

**The impact of a child's death;  
An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis undertaken with  
five head teachers**

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## **Abstract**

This research explores with five head teachers their views and experiences of a period when a child was terminally ill and subsequently died when in their school community.

The participants were selected purposively from Derbyshire head teachers who had experienced the death of a pupil in their school community. After interviewing the participants using a semi-structured interview schedule the transcribed interviews provided the data for the research.

The interviews were analysed, using the methodology of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, to explore the experiences of each of the participants. Three superordinate themes were identified which were;

- Emotions and their management
- Interactions with the bereaved family
- Interaction with the school community

Additionally, an overarching theme of Elevation was identified.

Each theme is presented and illustrated with abstracts taken from the original data. This is accompanied by interpretation which is also discussed and compared with knowledge from the existing literature.

The research has illustrated the complications that exist for head teachers in managing their emotions and the possibility of these emotions intruding on their personal and family life. It has illustrated the way in which the relationship between the head teacher and the bereaved family changes and how it changes their interactions within the school community.

This research led to the consideration of the influence of the cultural expectation enshrined in the saying, 'De mortuis nil nisi bonum dicendum est' (Of the dead, nothing unless good). Also considered is the behavioural derivative of this saying and how it shapes the responses that head teachers make when managing a school community when a child has died. It also led to the consideration of the implications of the research findings for any support professionals who help schools.

### **Tribute**

I would like to pay tribute to all the children who died and whose deaths led to this research. Also to the families, friends and the staff of the schools they attended. They all suffered terribly after the deaths, each in their own way. It is with some personal sadness that I write this thesis as each of the children who died and whose parents and head teachers I met, caused me to grieve with them.

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**The impact of a child's death;  
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teachers**

**Chapter 1 – Introduction**

This thesis reflects my thinking and efforts to better understand and help my colleague head teachers when they are faced with the death of a child who is part of their school community.

The story of my efforts to do this began for me on 13 March 1996 when an unemployed former shopkeeper and leader in the Scout movement, Thomas Hamilton, walked into the Dunblane Primary School armed with four guns and something like 750 rounds of ammunition and began to discharge the weapons. Hamilton opened fire on a class of five and six year old children killing sixteen of them and a teacher. He then killed himself by firing a further shot upwards into his own mouth. These events shocked and saddened the world and had a similar impact on me, affecting me greatly at the time. This was largely because of the cruel nature of the events but also because of the realisation of my own professional shortcomings.

It could be argued that it is impossible to be prepared for such an event as it is likely to be outside the usual experience of an educational psychologist. These events, however, made me realise that had they occurred in one of the schools serviced by the Educational Psychology Service in Derbyshire, the service would have not been in a position to help the school community begin the process of recovery. The service did not have the knowledge, nor did the Educational Psychology Service have the systems in place, to make a contribution to this process of recovery. I was therefore personally upset and at the same time professionally worried by my own and the Educational Psychology Service unpreparedness.

Probably more importantly it made me realise that there was little understanding of, or capability to deal with, any tragic event that might occur in a school. That realisation prompted me to begin the process of developing the knowledge and skills that might help in this respect. This has involved in the development of a professional knowledge and competence that helps when tragic events occur in

schools. It has also involved me in the development of a systematic response protocol for the Educational Psychology Service.

This thesis is the latest, though undoubtedly not the last, chapter in this process. The research and the writing of the thesis has provided me with the time and an opportunity to explore some of the issues involved in helping a school community recover when tragedy strikes. It has been part of my process of evolving into a more competent professional in a better prepared Educational Psychology Service.

The research has been undertaken through the analysis of semi-structured interview response data obtained from five head teachers. They agreed to participate in these interviews with me so that I could explore with them their experiences. In this way I tried to understand the impact that these experiences had on them during a period when a child, who was a member of their school community, became terminally ill and subsequently died.

The thesis is written in the first person partly because my own experiences played a part in developing the data. My work was part of the experience for one of the head teachers as I supported her during the period after the child had died. It also seemed to enable me to better express my reflexive thoughts in a consideration of the processes and outcomes of the research. This then led to the particular methodology that I used and my reasoning for this is set out fully in chapter 2.

The analysis of the data from the interviews indicated that there were three superordinate themes which were part of the experience of all of the head teachers. These were concerned with emotions and their management, changes in the interactions with the bereaved families and changes in the interactions with the school community. Additionally, the exploration of the influence of the cultural heritage of, 'De mortuis nil nisi bonum dicendum est' (Of the dead only good) played a significant part in the understanding of the responses of the head teachers to the issues with which they were faced.

The exploration of this influence indicated that the head teachers faced challenging and sometimes upsetting situations which they were not always free to respond to in ways that they would, perhaps, have wished. There were also indications that the previous experiences of the head teachers could play a significant role in their responses, while the management of the evolving situations sometimes impacted on their personal or family life.

Research of this nature raises a number of dilemmas. Not the least of these is how the bereaved families might respond to it. Additionally, the interviews with the head teachers place them back into the emotional environment which contains distressing elements and to some extent there are dangers of causing them to be upset again. These dilemmas are both considered in the section on ethical consent and the resolution of them is described there.

There were implications which arose from the research findings for the range of work of the Educational Psychology Service and similar school support services, also, for the ways in which this work could be undertaken in schools where such child death events occurred. There were also indications as to why the head teachers responded in the ways that they did which help to give an insight into the kind of help and support that they might welcome and benefit from.

### **Organisation of the thesis**

The thesis is organised largely in a traditional way though there are some aspects of the organisation that require a little explanation.

After the introduction to the thesis I have, in Chapter 1, considered and reviewed the literature in respect of the issues of death and dying and in particular the death of children. I have also sought to bring together any relevant research that relates to the impact on those who teach and care for children. Finally, in this chapter I have considered evidence from various sources and journals, including the Health Service, which relates to the impact on professionals of the death of those with whom they work.

Following this, Chapter 2 describes some of the methodological options, debates and dilemmas together with the reasoning for my choice of methodology. I also consider in this chapter the theoretical underpinnings that support the methodology. This chapter, additionally, gives an insight into the way I have adapted the methodology to suit this research together with a full description of my own personal and epistemological reflexive 'positions'.

Chapter 3 describes the method that I used and the way in which I have addressed ethical and procedural issues. These descriptions are illustrated by documents contained in the appendices.

I have gone on, in Chapter 4, to analyse the data from the interviews with the participants and to develop the superordinate and subordinate themes that have been outlined in the introduction. These are shown in table form in the early part of the chapter so as to orientate the reader to the way that the material of the chapter is organised. In this chapter there are extensive references back to the original texts of the interviews and the referencing system, for the original texts, is explained fully at the beginning of the chapter. The interview texts are part of the appendices.

Chapter 5 is my discussion of the analysis and it is here that there are some differences that need a little explanation. I have related the analysis to head teacher experiences and to the literature described in the review. This led me to question the reason for, and the purpose of, some of the developing themes. In order to make my thoughts, in respect of these themes, clear, I have, where it is appropriate, discussed them in the immediately following text under the heading of 'Thesis'. I have done this rather than at the end of this chapter.

Later in this chapter I have drawn these thoughts together. I have said how they might inform my thinking and what the implications might be for the work that educational psychology services and similar support services do, and the boundaries of that work. As is usual in the final chapter, during the discussion, I have considered the limitations of the work and implications for further research. Finally, I have attached the bibliography and various appendices that are referred to in the text of the thesis.

## **Literature review**

In the review of the extant literature I had in mind the following objectives.

- To gain background knowledge of the research topic and provide a context for it
- To know what others have found out about the subject and how they have done so
- To provide an overview of the conceptual frameworks and models which guide research
- To get some support for the design of research methodology and techniques of analysis.

Initially, I used the search facilities of Google Scholar to develop a view of the range literature that may be available. This was followed by literature searches of a number of sources. This included searches of the Sheffield University Starplus Library Catalogue for all electronic and print books, journals and theses. It also included a search of The Directory of Open Access Repositories which allows not only search for content but also for other repositories

A range of search terms were used in these searches including, in the first stages, terms that were directly associated with the research topic such as, death, dying child, children, head teacher, teacher, school and school children. Later, I used a broader range of terms that included euphemistic terms such as terminally ill, passed away and also sought to increase the range of the searches to other professions, particularly in the health sector. It was also necessary, at a later stage, to seek data relating to death rates, theories of grieving, attitudes to death, emotional regulation and tragic events.

Finally, searches were used to identify papers and books relating to the various method and methodological options and also texts which might provide a philosophical perspective on the research topic. During these searches, it was also productive to seek out any titles by the authors that developed key theories or are prolific writers on key aspects of the thesis topic. This provided a variety of background texts that elaborated on their the thoughts and ideas of these writers.

These initial searches also, of course, yielded in all of the papers and books, further bibliographies that could be used as sources of further information and reading.

Using these materials and information in this section of the thesis I describe initially the literature which supports our knowledge of dying, death, their impact on individuals and more generally, the occurrence of tragic events.

I go on to consider the philosophical, social and cultural context that exists in our society in respect of dying and death generally. I have also described the current thinking concerning our response to death when we grieve and some of the ways in which we regulate these responses. This is so as to provide a context for the analysis of the data from the head teachers.

I have then considered the general state of the occurrence of tragic events and the likelihood that we might experience such an event, together with some considerations of the way in which press reporting of them can also have an impact. I go on to consider how such an experience might affect the individuals who have that experience, to provide a further basis for comparison with the experiences of head teachers when a child death occurs in their school community.

I follow this with a consideration of the frequency of child deaths in order to show how likely it is to be an experience that a head teacher has during their normal work. I also consider how providing support for such levels of child death might be part of the regular work experience of an educational psychologist or other school support service.

Finally, I consider the research and writing which informs the current knowledge of the impact of child deaths on the adults who know and care for children in various ways. This includes consideration of the impact on parents, health professionals and educational professionals.

## **Understanding death**

At the beginning of the last century death was seen as a natural part of family life. There was an understanding of the natural processes of aging, illness, and death that were accepted and understood by all family members including the children (Willis, 2002). This enabled children to begin to understand what death was and how it affected the family where it occurred.

Today, in western cultures, we grow up in a society where we have a distinct tendency to avoid discussion of death and of grief. This may relate to cultural changes or what O’Gorman (1998) describes as the medicalisation of death. We live in a society where medical practices encourage us to deny the inevitability of death. Since we have come to expect medicine to protect us from death we are less familiar with it. Many of the rituals associated with death have been lost giving us less cultural protection. There may be changes which are more individual. John Bowlby suggested that:

Often adults will attempt to protect children because their own feelings are too painful to discuss, and they do not want their children to feel their pain (Bowlby, 1980, p. 272).

We have cultural traditions which prompt us to respect the dead in various ways such as in the clothes we wear and how we speak. This is a respect which is enshrined in the Latin phrase, ‘De mortuis nil nisi bonum dicendum est.’ (Speak no ill of the dead). Interestingly, these issues are not, of course, confined to psychology. For example the medico/legal worlds also debate these issues in respect of tissue and organ transplant protocols (McGuinness and Brazier, 2008).

As Bowlby (1980) describes, many adults believe that children should be protected from all knowledge of death and consequently children can grow up without knowledge of one inevitable aspect of life. There is evidence (Slaughter and Griffiths, 2007) to show that discussing death in biological terms with children is an effective way of reducing their fear of death and increasing their understanding.



One of the cultural traditions is seen in the euphemisms that we use, such as 'passed away,' to describe death. Though they may have protective purpose they can foster this lack of understanding. In children this can lead to misunderstanding of the nature of death particularly those components of it such as irreversibility. This kind of misunderstanding in children is illustrated below.

Little children have a peculiar concept of death. They regard death not as a permanent happening, but as a temporary happening. Every normal 4 or 5 year old child who is angry at mommy wishes mommy to drop dead. That is very normal behaviour. Children think of it when they are angry, when they feel small and impotent and helpless, and they wish mommy would drop dead only to make her get up again when they are hungry and they want a peanut butter-and-jelly sandwich (Kubler-Ross, 1972, P. 174).

My own experiences of death and dying stretch back to some of the older rituals which my parents partially protected me from. These experiences fostered my, then, understanding of death. I clearly remember my grandfather's body being in the front room (a room that was rarely used) though I was not allowed to see it directly. Visitors came to pay respects by bowing their heads by his open coffin. The room, indeed the whole house, was in semi-darkness as the curtains were closed as a mark of respect. All wore their best black clothes when they visited and said kind things with furrowed brows, an example of, 'De mortuis nil nisi bonum dicendum est.' They all took a drink of sherry as a mark of further respect. As a child I was mostly excluded from these rituals and so there was a mystical element which I only later understood. Death was portrayed as a rite of passage into a better world and so I misunderstood the finality and irreversibility of death. It was, of course, the 'better world' that led to my confusion as a child. My confusion was, of course, a consequence of the actions of my parents as O'Gorman (1998) pointed out in work on death and rituals. My partial understanding related to my grandfather having gone to a better place.

I am reminded of an anecdote by this. My young nephew's cat was killed accidentally when his mother reversed over the cat in her car coming out of the drive of their house. All were very distressed and he was told that the cat had

gone to heaven. Later when traveling to Devon he asked if he would be able to see the cat again. This illustrates a humorous but partial understanding.

These changes in our cultural understanding of death are particularly relevant to research such as this. It is important to understand why such a natural part of the human life cycle is treated in the way that it is. It sets the context for understanding how individuals, such as head teachers, respond to the death of a pupil.

### **The characteristics of death**

To understand death we need to be aware of all aspects of it. However, the components of the concept of death are not agreed universally. There is some agreement on what these components comprise.

Slaughter and Griffiths (2007) recognise five components of death. There is the inevitability component which comprises the acknowledgement that living things must die eventually. The component of universality of death is the understanding that death must happen to all living things at some time or other. The irreversibility or finality of death recognises that the dead cannot come back to life. Slaughter and Griffiths (2007) recognise two further components the first of which is the cessation or non-functionality component. This is the understanding that death is characterised by bodily processes ceasing to function. The final component referred to is that of causation. This refers to the understanding that death is, ultimately, caused by a breakdown of bodily function in the person who has died.

Willis (2002) sets out four components of understanding in relation to death. These are described as the irreversibility, finality, inevitability, and causality factors. Speece and Brent (1984) writing about children's understanding of death, on the other hand, refers to only three: irreversibility, non-functionality and universality.

Though there are likely to be cultural and indeed individual differences as described above, the development of an understanding of the nature of death begins in childhood. Speece and Brent (1984) report that, in the vast majority of

children there is an understanding of death by the time they have reached the age of five to seven years of age. Slaughter and Griffiths (2007), on the other hand, suggest that the acquisition of a mature concept of death is not as universal as this.

The work of Slaughter and Griffiths (2007) with Australian children suggests that there are different rates at which the components of death concept are acquired. For example, it is suggested that the understanding of the irreversibility of death occurs first by the age of five or six years. Following this the subcomponents of universal applicability, inevitability and cessation are acquired a little later. By this time children come to understand that death must happen universally and that it is defined by bodily processes ceasing to function. Lastly, it is the component of causality that is acquired. This is a complex concept which it is suggested can be acquired by the age of seven to ten years. The complexity lies in developing an understanding that specific mechanisms can result in the breakdown of bodily functioning leading to death.

Barrett and Behne (2005) have a different perspective on this development suggesting that children struggle to grasp the ontological nuances of death and that it is a struggle that lasts well into late childhood and perhaps into adulthood. It is suggested that the reasons for this are that death is, perhaps, a unique concept that crosses an ontological boundary from living to dead things. The research in this area is equivocal about our understanding of death and about when and how it develops.

There are, of course, some common themes in these writings which suggest a basis of an understanding of what death comprises. Whether there currently exists a good understanding within the adult population of Western culture is apparently something that seems to be in doubt (Barrett & Behne, 2005).

### **Responses to death**

Death in our society brings with it cultural rituals and behaviours which help us manage our grief. These rituals and behaviours change for the different cultures and religious groups. O'Gorman (1998) has described some of these differences and how contemporary attitudes to death have evolved. The

behaviour can vary greatly from the 'ritual wailing' seen in Brazil (Urban, 1988) to the quiet of a Catholic mass (Neimeyer, Prigerson and Davies, 2002). The universal element is that all cultures have rituals which signal the emotional response to the death of someone close.

In western culture child deaths are seen as very upsetting and bring with them a more intense expression of grief.

The literature suggests that parental reaction to child death is complex and poorly understood. Studies show that parents have more intense grief concerning the death of their child than the death of their partner or than adult children concerning the death of their parent (Seecharan, Andresen, Norris and Toce, 2004, p. 551).

In considering the nature of the impact of child death on head teachers it is important to ask what, in general conversation might be thought of as an un-askable question. Why do we see the death of a child as such an enormous tragedy?

Implicit in much research around death and grieving is the notion that death is bad and that the death of a child is one of the ultimate tragedies that can befall us. Nagel (1979) seeks to understand whether death is evil and how great an evil. In the debate into issues such as these, we are asked to think about why we consider death to be bad. It is suggested that it can only be on the grounds that life is good. Nagel (1979) continues by making the point that one difficulty, among others, concerns the asymmetry between our attitudes to posthumous and prenatal non-existence. How can the former be bad if the latter is not? The argument that is made is that life familiarises us with what are thought of as good things of which death then deprives us. We have learned to appreciate these good things. If we ignore the issues around what these good things are and what makes them good and accept that what makes them good is that they continue, then the question remains whether death, no matter when it occurs, can be said to deprive its victim of what can only be thought of as a continuation of life. Can such a deprivation at 5 years of age be said to be more evil than at 70 years of age?

Perhaps what this helps us to see is that death has no impact on the child that dies, nor is it in any sense a logical response for others to believe that it does. What we see is an intensely human reaction to the consequences of the death for those left behind.

On the one hand it can be said that life is all we have and the loss of it is the greatest loss we can sustain. On the other hand it may be objected that death deprives this supposed loss of its subject, and that if we realize that death is not an unimaginable condition of the persisting person, but a mere blank, we will see that it can have no value whatever, positive or negative. (Nagel, 1979, p.1)

If we subscribe to the view presented by Nagel (1979) we may see that death is merely a blank with no value though we have to accept that the impact is real in the sense that we feel it.

Perhaps one clarification of Nagel's view can be found in the quotation.

What is real is not dependent on us, but the exact meaning and nature of reality is. (Larkin, Watts and Clifton, 2006, p.107)

What Larkin et al. (2006) refer to is the recognition that certain 'things' exist and that existence would have been the same even if human beings had not existed. These things are real. However, the reality of this separate existence and the nature of that reality can only become an issue because we are here to ask the question.

James (1884) raises the question of the consideration of the nature of things and this leads inevitably to the consideration of what is good and what is bad. James (1884) in discussing the dilemma of determinism suggests that there is some absurdity in our ordinary ideas of things being good or bad in themselves. There is in the work the suggestion that moral judgment is the key issue and that the outward facts are merely the instruments of this judgment. This he describes as subjectivism.

Can murders and treacheries, considered as mere outward happenings, or motions of matter, be bad without anyone to feel their badness? And

could paradise properly be good in the absence of a sentient principle by which the goodness was perceived? (James, 1884, p.10)

Here James is commenting on how our ordinary notions of things being good or bad arise. He describes good and evil as indistinguishable except in that they result in moral judgments made by human beings.

One further aspect of this research that requires consideration is that of seeking to understand the impact of death on another person. James (1925) also makes comments on this. He suggests that there are perils in forming views about the way in which we judge the existence and experiences of others.

And now what is the result of all these considerations and quotations? It is negative in one sense, but positive in another. It absolutely forbids us to be forward in pronouncing on the meaninglessness of forms of existence other than our own; and it commands us to tolerate, respect, and indulge those whom we see harmlessly interested and happy in their own ways, however unintelligible these may be to us. Hands off: neither the whole of truth nor the whole of good is revealed to any single observer, although each observer gains a partial superiority of insight from the peculiar position in which he stands (James, 1925, p.10).

The subject judged knows a part of the world of reality which the judging spectator fails to see... (James, 1925, p. 72).

Such considerations of how we understand the consciousness that we have about the thoughts and feelings of others is further complicated by our inability to fully understand the nature of consciousness. McGinn (1989) sees this as the 'hard nut' of the mind body problem.

McGinn (1989) argues that human beings have, for a long time, been trying to solve the mind-body problem. In debating this there is a reflection of the fact that it has stubbornly resisted the best efforts of thinkers for a long time. It is argued, in this document, that as the mystery persists the time has come to admit quite openly that it cannot be resolved and that this very insolubility or the reason for it removes the philosophical problem.

McGinn (1989) goes on to argue that the understanding of consciousness could be beyond us as we are constrained by our range of concepts. This is likened to the example of a man born blind who is unable to grasp the concept of a visual experience of red. In the same way a human being is unable to conceive of the echolocatory experiences of bats. This means that any theory that would be useful in explaining our consciousness would require us to transcend our cognitive capacities and this would be a theory that, ipso facto, we could not grasp.

The implication of this is that we are therefore constrained in seeking to understand the impact of life events on others by many things including the range of concepts that are available to us in our own form of consciousness. It is for these reasons that we have to seek to interpret the phenomenological reports of those who have had the experience so that we can seek to better understand in terms of their impact or consequence. We have to recognise, however, these constraints and that our interpretation may at best be partial and described in our own imperfect concepts. The reader too may also have an imperfect understanding of the words that we use in our explanation.

### **Changing attitudes to dying and death**

Our attitudes to dying and death are not derived from solely individual or cultural influences. Studies of 'public' deaths such as Princess Diana's have illustrated the way in which the media can influence attitudes to dying and death.

In fact the 'extreme' images of national unity actually served not to unite and integrate, but to position opinion against an imagined community of Diana mourners who, in the memory of September 1997, have become increasingly synonymous with irrational and excessive grief for a stranger (Thomas, 2008, p. 373).

These influences can blur our perception of changes and they can influence our thinking about other deaths. There is evidence of changing attitudes to 'private' deaths. Kubler-Ross (1972) describes society as having changed so that whereas in the past most people died at home now half of us die in hospitals. This reflects a different social experience of death which has brought with it

changing attitudes. O’Gorman (1998) has described how, in our society, our attitudes to death and dying have undergone a significant change during the first half of the twentieth century. O’Gorman (1998) develops a theme designed to enable helping professionals understand the current views in respect of death and dying and the associated issues of health and healing.

O’Gorman (1998) is of the view that during the first half of the last century our society lost sight of the importance of rituals associated with death and dying. This, it is said, resulted in patients and professionals alike, finding that they are unable to cope with the inevitability of death. This led health professionals to realise the inadequacy of their knowledge of an issue which fundamentally and unavoidably affects everyone including themselves. O’Gorman (1998) goes on to suggest that fear supplanted hope, and the health and well-being of society was deleteriously influenced. The research concludes that there is also a need to help our children, through education, to understand the issues around death by ensuring that they have appropriate teaching that helps in this process.

O’Gorman (1998) has commented on the fact that in western cultures, death has now been medicalised with important social consequences. This implies that there is evidence that our society cannot look upon death as a right of passage to be compared with birth, coming of age, marriage and retirement.

Changes in attitude such as these have developed as death and dying have become the subject of relatively recent social science research.

Dying and dignity have been with us for as long as there has been mankind. Why is it now that we have to give seminars and workshops on death and dying? Has it taken us all these decades to begin to be aware that we are finite? (Kubler-Ross, 1974, p. 174)

## **Death and grieving**

Grief can be described as a natural human reaction since it is a universal feature of human existence irrespective of culture although the form and intensity of it varies considerably (Archer, 1999, p. 1).



For those who have undertaken research into dying and death, grief has been an area of particular interest. Freud (1917) describes grief as adjusting to loss and disengaging from the deceased.

Reality-testing has shown that the loved object no longer exists, and it proceeds to demand that all libido shall be withdrawn from its attachments to that object (Freud, 1917, p. 244).

Davies (2004) ascribes to Bowlby one of the first descriptions of the phases of the experience of grief. The first of these is described as being evidenced by the experience of extreme emotions, including numbness and disbelief, surrounding the death. This is followed it is said by Davies (2004), to involve restlessness and preoccupation, with occurrences, which may suggest that the deceased may, in fact, return. The third of the phases, he suggests, is one that brings disorganisation and despair, as it becomes apparent that the life of those who grieve will not be the same as before. The final phase is described as one where there is a reorganisation, through necessary changes, for a life without the lost person. It is suggested that this is a process through which different people pass in their own sequence and in their own manner.

Kubler-Ross (1969) is perhaps the best known writer on grief and sets out what was described later as the five stages of grief. The first of these stages was said to be denial. This is described as a defence mechanism which is used by individuals as a way of consciously, or possibly unconsciously, refusing to accept the facts surrounding death. It is, as such, seen as a natural response that the person uses as a first mechanism in dealing with the death of someone close.

This is followed by anger and is thought of as a stage of becoming upset with themselves, or with other people, as a response to the powerful emotions that are associated with death of someone close.

Kubler-Ross (1969) sees this stage as one which is followed by a stage of bargaining. This is the stage where those faced with death can become involved in an attempt to reach a 'deal' with whoever or whatever is their God.

After this comes a stage of depression and this is thought of as a stage of preparation to grieve. It involves some kind of preparatory acceptance of the inevitability and is the natural human emotional response to this.

Finally, there is said to be the stage of acceptance. This stage is thought of as some kind of emotional detachment or objectivity. It is also thought that those dying often reach such a stage before those who are 'left behind'.

Kubler-Ross (1969) was seeking to understand the stages that terminally ill patients may go through upon learning of their illness. Although this is presented as a summary of the five stages of grief it was in fact the way in which these patients coped with their diagnosis. It showed what terminally ill cancer patients can teach us about coping mechanisms. This only subsequently became thought of as the five stages of grief by others and as such could be criticised as not being developed from sources that enable such a generalisation to be made.

In defending against this argument Kubler-Ross (2012), on her web pages, argues that it is a 'grief cycle' and that it is not a rigid sequence of uniformly timed steps but more a model or framework. It is also argued that people may not always experience all five stages and additionally, might revisit some of them as their grieving progressed.

Bowlby (1980) on the other hand sees grief as a relationship between early attachment patterns and later reactions to bereavement. In this model grieving is thought of as that component of death and bereavement which is psychological and is caused by the significance of the loss and suffering caused when someone close dies. This might help to explain the individual nature of grieving.

Walter (1996) in proposing a different model describes the dominant model relating to grief as one that primarily works through emotions. This model suggests that people eventually come to terms with their loss and this process enables them to disengage from the deceased and move on to new relationships. The model proposed by Walter (1996) is that grieving serves the

purpose of integrating the deceased into ongoing lives, through the construction of a durable biography, in conversation with other survivors. Survivors, he suggests, typically, want to talk about the deceased and to talk with others who knew the deceased person. In this way they are able to construct, through their dialogue, a story that is capable of becoming an enduring one. This therefore implies that the model is one that is based on talk and is in contrast to the view of grief as based in emotion.

Although our understanding of grief has developed and there are differing models of how it operates, there is a universality about it which stretches across all cultures. (O’Gorman, 1998)

### **Grief and emotional regulation**

Costa, Hall and Stewart (2007) have commented that individuals develop expectations about how others should react in specific situations, such as bereavement. The implications of this are that we regulate our emotional responses according to the circumstances. We are not free to respond without recourse to those circumstances.

After all, civilization is defined by coordinated social interchanges that require us to regulate how emotions are experienced and expressed (Gross & Thompson, 2007, p.3)

The work of Kubler-Ross (1969) suggests that grief is a powerful emotion and we are culturally promoted to regulate some of the display of that emotion. Baumeister, Dale and Sommer (1998) have discussed the use of Freudian defense mechanisms as a way of regulating emotions and find them still relevant to modern social psychology. Gross (2002) proposes a process model of regulation. Fundamentally the notion of this model is that emotional regulation strategies differ in when they have their primary impact on the emotion-generative process. There is a distinction made between those strategies that we use before the emotional response is fully formed, such as in reframing, and those responses we use as reactive, such as not showing our anxiety to others.

Later Gross and Muñoz (2006) discuss some ways of regulating emotions and consider whether some are more successful than others. It is suggested that our individual characteristics and our learned responses interact to shape our style of emotional regulation. This means that there is a complicated relationship between the emotions and the regulation. There may be different regulatory processes for different emotions while the same regulatory processes may have different consequences in the context of different emotions.

Clearly emotional regulation is influenced by many factors and is likely to play different roles for head teachers, depending on their circumstances, when they experience the death of a child. This will be particularly so when they have differing previous experiences. As Gross and Muñoz (2006) point out, the links between emotions and their regulation is a complex one. Such differing experiences may therefore be a relevant consideration, in this research, when considering how head teachers manage their emotions.

### **Experience of tragic events**

Our world today seems increasingly to expose individuals to horrific events, sometimes directly, sometimes through the press. The consideration of the level of this exposure is, however, clouded somewhat by changes in our global awareness of news events through the press and the many other electronic sources of information.

It seems to be the case that through natural disasters, terrorist threat and general violence in society that there is a strong chance that at some time in our lifetime we may personally experience something that will upset us greatly whether as adults or as children.

Most people are exposed to at least one violent or life-threatening situation during the course of their lives (Bonanno, 2004, p. 20).

The 1980s saw what seemed to be an increase in tragic events. There were many events and these included the Hungerford massacre, the Lockerbie disaster, the Bradford fire, the Manchester Airport crash, the Herald of Free Enterprise sinking at Zeebrugge, the Hillsborough disaster, the Kings Cross fire

and the Marchioness sinking. On a world wide scale there was the Exxon Valdez, the crash of Challenger Space Shuttle, Bhopal and Chernobyl. This period has been referred to by some as the Decade of Disaster (Larabee, 2000) as there seemed to be such an unusual number of such occurrences. History may in the future reflect on that name and the appropriateness of it as a label for the decade.

However the globalization of news has changed since 1980 and we must be aware that this may have contributed to an increased awareness of tragic events. In the UK in 1980 there were ten daily newspapers and a similar number of Sunday publications. There were news bulletins on three television channels (BBC I, BBC2 and ITV). This was said to contribute about two hours of TV news each day. Radio carried hourly bulletins and some current affairs, mainly on the BBC's Radio Four. By September 11th 2001 this had changed significantly. In Britain, TV covered the events unfolding in New York on five terrestrial TV channels and three 24-hour news services (BBC News 24, Sky News, ITV News). Additionally, there was news from other channels CNN, CNBC, Bloomberg as well as subscription channels and Radio Five live. (McNair, 2006).

By then, too, there was the internet, providing hundreds of millions of people all over the world with round-the-clock access to online coverage from established titles such as the Guardian and the New York Times, as well as thousands of independent information and news-based web sites (McNair, 2006, p.1).

Since that time the list of horrific natural and terrorist events has grown with numerous annual additions to the list including:

- Ellis Park Stadium disaster South African 2001
- Bali bombings 2002
- Indian heat wave 2003
- Indian Ocean Tsunami 2004
- Kashmir earthquake 2005
- Bad Reichenhall Ice Rink roof collapse 2006
- Algiers bombing 2007
- Cyclone Nargis 2008

Australian bush fires 2009  
Haiti earthquake 2010  
Tohoku earthquake and tsunami 2011  
Sasago Tunnel collapse Japan 2012

Increased awareness does not, of course, change the frequency of horrific events and so despite the fact that these tragic events might have gone unnoticed in the UK before the globalisation of news; the exposure likelihood seems high, as suggested by Bonanno (2004). Our levels of awareness of such events has undoubtedly changed and there is evidence that awareness brings with it psychological consequences which are discussed in the section below.

### **The effect of tragic events**

Some tragic events have a profound and long lasting effect on the community, such as the killing of the children and teacher in Dunblane. This was described by Lord Cullen, in the inquiry into the events of that day, as a horrific example of this (Cullen, 1996). Much of the concern surrounding major tragic events of these kinds has focused on preventing their reoccurrence and on the way that the events damage people physically and psychologically.

The psychological damage to individuals caused by traumatic events is often described as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. In the DSM-IV American Psychiatric Association (APA, 1994) this condition is described using the criteria listed below:

- Exposure to a traumatic event
- Persistent re-experiencing
- Persistent avoidance and emotional numbing
- Persistent symptoms of increased arousal not present before
- Duration of symptoms for more than 1 month
- Significant impairment

In addition to Post Traumatic Stress Disorder there are other psychological conditions commonly associated with the experience of traumatic events. Katz, Pellegrino, Pandey, Ng and DeLisi (2002) in a review of the literature on this subject comment that:

Regardless of the specific type, disasters may lead to psychiatric morbidity. This morbidity is well established in long term follow up studies (Katz et al., 2002, p. 212).

These include other anxiety disorders, major depression, psychosis and substance use disorders. (Katz et al., 2002)

In addition, stress reactions such as feeling very upset, repeated disturbing memories thoughts or dreams, having difficulty concentrating, difficulty falling or staying asleep, feeling irritable or having angry outbursts, have all been reported. These reactions were reported in a national survey after the 9/11 terrorist attack by Schuster et al. (2001)

Catastrophes can have a pronounced effect on adults who are not physically present. The effect may be greatest when a loved one or acquaintance is harmed, but others who may personalize the event and think of themselves as potential victims can also have stress symptoms. (Schuster et al. 2001, p. 1511)

Major tragedies, such as those described earlier in the work of Larabee (2000) are the ones which become headline news and as such are high in the consciousness of the public. They have an effect, not only on those directly involved but also, on those who hear and see the reports of them. The description or visual portrayal of events, such as in the press, may also serve to construct the event not just to report it, and as such this construction may play a part in developing some of the responses reported above in those who are not directly involved.

That reality is a social construction, an interpretation of symbols and images negotiated through interactions, is an assumption of the social constructionist perspective. Numerous studies have pointed to the crucial role of the media in constructing that reality (Herda-Rapp, 2003, p. 547).

Deaths in a community which do not make national news have an effect which is less developed by press reporting. For some there is a more transient effect. The effect though is one which is none-the-less profound at the time for the local community. This is especially so in a school community.

Not everyone copes with these potentially disturbing events in the same way. Some people experience acute distress from which they are unable to recover. Others suffer less intensely and for a much shorter period of time (Bonanno, 2004 p. 20).

In the early stages of experiencing a traumatic event it is probably impossible to conceptualise the impact on an individual in any other way than damaging. We understand and feel this often in an empathetic way. Research into the development of empathetic maturity in individuals suggests that this empathy arises from the perception of mutuality with another person (Olsen, 2001). It is perhaps for this reason that we find it difficult to conceptualise the impact in any other way than damaging.

This is not now however the only perspective. More recent research has begun to focus on the possibility of Post Traumatic Growth and how this can lead to higher levels of psychological well-being, after exposure to traumatic events. The suggestion is that the experience of horrific events leads to a breakdown in self-structure which brings the symptoms of post-traumatic stress. It also drives us to re-process the information that we experience from the trauma, cognitively, in ways that help us. Joseph (2012) describes this as the rebuilding of the shattered assumptive world.

The theory shows trauma leads to a breakdown in self-structure, signaled by the experiences of post-traumatic stress indicating the need to cognitively process the new trauma-related information. People are intrinsically motivated towards processing the new trauma-related information in ways that maximise their psychological well-being (Joseph, 2012, p. 817).

Such processes are hopeful signs for the recovery of individuals but for the purposes of this thesis it is the immediate breakdown in self-structure that is likely to be the most relevant area of interest.

In comparison to general deaths in a community, the death of a child is more uncommon. It is, however, important to understand that, in our culture, the death of a child is an experience that occurs at a level that makes it an



experience that some communities will have and therefore will be experienced in some school situations. The level of this experience is something which is developed fully in the section on child death incidence rates below.

For those who teach and care for the children in a school the impact of the death of a child is not like the impact on parents. Papadatou (1997) suggests that adults who have these roles do, however, need consideration in respect of appropriate help and support. Though it should not be assumed that everyone requires help or that everyone has needs that are the same.

Better understanding of the increasing and special needs of the dying child, of family members, and of peers and adults who are directly affected by the child's illness and death will be among the most important challenges death educators will face in the years to come. (Papadatou, 1997, p.597)

### **Child death Incidence rates**

I have suggested above that the incidence rates of child death are such that it will not be an uncommon experience for a community, though it is not a common experience for a family. In the developed world this evidence is not hard to find.

For example in the United States evidence from the National Co-morbidity Survey suggests that the incidence of exposure to traumatic life events occurs in general society in something like 8% of the population at some time during their lifespan (Kessler, Sonnega, Bromet, Hughes and Nelson, 1995). More specifically, the data suggest that in 2000 in the United States of America there were more than 20,000 child deaths of school age children (Lazenby, 2006). In Canada in 2004 the deaths of 3449 children ages 0 to 19 were recorded (deJong-Berg, 2009). In the UK the Department for Education (DfE, 2012a) recorded the deaths of 5593 children of school age during the period 2006 – 2010. The national data is summarised in the table below which show the death by age of the child over the period 2006 to 2010. (DfE, 2012a)

## Death by age 2006 - 2010 (DfE, 2012a)

Date	0-27 days	0-4 years	5-9 years	10-14 years	15-17 years	0-17 years
2006	2,238	3,716	296	395	552	4,959
2007	2,153	3,665	282	378	529	4,854
2008	2,177	3,699	291	303	501	4,794
2009	2,126	3,560	267	330	491	4,648
2010	2,036	3,446	267	302	409	4,424

However, many children in the age group 0-4 are now in maintained nursery settings attached to schools or in the non-maintained setting. As can be seen from the data in the table above, this would mean that in 2010 for example there would be 1410 ( $3446 - 2036 = 1410$ ) additional deaths of children in the age range 27 days to 4 years. If one third of them were in the 2 to 4 year old group that would mean that there would be an additional 470 deaths of children who were in some form of nursery setting in that year giving a total of  $978 + 470 = 1448$  deaths of children in school and nursery settings for the year 2010.

The figures produced by the Department for Education for the year 2010 showed the figure of 978 school age deaths in England (DfE, 2012a). With 24616 schools in England in 2010 (DfE, 2012b) the indications are that one school in every 26 was likely to experience a pupil death between the ages of 5 years old and 17 years old, during that year. With the additional 470 deaths described above this figure rises to 1448 deaths of a child between 2 years old and 17 years old or one school in every 17. The data for Derbyshire where the research was undertaken is summarised in the table below which show the death by age of the child over the period 2006 to 2010.

## Deaths by age 2006 - 2010 in Derbyshire (DfE, 2012a)

Date	0-27 days	0-4 years	5-9 years	10-14 years	15-17 years	0-17 years
2006	26	40	3	2	6	51
2007	19	33	4	7	7	51
2008	24	44	5	8	7	64
2009	20	33	2	8	5	48
2010	21	36	3	2	4	45

In Derbyshire there were 9 school aged child deaths in the age range 5 years old to 17 years old during 2010 (DfE, 2012a). With 437 schools in Derbyshire this gives a figure of one school in 48 likely to experience the death of a child of school age. Pro-rating this figure for the age group 2 to 4, as described above, the death figures rise by 5 to 14 deaths or one in every 31 schools likely to experience the death of a child.

### Child deaths and the impact on teachers

There have been few studies into the effect of a pupil death on teachers. However, Lazenby (2006) undertook research into the reactions of teachers to the death of one of their pupils. In interviews with 13 teachers in the United States the data indicated that teachers do grieve and that their support comes from faith and from their fellow teachers. There was also evidence in this study that the teachers were helped in their coping by 'reaching out' to other students and the parents 'left behind'.

One of the emerging themes from this work was that the teachers had to deal with their own grief while at the same time they had a role in helping other students deal with their feelings. This research by Lazenby (2006) describes the

teacher as the 'forgotten griever.' A number of the teachers had to take on the role supporting students in their grief in the classroom. They did this rather than getting help for their own grief from others who might have supported them.

There was also evidence that the teachers who participated in the Lazenby (2006) research exhibited some or all of the stages of grief that were described by Kubler-Ross (1969). What was very clear from the work was that there was a great deal of personal uncertainty about how to respond to the deaths in the school situation. It appeared in this study that there was little guidance or preparedness for the eventuality.

Those who are responsible for implementing support for children after tragic events in schools are often the staff of the school. They need considerable support themselves as described in the work of Lazenby (2006). Perhaps because of our concerns for children this is one aspect of the care required that can be overlooked.

Examples of the fact that teachers can be overlooked in this respect can be seen in some other research. Rodabough (1980) seeks to give much advice to teachers about how to tell children of the death of other children or of parents, but there is no mention of the needs of the teachers and how these might be met.

Macpherson and Vann (1996) have discussed the lack of attention to understanding the grief experienced by head teachers in Australia. In a study of the recollections of a single participant head teacher, who had to deal with the impact of a colleague teacher who committed suicide, there are a series of moral and judgmental issues with which the head teacher is faced. There is also a contrasting discussion of the support provided when other major disruptions are having an impact on an educational institution.

Macpherson and Vann (1996) suggest that when school communities are grieving the head teacher of a school requires an educative moral theory to guide their actions. The interesting aspect of this work is that, as leaders, they seem to find it preferable and indeed comforting, to know that what they are

doing is right and that their actions can be publicly justified. These authors suggest that in order to build a respectable justification requires a refined knowledge of 'rightness'.

It is suggested that this 'rightness' is based on five precepts. First that since the decisions made have consequences for others they should be subject to a moral appraisal. Second the moral knowledge that is used should be part of a total web of belief. Third; that the individual's contribution during times of stress should be judged from the perspective of whether it enhances this web of belief. Fourth; head teachers must create the conditions for this enhancement. Finally; there must be the circumstances which promote inquiry into: feelings perceptions and norms and that there is a value given to criticism while giving consideration to the future.

The immediate implications of this for practice are that the head teacher who is managing a school in grief may judge their work against five criteria which are suggested by Macpherson and Vann (1969) to be:

- That they have the ability to develop and maintain an effective inquiry and problem-solving climate, especially through the provision of counselling structures.
- That there is a tolerance of different beliefs, emotions and perceptions, an acceptance of norms being criticised and respect for debate about legitimacy as key ingredients in the growth of knowledge within the school community.
- That they have the ability to adapt to challenges and to provide for changes in policies or practices through participative feedback and reflection.
- That they have the ability to help all people fully participate in the process of learning about death and growth through meetings, icons, ritual and ceremony.
- That they maintain an ability to defend their facilitation of processes in terms of the benefits of long-term learning within the organisation.

There is much comment in the above research about the need for educating head teachers in the UK to prepare them for the death of pupils even though

there are likely to be cultural and educational differences between Australia and the UK. This set of precepts and criteria may not be directly applicable as they are based on specific cultural belief systems. What it may indicate is that this kind of thinking and preparation may be beneficial to a head teacher when undertaking or managing supportive roles with grieving students.

Munson and Hunt (2005) report on a literature survey of the nursing, medical, psychological, counselling, and educational literature which shows that there are few guidelines for professionals who are supporting colleagues or themselves. Munson and Hunt (2005) comment on the complexity of the impact that teachers experience when a pupil dies. They have to not only cope with their own grief and the reactions that it may bring such as anger, guilt and frustration, but they also have the need to support the family of the pupil that has died. They may also have to support other pupils who may not fully understand the meaning of death and the implications of it. This work also goes on to comment on other needs such as those related to the support of siblings of the dead child in school. Reid and Dixon (1999) have also written of the way that teachers are in a unique position to assist in the grieving processes of children, but make no reference to the needs of the teachers themselves for support in their own grieving process.

The research of Munson and Hunt (2005), suggests that there is a need for teachers to be pro-active in their response to child death. It is suggested that there should be a 'grief plan' which should be prepared and ready for implementation in the eventuality of a child death. This plan, it is said, should also include support for the grieving teachers as well as for other students and the bereaved family. It should, perhaps, also consider the nature of the language used by those who support children as the euphemistic language of death can be quite confusing (Norris-Shortle, Young and Williams, 1993).

Where the work described above differs from the current research is that it relates largely to teachers rather than head teachers who have a different role to play. Indeed one of the roles of a head teacher would be to provide some of the support mechanisms that are said to be lacking for teachers in this

research. Munson and Hunt (1969) describe the support from peers and to peers to be a critical aspect of the necessary support systems.

### **Evidence of impact of child death on caring adults**

There is much evidence that seeks to show the impact of death on the bereaved family of a child. Davies (2004) has reviewed the literature on this issue and found 266 publications, of which 32 were relevant to the theories of how families grieve after the death of their child.

The work of Davies (2004) points out that from a historical perspective child death has changed. In modern society it is only in developed countries such as the UK and the USA that a child death is relatively unusual. In developing nations, these deaths are more common. Davies (2004) goes on to add that the consequence of this in developed countries is that comparatively few people today experience the death of a child within their own family or community. What seems not to be in doubt from the statistics described earlier is that a school community is much more likely to have this experience.

One example of the literature described by Davies (2004) is that of Dyregrov and Dyregrov (1999) a study of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome. Dyregrov and Dyregrov (1999) describe the immediate impact as shock and unreality coupled with strong feelings. In this study, the outcome of a long term follow up study of 26 parents who experienced child death is described. Dyregrov and Dyregrov (1999) describe the after-reactions as, including over several 'life spheres', emotional reactions such as anxiety, depression, anger and guilt. Also described were somatic complaints such as sleep disturbances, loss of energy. Social difficulties were also described including gradual reduction in social contacts or self induced isolation, together with existential challenges concerning meaning, faith, and assumptions about life.

The study above uses a range of interview and psychometric instruments to measure the impact. Although, it is hard to see how emotions or impact can be measured, it is reasonable to assume from the work that there will be differences in the way that individuals react to situations such as child death.

Davies (2004) concludes that the theoretical perspectives on parental grief have changed considerably, and that the new models of grief no longer emphasise the task of grief as that of breaking bonds between the living and the dead. Instead the models now focus on the social world and the connectedness of people so that there are continuing bonds with the deceased, or of holding on to one's relationships with them.

There is evidence of the impact of child deaths on health professionals. Tan, Zimmermann and Rodin (2005) discuss the impact of the relationship which could develop between clinicians and children when applied to the understanding of the clinician patient relationship in palliative care. This evidence suggests that such relationships can be seen to develop outside the child and caregiver dyad. It is not unreasonable to make some generalisations across the professional boundaries to the teachers of children and their emotional responses to the death of a child.

There is additionally, within the sector of education a factor which is less likely to be present in the health sector. This is the relationship which exists between teachers or head teachers with the children they teach. Teachers at some stages in a child's life are spending as much waking time with children as do parents. This inevitably leads them to form strong bonds with the children they teach. This in turn leads to an interest in these bonds and how they influence those involved.

The likelihood is that the relationships developing between teachers and the children create a level of impact that changes the way the teachers respond during times of stress. This would be expected when the relationships mirror the relationships that develop within the family. The work of Dyregrov and Dyregrov (1999) discussed above also comment on evidence to show that mothers react more strongly and over a longer period of time than fathers though they concede that this may be a function of the measurements involved. This may have implications for teachers in a largely female part of the profession.

What is perhaps also important is to recognise that the idea of grief in the school community may well have evolved just as Davies (2004) suggests that it



has done in the family. If it has, then the idea promoted by Davies (2004) of having continuing bonds with the dead children could change the grieving process. It seems appropriate therefore to consider further the changes which come with these developing of relationships within the school community.

### **Relationships between pupils and school staff**

One way of considering the relationship issues between school staff and pupils is through Attachment Theory. Attachment has been defined as an emotional bond between two individuals based on the expectation that one or both members of the pair provide care and protection in times of need. Initially this was a theory developed by John Bowlby in a book *Child Care and the Growth of Love* (Bowlby, 1953).

Attachment theory focuses on the cognitive, social, emotional, and behavioural processes by which children acquire confidence in parental protection. It is seen as a theory about the bonding relationship which parents and children develop as the child grows. Bowlby (1969) thought of this as a behavioural system which restores the proximity between the caregiver and the child during exploration by the child. Barnes (1995) suggested the idea that individuals form an internal representation or 'working model' of interpersonal relationships with caregivers that are the basis of the ongoing pattern of relationships with that caregiver. These patterns include the beliefs and expectations that the child has of this person. These relationships are said to be the basis of the caregiver's and the child's emotional regulation system when faced with situations which provoke anxiety. How the child communicates distress and how the caregiver responds then is said to determine the basis of their interactions when faced with anxiety.

The notion of attachment has been much extended since the original work by Bowlby. Bergin and Bergin (2009) have discussed the importance of the attachments formed in the classroom for social and educational progress and make the comparison between this educational component of attachment theory and that in the health sector. In hospitals it had a considerable influence and altered them for the better on the basis of enabling bonding relationships to develop between staff and children when in the past they did not exist to any significant degree. Ciechanowski, Katon, Russo and Walker (2001) have

suggested that the relationship is more complex than this since the internalisation of earlier experiences and the nature of the internal working models influence the way in which relationships with health professionals develop.

Bergin and Bergin (2009) suggest that to feel securely connected to others is a basic human need. This means that the death of a child, where such a bond exists with, for example, a teacher, is likely to be one that then creates the strong human reactions that are not unlike those of bereaved families. Often the bond between a head teacher and a child will be equally strong though not always. The effect of such an attachment is, therefore, likely to be more variable, though often one that still creates the same strong emotions. The work of Davies (2004) suggests that this might involve the head teacher in a process of holding on to the relationship bond if grieving in school has evolved in the same way that it has in families.

Though there has been much debate about Attachment Theory it continues to be used as a way of exploring relationships and may help to provide a further context for the understanding of the impact of a child's deaths on head teachers.

### **The training of professionals**

A comparison of the research in education with that in the health sector shows that in the latter there is a well recognised and perhaps better defined training need to prepare professionals for the expression of grief. This is, of course, understandable in professions where death is perhaps a more common occurrence.

Papadatou (1997) wrote of concern with the training of professionals and suggests that if grieving was inevitable, then those responsible for the training of professionals must provide a safe environment in which to learn to acknowledge, explore, and deal with loss and grief. Health professionals can see the death of a child in their care as a triple failure. They did not save their life, they were unable to protect the child and so there is a social impact and finally, they betrayed the parents who trusted them with their most valuable

possession. Such a reaction inevitably increases the feelings of helplessness, guilt, anger and sadness (Papadatou, 1997).

Granek, Tozer, Mazzotta, Ramjaun and Krzyzanowska (2012) too have commented on the impact of grief in health professionals and how this might impact on their personal lives. It is suggested that grief reactions are often not seen as valid by members of the public since society expects professionals to be strong and powerful. There is also a suggestion that professionals may choose to suppress their emotions as they may feel ashamed of them and be perceived as weak. There is also recognition that part of this process is personal and partly collective and that sharing experiences in supervision sessions is important. This can be undertaken in ways that are both formal and informal particularly with peers (Papadatou, 1997).

Black, Hardoff and Nelki (1989) also comment on the need to remove the taboos about death and develop structured comprehensive educational programs for students of medicine which deal with terminal care, death, and dying. It is said that this would improve the future doctors' skills in handling delicate and sensitive moments in their patients' lives.

Though much of the research is primarily aimed at informing health service personnel, there are parallels within the world of education. Papadatou (1997) has suggested that it is also necessary for professionals to recognise and accept their own grief reactions to be able to help others successfully. It is clear that it is important that those who help to deal with grief in other people must also have in place mechanisms that enable them to deal with their own emotions.

There is evidence of the need for training directly from educational research. Tarrant et al. (2011) have reported on the leadership issues of the principal of a school in New Zealand where students and a teacher died in a school trip river accident. One of the outcomes of this research is the conclusion that school principals are given training in crisis leadership.

In order to be able to help others who are grieving, professions may have to deal with the issues such as the recognition of their own losses. These may be anticipated losses or unresolved losses from their own past experience.

O'Connor and Templeton (2002) have also described the need for teachers to prepare to help others by dealing with their own feelings about these issues first.

There is much less evidence of the impact of child deaths on the school community than in the health sector, despite the work of Lazenby (2006), Macpherson and Vann (1969), Munson and Hunt (2005) and Reid and Dixon (1999). However, there seem to be clear parallels between the work of health professionals and that of educational professionals in the work described above which indicates the need for training and preparation for the possibility of a child death. This would apply to professionals in any sphere where there are close relationships with children.

### **Providing support to schools**

In common with Educational Psychology services across the country, the Derbyshire Educational Psychology Service is responsible for supporting schools in many ways. The support that is provided should be evidence based as this is congruent with ethical principles and social policy surrounding the mental health and general wellbeing of children. These principles accord with the increasing attention that needs to be paid to the evaluation of interventions in any profession (Frederickson, 2002). This will, of course, include circumstances where a child of school age dies.

Typically, the work of a full time educational psychologist in Derbyshire with no other responsibilities involves providing a service to about 20 schools. It can be as high as 32 schools depending on the size of the school and other proxy indicators of need. These figures give an idea of how likely it is that an educational psychologist in Derbyshire will experience a request from a head teacher for support under the circumstances of a child death. As described earlier one school in 31 is likely to experience a child death each year.

## **Support when a child dies**

Although events such as child deaths are relatively rare they are at a level, as can be seen from the descriptions of incidence rates, which makes them an event which is going to be part of the regular work pattern of an educational psychologist and, indeed, other school support professionals.

In healthcare settings, where death is more common, there have been protocols in place to care for the bereaved for some time. Evidence can be found of this over the last thirty years. White, Reynolds and Evans (1984) reported on the evidence that bereaved parents in special care baby units required more care after the death of a child and produced a care checklist for junior doctors to support this process.

Requests for help when children die together with requests after other tragic events have necessitated that educational psychology services develop the knowledge, skills and willingness to respond to such request. It is this that prompts the need for better understanding. It also prompts the need to develop a way of helping those who are part of a tragedy which impacts on a school community. When help is provided it is important that the help is offered to all of those who are part of the school community. The professionals that manage the children, such as head teachers, also require that they too have their needs understood and met.

Derbyshire Educational Psychology Service has extensive experience in responding to those affected by tragedy. There are annually in the region of 25 to 30 such tragic events in Derbyshire which disrupt the school functions and upset the school community. Examples range from the deaths of children in road traffic accidents, the suicides of children or teachers, fires and more disturbing predatory events which can affect many families in the wider community, as well as the school community who are more directly affected.

As evidence changes it is clear that the Educational Psychology Service has a responsibility for developing this support to children and to schools so that it takes account of the emerging research. Some of this guidance and research evidence is provided by Government. The Government sets this out in the

document 'Helping children affected by an emergency' (Directgov 2011). This is guidance for settings on how to help children when tragedy strikes a learning community of any kind. This document sets out the view that it is expected that society will extend to a school community help and support in order to assist recovery. As well as this advice there are other sources of help that are available to schools such as voluntary agencies like Action for Children, teachers associations (NUT 2012) and from the internet sites such as Winston's Wish.

An understanding of how help is provided and the nature of the help can be misunderstood by the general public. Press reports into tragic events almost invariably capture the spirit of this misunderstanding, and possibly serve to encourage it, by referring to the help that is offered as counselling, whatever source this comes from. An example of this can be seen in 'How does a town get over a massacre?' (Grice, 2010). Here the issue of counselling and the value of it are debated. In Derbyshire, the help is related to providing the school staff with the support that has the aim of increasing resilience. Also provided is information and advice on how to act in relation to the children and families involved so beginning the process of recovery. This would seem to accord well with the more recent research on post traumatic recovery outlined above (Joseph, 2012).

Head teachers can be uncertain about some of the help that is offered. Moore, George and Halpin (2002) have commented on the role of head teachers who must act as agents between the school and its 'clientele'. This necessarily involves seeking and validating help and support that the school requires. This is not an easy role and the volunteered contribution of well meaning individuals, who may not be fully capable, can increase any uncertainty.

It is the experience of those who work in an educational psychology service with children affected by tragedy that the need to be 'doing something' can lead to offers of help from individuals who have little understanding of, or training in, appropriate interventions. Head teachers are then faced with deciding on the value of such offers of help. As Grice (2010), in discussing the Cumbrian shootings, points out even 'professional' interventions are not always welcome.

As happened at Hungerford and Dunblane – whose gentler identities were also stolen by a gunman – the self-reliance and interconnectedness of small-town life will count for more than any well-meaning, outside intervention. (Grice, 2010, p.1)

It is understandable that communities close ranks in this way when press reports support the notion of self help based on a misconception of the nature of the help available. The Educational Psychology Service in Derbyshire does not seek to descend on a school with numerous counsellors. Our actions are aimed at improving the resilience levels and marshalling the resources within the school to prompt the beginnings of the school recovery. It is, however, this sometimes poor understanding of the nature of help that underlines the need for research into the social science surrounding the work. There is clearly the need for appropriate training and supervision for those who undertake it (Huges 2002). There are also considerations of common law (Negligence and the Duty of Care) which also drive the need for ensuring evidence based practice. All of these features of work with school communities experiencing tragic events require that a professional group, such as an Educational Psychology Service, retains a research review attitude. Not to do so is to risk the wellbeing of the school communities that they are seeking to help.

The natures of the tragic events, despite their relative rarity, are such that they invariably have an impact on the whole community. This includes the school community of which the child was part. It is this impact that is of interest here. In particular it is the impact on a key professional in the school community, the head teacher and that is the subject of this research.

### **Research question**

As this review of the literature surrounding death, dying and tragedy has progressed it has become clear that much is known about the issues which impact upon the bereaved families. There is also some considerable research which seeks to help in the understanding of the impact and implications for those who work in the health services.

On the other hand, there has been limited research into the way that child deaths affect those who work in schools. The work done by Lazenby (2006) indicates that the teacher may be the 'forgotten griever.' It also suggests that teachers have a dual role in counselling others when indeed they might well have been in need of receiving counselling themselves. Reid and Dixon (1999) have also written of the way that teachers can help in the grieving processes of children but make no reference to the needs of the teachers themselves.

Munson and Hunt (2005) have surveyed a wide range of professional literature and comment that when teachers experience the death of a pupil, they have to manage not only their own grief but they also have to manage to support the family of the pupil that has died. Additionally, the work of Macpherson and Vann (1996) has indicated the ways in which a head teacher responding to a grieving school community might be judged.

There is, however, little evidence of research into the impact on head teachers of the schools where children have died. It has become clear that this lack of research and the consequent limited understanding of the impact, is a considerable gap in the knowledge needed to provide appropriate services and support. It is impossible to conceive of the impact that the events at Dunblane Primary school had on the head teacher at the time and there is nothing in the reports which indicates what support was provided.

The kinds of death that are considered in this research are not of the same order as this. That does not in any way diminish the emotions that that school staff feel themselves, for the dead children and for the bereaved families. It is these less 'sensational' deaths that support services to schools most frequently have to deal with, and it is, therefore, important to understand the impact that they have if the support offered is to be appropriate. It was this which led me to formulate the research question, 'What is the impact of a child's death on the head teacher of a school community?'



## Chapter 2 - Methodology

### Epistemological Position

In considering this research I was aware that having worked with head teachers for much of the time in my job it had to be undertaken with the head teachers and not on them. Hatch (2002) suggests that treating teachers and students as subjects on whom experiments are conducted is not an attractive proposition. They need to be participants and partners and not treated as subjects.

In the history of research in the social sciences there is evidence of concern as to whether it is appropriate to borrow from the physical sciences their methodology. Smith (1983) describes this concern as being rooted in the 19th Century when researchers debated this issue and doubted the appropriateness of using the methodology of physics to investigate the human and social world. These beginnings of the rejection of Positivism led in the 1980s to a more reflexive and participatory approach which used qualitative research methodologies.

The writers below are all critical of such a Positivist position and are reflecting an historical position as part of their criticism.

Scientific maturity is commonly believed to emerge as the degree of quantification within a given field increases (Guba and Lincoln, 1994, p.106).

In psychology, the benchmark was the laboratory study. For psychologists, the motto seemed to be: 'demonstrate the facts through a controlled experiment and the theories will take care of themselves'. (Silverman, 2009, p. 75)

Such debates have been divisive.

... to gain employment in the world of academia or research are left with the impression that they have to pledge allegiance to one research school of thought or the other (Onwuegbuzie, 2005, p. 376).

This research seeks to gain an insight into the personal, educational and management experiences of five participants who were head teachers of a school when a pupil who was part of that school community died. The research seeks to understand how they made sense of those experiences and responded to them. This kind of research does not lend itself to a hypothesis-driven, hypo-deductive methodology derived from a quantitative approach. A paradigm of this kind is one that usually supports the view that there is one reality and that this reality can be measured using the principles of scientific measurement. I am not of that view.

My own view is that knowledge is created by human interactions and is not the discovery of a truth through a neutral observer. This is a Social Constructionist epistemology since I see knowledge as a construction of inter-subjectivity and not objectivity.

Research from a social constructionist perspective is concerned with identifying the various ways of constructing social reality that are available in a culture, to explore the conditions of their use and to trace their implications for human experience and social practice (Willig, 2008, p. 7).

There are very clear thoughts and perspectives that I carry as a consequence of my involvement in work that is related to this research and these are described later in the section on personal and epistemological reflexivity. This seems to be in keeping with what Onwuegbuzie (2005) describes as the nature of the researcher's lens.

My own role in the research is central for two reasons. I am the constructor of the research and of the findings but I am also a part of the findings having played a part in sharing some of the experience with the head teachers. Willig (2008) suggests that this position would leave me as the author of, rather than witness to, the research findings and as such involved in a double hermeneutic.

For example, there has been an explosion in the popularity of social networking sites, such as Facebook and LinkedIn, which make one's connections highly visible and salient. Many of these sites offer users detailed information about the structure and content of their social

networks, as well as suggestions for how to enhance their social networks. Will this enhanced awareness of social network theories alter the way in which people create, maintain, and leverage their social networks? (Borgatti, Mehra, Brass & Labianca, 2009, p. 895).

In a similar way to this example my social scientific knowledge of the research area will change my interpretation. It is suggested that a researcher should put to one side or 'bracket' their taken for granted world in order to focus on the process of reflection (Smith, Larkin and Flowers, 2009). I have tried to do this and I have debated this point more fully later though being the author of, rather than witness to, the work does present some difficulties in this respect. These difficulties are also debated later.

### **Rationale for the methodology used.**

(Willig, 2008) has described the rationale for the methodology as the epistemological reflexivity and relates to how the research question is designed. It determines what can be found from it, how the research might have been framed differently and how this might have given a different understanding of the phenomenon. I debate this point more fully in the section on reflexivity.

### ***Aims of the research***

In order to justify a choice of methodology it is necessary to identify the aims of the research. It is also necessary to have a clear view of what kind of things it may be possible to find out (Willig, 2008).

This research is concerned with understanding the meaning and impact of child death events for head teachers. The interest is in how the head teachers understand and feel about these events and what impact they had on them during their management of the school when the child was dying and later died. I want to be able to interpret the stories of the head teachers and compare each story with the stories of other head teachers to see what, if any, commonalities there are. The data that has been collected, as each head teacher has told their story, is their construction of the experience that they had. Qualitative data collection of this kind has to be participant led and so the data was collected

through semi-structured interviews. My interpretation of this data will constitute the analysis.

The questions that the head teachers addressed in the semi-structured interview were open ended with the intent that they should be able to interpret each question in their own way and construct their own version of the reality that they perceived. This is necessary if participants' voices are to be heard (Willig, 2008).

The semi-structured interviews can be found in Appendix 1. The stories that the head teachers told me in response to the semi-structured interview questions may represent what they see as a factual account of what happened. The stories may also represent their wish to present themselves in a particular way to me as a representative of the Educational Psychology Service and the Local Authority. There may be an expression of how the head teachers would have preferred to feel or act or the account may be idealised. This status of the story of each head teacher will never be known, though in the interpretation my ideas on this will be developed.

Smith et al. (2009) and Willig (2008) describe the exploration of experience and how people make sense of their life experiences in this way as phenomenological. The origins of phenomenology lie in philosophy of Husserl who argued that we should 'go back to the things themselves' (Smith et al., 2009). Heelan (2004) suggests that methodologically, phenomenological reflection shifts the attention of the inquirer away from the 'given' sensible particular object to the structure of the 'givenness' of this object to conscious awareness.

The ontology of the research is an attempt to understand the relative reality of the experiences that the head teachers have had. It is also an attempt to try to explore how the experiences are constituted and how they differ for each of the participants. The data is, of course, the version of the internal reality of their subjective experience. As such this is what Nel (2007) sees as an ontologically interpretative position. This Interpretative position is informed by hermeneutics (Smith et al., 2009). Willig (2008) describes this Interpretative position as 'out

there-ness' which emphasises the diversity of the ways in which the research can be construed.

Willig (2008) suggests that qualitative research methods span a continuum of epistemological positions. It is suggested that this continuum ranges from at one extreme, naïve realism to at the other radical relativism. Ontologically, naïve realism suggests there is one true reality which can be identified. On the other hand radical relativism rejects the existence of truth and emphasises the multiple interpretations that can be construed from the information.

This places the epistemology of this research at some mid point along the realist relativist continuum since the stories are real to the head teachers yet they are their constructions which are interpreted by me. This is likely to be more inclined to a relativist position on the continuum rather than a realist position.

### ***Methodological options***

Having described the epistemological position that I take and the ontology of the research data I consider next the methodological options available within the qualitative paradigm.

There are four major or well known methodological approaches to qualitative research. Each of these approaches was considered for this research in order to ensure that the most appropriate methodology was in place. Each is considered briefly here.

Grounded theory was probably the first formal approach that became popular with qualitative researchers (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). It was a development that was aimed at giving social researchers a guide to qualitative research and analysis. It sets out to give a theoretical level account of the phenomenon under consideration. Grounded theory has a research process that merges the processes of data collection and analysis. The researcher returns to the participants to collect additional data after analysis of previous data. The aim of this is to clarify and explain social processes. To enable this to happen there needs to be relatively large sampling procedures. This suggests a vaguely

positivist epistemology from which a new theory would be developed. The researcher is seen as a witness to the process of an emerging theory. This methodology involving returning for more data would present me with considerable difficulties both practical and ethical.

Discursive approaches which Hook (2001) has described as a growth industry develop the issue of power in the case of Foucault or interaction in other discursive approaches. These approaches are based in Social Constructionism and were a consequence of the 'turn to language' during the last century. The assumption was that language would provide a line of understanding of internal states.

It is focused on discourse because it is the primary arena for action, understanding and inter-subjectivity (Wiggins and Potter, 2008, p. 73).

This was influential in psychology after Potter and Wetherell (1987) criticised the preoccupation of psychology with cognitivism. The ideal for discourse analysis is to develop and understand naturally occurring text and how these manufacture particular versions of reality. There are also possibilities for the analysis of conversations. The researcher has in mind what the text is doing and how, in the case of Foucauldian discourse analysis, it constructs social and psychological realities, rather than what the text is saying.

Here, the emphasis upon 'procedures' that govern the production of discourse establishes the materiality of knowledge as an instance of power (Arribas-Ayllon & Walkerdine, 2008, p. 99).

Interestingly in the same article the author warns that:

We also cautiously advised that perhaps there is no such thing as 'Foucauldian Discourse Analysis', and that if such a thing existed it would look quite different to linguistic versions of discourse (Arribas-Ayllon & Walkerdine, 2008, p. 105).

Narrative approaches are also associated with Social Constructionism. It is a way of considering how, through the construction of narratives, people organise and bring order to their experience. There is an interest in the structure and form of the stories and how they relate to sense-making activities (Willig, 2008).

There are views associated with the narrative approach (Crossley, 2000) that place the stories in a category that 'reflect' the realities of personal experience. When considered in this way there is congruence between the talk about life and the actuality of living that life. This can be seen as a realist epistemology. There are tensions around the ontology of narratives with some views reflecting a position such as that of Crossley (2000) that, theoretically, there is a reality that can be known while others consider that this is not the case and that knowledge is socially constructed with multiple ways of knowing.

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis has as a focus the meaning and sense making in a particular context (Smith et al., 2009). It is an approach which is associated with Husserl's attempts to construct a philosophical science of consciousness. It is also concerned to utilise the hermeneutics theory of interpretation. The attempt is to understand how the experiences that the participants have had make sense to them. Though grounded in the participants' stories, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis attempts to go beyond these conceptualisations. The researcher is seeking to obtain an insider's perspective of the participants' experiences using their own awareness of their position, their experience and their knowledge of psychology. It is said to be both empathetic and questioning. It is also idiographic in that it is the study of the individual.

### ***Methodological choice***

Consideration of the issues outlined above led me to the conclusion that Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis was the most appropriate methodology for the purposes of this research. The sample is not large and I am unable to return to collect more data. The data that I have been able to collect does not fall within the naturally occurring category. Some of it is unspoken and contained in the inflections and tone because of the high emotional content. It is not the way that the structure of the stories makes sense of the experience that interests me and although the work of Crossley (2000) on narratives having a realist epistemology has some appeal, I think that the semi-structured interviews are not naturally occurring and a narrative approach may miss some of the none narrative aspects of the data. What I want to have is an insider's view of the experiences of a head teacher when child dies when they

are part of a school community. What seems to me to be important is how I can bring to the research the three components suggested by Smith et al. (2009).

Systematic and thorough analysis of the text

Connections through having a data set from other participants

Having a dialogue with psychological theory

For these reasons Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis was selected. I summarise below a brief history and origins of the approach.

### **Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis**

Phenomenology arose as a philosophy in Germany before World War 1 and has since occupied a prominent position in modern philosophy. It challenged the dominant views on the origin and nature of truth of the time (Dowling, 2007 p. 132).

Husserl, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty and Sartre are leading figures in phenomenological philosophy. It is from their work that the main phenomenological developments that have influenced psychology have been developed. Husserl was the founder of the phenomenological approach and emphasised how important it was to consider, in detail, the relevance of experience and its perception. The notion was to make human consciousness and intentionality central to the analysis. In a sense Husserl 'brackets' out whether a reality actually exists in human experience (Larkin et al. 2006).

In developing Husserl's work further Heidegger suggested that:

... thought is ephemeral and ad hoc in nature, and is little more than a derivative aspect of the overall intentionality that we exhibit as we actively engage with the world around us (Larkin et al., 2006, p. 106).

Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty and Sartre developed the notion that a person is embedded and immersed in a world of objects and relationships, language and culture, projects and concerns. Merleau-Ponty (2004) suggests that the perceived world is the 'real' world, compared with which the world of science is just an approximation, i.e. an appearance. Merleau-Ponty (2004).



The implications for psychological understanding are that any outcomes that derive from such research must necessarily be a function of the relationship that exists between researcher and the research data. This is described by Starks and Trinidad (2007) as creating a deeper understanding of lived experience by exposing taken for granted assumptions about ways of knowing. What Heidegger saw as the essence of phenomenology was to observe and consider the object of our study in ways that give the object opportunity to show itself as it really was.

These ideas have assisted psychology to develop a more Interpretative view of how we function in the world in which we live. Indeed, Hefferon and Gil-Rodriguez (2011) comment that it is mainly an Interpretative approach rather than phenomenological though Larkin et al. (2006) gives emphasis to both the Interpretative and phenomenological aspects of the approach. This has enabled the development of a style of understanding which is very individualistic yet considered in relation to the world in which we live. Using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis research enables us to attempt to give meaning to experiences, activities and behaviours.

Hermeneutics has then helped us better understand the nature of the interpretations that develop (Smith et al., 2009). A key aspect of hermeneutic theory is thought to be the hermeneutic circle. Smith et al. (2009) describe this as operating at a number of levels between the particular parts of the text and its complete whole. The meaning of the word only becomes clear when seen in the context of the sentence and the sentence only has meaning dependent upon the cumulative meanings of the words. By applying attention to the minutiae of a text, an overview of the text in its entirety can be gained.

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis developed from these ideas and was conceptualised in the mid 1990's (Smith, 1996) and though there have been criticisms that it is a mainly descriptive approach (Larkin et al., 2006) it has developed an increasing popularity (Hefferon and Gil-Rodriguez, 2011). Smith describes it saying:

While one attempts to get close to the participant's personal world, one cannot do this directly or completely. Access is both dependent on, and

complicated by, the researcher's own conceptions which are required in order to make sense of that other personal world through a process of interpretative activity (Smith, 1996, p. 264).

The Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis that I have used and which is described in detail in Chapter 3 (Method) is perhaps around the mid-point of the continuum described by Willig (2008), naive realism to extreme relativism, and subscribes to a Social Constructionist epistemology. In this sense it seems to match well the ontology of the research which was described earlier.

### **Limitations of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis**

There are some issues that limit the effectiveness of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. The role of language is one that requires consideration. Willig (2008) has argued that language constructs, rather than describes, reality. Eatough and Smith (2008) comment on the role of language and describe it as being an important component of the way that we experience and understand our world. They go on to say that such a view sees the individual's experience merely as a linguistic and discursive construction and as such does not speak to the empirical realities of experiences. The view that I take is that the data is how the head teachers talk of the experience and how they construct it in their interactions with me rather than the experience itself. This construction requires that I then interpret it to gain an insight into these experiences. However, there are issues around language in that in doing this I recognise that, I too, have to use language and this is then a limitation experienced by the reader. Parker (2005) has commented on this difficulty:

How one represents 'others' of different sexualities and cultures, for example, is a question that cannot be answered with any simple formulae, but is one to be thought through, and if at all possible talked through, with those who participate in a study (Parker, 2005, p. 20).

Eatough and Smith (2008) consider that Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis is part of a Symbolic Interactionist perspective as it acknowledges that experiences are situated within social interactions and processes. This then raises the issue of the preconceptions that I bring to the interpretation. I have tried to be aware of these and I have tried to 'bracket' them during the

interpretation and the analysis but these 'positions' that I bring will always influence the way that I constructed the research and my interpretations of the data.

In short, we carry out an epoché in regard to all objective theoretical interests, all aims and activities belonging to us as objective scientists or even simply as [ordinary] people desirous of [this kind of] knowledge (Husserl, 1970, p.45).

Here Husserl uses epoché, to describe the theoretical moment at which all judgments about the existence of the external world, and consequently all action in the world, are suspended. This is the notion of 'bracketing'; however whether this can be done successfully is not universally accepted as possible. Richards (2011) refers to this as the brackets leaking.

But how does one put out of play everything one knows about an experience that one has selected for study? If we simply try to forget or ignore what we already 'know.' we may find that the presuppositions persistently creep back into our reflections (Van Manen, 1990, p. 47).

Related to this is the issue of reflexivity which is one that requires centrality in Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. Willig (2008) describes reflexivity as the way in which the researcher has relationship with, or is implicated in, the phenomenon being studied. To this end I have spent some time in the section below reflecting on my 'position' to make clear my personal and epistemological reflexivity.

Finally, there is also the issue of explaining why experiences take place and generalisation. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis does not easily explain why there may be differences between individuals (Willig, 2008). As such Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis does present fewer opportunities for generalisation. The interpretations of these perceptions can however be used to question the understanding, boundary or treatment of the circumstances under consideration and, of course, to raise questions about professional practice (Watts, 2012).

## **Reflexivity and epistemological position**

Willig (2008) describes two types of reflexivity. The first is personal reflexivity which relates to our values and experiences, interests and beliefs. The second is epistemological reflexivity which requires that we consider how the research construction or question has limited or defined what can be found. Willig (2008) also comments on critical language awareness which contributes to epistemological reflexivity since the language that we use constructs and shapes the findings.

Many workers, especially in the human sciences and in qualitative research, have explicit injunctions towards researcher reflexivity within their methods: there is an onus on researchers to recognise what notions, ideas, aspirations and, crucially, assumptions they are bringing to the research themselves, and to address these (Richards, 2011, p. 904).

Parker (2005) has described reflexivity as a way of attending to the institutional location of historical and personal aspects of the research relationship.

Personal reflexivity relates to the ways in which my values, experience, interests, beliefs, aims in life and social identity have shaped the research (Willig, 2008, p. 10).

I have tried below to explore extensively my thoughts and feelings in respect of this research in order to try to be fully aware of it by undertaking this exploration. My exploration of this is also a reflection of the work that I do in respect of tragic incidents, including when a child dies, how this work affects me and how this has influenced this research.

### ***Personal reflexivity***

The writing of this research thesis is, for me, partly a way of describing the way in which the events of 13 March 1996 changed my professional life. As I described earlier this was when Thomas Hamilton killed sixteen children and a teacher in Dunblane Primary school Cullen (1996). This event made me realise that I did not have the skills or knowledge that would have enabled me to help in the process of recovery had it occurred in a school in my Local Authority.

This event began the process that led in my Local Authority to the development of protocols and techniques for undertaking this kind of work. It ultimately also led to this research and the writing of this thesis.

In order to understand the context of this writing I will try to explain some of my values, experience, interests, beliefs, aims in life, social identity and the way in which I work as an educational psychologist.

When I started the research it seemed important to describe of the impact of child deaths on head teachers. This was because I had increasingly become aware that this was not well understood, despite the developments that had occurred in my Local Authority since 1996 in respect of the critical incident protocols. As the research and my learning have progressed, however, it has become apparent that what is emerging is my construction of these descriptions. Despite this change it is my hope that, in writing the descriptions of these constructed experiences, others will come to know something of this complex experience too.

I was initially constrained by my training and experience to a Positivist standpoint. I came back to university late in life and I came from an era when Positivism was the unquestioned pathway in psychological research. As a practitioner, trained some time ago, I had some awareness that that psychological research was changing but I had not really grasped the extent of the change in thinking and the new energy that was derived from it. Reading Parker (2005), Smith (1996) and Willig (2008) was an enlightening experience and it was this reading that brought the changes in my thinking about the outcomes of the research.

This reading and the need to consider the research methodology led to me embracing a much more qualitative and reflective standpoint. I have always held some social constructionist views but had not fully developed my thoughts on the social construction of the world that I experience. I believe that I have learned to better understand this now with a greater awareness of the importance of language in this process. This is, however, a complex learning process since as Burr (2003) points out what links together the various people

who describe themselves as Social Constructionists is no more than a "family resemblance"

There is agreement among Social Constructionists that our world is the product of the social processes that we are part of in our everyday lives. Social Constructionists all embrace the ideas of historical and cultural change, and accept that knowledge and activity are closely related. It is within these processes that language takes on a dominant role in Social Constructionist thinking. It is seen as having a central role in our life and experience. Language in our society is thought of as imparting the meaning to our experiences, relationships and our knowledge of our selves. This is described by Parker (1998) as making it possible for us to understand human psychology as an ensemble of social relations.

Burr (2003) describes this as placing knowledge and social action together. As we seek to know and understand our world, the way in which we ask the questions and get the answers that we do is ultimately linked to our social activities. As such we create a knowledge that would be a different knowledge from that which arises from different activities undertaken for other purposes.

This is not to say however, that the issue is straightforward or universally agreed. As Burr (2003) implies in the comment about 'family resemblance' there are significant differences in the way that all those who refer to themselves as Social Constructionists would describe the way that our knowledges of the world develop.

One of the issues relates to the realism-relativism debate. This issue is an exploration of the disputed claims about what we can know of reality in social constructionist and discursive research in psychology (Parker, 1998). In this debate realism represents the view that the world has an existence that is independent of our various forms of representation of it. Such representations would include our linguistic descriptions, our perceptions, thoughts and hopes. This perspectives is challenged by the view of the relativists. Those holding this view argue that since such a world is not accessible to us it does not require our consideration.

Cromby and Nightingale (1999) consider this issue at length and after rehearsing the arguments around this issue conclude with the following argument.

We must strategically deploy the analytical and critical methods we have developed in an attempt to forge a coherent and grounded social constructionism that explains the world, in all its intransigence and mess, since only in this way might we contribute to its progressive transformation. (Cromby & Nightingale, 1999, p.10)

In the same article it is argued that there are three elements that the relativist perspective is not able to accommodate. These are embodiment, materiality and power. Embodiment represents the intimate place where nature and culture meet, they are what we call a human being and are difficult to find in social constructionism. Social constructionism seems to disregard the body yet seems to address it by focusing on the analysis of the discourses of bodily matters.

With respect to materiality Cromby and Nightingale (1999) argue that while all material things appear in discourse they are not reducible to it and to deny materiality makes social constructionism appear unconvincing.

Power, it is argued (Cromby & Nightingale, 1999) is a significant factor in the process of social construction and operates through discourse. It is, therefore, considered in discourse analysis. However, unless the discourse is situated in the material and embodied context from which it derives meaning then paradoxically the analysis does not address its own significance.

The many psychologists who have recourse to notions of embodiment and materiality, both in their practice and in their everyday lives, are unlikely either to resign *en masse* or wholly transform their approach simply because constructionism refuses to believe in them. (Cromby & Nightingale, 1999, p.114)

I have tried to reflect on my own practice in the following sections and I think that this reflection illustrates how difficult it is for a practicing educational psychologist to embrace the extreme realist view and have no recourse to embodiment and materiality. This will be clear, I hope, as I describe my personal and professional positions.

There are a number of personal and professional thoughts and emotions that have interacted during the development of this thesis. They will undoubtedly continue to do so during the remainder of this research process.

In order to develop my thoughts on this I have tried to understand the differences between me and the person that I am when I work. I recognise that, as with the person, the psychologist is not always the same. As a psychologist sometimes I am fumbling and uncertain, though others might not always perceive it, more so than me the person. Sometimes the psychologist is thoughtful and insightful. These characteristics apply, however, to some extent to both the person and the psychologist. They appear more so, however, in the psychologist and they are, therefore, the characteristics that I bring when I try to understand those children and adults with whom I work. This is a view shared by Bishop and Mercieca (2011).

An argument is made that although professionals are expected to be certain and to possess a font of knowledge on which to draw in their work it is possible that learning to tolerate uncertainty makes a better professional especially when the work involves dealing with people and children (Bishop & Mercieca, 2011, p. 33) .

The thoughtfulness is rooted in my understanding of psychology. Although I have a Social Constructionist perspective I also believe that human behaviour has multiple origins. Some human behaviour may be historical and based in experiences. Some are social constructions in the way that humans think about and how they relate to each other and construct their knowledge. Some are driven by current wants and needs or needs of the future.

There are many influences on my understanding of psychology. Wants and needs remind me of the influences of the Humanistic approach of Maslow. I also understand how the theories of learning of Thorndike, Clark, Hull and Skinner can explain the ways in which people might be predisposed, or conditioned, by their environments to behave in certain ways. There is also the influence of the psychoanalytic view of how we interpret experience. My own experiences also develop my knowledge of psychology. Bradley (2005) in



discussing types of experience describes immediate experience as the primary sense, so far as psychology is concerned. The author goes on to say:

For experience, life as it is made up of events lived at first hand is the stock in trade of psychology.

Psychological problems are problems because they make living difficult. Experience must hence be the ultimate proving-ground for the fruitfulness of all our conjecture (Bradley, 2005, p. 17).

As I reflect on this argument it is interesting to consider experience as a primary sense in the way that Bradley (2005) does. As I try to understand what I can see and hear at work I wonder which of the above influences me most. By interacting with the people with whom I am working my understanding may begin to develop. The process is often by suggesting things and listening to responses which increase or decrease my confidence in what I think. I think that the more I come to know the closer I get to what I think is a good understanding though this brings complexity. All of this might be thought of as experience in the way that Bradley (2005) describes it. The understanding may be simple or complex, single or multi faceted, but always incomplete and containing uncertainty. Perhaps the uncertainty should not be worrying. Mercieca (2009) believes that we should develop the values of uncertainty.

Rather than aspiring to secure knowledge and skills, a stance is suggested where the educational psychology professional is seen as one who works with uncertainty and complexity. The better professional is not the one who professes to know the answer, but the one who engages with the 'not knowing' which arises in situations (Mercieca, 2009, p. 171).

The insightfulness, I believe comes from experience and perhaps this confirms the views of Bradley (2005). There is a sense of privilege involved in being with and talking to others, whether adults or children, who offer a sense of trust that my experience is important to them. Talking to people and watching them enables me to build up a store of images and thoughts to which I can refer in new and different situations. This store contains templates of what is usual and conversely what is unusual. It is the basis for some of the explanations I refer to

above. I want to make sure that I use them carefully in order to understand some of the reasons for the behaviour of others.

Fumbling is something I do all the time. I have theories which seem to explain but then get discarded as they do not fit with what I see and what I am told. Mercieca (2009) describes the benefit of allowing ourselves to be uncertain so that we are open to shock and surprise. In my case I rummage through my experience store trying to match things from within my mental database. I then struggle to put into words for others the complex thoughts that are the essence of my fumbling. The words are only ever an approximation to the thoughts and I have no doubt that the understanding of them by others is only an approximation to the words. Sometimes I struggle to use words that are straight forward enough for my audience but not complex enough for my thoughts. Fumbling explains this well.

This all leads to my uncertainty. Have I seen and heard enough? Have I thought it fully through? Have I reached a reasonable understanding? Have I explained it well enough and has my explanation been understood? Most importantly, will it make a difference? These are the same qualities that I bring to the research.

### **Epistemological reflexivity**

When the work that I am faced with involves a child death there is more to the thoughts and feelings that I have than described above. It is not possible for me to develop my thoughts and feelings on the issue of child deaths in an entirely professional manner. Child deaths are unbearably painful. I cannot take the view of Nagel that;

Death is a mere blank, with no value whatever, positive or negative  
(Nagel, 1979, P. 1).

In this sense I am, of course, looking for and expect to find the pain of others in the research data since the issues surrounding child death events have, in the past, affected me and continue to do so personally and professionally. I feel some very strong emotions when I visit a school where a death has occurred. I think that they are similar emotions to the other people with whom I work though I cannot be sure. When the work is about a child death I am incapable of

preventing these emotions from emerging. Indeed, I believe that I should not even attempt to prevent them from doing so. I think that to empathise in this way is to begin to have a better understanding of the emotions that are emerging but this also drives the research in that particular direction.

I want to describe something of the interactions and tensions that I am aware of when undertaking this kind of work. I want to provide an insight but also to provide a basis for my interpretation of the data from this research. This, I hope, will enable my interpretation of the data that I have obtained from the other participants in this research to be evaluated. There are six participants in the research of which five are head teachers together with me. I have come to understand that I have a participation that is somewhat different from the usual researcher participation since I have worked with one of the head teachers not only to obtain the data but also I have assisted in the recovery process in her school community. Here, too, I am constrained in the research by the experiences of working with schools where tragedy has occurred and this leads the research in the directions of the influences that affect the recovery of the school community since this is what my work seeks to do.

When there is a child death in one of the schools that I visit, sometimes I am aware of it from a local radio news bulletin. Sometimes, however, it comes as a complete shock. Occasionally it is predictable as I have involvements with children who have a degenerative condition. Whichever of these applies there is, for me, trepidation. It is that sense of having to go to a community where I know there will be immense sadness, often disbelief, guilt and bewilderment and at the same time an expectation of support and help. I have to go but I fear these emotions that sometimes seem to have no boundaries. This has a particular impact on the way that I have conceptualised the research since I anticipate that these emotions will be the ones which head teachers will want to express.

There are some tensions which can develop in this work which are quite unique. An important tension is that almost invariably I have no time for preparation which is a key element of the work of an educational psychologist. Imich (1999) has reported survey data that suggests that roughly 20% of the time of an

educational psychologist is spent in preparation of some kind. Other pre-arranged appointments are dropped as I, together with all the other psychologists, am committed to giving this work an absolute priority. Such actions do not accord well with the expectations of schools where it is often considered that there is a considerable shortfall between present and desired levels of service MacKay and Boyle (1994). That does not mean that the other people I was due to meet can be forgotten. Inevitably I am aware of the disruption that late changes can make, especially for children and parents who have perhaps waited for some time to meet with me. We have a telephone call system which our administrative support team operates for us under these circumstances. This system is, however, only a partial solution to the problem.

The lack of time for preparation has more debilitating consequences in that there is no time to fully find out beforehand what situation I am to face. We do have a 'grab bag' arrangement that ensure that appropriate materials are ready to pick up and go but that is little comfort in the impending uncertain and emotionally charged environment.

When I visit a school community undergoing the experience of a child death I have in mind the need to be aware of the sensitivities of the situation. I have to present to the community an appropriate concern for the emotions that are in evidence while at the same time thinking about what the needs of the community are. As the story of the death is developed my own feelings add to these conflicting needs. This is a significant turmoil of thoughts and feelings. Fear, professional assessment, empathy and sadness intermingle in a changing spectrum of processes. These expectations of tensions and sensitivities in the school environment are ones that then gives a further directional imperative to the way that constructed the research and interpreted the data.

I wonder if the head teachers are aware of this when I arrive, though I think it is unlikely in the midst of their own concerns. Perhaps what is more important is that I am unlikely to be aware of the extent and depth of the feelings and emotions that they are experiencing. What their private and intimate thoughts and feelings are I am not sure. This is just as described by James (1925) on the issue of knowing about the thoughts of others. But I do what psychologists do

all the time which is to try inferring from behaviour. The behaviour can be actions or words but the inference is mine and it will be partial. It is partial in the sense of part of the whole and partial in the sense that it will be my inference and not impartial.

To do my job and to help the school community to begin to recover from a child death I need to understand the impact on a head teacher, as it is usually the head teacher with whom I work. I can only do this within the concepts that I have. I cannot conceptualise thoughts and emotions that I do not have or understand and in choosing head teachers as the participants I am constraining the research to produce a story that represents only a single perception, that of the most senior member of the school community. The views of others of the impact on the head teacher are therefore excluded by my research design.

My interpretation is therefore necessarily an interaction between what I perceive to be the issues for the head teacher and the concepts, thoughts and feelings that I use to interpret them. It is this that presses me to seek to have a better understanding of them through this research.

When faced with these upsetting situations in schools I am not sure of my capability. I have a natural response to want to remove myself from the situation because of the pain that is displayed. I suppose that this is partly cultural but it is also partly my own response. I do not consider this to be unusual, indeed one of the assumptions of models of emotional regulation is that people naturally seek pleasure and avoid pain (Mayer and Salovey, 1995).

I have awareness of these issues but also of the limitations imposed on me. These are imposed partly by my work ethic, partly by the commitment of the Educational Psychology Service and partly by my own reactions to the developing situation. Experience helps in that I have responses that I have used and found helpful in the past. Whether these are fully appropriate to the situation I am faced with is less than certain. I may be dysfunctional as may anyone in a highly charged emotional situation. It is good therefore to expect this and it is for these reasons that the Educational Psychology Service has a support system for those involved in this kind of work.

Supervision is central to the delivery of high quality psychological services. Good supervision supports professionally competent practice and ensures that legal and ethical responsibilities to clients are met (Dunsmuir and Leadbetter, 2010, p. 2).

These are my representations of the work and functioning of a person and a psychologist when faced with the visit to a school where there has been a child death. What is more important, is that it illustrates the complexity involved in the analysis of the responses of my co-participants in this research since interrogation of the data revives these thoughts and emotions in me. It also establishes the epistemological reflexivity that shapes and sometimes limits the research interpretations.

I hope that I am never again faced with visiting a school where there has been a child death but I know this is unlikely. Perhaps the next time that I go I will understand better how to be part of the process and not feel so strongly the need to escape and that I use the uncertainty that is generated in a positive way as suggested by Mercieca (2007).

The head teachers have told me their story but I have also had a part in some of the events and have my own recollections of them too. To divest myself of these recollections is hard and perhaps impossible just as suggested by Van Manen (1990). To minimise them I have tried, in the semi-structured interview, to limit my input to the questions that were developed as the platform for data collection. It is not entirely possible to do this however, as these are sometimes people that I know and always people that I respect. To not respond to their emotions, even in a research situation is something that I find to be a personal difficulty. When a head teacher says in a highly emotional way that, "It was dreadful" I cannot remain dispassionate. I have to show that I empathise.

### **Reflexivity and data analysis**

I turn now to the issue of the analysis of data. As I described earlier, the analysis has a personal element to it that arises from my involvement. This means that my judgment is likely to be one where I expect to find at least some of the emotions that I experience.

I know that I interpret the data in ways that are my construction but I want to try to gain an insight into the thoughts, reflections, motivations and perhaps fears that the head teachers experience. I hope that I am able to achieve this through the interpretation of what they say and through making comparisons across the data sets. I want to understand the differences too, as this is work that has an idiographic basis.

During the analysis of the data of the research it is important to attempt to 'stand outside' my own thoughts and feelings while at the same time recognising that they still exist. As Smith et al. (2009) describe this process of 'bracketing' is not one where the taken for granted world disappears. I have awareness that they exist and recognise how they may determine some of what I report and how they influence the conclusions that I reach. While recognising this I have tried to provide three other components. These are the detailed analysis of the data, the comparisons with the perceptions of the other participants' stories and the way in which these stories interact with psychological theory. These components are very close to the strategies described by Smith et al. (2009) in the iterative and inductive cycle of analysis.

The interpretation of the response from the head teachers is undertaken with these three components in mind, as I will be trying to understand what their particular lived experience of being a head teacher is like in a school where a child dies. My construction of the responses are the subject of this analysis as it cannot be the experiences themselves nor even can it be the participants' perceptions of the experience. These are the barriers to be overcome in the analysis. My consciousness of the values, thoughts, goals, actions and emotions that they are trying to express about their perceptions of the experiences will be the output. This is not too dissimilar to fumbling and uncertainty, thoughtfulness, and hopefully, insight that is part of my work.

## **Chapter 3 - Method**

### **The research process – participant selection**

Finding head teachers who have had the experience of managing a school where a child has died, and who are then willing to participate in research is not an easy task. Participants in research such as this are not readily identifiable to researchers in university situations. I am fortunate in this respect in that I have a record of critical incidents in my Local Authority that have involved a child death. They are part of the Educational Psychology Service records and I am able therefore to access them relatively easily. I am also fortunate in that, having worked in the Local Authority for some time. I am also in a position to be able to approach these head teachers to seek their cooperation in the research. In some cases the head teachers are colleagues as I have worked with them on the processes of assisting the school to recover after critical incidents.

The selection of participants for this research is purposive. The individual participants enable me to develop idiographic perspective of their individual experiences (Smith et al., 2009). The reason for using purposive sampling is not only so that the participants have had the experience under consideration but also so that the variability among them could also be the subject of the analysis. This is consistent with the principles of a qualitative approach (Smith et al., 2009).

The sample was chosen from head teachers who had recently experienced a child death in their school community. There were, however, some unusual ethical issues that also had to be considered before the research could begin because of the very sensitive nature of the issues under consideration.

### **Ethical considerations**

There are ethical issues relating to the participants themselves and also relating to the bereaved families. The participants required not only to understand the issues relating to their participation in the research but they also needed to understand that the research may re-create emotions again that they had experienced during the life events under consideration. They also needed to understand that the research may raise new emotions that may be powerful and possibly deeply upsetting.



There are, in addition, ethical issues that relate to the bereaved family. It would be totally inappropriate to undertake research of this kind without seeking from them their approval. To not do this and then for them to discover the nature of the research subsequently would be completely unacceptable and disrespectful of their bereavement. There would be implications for the research content, the standing of the Educational Psychology Service and to the relationship between the bereaved family and the head teacher.

In order to manage these ethical issues, information and consent sheets were prepared for the participants and for the bereaved families. These forms and consent documents can be found in Appendix 2.

### ***Informed consent***

The consent obtained for this work was compliant with the university regulations. Each participant was approached informally by me and invited to consider whether they would agree to be involved. At this stage a verbal indication of the subject matter of the research was given to the potential participants together with the reason why it was hoped they would agree. This related to their experience of having a child death in school.

With their agreement they were then supplied with the information sheet (See Appendix 2) which had been agreed by the university ethics approval system so that they could give a more considered view of their willingness to be involved. Once this agreement had been given there was then a consultation about the bereaved parents, their relationship with the head teacher and whether it was felt that they would agree to the research being conducted in that school. Fortunately there was a view in all cases that agreement would be given by the bereaved family.

Information sheets for the bereaved family were then provided and the head teacher met with the mother of the dead child and sought their willingness to consider giving their approval on the basis of the written information provided. The family were given time to consider this and were offered an opportunity to meet with me. Two families did this and then agreed to the research. The other families gave their agreement without a meeting.

The two mothers that I met did not really have any questions but seemed to benefit from just talking about their dead children. They said that they were pleased that there might be some positive outcome to what had been such a tragic experience.

Once these approval procedures were complete, each head teacher agreed an appointment for the research interview which gave further time for consideration of their involvement.

It was at the interview that the written consents were collected from the head teacher and from the bereaved families.

### ***Protection, well-being and the right to withdraw***

Some of the commitments to the protection and well-being of the participants were developed in the information documents that were provided as part of the consent procedure. These can be seen in full in Appendix 2. At each interview, however, the participant was asked if they still wished to continue with the participation. This right to withdraw is recorded as part of the transcripts of the interviews.

Great care was taken during the interviews to show good listening skills and to demonstrate empathy. Issues around this are discussed more fully in the section on personal reflexivity earlier.

When the interviews were concluded, time was taken to hold a confirming conversation with the participants, to share emotions and to indicate the next stages of the research process. At this time I also had details of helping agencies should any of the participants require further support, though none did. Telling the story was said by all to have been a supportive experience. Subsequently, each of the participants was contacted either by telephone or email to thank them for their involvement and to check on their well-being.

### ***Confidentiality and Anonymity***

Reassurances to participants on the issue of confidentiality and anonymity were contained in the information documents. This was later confirmed in all meetings with the bereaved families and the head teachers.

The transcription of the digitally recorded interview was something that I undertook in order to ensure confidentiality and anonymity. During the transcription all the names of participants, deceased children, family members and schools were changed. I am the only person with access to these names and information and there is no necessity within the research for them to be known to others. The digital recordings were erased once the transcriptions had been completed and checked for accuracy. None of the participants, the dead children, their families or the schools has been named in the writing of the report or to my tutor. There is the possibility that the participants themselves or the families of the dead children may discuss their involvement in the research as there was no attempt made to engage them in the confidentiality procedures other than to make my commitment to them.

### **Validity and Quality (Trustworthiness)**

Smith et al. (2009) have commented on the issue of the assessment of validity and quality in qualitative research. This is an issue that has generated considerable discussion among qualitative researchers. In the past the way in which qualitative research has been judged is by the use of criteria that were in place for quantitative research and these criteria may not be considered appropriate for qualitative research. In qualitative research a more appropriate term might be trustworthiness as this term does not have the connotations of a Positivist Epistemology.

Smith et al. (2009) prefer approaches to this that are more than simplistic checklists. The assertion is that they can miss the subtleties of quantitative research. The suggestion is that there is the need to develop a discussion of the four broad principles espoused by Yardley (2000) which present general guidelines for assessing the quality of qualitative psychological research and have a more sophisticated and pluralistic stance.

The four principles suggested by Yardley are:

- A sensitivity to context (Theoretical; relevant literature; empirical data, socio-cultural setting, participants' perspectives, ethical issues)
- A commitment and rigour (In-depth engagement with topic, methodological competence and skill, thorough data collection, depth and breadth of analysis)
- A transparency and coherence (Clarity and power of description and argument, transparent methods and data presentation, fit between theory and method, reflexivity)
- impact and importance (Theoretical in enriching understanding, socio-cultural, practical for community, policy makers or health workers)

Yardley (2000) proposes that these criteria should not be thought of as rigid rules but principles open to flexible interpretation. I will try to develop each of these four principles in relation to this research.

### ***Sensitivity to context***

I have tried to demonstrate contextual sensitivity in a number of ways during this research. Care was taken in the development of the contacts leading to participants agreeing to their involvement in the research. Each participant was approached personally by me and then offered written information to enable them to give full consideration to the request for their participation. Agreement was then obtained in accordance with the university's ethical requirements. Considerable care was also taken in the ethical processes to include the bereaved families as the subject matter of the research was such an upsetting one. Although the bereaved families were not in any way involved in the research they were informed in a sensitive way, given opportunities for discussion and then asked to give their approval for the research in the school that their child had attended. Part of the commitment to the bereaved families was that the research would not continue in that school if they objected in any way. Consideration for the participants and the bereaved families has been demonstrated in these processes.

During the interview processes I was very conscious of the need to consider the feelings of the participants. I was aware that the interviews with them could

revive upsetting thoughts and feelings. Where appropriate, I was able to make an empathetic response and offer support. I found this to be a natural response that would have been hard to inhibit.

Confidentiality and anonymity were fully managed throughout the process in accordance with the university's requirements and the commitments made to the participants and bereaved families.

Care was also taken in choosing the methodological approach which had to be Interpretative and idiographic. Careful consideration was given to the major approaches to qualitative research, as described earlier. The advantages and disadvantages of each were part of this consideration which ultimately led to the choice of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis.

Finally, sensitivity to the data and the analysis of it was of prime concern during the Interpretative phases of the research with frequent reference to the original data records and relevant literature.

### ***Commitment and rigour***

The research process provides a number of opportunities for commitment. The first of these is in the commitment to the ethical processes and in particular in this case the commitment to the bereaved families which is described above. There is also a commitment to the participants' well-being which was demonstrated during the interview process through good listening skills and empathy. A commitment was also demonstrated after the interview through having a conversational period during which the well-being of the head teacher could be considered. During this time they were informed of the research processes and given an opportunity to discuss their well-being.

The rigour is demonstrated initially in the selection of participants and in the preparation of the interview questions. The processes of data collection have also been carefully undertaken. It is, however, during the analysis of the data that there is the greatest opportunity for rigour. This is demonstrated in the comprehensive nature of the analysis. There was rigour in the choice of approaches and the consideration of alternatives. The analysis itself is a

thorough process with frequent reading of the data and references back to it. These references are made to illustrate the interpretations made. Finally, in the writing of the thesis there has been an attempt to describe, discuss and consider every aspect of the research and to relate it to other work that has a similar theme.

### ***Transparency and coherence***

I have tried to demonstrate the transparency of this work through the description of every aspect of the research process in order that the entirety of the research process is clear. I have been careful to pay particular attention to this during the writing of the methodological and reflexivity sections of the thesis. I have also tried to develop a transparency through the way in which the interpretation of the data is clearly referred back to original text so that it is apparent how the interpretations were reached. I tried to develop a further transparency through seeking advice from my colleagues in the Educational Psychology Service on various aspects of the research and writing. In addition, I have also been able to return to the participant that I worked with and show the analysis in order to seek from them confirmation of the interpretations that I made.

I have attempted to develop the coherence of the study mainly in the writing up of the work. I was particularly aware of the need for clarity in the writing of the thesis and particularly so during the proof reading stages. I have tried to write in a clear way about complex concepts. Where possible I have simplified sentences and used illustrations when appropriate. I have done this in order to try to ensure that the research is understood and how the different parts of it fit together. The analysis was undertaken in a way that was in keeping with the developed theories of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis and the systematic approach suggested by Smith et al. (2009). This, too, was so that there was coherence in this stage of the process.

### ***Impact and importance***

Impact is, of course, difficult for me to judge though it is related to importance. The importance of the work seems clear since it is an aspect of my work that seems to lack an evidence base. This lack of research evidence was apparent during the literature search. Yardley (2000) suggests that the real validity of a

piece of research is whether it has something important, interesting and useful to tell the reader. This research is partly a story and, as such, has an innate component of interest. The importance is, I think, demonstrated in the consideration of how human beings are affected by distressing yet relatively common events, while since there seems to be little previous research into this area it should meet the criteria of usefulness.

Smith et al. (2009) have commented on the power of the independent audit tool in this process and suggested that it may be used in addition to the suggestions in the work of Yardley (2000). The implication of this is that the research data and procedures should be available from the writing up in such a form as to allow other researchers to reach similar conclusions, using the same data and methods, to those in the original work. I have attempted to provide this in the writing of this thesis.

### **Data collection and analysis**

IPA also requires rich data. This is clearly a subjective judgment, but when we say that, 'rich' data are required, we mean to suggest that participants should have been granted an opportunity to tell their stories: to speak freely and reflectively and to develop their ideas and express their concerns at some length (Smith et al., 2009, p. 56).

In the same discussion Smith goes on to say that in highly structured interviews or questionnaires this rich data is less likely to become available.

The interview schedule that was used in this research is shown in Appendix 1. This was designed to encourage open responding and to enable the participants to engage in developing a story of what happened. There is a kind of chronology to the prompting questions which should support this kind of development. There was no rigidity about the interview. The ethos was one where the participants were free to develop their story as they felt it could best be told. There were neither time constraints nor any signals from me about the extent of what was being said. It was only when a natural break occurred that I moved onto the next question. On occasions this led to the participants talking about other aspects that were contained in later questions at which point I would comment that I hoped to cover this in more detail later.

### ***The research data used***

The data used for this research are the verbatim transcriptions of the participants' responses to this semi-structured interview. There are, contained in the transcriptions, some comments made by me which are largely confined to the presentation of the questions but occasionally there are empathetic comments too. Additionally, during two of the interviews there were two people present. In one case this was a head teacher who had been head of the school for part of the time when the child was dying and so she was treated as another participant. In the second case the head teacher asked one of her teaching assistants, who had worked with the child, to be present during the interview. Her comments are also recorded but since she was not a head teacher they have not been used as part of the data set. There were potential complications in this latter case as it was possible that the teaching assistant might introduce ideas or themes that were not in the perceptions of the head teacher. As the head teacher had made this arrangement independently, I did not feel in a position to ask the teaching assistant to leave.

It did mean however, that I was faced with a serious complication in the use of the data. Careful consideration of the data, however, showed that the head teacher was the predominant speaker and the teaching assistant frequently added a few words to validate what the head teacher was saying during the responses that were made. There were rarely more lengthy comments than a sentence and so I made the decision to use the data from this participant head teacher despite this complication.

To produce the data, each interview was recorded on an iPhone 4S voice memo. This was later converted to text through the use of Dragon Dictation on an iPad. This transcript was then checked and re-checked for accuracy against the original recording.

### ***The method of data analysis***

Traditionally, data analysis using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis requires a large area where the paper versions of the transcript can be seen, scrutinised and cross referenced. To make the task of data analysis one that did



not require masses of paper and post-it stickers I decided to maintain only an electronic form of data.

An example of part of a transcript can be seen in Appendix 3 Part 1. The interview transcripts were 'poured' electronically into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet in a single column. This can be seen in Appendix 3 Part 2. Each line was numbered for reference purposes. To facilitate this process a three column style of analysis was used as suggested in Smith et al. (2009) and in Willig (2001).

With this form of transcript the analysis of the data began. The basis of the data analysis is the use of the staged approach originally described by Smith et al. (2009). The stages suggested are described below.

The first stage of the analysis process was undertaken by reading and re-reading of the transcripts. This was partly achieved during the transcription process where the recordings were listened to and the transcriptions made. This process was repeated until the transcriptions were accurate. The transcriptions were then read and re-read to create an intimate knowledge of the content. Following this the analysis described below was undertaken. This is a necessary part of the process as it is important to have an 'immersion' in the data. It is a way of trying to enter the world of the participant.

Stage two of the process involved working through the transcript and making notes of the initial thoughts that occur. Smith et al. (2009) refer to this stage as 'Initial Noting'. This stage is undertaken without critical or thematic considerations and recorded next to the transcription as shown in the example in Appendix 3 Part 3 for later detailed consideration. Conceptual, descriptive and linguistic comments were made. The conceptual comments are shown in red and these are focused on making some Interpretative understanding of the text. The linguistic notes relate to how the participant uses language and these notes are in blue. The descriptive notes are in black and these notes relate to the context and subject matter of the text. This process was used with each interview recording and transcript in turn and the comments were entered into the spreadsheet in the column two under the heading 'Exploratory Comments'.

The next stage (three) of the analysis was to note developing themes from the notes that had developed in the stage two initial noting processes. These themes were developed to help manage the ideas that were elicited from the transcripts. An example of this stage can be seen in Appendix 3 Part 4. This part of the process does reduce the quantity of the detail to a more manageable level. Yet, as Smith et al. (2009) indicate this does not diminish the complexity of the data.

At this stage the initial notes became the main focus of the analysis and as the thematic construction progressed this produced a new product. This is seen as closing the hermeneutic circle since during this iterative process the part and the whole are interpreted in relation to one another. This enables the interpretation to try to capture the nature of the experience for each of the head teachers.

In the fourth stage of the process the themes that had been noted in stage three were considered in relation to each other. This gave an opportunity to explore the way in which they could be organised. In order to undertake this task the spreadsheet was sorted alphabetically so that the same themes were seen together in the spreadsheet and could be considered together. An example of this is shown in Appendix 3 Part 5.

The final stage of this process involved moving to the next transcript and repeating the processes described above. As ideas that had developed during the previous transcript were likely to influence my thinking about the subsequent one I tried to come to each transcript with a fresh mind and leave behind those previous ideas. This was difficult to achieve but the process was helped by compartmentalising the analysis of one transcript from the next by taking a break of a few days. I was careful to have the materials from the previous transcript not on screen at the same time as the next transcript that was being considered.

It was important then to consider how the themes could be connected in order to produce superordinate themes. This was done by taking a list of the developing themes and trying to arrange them in a table form on a Microsoft

Word document. Once I was satisfied with the various grouping of developing themes I tried to generate names for these superordinate themes which reflected their nature and importance in the analysis. This process took a little time as the naming of these superordinate themes had to produce meaningful and descriptive labels for the content. The table of the developing themes with their names and the superordinate themes is shown in the next chapter and Appendix 3 Part 6.

There was much of a very individual nature within each analysis but there was also a sharing of common and recurring themes. This will become clear in the analysis of the data in Chapter 4. Smith et al. (2009) suggest that for them to be considered as recurrent they should be present in at least a third to a half of the cases. Though this related to larger samples it provides some guidance, however, I considered that the developing themes should all be discussed and where they were unique to one individual I have made this clear in the analysis and discussion.

## Chapter 4 - Interpretative analysis

### Introduction to the Interpretative analysis

In order to enable an Educational Psychology Service or other school support service to provide help and support to head teachers in schools where a child dies it is necessary that there is an understanding of the experiences of those head teachers who have lived through such an event.

Each of the five head teachers who kindly agreed to share with me their experiences did so knowing that the process would probably revive some of the difficult memories that they have of the experience. They told me about the children who had died, of their thoughts and feelings, the decisions and dilemmas that they faced and about the personal impact that the events had upon them. They told me about the bereaved families and the support systems that they used. They also told me about their doubts and issues they dealt with that came from the larger school community.

All of this provided a rich data set which enabled me to try to establish an understanding of each of their individual experiences. During this process there were often times when I did feel very sad myself about the deaths of these children despite never knowing them

From the data provided by the head teachers I constructed and named three major themes that formed the superordinate categories into which the subordinate themes were placed. These three themes focus on:

- Emotions and their management
- The interactions that they had with the bereaved family
- The interaction with the school community

It also became clear that there was in addition an over arching theme which I named Elevation. A full explanation of this theme is given below.

The language that I have used in naming and describing these themes is mine and relates to how I conceptualise them. I have tried to make the language as descriptive and representative as possible though I am aware of the difficulties

of this as described by Parker (2005). They are set out in the table below on page 86 with their corresponding subordinate themes for clarity. The subordinate themes appear not in any sequence related to the interview data but in an order that seems to me to give meaning to the analysis undertaken. Each of the themes shown in the table is fully discussed in the sections that follow it.

In order to reference the quotes and extracts from the interview texts I have used a universal notation system of which an example is given here. (Rosemary 212 – 214) This represents an extract taken from the interview of Rosemary and refers to lines 212 to 214 within the text. Throughout this section the participants are referred to as Jane, Margaret, Pat, Rosemary and Judy. Margaret and Pat were both head teachers at the same school at different times during the period of the child at that school dying. They were interviewed together as they had independently made the arrangement to be together for my arrival in school, as described earlier.

## Themes

	<b>Superordinate themes</b>	<b>Subordinate themes</b>
<b>Overarching theme - Elevation</b>	Emotions and their management	Emotional impact Emotional regulation Emotional projection Emotional distancing and avoidance Grief spill over
	Interactions with the bereaved family	Family empathy and living the illness Parenting role and family absorption Family conflict Family demands Family support
	Interactions with the school community	Competing demands Buffering Emotional gradient Emotional Isolation and validation External validation Family validation Support issues Planning for the death Uncertainty Unpreparedness School disruption

Each of these superordinate themes was apparent to some degree within the data sets obtained from each participant. However, there were noticeable differences in the way in which the participants experienced the subordinate themes. Not all of the subordinate themes were present for every participant. The superordinate themes are described and discussed in this chapter together with the subordinate themes that were present in each case. This is progressed by taking each participant in turn before returning to the issue of common threads across them all.

### ***Overarching theme - Elevation***

Before beginning that process I believe that it is important to mention what seemed to be a universal phenomenon that is possibly culturally characteristic behaviour and which may help to explain some of the patterns of response that can be seen in the participants. I do not propose here to do more than mention it but I will return to it and consider it at some length later. On reflection it is also commonly seen in comments made by head teachers and others in television and news reports of the deaths of children.

The phenomenon seems to derive from the cultural practice which is enshrined in the saying, 'De mortuis nil nisi bonum dicendum est', sometimes shortened to, 'Nil nisi bonum.' The phrase is variously translated as 'Speak no ill of the dead,' 'Of the dead, speak no evil,' 'Do not speak ill of the dead' or, strictly literally, 'Of the dead, nothing unless good.' Owusu-Ansah (2012) considers the origins and possible interpretations of this phrase from social, religious and innate perspectives and indicates that it is a long standing cultural norm that dates back centuries. The head teachers demonstrate universally what I have described as 'Elevation'. In effect all the participants could not speak too highly of the children who had died. Their behaviour and decisions also seemed to be influenced by the Elevation.

This comment by Pat is a good example of this Elevation

He was always really happy, always smiling, always tried to let you notice him being good. So if you said sit up he would always be the one sitting up like that and smiling and in singing practice that I used to do with the school every week he'd be like that and following me with his eyes so that you could notice him. He'd be singing his best as you walk along to listen to the good singers. So he liked being noticed for that. He was very popular with the other children and just all you can think of is his lovely big eyes and his big smile. Pat (24 -31)

The effect of this seems to be to complicate many of the decisions and actions taken by the head teachers and I will return to this issue later.

There are many ways to investigate the data of an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis study. Smith et al. (2009) allude to this and goes on to illustrate one of the ways which involves the analysis of each individual participant interview before considering common themes that can be seen across the data set. One alternative to this approach is to consider the phenomenological characteristics of the data and pursue interesting themes which are illustrated or sometimes contradicted from the participant stories. Using this way the focus seems to be more on the phenomenon than the participants through the completion of the hermeneutic circle\*. In this way I hope that a story of the impact of child death on a head teacher will develop while still enabling the individual experiences to be differentiated.

### **Superordinate theme 1 - Emotions and their management**

#### ***Emotional impact***

The death of anyone that we know creates in each of us a range of emotions. The death of a child seems to add to the intensity of these emotions and head teachers are no different from the rest of us in this respect. One of the subordinate themes which became apparent in this area is that of emotional impact.

There is evidence of a range and depth of emotional impact on all the head teachers who took part in this research. It is clear that when a child dies that head teachers feel this very strongly and this will be illustrated in the analysis that follows. Some of the comments that the head teachers made to me are indicative of emotions that are much like the ones that could be expected from bereaved family members.

For Jane this emotional impact began with the diagnosis of a brain tumour in John a child in her school. There followed a remission in John's illness after surgery and Jane goes on to express her anxiety about the need for further hospital treatment.

\* This refers to the idea that one's understanding of the text as a whole is established by reference to the individual parts and one's understanding of each individual part by reference to the whole. Neither the whole text nor any individual part can be understood without reference to one another, and hence, it is a circle. However, this circular character of interpretation does not make it impossible to interpret a text; rather, it stresses that the meaning of a text must be found within its cultural, historical, and literary context and can only be established for each individual.



This is an emotion that is shared by the head just like a member of the family. She had made preparations for John to return to school after his surgery and then there was a further deterioration in his condition. This deterioration is rather rapid and she describes it as unbelievable.

Jane describes visiting him in the hospice with other members of staff knowing that it was likely to be the last time she saw him alive. She goes on to explain how they then all shared the early feelings of grief.

The news of John's death came to Jane by text message and she describes her response as:

Stunned! Disbelief! To begin with err I was at home as well so you are isolated and when you are here with your computer and all your contacts.  
Err (Jane 97 – 98)

Jane felt very isolated at the news and needed to seek support which she did by telephone. Jane goes on to describe how she felt that everyone suffered from the shock of the news and admits that;

I know how much of a shock it was for me. (Jane 116)

Pat describes being told that Steven is about to die by his mother and that the hospital were sending him home as there was no more that they could do for him. She found it difficult to hear from Steven's mother of his death but was very hesitant in her description of this reflecting the emotions that she felt. She comments:

I don't know it just feels sort Oh... unbelievable that a little boy won't be here any more. (Pat 98 – 99)

Part of the emotional impact on Pat is created by a visit to see Steven at home at this point when she described him as looking a completely different boy at this stage of his illness. She had taken him a gift of chocolates and described him as:

... sucking at them (Pat 138)

Margaret recalls the response of Steven's brother when the news of his death comes into the school in a very emotive way. She was very affected by what she saw when Steven's brother reacted to the news brought by his uncle:

Andrew just leapt into his arms and he sort of jumped up and wrapped his legs round him and just hugged him. And that's just when we all knew didn't we? (Margaret 171 – 173)

Pat later describes herself as being in a state of trauma at the news of Steven's death (Pat 299) and goes on later to express a sense of injustice about the death of a young child. (Pat 782)

Rosemary avoids saying what impact the news of William's death has upon her personally and appeared to be less inclined to discuss this often referring to the impact on others. However, the emotional impact on Rosemary seemed to be indicated in the language she used in describing the events prior to William's death. She describes how it was confirmed that William had a cancer in his head and ear. Surgery left his face disfigured and unable to speak. She found it difficult to describe this in a coherent way saying:

So er... and obviously the he was a you know you could see that he had operations and you know part of you know his face and he couldn't talk and he had a really difficult eating and so he had a feed and but you know you would be coming for hours in the day he had a personal tutor... (Rosemary 92 – 95)

Judy knew that Andrew, a child in her school, was likely to die as he had Cystic Fibrosis. She describes praying that he might get a lung transplant despite her awareness that this involved the death of another child. She visits him in hospital knowing that he is unlikely to survive. Two days later when she hears of his death she describes her shock, despite knowing that Andrew's death was close. She asks for help from the Educational Psychology Service and describes her personal relief at being able to cry when the educational psychologist arrived.

... then I could cry (upset here) and I could I could be in here I could be away from everybody and she just let me cry and get over all of my emotions... (Judy 97 – 99)

She goes on to describe her sadness (Judy 289) and uses the term 'falling apart' (Judy 313) to illustrate the extent of her emotions.

The emotional impact theme that developed was not confined to the illness and deaths of the children but it developed also in relation to events that follow as a consequence of the deaths.

The funerals of the children impacted on the head teachers in a number of ways and were described by each of the head teachers, all of whom attended in order to represent the school.

Jane refers to very strong emotions aroused by the funeral saying:

It was highly highly emotional very very upsetting. (Jane 441)

She goes on to describe not staying long at the wake in a sentence that tails off, and remains unfinished. (Jane 451)

Margaret makes a response in respect of Steven's funeral which is indicative of the impact when she describes it as bringing back all the emotions again saying also:

Oh... it was just so sad. (Margaret 480)

Pat confirms that she had, too, felt sadness at the funeral.

The impact of the funeral on Rosemary was different but apparently no less intense. It seems to be related more to seeing other very ill children at the funeral and to the pictures of William that were on his coffin. This seems to affect her more than to the death of William itself. It would seem from her response that she had different views on how the funeral should have been conducted than did the family and this had an impact on her. This can be seen in her comments:

... thing is just to remember people as they they are at their best because at the flipping funeral they have got these great big pictures of him being ill on the er... coffin and er ... I don't know I think er... so I think... I mean ...I have I suppose you reflect on yeah how should you

remember people and how what's important about a life I think.  
(Rosemary 394 – 398)

Then after the funeral at the there were just things about the funeral who were you know at our ... had parts of them missing, drips, no hair, thin, just ghostly which I found really upsetting. The pictures on the coffin were all of William in his illness like glorifying almost the illness which I felt very sad about. (Rosemary 494 – 498)

For Judy the day of the funeral was one where she was surprised by her emotions. She expresses surprise that she did not cry as she seemed to expect. Judy goes on to explain that it was only later when alone that she cried.

The analysis of the emotional impact that has been considered in this section is that which has been described by the participants in a fairly open and overt way using their own words. What also becomes apparent from the analysis of the data set is that there is a considerable amount of emotional regulation required at the time and used by the head teachers when telling of their experiences.

### ***Emotional regulation***

Costa et al. (2007) and Gross and Thompson (2007) have commented that individuals develop expectations about how others should react in specific situations, such as bereavement. It is, therefore, perhaps not surprising to find this construction in the head teachers' responses. Various forms of emotional regulation are used and these are described in the following sections.

Some of the emotional regulation used is seen in the way that the head teachers move the conversation from a difficult subject to an easier one or one which is more familiar territory and they feel more comfortable. Jane does this in turning the conversation from death and sadness to friendship (Jane 466).

Rosemary uses a considerable amount of emotional regulation which can be seen in her responses during this difficult time but also during the interview.

During the interview Rosemary begins to say something about her own bereavement at seven years old but then resists this and declares that children need to see adult role models in control of their emotions (Rosemary 314).

Later she is saying how important it is to have people talk to you during bereavement but then describes making a book of memories and moves the conversation to William's siblings (Rosemary 324 – 325).

Still later Rosemary (Rosemary 366 – 371) begins to relate her personal feelings but then diverts her description to a vicarious experience which was the cancer of the teaching assistant in the interview.

The use of emotional regulation during the bereavement time by Rosemary can be seen in her description of preparing for and telling members of staff about William's death.

I think that's what really helped me at to think that I've got to prepare people because you know actually at the point you've got to somehow you know you managing yourself in public aren't you? You got public duty of office and actually I was quiet I was quite worried that I'd get and in fact I never did overly emotional I did get a bit emotional at two of the meetings talking to members of staff about themselves but actually with the children in assembly I was actually just this is what we're doing and it's really sad you know (Rosemary 383 – 389).

Rosemary shows a determination to regulate her own emotions and those of others when she reflects on the class teacher's response to William's death.

Well it was quite... and what was what was really quite difficult was that there was actually some hysteria from the class teacher. (Rosemary 155 – 156)

Also in response to the emotions within the school after the news of William's death:

... but then the teacher and the support people in the class got quite hysterical and I just thought at this point I'm going to have to put a brake on this kind of transmit because we we are a challenging school.

Emotions tend to get out of control and also the children do need a kind of studying routine keep things you know and she had started making all these cards and publicising er... (Rosemary 174 – 178)

Rosemary decides on how she will react to this situation:

I'm going to have to get everybody in to just say look it is really bad but you're going to have to just keep the lid on your own emotions and keep going. We've got It's the start of the week ... can you please just not if you ... if you need support from each other actually you know we can't have everyone making cards and kind of going into this you know but also I I was almost saying that he's going to die and er... you have got to deal with it it's going to happen. er... (Rosemary 181 – 186)

When asked about the issues that Rosemary had to face it was clear that she felt that her priority was to regulate the emotions in school and to ensure that there was a normalisation of the school routines. (Rosemary 257)

When describing which staff were able to attend William's funeral Rosemary confirms these priorities:

... there were other members of staff who were positioning themselves to be invited to the funeral and to er... obviously wanting to go but and I did actually er... say quite publicly that myself and Sarah would be going to represent the school and that they wouldn't be going er... because it was just you know you have to get some perspective of like keeping the school going and er... (Rosemary 283 – 287)

Judy during the interview also regulates her emotions through tailing off her description. During a discussion of how she felt after hearing of the death of Andrew she comments:

It was a mixture of shock but.... (Judy 67)

Judy also illustrates her need to regulate her emotions during the bereavement feeling that she should not display her emotions. Judy indicates that she had to be composed for the staff (Judy 65). She also describes the episode of being able to cry when the educational psychologist arrived which is then followed by:

...and I could I could be in here I could be away from everybody and she just let me cry and get over all of my emotions so that I could go out there and be normal well as normal as I could be with the staff and children.... (Judy 98 – 101)

### ***Emotional projection***

One of the ways in which the participants seemed able to regulate their emotions was to project them onto others in the school community.

Jane showed this when discussing her attachment to John which she attributes to everyone in the school community when she describes the commitment as:

... everybody looked out for. That is pupils teachers, everybody, the whole, every stakeholder within the school really wanted the best for John we were all emotionally attached to him. Yes! (Jane 68 – 70)

In describing to me the support given to John, Jane develops the theme of a wide support for him based on the support that she gave. She indicates that a broad range of staff and pupils were supporting John when perhaps it was her own unflinching support that she was projecting. (Jane 68 – 70)

Later Jane in talking about the death of her own brother and the way that she was treated during his illness sees her own vulnerability as an indicator of the vulnerability of all the staff to the impact of John's death. (Jane 343 – 354)

Again it's all very much personal my knowledge was very much based on my own experience with my brother. What I found is that how other people acted towards me when my brother was dying some people every time I saw them was like ask how is your brother? How is he getting on? And then could not talk about the sadness of when he died. Others they used euphemisms they could not even say cancer or dying they skirted around the issue and then there are others who would talk about anything but and would avoid the situation totally and I was very much aware of how I was treated and how other people treat death and cancer and I was very much aware of that with being the staff would have all those issues.... in one member.... in one group of people and the parents and the children so it's

getting a very fine balance where people aren't offended by it by how you talk.

Pat suggests that Steven had a very close relationship with her when she describes him as:

... he'd be like that and following me with his eyes so that you could notice him. (Pat 28)

It seems likely that Pat felt a very close relationship with Steven and interpreted his behaviour as closeness to her.

Rosemary seems to reflect her own bereavement experiences which were related to the loss of her father when she was seven. This seems to enable her to express her own emotions in respect of this experience onto the brother of William when she describes the fact that:

You as a child you get lost in you get sort of forgotten. (Rosemary 338)

### ***Emotional distancing and emotional avoidance***

A different form of emotional regulation can be seen in emotional distancing and emotional avoidance. This form of regulation is most commonly seen in the language, or sometimes lack of it, that enables the head teacher to avoid articulating some of the more difficult areas of discussion.

Jane uses this way of avoiding difficult descriptions when talking about the emotional aspects of a child starting school. She is, at this point, comparing her own emotions to those of the family of John who was coming into school and use etcetera etcetera to avoid describing them

...daughter was starting school full-time and as a parent you have all the emotions of..... your daughter is starting school etc etc (Jane 23 -24)

Later, when talking about the severity of John's illness Jane uses disjointed language on reaching a point of saying how difficult it would be for John to start school because of his illness.



The conversation was very much about.....and obviously John was not going to be able to come to a mainstream school and obviously she was very emotional about that. (Jane 29 – 31)

Margaret illustrates the use of emotional avoidance when describing how she was provided with information in order to help her plan for the death of Steven but 'left it sitting there' for three weeks (Margaret 295).

When the children learn of Steven's death from Margaret she allows the most upset children to be taken by another member of staff which has the feel of using this strategy to distance herself from the strongest emotions of the children. (Margaret 218)

During the interview Margaret distances herself from describing how she felt about Steven's death by deferring it to Pat by saying:

It might be more pertinent to you. You knew him better than me.  
(Margaret 309)

There are also indications that Rosemary distances herself from some of the powerful emotions in a section where she is discussing the communication with staff over the death of William and how they might be supported:

...some time to talk to other people that they identified for themselves so there were some you know allowance of people going for cups of tea in the staff room. (Rosemary 255)

A little later Rosemary indicates concern for the siblings and seems to be implying that the death is over and we should be concerned for the living rather than grieving. (Rosemary 433) This has the feel of emotional distancing.

In discussions about the support available to Rosemary she refers to a document provided by the Educational Psychology Service to guide her actions. The response has a sense of reliance on instinct as mentioned by Rosemary earlier and this, too, has the feel of emotional distancing. (Rosemary 436)

During the interview Rosemary uses forms of language that enable her to distance herself from the strongest emotions. She shows an awareness of the need to understand the grief of the family yet resists full emotional expression by saying:

...wanting to signal to the family that that we were you know very sad and shared in the loss er... (Rosemary 288 – 289)

Judy in discussing her preparedness for Andrew's death indicates that she had downloaded a document from an internet source and read through the understanding of death at different ages. This was the extent of the preparation, despite the predictability of his death. This could be the issue of not appearing to 'wish' the death forward. It could be an element of avoidance too (Judy 230 – 232).

In her decision not to attend the wake for Andrew Judy seems to be distancing herself from the high emotions. This decision was unrelated to school issues as can be seen from her comment:

... when we came back we left the very close member of staff went to the funeral went to the wake er... but the rest of us didn't we just decided we wouldn't go but it was really an end to the inset day it wasn't nothing nothing could be done and we just went home early and ... (Judy 392 – 395)

### ***Grief spill-over and grief revival***

There can be events which we experience that are sufficiently similar to remind us of our past grief and this can cause grief spill-over. There is evidence that the head teachers in this research had this kind of experience. Events that reintroduce us to our own grief, such as when a family gets rid of a dead person's clothing, can trigger a grief revival and individuals may re-experience any of the emotions that have previously been present and which may have subsided as grief progresses over a period of time.

Jane in explaining the issues that she faced began by volunteering that she had some personal issues relating to the situation which the death of John brought

back to her. In telling this Jane was clearly upset and wrestling with her emotions in relation to her brother's death.

Again you bring with it your own baggage. Err only a couple of years before my brother had died of cancer. I saw my brother obviously in the last few days of his cancer and it was something I never wanted to live through again. (Jane 153 – 156)

At this point Jane is explaining that she was asked to visit John in the hospice as he was close to death. She is faced with a very difficult decision on this issue and is experiencing grief spill-over which adds to the difficult emotions that she is experiencing as head teacher.

... so the request to go and visit John is one that I personally didn't want to do for my own personal reasons, because I didn't want to bring up all my... my personal history err ...(Jane 156 – 158)

The level of the difficulty that Jane experiences is acute and it is made clear in her next comments that it creates difficulties for her not only at school but at home in her family life where her husband tries to protect her from the returning grief she feels.

It put a lot of pressure on me and my husband. My husband was saying that it was above and beyond the call of duty and I shouldn't feel like I should do it and so he was obviously trying to protect me. But then I knew I had to do it for the school and for John and the family. (Jane 162 – 165)

Jane returns to this theme later when we are discussing the issue of her preparedness for the death of John. Jane relates to me the way in which she was treated during the dying process of her brother and there is evidence in what she tells me that she is showing signs of reviving the sadness that she felt before her brother's death.

What I found is that how other people acted towards me when my brother was dying some people every time I saw them was like ask how is your brother? How is he getting on? And then could not talk about the sadness of when he died. Others they used euphemisms they could not even say cancer or dying they skirted around the issue and then there

are others who would talk about anything but and would avoid the situation totally and I was very much aware of how I was treated. (Jane 344 - 350)

Later Jane recalls that she became close to the family resource worker during the period of John's death. This closeness seems to be derived from their shared experiences of personal grief into which these events spilled over. Jane is clear that she found this sharing experience supportive in dealing with her grief over John and her brother.

... we could say we are doing okay! We are getting through it I did in the end get support from the family resource worker. (Jane 399 – 401)

At the very end during a process of closing the interview Jane returns again to this important issue for her and reiterates the fact that John's death caused her to recall the grieving for her brother.

I do think it is what you bring to it. It's your own personal baggage and it's everybody that has baggage. I think that if you have experienced death there.... and you are not close to the child that died yes it's not very pleasant but you deal with it very differently. (Jane 589 – 592)

Although it was only apparent from the interview data with Jane and not for any of the other head teachers the issue of how the death of a child at their school affects the work and home life balance of the head teacher seems to be important to record. As set out above in (Jane 162 – 165) the head teacher is clear in saying that it created a lot of pressure on her and her husband. Jane was affected by the grief spill-over, did not want to visit the dying child in the hospice because of the impact on her own grief for her brother, yet felt obliged to do so. There is no evidence in the data of a long lasting effect of this pressure though the possibility exists that the death of John affected this family, too, in a way that would be unexpected.

I could see no evidence that Margaret experienced any impact on her family from my interview with her. Pat, however, does indicate that she experienced grief revival during the period of Steven's death.

During our discussions about having the knowledge and an understanding of how to manage the situation during the death of Steven, Pat describes the way in which she had used the recent experience of the death of her mother when thinking through the issues in school.

... because my mother had recently died. Er.. who was very old who was 84 she was when she died and I had sort of that was the first sort of really close person who had died to me. To have that sort of thing er... I actually sort of used that experience to help to think to try to look at the bigger picture that everybody will die and that sort of thing and er... and actually talking to Andrew and supporting Andrew who spoke about things quite matter of factly. (Pat 311 – 317)

Although Pat thinks immediately of her mother's death in response to the question, it is interesting that she is not so much drawn back into the grief for her mother but seems to use the experience to give herself a mind 'set' which enabled her to be less emotional. This can be seen in how she refers to Steven's brother speaking about things with little emotion and taking this as her model.

Later when discussing the arrangement of the funeral Pat is again prompted to recall her mother's funeral. She expresses some personal regrets about her mum's funeral and it is clearly very sad for her as she moves her thoughts between her mother's funeral and that of Steven at this point. Part of the sentence that Pat uses here is 'at the end of the day' which is perhaps a way of signifying her grief thoughts about death.

... comes into my head that and I couldn't after my mum had died I couldn't listen to the children I thought oh! this is just so and it's like at the end of the day that sort of thing isn't it? (Pat 507 – 510)

There is something of a difference in the way Rosemary experiences grief spill-over. Rather than having a direct impact on her own emotions it seems to have played a part in determining how she would manage the situation in school.

Rosemary was clear that she wanted to regulate the emotional climate in her school during the death of William yet she, too, was drawn to her own history of

bereavement when she describes the death of her father when she was only seven years old. This also prompts her to recognise that there is likely to be similar events in the history of other members of staff. In terms of her decision to regulate the emotions in school it presents her with a difficulty.

... you know also like I think I mean it was I said that well people were getting emotional and I think also I was sort of saying and also everyone's had experience of some kind of loss and bereavement and it kind of triggers things off that you kind of find unexpected in yourself you know I you know I I'm in that position as well because my dad died when you know I was seven you know its all these kind of you know being personal about it but also actually saying to people you know he's going to die you got to be ready for it. (Rosemary 195 – 201)

The language used by Rosemary during this passage is very halting and uncertain which perhaps represents her dilemma of recognising the likelihood of grief spill-over or grief revival in other staff. Her final phrase is indicative of the view that she had which was that staff needed to be 'ready for it'.

Later when discussing the issue of her knowledge in respect of planning to manage the school during the bereavement Rosemary returns to this issue again in a very similar way.

... what children needed in school was adults who were actually managing their own emotions in terms of thinking about the child because I know that you know I lost my dad but also lost my mum because my mum was in a lot of shock and grief and found it really hard to cope after my dad died and as a child you kind of need stable adults and actually I remember going to school and actually finding quite a lot of you know security in routine and people being the same and normal. And not having an outpouring of grief and emotion everywhere at everywhere you went. You know from you know it's like you know you need time to understand. (Rosemary 317 – 324)

This passage seems to represent this same theme of recognition of grief spill-over but with the need to contain it by controlling her emotions and those of others. It seems to relate to the way she needed stability and found it in school

routines when her mother was grieving and the, then, current situation in school 'spills-over' to remind her of this and in turn determine her responses. There is a strong sense here that the world of Rosemary was 'falling apart' at that time and Rosemary actually says that after her father's death she lost her mother, presumably to the grief. This resulted in her finding her own security in her school normality. Her decisions around managing emotions can be viewed and understood in this context. It is also an indication of the massive impact on this head teacher and the management of the school as a consequence of the grief spill-over.

Judy also experiences the impact of grief spill-over during her management of the school when Andrew died. She indicates that she felt that some staff were vulnerable because of their personal experiences of death though she does not elaborate on how this will affect them at this point. She is also aware of the vulnerability of children who have had bereavements recently in school and this she takes to be a case for giving them special consideration.

...there were two children that I needed to be really careful with because they had well actually more than two to be honest with you. There were some children who have had suffered bereavements in school who were in school currently and I needed to make sure that their teachers were aware because they had changed, the teachers had changed since the bereavements and that the children were okay and a special eye was kept out for them. Er... The staff as well had had its just about their personal experiences of death ... (Judy 140 – 149)

One child in particular is of concern to Judy. This is a child who has had three family members die and who was not in school when some of the community grieving over Andrew took place. The effect of grief spill-over here for the head teacher is less about her personal response than about how to manage and support a vulnerable child.

er... I spoke to him he had had three other people members of his family who had died and I said had had anybody talked to you about that and he said no because I think sometimes you don't talk to children do you? (Judy 194 – 196)

There are a number of examples of emotional regulation in this section and they indicate that it is a strong theme in the responses of the head teachers as described above. They regulate their emotions through the way that they manage the staff of the school. They also project their own emotions onto others while they also use techniques of distancing themselves or avoiding some of the most difficult situations that they face. Some of the difficulties they experience relate to their own vulnerability or the vulnerability of others in circumstances where they have themselves experienced bereavement.

It is not easy to summarise this whole section on the superordinate theme of emotions and their management or to generalise from it. There are indications of a powerful impact on the personal emotions of head teachers when a child in their school dies. There are very clear differences between the experiences and actions of the five head teachers in response to these events. The regulation of personal emotions, as described above, is apparent in a number of ways and there are indications that the previous experiences of death by head teachers play an important part in how they manage the situation in school. There are implications in all of this for the well-being of children, staff and to a lesser extent the families of the head teachers.

### **Superordinate theme 2 - Interactions with the bereaved family**

I turn now to the issue of how the head teachers interacted with the bereaved families of the children who died. These interactions are of a very different character to the ones which head teachers commonly experience with families of the children in their school. They change not only at the point of the death of the child, but also in the period when the child is ill, and particularly during the period when it is apparent that the death is inevitable.

With the sadness that accompanies the death of a child in school there is, as would be expected, a strong sense of empathy and compassion for the bereaved family. These and other emotions seem to bring changes in the interactions that take place between the head teacher and the bereaved family.



### ***Family empathy and 'living' the illness***

For Jane there is a sense of despair in some of the comments she made during the interview in respect of John's illness when it was in the early stages. This should be judged in the case of Jane in the light of the recent bereavement she had experienced with her brother.

... a scan and they said that the tumour had come back and had obviously gone through his whole body. And there was nothing they could do ... (Jane 87 – 89)

These comments were made with a depth of feeling which showed a shared understanding of the despair of the family.

Later this is more overt when talking about John's inclusion in school which had been seen as only a remote possibility Jane explains that:

... they had actually achieved that milestone that, they thought he would never live that long any way as well. So they actually achieved their first goal, so to speak and as I say I knew emotionally I knew exactly how they were feeling as parents... (Jane 45 – 47)

Jane goes on at this point to indicate how delighted she was that this had been achieved for the parents and confirms this with a very affirming yes at the end of the sentence.

So I was delighted that together we had actually managed to achieve that. Yes! (Jane 47)

Jane also indicates shared emotions with the family when describing the early interactions with the family:

So we were all very emotionally attached to the family and John from a very early stage. (Jane 61 – 62)

Further evidence of this empathy on the part of Jane is in the language she uses when describing these early stages. There is a use of the collective pronoun 'we' is indicative of this:

...we had been through their anxiety about not starting school and then... (Jane 63)

In a description of how the family kept her up-to-date with the progress of John's illness Jane shows how much she is living the illness herself just as the family might when she says:

Because it's the not knowing isn't it? Yes! And that anxiety. (Jane 203)

For Pat though not for Margaret who came to the school during the progress of Steven's illness, there is evidence of the level of empathy that she felt for the family. Pat passes Steven's brother and notices that he is 'white as a sheet' (Pat 52). In telling of the attempts to find a bone marrow donor for Steven Pat aligns herself with the emotions of the family and expresses their emotions as her own.

... and it was always huge disappointments (Pat 80)

During a description by Pat of how Steven's mother told her of the unlikely return home from the hospice she empathises with the mother and feels the impact strongly. There is a sense of dismay in this description:

She was so brave she came in and said I've got something to tell you and she just said that they are not they are sending him home from hospital because there is nothing else they can do er... and he wants to die at home. (Pat 88 - 91)

Pat confirms her empathetic link with the family in describing how over a half term holiday she stayed in contact with the family in order that she knew how Steven was. (Pat 114 - 115)

Pat goes on to demonstrate a continuing closeness with Steven's brother by describing how unhappy he was about some of the protocols of the hospital. Such detail is probably only shared by a child with a close adult. Pat in her language gives a sense that she too shares this unhappiness and goes on to indicate that she has discussed these issues with Steven's mother who is also unhappy with the care Steven received. This shared feeling can be seen at the end of the comment where the language indicates that Pat also felt the same though the sentence was not completed.

... he ended up dying in hospital as well er... but Andrew is not very happy about that says things about what they didn't do and what they

didn't care and things like that. I think that there are still some issues there still with mum feeling like they had all the support up to his death and then suddenly like that was the end of that then. And she has not had the support which felt... (Pat 128 – 133)

Pat towards the end of the interview when asked about ongoing concerns relating to Steven's death shows a further closeness to his brother worrying about the impact of the family events on him from a developmental point of view. She shows concern for his recovery and recalls:

Because it's been all his life from him being probably was it three or something like that. From being a little tot his brother was seriously ill and he has had and his parents missing for long periods while he has been in hospital and ambulances in the middle of the night and things. (Pat 673 – 684)

Pat also demonstrates some level of 'living' the illness as she describes her empathetic response to the family situation during a search for a suitable bone marrow transplant donor. She shows a high level of investment in the family emotions during this period:

There was a long period where they thought there was some hope and they were doing bone marrow transplants and tests to see whether dad was any good and uncles and different relatives er... and it was always huge disappointments. Every time it was like no chance with it. (Pat 77 – 81)

There is evidence in the interview of Rosemary that she too shared a strong commitment and an empathy with the family of William. In describing this commitment it is clear that in order to enable the family to offer care and support to William, during medical appointments and procedures, she provided resources from the school to care for William's brother who was in nursery at the school at that time.

... trying to have Peter who was in nursery at that time full time in nursery so it involved some kind of re-allocation of resources to enable that to happen. But we did do that for between the Easter and summer. (Rosemary 33 – 35)

Later on when it was understood that the death of William was close Rosemary suggests that the family should not have to experience the emotions of others that were around in the school community. Here she seems quite protective of them. This head teacher was, of course, trying to contain many of the emotions that were around at the time and this response should be seen within that context.

...the family who were coming to school and you know they didn't want to have to deal with raw emotion you know because they're having to deal with William being ill at home and lots of people coming at home to sort him out er... (Rosemary 206 – 209)

Judy during her interview, when describing the early stages of Andrew being in school, aligns herself with mum who seeks to have everything normal for Andrew. At this stage Andrew was undergoing regular checks and understandably both his family and the head teacher want him to be normal too. For his mother this seems to be a process of normalising his school environment. The head teacher in acknowledging Andrew's friendships contributes to a sense of strong empathy with her.

... and he was going for his checkups his mum wanted everything to be completely normal he had loads of friends and er... (Judy 26 – 27)

Judy goes on to show her admiration for his mother by valuing her openness in telling Andrew everything. This valuing of Andrew's mother seems to be a strong indication of the alignment with her and the empathy that she feels.

Because his mum shared everything with him... (Judy 41)

### ***Parenting role and family absorption***

The level of empathetic response to the bereaved families may be unusual in comparison with the usual interactions that take place between the head teacher of a school and the families of their children. This can be further seen in the way that the head teachers, in their differing ways, developed a parenting role which seems to be beyond the role of in loco parentis (In place of the parents) that schools are familiar with. Some of the data from these subordinate themes seems almost to suggest that taking on some of the roles that the head

teacher did take on were almost akin to being absorbed into the bereaved family.

Jane indicates this level of family involvement quite early as she describes her delight in including John in school when this was not expected to be possible. (Jane 47) The use by Jane of the collective pronoun 'we' which was described earlier also suggests this. (Jane 47 and 60)

The first indications that John was deteriorating and in danger of dying were when a member of the school staff asked if they could give, what appears to be, the personal phone number of the head teacher to the parents of John. This is something that the head teacher readily agrees to and as such it has the feel of taking on a very close role similar to other family members. The response of the head teacher in using the first name of the mother is some confirmation of this position. Her language too is indicative of this when she declares that, 'obviously I agreed.'

I had a phone call from, I had a text from a mid-day supervisor who said could she give my phone number to Mr Smith Err she didn't put any reasons but she said it was very important. So obviously I agreed to that and Pat rang me.... (Jane 76 – 79)

Such a relationship which at first sight can seem very positive can also, of course, bring with it unwanted responsibilities as Jane found when she was asked to visit John in the hospice. Her difficulties with this have been described above in relation to the grief spill-over issue with her brother. (Jane 138 -139) There are indications that John's family drew on this relationship perhaps for their own support by telephoning the head teacher on a daily basis to give her updates on his condition. The language of Jane in using the first name of the mother is again some confirmation of this and suggests that she continued to accept this role despite it creating some significant difficulties for her.

I was giving them an update on what Pat was sending me to say what state John was in. (Jane 198 – 199)

Pat described a number of examples of how she took on a parenting role with the family of Steven. Many of the example relate to her role with his brother. In

some cases she interprets his brother's behaviour in relation to the family for example 'feeling pushed out' (Pat 66) during the time when Steven needed much care from his parents. In response to this view of the situation Pat undertook to compensate for it by doing lots of talking with him (Pat 67) and 'keeping an eye on him'. (Pat 68)

Later when talking about her visit to see Steven when he was dying Pat reports that she and his brother still laugh about something that happened during the visit. (Pat 157) The fact that she still discusses this episode with Steven's brother seems to demonstrate the nature of her role and relationship with the family. It appears as if it may also be a further way of supporting him after he had seemed to be neglected.

Pat also describes how Steven's brother finds her if she has been off school for any reason and seeks special time with her. (Pat 727 - 728) He also seeks her out if there are issues with other children that he is finding difficulties with.

He does like to have that time and he is finding that sort of every day issues that children normally go through something like he had had an argument with a boy about whether they were out or not at cricket and it was not resolved and he said oh I need you to have that meeting and can we can we invite John to it because there is a thing I want to ask...

(Pat 732 -736)

Perhaps the most striking example of the mothering role of Pat is where she compares her own relationship to Steven's brother with that of his mother when we discuss how he might move on from the close relationship with her. Pat highlights the issues of support for Steven's brother but perhaps importantly the way that she has replaced mum in this support role. She is the one he talks to:

Yes but I think he will be all right. Yes. And he has got like a group of people who and he knows that people will talk about it. And he can talk quite openly about it where that whereas his mum says he won't talk about it at all at all he won't talk about it at all. (Pat 765 – 767)

Pat reaffirms this in a later discussion the issue of open talking between Steven's brother, herself and other children.

He tells us everything how he is feeling. (Pat 771)

There is evidence also that Pat is absorbed into the family by the events of Steven's illness and death. This is illustrated in the language Pat uses showing how close to the family she had become with indications that she and Steven's brother had formed a mutually supportive relationship:

He did with me a bit but he wasn't talking with his mum well he still isn't but I think that was because we could talk about things and you don't have to risk upsetting somebody else about that so talking to Andrew really helped me a lot and talking with or listening mainly with the circle of support group for Andrew was a big help. (Pat 321 - 325)

Later when I asked Pat to reflect on whether she might have done anything differently she returns to the issue of the communication that she established with Steven's family and uses a very interesting form of words which suggests that she felt placed centrally within the family.

Because our family were so good with us and telling us along the way and mum will talk about it she talked about the Christmas and everything she is open (Pat 602 – 604)

There is a little evidence that Margaret also formed a close relationship with Steven's family as she too refers to his mother by her first name.

### ***Family conflict***

In contrast to Jane and Pat there is with Rosemary little to indicate that she developed a parenting role with the family which was beyond the usual in loco parentis. While describing to me the events in school during the initial stages of William's illness Rosemary uses a form of language which places her thoughts clearly within the family. She uses the collective 'we' in her description.

Well er... at Christmas time 2010 he came back after that and he and er... had a kind of quite persistent ear ache and he wasn't that well and Mum kept taking him to the doctors and we were quite worried about him because he seemed quite lethargic.... (Rosemary 63 – 66)

Also when discussing her concerns for the surviving siblings Rosemary shows closeness to them:

I mean we've always had concerns about the emotional well-being of those children I guess. I mean I think I'm quiet alert to er... er ... that the children the four children that in school. Er... (Rosemary 621 – 623)

These two examples are not supported by further evidence from the interview with Rosemary. Indeed, what becomes clear from the interview is more suggestive of conflict with the family. This is not in any sense open conflict. It is more conflicting thoughts and attitudes developed by Rosemary as events unfold for this particular head teacher.

The first indications in my interview with Rosemary of this are apparent when she is describing how the school had to make arrangements to keep William there when clearly they thought him too unwell to be present in school. The language of Rosemary in this description is also indicative of this 'we finally said' and 'it's not right' both signal these thoughts.

... we didn't actually feel that he was quite right and the you know we would have to you know organise sort of groups or allow him a bit longer in the nurture room or you know look after him because he didn't seem well er... and this this kind of went on for some time and then she finally we finally said I think you need to kind of it's not right there is something wrong and she took him to the hospital (Rosemary 74 – 78)

Later Rosemary seems to indicate some conflict in her thoughts again in talking about returning to school after a serious operation. She seems to indicate that he should not perhaps be in school contrary to his parents' wishes. This difference is also apparent in the language chosen when she describes, in the same passage of conversation, the fact that William was seen out in the local community.

... but actually all through treatment and he had some teeth removed and part of his tongue removed and he did actually come back to school and even in the Easter holidays he had had the operation and he was seen out with the rest of the family she has got an older daughter, step-daughter who is quite heavily involved in the child care and he was seen



out with the rest of the gang kind of shopping and going to the library.  
(Rosemary 86 – 91)

During our conversation about William's funeral there develop differences in the family thinking and that of the head teacher. These differences are apparent in what is said and the language chosen to describe the thoughts.

... there were just things about the funeral who were you know at our had parts of them missing, drips, no hair, thin, just ghostly which I found really upsetting. The pictures on the coffin were all of William in his illness like glorifying almost the illness which I felt very sad about. (Rosemary 494 – 498)

Rosemary makes further comments on the pictures at the funeral by explaining that she had not done the same in school in the memorial book which is indicative of different thinking.

Anyway and I did make the decision not to have any of the later photographs of him when he was ill. I don't know whether that's the right or not... (Rosemary 569 – 570)

Rosemary also refers to the teaching assistant's comments about some of the siblings not knowing about the funeral in a way that seems to indicate a further difference with the family:

They thought their older brothers weren't at school because they been to the dentist. So I don't really know how much the younger children actually know about what's what's really happened.

Rosemary: No but but that was sort of the icing on the cake wasn't it?  
(Rosemary 529 – 533)

It is perhaps important to view these differences with the family within the context of the aim which Rosemary had of containing the emotions around William's death.

There is little in the interview with Judy to indicate that she took on a parenting role with the bereaved family or that she was drawn into the family actions and

emotions. At one point in our discussions about the support that the head teacher received Judy describes the fact that she considered Andrew's mother to have been a 'massive support' to her (Judy 327 – 328). There are additionally some instances of the use of Andrew's mother's first name (Judy 272). Also Judy goes on to express some admiration of the way in which Andrew's mother coped with all of the difficulties but this appears to be the extent of the closeness that was achieved.

### ***Family demands and support***

Perhaps inevitably with high levels of involvement with the family of children who die there also comes a level of demand as was illustrated in the demands made upon Jane to visit John in the hospice. Some of the demand engenders support from the head teacher, though these demands can trigger other responses too. Demand on the part of bereaved family is not necessarily overt indeed it may not be real though it may be perceived as such.

Some of the demand is at a low level such as the aspiration of John's parents to have him included in school (Jane 38 - 39) which the head teacher is pleased to support. Other demand is at a higher level as illustrated for Jane above. The particular demand referred to there also led to other overt demands which were equally hard for the head teacher to deal with.

Jane is faced with the difficult decision of also asking staff about their wishes in respect of the issue of visiting John at the hospice. Her description of this and the language used indicates that this also was perhaps unwelcome.

The comment; do I think that other staff would want to visit was very difficult because she was leaving that in my court to say... to ring up, in the holidays, certain members of staff asking them if they wanted to go to the hospice (Jane 168 – 170)

This is a complex form of demand since making the request of any member of staff indicates something about them in respect of the choice but also it effectively then gives that member of staff little choice in how they respond. This is perhaps another example of the influence of, 'De mortuis nil nisi bonum dicendum est'. On this occasion Jane finds an acceptable way of managing this

by asking all the staff to decide for themselves. The description of this event illustrates the demand level which the head teacher felt.

...if anybody would like to join to visit John please contact me and we will discuss the logistics. And I thought that way I'm not.... I'm not the one who's saying you can go and visit the hospice but you can't. So I did do an open invitation. (Jane 178 – 181)

This demand level increases on John's death when the head teacher is asked again if she would like to visit and see him now that he had died. The head teacher sees this as a 'step too far' and declines for herself and for other staff.

We had the request again if we wanted to go and see John I made the decision that.... thank you very much that on behalf of the school I did not offer that to any other member of staff. (Jane 288 – 291)

Jane goes on to explain how she is aware that John's mother wishes the school to be involved in his funeral. There are, however, indications in how Jane describes this issue that the family wishes for this involvement create a demand which she perceives rather than, as before, is explicitly asked about. The use of 'she wanted' perhaps indicates this perception.

So she had a very clear idea as John had died of what she wanted to happen for the funeral itself and she wanted the school to be involved with him. (Jane 294 – 296)

The head goes on to expand this further and the whole of this passage is spoken in a way that indicates high demand from the family but with almost incredulity on the part of Jane. This relates to the funeral arrangements.

She said she said she wanted the school involved within the funeral and she was.... she was saying things such as John is going to be buried in his school uniform that she wanted the hearse to stop at the top of that drive. She was very clear about her expectations what she wanted for the funeral. I found that a quite a lots of pressure on the school. I felt stopping at the top of the drive we had to honour that request... but what I didn't want to do is put any of those children at any greater stress and made worse.... (Jane 301 – 307)

What is apparent from this passage is the conflict felt by Jane around meeting family demands for the funeral, ensuring the wellbeing of the children and the needs of the other families. The head teacher has to resolve this issue by finding an appropriate compromise which was supportive for the bereaved family and for the rest of the school community.

... so the decision was that I told the parents of the plan and said if they wish to take their child to see the hearse pass they could but as a school we did not do any anything as a collectively. (Jane 307 – 310)

The issue of demand on Margaret is of a different nature and relates to the support provided by the school for Steven's brother. As Margaret describes the way the family felt about their own support it becomes apparent that the more disappointment that the family expressed the more important it was for the head teacher to meet their needs in school. Disappointment was expressed in the school nurse (Margaret 383) in the hospital support services (Margaret 373), the McMillan nurse (Margaret 360) and the Vicar. (Margaret 353)

In contrast to this Pat reports that Steven's mother is satisfied with the support that the school is providing for his brother. This would probably create a demand for that support to continue under the circumstances of their earlier disappointment. The language that she uses has a slightly defensive feel about it which perhaps confirms this.

She was so worried about Andrew. Andrew's behaviour not wanting to come to school and feeling like he is being bullied and things weren't right and that's her concern about Andrew is the key thing and the lack of support for him that she felt. But she actually said that he was getting enough at school didn't she when she had seen that so she wasn't bothered about whether they did or they didn't. (Pat 375 – 380)

For Rosemary there was a mixture of demand levels from the family of William. There appears to be in her language the implication that it was not easy working with the family. It would seem from what is said about 'up and down periods' that the involvement and demand level could be high with the head teacher trying to support the family in some unusual areas such as finance.

Mum can be quite fiery at times and er... she certainly had up and down periods and you know was flagging up issues and worries and there was .... we helped sort out financial problems in terms of them accessing hospital and things. (Rosemary 37 – 39)

There were also demands related to how William's illness should be described in school. The family initially did not want the school to use the word cancer but later on deciding that they did want then to use the word.

... she was categoric about it not being publicised as cancer and then they're quite rapidly changed and she did want every everybody to know (Rosemary 84 – 85)

Later Rosemary is faced with having siblings in school all day not knowing that their brother has died. It was at the parents' request that the school took the siblings in for the day though William had died and the siblings were unaware of this. In describing this, the language used by Rosemary indicates that although she acceded to the request the demand level was high and she appears unhappy with having to do this.

And I did have to do that thing saying that actually they going to be told at the end of the school er. mum was wanted to send them to school so they can deal with William's body and have some you know time and sort things out. (Rosemary 222 – 224)

Perhaps the most overt high level demand that Rosemary has to contend with is a request from the family to prepare a speech that was to be delivered at the funeral by a member of the family. Such a speech must have required a considerable effort in order to produce the required level of sensitivity, particularly knowing that it was to be delivered by someone else and where she had no control over the additions, emphasis and intonation. (Rosemary 289)

For Judy there were some demands from the family of Andrew though these were not high level demands. None-the-less these were recounted with a vague sense of criticism which may well be a consequence of the head teacher having little choice but to comply with them.

During our discussion of the head teacher's involvement with the larger community around Andrew's death she describes Andrew's mother's actions.

I think his mum his mum was sort of out and about one thing wanting everybody to to to take part and the funeral as well you know she came and she kind of said you can bring one rose well one flower er... and I don't know how I don't know what happened but there was just she loads of people there at the funeral loads of people in the community. (Judy 173 – 177)

There is something vaguely critical in the language used in this passage 'his mum was sort of out and about' and 'wanting everybody to take part in the funeral.' Judy perhaps feels other people as well as herself were pushed into things. One example of the perceived demand here is seen in (Judy 181) when the head teacher describes sending a letter to all the parents of the school to inform them about Andrew's funeral. With Andrew's mother being 'out and about' it is likely that the community already knew and the letter therefore can be seen as an action that is the 'right' thing to do in response to the family demand level.

During our discussion of how the head teacher dealt with the family issues when asked directly whether the family had sought anything from her Judy responds with a firm 'no.' (Judy 212) This is interesting in the light of the previous discussion and suggests perhaps that the demand level was unrecognised.

Andrew's mother is described in a way by Judy that suggests that she had a considerable resilience and the relationship between the head teacher and the mother appears to be mutually supportive rather than one directional. In talking about support (Judy 327 – 328) the head teacher describes mum as providing 'massive support.' A little later in the same discussion the head teacher shows supportive admiration for the mother:

Because she was she was so she's such a little lady really little and very slim and she would have to carry him around and I don't know she didn't have er... the father wasn't with them so she was sort of managing on

her own and I think that sort of example as well to everybody was incredible so I suppose that was her really support.... (Judy 332 – 336)

In this section the data provided by the head teacher interviews indicates a variety of ways in which they develop the empathetic relationship with the bereaved family. There are indications that they are 'living' the illness and death with the family by staying closely in touch with the family and sharing their aspirations and disappointments. They show that they take on parenting roles and respond to the changes in demand that the families make of them and they respond to the issues of support that arise for them.

### **Superordinate theme 3 - Interactions with the school community**

#### ***Competing demands***

Head teachers are used to dealing with competing demands within the school community. Indeed their role is frequently to prioritise which of the competing demands should be met first or met at all. In organising the teaching resources within a school to meet the range of learning needs of the children is perhaps their major task. This should mean that the inclusion of a very ill child in a school community is part of the usual major task of the head teacher and should not create insurmountable difficulties in our current inclusive climate.

This is well illustrated by Jane in her inclusion of John when it was thought by his parents that this would not be possible. Though there were many meetings and a need for external support this was achieved much to the pleasure of the head teacher and the parents. (Jane 32 – 39)

When a child in the school dies there is a new set of demands which are hard to resist. They have little to do with the teaching needs of the staff and the learning needs of the children. Indeed, these new demands can be intrusive and may disrupt the major task of the head teacher and as such create very significant difficulties. At other times the competing demands are personal and can in these circumstances be distracting or upsetting to the head teacher.

The delight that Jane has in the success when managing the competing demands that develop during her inclusion of John in school is in contrast to the impact of the competing demands that develop later when John has died.

The arrangements for John's funeral present Jane with significant competing demands. She makes a clear admission that she feels the pressure to meet the demands of both the bereaved family and the rest of the school community. Although the head teacher refers to pressure on the school it is, of course, pressure on her as she has to make the decision.

I found that quite a lot of pressure on the school. I felt stopping at the top of the drive we had to honour that request... but what I didn't want to do is put any of those children at any greater stress... (Jane 304 – 307)

The management of grief within the school presents Jane with some difficulties. She felt that some children were 'moving on' when the grief of the family was still acute.

.... is in a way expect them to continue the grief because the family were continuing the grief. And I felt that we'd almost been forced to continue that grieving process when some of the children would automatically move on themselves so it was getting that balance. (Jane 331 – 338)

Jane also experiences competing demands that arise from the work that she undertakes in school to inform and support the children in a way that is appropriate to their own feelings after John has died. There is not a universal attitude among the parents of the children in school to talking about death and she has to balance these demands carefully so as not to upset members of the school community.

There are a lot of parents.... like why are we talking about death to young children it is not appropriate. So it was getting that very fine balance of addressing it because it is something that is going to happen and it is better for the children to have those life skills to be able to cope with death and bereavement in a controlled environment than parents who can't support the child themselves. (Jane 356 – 361)



Jane goes on to illustrate that with respect to the funeral arrangements this balance is complicated by the fact that there are cultural and religious issues. These decisions are made more complicated in her school as they have an 8% ethnic minority population of children.

... obviously this was a Christian burial and how Christians believe in death and that.... we had to do some very quick research about what other religions did and my knowledge was not that good and my year one teacher in particular was very concerned about her knowledge and she was coming to me for confirmation and checking on the understanding and so together we had to be clued up very quickly. We had to do research to make sure that we weren't offending other religions. (Jane 368 – 374)

Jane also finds that there are competing demands created by other agencies that are in touch with the school. She discovers that there are people who come to the school to express their own sorrow which she has to accept on behalf of the school while managing her own feelings.

So it is very difficult 'cause you do feel like you are faced with you are fronting the school you are the buffer all the time and... quite interesting it was all the other agencies as well who seem to want to come here to talk about how sad they were... (Jane 386 – 388)

In addition to the more widespread competing demands referred to above, Jane was also aware of special cases of children within her school who had experienced the suicide of a parent recently. This creates further complications for her management of the grief in school.

... talking about a child when obviously for the death of their father was more important to them then than the death of John. It was trying to get that balance all the time. (Jane 428 – 430)

There are further competing demands for the head teacher to contend with at the funeral when she has to decide whether she should go to the wake. Part of the issue in these circumstances is related to the different behavioural norms that might be expected of her in this situation.

... obviously, obviously we want that partnership... that it is a very different relationship when you are sitting there afterwards having a laugh and a joke or a cry and I felt that it was more appropriate that we make our presence but then we don't stay for the.... (Jane 448 – 451)

Finally, Jane experiences competing demands over the nature of the memorial for John which is resolved finally by the creation of a train in the school grounds which children could play on.

The competing demands seem to begin for Pat when she visits Steven at home after he deteriorates. She finds how it is necessary to step out of her role as head teacher and use different standards of behaviour. The acceptance of rudeness and swearing does illustrate the competing demands she faced. She visits the family and responds with behaviour that she would not normally show. She is helped by use of pretence of being shocked.

... they had bought they had brought his brother just a little what is called a farting toilet which has got this gunge stuff in it and you push it in the toilet and there are splats of air that come out and make sort of rude noises and his little brother was playing with that which I was pretending to be like really shocked saying, "oh my goodness". And then so Steven started giggling things and so it was alright and he kept and he was swearing a bit ... (Jane46 – 151)

There are also competing demands for Pat when she is told of the death of Steven. The emotional impact on her is contained as she describes having to inform the rest of the staff despite being upset.

Well I was sort of I pulled myself together with mum and then I thought well I need to tell the rest of the staff as well before they go so I did tell all the staff er... they were all quite upset they were very upset some of them (Pat 103 – 105)

Margaret also experiences these competing demands when the children in Steven's class are told of his death and are 'distraught'. Margaret makes the decision to abandon the school work and provide the children with distracting

activities. In this way she enables the children to deal with their distress by choosing to ignore the usual work ethic of the school.

I read them a story and some of them did perk up then but there was a small group of about half a dozen that er...we took them back to class and we just said you know there is no work this morning we got out lots of things to distract them. The children who were still crying ... (Margaret 214 – 217)

The issue of closing the school to accommodate those from the school community who wished to attend Steven's funeral provides Margaret with strongly competing demands. There were pressures from staff and children, who wanted to attend, to close the school but there were also others who felt that it would be wrong to do so. The head teacher decides to seek advice on this issue from external sources within the local authority but is told that she should make the decision. In her description Margaret indicates how uncertain she was over this issue and resolved it by giving those who wanted to attend cover so that they could do so. It is a difficult dilemma and the head teacher must consider what the bereaved family would have thought had she denied staff and children the right to go.

I was under some pressure to close the whole school that day there were some people that you know some parents and a couple of members of staff who said we shouldn't close the whole school. (Margaret 439 – 441)

It is almost the people who wanted to go to the funeral could attend but if the school could carry on with the staff who er...weren't going to the funeral it was almost as long as the school could function and stay open for the funeral I thought that would be the wisest choice. (Margaret 448 – 451)

Rosemary like Jane demonstrates her ability to manage what I have described as the usual competing demands of the school by ensuring William's inclusion despite his illness and disconcerting appearance after chemotherapy. She describes this success by saying:

... and he lost his hair and things and the rest of the school I actually I don't think there was much fuss er.. he was in class... (Rosemary 108 – 109)

This is confirmed later when Rosemary explains that there were worries about William's presence in school after the operation but indicates that the school worked hard to integrate him despite these concerns.

so he was actually er... quite well integrated throughout and was just adjusted and adapted very well and actually we we were quite worried about this whole strategy of you know you've been to the hospital and then he's back in you know (Rosemary 123 – 126)

On the news of William's death Rosemary is faced with the competing demands of the expression of emotions in the school and need to continue the learning processes. The emotional climate of the school is changed and she tries to ensure that the school routines continue as a way of containing these emotions and maintaining the learning routines in school.

... because we we are a challenging school. Emotions tend to get out of control and also the children do need a kind of studying routine keep things you know and she had started making all these cards and publicising ... (Rosemary 176 – 178)

Later Rosemary describes meeting with the staff in which she offers sources of help. This is for the management of the emotions that were being displayed in the school. The head teacher does this while at the same time being faced with the need to contain the emotions and maintain the work ethic.

... a series of meetings to er... make sure that all of the staff were aware but not kind of going into this grieving process although I was preparing them for it. So I had three meetings and also it was quite difficult because I say there are materials here that you can access and read and that might help you kind of think ahead and you know also like I think I mean it was I said that well people were getting emotional and I think also I was sort of saying and also everyone's had experience of some kind of loss and bereavement and it kind of triggers things off... (Rosemary 191 – 197)

In a description of how she informed the school about William's death Rosemary also indicates that there are competing demands to inform yet maintain the use of appropriate language during the process.

Well I had to wrestle... well communication how to comm... know how to phrase things and how to do it in public way but also to allow people some time to talk to other people... (Rosemary 253 – 255)

In marking William's death in school Rosemary clearly felt competing demands in school in saying, 'I was really quite worried.' This is repeated (Rosemary 261) and relates to the wide age range of the children that needed to be considered in the assembly.

... But also... I was really quite worried about how I was going to mark it in a kind of almost ritualistic kind of ceremonial way and I was quite worried about that because I'm not I'm not a religious person and but obviously you've got to do do assemblies and then I was quite worried about how to you know go from nursery through to year six. How to communicate things in a symbolic as well as a sort of language that was accessible to everybody in assemblies (Rosemary 258 - 264)

Judy Experiences competing demands when the death of Andrew becomes widely known in school. In particular his own classmates are distressed and the head teacher decides that learning should be abandoned in favour of allowing the children to grieve. She decides that Andrew's class needs this as opposed to the alternative strategy, which others use, which is to keeping the children's minds off the death and continue to focus on learning.

Judy also recognises one teacher's particular vulnerability and she clearly found it hard but necessary to support that teacher's grief yet she also knows also that, 'they still have to do their job.'

... also there was one member of staff who was incredibly close to Andrew and er... she knew it was going to happen but it was still so hard and it was just and trying to maintain the allowing staff to grieve but also they still had to do their job. They still had to come into school and teach with and has it as it happened that week for this for this particular teacher was a very difficult week for her and you know I just had to be conscious

of that and aware of it and be going in and making sure that she was okay. (Judy 148 – 156)

This dilemma is apparent later when Judy is talking to me more generally about the difficulty in managing the school's continued learning while also recognising the needs of staff to grieve. There is a sense here of her awareness of these competing demands when she uses the phrase, "it was not as if it was you know out of the blue." (Judy 160) Recognition on one hand of grief but on the other that the staff knew it was coming so why can't it be managed so that the school can continue to function.

There are also difficulties for Judy later when she is describing the process for deciding on a memorial for Andrew. She begins to describe the mechanisms in place in school of which one is the school council. They eventually decided on a memorial after there has been much debate about the nature of the memorial. It seems to be the head teacher's way of ensuring that everyone has a say in the decision rather than just her.

... we came up with lots of different ideas like a den or or a garden or all sorts of different ideas and then the councilors took those ideas to the classes and they voted and the final vote is that they want to have a car made out of stone. (Judy 250 -254)

A little later in using the phrase, 'the whole school decided' (Judy 263) the head teacher is able to reconcile these competing demands. This is despite the fact that this is unlikely but it is a mechanism for dealing with differing ideas and emotions.

This issue is returned to later in the interview when I ask about the timing of the memorial. There is a sense of procrastination in the head teacher's comment, "We have taken ever such a long time so I am imagining in the summer term." It may well be a further example of the need to be seen to do something that she is perhaps not fully supportive of. (Judy 433 – 435) There are further hints in the language she uses of the hesitation felt on this issue, "We just need to raise the money to pay for it and so I will be writing to parents asking if anybody wants to make a donation."

Judy indicates, perhaps, that her choice might be a garden as this is less obvious than a stone car. The garden might blend in better with the school environment and help more from the point of view of moving on.

And it and I think it's interesting because adults would think of gardens you know that was my first thought we got some grassy areas over there we'll create a garden for Andrew but the children were much more sort of Andrew focused if you like. (Judy 445 – 448)

One further mechanism which the head teacher describes is a balloon release. This can be seen as a method that enables everyone to display their own message and avoid competing demands. (Judy 267)

A little later Judy elaborates on the competing demands between her public and private behaviour. She does not wish to show her grief in front of the staff or children as she feels that this would be an inappropriate model for them. In this description she shows that she is aware of her own grief. She feels that she should only display it outside the school when she is a private person and not the head teacher of the school. She goes on to demonstrate that there is a tension in this perspective as on the arrival of the Educational Psychologist she is enabled to display her personal grief. This is in the privacy of her office rather than in her own home. This tension is demonstrated in the use of the phrase, 'such a relief.'

... because I knew that I had to be I had to be er... a role model if you like I suppose, for everybody you know if I sort of burst into tears in front of the staff and whatever, then how are they going to handle their grief because their leader if you like is falling apart and I knew that I couldn't do that and I thought and I honestly didn't think that I was going to and I thought I will be able to go home when I'll be able to grieve myself but when Jane came it was just it was really it was such a relief that I was able to just be with her and just be a human being and not a head teacher. (Judy 310 – 317)

The issue of a school closure which was faced by all the head teachers is less of a problem for Judy as the funeral of Andrew took place on the day when the school was closed for staff training. None-the-less the head teacher recognises

this as a competing demand situation as she is clearly relieved that she did not have to make that decision.

Well as it happened it was on an inset day. So and so I didn't have to make that decision about whether to close the school er... and I still don't know what I would have done. (Judy 344 – 346)

She shows the uncertainty about the issue which others displayed but comments that with retrospective knowledge she would probably have closed the school. (Judy 350 - 352) The level of difficulty over this decision is indicated by Judy returning to it once again when describing the funeral when she uses the phrase, “So that was a decision I did not have to make which I am grateful for...” (Judy 378)

### ***Buffering***

It is perhaps natural that during times of stress, which are beyond those usually experienced in school, there should be an increase in a different response from the head teacher. This is the response of that I have referred to as buffering. Though it is also a role with which head teachers are familiar. Buffering is the response of acting to protect those in the school community in some way that enables the major functions of the school to continue when some form of stress is experienced. There is much evidence of this response from the head teachers in this research. They undertook this role during the dying and the death of the children when stresses were experienced.

Jane introduces the term buffer unprompted when describing one of her major roles on hearing of the death of John. This is, perhaps, for her made more important as she feels the impact of the death of her brother acutely and the grief spill-over effect means that she was very shocked by the news. She wished to protect everyone and lessen the impact on them.

I think that was useful so I could then work as a buffer as well and protect the staff because in hindsight as well the staff everybody, everybody suffered and it's a shock. I know how much of a shock it was for me and I wanted to lessen that blow for the rest of the staff as well. (Judy 114 – 117)



A later example of this response became clear during the discussion around visiting John at the hospice, when it was known that he was dying. John's parents' asked if other members of staff would like to visit the hospice. At this point the head teacher recognises that this will present staff with a difficult decision, as they may not wish to visit, but might find this request difficult to refuse. In passing this on the head teacher begins the buffering by using the word 'news' rather than 'request.' (Jane 177) and then buffers the situation further by enabling staff to discuss it with her rather than the parents. The head teacher is then able to use logistics as part of the protective buffering for those who do not want the visit and as a reason that she can use to explain to parents in a way that protects the staff.

She said do I think any staff would want to go? So I took quite a while thinking about that and in the end I contacted the staff to give them the news. Err I said I am there for them to talk to me if they want to talk further with me about anything err and that is if anybody would like to join me to visit John please contact me and we will discuss the logistics. And I thought that way I'm not.... I'm not the one who's saying you can go and visit the hospice but you can't. So I did do an open invitation. (Jane 175 – 181)

A further form of buffering undertaken by Jane was that of acting as an intermediary between John's family and the staff of the school. This was particularly prevalent during the time leading up to John's death. The family were in contact with the school on a daily basis as the head teacher describes, keeping the staff constantly informed. (Jane 202)

... he was still alive when we came back to school. Err but I think one of the most important things is that the staff were constantly informed all of what was happening. Because it's the not knowing isn't it? Yes! And that anxiety, the staff found that very useful that we all knew what was happening. (Jane 201 – 204)

Later when John had died Jane continues this role of buffering staff when there is a request from the bereaved family for members of staff to visit and see John's body. Here the head teacher makes a firm decision that this should not

be passed on to staff over a weekend, recognising that this was staff family time. She therefore buffers the staff from this decision.

... request again if we wanted to go and see John I made the decision that... thank you very much that on behalf of the school I did not offer that to any other member of staff. I thought this was their family time and it was not for others to go and visit John after the death. (Jane 289 – 292)

As well as buffering for the staff there is evidence in what Jane told me of other forms of buffering too, this was for the children. The arrangement made by the bereaved family to halt the funeral cortège at the top of the school drive was felt by the head teacher to be something that may be too stressful for the children. In order to buffer this she decided that she would allow parents to take their children out of school should they wish to, in order to be present at the school gates. In this way the head teacher was seeking to protect the children from undue stress.

... we had to honour that request... but what I didn't want to do is put any of those children at any greater stress and made worse... so the decision was that I told the parents of the plan and said if they wish to take their child to see the hearse pass they could but as a school we did not do any anything as a collectively. (Jane 306 - 310)

The head teacher further buffered the children on the day of the funeral by indicating a less direct way of paying respect to John than by being at the school gates. This was by wearing an item of orange clothing as this was John's favourite colour. (Jane 314)

There is a particular concern for the children by Jane in the two week period when John was dying and the community was awaiting the funeral. She sees the need to protect them from the grief that is around in the community. Some of the children were 'moving on' and the head teacher had to achieve a balance in the school between respect, grieving, learning and normality.

Yes! It was their grief. But a week for waiting for John to die which is what we were doing, and then a week of build up to the funeral two weeks in school... a school life for some children who, children are very

day by day very young children oh yes John has died they were upset but they would move on the next day and what we did not want to do is (long pause).... is in a way expect them to continue the grief because the family were continuing the grief. And I felt that we'd almost been forced to continue that grieving process when some of the children would automatically moved on themselves so it was getting that balance. (Jane 330 – 338)

Finally, there is evidence that Jane had to act as a buffer for the other parents in the school and for some of the other agencies that support the school. Both groups wanted information and to be able to express their grief and the head teacher had to take on this additional role of buffering for them.

Err a lot of the parents wanted to come and talk (Jane 250)

So it is very difficult 'cause you do feel like you are faced with you are fronting the school you are the buffer all the time and.... quite interesting it was all the other agencies as well who seem to want to come here to talk about how sad they were and I think sometimes very much I felt.... (Jane 386 – 389)

For Pat the buffering begins for her when she seeks, and gets, advice from Steven's mother on how to prepare the staff and children for his death.

... mum had come to prepare us. So we could prepare the children and the staff. (Pat 187 - 188).

We have got assemblies ready. We had got things to say to the staff. We got the day that, 'The Day the Sea Went Out.' (Pat 198 – 199)

When the news of Steven's death came into the school the head teacher decided that the children were too upset to learn. She abandons the learning processes in favour of stories and other distractions in order to protect the children from the upset that they were feeling. The head teacher makes the decision that distraction rather than supported grieving is the most appropriate course of action as a form of buffering.

And then I stayed in the morning in with his class because obviously his classmates were really distraught when I went to tell them some of them already knew. I think 90% of them were in tears and it was a you know it was a nice day weather wise so the teacher and I took them all outside and we we went for a walk round the school grounds and then we went up and sat up the front of the school. There is a story chair and we sat up there and I read them a story and some of them did perk up then but there was a small group of about half a dozen that er...we took them back to class and we just said you know there is no work this morning we got out lots of things to distract them. (Pat 208 – 217)

Later, in describing to me what she might advise colleague head teachers to do in circumstances of having a child die, Pat is clear in saying that she would advise that they 'watch out' for the staff. (Pat 659) She here seems to be indicating the need to buffer the staff from the effects that the death might have on them.

For Rosemary there is evidence of buffering the school community when talking to me about the events during the illness leading to the death of William. She signals that the conflicting views that are apparent about the responses of children to William's appearance are worrying. In the interactions she has with the family these conflicting views have become more overt and Rosemary feels the need to defend others in the school community.

... operations and you know part of you know his face and he couldn't talk and he had a really difficult eating and so he had a feed and but you know you would be coming for hours in the day he had a personal tutor but initially mum was really angry about children making comments and we had to have you know well children will and it's not necessarily you know negative notice it's just notice and er... (Rosemary 93 – 98)

The following is an example of the need for this buffering illustrated during this part of the discussion.

He felt quite embarrassed and quite withdrawn initially and you know he would take somebody you know making an overture to him as, "they're

picking on me” or something so or that's what he'd relate to mum it wasn't the case you know. (Rosemary 102 – 105)

Rosemary then goes on to demonstrate some protective buffering of the school when there is some implied criticism of them. William was said not to have liked his personal tutor and this is explained by the head teacher when she says that, “He did not bond with her.” (Rosemary 118) The buffering of the school community is then taken a step further by the head teacher who seems to place the tutor outside the school community by saying that, “She actually looked more out of place than he did most of the time.” (Rosemary 122)

Later in describing to me the relationship with William's mother during his illness the head teacher again feels the need to protect the other children in William's family. This protection was from the anger that William's mother sometimes displayed in school. This form of buffering of William's siblings suggests that Rosemary had concerns for them which required this intervention rather than confrontation with William's mother, which would have been difficult during this period. The language of Rosemary shows much hesitation at this point which is perhaps indicative of the uncertainty the head teacher felt about this buffering intervention.

So er... but then also er ...how to er... but mum was quite aggressive er ...and how to er... manage er... her in terms of her er... in terms of with er... other children as well I think. Because she would come in with something that was really upsetting her like she'd spent money on a bike for William and she couldn't and she couldn't get it back but she be quite angry with the other children and I was sort of trying to not create opportunities for there to be aggressive in front of them. Kind of. Er... So so it's a number of issues. Er... (Rosemary 272 – 278)

Rosemary later goes on to describe how upsetting the funeral was and makes particular reference to protecting the children from the sight of other 'ill' children who looked 'absolutely ghastly' (Rosemary 304 - 306)

Judy also describes preparations which she made in order to buffer the staff from the shock of Andrew's death which was at that time imminent. His death

followed the next day and she comments on the shock of this despite it being expected. (Judy 61) The head teacher clearly wished to protect the staff by preparing them for this news.

A further form of buffering was demonstrated by Judy in that she was aware of children who had experienced their own bereavements and who she therefore considered to be vulnerable at this time. She decided to ensure that the class teachers were aware of these vulnerabilities in order to offer the children as much protection as possible from grief spill-over.

There were some children who have had suffered bereavements in school who were in school currently and I needed to make sure that their teachers were aware because they had changed, the teachers had changed since the bereavements and that the children were okay and a special eye was kept out for them. (Judy 142 - 146)

### ***Emotional gradient***

There is evidence that some of the difficulties experienced by the head teachers described in this research were related to the issue of an emotional gradient. This is the different response that some individuals have to a bereavement than do others in the same community. It is not, however, something which is said overtly as to do so might offend the principle of, 'De mortuis nil nisi bonum dicendum est'. This gradient would be entirely expected on the basis of individual differences but it does complicate the issues for a head teacher in managing a school community where there are expectations of being seen to do the 'right thing'.

Some of this gradient is evident when considering the responses described earlier by Jane. Her own personal experiences of bereavement led her to be vulnerable to the emotions. (Jane 153 - 154) There was evidence of this difference among the children, some of whom were moving on more quickly than others, (Jane 333 – 334) as well as differences related to cultural variations. (Jane 367 - 368) They can be perceived in the differences of opinion among the staff surrounding the issue of attending John's funeral wake. (Jane 435 – 439)

This gradient of emotion is perhaps more obvious in the interview with Margaret and Pat. In her description of the emotional state of the staff on hearing of Steven's death Pat uses the following description.

Well I was sort of I pulled myself together with mum and then I thought well I need to tell the rest of the staff as well before they go so I did tell all the staff er... they were all quite upset they were very upset some of them and ... (Pat 103 -105)

The gradient is evident also when Margaret describes the attendance of staff at Steven's funeral. The language used indicates, perhaps, some disappointment in staff that did not go but excuses them by using the term 'new staff.'

Yes I think so some staff and we had got quite a few new staff and some staff didn't go you know they... they stayed in the school because they... they felt they didn't know him but those staff went and who had taught him who had had him in their class for a year I think it was very tough on them. (Margaret 526 – 530)

Margaret indicates the existence of this gradient among the children also. She decides to tell some classes individually herself but seems to feel that the younger children would be less aware and should be told by their teacher. (Margaret 201)

Rosemary confirms the view of her teaching assistant of the differing feelings of the children and staff in the school by indicating the need to take the lead on supporting children from them.

I think you got to take the lead from the children as well because they're not necessarily feeling what you feel... (Rosemary 584 – 585)

She also recognises that some children are more vulnerable (Rosemary 267)

More generally however, it can be implied in some of the earlier descriptions about members of staff becoming, 'hysterical.' (Rosemary 174) Also of the class teacher being the, 'worst.' (Rosemary 205)

For Judy the evidence she gave of the emotional gradient can be seen in her decision in respect of informing the children. The decision made by Judy has the sense of unnecessary rather than unwise which is indicative of the differences among the children.

And we thought well some of them would have known him but we thought we won't bring them in and we brought the four, fives and sixes in and ... (Judy 113 – 114)

Later when discussing Andrew's funeral Judy indicates that the emotional gradient also exists among parents. She indicates that she was aware of the range of feelings and possible expectations within the school community around closing the school for the funeral. Such a range of feelings can only be interpreted as part of this emotional gradient.

If I had been at the funeral and I if I'd already gone through the funeral and seen the number of people that were there and children then I probably would have said yes I will close the school. But you know you don't have to think of you know parents working and things like that but there were so many people there that I don't think I don't think anybody would... (Judy 350 - 354)

There is also evidence of this too in the attendance at the funeral wake.

A community and then when we came back we left the very close member of staff went to the funeral went to the wake er... but the rest of us didn't we just decided we wouldn't go... (Judy 391 - 393)

### ***Emotional isolation - external and family validation***

Head teachers are, perhaps, by the nature of their position in managing a large institution somewhat isolated from the rest of the school community. This is not to say that they are not included in anything but they do have some separation from the other staff and from the children because of their responsibility and the decisions that they have to make for the greater good.

It seems that one of the consequences of the buffering and the emotional gradient, that seems to be emerging in these schools after the death of a child, is that the head teacher develops a sense of isolation from those around them



in the school community. This engenders the need for external validation of the way that they manage the child's illness, dying and death. The competing demands and personal responses to the events seem to create more of a sense of this isolation than is usual. This leads therefore to the need for the validation of what the head teacher does by others outside the school.

For Jane there is evidence of her feeling of isolation apparent in her early comments when she heard of the death of John. She was at home at the time and despite modern communication technology she expresses this feeling of isolation quite overtly.

Stunned! Disbelief! To begin with err I was at home as well so you are isolated and when you are here with your computer and all your contacts. Err fortunately for me we had that meeting June July time when you said, "Are we aware of that service if there is a bereavement or critical incident I think is the word you used as well to contact the service." That was fresh in my mind and so it was that you were the first port of call. What do I do? I'd have never had any training how to deal with it and I think it was a 'knee jerk' reaction before I sat down and started I needed to talk to somebody before I could actually start to think of an action plan. (Jane 97 – 105)

The description given here by the head teacher can be seen as an indication of how much she felt distanced from her colleagues and how much she needed a reference point before beginning to manage the situation.

Later when discussing with me the way in which she coped with the death of John personally there is a sense here of being denied the right to grieve. Jane uses the concept of a 'front' to indicate that she was not able to display the emotions that she felt at the time. The expectations on her were that she would be able to manage and would have the 'answers' to the situations that were developing.

... daily. Hourly! After each phone call have I done right? Have I done that okay? Personally in school I felt I had to take on this front. In school I felt people thought I would have all the answers. People thought I knew how to deal with everything that was being thrown at us. Hopefully I gave

them the confidence that I did but there were many times when I'd be....  
oh my gosh! I.... what do I do next? Am I doing right? I doubt it. I  
analysed things to an extreme amount So it is very difficult 'cause you do  
feel like you are faced with you are fronting the school you are the buffer  
all the time and.... quite interesting it was all the other agencies as well  
who seem to want to come here to talk about how sad they were and I  
think sometimes very much I felt.... you actually came and said how am  
I? But very few people think of you as a person with your own feelings so  
I felt quite isolated. (Jane 380 – 391)

There are many aspects of this piece of the interview that indicate that the head teacher was feeling emotionally isolated at the time of learning of the death of John. The expressions of uncertainty that are scattered through the text are themselves indicators of the distancing that the head teacher felt. The emotions too are clearly powerful as she had been containing them for the sake of the school community. She mentions the issue of buffering in this context and this must have been difficult to contend with while feeling so uncertain. When I asked her how she was when I came as a visitor to the school at the time of John's death, her containment of the emotions was quite clear and she confirms this in the text. The last sentence is particularly powerful as an indicator of this emotional state.

Finally, during her reflections of the way that she managed the events around John's death Jane is very clear again about her feelings of loneliness and isolation.

Straight away one of my staff knew about the situation and she came to me for support. I wanted to offer that support because I did find it a very lonely time. And I wanted her to know that I just wanted to have a moment to scream kick the cat. A moment she could... you know I would be there if she wanted to talk to me. So... so I wanted to provide a network and you know when you said you were going to do this research I was more than happy because I did find it a very the very high highly stressful time. (Jane 521 – 527)

There is much in this extract that confirms the feelings that this head teacher experienced. There are overt comments about it feeling, 'a lonely time' again but there are also comments that indicate the need to be able to express the feelings which are expressed in the vernacular but none-the-less are indicative of their power. Additionally, Jane indicates the loneliness she feels by advocating a network which would, of course, have provided her with the support and contact that she wanted had it been in place. She also expresses the desire to provide a level of support that she did not experience. Once more the final sentence of the extract is indicative of the power of the emotions that she had.

The indications of the need for external validation are numerous in the interview of Jane and they begin early in the developing story of John's death. One of the comments made by the head teacher when she first hears of the death relates to speaking to someone on the outside.

Yes! Possibly it may have been different if I was in school because obviously I would have had the senior leadership team there had my deputy head there and we may have brainstormed what we do next. Err I wanted to talk to somebody removed from that and I think that was useful so I could then work ... (Jane 111 – 114)

Slightly later in the same conversation the head teacher tells me again about the need to speak to someone on the outside.

...was for me and I wanted to lessen that blow for the rest of the staff as well. So talking to somebody outside who was not involved was useful. (Jane 117 – 118)

When later discussing with me the impact of John's death on the wider school community it is clear that the range of views, which are present in the community, require that the head teacher has to find a balance in meeting all of the needs. The issue of balance, which indicates the need to be validated by the community, is mentioned a number of times in this short extract.

... and instead it was trying to get that balance and starting a new year how exciting it was the class but also an opportunity because obviously

the children were aware and the parents and the community were aware so it was trying to get that balance. It was very sad about John is very poorly and he is not going to live also getting the balance that we knew he was going to die. (Jane 240 – 244)

During our discussions of the funeral arrangements for John, Jane indicates the difficult decision making required in resolving conflict around children being taken out to see the hearse. Whatever she decided would not please all the community and this is a further indication of this need for validation.

... something orange and it was parents if they wanted to come and take their child out of school to the top of the drive they could but I said to the parents.... and we had about eight children who were collected from school taken to the top of the drive and then return to school. (Jane 316 - 319)

When John had died there is some indication of a real conflict of having the school grieve beyond what they would have done in order to satisfy the family. The language used by Jane at this point, 'oh yes John has died' indicates that there was an emotional gradient and in trying to meet all of the community needs the head teacher wanted her actions to be validated by them.

Yes! It was their grief. But a week for waiting for John to die which is what we were doing and then a week of build up to the funeral two weeks in school.... a school life for some children who, children are very day by day very young children oh yes John has died they were upset but they would move on the next day and what we did not want to do is (long pause).... is in a way expect them to continue the grief because the family were continuing the grief. (Jane 330 – 335)

Perhaps the strongest expression of the need for validation comes more overtly from the head teacher when discussing her own feeling and actions with me.

... but there were many times when I'd be.... oh my gosh! I.... what do I analysed things to an extreme amount daily. Hourly! After each phone call have I done right? How I done that okay? (Jane 383 – 385)

The work with the family resource worker that occurred during the events of John's death enabled the head teacher to seek and to give validation in her working relationship with another external professional.

... experience of death. I did and so we became colleagues rather than just a professional relationship where we could say we are doing okay! We are getting through it I did in the end get support from the family resource worker. (Jane 398 – 401)

There are indications also in the discussions of the head teacher's preparedness for these events that she wanted her actions validated externally. Jane wants to be reassured that she is not alone and may even be seeking some reassurance that she did well from someone with wider experience of death.

I think that it was that talking to you and almost reassurance that there is material, you are there, I'm not alone, it's happened so many times in Derbyshire it gets things into perspective. Yes! (Jane 552 – 554)

There is much uncertainty reflected in the use of the reassuring words that I used to the head teacher at the time. Jane seems to want to use my words to be reassured that she did act appropriately when we were discussing the issue of support. The language here is indicative of the need for a reference point. It is almost like attachment theory, proximity to the caregiver but safe to explore which gives this sense of need for validation.

It was that initial don't worry.... you know there are people who can support.... here is this material have a look at it if there is anything else I can do come back to me. For me that.... okay right what am I going to do how am I going to do it what is my action plan I have got some material let's have a look at the material. It.... it is almost like you are starting point. You're OK and then you can do your action plan. (Jane 562 – 567)

When closing the interview with Jane her use of a certain phrase is perhaps a further indication that she is still seeking validation that her actions were seen by me to be appropriate even at that stage well after the events of the death of John. It seems that the use of 'something to hang on to' is an expression of the need to be able to check out her actions with others.

Although it was only brief did give you something... something to hang on to the first contact you knew you could make a call and you knew there would be some information for you. So thanks again. (Jane 602 – 605)

There was an earlier example of this when I commented during the interview that the memorial service seemed to work well to which the head teacher responded very positively and seemed to enjoy the validation that it gave her. (Jane 472 – 474)

There is less evidence of comments of an overt nature on isolation in the interviews with the other head teachers but there is implied evidence from the need for external validation.

Pat describes her visit to see the dying Steven in a way that contrasts her behaviour with that of others indicating the need for my validation. This is when she is describing the support issue for the family. Support at that time was declining. (Pat 133)

A little later when discussing the expected death of Steven Pat gives a feeling that mum released them to make preparations. Without this release they would have been seen to be accepting Steven's death before it occurred. This validation enabled them to feel enabled to make those preparations.

... it was very good and it was good of mum to it was very good and it was good of mum to advance. (Pat 300 – 302)

Later when trying to make the decision about closing the school for Steven's funeral the head teacher describes how she rings round for advice on this issue though she is ultimately faced with making the decision herself. (Margaret 442) When she makes this decision the language that she uses to describe the way in which it was judged suggests that it was universally accepted. This is despite the fact that this was unlikely in view of the emotional gradient.

So that first of all make that decision and at the end of the day I think everybody thought that was the right decision didn't they rather than

closing the whole school and then just you know making sure that we were covered for that.... (Margaret 463 – 466)

Pat confirms her similar thoughts about external validation on this issue by supporting Margaret with her comments.

That was tough for you wasn't it? Having to make those decisions at that time it would be nice to have some sort of guidelines rather than use your judgment. (Pat 468 – 470)

This is followed immediately by affirmation by Margaret that she could have done with that support. (Margaret 474)

When describing to me the development of a memorial garden Margaret shows clear pleasure in the involvement of Steven's brother and mother in the project. It seems to indicate her feeling that there is a unity of school and family and that they validate the head teacher's decision and actions.

... the family were involved in that in the design of the Garden of things that we want there and mum is going to come in and help with building. (Margaret 548 – 550)

When Margaret and Pat were asked to reflect on whether they would have done anything differently Margaret, although confident earlier, seems to seek reassurance here about her action in respect of the children

I mean dealing with his classmates I am not sure how else I could have done that. (Margaret 617 – 618)

There is a little more overt evidence of the need for external validation later when Margaret is asked what advice she might give to colleague head teachers. She has said that she would not have changed what she did but is actually accepting the possibility of improving things through having an external reference point to validate her actions.

And other colleagues might you know have something totally unexpected so you can't prepare. But just having somebody to talk you through what they did. (Margaret 636 – 638)

When closing the interview Margaret indicates that she may well have sought confirmation of what she did by asking what another head teacher did in similar circumstances when they met later at a head teacher event. (Margaret 643)

The issues around external validation for Rosemary are somewhat different in that they seem to be mostly concerned with validation by the family of William. This may relate to the difference between the views of the head teacher and the family over some issues. This perhaps then accentuated the head teacher's need to be seen to have done the right things.

Early in the interview the head teacher, unprompted, makes a reference to the production of a memorial album for William after he had died. The way that this is described gives a sense of the school being well organised. In producing the document which was later used by William's brother and which was approved of by the family.

Yes. We we we have actually put an album together of a series of pictures really. He but obviously we were able to do that because you know because there was sort of records available with photographs and er... so all you know we could catalogue a bit of the events involved.  
(Rosemary 54 – 59)

Later, during our discussion of the events that led up to the death of William, there was uncertainty around him being back in school soon after treatment. This was something requested by his mother. Despite her worries, Rosemary reconciles the thinking in favour of the family decision. This indicates that the school had done well in a difficult situation. She then seeks confirmation of this from her teaching assistant.

And so actually we we were quite a bit worried about this whole treating it all as normal and actually I think we felt that mum had done the right thing in the end didn't we? (Rosemary 130 – 132)

In telling me about the events of the funeral the head teacher shows some clear relief at the family validation of her. This is clear when William's mother seeks comfort from her and was not angry with her. The concern by Rosemary that William's mother may have been angry with her, without specifying why,



suggests the levels of concern that was felt by her. It also indicates her relief that she was being validated by the family.

Well that I... well mum actually was very er... she sought physical er... comfort you know it was actually quite nice in terms of thinking that she wasn't angry with me or er... and she was she was very pleased that we had gone. (Rosemary 475 – 478)

In her description of the development of a memorial for William there is further relief seen in the family's validation of her actions. She validates the actions by describing the fund raising and how mum's approval for the memorial garden was obtained. She gives further confirmation of the value of the family validation in the language that she uses, "She was all all right about that."

And also we had raised some money from the school and some people had come and contributed very generously like a £20 note and so we'd had a box just to say that you know we would support whatever mum would wish so we started that so really then I had to phone up to ask was that all right because you know and we were doing it a commemoration in the garden. And we were going to buy a star for him and she was all all right about that. (Rosemary 506 – 511)

At the end of my interview with Rosemary I asked about any ongoing worries or concerns and her first thoughts in this respect relate to family validation. She remains somewhat unsure about mum and seems to want more closeness.

Mum's being very distant. (Rosemary 636)

Judy was discussing with me the way in which the children in school were supported after the death of Andrew, particularly those children who were vulnerable through other bereavements. She recognises the value of allowing children to grieve and speaking to them about death and seeks a little validation from me on this issue.

He was obsessed with the idea of Andrew's death and when er... I spoke to him he had had three other people members of his family who had died and I said had had anybody talked to you about that and he said no because I think sometimes you don't talk to children do you? (Judy 193 – 196)

In discussing with me issues around a memorial arrangement for Andrew, the head teacher indicates her uncertainty about the decision and seeks the approval of the family for her ideas.

And we're also going to have a balloon release. So each child will have a balloon and with that message on to Andrew. And I asked Laura his mum that is is that okay and she said whatever you want to do is absolutely fine. (Judy 267 – 273)

Describing Andrew's funeral the head teacher uses a form of language that indicates her appreciation of the family validation. Using, "She just gave people hugs" indicates the cohesion between school and family and perhaps also the appreciation of the schools actions by the family which forms part of the validation.

... and his mum was outside with his family and she just came up and she just gave people hugs and and then we said goodbye and then we just all walked into the church and sat together. (Judy 363 – 368))

During the closing stages of my interview with Judy when I asked her to reflect on her management of the events of Andrew's illness and death she indicates that she is satisfied with her actions based on Educational Psychology Service support and advice. There is the sense of dependence on outside help and validation.

Well there are always there is always lessons to be learned. I think but I think the judgments that were made were the right judgments with the support that I had and clearly the educational psychology service had had that experience so they advised me well. er... (Judy 461 – 464)

### ***Support issues***

Linked to the issues of isolation and validation are the issues of support for the head teachers and the support given by them to the families. This is familiar territory for the head teachers as they are used to receiving support from various services and also used to providing it to their school community families. There is evidence in these interviews that the nature and extent of these support issues changes in circumstances of a pupil who is terminally ill and then dies. It seems partly that although there is an understanding that a

child is dying, the head teachers have a reluctance to plan for it. This is perhaps so as not to upset and concern the family of the child.

In my interview with Jane she makes a number of clear references to her need for and value of support.

... critical incident I think is the word you used as well to contact the service." That was fresh in my mind and so it was that you were the first port of call. What do I do? I'd have never had any training how to deal with it and I think it was a 'knee jerk' reaction before I sat down and started I needed to talk to somebody ... (Jane 100 – 104)

Just to talk to somebody. What do I do next? (Jane 105)

So just talking to somebody was quite a help was it?

Absolutely! (Jane 107 – 109)

She is also clear about having to provide support to her staff.

... where I can offer that support immediately I.... I wanted that support from people that I knew of so if I'm telling the member of staff that something has happened, they immediately want that support back so I have got to be in a position where I feel strong enough to be able to give that support. Yes! (Jane 127 – 130)

After this head teacher has visited John in the hospice, when he is dying, she comments on the support issue again with an expression of need for in-house mutual support from other members of staff.

... we all felt that would be the last time we saw John. After the meeting we met and we talked about how everyone was feeling back together we can work through it and we will be there to support each other within the staff so that the teachers who went to the hospice obviously had.... we were together in the early times of grief. That was what we were going to share. (Jane 190 – 195)

This giving and receiving of support is evident in the head teacher's comments about the work of the family resource worker. It is particularly noticeable in the

relationship that was formed. The use of, 'fortunate that we had a relationship' suggests that Jane benefited a great deal from the support it provided.

... they have any slight concerns they can come and talk to Lilly. So we used Lilly an awful lot that week as well. So that they could come and have coffee and collectively they could talk about how sad the situation was and share their emotions as well as a group of parents if they so choose to. It was fortunate that we already had a relationship. (Jane 256 – 260)

The nature of the mutually supportive relationship becomes apparent in a later extract when the head teacher is describing her thoughts and feelings.

During that time family resource worker she actually... because the family resource worker was dealing with some of the parents as well and also as it turned out some teachers were also going to her for some... personally we got quite close and we talked about our own... she had a personal experience of death. I did and so we became colleagues rather than just a professional relationship where we could say we are doing okay! getting through it I did in the end get support from the family resource worker. (Jane 394 – 401)

There is an interesting aspect to the words used in this extract when the head teacher describes them as becoming colleagues rather than just having a professional relationship. It might be reasonable to conjecture that the relationship was more a friendship and mutually supportive than collegiate.

There is evidence from this head teacher that mutually supportive work was of very significant benefit. It appears later again when discussing the issue of cultural differences in the understanding of death in children. There is a sense of mutual support in what I am told and the use of; 'together' in the extract confirms this benefit for both.

... we had to do some very quick research about what other religions did and my knowledge was not that good and my year one teacher in particular was very concerned about her knowledge and she was coming to me for confirmation and checking on the understanding and so

together we had to be clued up very quickly. We had to do research to make sure that we weren't offending other religions. (Jane 369 – 374)

When I comment on the mutually supportive link between the two there is a strong affirmation of the mutual support being beneficial.

Yes! Yes! (Jane 405)

It is confirmed again later when the head teacher expresses her recognition of the importance of a support network. (Jane 525)

Pat begins to describe the support issues for her when she talks about the input made by the Educational Psychology Service. The educational psychologist is seen here as a key element of support and information but more importantly there is a strong response relating to the necessity for this support which indicates the importance of it for this head teacher.

Janet went through an awful lot with us in a very understanding way she was brilliant. (Pat 292 – 293)

This head teacher also seemed to develop and benefit from support arrangements for the family of Steven. In particular it is clear during her involvement with, and support for, the brother of Steven. She describes as a circle of support and clearly benefits personally from this.

... so talking to Andrew really helped me a lot and talking with or listening mainly with the circle of support group for Andrew was a big help. (Pat 323 – 325)

Despite the well received support from the Educational Psychology Service and the benefit from the support circle there is a sense of being let down in the descriptions given by the head teachers. Margaret goes on at this point to list a number of other support agencies that offered support but the whole passage has a feeling of being let down and of disappointment. It feels as if the two head teachers were left to their own devices and regret it but don't say so.

The vicar came down to see us didn't she? And she was the one who took the funeral service. So she came down and talked to us.

We had the McMillan nurse was supposed to be coming but didn't come did she?

No no

For meetings and somebody from Click-Sergeant came in once

And just brought some things but their meetings were a little bit they were supposed to have another one and didn't come and then they had not turned up to a previous one so...

The school nurse they were disappointed in the school nurse as well.

The school nurse was going to come and then...

It has been very erratic... She made an appointment and then she had some sort of bereavement so didn't come then and then it was she was not sure she what she was going to do and then she didn't know Andrew so... She spent two sessions getting to know him but they were quite far apart and Andrew's not bonded with her so she has dropped off the scene. (Margaret and Pat 353 – 395)

Pat goes on at this point also to describe what she saw as the disappointing support for the parents from the hospital. It is portrayed as being present during the hospitalisation but not otherwise. Pat (416 – 418) In contrast to this disappointing level of support there seems to have developed a good support network in the school. There were indications in the interview with Margaret and Pat that there were significant benefits in this unity. It seems to have overcome some of the isolation that was evident in other interviews.

... people have already asked about they wanted to donate something towards it. And the support group that I had when we talked about doing a garden before this had come up with that because we were going to do something anyway when we whatever. They all brought me 5 pounds and things not like a pound or 2 pounds they just brought 5 pounds and said my mum sent that for Steven, or I have brought this. And so they and when I said we were going to apply for all this funding for they said that but we want to do so I said we will have both and make it really good.

His class had a cake sale shortly after to raise money for the garden and we asked you know if parents wanted to contribute to the wreath and we had a huge amount of money come in and you know it was quite it was £150 left from that to go towards the garden. So we got quite a lot of money. We also remembered his birthday because his birthday was on Friday the 13th wasn't it? And they wrote they did some.... The class made a book they made a memorial book. (Margaret and Pat 552 – 570)

Margaret when reflecting on what she might say to colleague head teachers makes it clear that there is the need for informed support. She also goes on to comment on the value of the support that she received from the Educational Psychology Service which was recognised as a whole school support.

It would... I would have liked to have spoken to somebody else who had been through the experience. I know all circumstances are all very different and at least we could we could prepare in advance for this couldn't we? (Margaret 633 – 635)

But the educational psychologist support was a real boost wasn't it with all good things. (Margaret 646 – 648)

And Janet also it wasn't just about, just about going to be about Steven or the family it was about the school and the children and how we would feel. Having to deal with those things and what to watch out for and staff and that sort of thing. (Pat 657 – 660)

There are indications in this interview that the need to support the surviving siblings is a need that the head teacher felt strongly. She had a long and important supportive relationship with Steven's brother. What she appears to have not considered was what her exit strategy from this relationship would be.

Have you thought Pat about how you are going to stop this?

Well I mean Andrew will move...

It will come to a natural stop because he is moving to secondary school. Secondary school so we will pass some information on there that will have that support

If he hadn't been that would have been a thought wouldn't it? (Pat 749 – 759)

The issue of support for Rosemary developed differently. She had been bereaved at seven years old and had gone to her own school seeking adults that could manage their own feelings so that she could use this as a role model to manage her distress. She did not mention the need for support for herself, but appears to have decided that the best way of supporting her school community was to show the same kind of management of her own feelings in order to provide a good role model for them.

Well I don't think I did partly because I have been seven and experienced I think the thing that I felt quite strongly through it all was what what children needed in school was adults who were actually managing their own emotions in terms of thinking about the child because I know that you know I lost my dad but also lost my mum because my mum was in a lot of shock and grief... (Rosemary 314 – 318)

She also referred back to her own experiences as a guide to how she should manage the situation in school.

So I actually just went really on instinct and obviously I'd had a bit of a bit of training and we have got bits of material there and obviously knew we could go onto Winston's Wish... (Rosemary 344 – 346)

What also becomes apparent is that Rosemary does not seek support in the same way that other head teachers indicate that they do in their interviews. She seeks less external validation but rather more from the bereaved family.

The issues around support for Judy were first indicated when discussing the input from the Educational Psychology Service. She describes working on a plan with the educational psychologist and then speaking to the staff. She describes being accompanied by the two educational psychologists that visited her in a way that suggests that the support was welcomed.

... we talked through a plan you know what we were going to do what we were going to say we got a sort of a bit of a script together and she came and then Claire came and so we all went up to the staff room at



lunchtime everybody knew what had happened well they knew that Andrew had died but I think they needed to know a bit more and I told them and then Jane just asked if anybody needed any help any advice any support and Claire as well and er... so then we organised to have an assembly. (Judy 101 – 108)

The head teacher reiterates her surprise later in the interview at the speed of the Educational Psychology Service response. In using, 'overwhelmed' (Judy 300) she indicates that initially she thought it was too much. Though in the same conversation a little later the head teacher uses, "I thought that I was I was managing. And I didn't..." (Judy 309) which seems to confirm that she was helped by the Educational Psychology Service visit and reflects on her awareness of the fact that she was not coping without support.

She also makes it clear that she received considerable support from the bereaved family. Using the term 'massive support' (Judy 327 - 328) there is an indication of how the relationship with the family changes in these circumstances. It might almost be expected that the support given would be the other way round.

Towards the end of the interview this head teacher also comments on the importance of the research for her by saying that she considers it important that the issues that are raised for a head teacher when a child dies in a school are considered to be important enough to undertake research into them.

... I think this is very good. I think the fact that the the Authority has taken something like this as seriously and I think that's that's credit to the Authority because the staff are probably the biggest resource that you have got. (Judy 512 – 515)

Support issues for children are illustrated when Judy focuses on some children who had been bereaved and who had new teachers. This was to ensure that they were well cared for while there were bereavement issues in the school after the death of Andrew.

... there were there were two children that I needed to be really careful with because they had well actually more than two to be honest with you.

There were some children who have had suffered bereavements in school who were in school currently and I needed to make sure that their teachers were aware because they had changed, the teachers had changed since the bereavements and that the children were okay and a special eye was kept out for them. (Judy 140 – 146)

Later the head teacher is obviously concerned for one child who had experienced three family deaths and seeks some additional support for him particularly as he was not present for the school assembly.

... there was one little boy who wasn't here on the day that we had the assembly and the grieving and everything and I have now needed to put into place some er... bereavement support for him ... (Judy 189 – 192)

Then there were also support issues for the staff which the head teacher had to consider. One particular teacher required much support from her because she appears to have been very close to Andrew.

... one member of staff who was incredibly close to Andrew and er... she knew it was going to happen but it was still so hard and it was just and trying to maintain the allowing staff to grieve but also they still had to do their job. (Judy 149 – 152)

### ***Planning for death - uncertainty and unpreparedness***

The issues that have been seen to develop in this superordinate section on interactions within the school community are all suggestive of an uncertainty. It is an uncertainty in the head teacher as to how it is appropriate to respond to the dying and death of a child in school. It also seems to be that this uncertainty is often based in a level of unpreparedness that may be considered to be surprising since head teachers face many varied situations, when managing a school, which they respond to on a regular basis in a competent way.

Early in her interview Jane makes it clear that she was just beginning in her head teacher role at the time that John came into the school as a very ill child. Use of, 'started the Headship' and 'starting as a head' (Jane 22) suggests some level of uncertainty. This is also evident when discussing with me how she would manage the situation after the news of John's death and said, "We may

have brainstormed what we do next. Err I wanted to talk to somebody...” (Jane 113 – 114) The head teacher goes on to signal the level of uncertainty about how to proceed and need for outside reference.

... I don't know I would probably come straight to Joan the SENCO who is our Acting deputy head at the moment. (Jane 119 -120)

The uncertainty is evident also in the uncertain language that she uses to talk about John's death. “I think death is such... it affects everybody doesn't it?” (Jane 126) and also in describing John's illness, “No he had... he was diagnosed with days left to live.” (Jane 144) Uncertain language is used also in the description of how to deliver an assembly to the school when the head teacher says, “... are we starting with some bad news... sad news...” (Jane 222) The level of uncertainty displayed in the head teacher's language is well illustrated in this passage when she is describing how she was trying to decide on support for the children in school.

Yes! It was very difficult because obviously we were, it was a day-to-day basis. Hour by hour basis. Is he alive is he dead what are we telling the children? Where do we go now? And just keeping the children informed but ... (Jane 231 – 233)

She shows further uncertain language later when discussing what she should say so as not to offend some members of the school community.

... so it's getting a very fine balance where people aren't offended by it by how you talk. (Jane 353 – 354)

During her discussion with me of her own personal responses this head teacher is quite open about her uncertainty

... people thought I would have all the answers. People thought I knew how to deal with everything that was being thrown at us. Hopefully I gave them the confidence that I did but there were many times when I'd be.... oh my gosh! I.... what do I do next? Am I doing right? I doubt it. I analysed things to an extreme amount daily. Hourly! After each phone call have I done right? How I done that okay? (Jane 380 – 385)

When I asked if she would do anything differently with hindsight the head teacher responded with the following comment.

... the same assemblies et cetera but I don't know if the emotion would be as,... I don't know! I mean the death of a child! (long pause) It's horrendous anyway isn't it? I don't know is the answer to that. I don't know. (Jane 506 – 509)

The uncertainty displayed by the head teacher is almost certainly linked to the fact that there is strong evidence of the unpreparedness that she comments on in a number of situations. The Educational Psychology Service in Derbyshire briefs all head teachers on the Service capability to respond to critical incidents and it was this briefing that prompted the head teacher to make contact as she was unprepared.

... fortunately for me we had that meeting June July time when you said, "Are we aware of that service if there is a bereavement or critical incident I think is the word you used as well to contact the service." That was fresh in my mind ... (Jane 99 – 101)

In the same conversation the head teacher uses language that indicates the unpreparedness when she describes her response as a, 'knee jerk reaction.' (Jane 103)

The way in which the head teacher responds to the materials and sources provided by the Educational Psychology Service is a further indication of the unpreparedness that she experienced.

... all the material all off the website that you sent me in the e-mail and fortunately for us we had an inset on the first day back first day back.... First day back in September and we threw that all out of the window and we had an inset. The first bit of the morning looking at how we were going to tell the children what was happening. So we discussed the type of questions we think the children may be asking. How will we answer that? Have we got the facts to answer that information? We were looking at the resources we had in school and particularly the story books that we used for err and looking at the organisation of the first day. (Jane 210 – 221)

She goes on later to explain how the school had to buy in appropriate books and other materials. (Jane 417 – 418)

There was also evidence from this head teacher as to the unpreparedness for religious and cultural differences within the school population and she describes having to do some 'quick research' in this respect. (Jane 369 – 370)

Towards the end of my interview with Jane I asked her to reflect on the level of her preparedness and she is clear that she felt very under prepared for the events of John's death.

... it is one of those things that okay and it is lodged if I ever need it type until it comes it is like I wish I had paid more attention to what was happening I think ....and I hope it would never happen in your school, in your career and only when it does do you then start to think what was said and I think it is one of those.... it's not relevant how much do you take in beforehand. I think of all the courses that have been offered and it is never something I have thought I will sign up for that just in case.  
(Jane 534 – 540)

Jane returns again to her unpreparedness towards the very end of my interview with her and comments that, '... you just think that it is not going to happen to me.' (Jane 599)

For Margaret and Pat the levels of uncertainty seem to be less than for Jane but still present. There is some uncertainty displayed by Margaret when she was describing how she makes a judgment about young children who may be less affected by the death of Steven, and this makes her decision about school closure for the funeral more complex. The language used at this point may also represent her perception of parental wishes and indicates her uncertainty of what these are by using 'for instance' (Margaret 445) to describe her reasoning for the decision she makes.

Although Pat describes a little evidence that she was planning for the death of Steven it is largely conceptual in that she describes some thinking about a memorial before his death. (Pat 236 – 237) This appears to be the only evidence and it is the unpreparedness that is most evident. An example of this

can be seen when Margaret describes deciding to abandon the school programme because a group of children remained distressed and require something to enable them to deal with their grief. (Margaret 222 – 224)

When asking about advice received by the head teacher I am also giving her an opportunity to reflect further on the management of the events of Steven's death. There is acceptance that there was an experience of a feeling of a level of unpreparedness.

It would... I would have liked to have spoken to somebody else who had been through the experience. I know all circumstances are all very different and at least we could we could prepare in advance for this couldn't we? And other colleagues might you know have something totally unexpected so you can't prepare. But just having somebody to talk you through what they did. (Margaret 633 – 638)

The language used by Margaret in describing the training issue is also indicative of the preparedness issue. She points out that they were 'lucky' that Pat had just completed a loss and bereavement training which perhaps is a way of validating the necessity for being prepared. The fact that this had been the case for Pat might also partly explain the difference in uncertainty levels seen in this interview.

Rosemary, who was trying hard to control the emotional environment in her school community, indicates some uncertainty too in what she tells me. In telling me about how she felt staff needed to be able to deal with the inevitable death of William she shows uncertain language.

We sort of that that felt quite difficult to do because and I had I had to do like a series of meetings to er... make sure that all of the staff were aware but not kind of going into this grieving process although I was preparing them for it. (Rosemary 190 – 192)

The head teacher also finds it difficult to manage the situation during the period on uncertainty leading up to William's death. There is more uncertainty, too, in her thoughts about how upset staff and children were. She also shows that she is uncertain about whether this should be displayed in school.

So I found that it was a bit unnerving because you know he obviously hasn't died and you've got to he might not he might not. He might not er... so that was quite difficult and also er... people were emotional and having you know sort of well the class teacher was one of the worst but also I don't know you know there's also there is also four other children five other children in school and you kind of the family who were coming to school and you know they didn't want to have to deal with raw emotion you know ... (Rosemary 202 – 208)

When I later asked this head teacher about the issues she had to manage, there is evidence in the language fluency that perhaps demonstrates the underlying uncertainty that she felt.

So er... but then also er ...how to er... but mum was quite aggressive er ...and how to er... manage er... her in terms of her er... in terms of with er... other children as well I think. Because she would come in with something that was... (Rosemary 272 – 274)

The issue of the funeral causes this head teacher uncertainty when she is asked for advice by parents about their children attending William's funeral.

The er ... there were actually a lot of children who were really upset partly and parents who were really upset and also I had quite a lot of parents asking advice about whether or not I should whether or not they should be taking their children to the funeral. (Rosemary 297 – 299)

When I asked this head teacher about what she might say to colleague head teachers, she showed her awareness of the issue of unpreparedness that she had experienced.

er... I would say I would say when a child got serious illness like that I think you've got to face what might come and try and get people prepared and I think that's really quite difficult. Er ...you know it's like that thing about talking about people before they die. You know I mean obviously things are unpredictable as well you and so I think also having some materials in school I mean I know ... (Rosemary 591 – 595)

There is, however, for this head teacher, also a little evidence that she had created some preparation within the school by arranging for staff to attend a loss and bereavement training some time before the events of William's death. This is mentioned somewhat in passing, when discussing support issues, and there is the feeling that creating preparations for the death of a child are not quite right.

We organised the training well there was some training and we booked actually that was that was quite a bit before though we booked the places didn't we? It was quite opportune actually.... (Rosemary 408 – 410)

She does espouse the collection of materials later when describing what advice she might give to a colleague head teacher, though this is a view expressed with hindsight. The head teacher recognises the difficulty of planning for a death before it happens.

... you've got to face what might come and try and get people prepared and I think that's really quite difficult. Er ...you know it's like that thing about talking about people before they die. You know I mean obviously things are unpredictable ... (Rosemary 592 – 594)

For Judy her uncertainty is expressed throughout in terms of the unpreparedness that she felt. When Andrew died she was unprepared for how to tell the staff and children about this.

... but it was I knew that I had to I had to tell the staff and I knew that I had to be composed for the staff and the children but I had to work out a way of doing it so that's how I felt really... (Judy 64 – 66)

The head teacher also demonstrates this in her use of language in describing this when she comments that she was 'stunned' at the Educational Psychology Service response. (Judy 79) This suggests that she was pleased to find that help was available despite an Educational Psychology Service policy of regular briefing of head teachers about the Service capability to support them.

When later referring to some of the documents provided by the Educational Psychology Service, the head teacher indicates that she had to read these



through when the death of Andrew was a predictable event. (Judy 230 – 232)  
This indicates that there was little preparedness, though this could be related to the issue of not appearing to 'wish' the death forward. It could be an element of avoidance too. She goes on at this point to articulate the fact that she recognises the need for preparation in, 'I wouldn't have wanted just to have relied on my own nous instinct' is what she said to me. (Judy 243)  
When I later ask this head teacher to reflect on how she managed the events around Andrew's death she is clear in saying that there is a need for preparation for such events.

I would I would advise all head teachers whether they had a situation like this when we knew he was going to die or not to certainly read Winston's Wish if that's the least that they do because you just never know when it could be a child knocked over you know a traffic accident and I would definitely say hope that it never happens but make sure that if it does happen you have got at least an element of preparation in place and an idea of of what you would never need it. (Judy 470 – 479)

On reflection she continues and seems to come to the decision that there should be much more than 'an element of preparation in place' and that training would be valuable.

I think but I think I mean to give up half a days head teacher training to find out about bereavement and how you would respond would I think be well worth it well worth it. Well worth it. (Judy 489 – 491)

### ***School disruption***

Inevitably events that involve major adaptations of an institution, like a school, to things that have the high emotional content of dying and death create disruptions in their functioning. There are disruptions in school functioning that head teachers manage all the time, though these are ones that they expect and understand such as illness, school holidays, religious festivals and tests and examinations. As the previous section showed, the dying and death events, though they may be predictable, are not prepared for and create uncertainty and high levels of emotional experience.

Jane describes how the events of John's death completely disrupted the school's planned training which was then abandoned because of the pressing need to adapt to the events.

... we had an inset on the first day back first day back.... First day back in September and we threw that all out of the window and we had an inset. The first bit of the morning looking at how we were going to tell the children what was happening. So we discussed the... (Jane 211 – 215)

Not only are there what might be described as structural disruption but there are also disruptions of attitude and morale.

... the morale in the school was.... was very very ... You know normally on the start of a school year it is very upbeat. At the start of a new year and you know everyone's boosting morale and how fantastic and instead it was trying to get that balance and starting a new year how... (Jane 234 – 240)

A similar emotional disruption also occurred during the period just prior to John's funeral.

Yes! It was their grief. But a week for waiting for John to die which is what we were doing and then a week of build up to the funeral two weeks in school... a school life for some children who, children are very day by day very young ... (Jane 330 – 332)

There is less evidence of the structural disruption in the interview of Margaret and Pat though there were structural changes that were necessary such as assemblies (Margaret 223) and funeral arrangement. (Margaret 439) The emotional changes are evident in the difficult times around the funeral of Steven. (Margaret 480)

In the case of Rosemary much the same can be said of the structural disruption for the funeral (Rosemary 287) and assemblies (Rosemary 261), however the emotional climate described by this head teacher had the difference of a higher expectation level of emotional regulation and of family validation which are outlined earlier.

Judy gives in her interview a similar feel to the issue of school disruption to that described by Margaret. There were structural disruptions related to the assemblies (Judy 107) and the curriculum. (Judy 127) This head teacher had few disruptions related to the school closure for the funeral since the school was closed for training on that day. The impact on the training however (Judy 394 – 395), was to cause it to be abandoned just as it was for Jane.

There were distinct emotional disruptions indicated personally by the head teacher when she describes her own grieving and tearfulness which were, for her, largely private though still present and influential. (Judy 98)

### **Summary**

The themes that were developed in this chapter provided a rich source of data from which to make an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. The themes were emotions and their management, interactions with the bereaved family and interactions with the school community. There was also, what I have described as an overarching theme called Elevation which I explore during the discussion of the emerging themes.

The head teachers have described their emotions, thoughts and feelings about the dying children and their deaths. Their deep sadness for the children that died is very apparent as were their feelings for the bereaved families and distressed staff and children. They have also described their relationships with the dying children and their families. Finally, they have described their interactions with others in the school community and how the community was affected. These themes will be further explored in the next chapter.

## **Chapter 5 - Discussion of the analysis**

### **Introduction**

This research has considered the impact on a head teacher of the death of a child who was part of their school community. The analysis of the data from the interviews with the head teachers are the subject of my discussions in this chapter. Additionally, I consider what conclusions can be drawn from the data, how these conclusions fit into the pattern of previous research and how they can be understood from a psychological perspective. Each area of superordinate and subordinate theme is considered in the sections presented below, together with the relationship of the research to the extant literature on this subject.

I also seek in this chapter to explore the significance of these findings together with any practical implications that may be relevant to an educational psychologist or to any school support service.

I then explore the limitations of the research and suggest what might be further research that would follow on from the present study.

Finally, I will draw together my thoughts from this chapter into some general conclusions.

### **Elevation**

It seems to be the case from this data that what I have described as Elevation is a response that the head teachers make when they are faced with the death of a child. What the head teachers do is to describe the child in terms which portray their positive attributes and effectively elevate the characteristic status of the dead child. There is strong evidence from each of the interviews that this is a phenomenon that is a common. It seems to have a long cultural history as described by Owusu-Ansah (2012) and seems closely linked to the saying, 'De mortuis nil nisi bonum dicendum est,' which I discuss in detail later in the chapter. There also seems to be a form of derived behaviour that is in keeping with this sentiment and which can be seen in the way that the head teachers react to the situations that face them. It seems to impact on the decisions that they make and, as such, forms a powerful influence that can determine how the

school community in general, and the head teacher in particular, respond to the developing situation. It seems to influence the decisions of the head teacher and as a consequence how the head teacher behaves and how they relate to others in the school community.

Elevation appears in all the descriptions given by head teachers of the children that died in their schools. It is also evident in our community more generally and is commonly seen in any television interviews with head teachers in newscasts or in their reported comments when a child has died. It would seem that it serves a purpose and I discuss this fully in the section where, 'De mortuis nil nisi bonum dicendum est,' is explored from a religious, social and human perspective taking account of the views of other writers who have given consideration to this phenomenon.

## **Emotions and their management**

### ***Forgotten grievers***

The work of Lazenby (2006) has indicated that when a student dies teachers are the forgotten grievers. Munson and Hunt (2005) also comment on the way that teachers grieve when a child dies and goes on to say that there is little in place to support those teachers. These studies, however, relate to teachers and not to head teachers where there is a different level of expectation. The grief of the head teachers in this study was clear to see. The personal impact upon them was quite varied but always profound. It ranged from stunned disbelief for one head teacher to, in another head teacher, the use of avoidance when faced with describing the impact that it had on them. Yet another of the head teachers reported private grief that led to crying when she was alone. One head teacher described her emotional 'falling apart.' There were, as might be expected, expressions of high emotion surrounding the funerals of the dead children when the head teachers said how sad and distressed they were when attending these events. Though there is a difference in the words used, or sometimes avoided, to express the emotions about the dying and death of the children, the level of impact on the head teachers as individuals appeared to be very high.

Tarrant et al. (2011) have commented on the fact that leaders are subject to the same physiological responses as anyone but are expected to act rationally and

control themselves in difficult situations. This would certainly be a relevant statement for head teachers. This role awareness was apparent in the interviews with the head teachers who were able to explain how, on occasions, they were concerned about the display of their personal grief as they had concerns about the impact of this on others in their school community. Although we all use techniques that enable us to regulate our emotions it may be that this was a more pressing need in the head teachers for the reasons suggested by Tarrant et al. (2011).

### ***Emotional regulation***

In addition to the use of emotional regulation that was apparent when the head teachers were faced with the death of a child, there are also examples of the techniques of emotional regulation which can be seen during the interviews of the head teachers. The importance of emotional regulation is recognised in the work of Costa et al. (2007) and Gross and Thompson (2007). Some of the head teachers show this more than others during the interviews. Moving the conversation from a difficult to an easier subject is evident as one form of regulation. This may well be an indication of the residual impact of the events of the death of a child.

The former of these forms of regulation is of importance for this research. These techniques of emotional regulation seen in projection, distancing and avoidance are the techniques used to manage the emotions that were around during the dying and deaths of the children. It is interesting to note that Papadatou (1997) writing of issues concerned with the training of professionals suggested that if grieving was inevitable, then those responsible for such training, must provide a safe environment in which participants can learn to acknowledge, explore, and deal with loss and grief. Tarrant et al. (2011) also reported on the training issues for the principal of a school where a tragedy occurs. This kind of training provision might help support the head teacher in the regulation of their emotions though it is likely to have more impact on other aspects of the head teacher responses, such as preparedness and validation which are discussed later.

For one head teacher the issue of regulating the emotional climate of her school community is very important and drives many of her decisions during the events

of the child's death. The reasons for this seem to be not only in the expectations of others but also in her personal experiences of bereavement. This was something she contended with at seven years of age by benefiting from the emotional control displayed by the adults in her own school at the time.

The influence of personal experiences on the responses of the head teachers is clear in a second case. This was illustrated when the head teacher had to decline an invitation to visit the dead child in order to regulate her emotions after a family bereavement.

In both of these cases there was evidence of grief spill over, a phenomenon that others have reported on in professionals in medicine. Granek et al. (2012) report on this phenomenon which occurs when there is difficulty separating the work life from personal lives in professionals when the grieving they experience at work comes home with them. There is also evidence of grief revival when the death of the child has this impact on a head teacher who returns to an earlier stage of grieving over a family bereavement, one that they had previously progressed from.

All of the head teachers demonstrate to some degree the need to regulate their own, or the emotions of others in the school community. Some of this is a conscious decision not to show the emotions that they have but other ways are used as well, as described below.

### ***Projection***

A further way in which the head teachers regulate the emotions that arise over the deaths of the children is to project them onto others in the school community.

Baumeister et al. (1998) in considering Freudian defence mechanisms in modern social psychology reported this to be a common way of dealing with undesirable thoughts and feelings. This work describes projection as a psychological defence mechanism which individuals use to deal with such thoughts and feelings. What is described is the way that an individual 'projects' them onto someone else and considers that these emotions or excitations

which the ego is trying to ward off are 'split out'. This means that they are then felt as being outside the ego and they are perceived as being present in another person.

One of the head teachers was particularly vulnerable to grief spill over effect. The way in which she seems to deal with her vulnerability is to project it onto her staff. In doing so she then takes steps to protect them as a consequence. It seems that in this way the head teacher is better able to manage the emotions.

There was further evidence of projection also in that one head teacher described a surviving sibling as being close to her when it seems that the reverse was the case. It seemed that she was benefiting from the closeness to the child and says this as part of her interview. This seems to be a projection of her feelings onto the child. This same head teacher also describes what she sees as a state of 'being forgotten' about this sibling which appears to be very much what happened to her during her bereavement experience when she was seven years old and her father died.

I am not in any way suggesting that there is anything pathological about these reactions but that it is a useful form of emotional regulation. Baumeister et al. (1998) view this in a slightly different way commenting that projection can be seen as more of a cognitive bias than a defence mechanism. None-the-less projection can be seen as defensive if perceiving the threatening thoughts or feelings in others helps the individual in some way to avoid recognising it in themselves.

### ***Distancing and avoidance***

A different form of regulation can be seen in the way that the head teachers need to distance themselves from, or avoid, the events that create the most powerful emotions. Granek et al. (2012) give evidence of this strategy occurring in medical staff. When they have to face the death of their patients they are known to withdraw from the dying and their families and reduce the number of bedside visits and energy expended on their treatment.



This distancing can be seen in some of the disjointed language used during the interviews with the head teachers but also in some of the ways in which situations were managed during the dying processes. Information and planning was put to one side and left 'sitting' there. Relying on instinct rather than using the information that was provided, to order to help the head teacher, is also in evidence. In effect, it seems that the head teacher distances themselves from the need to consider what they will have to do.

There is evidence of avoidance of some the most powerful emotions when a head teacher enables her staff to talk, but this is done in a way that removes her from the circle of discussion.

Perhaps the clearest use of this form of emotional regulation appears during the events around the late stages of the children dying and at their funerals. One way of regulating the emotional impact of these events is through avoidance and this can be seen in the resistance to some of the events of hospital and hospice visiting and some of the events of the funerals. These differing ways of emotional regulation accord well with the description given by Gross and Muñoz (2006) of the complex relationship between the emotions and their regulation.

### ***Grief spill-over***

Perhaps one of the most powerful impacts of the dying and deaths of the children can be seen in the grief spill-over that the head teachers can experience. Where a head teacher has a recent bereavement, or a particularly upsetting one, they seem to be vulnerable to this. It is then very difficult for them to separate their home and family emotions from those that they are experiencing in school. This effect too has been noticed in medical staff by Granek et al. (2012) who report that oncologists found difficulty in separating their personal and professional life taking their grief home with them. Papadatou (1997) suggested that it is necessary for health professionals to recognise and accept their grief reactions as some of the issues with which professions may have to deal, in order to be able to help others who are grieving, including recognition of the losses or unresolved losses of their own.

In the case of one head teacher, in particular, this happened and the impact of the grief spill-over effect seems to be that the head teacher also revives an earlier stage of grieving, one which they had previously passed through. It is important to record here also that in one case of grief spill-over this had an important impact upon her family life. Four of the five head teachers indicated that they had experienced a grief spill-over effect.

### ***Kubler-Ross five stages.***

In order to better understand the grief spill-over effect it seems important here to say a little here about the grief cycle as it has been called (Kubler-Ross, 1969). This involves experiencing five stages though not necessarily in a chronological sequence. These are denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance.

Kubler-Ross (1969) has suggested that it is not unusual for people to return to a different type of grieving. In view of this aspect of the cycle of grief this transition between types of grieving can be seen more as an ebb and flow rather than a progression through the five stages. It is not necessarily a linear model which people pass through during the grieving process but more a framework. This then helps us understand what is happening to people who re-experience grief after a grief spill-over event. This too is in keeping with the work of Gross and Muñoz (2006) on the complexity of the emotion and emotional regulation relationship.

The model proposed by Kubler-Ross (1969) should perhaps be seen as a way of understanding the recovery process. This model, which does not seek to diminish the differences between the experiences of individuals, is still valuable as a way of understanding that people have their own individual journey to recovery and coping with loss. This is how time helps and life begins to return to normal.

In developing a better understanding of the grieving process we are then helped better to deal with it. While Kubler-Ross' (1969) focus was on death and bereavement, the grief cycle model is a useful perspective for understanding people's emotional reaction to any traumatic event. For the head teachers in

this research this way of thinking about the recovery process may well help to explain some of the reactions that have here been referred to as grief spill-over.

### ***Grief sharing***

A further example of emotional regulation can be seen in the way that grief is shared with others. This can be seen in the sharing between the head teacher and staff in their school. It can also be seen in sharing with bereaved families or with some of the professionals who work in the school or visit.

### ***Thesis about regulation***

The importance of emotional regulation is well recognised (Costa et al. 2007) and (Gross & Thompson, 2007), but two questions require to be considered from these examples of emotional regulation. These are; whether it is different from the emotional regulation that might be displayed by anyone who knows someone close that dies and if it is, what purpose does it serve?

In considering these questions it would seem that the types of personal emotional regulation are not different in character since projection, distancing and avoidance and sharing are familiar concepts in psychology. They can be thought of as part of a typical recovery process as described by Baumeister et al. (1998) and by Kubler-Ross (1969). The difference that seems to be present is the need to regulate the emotions in others and this may stem from the tension between the emotions which can be debilitating and the need to manage and maintain the functions of the institution where a gradient of emotions exist.

The head teachers seem to experience this tension as they have a leadership role to perform and they have a responsibility for the learning of a large number of children. As Tarrant et al. (2011) suggested, leaders are expected to act rationally and control themselves in difficult situations this would, of course, apply to head teachers in these situations.

Perhaps then the emotional regulation of others has the function of maintaining the learning capacity of the institution at a time when it is stressed. It may relate to role ascribed by Moore et al. (2002) of 'managing director'. But why should

this be necessary in a situation of grieving? This seems to be perhaps best explained on the basis of the emotional gradient that exists and which the head teacher is unable to ignore. The head teacher may anticipate an emotional gradient in respect of the expectations of parents about the learning of their children. Certainly there were a range of views expressed, for example, around school closures that would have created such a tension and similar tensions might exist around funeral attendance and other events such as memorials because of an emotional gradient.

Why then cannot the head teacher manage the grief and maintain a regular pattern of working in the school? This course of action is difficult when staff and children are distressed but there may be a more influential force in the form of, 'De mortuis nil nisi bonum dicendum est,' as described below.

It would be easy to dismiss, 'De mortuis nil nisi bonum dicendum est,' as a quaint and historical mythology. However, it has a cultural and historical aspect to it (Owusu-Ansah 2012) and therefore it seems to me to be inappropriate to dismiss it in this way. How then does it function to influence the head teachers in this situation? My thesis is that it does so by having a behavioural derivative and that is that our actions should be compliant with the bereaved family's requests or their perceived requirements. They are experiencing a great deal of pain and upset and it would seem to be socially inappropriate to increase this pain by behaving in ways that would do this. Culturally we do behave in ways that respect the dead and this behavioural requirement would seem to be of particular concern for a head teacher faced with an emotional gradient and a culturally expected form of behaviour.

Returning to the central issue then, a head teacher is faced with such a tension that requires a delicate balance. Too much normality offends the behavioural derivative of, 'De mortuis nil nisi bonum dicendum est,' while too little normality is likely to offend those in the institution who are less affected. Evidence for this might come from seeing the same pattern that is associated with, 'De mortuis nil nisi bonum dicendum est,' in the behavioural derivative. It is recognised, for example, that we can speak ill of the long dead if not of those who are recently deceased. If then, the derived behaviour was to change in a similar way to the

spoken behaviour, this might give some credibility to this theory. There is a little evidence for this in the data when, for example, one head teacher has delayed the development of a memorial and is not now certain of the process of its establishment. Indeed, the head teacher's comments were indicative of perhaps procrastination which is suggestive of a change in the behaviour that the head teacher might display at an earlier stage in the grieving process. This may be a behavioural manifestation of the capability for speaking ill of the longer dead though to be confident more evidence would be required.

## **Interactions with the bereaved family**

### ***Empathy***

The way that head teachers interact with the families of the children in their school varies widely in the population of schools across the UK. In education, the idea of a partnership between parents and practitioners has been around for many years. In the late 1970s the Warnock Report (Warnock, 1978) reviewed provision for children with special educational needs in England and Wales. The report contained an influential chapter entitled 'Parents as partners' and it is from this that modern thinking in education has developed the notion of partnership with parents.

The fact that partnership interaction happens is therefore a 'given' without which the education of the children would be much undermined. What is of interest here is the way in which the interactions with the family of children develop during their dying and death, how they change and more importantly what functions these changes serve.

One change that seems to occur is that of the development of an enhanced empathetic response to the bereaved family. This is the power of understanding and imaginatively entering into another person's feelings. This change is clear when a head teacher make comments like, "I know exactly how they feel" and indicates shared aspirations and pleasure in joint achievements. Olsen (2001) has described the development of empathetic maturity as differing for each individual. It is suggested that the meaning of empathy originates in and is defined by the experience of life. Empathy therefore arises from the perception of mutuality with another person.

There is evidence of shared worries about the health of the dying children and the same need to have information about what is happening to them. The head teachers variously express the same disappointments that families feel when there are deteriorations or when the care of the children is not what they expect it to be. They exhibit concerns for the siblings of the dead children when they are in the same school and they also act in a supportive way that indicates the shared concerns. These are interesting observations in the light of the research by Munson and Hunt (2005) who comment on the need for teachers to be able to support the families of the children that had died and in particular the surviving siblings in the same school.

One head teacher in particular shows a very strong attachment to the family very much like that described by Bergin and Bergin (2009) and shares many of the emotions that they seem to have experienced. There are shared worries and levels of distress that mirror those of the family of the ill child. Another head teacher feels the same emotions and disappointments staying in contact with them during school holidays when she could have reasonably been out of touch. She also has a particularly strong empathetic response to a sibling of the dying child who also attends the school, worrying as a parent might over progress and development.

One head teacher demonstrates the empathy through the caring arrangements that she makes for siblings during a particularly difficult time for the parents of the dying child. She is also at pains to protect them from some of the emotions that are around in the school at that time, recognising how these emotions will impact on them, as they did her when she was bereaved.

One head teacher aligns herself with the wishes of the family of the dying child seeking, as the mother did, to normalise his school environment, recognising his friendships and validating the mother's openness.

The level of these reactions and their nature seems to be different from those which are common in head teacher relationships with families. The different level is evident in the high volume of contacts and the evidence of them continuing out of school time. The qualitative difference is evidenced in the

parenting role and concern that goes beyond the dying child to encompass the families and particularly the siblings. It is evidenced by the giving of personal time and mobile phone numbers, something which would seem to be very unusual in a family relationship with a professional. There is evidence also of the toleration of patterns of behaviour that a head teacher would normally want to correct as well as the use of first name familiarity.

### ***Family reciprocation***

This different relationship is also seen in reciprocation by the family. An invitation to see a dead child is really the province of close family. A sibling who seeks out a head teacher, in apparent preference to his mother, to talk about distressing issues, further suggests this qualitative difference. The discussion by family members of the details of their family life and events such as Christmas arrangements is also somewhat unusual.

Even the conflicts with the family of the dying child that were described in one interview are, in an unusual way, indicative of a qualitative difference in the relationship with them. There are differences of view that develop in this interview that relate to the appropriateness of his care while he was ill. Additionally, there are very strong differences relating to funeral arrangements. There were differences expressed about the way that siblings were not included when informing others of the death. The family decided on how this should be done and the head teacher had different thoughts about it. These differences all have the feel of the kinds of disputed view that might commonly be seen within families more than between a family and a professional.

### ***Demand characteristics***

Perhaps the most significant change in the interaction between a head teacher and the family of a dead or dying child is seen in the demand characteristics of the relationship. One of the demand characteristics that changes is direction of demand. Another characteristic that changes is the nature of the demand that is made.

The head teacher has a very complex role (Moore et al., 2002). Although for the most part school life is one where the school, through the head teacher, creates

learning environments for children this comes with certain demands made of parents. These are, for example, to be present regularly in school, to be ready to learn, to behave in appropriate ways and to engage with the school and support learning at home. There are demand levels from parents and these relate to the quality of care and education in the school.

The evidence from these interviews is that the directional characteristic of this demand relationship changes in that the school makes fewer demands of the dying child and parents and they begin to make more demands of the school. The school lowers its demands in each of the example categories given above, while the parents increase the demands for access to the head teacher and other staff. Parents also increase the demand for support.

### ***Nature of demand***

A further change in demand characteristics is in the nature of the demand. There are real or perceived demands for involvement in family interactions, decisions and activities that are different from those which head teachers would normally contemplate as appropriate for these families in more usual circumstances. Involvement in health issues, care arrangements, sibling support work, communication on behalf of the family, speech writing and involvement in visiting and rituals surrounding death are all part of the changes in the nature of the demand characteristics.

These changes in demand characteristics are accompanied by the further effects of, 'De mortuis nil nisi bonum dicendum est.' The head teacher is not apparently able to respond to the demands in a way that is either their personal choice or that is always in the best interests of the school community.

Compromises are found that seek to protect the head teacher and school community, but also accede to the wishes or perceived wishes of the family of the child.

Not all the head teachers experience the same levels of change in these characteristics. There are differences between the head teacher interviews. These differences show the variability in these changes in relationship with the families of the dying and dead children.



What the purpose of these changed relationships and demand characteristics might be, and what it might tell us about the psychology of the relationship is of particular interest here. Although there are differences between the head teachers, there is some evidence of these changes in all cases and this suggests that it may have a purpose.

One explanation of these changes is that they enable both the school and the family to continue to function during these events. The head teacher continues to have the responsibility for the whole school community and the functions of that community as described by Moore et al. (2002) using 'managing director'. There is evidence of a gradient of emotion in relation to the dying and death of a child and this means that the response that a head teacher makes must be a balanced one, that tries to meet the needs of everyone in that community.

At the same time, the family of a dying or dead child still has to function to bring itself through to recovery and acceptance. In order to obtain support and tolerance of their emotional state they need to have time and space to display an ebb and flow within a framework, such as that suggested by Kubler-Ross (1969).

### ***Thesis around the development of empathy***

The changes described above in these interviews are characterised by compromise, closeness, compassion and tolerance. These are exactly the characteristics that we exhibit, as individuals, when there are tensions and emotional upset for someone that we know. Here it is made more complex as an institution, the school community, cannot make responses of these kinds and so it falls to the head teacher to find these characteristics and develop their representation within the functioning of the school.

Walter (1997) has proposed an alternative model to that of Kubler-Ross(1969) in which It is suggested that the purpose of grief is the construction of a durable biography, that enables the living to integrate the memory of the dead into their ongoing lives. Walter (1996) suggests that the process by which this is achieved is principally by having conversations with all those who knew the dying or deceased. This process hinges on talk more than feeling and entails moving on

with, as well as without, the deceased. The durable biography is thought to be the vehicle for this process of recovery.

Perhaps then the function of the changed relationships and demand characteristics can be explained using this model. Perhaps it is to facilitate this conversation, which would be largely impossible during the existence of the more usual relationships and demand characteristics.

Walter (1997) has said that the model does alert us to the possibility that some bereaved people may be unable to talk with others for reasons such as pre-existing tensions. This might certainly be the case in the usual relationship between a head teacher and a family. There may also be an element that such usual conversations may often be restricted to 'how' issues and avoid those which the family might wish to talk about the 'why' issues. Walter (1997) recognises this in discussion about court explanations of deaths. Coroner's courts answer questions related to how, where and when but not why. The changes that have been described above may well facilitate more of the kind of conversation that would develop the durable biography. This would then enable both the school and the family to integrate the memory of the dead child into their ongoing lives as part of the process of moving on.

Both the Kubler-Ross (1969) model explanation and the explanation related to the model proposed by Walter (1996) are attractive and could possibly be subsumed under the general thesis of a normalisation of human relationships. When a child death occurs the 'unusual' relationship that exists between a family and a school community changes and it becomes more like the normal relationship that exists between two people. In effect, the development of the empathetic relationship and the changed demand characteristics strips away professional barriers and in so doing provides a more usual response that allows both parties to function during a stressful period.

Perhaps it normalises the relationship to enable human reaction rather than changing it to something unusual. Perhaps it strips away the usual professional behaviour patterns that exist between a head teacher and parents. The behavioural derivative of, 'De mortuis nil nisi bonum dicendum est' could well be

seen as another aspect of this process, particularly as it seems to have a limited life span effect.

The work of Olsen (2001) suggests that there are three levels of empathetic maturity displayed in clinical nurses. The final, most mature level is mutuality based on one's perception that the other person creates and maintains meaning that is valid but independent from one's own meaning. It could be expected that head teachers would display this level of empathetic maturity and they would therefore be in a good position to develop this normalisation process while maintaining their own appropriate thoughts and feelings.

## **Interactions with the school community**

### ***Competing demands***

The head teacher's relationship with the school community is a complex one. Moore et al. (2002), in a discussion of the tensions faced by a head teacher, describes their role as, 'very complex indeed.' It is pointed out in this work that these tensions that drive this complexity can arise from the philosophical or ideological views of teaching staff, the need for the school to 'compete' for students and the demands that the school is obliged to respond to in respect of national policy.

Like any manager of a large institution, they have to exercise an executive function but they are also a public servant answerable ultimately to the public and its representatives. Moore et al. (2002) use the term 'managing director' to describe part of the head teacher's role. They also have to ensure that the institution is effective in teaching children at the same time as caring for them. Care cannot be abandoned in favour of effective teaching or teaching abandoned for care and so the executive function is very much a compromise with the need to be aware of the interests of many stakeholders. More in fact than are mentioned in this brief summary.

The head teachers are faced with general issues during the serious illness of a child. There are issues to contend with relating to the behaviour of the child who is ill, their attendance at school at this time and their inclusion during treatments such as chemo-therapy which may be debilitating or disfiguring. As well as

these general issues, there are the more specific issues relating to competing demands.

### ***Specific areas of competing demand***

The funeral arrangements are one such specific area where decisions have to be made about the attendance of staff and children and around the closure of the school. Both in relation to the attendance and to the school closure there were quite differing opinions that the head teacher needs to take account of.

Interestingly, when the head teachers asked for advice on these issues they are told that they must make the decision themselves. This suggests that others from the Local Authority or Governors that normally participate in the running of schools have not thought about the issues, or thought about it but reached no conclusion.

Some of the rituals such as wakes and viewing the body of a child are also specific issues which face the head teacher. Others arise from cultural and religious differences within the school community in respect of the understanding of death, talking about it and following the rituals that accompany death.

The management of grieving pupils and staff are areas of difficulty for the head teacher. Lazenby (2006) has commented on the importance of this role. A balance has to be found between the expression of emotions and the need to continue the teaching and learning processes. This is possibly the most common experience that the head teachers have in respect of this difficulty. It is particularly difficult for a head teacher when the member of staff or child is one who has been particularly close to the child that has died and their emotional levels are very high. It is possibly harder for staff than children as our expectations of continuing to function are greater of them than of children. Some of these issues also arise since there are some staff and pupils who are particularly vulnerable, having had bereavements of their own. Having had this experience they may therefore experience debilitating grief spill-over effects.

Macpherson and Vann (1996) have discussed the lack of attention to understanding the grief experienced by head teachers. For some of the head teachers the need to feel that they can contain the emotions in the school community is one that they have to consider carefully. This may relate to what Costa (2007) has described as the development of expectations about how others should react and to the lack of understanding of the needs of head teachers (Macpherson and Vann, 1996). These expectations sometimes relate to the continuation of the learning function of the school. At other times this is related to their own emotional requirements. This is based on the need to regulate the emotional climate of the school community, so that they are comfortable with the feelings being expressed. This containment can be seen particularly clearly when one head teacher manages to contain her emotions in school until she is relieved to find that, on the arrival of the educational psychologist, she feels released to display the emotions in private to that person. This illustrates the strength of the emotions being contained by the pressures of competing demands.

The issue of memorials for the dead children presents particular difficulties for head teachers. These include differences relating to the importance of the memorials and also their nature. There may be some conflict created here by the cultural expectations in our society. As O’Gorman (1998) comments in western cultures death has been medicalised and that there is evidence that our society cannot look upon death, and the rituals that surround it, as a way of establishing it as a right of passage. Issues relating to memorials may be influenced by those cultural mores and create further issues that the head teacher needs to resolve.

As O’Gorman (1998) has pointed out there are differing attitudes that exist among parents in relation to what their children should be told about death as does Bowlby (1980) and Slaughter and Griffiths (2007). This creates an issue that requires further resolution by the head teacher. The need for the head teacher to inform others in the school community, while suppressing their own feelings creates some of these competing demands. The complexity of this issue is increased when some parents do not wish their children to be told about death and dying.

The decisions related to the language to be used in various forms of written or spoken communication present head teachers with difficulties. Slaughter and Griffiths (2007) comment on these difficulties in the use of language as an issue that has to be faced when telling children about death. Head teachers needed to find the right words to describe to staff and children the events that are taking place. This is difficult enough for an individual speaking about dying and death but much more complex where there is an emotional gradient and a mixture of children with widely differing developmental levels.

Finally, some issues appear to derive from the needs of others that are there to support the school community. There is evidence that others come with needs of their own into the school after the death of a pupil and create the need for the head teacher to accommodate these requirements too.

It is the variety mentioned here within this range of issues that leads to the difficulties experienced by the head teachers. The need to make and be prepared to modify priorities as circumstances change leads to the complexity of decision making. The competing demands which are evident in the interview data provided by these head teachers are wide ranging. The numerous examples described above of the way that competing demands, within the school, challenge the head teachers and require them to make adjustments of some kind in the school functioning, illustrate this complexity. Frequently these relate to the tension between the rituals and processes associated with dying and death and the functioning of the school. Sometimes, however, they relate to the personal choices that the head teachers faces. These complex issues are much as described by Moore et al. (2002).

The position taken by the head teacher when faced with competing demands requires that they balance the impact of grieving with the maintenance of functioning. Previous experience of grief in the school community is one important feature of the situation that makes a considerable difference to the way this resolution takes place. As Papadatou (1997) suggests it is also necessary for professionals to recognise and accept their own grief reactions. To some extent the resolutions of the issues seem to be partly determined by the previous grief experiences of the head teacher.

Perhaps head teachers would benefit from an understanding of the decisions they will have to take and the importance of the previous grief experience for these decisions. Once they are prepared for the decisions, and they understand how previous experience can influence them, the resolution of the competing demands may become more straightforward.

The way in which the resolution of these issues takes place is, perhaps, a key aspect of helping a head teacher to manage a school community during the dying and death of a pupil. There are sources of help and support that can assist in this process. Though others, who help, will not be able to make the decisions for the head teacher they might be of particular help to them in reaching their own decision. Proactive interventions that promote discussions around these difficult decisions might be one way of doing this. As Walter (1969) has suggested, conversations help in the process of moving on and they might also help in the process of decision making.

### ***Buffering***

There is much evidence of the need for the protection of professional staff such as teachers when a child dies. Munson and Hunt (1969) describe the need for peer support and Lazenby (2006) describes teachers as the forgotten grievers. One form of protection is buffering. Buffering is an action that was seen to be present from the interviews with all of the head teachers. It was a term that was introduced, quite spontaneously, in the interview with one of the head teachers. She goes on to describe this as one of the major roles that she undertook during this period.

In its broadest sense, this is the protection of others from the impact of the dying and death of the children. This response which is seen in the discussions with these head teachers is, perhaps, an extension of their caring role regarding their staff. It may be an act of protection of the school community and can be seen, perhaps, as caring but also as an extension of their need to enable the school community to continue to function.

There is a natural response in most of us to protect others from distressing events and as such buffering is perhaps more easily understood than some of the other responses made by the head teachers as they experience these kinds

of events. It is probably in the level of the buffering that takes place that there is a real difference. The difference between the situations that are experienced with a dying or dead child, to those which are experienced at other times requires more buffering. This could be seen as a quantitative difference.

Sometimes however, the buffering response requires some thought. Head teachers are not free to exercise this kind of response anymore than they are completely free to make other responses. They cannot respond with buffering without recourse to the issue of the requirements of the competing demands within the school community. The head teacher is still faced with considering what the bereaved family might expect. In this case the difference is probably qualitative.

One example of this qualitative difference is the issue of involvement with the family by school staff at funerals or during the illness of the child. School staff may be asked about visiting the child during illness and later have to face the decision about attending funerals. Another example is in the protection of the children during the grieving process. Some children can be seen to be very upset and need to be protected as a result of their own emotions. Sometimes there is a need to protect children from the emotions of adults. At other times there is a need to protect very vulnerable children, such as those who have experienced bereavements in their own family.

In these types of examples the head teacher is not free to act entirely to buffer the school community but has to balance the actions they take with the perceived demands of the family. It is this that makes the buffering different from that which might otherwise be considered appropriate.

There also seems to be evidence from the interviews that the head teacher can be faced with buffering of others for whom they would not normally be expected to undertake this role. There are two groups that fall into this category. That of other parents of children in the school and, more surprisingly, that of other support staff that work with the school.



In the case of parents of the school community the head teacher has a buffering role with those that want to express their emotions in respect of the child who was dying or dead. Also it occurs when keeping other parents informed of the latest developments something which the parents found it hard to seek themselves.

In the latter case it is almost a complete role reversal when the head teacher buffers the support staff. Both of these groups were seen as coming to the school with their own needs for support during the grieving process. It was interesting that, during the process of taking the analysis back to one head teacher so that I could check on my interpretation, she recalled this very strongly and described her thoughts as 'OK if I have to - bring it on.'

### ***Thesis about buffering***

Buffering can be seen as a natural behaviour such as the peer support described by Munson and Hunt (1969) but in the circumstances of a child dying, differences seem to develop. The amount of buffering seems to increase and the nature of it is changed because of the perceived or actual requirements of the family of the child, or because of the heightened emotions within the school community. Not only are these changes apparent but there are also new groups of adults who seem to place expectations on the head teacher to buffer them during their grief.

Why might these changes occur? Perhaps the quantitative changes are merely the consequence of the high levels of emotion. The qualitative changes seem to be because of the need to reconcile the competing demands and I am faced again with the consideration of the impact of, 'De mortuis nil nisi bonum dicendum est.'

When considering the new groups that require the buffering by the head teacher the explanation perhaps lies in the cultural expectation that grieving is an enterprise that requires a dialogue just as was suggested by Walter (1996) and the head teacher is a natural focus for these conversations.

### ***Emotional gradient***

During the interviews with the head teachers there was evidence that some of their interactions with other members of the school community are apparently influenced by what I have called the gradient of emotion. As would be expected there are differences in the emotions that individuals experience when a child is dying or has died. O'Connor and Templeton (2002) describe how grief and loss may be experienced repeatedly and how each experience may be different just as each individual's grief experience is unique. Kubler-Ross (1969) also considers that people's grief, and other reactions to emotional trauma, are quite individual. The gradient of emotions is, therefore, quite likely to be a reflection of this individual nature of experience.

What makes this gradient of emotion more complicated in such cases is that it cannot be discussed in an open and honest manner, as this too would offend the principle of, 'De mortuis nil nisi bonum dicendum est.' Any behaviour that could be seen as showing a lack of respect would be offensive yet at one end of the spectrum of feeling there is undoubtedly one perspective that could be described as mild. This perhaps can be because the child was not close or even known to those who feel this way. This then makes the decisions and actions of the head teacher more complex.

There are examples of this gradient within the feelings of the staff and children about the issue of attending the funeral. Other examples are found in the issue of school closure for a funeral and also on the issue of vulnerability. One particularly difficult area is that of the emotional gradient that exists among the parents of children within the school. This particular issue complicates greatly the issue of the balance between managing the sadness and grieving and the functioning of the school as a learning community. Indeed it has an impact on many of the decisions that the head teacher is faced with as described earlier in this section. The head teacher needs to exercise some care in respect of these decisions as they cannot 'offend' either those at one end or the other of this gradient.

### ***Emotional isolation and validation***

There is evidence from these interviews that the head teachers develop a sense of isolation from others in the school community. It seems to bring with it

a need for external validation of their management of the community, during the dying and death of a child. They are faced with many decisions in respect of the balance of the grieving processes and the functioning of the school that have been described earlier.

Perhaps this is a natural consequence of the difficult decisions that face the head teacher, in an environment where there are high emotions and yet an emotional gradient. These decisions have to be made in a situation where the head teachers find it difficult to discuss their decisions with those who matter and where the criteria against which they can judge themselves are complex (Macpherson and Vann, 1996). This is perhaps partly because these individuals are experiencing a grieving process and are not as accessible as they otherwise might be, for example, staff or the bereaved family. Perhaps also the lack of an external source of advice adds to this feeling and brings, as a natural consequence, the need to validate their actions. There can be no easy resolutions of the competing demands in circumstances where there is so much uncertainty.

In addition to these difficulties the head teacher is also experiencing grief and struggling to contain their emotions. It is clear that they recognise both their feelings and the need to respond to their sense of duty and perform the role of head teacher and manager. The management and containment of their emotions during a time when they have to make key decisions and provide support and buffering to a wide range of adults and children presents the head teachers with significant difficulties. To release the emotions would compromise their decision making and reduce their capability to provide the support. This must be a very isolating experience.

An external source of validation at this time would provide the head teacher with some increased certainty about the decisions that they make. It may also provide the emotional release that was evident in the interviews where the educational psychologist was able to play this or a similar role. One alternative outlet and source would, of course, be possible from among the head teacher community and this was certainly advocated during the interviews. Almost certainly however, it is a role for someone external since it requires that the

validator is removed from the same influences that impact upon the head teacher. Otherwise the validation would be similarly compromised.

This need for external validation became quite clear during the interviews when there was some evidence that, even at that late stage, I was being asked to confirm the decisions and actions taken. This was clear both in the words used by the head teachers and in the pleasure that was expressed when the confirmation was perceived by them to be forthcoming. It is also in accord with the research described by Macpherson and Vann (1996). In this work there was comment on one interesting aspect of this which was that, as leaders in a school community, they find it preferable, and indeed comforting, to know that what they are doing is right and that their actions can be publicly justified.

### ***Parental validation***

One interesting form of external validation that seemed to be present for the head teachers, but particularly for one head teacher, was that of the grieving family. This is very clearly shown in the situation after the funeral when a sense of relief is evident that the mother of the dead child is not angry with the head teacher. It is also evident later when the issue of a memorial is discussed. It was clear also for other head teachers over the issue of memorial arrangements too.

Why would such a validation be important to the head teacher? The answer to this might stem from the general need for external validation, since what the head teacher is seeking is confirmation that they have made decisions that meet the needs of all parties. The grieving family, because of the sadness and bereavement, is probably the most difficult of the parties to seek the confirmation from and this therefore increases the importance of the confirmation. This is probably accentuated by the behavioural derivative of, 'De mortuis nil nisi bonum dicendum est.'

### ***Support issues***

The issue of support in the circumstances of a child who is dying or has died in a school is multi-faceted. Some of the support issues have been covered in discussions about buffering and they related to the staff, the children and the other parents of the school community. The issue of support for the head

teacher has been alluded to in the discussions around their feeling of isolation and the consequent need for validation from an external source.

Some of the support that the head teacher receives is that which is reciprocated by others to whom they give their support. Sometimes this can be school staff, sometimes others who are outside this group, such as a family resource worker. What seems to be important about it is that the head teachers are glad of the support and 'enjoy' the mutuality of it. There is confirmation of this in suggestions that come from the interviews that describe the value of collegiate support networks. This is perhaps a further indication of the needs that the head teachers have for such support. It is also confirmed in the comments about the supportive nature of the Educational Psychology Service work. These kinds of support perhaps also add to the sense of external validation that they seek, and which was discussed earlier.

What must be seen as an additional confirmation is in the disappointment sometimes expressed about the lack of support that the head teachers felt in respect of some external agencies.

### ***Family support***

There is, in addition to the support issues outlined above, a further area of support is illustrated during the interviews with the head teachers. This relates to the supportive nature of the developing relationships with some of the grieving and bereaved families. In view of the discussion earlier about the issues of family validation, there is an understandable support to be gained from these developing relationships. It would be a considerable level of validation that the head teacher would feel, albeit often unspoken, when the relationship developed in a positive manner. The mutual benefit of such a relationship should not be underestimated. For the head teacher the validation would be their benefit and for the family, support from and access to, a key figure in the child's life. It would however, probably influence the head teacher's decision making as an increased closeness would bring with it stronger desire to act in any way that was perceived to be in accordance with the family wishes.

It would not be true to say that the need for this kind of support was universal among the head teachers. There was evidence that an alternative strategy was one where the head teacher demonstrated self containment of the emotions that she felt more so than sharing them. This seems to relate to the previous experiences of the head teacher and may also have been influenced by a stronger disagreement with some of the family arrangements.

This did appear, however, to increase the need for validation from the family and so perhaps these are both effective ways of reconciling the thoughts and emotions that come with managing the situation where there is a child death in school. Perhaps they are not different outcomes but only different processes leading to hearing or understanding the views of the family members.

### ***Preparedness and uncertainty***

There is one area of support that requires further exploration and this is one that relates to the preparedness of the head teacher for the events that accompany the death of a child. This has been described as of considerable concern by Papadatou (1997).

There is little evidence from the interviews that there had been planning for the eventual deaths of the children, or how the head teacher would manage the situation. The evidence was more so that on hearing the news the head teacher was at a loss as to how to proceed. Evidence for this comes from the head teachers seeking help from the Educational Psychology Service, asking for advice and materials, and not knowing how to respond when key decisions were required. Decisions that the head teacher needed to make about the school functioning, involvement with the funeral arrangements and support for those who were upset, all fall into this category.

The relief that is expressed when support is given to develop the head teacher's plans, for example by the Educational Psychology Service, highlights the need for it and perhaps also provides that contact that gives the external validation.

There appears to be reluctance to contemplate the planning for a death even when the inevitability is clear. The response of the head teacher prior to the

death of a child seems to be quite limited. This is, perhaps, understandable as it appears to contradict our optimism that the death will not occur or at least the hope that it will not. This is congruent with the thoughts of society's medicalisation of death as pointed out by O'Gorman (1998). It may be that an additional issue is that some of the planning that is required is contingent upon details that can only be known at the time and this would include the parental wishes and arrangements.

Perhaps a more important issue is that of uncertainty. Planning assumes a body of knowledge upon which plans can be based. In order to make plans the head teacher would need to draw on this body of knowledge and use it to guide the decisions that need making. The body of knowledge is, however, not one which is easily accessible. Just because of the nature of the subject, it is something that is not of interest to ordinary people, indeed it has a kind of taboo nature to it. It is something to be avoided. Until I began to write this thesis the level of my knowledge base was much less than it currently is. I had never heard of thanatology and I would expect head teachers to be in much the same position in respect of their knowledge. What makes it a little more complicated is that the head teachers do recognise the need for preparation.

The level of uncertainty expressed by the head teachers is seen in many forms. In the most obvious form it is in the overt expression of it. The uncertainty seems to be made worse by the way in which others expect from them the answers to the questions that they may have. It is also obvious from the uncertain comments and the uncertain ways in which the comments are delivered by the head teachers and in the need for external validation. Macpherson and Vann (1996) suggested that it may also be helpful for head teachers to have some criteria against which to judge their actions.

To summarise the criteria suggested by Macpherson and Vann (1996), which were discussed earlier, they are:

- The maintenance of a problem-solving climate through providing help;
- That there is a tolerance of different beliefs, emotions and perceptions;
- That they have the ability to adapt to challenges;

- The ability to help all people fully participate in the process of learning about death and growth;
- An ability to defend their facilitation of processes in terms of the benefits of long-term learning within the organization.

Many of the issues discussed in this section and indeed this chapter accord well with the suggestions of criteria made in this work summarised above.

It seems clear that the issues of uncertainty, unpreparedness, the need for support and the need for external validation are inextricably linked for the head teachers when there is a child death in their school. The reason for the co-occurrence of these issues seems to lie in the reluctance to learn about dying and death and the consequent lack of planning for the consequences, even when it is inevitable. The head teachers seem pleased to know how to access information and support from a service like the Educational Psychology Service but even when this information was brought into school in preparation for the death of a child it can remain untouched. Examples given by the head teachers included phoning the Educational Psychology Service, rushing to the internet in order to buy materials, having 'quick' consultations, sudden decisions to abandon school processes and admitting that it was something that they thought would never happen to them.

Interestingly, one head teacher indicates that they were 'lucky' that someone had recently had training in, 'Loss and Bereavement' and that the events of the death were totally 'unexpected'. This seems to confirm the reluctance to address what are a set of predictable events as the child was known to be dying. The explanation for all of these co-occurring needs is probably in our cultural reluctance to address the issue of death unless we are forced to do so. One head teacher confirms this in a comment about not talking about a death until it happens.

Finally, in respect of these issues it has to be said that planning and preparedness are only part of the answer. There are some aspects of dying and death that cannot be helped by plans and this relates to the human responses that we have to such very sad events. Our emotions do overcome us and some



people find that they are very difficult to contain or control. What can help however, for these events is some knowledge of our own responses and an acceptance that they are normal.

### ***School disruption***

The complexity of the head teacher's role is well understood (Moore et al., 2002). One of the consequences of the uncertainty, unpreparedness, the need for support and the need for external validation that are discussed above is that of a disruption of school processes. These, as discussed earlier, present the head teacher with a set of decisions that are not easy, and are made more complicated by the gradient of emotion that seems to exist.

There are also disruptions that come as new and different events are required to be incorporated into the school processes. There is a need for information sharing, meetings with parents and children, special assemblies and the events around funeral arrangements. These all become part of the structural management arrangement decisions that the head teacher is required to make, as well as changes to curriculum events. One of the most difficult disruptions is the consideration of school closures. Another is when important school events such as training days have to be abandoned where the head teacher is in a position of being unable to completely please everyone.

The issue of school disruption is one further example of the impact on head teachers. In a political climate where school outcomes for children are of such importance, these disruptions work against the teaching and learning processes that are so important in this climate. The head teacher is not, however, in a position to decide that they will not allow the disruptions. Indeed they are often unable to do anything that will moderate them. Our society is one that requires us to be respectful of the dead and the derivatives of, 'De mortuis nil nisi bonum dicendum est,' are once again powerful influences on the head teachers management of the school.

### ***'De mortuis nil nisi bonum dicendum est'***

In the forgoing discussion of the analysis of the interviews with the head teachers in this research, 'De mortuis nil nisi bonum dicendum est,' has been

referred to on a number of occasions. I have come to think that it plays a very significant role in the impact of child's death on a head teacher. This being the case it should be given some additional consideration in order that it is better understood. I have tried to understand the origins and influences of it and why it may play a key role.

There appears to be this tradition that we do not speak ill of the dead. This is a tradition that is so old that it is expressed in what was once a universally understood Latin phrase, 'De mortuis nil nisi bonum dicendum est' (of the dead, say nothing unless it is good). James (2009) attributes the origins of this phrase to Diogenes Laertius. It is said to refer to mortuary workers' respect in Greece translated as, 'Don't badmouth a dead man.' If this is the case then it originated during the period 200AD to 500AD and has shown remarkable endurance. It has appeared in modern literature in novels by John Bucan, Neville Shute and Christopher Morely and in poetry, theatre and cinema. Probably most famously in Lawrence of Arabia when the clergyman asks: "Well, nil nisi bonum. But did he really deserve . . . a place in here?" when viewing a bust of Laurence in St. Paul's Cathedral. It also appears in politics and medico/legal circles (McGuinness and Brazier, 2008) and (Owusu-Ansah, 2012)

It appears also in the interviews conducted with all of the participants in this research. A typical example of this was given at the opening of Chapter 4 Interpretative Analysis. A further example is from participant 4.

... because he had cystic fibrosis and er... he was he just smiled all the time and he was he never complained it was for him it was just completely normal and he was going for his checkups his mum wanted everything to be completely normal he had loads of friends and er... yes he was just well I know it's a cliché but he was just a little ray of sunshine really yes yes. Judy (24 – 28)

How though can we explain the influence that it has exerted? There seem to be a number of perspectives according to Owusu-Ansah (2012) a lecturer and an investigative journalist who, in describing the late Ghanaian President John Atta Mills, has suggested some reasons for this influence. It is suggested that there may be a number of perspectives with which to view this influence.

The religious perspective is one which suggests that religion has formed an enduring part of human life for centuries and that a doctrine of all the major religions is one where there is some kind of belief in an afterlife. Owusu-Ansah (2012) suggests that this means that to speak ill of the dead may in some way influence some divine power. This divine power is usually thought of as outside human influence and yet the fear still persists that speaking ill may deny the dead an access to this blissful afterlife. Additionally, some Christian religions developed the notion that the living should magnify the good deeds of the dead and diminish their transgressions so that if they were residing in purgatory their liberation to heaven might be speeded.

The social perspective is one that suggests that the family and close friends of the dead person are confused, hurt and experiencing emotional pain and grief. As such they are seen as vulnerable and therefore to speak ill of the dead person would serve to inflict on them more pain and suffering. This is part of the medico/legal argument made by McGuinness and Brazier (2008). One way of doing this is, of course, to prudently avoid mentioning the wrongdoings the deceased might have done on earth. This social perspective seems to have a limited time span and after a while a more critical stance becomes appropriate. This can be seen particularly in prominent figures where critical appraisal of their life follows this immediate restraint.

The innate viewpoint on this issue is one that suggests that people are responsible for their actions during life and where they are criticised they can defend the actions. This means, of course, that they cannot exonerate themselves from any false allegations after they are dead. The suggestion, then, is that this innate response is one that is to give others this chance during life to hear both positive and negative thoughts from others but after death only those positive thoughts should be made public. Though some might argue that the dead cannot be hurt, none the less this would seem to offend the right to a defence. Since the dead cannot change there seems to be little point in the overt criticism as it could make no difference and it would also be very dispiriting for those that saw them differently.

If each of these perspectives contains something of the truth then it is a powerful trilogy of influence. Anything that has innate, social and religious imperatives is going to be difficult to resist. An extract from the interview with participant 1 illustrates the depth of feeling that is perhaps indicative of these imperatives.

John was one of those children he was just..... he touched everybody. He was, he tried his best he was very friendly he persevered and it was obvious to everybody that he had had a very tough life already. But he was prepared to have a go and nothing was going to stop him joining in with his peers etc. (Jane 50 – 53)

It seems to me that this is the case for the head teachers. It impacts on them both in its original form of speaking only good of the children, as seen in their Elevation, but also in the form of the behavioural derivative, where the head teacher is constrained by the real or perceived requirements of the bereaved family in their actions and the decisions that they make.

## **Chapter 6 - Implications for practice**

### **Implications for practice**

These findings are not, of course, relevant only for educational psychologists. As Sim (1998) points out the goal of qualitative research is transferability. This is what is described as theoretical generalisability.

Here, the data gained from a particular study provide theoretical insights which possess a sufficient degree of generality or universality to allow their projection to other contexts or situations which are comparable to that of the original study. The researcher recognises parallels, at a conceptual or theoretical level, between the case or situation studied and another case or situation, which may differ considerably in terms of the attributes or variables that it exhibits' (Sim, 1998, p. 350)

Sim (1998) goes on to caution that it is important to strike a balance that does not involve extrapolating too widely on the basis of the findings. With this in mind it may be reasonable to include other educational or health service personnel as relevant professionals who might expand into this kind of work and find the information described in this chapter useful when undertaking such work. This might include services such as the school doctor and school nurse from health and advisory and inspection services from education. With this in mind I have in the following sections made, what I consider to be reasonable theoretical generalisations, by referring to the support services or professionals as described above rather than considering the implications for practice only for an educational psychologist.

This research is based on the interviews with five head teachers and as such it is not possible to make generalisations about what might be the case with a different group of head teachers. It is clear, even within this small sample, that there are differences between the ways that head teachers respond to the death of a child in their school. What it has done, however, is to suggest how to better understand the impact that a child death has on a head teacher and how to better prepare to assist other head teachers for the eventuality of a child death in their school community.

This research has highlighted the way in which a head teacher is affected when a child dies in a school community. Some of the effects might have been anticipated such as the emotional impact that head teachers feel. Some of this impact drives very strong emotional responses in a professional and this might be seen as surprising by some, as described by Granek et al. (2012). Some of the impact is, however, a surprise and has suggested the need to look more carefully for similar effects in the future. Some of the surprising outcomes relate to the change in relationships, the need for external validation, the gradient of emotion, together with the apparently very significant influence of cultural norms.

What also seems to be illustrated in this research is an indication that there is the possibility that educational psychology services or other schools support service might expand into this field of work and provide head teachers with additional support during what is clearly a very difficult time for the school community. There are indications that the skills and knowledge that are emerging in this field of work are appreciated by head teachers and that, as this knowledge grows, the redefinition of the boundaries of support service work can and will expand. Knowledge and skills of this kind vested in a support professional that understands schools and yet is an 'outsider' to the system provides an ideal professional to explore these support possibilities.

### **Language and emotions**

What is very sad about the learning from this research is that the pattern of child deaths is such that I know that it is very probable, perhaps even certain, that I will have to face this kind of work again. It is work that is upsetting and during the writing of this thesis I have been saddened and sometimes tearful.

One thing that has become clear is the importance of not using euphemisms for dying and death. It seems important to carry this over into support work as euphemistic language is just another way of distancing from the tragedies and may serve to confuse. To do this work well professionals need to understand how much it hurts. Few professionals have any conception of the pain involved in the death of a child. Using the language that has been used in this thesis, should help when working with a head teacher in a school where there has

been a child death. It demonstrates to the head teacher that the professional has the vocabulary and competence to give the help and support that they need and deserve.

It is also the case that children in particular deserve age appropriate honesty in respect of death so that they too can face it in a way that they can understand at their age. The use of straight forward language may then help a head teacher to use the appropriate language with children. Norris-Shortle et al. (1993) commented on the confusion created in young children by the use of euphemistic language in relation to death. 'Passed away', is a good example of the way in which language can be confusing for a child as it gives no sense of the permanence of death. Although the choice of language presents some difficulties, children need to understand so that they too can grieve in their own way. To deny a child their understanding about what has happened to a sibling or a friend is to deny them the opportunity to begin the process of recovery. Silence, lies or euphemisms about death must inevitably lead to confusion in children and perhaps later recrimination. The language that is used is very important. It always is in educational psychology but more especially so in the kind of work needed to support head teachers when a child dies. The importance of the use of language by head teachers is, of course, a further area where the principle of theoretical generalisability would legitimately apply.

Those undertaking this work need to be able to understand the emotions and signify this in what they say but also need to give a head teacher confidence that they can and will help them. They also need to accept that they too will be upset.

### **Elevation**

The analysis of the interviews suggests why, when a child dies, they are Elevated in the descriptions given by others. There seems to be a value in this and the value is one which those who are grieving will benefit from. It is a very human behaviour that may well have survived for such a long time because it enables us to live through the difficult times of death and perhaps also has a survival value in an evolutionary sense. We are a social species and we need therefore to have social ways that are compassionate for those who are

suffering. It apparently helps in the process of recovery within a family and also within a school community. Since this recovery in the school community is one of the aims of support intervention it seems reasonable to make use of it.

### **Emotions and their management**

This research indicates that there are many and varied ways in which the powerful emotions are managed when a head teacher experiences the death of a child. To avoid the emotions, to distance themselves from them or even to project them onto other people is entirely legitimate. Head teachers have very good human reasons for doing this especially as they have the wellbeing of others to consider when they are faced with the difficulties that have been illustrated in the research. The research illustrates what complicates the thoughts and emotions that they experience and the actions that they take.

The balance that they have to find within competing demands and the gradient of emotions is only one aspect of this. They also have to contend with the intrusion of their own previous experiences. Grief revival or spill-over can impact on personal and family life. It is, perhaps, inevitable under these circumstances that they will need to undertake some emotional regulation so that they can function within these complex set of circumstances. It is of course very likely that others too in the school community would be similarly affected including those who might be undertaking support work.

This emotional regulation then helps to bring the school back from the disturbance that has been experienced to a position where it is a recovering school community. It seems important to see and understand how these factors may all play a part and where possible have a view of how previous experience can influence these things. It does suggest that the success of work of this kind will be uncertain without more understanding of the head teacher and perhaps closer working relationship than would otherwise be the case.

### **Interactions with the bereaved family**

This research has shown that the relationship with the family of a dying or dead child changes. It has a different character to the relationship that usually exists between a head teacher and the family of a child in their school. There are



changes in the empathetic response to the family, increased contacts with them, changes in the level and nature of the demand characteristics and changes in the access level accepted by the head teacher. It might be reasonable to generalise this to any professional within the school community who might experience such changes when working with a bereaved family.

There seem to be mutual benefits incorporated in these changes that help the school and the family to continue to function during the period of the child dying and in the immediate period after the death. As such there would seem to be a benefit for all concerned if the educational psychologist or other professionals were to help develop these changes and to provide information about them. Educational psychology services already provide much written information for head teachers but this research suggests that there are aspects of this information which require reform and improvement. This information may enable the head teacher and the family to have a better understanding of the functions that these changes serve. As Walter (1996) has described this might then also facilitate the conversations that would seem to be a necessary part of the processes of grieving. It may be important, however, for any professional to be aware of the limitations of written information.

There may also be some value in the educational psychologist or other professional making the pressures that can come from the emotional gradient and from, 'De mortuis nil nisi bonum dicendum est' more explicit. It may be then that head teachers are better able to understand how these pressures influence the role that they play and the decisions that they make.

Finally, there may also be a value for those supporting a school in providing a very overt validation service to the head teacher. This might ensure that the feelings of isolation are reduced and there is less need to wonder where else they might validate their actions and ideas. In these circumstances the buffering that appears to be a role that the head teacher plays could also be validated as an important aspect of the protection of others. Indeed this kind of validation service may well also provide additional support and buffering for the head teacher.

These kinds of changes in practice may be relevant across a range of professions where there is an aim of providing school support. These changes are ones that might come from having a clearer understanding of the dynamics of the relationship between the head teacher and the bereaved family. The pressures that influence this relationship, when understood, can bring an increased understanding of the way in which a relationship serves to support the functioning of both parties. This should enable support professionals to work more productively with them in the circumstances of a child dying.

### **Interactions with the school community**

The competing demands experienced by a Head Teacher at the time of a child death in a school are ones of which were illuminated by this research. The same applies to the gradient of emotion. If a service is to provide a validation service as part of a change in practice, then these influences must be better understood. Understanding the influences would never enable a support professional to make the decisions with which the head teacher is faced and it would not be appropriate for them to do that. What then might be the nature of a validation service?

Head teachers appear to want to 'check out' their decisions with an external source. It seems that it is not the content of their decision that requires validation however. It would seem to be more the process which provides them with an opportunity to debate the decisions during the consideration of them. It also helps to relieve them from the sense of isolation that they feel when making these difficult decisions. This means that the provision of such a validation service is one that requires the professional to establish ready access to the head teacher in order that they can share their thoughts. Such an arrangement has some practical difficulties which a 'ring back' arrangement, for example, would only partially overcome. Perhaps during an agreed key period a daily update call or visit would be a better answer. A raised awareness that comes from this research helps but the practical applications of it do need to be established by any professional providing this kind of support.

The establishment of such a validation service may also reduce the need for family validation though this seems to me to stem from a different source. It

relates much more to the need of the head teacher to be confident that their decisions and actions do not conflict with the requirements of the family. As such this may respond more to the suggestion made in the previous section relating to how to facilitate the establishment of the different relationship with the family of the dead child.

The support issues that face a head teacher when a child dies are wide ranging. These together with the need for greater preparedness for such an event suggest that any supporting professional needs to be more proactive in the work with schools in order to produce this. Currently the practice of the educational psychology service and probably other similar services is to make schools aware of the support and documentation that is available but this seems to be less than complete or fully effective. It is made so, somewhat, by the tendency for head teachers to distance themselves from any materials produced and provided for them as part of their emotional regulation. The issue of written materials for head teachers seems at first straight forward but the research suggests it might not be so.

It would seem that the provision of training might be very productive. Training that helped head teachers to plan and prepare support arrangements and that alerted them to their need to recognise and use their own methods of emotional regulation could be useful. What seems to be clear, as described above, is that awareness and the provision of materials do not fully meet the requirement of preparation. In particular, the need for planning for the death of a child when they are known to be dying is something that would be a significant benefit. Here too an awareness of the reluctance, felt by the head teachers in this research to do this, would need to be addressed in any training provided by a supporting service. Such training with insights into the emotions and reactions that head teachers are likely to experience would also seem to address the issue of their uncertainty too. What might also be that included in a training package could be planning for the disruption that has been seen to occur in the schools of the head teachers in this research. It is well within the remit of supporting services to provide such training

## **Limitations and further work**

### **Limitations**

The limitations of this research are clear. Only a small number of head teachers have been interviewed. The differences that they display would undoubtedly be considerably greater in a larger participant sample. However, the data provided by the participating head teachers has a richness which has provided considerable insight into what the head teachers experienced when a child in their school community died. As the research has progressed it has become increasingly clear that the prior experiences of head teachers play a very significant part in how they respond when a child dies. This is particularly so when they have experienced bereavement. Such insights are one of the benefits of in depth analysis of the responses of a small number of participants and would not, perhaps, become clear from anything other than the analysis that accompanies qualitative approaches to research.

The limitations of the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis approach, which were discussed in the methodology section of this thesis, remain important. In particular, the researcher 'position' and interpretations of the data play a large part in the way in which the themes are developed in this research. There are, however, strengths which derive from this as the establishment of the comprehensive reflexivity that was described earlier ensures that the context for the interpretations of the data are established for the reader to consider.

One way of establishing the robustness of the data and interpretations is to undertake 'member checks'. This involves checking with participants the accuracy and interpretation of the data that they provided. There were some practical difficulties relating to the use of this process that meant that it was only able to do this with one participant. The analysis was, however, reviewed with one head teacher who participated and was also passed to two colleague educational psychologists for comment. In this way attempts to develop the robustness of the interpretations were pursued though it is important to recognise that this was a less than complete process. What came from this limited form of 'member checking' was confirmation from all three professionals of the appropriateness of the interpretations that had been made of the data

while the head teacher also confirmed the accuracy. Additionally, the head teacher was complimentary about the analysis.

It is important to be aware, however, as well that there is likely to be a power differential that may have influenced the head teacher's feedback on the analysis. A psychologist is often seen as having expertise in understanding underlying motivations for behaviour and this may have been the case here. None-the-less it seems that both of these latter actions have given some confidence in the analysis and discussion that followed.

### **Further work**

It is clear that having undertaken this research that it is only one kind of child death that has been considered. Unfortunately, there are other kinds of death that may well introduce different effects which may have an impact on the head teacher. They may also create new and different situations that they have to manage in schools when they occur.

Sudden child deaths which occur, often in younger children with disabilities, are very shocking. These may introduce that element of disbelief and guilt that can be debilitating for a head teacher when they need to manage the situation. The same applies to another relatively common group of deaths, those of children killed in road traffic accidents. In these circumstances there are likely to be strong emotions in all the members of the school community. There may well, in these circumstances, also be children or adults from the community that witness these events and suffer significant traumatisation as a consequence. This too is likely to bring different emotions and response from a head teacher.

This research has not considered these issues but it does suggest that there will be, in such cases, effects that are not being understood and addressed. The range of critical incidents that are beginning to require the support from educational psychology services has certainly enlarged. Possibly, within a service like the one in my own Local Authority, this is because of the increased level of training and expertise that the service invests in the psychology staff. The service currently trains every year and has manuals and documents available for a variety of tragic events. The service has a reputation for

willingness to provide support and prioritise it over other work. This has seemingly been a significant factor in the increased demand for the work and the range of incidents that bring the request for help. Recently, in the last three months, there has been a considerable involvement with three schools where the actions of teaching staff have been extremely distressing in differing ways. Each of these kinds of incident brings with it unexpected and unexplored impacts for head teachers which almost certainly deserve the same kind of analysis if effective support is to be provided.

## **Conclusions**

Much has emerged from this research about the impact of a child's death on the head teachers in this study. The range of effects that the death of a child in the school community has on the head teacher is very considerable.

The head teachers in this research were affected greatly by the deaths of the children though in differing but very profound ways. All expressed their sadness and grieved in their own ways and while trying to continue to enable the school to function. This often requires that they managed their emotions and those of others in various ways. One head teacher became very controlling of the emotions and actions within the school and seemed to be reacting to her own early grief experiences.

In the case of one head teacher the death of the child caused problems within the head teacher's family. There was a grief spill-over that was clear and revived their grieving for a family member.

The deaths caused changes in the relationships with bereaved families and with school communities. There were changes in the empathetic responses of the head teachers and the demands made on the head teacher by bereaved families, by schools staff and by visitors to the school. These all changed quite dramatically during the dying and death of the child.

There were many issues of support and some of these required the buffering of others. There were changes in the demand expectations. Some of these

demands were surprising and created a sense of incredulity yet were difficult for the head teacher to resist.

Possibly of most interest is the way that the range of views which relate to an emotional gradient and the cultural imperatives, together with the previous experiences of the head teacher, create limitations on the actions that they can take in the management of schools when a child dies.

There was evidence of uncertainty, lack of preparation and this was linked to a clear need for a validation service that could be provided, perhaps, by the professional school support services. This and many other things will need consideration as part of the practice of the services. This research may serve to inform such practice.

Some of this has been very surprising and some of it indicative of the way in which the practice of support professionals might be improved. The research has constructed an insight into the work of the head teachers who have to manage a school when a child dies. It may serve to inform support professionals and other head teachers about how great the impact is on them. It has also displayed how limited is the knowledge of the effects on head teachers, which might arise from other types of critical incident that now seem to have become increasingly a part of the work that support professionals undertake.

### **Final reflections**

In constructing the analysis and the interpretations in this research it has created one form of insight into what happens to a head teacher when a child dies. This serves to increase the knowledge and values that are required to help head teachers. It has also given an insight into what bereaved families feel when a child dies. Additionally, conducting research of this kind illustrates how the researcher interacts with and affects those that we seek to learn about. The greatest benefit should be however that the research helps to inform others who have to undertake similar work with schools and head teachers when tragedy strikes a school community.

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## Appendices

### **Appendix 1 – Semi-structured interview**

You know that we agreed to talk about the events around the death of \*\*\*\*\*. As this is research aimed at understanding the impact of \*\*\*\*\*' death on you I hope you will tell me about the events, the people, the thoughts and feelings as well as the practical issues. I would like to become better informed by what I learn from you.

Are you happy to go ahead with the talk now?

If you want to stop at any time please let me know.

Tell me something of \*\*\*\*\* when he was in school?

What were the events that led up to his death?

What was it like for you on the day you heard that \*\*\*\*\* had died?

What did you do that day?

Were there issues for you as a head teacher when you think about the staff, children, \*\*\*\*\*' class and the community?

What about the bereaved family?

Were there issues relating to your knowledge?

Tell me about coping with the death of \*\*\*\*\*?

What about thoughts and feelings?

Will you tell me about help and support?

Can you tell me about the time of the funeral?

What do you think about \*\*\*\*\* being remembered?

Is there anything you might do differently if it happened again?

What would you say to colleague head teachers in the same situation?

Do you have any ongoing worries or concerns?

Do you have any final thoughts about what happened?

**DCC**[http://www.derbyshire.gov.uk/social\\_health/adult\\_care\\_and\\_wellbeing/health\\_and\\_wellbeing/death\\_and\\_bereavement/default.asp](http://www.derbyshire.gov.uk/social_health/adult_care_and_wellbeing/health_and_wellbeing/death_and_bereavement/default.asp)

**Cruse**<http://www.cruse.org.uk/LocalCruse.html>

01246 550080

**NHS**<http://www.nhs.uk/carersdirect/guide/bereavement/pages/bereavementsupport.aspx>



## **Appendix 2 – Ethics and consent**

### **Information sheet for those asked to participate in this research project.**

You are being asked to participate in a research project that is part of the DEdPsy programme of Sheffield University School of Education. The researcher is Ian Shepherd who works for Derbyshire County Council as a Senior Educational Psychologist with over 30 years experience. He is registered with the University for the purposes of this research and is supervised by Tom Billington, Professor of Educational and Child Psychology, throughout the research process. He is also registered to practise by the Health Professions Council.

The outline of this project has been subject to ethical review by the University and it has been recognised as having met all the appropriate safeguards for the care and well-being of those involved.

Before you give your consent you should be aware of the nature and extent of the project and this is therefore described below. You are free to ask questions about this in order to make an informed decision and you should be clear that there is no obligation, actual or implied, that should make you feel that you have to participate. Should you agree to participate you will have regular opportunities to change your mind as the project progresses. In particular you will be asked for your continuing consent at the beginning of any meeting.

You should be reassured that you, your school nor anyone concerned with the data of the project will not be identified in any way other than to the researcher. This would be unnecessary for this project but even so your anonymity, and that of others, will be safeguarded. The research supervisor and assessors will see only anonymised information relating to the research.

The research

As part of the work Ian Shepherd undertakes for Derbyshire County Council as an educational psychologist he convenes and chairs a regular review group that develops the way in which educational psychologists support schools when

they experience traumatic events. One key aspect of this work, that requires further development, is the capability to prepare schools for such eventualities. This requires that there is a better understanding of the impact of such events on key professionals, in particular and for the purposes of this research, the Head Teacher. With a better understanding, it is hoped, will come a better capability to develop the means to prepare for, and support the recovery of, the school community when tragic event occur.

It is because you have had such a tragic experience in your school that you are being asked to participate. It is hoped that through a process of semi-structured interviews, which will be digitally recorded, the researcher will gain some insight into the issues with which you had to deal. These are likely to be issues relating to your own thoughts and feelings and to the ways in which you managed the school through this process.

The interviews that are conducted will be recorded digitally so that they can be accurately transcribed but once that process is complete the recordings will be destroyed though written transcripts will be retained for analysis and will be included in the write up of the project. It is important that this happens so that the data is accurate and fully analysed. You will not be identifiable in any way during this process and the same applies to your school.

It is likely that the project will take two years to complete and then it will be submitted to the University. It may be that as the project progresses and information begins to emerge that informs the educational psychology service practice that this information will be used to improve the support that is extended to schools when tragic events occur.

As there is the possibility of issues being raised that may be upsetting, you will be given opportunities to break off or even discontinue your participation and you will be able to do this at any time. Should you decide to terminate your involvement you will not be criticised nor coerced to continue in any way. Should you become distressed the researcher will be able to provide sources of appropriate support that you can use if you wish.

As the nature of the research follows from a family bereavement the family concerned will be asked to give their consent for the research to take place. They too will be told about the reasons for the research, the nature of it and the extent so that they can make an informed decision. If it is agreed by both parties that it would be helpful to hold a joint meeting to discuss the issues before either give consent then this can be arranged. The first contact with the bereaved family will, however, be by the researcher probably by telephone, not earlier than six weeks after the bereavement when an outline of the research will be given and an opportunity to discuss the research in more detail will be offered during a face-to-face discussion.

Ian Shepherd

Senior Educational Psychologist

St Helena Centre

Sheffield Road

Chesterfield

S41 7LU

01246 204851

Registered to practise by the Health Professions Council

<http://www.hpcheck.org/>

## **Research information sheet for bereaved parents**

This information sheet is to inform you of a proposed research project that is trying to better understand the impact of tragic events in schools.

I know that you have experienced some very sad events recently. To have your child die is beyond the comprehension of those of us who have not had this happen to us. I would like to say how sorry I am that you, and the rest of your family, find yourself in this position and I hope that by approaching you I have not in any way added to your grief.

You are being asked to give your consent to a research project that is trying to understand the impact of such tragic events on key professionals, in particular and for the purposes of this research, the Head Teacher of the school which your child attended. You are not, however, being asked to participate in the research. Because of the nature of the research, which will be conducted with the head teacher, I was of the view that it would only be courteous to you to seek your approval. Should you not approve then I would feel that I was unable to proceed with the research in the school your child attended.

The reason for the research is that as part of the work I undertake for Derbyshire County Council as an a Senior Educational Psychologist I convene and chair a review group that regularly meets to develop the way in which educational psychologists support schools when they experience traumatic events. Should you agree to it you may feel that others may be helped by the knowledge that is acquired.

The research is part of the DEdPsy programme of Sheffield University School of Education. The research is to be conducted by me and my name is Ian Shepherd. I have worked for Derbyshire County Council as a Senior Educational Psychologist for over 30 years. I am registered to practise by the Health Professions Council and I am registered with the University for the purposes of this research which is supervised by Tom Billington, Professor of Educational and Child Psychology, throughout the research process.

You should be reassured that you, the school nor anyone concerned with the data of the project will not be identified in any way. This would be unnecessary for this project but even so your anonymity, and that of others, will be safeguarded. The research supervisor and assessors will see only anonymised information.

As the nature of the research follows from a family bereavement you, as the unfortunate family concerned are being asked to give their consent for the research to take place.

If you now wish to give your consent to this research project would you please sign this form and date it.

Signature

Date

Ian Shepherd

Senior Educational Psychologist

St Helena Centre

Sheffield Road

Chesterfield

S41 7LU

01246 204851

Registered to practise by the Health Professions Council

<http://www.hpcheck.org/>

## Participant Consent Form

University of Sheffield

**Title of project:** The impact of a child's death on a head teacher

**Name of researcher:** Ian Shepherd

**Participant identification number for this project:** 1

**Please initial box**

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet dated ../../.. for the above project and have had the opportunity to ask questions

2. I understand that my participation is voluntarily and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason. Contact number 0000 000000

3. I understand that my responses will be anonymised before analysis. I give permission for members of the research team to have access to my anonymised responses

4. I agree to take part in the above research project

_____	_____	_____
Name of participant	date	signature
_____	_____	_____
Name of person taking consent	date	signature
_____	_____	_____
Lead researcher	date	signature

Copies once this has been signed by all parties the participant will receive a copy of the signed and dated participant consent form and the information sheet.

A copy of the signed and dated consent form will be placed on the project main record which will be stored confidentially and not shown to anyone.

## **Appendix 3**

### **Part 1 - Sample text from Jane interview**

What were the issues relating to your own knowledge?

Again it's all very much personal my knowledge was very much based on my own experience with my brother. What I found is that how other people acted towards me when my brother was dying some people every time I saw them was like ask how is your brother? How is he getting on? And then could not talk about the sadness of when he died. Others they used euphemisms they could not even say cancer or dying they skirted around the issue and then there are others who would talk about anything but and would avoid the situation totally and I was very much aware of how I was treated and how other people treat death and cancer and I was very much aware of that with being the staff would have all those issues.... in one member.... in one group of people and the parents and the children so it's getting a very fine balance where people aren't offended by it by how you talk.

There are a lot of parents.... like why are we talking about death to young children it is not appropriate. So it was getting that very fine balance of addressing it because it is something that is going to happen and it is better for the children to have those life skills to be able to cope with death and bereavement in a controlled environment than parent who can't support the child themselves.

Part 2 - Sample text from Jane interview in spreadsheet

P1	340. What were the issues relating to your own knowledge?		
P1	341.		
P1	342.		
P1	343. Again it's all very much personal my knowledge was very much based on my		
P1	344. own experience with my brother. What I found is that how other people acted		
P1	345. towards me when my brother was dying some people every time I saw them		
P1	346. was like ask how is your brother? How is he getting on? And then could not		
P1	347. talk about the sadness of when he died. Others they used euphemisms they		
P1	348. could not even say cancer or dying they skirted around the issue and then		
P1	349. there are others who would talk about anything but and would avoid the		
P1	350. situation totally and I was very much aware of how I was treated and how		
P1	351. other people treat death and cancer and I was very much aware of that with		
P1	352. being the staff would have all those issues.... in one member.... in one group		
P1	353. of people and the parents and the children so it's getting a very fine balance		
P1	354. where people aren't offended by it by how you talk.		
P1	355.		
P1	356. There are a lot of parents.... like why are we talking about death to young		
P1	357. children it is not appropriate. So it was getting that very fine balance of		
P1	358. addressing it because it is something that is going to happen and it is better		
P1	359. for the children to have those life skills to be able to cope with death and		
P1	360. bereavement in a controlled environment than parent who can't support the		
P1	361. child themselves.		
P1	362.		
P1	363. Were there other issues around death and grieving that you felt that you		
P1	364. did not know enough about?		
P1	365.		



### Part 3 - Sample text from Jane interview with analysis

P1	340. What were the issues relating to your own knowledge?	
P1	341.	
P1	342.	In this section P1 talks about her preparedness for the death
P1	343. Again it's all very much personal my knowledge was very much based on my own experience with my brother. What I found is that how other people acted towards me when my brother was dying some people every time I saw them was like ask how is your brother? How is he getting on? And then could not talk about the sadness of when he died. Others they used euphemisms they could not even say cancer or dying they skirted around the issue and then there are others who would talk about anything but and would avoid the situation totally and I was very much aware of how I was treated and how other people aren't offended by it by how you talk.	This draws P1 back into the sadness of her own bereavements
P1	344. own experience with my brother. What I found is that how other people acted towards me when my brother was dying some people every time I saw them was like ask how is your brother? How is he getting on? And then could not talk about the sadness of when he died. Others they used euphemisms they could not even say cancer or dying they skirted around the issue and then there are others who would talk about anything but and would avoid the situation totally and I was very much aware of how I was treated and how other people aren't offended by it by how you talk.	P1 is reliving her own brother's death
P1	345. towards me when my brother was dying some people every time I saw them was like ask how is your brother? How is he getting on? And then could not talk about the sadness of when he died. Others they used euphemisms they could not even say cancer or dying they skirted around the issue and then there are others who would talk about anything but and would avoid the situation totally and I was very much aware of how I was treated and how other people aren't offended by it by how you talk.	In talking about the use of words by others P1 is aware of what is expected of her in talking to others about John's death. It is likely that in a large part this will be concern about how to speak to children
P1	346. was like ask how is your brother? How is he getting on? And then could not talk about the sadness of when he died. Others they used euphemisms they could not even say cancer or dying they skirted around the issue and then there are others who would talk about anything but and would avoid the situation totally and I was very much aware of how I was treated and how other people aren't offended by it by how you talk.	P1's treatment by others during her brother's death makes her self-aware and also aware that there is likely to be an impact on other staff who may have experienced bereavements
P1	347. talk about the sadness of when he died. Others they used euphemisms they could not even say cancer or dying they skirted around the issue and then there are others who would talk about anything but and would avoid the situation totally and I was very much aware of how I was treated and how other people aren't offended by it by how you talk.	
P1	348. could not even say cancer or dying they skirted around the issue and then there are others who would talk about anything but and would avoid the situation totally and I was very much aware of how I was treated and how other people aren't offended by it by how you talk.	
P1	349. there are others who would talk about anything but and would avoid the situation totally and I was very much aware of how I was treated and how other people aren't offended by it by how you talk.	
P1	350. situation totally and I was very much aware of how I was treated and how other people aren't offended by it by how you talk.	
P1	351. other people treat death and cancer and I was very much aware of that with being the staff would have all those issues.... in one member.... in one group of people and the parents and the children so it's getting a very fine balance where people aren't offended by it by how you talk.	P1 refers to 'offended' and this makes it clear that she does not want to offend and wishes to use appropriate language
P1	352. being the staff would have all those issues.... in one member.... in one group of people and the parents and the children so it's getting a very fine balance where people aren't offended by it by how you talk.	
P1	353. of people and the parents and the children so it's getting a very fine balance where people aren't offended by it by how you talk.	
P1	354. where people aren't offended by it by how you talk.	
P1	355.	
P1	356. There are a lot of parents.... like why are we talking about death to young children it is not appropriate. So it was getting that very fine balance of addressing it because it is something that is going to happen and it is better for the children to have those life skills to be able to cope with death and bereavement in a controlled environment than parent who can't support the child themselves.	Another conflict here as parental pressures arise around how P1 deals with the death
P1	357. children it is not appropriate. So it was getting that very fine balance of addressing it because it is something that is going to happen and it is better for the children to have those life skills to be able to cope with death and bereavement in a controlled environment than parent who can't support the child themselves.	The issue of balance reoccurs regularly indicating the competing demands
P1	358. addressing it because it is something that is going to happen and it is better for the children to have those life skills to be able to cope with death and bereavement in a controlled environment than parent who can't support the child themselves.	
P1	359. for the children to have those life skills to be able to cope with death and bereavement in a controlled environment than parent who can't support the child themselves.	This is a clear example of competing demands. There is research around letting children grieve
P1	360. bereavement in a controlled environment than parent who can't support the child themselves.	
P1	361. child themselves.	
P1	362.	
P1	363. Were there other issues around death and grieving that you felt that you did not know enough about?	
P1	364. did not know enough about?	
P1	365.	

**Part 4 - Sample text from Jane interview with emerging subordinate themes**

P1	340. What were the issues relating to your own knowledge?		
P1	341.		
P1	342.	In this section P1 talks about her preparedness for the death	
P1	343. Again it's all very much personal my knowledge was very much based on my		
P1	344. own experience with my brother. What I found is that how other people acted	This draws P1 back into the sadness of her own bereavements	Grief spill over
P1	345. towards me when my brother was dying some people every time I saw them		
P1	346. was like ask how is your brother? How is he getting on? And then could not	P1 is reliving her own brother's death	Grief spill over
P1	347. talk about the sadness of when he died. Others they used euphemisms they		
P1	348. could not even say cancer or dying they skirted around the issue and then	In talking about the use of words by others P1 is aware of what is expected of her in talking to others about John's death. It is likely that in a large part this will be concern about how to speak to children	Uncertainty
P1	349. there are others who would talk about anything but and would avoid the		
P1	350. situation totally and I was very much aware of how I was treated and how	P1's treatment by others during her brother's death makes her self aware and also aware that there is likely to be an impact on other staff who may have experienced her own bereavements	Emotional projection
P1	351. other people treat death and cancer and I was very much aware of that with		
P1	352. being the staff would have all those issues.... in one member.... in one group		
P1	353. of people and the parents and the children so it's getting a very fine balance		
P1	354. where people aren't offended by it by how you talk.	P1 refers to 'skirted' and 'talkes' it'd say that she does not want to offend and wishes to use appropriate language	Uncertainty
P1	355.		
P1	356. There are a lot of parents... like why are we talking about death to young	Another conflict here as parent's pressures arise around how P1 deals with the death	Competing demands
P1	357. children it is not appropriate. So it was getting that very fine balance of	The issue of balance reoccurs regularly indicating the competing demands	Competing demands
P1	358. addressing it because it is something that is going to happen and it is better		
P1	359. for the children to have those life skills to be able to cope with death and		
P1	360. bereavement in a controlled environment than parent who can't support the	This is a clear example of competing demands. There is research around letting children grieve	Competing demands
P1	361. child themselves.		
P1	362.		
P1	363. Were there other issues around death and grieving that you felt that you		
P1	364. did not know enough about?		
P1	365.		

## Part 5 - Subordinate themes from Jane sorted for analysis

P1	344.own experience with my brother. What I found is that how other people acted	This draws P1 back into the sadness of her own bereavements	Grief spill over
P1	346.was like ask how is your brother? How is he getting on? And then could not	P1 is reliving her own brother's death	Grief spill over
P1	397.got quite close and we talked about our own.... she had a personal	P1 and FRW both have their own experiences of death being recalled because of these events	Grief spill over
P1	554.Derbyshire it gets things into perspective. Yes!	Is P1 challenging her own sense of perspective here? This perhaps relates to her brother's death	Grief spill over
P1	590.everybody that has baggage. I think that if you have experienced death	Personal 'baggage' is how P1 refers to her emotional environment and to her own bereavement	Grief spill over
P1	592.but you deal with it very differently.	Perhaps a comparison between dealing with death as a person and a HT	Grief spill over
P1	195.together in the early times of grief. That was what we were going to share. I	Here P1 talks about her role with staff	Grief stages
P1	467.to have lots of friends and John will always be our friend. We then looked at	Some lack of acceptance of John's death	Grief stages
P1	469.then we finish off with a very silly song so they left the assembly and finished	The developing theme is from sadness to happiness which is probably good for the children and the staff it gives a sense of moving on in P1	Grief stages
P1	484.call it John's train yes! So that all the children can have fun with it	The 'children can have fun with it' gives a further sense of moving on as a community	Grief stages
P1	81.neck. The doctors thought it was just a virus and they struggled through for	Feeling powerless at the news	Living the illness
P1	82.three weeks and then he deteriorated really quickly to not being able to	A description by P1 of what was happening to John and how severe his difficulty is	Living the illness
P1	87.a scan and they said that the tumour had come back and had obviously gone	Feeling powerless at the news	Living the illness
P1	203.happening. Because it's the not knowing isn't it? Yes! And that anxiety, the	The close contact seems to have benefited P1 as well as creating some difficulty	Living the illness
P1	153.Err so what issues did I have for myself first of all? Again you bring with it your	P1 recognises that the death brings back her own experiences of bereavement	Personal grief regression
P1	154.own baggage. Err only a couple of years before my brother had died of	Here there is an increase in the hesitant speech (More Err hesitations) as P1 faces her own experiences of death.	Personal grief regression
P1	155.cancer. I saw my brother obviously in the last few days of his cancer and it	Some difficulty with the word death.	Personal grief regression
P1	156.was something I never wanted to live through again err and so the request to	P1 seems to be wrestling with her emotions as she is reminded of her brother's death	Personal grief regression
P1	158.reasons, because I didn't want to bring up all my.... my personal history err	A hint at some difficult issues in reference to 'personal history'	Personal grief regression
P1	208.	Here P1 describes one element of the disruption to school life	School disruption
P1	212.day back in September and we threw that all out of the window and we had an	These events completely disrupted the school planned training	School disruption
P1	234.we don't want to prolong their, the morale in the school was.... was very	P1 finds it difficult to say how long it was as a consequence of John's dying process	School disruption

## Part 6 - Table of emerging themes

### Themes

	<b>Superordinate themes</b>	<b>Subordinate themes</b>
<b>Overarching theme - Elevation</b>	Emotions and their management	Emotional impact Emotional regulation Emotional projection Emotional distancing and avoidance Grief spill over
	Interactions with the bereaved family	Family empathy and living the illness Parenting role and family absorption Family conflict Family demands Family support
	Interactions with the school community	Competing demands Buffering Emotional gradient Emotional Isolation and validation External validation Family validation Support issues Planning for the death Uncertainty Unpreparedness School disruption

1.Interview text participant 1 - Jane
2.Participant 1 Interview 13.01.12
3.
4.My words are in Bold and names are made up.
5.
6.What I would like to do is talk about all the events around John's death.
7.The aim of the research is to try and understand the impact on you in
8.particular. What I hope you will tell me about are about all the events, the
9.people that thoughts and feelings as well as the practical issues. What I
10.would like to do is to get really well informed about the whole picture
11.that occurs to you as a head in managing it.
12.
13.I need to just check with you that you are happy to go ahead because
14.the University requires me to make sure that you are okay with that. If
15.you want to stop at any time just let me know.
16.
17.Do you want to just tell me some things about John about when he was
18.in school? Tell me things about him, how it was when he was in school?
19.
20.Okay if I start even before that, because I think I was emotionally involved
21.with John for quite personal reasons. I met, I started the headship here in
22.September 2009 and at that time not only was I starting as the Head but my
23.daughter was starting school full-time and as a parent you have all the
24.emotions of..... your daughter is starting school etc etc
25.
26.
27.It was a couple of months after that I met John's parents. They came in to talk
28.about their eldest son Peter and during that conversation mum got quite
29.emotional because I was in the process of having meetings for parents whose
30.children would be starting school later on that academic year. The
31.conversation was very much about.....and obviously John was not going to
32.be able to come to a mainstream school and obviously she was very
33.emotional about that. And the fact that I have just had that emotion, I knew
34.exactly how important it was and what a big milestone it was. So what
35.followed was we had lots of meetings about how we could make sure that
36.John was included in mainstream school. We were very fortunate that we got
37.TEYS funding very quickly and it meant that John could start school in
38.September along with its his peers as his mum and dad hoped for but never
39.thought that it would actually happen
40.
41.Really
42.
43.It was.... was a real momentous day for the parents that they had actually
44.achieved that milestone that, they thought he would never live that long any
45.way as well. So they actually achieved their first goal, so to speak and as I
46.say I knew emotionally I knew exactly how they were feeling as parents, so I
47.was delighted that together we had actually managed to achieve that. Yes!
48.
49.
50.John was one of those children he was just..... he touched everybody. He
51.was, he tried his best he was very friendly he persevered and it was obvious
52.to everybody that he had had a very tough life already. But he was prepared
53.to have a go and nothing was going to stop him joining in with his peers etc
54.
55.
56.The first term went very well up until Christmas when..... when he started to
57.become very tired and withdrawn and it turned out that his brain tumour had
58.re err grown and he had to go back into hospital err but fortunately they
59.managed to take the tumour away and he was actually back in school again in
60.January. So we lived through again, with the parents, that trauma of having
61.him diagnosed again and then obviously come.... coming back. Err so we're
62.all very emotionally attached to the family and John from a very early stage
63.we had been through their anxiety about not starting school and then
64.obviously the anxiety about going to the hospital and because of his nature
65.and he's just.... he was always smiling he was always happy even when he
66.was poorly he was still such an upbeat little boy that everybody had John's
67.best interests.... everybody loves John. He was one of their special children
68.that everybody looked out for. That is pupils teachers everybody the whole,
69.every stakeholder within the school really wanted the best for John we were
70.all emotionally attached to him. Yes!

71.
72.What were the events that lead you to knowing about his death?
73.
74.He err it came entirely out of the blue err he finished his first year at school on
75.a very high note he'd had a very successful year. We had done the transition
76.for him to go into year one and I had a phone call from, I had a text from a
77.mid-day supervisor who said could she give my phone number to Mr Smith.
78.Err she didn't put any reasons but she said it was very important. So
79.obviously I agreed to that and Pat rang me.... Mrs Smith rang me to say that
80.over the holidays soon after we had broken up John was complaining of a stiff
81.neck. The doctors thought it was just a virus and they struggled through for
82.three weeks and then he deteriorated really quickly to not being able to
83.swallow not being able to move his head at all getting very wobbly.
84.
85.
86.They took him to A and E . A and E rushed him over to Sheffield. Sheffield had
87.a scan and they said that the tumour had come back and had obviously gone
88.through his whole body. And there was nothing they could do and they had
89.been transferred to Bluebell Hospice. And it was days before the diagnosis.
90.So it came totally out of the blue it all came in the August holidays just after
91.bank holiday err for Mrs Smith which was totally unbelievable. Because he left
92.here four or five weeks before absolutely fine. Yeah.
93.
94.What was it like for you on the day you heard that?
95.
96.
97.Stunned! Disbelief! To begin with err I was at home as well so you are isolated
98.and when you are here with your computer and all your contacts. Err
99.fortunately for me we had that meeting June July time when you said, "Are we
100.aware of that service if there is a bereavement or critical incident I think is the
101.word you used as well to contact the service." That was fresh in my mind and
102.so it was that you were the first port of call. What do I do? I'd have never had
103.any training how to deal with it and I think it was a knee jerk reaction before I
104.sat down and started I needed to talk to somebody before I could actually
105.start to think of an action plan. Just to talk to somebody. What do I do next?
106.
107.So just talking to somebody was quite a help was it?
108.
109.Absolutely!
110.
111.Yes! Possibly it may have been different if I was in school because obviously I
112.would have had the senior leadership team there had my deputy head there
113.and we may have brainstormed what we do next. Err I wanted to talk to
114.somebody removed from that and I think that was useful so I could then work
115.as a buffer as well and protect the staff because in hindsight as well the staff
116.everybody, everybody suffered and it's a shock. I know how much of a shock it
117.was for me and I wanted to lessen that blow for the rest of the staff as well. So
118.talking to somebody outside who was not involved was useful. Would I have
119.done that in school? I don't know I would probably come straight to Joan the
120.SENCO who is our Acting deputy head at the moment.
121.
122.It is interesting that you felt you had to protect the staff. Can you
123.develop that I mean.....
124.
125.
126.I think death is such.... it affects everybody doesn't it? Err and for me to be in
127.a position where I can offer that support immediately I.... I wanted that support
128.from people that I knew of so if I'm telling the member of staff that something
129.has happened, they immediately want that support back so I have got to be in
130.a position where I feel strong enough to be able to give that support. Yes!
131.
132.What were the issues for you as a head teacher around the staff, the
133.children, John's class and the school as a community? What were the
134.issues you dealt with then?
135.
136.
137.OK! The first issue was the family requested err for me to visit the hospice. Err
138.and she also.... she said I would like you to come to the hospice to see John
139.to say goodbye to John and do you think any other member of staff would like
140.to come as well?

141.
142. Just checking John was by then dead was he?
143.
144. No he had.... he was diagnosed with days left to live.
145.
146. Right okay!
147.
148. So he had days left, so this was the Tuesday and they didn't think that he
149. would last week through. And we were due back. That was the Tuesday we
150. were back a week that Tuesday.
151.
152.
153. Err so what issues did I have for myself first of all? Again you bring with it your
154. own baggage. Err only a couple of years before my brother had died of
155. cancer. I saw my brother obviously in the last few days of his cancer and it
156. was something I never wanted to live through again err and so the request to
157. go and visit John is one that I personally didn't want to do for my own personal
158. reasons, because I didn't want to bring up all my.... my personal history err
159. but then I also felt that I had to represent the school by fulfilling that request.
160.
161.
162. It put a lot of pressure on me and my husband. My husband was saying that it
163. was above and beyond the call of duty and I shouldn't feel like I should do it
164. and so he was obviously trying to protect me. But then I knew I had to do it for
165. the school and for John and the family.
166.
167.
168. The comment; do I think that other staff would want to visit was very difficult
169. because she was leaving that in my court to say.... to ring up, in the holidays,
170. certain members of staff asking them if they wanted to go to the hospice.
171.
172. Did she specify them?
173.
174.
175. She didn't specify them. She said do I think any staff would want to go. So I
176. took quite a while thinking about that and in the end I contacted the staff to
177. give them the news. Err I said I am there for them to talk to me if they want to
178. talk further with me about anything err and that is if anybody would like to join
179. me to visit John please contact me and we will discuss the logistics. And I
180. thought that way I'm not.... I'm not the one who's saying you can go and visit
181. the hospice but you can't. So I did do an open invitation. As it turned out it was
182. Joan who had obviously been the SENCO who had worked very closely with
183.
184. the family. It was Deborah who was the TA support and it was Mary who was
185. going to be the next class teacher and it was the four of us that actually went
186. to visit John the following day.
187.
188.
189. Err (Long pause) It was obviously very hard he err and at that time the
190. diagnosis.... we all felt that would be the last time we saw John. After the
191. meeting we met and we talked about how everyone was feeling back together
192. we can work through it and we will be there to support each other within the
193. staff so that the teachers who went to the hospice obviously had.... we were
194.
195. together in the early times of grief. That was what we were going to share. I
196. was aware very much that I had dropped this bombshell. They were.... the
197. other staff were coming to school not still not knowing what was happening so
198. on a daily basis I was giving them an update on what Pat was sending me to
199. say what state John was in. He defied all odds and he.... he didn't die at the
200. end of that week he actually err survived that week and the following week so
201. he was still alive when we came back to school. Err but I think one of the most
202. important things is that the staff were constantly informed all of what was
203. happening. Because it's the not knowing isn't it? Yes! And that anxiety, the
204. staff found that very useful that we all knew what was happening.
205.
206. What about with the other children?
207.
208.
209. With the children err again it was following the discussion with yourself.... got
210. all the material all off the website that you sent me in the e-mail and

211. fortunately for us we had an inset on the first day back first day back.... first  
212. day back in September and we threw that all out of the window and we had an  
213. inset. The first bit of the morning looking at how we were going to tell the  
214.  
215. children what was happening. So we discussed the type of questions we think  
216. the children may be asking. How will we answer that? Have we got the facts  
217. to answer that information?  
218.  
219.  
220. We were looking at the resources we had in school and particularly the story  
221. books that we used for err and looking at the organisation of the first day. We  
222. still didn't know at that point are we starting with some bad news.... sad news  
223. that John had died or were we saying that we have some very sad news  
224. that John was very ill and he's not going to be returning to school and he is  
225. going to die. And still planning it was still that unknown. I think it probably  
226. would have been easier if he had died before it was the end so it was an  
227. ongoing process.  
228.  
229. It made your planning easier?  
230.  
231. Yes! It was very difficult because obviously we were, it was a day-to-day  
232. basis. Hour by hour basis. Is he alive is he dead what are we telling the  
233. children? Where do we go now? And just keeping the children informed but  
234. we don't want to prolong their, the morale in the school was.... was very  
235. very....  
236.  
237.  
238. You know normally on the start of a school year it is very upbeat. At the start  
239. of a new year and you know everyone's boosting morale and how fantastic  
240. and instead it was trying to get that balance and starting a new year how  
241. exciting it was the class but also an opportunity because obviously the  
242. children were aware and the parents and the community were aware so it was  
243. trying to get that balance. It was very sad about John is very poorly and he  
244. is not going to live also getting the balance that we knew he was going to die.  
245.  
246. And what about other parents in the community? Were there issues  
247. there?  
248.  
249.  
250. Err a lot of the parents wanted to come and talk. Again I think some of that  
251. was to find out more up-to-date information. We are very very lucky that we  
252. have a very very strong relationship with our family resource worker and the  
253. family resource worker based herself here on a regular basis.... and she does  
254.  
255. the drop ins on a Friday afternoon we have coffee mornings for the parents if  
256. they have any slight concerns they can come and talk to Lilly. So we used  
257. Lilly an awful lot that week as well. So that they could come and have coffee  
258. and collectively they could talk about how sad the situation was and share  
259. their emotions as well as a group of parents if they so choose to. It was  
260. fortunate that we already had a relationship.  
261.  
262. And once you have heard that John had died did any of those things  
263. change for you? I mean was it the first day of term that you knew?  
264.  
265. No he survived the first week it was the Sunday. So we did a full week and it  
266. was the Sunday he died. Did things change with parents in particular?  
267.  
268. Any of those issues really staff, children, parents.  
269.  
270.  
271. Not a sense of relief on the Monday but at least there was closure. It was the  
272. waiting and how long.... as I say because.... as I say because it was the  
273. beginning of a school year there is that expectation that you throw yourself  
274. fully in to a new school year and it is all very exciting, starting a new topic.  
275. But staff found it very hard to get motivated. They were waiting for the phone  
276. call. So in some way to actually.... actually say well it is, John has died we  
277. could address those issues plan for the funeral and then the funeral is for lots  
278. of people.... that closure then they feel they can move on. Whereas I think we  
279. had a second stone where we were waiting.... waiting.... waiting. Almost relief  
280. that we can now address these issues with the children and ourselves going



281.to be able to move on.
282.
283.Once you have got the news of John's death what about the issues with
284.the bereaved family? What was that like?
285.
286.
287.It was a Sunday afternoon again I got the phone call to say that John had
288.died. Obviously it was all done over the phone it was very difficult. We had the
289.request again if we wanted to go and see John I made the decision that....
290.thank you very much that on behalf of the school I did not offer that to any
291.other member of staff. I thought this was their family time and it was not for
292.others to go and visit John after the death. Mum approached to.... I suppose
293.what mum was saying in that we were waiting for the phone call mum was
294.obviously planning the funeral. So she had a very clear idea as John
295.had died of what she wanted to happen for the funeral itself and she wanted
296.the school to be involved with him.
297.
298.Interruption secretary asking for diary
299.
300.
301.She said she said she wanted the school involved within the funeral and she
302.was.... she was saying things such as John is going to be buried in his school
303.uniform that she wanted the hearse to stop at the top of that drive. She was
304.very clear about her expectations what she wanted for the funeral. I found that
305.a quite a lots of pressure on the school. I felt stopping at the top of the drive
306.we had to honour that request... but what I didn't want to do is put any of
307.those children at any greater stress and made worse.... so the decision was
308.that I told the parents of the plan and said if they wish to take their child to see
309.the hearse pass they could but as a school we did not do any anything as a
310.collectively.
311.
312.
313.Saying that John's colour was orange he loved orange. So on that day we
314.said again if you want to remember John on that particular day if you want you
315.can come in to school wearing something orange. So as a school we wore
316.something orange and it was parents if they wanted to come and take their
317.child out of school to the top of the drive they could but I said to the parents....
318.and we had about eight children who were collected from school taken to the
319.top of the drive and then return to school.
320.
321.We had six members of staff who went to the funeral and again I opened it up
322.to the staff to let me know if they wanted to go to the funeral. Some members
323.did some did not.
324.
325.One of the things that is emerging is that there was a tension between
326.what parents want and what you feel you can provide. Which is
327.interesting.
328.
329.
330.Yes! It was their grief. But a week for waiting for John to die which is what we
331.were doing and then a week of build up to the funeral two weeks in school....
332.a school life for some children who, children are very day by day very young
333.children oh yes John has died they were upset but they would move on the
334.next day and what we did not want to do is (long pause).... is in a way expect
335.them to continue the grief because the family were continuing the grief. And I
336.felt that we'd almost been forced to continue that grieving process when some
337.of the children would automatically moved on themselves so it was getting
338.that balance.
339.
340.What were the issues relating to your own knowledge?
341.
342.
343.Again it's all very much personal my knowledge was very much based on my
344.own experience with my brother. What I found is that how other people acted
345.towards me when my brother was dying some people every time I saw them
346.was like ask how is your brother? How is he getting on? And then could not
347.talk about the sadness of when he died. Others they used euphemisms they
348.could not even say cancer or dying they skirted around the issue and then
349.there are others who would talk about anything but and would avoid the
350.situation totally and I was very much aware of how I was treated and how

351.other people treat death and cancer and I was very much aware of that with  
352.being the staff would have all those issues.... in one member.... in one group  
353.of people and the parents and the children so it's getting a very fine balance  
354.where people aren't offended by it by how you talk.  
355.  
356.There are a lot of parents.... like why are we talking about death to young  
357.children it is not appropriate. So it was getting that very fine balance of  
358.addressing it because it is something that is going to happen and it is better  
359.for the children to have those life skills to be able to cope with death and  
360.bereavement in a controlled environment than parent who can't support the  
361.child themselves.  
362.  
363.Were there other issues around death and grieving that you felt that you  
364.did not know enough about?  
365.  
366.  
367.One of the areas.... we have 8 percent of children from ethnic minority and it  
368.was the case of obviously this was a Christian burial and how Christians  
369.believe in death and that.... we had to do some very quick research about  
370.what other religions did and my knowledge was not that good and my year  
371.one teacher in particular was very concerned about her knowledge and she  
372.was coming to me for confirmation and checking on the understanding and so  
373.together we had to be clued up very quickly. We had to do research to make  
374.sure that we weren't offending other religions.  
375.  
376.Do you mind telling me about how you personally coped with the death  
377.of John?  
378.  
379.  
380.Personally in school I felt I had to take on this front. In school I felt people  
381.thought I would have all the answers. People thought I knew how to deal with  
382.everything that was being thrown at us. Hopefully I gave them the confidence  
383.that I did but there were many times when I'd be.... oh my gosh! I.... what do I  
384.do next? Am I doing right? I doubt it. I analysed things to an extreme amount  
385.daily. Hourly! After each phone call have I done right? How I done that okay?  
386.So it is very difficult 'cause you do feel like you are faced with you are fronting  
387.the school you are the buffer all the time and.... quite interesting it was all the  
388.other agencies as well who seem to want to come here to talk about how sad  
389.they were and I think sometimes very much I felt.... you actually came and  
390.said how am I? But very few people think of you as a person with your own  
391.feelings so I felt quite isolated.  
392.  
393.  
394.During that time family resource worker she actually.... because the family  
395.resource worker was dealing with some of the parents as well and also as it  
396.turned out some teachers were also going to her for some.... personally we  
397.got quite close and we talked about our own.... she had a personal  
398.experience of death. I did and so we became colleagues rather than just a  
399.professional relationship where we could say we are doing okay! We are  
400.getting through it I did in the end get support from the family resource  
401.worker.  
402.  
403.That sounds a bit like mutual confirmation that you are doing okay.  
404.  
405.Yes! Yes!  
406.  
407.I think you have covered.... I was going to ask you about your thoughts  
408.and feelings but I think you have covered that.  
409.  
410.What about where there any other sources of help and support other  
411.than the ones that you have mentioned? Or were they issued about the  
412.help and support? Did you feel that in some way that you.... that it  
413.wasn't provided?  
414.  
415.  
416.(Long pause) Possibly more re-sources at the time. We had a few books and  
417.because John survived longer we were able to buy some books very quickly  
418.through Amazon as it turned out. But we didn't have a vast amount of  
419.literature. If John had died as they predicted we would have struggled with  
420.some resources. So may be the books particularly for the younger children  
421.that deals with death and also the death of.... the books that we were finding

422.were all related to grandma dying all grandpa dying or.... not very often about  
423.a child death. Yes! I think that as well just to.... I think why the school  
424.struggled so much as well and I have been very mindful about how we were  
425.dealing with parents and the children was also that a father had committed  
426.suicide and we had three children who were suffering with their own grief and  
427.we didn't want to over-shadow their emotions and feelings when we were  
428.talking about a child when obviously for the death of their father was more  
429.important to them then than the death of John. It was trying to get that  
430.balance all the time.  
431.  
432.Can you tell me about the day of the funeral?  
433.  
434.  
435.The day of the funeral as I say there were six members of staff who went. We  
436.went in two cars to the funeral. It was very emotional and we made the  
437.decision that there was only myself and Deborah the TA that was working with  
438.John would go to the reception afterwards and we actually only stayed for a  
439.cup of tea and then left.  
440.  
441.It was highly highly emotional very very upsetting.  
442.  
443.Can you say about just having a cup of tea and leaving?  
444.  
445.  
446.Why did we make that decision? There were the lot of parents there. And I  
447.think it is that relationship isn't it between teachers and parents.... yes  
448.obviously, obviously we want that partnership.... that it is a very different  
449.relationship when you are sitting there afterwards having a laugh and a joke  
450.or a cry and I felt that it was more appropriate that we make our presence but  
451.then we don't stay for the....  
452.  
453.What do you think about John being remembered subsequently? What  
454.are your thoughts around remembrance?  
455.  
456.  
457.Okay as I say he died at the beginning of the term and the very final day of  
458.the term we actually had a memorial service. We asked for a vicar to come in  
459.and he actually fronted the assembly I felt that I could not do the whole  
460.assembly myself and he is used to doing assemblies for children and he  
461.came and he talked to myself and the staff and he also talked to Mrs Smith  
462.and we invited the immediate family and we asked Pat to invite any of the  
463.parents that she wanted to we did not want to have it as a whole school.... we  
464.ask Pat to invite certain parents and obviously the whole school.... and we  
465.talked about John we talked about how special he was to us and how  
466.important friendship is . We turned it into a friendship.... how important it is  
467.to have lots of friends and John will always be our friend. We then looked at  
468.pictures and had some music which upset quite a few of the children. But  
469.then we finish off with a very silly song so they left the assembly and finished  
470.the term on quite a high note.  
471.  
472.It sounds as though it work well?  
473.  
474.It worked very well yes! yes!  
475.  
476.  
477.We then also had a train.... John was keen on trains John was.... and so  
478.Wilton Street School friends and the parents all contributed money and  
479.we bought a wooden train which has got number five which is how old he  
480.was and John written on the side and that is in the playground.  
481.What we didn't want knowing how John was.... we didn't want a bench that  
482.people could sit on.... you know it is something that John loved something  
483.that John would have loved playing with and so that was how.... and we  
484.call it John's train yes! So that all the children can have fun with it  
485.  
486.  
487.Just reflecting, do you think that there is anything you might have  
488.done differently if this happened again? Though I hope it does not.  
489.  
490.  
491.Anything I would have done differently? (long pause) No I don't think.... it may

492.be very different if.... the family had quite high profile in school and because  
493.he was special needs there was an awful lot of agencies involved and many  
494.more staff than just the class involved the children all supported John....  
495.because because of his special needs because of his illness.  
496.  
497.So he had quite a high profile. If it happened again would so many people be  
498.involved? I don't know. Would he have had such a high profile? I am not  
499.saying he was.... was more important than any other child dying but the  
500.motive.... our emotions were very high because of how much support and  
501.time he needed to be integrated into the school so he was a very high profile  
502.child.  
503.  
504.I would do everything the same if another child died. I would make sure that I  
505.contact the parents I would make sure that I support the staff I would make  
506.sure the family resource worker had the same.... the same assemblies et  
507.cetera but I don't know if the emotion would be as,... I don't know! I mean the  
508.death of a child! (Long pause) It's horrendous anyway isn't it? I don't know is  
509.the answer to that. I don't know.  
510.  
511.Do you have any ongoing worries or concerns? Any residual issues?  
512.  
513.  
514.No I am very I was aware of a school recently that had a bereavement  
515.actually of a mother.  
516.  
517.This is the one that we talked about  
518.  
519.Yes!  
520.  
521.Straight away one of my staff knew about the situation and she came to me  
522.for support. I wanted to offer that support because I did find it a very lonely  
523.time. And I wanted her to know that I just wanted to have a moment to scream  
524.kick the cat. A moment she could.... you know I would be there if she wanted  
525.to talk to me. So.... so I wanted to provide a network and you know when you  
526.said you were going to do this research I was more than happy because I did  
527.find it a very the very high highly stressful time.  
528.  
529.Is there anything that you would say to colleague head teachers in terms  
530.of preparing them?  
531.  
532.  
533.I think it is one of those things that when you said about are you aware of our  
534.service and what we can offer I think it is one of those things that okay and it  
535.is lodged if I ever need it type until it comes it is like I wish I had paid more  
536.attention to what was happening I think ....and I hope it would never happen  
537.in your school, in your career and only when it does do you then start to think  
538.what was said and I think it is one of those.... it's not relevant how much do  
539.you take in beforehand. I think of all the courses that have been offered and it  
540.is never something I have thought I will sign up for that just in case.  
541.  
542.It is the kind of thought that it will never happen.  
543.  
544.Yes! Yes!  
545.  
546.Finally.... any final thoughts closing thoughts?  
547.  
548.To make sure that there is a central contact that all head teachers need to  
549.know about. Saying, if I hadn't had that contact I don't you know quite where I  
550.would have been at day one.  
551.  
552.I think that it was that talking to you and almost reassurance that there is  
553.material, you are there, I'm not alone, it's happened so many times in  
554.Derbyshire it gets things into perspective. Yes!  
555.  
556.In actual fact I didn't do a lot did I?  
557.  
558.  
559.  
560.You send me the information the about and for me it was that initial there is  
561.something there.... I then went and did an action plan and from there moved  
562.on. It was that initial don't worry.... you know there are people who can

563.support.... here is this material have a look at it if there is anything else I can  
564.do come back to me. For me that.... okay right what am I going to do how am  
565.I going to do it what is my action plan I have got some material let's have a  
566.look at the material. It.... it is almost like you are starting point. You're OK and  
567.then you can do your action plan.  
568.  
569.Well that's brilliant thanks. Well I mean that's a terrific amount of information.  
**570.**  
571.  
572.  
573.Laughter  
574.  
575.I've only got to put it onto paper now and have a look at it. I would like  
576.to say thanks very much.  
577.  
578.No problem. If there is anything else I have not covered  
579.  
580.Are you okay  
581.  
582.Absolutely!  
583.  
584.You don't need another hug then?  
585.  
586.Laughter  
**587.**  
588.  
589.I do think it is what you bring to it. It's your own personal baggage and it's  
590.everybody that has baggage. I think that if you have experienced death  
591.there.... and you are not close to the child that died yes it's not very pleasant  
592.but you deal with it very differently.  
593.  
594.And that is the issue that we do not know enough about you see. How it  
595.impacts on people like you and as you said you had such a lot to deal  
596.with and we are doing nothing to help prepare for that.  
597.  
598.I don't know how I haven't signed up for courses for this, ever because you  
599.just think that it is not going to happen to me.  
600.  
601.We have that opportunity you see when we come in for planning  
602.meetings to do some preparation. Although it was only brief did give  
603.you something.... something to hang on to the first contact you knew  
604.you could make a call and you knew there would be some information  
605.for you. So thanks again.  
606.  
607.No problem thank you.  
**608.**

1	Interview text Pat and Margaret
2	
3	Pat was acting head
4	Margaret is the current head
5	Steven was the boy that died
6	Andrew was his brother
7	
8	Ian: Thank you for letting me come in. As you know I want to talk about the
9	events around the death of Steven. The research is aimed at understanding
10	the impact of Steven's death on you and senior members of staff in school
11	and I hope you will be on to tell me about the events including, the people
12	the thoughts and feelings as well as practical issues. What we would like to
13	do is become better informed about the impact on you and what I learn from
14	you will help us with that.
15	
16	I need to just check that you are happy to go ahead now and if you feel
17	upset at any time and want to stop I am quite happy to do that so I don't
18	want you to feel compelled in any way to go on if you are too upset to go on.
19	Because I know it is an upsetting subject.
20	
21	So shall we begin by could you tell me something of Steven when he was in
22	school and what he was like.
23	
24	Pat: Yes. He was always really happy, always smiling, always tried to let

25	you notice him being good. So if you said sit up he would always be the one
26	sitting up like that and smiling and in singing practice that I used to do with
27	the school every week he'd be like that and following me with his eyes so that
28	you could notice him. He'd be singing his best as you walk along to listen to
29	the good singers. So he liked being noticed for that. He was very popular
30	with the other children and just all you can think of is his lovely big eyes
31	and his big smile.
32	
33	Margaret: It was one of the first names that I learned when you've got all
34	these names to learn when you are new to a school but I knew his name by
35	the end of the first week. Because he was he always... he always had a big
36	smile on his face and he... you know as you say he was catching your eye
37	
38	Pat: He would make himself be noticed for the right things.
39	
40	Margaret: He would catch my eye as he came down the corridor for lunch or
41	assembly or whatever.
42	
43	Ian: He sounded like a very cheerful little one then.
44	
45	Margaret: Yes
46	
47	Ian: what were the events that led up to his death?
48	
49	Pat: He had...he was diagnosed with leukaemia when he was about two...
50	something like that...so the first I knew of it was his brother Andrew who
51	when he was in the infants... we had a first aid thing out there and he was
52	sitting there and he was white as a sheet and as I walked past I said Oh
53	just dear are you all right I thought he was going to faint or something and he
54	was sipping some water. And he said yes I'm all right it's just that I think my
55	brother is going to die. And I thought strange thing to say and I said oh right
56	and I didn't know anything about that and then I spoke to the teacher
57	at that time and she said well we can't say there is nothing to worry about
58	because his brother probably is going to die. He's been diagnosed with this
59	leukaemia and the chances of him surviving it aren't very good. And he had
60	been rushed into hospital that night.
61	
62	So Andrew... so I knew about it from then and I saw Andrew a lot and there
63	were often quiet traumatic things where Steven had been rushed in in the
64	night, and also Andrew... the parents came up because Andrew was being
65	quiet naughty and they were thinking because they were spending a lot of
66	time at the hospital with Steven that Andrew was feeling pushed out because
67	he was only a little boy himself. Erm so I did lots of talking with Andrew
68	through through that although he wasn't in my class it was just... just keeping
69	an eye on him with that.
70	
71	Then when Steven came to school... he used to have treatment and just he
72	came part time to school but he'd got no hair so even in the nursery he'd got
73	no hair... because of the drugs he had got this sort of like pirate headscarf
74	on his head. But he would walk into an assembly full of all the older children
75	right up to 11 year old and he was like four year old and he would walk
76	through still proudly smiling full of confidence and everything so that just went
77	on er... over the years with parents keeping us updated. There was a long
78	period where they thought there was some hope and they were doing bone
79	marrow transplants and tests to see whether dad was any good and uncles
80	and different relatives er... and it was always huge disappointments. Every
81	time it was like no chance with it.
82	
83	Ian: Can you say Pat what it was like for you on the day you heard he was
84	going to die?
85	
86	Pat: What when his mum came in and just said he will probably die over half
87	term it was. And er... I think it was half term wasn't it? It was the half term
88	before you came. It was just before you came and she came in and she was
89	so brave she came in and said I've got something to tell you and she just said
90	that they are not they are sending him home from hospital because there is
91	nothing else they can do er... and he wants to die at home.
92	
93	So well I don't know we had sort of been expecting it. We had got a big
94	poster up at school with a newspaper cutting of how he was recovering and
95	he had fought back four times from the brink of death and er... and just
96	hearing it from the mum even though in the back of your mind I always felt that
97	that would eventually be the 'case I didn't quite believe newspapers thing er...
98	and she just said it so so calmly and bravely er... I don't know it just feels

99	sort Oh... unbelievable that a little boy won't be here any more.
100	
101	Ian: Can you remember what you did on that day? How did you deal with it?
102	
103	Pat: Well I was sort of I pulled myself together with mum and then I thought
104	well I need to tell the rest of the staff as well before they go so I did tell all the
105	staff er... they were all quite upset they were very upset some of them and
106	er... although we had all sorts of expected it but it sooner or later but it was
107	just that he would not be coming back to school any more. So we wouldn't
108	see him. er... I said, I asked mum if I could go and see him or if he was too
109	poorly and she said I could go down er... and see him but that was later
110	on wasn't it?
111	
112	Margaret: It was when I'd been here about a fortnight. Yes
113	
114	Pat: Yes because he did not die over the half term and I kept in contact with
115	them to see how he was and he was okay then er... then he had gone back
116	into hospital again, he was rushed back in and Andrew said he has
117	been rushed in and then he said Andrew told me that he had woken up
118	one morning and Steven was covered in bruises and he had only been in bed
119	all night he had got all these bruises which you know we were sort of
120	thinking I know that happens sometime but for Andrew to be shocked
121	because he see it such a lot of times er... and then I asked Margaret had
122	started by then hadn't you? Because it went on a few more weeks and mum
123	said it would be happening within the next couple of weeks but it took
124	perhaps two months didn't it from that
125	
126	Ian: Before he died?
127	
128	Pat: Yes and he did go back into hospital again and he ended up dying in
129	hospital as well er... but Andrew is not very happy about that says things
130	about what they didn't do and what they didn't care and things like that. I
131	think that there are still some issues there still with mum feeling like they
132	had all the support up to his death and then suddenly like that was the end
133	of that then. And she has not had the support which felt. I did go down
134	to see him and he was like lying on the settee and he did look a
135	completely different boy. Er.. er... he was quite sort of cross and grumpy
136	and I had never seen him like that that.
137	
138	Er... but I had taken in taken in some chocolates and he loved sucking
139	at the chocolates and things and he liked those and an uncle brought
140	him some presents. They bought him this huge transformer thing 60 odd
141	pounds at least that he sat and he was getting cross with that because
142	he was really tired and it was hard to concentrate and really tricky to do
143	it breaks up into about five different cars and vehicles and then all fits
144	together in this thing and he was determined to do it.
145	
146	But his brother they had bought they had brought his brother just a little what
147	is called a farting toilet which has got this gunge stuff in it and you push it in
148	the toilet and there are splats of air that come out and make sort of rude
149	noises and his little brother was playing with that which I was pretending to
150	be like really shocked saying oh my goodness. And then so Steven started
151	giggling things and so it was alright and he kept and he was swearing a bit
152	but his mother said it was the drugs made him lose some of those
153	inhibitions and things so and he was swearing a bit and it which was quite
154	funny in the end and we could just have a little giggle about it because he
155	was saying Oh it's farting and things like that which you wouldn't have
156	Steven would never dreamt of saying anything like that to me and it was
157	quite amusing. Andrew and I laugh about that because it was really funny
158	that little interlude.
159	
160	Ian: Can I just bring you back to the school what were the issues for you
161	as... Well you were head teacher by then Margaret.
162	
163	Margaret: Yes. That's right yes.
164	
165	Ian: what were the issues for you as head teacher when you think about the
166	staff and the other children in school rather than just about, Steven?
167	
168	Margaret: When we found out about at about the end of the day I can
169	remember seeing one of Steven's uncles coming in to collect Andrew. It was
170	the end of the day and he had obviously just told him and Andrew just leapt
171	into his arms and he sort of jumped up and wrapped his legs round him and
172	just hugged him. And that's just when we all knew didn't we? Those who

173	have seen it happen and I think we got a message and did we get all the
174	staff have together or did we go round?
175	
176	Pat: I was not in on that day. I don't know where I was on the day that he
177	died whether I was on a course or something 'cause somebody sent
178	me a text
179	
180	Margaret: But the next ....
181	
182	Pat: Katie sent me a text.
183	
184	Margaret: But the next morning we contacted Janet and
185	
186	Pat: We'd had some input before with Janet knowing that he was going to
187	happen that's why mum had come to prepare us. So we could prepare the
188	children and the staff. Er...
189	
190	Ian: What preparation did you do?
191	
192	Margaret: I have got the feeling that Janet came in immediately.
193	
194	Pat: She came in before....
195	
196	Margaret: She came in before we had got everything ready.
197	
198	Pat: We have got assemblies ready. We had got things to say to the staff
199	we got the day that 'The Day the Sea Went Out'.
200	
201	Margaret: We let the staff know immediately. The following morning er... I
202	went round I didn't want to tell the school on mass in an assembly so first
203	thing nine o'clock I went round each class I'm I don't think I involved the
204	younger children because Steven at the time was in year three so I think
205	I told it year three, four, five and six and I have got a feeling that the
206	teachers told the younger children er...
207	
208	And then I stayed in the morning in with his class because obviously his
209	classmates were really distraught when I went to tell them some of them
210	already knew. I think 90% of them were in tears and it was a you know it
211	was a nice day weather wise so the teacher and I took them all outside and
212	we went for a walk round the school grounds and then we went up and
213	sat up the front of the school there is a story chair and we sat up there and
214	I read them a story and some of them did perk up then but there was a small
215	group of about half a dozen that er...we took them back to class and we
216	just said you know there is no work this morning we got out lots of things
217	to distract them. The children who were still crying it is hard to remember
218	now I am sure somebody like Sue Jones took them off there were just
219	six children who had been very close to him were absolutely distraught.
220	
221	But they did you know by sort of lunchtime they were just one or two who
222	were still weepy but the others they had stopped you know they had
223	stopped crying but I did and assembly for the whole school at about
224	10 o'clock and I did this story when the...
225	
226	Pat: The Day the Sea Went Out.
227	
228	Margaret: Yes 'The Day the Sea Went Out' and talked to them talked about
229	you know our feelings and sort of alluded to Steven, because you see that
230	they all came in knowing already so you know I talked briefly about Steven,
231	told the story and talked about Steven, obviously his brother was not in that
232	day. Er... so I did the assembly and I did a letter out to parents just to inform
233	the whole school community what had happened and what we were planning
234	you know what the next steps will would be.
235	
236	Pat: We had actually got things in place like we would do a garden and
237	would have a cup for people who persevered in spite of all odds against
238	things we would have that annually present it so... although we don't want
239	to do that before or even too soon afterwards it was sort of planned while
240	we could plan them sensibly.
241	
242	Margaret: The next hurdle was the funeral.
243	
244	Ian: Yes I will get to that if you don't mind there are a few things I would like to
245	talk about. What were the issues at that time with the bereaved family? Did
246	you have any issues to deal with with them? Did they come into school?



247	
248	Margaret: No social worker came in on their behalf. She came in and liaised
249	with us.
250	
251	Pat: Andrew came back quite quickly. Mum's...
252	
253	Margaret: He did they wanted him back quite soon.
254	
255	Pat: Mum was keen to have everything as normal as she possibly
256	could make it.
257	
258	Margaret: I've got a feeling it all happened on a Thursday, Friday-ish and he
259	was back in on the Monday.
260	
261	Ian: So they the parents or family didn't come in asking for memorials or
262	anything like that?
263	
264	Margaret: They didn't. No no.
265	
266	Ian: OK
267	
268	Margaret: I did speak to them soon after I can remember that meeting them.
269	Er... We must have had some event in school that they might have come to I
270	can remember meeting in the hall.
271	
272	Pat: Yes they did didn't they?
273	
274	Margaret: And talking to them.
275	
276	Pat: Was it a Saturday morning? We had something on the Saturday didn't
277	we?
278	
279	Margaret: We had the Saturday fair.
280	
281	Pat: They came to that with Andrew
282	
283	Margaret: Yes that's right yes.
284	
285	Ian: Were there any issues relating to your knowledge of what you had to do
286	or what you needed to do? Did you feel that you were knowledgeable or not
287	about?
288	
289	Margaret: I followed the advice in one of the books in the pack that Janet
290	brought.
291	
292	Pat: Janet went through an awful lot with us in a very understanding way she
293	was brilliant.
294	
295	Margaret: She came in a few weeks before hand. About three weeks I can
296	remember that pack sitting there for a while
297	
298	Pat: Yes. And she let us borrow that and read through the things and that
299	hand and so we were prepared before we were in a state of trauma sort of
300	thing you know it was one of it was very good and it was good of mum to let
301	us know like that and that was a intention so that we could prepare in
302	advance.
303	
304	Ian: So the knowledge issues had been dealt with before that? Would you
305	mind telling me about coping with Steven's death? How did you cope with it
306	yourself were there any things you did or thoughts that you had around
307	coping with it?
308	
309	Margaret: It might be more pertinent to you. You knew him better than me.
310	
311	Pat: Er... because my mother had recently died. Er.. who was very old who
312	was 84 she was when she died and I had sort of that was the first sort of
313	really close person who had died to me. To have that sort of thing er...
314	I actually sort of used that experience to help to think to try to look at the
315	bigger picture that everybody will die and that sort of thing and er... and
316	actually talking to Andrew and supporting Andrew who spoke about things
317	quiet matter of factly.
318	
319	Ian: Did he?
320	

321	Pat: He did with me a bit but he wasn't talking with his mum well he still isn't
322	but I think that was because we could talk about things and you don't have
323	to risk upsetting somebody else about that so talking to Andrew really
324	helped me a lot and talking with or listening mainly with the circle of support
325	group for Andrew was a big help.
326	
327	Ian: That helped you as well?
328	
329	Pat: They support each other they talk about things quiet astoundingly er...
330	deeply and bring out things that you as an adult you'd think better not
331	mention that but they mention it and it's quite out in the open and quite
332	understood and the feelings are shared er...
333	
334	Ian: Do you feel that helped you Pat?
335	
336	Pat: Yes yes completely.
337	
338	Ian: That is interesting that. What were your thoughts and feelings at that
339	time?
340	
341	Pat: Oh! It's the same of loss thing you feel you cry for a day and then think
342	that's that and then you think no its not actually that isn't it it's like for ever
343	that that loss will be for it now for ever now and I always just you know
344	remember that little boy like he was then and that will... it will always
345	be that big thing that never moved any further on er...but it is a case of
346	still going through that process of thinking move on now had a thought
347	think about it and a sad thought about it so now move on to something
348	else rather than dwelling on it.
349	
350	Ian: What other sources of help and support did you have? Were there any
351	other er...
352	
353	Margaret: The vicar came down to see us didn't she?
354	
355	Pat: yes
356	
357	Margaret: And she was the one who took the funeral service. So she came
358	down and talked to us.
359	
360	Pat: We had the McMillan nurse was supposed to be coming but didn't
361	come did she?
362	
363	Margaret: No no
364	
365	Pat: For meetings and somebody from Click-Sergeant came in once
366	
367	Margaret: Yes.
368	
369	Pat: And just brought some things but their meetings were a little bit they
370	were supposed to have another one and didn't come and then they had
371	not turned up to a previous one so...
372	
373	Margaret: Mum feels quite let down by Click-Sergeant.
374	
375	Pat: She was so worried about Andrew. Andrew's behaviour not wanting to
376	come to school and feeling like he is being bullied and things weren't right
377	and that's her concern about Andrew is the key thing and the lack of
378	support for him that she felt. But she actually said that he was getting
379	enough at school didn't she when she had seen that so she wasn't bothered
380	about whether they did or they didn't. She was disappointed at the start that
381	they were going to do this counselling.
382	
383	Margaret: The school nurse they were disappointed in the school nurse as
384	well.
385	
386	Pat: The school nurse was going to come and then...
387	
388	Margaret: It has been very erratic
389	
390	Pat: She made an appointment and then she had some sort of bereavement
391	so didn't come then and then it was she was not sure she what she was
392	going to do and then she didn't know Andrew so...
393	
394	Margaret: She spent two sessions getting to know him but they were quite

395	far apart and Andrew's not bonded with her so she has dropped of the scene
396	
397	Ian: Do you mind explaining what Click-Sergeant is?
398	
399	Margaret: Isn't it childhood leukaemia I am trying to think of what the letters
400	stand for.
401	
402	Pat: I wrote it down (Pat leaves the room to get some documents.)
403	
404	Margaret: I'm not sure what the final 'l' thing is. The final 'c' is...
405	
406	Ian: So it's an acronym is it?
407	
408	Margaret: Yes it's that sort of thing
409	
410	Pat: The Click stands for something
411	
412	Margaret: I am not sure what the Sergeant bit is
413	
414	Ian: That's okay don't worry about it.
415	
416	Pat: and I have got a feeling that they are based at the hospital where he
417	was being treated so there is somebody there and they give support to the
418	parents beforehand and basically after.
419	
420	Ian: And so to kind of summarise the kind of support that you got you feel
421	you got a lot from the educational psychology service and bits from other
422	people but...
423	
424	Margaret: Mainly the educational psychologist.
425	
426	Ian: I see yes
427	
428	Pat: Click-Sergeant is cancer and leukaemia in childhood and I don't know
429	what the Sergeant is whether that is the person who set it up or not
430	
431	Ian: It could be couldn't it? Do you mind talking to me about the time of the
432	funeral what that was like?
433	
434	Margaret: That was about two weeks after wasn't it two to two and a half
435	weeks after and I think it brought all the emotions back again.
436	
437	Pat: yes
438	
439	Margaret: And there was I was under some pressure to close the whole
440	school that day there were some people that you know some parents and a
441	couple of members of staff who said we shouldn't close the whole school.
442	And I did ring round for advice on this and was told well you need to make a
443	judgement about it but my feeling was that you know we have got nursery
444	reception and year one and year two all those children you know very few of
445	them would have known him so you have got to think about for instance
446	those children and parents.
447	
448	It is almost the people who wanted to go to the funeral could attend but if the
449	school could carry on with the staff who er...weren't going to the funeral it
450	was almost as long as the school could function and stay open for the
451	funeral I thought that would be the wisest choice. So I had to look at which
452	members of staff wanted to go to the funeral and how we were going to cover
453	them. Luckily it was over a lunchtime and you know everybody sort of pulled
454	together and members of staff went out on the playground to cover the
455	lunchtime staff who wanted to go and also children who wanted to go to the
456	funeral as well you know I I sent a letter out to parents saying you know
457	obviously your child will they be able to attend if they wish to but they need
458	to be accompanied by you. We can't just have children going to a funeral
459	just on their own because chances are it is the first funeral they have been
460	to and they will be distressed. So we had to make arrangements for parents
461	to come and collect children and I also as I said I thought it would be best
462	that they stayed at home for the afternoon rather than coming back to
463	school after the funeral. So that first of all make that decision and at the end
464	of the day I think everybody thought that was the right decision didn't they
465	rather than closing the whole school and then just you know making sure
466	that we were covered for that....
467	
468	Pat: That was tough for you wasn't it? Having to make those decisions at

469	that time it would be nice to have some sort of guidelines rather than use
470	your judgement.
471	
472	Ian: Well that is exactly why am asking about it really.
473	
474	Margaret: And that is where I could have done with some support
475	
476	Pat: yes yes...yes
477	
478	Ian: And the funeral itself?
479	
480	Margaret: Oh... it was just so sad.
481	
482	Pat: It was. Although we knew we knew that sort of things that were going to
483	be there because Andrew had told us he had been and picked the coffin.
484	Mum had called in and said at school that she wanted Andrew to go and
485	choose the design for the coffin he got because he liked Power Rangers
486	because his name was Steven. One of the things that he liked was Power
487	Rangers so he had his coffin with all different coloured Power Rangers on it
488	
489	Pat: And there was for everyone to wear red Manchester
490	
491	Margaret: Yes yes because he was a Manchester supporter so everybody
492	
493	Pat: So everybody wore something black and something red
494	
495	Margaret: But there was a screen at the front as you can as you came in
496	like a Facebook page ....
497	
498	Pat: There was a book of all photos of him.
499	
500	Margaret: And a very sad song playing but something that the school did for
501	the funeral we recorded a song his brother chose a song a favourite song...
502	
503	Pat: No I chose that.
504	
505	Margaret: Oh you chose it did you? Ah! I can hear that song now ....
506	
507	Pat: I know well I thought I would like that at my mum's funeral because it
508	always comes into my head that and I couldn't after my mum had died I
509	couldn't listen to the children I thought oh! this is just so and it's like at the
510	end of the day that sort of thing isn't it?
511	
512	Margaret: So we did have a whole school recording of it. And that was
513	played at the funeral.
514	
515	Pat: And it was lovely and it sounded really nice didn't it? So we got all the
516	children there and their voices and it sounded lovely and yes they played
517	some music didn't they over the thing so it was although you think a bit of a
518	sort of an American tear jerker thing and I don't usually like things like that
519	go all out to try and make you weep. It wasn't like that there was some nice
520	funny pictures weren't there and things
521	
522	Margaret: Yes yes. There were but it was hard.
523	
524	Ian: Was it tough on the staff as well at that time?
525	
526	Margaret: Yes I think so some staff and we had got quite a few new staff and
527	some staff didn't go you know they... they stayed in the school because
528	they... they felt they didn't know him but those staff will went and who had
529	taught him who had had him in their class for a year I think it was very tough
530	on them.
531	
532	Pat: And Andrew absolutely sobbed and let go there and he had been so
533	brave at school and he had to be taken upstairs and because he was really
534	out of it. There was another child wasn't there from our school as well was it
535	Jacob who really sobbed I remember him he was really loudly through it. It
536	was really hard to hear children crying because sort of everybody else was
537	crying and manage to keep it .... yes
538	
539	Ian: What do you think about remembrance of Steven? What do you think
540	about things like memorials?
541	
542	Margaret: We have got a memorial garden that is going to be built on it is a
543	Princes Trust project so we are going through the fund raising and parts of it

544	at the moment and on 5th March they're going to be here for two weeks
545	building a memorial garden.
546	
547	And his brother was involved in the presentation that we did to the Princes
548	Trust and hopefully choose our project which they did and the family were
549	involved in that in the design of the Garden of things that we want there and
550	mum is going to come in and help with building.
551	
552	Pat: And people have already asked about they wanted to donate something
553	towards it. And the support group that I had when we talked about doing a
554	garden before this had come up with that because we were going to do
555	something anyway when we whatever. They all brought me 5 pounds and
556	things not like a pound or 2 pounds they just brought 5 pounds and said my
557	mum sent that for Steven, or I have brought this. And so they and when I
558	said we were going to apply for all this funding for they said that but we want
559	to do so I said we will have both and make it really good.
560	
561	Margaret: His class had a cake sale shortly after to raise money for the
562	garden and we asked you know if parents wanted to contribute to the wreath
563	and we had a huge amount of money come in and you know it was quite it
564	was £150 left from that to go towards the garden. So we got quite a lot of
565	money
566	
567	Pat: We also remembered his birthday because his birthday was on Friday
568	the 13th wasn't it and they wrote they did some....
569	
570	Margaret: The class made a book they made a memorial book.
571	
572	Pat: And I asked Andrew about that because they had at Christmas er... I
573	asked him how what it had been like over Christmas and he said all right but
574	sad really because my mum cried and my dad went out to cry and he said it
575	was hard when we were unwrapping the presents, Steven's presents. So I
576	said Oh did he have presents and he said yes er... and they'd all wrapped
577	them and
578	
579	Margaret: A lot of relatives had brought presents.
580	
581	Pat: And mum had. And she had bought them like earlier in the year like
582	when they were stock for things. They had bought a Power Ranger thing but
583	relatives had as well and mum had wrapped all hers up and I said to Andrew
584	what that was like because I was thinking that I could not cope with that and
585	he said Oh! well it was sad that he was happy as well you to know that
586	people still thought about it because it's that fear that it will it will be all over
587	for everybody else but it won't be for you and that's what I can get that
588	powerful thing from Andrew because that is how it is with death it is not we
589	have just we've had the funeral and get over it and I think that that's what he
590	needs that understanding that people do still remember and think
591	about Steven
592	
593	Ian: clearly even at this stage it is still very acute for you isn't it?
594	
595	Pat: yes yes
596	
597	Ian: When you reflect on all the things you did is there anything in retrospect
598	you think you would have done differently now? Having thought about it?
599	
600	Margaret and Pat: I don't think so no.
601	
602	Pat: Because our family were so good with us and telling us along the way
603	and mum will talk about it she talked about the Christmas and everything
604	she is open
605	
606	Margaret: She does come in and talk to us doesn't she?
607	
608	Pat: So I don't think so and the funeral thing was handled really well as....
609	
610	Ian: So there is nothing that you feel that you could have changed for the
611	better?
612	
613	Pat: No
614	
615	Ian: That's fine.
616	
617	Margaret: I mean dealing with his classmates I am not sure how else I could
618	have done that.

619	
620	Ian: No. I am not suggesting that...
621	
622	Margaret: I don't think there would have been a way to make it easier for
623	them.
624	
625	Pat: We have had lots of things we thought we could have done better just
626	recently but I don't think this is one of them do you?
627	
628	Margaret: No.
629	
630	Ian: Good. That's lovely. What would you say to colleague head teachers
631	who have to face this experience? What would your advice be to them?
632	
633	Margaret: It would... I would have liked to have spoken to somebody else
634	who had been through the experience. I know all circumstances are all very
635	different and at least we could we could prepare in advance for this couldn't
636	we? And other colleagues might you know have something totally
637	unexpected so you can't prepare. But just having somebody to talk you
638	through what they did
639	
640	Ian: You said you actually spoke to another head teacher but that was
641	subsequently was it?
642	
643	Margaret: Oh that was a lot later that was December time and I told her what
644	I had done actually. She said you know she had just had this situation
645	
646	Pat: It's good to have a sort of network out there saying who can help with
647	this. But the educational psychologist support was a real boost wasn't it with
648	all good things.
649	
650	Ian: That's nice to hear.
651	
652	Pat: er...that we could do
653	
654	Ian: We do a lot of training actually to prepare ourselves for all kinds of
655	eventualities not just predictable child deaths like these but accidental ones.
656	
657	Pat: And Janet also it wasn't just about, just about going to be about Steven
658	or the family it was about the school and the children and how we would feel.
659	Having to deal with those things and what to watch out for and staff and that
660	sort of thing.
661	
662	Ian: That great. Do you have any ongoing worries or concerns?
663	
664	Pat: I don't think so.
665	
666	Ian: About children or staff.
667	
668	Pat: it's just Andrew really with it
669	
670	Margaret: But it's something that is going to take a long time with him
671	isn't it?
672	
673	Pat: Because it's been all his life from him being probably was it three or
674	something like that.
675	
676	Ian: He's a younger brother is he?
677	
678	Pat: He's an older brother
679	
680	Ian: He's an older brother. Right OK.
681	
682	Pat: From being a little tot his brother was seriously ill and he has had and
683	his parents missing for long periods while he has been in hospital and
684	ambulances in the middle of the night and things.
685	
686	Ian: Any final thoughts, anything that I have not covered with you?
687	
688	Pat: Er... no I don't think so.
689	
690	Margaret: It's just I suppose it would .. the support afterwards for the
691	children who are in school. I mean it was lucky that you had the course with
692	Janet.

693	
694	Pat: I had just did that with Janet the course and since then I have been on
695	another course with her to do that and then I used and I found some things
696	on the Internet and things that...
697	
698	Margaret: It's good to have somebody trained in school at the time.
699	
700	Ian: So you have been told about Winston's Wish and all those kind
701	of things.
702	
703	Margaret: yes yes
704	
705	Pat: And this one's really I was saying to Margaret that this book that the
706	Click-Sergeant gave to me when he is very good. And Andrew actually likes
707	as I had a photocopied something that we were going to be doing and he
708	was having a look and he went oh I know what I will be doing for that the next
709	time and that was the awful it was this one here what is the saddest thing
710	you can remember. Draw a picture about it. And some of the things that
711	other children right are quite come out with some quite serious things that
712	he had just drawn his brother in the coffin.
713	
714	Ian: Oh I see yes
715	
716	Pat: But he spent ages colouring all that in first and then that in and they
717	were all saying what are you going to draw then Andrew because everybody
718	else was writing away and doing that but it that's the one where he said
719	I know what I am going to do for that one.
720	
721	Ian: So in that sense, to summarise, one of the major themes of what you
722	have had to do is to deal with a surviving sibling in this case and that has
723	been a big piece of work for you hasn't it?
724	
725	Margaret: For Pat it has.
726	
727	Pat: And if I have been ill or been on a course or something. Andrew does
728	find me and says when are we having...
729	
730	Ian: Does he?
731	
732	Pat: He does like to have that time and he is finding that sort of every day
733	issues that children normally go through something like he had had an
734	argument with a boy about whether they were out or not at cricket and it was
735	not resolved and he said oh I need you to have that meeting and can we can
736	we invite John to it because there is a thing I want to ask. So other children
737	have sort of come into it and he feels that he can't cope with the ordinarily
738	things like he could do before and he actually needs his classmates to
739	understand so when he gets all upset because he is out and they have gone
740	yes you're out and er... he says he finds that really hard to cope with and he
741	says and they should know and they should understand that I am sad and
742	so they don't and he is feeling that it is unfair of them.
743	
744	Ian: I see
745	
746	Pat: but it gives those that opportunity to talk about things of different
747	sides of that...
748	
749	Ian: Have you thought Pat about how you are going to stop this?
750	
751	Pat: Well I mean Andrew will move.....
752	
753	Margaret: It will come to a natural stop because he is moving to secondary
754	school.
755	
756	Pat: Secondary school so we will pass some information on there that will
757	have that support
758	
759	Margaret: If he hadn't been that would have been a thought wouldn't it? If he
760	had been in year four or five.
761	
762	Ian: So there is a natural break but he will obviously miss you a lot won't he?
763	
764	Pat: Yes but I think he will be all right. Yes. And he has got like a group of
765	people who and he knows that people will talk about it. And he can talk quite
766	openly about it where that whereas his mum says he won't talk about it at all
767	at all he won't talk about it at all

768	
769	Margaret: He tries to avoid it. He's out at friends houses all the time.
770	
771	Pat: He tells us everything how he is feeling. Why he'd done him in blue
772	because he said he was cold. He says because they keep you in a chiller
773	cabinet and he was really cold and it didn't look like him so he can talk quite
774	openly and they all will listen and all ask questions because it's interesting
775	as well it is not sort of the gruesome bit it's interesting and then oh and did
776	you feel sad when you saw him and so they ask all the questions naturally
777	and then...
778	
779	Ian: It sounds as though it's been a really good piece of work. Very
780	therapeutic for him.
781	
782	Pat: yeah and yeah and it does allow him it's that er... I think its the
783	injustice thing that are coming out now because it feels unjust that little boy
784	is taken away like that and so any little injustice absolutely gets to him
785	doesn't it?
786	
787	Ian: Well thank you for telling me all of that that's it's an incredible story I
788	have got to pick from that all the things that we need to do. Thank you.
789	

<b>1</b>	<b>Interview text - Rosemary</b>
2	Participant 3 Interview
3	In this interview the Head Teacher had decided that she wanted a colleague
4	with her and so there are my words and the words of two members of staff
5	recorded below. Their names have been changed to ensure anonymity.
6	
7	Ian: You agreed to talk to me about the events around the death of William. The
8	research is aimed at understanding the impact of his death on you and one of the
9	reasons that we went to ask his mum to ask his mum for approval is that we
10	would not want her to find out subsequently that we had been doing this and then
11	for her to be upset. So that was why she was involved as part of the ethical
12	process.
13	
14	I hope you will tell me about the events the people, the thoughts and feelings as
15	well as the practical issues. I would like to be better informed so that we as a
16	service can then prepare ourselves to help again should we need to in the future.
17	
18	I just need to check with you that you are okay to go ahead now and that you are
19	happy to do this. If you should feel upset and want to close the interview I will be
20	very happy to do that. Don't feel as though you had to go on if you are upset. OK?
21	
22	Would you just tell me something of William when he was in school? Tell me a
23	little bit about him.
24	
25	Rosemary: Well he was a year three pupil. He had been with us since nursery. He
26	is part of a big family so we had a long history with the family. He's got a half
27	sister who is very much older and then he's got still currently with us er... there is
28	children in nursery right the way through to year six. So obviously they are kind of
29	well-known. He was a lively, boisterous little boy er... They are all very engaging
30	likeable children. They've all had needs so Sarah: has had involvement with with
31	the children in terms of positive play and in nurture groups. And when William got
32	ill we had quite a lot of discussions with mum, family resources workers and
33	hospital about trying to have Peter who was in nursery at that time full time in
34	nursery so it involved some kind of re-allocation of resources to enable that to
35	happen. But we did do that for between the Easter and summer. Then he
36	transferred into mains school er...
37	Mum can be quite fiery at times and er... she certainly had up and down periods
38	and you know was flagging up issues and worries and there was .... we helped
39	sort out financial problems in terms of them accessing hospital and things.
40	So really we were quite involved already in the family before and er... obviously
41	we then subsequently quite involved with some you know helping her sort out
42	some of the issues and also supporting the children if they needed if we needed
43	to help with transport or er... looking after the children while mum and dad were at
44	hospital in the first kind of series of treatments that he went. Er... so but he was
45	you know making normal progress. He was well liked and popular with his friends.
46	Again but you know he could get up to mischief....
47	Sarah: As the other children said he loved his school dinner.
48	
49	Ian: Did he?



50	Rosemary: so ..
51	
52	Sarah: He always made them laugh.
53	
54	Rosemary: Yes. We we we have actually put an album together of a series of
55	pictures really.
56	Ian: I will ask you about that later.
57	Rosemary: He but obviously we were able to do that because you know because
58	there was sort of records available with photographs and er... so all you know we
59	could catalogue a bit of the events involved.
60	
61	Ian: What were the events that led to his death? Was it an illness?
62	
63	Rosemary: Well er... at Christmas time 2010 he came back after that and he and
64	er... had a kind of quite persistent ear ache and he wasn't that well and Mum
65	kept taking him to the doctors and we were quite worried about him because he
66	seemed quite lethargic....
67	
68	Sarah: He was losing weight.
69	
70	Rosemary: He was looking quite pale er... so we did actually you know on a few
71	occasions send him home and er... mum had kept taking him to the doctors and
72	trying things but actually they are a family that do have a good history of good
73	attendance you know they kind of attend come what may. And so quite often he
74	would come and we didn't actually feel that he was quite right and the you know
75	we would have to you know organise sort of groups or allow him a bit longer in
76	the nurture room or you know look after him because he didn't seem well er... and
77	this this kind of went on for some time and then she finally we finally said I think
78	you need to kind of it's not right there is something wrong and she took him to the
79	hospital and then they did diagnose some kind of blockage and then it sort of
80	transpired that he would have this he'd got this cancer in his head and there was
81	cancer in his ear and but but the other thing was that she didn't want us to refer to
82	you know to C word I'm so it was all kind of you know there is kind of something
83	serious and so but obviously it was all all the staff were aware that she did not
84	want that she was categoric about it not being publicised as cancer.
85	And then they're quite rapidly changed and she did want every everybody to know
86	but actually all through treatment and he had some teeth removed and part of his
87	tongue removed and he did actually come back to school and even in the Easter
88	holidays he had had the operation and he was seen out with the rest of the family
89	she has got an older daughter, step-daughter who is quite heavily involved in the
90	child care and he was seen out with the rest of the gang kind of shopping and
91	going to the library.
92	So er... and obviously the he was a you know you could see that he had
93	operations and you know part of you know his face and he couldn't talk and he
94	had a really difficult eating and so he had a feed and but you know you would be
95	coming for hours in the day he had a personal tutor but initially mum was really
96	angry about children making comments and we had to have you know well
97	children will and it's not necessarily you know negative notice it's just notice and
98	er...
99	
100	Sarah: It wasn't unkindness was it? it was more a curiosity.
101	
102	Rosemary: He felt quite embarrassed and quite withdrawn initially and you know
103	he would take somebody you know making an overture to him as they're picking
104	on me or something so or that's what he'd relate to mum it wasn't the case you
105	know.
106	
107	So but actually the rest well the school I mean you know he'd obviously chemo
108	and he lost his hair and things and the rest of the school I actually I don't think
109	there was much fuss eer.. he was in class ..
110	
111	Sarah: He quickly got back into the step of things.
112	
113	Rosemary: He didn't like he didn't like the tutor who accompanied him and he was
114	very wary of having her around and she wasn't I don't know you know
115	
116	Sarah: He didn't bond with her did he?
117	
118	Rosemary: No.
119	
120	Sarah: He wanted to be at school.
121	
122	Rosemary: She actually looked more out of place that he did most of the time.
123	er... so he was actually er... quite well integrated throughout and was just

124	adjusted and adapted very well and actually we we were quite worried about this
125	whole strategy of you know you've been to the hospital and then he's back in you
126	know
127	
128	Sarah: About playtimes no slow down but....
129	
130	Rosemary: And so actually we we were quite a bit worried about this whole
131	treating it all as normal and actually I think we felt that mum had done the right
132	thing in the end didn't we?
133	
134	Sarah: Yes because I think William was as normal as things could be in school
135	because he was still playing football and he was still going up into the dining
136	room having lunch with everyone he was accessing groups.
137	
138	Rosemary: He was off .. actually he deteriorated really quickly and he'd be he
139	was playing football on that Friday. He had fallen over hadn't he?
140	
141	Sarah: No I think the ball had caught him and he cried because the ball had hurt
142	him and then he said oh I'm alright now and then went back off to play football
143	because obviously we were worried about him
144	
145	Rosemary. Well actually I did an assembly and I was handing out things in
146	assembly or something on that last Friday he was here. And he actually came to
147	me in here after the assembly and asked me could he have one of the things that
148	I was handing out. I can't remember whether it was a sticker or medal or
149	something. Could he have one. He went off home and then we had news that he
150	had collapsed and was back in hospital and then but he came back home and
151	then he died on the Friday.
152	
153	Ian: What was it like for you on the day that you heard that he had died?
154	
155	Rosemary: Well it was quite.. and what was what was really quite difficult was
156	that there was actually some hysteria from the class teacher.
157	
158	Sarah: Well mum came in early didn't she and she told me that William had died
159	and that the younger children didn't know did they? They came to school....
160	
161	Rosemary: Well that's well what I was just going to do the lead up to it because
162	there was when we knew well I had I think an e-mail or something so I knew that
163	he had actually collapsed at the weekend and had been admitted to hospital and
164	actually was very.... I mean ... The thing was when he had the diagnosis I got all
165	the information from the hospital I did that things of going on the Internet and
166	finding out all the prognosis and kind of trajectories of and I just didn't know that it
167	was not likely you know it did actually the whole history of removals of bits of face
168	and things was you know if it got to that stage it was obviously very likely to be
169	terminal and very quick if they were young and that kind of thing so it and you
170	know.
171	I had all this knowledge inside of me that it wasn't going to be good and er... so
172	er... when er... they I had got the information about him going into hospital and
173	sudden collapse and you know I actually thought well this is it kind of thing and
174	but then the teacher and the support people in the class got quite hysterical and I
175	just thought at this point I'm going to have to put a brake on this kind of transmit
176	because we we are a challenging school. Emotions tend to get out of control and
177	also the children do need a kind of studying routine keep things you know and
178	she had started making all these cards and publicising er...
179	(Interruption here) Rosemary: It's always the case isn't it?
180	She had started kind of almost transmitting to the children Oh! is he and I thought
181	I'm going to have to get everybody in to just say look it is really bad but you're
182	going to have to just keep the lid on your own emotions and keep going. We've
183	got It's the start of the week ... can you please just not if you ... if you need
184	support from each other actually you know we can't have everyone making cards
185	and kind of going into this you know but also I I was almost saying that he's going
186	to die and er... you have got to deal with it it's going to happen. er...
187	
188	Sarah: We had to support the other children.
189	
190	Rosemary: We sort of that that felt quite difficult to do because and I had I had to
191	do like a series of meetings to er... make sure that all of the staff were aware but
192	not kind of going into this grieving process although I was preparing them for it.
193	So I had three meetings and also it was quite difficult because I say there are
194	materials here that you can access and read and that might help you kind of think
195	ahead and you know also like I think I mean it was I said that well people were
196	getting emotional and I think also I was sort of saying and also everyone's had
197	experience of some kind of loss and bereavement and it kind of triggers things off

198	that you kind of find unexpected in yourself you know I you know I I'm in that
199	position as well because my dad died when you know I was seven you know its
200	all these kind of you know being personal about it but also actually saying to
201	people you know he's going to die you got to be ready for it.
202	So I found that it was a bit unnerving because you know he obviously hasn't died
203	and you've got to he might not he might not. He might not er... so that was quite
204	difficult and also er... people were emotional and having you know sort of well the
205	class teacher was one of the worst but also I don't know you know there's also
206	there is also four other children five other children in school and you kind of the
207	family who were coming to school and you know they didn't want to have to deal
208	with raw emotion you know because they're having to do deal with William being
209	ill at home and lots of people coming at home to sort him out er... because he
210	had come back home. So er... there was that.
211	
212	Ian: What did you do that day?
213	
214	Rosemary: So the day that he died well I get here really early and I knew that he
215	er... died but also I knew that the other children were coming like that Sarah had
216	said the children were coming in not having been told that he died.
217	
218	Ian: Do you mean children of the family or all of the children?
219	
220	Rosemary: Yes, the younger children of the family.
221	
222	Rosemary: And I did have to do that thing saying that actually they going to be
223	told at the end of the school er. mum was wanted to send them to school so they
224	can deal with William's body and have some you know time and sort things out
225	so you know he has died but you're going to have to do carry on but the actual
226	the actual preparation that I had done beforehand then came in really good stead
227	because it had released some of the emotion and enable people to deal with it so
228	that was that was a really good thing. So we got through that day and er...
229	
230	Sarah: I think it touched everybody because there's every adult in school that's
231	dealt with at least one of the members of the family because there are large
232	family They'd gone all the way through school so everybody taught someone in
233	the family. Yes we did get through it.
234	
235	Rosemary: And also it must have been fairly successful because it actually really
236	didn't get out to members of the community because normally it's like bush
237	telegraph operating. So actually that all went quite smoothly the children kind of
238	went home and obviously they had the weekend then to have family time er... but
239	all the children were back in school on the Monday:
240	
241	We were we had we had some discussions about... well we got materials ready
242	hadn't we? There were some members of staff who would already be on
243	bereavement ...
244	
245	Sarah: They had done some training hadn't they? They'd had some information
246	about and local undertakers had sent some information for us that was general
247	before this had happened so this is all been distributed to staff beforehand so ...
248	
249	Ian: Can I ask what the issues were for you as the head teacher with other
250	members of staff children and the community? What issues did you have to
251	wrestle with?
252	
253	Rosemary: Well I had to wrestle... well communication how to comm..... you
254	know how to phrase things and how to do it in public way but also to allow people
255	sometime to talk to other people that they identified for themselves so there were
256	some you know allowance of people going for cups of tea in the staff room. I was
257	trying to ensure that the school functioned normally for the majority of the rest of
258	the children because they have got ... But also... I was really quite worried about
259	how I was going to mark it in a kind of almost ritualistic kind of ceremonial way
260	and I was quite worried about that because I'm not I'm not a religious person and
261	but obviously you've got to do do assemblies and then I was quite worried about
262	how to you know go form nursery through to year six. How to communicate things
263	in a symbolic as well as a sort of language that was accessible to everybody in
264	assemblies.
265	
266	I was worried about ... I mean the other members of the family are vulnerable
267	children that we already knew were vulnerable and I was concerned to have
268	something in place in fact actually that's what we discussed about er ... thinking
269	ahead in the event of William's death what er... support those children would
270	need long term in terms of having er... time and space to communicate and er...
271	just relax and er... er...

272	So er... but then also er ...how to er... but mum was quite aggressive er ...and
273	how to er... manage er... her in terms of her er... in terms of with er... other
274	children as well I think. Because she would come in with something that was
275	really upsetting her like she'd spent money on a bike for William and she couldn't
276	and she couldn't get it back but she be quite angry with the other children and I
277	was sort of trying to not create opportunities for there to be aggressive in front of
278	them. Kind of. Er... So so it's a number of issues. Er...
279	
280	Ian: Were any other issues with the bereaved family?
281	
282	Rosemary: Well the other issue was that I knew that you know I could feel mum's
283	and that there were other members of staff who were positioning themselves to
284	be invited to the funeral and to er... obviously wanting to go but and I did actually
285	er... say quite publicly that myself and Sarah would be going to represent the
286	school and that they wouldn't be going er... because it was just you know you
287	have to get some perspective of like keeping the school going and er... but also
288	wanting to signal to the family that that we were you know very sad and shared in
289	the loss er... but also I was asked to prepare er... you know a kind of bit of a er...
290	speech for somebody else to say about William about school for the funeral.
291	In school er... I had bought this kind of candle in a glass dome thing which we lit
292	every assembly because we were moving up to Christmas and so one of the
293	other children kind of came and lit the candle and blew it out at the end of
294	assembly so that was just a bit of a ritual marking we had you know moments of
295	silence to think about William remember.
296	
297	The er ... there were actually a lot of children who were really upset partly and
298	parents who were really upset and also I had quite a lot of parents asking advice
299	about whether or not I should whether or not they should be taking their children
300	to the funeral. But I already knew that mum er... she was the two older children
301	the boy who is in year six and Keith had been in year six the previous year were
302	going but she didn't want the younger children going so that helped me just say
303	well no you know the other children aren't going so I think really it would. And
304	actually the funeral was quite upsetting and actually wouldn't have been good for
305	other children to see because friends that William that made in hospital who were
306	er... very poorly attended and er... so they they looked absolutely ghastly....
307	
308	Sarah: It was quite upsetting wasn't it? To see those children as well.
309	
310	Ian: Where there any issues relating to your own knowledge? Did you feel that
311	you were knowledgeable enough or that you needed some support about for
312	example children's understanding of death and so on?
313	
314	Rosemary: (Long pause) Well I don't think I did partly because I have been seven
315	and experienced I think the thing that I felt quite strongly through it all was what
316	what children needed in school was adults who were actually managing their own
317	emotions in terms of thinking about the child because I know that you know I lost
318	my dad but also lost my mum because my mum was in a lot of shock and grief
319	and found it really hard to cope after my dad died and as a child you kind of need
320	stable adults and actually I remember going to school and actually finding quite a
321	lot of you know security in routine and people being the same and normal. And
322	not having an outpouring of grief and emotion everywhere at everywhere you
323	went. You know from you know it's like you know you need time to understand
324	and assimilate you've got to have people talking to you about it and not shutting it
325	off you know. So actually what I did was I made an album of William which I can
326	show you in fact and I left it out and we had well John particularly and Danny
327	initially they would come and they would love to just rifle through the book.
328	
329	Ian: Are they siblings?
330	
331	Rosemary: Yes and they would bring other of their friends to rifle through and look
332	at the book. And actually what they liked about it was there were pictures of them
333	in with William so actually it was about a book about them as well so as well so
334	that's the other thing is just like....
335	
336	Sarah: It's a family book isn't it?
337	
338	Rosemary: You as a child get lost don't you in you get sort of forgotten I think
339	they felt like John actually really did think it was more a book about him.
340	
341	Sarah: Yes and I think that the assembly with the candle and taking part in
342	blowing it out and standing there felt quite special as well. Er....
343	
344	Rosemary: So I actually just went really on instinct and obviously I'd had a bit of a
345	bit of training and we have got bits of material there and obviously knew we could

346	go on to Winston Wish and you know there was some ideas in there I suppose
347	they had an idea of an album or something like that I don't know. er... But also
348	that we had a positive play so the children were having er ...but that was quite
349	normal they were having identified time with an adult you know in a small group
350	and I think I did er... I did make the other adults aware that they could use that
351	book if they wanted to look through and talk Kyle and Sharron there in....
352	
353	Sarah: In reception and year one aren't they?
354	
355	Rosemary: Yes. But the other thing I did with that was that the children who were
356	in William's class actually all did a bit of remembrance about William and I put
357	that in the book as well so and that class shared that and Danny took it into his
358	class as well so they did share the older Sharron and Kyle I don't know whether
359	they did it in class because I think they Sharron's in year one and she's got
360	language difficulties and Kyle's in reception and he's got language difficulties and
361	it's quite hard to assimilate well there's not that talkative. Er... but I think they did
362	share that with a positive play adult and perhaps another child I don't know...
363	
364	Ian: Did you have any difficulties coping with the death, personal difficulties?
365	
366	Rosemary: well well you think that this is the thing that I did I was aware before
367	well Sarah Sarah actually made me aware as well about how people well it
368	becomes very personal and it's not necessarily that have had personal
369	experience of it. It becomes like your reaction to cancer and because you've had
370	experience of dealing with your own cancer it makes people angry you know that
371	so before obviously Sarah had been quite upset...
372	
373	Sarah: I was quite angry weren't I actually?
374	
375	Rosemary: And I thought well what's that all to do with and I actually it's to do
376	with William so I was kind of I think that helped me I kind of realised how
377	
378	Sarah: But that was just sort of me and you not at school thing but me and
379	Rosemary and your answer was deal with what you can change not what you
380	can't and then b'time it come round to William er... passing away I I have gone
381	past those sorts of feelings as well.
382	
383	Rosemary: I think that's what really helped me at to think that I've got to prepare
384	people because you know actually at the point you've got to somehow you know
385	you managing yourself in public aren't you? You got public duty of office and
386	actually I was quiet I was quite worried that I'd get and in fact I never did overly
387	emotional I did get a bit emotional at two of the meetings talking to members of
388	staff about themselves but actually with the children in assembly I was actually
389	just this is what we're doing and it's really sad you know.
390	
391	Ian: But inside yourself what were your own thoughts and feelings?
392	
393	Rosemary: (Long pause) It's just a terrible loss (laugh) and also I think the other
394	thing is just to remember people as they they are at their best because at the
395	flipping funeral they have got these great big pictures of him being ill on the er...
396	coffin and er ... I don't know I think er... so I think... I mean ...I have I suppose
397	you reflect on yeah how should you remember people and how what's important
398	about a life I think.
399	
400	Ian: Would you mind telling me about the help and support that you got in school?
401	
402	Sarah: We had the training at the....
403	
404	Rosemary: Well we organised we organised ...
405	
406	Sarah: Well ten of us went up there ....
407	
408	Rosemary: We organised the training well there was some training and we
409	booked actually that was that was quite a bit before though we booked the places
410	didn't we? It was quite opportune actually....
411	
412	Sarah: To be honest I can't remember.
413	
414	Rosemary: In the January there was this training organised locally through the
415	MAT team on bereavement.
416	
417	Ian: Was this loss and bereavement?
418	
419	Rosemary: yes

420	
421	Ian: Kate Peterson?
422	
423	Rosemary: It wasn't it was a man from but I think she was involved as... any way
424	so I booked er... a lot of places on it and actually a lot of staff a lot of the LS the
425	learning support teachers rather than the teachers went up and people from the
426	office and the other learning mentor er... not so much teachers which I felt was a
427	bit interesting but er... we went up and that was quite nice because we then
428	shared more intimately I suppose our own experiences of loss and how we
429	interpreted loss and bereavement.
430	
431	Sarah: I think people felt settled when they been and actually listened and just
432	shared little bit with each other. I think it helped.
433	
434	Ian: Is there any more to tell about the funeral?
435	
436	Rosemary: And then Robin came as as well with the file which to be honest I
437	didn't look at because I've seen it before and things had I don't know I felt like I
438	had done what I could and ...
439	
440	Sarah: I think is a school coped quite well with it with everything and all the
441	children...
442	
443	Rosemary: But I think what I was very keen to stress was actually that I know
444	this proved true as well but I mean obviously the death was an event but then
445	that those children are still experiencing the shock waves and they are
446	have had some trouble with John but I think that people have dealt with the
447	emotionally children better having had the preparation actually talking about the
448	issues and I mean for instance Danny year six he got quite hysterical about...
449	
450	Sarah: It was his shoulder blade I think you'd had a scratch and he realised that
451	there was something there and he was quite hysterical.
452	
453	Rosemary: And it was just his... shoulder....
454	
455	Sarah: And he needed a little bit of reassurance .....
456	
457	Rosemary: And he's been quite tearful so and so I was just very keen to stress
458	that it won't you know that the rest of this year we would mean we would need to
459	be thinking about those children things that and actually ...
460	
461	Sarah: I think he's been told not to cry hasn't he and to keep it in and not to cry.
462	It builds up.
463	
464	Rosemary: But also we had we did think about doing a referral for CAMHS
465	because and then we found out that actually CAMHS were involved with the older
466	boy.
467	
468	Sarah: yes
469	
470	Rosemary: So I think things are up but but you know there were needs in the
471	family before.
472	
473	Ian: Is there any more to tell about the funeral?
474	
475	Rosemary: Well that I... well mum actually was very er... she sought physical
476	er... comfort you know it was actually quite nice in terms of thinking that she
477	wasn't angry with me or er... and she was she was very pleased that we had
478	gone. It was er... a bit shocking that they had said how William hated the tutor
479	and I felt quite upset that it's like this thing of being a professional and doing a job
480	and you get sort of publicly defamed at a things that was a bit upsetting.
481	
482	Ian: Was that said at the funeral?
483	
484	Sarah: Yes and she was sort of sat looking at us wasn't she?
485	
486	Rosemary: That would be me. The er... she had spoken the words that I had
487	prepared about William er... and I mean that was the er... it was er... the two
488	older boys were adrift and I felt very concerned about Ray and Danny I had three
489	calls..
490	
491	Sarah: They was comforted by the sister weren't they?
492	
493	Rosemary: Not mum and dad mum dad was very sounded like we had them in to

494	talk about them and they actually can't talk or communicate. Then after the
495	funeral at the there were just things about the funeral who were you know at our
496	had parts of them missing, drips, no hair, thin, just ghostly which I found really
497	upsetting. The pictures on the coffin were all of William in his illness like glorifying
498	almost the illness which I felt very sad about. They talked about this you know
499	dragonfly story which is out of Winston's Wish which I suppose was very childlike
500	and er ... and then that was really it was actually very nice to talk to mum
501	afterwards and have that hug from her and er...
502	
503	Sarah: She was very appreciative of everyone that went wasn't she? She made
504	sure she spoke to everyone.
505	
506	Rosemary: And also we had raised some money from the school and some
507	people had come and contributed very generously like a £20 note and so we'd
508	had a box just to say that you know we would support whatever mum would wish
509	so we started that so really then I had to phone up to ask was that all right
510	because you know and we were doing it a commemoration in the garden. And we
511	were going to buy a star for him and she was all all right about that. So that was
512	the funeral but then after the funeral we came back and then er ... we had the
513	phone call at night to say that her dad....
514	
515	Sarah: Something had happened to her dad hadn't it?
516	
517	Rosemary: And Sarah ended up having the children taking them home after
518	school because the dad they had had a wake and then been at the pub and he
519	had collapsed and they had an ambulance out there. So that night the night of the
520	funeral Sarah was at home cooking pizza and chips for the four other children.
521	Waiting to...
522	
523	Sarah: The younger ones thought ...
524	
525	Rosemary: Waiting to find out what had happened and...
526	
527	Sarah: They didn't really know what had happened. I just said that granddad was
528	poorly and that mum was just looking after him but they didn't know that the
529	funeral had been that day. They thought their older brothers weren't at school
530	because they been to the dentist. So I don't really know how much the younger
531	children actually know about what's what's really happened.
532	
533	Rosemary: No but but that was sort of the icing on the cake wasn't it?
534	
535	Sarah: But then as we were walking to the shop they did say they did point to
536	star and say oh look there's William. So they'd got some understanding of that
537	William was no longer here but I don't think they spoke about a funeral or anything
538	like that with them for ages.
539	
540	Ian: What about remembrance in school have there been any issues around that
541	that you have had to deal with?
542	
543	Rosemary: No in fact it's been really lovely. We had a granddad who'd made
544	something to go you know
545	
546	Sarah: He made a beautiful windmill.
547	
548	Rosemary: To go in a little garden out there. I'll show you the album is just so
549	you er... we had the candle and we can actually well all the weeks up to
550	Christmas. I you know on all the er... er... the album actually just I mean it's
551	still there but it's not being referenced...
552	
553	Sarah: I think the children pick it up when it's left on the table at the back or pick
554	it up and have a quick look.
555	
556	Rosemary: I don't know what else...
557	
558	Sarah: I think you bought the children little figure that small figures that and they
559	could...
560	Rosemary: That was the day of the funeral wasn't it?
561	Sarah: they all put one in their pocket to be always be there.
562	
563	Ian: What were the figures?
564	
565	Sarah: I think there was something like little Pokémon figures just something just
566	something small that William would have liked but then something they could
567	keep in their pocket.
568	

569	Rosemary: Anyway and I did make the decision not to have any of the later
570	photographs of him when he was ill. I don't know whether that's the right or not I
571	mean I think they got quite a few at home. I bought I bought er... mum and dad
572	that this sort of glass sort of glass flower thing from school and card and ...
573	
574	Ian: When you reflect on the way you dealt with it all do you think there's anything
575	that you would do differently?
576	
577	Rosemary: er... I think it depends on the age of the children and I might have
578	done something if it'd be in year six ...
579	Sarah: I think it depends the circumstances as well. Each family it's with...
580	
581	Rosemary: I suppose it was just giving an opportunity for people to own the
582	memories and also.... Er...
583	
584	Sarah: I think you got to take the lead from the children as well because they're
585	not necessarily feeling what you feel...
586	
587	Rosemary: No
588	
589	Ian: What would you say to colleague head teachers if you were advising them?
590	
591	Rosemary: er... I would say I would say when a child got serious illness like that I
592	think you've got to face what might come and try and get people prepared and I
593	think that's really quite difficult. Er ...you know it's like that thing about talking
594	about people before they die. You know I mean obviously things are unpredictable
595	as well you and so I think also having some materials in school I mean I know
596	you've got that file that Robin brought that it's like you need things that you can
597	access that are really relevant so we did use that and actually...
598	
599	Sarah: You just need to talk to each other as well don't you? You know.
600	
601	Rosemary: I think I think I mean (Long pause) obviously I did that and I did
602	actually feel like....
603	
604	Sarah: That people could have contributed a little bit more to it I think.
605	
606	Rosemary: But actually I was so pleased to have put that together for the children
607	but then but then I suppose if you didn't have as many siblings.... But actually the
608	children in the class really liked it.
609	
610	Ian: I would really like that I'd like to have a look at that when we finish.
611	
612	Rosemary: They really enjoyed having their work in and obviously the comments
613	that they made....
614	
615	Sarah: It's more like the school as a family is in here rather than it just being a
616	book a sad book probably about William. It's a happy book about everyone in
617	school isn't it?
618	
619	Ian: Do you have any ongoing concerns worries or concerns?
620	
621	Rosemary: er... I mean we've always had concerns about the emotional
622	well-being of those children I guess. I mean I think I'm quiet alert to er... er ... that
623	the children the four children that in school. Er...
624	
625	Sarah: They all struggle to show to show their emotions don't they? They all show
626	them in different ways. Er...
627	
628	Rosemary: And I mean Kyle ....
629	
630	Interruption child coming into the room
631	
632	Rosemary: Sorry I'm too accessible that's what Kay says. What was I saying?
633	
634	Ian: Worries or concerns ongoing worries or concerns.
635	
636	Rosemary: Mum's being very distant.
637	
638	Sarah: We haven't seen her since Christmas have we?
639	
640	Rosemary: I think I do I mean I've taken Danny home a couple of times after 'Did
641	you Smile' and we've not really had I mean I know the family is well they are
642	working with the family resource worker and the family resource worker it is off



643	sick and I do ...
644	
645	Sarah: And I think she sort of said to mum that if she wanted to support then to
646	contact her because she didn't want to overload all be there if she didn't want her
647	to and I don't think mum has been in touch with her as much but I get the feeling
648	that perhaps she is thinking that she would have liked someone to be there but
649	doesn't want them to be there if that makes sense. Sort of wanting to support but
650	not wanting people to be there. I think they are dealing with it together as a
651	couple aren't they?
652	
653	Rosemary: Yes but also we are we all worry don't we about the relationship that
654	the children have with dad. I think mum and dad are very kind of close but then I
655	don't think and I think that's some of what my worries are that they ....
656	
657	Sarah: They're together with their own needs but the children's needs may be
658	aren't ...
659	
660	Rosemary: and that does put extra responsibility on us.
661	
662	Ian: Any final thoughts? Anything I have not covered?
663	
664	Rosemary: I don't think so
665	
666	Ian: Well thank you very much.

1	<b>Interview - Judy</b>
2	Participant 4
3	
4	Ian: So the preliminaries Judy, are that it's to talk about the events of Andrew's
5	death and the research is aimed at understanding the impact on you. What I
6	hope you will tell me about are the events, the people the thoughts and
7	feelings all those kinds of things so that I have a better understanding of not
8	only the practical issues but at the kind of impact on you as a person as well.
9	And so that we can be better prepared and learn from that.
10	
11	I just need to check with you that you are happy to go ahead because the
12	university requires me the ethics committee at the University require me
13	requires me to say that if at all you feel upset you want to stop that's fine
14	there's no imperative to go on. If you feel you don't want so you just need to
15	let me know.
16	
17	Judy: Yes that's fine.
18	
19	Ian: Shall we begin by can you tell me something about Andrew when he was
20	at school just tell me a little bit about him.
21	
22	Judy: Well I was here I came in September 2010 and he was then in year four.
23	And he was he could walk about but quite often he needed a wheelchair
24	because he had cystic fibrosis and er... he was he just smiled all the time
25	and he was he never complained it was for him it was just completely normal
26	and he was going for his checkups his mum wanted everything to be
27	completely normal he had loads of friends and er... yes he was just well I
28	know it's a cliché but he was just a little ray of sunshine really yes yes.
29	
30	Ian: He sounds nice.
31	
32	Judy: yes
33	
34	Ian: What were the events that led up to its death?
35	
36	Judy: Well we obviously we knew that he was ill and late last academic year
37	we knew that he would have to go and go on the list for a lung transplant.
38	When he came back in September it was it was amazing because he came
39	into school in his wheelchair and he said if I don't get a lung transplant in three
40	months I'm going to be dead but it wasn't a sort of sorry for me thing it was
41	just a matter of fact thing. Because his mum shared everything with him and it
42	was really from then onwards that we started to see him going downhill. But
43	he still he came into school as much as he could. He loved going to Craft Club
44	which was an after school club so he would come in the morning and then he
45	would go home to rest and then you would come back for Craft Club but then
46	he started to he needed to use his oxygen more much more so in the sense of
47	preparing for a death er... it wasn't a sudden thing. You know we all prayed
48	and hoped that there would be lungs for him with the sadness that that brings

49	because that would be another child that had lost their life. er... But it became
50	clear by close to the end that he wouldn't even be well enough even if there
51	were some lungs. So
52	
53	Ian: What was it like for you when you heard that he died on the day you
54	heard that he died? Can you tell me how you were and how it felt and so on?
55	
56	Judy: Well I had been to the hospital to see him on Sunday because he was
57	having Christmas on that day because he wasn't going to survive and he was
58	so weak that he was still and I bought him a teddy and he was still you know
59	thank you but just so weak and it was clear that it wasn't going to be long.
60	
61	So I on the Monday I came back and I sort of prepared the staff and then it
62	was the Tuesday that I heard that he had died and even though even though
63	even though you were expecting it you it is a shock because obviously he was
64	just a lovely boy it's a shock for any child's death but it was I knew that I had
65	to I had to tell the staff and I knew that I had to be composed for the staff and
66	the children but I had to work out a way of doing it so that's how I felt really it
67	was a mixture of shock but....
68	
69	Ian: Can you tell me what you did on that day, the first day back?
70	
71	Judy: After I heard?
72	
73	Ian: Yes
74	
75	Judy: Now I phoned er... I phoned somebody at County I can't remember who
76	it actually was that I phoned but they immediately put me in touch with the
77	educational psychologist department.
78	
79	And I was I was stunned because they dropped everything they just dropped
80	everything and they came and I thought that at the time I thought I thought
81	that was a bit of an overreaction because I thought well I'm okay I'm coping
82	you know because and I had never know anything happens so quickly as
83	that and it was a lady I can't remember her name she was the lead
84	psychologist and er... our educational psychologist Claire Watkins came.
85	
86	Ian: It would be Jane White was it?
87	
88	Judy: Jane?
89	
90	Ian: White.
91	
92	Judy: Blonde hair.
93	
94	Ian: Yes I think it's Jane White.
95	
96	Judy: She came Claire didn't come until later and she came within about three
97	quarters of an hour and I was actually so glad that she had come because
98	then I could cry (upset here) and I could I could be in here I could be away
99	from everybody and she just let me cry and get over all of my emotions so that
100	I could go out there and be normal well as normal as I could be with the staff
101	and children and then she er... we talked through a plan you know what we
102	were going to do what we were going to say we got a sort of a bit of a script
103	together and she came and then Claire came and so we all went up to the
104	staff room at lunchtime everybody knew what had happened well they knew
105	that Andrew had died but I think they needed to know a bit more and I told
106	them and then Jane just asked if anybody needed any help any advice any
107	support and Claire as well and er... so then we organised to have an
108	assembly. We didn't bring the year year threes in because Andrew was a year
109	five
110	
111	Ian: I see.
112	
113	Judy: And we thought well some of them would have known him but we
114	thought we won't bring them in and we brought the four, fives and sixes in and
115	Andrew's mum turned up at the school.
116	
117	Ian: Oh! did she?
118	
119	Judy: And she came into assembly. And I said do you want to say anything
120	and she said no you know you say you know and I told the children and then
121	she came to the front and she just said you know he's happy he is he is
122	playing happily now and then she went to the his class and spent time with

123	the children so that they could just grieve with her.
124	
125	Ian: Did she?
126	
127	Judy: And then we just put everything on hold that afternoon and children just
128	they could read or they can write something to Andrew or they could not even
129	think about him if I didn't want to but it was just their opportunity to just spend
130	time...
131	
132	Ian: So the day went well with support kind of thing did it?
133	
134	Judy: It did yes yes definitely.
135	
136	Ian: What were the issues for you as a head teacher when you think about the
137	other staff and the children? What were the issues you kind of had to deal with
138	and also with the local community?
139	
140	Judy: I think er... (Long pause) there were there were two children that I
141	needed to be really careful with because they had well actually more than two
142	to be honest with you. There were some children who have had suffered
143	bereavements in school who were in school currently and I needed to make
144	sure that their teachers were aware because they had changed, the teachers
145	had changed since the bereavements and that the children were okay and a
146	special eye was kept out for them.
147	
148	Er... The staff as well had had its just about their personal experiences of
149	death that you are aware of and also there was one member of staff who was
150	incredibly close to Andrew and er... she knew it was going to happen but it
151	was still so hard and it was just and trying to maintain the allowing staff to
152	grieve but also they still had to do their job. They still had to come into school
153	and teach with and has it as it happened that week for this for this particular
154	teacher was a very difficult week for her and you know I just had to be
155	conscious of that and aware of it and be going in and making sure that she
156	was okay.
157	
158	Ian: This was the one who was close to him?
159	
160	Judy: Yes yes yes so I mean there were yes most of the teachers who were
161	here knew him but most knew that he was going to die so it was not as if it
162	was you know out of the blue.
163	
164	Ian: And what about the community? Did you have to deal with that?
165	
166	Judy: No I did no I didn't no.
167	
168	Ian: You didn't feel that you had to inform them or anything like that?
169	
170	Judy: Oh! yes no I did I wrote the parents and explained what had happened
171	you know I just wanted I wanted them to you know that we thought you know
172	he was he was very precious to us as he was obviously to his family er... but
173	I think his mum his mum was sort of out and about one thing wanting
174	everybody to to to take part and the funeral as well you know she came and
175	she kind of said you can bring one rose well one flower er... and I don't know
176	how I don't know what happened but there was just she loads of people there
177	at the funeral loads of people in the community.
178	
179	Ian: I will ask you a bit more about the funeral later.
180	
181	Judy: Yes. So I but you know I wrote a letter to the parents to inform them
182	really.
183	
184	Ian: And what about the other children generally in school you did the
185	assembly did you feel any other issues out to be dealt with? There were two
186	you said who had had bereavements.
187	
188	Judy: they were actually they were okay. I checked with their parents and they
189	were fine but one issue that did come up was there was one little boy who
190	wasn't here on the day that we had the assembly and the grieving and
191	everything and I have now needed to put into place some er... bereavement
192	support for him because his mum she is saying he is going home he is going
193	up to to his room. He was obsessed with the idea of Andrew's death and when
194	er... I spoke to him he had had three other people members of his family who
195	had died and I said had had anybody talked to you about that and he said no
196	because I think sometimes you don't talk to children do you?

197	
198	Ian: No that's right.
199	
200	Judy: So he had been he'd not been able to talk about these three members
201	of his family that had died. He had not had the experience of the grief that the
202	other children had had so yes so now.
203	
204	Ian: There is some support in place for him.?
205	
206	Judy: yes I don't think it will be a long-term thing but I just think he needed
207	somebody to talk to.
208	
209	Ian: What about with the bereaved family you mentioned that mum came in
210	were there any other issues in dealing with them that you can think of?
211	
212	Judy: No
213	
214	Ian: Did they ask for anything any kind of support or help or anything like that?
215	
216	Judy: No but they already had a lot of support in place.
217	
218	Ian: Did they?
219	
220	Judy: With him you know having...
221	
222	Ian: with his death being predictable.
223	
224	Judy: Yes Yes so no they didn't ask for anything.
225	
226	Ian: What were the issues relating to your own knowledge? Did you feel that
227	you were well equipped in terms of knowledge about children and their
228	understanding of death and those kind of things?
229	
230	Judy: Well I got me I gave a copy of Winston's Wish the Winston's Wish pack
231	to everybody and I read through that and I read through the the understanding
232	of death at certain ages and stages.
233	
234	Ian: That's on our web page isn't it?
235	
236	Judy: Yes er... and really I just sort of tried to to follow that because I sort of it
237	seemed very good honest, open, supportive guide so that I just followed that
238	advice.
239	
240	Ian: So although you perhaps didn't have an extensive knowledge you had
241	materials available that helped you?
242	
243	Judy: Yes. Which I wouldn't have been without you know I wouldn't have
244	wanted just to have relied on my own nous instinct yes.
245	
246	Ian: Can you can you tell me how the school and you in particular have coped
247	since that time with the death of Andrew?
248	
249	Judy: Well the school council we meet weekly and one of the agenda items is
250	the memorial that we are going to have for him and we haven't done a survey
251	and we came up with lots of different ideas like a den or or a garden or all
252	sorts of different ideas and then the councillors took those ideas to the
253	classes and they voted and the final vote is that they want to have a car
254	made out of stone.
255	
256	Ian: A car oh! really?
257	
258	Judy: Because he loves cars and his coffin was in the shape of a formula one
259	car
260	
261	Ian: Was it really?
262	
263	Judy: Yes and yes so that is what the whole school has decided
264	
265	Ian: I see.
266	
267	Judy: And we're also going to have a balloon release. So each child will have
268	a balloon and with that message on to Andrew.
269	
270	Ian: That's nice isn't it?

271	
272	Judy: And I asked Laura his mum that is is that okay and she said whatever
273	you want to do is absolutely fine.
274	
275	Ian: As I have gone round schools doing this interview that has been an
276	amazing array of things that schools have done as memorials. Gardens is a
277	common one.
278	
279	Judy: Yes Yes. No they wanted a stone car.
280	
281	Ian: How nice.
282	
283	Judy: Yes
284	
285	Ian: What about the thoughts and feelings that you have had personally. Have
286	there been any thoughts and feelings that have impacted on you as a head
287	teacher in school and work?
288	
289	Judy: Er... (long pause) not really just just sadness. Just you know just this
290	little life has just been cut short.
291	
292	Ian: But it's not made you re-think certain things at all?
293	
294	Judy: No
295	
296	Ian: Do you mind telling me about the help and support that you got? You said
297	a little bit about the educational psychology service. Can you tell me a little bit
298	more about that and whether there was any other support that you had?
299	
300	Judy: er... Well I think just well I think as I said before it was the speed of the
301	response that I was really overwhelmed by.
302	
303	Ian: Yes we do have a commitment to give it priority so you know whenever
304	this happens and it happens quite frequently I mean I think last year there was
305	30 odd deaths throughout the county either predictable or un-predictable
306	deaths. So we do have a commitment to doing that. You thought it was over
307	the top and subsequently I think you felt it was good that that could happened.
308	
309	Judy: Yes because I think I thought that I was I was managing. And I didn't
310	because I knew that I had to be I had to be er... a role model if you like I
311	suppose for everybody you know if I sort of burst into tears in front of the staff
312	and whatever then how are they going to handle their grief because their
313	leader if you like is falling apart and I knew that I couldn't do that and I thought
314	and I honestly didn't think that I was going to and I thought I will be able to go
315	home when I'll be able to grieve myself but when Jane came it was just it was
316	really it was such a relief that I was able to just be with her and just be a
317	human being and not a head teacher.
318	
319	Ian: Yes of course. And what about support from other places was there any?
320	
321	Judy: er... no no.
322	
323	Ian: Sometimes we have people come in you know clerics, vicars, priests.
324	
325	Judy: Oh well Peter Brown came he is the vicar but not so much for support
326	but he just wanted to well not well he wanted to know about Andrew because
327	he was delivering his address. I think as much as anything is mum was a
328	massive support.
329	
330	Ian: Was she really?
331	
332	Judy: Because she was she was so she's such a little lady really little and
333	very slim and she would have to carry him around and I don't know she didn't
334	have er... the father wasn't with them so she was sort of managing on her
335	own and I think that sort of example as well to everybody was incredible so
336	I suppose that was her really support....
337	
338	Ian: Do you mind telling me about the time of the funeral?
339	
340	Judy: The time? What happened?
341	
342	Ian: What happened.
343	
344	Judy: Well as it happened it was on an inset day. So and so I didn't have to

345	make that decision about whether to close the school er... and I still don't
346	know what I would have done.
347	
348	Ian: That's interesting many head teachers wrestle with that decision.
349	
350	Judy: Yes. Yes. If I had been at the funeral and I if I'd already gone through
351	the funeral and seen the number of people that were there and children then I
352	probably would have said yes I will close the school. But you know you don't
353	have to think of you know parents working and things like that but there were
354	so many people there that I don't think I don't think anybody would...
355	
356	Ian: So how did you manage it that day on the funeral day?
357	
358	Judy: Well we all came into school then we all the whole staff walked down
359	to the church and as it happened we walk past the funeral parlour
360	
361	Ian: Oh! I see.
362	
363	Judy: Which has just been built and his mum was outside with his family and
364	she just came up and she just gave people hugs and and then we said
365	goodbye and then we just all walked into the church and sat together.
366	
367	Ian: So all the staff went?
368	
369	Judy: All the staff yes.
370	
371	Ian: Which I guess wouldn't have been possible had it be a school a normal
372	school day?
373	
374	Judy: No well it would have been if we'd closed the school.
375	
376	Ian: Unless you had closed the school.
377	
378	Judy: So that was a decision I did not have to make which I am grateful for
379	and then yes we all sat together waiting and then he came in he was brought
380	in his in his Formula One car coffin and er... and I didn't cry!
381	
382	Ian: Didn't you?
383	
384	Judy: No I am really surprised that I didn't cry. I did later at home driving home
385	but I didn't cry. Quite a few of the staff did and then...
386	
387	Ian: Were you in a sense trying to offer leadership or was it just how you felt
388	on that day?
389	
390	Judy: No I you know it wasn't even a role I even thought of playing at that
391	time. We were just there as a grieving group of people. A community and then
392	when we came back we left the very close member of staff went to the funeral
393	went to the wake er... but the rest of us didn't we just decided we wouldn't go
394	but it was really an end to the inset day it wasn't nothing nothing could be
395	done and we just went home early and ....
396	
397	Ian: What about the children how are they at the funeral? Other children?
398	
399	Judy: They were they were fine I'm not saying fine but they were...
400	
401	Ian: They were holding together kind of thing where they?
402	
403	Judy: Yes I think it was almost as if it was a sort of a new thing you know
404	there's this car and Andrew is in this car but they are young I mean you know
405	....
406	
407	Ian: Of course yes.
408	
409	Judy: So you know so I didn't see lots of tears afterwards.
410	
411	Ian: What you think about the issue of remembering Andrew? You have said
412	there's a move to have a memorial is that what you feel is appropriate or do
413	you feel there should be an anniversary or anything like that?
414	
415	Judy: er... I think it is I do think it's appropriate to have a memorial and it
416	needs to be this year because this is the year that he died and and and
417	obviously the children the year sixes are here and they have experienced him
418	dying.
419	

420	Ian: He died when he was year five did he?
421	
422	Judy: He was year five yes. I am not so sure about an anniversary because I
423	know one of my daughters friends from Wigglesworth (Secondary school) died
424	and there is an anniversary every year and everybody you know get together
425	and meet but I just think sometimes when do you stop that and I think
426	anniversaries are more for families rather than for so I would want to have
427	a memorial but I don't I wouldn't be saying next year on 31st of October this is
428	the day that Andrew died.
429	
430	Ian: When do you think the memorial will arrive? What is the process where
431	are you with it?
432	
433	Judy: Well we know what we got we have taken ever such a long time so I am
434	imagining in the summer term and I have got an artist who can we are full of
435	artists in the village who can create the stone.
436	
437	Ian: I see.
438	
439	Judy: er... So now we just need to raise the money to pay for it and so I will
440	be writing to parents asking if anybody wants to make a donation.
441	
442	Ian: So it's really a nice way of remembering him I think actually it's something
443	that he was interested in.
444	
445	Judy: And it and I think it's interesting because adults would think of gardens
446	you know that was my first thought we got some grassy areas over there we'll
447	create a garden for Andrew but the children were much more sort of Andrew
448	focused if you like.
449	
450	Ian: More creative?
451	
452	Judy: He liked cars we want a car (laughter).
453	
454	Ian: When you reflect on all that you did is there anything now that you think I
455	would have done differently?
456	
457	Judy: (Very long pause) no.
458	
459	Ian: There are no lessons to be learned in the experience for you then?
460	
461	Judy: Well there are always there is always lessons to be learned. I think but I
462	think the judgements that were made were the right judgements with the
463	support that I had and clearly the educational psychology service had had that
464	experience so they advised me well. er...
465	
466	Ian: That's fine I was just kind of checking it out with you. What would you say
467	to colleague head teachers who might have this experience? What would you
468	advise them?
469	
470	Judy: I would I would advise all head teachers whether they had a situation
471	like this when we knew he was going to die or not to certainly read Winston's
472	Wish if that's the least that they do because you just never know when it could
473	be a child knocked over you know a traffic accident and I would definitely say
474	hope that it never happens but make sure that if it does happen you have got
475	at least an element of preparation in place and an idea of of what you would
476	do er... in terms of telling the children and obviously a secondary school is
477	going to be different we are lucky because we are a small school we can get
478	them all in the hall and that but definitely you would need to prepare and hope
479	that you never need it
480	
481	Ian: Do you think there's a place for training?
482	
483	Judy: (Long pause) er...
484	
485	Ian: It is one of the things we have been thinking about.
486	
487	Judy: I think actually yes I do... I do because er... it can be devastating I am
488	you know it was devastating for us but with the support that we had we we got
489	through it well I think but I think I mean to give up half a days head teacher
490	training to find out about bereavement and how you would respond would I
491	think be well worth it well worth it. Well worth it.
492	
493	Ian: For head teachers rather than for staff in general is what you're thinking is

494	it? It's just that we are talking around this issue and and you know wondering
495	what we should do if anything on it.
496	
497	Judy: (Long pause) Well yes I mean we had an inset day a twilight session on
498	violence to staff and because I thought well you know it's offered by health
499	and safety and it was free I thought well its something we could do and after it
500	even though you know you hoped that nothing like that would ever happened
501	the staff I think better prepared to deal with the situation if it was if it's going to
502	happen. So I would imagine anything that would help somebody be prepared
503	in a critical situation like that would be helpful.
504	
505	Ian: Thanks for that. Do you have any ongoing worries your concerns about
506	you, staff the children, the community as a consequence of this?
507	
508	Judy: No
509	
510	Ian: Any final thoughts. Anything I've missed? Not covered?
511	
512	Judy: No. I think this is very good. I think the fact that the the Authority has
513	taken something like this as seriously and I think that's that's credit to the
514	Authority because the staff are probably the biggest resource that you have
515	got.
516	
517	Ian: Indeed.
518	
519	Judy: You know if you've got the staff of a whole school breaking down
520	because they're not prepared and the devastated and whatever then that
521	affects the lives of the children and that affects the life of the community.
522	
523	Ian: Well thanks very much for that Judy.