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Irma Briggs-Hooker

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DEATH AND YOUTH:
AN EXPLORATORY STUDY
OF TEACHER AWARENESS

By

Irma Briggs-Hooker

A DISSERTATION

Submitted to
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ABSTRACT

DEATH AND YOUTH: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF TEACHER AWARENESS

By

Irma Briggs-Hooker

Purpose

Although there has been much interest in researching medical professionals' attitudes toward death, no studies are available on the attitudes of teachers toward death despite the influential position held by teachers in young peoples' lives. Because of this void, and the importance of the supportive adult in the clarification process of conceptualizing and mourning death, it seemed most appropriate to center upon the teacher as a helping professional in death education.

Study Design

Information was elicited by interview from twenty-six elementary and secondary teachers. Every grade level was represented. These three exploratory questions served as the framework for the study:

Are teachers aware of their students' experiences with death?

If they are aware, do teachers use this awareness within the school community?

Further, are there differences in the awareness, and the use of this awareness, between teachers of children and teachers of adolescents?

Limitations of the Study

Two limitations were inherent in the study. The findings of this study cannot be generalized beyond the limits of the population studied. Second, the interviews were conducted by the author herself and the data were interpreted solely by the researcher.

Discussion

Teachers were aware noticeably of their students' experiences with death; their awareness was used to a limited degree in verbal interaction, curriculum planning and consultation with parents and staff. Teachers of children were more aware, and used their awareness considerably more, than did teachers of adolescents.

Students were the initiators most often of interactions about their encounters with death. The death experiences affected the behavior of individual students as well as the learning atmosphere in the classroom. Teachers gave support often within the school community; no consultation was offered and little consultation was given to teachers.

Observational skills and self-awareness were suggested as the foundation for teacher awareness. Teachers and students needed support, but it was not available for them.

Recommendations for program development included: the inclusion of the teacher into the health care system, particularly mental

Irma Briggs-Hooker

health; a review and expansion of the health care support system within the school community, and an examination of pre-service and graduate programs.

To Alison and Ralph
who re-opened the ultimate question for me

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
LIST OF TABLES	v
LIST OF APPENDICES	vi
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	vii
 Chapter	
I. INTRODUCTION	2
Background	2
The Problem	5
Significance of the Problem	5
The Population and Setting	7
Methodology	8
Definition of Terms	8
Limitations	8
Summary	9
II. YOUNG PERSONS AND DEATH: A REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE AND RESEARCH	12
Historical Development of Society's Attitudes Toward Death	13
Attitudes of Helping Professionals Toward Death	30
Particular Needs of Adolescents in Relationship to Death	42
Children and the Process of Conceptualizing Death	50
The Supportive Adult in the Clarification Process	61
Summary	74
III. METHODOLOGY	76
Population and Research Setting	76
Methodology	79
The Interview Guide	79
The Pilot Study	82
Analysis of the Data	84
Summary	89

Chapter	Page
IV. FINDINGS OF THE RESEARCH	91
Teacher Awareness of Students' Experiences with Death	91
Use of Teacher Awareness of Students' Experiences with Death	116
Summary	141
V. SUMMARY, REFLECTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	143
Summary	143
Reflections on the Research	147
Observations on the Interviews	155
Recommendations for Program Development	160
Recommendations for Research	165
FOOTNOTES	168
BIBLIOGRAPHY	183
APPENDICES	191

LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
1. Interviewed Teachers by Grade and/or Subject	78
2. Student Responses to Experiences with Death	99
3. Number of Students' Death Experiences	101
4. Verbal Interactions Reported by Teachers	120
5. Teachers' Observations of Their Uses of Awareness for Curriculum Planning	124
6. Teachers' Observations of Their Uses of Awareness for Consultation	136

LIST OF APPENDICES

Appendix	Page
A. INTERVIEW GUIDE	192
B. #13 TEACHER'S OBSERVATIONS OF RICK	198
C. #13 TEACHER'S OBSERVATIONS ON MARK	203

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Karen Fisher and Jo Grandstaff executed the typing and expert attention to detail. Their skills made for a smooth finish.

To my daughter, Alison and my son, Ralph, for their love, patience, endurance and encouragement in my writing, I dedicate this dissertation.

Solomon Grundy,
Born on Monday,
Christened on Tuesday,
Married on Wednesday,
Took ill on Thursday,
Worse on Friday,
Died on Saturday,
Buried on Sunday,
And this is the end of
Solomon Grundy.

Anonymous childhood chant.



CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Background

There is a growing awareness in the United States, and the United Kingdom as well, that modern persons, unlike their predecessors are unable to accept death as a part of life. Although twentieth century persons display great ability in mastery of their environments, technologically and scientifically, they have been unable to unlock the mystery of the creation of life or the controlling of death. Death can be postponed and the misery of dying can be alleviated due to scientific and technological advances but as a very perceptive eleven year old Australian boy wrote:

...Death is but death.
Death is like growing of people.
It cannot be stopped.¹

If, as the young poet said, "Death cannot be stopped," then, let us look at the manner in which death has been handled this century. When the twentieth century literature on the subject of death is reviewed, two themes appear dominant: the refusal of our society to face death honestly, and the scarcity of reliable information and systematic study on death.

In 1972 Robert Kastenbaum was lamenting the situation when he stated, "No topic in psychology has been more neglected through

the years..."² Interest in helping professionals' awareness of death, exists in the medical literature. Kubler-Ross, Quint, Cook, Kastenbaum, Kalist maintain that medical professionals avoid and deny death.³ However, in the literature of other helping professionals the studies are very scarce and in some disciplines are non-existent. In 1967 Earl Grollman discovered the lack of awareness among educational psychologists on university faculties about death as a serious subject for study by teachers.⁴ No studies were located on the attitudes or awareness of teachers toward death.

So questions arise. Do helping professionals such as teachers reflect the society in which they work? Would this mean helping professionals who work with young people are avoiding and/or denying death? Would the avoidance of death be helpful or harmful for young peoples' development? If not avoidance, how does one handle the topic and the feelings of a child in a sensitive manner so the child gains from the encounter? And then, how does the professional handle her/his feelings? It is difficult to give guidance and support to young people if the adult's feelings are in turmoil. What type of guidance and support is necessary for young people? Has any research been done specifically with professionals who spend large amounts of time interacting with young people? So many questions surface but few answers are available for helping professionals.

If the educational psychologists, those helping professionals who are trained specifically in focusing on young peoples' learning and behavior in the educational setting, are not aware of the relevance of death as a serious topic for the attention of

teachers, questions quickly surface centering on classroom teachers. Are classroom teachers aware of death as a relevant topic for study by their students? Do teachers have a professional need for awareness of this aspect of their students' lives? Are teachers knowledgeable about the happenings concerning death in the lives of their students? What effect, if any, does death have on the lives of students and teachers within the school environment? Does experiencing death change behavior? What behavior signals the teacher for closer observation of the young person?

Whether there is awareness, lack of awareness or some degree of awareness between these two extremes, one fact remains constant for the teacher and the student. Each student is spending a significant amount of time under the influence of teachers. Classroom teachers, particularly elementary teachers, often spend as much time with their students as do the parents of these youth. A teacher's opportunity for influence with young persons is awesome. Therefore, a teacher's attitude toward death, a teacher's skill in observing the effect of death on students, a teacher's decision to follow through, or not follow through on the observations and the teacher's sensitivity in executing the follow through, has the potential for great effect on young persons' lives. Surely, then, teachers' attitudes toward such a universal experience as death bear closer scrutiny.

The absence of attitudinal studies centered on teachers as helping professionals in death education, causes one to ask: Are teachers aware of the experiences with death encountered by their

students? If teachers are aware, do they act, or not act, upon this awareness when interacting with their students and other adults in the school community? Is this awareness used when teachers develop and plan curriculum? And lastly, are there differences in awareness, and the use of awareness, among teachers of different age groups?

The Problem

Too little is known about teacher awareness of student death experiences, and the use of this awareness. Therefore, an exploratory study needs to be conducted in which the following questions are explored: Are teachers aware of their students' experiences with death? If they are aware, do teachers use this awareness within the school community? Further, are there differences in the awareness, and the use of this awareness, between teachers of children and teachers of adolescents? In order to answer these questions a population was defined, a sample selected, and a methodology developed.

Significance of the Problem

If death is important in young people's learning and development, then, the integration of young persons' death experiences into their school lives becomes equally important. It follows that professionals working with young people would need similar opportunities for exploring the role of death in their development. Consequently, the issue has broad implications for curriculum development in a pre-school through twelfth grade school setting

as well as for the preparation of teachers in a university/college setting.

If the present study reveals there is little or no awareness by teachers of the part death plays in their students' school lives, it would leave teachers unaware in other significant areas such as: understanding the behavior of their students in relationship to death, helping their students understand and learn about a universal concept which directly affects their lives, giving necessary support for the healthy development of the young people in their classrooms and for a healthy school community. In the event teachers are aware, then the transformation of this awareness, and the manner in which it is transformed, becomes of primary importance to students and teachers. The quality of the process used by teachers in their interactions with students, their planning of curriculum and their decisions about integrating, or not integrating, death into their students' lives becomes very significant in the growth of young people.

The results of the study will raise crucial questions. Will a teachers's lack of awareness in the death experiences of her/his students have consequences for her/his teaching, for the learning atmosphere in her/his classroom and building, for her/his relationships with her/his students and school community, for her/his students' development, and for the teacher's professional development? Where does the aware teacher receive support for herself/himself while helping students deal with death? Where can the teacher develop skills in observation, interaction, values clarification, and

curriculum planning? What opportunities are available for a teacher in gaining more knowledge and understanding of herself-himself, and her/his students, in relationship to death? And finally, how do teachers with different degrees of awareness and different levels of usage of their students' death experiences co-exist and learn from each other?

The Population and Setting

The decision for conducting the research within the context of Michigan State University was made for two reasons. First, a university setting would provide a heterogeneous population. The teachers would have varied family backgrounds in culture, geographical locations, race, religions and socio-economic status as would the children taught by these teachers. Further, the teachers in the university summer setting would be in a less pressured situation of time for self and time for reflection than a salaried teaching setting would provide.

The specific university identified for the research was chosen because of characteristics which held special relevance to the research being conducted. The teachers were employed by schools which served children from varied backgrounds. Selection of teachers from a heterogeneous group of this description reduced the chance to have data from a homogeneous group of children. Finally, but not least important, is the fact that the researcher was acquainted with the setting and instructors which facilitated entry into the classes for the request of volunteers for the interviews.

Methodology

An interview focusing upon the teachers' experiences with childrens' encounters of death within the past teaching year was the method selected for the collection of data. In choosing this method, the skills of teachers in observing young people were considered a foundation for the interviews. An interview guide was developed to provide a framework for the collection of data.

Definition of Terms

The terms of interest, as used in the exploratory questions, are defined as follows:

student's death experience - a death, non-human or human, which the student has encountered within the past school year as reported by her/his teacher in the interview.

teacher's awareness of the student's death experience - the teacher reports the death experience of a student and/or describes the student's response, if any, to the death experience in her/his observations during the interview.

teacher's use of awareness - the teacher's description of her/his behavior, if any, in response to the student's behavior surrounding the death experience as reported in the interview.

Limitations

Certain limitations were inherent within the design of the research. The findings of this study cannot be generalized beyond the sample studied. The thirty-six teachers who were subjects for the study were graduate students attending Michigan State University.

No other group was interviewed. As an exploratory study, it was not the intent of the author to make generalizations for a large population. Rather, the interest was primarily to identify issues for other exploration.

Demographic information related to age, amount of teaching experience, and teaching localities of the respondents were not obtained. A balance of teachers of children (children defined as 4 - 11 years) and teachers of adolescents (adolescents defined as 12 - 18 years) was obtained. Lastly, the interviews were conducted by the author herself. The author was the sole interpreter of the data as well.

Summary

In this chapter, the background to the present research was discussed, and the specific problem to be addressed by the research was defined: Are teachers aware of the experiences with death encountered by their students? And if so, do teachers use this awareness in their teaching and interactions with others in the school environment? Finally, are there differences in awareness, and the use of awareness, between teachers of children and teachers of adolescents? The selection of the university setting for the research was discussed and the specific university population chosen for the research was described. The methodology chosen was identified; an interview conducted by the researcher utilizing an interview guide for the gathering of data. The questions in the research were specified and then the limitations of the research were noted.



In the following chapter, the literature and research pertinent to the present investigation are examined in detail. In Chapter Three, a more detailed discussion of the research setting and methodology is given and is followed, in Chapter Four, by the reporting of the data. A final chapter includes a summary, reflections on the research, some final observations on the interviews and the recommendations for program development and research.

You would know the secret of death.
But how shall you find it unless you seek it
in the heart of life?...

If you would indeed behold the spirit of death,
open your heart wide into the body of life.
For life and death are one, even as the river
and the sea are one.

Kahlil Gibran

CHAPTER TWO

YOUNG PERSONS AND DEATH: A REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE AND RESEARCH

Young persons learn about death.^{1,2} Certainly most authorities in the death and dying field would agree with this statement. Consensus would not be so easily gained for other statements and questions. For instance, young people need help in learning about death. Who should help children in their learning about death? Should teachers be included in the group of helping professionals? Do teachers initiate the topic of death for discussion or do teachers avoid this subject? Is it important for children to have a basic concept of death? Do children mourn? If mourning is possible for young persons, what are the consequences if they do not mourn? Is there any relationship between the effects of death on young people and the role of the teacher? Should death and its ramifications be included as part of the curriculum?

Some of these questions have been given serious attention since 1940 when Sylvia Anthony confronted the taboo which had been placed on the study of death: the development of a concept of death and the need to mourn have been studied most seriously.^{3,4} Other questions, only recently, have been considered, particularly those

questions relating to schools, teachers and curriculum. From 1959 to the present the literature on young persons and death has grown steadily but the volume has been limited. There is a scarcity of literature which relates young people, teachers, schools and death. Most of the existing material has been done in relatively recent times by professionals concerned with mental health such as psychiatrists, psychologists and ministers.

In the review of the literature, attention is first given to the historical development of society's attitudes toward death. Next, consideration is focused upon the helping professionals' attitudes toward death and lastly, attention is given to the needs of young persons in relationship to death.

Historical Development of Society's
Attitudes Toward Death

Until we know what life is,
how can we know what death is?

Confucius

The curriculum of the public schools in the United States is interrelated with the attitudes of the society in which the school operates. Due to the importance of society's attitudes and its relationship to the school, the writer investigated society's past attitudes toward death as revealed by earlier studies. Primary emphasis was placed on the studies done by United States' citizens with the inclusion of some British studies.

Society's Attitudes Toward Death
From 1899-1959

"Death has lost its terrors," wrote Joseph Jacobs in "The Dying of Death" in 1899.⁵ Contrast Jacob's statement with the following quotes from authors of recent death literature:

A study recently done by the National Institute of Mental Health revealed that 80 percent of children's fears were concerned with death.⁶

A 'psychology of death' is both premature and overdue.⁷

One of the most important facts is that dying nowadays is more gruesome in many ways, namely more lonely, mechanical, and 'dehumanized'; at times it is even difficult to determine technically when time of death has occurred.⁸

Surely Robert Fulton's question in 1970 "Is death dying in the United States?" has different meanings completely than Jacob's title, "The Dying of Death."⁹ Death is the new pornography; this is a common statement by authors in the death and dying field.^{10,11,12,13} What has happened during the past 75 years to bring the researchers and practitioners of today full circle since 1899?

In 1915 Sigmund Freud in his essay, "Thoughts for the Times on War and Death" wrote that death was natural and inescapable; yet the behavior of people did not reflect this attitude. "We displayed an unmistakable tendency to 'shelve' death, to eliminate it from life. We tried to hush it up: ..." ¹⁴ Certainly people did not speak of the death of another within hearing distance of that person. Only children ignored this limit. Freud advised people to explore their attitudes toward death since people were suppressing and distorting their feelings toward death just as with sexuality.¹⁵

"Go to any public library and look under 'Death: Human' in the card index, and you will be surprised to find how few books there are on the subject" noted H.L. Mencken in 1919.¹⁶

From the early 1900's avoidance of the topic of death was the prevalent attitude in society, but in 1930 T.D. Eliot, an explorer in the scientific study of human's relationship with death, suggested social scientists might investigate the psychology of death further.¹⁷ From this date a growing concern can be documented. Agee's novel, A Death in the Family, published in 1938, brought the topic to the literary world in a very realistic manner.¹⁸ Thirty-four years later Edwin Shneidman states, "Agee brings out the fact that the taboo of the word death is inculcated in people from childhood. Aunt Hannah and Mary explain the idea of death to Cathy and Rufus in the most indirect terms."¹⁹

During the 1940's the treatment of death as a topic for consideration appeared more acceptable to those people working with children than those working with adults. Bro, Baruch and Gesell/Ilg considered the subject of death important enough to include it as a section in their books.^{20,21,22} Bro's treatment of death is religious in nature and Christian in particular. Nonetheless, she is open to differences and her philosophy is based on sound developmental principles for childrearing. You, Your Children, and War by Baruch has an entire chapter devoted to "Talk of Killing." Gesell and Ilg, not only have a short section on the development of the concept of death in children, but also include in each age level a

category entitled, 'Philosophic outlook' which covers 'Death and Life'. Interestingly enough, none of the three books mention death as a taboo topic.

One of the most well known authors in the area of children's conceptualization of death, Sylvia Anthony, published her dissertation, "The Child's Discovery of Death" in 1940. In the introduction Professor Fluegel mentioned aversion to the topic of death:

There is no corresponding literature on the psychology of death--and this in spite of the fact that psychoanalysis has shown that in many important respects our attitude toward death is similar to that toward sex. Both subjects are often unpleasant, inasmuch as they tend to arouse anxiety...; we often react to both forms of unpleasure and anxiety by the same devices of flight, repression, taboo and symbolism (we talk of a 'departed friend' as we talk of a 'fallen' woman, ...) ²³

Fluegel continued then to congratulate Sylvia Anthony "on having had the courage to overcome the resistances and taboos which have hitherto surrounded this difficult and delicate subject--a courage comparable to that of the writers who braved the corresponding sexual taboos a decade or two ago."

Two years after the end of World War II a diary of a young girl who dared to live joyously in the face of death stirred the hearts of the world. Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl was made into a film and a play as well. ²⁴ In 1948 Evelyn Waugh described in very graphic terms the funeral customs practiced in the United States. ²⁵ The Loved One was a well discussed novel. The next year John Gunther wrote Death Be Not Proud. This book was a poignant and moving tribute to his son who died at the age of 17. ²⁶ So ten years

after Agee's sensitive treatment of death via the novel, the literary world added three other works focused on death.

Undaunted by the scientific world's concern over the resistance to the idea of death, Edith Hunter and Anna Wolf treated the "untouchable" topic in different ways. Hunter, in The Questioning Child and Religion (1956), devotes one chapter to "The Cycle of Life and Death." "We wish to open all possible windows on the subject of death. We do not wish to close our children off from all views except our own."²⁷ Wolf wrote a pamphlet for the Child Study Association entitled, Helping Your Child to Understand Death (1958). She believes parents are unprepared for children's questions because death is no longer a part of family life.²⁸

And Charles Wahl, in 1958, thought people used magic a great share of the time in facing death. "Firstly the word death is itself taboo, instead cumbersome and elaborate euphemisms such as 'passed on' or 'departed' are employed." It was his opinion that a huge and extremely expensive industry existed for the sole reason of protecting us from the realities of death. Then, too, most people identify with a religious or philosophical system which guarantees our immortality. "We flee from the reality of our eventual death with such purpose and persistence and we employ defenses so patently magical and regressive that these would be ludicrously obvious to us if we should employ them to this degree in any other area of human conflict."²⁹

Would the coming years bring less magic and more acceptance of death? The next section reviews the literature relevant to the years from 1959 to the present.

Society's Attitudes Toward Death
From 1959 to the Present

A major work, The Meaning of Death, edited by Herman Feifel, appeared in 1959 and this book acted as a catalyst to the literature on death. If time span is considered, the articles dated from 1934 to 1958; however, most of the writings ranged in the late forties or late fifties. Certainly the interdisciplinary nature of the collection was its most striking feature. Art, English, anthropology, psychiatry, religion, philosophy, and politics were a few of the disciplines represented. Feifel identified three themes stressed by contributors:

1. The outlook of the United States toward death is mainly one of "denial and avoidance." This poses ramifications for the individual and for society.
2. Our science-conscious culture tends to measure experience within the bounds of space and time and possibly we are not provided "with all the necessary parameters for investigating and understanding death."
3. More trustworthy knowledge is urgently needed; more planned, controlled study on the topic of death is a necessity.³⁰

This same year Thelma Fraiberg in The Magic Years considered the topic of death of enough importance in child-rearing to include a discussion of it in her book.³¹

There are two collections of children's writings which reflect eloquently the feelings of children "caught in World War II."

Children of the A-Bomb, edited by Arata Osada, Past President of Hiroshima University, in 1959 is a testament of the boys and girls of Hiroshima who experienced the A-bomb. The following quotation is an example of a high school senior's comment:

...Science--what in the world is this science? Such an atom bomb is undoubtedly a crystal of scientific progress. But can it really be said that a thing which takes several hundred thousand human lives at one time is true scientific development.³²

An undated book ...I Never Saw Another Butterfly... is another powerful, heart-wrenching collection of children's drawings and poems from Terezin Concentration Camp during the years 1942-1944. Out of 15,000 children under the age of 15 who passed through Terezin, 100 exited alive. Eva Pickova, 12 years old, left this poem:

FEAR

Today the ghetto knows a different fear,
Close in its grip, Death wields an icy scythe.
An evil sickness spreads a terror in its wake.
The victims of its shadow weep and writhe.

Today a father's heartbeat tells his fright
and mothers bend their heads in their hands.
Now children choke and die with typhus here,
A bitter tax is taken from their bands.

My heart still beats inside my breast
While friends depart for other worlds.
Perhaps it's better - who can say?
Than watching this, to die today?

No, no, my God, we want to live!
Not watch our numbers melt away.
We want to have a better world,³³
We want to work - we must not die!

By 1965 there were still less than 400 entries in R.A. Kalish's bibliography entitled, "Death and Bereavement," published in the Journal of Human Relations.³⁴ In 1965 Geoffrey Gorer completed a study, Death, Grief, and Mourning, in which he concluded that English society did not give support for the process of mourning. He also noted the entwinement of sex and death as so many other authors had.

In 1955, I had put into words my awareness that death had superceded sex as a taboo subject and one surrounded with a morbid and furtive fascination for many people, according to the evidence of the horror comic and the 'X' film; I called my essay 'The Pornography of Death'.³⁵

In Death and Identity Fulton's view of the research was a much more positive one than that of most other writers in 1965. He thought research in this area had "burgeoned" in the United States since the publication of The Meaning of Death by Feifel in 1959.

Although Feifel could, in truth, state six years ago that we possessed little systematic knowledge about attitudes or reactions toward death, and that not enough attention had been paid to the implications of the meaning of death in this country, the situation was now changed perceptibly. Research into grief and bereavement, studies of attitudes toward death, and recorded responses to death and dying have begun to appear in increasing plentitude in the social and medical science literature.³⁶

Interestingly enough, in 1965 Wolfenstein and Kliman, the editors of Children and the Death of a President, made no mention of "the avoidance of death" pattern by society except as a natural part of the review of literature when Feifel and Gorer are cited. The editors did touch, however, on the fact that the death of President Kennedy had been very shocking and distressing to them. It was difficult for them not to feel uneasy pursuing the study of

a death so close to all of them.³⁷ This same year Edgar Jackson, a Protestant minister, wrote a slim but practical volume entitled Telling Your Child About Death.³⁸

After Sylvia Anthony's dissertation, "The Child's Discovery of Death" in 1940, there was no major work relating children and death until 1967. Rabbi Earl Grollman was the editor of Explaining Death to Children; the book was a compilation of articles from various disciplines of psychology, children's literature, psychiatry, anthropology, biology, sociology and religion. Louise Ames, who wrote the introduction for the book, stated:

We seem to be trying to put death and the thought of death into the background if not denying it entirely. ...A significant and demanding theme which runs through the whole presentation is that if we as individuals and as a society could ourselves come to terms with death, we could do a better job in telling our children about it.³⁹

Grollman said, "One of the reasons why many persons reject the aged is that they remind them of death. Discussion about death is relegated to a tabooed area formerly reserved for sex and dread diseases like cancer."⁴⁰

Mothers and Daughters by Edith Neisser came off the press the same year as Grollman's book. One chapter of the book was devoted to death; "What the Death of a Mother Means to Her Daughter." She thinks this particular event is even more difficult for those involved because our society copes so poorly with death and the accompanying grief.⁴¹

Joseph Rheingold, in 1967, trod on two taboos; he wrote on death and maternal destructiveness. In The Mother, Anxiety, and

Death, Rheingold maintained that "The taboo of maternal destructive-ness is more fundamental and more difficult to overcome than the taboo of death."⁴²

In 1969 Elisabeth Kubler-Ross, an experienced psychiatrist, wrote On Death and Dying; this is the book which opened the emotional dam in the area of death and dying in the United States. In the book she tells of the wall of resistance erected by the professional medical staff when she requested interviews with terminally ill patients. Some reacted with "stunned looks of disbelief" while others changed the topic of conversation suddenly. The staff made certain she never came near a dying patient. Some doctors protected patients with weak excuses such as the patients were too sick or too weak or too tired or did not want to talk. Others directly told her they would have nothing to do with the study while others said they would think about it. Nurses became angry with Kubler-Ross and walked away from her so they would not be forced to respond to her.⁴³ As the well-known psychiatrist has said, "The more we are making advancements in science, the more we seem to fear and deny the reality of death."⁴⁴

The year 1969 was a very prolific one for literature on the topic of death. Still another book that year, Up From Grief, by Kreis touched on a more personal level. She believes that the great share of people are not prepared for death for themselves or their friends or family members.⁴⁵ During the same year Austin Kutscher edited But Not to Lose: A Book of Comfort for Those Bereaved.

He does not mention that death is not a topic for discussion; perhaps this is because his interest in death came as a result of experiencing his wife's death. In the prologue he calls the book "a labor of love."

I still live in the same house. Many of the same birds, the wood ducks and the swan, are still in your back yard. Many of the relics that Jane and I collected in our travels are about our house. But there are no ghosts. Memories that for a time were inexpressibly sad have once again become a source of deep pleasure and satisfaction.⁴⁶

Nicholas Tucker, a British developmental psychologist, wrote two articles touching on the death theme. In the 1969 article, "Why Nursery Rhymes?" there is a section entitled 'No Taboo on Death'. "Death, so often ignored as a theme in children's literature, occurs frequently in nursery rhymes."⁴⁷ In "Books that Frighten" Tucker mentions that rhymes including death have been eliminated from anthologies while others have been rewritten.

In 1970, Elizabeth Reed's Helping Children with the Mystery of Death was followed one year later by Sylvia Anthony's reworking of her 1940 material; "repeating and adding to earlier observations, relating them to later researches in kindred fields, placing the whole in the sort of setting such a subject deserves."^{48,49} In the introduction to this new book, The Discovery of Death in Childhood and After, Anthony reviews the death taboo and identifies the later 1950's as the time the taboo began to lift generally. She devotes more attention to the topic of the development of the concept of death in children and the lack of study done since her 1940 work.

From her perspective the taboo is lifted with Herman Feifel's book in 1959.

...the psychological problems of the profession itself in this context were treated with frankness and perspective, and the inclusion of an eminent psychologist among the contributors, by recognizing the involvement of workers in other disciplines, came like a breath of fresh air.⁵⁰

In the journal Young Children in August 1972 an article, "A Matter of Life and Death" by Harlene Galen suggests practical guidelines for teachers in handling the subject of death with young children. These guidelines were a result of the discovery that a nursery school staff desired "reassurance of the validity of coping with this subject in the preschool."⁵¹ The shunning of death was discovered when photographs of the pupil's participation in "playing dead" were consistently blurry or poorly composed as compared to the other well-composed and sharply focused photographs. Discussion with the staff revealed this was not due to chance. The teachers felt very ambivalent about including the subject of death--even "playing dead"--in the early childhood curriculum.⁵²

And in 1972, Robert Kastenbaum was writing that the topic of death in psychology had been neglected.

No topic in psychology has been more neglected through the years--yet one might contend that psychology originated in thoughts about death.... We are struck by how little our own field, psychology, has contributed to the understanding of death in proportion to its more general contributions to human knowledge.⁵³

Kastenbaum suggests in his book, The Psychology of Death, that mental health specialists are attempting to decontaminate the topic of death. He gives credit to Feifel for recognizing that "there could

be no really useful psychology of death until people, including his own colleagues, were willing to accept this topic as relevant and legitimate.⁵⁴

Dumont and Foss in 1972 added to the lament over the scarcity of research concerning the understanding of people's attitudes toward death. "Despite the obvious importance of understanding people's attitudes toward death, empirical research in the area is not as yet very extensive. In fact, the social sciences have only recently ventured into death research."⁵⁵ This book also was an attempt to bridge the "denial vs. acceptance of death argument." Dumont and Foss thought people accepted and denied death simultaneously; there was no one view then, but views of varying degrees of denial or acceptance.

John Langone, in 1972, wrote,

...But first, one must be willing to approach the subjects of death and dying in a way that removes them from the grave, as one would approach any topic of study. Death is a noun, and it and dying are very much a part of the story of life. It behooves us to read the story in its entirety.⁵⁶

The same year Robert Kavanaugh, a former priest and present counselor and university teacher, wrote about the relationship of death and pornography.

Writing this book has not been easy. Friends hear you are writing, inquire avidly about the subject, then gulp and look away when you tell them. No wonder death is now known as the new pornography and Americans as the new Victorians of prudery about death. Some days I feel like the teller of bawdy jokes in a girl scout camp or convent parlor.⁵⁷

Avery Weisman agreed with Kavanaugh that the majority of adults cannot confront death or even accept death. "Death is not real; yet it is constantly around us."⁵⁸

Despite this tendency, death, as a subject for study, is becoming of more interest to the general public. A monthly magazine of national standing found half again as many respondents to a poll on death as to a poll on sex.⁵⁹ Shneider reported a similar experience. Even so, the same year Milton Mayer commented in If Men Were Angels, "The paper-thin bibliography of the subject (death) is eloquent testimony to the invincibility of our ignorance."⁶⁰

A medical journalist, David Hendin, reports that the bibliography is not so thin for the specialist. He notes

that it has been only in the past few years that physicians and even theologians have had courses on death and dying available in their professional training. Even today such courses are conspicuously absent at most of the nation's medical schools.⁶¹

Yet still in 1972 Talcott Parsons, Renee Fox and Victor Lidz noted in an article, "The Gift of Life," which appeared in the book, Death in the American Experience, the concern of both medical and secular groups with the different aspects of death and dying. Parsons felt that both medical students and physicians had an increased interest in the topic; the literature was growing rapidly.⁶²

Neale's, The Art of Dying, was one of the first attempts to go beyond a "strictly reading approach" to death education.

The purposes of these exercises is to facilitate our own movement from death to life. . . ., we will explore our awareness of death in the midst of life and our fear of death and life.⁶³

A year later in 1973, Marya Mannes said,

Many brave and eloquent men have looked death squarely in the face. 'My bags are packed,' said Pope John XXIII in 1965. 'I am ready to go.' But now the open dialogue of death is far more pragmatic than poetic because machines control the time and definition of death.⁶⁴

Sarah Cook, Assistant Professor of Nursing at Columbia University, added a slim book, Children and Dying, to the death literature in 1973. She noted that most of the articles and books relating children and death speak of the importance and difficulty of the subject along with the scarcity of material. She contends, however, that once the research process is underway the "articles seem endless."

It is as if each author must go through a long, researching process of his own in order to arrive at some opinion about the subject. Closer perusal of the material does indicate that there is a paucity of new material on the subject, and that many 'new' articles (as this one) are a recombination and republication with editing of past work. ...The earliest evidences of work in this area do not appear until the 1930's and early 1940's, and then there is an absence of material until the late 1950's and early 1960's, when an explosion of material occurs.⁶⁵

When Questions and Answers on Death and Dying was published in 1974, Kubler-Ross had dropped "the avoidance of death."⁶⁶ This particular year, 1974, reputable writers added significantly to the literature on death and dying; Kubler-Ross, Aries, Grollman, Lifton, Keleman and Zeligs are a few. The tone and attitude toward death is very different for the most part. The extensive quotes give a flavor of the change, along with some sense of the consistency of their messages.

Aries was "convinced by his research that it was indeed the culture of the United States which has played the primordial role in changing Western attitudes toward death in the twentieth century."⁶⁷

He also gives a concise review of the death and dying scene:

During the last ten years in American publications an increasing number of sociologists and psychologists have been studying the conditions of death in contemporary society and especially in hospitals. (A bibliography of 340 recent works is to be found in O.G. Brim et al., The Dying Patient (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1970.)) This bibliography makes no mention of the current conditions of funerals and mourning. They are deemed satisfactory. On the other hand, the authors have been struck by the manner of dying, by the inhumanity, the cruelty of solitary death in hospitals and in a society where the interdiction of death paralyzes and inhibits the reactions of the medical staff and family involved. ...And this para-medical literature, for which, as far as I know, there is no equivalent in Europe, is bringing death back into the dialogue from which it had been excluded. Death is once again becoming something one can talk about....⁶⁸

Contrast this with Feifel in 1959 when he spoke of Western culture in quite a different tone:

In the presence of death, Western culture, by and large, has tended to run, hide, and seek refuge in group norms and actuarial statistics. The individual face of death has become blurred by embarrassed incuriosity and institutionalization. The shadows have begun to dwarf the substance. Concern about death has been relegated to the tabooed territory heretofore occupied by diseases like tuberculosis and cancer and the topic of sex. We have been compelled in unhealthy measure, to internalize our thoughts and feelings, fear, and even hopes concerning death.⁶⁹

Lifton, a psychiatrist, refers in Living and Dying to the unavoidable pressures which society exerts on people.

Historical struggles strongly influence the subjects psychologists choose for study. In our time, massive violence and absurd death have made this century one of horror for millions of people. Death has become unmanageable for our culture, and for us as individuals...

What is needed now, we believe, is an approach to death that is both sensitive to personal experience and responsible to broader currents of thought.⁷⁰

Keleman, Lifton and Aries sound more positive about increasing concern with death and its aspects.⁷¹ Grollman's book in 1974, Concerning Death, concentrates on the avoidance theme at great length.

And yet, the subject of death is the most significant taboo of our society. There is a vast conspiracy involved in hushing up the new four-letter word of pornography. D-E-A-D. Death has become the forbidden topic, replacing sex as an object of repression....

Death is not only camouflaged; it is avoided. For many, the theme is an obscenity not to be discussed or even mentioned. There is a superstitious belief that if it is not talked about, it will simply disappear. Death itself will 'pass away'. It is what some social scientists call 'The dying of death'.⁷²

Despite Grollman's negative view of the situation, the Journal of Clinical Child Psychology in the summer of 1974 devoted an entire issue to "Death and Children."⁷³ Feifel, Kastenbaum, Maurer, Kubler-Ross, Lifton, and Leviton are but a few of the outstanding contributors to that particular issue. And the May-June 1975 issue of Children Today concentrated on "Child Abuse" as the central theme; since the fear of death is one of the main issues of child abuse this topic seems very relevant to the subject of death and children. Perhaps if death can be put in perspective by society, it will be easier to put life into an equal place with death and related issues such as child abuse.⁷⁴

By 1976 professionals sounded more certain about their views on death. Eda LeShan, an educator, writer and family counselor

opened the introduction to her book with firmness on her stand about children and death.

Some people may find this book shocking. There are those who believe that children should be 'protected' from talk about death and dying, that painful experiences which are not discussed will just go away and be forgotten. This is wrong. We now know that this is just a temporary masking of feelings which can be very hurtful to us all through our lives. What I have learned from many years of working with children and their families and from my own experience is that the most important part of living through a terrible experience is to understand and accept your feelings.⁷⁵

Although society has avoided and denied death since the beginning of this century, the past ten years indicate a growing concern which is evidenced by an explosion of literature in the death and dying field. How will this change of attitude filter from the research arena to the individual supporting those experiencing death with all its ramifications? Do the attitudes of the helping professionals, who hold the responsibility for disseminating the change of attitude, differ from society in general?

Attitudes of Helping Professionals Toward Death

Teacher, teacher,
Will I die?
Yes, my child,
And so will I!

Anonymous childhood chant

Once upon a time a patient died and went to heaven, but was not certain where he was. Puzzled, he asked a nurse who was standing nearby: "Nurse, am I dead?" The answer she gave him was: "Have you asked your doctor?"

Anonymous, circa 1964.

Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss
Awareness of Dying

"Even for professional men and women euthanasia and death remain an almost taboo subject--just as sex was once taboo," states Dr. Florence Clothier, a former faculty person in psychiatry at Harvard Medical School.⁷⁶ Herman Feifel comments,

Some colleagues and I are now engaged in scrutinizing these attitudes in students entering areas where coming to grips with dying, death and bereavement is an essential feature of their professional functioning, i.e., the ministry, medicine, nursing, and funeral directing.⁷⁷

Since it is the professional group which sets policy for our institutions, it is interesting to note that Trubo and Shneidman both mention the unhealthy state of our institutions in relationship to the topic of death and dying. Shneidman speaks of the dehumanization of our society and the urgent need to reverse our present national death-oriented course. "But in order to avert the death of our own institutions we shall, in addition to being the home of the brave and the land of the free, have to become the country of the humane."⁷⁸ Trubo is more direct than Shneidman. "How, in fact, do you convince people to confront their own dying and death when many of our major institutions--from health agencies to hospitals to religious groups--encourage us to deal so unrealistically with death."⁷⁹

Attitudes of Medical Professionals Toward Death

Seventy-five percent of all deaths will occur in crowded hospitals or homes for the aged where the goal is to improve the health of the patient.⁸⁰ If a terminal illness interrupts this goal, then the objective is to keep the patient quiet and comfortable to the end. In meeting this objective most health personnel use drugs because of their limited knowledge.⁸¹ Kavanaugh states: "The plain facts of the matter are clear; staff peoples such as doctors and nurses receive no rewards for responding in a human way to dying patients."⁸²

Elisabeth Kubler-Ross verifies by her personal experience, both in her workshops and writings, that nurses and doctors avoid death and the dying patient.⁸³ Certainly the title of her book tells her message; On Death and Dying: What the Dying Have to Teach Doctors, Nurses, Clergy and Their Own Families. She has explained with very poignant and often dramatic observations that doctors, nurses and all other professionals in human services, as well as lay people, have much to learn about death.

Most likely, nurses, as a group, have had the most experiences with death and dying; nonetheless, they tend to deny death and conceal it from others. Richard Kalish concludes from a study "...the nurses, although not the observer, were startled to learn how much they delayed answering the ring of the dying."⁸⁴ In The Psychology of Death, Kastenbaum reports a study which he made while working with nurses in a hospital setting.

The nurse is likely to be a person with at least average, often above average, compassion for the ill and suffering. While some nurses, as some physicians, manage to insulate themselves from the emotional implications of their work, it is more typical for the nurse to care about what her patients are going through. Yet it is also typical for the nurse to believe that she should not 'give in' to her feelings, even to the extent of 'letting them show' to others.⁸⁵

In The Nurse and the Dying Patient, Jeanne Quint maintained the nurse's goals are not consistent. She is told "to keep the patient alive at all costs" but at the same time she is "to help him die in a dignified and comforted manner." There is little importance placed on conversation as an important content area for nurses' training. While the technical aspects of nursing care are given in most explicit ways, there is little specialized direction in the use of conversation in the best interest of patients.⁸⁶

Kastenbaum found Quint's observations were consistent with his findings. He concluded:

We arrive at a general view of the nurse as a person who must cope with the daily challenges and demands of the death situation--yet lacking the authoritative leverage of the physician, lacking relevant training from her own profession, and lacking on-the-job atmosphere that would support her in times of personal distress or in her more adventuresome and involved efforts. It is no wonder that she may lean heavily upon unexamined cultural values and attitudes. Nor should we be hasty in asking her to function within the vicinity of the terminal patient. As with the funeral director and physician, we sent the nurse forward with conflicting orders ringing in her ears. We are not sure precisely what we want her to do with death except, somehow, to keep it out of sight.⁸⁷

In Greenberg's and Irwin's study with medical personnel, they interviewed all first year residents and all nurses between 20 and 30 at a cancer research center about their attitudes toward work and

their attitudes toward death.⁸⁸ It was common for the nurses to respond in a psycho-social manner by withdrawal and isolation, but very often they sought relief by talking with roommates or parents via long distance. Half of the nurses servicing cancer patients left by the end of the year, whereas one-fourth of the nurses left the cardiac and psychiatric services. There were no nurses who would discuss death with the patient or deal with the patient's feelings. Questions from patients were fielded to the doctors. However, there was no discussion of the questions among the clinical personnel.

Sarah Sheets Cook, a nurse and author, suggests

The core of the problem of dealing with childrens' perceptions of death and with dying children seems mainly that nurses are human beings, living in a society where death is a hateful and distressing experience and working in a profession which regards death as an enemy.⁸⁹

Glaser and Strauss have a similar view:

...Nurses import into the hospital the values of our society and act accordingly...what surely can be done is to become deliberately aware of the importation so that responses to social loss will not hinder professional requirements for composure and care.⁹⁰

The person who should know more about dying and death than any other is the doctor, since he spends a good share of his life with people who have death and/or pain as a companion. August Kasper does not think the medical profession supports this thesis, however.

I am not impressed with either the volume or profundity of medical thought concerning death or dying people. It is as if this one certainty of life were to be avoided not only by vigorous positive thought and action, but also by giving it, as an event, no more attention than one gives to a period at the end of a moving impressive novel.⁹¹

Herman Feifel interviewed 81 physicians and two control groups, one of healthy normal persons and one of seriously ill patients. He contended from the results that physicians tended to have an above-average fear of death. Further, he also found "the implication that a number of physicians utilize the medical profession so the individual can secure prominent mastery over disease, to help control personal concerns about death."⁹² A personal accident, illness, or threat of death before the age of five was the major reason given for these fears.

Livingston and Zimet, a physician and a psychologist, studied physician's orientations toward death. The medical students studied were specializing in surgery, internal medicine, pediatrics and psychiatry. The results of the questionnaire showed those students who scored high in authoritarianism expressed little death-anxiety while death-anxiety increased as the students moved from the academic to the clinical setting.⁹³ Both Feifel and Gorer report that physicians think of themselves as different from patients if terminal illness is the consideration. Even though physicians want the truth, they do not feel their patients want the truth about terminal illness.⁹⁴

Kubler-Ross and Feifel have told their personal experiences with physicians while researching in the field of death and dying. Both of these well-known figures in the death literature discovered invisible walls when searching for research settings and population samples. Kubler-Ross said: "Early in my work with dying patients

I observed the desperate need of the hospital staff to deny the existence of terminally ill patients on their ward."⁹⁵ Herman Feifel reported:

...After a few more vetoes in various setups, I began to realize that what I was up against were not personal quirks, the usual administrative vicissitudes, non-acceptance of an inadequate research design, or the pique aimed at an 'outsider' coming in to ruffle smooth waters. Rather, it was a personal position, bolstered by cultural structuring that death is a dark symbol not to be stirred or touched, that it is an obscenity to be avoided.⁹⁶

The most important factor in working with dying patients according to Kubler-Ross is "our own attitude and ability to face terminal illness and death." Certainly it would be impossible to face death calmly and helpfully with a patient if death is seen as a taboo topic which conjures fear. She continues:

...I am convinced, from the many patients with whom I have spoken about this matter, that those doctors who need denial themselves will find it in their patients and that those who can talk about the terminal illness will find their patients better able to face and acknowledge it. The need of denial is in direct proportion with the doctor's need for denial.⁹⁷

Marya Mannes in Last Rights comments about the superiority of our medical equipment, research facilities and technical know-how.

But no machine can tell them (the physicians) what to say to a dying patient and ease him truthfully but gently into death. It is this worry, this call for help in the night or day, that the 'lower echelons' in the treatment hierarchy of the critically ill are now trying to answer.⁹⁸

"Over-involvement" is used as a warning often with newcomers to the medical professions. Kastenbaum, however, maintains "under-involvement" is at least as grave a danger. He feels many of our

destructive attitudes in this shunning of death stem from the failure to identify with other humans. "Death tends to level the distinctions between specialist and everybody else...."⁹⁹

Have the mental health specialists accepted these "destructive attitudes?" The next section reviews the literature focusing on the mental health professional.

Attitudes of Mental Health Professions Toward Death

As natural as the inclusion might appear, Kastenbaum suggests "conspicuous by his absence" as an accurate description of the mental health specialist's role in our culture's death system.¹⁰⁰ Certainly the mental health system has expanded greatly in the United States, but there has been no noticeable attention given to death and topics related to death. Even courses for these specialists have not included the topic of death in their content. A year's course in developmental psychology, or even a four year graduate program might not include the relationship between growth and death. A clinical psychologist or a psychiatrist is not apt to enter her/his profession with an adequate knowledge or a sense of involvement in death-related questions Kastenbaum maintains.¹⁰¹

Like Kubler-Ross, Feifel suggests those in the mental health professions must resolve their own fears and concerns about death before they can be helpful and supportive with others confronting death.¹⁰² In fact, Feifel goes much beyond the professional necessity for psychological comfort with death. He thinks findings suggest that a person's philosophy of life and death lie at the

heart of meaning, value and personality. The manner in which a person views death may be a major organizing principle in determining how we behave. "If, in truth, 'the child is father to the man,' what greater challenge is there to the clinical child psychologist than that the idea of death serve as preparation for living!"¹⁰³ Feifel believes our schools should be considering "death education"; his view is indicative of a new interest and a changing attitude toward relating children and death within an educational framework. Are teachers prepared for this new development?

Attitudes of Professional Educators Toward Death

Earl Grollman commented on the lack of awareness among university educators about death as a topic for serious consideration for teachers in 1967.

The editor found the selection of an educational psychologist the most difficult of all the contributors to obtain. Numerous calls were made to university professors throughout the country.

'How do you, in the school situation, handle youngsters who have sustained a loss?'

The replies were almost the same: 'Frankly, we never thought of it. I guess we leave it to the individual teacher.'

But you give instruction for all the details of academic life. You mean that there is no portion of your curriculum to teachers regarding the crisis situation of death?

The resounding response: 'Yes--we have avoided the subject.'¹⁰⁴

In "Death: Handling the Subject and Affected Students in the Schools," Hella Moller believes that the deep effect on a child of the death of a parent is not often realized by school personnel.¹⁰⁵ Most often there are not enough "professionals to detect and treat all children who could benefit." (Moller obviously is not including classroom teachers as professionals who could assess the emotional needs of children; nor is she viewing the curriculum as a possibility for exploration of expressing emotions.)

The issue of Young Children in August 1972 had an article "A Matter of Life and Death" in which Harlene Galen comments on the place of death within the life of the young child.

Death is not confined to the world of the adult. It has a definite place in the world of the young child as well. The vital importance of the early childhood educator's acceptance of this fact and his associated professional role cannot be stressed too greatly. If the teacher ignores this fact he denies the child's full development of a firm foundation for lifelong sound mental health.¹⁰⁶

No studies have been found by the writer concerning educator's attitudes toward death. Some authors have written about "death education"; criteria have been suggested for effective teachers in death education.¹⁰⁷ Leviton in 1974 states: "The proliferation of death education courses with children and youth obliges us to offer several recommendations." One of the three recommendations is the training of teachers in death education.

It is interesting to note that most of the suggestions directed toward teachers are not given by educators or professionals who have worked with youth. With the exception of Eileen Forman, a kindergarten teacher and Harlene Galen, a nursery school director,

those professionals setting criteria and recommendations are educators at the university level, interested in working with adults or professionals in related fields such as mental health.¹⁰⁸ In the field of religion, Earl Grollman is an exception; he shares some of his experiences in working with children. Educators are not prominent in this current and, now more widely discussed, subject of death.

Educators most often are missing members of the professional groups included within the death education framework. When Kastenbaum mentions the integration of the dimension of death into educational and training programs, he neglects teachers.

Future psychologists, psychiatrists, sociologists and social workers should, we think, be given opportunity to consider death as it is relevant to their prospective life's work. ...The same might be said of future nurses, physicians, clergymen, police officers, and some others.¹⁰⁹

In his preface Kastenbaum does include teachers in a list of professionals he hopes will read the book.

Leviton, in the Journal of Clinical Child Psychology, mentions an article that "death education is taught by sociologists, psychologists, health educators, psychiatrists, specialists in English and language studies, literature, etc." Although the title of the article reads "Death Education for Children and Youth," the classroom teacher, the professional person who spends the most time with children having ordinary needs, is excluded from those classified as death educators.¹¹⁰

In the Project Headstart Rainbow series there is an example of this type of exclusion from the mental health field in the #12 pamphlet, Psychologist. One section is entitled, "Utilization of Other than Professional Psychologists in a Psychological Service Program."

Who are these 'other than accredited psychologists' who may make a contribution to the Head Start program? They come from various disciplines. For example, guidance counselors, speech clinicians, special education teachers, psychology majors at the master's level, child development and rehabilitation specialists all may constitute resources upon which to draw.¹¹¹

The experienced classroom teacher is not included in this list. Experience with children is not a prerequisite; academic requirements are given priority.

Another illustration of the exclusion of teachers from death-related issues is evident in an article, "Why Most Physicians Don't Get Involved in Child Abuse Cases and What to do About It." A child protection team for intervention in families embroiled in the child abuse cycle is suggested. On this team Helfer would include a community protective service worker, public health nurse, pediatric specialist, psychologist, hospital social worker, lawyer and, occasionally a law enforcement person.¹¹² Like Kastenbaum, Helfer has not included the teacher as a professional concerned with mental health and the protection of children. Yet the great majority of children in the United States spend more time with teachers than with any other persons other than parents.

In an article, "Developmental Consideration of the Nursery School Experience," Emma Plank speaks of the abdication by educators

in the area of emotional development of children within the nursery school framework.

We as educators cannot abdicate this job, as we have done, for instance, with our tendency to have people from other professions rather than educators as consultants for our nursery schools. We find the social worker, the child psychiatrist, the psychologist--all of them trying to help teachers deal with their children, but we rarely find a specially skilled educator invited as a consultant. The nursery school teacher can easily confuse her role with that of the admired clinician, forgetting that she has the unique function of creating an intricate educational environment, conducive to the growth of different children, with differing needs--and this includes cognitive learning.¹¹³

Are teachers abdicating their role in death education?

Numerous authors and investigators have addressed the avoidance and denial of death by the professionals staffing human service institutions in the United States. These investigations include the following professionals: nurses, physicians, and mental health personnel. Most authors agree that the professional's attitude toward death is the instrumental factor in their supportive ability for others when confronted with death or the topic of death. Exploration into educator's attitudes toward death are non-existent. The literature relevant to the particular needs of adolescents in relationship to death is examined in the next section.

Particular Needs of Adolescents in Relationship to Death

And it's 1,2,3, what are we fighting for?
Don't ask me I don't give a damn
Next stop is Vietnam
And it's 5,6,7,8 open up the Pearly Gates
Well there ain't no time to wonder why
Whoopee we're all gonna die.

Recorded by Pete Seeger



Kastenbaum and Aisenberg support their thesis that a great deal can be done to prevent premature death in The Psychology of Death. In speaking of developmental limits and their influence these authors state that the likelihood of being in an accident increases appreciably during the adolescent years. Two studies are cited "which show that in Massachusetts and Connecticut (during the periods studied) the youngest drivers had the highest accident rates."¹¹⁴ In 1965 there were 1,600 Americans killed and 60,000 injured in motorcycle accidents and "most of the fatalities are of high school and college age."¹¹⁵ This is not unique to the United States. "One of every 12 boys who gets a motorcycle at the age of 16 is killed or seriously injured by the time he is 19" in the United Kingdom.¹¹⁶

Kastenbaum continues:

...several characteristics associated with adolescence and early adulthood undoubtedly tend to predispose this group to accidents. These include inexperience, poor judgment, the need to rebel against authority and to test limits, the desire to prove one's masculinity and competence--frequently by risk-taking, and general emotional, and possibly physical, immaturity. If we add to these the likelihood that young people will use defective and unreliable equipment and vehicles, then the accident statistics are easier to understand.¹¹⁷

Thus, developmental level sets limits not only on physical strength, size, stamina, ability to conceptualize, and experience but it also indirectly influences opportunities and ability to interact with others, and to be allowed to function without supervision in potentially dangerous situations. In short, it is a major, sometimes rather arbitrary, determinant of when a society will permit the individual to be exposed to certain dangers.¹¹⁸

But the attitude of society toward recklessness is not one of discouragement; rather it is encouraged. Here is a father of a dead football player talking:

I think you'd make a mistake banning football.... I think these boys are entitled to play. I played for nine years, and I couldn't tell my son not to and make it stick. It isn't up to you to cushion the shocks. These kids can take it. My boy did, and I'm proud of him. Don't blame football. These things, I think, are predestined. There's no shame in dying. It's how you die. If you die like a man, there's nothing wrong with that....¹¹⁹

Two basic attitudes are reflected in this man's statement Kastenbaum suggested. These are: (1) accidental death is unavoidable or predestined; (2) risking death, even unnecessarily, is honorable since it shows masculinity. Kastenbaum and Aisenberg state: "If it isn't up to the adults to protect the young, then who is it up to. Reckless attitudes are helped by adults in our society."¹²⁰

Farnsworth, in the preface to Shneider's Death and the College Student, speaks of adults from a different perspective.

If I were to simplify a very complex problem in a constructive way, based on my experience over nearly four decades of working with young people, I would say that the most important force or influence preventing a distraught young person (or anyone else) from trying to end his own life is a warm, trusting, dependable relationship with someone who cares deeply for his welfare and who can get across to him that this concern is genuine.¹²¹

Sometimes the college psychiatrist or counselor becomes the trusted adult for some students. If for some reason this type of a relationship can not be formed within the established framework, then a person, such as a teacher, a boy or girl friend must be the trusted listener. Therefore, Shneider believes each community needs a group of persons 'who are aware of the depth, variety, power, and subtlety of self-destructive wishes and preoccupations and

who are willing to save a life by responding when such a crisis becomes apparent. Pastors, physicians, psychologists, psychiatrists in many instances. In any case, such individuals can do much to refer troubled persons to whatever more highly trained help is available.¹²²

Let us return to the adolescent who is seeking the meaning of life and death. Edgar Jackson remarks:

It is at this point that the insights of Viktor Frankl may have special relevance. He would urge that persons seek first an adequate meaning for life, and then all of the other things will be added unto them. It would seem essential then, that the teaching of children and young people would be aimed at their need to find adequate meaning for their own lives at the time they are obliged to live them. ...For it is only by the process of enlightened confrontation that the deep anxiety about life and death can be resolved and the maturing individual can achieve the self-understanding and the self-realization that it is competent to face all there is of life, even its mark of mortality.¹²³

As the young person is forming his/her purposes and making decisions it must dawn on him/her that all hopes, expectations, ambitions require time for fruition. As a result, it becomes a very difficult task to weave the concept of death into the fabric of life. Many youth give much thought to this topic of death. "...The adolescent's understanding of death will be shaped by his own life experiences. 'Attitude' or 'viewpoint' is just as significant as basic mental ability" maintains Kastenbaum.¹²⁴ He even suggests the manner in which a person united the thought of death with his personality when a youth could have long range consequences for mastery of problems in his/her later life.

In "Understanding the Teenager's Response to Death," Edgar Jackson proposes that approaching death in an unrealistic fashion can be a danger to young people since this period of their lives

faces them with such important tasks. There are three major decisions: (1) to lay the foundations for a philosophy of life; (2) the task of sexual adjustment leading to the choice of a life partner; (3) choosing a vocation. Jackson maintains "It can be shown that the person's attitude toward death may in many cases be a significant factor in determining behavior in relation to these major choices."¹²⁵

Avery Weisman states "In short, to be responsible, man must believe in his own death."¹²⁶ Yet our society constantly denies death so young people would find the developing of this responsibility very difficult.

Stanley Keleman relates an encounter with death which happened in his adolescent years.

I recall a friend of mine dying when we were both 17. He died of cancer. I remember how the gang would all gather together and make mass marches on the hospital ward, as though our energy and determination would effect his cure. I remember the enforced visiting hours, and the stupid behavioral straight they put my friend in and that we put ourselves in. Everybody knew he was dying. But they forced him to eat hospital food, when all he wanted was a hot pastrami sandwich, which we sneaked to him. I remember him sneaking smokes too, because they weren't permitted. Dying for him was the same rebellion against the prison of helplessness that was around him from his childhood on.

I remember then that Ed had lost his father two years before his own dying--a man he was deeply attached to. He never mourned his father. He just became delinquent, dropped out of school and haunted pool rooms. Nobody made the connection. Ed's way of dying, congealing and shrinking, with his unspoken resentments at feeling fatherless, manifested as brave stoicism. And he died.

I remember all of us--his friends, his brother, his mother--bravely living the pretense of his getting well. I remember the jokes we made to cheer him up. The brave, smiley stuff, then we would all agonize outside his room.

We shared the terrors of his fate but couldn't express our fears. I have often wondered if my friend died thinking we really didn't care or couldn't feel. Even as I tell this story I begin to feel sad at not sharing his fear with him and my fear with him. Maybe I am finally ending something that has remained unended for 25 years. We cared Ed. We cared but we were scared. We missed you. We were frightened and angry. For me, there is still an empty space.¹²⁷

Shoor and Speed support Keleman's memory of the cause of delinquency in his friend.

In a child or adolescent, the impact of a loved one's death may result in a normal mourning process with resolution, or an immediate pathological reaction, a delayed reaction leading to psychiatric problems as an adult or delinquent behavior. Surprisingly enough to many people, delinquency may be a masking of the mourning process.¹²⁸

Acting out behavior has been related often by authorities to anti-social attitudes. These delinquent adolescents have been labeled as "children who hate" and their behavior has been blamed on hostility. However, after Shoor and Speed gave psychiatric consultation to 14 adolescents from the ages of 14 to 17, they decided hostility was not the reason for this behavior. The actions of the young people had been so harsh as to bring in the legal system upon them. A death of an immediate member of the family had preceded the behavior, either immediate or delayed. Previously these young people had fit within the normal expectations of their families and communities. These adolescents could not express their grief after the death in a manner acceptable to society so that anti-social behavior resulted.¹²⁹

Two of the consultations done by Shoor and Speed had bearing on the research at hand. Martin and his mother were extremely close.

She was dying of cancer but Martin became "callous" to her suffering. As he said, "I couldn't cry." Martin's behavior disintegrated; he began to fail in school and burglaries of the houses in the neighborhood began. Since he could not "cry" about his loss, he acted out the tears instead. After Martin was helped to verbalize his sense of loss and gain affection from other sources, his school work improved and the delinquent behavior receded.¹³⁰

The second consultation concerned Jeannie who had been shielded from the facts when her father died. This overprotection created anxiety and confusion for her. Jeannie had been happy and well behaved as a young child. After her father's death she started lying, stealing and running away and this continued from the age of 7 until 15. Now she started extreme sexual misconduct until her mother brought her in to Juvenile Probation because she was "beyond control." Eventually Jeannie was helped to see the relationship between her father's death and her delinquent behavior.¹³¹

Fulton writes:

It is the conclusion of Geoffrey Gorer, an English research anthropologist, that certain expressions of adolescent vandalism may be a function of the refusal or the inability of some youths to mourn. In a study of recently bereaved individuals he found that in contemporary Britain there was both an individual repudiation and a social denial of grief and mourning--a repudiation and denial which left the survivor grievously alone and ill-equipped to cope with the myriad of personal and social difficulties that attendant upon a death.¹³²

A number of children and adolescents who had lost a parent came to Wolfenstein for help within a year of the death. She reported that "sad feelings were curtailed; there was little

weeping. Immersion in the activities of everyday life continued..." However, as time went on the analysts realized the children and adolescents were "denying the finality of the loss." These young people still held the expectation at a conscious level that their dead parents would return.

When these young people became aware that the parent would not return, they reacted with panic and anger. A 15 year old girl named Ruth remarked a few months after the death of her mother, "If my mother were really dead, I would be all alone.... I would be terribly scared." Sometimes Ruth would be distraught with "frustration, rage and yearning; she would roll the sheets and blankets into the shape of a human body and hug them."¹³³

After the death of President Kennedy the essays written by adolescents about their feelings about the assassination for the study done by Wolfenstein were strong, emotionally expressive documents.

Without them I would have underestimated the intensity of emotional reaction of children in this age range. At the same time they presented a challenging paradox. In our experience, children of this age tend to show strong inhibitions of affect when someone in their own family has died. Yet they could feel and express outspoken grief for the death of the President.¹³⁴

Jackson, in his article "Understanding the Teenager's Response," states the following:

The teenager, filled with a new sense of the creative power of life and the wonder of the future, shows his interest in the subject by a quest for the spiritual, psychological, and personal meanings of death. He is busily engaged in welding his philosophy of life and needs to have a place into which death will fit. The teenager who is most apt to need special help is the one who cannot talk about death

when it occurs. He is probably indicating that he cannot cope with the idea, and his philosophy of life is not big enough to find a place for it.¹³⁵

The small amount of information on adolescents' needs in relationship to death revealed an agreement by the authors on the importance of the adolescent's attitude toward death. The major needs of adolescents were two-fold; a trusted adult relationship and a philosophy of life large enough to encompass death. An adolescent's attitude toward death affects his mastery of problems in later life, his behavior in relation to major developmental tasks for this period of his life, and the manner of the mourning process and its constructiveness or destructiveness in relationship to the major developmental tasks. Would the needs of younger children in relationship to death have any similarity to the needs of adolescents? The literature relevant to this question is examined in the next section.

Children and the Process of Conceptualizing Death

Patrice and Heidi began a conversation about babies, as apparently Patrice's Mom just had a baby. Mike informed the children that he knew where babies came from. Of course, all the people who had accused him of copying their coloring (previous interchange concerning the assignment had occurred), said, 'Sure you do,' very sarcastically. He proceeded to explain that babies come out of people's stomachs when they die. I was quite surprised at this but the girls he was speaking to just asked him how he knew for sure. He told them that his grandfather takes care of dead people and that his grandfather and mother had six babies. None of the young ladies disputed the point so the topic died there.¹³⁶

Observation by an undergraduate student
in Education 412 Growth and Development
of Children

The observation cited above is an excellent example of the confusion six year olds experienced while struggling with the concepts of death and birth. Certainly the children opened many avenues of search as well as questions. Is this a conversation one would expect from six year olds in a classroom for children with ordinary needs? What is the purpose of this conversation? Is observation of this conversation worthy of scrutiny? Is the concept of death developmental in nature with children? What does the teacher do with this information? Is sexuality or death part of the curriculum?

As discussed previously, death and sexuality are often linked; death has replaced sexuality as the taboo topic in our society today. According to Sylvia Anthony,

Parents today are mostly well prepared to answer their children's questions about birth and sex, but may be troubled when they have to deal with questions about death. The facts and the thought may be distressing to themselves. They may repress thought on the subject. Freud's biographer, Dr. Ernest Jones, suggests that Freud himself did so.¹³⁷

Tallmer, Formanek and Tallmer have views similar to Anthony. "In many ways, the status of death as a subject for discussion by children may be likened to attitudes toward sexuality pre-Freud, i.e. sexual ideation emerged full grown from an adolescent's head."¹³⁸

According to Kastenbaum, judicious selection and even censorship have been used in order to keep death and sex themes from fairy tales. Kastenbaum suggests that the Victorian image of childhood innocence may have hidden actual sexual abuse of children and disturbing suicidal behavior on the part of young children in

Victorian times.¹³⁹ He also speculates that the lack of recognition concerning sexuality and mortality as it relates to children might be a way parents reduce pressure from the "moving-up generation."¹⁴⁰

As early as 1927 Susan Isaacs, a British children's psychologist, pondered the evasion of the sexuality and death themes with children. It was assumed the botanical approach was a lead-in to sex education. Isaacs questioned this:

Are the sexual processes in plants assumed to throw light upon human sexual physiology?... Do we favour the study of plants just because it is more remote from the facts of human sexual relations, and we are afraid to make more than a half-concession to our conviction of the child's need for knowledge and understanding.¹⁴¹

She then suggests children are far more interested in animals than plants. Although children have been encouraged in the care of animals,

it has not been considered desirable that he should take any interest in (a) the facts of internal structure and physiology--particularly if this involves any reference to the processes of digestion, excretion, reproduction, etc., in humans; and (b) the facts of death.¹⁴²

Kastenbaum identifies developmental level "as an important influence upon the child's emotional orientation to death." After a person realizes death cannot be escaped, she/he will feel differently toward death compared to the time when it was thought of as an inconvenience easily outwitted.¹⁴³

Ongoing research has provided evidence that the guiding force of awareness of death is active at all age levels, Feifel tells us. Only recently has it been discovered that children have fear of or concern with, death. "...mounting evidence suggests that the

primary existence of death is available to the child as early as two or three years of age."¹⁴⁴ And as humans develop there are qualitative changes in the meanings of death.¹⁴⁵ As a result of the developmental cycle of maturation the significance of death is very different at differing ages of 3, 30 and 60.

These qualitative changes as a child develops often bring confusion. The next section examines the misunderstandings which may occur during the growth of a child's concept of death.

Children's Confusions and Misunderstandings

Let us return to the observation of the child cited at the beginning of this section. From an adult perspective, the child appears extremely confused in his thinking about sexuality and mortality. Connor and Doerring, however, maintain

Children's understandings are often constructed out of their own unique combinations of partial information, single dimensioned perceptions, and undifferentiated feelings. For them fantasies are real and certainly the ones a child creates about death may have exceedingly disruptive effects on his personality.¹⁴⁶

Evelyn Pitcher in Children Tell Stories reports that the themes of aggression, hurt or misfortune, or death, resulting from the analysis of the stories in their study were expressed in the "context of apparently stronger affects than any of the other."¹⁴⁷ She also thinks the vulnerability of young children to fears in the early years such as fears of falling or the loss of a parent or home or personal parts must face the child with many mystifying events.

His relative lack of experience, only tentative ability to distinguish between fact and fantasy, and uncertain apprehension of time sequences tend to make every experience potentially destructive. It is difficult for the child to perceive an experience as a single passing incident in a life full of incidents; he is more likely to view an experience as one beyond which there is nothing else.¹⁴⁸

(In this study Death and Aggression as themes were difficult to separate since often aggression had been used previous to the death.)

Anthony explains the conceptualization process in the following manner:

The child's conceptual scheme is built up on subjective interpretations of objects in terms of familiar things and functions, plus queries. In this process social communication as well as independent sensory perception plays a part. It was found, however, that the maturity of children's concepts of death was related more closely to mental than to chronological age, irrespective of the distinctive content of what they had been told. Social teaching independent of experience was swallowed whole, as it were, undigested. Children would believe that a worm or rabbit after burial would go up into the sky and be no longer bodily present in the ground.¹⁴⁹

Piaget states, "Arising from the relations between personal activity and the external world, at first (causality) partakes of efficacy mixed with phenomenalism but later...is incorporated into a system of pure relations."¹⁵⁰ "The relationship between the death concept, reasoning, and the concept of cause is of critical importance throughout life, and central to our theme," comments Anthony.¹⁵¹ When young, the child confuses time and being in his mental thought processes. If the child is faced with questions or statements about happenings when he/she was not a being, confusion may result. The child might deny the fact clearly or possibly he/she might become entangled in contradicting statements.¹⁵² "We must avoid the danger



of supposing that irrational thinking of this kind occurs in the child but not in the adult, or that irrational ideas of similar content have similar origin or function in child and adult"reports Anthony.¹⁵³

Anthony states,

The intelligent adolescent's concept of death refers to mortality as physically ascertainable. In the child's earliest conception, physical observations of this kind play only a small part. They are the keystone rather than the foundation of the final structure.... Their (young children) concepts of death and of life are often erroneous and always incomplete.¹⁵⁴

Unfortunately, many adults assume children are small adults who need education. However, most teachers and parents realize that the mental processes used by children are not as developed as those of adults. In fact, children are not capable of assimilating the experiences of others. A child under the age of six or seven may not be able to implement "cognitive reciprocity" as it is termed by Piaget. In other words, the child does not benefit from learning outside the realm of his own experience. Koocher concludes, "In talking about death, therefore, such children will naturally react in the light of their own experiences and of what they have been told by adults or have seen in the media."¹⁵⁵

Anthony writes, "The concept (death) remains a source of emotion and autonomic arousal, perhaps of anxiety, of mockery, of defiant bravado, perhaps a stimulus to a perpetual search for answers. Concepts of death and cause tend to remain closely tangled."¹⁵⁶

How does the young person bring clarity to the confusion and misunderstandings? The next section examines the literature relevant to this question.

Children's Clarification of the Concept of Death

One of the needs of children who experience death is guidance in understanding the events so they can accept the fact of death at their developmental level.¹⁵⁷ Koocher, a psychologist at The Children's Hospital Medical Center in Boston, along with a faculty person at Harvard University Medical School, believes "most children show a desire to 'master' death in some sense by learning about it and knowing, as much as is possible, what happens to make things die."¹⁵⁸

Frances Wickes, a contemporary of Susan Isaacs, in The Inner World of Childhood, speaks of mastery in quite a different manner; her mastery has more feeling in it.

...There is a constant interplay of the forces of retreat and advance. As soon as life demands a greater degree of consciousness there comes the temptation to retreat, the desire not to accept the new understanding which must of necessity bring with it a great responsibility.

Even very little children feel this urge. Sometimes they voice this desire to remain unconscious so clearly that certain ones will try to go to bed when they feel that they are asked to do something too hard (as expression of the desire for sleep and forgetting the pull of death). Death desires are strong even in children, though usually they are masked even to the one who feels their urge. Nevertheless we all have this desire to remain unconscious of the suffering and evil in the world about us, of which it is easier to remain ignorant; unconscious of the changing demands of society which would force upon us the consideration of new problems; unconscious of the things which would necessitate new adjustments of personal relationships; and most of all

unconscious of the undercurrents of our own psychology, of the inferior thing in ourselves which, raised to consciousness, would necessitate a new valuation of ourselves and a new conception of our responsibility. Unconsciousness of all these things relieves us of the burden of growth; but even as the urge of death is toward unconsciousness the urge of life is toward a fuller consciousness. Whenever we accept this dynamic urge of life there is a rebirth of the spirit.¹⁵⁹

Clarification through fantasy created by the child.--An

illustration involving the mastery of death at a very practical level in the life of a child was illustrated through the use of children's stories.¹⁶⁰ The children were seven years old. A fanciful child said, "I am going to pretend I am a little dog who went with his master for a walk in the forest and got lost in a snowstorm." All the children were delighted to join in the tale but the stories they told were very different.

One child's story ended, "It was dark; very, very dark. It was cold; very, very cold. I was lost; very, very lost. There was nothing I could do about it, so I just lay down in the snow and died."

Now the other story was quite different.

I felt cold white feathers falling on my nose and it was fun and I chased them farther and farther into the forest and it got dark and I couldn't find my master and I was lost. So I crawled into a hollow log to wait for morning. But it was all worthwhile, for that night another little dog crawled into the other end of the log and next morning we had eight puppies.

Clarification through dreams.--Wickes reported then

remembering a dream told by the child who "just lay down in the snow and died."

I came home from school but the door was locked, and all the blinds were down tight, and I knocked but no one came and I knew Mother had gone away forever and forever, and there was no place to go, and there was nothing I could do about it. Then I woke up in the dark and there was the dream staring at me.

As it happened a divorce was pending in this child's family. The child did not know this but evidently the emotional level of the family was empty of love. Subconsciously her nature "flowed into this dark sea of no return." She "just lay down and died." (See Krantzler, Creative Divorce.)¹⁶¹

Wickes continued,

I saw how this attitude permeated every experience. Even the smallest schoolroom task could defeat her. At the first challenge in relationship, in lessons, even in her games with the other children, she 'just lay down and died'; that is, she completely repudiated the idea that she, her own small self, could do anything about it. She was constantly defeated by her own sense of inadequacy and her terror of life itself. This sense of doom was the deepest undercurrent of her nature. The first prerequisite was that someone should believe in her potentialities and love her as she was, without waiting for the transforming touch that should make her possibilities into actualities.¹⁶²

Clarification through literature.--Children, unlike adults, do not inhibit their expression of thoughts about death; often these thoughts are developed in fantasy according to Freud. This observation has been confirmed by subsequent research in Switzerland, England, Hungary and America.¹⁶³ This does not mean necessarily that the child's behavior is normally free from anxiety. Since this anxiety can be promoted or obstructed, the question which frequently arises for debate is the advisability of telling children the traditional fairy tales.



Fairy tales treat the topic of death frequently but this does not make them unsuitable for children since death enters into children's fantasies often. However, the adult who offers this type of literature for the child's enjoyment is promoting "a sadistic disposition" in the child according to Anthony. Anthony also believes this approach could increase anxiety in children who on surface observation might appear to accept or reject the fairy tale.¹⁶⁴ When a child can read herself/himself, then the person can be given the freedom to select or reject his/her reading material. The adult might need to be alert to the child's reactions.

The general view, however, that folk tales are appropriate material for young imaginations is based on sound psychology in Anthony's estimation. The employment of simple symbols which the child is capable of understanding lends a positive value to folk tales.

Ultimately, however, the defense of folk tales in the nursery is not that they excite to the learning of or pleasure in scientific fact, that that they communicate ways of thinking, symbols, concepts and attitudes that enrich and humanize life. This is done by handling the whole natural range of human activity with cultural singleness and simplicity.¹⁶⁵

Clarification through animals--care of, observation of and dissection of.--In the 1930's, Susan Isaac maintained that opinion was rigid regarding the fields of fact which adults would allow the young child to become interested in within the study of animals. If children ten years or older were given information about physiology, textbooks or diagrams were used. Older children, however, were not

given the opportunity for direct investigation by dissecting the bodies of dead animals; such a method of accumulating knowledge was completely out of the question for young children.

So strong is this widely held attitude that it is difficult to get many people even to consider the possible wisdom of the opposite course--they are too disturbed by the mere suggestion to be able to give it any attention. Perhaps they fear that to 'look inside' dead bodies will either shock and frighten the children, or will encourage them to cruelty with living animals. But when one assures them from one's own experience that the majority of little children are not shocked nor frightened, nor made cruel by these ways of study, the solid wall of prejudice does not melt away, and one is in the end left with the suspicion that the real attitude is 'Well, if they're not shocked or frightened, they ought to be!'¹⁶⁶

Anthony states that the child's reaction to the killing of animals may be very profound and long-lasting; it may determine behavior through life.¹⁶⁷ Isaacs suggests the moral field of adult behaviors with animals presents more confusion, contradictions and inconsistencies than any other.¹⁶⁸

Clarification through questioning and discussion.--Citations from Wickes in the section concerning clarification through fantasy have given some insight into the manner in which a child's cognitive style or language can reveal his/her attitude toward life. Koocher has an excellent case study of a five year old boy who misinterprets adult comments pertaining to death. The child began throwing temper tantrums before bed. Koocher uses this example in order to show the "harm that can result from not talking about death with children."¹⁶⁹ Koocher found children very willing to discuss their thoughts about death with sensitive adults.



The Supportive Adult in the
Clarification Process

There is too much to say,
too many directions because attitudes
toward death color all of our thinking
and doing things,
ways of coping with trouble,
ways of enjoying ourselves.
I could start with almost any subject--
discipline, toilet training, jealousy,
learning to count, fighting, shyness,
eating fussiness, why we take them to the zoo,
and develop the idea of how this is related
to the child's conception of life and death.

Adah Maurer
"Intimations of Mortality"
From the Journal of Child Psychology
Summer, 1974

Knowledge About Children's
Intellectual Development
Which Clarifies the Con-
ceptualization Process

Although the following authors have not worked in the field of death awareness, their findings have bearing on the topic of the development of concepts because of their research into the intellectual development of children. Wann, Dorn, and Liddle in Fostering Intellectual Development in Young Children, "learned a number of things about children's understanding and interpretation of their physical and social environment and what we (they) can do to help them clarify and extend their understandings."¹⁷⁰ Their learnings are as follows:

1. Children are collectors of information.

Not only did the children observed have a wide range of information, but the extent and depth of the information



was considered significant. The children also received much satisfaction in possessing the information and in using it. The interests were global and even universal in scope. Death was one of the topics mentioned by children.

2. Young children employ the essential elements of the process of concept formation.

The children continually sought information on a given topic; then they "tried to relate and test one bit of information against another. They were associating ideas, attempting to discover cause and effect relationships, classifying and generalizing about those things which they see, hear, and feel in their environment."

3. Teachers can enrich experiences for children by studying children as we did.

The authors wanted a balance of intellectual, social, emotional, and physical development in young children. However, they felt children at this age needed more intellectual challenges but there were few indicators which gave guidance.

4. "The process of concept formation observed in many of the children suggests that we might consider knowledge as keys to the facts or information which should be taught."

Since children are so interested in fitting together isolated phenomena, bits of information, and the actions of people, this approach might be a worthy one to use.

The four major points of learning from the study of Wann, Dorn, and Liddle listed above most certainly clarify to some extent the confusions within the observation at the beginning of this section on the process of conceptualizing death. If this study, which was not related to death, is helpful, could other studies illuminate the development of concepts in children? Is there a need for studying children in relationship to death or is there an abundance of this type of study? What does the past reveal?

Anthony found in 1940 that school-age children thought readily of the subject of death. Not only did it appear in their play but it arose in their fantasies as well. If grief or fear, loss or separation was suggested, the response of death was evident.¹⁷¹ Previously in 1937 Schilder and Wechsler had done a study, "The Attitude of Children Toward Death," and they had concluded that a study in depth, with children directly involved, was greatly needed. Anthony's study confirmed Schilder and Wechsler's work.¹⁷² The next clinical study by Nagy in 1948 was done with Hungarian children, four to ten years of age. Again her data reaffirmed the work of Schilder, Wechsler and Anthony. The subject of death was very important to even the youngest child observed.¹⁷³

For the next 20 years, no one studied the subject more deeply nor did anyone do a critical review. Rochlin then did a study in which he tried to show that, not only is death a matter of deep concern to the very young child,

but also that his thoughts of dying are commonplace. They serve as important determinants in his emotional development. I shall show, moreover, that his behavior is influenced by such thoughts, which are decisive in respect to some of his lifelong beliefs.¹⁷⁴

In The Psychology of Death, Kastenbaum suggests observation of the "young child's mental operations for their own sake."¹⁷⁵ He believes that objective and patient research might reveal that the first important doubt to engage the mind of the child would be the problem of death; and this might be the first spark to the continuation of his mental development. "How can we have ignored this

possibility so long?"¹⁷⁶ Anthony has said, "Our present proposition is that stages in the conceptualization of death may initiate stages of intellectual growth."¹⁷⁷

In another article dealing with this same theme, Kastenbaum speaks of the direction of thought we might take toward the child's conception of death. There is the possibility of contrasting adult opinions of death with the child's opinions. "But we might also observe the child's changing orientation toward death as a phenomenon deserving study and respect in its own right, not merely as a stepping-stone toward some ideal concept."¹⁷⁸

It appears the child has the desire, and the need to master death: does it follow then that there is a need for adults who are interested in studying the child in relationship to death? Tallmer, Formanek and Tallmer state,

Although there is presently an increased interest in the topic of death, evidenced, for example, by the launching of a Foundation of Thanatology in New York City, there is correspondingly a puzzling dearth of information concerning this subject in relation to children. ...The development of conscious and unconscious thoughts about death, immortality and the process of dying are topics which merit scientific investigation. Despite this need, however, an implicit embargo does exist and may be measured by both the lack of pertinent research and the slighting of empirical evidence that does surface. We have made the topic a non-topic. For example, Anthony's book, The Child's Discovery of Death, has had practically no heuristic significance whatsoever, although it was published in 1940, a period of generalized world conflict and violent, widespread death.¹⁷⁹

Many writers, then, think the need for adults to study children in relationship to death is evident. Some of these writers speak more specifically to the method of studying children. Anthony



suggests, "Knowledge, gained by controlled observation and record, of the way the idea of death and the emotion arising from it develops in childhood may help the adult to guide the child along a path which later has some hard going for every human being."¹⁸⁰

Does the process of the conceptualization of death inter-relate with the intellectual growth of the child? Anthony proposes that "stages in the conceptualization of death may initiate stages of intellectual growth."¹⁸¹ Possibly she is suggesting obstacles to growth when she discussed the relationship between old age and conceptualization. Children see the dead as one group and those who die as a separate group. Often those who die are old since old age is given often as a leadup to death. Then, when the child affirms death for himself, thinks of himself growing older and then dying, he may decide children do not die. Right then, he may not wish to grow up.¹⁸²

Another relevant idea presented by Anthony was the following:

In studying records made in childhood of children now grown up, it has seemed to me that their early interest in the discovery of death may have had some connection with their major interests in later life. And it would seem that such special interest may lead either to avoidance or approach in respect of activities emotionally associated with the idea of death.... So it is suggested that the way death is represented in the early thinking of the child may influence the direction of his major interests through life.¹⁸³

A separate stage in intellectual growth, Anthony maintains, is indicated when one can face the thought of her/his own death.

It was suggested by Piaget some 40 years ago that the child's encounter with the idea of death plays a special part in intellectual development. The idea of death, he wrote, sets the child's curiosity in motion because if, for him at an early age, every cause is coupled with a motive, then death calls for a special explanation....¹⁸⁴

In The Language and Thought of the Child, Piaget commented that things seem well ordered until the child becomes conscious of the difference between life and death.¹⁸⁵

"The concept of death and the concept of time seem to be continuously interactive; there is no two-way traffic. It has been said that through the realization of death man is enabled to perceive time," states Anthony.¹⁸⁶ When the child could define the word dead logically and physiologically, the development of the child's concept of death seemed to have reached maturity. However, for the adult and adolescent this definition stage is only the beginning of the meaning of death. The idea develops continually. The concepts of time and cause along with the concept of man is linked together in some complicated manner that philosophers and physicists are challenged to unravel the ideas. Anthony continues that young children in our own culture differ between themselves in their concepts of life and death.¹⁸⁷

In a more universal vein, Anthony states

Children spontaneously interpret in various ways the objective sources of phenomena, whereas a culture develops an interpretation relatively consistently. Children do not echo concepts from distant cultures. They offer, in every culture and every generation a variety of potential foundations for religion, philosophy and myth, relatively independent of the selection made by their own society.¹⁸⁸

The child's process for conceptualizing death, and sorting out the confusion, is lengthy and complex. Many diverse methods can be, and are used by children depending on his/her developmental level and individual interest, skills and abilities. A few selected methods used by a child in clarifying the concept of death are fantasy, dreams, literature, care of animals, questions and discussion. Many authorities, who have studied death and youth agree on the need for more studies focused on children and their relationship to death. In the section that follows, the role of the supportive adult in assisting youth with death is examined.

The Role of the Supportive Adult in the Clarification Process

Connor thinks

the conceptual understanding of death is an educational task which should not be neglected, for children at the age of two or three are beginning to realize that there are some things beyond human control and they need help in accommodating themselves to this awareness.

He continues,

Death is a difficult concept for adults to accept, and a great degree of this difficulty may be attributed to the adults' own lack of resolution of feelings about death and other separations, thus hampering their attempts to be of assistance and comfort to children. 189

Gartley and Bernasconi find that facing the thought of death is "an easier task for children than it is for most adults." 190

In an article, "Childhood: The Kingdom Where Creatures Die," Kastenbaum begins with two facts: "(1) Most children have a variety of death-related thoughts and experiences that are central

to their personality development; (2) Most adults speak and act as though children were oblivious to death."¹⁹¹ This incongruity leads to prejudices of adults toward content areas for children and then to the thoughts and experiences concerning death which the children have. Let us look toward the children first.

Sylvia Anthony reports in The Discovery of Death in Childhood and After, about Professor David Katz's views of the relationship of death and children in 1936:

We have tried as far as possible to keep away from the children any conception of death, especially in connection with human beings. Of what use would it have been to disturb them with thoughts about death, which must necessarily be extremely mysterious and terrible to them, if they hear of it and yet have no consolation of any kind to support them....¹⁹²

In 1974 Kastembaum believed the denial of death with children is still with us because of the model society presents. Then, too, Kastembaum continues, denying death to children protects adults at certain vulnerable points. If a parent has an immortal child, it is one way of keeping the child-self alive. By assuming children are not related to death through their own thoughts or experiences it helps the parent think he can survive in her "own flesh and blood...."

The parent who has not come to terms with his or her own death-related anxieties may feel at a loss in responding maturely to the child's experiences.... Often enough, a conversation that begins with the parent's expressed concern about 'managing' the child's death experiences shifts into a deeply felt exploration of the parent's own unresolved problems that have been exacerbated by the current episode. They assume that adults actually have the power to tell children about mortality or to keep them shrouded in blissful ignorance.¹⁹³

Anthony is even stronger in her message.

When adults attempt to keep from the child such facts as his personal experience would otherwise present to him, he may suspect deception, and develop anxieties in consequence more morbid and persistent than those which the perception of the reality would have aroused.¹⁹⁴

There are three different observations in Anthony's records where the children deny a fact relating to death and the mothers assist the child's denial.¹⁹⁵

There are three reasons Anthony gives for the parent's unwillingness in many cases to deny reality for the child:

(1) the desire to satisfy his own conscience; (2) the desire to do so particularly in relation to the child, as the child's model; and (3) the fundamental wish to maintain a code for social communication corresponding to pragmatic reality and natural law, or in other words, to teach the child by example to tell the truth about matters of serious concern.¹⁹⁶

The concepts of death held by children tend to mirror those of their society. Children learn from all that is occurring around them, not only from what is purposefully taught.¹⁹⁷

There seemed to be so strong a tendency to encourage regressive impulses in the contact between adults and child on the subject of death that communication frequently confuses rather than clarifies the child's conception.¹⁹⁸

Gartley and Bernasconi agree that parents usually protect children from death because of their own inability to face death.¹⁹⁹ Rochlin, Director of Child Psychiatry Services at the Massachusetts Mental Health Center, comments:

It is the conventional view that the child does not know about death. This seems to be as true of culturally archaic peoples as of modern society. Death as a subject for discussion is commonly treated by adults as if it were a

prohibited issue where children are concerned. Children may play death games endlessly so long as no one takes that play seriously. When taken as a matter for sober consideration, evasiveness is clearly evident on the part of both the adult and of the child. Adults themselves are reluctant to acknowledge, as we have noted, the inevitable fate which awaits us all, and hence are the least likely source of information. Moreover, there are often concerted efforts to deny the child an awareness of death. The inevitable discovery of death then becomes a private individual experience of great magnitude. What such a discovery means is not conveyed to young children either as a body of dogma or as a natural phenomenon, nor is what to do about it once the revelation occurs. The attempted solution to the problems the discovery raises is universal in the sense that children everywhere seem to find remarkably similar solutions.²⁰⁰

Three basic roots to this conspiracy of silence in discussing death with children are suggested by Koocher. (1) The adult's own emotional entanglement with the topic might keep him from facing death. (2) She/he might not know where to begin in the discussion or how to sort the important points from the unimportant. (3) An emotional crisis might precipitate a situation before the adult is prepared.²⁰¹

Kastenbaum refers to a study that concluded

it would appear that the socially desirable attitude toward death attitudes is that one should be able to face death with equanimity and perspective but if one cannot bring this off with a flourish, it is better to avoid the topic altogether.²⁰²

"One of the many problems in dealing with children and death or with the dying child is the tendency of adults to equate their perceptions of death with the child's perceptions," asserts Sarah Cook, a nurse and writer.²⁰³

When Susan Isaacs deals with the avoidance of death and sexuality themes with children in relationship to animals, she suggests certain conditions for "active, continuous and cumulative interest in animal and plant life." The following quotation gives the conditions:

- A. That we free ourselves from prejudices and inadequate thinking, as to
 - (1) The order in which plant and animal life should be dealt with; and
 - (2) The fields of fact which are acceptable to the little child, and educationally valuable.
- B. That we follow the child's actual direction of interest, day-to-day questionings, and provide the situations and material which will answer his questions, and stimulate his interest still further.²⁰⁴

If this quotation of Isaacs was amended to include human life, these suggestions might stand today as a firm base for the supportive adult interested in helping children with death education.

Some background knowledge about the concept of death which Kastenbaum gives prove helpful for the supportive adult. The information also is helpful in analyzing the data.²⁰⁵

- 1. The concept of death is always relative.
- 2. The concept of death is exceedingly complex.
- 3. Concepts of death change.
- 4. The developmental "goal" of death concepts is obscure, ambiguous, or still being evolved.
- 5. Death concepts are influenced by the situational context.
- 6. Death concepts are related to behavior.

Kastenbaum examines the idea of death as part of a child's intellectual development. When a child speaks three words, "I will die," it sounds simple. "However, the concepts implied by this statement are not within the reach of the young child's mind."²⁰⁶

"I will die" is a simple statement a young child could verbalize. Yet the person who makes that simple statement must have mastered many complicated concepts to truly understand it. Kastenbaum lists the eight concepts which are involved.

1. I am an individual with a life of my own, a personal existence.
2. I belong to a class of beings one of whose attributes is mortality.
3. Using the intellectual process of logical deduction, I must arrive at the conclusion that my personal death is a certainty.
4. There are many possible causes of my death, and these causes might operate in many different combinations; although I might evade or escape one particular cause, I cannot evade all causes.
5. My death will occur in the future. By future, I mean a time-to-live that has not yet elapsed.
6. But I do not know when in the future my death will occur. The event is certain; the timing is uncertain.
7. Death is a final event. My life ceases. This means that I will never again experience, think, or act, at least as a human being on this earth.
8. Accordingly, death is the ultimate separation of myself from the world.

Even this incomplete analysis indicates that the statement "I will die" requires self-awareness, logical thought operations, conceptions of probability, necessity, and causation, of personal

and physical time, of finality on the part of the speaker. The available evidence strongly suggests that the young child lacks almost all the mental operations required to form the separate concepts which are integrated into the recognition of personal mortality.²⁰⁷

Isaac's solution to the confusing dilemma faced by children when they observe the contradictions in the area of adults' attitudes and actions in the field of pets, animals and the eating of meat might be equally applicable to the supportive adult's role in the observation which started this section on the conceptualization of death in children.

The solution for the educator must lie rather in a more balanced and positive attitude to the various psychological tendencies and external necessities which lie behind these confusions and contradictions. Is it possible to arrive at a reasonably consistent set of standards for the demands we make on children, one that will be both more honest and more intelligible to them, and more easily maintained against real necessity? One, moreover, that will yield a more satisfactory psychological solution for their own internal conflicts?²⁰⁸

Many writers in addressing children's conceptual understanding of death have made suggestions concerning the role of adults, including teachers, in the guidance of children in this important developmental and educational task. The focus of the present research will turn now to the examination of the supportive adult's role, the teacher, with youth and the school community.

Summary

The attitudes of society toward death were examined, and the literature centering on the attitudes of helping professionals toward death was reviewed. The relationship between children and the conceptualization of death was examined, and the particular needs of adolescents were reviewed. The role of the supportive adult in the clarification process was examined. In the chapter that follows, the methodology for the research is discussed.

DEATH

Who set that endless silence
Of her breath?
Death is but death.
Death is like growing of people
It cannot be stopped.

Miracles: Poems by children
of the English-speaking world.

Collected by Richard Lewis
UNESCO

CHAPTER III

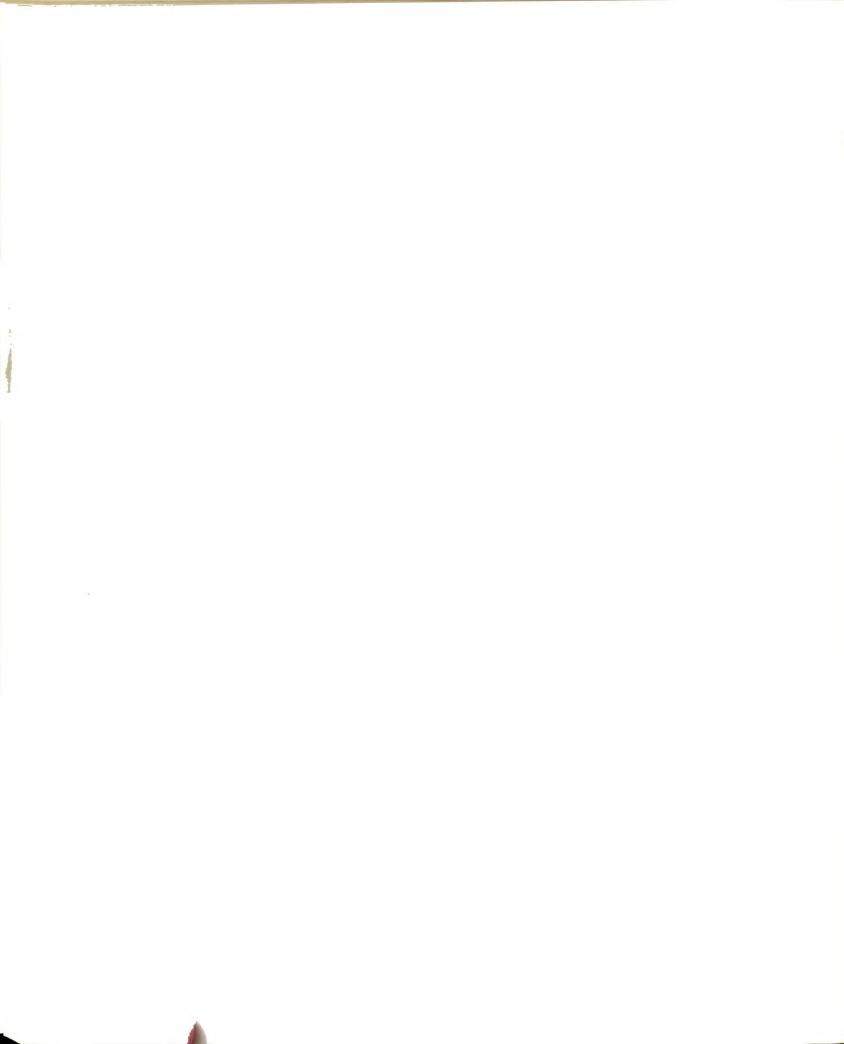
METHODOLOGY

The population and research setting along with the methodology used in the research are presented in this chapter. In addition, the interview guide, pilot study and plan for analysis of the data are discussed.

Population and Research Setting

The research was conducted at Michigan State University during a summer session. Thirty-six volunteers participated in the research; ten educators for the pilot study, thirteen teachers of children (elementary, defined as preschool through fifth grade) and thirteen teachers of pre-adolescents and adolescents (secondary, defined as sixth through twelfth grade) for the study itself. The volunteers were chosen from three graduate classes in the College of Education. These classes were scheduled during the first five weeks of the summer session. All interviewees were experienced teachers. Every grade level was represented from preschool through twelfth grade.

In the elementary group of teachers representation covered preschool through fifth grade. The secondary group of teachers included middle school and high school teachers from sixth



grade through twelfth grade. The thirteen secondary teachers represented the following specialities: math and science, sixth grade with football coaching, reading, math, vocational education, English, art, generalists (in middle school) and English with basketball coaching. (See Table 1.)

The researcher requested entry from the professors into the classes from which the volunteers were solicited. The professors introduced the researcher to the class so the nature of the research could be explained briefly.

In recruiting the volunteers the following remarks were addressed to the university classes:

I would like interviews with a total of thirty-six teachers, ten for a pilot study and twenty-six for the study itself. This research will focus on the cognitive/affective development of young people. If any of you would share some of your past year's teaching experiences in this area with me, I would like an hour, or possibly two, of your time. A sign-up sheet is being passed through the group for those teachers willing to participate in the study. School support staff, such as school psychologist, counselor, or social worker, would be welcome also. A minimum of one year of professional employment within an educational framework which served young people with a wide range of needs is expected.

After the pilot study was completed, the request for volunteers was narrowed to teachers who had taught children within the normal range of needs for a minimum of one year. Since the professors had offered the research as a legitimate class option during their class meeting time, the enlistment of participants, the scheduling and the interviewing was arranged easily.



TABLE 1.--Interviewed Teachers by Grade and/or Subject.

Elementary Teachers		Secondary Teachers	
ELEMENTARY SCHOOL		MIDDLE SCHOOL	
<u>Grade</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Grade/Subject</u>	<u>Total</u>
Preschool	1	Sixth	2
Kindergarten	1	Math/science team	1
		Sixth grade/football	1
First Grade	3		
Second Grade	1	Seventh	2
		Reading	1
Third Grade	2	Math	1
Fourth Grade	4	Eighth	2
Fifth Grade	1	Ninth	1
		English (7th-9th)	1
		HIGH SCHOOL	
		Vocational Education	2
		Electronics (9th-12th)	1
		Home Economics (10th-12th)	
		English	2
		English/basketball (10th-12th)	1
		English (10th-12th)	1
		Art (10th-12th)	1
Total Number of Teachers	13	Total Number of Teachers	13

Methodology

The methodology selected for the research was the interview. All the interviews were completed by the researcher over a period of four weeks. An informal setting conducive to a one-to-one relationship and open communication was used. An outdoor area was used when the weather permitted.

The purpose of the interviews was the gathering of observations of young persons in their classrooms and school buildings during the previous teaching year. The observations were recorded on interview guide forms. These forms were used in the analysis of the data.

The Interview Guide

Prior to the pilot study it was decided that taping the interview might prove threatening to some volunteers. Extensive notetaking also was discarded due to the possible threat involved and the impossibility of maintaining eye contact while writing notes. An interview guide was developed for a recording tool; this guide would require a minimum of effort on the interviewer's part. A limited number of well-planned, open-ended questions would set the framework for the interview. This method allowed for a flow of information during the interview which would be an educational process for both parties. (See Appendix A.)

The development of the interview guide was the beginning framework for the analysis of the data. The guide was used during the interview so that the data were organized into categories when

the interview was completed. The information recorded on the interview guides was taken from the teachers' observations of their students' reactions and their own reactions to their students' death experiences during the past school year.

The exploratory questions of this study were used in developing the format of the interview guide: Are teachers aware of their students' experiences with death? If they are aware, do teachers use this awareness within the school community? The third question stated in the problem was addressed in the grouping of the sample into elementary and secondary teacher: Are there differences in the awareness, and the use of this awareness, between teachers of children and teachers of adolescents?

In order to aid in organizing the data at the end of the interview the broad areas of awareness and the use of awareness were outlined in more detail. The range of student experiences with death was more defined by listing the types of deaths which a student might experience. Fourteen types of death were listed in the guide. A few examples of the death categories are: pet, stranger, parent, adult on the school staff, and child in the classroom.

A teacher could use a student's experience with death in interaction with people within the school community, in curriculum planning and/or in consultation with parents and staff. The interaction was subdivided further into interaction with students and adults. Then, the various groupings of people, with which a



student or teacher could interact, were established. A few of the groups are: with you (the teacher), with other adults, or with children.

A chart was developed by combining the types of death and the many categories of interaction. The interviewer could record the material by checking the chart during the interview or immediately following the interview.

The interaction between the teacher and other adults in the school community was one focus in the interview guide; more specifically, consultation requested, offered, and given. Another focus was the teacher's use of curriculum planning concerning the student's death experience. Class-planned activities following the death were recorded, such as sympathy notes, along with teacher planned lessons and activities, such as the careful selection of children's literature centering on death.

Very brief notes were written occasionally during the interview, but the recording of information was done with a minimum of notation. Immediately upon completion of the interview, the researcher reviewed the material so it could be recorded in a more comprehensive manner if required.

With the use of this method primary importance could be placed on the quality of interaction between the interviewer and interviewee. The time was structured so that the interviewee could use this time for reflection and integration of his/her observations of the students' responses to their encounters with death.



The Pilot Study

The purpose of the pilot study was to field test the procedures and interview guide by which the researcher would collect the data required for the study. Several questions related to this objective were addressed: (1) Would a time period of one hour be sufficient for the interview? Or should the interview be extended if more time was needed? (2) Would the planned method for recording the data be functional during the interview? (3) Would the interview guide prove usable? (4) Would the sample need more narrow definition?

The pilot interviews were completed during one week. Several procedures used in the pilot study were tested and adopted. The one hour time allotment proved sufficient in most interviews. There were occasions when the interviewee suddenly recalled an experience after the interview had terminated. Often it happened when the setting had changed. The researcher made the decision to allow extended time. Often important personal data were given during the extended time such as: "I had a child die two years ago." (The teacher was speaking of her own child and not a student). One hour was allotted for each interview. An extension of one hour was permitted.

The method, which had been planned for recording the information during the interview, worked very well during the pilot interviews. The recording was done easily with checks and a minimum of writing. However, the immediate notation of more complex



information demanded the scheduling of thirty minutes to an hour between each interview.

The pilot study illuminated minor gaps in the structure of the interview guide. For instance, in three categories the researcher allowed for experiences within the class but not within the school building. The death of a plant and other non-human living things were mentioned by teachers during the pilot interviews so the plant category was added to the interview guide. During the study the interviewer was more attentive to the teachers' observations of non-human living things such as insects, frogs, and birds as a results of the pilot interviews. The framework proved very functional except for minor adjustments.

It became evident during the pilot study that limitations on the categories of teachers would be necessary. First, the decision was made to interview only public school teachers. Public school teachers had a system for consultant services which parochial, private or daycare centers did not. Secondly, only the teachers who taught children with a normal range of needs were interviewed. One of the special education teachers interviewed during the pilot study worked with non-verbal children so the information pointed to the gap in communication with certain children about their specific death experiences.

The pilot group of elementary teachers was weighted heavily with preschool teachers. Thus, from those who volunteered, teachers were chosen to obtain a balanced representation. The thirteen elementary teachers were distributed evenly among grade levels.



The percentage of humanities teachers in the pilot group of secondary teachers was high so the researcher sought math and science teachers to add balance in the secondary group. Grade levels were distributed evenly in the secondary group of teachers also.

Analysis of the Data

Definition of Terms

It is important to understand the terminology used throughout the study. The terms of interest, as used in the present study, are defined as follows:

teacher of children (elementary teacher) - a teacher who interacts with children, four years through eleven years old, in an assigned grade and classroom for the major portion of the school day in an elementary school.

teacher of adolescents (secondary teacher) - a teacher who interacts with adolescents, twelve years through eighteen years old, in an assigned grade or subject within a middle school, junior high school, or high school for a limited portion of the day (such as one or two hours).

teacher's observation - the teacher's description, using her/his observational skills, of the student's experience with death and the student's behavior in response to that death as reported in the interview.

It is important for the reader to understand that a teacher's observation could focus on an individual's response to a death experience, a small group of students' responses, or a large group

of students' responses (class) within the classroom or within the school setting, such as on the playground, in the halls, in the gym, or in the library. A teacher's observation of students can, and does, take place in any area of the school or grounds.

student's death experience - a death, non-human or human, which the student has encountered within the past school year as reported by his/her teacher in the interview.

teacher's awareness of the student's death experience - the teacher reports the death experience of a student and/or describes the student's response, if any, to the death experience in her/his observations during the interview.

teacher's use of awareness - the teacher's description of her/his behavior, if any, in response to the student's behavior surrounding the death experience as reported in the interview.

non-verbal response - a student's behavior in response to the death experience which includes all behavior, except verbal behavior, as identified by the teacher in the interview. Non-verbal responses are divided further into emotional and action responses.

verbal response - a student's response to the death experience which employs language in oral, written, or signing form as described by the teacher in the interview.

combination non-verbal and verbal response - a student's behavior in response to the death experience which includes a verbal response and one, or both types of non-verbal responses, emotional and action.



class-planned curriculum - follow-through behaviors on the student's experiences with death initiated by the student's or teacher's awareness, which include interaction, planning, and some form of response to the death experience by the student(s) and teacher, such as sending notes to the family, attending the funeral, or burying the dead fish, as described by the teacher in his/her interview.

teacher-planned curriculum response - a student's response to an activity, lesson, or unit which has been initiated and planned by the teacher using her/his awareness and observations of the student's awareness and response to the death experience, as described in the teacher's interview.

consultation by teachers with parents and staff - the action(s) requested, offered and given by a teacher(s) with other adults within the school community as a result of the teacher's (teachers') awareness, and in response to, the student's death experience described in the teacher's interview.

Data Analysis

In analyzing the data the researcher was confronted immediately by the issue of providing quantitative information to the exclusion of qualitative information. The quantitative information was the simpler avenue, but this type of analysis presented no view of the differences in quality in the following areas of interest:

1. The different levels of teachers' awareness which ranged from no awareness to high awareness.



2. The quality and depth of the teachers' uses of their awareness in their interactions with students and school community.
3. The various levels of curriculum planning used by the teachers in following through on their awareness.
(Planning ranged from simple to complex use of awareness. Sometimes the teacher's awareness was not used due to a value judgment about her role as a teacher.)
4. The quality and depth of young people's responses to their experiences with death. These responses were non-verbal and verbal. The verbal responses ranged from simple to complex. The non-verbal responses were emotional in nature sometimes and at other times the responses involved action. Combinations of verbal and non-verbal responses were reported, such as verbal, emotional and action responses.

In short, there would be little depth to the study if only quantitative aspects were analyzed.

The numbers of death experiences in each of the fourteen categories were tallied from the interview guides as one criterion for teachers' awareness. In some instances, the teachers remembered a death, but no response by the students. A majority of the teachers' reports, however, included a student's response along with a death experience.

The data on the teachers' observations were presented in a format where quantitative and qualitative aspects were both



available for the reader's perusal. For each exploratory question the data were divided into two groups: the elementary students' responses and the secondary students' responses. Each teacher's individual observations were identified by the number assigned her interview guide. Elementary teachers were assigned numbers one through thirteen and secondary teachers were given the numbers fourteen through twenty-six.

The teachers' observations of their students' responses to death experiences were used as indicators of teachers' awareness, and the use of awareness by the teachers, with one exception, the category of consultation use. The data for consultation uses were gathered by using the teachers' perceptions of help requested, offered and given. The students' responses and teachers' self-observations were grouped into elementary and secondary divisions in the presentation of the data so the differences, if any, between elementary and secondary teachers in their awareness, and use of this awareness, could be examined.

The students' responses as observed by their teachers were divided into four categories: non-verbal, verbal, combination of verbal and non-verbal, and unknown. The numbers of student responses reported by teachers for each category were sub-totaled and then totaled.

The students' responses relevant to the teachers' use of their awareness were analyzed along four dimensions: interaction in the school community, class-planned curriculum, teacher-planned



curriculum, and consultation with other adults in the school community.

Two categories of interaction were identified: interaction initiated by students and interaction initiated by teachers. The numbers of interactions within each category were gathered from the interview guides.

The interview guides were examined also for each student response to class-planned or teacher-planned curriculum. Each student response was listed under the proper curriculum category and under the student's teacher assigned interview guide. Totals for the number of student responses, the number of responses to each type of curriculum planning, and the number of elementary and secondary student responses were easily available for review.

The teachers' observations regarding consultation use of their awareness were grouped into three types: consultation requested by teachers, consultation offered to teachers, and consultation given by teachers. Elementary and secondary groupings of the teachers' observations were used within each consultation category. The data were taken from the interview guides.

Summary

In this chapter, the population, research setting, methodology, interview guide, pilot study and the plan for the analysis of the data were described. In the following chapter, the results of the study are discussed.



"Over a number of years K. Kollwitz worked on a monument for her younger son who was killed in October 1914. His death became for her a sort of personal obligation. ...she noted in her diary: 'There's a drawing made, a mother letting her dead son slide into her arms. I could do a hundred similar drawings but still can't seem to come any closer to him. I'm still searching for him as if it were in the very work itself that I had to find him.'"

from Catalogue to an exhibition
of the works of K. Kollwitz,
London, 1967.



CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS OF THE RESEARCH

In this chapter the findings of the research relevant to each question are presented and discussed. Where necessary, additional discussion of the methodology used in analyzing the data is included.

Teacher Awareness of Students' Experiences with Death

Are teachers aware of their students' experiences with death? In response to this question relevant data were organized by dividing the students' responses to their death experiences, as reported by their teachers, into non-human and human deaths. Each student response represents one death experience. The students' responses are grouped further into four broad categories: non-verbal, verbal, combinations of verbal and non-verbal, and unknown. In this format the quantity, quality and depth of the students' responses are available for review. The differences between teachers of children and teachers of adolescents in their awareness of their students' death experiences will be addressed in the presentation of the data.

Student Responses to
Non-human Death Experiences

Non-verbal responses reported
 by teachers

#12 Elementary teacher

At recess a girl's frog was run over by a boy in another class. The frog died immediately and then the owner became very upset. She cried so hard that other children comforted her.

#13 Elementary teacher

The class hamster died in December. Rick became very sad. He withdrew from class participation and often he appeared to be daydreaming.

#14 Elementary teacher

During November Rick's behavior changed; he withdrew. There was no apparent reason. One writing assignment was remembered. The children were told, "Pretend you are a turkey. How would you feel about Thanksgiving? Write about it." Rick was adamant in his refusal to do the assignment. Usually he was very cooperative. Finally, he was told, "Write about any topic you would like." However, he did not start the assignment. In a few days the discovery was made about the death of Rick's dog. The teacher thought the death of his dog caused the change in his behavior. Rick ordinarily was very conscientious and cooperative.

#15 Secondary teacher

A plant tended by the students for months died suddenly. Emotions of anger, sadness and disappointment were shown by students during the day. The class atmosphere was affected for a couple of days.

There were four non-verbal student responses reported by the teachers. Elementary teachers reported three responses and secondary teachers reported one response. The non-verbal responses often were a combination of emotion and action by the students. The behavior of the students experiencing the death changed. Sometimes this



change of behavior was obvious, such as tears, and sometimes the change was more subtle, such as withdrawing from participation in class activities.

Verbal Responses Reported by Teachers

#8 Elementary teacher

During "show and tell" a child stated, "My cat was run over."

#8 Elementary teacher

"One of the fish died. He's floating," stated a child. The teacher disposed of the fish after the class left.

#9 Elementary teacher

One of the children brought a couple of frogs to school. They died from over-exposure to the sun after being placed on the window ledge. The teacher said, "Do you want to take them home?" The child answered, "No, throw them out."

#12 Elementary teacher

One of the children in this class wrote a letter to her teacher telling about the death of the class hamster.

#12 Elementary teacher

Upon entry into the classroom, the teacher said to a child, "How is your bird?" "He's dead," replied the child.

The interviewed teachers observed five verbal responses of their students in reaction to the deaths of their pets. Elementary teachers accounted for five verbal responses and secondary teachers reported none. The verbal reactions were short and simple. In three of the observations the child initiated the topic of death and in two responses the teacher initiated a question which opened the verbal exchange to the topic of the death experience.

Combinations of Non-verbal
and Verbal Responses
Reported by Teachers

#2 Elementary teacher

Observation by the teacher revealed this child was daydreaming. His mother called and told the teacher about the child being extremely upset. He felt guilty over the death of his bird which had died from overhandling by the boy and his friends. The daydreaming continued for a couple of weeks. He said over and over, "It was my fault."

#3 Elementary teacher

The teacher noticed this child was very angry so she talked with him about his anger. It was written in his journal that his father had shot his puppy because the dog had chewed a slipper.

#3 Elementary teacher

This group planned many funerals during classtime. The children wrote poems, songs, and eulogies which they used during the funerals at recess. The funerals were held for dead birds, bees, ants, and mice.

#3 Elementary teacher

A child said to the teacher, "Let's use the fish for fertilizer." He buried the fish.

#8 Elementary teacher

During sharing time a child was very aggressive with the other children. When the teacher explored his aggressiveness, the child said angrily, "My father got mad at my dog and shot it."

#9 Elementary teacher

A child told the class, "We buried a dead bird in our yard." Another child confirmed it, "Yah, I saw him do it."

#9 Elementary teacher

A fish was floating in the water.

Child: "There's a dead fish in here. What shall we do with it?"

Teacher: "What do you think we should do with it?"

Child: "Put it outside."

The child did take the fish outside when he was given permission.

#10 Elementary teacher

The mother rat had a litter, but she was eating one baby a day on a regular basis. Each day the pre-school children raced off the bus with a great excitement so they could count the babies. This exchange between children took place after a few days of counting and losing baby rats:

Child: "My mother doesn't eat me."

Classmate: "No, we're people."

#11 Elementary teacher

"A fish died," the teacher told her class. A child answered, "Oh, flush it down the toilet." So the fish was flushed down the toilet.

#12 Elementary teacher

A child started telling the group about his dog dying and he started crying. Other children then began talking about their own experiences concerning death. The teacher said, "I was afraid. I didn't know how to handle it. I thought we'd get in too deep."

#13 Elementary teacher

Rick's cat died in January. Rick was sick for three weeks and he was very depressed. Rick came back to school in the first part of February. Then, he was sick for two weeks again. The social worker visited Rick at home. On one of her visits with Rick he asked, "I wonder if I'll die?" (See Appendix B.)

#15 Secondary teacher

While a class hamster was being checked by the animal control person, the animal bit the official. The hamster was flung to the ground. The children were very upset. "Get him out of here, Ms. Jackson. He'll kill our hamster." The students were very angry and visibly upset with the inspector for his careless behavior with their class pet. The inspector took the injured hamster with him to the health office.

Each day a couple of students from the class checked with the principal about the hamster's condition. Finally the principal came to the class and said, "The hamster ran away from animal control." Actually the principal did not know about the hamster's fate.



#15 Secondary teacher

The boa constrictor ate the rat during the class. Some students were "horrificed." Some youngsters were very upset and excited. There was much talk about this event and the class atmosphere became rather chaotic. Finally, after much informal conversation, a discussion evolved centering on survival and the life and death cycle.

#17 Secondary teacher

A vocational education teacher was walking through the halls when he observed a girl in his class crying by her locker. He stopped and talked with her. She was upset because someone had put a dead parakeet in her locker. She said, "The person who did this was mean."

Interviewed teachers observed fourteen student responses which combined non-verbal and verbal reactions. Three responses were identified by secondary teachers and eleven responses were reported by elementary teachers. The behavior of the student, or students, had some effect on the class in thirteen observations. Sometimes the effect was indirect, such as the child who was absent intermittently due to the personal stress from his many death experiences. Other times classmates were on the receiving end of stirred emotions caused by the death experience, such as the child who was hitting his classmates/crying over her frog.

Teacher initiation or guidance into further exploration occurred in two observations. In the other twelve responses the child was allowed completion of his action, but the teacher did not encourage the child or expand on the action or topic. In one instance the children developed the opportunity for conversation about their death experiences because the teacher was afraid. She

evidently did not feel comfortable in guiding the discussion, so did nothing.

Pets accounted for thirteen of the death experiences in this category. The two angry children had experienced violence against their pet by a parent. Cooperation and complex planning took place with the children who dealt with the impersonal death of bees, ants and birds.

Unknown Responses Reported by Teachers

Because of the manner in which one elementary teacher responded to the death experience, the children's responses were unknown.

#4 Elementary teacher

The teacher discovered a dead snake. She yelled and ran from the room. She told four teachers about it later. She could not remember the children's reactions to the incident.

Two death experiences followed science experiments, but the students' responses were unknown.

#18 Secondary teacher

A science experiment was set up with guppies. One half of the guppies were placed in a well balanced environment while the other half of the guppies were placed in a stagnant environment. As planned, the guppies in the stagnant water died.

#18 Secondary teacher

Another experiment involved crickets which died. The teacher could not remember any discussion about the dead crickets or the planning of the death experience.

Teachers reported eight non-human death experiences for which there were no reported student responses to the death experiences; elementary teacher cited five deaths with no student responses and secondary teachers identified three death experiences with no student responses.

Awareness of Non-human Death

Elementary teachers reported twenty-four non-human deaths; eight elementary teacher were represented with nineteen student responses to the death experiences and five unknown student responses. There were seven non-human death experiences identified by secondary teachers. Two of the secondary teachers cited four student responses with three unknown responses (see Table 2).

Eleven teachers reported no non-human deaths while fifteen teachers reported a minimum of one non-human death. In the elementary group eleven teachers reported one, or more, non-human deaths and four teachers in this secondary group recorded one, or more, non-human deaths.

The young persons' responses to these non-human deaths ranged from highly emotional reactions, such as throwing objects across the room in anger, to responses which produced non-emotion action, such as burying the dead pet with no display of emotion. Student responses included a variety of pets such as dogs, frogs, birds, hamsters, cat, rat, and pig.

From the interviews of twenty-six teachers the following data were gathered: four non-verbal student responses, five verbal

TABLE 2.--Student Responses to Experiences with Death.

Type of Response	Category of Death and Divisional Grouping			
	Non-human Death		Human Death	
	Elementary Students	Secondary Students	Elementary Students	Secondary Students
Non-verbal	3	1	1	5
Verbal	5	0	4	3
Combination of Non-verbal and Verbal	11	3	11	4
Unknown	5	3	7	3
TOTAL	24	7	23	15

student responses, fourteen combinations of non-verbal and verbal student responses, and eight unknown student responses. Secondary teachers accounted for four observations of student responses while elementary teachers cited nineteen student responses (see Table 3).

Behavioral changes by the students were evident in thirteen of the student responses; nine student responses were reported by elementary teachers and four responses were cited by secondary teachers. A list of the words and phrases used by teachers in their observations of their students' behavior following the death experience is included below:

cried so hard	withdrew from class participation
daydreamed	adamant in refusal to do the
anger	assignment
sadness	did not start the assignment
disappointment	planned funerals
extremely upset	wrote poems, songs, eulogies
felt guilty	with great excitement
angry	began talking
aggressive	much talk
crying	class atmosphere chaotic
depressed	
sick	
visibly upset	
horrified	

In total there were thirty-one non-human deaths reported by twenty-six teachers with twenty-three student responses to these deaths and eight unknown responses. Twenty-four non-human deaths were in the category of pets. In the secondary group of teachers there were seven non-human death experiences reported; three of the deaths in this group were pets (see Table 2).

TABLE 3.--Number of Students' Death Experiences.

Categories of Death Experience	Divisional Groups	
	Elementary Students	Secondary Students
<u>Non-human Death Experiences</u>		
Plant	0	1
Stray animal	4	3
Pet	20	3
TOTAL	24	7
<u>Human Death Experiences</u>		
Dying student in class	0	0
Dying student in school	1	1
Student in class	1	1
Student in school	0	2
Sibling of student in class	2	0
Sibling of student in school	1	2
Dying parent of student in class	1	0
Parent of student in class	4	7
Parent of student in school	0	0
Close relative	8	0
Close friend of family	0	0
Neighbor	1	0
Dying teacher	0	0
Adult on school staff	4	1
A stranger	0	1
TOTAL	23	15



Student Responses to
Human Death Experiences

Non-verbal Responses
Reported by Teachers

#4 Elementary teacher

A child's parent died. The child had been doing fine work, but he became very depressed after the death. The quality of his work dropped and he began acting differently. His interaction with other students became minimal.

#16 Secondary teacher

The art teacher checked with the counselor about one of the boys in her class who seemed distant and preoccupied much of the time. The counselor reported his mother had died the year before and the boy had not adjusted to her death. He would sit in the cemetery by her grave day after day.

#17 Secondary teacher

The father of a sixteen-year-old, who was a junior in high school, committed suicide. The youth stayed home for a few days. Immediately, he changed roles from that of a son to that of the father in the family. From his teacher's perception there was no need for this change in this particular family. In his senior year his academic work fell drastically. His attendance was erratic. He would stay home with his brother with the most flimsy excuses. The teacher recommended him to the counselor. However, he did not graduate that year. The teacher does not know if he ever did finish school.

#18 Secondary teacher

One of the elementary teacher died after a long illness with cancer. However, she had taught until shortly before she died. Many of these sixth grade students in this teacher's class had had her for fourth grade. The day after her death the children were very excited about the news. They talked an excessive amount.

#19 Secondary teacher

When a parent died, the class made a card.

There was a total of five non-verbal responses from the interviewed teachers; one response was cited by an elementary teacher and four responses were identified by secondary teachers. Four of the death experiences centered on the death of a student's parent while the fifth concerned the death of a teacher within the building. In three of the observations the individual student's behavior was affected deeply by the death and the student's academic work fell in quality.

Verbal Responses Reported by Teachers

#3 Elementary teacher

A handbill for a benefit basketball game was distributed in class. The benefit was planned for a boy who was dying of Hodgkins disease. One boy asked, "What is wrong with him?" The teacher answered, "He has a disease that could be fatal but using medications may cure him."

#9 Elementary teacher

"My grandfather had a heart attack. It happens often with relatives," a child stated.

#9 Elementary teacher

When a child was putting on her coat, she remarked, "My friend's mother passed out. The wake is tomorrow."

#12 Elementary teacher

A child wrote in her daily log, "My grandmother died."

#14 Secondary teacher

The teacher called the roll on the first day of school. When "Frances" was called, a couple of students said, "She died this summer. Her house burned up. Her sister burned too."



#23 Secondary teacher

A student in another class killed a hunter. The students in the class talked about it.

#24 Secondary teacher

A student's father died of cancer. The youth wrote poems with heavy death themes after the death.

Seven verbal responses were reported by the teachers; four responses were observed by elementary teachers and three responses were cited by secondary teachers. In all seven responses the student initiated the topic of his/her death experience. The verbal expression was directed toward the teachers in six of the incidents; one teacher reacted to the students' initiation. Because of the curriculum structure the teacher learned about the students' death experiences in two observations.

Combinations of Non-verbal
and Verbal Responses
Reported by Teachers

#1 Elementary teacher

The group collected money so a plant could be purchased for Anita when her father committed suicide. Anita blossomed after the death of her father. He was an alcoholic. "I'm sorry," the teacher said to Anita on her return to school. "What are you sorry about?" Anita replied.

#3 Elementary teacher

In September Mark was rebellious, violent and non-verbal. When the teacher contacted his mother, she was told the family had no events occurring which might cause the following unusual behavior:

He tore a teacher's manual in half.
He threw chalk and erasers across the room.
He would crawl under the desks and kick them.

He hit children for no apparent reason.
 He would not participate in any activities.
 Assignments were not finished or even begun.
 Sometimes he would lie quietly under a table for
 long periods.

Mark would not talk with the children or teacher. (See Appendix C for all of Mark's behaviors which gave reasons for his teacher's persistence in continuing communication with his mother. Only in this way did Mark's teacher discover his father was dying of cancer at home due to the low income status of the family.)

The following verbal and action responses were selected from Mark's case study.

In the middle of October Mark participated and communicated with his teacher for the first time that school year. He stated aloud for the first time, "There is a man dying in my house."

One day he threw himself on the floor and shouted, "I hate you. I hate the trees. I hate the walls. I hate everything." In October, he wrote, "I wish the world would die."

Mark was very sensitive to interpretation of music. One day while listening he said, "It sounds like someone is being punished. Maybe he is dying." In the middle of November, he said, "You know, my father is going to die."

Mark would lie under a table in the classroom with hands folded. If the children asked him, "What are you doing?," he replied, "Playing dead."

Just before his father's death in December, he said, "This man is dying at my house." (He had drawn a coffin with a man in it.) He used the following sentence often: "He doesn't look like anyone I know."

He drew a picture of a boy on a blanket on a hill. "My family is having a picnic," he stated. Another child in his class answered, "It looks like you are having a picnic in the cemetery!" Mark retorted, "Where else could I have a picnic with my Dad?"

In February, Mark exploded at recess, "My father is dead. He's dead. He's dead. He's dead!" Later he said, "He didn't perspire. He's dead--died--no more life." Mark wrote several haikus about "baby bouncing on father's knee."

When Mark told about his family picture, he said in a very matter-of-fact manner, "You all know my father died, but this is my mother, brother Sid, brother Verne and brother, Art.

One day in April, when the class was bursting out the door for recess, Mark ran from one tree to another hugging them and exclaiming, "Oh, here is a new bud. Here are two buds. Here are two more." (The teacher said, "It was as if Mark was accepting life after struggling most of the year with death.") He was joyful.

During the school year small groups of children planned funerals for bees, ants and bees and then carried through on the funeral service.

All the children attended Mark's father's funeral or visited the funeral parlor or visited the family when Mark's father died.

#4 Elementary teacher

The children in the first grade became very excited when the brochure announcing a memorial service and dedication of a new playground for a former classmate was handed to them. Some children acted puzzled while others became sad as the children talked among themselves and with the teacher. "I remember him." "He was killed." These were comments made by children when the picture of their dead classmate was discovered on the brochure.

When the fatal accident took place during their kindergarten year, these children were playing during recess on the asphalt playground. The child who died had been climbing on the only piece of equipment on the asphalt, a dumpster used for school trash. It had tipped over on the child. The boy picked himself off the ground. The principal appeared and shook him. Minutes later he collapsed and died on arrival to the hospital.

The parents were poor, but they took the money awarded them due to the death of their child and funded a playground for the school. The brochure circulating among the children was the agenda for the dedication as well as a memorial picture of him.

A memorial service was planned for the boy. The entire school participated in the planning including staff, parents and children. Some of the children helped adults clean the playground. Others decorated the playground. One class wrote words for a song which they sang. A first



grade class wrote a poem which was used as the eulogy. Every class participated in some way.

#4 Elementary teacher

When a parent died, the class sent notes and pictures.

#7 Elementary teacher

When the superintendent died, the group sent pictures and notes to his family after his death. The children received no communication from the family in response to their gifts. A few of the children in her class were in the school choir. The school choir sang for the funeral. Some children attended the funeral. The school was closed for the day.

#7 Elementary teacher

The teacher said to a child, "I bet you were absent because you went to the beach." The child replied with great sadness, "My grandfather died." The teacher could not remember his reply, but he guessed there was no reply on his part.

#8 Elementary teacher

When the children came to the classroom on Monday, many were aware of their principal's death. He had been sick during the preceding weeks. The group discussed it, but they were very silent during much of the day. The next day a girl was very upset over the death because of her mother's reactions to the death. As she talked with other children they became emotionally upset. The principal had been well liked.

The class collected money and the school purchased flowers. The children sent notes and pictures to the family. The school was given the day off and some children visited the funeral parlor while others attended the funeral.

A boy outside of her class questioned the teacher, "Hey, did you hear Mr. Keyes died?"

#10 Elementary teacher

After her grandmother's funeral the child returned to preschool. "How was your day yesterday?" the teacher asked her. "I played," she replied.

Although she never mentioned the funeral or her grandmother, she was very sad much of the time and moped

around for many days after the funeral. This behavior was very unlike her. The children and her teacher would bring her into the play situation, but she would return to a passive state during the next few minutes.

#11 Elementary teacher

"My grandmother died," said a child. The child was not upset, but the airplane trip was very exciting and important to her. She hopped around in a very excited manner as she was telling other children.

#13 Elementary teacher

The third grade teacher was teaching one day and the next day her death was announced. At least one-third of the class had had this teacher during the past year. #13 Teacher thought the children would "hear the news better from me rather than through the grapevine." The principal had told the teachers about the death at an emergency staff meeting that morning.

While #13 Teacher was telling the children about the death, her voice cracked and she started to cry. Two children cried, too. There was some discussion, but many of the children appeared undisturbed by the news. They were so calm that their behavior upset the teacher. One child asked, "Where did she die?" Later, the teacher heard some children cried on the bus while talking about it.

The children wrote notes for the teacher's family. A couple of the children visited the funeral parlor to view the body. Their teacher asked, "Did you feel sad?" One child said, "She didn't look like that." The other child said, "It was very scary."

One child in this group was a very smug, arrogant child. After his third grade teacher died, he viewed her body in the funeral parlor. For some time after this event #13 Teacher noticed his behavior changed. He did not act with smugness or arrogance. He told his teacher, "It was kinda scary and spooky."

Rick's aunt died during Thanksgiving vacation. His aunt had lived with his family. Rick became withdrawn more than he had been after the death of his dog in September. His teacher was afraid to talk with him about the death because of his deep depression. Rick was very

conscientious so he became tense over his school work which now was slipping in quality. When he did not get his work handed in on time or did not understand the work, he obviously became very depressed over it. He daydreamed and his teacher gave him time for this personal activity.

One day the teacher kept Rick in the classroom during recess time so he would finish his work. She put her arm around him and said, "You are having a hard time lately, aren't you?" Rick sobbed and sobbed. The teacher said, "I never kept him in at recess again."

Rick experienced the following deaths in one school year: his dog, the class hamster, his third grade teacher, his aunt and his cat. After his cat died, he was sick for three weeks, back for one week and then absent two more weeks. When the social worker called on him, he asked her "I wonder if I'll die?"

#15 Secondary teacher

Eric's father died from cancer in the fall. During conversations Eric would say often, "You know my father is dead." None of the teachers could handle him. He acted up constantly; walked on the tables, walked around the room when the group was expected to be seated and he looked at anyone's paper at any time. However, #15 Teacher was successful in reaching the boy. She liked him very much.

One day she was in a neighboring classroom where the teacher judged Eric as a "horrible kid." This teacher saw #15 Teacher speak to Eric and he responded in a sensitive manner to her. "What did you do to get him to act that way?" the teacher asked. #15 Teacher replied, "Put your hand on his arm or shoulder, touch him and talk with him so you get to know him. He is having a hard time because of his father's death, I think." A short time later the neighboring teacher told #15 Teacher, "You were so right. He is a terrific kid."

#20 Secondary teacher

One of the boys in the English class came from a family of five boys. His mother was dying of cancer. The family was very open and strong in their unity. The student talked of his mother's dying, and later, her death, in a very open manner with other students and with his English teacher who was his basketball coach as well.

After the parent died, a few students asked for time to discuss the death. The class collected money and purchased flowers. Some of the students visited the family and others attended the funeral.

The young person, whose mother died, addressed a school assembly after the basketball team won the State championship. "I wish my mother were here to see this." (His mother had attended all the games until she was unable to make them.)

#21 Secondary teacher

Two girls asked their home economics teacher, "How can we help her?" Their friend's mother had died.

#25 Secondary teacher (involved two deaths of siblings)

Two girls had formed a relationship due to a common experience, the deaths of their siblings. One girl was obese while the other girl was very slim. The slim girl had a dominating mother. She called her mother a few times every day during school for a long period after her brother's death. Her father could not understand her frequent tears.

Notes were found planted in their books by the teacher. "I'm glad your brother died. You are too skinny." "Well, ditto. You are too FAT."

There were sixteen combinations of verbal and non-verbal responses by students reported by the teachers. Elementary teachers cited eleven responses while secondary teachers identified five student reactions. The student responses were connected with the following categories of death experiences: six parent deaths, two sibling deaths, four deaths of relatives and three deaths of teachers and supportive staff members. Fourteen teachers were responsible for reporting sixteen death experiences.

In eight of the observations the teachers observed students only and/or listened to the students; four of these observations were from elementary teachers and four were secondary teachers. The

teachers, in the remaining eight observations, observed, listened, and responded to their students by providing opportunities for self-expression about their death experiences. One secondary teacher and seven elementary teachers structured such a framework for their students.

The teachers described very noticeable behavioral changes in one student, a small group of students, or in the class as a direct result of the death experience. A few selected behavioral changes are: depression, aggressive behavior, acting out, excessive talking, and a change in the quality of academic work. Such behavioral changes were described in ten of the sixteen combination student responses; eight involved elementary students and two involved secondary students.

Unknown Responses Reported by Teachers

The unknown responses for elementary students numbered seven.

#2 Elementary teacher

The death of a relative was explained by the note sent by the parent which explained her child's absence.

#5 Elementary teacher

The teacher knew a grandparent died, but she remembered nothing about the response of the student.

#6 Elementary teacher

A sister of a student in this classroom was killed in a car accident. The teacher only remembered the lack of response from the other children regarding the death. The teacher did not go to the funeral because it would have been "too much of an emotional strain." The teacher stated, "I use an affective education kit so I am accustomed to dealing with feelings."

#7 Teacher

The math teacher in the building was killed in a car accident. The teacher did not mention the death to the children in his class. He did hear the children speak of the death, however.

#9 Elementary teacher

A student's sister was killed when she was crossing the street near school. Some of the children in the school saw the accident.

#9 Elementary teacher

The three-year-old brother of a second grade student died in an accident. He climbed on a gas tank, became tangled in a rope, and strangled. #9 Teacher heard about this death experience through the child's teacher in the lounge.

#13 Elementary teacher

Rick's mother had terminal cancer, but Rick had not been told in June when school ended for the year.

Secondary teachers reported three human death experiences with no student responses.

#15 Secondary teacher

This teacher first met this girl in her sophomore year. She had a muscular disease. When a sophomore she walked through the halls hanging to the walls. Her speech was affected and she wrote with great difficulty. Her writing was like a very small child's handwriting. When a junior she was in a wheelchair. Then, she had an operation on her tendons so she could walk. However, she couldn't manage it so she went back to the wheelchair. She was very active in Wheelchair Olympics and in Easter Seals. Although she was dying, she was very accepting, open and realistic about her condition. The teacher did not report any interaction with the student or any specific observations of interaction between the girl and classmates.

#16 Secondary teacher

A student was punished with the assignment of more practice in playing his band instrument after everyone had finished and left the school. While alone in the bandroom, he hung himself. The family told the school, "Never call us again."

#23 Secondary teacher

A student in the school took an overdose of a drug and died as a result. When the class discussed the book, Go Ask Alice (a book about a teenager addicted to drugs), no one mentioned this death.

There was a total of ten unknown responses by young persons to their death experiences. The elementary teacher reported seven human deaths with unknown responses while the secondary teachers cited three human death experiences with unknown responses. Six of the death experiences centered on young people; five were students and one was a sibling of a student. The remaining five death experiences included two close relatives, one parent and one teacher. Six of the deaths were a result of accidents; three car accidents, two hangings, and one death by a drug overdose.

Awareness of Human
Death Experiences

There was a total of thirty-eight death experiences reported by the interviewed teachers. Twenty-three death experiences were observed in the elementary group of students: five involved young people, five involved parents, eight involved close relatives, one involved a neighbor and four involved adults on the school staff. From the secondary group of students fifteen death experiences were identified: six involved young persons, seven involved parents, one involved a stranger, and one involved an adult on the school staff.

The data indicate the total number of students' responses to experiences with human deaths, as reported by teachers, totals

twenty-eight with ten unknown responses. There were sixteen responses from elementary students: one non-verbal response, four verbal responses, eleven responses which combined verbal and non-verbal responses and seven unknown responses. Secondary teachers identified a total of twelve responses by their students. There were four non-verbal responses, three verbal responses, five responses which combined verbal and non-verbal responses and three unknown responses (see Table 2).

The causes of the deaths, with numerical count, experienced by the students are listed below: two suicides, seven cancer, one heart attack, two terminal diseases (one Hodgkins disease and one muscular disease), seven accidents (one drug overdose, one gunshot, one burned, three car, two hangings, one crushed) and nineteen unknown causes of death. A minimum of ten deaths were sudden and unexpected.

Six of the accidental deaths were grouped in the unknown category of student responses. There were no initiations of interaction described by the teachers in their student responses for thirty-six of the death experiences. The two examples of discussion initiated by teachers are: a teacher discussed the death of a colleague with her class while another teacher told a child, "I'm sorry about your father's death."

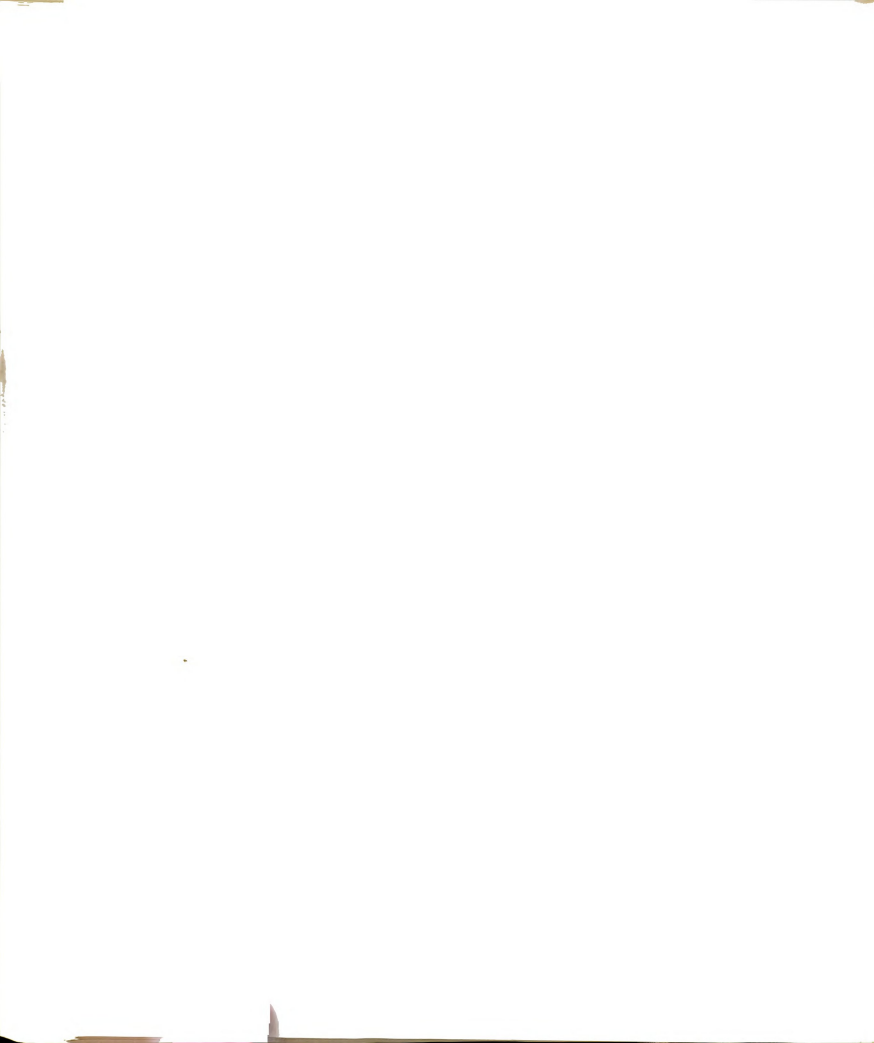
Fourteen of the student responses included behavioral changes by the student/students or the class. Five secondary teachers noted changes in behavior and nine elementary teachers identified behavioral changes in their students. The behavioral

changes were numerous and varied. The learning atmosphere of the class was affected often. A list of words and phrases used by teachers in their description of student behavior following the death experience is included below:

depression	violent	quality of academic work
fear	reflective	fell
excited	shouted	lack of participation
angry	joyful	talking about death
distant	rebellious	talking excessively
passive	non-verbal	no interaction
scared	preoccupied	interaction stopped
aggressive	silent	repetitious behavior
sad	delinquent	changed roles
tense	withdrew	poor school attendance
puzzled	hit	work not done on time
tears	threw	failure to understand
acting out	tore	instructions
sick	drew	failure to understand
daydreamed	wrote	how to do the work
sobbing	sensitive	stopped talking
crying	exploded	assignments not begun
blossomed	accepting	assignments not finished

For thirteen of the death experiences teachers provided opportunities for the expression of feelings or thoughts by students; four were secondary teachers and nine were elementary teachers.

The range of young persons' responses to human death experiences varied from highly emotional, such as "acting out" in school with great anger, to responses which produced non-emotional, matter-of-fact action, such as flushing dead fish down the toilet. The human relationships differed greatly among the death experiences from a stranger to a close relative, from a parent to a teacher, and from a classmate to a sibling. The sub-totals of the students'



experiences with human death, presented in Table 3, show thirteen possible categories of human relationships.

Summary of the Findings

The total number of students' death experiences cited by the interviewed teachers was sixty-nine; there were thirty-one non-human deaths reported and thirty-eight human deaths. Twenty-six teachers reported fifty-one student responses to these sixty-nine death experiences, with eighteen unknown responses.

Elementary teachers identified forty-seven death experiences, with thirty-five student responses and twelve unknown responses. Secondary teachers reported twenty-two students' death experiences with sixteen student responses and six unknown responses.

Twenty-seven student responses indicated behavioral changes by the students after experiencing death. Eighteen elementary teachers and nine secondary teachers cited behavioral change by the students. These behavioral changes varied greatly; the classroom learning atmosphere was influenced often by the students' reactions to the death experiences.

Use of Teacher Awareness of Students' Experiences with Death

If teachers are aware, do they use this awareness within the school community? The data relevant to this question were analyzed along two dimensions: curriculum uses and consultative uses of the students' experiences with death. Data for the dimension of curriculum uses was organized further into three categories: use of

verbal interaction, use of class-planned curriculum, and use of teacher-planned curriculum. Data for the dimension of consultative uses was sub-divided into three categories: consultation requested, consultation offered, and consultation given. All interview guides were reviewed and uses of teacher awareness were identified.

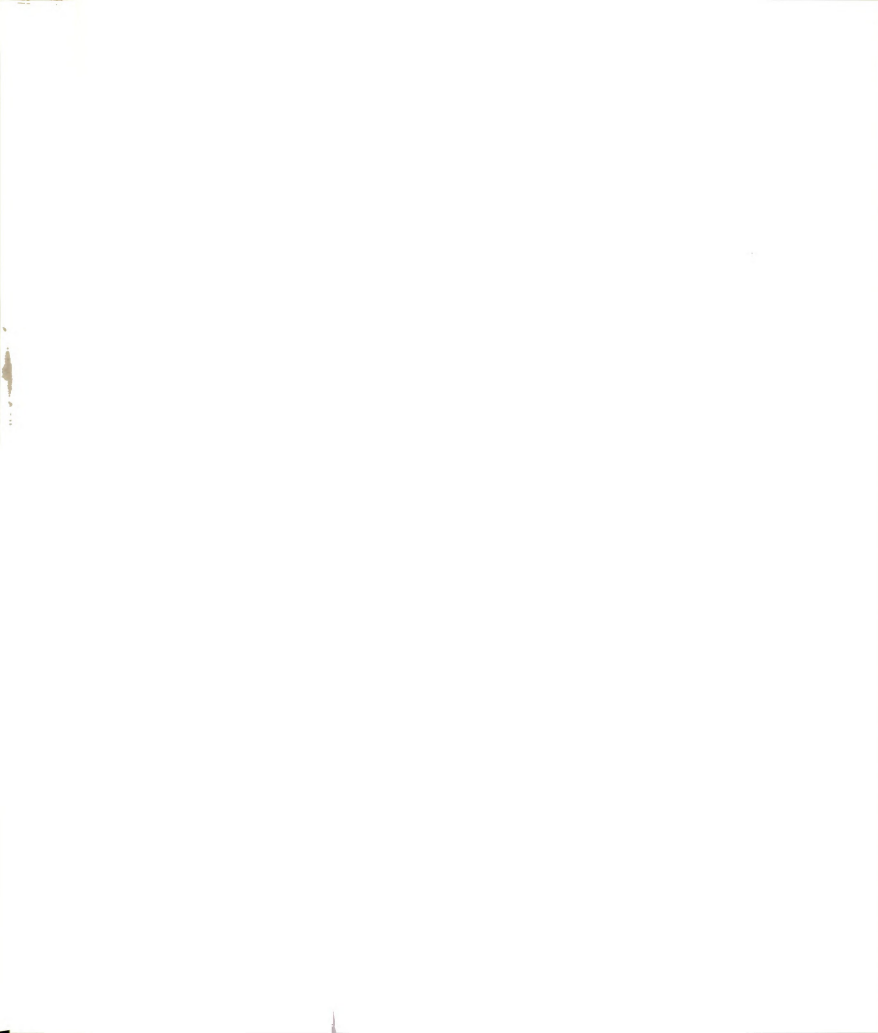
The teachers' observations of their own responses, and their students' response to the young people's encounters with death are grouped in the above mentioned categories. The quantity, quality and depth of the students' and teachers' responses are presented. The differences in the uses of awareness between teachers of children and teachers of adolescents will be addressed in the presentation and discussion of the data.

Student Responses From Teachers' Use of Curriculum

Responses of Verbal Interaction

Interactions within the school community which resulted in verbal interactions, centered on the students' experiences with death, are reported in Table 4. No attempt was made by the researcher to coordinate the numbers of deaths and the numbers of interactions reported by interviewed teachers.

Data relevant to this exploratory question were organized in two broad categories: student-initiated interactions and teacher-initiated interactions. In the teacher-initiated category the data was sub-divided into teacher-initiated with students and teacher-initiated with adults in the school community.



The groupings within the student-initiated category are: student to teacher, student to small peer group, student to class, and student to adults in the school community. Teacher-initiated interactions with students were organized further into three subdivisions: teacher to student, teacher to small group of students, and teacher to class. The data for the category, teacher-initiated with adults was sub-divided into three categories: teacher to parent, teacher to school personnel, teacher to staff (at staff meeting).

Significant differences in two major areas of the reported interactions were found: student/teacher initiation of verbal interactions and the elementary and secondary division's totals and percentages of interactions (see Table 4).

Although there is a small difference of ten percent between the interactions initiated by students (55%) and teachers (45%), closer examination reveals a more significant difference. Twelve percent of interactions were initiated by teachers with students and thirty-three percent of the interactions were initiated by teachers with adults in the school community.

Sixty-two percent of the interactions occurred in the classroom setting and thirty-eight percent took place within the school community, but outside the classroom. Sixty-six interactions took place within the classroom; fifty-three were student-initiated and thirteen were teacher initiated. Therefore, students initiated eighty percent of the interactions within the classroom

setting while teachers initiated twenty percent. Outside the classroom teachers initiated thirty-three percent of the interactions and students initiated six percent.

Further examination indicates noticeable differences between the elementary and secondary divisions. Seventy percent of the interactions were reported by elementary teachers and thirty percent of the interactions by secondary teachers. There were one hundred and seven interactions observed by teachers; elementary teachers reported seventy-five interactions and secondary teachers identified thirty-two exchanges.

Forty-two percent of the student-initiated interactions were begun by elementary students and fourteen percent were begun by secondary students. Within each of the subdivisions of the student-initiated category the elementary students initiated significantly more than did the secondary students. Sixteen percent of the interactions were addressed to the teachers by elementary students while secondary students initiated with their teachers in four percent of the interactions.

The category of teacher-initiated with students revealed the least percentage difference between elementary and secondary teachers. In the subdivision, teacher to class, the elementary teachers initiated four percent of the interactions while secondary teachers initiated in one percent of the interactions. In the other subdivisions the elementary and secondary teachers showed no differences.

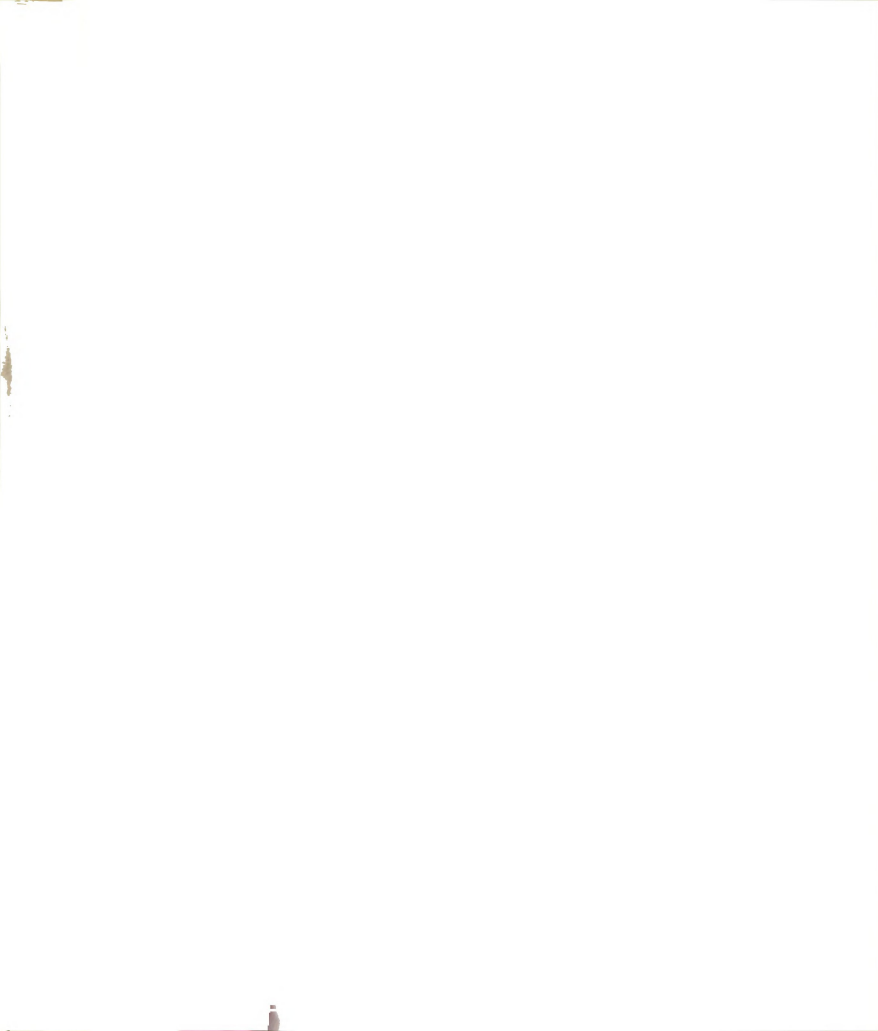


TABLE 4.--Verbal Interactions Reported by Teachers.

Category of Verbal Interaction	Total #	%	Elementary		Secondary	
			Number	%	Number	%
STUDENT INITIATED						
Student to teacher	21	19.6	17	15.8	4	3.7
Student to small peer group	18	16.8	13	12.1	6	5.6
Student to class	14	13.1	11	10.2	3	2.8
Student to adults in school	6	5.6	4	3.7	2	1.8
Total	59	55.1	44	41.8	15	13.9
TEACHER INITIATED						
Teacher to student	4	3.7	2	1.8	2	1.8
Teacher to small group of students	4	3.7	2	1.8	2	1.8
Teacher to class	5	4.6	4	3.7	1	.9
Teacher to student in school	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Sub-total (with students)	13	12.0	8	7.3	5	4.6
Teacher to parent	10	9.3	7	6.5	3	2.8
Teacher to school personnel	18	16.8	10	9.3	8	7.3
Teacher to staff (at meeting)	7	6.5	6	5.6	1	.9
Sub-total (with adults)	35	32.7	23	21.0	12	11.2
Total	48	44.8	31	28.9	17	15.8
TOTAL for verbal interactions	107	100.0	75	70.0	32	29.9



In all the subdivisions of the category, teacher-initiated with adults within the school community elementary teachers showed more initiation than did secondary teachers; elementary teachers initiated in twenty-nine percent of the interactions and secondary teachers initiated in sixteen percent of the exchanges.

The differences, which have been discussed in the two major areas of student/teacher initiation and elementary/secondary divisional totals and percentages, are significant. These differences will be discussed further in the next chapter.

Responses From Class Planned Curriculum

#1 Elementary teacher

After Anita's father committed suicide, her class collected money for a plant which was sent to her.

#3 Elementary teacher

In school Mark's behavior was violent so the teacher began planning for Mark's anger. She also requested suggestions from the children for equipment which helped them with anger and aggression. She brought in a Bozo punching clown; three Bozos were demolished by this class during the year. Beanbags and a wastebasket were substituted for the chalk and erasers thrown by Mark. Some days wood, hammer and nails were brought for Mark to pound; often he pounded nails by the dozens into both sides of the wood. Other children used these materials, too. Art materials were available at all times for Mark and the other children. The teacher and Mark talked with each other frequently so he would have the personal space and materials he needed for the expression of his emotions. Mark was told by his teacher, "You have enough to worry about right now. Don't worry about your school work. Do it if you feel like it. If you don't feel like doing it, leave it." Mark was allowed much time for himself since the teacher assessed from her observations and discussions with Mark that his greatest need was gaining some control over his daily school life. He had no control of anything else in his life. Many times



Mark would lie under a table for long periods of time. If the children asked him what he was doing, he would answer, "I am playing dead." During recess Mark would spend a great deal of time lying on the grass looking at the sky.

#3 Elementary teacher

Many of the children planned funerals for dead mice, bees, and ants with poems, songs and burial chants created by them. The teacher thought the funerals became humorous because of the number and the types of dead things buried.

#4 Elementary teacher

When a parent of a classmate died, the children sent pictures with notes to the family.

#4 Elementary teacher

The children constantly checked the plans for the new playground which had been given by the dead child's parents with the money awarded them because of the death of their child. Some children wrote poems as a eulogy. Others wrote words for a song. The playground was decorated by children and the building was cleaned by students. Staff, parents and children cooperated in planning this memorial service and preparing for it.

#7 Elementary teacher

When the superintendent of schools was terminally ill, the class drew pictures with notes for him. The children received no communication in return. Later, when the superintendent died, the class decided to send notes again.

#8 Elementary teacher

The class gave money when the principal died and the school purchased flowers.

#13 Elementary teacher

Many of the children had had the third grade teacher who died. The class sent pictures and notes to her family. Two children visited the funeral parlor.

#13 Elementary teacher

When the class hamster died, the teacher said, "We can get a new hamster." The class then talked about a new hamster

but they never did discuss the death of the hamster. "I don't know why I didn't talk to them about it," said the teacher. After the planning the class did purchase a new hamster.

#20 Secondary teacher

The day after the death of the mother of a classmate, one student on entering the English class asked the teacher for a discussion time with the class. He wanted the group to respond in some way to this death since many of the students had spent time in this woman's home. The family had been very open about her terminal illness and the high school age sons had discussed openly her terminal condition with their teachers and friends. The students made a card, signed it and sent it. The discussion included the funeral plans. Many students in this class attended the funeral or visited the funeral parlor or family of the deceased at home.

Seven teachers reported ten student responses which resulted from class-planned curriculum. Eight of these responses to class-planned curriculum were in reaction to human deaths and two responses were centered on non-human deaths. In all of the ten responses there is planning and action in reaction to the death, but there is no discussion about the death itself, people's thoughts and feelings about the death, or how the death affects them (see Table 5).

Nine of the ten student responses from class-planned curriculum were cited by six elementary teachers. One secondary teacher reported one student response which was class-planned on the request of a student (see Table 5).

Responses From Teacher Planned Curriculum

#3 Elementary teacher

Writing was suggested many times as an activity in this classroom. The children kept journals. Mark wrote in



TABLE 5.--Teachers' Observations of Their Uses of Awareness for Curriculum Planning.

	Total #		<u>Elementary</u>		<u>Secondary</u>	
			<u>Number</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>%</u>
TOTAL number of teachers reporting	14		12		2	
Student Responses to:						
Class Planned Curriculum	10	34.4	9	31.0	1	3.44
Teacher Planned Curriculum	19	65.5	18	62.1	1	3.44
TOTAL for curriculum uses	29	100.0	27	93.1	2	6.89

October "I wish the world would die." This line was written in response to an assignment which read: Write a few lines on the topic "How you feel today?" Mark's sentence was the first verbal response made about his reaction to his dying father.

#3 Elementary teacher

Twice the class newspaper had items about death written by the children.

"My father shot my puppy."

"My cat had kittens but my father put them in a bag and they aren't kittens anymore."

#3 Elementary teacher

When haiku was assigned, Mark sometimes wrote about his father. One line of a poem which the teacher remembered was about "baby bouncing on father's knee."

#3 Elementary teacher

Music was used for listening and relaxation. Most of the children moved freely to the music. Often the music was played particularly for Mark's relaxation even though he often responded only by blinking his eyelids. He interpreted music better than anyone according to his teacher.

An example of his interpretation follows: "It sounds like they are punishing someone. Maybe he is dying."

#3 Elementary teacher

Art materials were provided for the group's use at all times. The following examples of Mark's use of the materials were selected from Mark's case study, Appendix C.

In the middle of October Mark drew a picture of a big black rock on top of a small stick figure.

#3 Elementary teacher

In December Mark drew a coffin with a man in it.

#3 Elementary teacher

After his father's death, Mark drew a skeleton figure in a coffin.

#3 Elementary teacher

At the end of January Mark drew a boy sitting by a brown rock. Near the rock was a bud or little piece of grass. His teacher wanted to keep it but Mark drew another picture for her. Mark's new picture was dominated by a hill with three or four flowers in a bouquet near a blanket on which sat a boy. Mark described this scene as the cemetery where he was picnicking with his father.

#3 Elementary teacher

The class had many fish which were kept as pets because the teacher planned this as part of the science curriculum. Eleven died during the year and they were used as fertilizer.

#3 Elementary teacher

The children took responsibility for the bulletin boards in this class. In the spring it was Mark's turn. He chose the theme of "Smile" because "I think it's time to smile." Three or four children volunteered their help to him.

#3 Elementary teacher

The teacher planned a self-awareness unit in the spring. This was suggested in the curriculum guide for the third grade. However, the teacher chose it because of Mark's struggle with the death of his father. She also thought the class had shared deeply in Mark's experience.



The class drew pictures of their families. Mark drew his mother, brothers and himself. When explaining his picture to the class, he said, "You know my father died but here are my mother, brothers and me."

During this unit the teacher felt Mark opened to the world and to life again. It happened in an explosion of joy just as his anger happened explosively at the beginning of the school year. One day he went out to recess. He ran to a tree, embraced it and shouted, "Oh, here are two new buds." He threw his arms around the trees as if hugging them. "Here are two more buds." From bush to tree he ran joyously greeting spring and life.

#3 Elementary teacher

At the end of the year Mark gave his teacher a picture of a frog with a big grin. "It's been a hard year, but it's been kind of a fun year, too. I guess teachers aren't so bad."

#4 Elementary teacher

The teacher had plants in the room which the children helped tend. One day a parent discussed the life-death cycle with the children which was sparked by the death of a plant. Fish died during the year and this created interaction about the life-death cycle between the teacher and students. The teacher used the life-death cycle often in explaining death. "We have a certain time here and then we die. Everyone dies sometime and goes back to the ground like the plants and fish."

#5 Elementary teacher

The teacher read The Dead Bird to the class. They discussed the book and the funerals which the children had planned for dead birds in their daily lives. The teacher's awareness of death as an educational topic had been a learning from the previous year when a parent of a student in her class had been electrocuted. While the teacher was attempting to help her student, she became aware of death education.

#11 Elementary teacher

The class cared for fish which the teacher had set up for the children. When they died, some of the children told their parents.



#12 Elementary teacher

This class wrote in journals each day as assigned by the teacher. One child wrote "My grandmother died." The teacher observed this child more closely.

#13 Elementary teacher

The life cycle of a salmon was studied during science. Rick, who had had many experiences with death during the year, had not talked about them. He had withdrawn from participation. During this unit his teacher was surprised when she heard him ask, "Where do they (the salmon) go to die?" The teacher broadened the discussion so some of Rick's death experiences with animals could be included.

#13 Elementary teacher

A hamster which was the class pet was injured. The teacher took him out of the classroom setting when she noticed the injury. She kept the pet home for five weeks and then he died. She suggested the class buy a new hamster.

#15 Secondary teacher

A values clarification exercise was used. The students were told: If you had ten minutes to save someone's life, what would you do and who would you save to replenish your community after an A-bomb? A child, whose father had died of cancer that year, was the only student to choose a middle aged man and he argued at length for his choice. The teacher said, "I thought he was saying "I would have saved my father if I could have so I made certain he had time for developing his points."

There were nineteen student responses which evolved from teacher-planned curriculum. In eighteen of the curriculum situations the students were allowed to integrate their death experiences into the curriculum in an individualized manner. One teacher used her awareness in planning the curriculum so the children were shielded from participating in the illness and death of the class hamster.

In fourteen of the observations teachers provided curriculum situations with materials, time, and freedom for self-expression by



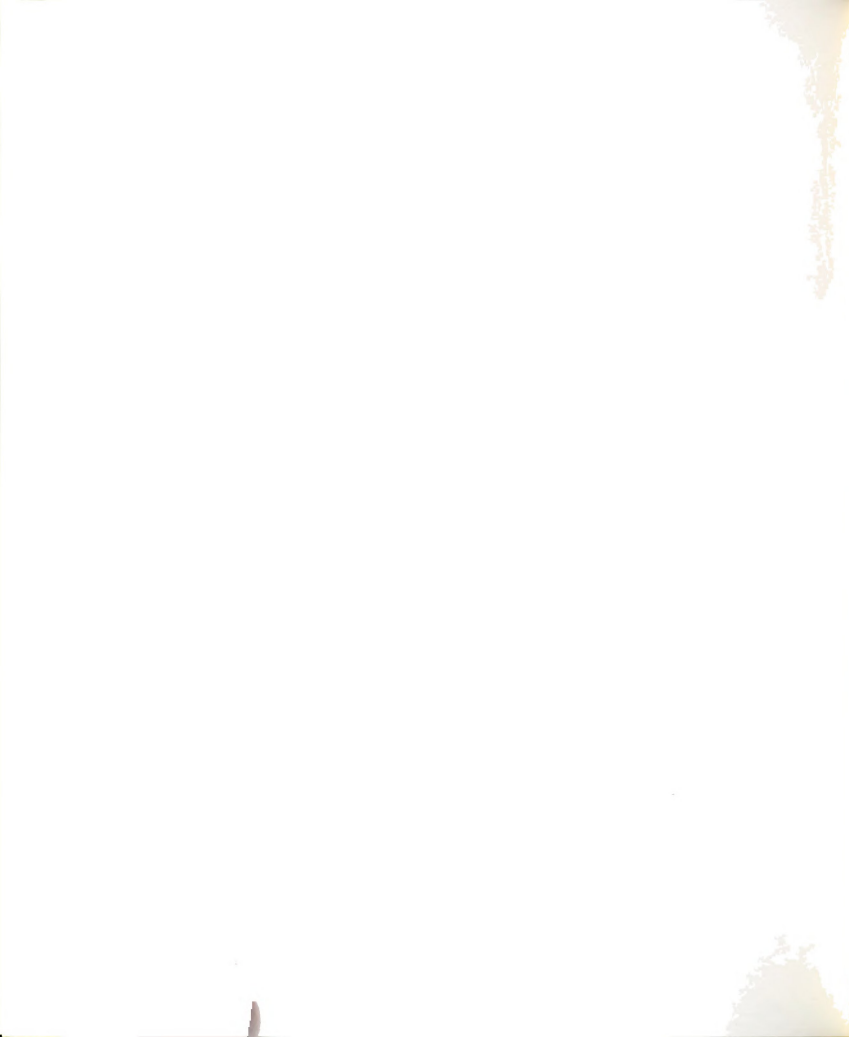
the students. The curriculum plans, which drew responses from students concerning their death experiences, were creative writing with four responses (two from journals, one from poetry, and one from writing for the class newspaper), music with one interpretive response, art with seven visual responses and animal/plant care with two responses.

The teachers used their awareness of their students' death experiences in a more integrative, cognitive manner in four of the teacher-planned curriculum incidents; as the planned lesson progressed, the teacher guided the integration of the students' death experiences by incorporating the death experiences into the content of the planned lesson. Two student responses evolved from science lessons, one from a special studies lesson and one from a literature lesson.

Six elementary teachers reported eighteen of the student responses to teacher-planned curriculum and one secondary teacher identified one student response. One elementary teacher was responsible for twelve of the eighteen responses cited (see Table 5).

Responses from Teacher-Planned Curriculum Involving the Concept of Death

The citation of student responses to teacher-planned curriculum by interviewed teachers, which involved the concept of death rather than the students' death experiences, was fairly common. The students' responses are given for the reader's review.



#13 Elementary teacher

From this activity some unexpected behavior evolved from a student. For language arts the teacher at Thanksgiving time asked the class to write from a turkey's perspective on his feeling about Thanksgiving as a holiday. Rick would not write. His resistance was strong. This behavior surprised his teacher since he was a shy, withdrawn boy who was cooperative usually. The teacher suggested to Rick that he write on a topic of his choice. He never did write the assignment. Then the teacher discovered Rick's dog had died before Thanksgiving and this helped her understand and accept his unusual behavior.

#14 Secondary teacher

A routine part of the curriculum, taking attendance, brought some unexpected news. The first day of the school year the teacher was calling the roll. In response to the calling of Frances' name, the students said, "She died this summer." "Yah, her house burned up." "She died." "She burned up."

#15 Teacher

This teacher had a mini-course called Hospital Center. She had been a nurse's aide in pediatrics in past years. Students always were full of questions for her.

"Have you ever seen a dead person?"

"Have you seen someone die?"

"Do they go ah-a-a (gasping sound with hand at throat)?"

"How does the body act?"

"I bet they are cold and stiff."

"Did you ever see the doctors cut them open?"

Medical students from M.S.U. worked with #3 Teacher's class. They were delighted to find students could work through their fears and learn about the body at the same time.

This discussion of a cow's head and organs developed from a conversation between the teacher and a student. The topic discussed was the chewing of a cow's cud and the digestion process. The teacher asked the student if he'd like to dissect a cow's stomach so he could understand the process. He was enthusiastic and then offered his mother as "picker upper" of the cow's head and organs from the slaughter house. Class discussion followed about the business of a slaughter house and how the cows are killed. The parent did bring the head and organs of the cow so the animal organs could be compared with human organs. Double stomachs were discussed. Some students refused to stay in the room for the dissection so they were given permission to stay in an

empty room next door. By the end of the period all the students came back to the dissection. However, some students stayed on the fringe of the group. Many students would not accept the fact that our stomachs had hairs like the cow's stomach. "We'd throw up if our stomachs were that dirty." The teacher kiddingly said, "Boy, they didn't leave any meat on this cow. They sent it all to MacDonald's." Students were horrified.

"What do you mean? That doesn't go to MacDonald's." The teacher told them the meat was sent to a place to be cut up into steaks, roasts, and hamburg, but the students could not hear this. "No, no, no! Hamburg isn't made from dead cow." They were very upset. Many students repeated these statements over and over. They could not accept the connection of dead cows and the meat eaten by them. Later in the same day the principal came into the class. He made a similar comment. "All steaks and hamburgs were taken from this cow." The students repeated the same performance and conversation which they had gone through earlier. "It was if they had never heard the topic discussed," said the teacher.

#16 Secondary teacher

The poem, "Death of a Hired Hand," was used for discussion preceding the assignment in art class. The students were asked to illustrate the poem; only a few drew the hired hand as dead.

#16 Secondary teacher

An episode from Crime and Punishment was used before the art assignment. It was a hideous description of a man beating a horse and chopping off his head. The students were requested to draw their view of this episode. Some drew happy horses. All figures were smiling - people, horses, everyone.

#16 Secondary teacher

The group discussed old age and dying. They were asked to draw pictures of someone old which would show how they felt about older people. Most of the youth felt repulsed by elderly people and their drawings showed this repulsion.

#18 Secondary teacher

The SCIS program was used by this teacher. Crickets were studied for the concept of the birth/death cycle. It was planned that some crickets would die. Two different

environments were set up for guppies; a healthy environment and a stagnant, unhealthy environment. Again, it was planned that some guppies would die. The teacher had not given any thought to the program possibly offending any student's values toward life and death.

#19 Secondary teacher

The novel, On the Sidewalk Bleeding, was read and discussed. It concerned gang killing. The young people involved in the discourse were urban.

#20 Secondary teacher

The topic of death was discussed in this classroom as it came up in the subject matter. The Jam, a novel which included some material with death, was discussed. Personal experiences of death had not been related to the discussion of death in the literature.

#23 Secondary teacher

While rewinding the film, Bartlby, a student asked "Is he dead?" A reply from a student was "Sure he's dead." Another comment was "I don't think he was." Five out of the thirty knew he was dead when a count was taken after the teacher presented the questions of "Who thinks he was dead?" and "Who thinks he was not?" the discussion was very heated. Some of the students were adamant about their opinions.

There were ten observations cited by eight teachers of teacher-planned curriculum, which centered on the concept of death rather than the students' death experiences. Secondary teachers reported nine of these observations and an elementary teacher reported one in which she gained some insight into a student's behavioral change.

Teachers' Uses of Awareness
in Planning Curriculum

Examination of the data for verbal interactions indicates one-hundred and seven discussions were cited by twenty-six teachers.

Seventy-five of these interactions were identified by elementary teachers and thirty-two verbal exchanges were cited by secondary teachers. Fifty-nine of the interactions were initiated by students. Forty-eight interactions were initiated by teachers; thirteen interactions were with students and thirty-five interactions were initiated with adults (see Table 4).

There were fourteen teachers citing twenty-nine instances of using their awareness of their students' death experiences in developing curriculum. Ten of the student responses were in reaction to class-planned curriculum and nineteen were in response to teacher-planned curriculum; thirty-four percent of the teachers' uses of curriculum were from class-planned curriculum and sixty-six percent were from teacher-planned curriculum (see Table 5).

Ninety-three percent of the curriculum uses were developed by elementary teachers and seven percent by secondary teachers. In the class-planned curriculum category elementary teachers accounted for thirty-one percent of the class-planned curriculum uses and secondary teachers accounted for three percent. Data for teacher-planned curriculum uses reveals sixty-two percent of the responses were cited by elementary teachers and three percent by secondary teachers.

In two of the twenty-nine curriculum uses of students' death experiences the student initiated the action and the teachers responded to the student. Four observations indicated actual awareness by the teachers in conjunction with the actions of helping the students integrate the actual deaths in a cognitive manner.



Eight of the observations helped the students respond to the people dealing with the deaths, such as the remaining members of the families. In fifteen incidents the flexibility of the curriculum plans allowed for the students' expression of their thoughts and feelings; some of these concerns centered on death. These particular responses to death through the medium of the curriculum provided the teachers with information about the students' thoughts, feelings, skills, abilities, and interests.

It was common for secondary teachers to integrate the concept of death into their teaching, but the death experiences of their students were not used often in their teacher-planned curriculum or in class-planned curriculum. Elementary teachers incorporated the death experiences of their students more easily into their teaching.

In total there were one-hundred thirty-six observations made by twenty-six teachers of their uses of awareness in curriculum planning concerning their students' death experiences; one-hundred and seven verbal interactions, ten class-planned curriculum uses and nineteen teacher-planned curriculum uses (see Table 4 and Table 5).

Teachers' Observations of Consultative Uses

Consultations Requested
by Teachers

#1 Elementary teacher

When an alcoholic parent committed suicide, the teacher went to the counselor to tell her of the suicide. In her conversation she asked for ways of helping Anita.



"You are doing all you can," answered the counselor. The counselor never saw the child. (The counselor was responsible for 700 students.) The counselor suggested, "If she wants to see me, send her in to me." As a result of this conversation the teacher asked Anita if she would like a visit with the counselor. "No," was the reply.

#3 Elementary teacher

In September the teacher requested help for Mark from the county intermediate school district social worker. The social worker sent a letter stating she would talk with the teacher in October. She came in December. It was her first year as a social worker and she had had no experience in helping people cope with death. "If you find out anything, let me know because I'm very interested," she replied. In May she observed Mark for the first time. The teacher reported that she, the class and Mark had lived through the crisis by May and Mark had adjusted well. The teacher did not need any help in May.

#3 Elementary teacher

In September when Mark was violent often, the teacher went to the principal for help. His response to her request was "Discipline should be handled in the classroom by the teacher." When the teacher discovered Mark's father was dying, she approached the principal again. His reply was "Every time a tough situation comes up you can't pass the buck." She never talked with him again about Mark.

#13 Elementary teacher

The teacher requested help from the social worker for Rick. "I was giving her all the help," the teacher reported. "She did tell me about Rick's father dropping out of high school and putting pressure on Rick," the teacher continued. The social worker called on Rick at home when he was out of school for three weeks.

#25 Secondary teacher

This teacher with others in a team situation worked with the counselor on a nine-week psychology course. Because of some death experiences the teachers requested the counselor's help in planning for discussion of the fear of death. Hypothetical situations of death such as death of a pet or grandparent were set up. The counselor acted as a small group leader along with other teachers.



Four teachers identified five requests for help from supportive staff. Four requests by elementary teachers centered on assistance for helping their students deal with a death experience; no help was received. A secondary teacher requested help, and received it, from the counselor for planning discussion groups which would deal with fear of death; the teacher had heard students talking about death experiences with panic (see Table 6).

Consultation Offered to Teachers

The twenty-six interviewed teachers identified no offers of consultation from supportive staff or from others within the school community. One incident was reported which gave strong evidence of a teacher's need for support when one of her students was demanding strong support. The teacher solicited support from an Intermediate School District social worker, her principal, and a teaching colleague, but she was not successful. Her only support came from the speech therapist who requested consultation with #3 Elementary teacher. In collaborating about two boys from the same family #3 Teacher and the speech therapist formed their own fragile and limited support system.

#3 Elementary teacher

The teacher approached the principal for help with a boy who was violent most of the time. "Discipline begins in the classroom," was his reply. A second approach was made when the teacher discovered the boy's father was dying of cancer in the home and the family had no economic, community, or personal resources for support. "When things get tough, you can't pass the buck," the principal said. She then tried contacting the Intermediate School District

social worker, but she received no help from her. "This is my first year. I'm interested. Let me know about it," was the social worker's response.

The teacher tried collaborating with the teacher of Verne, Mark's brother. She discovered their philosophies of education were totally different. Verne's teacher punished Verne for his "bad behavior."

Verne had speech therapy. He was acting violently in the speech class. In desperation the speech therapist went to #3 Teacher for consultation. She wanted information about Mark's behavior. In comparing notes, #3 Teacher invited the speech therapist for observation of Mark and the manner in which she was handling Mark's behavior. After their first meeting the two educators consulted with each other often for the remainder of the year.

Relations with the staff deteriorated steadily for #3 Teacher. "The staff was so punitive in talking about Mark and Verne that one day, I exploded. I said to them, 'I think you are inhuman. I don't know how you can be so inhuman.' I slammed the lounge door on the way out. I acted just like Mark and Verne! I didn't talk to anyone much after that." (See Appendix C for the case study on Mark.)

TABLE 6.--Teachers Observations of Their Uses of Awareness for Consultation.

	Total #	%	Elementary		Secondary	
			Number	%	Number	%
Teacher Observations of						
Consultation requested	5	26.3	4	21.0	1	5.2
Consultation offered	0	00.0	0	00.0	0	0.0
Consultation given	14	73.6	9	47.3	5	26.3
TOTAL for Consultation Uses	19	100.0	13	68.4	6	31.5
TOTAL Number of Teachers Reporting	14		9		5	



Consultation Given
by Teachers

#3 Elementary teacher

Mark's brother, Verne, was in speech therapy. He was as troubled as Mark over his father's illness and impending death. He was violent also. The speech therapist was searching for help with him so she and Teacher #3 talked often about the two boys and their family. It was agreed between them that the speech therapist would observe Mark and his teacher in order to view the manner in which Teacher #3 related to Mark. The speech therapist hoped for new, more successful ways of working with Verne.

#3 Elementary teacher

Mark's mother talked with the teacher often about her family problems. She particularly spoke of her teenage sons who were smoking "pot." Her sons were into other troubles. Evidently she felt her control of them was gone. The county mental health agency was recommended by the teacher since the family had little money. Toward the end of the father's illness, one of the teenage sons went to a therapist with this agency.

#4 Elementary teacher

The entire staff and the parents of the dead child planned a memorial service for the kindergarten child who had been fatally injured on the playground the previous school year. "Our staff was very close and planned everything together," said the teacher.

#4 Elementary teacher

When a parent died, the staff talked about the death and made a group decision about the staff's response to the family. "Whenever a parent died, we talked about it and responded as a group," reported the teacher.

#8 Elementary teacher

When the principal died, it was discussed at the lunchtime staff meeting. The teacher said, "There was no point in asking the acting principal for help because this was his first experience with death which was close to him. He kept saying, 'This has never happened to me before.' He talked about it a lot. The staff processed it a great deal. We helped each other."



#10 Elementary teacher

A parent asked the teacher, "Shall I let her (four-year-old daughter) go to the funeral?" "Yes, by all means!" replied the teacher.

#13 Elementary teacher

It was suggested to Rick's mother that she consult her minister about helping Rick ease his tension.

When the third grade teacher died, one parent voiced an objection about the teacher working so long when she had terminal cancer. (She was working one day and died during the night.) The teacher said, "Children must face this sometime so that is the good part of it."

#13 Elementary teacher

When the third grade teacher died, #13 Teacher talked with many of the staff members about the death, including teachers, principal and janitor. The staff met so a decision could be made about the staff's action with the third grade teacher's family and the staff's remembrance of her.

#15 Secondary teacher

The teacher went to the counselor when she learned a boy's father had died. The counselor knew. This boy had difficulty in adjusting to group work in all his classes. As the year progressed the teacher worked very successfully with Eric. The counselor often sent teachers to Teacher #2 for help in relating to Eric.

#15 Secondary teacher

After a student's father died, her mother asked the teacher if she would recommend camp for her son in the summer. The teacher suggested camp unless the youth was opposed to it.

#16 Secondary teacher

The art teacher discovered from one of her students that his father had died. She shared her information about the student with the counselor.

#21 Secondary teacher

"When the parent of one of my students died, we (teachers) talked among ourselves and helped each other. Our principal was the hyperactive type and he wasn't too helpful with anything like this."

#25 Secondary teacher

After a girl's five-year-old sibling died, the girl called her mother a few times each day. The teacher talked with the parent about this and the effect on her daughter.

There were fourteen cited incidents where teachers were giving consultative support to people within the school community. Consultative support was given to parents in eight observations, to supportive staff in two observations and to staff members or their families in four observations.

Five elementary teachers reported nine of the observations concerning their consultative support while one secondary teacher cited five observations. Two instances of consultative support for parents were identified by secondary teachers and six incidents involving parents were cited by elementary teachers.

Teachers' Uses of Consultation

Examination of the data indicates elementary teachers used consultation thirteen times as a result of their students' death experiences while secondary teachers used consultation six times. Sixty-eight percent of the consultative uses were cited by elementary teachers and thirty-two percent by secondary teachers.

The data reveal consultation given was used in seventy-four percent of the observations cited; consultation requested was used in twenty-six percent of incidents identified. There were no identifications made of consultation offered by supportive staff.

In four of the five requests for consultation teachers received no help; in one instance the teacher felt reprimanded for



asking which made the situation more emotionally difficult for her. Parents received the majority of consultation given by teachers to members in the school community.

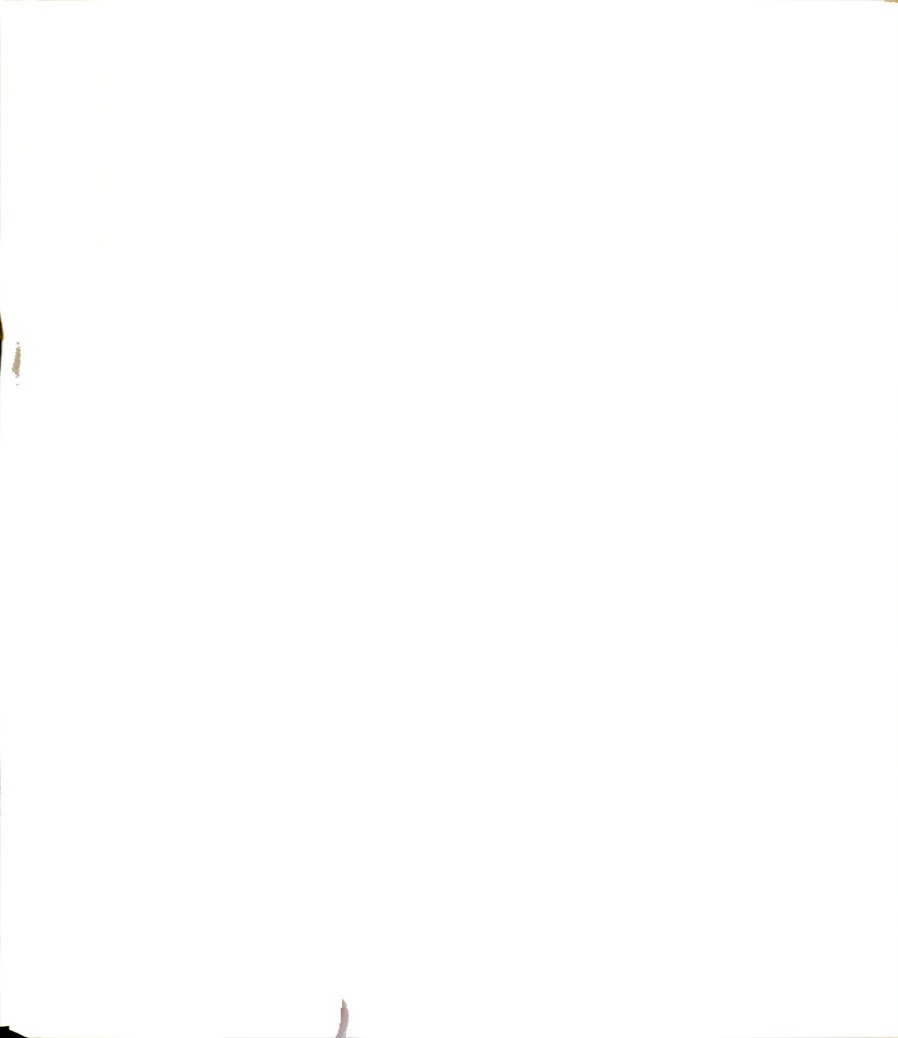
Nineteen consultative uses were identified by fourteen teachers. Nine elementary teachers cited observations and five secondary teachers reported incidents.

Elementary teachers used consultation more than did secondary teachers. In the area of consultation offered, the elementary and secondary teachers gave the same data revealing no offers of support from supportive staff. The data for consultation given was the category where elementary and secondary teachers were the closest (see Table 6).

Summary of the Findings

Teachers used their awareness of their students' death experiences in one-hundred and fifty-five observations of their interactions, curriculum planning, and consultation with their students and others in their school communities. One-hundred and fifteen of the observations were cited by elementary teachers and forty of the responses were reported by secondary teachers.

Seventy percent of the verbal interactions were identified by elementary teachers and thirty percent by secondary teachers. Elementary teachers were responsible for eighty-three percent of the total curriculum and consultative uses while secondary teachers identified seventeen percent of these uses. In every category and sub-category of curriculum and consultative uses elementary teachers were represented more noticeably than secondary teachers.



Summary

In this chapter the results obtained from the analysis of the data for each of the two exploratory questions were presented. The sample of teachers were aware noticeably of their students' encounters with death. This awareness by teachers was used to some degree in verbal interactions with students, in curriculum planning, and in consultation.

Significant differences were found between teachers of children and teachers of adolescents; elementary teachers were more aware of their students' experiences with death, and acted upon this awareness, more often than did teachers of adolescents. In Chapter Five the findings and recommendations for program development and research are presented.



For everything there is a season and a time to every
purpose under heaven:

a time to be born and a time to die;
a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted;
a time to kill, and a time to heal;
a time to weep, and a time to laugh;
a time to mourn and a time to dance;
a time to cast away stones, and a time to gather

stones together;

a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;
a time to seek, and a time to lose;
a time to keep, and a time to cast away;
a time to love, and a time to hate;
a time for war, and a time for peace.

Ecclesiastes 3:1-8

"Turn, Turn, Turn" - recorded by Pete Seeger

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, REFLECTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In this chapter, a summary of the findings, reflections on the research and recommendations for program development and research are discussed. In addition, observations on the interviews are presented and discussed.

Summary

The subject of this thesis has been teachers' awareness, and use of awareness, of their students' death experiences, examined through interviews with twenty-six elementary and secondary teachers attending a state university. The reported teachers' observations of their students' death experiences, and their self-perceptions, were studied in an effort to determine teachers' awareness, their use of awareness in verbal interaction, curriculum planning, and consultation and further, the differences, if any, between teachers of children and teachers of adolescents.

Awareness, and use of awareness, was evident by the quantity, quality and depth of the teachers' observations. A considerable degree of teacher awareness was revealed by the quantity of deaths reported (69), by twenty-five of the twenty-six interviewed teachers, and the number (51) of student responses to the death experiences. In addition, qualitative aspects were cited which denoted more

specific awarenesses, such as: relationship of the student to the dead human or non-human, the cause of death, and the changes in the behavior of the student, class, or school community caused by the death experience. Four teachers' observations indicated a deeper awareness, reflecting more sensitivity, concerning the effect of the death experience upon individual students, the class and the school community.

If teachers are aware, do they use this awareness in the school community? Teachers used their awareness to some degree in verbal interactions, curriculum planning, and consultation with other staff and parents. This use of awareness was supported by a total of 155 teachers' observations in these three categories. Further examination of the research for this exploratory question revealed qualitative information related to the nature and use of their observations, which modifies the immediate impression created by the quantitative results.

Consultative uses furnished little support for teachers in their day-to-day classroom living with students who were dealing with death. In four of five requests for consultation, teachers were confronted by supportive staff who were inexperienced, unaware of the effects of death on students, or attitudinally negative about the request of help from a teaching professional. No supportive staff offered help due to information or observation of a student's or teacher's situation, but teachers often gave support to other adults in the school community.

Although most teachers were noticeably aware of their students' death experiences, and used this awareness to a limited degree, significant differences surfaced in this research between elementary and secondary teachers. If the quantitative aspects of the data are reviewed, elementary teachers show considerably more awareness than secondary teachers in the following categories: the number of deaths reported (both non-human and human death), the number of reported student responses to these death experiences, and the number of behavioral changes identified. Elementary teachers used their awareness to a greater degree than secondary teachers in the three major categories, and in the sub-categories, of verbal interaction, curriculum planning and consultation.

There also were qualitative differences between teachers of children and teachers of adolescents. Elementary teachers responded more to the personal and interpersonal aspects of the student's death experience while secondary teachers reacted more to the cognitive aspects of death. The integration of the student's death experience through the utilization of a wholistic, developmental approach was used more by elementary teachers. Secondary teachers separated the cognitive, affective and psycho-motor domains in their curriculum planning.

In verbal interaction the students initiated the exchange most often. The teacher responded in a very limited manner in the majority of observations; as a result of the limited interaction, students had little chance for exploration of their experience



with death. Students were the innovators generally; they included the topic of death in the curriculum.

Frequently, the teachers received responses from the students about their death experiences through open-ended, flexible curriculum plans; the teachers provided time, materials and a certain amount of freedom for the sharing of the students' personal experiences and for responses to the bereaved family. Teachers seldom used their awareness in a focused, active manner for the guidance of their students in exploring their feelings and/or clarifying their thoughts about death.

Four teachers shared observations of their students and selves which suggested much deeper use of awareness, and much deeper awareness, than the other twenty-two teachers. The uses made of their surface awareness served to deepen their awareness of the student's or family's death experience. Each of these four teachers used their awareness in methods which allowed for the gathering of more information about the student's/family's feelings, skills, and abilities. The newly collected information, then, created newer and deeper awareness; the deeper awareness suggested more uses.

Some of the methods used by these teachers were: closer observation of the student and class; more sensitive interaction with the student (in a one-on-one situation often); curriculum planning which provided for acceptable outlets for the student's thoughts and feelings, and for integration of these thoughts and



feelings into their life; requests for consultation; and the sharing of their thoughts, feelings, and methods with other staff members.

Three of the four teachers with a deeper sense of awareness were elementary teachers. All of these teachers were skilled observers. Two elementary teachers and one secondary teacher used their awareness in sensitive interactions with the students who were experiencing a death. One elementary teacher and one secondary teacher used complex, extended curriculum planning in response to their students' experiences with death. The last elementary teacher was deeply involved in a school community planning of a memorial playground in memory of a child who was killed on the playground; this memorial involved all the classes and all the children.

Reflections on the Research

What could account for such significant differences between teachers of children and teachers of adolescents in their awareness of their students' death experiences, and their uses of this awareness? A variety of factors surface for consideration: the number of students served per day, the time spent with students daily, the structure of the day, the organization of the curriculum, opportunities for contact with parents, the developmental needs of the youth served, and the expectations of the community for the teacher's role and for curriculum content.

The visible organization of elementary and secondary schools suggest vast differences immediately. An elementary teacher usually works with 25-35 children who remain with her/him for the major



portion of each day for the entire school year. In contrast, the secondary teacher works with 125-200 students, in groups of 25-40 adolescents, for one hour, possibly two hours, for a semester. The smaller size of the elementary population, the elementary building, and the elementary staff allow for much more interpersonal contact between teachers, students and parents in a variety of situations. Due to the factors mentioned in the paragraph above, secondary teachers easily could see a majority of their students only once a day during the scheduled classtime. The opportunities for observation outside of the classroom are much less for teachers of adolescents than for teachers of children.

Due to the external organization of the school and school day, the expectations of parents and community, and the age and needs of the youth served, many elements of the curriculum are pre-planned and set for the teacher. By the very nature of the elementary school, more choices are available for teachers of children than for teachers of adolescents. Elementary teachers have more control of their use of materials, space, groupings, and time in their curriculum planning. Scheduling and assignment in secondary schools generally structure the use of time, space, groupings, and materials for secondary teachers; in turn, the structure narrows the choices of certain teaching styles and limits curriculum planning.

A teacher of children may choose a focus on the class, a small group, a child, the subject matter, or blend the focus in a multitude of ways. The constant number of children, the duration of time spent with the same children, the developmental tasks and

needs of students, and the involvement of parents provide more opportunities for creative curriculum planning. With such planning the child, classmates, and teacher are placed in a variety of settings and groupings, both formal and informal within the classroom and school community, in which exploration of learning can be observed easily by the teacher.

By comparison, a teacher of adolescents is focused on subject matter by the nature of class scheduling, group assignments, and parental and community expectations. It is impossible for a secondary teacher to observe each assigned student in various settings and groupings; with the lack of such information and interaction, the secondary student is not known personally by each teacher. There is little parent involvement at the secondary school level because of the developmental needs of both students and parents at this time.

A blending of foci on each adolescent's total growth and development with the emphasis on his/her cognitive learning is an impossible task for the teacher; selective observation and interpersonal involvement with a chosen few is more realistic. The only secondary school where the blending of the foci is a realistic choice for the teacher of adolescents is the middle school where groupings, space and time have been used more creatively. Awareness, and use of awareness, directed toward the clarification of the concept of death rather than the clarification of personal thoughts and feelings of a student or group of students about death



experiences, appears more manageable when considering the daily life of a teacher of adolescents.

Awareness of the wholistic growth and development of the young person, and the creative use of the teacher's awareness in developing more learning opportunities for her/his students and observational situations for self are nurtured more when the structure gives more freedom and choices. In the present study the teachers with a more open framework for planning, the elementary teachers, and individual teachers with more creative views of planning, were the most aware of their students' death experiences and these teachers created the most opportunities for further learning about the death experiences.

The foundation for teacher awareness of students' death experiences, in the opinion of this researcher, is the observational skill of teachers which is used as the teacher participates with young people in their daily lives in the school community; in conjunction with observational skill, the teacher must have self-awareness as she/he interacts with the school community. In the present study, the observational skills of elementary teachers and secondary teachers differed widely; the consequence of more skilled observation was more awareness, and use of awareness, by teachers of children. Therefore, investigation of the teacher's use of observational skills appears valuable.

Observation is the teacher's tool for collecting information about her/his students; then the teacher, an important adult in the lives of youth, can give the students better guidance and learning

opportunities. This collection of information might include knowledge of the following aspects of the young person's growth and development in the intellectual, social, physical, and emotional domains: present growth and needs; the student's special interests, talents, and skills; their knowledge of self and interaction with fellow students, class, school community and family; and the family's needs and relationship to the community.

With the accumulation of information, the teacher can respond to the student's needs and foster his/her growth. More knowledge of the student allows for more sensitive interaction and curriculum planning in the classroom because the interaction and planning are based on group needs and individual needs. More opportunities for closer observation are created also. The consultation requested and given will be based on solid data. The benefits of keen observation are more sensitive interaction between student and teacher and more creative, interesting and informed curriculum planning.

Direction for the teacher's growth of self-awareness, and use of this awareness, can be provided by the same collected information which helps the teacher respond to her/his students more sensitively. If the teacher is not aware of self in relationship to death, it is not possible for her/him to guide students to self-awareness; denial or avoidance will result. In the present research, the elementary teachers, who were more aware than secondary teachers, cited the most examples of personal experiences with death in their interviews. These data suggest that the teacher



who was exploring death in relationship to self may also have been more observant and sensitive in relating to students who were experiencing and exploring death.

The teacher must be aware of her/his own needs and limits in responding to the topic of death and the needs of students. One teacher may be capable of responding to the needs of the group and the needs of individual students; yet another teacher may be capable of responding to the group only. Since a teacher is responsible for the mental health of the group, and not the mental health of each individual child, the knowledge of needs and limits are very important. The teacher's self-awareness also would dictate the type of consultation for self, if any. Teachers need emotional support and guidance in clarifying their feelings and thoughts about their experiences with death in order to give support and guidance to students in their care.

There were strong indications in the data that teachers did not receive encouragement and support for clarifying their feelings and thoughts concerning their death experiences from supportive staff; the same reactions accompanied their requests for help with their students. There were no offers of help or cooperation from supportive staff. The few requests for consultation about students received no positive responses.

A most disturbing observation was the punitive attitude on the part of the principal in response to the teacher's request for help in dealing with the puzzling behavior of a student. This teacher knew her limits and needs, but it hindered her professional

standing in the school community. In the experience of the researcher, it is fairly common for educators to look upon requests for help by teachers as an unprofessional attitude and a sign of incompetence or weakness. The question arises: Where can a teacher receive guidance and support so she/he can return the guidance and support to students?

Evidence surfaced which revealed the young people's need for emotional support and for opportunities which allowed the exploration of their feelings and thoughts concerning their death experiences; the most convincing data centered on the many behavioral changes by students in response to their death experiences and the persistent initiation of interaction by students with teachers regarding their encounters with death. A young person seldom had a teacher engage in a deep interaction in response to his/her initiation. The behavioral changes brought observation, punishment, avoidance, and, infrequently, a sensitive exchange between student and teacher. It was more usual for a teacher to avoid grappling with a student's feelings of anger or depression unless the behavior affected the class very directly.

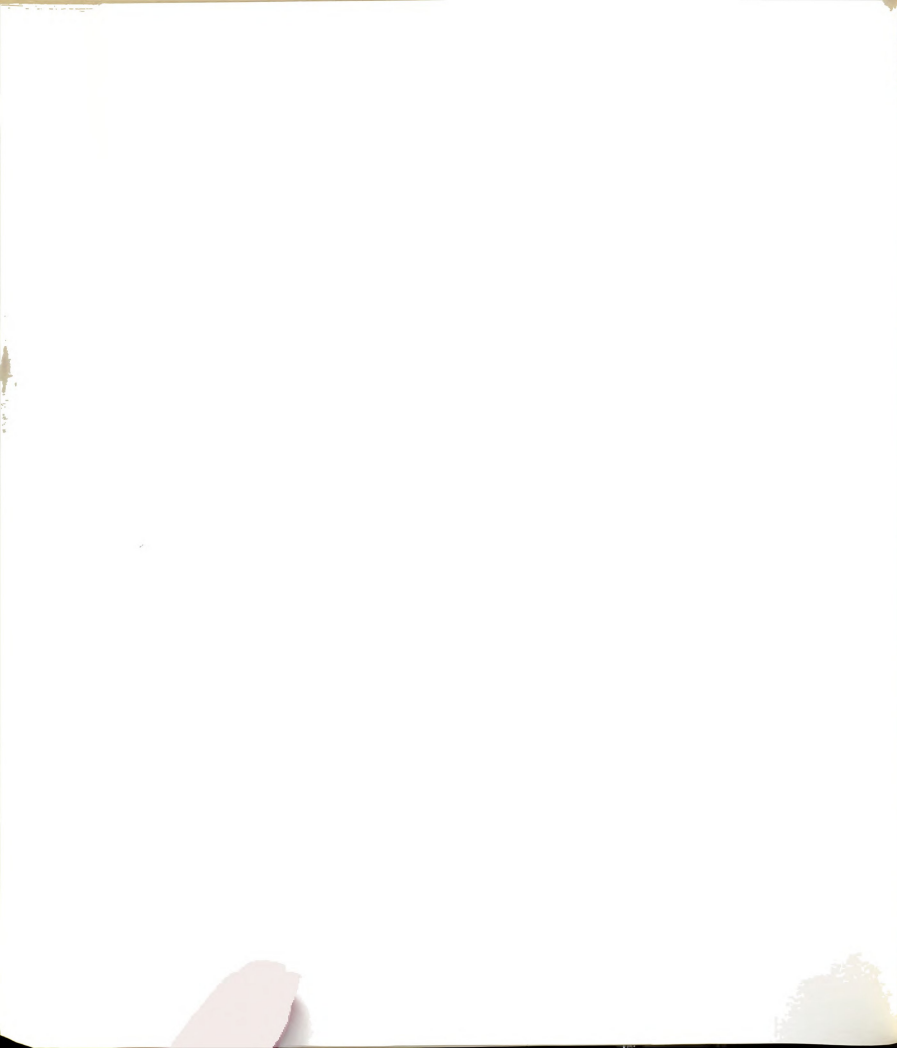
When the teacher mentioned previously received no help with the disruptive student in her class, she used her own resources. She proved to herself, and to the researcher, that curriculum planning can be used very effectively in responding to the feelings and thoughts of a student's deep concerns about a very personal, painful death experience. Since the curriculum is the major vehicle



for interaction with students for teachers, the exploration of using curriculum planning in more depth bears serious consideration.

The limited data, or lack of data, suggested supportive staff lacked awareness and knowledge about the effects of death on people, youth and adults, and the learning possibilities surrounding death experiences. How can a supportive staff person understand, and accept the behavior of students and teachers dealing with death experiences if he/she is not aware? If there is no awareness, then, surely the supportive staff person cannot foster the growth and development of students, teachers and self. The interdependence of students, teachers and supportive staff makes awareness essential for the adults in the school community concerning the effect of death on the behavior of people and the learning possibilities present. Educators are significant adults in the health care of students.

The acceptance of educators into the mental health and larger health care system is required if educators are to become aware of the tremendous potential for mental health care and mental health education. In the past educators have been excluded most often when topics such as death, child abuse, sexuality, incest or violence have been discussed by the community's professionals who work with children. Social workers, doctors, lawyers, nurses, ministers, psychologists and even police are grouped on panels for presentations to professional and community groups. Inevitably the professionals discuss "what the teachers should be doing"



and "what they would like from other health care professionals." Participation in the interdisciplinary community of professionals may reveal little awareness, and use of this awareness, with youth's experiences with death in other institutional settings such as the courts, hospitals, social service agencies.

Observations on the Interviews

The interest level shown by teachers during the interviews was very high. This was evidenced by their behaviors; these behaviors included time given for the interviews, requests for extensions of time, using the time as a learning opportunity, the high desire to be helpful in the study, the emotional involvement evidenced by the sharing of personal information about their teaching and family experiences, and their comments during the interviews.

The time given for the interview was a voluntary act by each teacher so this was the first indication of interest. At the start of the interview the interviewee was given a choice of the class work or the interview. A person occasionally would request a postponement of the interview because of particular interest in the on-going work of the class. Such a request was honored. Although the information within the confines of the study was shared often in an hour by a teacher, the two hour limit for the interview was used frequently for personal reasons.

During the interviews the helpfulness of the teachers was evident. Frequently, a teacher remarked, "Call me if you would like more information or discussion about the incidents I mentioned."



Or "Call me, if you want to talk about the death experiences which happened a couple years ago?" "I wish I could give you more material. It's too bad you can't use some death experiences from two or three years ago." The cooperativeness of the teachers and the university professors created an open learning environment which was an indirect goal of the study.

The comments of the teachers, both personal and professional, directed attention to the learning aspects of the interview. "I never thought about this before." "This is very interesting." "I'd like to learn more about this," "I wish I could talk more with you about this." "I never put all this together." "I never realized how many death experiences my children had." "I wish I'd known about this study before because I would have kept notes." "I'll be more aware this year. I didn't realize growth and development (of children) and the concept of death have any relationship." "I really liked this." "Do you think what I did with this child was right?"

The difficulty for teachers in fostering their professional growth in the area of mental health surfaced during the interviews. One teacher's remark illustrated this point: "I am interested in working with children who have problems like this (death experiences). The school psychologist can't give you any help because he has too much to do. He's always testing. He tells you do this, but then it doesn't work. You don't feel like you can go back if it doesn't work and talk it over with him so you know what you can try next."

The death of a parent by electrocution plunged an elementary teacher into the topic of death. Because of her feelings of

helplessness she tried learning about death. Although this death experience had happened outside the framework of the study, her learning from that year caused the inclusion of discussion and literature centered on death in her curriculum planning for the time framework of the exploratory study. When her teaching colleague's husband died of a heart attack, this teacher recommended reading material for her. She also used her knowledge gained from her reading: much time was spent with her colleague in listening to her story about the death which she told repeatedly.

Professional skills and personal experiences overlapped often. A fourth grade teacher related this observation of questions asked by her four-year-old nephew as she was driving. She did not include her answers. "Where do I go when I die?" "What happens to my body?" "I won't die, will I?" "Will you die?" The four-year-old's resolution was "Older people die - not me."

Personal experiences were drawn from childhood frequently. "I was an altar boy so I had to attend and serve at many funerals. I come from an Italian background. People got hysterical and had to be pulled from the graveside. I saw coffins lowered into the ground. After the people left, I stayed with the priest. I didn't understand what was happening. I didn't think about it after though. It didn't bother me. When my aunt died, it bothered me, I guess. My family made an awful fuss. On holidays in particular. I'm Italian and maybe that is why but you could feel it when you went in. We got together on holidays. It was silent, but when my uncle walked in, my grandmother and everyone got hysterical. I didn't want to go and neither did any of the people my age. It lasted a long time. At least a year or more."

Some personal experiences were current experiences. A number of teachers realized their observations were personal ones, but they continued eagerly. "I know this is not about my students, but . . ."

and then would continue at length. A teacher spoke with tenderness of her mother's tender, compassionate care for her dying grandmother, a bed-ridden invalid, who lived with her mother. "I know I will care for my mother in the same way if she needs me because she has given me such a wonderful model."

The interviewee with the least apparent interest was the school psychologist. This pilot study interview of ten minutes was the shortest interview. The school psychologist appeared uncomfortable with the topic. He took no initiative for sharing information voluntarily. He waited for the posing of questions. "I do not work directly with children so I don't have any material." (He was in the Special Education Division of an Intermediate School District.) This was the one interview which contained no incidents about death, either professional or personal experiences. Since Earl Grollman had discovered the lack of awareness among educational psychologists on university faculties about death as a serious subject for study by teachers, these observations were noted with interest.¹

Differences between elementary and secondary teachers were noticeable. Elementary teachers appeared more comfortable discussing the topic of death than did secondary teachers. This was evidenced by the inclusion of more personal experiences with death. Comment was made by many of the elementary teachers that their personal experiences had made them more alert. This alertness evolved into closer and more skillful observation of the children. Elementary teachers often became more aware of their students' death experiences through interaction with staff, students



experiencing the death, or the families of the students. With the combination of awareness, skillful observation, and interaction the elementary teachers appeared more comfortable in handling the topic of death with students and significant others.

Elementary teachers reported more interpersonal, integrated examples than did secondary teachers. The school memorial service for the kindergarten children and the therapeutic curriculum for Mark during his tension-filled year were examples of such integrative, interpersonal experiences. These observations were indicative of the integration of the cognitive, affective, and psycho-motor domains for young people by elementary teachers in their guidance of the children's experiences with death. Art materials, music, play, movement, paper, pencils and books were used.

Secondary teachers gave more examples of experiences with death which developed from the content of the secondary course than did elementary teachers. The cognitive, affective, and psycho-motor areas of learning were very separate. There were no instances where a secondary teacher incorporated the death of a person or pet into the teacher-planned curriculum. Books, paper and pencils were the materials used by secondary teachers with their students.

During the interviews secondary teachers often took more time for perceiving the possible relationship between the death experience and the change in the student's behavior following the death experience. "Gosh, I wonder if the death of his parent had anything to do with his delinquent behavior?" "Do you think his poor grades are connected to this death?" "His acting-out behavior



started after his dad's death, I think. Does that have something to do with his skipping school?" As the interview progressed secondary teachers, as a group, became more aware. Elementary teachers, as a group, started the interview with more awareness. Their new awareness was in the discovery of a new content area in the growth and development of young people: youth and death. How do young people learn about the concept of death? What effect does death have on youth? Do children mourn? If so, how do they mourn?

Recommendations for Program Development

The educational and programmatic implications for the research findings are varied and far-reaching. The role of the educator, the teacher in particular, has tremendous potential within the school and within the health care system. The structure of the teacher's role produces a variety of possibilities for significant interaction and influence with children and adolescents. Youth spend many hours of each day with teachers for the major portion of each year until the age of 16-18 years. Teachers touch the lives of large numbers of youth and parents each year.

The findings from the research revealed strengths in teachers which were used in a limited manner by the majority of interviewees; these strengths were observational skill, listening, and the use of curriculum planning. The skills of observation and listening raised the teachers' awareness, and curriculum planning provided an avenue for using and increasing the awareness of their students' death experiences. The potential for the further



development of these skills, in relationship to the student's encounters with death, holds much promise for teachers and the health care system.

In the study, one skillful, supportive teacher was able to use the curriculum as a vehicle for encouraging children to deal with death in all the domains of learning - cognitive, affective and psycho-motor. The data revealed the quality of the interaction and planning between students, groups of students and teachers differed widely and affected the manner in which the death was handled, the behavior of the student and performance of the student. There was a definite need revealed by the data for a supportive, skillful, and trusted adult who could guide students in their experiences with death.

The results of the teachers' skills revealed weaknesses as well as strengths; their skills developed awareness, but the majority of teachers lacked confidence in guiding their students' exploration of their encounters with death. Through observation many behavioral changes by students, particularly in the areas of feelings and school performance were noted but teachers appeared uncertain about their role and their skills in dealing with the topic of death and the feelings and thoughts of their students. The students initiated conversation about their death experiences and teachers listened, but they did not react deeply to the students. The general response was avoidance of close interaction and close encounters with the students' death experiences. Curriculum planning was used more for dealing with the feelings and thoughts of those

outside the classroom rather than with the feelings present within the classroom. It was the rare teacher who provided outlets for the youth's feelings in a pre-planned manner, gave permission for the sharing of feelings, and gave choices to the student about his academic workload in respect of his/her emotional needs.

There was a definite need revealed by the data for a supportive, skillful, and trusted adult who could guide students in their experiences with death. The possibilities for development of the needed skills are present in teachers and the opportunities for growth are present within the school community. How can the school community foster the teacher who chooses the role of guiding youth in the acceptance of death in their lives?

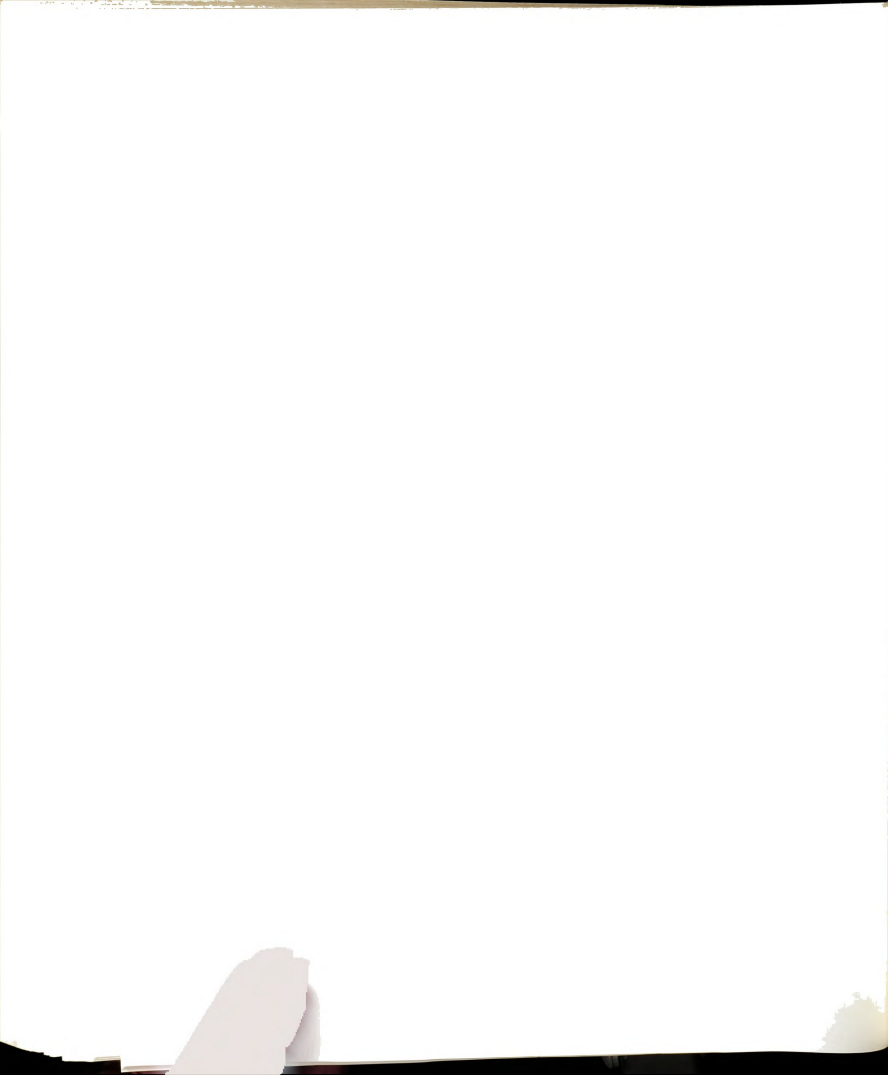
Much of the data, and implications from the data, suggested a review and expansion of the health care system for educators, particularly the mental health support system. Examination of the data revealed that teachers received very little help from supportive staff in dealing with their students' confusion, strong feelings, and behavioral changes caused by death. The lack of support in conjunction with the responsibilities and expectations placed on teachers by administration, parents and community places the teachers' responses to their students' encounters with death in a different context. The supportive staff appeared unaware of the effects of death on youth; the teacher was isolated and dependent on her/his own emotional strength and resources for guiding students in exploration of their confusions and feelings.



Within the school community an aware supportive staff would be of tremendous value to the teacher who was interested in guiding youth with exploration of death. The acceptance of the teacher's exploration of her/his feelings and confusions will build the confidence needed for supporting students in the same exploration. The supportive staff can seek resources in the larger community for strengthening the support base of the school community. Community mental health agencies can provide support for school families. Universities, State Departments and agencies, community mental health agencies, colleagues and parents can provide in-service education for strengthening communication skills, the emotional support base, and knowledge about the process of conceptualizing death and mourning death.

Communication skills are basic to a wholistic health care system. The teacher becomes aware of students' needs through observing non-verbal communication, listening and interacting sensitively; colleagues and supportive staff become aware of the teacher's needs through the same process. In turn the staff uses the process with parents. What skill could be more fundamental for in-service education for the school community of educators, students and parents? If teachers guide students in clarifying their feelings and thoughts about death, communication skills are essential to the process.

For the guidance process the teacher must have knowledge upon which she/he can draw for observation, interaction and curriculum planning. Developmental information is needed by the school



community; the teacher needs this information for guiding students through the conceptualization of death and through the mourning process. Confusions and misunderstandings can be clarified and strong feelings which accompany mourning can be processed.

Knowledge, communication skills, and emotional support will assist the teacher in self-exploration also. The same elements will strengthen observation, interaction and curriculum planning in her/his professional growth.

Interdependence is a vital ingredient in a healthy support system. If the concept of interdependence is not operating in the school community, students will find it most difficult for receiving the guidance needed for learning about death and accepting death as part of life. Students will learn about death; will they learn denial, avoidance, or acceptance through dealing directly with their fears, confusions and feelings with a supportive, skillful, trusted adult? The answer lies with the adults in the school community and community-at-large.

The teachers' difficulties and uneasiness in dealing with death suggest an examination of the pre-service and graduate programs for educators and other professionals caring for youth. A new framework might be needed for developing a professional who is confident and knowledgeable in guiding students through their death experiences. Not only individual courses need scrutiny, but the teacher development program bears examination. For instance, what opportunities are available for teachers in processing thoughts and feelings about death? For developing communication skills with



youth, other educators and interdisciplinary professionals? For interdisciplinary exploration of a wholistic view of self or child or adolescent? For reflection on the value of a preventive, wholistic health care system? The issue of death is a representation of all mental health issues. How does a teacher plan a graduate program in preventive mental health or wholistic health care?

Recommendations for Research

Many avenues for further research evolved from this study. The present research generates a need for replication: will the results obtained here be similar to those obtained in a different setting? Replication of the study with a more narrow population of school personnel would have informative results. The population could be limited to the following groups: pre-school teachers, elementary teachers, secondary teachers, administrators, support staff, or mental health supportive staff. Since the adult in the school community is the model for students in processing their death experiences, the information provided about awareness, and the uses of this awareness, by these professionals would prove most valuable.

The many qualitative levels of awareness, and qualitative uses of awareness provide interesting foci for research. The populations for studying the qualitative levels of awareness are teachers, students, administrators, supportive staff and mental health supportive staff. The areas of foci for researching the levels



in usage of awareness are: teachers interactions, students interactions, curriculum planning and consultation.

Teacher-identified behavioral changes by students after experiencing a death raises an interesting research direction; the effect of a death experience on a child/adolescent/teacher. What effect, if any, does a death experience have on a child's/adolescent's behavior? Further, does a death experience affect a student's academic performance? Should a teacher react differently with a student who has experienced a death? Does a death experience affect the child's/adolescent's family life? What effect does a death experience have on a teacher's performance and interaction with students and the school community? Answers to these questions have great impact on the mental health of a school community.

From the data in this study one can conclude that classroom teachers are functioning within the health care system without the needed knowledge, skills and emotional support for the healthy processing of death experiences with youth or self. A question with possible research ramification is: Are teachers, supportive staff and the interdisciplinary group of community professionals working with youth aware of teachers' influence, and their isolation, within the health care system?

Acceptance of educators, particularly classroom teachers, into the health care system would validate the teacher's role as a significant, supportive adult in the lives of children and adolescents as they experience death. This validation is needed by teachers within the school community itself and within the



interdisciplinary group of professionals who work with youth. The teacher, who responds sensitively to youth during the processing of death experiences, needs intellectual and emotional interchange with the interdisciplinary community of professionals who care for youth within the school and within the larger community.



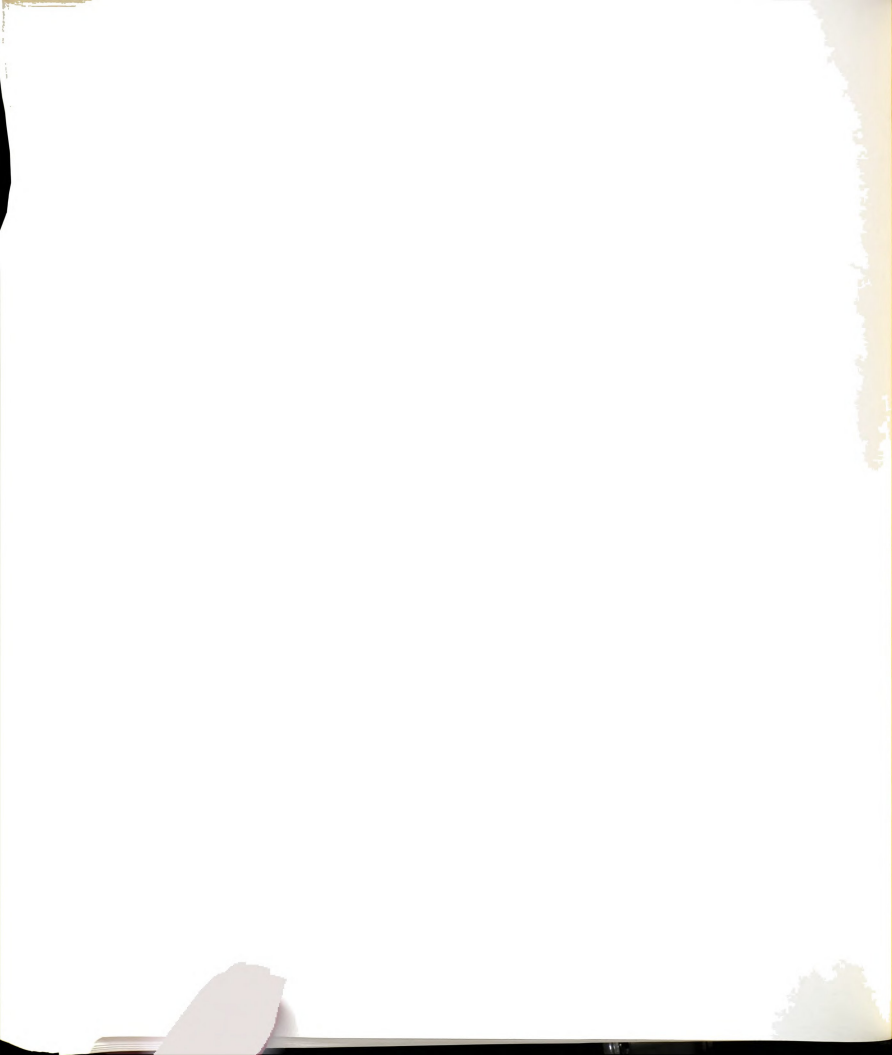
When I Die

I'd like flowers
and sunshine.
Grass growing,
leaves blowing,
dogs barking.
Nothing stopping,
everything the same,
When I die.

Jose L.
Age 12



FOOTNOTES



CHAPTER ONE

¹Elisabeth Kubler-Ross, On Death and Dying (London: Macmillan, 1969), p. 7; Jeanne Quint, The Nurse and the Dying Patient (New York: Macmillan, 1967); Sarah Sheets Cook, Children and Dying (New York: Health Sciences Publishing, 1973), p. 2; Robert Kastenbaum and Ruth Aisenberg, The Psychology of Death (New York: Spring Publishing Co., 1972), p. 1; Richard Kalish, "Death and Bereavement: A Bibliography," Journal of Human Relations, 1965, 13, pp. 118-141.

²Richard Lewis, comp., Miracles: Poems of the English-Speaking World (Simon and Schuster, N.Y., 1966).

³Robert Kastenbaum and Ruth Aisenberg, The Psychology of Death (New York: Spring Publishing Co., 1972), p. 1.

⁴Earl Grollman, Explaining Death to Children (Boston: Beacon Press, 1967), p. 142.



CHAPTER TWO

¹Earl Grollman, Explaining Death to Children (Boston: Beacon Press, 1967).

²Robert Kastenbaum and Ruth Aisenberg, The Psychology of Death (New York: Spring Publishing Co., 1972).

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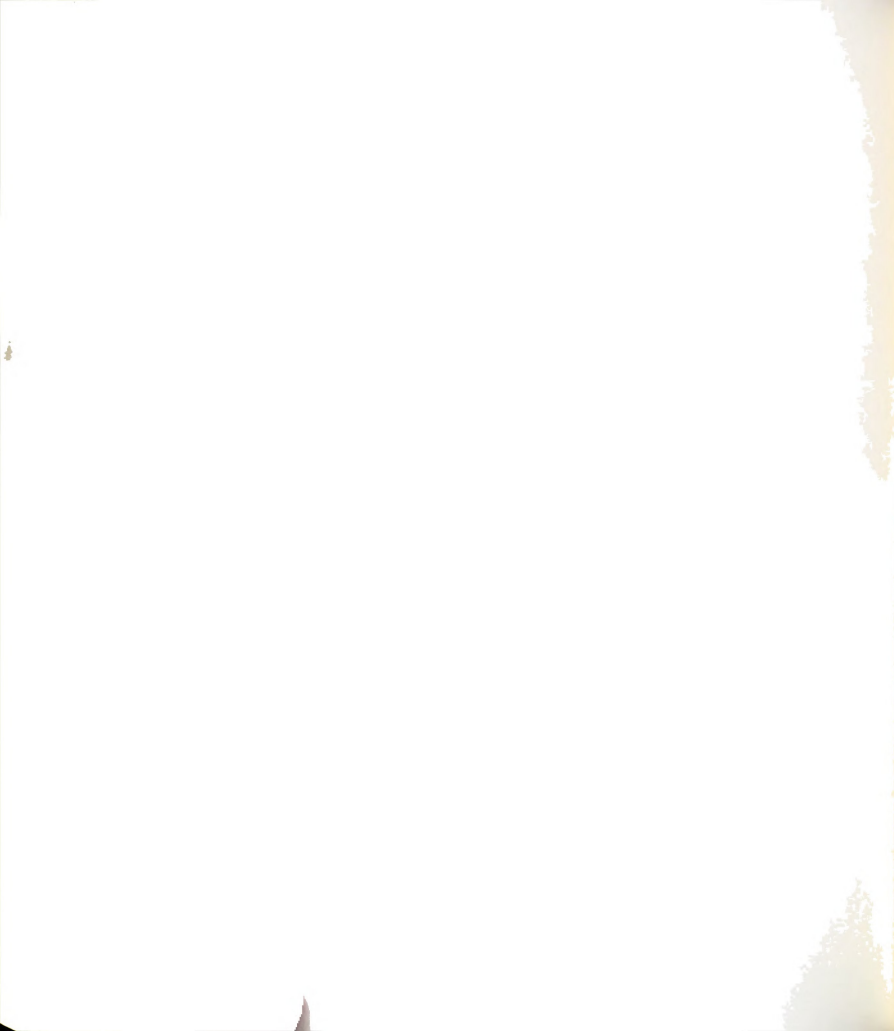
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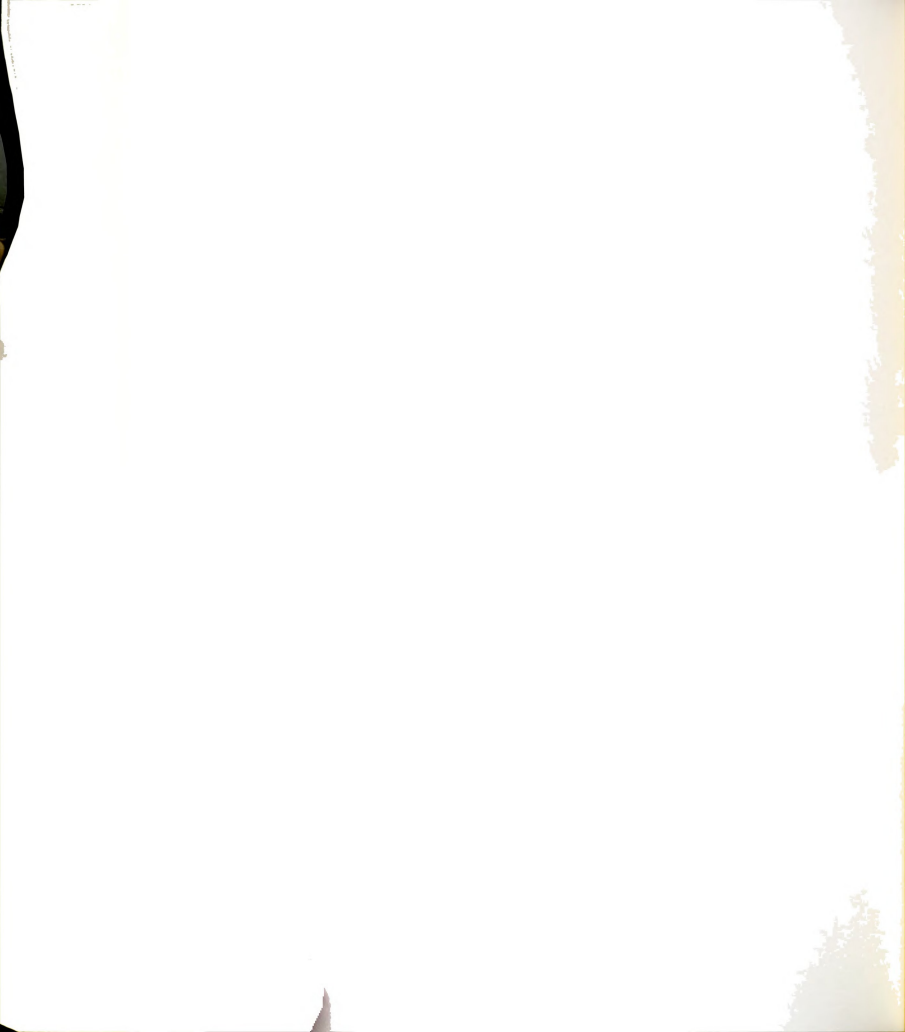
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CHAPTER FIVE

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APPENDICES



APPENDIX A

APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW GUIDE

Dying child in school				
Dying child in class				
Death of parent of child in school				
Death of parent of child in class				
Death of sibling of child in school				
Death of sibling of child in class				
Death of child in school				
Death of child in class				
Death of adult on school staff				
Death of close relative or friend of family				
Death of a neighbor				
Death of a stranger				
Death of a pet				
Death of a plant				
During the past school year in your professional role with children or adolescents:	--has a child experienced	--has a child initiated discussion on this experience	--with whom did the child initiate this discussion: 1. with you 2. with other adults 3. with other children a. small group b. whole group c. individual child	--if initiated by child, how did you deal with it? 1. avoid topic (distraction, silence) 2. close topic (referral, verbally) 3. respond (verbally, nonverbally) 4. allow group to respond



APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW GUIDE

Dying child in school					
Dying child in class					
Death of parent of child in school					
Death of parent of child in class					
Death of sibling of child in school					
Death of sibling of child in class					
Death of child in school					
Death of child in class					
Death of adult on school staff					
Death of close relative or friend of family					
Death of a neighbor					
Death of a stranger					
Death of a pet					
Death of a plant					
During the past school year in your professional role with children or adolescents:					
--did you initiate discussion on experience with the					
--if you invited discussion on this topic, what framework did you use? 1. teacher to child 2. small group 3. whole group					
--did you discuss the child's experience with other school personnel? (janitor, secretary, nurse, etc.)					
--did you discuss this child's experience with the parents?					
--did you initiate this topic at a staff meeting? 1. was the topic avoided? 2. closed? 3. continued?					



APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW GUIDE

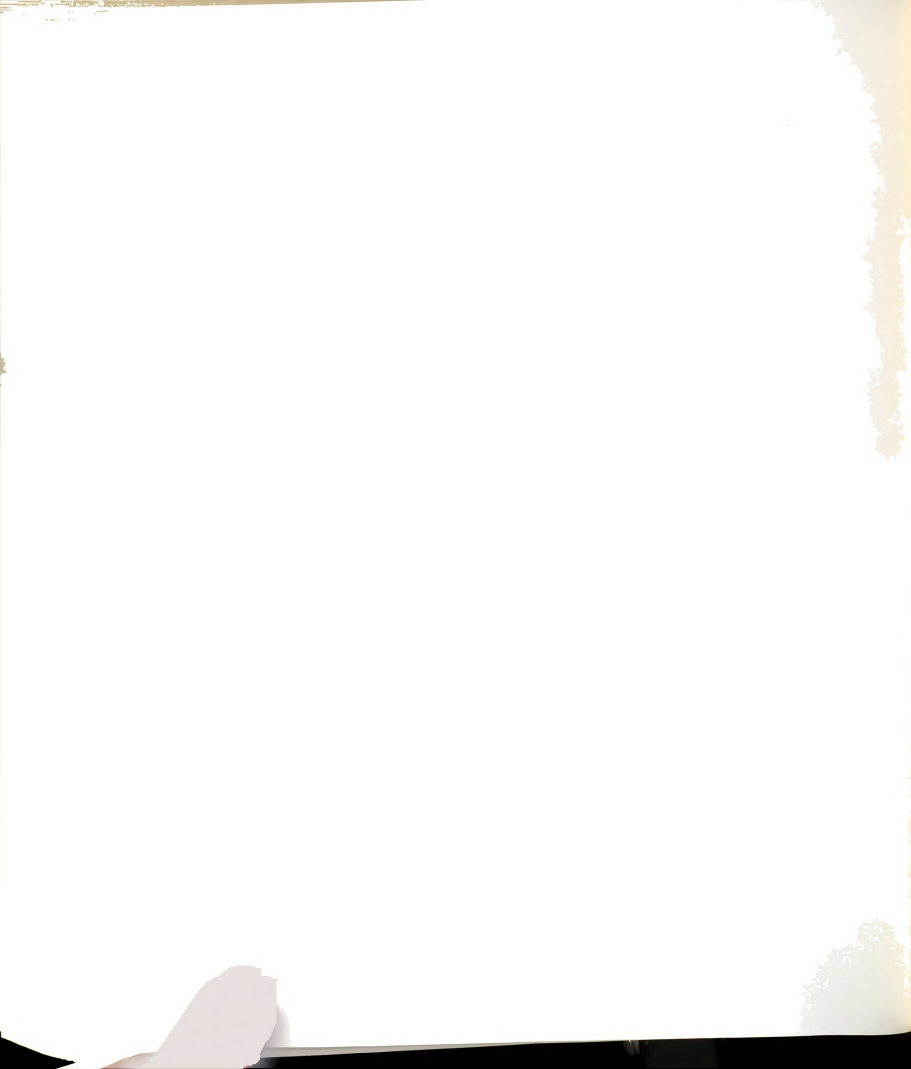
STUDENTS' RESPONSES TO THE DEATH EXPERIENCE

Emotional Responses:

anger
crying
sadness
hostility
withdrawal
loneliness
joy
indifference

Action Responses:

send notes, cards, pictures
send flowers
send food
visit the family
visit the funeral parlor
attend the funeral
ask for help
talk with a resource person
build a support system



APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW GUIDE

CURRICULUM RESPONSES

Fine arts

movement

drama

art

music

creative writing

literature

Language Arts/English

Social Studies/Humanities

Science

Physical Education/Extracurricular Sports

Extra-curricular Activities

Vocational Education

Math



APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW GUIDE

1. What consultation help did you request so you could be more effective in helping the student (or students) integrate the death experience?
2. What consultation help were you offered by the consultants so you could be more effective in helping the student (or students) integrate the death experience?
3. What consultation help have you given to help other adults in the school community integrate their death experiences?



APPENDIX B



APPENDIX B

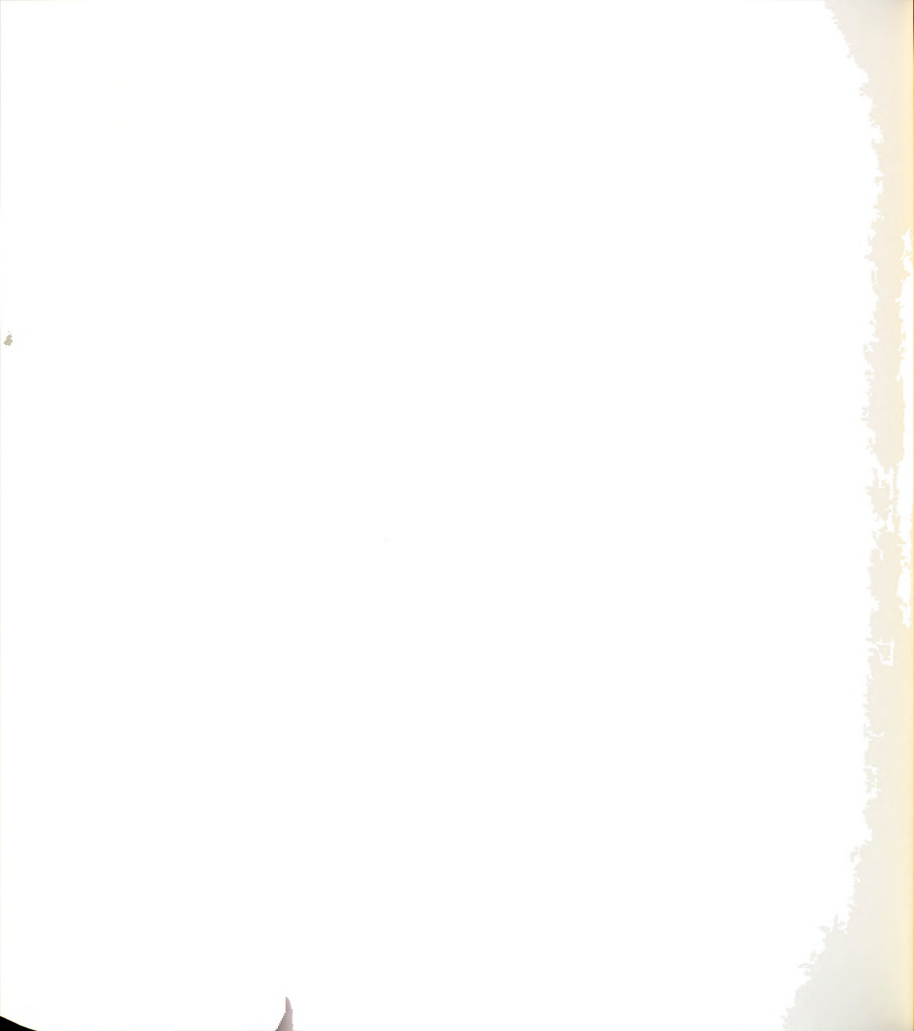
#13 TEACHER'S OBSERVATIONS OF RICK

Rick was ten years old and in the fourth grade. In September Rick was shy and withdrawn. The goal set for him during the fall was to "bring Rick out of his shell." Great improvement was made during the first month of school.

During November Rick's behavior changed; he withdrew again. There was no apparent reason. One writing assignment was remembered. The children were told, "Pretend you are a turkey. How would you feel about Thanksgiving? Write about it." Rick was adamant in his refusal to do the assignment. Finally, he was told, "Write about any topic you would like." However, he did not finish the assignment. In a few days the discovery was made about the death of Rick's dog. His mother reported, "Rick has been very upset about his dog."

During the Thanksgiving vacation an aunt who lived with Rick's family died. Now Rick's behavior changed even more. He became very withdrawn. "I was afraid to open up a discussion about death. He was so depressed." When Rick's mother was called, she said, "Oh, I hoped it wouldn't affect his school work. He is having trouble at home, too."

Since Rick was a very conscientious child, he became tense over his schoolwork. He became depressed when he found his work



unfinished. When he did not understand his work immediately, he became very "blue." Often he daydreamed. Since he appeared to need time for daydreaming, he was allowed some time without accountability.

The class hamster died in December. Rick was sad about this event. One day Rick was deprived of recess because his work was not finished. A talk was needed.

"You're having a hard time, aren't you, Rick?" And I put my arm around him. Rick broke into sobbing and he sobbed for a long time. I said, "You have enough to think about. Don't worry about your work. If you have a question, ask me. You want to be smart, don't you? You are smart. Remember the good work you did in math and spelling last week?"

Rick's cat died in January. Now Rick was sick for three weeks. Rick came back to school in the first part of February, but he was "very low." Then, he was sick for two weeks again. The social worker visited Rick at home. On one of the social worker's visits Rick asked, "I wonder if I'll die?"

According to the social worker, Rick's father put too much pressure on him. Rick's uncle had a Ph.D. and he taught in a university. Although Rick's dad was a very successful businessman, he regretted the lack of a degree. Now he was "making sure Rick did not make the same mistake."

A benefit basketball game was held as a fund-raiser for a sixth grader who had Hodgkins' disease. The funds were used for the hospital bills. Rick's class discussed this project and its ramifications after the handbill was delivered. The children asked



questions about the disease. "Is it fatal?" A long discussion period developed from the questions. Although the children learned the disease was fatal in time, the hope of medication and arrest was discussed too.

Rick loved competing and playing baseball at recess. He returned from the playground in a very dirty state. The dirt was unbelievable and he was sent to the bathroom often for washing. It was as if Rick came alive on the ballfield.

The neighbor teacher had had many of the children in the class for third grade the previous year. Rick was one of her former students. One day she was teaching and the next day she was dead. Comprehension of this event was difficult for me, the staff and the class. For Rick it was one more death blow.

Rick did not finish one written story during the entire year. His achievement scores dropped during the school year; probably this was because of the many deaths. Rick was less depressed by the end of the year.

As the end of the year approached, Rick was in touch with his work, his friends, his teacher and himself. Bad news came through the secretary. Rick's mother had terminal cancer. Now Rick was given more "leeway." It was suggested at the parent-teacher conference that Rick's mother seek help for Rick from his minister. If his tension could be relieved, his spirits might rise.

"I was very concerned about Rick's ability to assimilate the news of his mother's approaching death." Since he was going to middle school, some continuity for Rick and the next teacher seemed



desirable. A long commentary was written and put in his folder. (A suggestion was made to #13 Teacher about personal follow-up with the middle school teacher. She was very interested in this idea.)

"One thing Rick has going for him is interested parents. His father is very interested. Thank heavens!" These were the parting words in the interview.



APPENDIX C



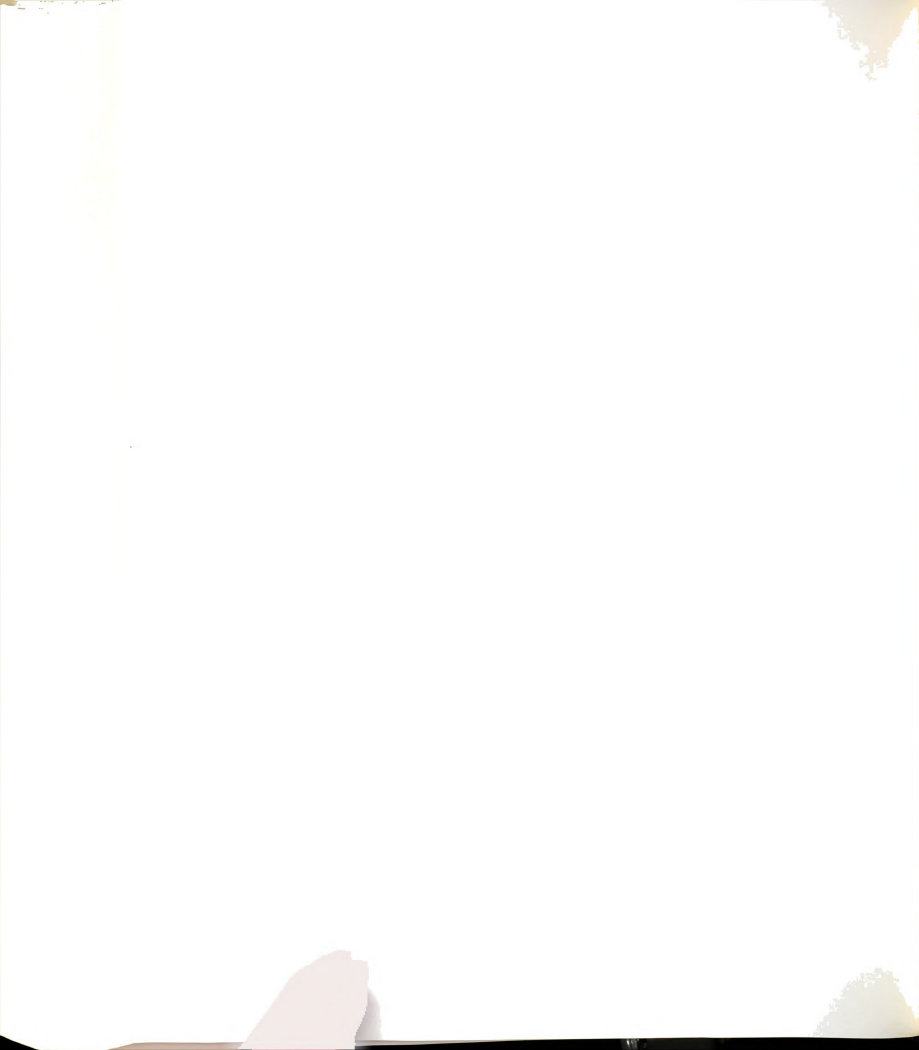
APPENDIX C

#3 TEACHER'S OBSERVATIONS ON MARK

Mark was nine years old and in the third grade. During September Mark was rebellious and violent. Between the violent outbursts he acted numb. He would do no work. There was no participation by him in any activity. Journal entries were written each day but Mark never wrote a line. He retreated from the group by disappearing under his desk; then, he would kick his desk and "send it flying." He threw chalk across the room; sometimes erasers and books joined the missile barrage. If it was close at hand, Mark threw it. "It was as though Mark was saying, 'Pay attention to me.'"

Because Mark could not be reached by talking with him or through any assignments, a phone call to his parents seemed appropriate and necessary. One week after school opened, the call was made. Hopefully Mark's parents might have a reason for his unusual behavior. However, his mother had no new information. "Nothing unusual was happening at home." The violent behavior continued in the school.

Toward the end of September, Mark's parents were called again. The situation was desperate. This call revealed very important information. Mark had been in the hospital for a hernia operation in August. While in the hospital, Mark had been in a ward



with seriously ill people. Mark's mother told about her husband's terminal illness of cancer. She was caring for him at home since the hospital was not in their financial reach. The family had no major medical insurance. Mark's father had been an active, vigorous man, but now was "a shell of his former self." He was in great pain.

Mark's behavior was destructive to himself, destructive to others and destructive to the learning atmosphere in the classroom. The children avoided him now because they had been hurt by him. They were afraid of Mark. He did hit without discrimination and for no apparent reason.

Help was requested from the principal. The principal's response to the request was "discipline should be handled in the room." In desperation help was requested again two weeks later. "Every time a tough decision comes up you can't pass the buck" was the principal's comment. Help was never requested again.

Mark was failing academically and his behavior indicated emotional anguish. With the new information from his mother Mark was told, "Don't worry about your school work. You have enough to worry about right now. Do the work if you feel like doing it. If you don't, leave it."

A letter was written to the social worker for the Intermediate School District requesting a visitation and observation of Mark. Meanwhile, "a teacher in another building and a non-school friend helped me by listening."



The speech therapist in the same building taught Mark's brother, Verne. He was violent in speech class. In desperation the speech therapist compared notes with me. At my invitation she came into my classroom for observation of Mark. She wanted ideas for working with Verne. She could not reach Verne either.

Verne was in the classroom next door to Mark and Teacher #3. He spent a great amount of time in the hall so the conflict between Verne and his teacher was obvious. Teacher #3 approached Verne's teacher but she was not open for discussion about the children's behavior and their situation. "In fact, she was punitive in her attitude toward Verne." These teachers never communicated about the boys during the school year.

In the middle of October, Mark communicated with his teacher for the first time when he drew a picture of a big black rock on top of a very small stick figure. The violence continued. One day he tore a teacher's manual in half.

The only reasonable thought was planning for the violence. The class was asked for the sharing of ideas revolving around aggressive toys. A Bozo clown was used for punching, pounding and pushing. A wastketbasket and beanbags were introduced as a substitute for the throwing of chalk, erasers and pencils. When hammer, nails, saws and wood were set up as an activity, Mark would pound nails for long periods of time. Sometimes he pounded dozens of nails into the wood so the surface showed all metal and no wood. Both sides of the wood were used if it was thick enough. The class and Mark destroyed three Bozos that school year.



Soon after the drawing of the rock picture, Mark stated aloud for the first time, "There is a man dying in my house." Mark appeared in a vacuum for long stretches of time; then, he would explode. These explosive times would be the "throwing periods." One day he threw himself on the floor and kicked and shouted. "I hate school. I hate you, I hate trees. I hate walls. I hate everything."

Mark would lie under the table in the room with hands folded. A classmate might ask, "What are you doing?" Mark would reply, "Playing dead." Another day he wrote in his journal, "I wish the world would die."

In the middle of November, Mark identified the dying man as his father. "You know my father is going to die," he said.

Mark's family was falling apart. His teenage brothers were involved in drugs. Mark and his brother, Verne, had been caught setting fires. Mark's mother wanted help but she did not know where to get it. Often she came to school and talked about her loss of control in the family. She was sinking beneath the weight of her responsibility. "I felt sorry for her and talked with her when I could. I investigated mental health agencies for her and suggested one for family counseling."

Since tension was high in the room often, music was used for relaxation purposes. Mark was very sensitive to music; he interpreted well verbally but never moved any part of his body with the rhythm. "It sounds like someone is being punished. Maybe he



is dying." When the children were invited to move with the music, Mark did not participate. The only noticeable movement was a blinking of his eyes; sometimes he blinked in rhythm.

During the fall the children held a few funerals at recess time, but Mark did not participate. The children sang songs, read eulogies, and chanted. They buried dead mice, birds, ants, and bees. Their funeral planning was extensive. Stones were piled on the graves as tombstones. Milk cartons were used for coffins. "It almost became humorous because they buried everything."

In November, Mark's brother, Verne, still was sitting in the hall much of the day. During one week he broke the glass in the classroom door four different times after slamming it on the way to the hall. The custodian replaced it each time. Suddenly Verne spent time in the principal's office rather than the hall. While in the office he sat and did nothing. Verne continued his violent behavior. He continued sitting in the office.

Many teachers in the lounge talked about Mark and Verne in a very punitive manner. Their family was criticized constantly. No one offered sympathy or help. "One day I could listen no longer. I shouted, 'I think you are all inhumane. I don't see how you can be so inhuman.' Then, I stormed through the door and slammed it on the way out--as hard as I could. I didn't communicate with anyone after that except for the speech therapist."

In December, the Intermediate School District social worker arrived. It was her first year as a social worker so she did not

have much help to offer. Her parting words were "I'm very interested in this, so let me know if you find out anything."

Before his father's death in December, Mark drew a coffin with a man in it. "This man is dying at my house," he said. (He used this sentence often.) "He doesn't look like anyone I know," Mark continued.

Mark's father died toward the end of December. Due to the experiences the children had been allowed to live together, every child participated in the funeral in some way. They attended the funeral or visited the family or visited the funeral parlor.

After his father's death, Mark drew a skeleton figure in a coffin. He stated, "My dad looked better dead than alive." Later in January Mark drew a boy sitting on a brown rock. By the rock was a bud or little piece of grass. When I asked for the drawing, Mark insisted, "I can draw a better one for you." His new picture was dominated by a hill with three or four flowers in a bouquet near a blanket on which sat a boy. Mark said, "My family is having a picnic." Another child in the class responded, "It looks like you are having a picnic in the cemetery." Mark retorted, "Where else could I have a picnic with my Dad?"

Another day Verne opened the double doors to both entrances of the library which was in the center of the school. Then, he went out of the building, mounted bicycles with Mark, and they rode through the building, library and out the front door. The librarian trailed after him yelling, "You can't do that in here."



During February, Mark exploded at recess. "My father is dead. He's dead, he's dead, he's dead!" he screamed. Before his father's death and after his father's death, Mark needed much time alone. He was quieter after the death, but he would go under the table still. He would sit quietly for long periods. One unusual statement was "He didn't perspire (expire?). He's dead--died--no more life."

Mark's mother continued a relationship with me throughout the year. She always talked about her family's troubles and there were lots of troubles. Finally one of the teenage sons scheduled an appointment with a county mental health agency.

Mark wrote some poetry. A haiku poem mentioned "baby bouncing on father's knee."

As Mark became more well adjusted in living with his classmates, the children shared more about their own experiences with death. Sometimes the sharing was sad. "My puppy chewed my father's slippers and he took my puppy out and shot him." "My cat had kittens but my father put them in a bag and they aren't kittens anymore." Other times it was more joyous. "My grandma died but I remember the fun we had baking cookies."

In the spring a self-awareness unit was planned. It was a suggested unit for third grade, but I chose it because of Mark's unique experiences. The involvement of the other children in his experience was an added reason. The group drew pictures of their families for the unit. Mark said as he showed his picture to the



group, "You all know my dad died but this is my mother, brother Sid, Art and brother Verne."

One particular day in April, Mark burst out of the door at recess time. He ran to a bush and shouted, "Here are two buds." Then he ran to a tree and hugged it. "Oh, here are two more." He continued running from tree to tree enthusiastically greeting spring. This was the day Mark accepted his father's death and life for himself again, in my opinion.

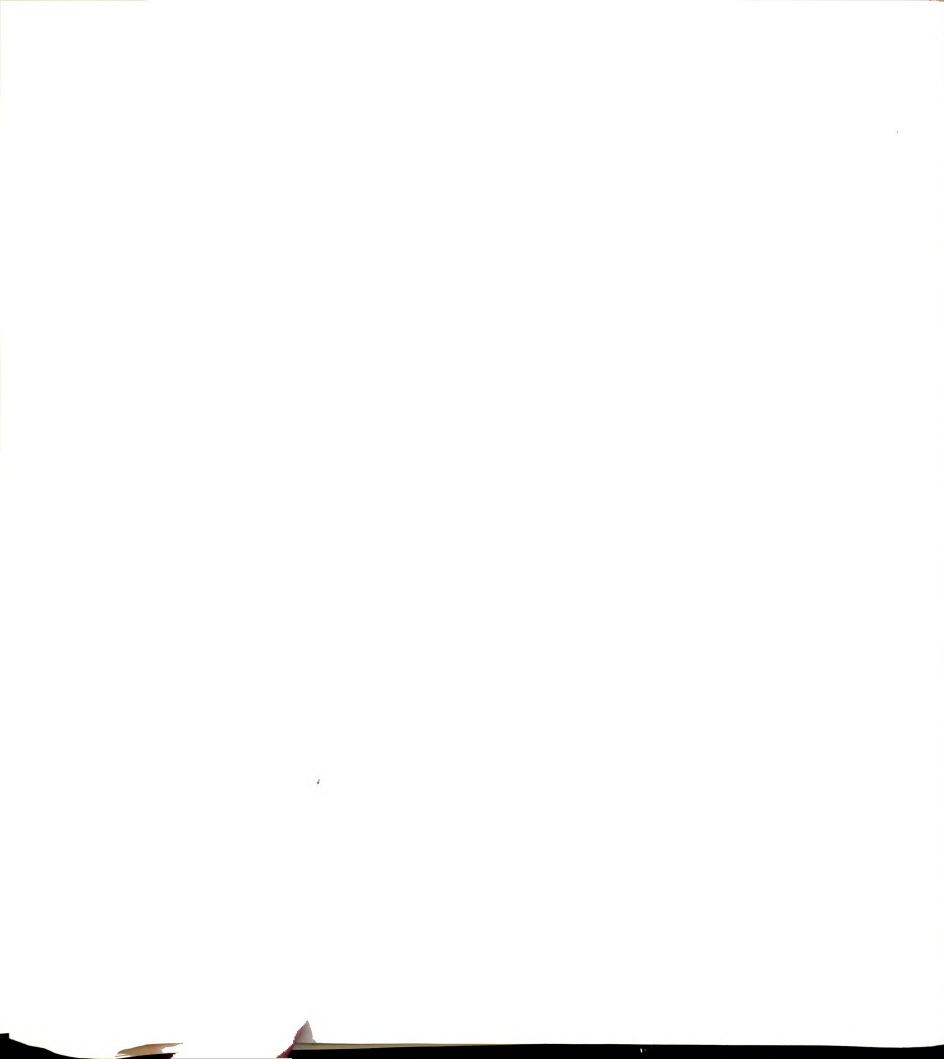
Until the end of the year Mark required periods of aloneness. He was very sensitive to the outdoors. Often during recess he would lie on the grass and look at the sky the entire recess time.

In May, it was Mark's turn for decorating the class bulletin board. After some class discussion he chose the theme of Smile. He used paper cuts and much fantasy. When he was asked if he needed helpers, he replied, "Three or four kids want to help me." They did help him and the bulletin board turned out well.

Later in May he said, "I have this problem. Can I talk with you?" He gave me a picture of a frog with a big grin. "I guess teachers aren't so bad."

At the end of the school year Mark was on grade level. His brother was not. His brother was not in a healthy mental state, either. Verne's teacher said, "You got the more mature one. I got the violent one."

Mark's mother commented on the marked differences between the growth of the boys during the year. She also thought Mark had helped the family grow.





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