

Review of Education
An International Journal of Major Studies in Education

Review of Education
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Abstract

Background: Supporting, caring for and working with bereaved children is both daunting and challenging, yet not much is known about how schools can help children to cope with death and dying. The main objective of this study was to identify approaches used to support children who are grieving and explore implications for teachers. The use of retrospective autoethnography sets out this review as a practitioner enquiry-based project.

Methods: A systematic review of literature involving school-aged children was undertaken. The focus of these studies was on approaches – viewed by children, parents and teachers – which helped children cope having recently been bereaved. The studies all relate to children aged 3-18. Four databases were searched up to and including Spring 2019: British Education Index; Child Development & Adolescent Studies; ERIC; and PsycINFO. The included studies were analysed using a qualitative enquiry model which draws on metaethnography.

Results: Abstracts and titles were examined of seven hundred and sixty-five articles. Following the selection process, 15 studies were included. All of the studies were peer-reviewed, published after 2000 and used qualitative methods of data collection (interviews, ethnographies, a case-study and observations). Encouraging children to openly communicate, find comfort in various ways and express emotion regularly were the most common approaches.

Conclusion: The results indicate that if approaches are taken, children can feel supported during a challenging and fearful time in their lives. Future research is required on the effects of specific teacher-led approaches in schools.

Keywords: death, approaches, bereavement, children

Introduction

Bereavement can be a very significant and stressful time in a child's life (Auman, 2007; Mallon, 2011). Approximately one child in every school class in Scotland has experienced the death of a parent, brother or sister (Fauth, Thompson and Penny, 2009); Scottish Partnership for Palliative Care, 2018). Learning to live with the void that is left when a loved one dies is a vital part of the grieving process. If we truly want to improve the lives of children, we need to look at the role of education in this and explore what schools can do to support pupils in relation to death, dying and bereavement. The potential impact of death on a child is highly unpredictable and complicated: with possible effects to behaviour and academic performance (Holland, 2008; Schlozman, 2003), nor is it clear to see the impact death is having on a child. That is why, in schools, children are often left to grieve alone: practitioners are in fear of the 'right thing' to do or say (Gunn, 2009). When experiencing loss, children become vulnerable (Graham, 2012). They will struggle to make sense of death as their social, emotional and developmental worlds are turned upside down. Death is a part of life. It affects 100% of our children. As children spend many of their days at school, teachers have an important role in developing approaches around death and dying.

The term 'approaches' is used in this paper as a way of dealing with child bereavement. It refers to the way grieving is considered in relation to helping children to cope. The perspectives explored encompass knowledge and experience that could be made for better understanding of the issues. Going beyond showing sympathy to bereaved children, teachers can embrace approaches to improve healthy grieving and resilience. Early intervention is crucial in helping children to heal and grow from a recent bereavement (Auman, 2007). Yet, what approaches should practitioners be using to help children understand death and their grief?

Rooted in theory, there may be commonalities in the processes and phases of grief; however, everyone grieves differently and at their own pace (Mallon, 2011). The realm of children's grief is unforeseeable. In aiming to tackle the abnormality around grief, this paper focuses on the following definition: "Grief can be defined as the response to the loss in all its totality - including its physical, emotional, cognitive, behavioural and spiritual manifestations - and as a natural and normal reaction to loss" (Hall, 2014, p.7). Notably, this paper uses the terms 'grief', 'mourning' and 'bereavement' interchangeably. However, there are distinct differences among them. Bereavement refers to the state of having experienced the death of a loved one (Mallon, 2011). The natural reaction to this loss can be described as grief: where external expression is mourning (Hall, 2014; Mallon, 2011).

When bereaved, children can often internalise their grief and can lack skill in verbalising their emotions (Auman, 2007). The age and stage of a child matters. At early stages of schooling, children have a grasp of death and its finality (Zach, 1978). Research has indicated that children begin to acquire the cognitive concept of death at a young age despite their rare exposure to grief as a lived experience (Gabb, Owens and MacLeod, 2013; Hunter and Smith, 2008). Many myths, such as children do not grieve and children recover quickly from grief, are challenged by researchers; however, many models on children's cognitive understanding of and emotional responses to death and bereavement do not outright reject this. Children's understandings of death can often be listed according to common developmental ages (see Cruse Bereavement Care, n.d.). The interconnectivity

between children's grief and their stage of development is well evidenced (Auman, 2007; Scottish Partnership for Palliative Care, 2018). Yet, such guidance needs to be used with caution. No two children are the same; no two children will develop in the same way; and no two children will be similar with their grief. Children's grieving processes are often non-linear and grief can be submerged and then reemerge in varying intensities for months or years (Auman, 2007). The role of grief may have elements of linearity but is often filled with overlapping, and sometimes contradictory, emotional states and phases. Children will internalise their grief and verbalise their emotions in different ways and at different ages/stages. Working through grief can be painful, emotionally draining and helpful (Gunn, 2009); ultimately, this should highlight the need for much more attention and care to be given to this topic. It is not enough to say: 'they'll get over it'. The approach taken should consider the individual: their age; understanding of and ability to conceptualise death; personality; resilience; development; the circumstances surrounding the death; and the being they are (not becoming) (Cerel, Fristad, Verducci, Weller and Weller, 2006; Raveis, Siegel and Karus, 1999; Rotheram-Borus, Stein and Lin, 2001).

There are clear themes between many theories and models of grief, especially those by Lindemann (1994); Parkes (1976); and Worden (1991). Worden (1991; 1996; 2009) provides four tasks of mourning:

1. to accept the reality of the loss;
2. to process the pain of the grief;
3. to adjust to a world without the deceased;
4. to find an enduring connection with the deceased in the midst of embarking on a new life.

Furthermore, and similar to this staged pattern, Lindemann (1994) identifies five major categories with a focus on emotional detachment from the deceased and adapting to a new environment: somatic (physical) distress; preoccupation with the image of the deceased; guilt (relating to the deceased or to the circumstances of the death); hostile reactions; loss of patterns of conduct. This is confirmed by many other theorists where grieving is said to include, not exhaustively: numbness and anger, yearning and searching, disorganisation and despair, reorganisation; shock, denial, searching, despair, anger, anxiety, guilt; depression; withdrawal, anxiety, alarm and panic (Dyregrov, 2008; Wells, 1988). A common limitation with these models is that they often seem to follow an order, yet grieving is non-sequential (Hall, 2014). The danger with explaining the processes of grief in such a way is that many teachers may think there is a simple linear pattern.

However, on the other hand, Parkes' (1998) theory of grieving - which is similar to that of Bowlby's Theory of Attachment (1973; 1980) as they both identify phases of bereavement - highlights the overlapping and flexible nature of grief. They both explicitly illustrate a merge of phases where one replaces the former. This flexible interpretation should progress with the mindset that everyone will undertake these stages/phases at their own pace. Bereavement is unique and must be addressed individually (Holland, 1993). Grief is complicated and respecting the individual's journey is vital in child-centred approaches (Lohnes and Kalter, 1994).

The role of teachers has evolved drastically from 'purely' teaching to also taking on the responsibility for the welfare of children (Abdelnoor and Hollins, 2007; Holland, 2007). This view is a matter for parents, teachers and other working professionals alike; schools have a duty of care to support children who are dealing with significant loss or change. The Education (Scotland) Act (Scottish Government,

2016) identified bereavement as one of the factors where children or young people may require additional support. Most schools, at any given time, will have a recently bereaved child on their roll (Holland, 1993). However, the concepts of death and dying are often non-existent within the school curriculum (Gunn, 2009). A taboo about death still exists. It is often the forgotten about or ignored topic. Further to this problem, policy does not seem to address it. Terms such as 'death', 'dying', 'bereavement' or 'grief' do not appear in Scottish educational policies - such as Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) and Getting it right for every child (GIRFEC). This is problematic. There is very little evidence which provides clarity about the kind of support bereaved children might need. It brings to the forefront the need for this review to address approaches which should be present in educational policy to assist teachers in supporting bereaved pupils' health and wellbeing.

The psychoeducational approaches, which teachers working with school-aged children could take, will become available through this review process. This research does not aim to provide a checklist, yet it does provide a profile by offering insights. What educationalists know, do, and care about matters for our children (Hattie, 2003). Grieving children are present within our classrooms today, yet they can be silenced by teachers. Staff in schools report finding 'death' difficult to explain to children and, on the whole, they don't feel comfortable addressing the topic (McGovern and Barry, 2000). Thus, children can be left in the unknown. Approaches to death and dying can make a difference to the lives of all, and recently bereaved, children.

Self-Reflexivity and Positionality

In supporting bereaved children, as a teacher, I frequently found myself caught in a harsh spotlight. Often, I felt helpless, useless and ignorant of the right thing to say and do. A key question I continuously asked was: What approaches should I be taking to ensure bereaved children are supported in school? As a result of my own experience, in this paper, I document my own transformative journey as a teacher. I develop this by carrying out a systematic review to concrete the most common approaches for teachers to routinely help bereaved children and to highlight the need for this to be higher on the agenda.

The rationale for using retrospective autoethnography within the systematic review process is to recognise that tackling the notion of the 'forgotten mourners' needs to begin in the classroom and with the experiences which are present (Auman, 2007; Holland, 1993). To pave the way forward, this review explores approaches which encourage bereaved children to grow and to learn to live with loss - such as death of a parent, brother, sister, friend or other loved one. The aim of this study is to try and progress the field by synthesising the available research which captures the experiences and perceptions of those supporting bereaved children and the views of the children themselves. Illustrated by Auman (2007, p.35): "[There is] an alarming lack of understanding about childhood bereavement and children's need for bereavement support…". The retrospective autoethnography element enables me to position myself as a teacher. As a reflection tool, it acts as an ignition to systematically re-examine approaches in order to learn from them. In journeying to the centre of myself, I explore my own anxiety around this topic. With the dual role of researcher and teacher, my research seeks to discover unique and common perspectives among grieving children and those directly involved in their lives. I do not wish to remain outside of my data; and therefore, from the perspective of personal experience (speaking from the inside-out), I express circumstances taking

place in a classroom setting. This position, which many teachers will find themselves in and be able to connect with, is aimed at showing the relationship between the reviewed data and day-to-day practice. It will also show that the approaches are necessary as this could happen in any classroom, on any given day; only when I found myself in this situation did I become aware of supporting children through change and loss.

Education is ever-changing: never static. Yet grief is a recurring phenomenon that is, and always will be, in every school. My journey is a story of only one school; this systematic review provides approaches to help many. My personal experience of supporting a bereaved child is illustrated through autoethnographic vignettes which are progressed by Pitard (2016; 2017).

Retrospective Autoethnography

Context:

I had not anticipated that an eleven-year-old child in my class would experience the death of a sibling, having less than two years ago lived through the death of her Mum. Not only was I shocked by these events, yet I was also distressed by my own confusion in caring for and supporting this child. As a key individual in her life (class teacher), I wanted to tackle this bereavement both sensitively and meaningfully. Looking back, this story has evolved me professionally and emotionally. I soon noticed that children do not have a taboo about death: many adults - recently including me - do.

I will tell a story of supporting and teaching this child, and many others, at the time they experienced the death. As pupils in my class, their health and wellbeing was my primary concern. I understood that I played an important role in this child's grief and I opened my mind to the possibility of making a difference to her life at a time of need.

Note: Any names used are pseudonyms.

Anecdote:

As I entered the classroom on the morning after the death, there was an empty feeling. I noticed that Emily had decided to come to school that day. As I spoke to the class, I saw tears in their eyes. I paused and took a moment to myself. In this moment, I didn't know what to do, what to say and how to cope. I just kept going. What was the right thing to say? I continued on as normal, yet I felt frustrated that I was silencing the grief. The others were lost in their emotions. It soon became clear that I had to do something about what could only be described as an 'elephant in the room'. I looked at Emily who was troubled and fearful. I smiled. The smile was returned, and it spoke a thousand words. No problem was solved but comfort and safety were there. I remained silent: feeling empty and blue.

My initial step forward was speaking to Emily. The word 'died' was particularly tough to use. I still felt helpless at this point but being by her side was powerful. Her face lit up and a hug spoke more than words. For the rest of the day, I watched and wondered. I wanted to listen to the grieving voices of the children by providing happy

times and positive memories to reflect on while attending to their emotions of sadness and fear.

Emotional Response:
I felt so overwhelmed. I began to question my ability to meet the needs of all children within my care. What else could I do? I needed to talk about it and let go of my sadness. But I didn't.

The children soon let out their thoughts and feelings: chatter filled the room. I felt sad for everyone; I wanted to make it better. I was weighed down by the low emotional wellbeing of my pupils despite life carrying on as normal.

Hearing the words, "I don't really know how I feel that my mum and brother have died," from a young child is deeply upsetting. I didn't want to distress Emily more by talking about it. That was until she asked, "Why does nobody talk to me about it?" She described one of the biggest feelings of bereavement as loneliness.

Reflexivity:
Initially, I used my professional judgement to try and find answers. But, *being* present was the most important. I was at my most nurturing when I was honest about what had happened and honest with myself. In turning the lens back, I realise I didn't have the confidence or bravery to respond in the way I wanted to. I let the fear of upsetting and the assumption that there was a 'right' thing to do get in the way. I felt a responsibility of holding and containing the class and thus resorted to continuing to teach. I wanted to give everyone the chance to express themselves but felt unprepared for what might then happen. As a result of this, I often experienced professional isolation. The practice of reflexivity has enabled me to open myself to an understanding of child bereavement. I was in a position where I placed high expectations on myself whilst doubting I had the skills or endurance to fulfil these. I understood that my own well-being required emotional support too. Then, I could achieve what I wanted to.

Strategies:
In learning new ways to respond to death, I found there was a clear need to explore the impact of change and loss on everyday life. By combining psychology and education, within a child-centred approach to learning, I have come to terms with supporting children who are bereaved. I was scared of using the language around death and dying in case of hurting one's feelings and unintentionally upsetting, but sensitivity aligned with truth and honesty can provide comfort. This personal experience was the catalyst for my interest in this topic. Instead of letting children silently grieve, I now build on healthy curiosity: listening to the child's thoughts, beliefs, fears and questions about death.

Methods

A systematic literature search was undertaken in Winter 2018 and again in Spring 2019. Four electronic databases were searched. These were: British Education Index; Child Development & Adolescent Studies; ERIC; and PsycINFO. Search terms used across the databases included: bereavement, grief, death, approaches and school combined with search terms related to children. Specifically, an example of a search is as follows: child*; student*; death; bereavement or grief or loss; primary school or junior school or elementary school. Furthermore, reference lists, Google Scholar searches (first 10 pages) and SuPRIMO were also used to identify

literature in the field and scanned to locate additional relevant studies.

Cross-sectional studies, in peer-reviewed journal articles, were included to robustly obtain only empirical findings that were highly reliable. This decision was made to focus on beliefs and experiences related to approaches for supporting bereaved children and thus develop an understanding around complex social phenomena. It is assumed that alongside the retrospective autoethnography this review strategy will make visible the voice of the researcher in-line with the data. The reflection and systematic process go hand-in-hand in judging the quality of the published research.

The review inclusion criteria were studies: (a) published after 2000; (b) published in English language; (c) using qualitative methods of data collection; (d) involving bereaved children aged 3-18 or those working directly with; (e) related to children grieving the death of a parent or sibling or other loved one.

Notably, studies did not exclusively have to link to the school and classroom environment. It was felt that many approaches would be transferable, and a holistic view would consider how bereavement is approached across settings. This included a lens focused on a better understanding of how children cope with grief internationally. To capture the most appropriate evidence for children of today's world, articles published 2000 onwards *only* were included. Moreover, studies without identifiable qualitative methods of data collection and outcomes were excluded on the view that findings - ideas, concepts and metaphors - could not be compared across different studies in a coherent way (Britten et al., 2002). The quality of this review was enabled by piloting the inclusion criteria with specific focus on the research aims.

During the selection process, abstracts of all retrieved studies were examined. Initially, 765 publications were collected. Titles and abstracts were read at this screening stage and 727 records were excluded. When in doubt, the entire article was accessed and read. After duplicates were removed, 38 articles met the inclusion criteria for the content of this review. All of the 38 articles were retrieved and reviewed in full. The inclusion criteria was applied to the full text and 23 articles were excluded. The final set of includes was 15 articles – all of which were cross-sectional in design. Figure 1 presents a PRISMA flowchart (Moher et al., 2009) to illustrate the different phases of the systematic review search. The majority of the articles were excluded as they were not topic related, not linked to approaches for school aged children or not cross-sectional in design. The initial criteria was revised at title and abstract stage because it was too restrictive on the type of bereavement (the first attempt excluded 758 articles). It was broadened to encompass 'death of a loved one' rather than limiting it to 'death of a parent or sibling'. The impact of a bereavement is personal to the child and only including parent or sibling deaths in this paper would not represent all children's experiences.

(Fig. 1 – Flow diagram of search outcomes)

The handling of data followed a qualitative enquiry model. Alongside the systematic review protocol, this paper uses analysis phases to explore Noblit and Hare's (1988) seven-step process for conducting metaethnography. Thus, a qualitative enquiry model has been created for the purposes of this review (see Figure 2).

(Fig. 2 – Qualitative enquiry model developed to be used as review protocol)

It was clear that, after appraising individual studies included in the review (see Table 1), the strength of evidence was appropriate and thus a synthesis translation table was used for data extraction from the relevant studies (see Appendix 1). The synthesis translation table comprised all relevant concepts from each paper. This included details about the setting, participants, bereavement and type of study carried out. Key themes have been identified, explored and then summarised across studies.

Table 1 Ratings of the appropriateness of included studies (adapted from Liabo, Gray and Mulcahy, 2013).

To combat the decontextualisation of descriptive data, the synthesis table is included to show the reader the exact data extracted from each article. Furthermore, biases for each individual study were considered alongside bias across studies to ensure validity of their findings. Generally, studies used random sequence generation groups (comparability is therefore grounded). The selection of participants was fair and sensitive to those who had recently been bereaved. The findings in all studies described experiences and perceptions, and this was reflected in the completeness of outcome data where selective reporting was not evident. The sensitivity and uncertainty around this topic did, understandably, mean participants were vulnerable and careful ethical considerations were accounted for. Loss of participants was expected, natural and understandable – this was declared within all studies, with appropriate reasoning.

Results

A range of data collection methods were used across the studies: ethnographies (2); observation (1), case study (1) and interviews (11). Over half of the studies focused on working with children: with a small number also collecting data from their surviving parents/main carers. Three studies (Dyregrov, Endsjø, Idsøe and Dyregrov, 2015; Lane, Rowland and Beinart, 2014; Lowton and Higginson, 2003) interviewed teachers (including five primary and secondary head teachers). Recruitment for participants was school-related in four studies (Dyregrov et al., 2015; Lane et al., 2014; Lowton and Higginson, 2003; Reid, 2002); through bereavement services in three (Brewer and Sparkes, 2011a; Brewer and Sparkes 2011b; Bugge, Darbyshire, Røkholt, Haugstvedt and Helseth, 2014); through hospitals, obituaries and organisations in five (Andrews and Marotta, 2005; Brooten and Youngblut, 2017; Nilsson and Ängarne-Lindberg, 2016; Søfting, Dyregrov and Dyregrov, 2015; Thompson et al., 2011); and a further three studies took place in grief camps (Keeley and Baldwin, 2012; McClatchey and Wimmer, 2012; Richardson, Ferguson, and Maxymiv, 2017). 33% of the studies were UK based and 67% reported international findings. Most studies were conducted in the United Kingdom [5] (Brewer and Sparkes, 2011a; Brewer and Sparkes 2011b; Lane et al., 2014; Lowton and Higginson, 2003; Reid, 2002); and United States [5] (Andrews and Marotta, 2005; Brooten and Youngblut, 2017; Keeley and Baldwin, 2012; McClatchey and Wimmer, 2012; Richardson et al., 2017); one in Sweden (Nilsson and Ängarne-Lindberg, 2016); three in Norway (Bugge et al., 2014; Dyregrov et al., 2015; Søfting et al., 2015); and another was a collaborative study involving Canada and the United States (Thompson et al., 2011). Of those involved in the studies, the majority of the participants had been bereaved of a parent or sibling. Four studies

detailed bereavements as ‘family death’, ‘loved one’ or, in some cases, the deaths were classified as varied (Andrews and Marotta, 2005; Dyregrov et al., 2015; Lowton and Higginson, 2003; Richardson et al., 2017). Two articles (Reid, 2002; Thompson et al., 2011) worked with families who had encountered the death of a child.

The identified qualitative studies were analysed using an enquiry model rooted in metaethnography. The synthesis translation and extraction stages included raw data from participants and also discussions of the data from the authors of the studies. This review analysed a breadth of data which considered perspectives on parentally bereaved young people, sibling death, children who died from cancer and death of a loved one. It aimed to tackle a hierarchy around the impact of a death on a young person and focused on the effects of death and dying in its entirety.

Valuing the dialogue of all those involved in supporting bereaved children - teachers, parents and carers - was evident across studies. All interviews, case studies and observations took place in safe spaces where children felt comfortable and their feelings could be nurtured compassionately. It is worth considering that all children involved would have had different abilities to verbalise their grief (Mallon, 2011). Furthermore, teachers included in the studies were mainly women. Despite the fact this is a true reflection of the profession, male teachers are underrepresented within this research. Finally, all parents/carers who took part in the research were directly impacted by a bereavement and therefore were also dealing with their own grief as well as supporting their children.

A key research question for this review is: What approaches are used in the studies to help children cope with death? Most approaches taken were based on showing love, building resilience and helping children live with grief. The findings represent how approaches are used in different settings such as schools, camps and family communities. Looking outwards is appropriate as children may express their grief in different ways in different environments. The core themes resulting from commonalities across the main findings of the studies were:

- Communication
- Peer/Social Support
- Expressing Emotion
- Role of Adult (Including relationships)
- Conceptualising Bereavement (Meaning Making)
- Finding Comfort
- Stress and Trauma
- Looking to the Future

The themes which are present in individual articles are outlined in Table 2 (below). Figure 3 illustrates the reporting trend of the themes across time. It is clear that for the majority of the studies, which were published after 2010, the average number of themes reported was 5.3. This highlights the validity of the generated themes.

Table 2 Themes present in the included studies

(Fig. 3 – Chronological comparison of number of themes present in individual articles)

The retrospective autoethnography enables the reader to look inwards: to the school environment and think deeply about what approaches teachers can facilitate. The

findings of this systematic review are outlined in the synthesis translation table (see Appendix 1) where direct quotes and paraphrasing are used. Eight main themes were identified in the process:

Communication (13)
The results showed that talking about the deceased can be difficult, yet parents voiced in interviews carried out by Bugge et al. (2014) that their surviving children liked to talk as it provided comfort and security by keeping memories alive. There is often an 'awkwardness' around this and children can feel ignored when not listened to. The results of Brewer and Sparkes (2011a) yields towards getting children to talk about grief. Some participants expressed that talking about death becomes a part of daily conversations in an open and honest way. Findings highlight that being comfortable with communicating to bereaved children requires addressing barriers around lack of confidence. Three studies highlighted the role of communication in working with the child's immediate family structure. Dyregrov et al. (2015) provided evidence of a necessity for schools to have a response action plan: 'a formula' for dealing and communicating with parents/carers when a child is bereaved. However, no direct evidence was given around the efficacy of this approach. In fact, the data showed participants to be very sceptical.

Peer/Social Support (8)
Evidence given on participants' experiences and perceptions found in Brewer and Sparkes (2011a) showed that connecting with others who had lived through similar situations to their own yielded significant effect on the wellbeing of the bereaved. Many participants felt that this gave them a sense of belonging and that they were 'not alone'. One study used healing circles to develop social support during emotionally intense discussions. There is a small evidence base to suggest this empowered the young people to comfort self and others through a social-perspective focused on empathy. However, there was a reasonable amount of evidence given in studies by Lane et al. (2014) and McClatchey and Wimmer (2012) to conclude that friends of the bereaved felt anxious: often around wanting to help their friend but not knowing how to.

Expressing Emotion (14)
Two studies discussing emotion identified overwhelming sadness and anger felt by bereaved children - one goes on to discuss fear and enjoyment. The information provided by Thomson et al. (2011), working with a large number of parents and surviving siblings, illustrates that children should be aware of no expectations about how one should or should not feel. The participants across studies felt that self-acceptance was important and achieved when they were able to channel and attend to emotional chaos. Children in studies felt like they had to 'hold it back' or couldn't 'put it anywhere'. The facilitation of an emotional space which teachers used informally and formally was welcomed. Notably, evidence suggested that children's reactions can be erratic, confusing and painful to witness. There was no significant awareness of how this was dealt with by teachers. Nonetheless, participants felt that provided space (physically and psychologically) helped them to express their grief. There was little evidence to suggest that it was difficult to provide emotional support within the school day. This only involved one case study and the evidence appears weak.

Role of Adult (Including relationships) (11)
Parents, teachers and children across studies voiced the importance of normality (yet being adaptive). Evidence supported providing children with routine through security and predictability. Individuals included in the studies perceived that teachers have a role in providing children with coping strategies. One case study (Reid, 2002) portrayed a concern in bereavement being unacknowledged by staff in schools. Information regarding why this may be the case was shown in the study by Lane et al. (2014) as teachers feel helpless and useless of the right action to take. Teachers felt that they were becoming counsellors and a misunderstanding of their role was evident. Across studies, participants stressed that the role of the adult was to listen, be available, be present and reduce anxiety. The results of Søfting et al. (2015) echoed many professionals in that children are never too young to grieve. Children wanted adults to attend to this by having conversations around death and rituals with them.

Conceptualising Bereavement (Meaning Making) (12)
The children involved in the research felt empowered when they were taught grief terminology. Through observations, children were seen to experiment with coming to terms with the death of their loved one. Nilsson and Ängarne-Lindberg's (2016) data gathered through interviews suggested that children often do this with someone who isn't experiencing the death directly. In one particular case, the use of language by one child stunned a class to silence and the teacher 'moved on' (Lowton and Higginson, 2003). Teachers and parents expressed that being clear that death is final and explaining what this means and where the deceased has gone is important. Furthermore, four studies (Andrews and Marotta, 2005; Brewer and Sparkes, 2011a; 2011b; Bugge et al., 2014) involving children and parents agreed that metaphors were helpful for making sense of the bereavement. Evidence from one study showed an indication that parents believed their child was 'too young to grieve'. However, this study involved a small number of adult participants and the impact of death on their children was not directly measured to support the finding.

Finding Comfort (12)
Reporting found significant ways to help children find comfort. These related directly to the death in ways such as: reflecting through religion and faith (praying, thinking of heaven and remembering 'God's plan'); continuing a relationship with the deceased (using photographs and videos); and celebrating the life of the loved one regularly. Results also indicated that comfort was found in taking time to have fun in new activities, through recreation, physical activity and finding humour.

Stress and Trauma (7)
Mixed results were gathered across studies in relation to managing stress. Participants expressed a degree of trauma, but this varied from child to child. Mostly, this related to fear of experiencing a similar situation and death of living family members. Reid (2002) and McClatchey and Wimmer (2012) showed participants felt small but negative effects on their schooling: behaviour and attainment. Although, no evidence suggested that school performance was affected and approaches were not directed at this. Some studies showed children's symptoms of intrusive grief to include depression, anxiety and panic attacks. Findings from school staff within Lowton and Higginson's (2003) interviews concluded that reaching out to counselling services only addressed these issues short termly. Two respondents stated that long-term approaches require the school and family to work together.

Looking to the Future (8)
Most studies focused on positive changes, an appreciation of life and moving forwards. Keeley and Baldwin (2012) showed an importance of the family 'journey'. Participants in one study felt that some approaches were unrealistic, such as: 'move on with your life'. The data illustrated how children perceived themselves - with many participants increasing their appreciation of life over time. A study showed the difference a forward-looking approach can have: one participant discussed the 'wall' which had gone as a result of being optimistic.

The extracted data was translated to outline the relationships of the studies to one another. Across the 15 studies, the translation compared themes and concepts from each paper (where the synthesis of the former articles was compared with the following). Across the findings, some accounts were directly comparable (reciprocal) whilst others stood in relative opposition to each other (refutational). The articles agreed on the role of peer support, means of expression, metaphors and attuning to the needs of the individual: giving children the space and time they need to process their emotions. The 'taboo' around death was present in schools, yet it seemed that educators felt they had a role to consider what the child needs from them. In comparison, it was clear that a structured plan was not favoured by all and how schools worked with bereaved children was inconsistent. Short term targets were put in place, and consequently addressed, but the long-term support was overlooked. This seemed to be down to teachers feeling too much burden was placed upon them and they feel lack of training is a barrier. Finally, new ideas were built together and understood (line of argument). Talking about death and living with grief was beneficial in normalising feelings and emotions. A consideration of the child's social world explored how curiosity, language, peers, family and specialists could form a supportive network. Approaches focused on *being* (not trying to fix or rescue but having a presence as the child works through their grief) and *becoming* (looking to the future and embarking on a new life without the deceased).

Discussion

The aims of this article were to systematically review data around supporting bereaved children. The review found that research on approaches used to support bereaved children is significantly limited. The synthesis of articles illustrated implications for teachers by explaining what approaches help children cope with death and dying. Fifteen studies were included in this review; however, only four took place in schools and involved teachers. All studies used qualitative methods of data collection; mainly, this involved interviews with the exception of one case study, two ethnographies and one observational enquiry. Moreover, most identified studies involved a small sample size, except one study which reached out to 40 families. The review found that all studies provided rich evidence on approaches used to support children who are grieving. The gathered data was child-focused - where the impact on the children was clear and implications for teachers could be concluded. The findings, in line with the research aims, are indications of promising approaches rather than evidence of effect. The issue of the outcomes is potentially contentious as some teachers may feel there is too much burden already placed upon them and expecting them to have counselling skills is one step too far. Nevertheless, the priority is on influencing the matters that concern our children by empowering them with new knowledge and understanding to act and voice their worlds. This review is the first attempt to systematically consider approaches to death and dying with a specific focus on teachers and schools.

Common approaches encapsulated the views of bereaved children and those caring for young people, including parents/carers and teachers. The perceived common approaches are outlined in Table 3.

Table 3 Description of common approaches

Schools have a unique role in helping grieving children. The majority of the studies suggested approaches with psychoeducational components relating to curriculum development, pedagogy and teacher training. The use of metaphors can help children understand the many changes which are set in train when someone dies. This has been shown to help children manage their grief much more positively (Mallon, 2011). A rich symbolic curriculum design can underpin approaches in schools, particularly through use of connecting children with their peers. Valuing peer support as a coping mechanism can avoid social isolation which death can bring about (Ellis, Dowrick and Lloyd-Williams, 2013). Children, however, do lack the knowledge and skills to support bereaved peers (Stylianou and Zembylas, 2018a). Introducing children to death issues through the school curriculum can prepare them for supporting a bereaved peer. Furthermore, facilitating whole class and group opportunities builds a network of children who reach out to one another as their situations parallel. This is not surprising as it is reassuring when connecting with others with whom one is alike. A natural response to death, regardless of the circumstance, brings a chaos of emotions (Mannarino and Cohen, 2011). Teachers, in most cases, are committed to giving children the space and time they needed to express their emotions. If teachers adopt a pedagogical approach where they give children the opportunity to explore grief and grieving, with care and sensitivity, then an understanding of death in cultural and religious contexts will help children manage emotional responses when bereaved (Stylianou and Zembylas, 2018b). As someone who is not directly involved in the bereavement, pupils find trust in staff being regularly available to listen. A positive approach was favoured by the majority of participants - especially when considerations around death, dying and bereavement were encouraged as part of the school curriculum. This can be key in helping children move from *death denial* to *death acceptance* (Stylianou and Zembylas, 2018b; Wong and Tomer, 2011).

The overall results suggested that educating children around this topic is vital. The need for grief terminology to be taught is supported by evidence that children are not equipped with the language around death and dying: particularly when trying to help a bereaved friend. Moreover, the effects of teaching coping strategies to all children assisted in normalising grief and helped children to readjust. In most cases, participants used analogies such as ‘a journey’ which implicitly referenced cycles of grief such as those outlined by theorists Kübler-Ross (1969); Lindemann (1994); Parkes (1976); and Worden (1991). Permission and honesty should underpin approaches in schools to give children a positive outlook in life and support them to dip in and out of their grief.

Despite the research highlighting many ways in which adults could approach the topic of death with children, the results suggest a taboo still exists. In schools, talking about a death tends to happen between children and this does not involve staff (Paul, 2019). Adults may be modelling an avoidance approach and giving the impression it makes them feel uncomfortable (McGovern and Barry, 2000). This would consequently be the case for how the child engages with the death: the child may feel that they have to internalise as they model their behaviour on perceived normative structures (Szmigin and Canning, 2015). However, in this realm,

children's views are absent and unacknowledged. The studies in this review have shown that children can talk about death. It is often the social domain that surrounds the child – school staff and family members – who have a taboo about death (Paul, 2019).

Although many experiences and perspectives were common across studies, some differences were apparent. Mixed and inconsistent results found some studies reporting that some children were 'too young to grieve'. Furthermore, there was no direct link shown between attainment and behaviour in school and being bereaved: despite a minority of studies suggesting this link was important to consider. The role of the teacher in adopting sensitive approaches was compared to that of a counsellor. However, most studies acknowledged a difference and teachers must recognise themselves as the educator - and not the counsellor. Finally, participants were sceptical about schools using pre-planned actions as an approach. Lack of teacher training and confidence in tackling these issues may have a part to play in these views.

The majority of studies found that outcomes in child bereavement encompassed a range of factors including, but not extensive to: physical, emotional and mental health; bullying; suicide; attainment and achievement; self-esteem; resilience. Subsequently, approaches to tackling these issues were outlined. To meet these needs, teachers are required to work as part of the family network. Because children spend a great deal of their childhood in schools, teachers have an important role in helping children to understand death, to communicate feelings, to recognise that grieving will never finish and to regain control of their lives.

Implications

Death and dying will affect every person at some point in their life. With more than 45,000 children in the UK bereaved of a parent every single year (Winston's Wish, n.d), this topic should be at the forefront of our school's priorities. This review has sought to highlight the most common approaches used to routinely help bereaved children and explore implications for teachers. In doing so, it has highlighted the need for this field to be given much more attention in schools. Pupils are being silenced, ignored and turned away of the support they need. Teachers can, if taking appropriate action, ensure children grow and heal from significant changes and losses in their life.

School is often a safe place for bereaved pupils which, at a time of fear and uncertainty, brings normality and security. Support in schools needs to be directed at pupils, teachers and families. Leadership and Management Teams within schools should: tackle staff confidence in supporting pupils dealing with death; develop school bereavement policies; and put in place a rationale for facilitating lessons around death and dying (Scottish Partnership for Palliative Care, 2018). Many specialist services such as Child Bereavement UK, Winston's Wish and Richmond's Hope provide resources to give teachers practical strategies and activities for working through children's grief. However, the approach which the school takes should also value understanding and be consistently clear to all staff.

Findings confirmed that to provide adequate support teachers should provide normality, a listening ear, coping strategies and opportunities for children to their express emotions. In addition to this, schools can ensure they are being proactive

by working with parents/carers and teachers to create guidance. Suggestions are that teachers work closely with the bereaved family to support the child's learning, health and wellbeing in school. The role of the teacher needs to be clearly set out as they will be the prime supporter for the child. In some cases, however, children may require additional agencies to intervene. It should also be within the remit of the school to provide this information to families. Additionally, and as part of daily school life, teachers can create and facilitate support groups which use peers and social skills to significantly influence children's outcomes. Furthermore, the power of conversations should not be underestimated. Both informal and formal conversations with all children around death, dying and bereavement will undoubtedly provide a space for children to build up resilience – and not reliability.

The retrospective autoethnography expressed my anxiety around supporting a recently bereaved child within my class. I was stunned of what approaches to take: what to say, what to do, what support to give. Unintentionally, I resorted to not acknowledging the situation and therefore not attending to the present grief processes. In bringing together my experience of being a teacher with the approaches this systematic review recommends, a metaphor of a seasons cycle can be imagined. It shows that grief can fall suddenly and often unexpectedly like autumn leaves. I, as a teacher, had many questions about child bereavement. In the initial stages, the bereaved child in my class was in a state of turmoil and I couldn't help but feeling lost and getting caught in my own emotions. Darkened winter moved to spring and I connected with the child through a range of approaches. Over time, the child began to feel supported and hope was restored. No longer will I ignore the topics of death and dying as they present themselves in the classroom. By not turning away, I can show that winter doesn't last forever: and summer will come.

Although this review identified a broad range of perspectives, there may be some knowledge gaps. Findings have confirmed that more studies are needed in school settings focused on children and what matters to them. Creatively designed instruments are needed to particularly enable young bereaved children to express their thoughts, feelings and ideas around death and dying. Future research should also consider groups of children who are vulnerable as a result of other circumstances and the impact of bereavement in this perspective.

Limitations

This study has some limitations. A major limitation is that only one reviewer carried out this research and therefore this may impact on the rigour of the findings. A review team or external quality assurance procedures could have strengthened and enhanced the quality of the study. However, this was not possible as the research was part of a larger doctoral project. Secondly, the inclusion of data that was collected through qualitative methods, published after 2000 and in peer-reviewed journals may result in a potentially biased presentation of conclusions. Only articles in the English language were used in this review and this may not represent all evidence around this topic. This review referred to a limited amount of countries and applying the results to children with various cultural backgrounds may be inconsistent. However, to ensure transparency, the countries involved were stated. Furthermore, of the fifteen included studies, only four took place in schools. Looking into a range of environments was appropriate to represent a holistic view of how children are supported. However, this could raise questions on generalisability. All findings may not easily be transferred to school settings as suggested. Finally, because of the use of metaethnography as a synthesis tool some may argue against

the trustworthiness of the findings. Despite this, synthesis techniques were applied rigorously to ensure that the cross-sectional designs were reviewed in line with the research objectives.

Conclusion

The results of this systematic review consider what approaches can be taken in schools to help children cope with death and dying. This research recommends important implications for teachers. It highlights that death is an important part of every class and, with appropriate support, teachers can make a difference to the lives of bereaved children. The approaches are developed to give children better knowledge and understanding of death and to give support to those directly experiencing it. The approaches are presented to have practice and policy implications which, if addressed, may help to protect children against adverse effects of bereavement.

Conflict of Interest

There is no conflict of interest.

Data Availability Statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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Synthesis Translation

Methods and concepts (Reciprocal translation and/or Refutational synthesis)	**Reid, J. (2002).**	**Lowton, K., & Higginson, I. J. (2003).**	**Andrews, C. R., & Marotta, S. A. (2005).**	**Brewer, J. D., & Sparkes, A. C. (2011a).**
Setting	Early Years and School	Primary and secondary schools in Southeast London, England	Recruitment from paediatric offices, a hospital cancer centre, a hospice, churches and schools.	Childhood bereavement organisation in the UK.
Participants	A family (including two bereaved siblings)	13 school staff	6 children and parents/main caregiver	13 young people.
Details of bereavement	Child (aged 4) died at home in an accident.	Varied	Family death within previous 18 months.	Parentally bereaved young people.
Subject description	Case study	Interviews	Semi-structured interviews	Two-year ethnographic study
Communication	Eco-system (child, peers, family and school). Talking about deceased often avoided.	Work with child's immediate family structure Bereavement is often silenced if behaviour doesn't change.	Talking about (and to) the deceased during rituals.	Happiness is a choice (communicating a positive outlook). 'Move past the awkwardness some children feel in talking about grief'
Peer / Social Support	Important when bad news is disclosed.	Social and personal side to school Social withdrawal	-	Connectedness to others who suffer ('you feel like you're not alone').
Expressing Emotion	Happens informally and spontaneously. Difficulty within school framework to provide for emotional	'Low priority given to death and bereavement within the school curriculum.'	Making spiritual connections with God or a Higher Person to express emotion.	Talking openly promotes posttraumatic growth.

	support.	Space and time during school day (time out).		
Role of Adult (Relationships)	No acknowledgement in school. Alignment - Adults perception is guided by ability to read a child's needs and wishes. Teacher training (SMT responsible for school infrastructure).	Parents who support the school's management of the child's bereavement	Routine maintained to fulfil a containment role. Adults who listen can reduce anxiety.	Promote posttraumatic growth
Conceptualising Bereavement (Meaning Making)	Death is final (making this clear for young children).	When child told class of father's death, lack of experience and understanding silenced the class and the teacher decided to just move on. Learning grief terminology.	Difficulty with making sense of their experience. Metaphors used to 'control the uncontrollable'.	The 'journey' metaphor.
Finding Comfort	Play as a means to understand what has happened.	Celebration of Life in schools for students to attend	Linking objects to connect with decedent. Play and toys make children feel better.	'Living life to the full'
Stress and Trauma	Explore links to disruptive behaviour.	Counselling (Reaching out to child bereavement services)	-	Bereavement provokes some degree of trauma in all children (shock and distress).
Looking to the Future	-	-	-	Life paths

Methods and concepts (Reciprocal translation and/or Refutational synthesis)	**Brewer, J. D., & Sparkes, A. C. (2011b).**	**Thompson, A. L., Miller, K. S., Barrera, M., Davies, B., Foster, T. L., Gilmer, M. J., … , & Gerhardt, C. A. (2011).**	**Keeley, M., & Baldwin, P. (2012).**	**McClatchey, I. S., & Wimmer, J. S. (2012).**
Setting	Childhood bereavement organisation in the UK.	Recruitment through children's hospitals in the United States and Canada.	Three child bereavement camps and one counsellor's office.	Grief Camp
Participants	13 young people.	40 families (65 parents, 39 siblings)	Children	16 parentally bereaved children and their 11 surviving parents
Details of bereavement	Parentally bereaved young people.	Children who died from cancer	Parental death resulting from extended period of illness (not sudden death)	Parentally bereaved young people.
Subject description	Two-year ethnographic study	Semi-structured Interviews (Part of a longitudinal study)	Retrospective semi-structured interviews	Interviews
Communication	-	Talking about death in an open and honest way provides an outlet.	Final conversations (conducted during daily, routine interactions): comfort and security.	-
Peer / Social Support	'You're not the only one who's been through it.' Friendships are to key happiness.	As a means of embracing grief.	-	Feeling different from other children. Friends sometimes want to help but they don't know how to.
Expressing Emotion	*Sadness, anger, fear, enjoyment* -	'There should be no expectations about how one	-	Overwhelming sadness and anger - Children

	Non-judgemental environment which facilitates, but does not force, expression of emotion.	should or should not feel.'		can feel they have to hold it back. Feeling of they 'can't put it anywhere'.
Role of Adult (Relationships)	-	Continuing bonds	-	-
Conceptualising Bereavement (Meaning Making)	Learning to live with bereavement. Metaphors	-	Reflecting on time spent with loved one before death.	Confused/anger when parent dies by suicide is common ('It's a selfish act and it's not fair to the ones you leave behind.') - Help to process is appropriate.
Finding Comfort	Physical activity. 'Visual, auditory, kinaesthetic and a "secret sense".' Recognise having fun is important. Ongoing relationship with the dead parent.	Recreational activities Religion and faith is helpful in coping (I.e. - God's plan).	Rituals provide stability and continuity. Finding humour.	-
Stress and Trauma	Causing depression, panic attacks and anxiety. Techniques such as relaxation and breathing.	-	-	Internal turmoil can overtake and impact on schooling (attainment and behaviour) and life. Fears and worries related to living family members. Flashbacks can be traumatic.
Looking to the Future	Appreciation of life: 'She'll always be through my life'.	Importance of acceptance. Looking forwards and continuing to live one's life.	Positivity around 'the family journey after someone died.'	'Move on with your life' The wall metaphor.

Methods and concepts (Reciprocal translation and/or Refutational synthesis)	**Bugge, K. E., Darbyshire, P., Røkholt, E. G., Haugstvedt, K. T. S., & Helseth, S. (2014).**	**Lane, N., Rowland, A., & Beinart, H. (2014).**	**Dyregrov, K., Endsjø, M., Idsøe, T., & Dyregrov, A. (2015).**	**Nilsson, D., & Ängarne-Lindberg, T. (2016).**
Setting	Norwegian Bereavement Support Program	Secondary School	Schools in Norway	Childhood Trauma Team
Participants	8 parents	12 teachers	17 teachers and 5 head teachers from primary and secondary schools	14 parentally bereaved children and their 15 surviving parents
Details of bereavement	Sibling deaths and parentally bereaved children.	Teachers with experience of working with parentally bereaved young people in the last 5 years.	Varied	Parentally bereaved young people.
Subject description	Interviews	Semi-structured interviews	Focus group interviews	Interviews
Communication	Children liked to talk about deceased (especially in everyday conversations - 'keeping their dead siblings alive').	Openness to speak about death and bereavement (teachers can lack confidence). Communication with family is important… 'even if it's awkward.'	Some schools have a response action plan Parent/carer and school communicate to agree appropriate adaptations	Using conversations and concrete/practical activities to ensure information is good to receive (clarity and structure).
Peer / Social Support	-	Addressing death and separation anxieties which the friends of the bereaved young person are experiencing.	-	-
Expressing Emotion	Can be erratic, confusing and	Informal emotional	Psychological space for grief	Using conversations

	painful to witness.	support can be given by teachers/adults. A feeling of self-acceptance of your emotions.	(“left alone”)	and concrete/practical activities to attend to emotional chaos (inner order).
Role of Adult (Relationships)	Provide security and predictability.	Ensuring and maintaining normality whilst being adaptive. Feeling emotionally involved, including sharing own personal experience. Teachers feeling ‘...helpless, useless and ignorant of the right thing to say’.	Targeted measures in schools Being available and present. Aware of long-term perspectives on grief.	-
Conceptualising Bereavement (Meaning Making)	What is means to be dead and where dead parent or sibling had gone. Some children are too young to remember.	-	-	Able to ask questions without worrying about making others sad or angry (talking to someone who isn’t experiencing the grief directly).
Finding Comfort	Children liked to see pictures and videos of the deceased. Use of metaphor - ‘heaven’.	-	-	Feeling confident and secure in an environment.
Stress and Trauma	Fears and worries related to illnesses and other potential death.	-	-	-
Looking to the Future	Sense of belonging. ‘New life’.	Teachers express ongoing impact of bereavement	-	-

		on young people throughout their schooling and life.		

Methods and concepts (Reciprocal translation and/or Refutational synthesis)	**Søfting, G. H., Dyregrov, A., & Dyregrov, K. (2016).**	**Brooten, D., & Youngblut, J. M. (2017).**	**Richardson, R. A., Ferguson, P. A., & Maxymiv, S. (2017).**
Setting	Recruitment through advertisement and Center for Crisis Psychology	Recruitment from four South Florida hospitals and Florida obituaries.	Bereavement camps
Participants	11 children (Norwegian)	Responses from 6-year-old to 12-year-old children.	Children
Details of bereavement	Experienced loss of a sibling or parent	Sibling death.	Death of a loved one
Subject description	Interviews	Semi-structured interviews	Observations
Communication	Having someone to talk to. Talking to the deceased.	Talking to deceased sibling.	Naming aloud the deceased
Peer / Social Support	-	-	Healing circles Feeling of belonging and 'fitting in'
Expressing Emotion	Provide sufficient emotional space.	Thinking about their deceased sibling, crying and feeling sad.	Encourage but do not go beyond level of the grieving child's own comfort. It's okay to be scared, sad and to cry.
Role of Adult (Relationships)	Explain rituals to children before they take place. Children grieve alongside adults (They are never too young - 'I'm also part of the family').	Spending more time as a family. Talking with children as a coping strategy.	Encourage and positive feedback when working through grief.

Conceptualising Bereavement (Meaning Making)	Involve children in rituals. Empowerment through involvement.	'I wish…' - Thinking about how death could have been stopped.	Provide protected psychological space Learning grief terminology
Finding Comfort	Time and place for reflection and memories (I.e. - visiting the grave).	Involvement in funeral and celebrations of life. Praying. New activities (sports, drawing etc).	Not alone with their grief.
Stress and Trauma	-	Experiencing a similar situation all over again. Fears and worries related to living family members.	-
Looking to the Future	-	Positive changes after de-track - valuing life.	-

Note - Entries in quotation marks are original authors' own words; those not are paraphrasing.

Table 1 Ratings of the appropriateness of included studies (adapted from Liabo, Gray and Mulcahy, 2013).

Study	What is the relevance of the topic focus of the study to the review question?	Is the data collection method appropriate to the research questions?	Are the results of the study sound?	Is this study type appropriate for answering the review question?	Overall weight
Andrews, C. R., & Marotta, S. A. (2005).	Medium	High	High	Medium	Medium
Brewer, J. D., & Sparkes, A. C. (2011a).	Medium	High	High	Medium	High
Brewer, J. D., & Sparkes, A. C. (2011b).	High	High	High	High	High
Brooten, D., & Youngblut, J. M. (2017).	High	High	High	High	High
Bugge, K. E., Darbyshire, P., Røkholt, E. G., Haugstvedt, K. T. S., & Helseth, S. (2014).	High	Medium	Medium	High	High
Dyregrov, K., Endsjø, M., Idsøe, T., & Dyregrov, A. (2015).	High	High	Medium	High	High
Keeley, M., & Baldwin, P. (2012).	Medium	High	High	Medium	Medium
Lane, N., Rowland, A., & Beinart, H. (2014).	Medium	Medium	High	High	High

Lowton, K., & Higginson, I. J. (2003).	High	High	Medium	High	High
McClatchey, I. S., & Wimmer, J. S. (2012).	High	High	High	High	High
Nilsson, D., & Ängarne-Lindberg, T. (2016).	High	High	Medium	High	High
Reid, J. (2002).	Medium	Medium	Medium	High	Medium
Richardson, R. A., Ferguson, P. A., & Maxymiv, S. (2017).	Medium	High	Medium	High	High
Søfting, G. H., Dyregrov, A., & Dyregrov, K. (2016).	Medium	High	High	Medium	Medium
Thompson, A. L., Miller, K. S., Barrera, M., Davies, B., Foster, T. L., Gilmer, M. J., … , & Gerhardt, C. A. (2011).	High	Medium	High	High	High

Table 2 Themes present in the included studies

Communication	Andrews, C. R., & Marotta, S. A. (2005). Brewer, J. D., & Sparkes, A. C. (2011a). Brooten, D., & Youngblut, J. M. (2017). Bugge, K. E., Darbyshire, P., Røkholt, E. G., Haugstvedt, K. T. S., & Helseth, S. (2014). Dyregrov, K., Endsjø, M., Idsøe, T., & Dyregrov, A. (2015). Keeley, M., & Baldwin, P. (2012). Lane, N., Rowland, A., & Beinart, H. (2014). Lowton, K., & Higginson, I. J. (2003). Nilsson, D., & Ängarne-Lindberg, T. (2016).

	Reid, J. (2002). Richardson, R. A., Ferguson, P. A., & Maxymiv, S. (2017). Søfting, G. H., Dyregrov, A., & Dyregrov, K. (2016). Thompson, A. L., Miller, K. S., Barrera, M., Davies, B., Foster, T. L., Gilmer, M. J., … , & Gerhardt, C. A. (2011).
Peer/Social Support	Brewer, J. D., & Sparkes, A. C. (2011a). Brewer, J. D., & Sparkes, A. C. (2011b). Lane, N., Rowland, A., & Beinart, H. (2014). Lowton, K., & Higginson, I. J. (2003). McClatchey, I. S., & Wimmer, J. S. (2012). Reid, J. (2002). Richardson, R. A., Ferguson, P. A., & Maxymiv, S. (2017). Thompson, A. L., Miller, K. S., Barrera, M., Davies, B., Foster, T. L., Gilmer, M. J., … , & Gerhardt, C. A. (2011).
Expressing Emotion	Andrews, C. R., & Marotta, S. A. (2005). Brewer, J. D., & Sparkes, A. C. (2011a). Brewer, J. D., & Sparkes, A. C. (2011b). Brooten, D., & Youngblut, J. M. (2017). Bugge, K. E., Darbyshire, P., Røkholt, E. G., Haugstvedt, K. T. S., & Helseth, S. (2014). Dyregrov, K., Endsjø, M., Idsøe, T., & Dyregrov, A. (2015). Lane, N., Rowland, A., & Beinart, H. (2014). Lowton, K., & Higginson, I. J. (2003). McClatchey, I. S., & Wimmer, J. S. (2012). Nilsson, D., & Ängarne-Lindberg, T. (2016). Reid, J. (2002). Richardson, R. A., Ferguson, P. A., & Maxymiv, S. (2017). Søfting, G. H., Dyregrov, A., & Dyregrov, K. (2016). Thompson, A. L., Miller, K. S., Barrera, M., Davies, B., Foster, T. L., Gilmer, M. J., … , & Gerhardt, C. A. (2011).
Role of Adult (Including relationships)	Andrews, C. R., & Marotta, S. A. (2005). Brewer, J. D., & Sparkes, A. C. (2011a). Brooten, D., & Youngblut, J. M. (2017). Bugge, K. E., Darbyshire, P., Røkholt, E. G., Haugstvedt, K. T. S., & Helseth, S. (2014). Dyregrov, K., Endsjø, M., Idsøe, T., & Dyregrov, A. (2015). Lane, N., Rowland, A., & Beinart, H. (2014). Lowton, K., & Higginson, I. J. (2003). Reid, J. (2002). Richardson, R. A., Ferguson, P. A., & Maxymiv, S. (2017). Søfting, G. H., Dyregrov, A., & Dyregrov, K. (2016).

	Thompson, A. L., Miller, K. S., Barrera, M., Davies, B., Foster, T. L., Gilmer, M. J., … , & Gerhardt, C. A. (2011).
Conceptualising Bereavement (Meaning Making)	Andrews, C. R., & Marotta, S. A. (2005). Brewer, J. D., & Sparkes, A. C. (2011a). Brewer, J. D., & Sparkes, A. C. (2011b). Brooten, D., & Youngblut, J. M. (2017). Bugge, K. E., Darbyshire, P., Røkholt, E. G., Haugstvedt, K. T. S., & Helseth, S. (2014). Keeley, M., & Baldwin, P. (2012). Lowton, K., & Higginson, I. J. (2003). McClatchey, I. S., & Wimmer, J. S. (2012). Nilsson, D., & Ängarne-Lindberg, T. (2016). Reid, J. (2002). Richardson, R. A., Ferguson, P. A., & Maxymiv, S. (2017). Søfting, G. H., Dyregrov, A., & Dyregrov, K. (2016).
Finding Comfort	Andrews, C. R., & Marotta, S. A. (2005). Brewer, J. D., & Sparkes, A. C. (2011a). Brewer, J. D., & Sparkes, A. C. (2011b). Brooten, D., & Youngblut, J. M. (2017). Bugge, K. E., Darbyshire, P., Røkholt, E. G., Haugstvedt, K. T. S., & Helseth, S. (2014). Keeley, M., & Baldwin, P. (2012). Lowton, K., & Higginson, I. J. (2003). Nilsson, D., & Ängarne-Lindberg, T. (2016). Reid, J. (2002). Richardson, R. A., Ferguson, P. A., & Maxymiv, S. (2017). Søfting, G. H., Dyregrov, A., & Dyregrov, K. (2016). Thompson, A. L., Miller, K. S., Barrera, M., Davies, B., Foster, T. L., Gilmer, M. J., … , & Gerhardt, C. A. (2011).
Stress and Trauma	Brewer, J. D., & Sparkes, A. C. (2011a). Brewer, J. D., & Sparkes, A. C. (2011b). Brooten, D., & Youngblut, J. M. (2017). Bugge, K. E., Darbyshire, P., Røkholt, E. G., Haugstvedt, K. T. S., & Helseth, S. (2014). Lowton, K., & Higginson, I. J. (2003). McClatchey, I. S., & Wimmer, J. S. (2012). Reid, J. (2002).
Looking to the Future	Brewer, J. D., & Sparkes, A. C. (2011a). Brewer, J. D., & Sparkes, A. C. (2011b). Brooten, D., & Youngblut, J. M. (2017). Bugge, K. E., Darbyshire, P., Røkholt, E. G., Haugstvedt, K. T. S., & Helseth, S. (2014). Keeley, M., & Baldwin, P. (2012). Lane, N., Rowland, A., & Beinart, H. (2014). McClatchey, I. S., & Wimmer, J. S. (2012).

	Thompson, A. L., Miller, K. S., Barrera, M., Davies, B., Foster, T. L., Gilmer, M. J., … , & Gerhardt, C. A. (2011).

Table 3 Description of common approaches

Communication	Having conversations about death and dying can show children that adults care about their lived experience.
Peer/Social Support	The role of peers is crucial in supporting children when they experience the death of a loved one.
Expressing Emotion	Children's emotions will be unpredictable and sporadic. This will impact on them physically, socially and emotionally. Encouraging children to recognise, channel and explore their emotions can be healing.
Role of Adult (Including relationships)	Adults can provide security and structure at a time where the child may feel lost and alone. Be prepared to listen, over and over again.
Conceptualising Bereavement (Meaning Making)	Expose children to grief processes and what kind of experiences they may live through. Sharing stories and talking about what death means can be reassuring for the child.
Finding Comfort	Spending time focusing on the death can help children feel a connection to the deceased. Yet, this can also be painful. Encourage children to find comfort by 'switching off' and looking after themselves.
Stress and Trauma	Death of a loved one can trigger serious health problems. Every child will react differently and this should be monitored over short and longer terms, with a holistic view of the child in mind.
Looking to the Future	Children will adapt to a new life: living with the death. Take time to explore the child's desires and needs for the future.

Fig. 1 – Flow diagram of search outcomes

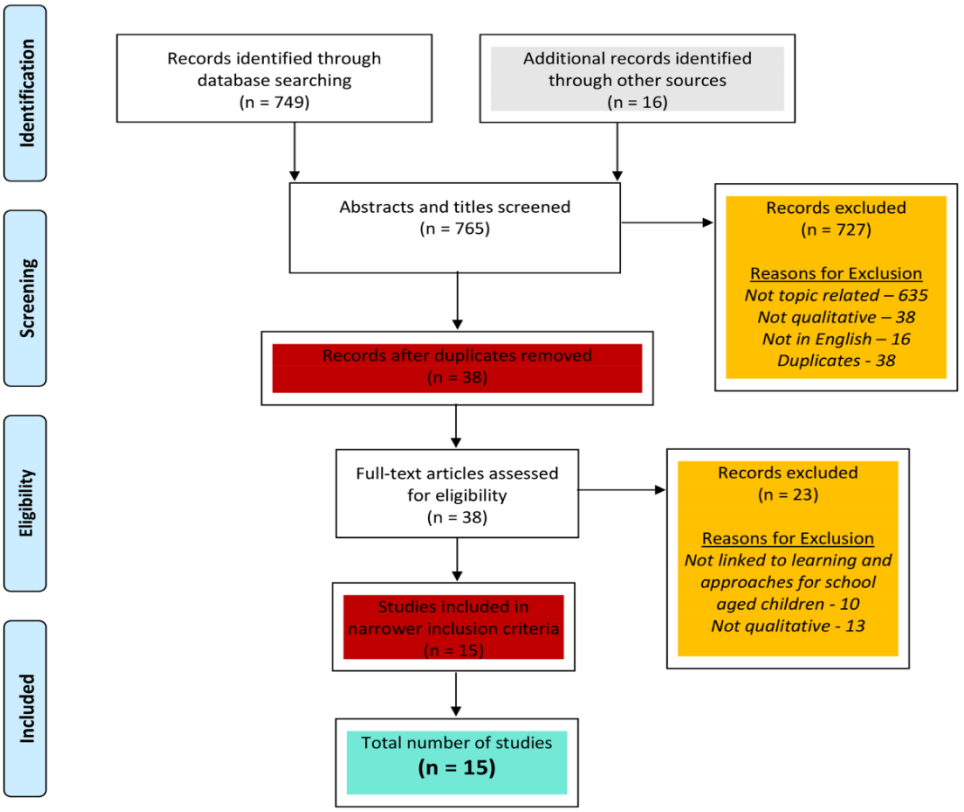


Fig. 2 – Qualitative enquiry model developed to be used as review protocol

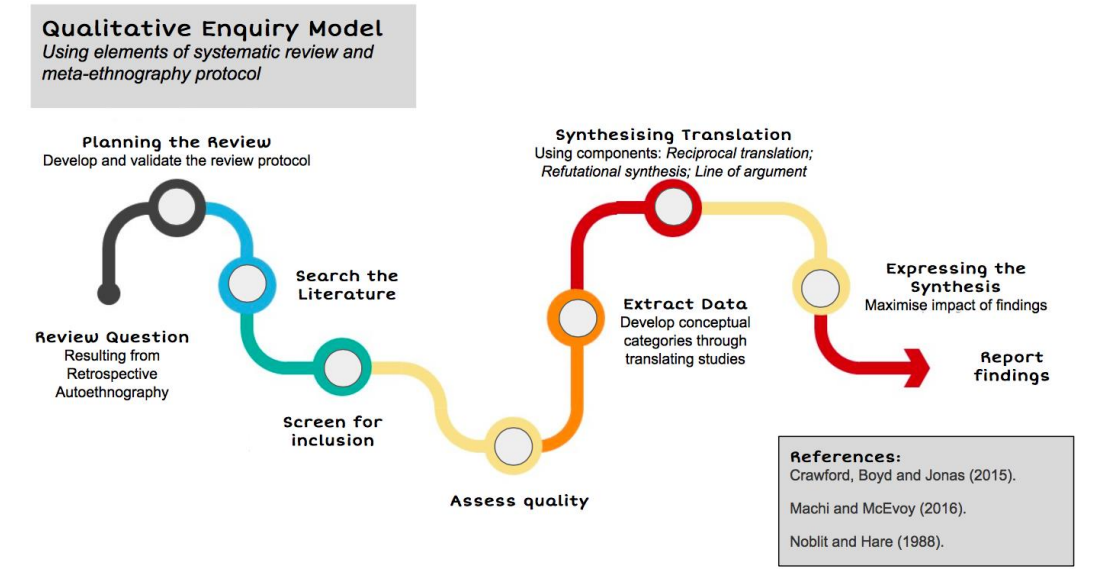
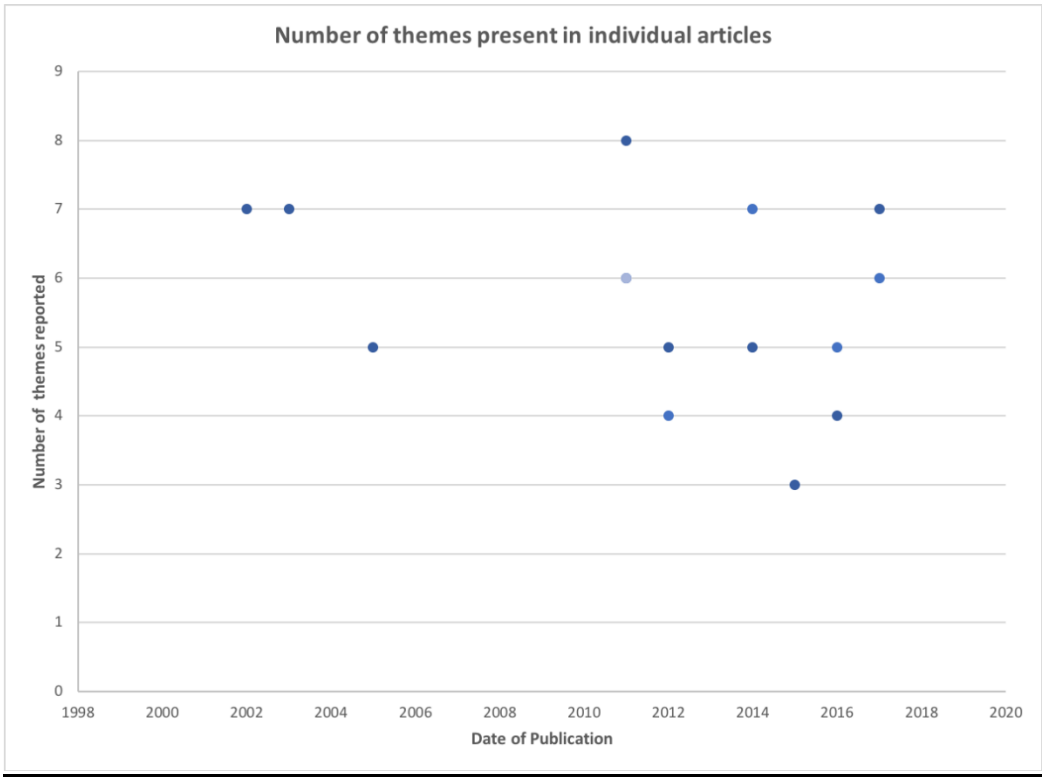


Fig. 3 – Chronological comparison of number of themes present in individual articles



Context and Implications Document for:
Death and dying: A systematic review into approaches used to support bereaved children.

David Duncan
University of Strathclyde, Glasgow, UK

This guide accompanies the following article:

David Duncan, Death and dying: A systematic review into approaches used to support bereaved children, RoE-2019-07-0248.R2, *Review of Education*, [DOI will be added by Wiley]

Author's Introduction

The experience of bereavement is common for children. Often coming unexpectedly, death interrupts everyday life and a child's reality becomes a social, emotional and developmental world of chaos. The potential impact of the death is highly unpredictable and complicated. There is no doubt, however, that the experience can be very memorable and stressful. Approximately 112 children are newly bereaved each day in the United Kingdom (Childhood Bereavement Network, n.d.); and, that only reflects those aged 0-17 who experience the death of a parent. Children will grieve deeply as they encounter many uncontrollable changes in, but not limited to: family structure; family finances; geographical location; school; friendships; academic competency; perspectives on life; and love and security. The impact a death is having on a child can relate to behaviour and academic performance, as well as having serious implications on physical and mental health (Funk, Jenkins, Astroth, Braswell and Kerber, 2018; Holland, 2008; Schlozman, 2003). Whether it's the death of a parent, brother, sister, friend, grandparent or other loved one, what truly matters is how the child is feeling and how they are supported. Bereavement may impact adversely over the medium and long term (Holland and Wilkinson, 2015); grief is an ongoing process (Mannarino and Cohen, 2011). Many people will offer their sympathy to children and families - expecting that time will allow them to 'get over it' and 'move on'. However, similar to adults, children learn to live with loss. The death becomes a part of who they are as they adapt to a new life without their loved one. When grieving, children require those around and close to them to help them cope. As a significant part of a child's life, this includes teachers and staff within schools. Yet, research does suggest that practitioners need support in approaching death and dying in the classroom. This review explores the literature on approaches used to support children who are bereaved. The intended audiences for this article are teachers, policy-makers, scholars and any other professionals who may work with bereaved children. The eight emergent themes that were identified in this study are not necessarily what adults *think* is best for bereaved children – but the evidence captures the voices of children who have directly experienced death and is a reflection on how they were (or were not) supported. Adults do have a key role in supporting children experiencing grief and this article outlines how this can be approached in a sensitive, meaningful and hopeful way.

Implications for Policy

The most important consideration for policy makers is that death and dying are considered part of the core curriculum. Children's voices are often missing from debates related to the idea that death has a place in the curriculum and this impacts on how children understand and experience grief. This review can be used to adopt approaches – specific for individual schools, children and families. The identified themes and approaches can act as a catalyst to bring about change in the classroom. The key implications for policy makers are outlined below.

Policy should provide an understanding of the particular difficulties associated with death and how this can impact on a child's attainment, achievement and, more crucially, their mental wellbeing. This issue needs to be influenced by broader policy contexts. There are very strong implications when policy – such as 'Every Child Matters', 'Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL)' and 'Getting it right for every child' (GIRFEC) – draws heavily upon inclusion. Nationally, however, there is still an argument for 'absolute inclusion'. The impact that policy has on the recipients of it needs to put the onus on schools to show them that they are not meeting the needs of all learners; many children are going unnoticed as they silently grieve. Central to this inclusion debate is the impact of death, dying and bereavement on children's education. One area in particular which is concerning as it can often be non-existent or limited within inclusion and wellbeing policies, is the need to support children who are dealing with significant loss or change. Policy does consider many factors surrounding child development, yet what it fails to show is how bereaved children can be disadvantaged. The concepts of inclusion and wellbeing are rarely a matter of urgency when the grieving process is considered. It is therefore reasonable to conclude that policy should now consider how bereavement impacts on achieving equity in education.

Furthermore, these implications for government policy makers are paralleled for those developing local policies for schools or clusters of schools. The evidence suggests inconsistencies across schools – with pupils better supported in specific areas. Attention needs to be paid to this matter and, consequently, school policies could be developed to improve practices. Teachers are not counsellors, but they need to be equipped with the skills and provided with guidance to tackle this matter. Effective professional development should build up teacher confidence and policy guidance should increase knowledge and understanding. A model where families, teachers and pupils work together needs to be developed. Not all children require professional help following the death of a loved one, but this doesn't mean they should be left to grieve alone and become 'unheard'. Teachers need support for agency to bring about change in their establishments. If death, dying and bereavement are not addressed then schools are failing to include *all* children through a lack of support and understanding (Holland, 2008; Lowton and Higginson, 2003). The unresolved issue of how to address bereavement in schools needs the full support of policy makers at all levels.

Implications for Practice

- Leaders should be fully aware that tackling death and bereavement in schools is not just a matter of pastoral support; it also includes opportunities to learn about life and death. This could develop as part of the curriculum.

- School staff should have an awareness of the potential impact that death may have on children so that they can understand and respond to the needs of their pupils. The review is clear about staff in schools working with families to take this topic forward in a holistic way. There is a need to look at contemporary research and consider the effects of bereavement and to rethink pedagogy appropriately. So, the curriculum should require teachers to teach change and loss and give children the opportunity to learn about the impact of death and how that may have an impact on their life. Teachers should also be equipped to act upon any bereavement which may be present in the classroom.

- A sensitive teacher who is able to acknowledge the needs of the pupil and help them through the mourning process is crucial. Equitable education for bereaved children is not initially about addressing any lower academic issues. Clear procedures need to be put in place to help children with the psychosocial consequences following trauma and loss and the educational challenges that such an event presents. Schools are a place of learning; learning about death can help children belong. Teachers need to be committed to ensuring equity through the removal of barriers to learning which are consequential of bereavement. There is a need to enlarge the scale of focus in career-long professional learning to support teachers to implement approaches. This might include staff training, resource development and clear guidance. In this way, teacher confidence can be increased. Furthermore, the review reveals that bereavement services, such as charities, are willing to work with schools: and often, a community-based approach works well.

- To take immediate action, teachers should address the ‘what ifs’, ‘perhaps’ and ‘maybes’ and integrate a bereavement policy into the classroom: transforming it into proactive pedagogical action. By considering children’s mental, emotional and behavioural development, school teachers will give children a voice.

Despite the fact that all children will experience change and loss, it still remains a taboo topic within schools. Too often it is easiest to turn away, particularly at times when educational pressures take precedence. But, education is about preparation for life and this includes preparation for change and loss. Teachers are best placed to use this research and think about what is most effective for their school staff, families and children. And, ultimately, teaching practices based on this research should place the journey of bereavement alongside the child’s journey of development.

Author Recommends

Holland, J. (2008) How schools can support children who experience loss and death, *British Journal of Guidance & Counselling,* 36(4), 411-424, DOI: 10.1080/03069880802364569

With a specific focus on research and curriculum initiatives, this article provides evidence on how schools in one region of England responded when a death occurred. It also explores how we can better prepare children and teachers for these situations and the associated challenges.

Mallon, B. (2011) Working the bereaved Children (London, SAGE).

This book provides an insight into theories around loss and bereavement – with a specific focus on practice implications for those working with CHILDREN who are experiencing death. The detailed discussions around resources, case studies and exercises encourage critical engagement with the topic and promote reflective practice.

Nabizadeh, G. (Ed.), Murray, C. (Ed.), Jindal-Snape, D. (Ed.), Vaughan, P. (Ed.), Gunn, A., Bradley, H., ... O'Connor, J. (2019) When People Die: Stories from Young People, *University of Dundee, UniVerse* https://doi.org/10.20933/100001131

This comic is designed to help young people, parents, teachers, counsellors and anyone who reads it to learn about different perspectives on grief and what grieving means for young people. The stories and scenarios have been written by young people and they capture how it feels to be in the position of a grieving young person.

Ness, P. (2011) *A Monster Calls* (London, Walker Books).

A book for young people and adults, it explores responses to family trauma and death – specifically around the difficulty in facing reality. It explores the themes of fear, loss, courage and trauma in a dark, imaginative way aimed at capturing the minds of young adult readers.

Paul, S. (2019) Is Death Taboo for Children? Developing Death Ambivalence as a Theoretical Framework to Understand Children's Relationship with Death, Dying and Bereavement, *Children & Society*, John Wiley & Sons Ltd and National Children's Bureau. DOI: 10.1111/chso.12352

This article draws on data from focus groups with children aged 9-12 years old. It explores how the death taboo misrepresents children's experiences.

Scottish Partnership for Palliative Care. (2018) *A road less lonely: Moving forward with public health approaches to death, dying and bereavement in Scotland.* Edinburgh: Author.

This report discusses ways of moving forward with a public health approach to death, dying and bereavement. It explores what practical action might be taken at a national level to encourage and support open and supportive attitudes and behaviours relating to death, dying and bereavement in Scotland.

Stylianou, P., & Zembylas, M. (2018) Dealing With the Concepts of "Grief" and "Grieving" in the Classroom: Children's Perceptions, Emotions, and Behavior, *Journal of Death and Dying*, 77(3), 240–266. DOI: 10.1177/0030222815626717

These authors carried out an action research study to explore children's perceptions of grief and grieving. Two important findings following an intervention program are reflected upon: children can be better equipped to define emotional responses to loss and when talking about grief and grieving children overcome their anxiety.

Teckentrup, B. (2014) *The Memory Tree* (London, Orchard).

This picture book can be used to help children celebrate memories when someone dies. It explores death and its finality. The story captures the importance of telling stories and how this can provide comfort.

Useful Links

The following NHS Education for Scotland website aims to provide support to those directly working with children who are bereaved. The video in the following link is useful for understanding how children feel about death and dying http://www.sad.scot.nhs.uk/bereavement/children-who-are-bereaved/.

Good Grief, an Australian organization, has developed evidence-based loss and grief programmes. The details of these can be found at: https://www.goodgrief.org.au/

Richmond's Hope is a Scottish based charity who value therapeutic play as a means for supporting bereaved children. The following link provides more information: https://www.richmondshope.org.uk/how-can-we-help/working-with-children/support-a-child/

A Whole School Approach to Supporting Bereavement and Loss (Scotland): (https://www.seemescotland.org/media/8151/whole_school_approach_to_lossandbereavement.pdf) This is a reference toolkit which contains information, further reading and signposting to local and national organisations. It is aimed at increasing knowledge and understanding on the subjects of bereavement, loss and change.

This website is designed specifically for youths – providing a safe space to learn from other young people, explore how to cope with grief and feel less alone. The short film linked on the web page https://www.hopeagain.org.uk/ reflects on personal journeys of grief, impact of support and the importance of being hopeful.

Focus Questions

1. What are the most important competencies that teachers might need to take forward death and dying as part of the school curriculum?
2. What skills do children need to build up resilience to help them cope with death?
3. How can schools, families and communities work together to support a child experiencing death?

4. As an adult, what are the most important aspects to consider when supporting bereaved children and educating them around death and dying?
5. How can policy makers and practitioners work together to ensure death and dying are considered factors when supporting children's wellbeing?

Seminar/Project Idea

In encouraging schools to consider how they support bereaved children and how they can include death and dying in the curriculum, prepare a presentation to deliver to teachers. Create a scenario where a child is bereaved and explore the role of the school in ensuring this pupil is supported. Highlight the 'death taboo' that could exist and how this may impact negatively on the pupil (and peers). In contrast, show how rethinking pedagogy and a shift in perspective can make a difference to this child's life. Provide evidence of clear approaches that the school can take to support this bereaved child.

References:

Childhood Bereavement Network. (n.d.) *National Statistics. Available online at:* http://www.childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk/research/key-statistics.aspx (accessed September 2019).

Funk, A. M., Jenkins, S., Astroth, K. S., Braswell, G., & Kerber, C. (2018) A Narrative Analysis of Sibling Grief, *Journal of Loss and Trauma,* 23(1), 1-14.

Holland, J. (2008) How schools can support children who experience loss and death, *British*
Journal of Guidance & Counselling, 36(4), 411–424.

Holland, J., & Wilkinson, S. (2015) A comparative study of the child bereavement response
and needs of schools in North Suffolk and Hull, Yorkshire*, Bereavement Care,* 34(2), 52-58.

Lowton, K., & Higginson, I. J. (2003) Managing bereavement in the classroom: A conspiracy of silence? *Death Studies,* 27(8), 717-741.

Mannarino, A. P., & Cohen, J. A. (2011) Traumatic Loss in Children and Adolescents, *Journal of Child & Adolescent Trauma,* 4(1), 22-33.

Schlozman, S. C. (2003) The Pain of Losing a Parent, *Educational Leadership,* 60(8), 91-92.

Appendix 2 – List of articles included in systematic review

Author/s	Setting	Participants	Details of Bereavement	Creative Element
Andrade et al. (2018)	Family environment	3 children	Death of a sibling	House-Tree-Person Test (HTP) and the Fables Test
Arnold (2020)	Art therapy room	3 females	Death of a parent	Art therapy
Bennett and Dyehouse (2005)	Primary school	Children, school staff, parents and educational psychologist	Death of a pupil	The school's response
Brewer and Sparkes (2011b)	Childhood bereavement service	Children and staff	Parentally-bereaved young people	Outdoor activity
Eftoda (2021)	Family circumstance	Two children	Death of parent	Mindfulness, yoga, play-based and music therapy
Finn (2003)	Bereavement counselling	5 children	Death of family member	Art
Holland (2008)	Region in England	Pupils and teachers	Varied	Creative Media
Kennedy et al. (2020)	Primary school community	Principals, teachers, parents and students	Close friend or family member	Creative 'hands on' response to death
McFerran and Hunt (2008)	School project	Children, adolescents	Varied	Music therapy
Richardson et al. (2017)	Bereavement camps	Children	Varied	Camp activities

Willis (2002)	Primary school	Children	Varied	Suggestions for caregivers – Art, music and nature

Appendix 3 – Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form for Children

To keep what you say private, I will not write your name in the report unless you and your parent wish to include your name.

I will be delivering an information session to your class on **XXX** at school. During this, there will be time to ask any questions you may have about the project.

If you feel you have experienced a death and would like help, please ask me about Richmond's Hope or Child Bereavement UK. If you haven't, yet feel you require extra support and cannot speak to an adult about this please contact Childline on 0800 1111 or visit https://www.childline.org.uk/.

Richmond's Hope
Ibrox Parish Church
Clifford Street
Glasgow
G51 1QH
Tel: 0141 230 6123

Child Bereavement UK
First Floor
16 Fitzroy Place
Glasgow
G3 7RW
Tel: 0141 352 9995

Email: glasgow@richmondshope.org.uk
glasgowsupport@childbereavementuk.org

University of Strathclyde
Humanities & Social Sciences

Hello, my name is **David Duncan**.

I am doing a research study with the **University of Strathclyde.** This will take place at **X.**

The research is about how children's experiences of death and dying. The research team also includes Dr Anna Robinson and Dr Sally Paul.

The project includes three Expressive Arts elements – Art, Drama and Music. It will use these to help you share, explore and express your ideas about the topic.

? I would really like to learn about your experiences of loss and to support you in learning about grief. I would also like to see if creative methods help you to express yourself.

Taking Part
Please read this carefully and let me know if there is anything that doesn't make sense.

I have spoken to you at your school about the project. I have also given some information to your parents/carers.

You will be asked to sign a consent form before we start.

If you would like to opt-out, your parent/carer can let me, or your class teacher, know. You do not have to take part – it is your choice!

What will I do in the project?
You will take part in a creative workshop with your class.
We will share, explore and express ideas in a creative space. You can do this through:

- Art
- Music
- Drama

What is the research for?
After the project, I will write a report about everyone's experiences. I will ask children to be involved in this too. I hope this will help schools to work with children on death, dying and bereavement in creative ways.

Before you take part, it is important for you to know that:
You can choose whether or not to take part.

Your parent/carer needs to give permission for you to take part. I'll ask them to sign a consent form to say it is OK for you to take part.

I will not discuss anything you say with anyone else, unless you tell me that you, or someone else, might be hurt. In this case, I will have to tell a teacher.

I may take photographs so that I can remember some of your work. When the study is finished, I will delete these so no-one else can look at them.

If you get upset or do not want to take part in a specific part, you can request time out.

If you change your mind at any time about taking part, you can tell me you want to stop without having to say why. (If what you have said and your work has been anonymised at this point, this will remain part of the project.)

University of Strathclyde
Humanities & Social Sciences

Consent Form for Children

Please read the following statements carefully and tick the box if you agree.	✓
I have read the information leaflet.	
I have had the chance to ask any questions and talk about the study.	
I understand that it is my choice to take part.	
I understand that I can decide to stop taking part, at any time, without saying why.	
I agree for photographs to be taken of me and my work.	
I understand that anything I say will not be discussed with anyone else, unless I say that I, or someone else, might be hurt.	
I understand that the researcher will not use my name to keep what I say private.	
I am happy to take part in this study.	

Name:	
Signature:	**Date:**

Appendix 4 - Participant Information Sheet for Parents/Carers

University of Strathclyde
Humanities & Social Sciences

Participant Information Sheet for Parents/Carers

Name of department: Humanities & Social Sciences
Title of the study: The Creative Space: Exploring death and dying with children

Introduction
This research project is aimed at primary school-aged children. It focuses on the experience of death, dying and loss through creative methods. This is an arts-based research project that uses art, drama and music to explore insights, ideas and emotions. The research will be carried out by David Duncan, Doctoral student at the University of Strathclyde, under the academic supervision of Dr Anna Robinson (Chief Investigator) and Dr Sally Paul (Investigator). Informed by the United Nations Conventions on the Rights of the Child, the aim of the study is to promote children's voice in creative ways. Through a child-centred and participatory approach, the research will be carried out with children in school.

Note – Whilst the research may have a therapeutic value, it is not designed to provide support to those in need of specialised services.

What is the purpose of this research?
The research is aimed at using arts-based techniques to capture the experiences of children so that their needs for support might be better understood. Death and dying are often non-existent in the school curriculum and a taboo still exists around the topic. As a result of this, children's views are often missing from discussions. This study is therefore focused on learning about the lived experiences of bereaved children and their peers, giving them a voice and realising their rights. An understanding of what children and young people experience when grieving and their perceptions of grief will impact on the knowledge in the subject area. The role that creative methods can play in helping children share, explore and express their experiences when processing and adjusting to change and loss will also become evident.

Does my child have to take part?
Your child does not have to take part in this research. They can opt-out. To be included in the study, consent must be received from the child and the parent/carer. Your child can also select parts of the research that they do not wish to be involved in. Further to this, your child can withdraw from the research, and you can also withdraw them, at any point. This decision will be fully supported by the researcher.

What will my child do in the project?
Your child will participate in a creative workshop. The participants will work together, as a class, for the duration of the day. During the workshop, participants will have the opportunity to select one or more of the *Expressive Strands* to work on. This will include: Art, Music and Drama. The work will be combined into a live arts-based performance/exhibition led by the children.

The research project will take place at **X**. The session will be delivered as part of the Health and Wellbeing recovery curriculum. It is likely that this will be on XXX. Further details about this will be send out.

Why has my child been invited to take part?
The project will involve one primary school class at X. Your child's class has been selected. Your child is eligible to take part as they are currently in Primary 6 at the school. Due to the creative nature of the project, participants will be invited to share, explore and express their ideas through art, music or drama. If your child has experienced the death of a relative or friend, there is no time-specific criteria since the death for your child to take part in the study. However, your child must feel ready to do so. If your child has experienced multiple deaths in a short period, a traumatic loss or is currently receiving specialised support then they should not take part. Please do not hesitate to contact the researcher to discuss this matter further.

What are the potential risks to my child in taking part?
It is understood that reflecting on the experience of death and dying can be healing, yet difficult. With this in mind, the researcher will work closely to support all children and young people. The research project may arouse strong feelings and emotions. The study will promote the expression of emotion and how intense emotion can be managed. However, should it become overwhelming for the child, and if the researcher feels additional support is required, professional services will be available. The researcher works closely with Richmond's Hope and Child Bereavement UK - charities who provide support for children and young people who have been bereaved. Participants and families can be directed towards these specialised services. Contact details are as follows:

Richmond's Hope
Ibrox Parish Church
Clifford Street
Glasgow
G51 1QH
Tel: 0141 230 6123
Email: glasgow@richmondshope.org.uk

Child Bereavement UK
First Floor
16 Fitzroy Place
Glasgow
G3 7RW
Tel: 0141 352 995
Email: glasgowsupport@childbereavementuk.org

If your child has not been bereaved and requires mental health support around the topic, they can contact Childline on 0800 1111 or visit https://www.childline.org.uk/. Your child may discuss and open up about bereavement to you. This could be difficult if you have experienced the same bereavement and you may become emotional. In this case, it is important to take time to reflect and to look after yourself. If you would like advice, please do not hesitate to contact the researcher.

What information is being collected in the project?
The information that will be collected during this project will relate to children's experiences of death, dying and loss. This will include thoughts, feelings, ideas and perceptions of death and dying through creative tasks. The project will also collect data around how the arts can be used to represent this experience. Group guidelines will be set to ensure that any autobiographical information shared remains confidential. In working with the researcher to create, all content will be fictional. It may develop from lived experiences - however, all members will be fully aware that the content is imaginary and is a culmination of experiences, ideas, thoughts and opinions. Photographs will be taken, if consent is given, to capture what words cannot. Creative methods (and photographs) included in the final report will be entirely anonymised and children will not be identifiable. Participants will not be identifiable in any of the investigation outputs. All collected data will be anonymised for analysis. After this point, the data cannot be withdrawn. Any names used will be pseudonyms. Should your child not wish for their work to be modified or for their name not to be changed then this will be agreed between the researcher, child and parent. Written consent will be sought for this. Any co-constructed work will only be shared with permission from all creators. This will be anonymously unless consent for ownership is given by all participants.

Who will have access to the information?
Only the research team (Researcher, Chief Investigator and Investigator) will have access to the information and data gathered. Regarding personal safety, all participants will be made aware of procedures that will be taken if concerns are raised about people within or out with the group. This information would be shared with the member of staff responsible for the child's health and wellbeing at their school, who would act accordingly. In addition to this, if any information is disclosed to the group and/or researcher, the above procedure will be followed. Confidentiality will be respected unless the information provided by the child concerns harm or abuse, then this must be acted on appropriately and the Child Protection Co-ordinator at your child's school would be contacted. Finally, as a parent/carer, you have the right to access any data about your child - should you request this. We ask that you have your child's permission to do so. This does not include any data that contains other children.

Where will the information be stored and how long will it be kept for?
All gathered data will be kept in a locked filing cabinet or on the Strathcloud (a secure, online network). After analysis, any data which has not been anonymised will be destroyed. Anonymous research data will be retained and stored indefinitely on the Strathcloud. Any work which your child has solely created will be returned to them at the end of the project. Should you or your child not wish for this to be returned, it will be kept in line with data protection regulations.

Thank you for reading this information – please ask any questions if you are unsure about what is written here.

Please also read our Privacy Notice for Research Participants.

What happens next?
If you would like to find out more about the project, please contact the researcher on the contact details below. I will be holding an information session for the children on XXX in school.

If you do not wish for your child to take part, please contact the researcher.

Finally, upon completion of the project a re-connector session will be organised to discuss the findings of the study. A summary of the investigation will also be sent out.

Researcher contact details:
David Duncan
University of Strathclyde
Lord Hope Building
141 St James Road
Glasgow
G4 0LT
Email: david.duncan@strath.ac.uk

Chief Investigator details:
Dr Anna Robinson
University of Strathclyde
Lord Hope Building
141 St James Road
Glasgow
G4 0LT
Email: anna.robinson@strath.ac.uk
Telephone: +44 141 444 8142

This research was granted ethical approval by the University of Strathclyde Ethics Committee.
If you have any questions/concerns, during or after the research, or wish to contact an independent person to whom any questions may be directed or further information may be sought from, please contact:

Secretary to the University Ethics Committee
Research & Knowledge Exchange Services
University of Strathclyde
Graham Hills Building
50 George Street
Glasgow
G1 1QE
Telephone: 0141 548 3707
Email: ethics@strath.ac.uk

Appendix 5 – Ethical Approval

Approval: UEC19/88 Robinson/Paul/Duncan: Experiences of bereavement: Using creative methods with children and young people to share, explore and express

I can confirm that the University Ethics Committee (UEC) has approved this protocol and appropriate insurance cover and sponsorship have now also been confirmed.

I remind you that the UEC must be informed of any changes you plan to make to the research project, so that it has the opportunity to consider them. Any change of staffing within the research team should be reported to UEC.

The UEC also expects you to report back on the progress and outcome of your project, with an account of anything which may prompt ethical questions for any similar future project and with anything else that you feel the Committee should know.

Any adverse event that occurs during an investigation must be reported as quickly as possible to UEC and, within the required time frame, to any appropriate external agency.

The University agrees to act as sponsor of the above mentioned project subject to the following conditions:

1. That the project obtains/has and continues to have University/Departmental Ethics Committee approval.

2. That the project is carried out according to the project protocol.

3. That the project continues to be covered by the University's insurance cover.

4. That the Director of Research and Knowledge Exchange Services is immediately notified of any change to the project protocol or circumstances which may affect the University's risk assessment of the project.

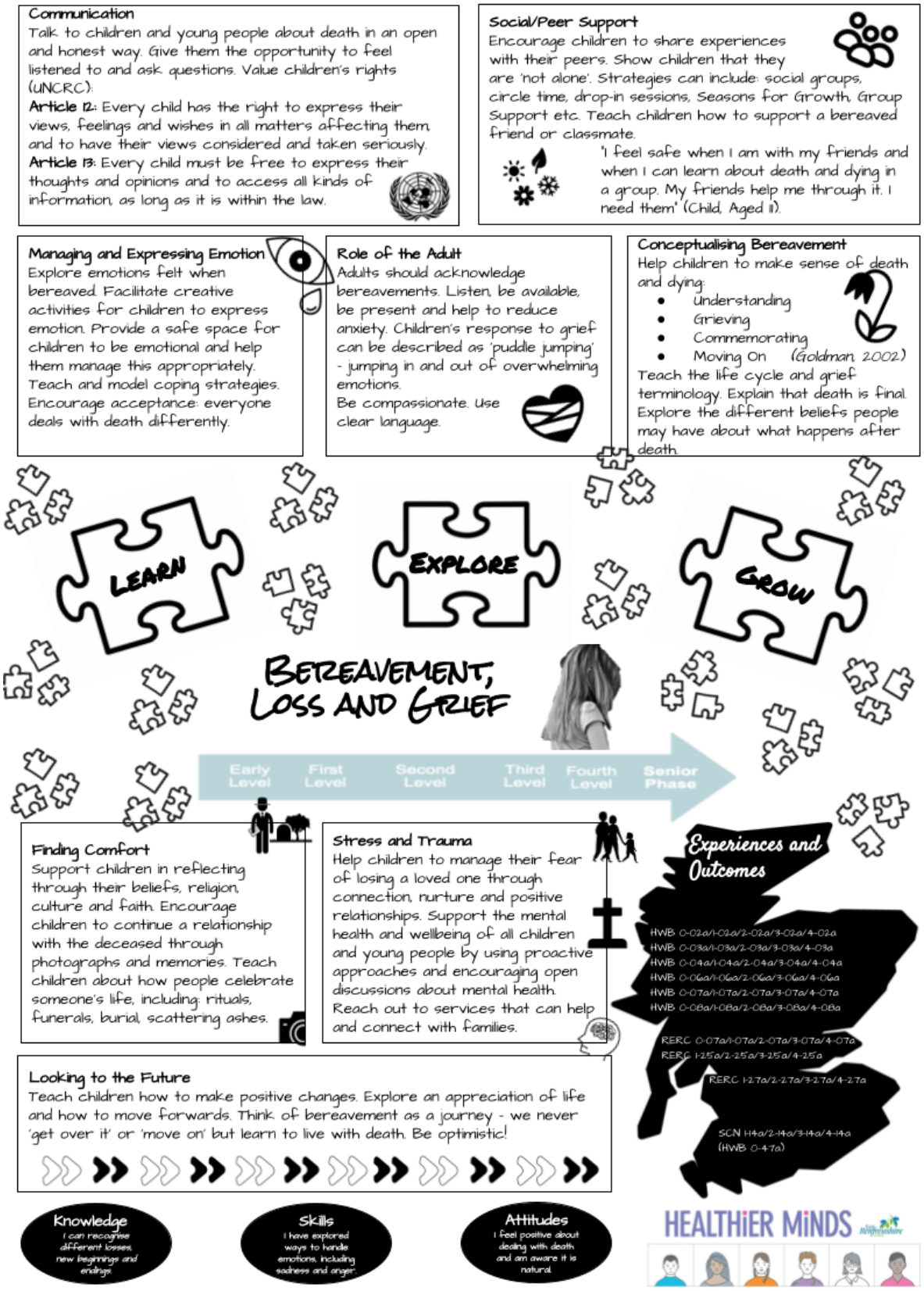
5. That the project starts within 12 months of the date of this letter.

As sponsor of the project the University has responsibilities under the Scottish Executive's Research Governance Framework for Health and Community Care. You

should ensure you are aware of those responsibilities and that the project is carried out according to the Research Governance Framework.

On behalf of the Committee, I wish you success with this project.

Appendix 6 – Bereavement Policy



Appendix 7 – Example lesson plan with supporting material

HEALTHiER MiNDS

EAST RENFREWSHIRE COUNCIL

Learning about Loss, Bereavement and Grief
PSHE Lessons
P3
Lesson Plans

WINSTON'S WISH

Giving hope to grieving children

With thanks to Winston's Wish

P3 Lesson 1: Learn

Detailed Lesson Plan

Lesson 1	**Learn**
Introduction	This is the 1st of 3 lessons for P3 pupils on loss, grief and bereavement. Some of the themes in this lesson may be upsetting for some pupils and careful consideration of those pupils who may need support prior to, during and after the lesson will be helpful.
Learning Outcomes	Exploring death, dying and bereavement So that… • I understand what death means • I explore characteristics of dead and alive • I can discuss the process of grief
Introduction to the lesson, signposting to support, ground rules and learning outcomes	Introduction Set the lesson up by acknowledging the content may be difficult for some and by reminding pupils that they can talk to you if they find it difficult. The lesson will include feelings related to loss, it will introduce the concept of death and grief. Tell pupils that the lesson will not be asking them to share personal experiences although they may safely use their experience to contribute to the activities. Introduce the concept of death to the children and discuss how to feel safe and valued when expressing their ideas. The Bereavement Charter - Spend some time looking at 'The Bereavement Charter'. https://www.winstonswish.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/ww-0107-CBC-lo.pdf Discuss with the children each part and how this relates to children's rights. As a class, pupils should create their own charter for learning about death in the classroom. This should include points such as: ● Listen ● Share ● Respect Others ● I tell only my story Show children the invisible suitcase clip. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wmzy6fRLcCU Ask the children to share what would be in their invisible suitcase.
Main Body	Activities Discuss with the children what dead means. Teaching Point - Being dead means that your body and your head don't work anymore. Someone who is dead can't talk, or see, or hear, or eat, or move or feel anything anymore. Think about stories or movies that involve the death of a character. Ask the children how other characters feel when someone dies.

	Activity 1 Watch the clips to show how death is present in animation. Moana's grandmother dies Inside Out Bing Bong dies Lion King Mufasa dies Use various pictures to discuss the word 'dead'. Ask the children to describe the images and share their ideas. Activity 2 The Small Creature – As children watch the clip, they should think about the journey Small Creature goes on when Bird dies. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ks2DOoZtZ4A Task – Children create their own story around the theme of 'loss'. Create a storyboard of your animation then use a software such as Stop Motion to bring your creation to life. Share these with your classmates/other pupils in your school.
Recap the Learning	Check the children's' understanding of death, in particular grief. Talk about the fact that people may have family members or friends who have died. Check they are all ok and that they know they can come to you. Complete show 'Belly Breathing' to finish the session. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RiMb2Bw4Ae8