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Building Resiliency: Supporting Elementary School Students Through Parental Bereavement

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BUILDING RESILIENCY:
SUPPORTING ELEMENTARY SCHOOL STUDENTS THROUGH PARENTAL BEREAVEMENT

by

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DEDICATION

To my father, Captain Richard A. Kerr, USMC and my mother, Rita Gill Kerr, who both live in my heart and mind.

ABSTRACT

This study employed qualitative methods to learn what understandings, practices, and interventions were used by educators from one elementary school to support bereaved children in the classroom and as members of a school community. Educators reported uncertainty about how children grieve, how to talk with children about a deceased parent, how to talk with the bereaved child's peers about parental death, and how to balance the bereaved child's emotional and academic needs. Educators were also uncertain about how to recognize and intervene when a parental death was remote in time and the child's grief response was attenuated (e.g., anxiety, disengagement, diminished self-efficacy). Even though instructional decisions were not grounded in a firm understanding of childhood bereavement or resiliency research, interventions created a culture of caring, communicated high expectations, encouraged engagement, and provided the bereaved child meaningful and successful opportunities to participate in the school community.

These educators drew upon their own grief journeys, their experiences as parents, and their understandings of the grief experiences of others when making decisions about how to support a bereaved child. Educators reported that they observed grieving children, made decisions intended to minimize grief responses and encourage students to re-engage in learning. Educators vigilantly observed bereaved students, looking for emotional struggle and healing. When distress was observed, educators adjusted the learning environment to provide "just enough" support to allow the student to use his or her own resources to re-engage in learning. When the child began to successfully navigate through instructional

tasks independently, teachers seamlessly withdrew from the interaction, but remained vigilant and ready to intervene again. These teaching moves occurred within a finely tuned synchronicity between teacher and student.

Both school principals led educators to develop a shared vision that it was both the school's and each educator's personal responsibility to actively respond to the emotional needs of its students. Additionally, through the implementation of a school-wide positive behavior intervention program, educators encouraged students to value caring behavior and discourage uncaring behavior. Educators also explicitly taught social skills and coping strategies, developing a strong school-wide culture of caring among students, families, and staff.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Because I was a bereaved child, this study is deeply personal. My father was killed in Vietnam in 1968 when I was 12 years old. Although I have very few memories of my father, I still feel intense grief about his death. My reaction to the death of my mother was far different. My mother died when I was an adult. She died of kidney failure and her death was expected. I can easily talk about my mother, but 40 years after the death of my father, I still experience unpredictable and intense emotions when I think or talk about my father.

Bereaved children struggle to make sense of the loss and despair they feel when they think about their deceased parent (Schonfeld & Quackenbush, 2010). Even into adulthood, many bereaved children continue to feel an overwhelming longing to reconnect with this parent. These intense emotions are unexpectedly triggered by events and interactions that occur within the ordinary day, such as seeing a loving moment between a child and his or her parent. The intensity of these emotional surges lessen as the bereaved child learns to shift the psychological bond with their deceased parent from one grounded in actual interactions with the parent to imagined interactions that live within the child's heart and mind. Although the child learns to better manage these intense emotional surges and these emotional surges become less frequent; they still occur unpredictably, disrupting the child's day sometimes momentarily, at other times for

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longer periods. It is this unpredictability that makes it difficult for these children to regulate their emotions and impedes their developing sense of competence when dealing with their everyday world (Webb, 2010).

One of the most difficult rites of passage for bereaved children is learning how to talk about their family and especially how to tell others that their mother or father has died or been killed (Schonfeld & Quackenbush, 2010). To avoid painful emotions, many grieving children become quite skilled at "not talking about their family." Inquiries about their deceased parent may be unwelcomed, especially if the child feels obligated to respond. Inquiries may also elicit anger, avoidance, or apparent disinterest. Some bereaved children also worry that talking about their deceased parent will cause their conversational partner to feel uncomfortable. So, in addition to trying to learn to regulate their own intense emotions, these children then begin to "take care" of the emotional needs of their conversational partners (Schonfeld & Quackenbush, 2010). Often out of an anxious attempt to manage the intensity of their emotions, many bereaved children quickly learn to use a very matter-of-fact tone to simply get through the conversational exchange without calling undue attention to themselves or making others feel uncomfortable. These children become skillful at "informing others about the death of their mother or father and then quickly shifting the topic of conversation" to an emotionally neutral topic. Out of psychological necessity, the skill of "not speaking about family" is learned very early in the grieving process. It is a rite of passage.

Unfortunately, when a child is able talk about his or her deceased parent without apparent emotion and grief reactions become attenuated, many adults believe that the child is coping successfully and is not in need of support (Schonfeld & Quackenbush,

2010). This is not the case. The child has merely moved from an acute phase of grief where he or she is unable to control his or her intense emotions to a new phase in which the child is learning strategies to get through difficult conversations and situations. These children learn to hurry these difficult interactions along and let their intense emotions pass by. The bereaved child is still very much in need of caring adults to help him or her fully re-engage in the world of learning and rebuild his or her sense of control over the events in his or her life.

Statement of the Problem

Most bereaved children are remarkably resilient in coping with the death of a parent or primary caregiver (Ravels, Siegel, & Karus, 1999). Even though losing a parent is one of the most heart-wrenching events that a child can experience, multiple studies have found that adolescent grief can be transformative—building a child's independence, self-reliance, self-efficacy, wisdom, compassion, and tolerance (Calhoun & Tedeschi, 1990, Oltjenbruns, 1991; Simon & Dratell, 1998). Bereaved children feel a full range of emotions, including joy. They typically move back and forth through a variety of emotional states. For example, Eppler (2008) interviewed 12 bereaved students, ages nine through 12, who had lost a parent within 3 years of her interviews. Eppler found that although these children, continued to feel sad, they also experienced feeling happy, nice, helpful, and fun. Eppler also found that these children thought of themselves as being able to both survive and thrive during their grief. They wanted others to see them as resilient, strong, and normal.

Bereavement and resiliency practitioners believe that schools can provide bereaved children a robust, caring community in which they learn academically, build life

skills, and grow in confidence that they can handle difficult emotional challenges (Benard, 2004). However, there is little purposeful support provided by schools. Instead, bereaved children are typically supported when a caring adult notices the bereaved child struggling and attempts, in the moment, to intervene to make this child's life easier. Educators' support for bereavement is not grounded in an understanding of the bereavement research. Further, there is a lack of comprehensive and cohesive school responses to ensure that each bereaved child receives appropriate interventions (Haggard, 2005; Lawhorn, 2004; Naierman, 1997). This problem is nation-wide. The American Federation of Teachers (AFT) along with the New York Life Foundation (2012) commissioned an online survey conducted by Hart Research Associates of 1253 classroom teachers, teaching assistances, guidance counselors, school psychologists, and support staff, all of whom were AFT members. The AFT and the New York Life Foundation published the results of these interviews through a press release and a summary of findings. Although the press release and the summary of findings provided little detailed information about the interview methodology employed, the findings were noteworthy. Ninety-three percent of the teachers reported that they had never received specific training on child bereavement. Only 3% of the teachers reported that they had received school-based or district-based training in childhood bereavement. Both the AFT and New York Life Foundation used these survey results to argue that educational preparation programs as well as schools and districts need to provide accurate information to teachers, so bereaved children can receive appropriate school support. Both the AFT and the New York Life Foundation joined forces to maintain a website which provides resources on childhood grief for families, educators, and other

professionals. To provide effective intervention within schools, educators must be knowledgeable about childhood grief, be open about the grief process, and purposefully incorporate appropriate support within instruction and the daily activities of the classroom and school communities (Charkow, 1998; McGlauflin, 1998).

Research Purpose

The purpose of this study was to gain insight into the kinds of understandings educators use when supporting bereaved children and how these understandings impact their day-to-day teaching within the classroom and school community. To accomplish this purpose, this study examined the understandings and practices used by fifteen elementary educators as they supported seven bereaved children within the regular educational curriculum and as members of the school community over two academic years.

Type of Study and Research Questions

This study employed qualitative methodologies to interview two principals, twelve classroom teachers, and one guidance counselor from one elementary school over two academic years. The questions that guided this study were:

- What key understandings, practices, and interventions were used by elementary educators, including administrators, teachers, and a guidance counselor to support bereaved children in the typical classroom setting, the general education curriculum, and as members of a school community?
- How did their day-to-day teaching, interactions and school culture reflect sensitivity to issues relating to childhood bereavement?

Significance of Study

One out of every 20 children experiences the death of a parent or stepparent during childhood (Hayes, 1984; U.S. Bureau of Census, as cited in Schroeder & Gordon, 1991). *However, educators have very little understanding of basic research in childhood bereavement or resiliency* (American Federation of Teachers & New York Life Foundation, 2012). Instead well-meaning educators respond as well as they can, in the moment, to help the bereaved children they teach. Although their interventions may include many effective resiliency-building practices, these instructional practices are not grounded in a firm understanding of bereavement or resiliency research. Further study is needed to document the current understandings, practices, and interventions typically used and to identify more effective ways for educators to provide support to children struggling with the death of a parent.

Most educators expect that immediately following a parental death, a bereaved child will experience difficulties learning and coping with school. Educators recognize that schools should provide bereaved students with emotional support within the school setting. Therefore, it is necessary for educators to be knowledgeable and open about grief so they can effectively and confidently integrate emotional support for the grieving student within their instruction, their classroom, and the school community (McGluaflin, 1998).

Educators may also assume that these children will need less support with the passage of time. This would be a serious misconception. According to the Harvard Childhood Bereavement Study (Worden, 1996), bereaved children at one year following a parental death did not exhibit significantly increased risk for emotional or

behavioral difficulties than did non-bereaved children. But when these same children were compared to their non-bereaved counterparts two years following a parental death, one third of the bereaved children studied exhibited significantly higher risk levels for serious emotional and behavioral difficulties including low self-efficacy, fear for the safety of their surviving parent, poor social relationships, social withdrawal, and higher levels of grief and sadness. Worden stated the fact that "the percentage of risk attributed to the death of a parent doubles from Year 1 to Year 2, argu[es] for a late effect on these children" (Worden, 1996 p. 110). Additionally, when bereaved and non-bereaved children were compared to each other two years post-parental death, Worden found a large and significant difference, with bereaved children reporting significantly lower self-worth. This is one example of the kind of understandings that should be, but are not yet part of teacher training or professional development.

Elementary educators are in a uniquely powerful position to support bereaved children (Schonfeld & Quackenbush, 2010). Educators observe these children seven hours per day, five days per week, and nine months per year as they interact with others, solve problems, and construct their understanding of the world. Most elementary teachers also teach interpersonal and problem solving strategies and then structure daily opportunities for children to practice these strategies within a natural environment. Most teachers purposefully provide guidance to help each child build his or her confidence so that he or she can successfully work through life's challenges. However, educators need a better understanding of the cognitive, emotional, and social needs of the bereaved child (Schonfeld & Quackenbush, 2010). Once armed with this knowledge, educators can then use their expertise as teachers to encourage these children to grow from their grief

experience within the context of day-to-day classroom instruction and as a member of a classroom and school community (McGlauflin, 1998).

Conceptual Framework

Cognitive/social constructivist and resiliency paradigms form a backdrop from which this study examines how, from an educator's perspective, the students they taught and/or served responded to the death of a parent(s), how their bereavement interfered with school performance, and how educators assisted these students to cope with a parental death and learn in the context of the classroom and school community. These conceptual frameworks were used as the lens to examine how a small group of educators thought about the decisions they made as they supported bereaved students in their classrooms and school community.

Because it seems that these kinds of understanding are not yet basic to teacher training or professional development, it is important to encourage studies to find out what is happening in terms of bereavement support in schools (American Federation of Teacher & New York Life Foundation, 2012). This study begins to uncover what is happening by focusing specifically on one high performing school and a small group of educators from that school as they think about how they support children who experienced the death of a parent.

Cognitive/Social Constructivist Framework

The cognitive/social constructivist paradigm adopted for this study asserts that both children and adults actively construct their knowledge of the world as they interact with others in their environment (Piaget, 1971). Children and adults learn by constructing their understanding of the world within the context of interacting with people and events

within their environment. People learn best when they are active members of a community of learners in which they use language and problem solving strategies to accomplish their own personal intentions and goals (Halliday, 1969). Whenever a person experiences new information, the person first must decide whether this information fits within their existing schema of knowledge. If it does, the person adds the information to his or her fund of knowledge. It is assimilated and becomes available for future problem solving. If the new information does not fit within the person's existing schema, the person has an important decision to make. He or she may modify his or her existing schema (accommodation) so the new information fits or he or she may reject the new information (Piaget, 1971).

Cognitive/social constructivism also describes how people learn new skills, including coping skills. In bereavement, children must reconstruct their world without the aid of their deceased parent. They must find others to provide the support that was previously provided by the deceased parent or they must learn to cope without this support, perhaps moving towards independence a bit more quickly or surviving the day without support. The child must also transform his or her relationship with this parent from one that is based on actual interactions in his or her day-to-day life to a relationship in which interactions are imagined. After the death of a parent, this relationship lives only within the child's heart and mind. This Herculean task must be managed at the same time the child is constructing an understanding of the world, learning to think abstractly, learning to regulate his or her emotions, and learning to interact with others. The skills a child uses to cope with stress, including bereavement, are initially developed out of necessity. However once developed, these lofe skills become part of a child's repertoire

of problem-solving and coping strategies, available to the child as a ready resource for solving future problems.

Educators also use a constructivist approach when they design instruction for children. Through both pedagogical knowledge and practice, the educator develops a generalized understanding about how children learn. The educator views each child through his or her generalized prism of "how children learn." But as an educator interacts with a particular child, the educator refines his or her generalized understandings about "how children learn," and also develops a particularized theory of how "this child" learns (Owacki & Goodman, 2002). Educators then use their general beliefs about "how children learn" and their particular "theory of how this child learns" to guide educational decision-making. This study uses a constructivist orientation as a basis for examining how educators approach student bereavement. Thus, this study is guided by the belief that teachers use their own knowledge and experiences of bereavement, their beliefs about how children learn, and their particularized theory of each bereaved child as a learner to construct knowledge about how to support the bereaved child within the school setting.

Resiliency Framework

Researchers and practitioners using a resiliency paradigm study how people successfully cope with adversity. These researchers want to know how a person uses his or her strengths and environmental supports to adapt to life's difficult challenges (Benard, 2004; Henderson & Milstein, 2003; Waxman, Padron, & Gray, 2004; Thomsen, 2002). The resiliency framework assumes that we all face and adapt to different challenges in life and that adapting to challenge is a normal and expected developmental process. This perspective honors the autonomy and dignity of the person facing adversity.

It assumes that the person will grow and learn from this struggle. It is a perspective of hope and celebration. It rejects the view of the person as deficient or lacking and instead focuses on a person's strengths and active use of environmental supports when coping with challenge (Benard, 2004; Henderson & Milstein, 2003; Waxman, Padron, & Gray; Thomsen, 2002).

Even though a parental death is one of the most heart-wrenching events that a child can experience, there is a growing body of research that asserts that grief, even in childhood, builds resiliency and can even be transformative. This research finds that coping with bereavement can lead a child to build independence, self-reliance, self-efficacy, appreciation of life, emotional strength, deep compassion, and tolerance (Calhoun & Tedeschi, 1990; Oltjenbraun, 1991; Simon & Dratell, 1998). The issue for educators is how to best support the child to develop these skills as he or she works through his or her own personal grief journey.

This study focused on what educators are doing to develop resiliency in the bereaved students they teach. The resilience framework guided the design, implementation, data analysis, and interpretation of the findings of this study. This study also drew on the conceptual models of Schaefer and Moos's (1998; 2001) and Stroebe and Schut (1999) which explain how people cope with bereavement. Schaefer and Moos identified the following variables as leading to effective coping and a greater likelihood of transformative growth following a parental death:

- Environmental resources, including financial, family, and social support;
- Personal resources, including the individual's socio-demographic characteristics, self- confidence, resilience, and existing coping skills;

- Event-related factors, including the nature, timing, and context of the death including its suddenness and controllability; and

- Cognitive appraisal and coping responses, including the acquisition of new coping strategies the individual develops as a result of the death.

Schaefer and Moos assert that approach-focused coping strategies positively relate with personal growth. Approach-focused coping strategies include a person's ability to analyze the death in a logical way, learn new coping strategies, renegotiate their relationship with the deceased person, take action, and seek help from others. Avoidance-focused coping strategies such as minimizing problems or believing that nothing can be done to solve problems are not associated with increased personal growth. Stroebe and Schut (1999) also observed that bereaved individuals cope with death through both loss and restorative-oriented coping strategies, and that healthy coping occurs when bereaved individuals spend progressively more time using restorative-oriented coping strategies than loss-oriented coping strategies. Transitioning to the use of more restorative-oriented coping strategies occurs when the bereaved person decides to re-engage with life and less time focusing on the death of their loved one.

Finally, this study relied heavily on the work of Bonnie Benard (2004). Benard, an educator, consolidated the findings of resiliency researchers across social science disciplines to build a theoretical framework and a set of practical principles to guide schools in their quest to build student resilience. Her work was not specific to bereavement. Instead, it addressed how schools can support the social-emotional growth of all children, particularly those who have been traumatized or are otherwise considered at-risk. She argued that resilience is fostered by a school culture of caring, high

expectations, and meaningful participation (Benard, 2004). Benard further asserted that schools most effective in developing student resiliency have a school-wide culture of compassion and caring which permeates relationships among school staff, students, and families. Quite forcefully, she also asserted that administrators must intentionally build staff resiliency because only resilient staff can build resilient students.

Conclusions

This study examined how educators and school leaders provide social-emotional support, teach coping skills, and structure the school environment to ensure that bereaved children learn and successfully cope with a parental death. It used the cognitive/social constructivism framework to analyze how these educators made both instructional and leadership decisions. The resiliency framework was utilized to analyze how these decisions strengthened the student's ability to cope with the death of his or her parent, providing the student with important survival skills that he or she could use when faced with other life challenges.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF RESEARCH

Existing research on educator perspectives about how to support bereaved children in the classroom is situated within three bodies of research: (a) childhood bereavement, (b) childhood resilience, and (c) how school leaders develop a culture of caring. This literature review is intended to create a conceptual framework or foundation for this research (Maxwell, 2006). Its purpose is to inform the reader of generally accepted principles, concepts, and understandings in the areas of childhood bereavement, resiliency, and school leadership. This study does not dispute or challenge the principles, concepts, or understandings set out in this chapter, but instead uses them as a lens to look deeply at how school leaders and elementary educators from one school support children coping with the death of a parent.

Research in the area of bereavement provides an important backdrop for this study, as it examines how human beings and children in particular, respond to and cope with the death of a loved one. The childhood resiliency research complements the work in the area of bereavement in that it helps us understand how children, not just survive—but grow from adversity. With a firm understanding of bereavement and resiliency research, it is then possible to examine the research on the leadership strategies used by elementary school administrators to develop resilient students. Together, these bodies of literature are important for the field of education because they provide insights that can

assist educators not just to help bereaved children cope with a parental death, but to develop the resiliency of all students, including those students dealing with other forms of trauma and/or adversity.

Childhood Bereavement

Within the area of bereavement, this section reviews the literature on Bowlby's Attachment Theory (1969; 1972; 1980), Cognitive Theories of Childhood Bereavement (Nagy, 1948; Cuddy-Casey & Orvaschel, 1997), Psychoanalytic and Constructivist Theories of Bereavement (Webb, 2010), and the conceptual models of coping with bereavement developed by Schafer and Moos (1998; 2001) and Stroebe & Schut (1999). Leading bereavement theorists and researchers have described the unique bond between a child and his or her parent, the trauma faced by children who have experienced a parental death, and how children understand death and cope with bereavement. Additionally, this section also reviews the Harvard Childhood Bereavement Study (Worden, 1996), a pre-eminent, longitudinal study which compared bereaved and non-bereaved children. This comprehensive study described the challenges faced by bereaved children, identified mediating factors, and articulated important implications for school intervention.

Attachment Theory

John Bowlby (1969) a pioneering researcher who studied children separated from their parents during the London bombings of World War II, laid the conceptual groundwork for attachment theory. Bowlby asserted that people, like many animals, are born with an innate behavioral system in which both the child and the parent (usually the mother) form an intense emotional attachment to each other. He believed this attachment process was deeply rooted in the more primitive portions of the brain. He also believed

that this attachment was more intense and different than the bonds of affection (Shaver & Tancredy, 2001).

Attachment theory explains the intensity, duration, and protective function of the grief response experienced by children who have been separated from their primary caregiver. According to Bowlby (1969; 1972; 1980) when a child is separated from his primary attachment figure, the child goes through a long-term and intense grief process. The child first searches for the missing parent. He or she then frantically protests the loss of the parent, often becoming inconsolable. During the next stage, the child enters into a period of despair, depression, and disorganization in which the child withdraws from activities and relationships. Finally, the child accepts the loss of the parent and re-engages in life. Bowlby further observed this grief response immediately lifts when the caregiver returns. However, he also observed that the substitution of another caregiver will not alleviate the very intense feelings of separation felt by the child. Bowlby coined the term "separation anxiety" to describe these intense feelings experienced by both the child and the parent when separated from one another.

Bowlby (1969) observed that the strong emotional attachment between a caregiver and his/her young is found across the animal kingdom. He believed this strong emotional response made it likely that the young would remain close to a parent, especially in times of insecurity and danger, thereby improving the chances that the young would survive into adulthood. Bowlby theorized that the primary caregiver provides a "secure base" from which the child leaves intermittently to explore his or her environment. The child then subsequently returns when he or she feels endangered or threatened. But as the child explores, the caregiver vigilantly monitors his or her

proximity to the child. If the caregiver believes the child is safe, the caregiver encourages the child to explore, guiding and encouraging the child to build independence. However, if the caregiver perceives danger, the caregiver hastily re-establishes proximity to child, providing increased supervision and protection. Bowlby reported that both the child and the caregiver vigilantly monitor their proximity to each other, adjusting this proximity to their level of perceived danger or safety present in the environment.

Bowlby (1969) asserted that only when a child's security needs are met through proximity to the child's primary caregiver, is the child free to focus attention and energy on forming relationships with siblings, peers, and other adults. Bowlby believed a healthy and secure attachment to a primary caregiver was essential to a child's sense of well-being and that when the child loses his primary attachment relationship, he or she will experience serious difficulties coping with stress and forming relationships with others.

Bowlby (1969) described a dynamic process of interaction between a caregiver and child in which the caregiver provides "just enough" support to allow the child to safely develop both competence and independence when interacting with the world. This dynamic process of graduated support governed by the child's need for security and instruction is referred to as "attunement" (Benard, 2004). Educators rely on the process of attunement when they make instructional decisions in the moment. Educators closely and continually observe their students and precisely calibrate their words and actions to provide "just enough" support to empower children to learn and succeed with as much independence as possible. Attunement is the *sine qua non* of highly effective teaching and learning. The more skilled an educator is attuning his or her teaching moves to the precise needs of the child, the more powerful the learning is for the child. In the

education literature, this process of attunement has also been called "scaffolding," "kid watching," "responsive teaching," "successive approximation," and "engrossment" (Johnson, 2006; Owacki & Goodman, 2002; Noddings, 2005).

Cognitive Theory of Bereavement

American children have been exposed to death through media coverage of both real and depicted natural disasters, crime, accidents, and war. Some children have experienced death more closely from community violence, the loss of family members, and the loss of pets (Webb, 2010). In the United States, 3.4% of the children experience the death of a parent before the age of 18 (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2001). Although most children adjust and cope with the death of a parent, about one-third of these children will exhibit emotional and behavioral difficulties requiring referral to a mental health expert (Dowdney, 2000). Many of these children will also exhibit difficulties in school (Abdelnoor & Hollins, 2004). This section is intended to inform the reader of how children reach a full understanding of death, its developmental sequence, how cognitive development impacts a child's understanding of death, how children grieve, and how a child's grief journey differs from the grief journey of an adult. When understanding how childhood grief differs from adult grief, teacher misconceptions become apparent.

According to bereavement theorists, attachment theory is foundational for understanding how children respond to parental death. The intense grief response described by Bowlby (1969) mirrors the stages of grief commonly accepted by bereavement researchers and practitioners today. Grief is the sequence of emotional states that follows loss (Bowlby, 1969). It is a process expressed through thoughts, emotions, and behaviors (Wolfelt, 1983). Mourning, on the other hand, is the mental work that

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follows the loss of a loved one through death. In order for mourning to be resolved, the

bereaved person must comprehend the significance, seriousness, permanence, and

irreversibility of the death of their loved one, and gradually come to the understanding

that life can again be meaningful (Krueger, 1983). Like adults, children grieve the death

of a loved one. But their level of cognitive development affects their emotional response

(Webb, 2010). Depending on their age and cognitive development, children vary in their

ability to do the work of mourning.

Maria Nagy (1948) is widely regarded by bereavement theorists and practitioners

as one of the seminal theorists regarding children's understanding of death. She studied

378 Hungarian children, between the ages three and 10 years, by analyzing their writings,

drawings, and conversations. Nagy posited that children progress through three major

developmental stages and that as children develop cognitively, they gradually reach a

more mature understanding of death. To clarify the progression of a child's

understanding of death, Nancy Boyd Webb (2010), a contemporary theorist, applied Jean

Piaget's Theories of Children's Cognitive Development to the framework of Nagy's three

stages. Webb describes these developmental stages as follows:

Stage One. Nagy's (1948) first developmental phase corresponds to Piaget's

Preoperational Stage of Cognitive Development (Webb, 2010). It describes children from

age two to five years. According to Piaget, children in this stage are egocentric, believe in

magical thinking, and distort their view of reality to conform to their idiosyncratic

understandings. These very young children do not understand the permanence of death

and believe that their deceased parent will return, even when they have been told the

parent has died. Because the child expects the dead person to return, the child may not

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show any signs of grieving. These children also have limited language skills. Therefore,

they often cope with their feelings of grief behaviorally and symbolically. When the

parent does not return, these children may grieve intensely, but their grief will be

exhibited in their behavior and play, and not usually communicated through language.

Nagy found that children of this age frequently have the following views about death:

- The child may not believe that death is final, but believes that the loved one is still alive and will be back.

- The child may believe that death is reversible or temporary.

- The child may believe in magical thinking and that wishes come true.

- The child may believe that he or she caused the person's death.

- The child may ask repeatedly about the whereabouts of the deceased person, even after being told that the person is dead.

- The child may be afraid that someone else may die.

- The child may be angry with the deceased person, caregivers, or family members.

   Stage Two. Nagy's (1948) second developmental phase in children's understanding

of death corresponds to Piaget's Concrete Operational Stage and describes children

between the ages of seven and 11 years (Webb, 2010). During this stage, children

become less egocentric and have an increased capacity to reason. These children are able

to read, organize sequentially, use language to explore curiosities, problem-solve, and

talk about abstract concepts (Piaget, 1971; 1972). Children in this developmental phase

realize that death is irreversible (Fox, 1985), but often deny the inevitability of death.

They believe that death will not happen to them or their loved ones, and that it can be

avoided. These children may act as though the death did not occur, may express anger or

irritability rather than sadness, may feel they caused the death, or may be fearful of death. These children will be able to talk about the death of a parent in concrete terms but may have unusual or idiosyncratic ideas about the death of their parent. They are able to conceptualize the understanding that the deceased can be both in heaven and in the grave (Saravay, 1991). They also understand that everyone will die someday, but believe that young people do not die and that only people that are old or sick die. (Fox, 1985; Nagy; 1948). They believe that death can be avoided if they are strong enough or can outrun their enemies. Because they believe that death will occur sometime in the distant future, these children often deny the inevitability death and believe it will not happen to them or to their loved ones (Fox, 1985; Nagy, 1948). According to Webb (2010), typical school age children:

- May use denial to cope with the loss of a loved one;

- May act like the death of a loved one did not occur;

- Once they have experienced a death, may feel guilty and/or different from their peers;

- May express anger or irritability rather than sadness;

- May grieve in private and hide their feelings in an effort not to seem childish (especially boys);

- May overcompensate for feelings of grief by becoming overly helpful and becoming the caretakers of others (especially girls);

- May develop somatic symptoms or hypochondria; and

- May become fearful of death.

Stage Three. Nagy's (1948) third developmental stage corresponds to Piaget's

Formal Operational Stage and describes children ages nine through 12 years (Piaget,

1971; 1972; Webb, 2010). According to Piaget, beginning at age 11 or 12, children's

thinking becomes logical. These children can handle more than one variable and are

capable of dealing with abstractions and hypotheses. Nagy believes that around ages nine

or 10, children have developed a realistic understanding of the finality and irreversibility

of death. However, children at this age continue to believe that death is far off in the

future (Lonetto, 1980). These children may vacillate between behaving in an adult

manner and regressing in behavior, may use anger to avoid feelings of helplessness, and

may experience guilt over behaviors with the deceased parent that are part of the normal

parent-child separation process. These children may give the impression they are

handling the death of a parent well, when in fact, they may continue to experience

intermittent and intense feelings of loss (Webb, 2010). Webb states that nine to 12-year-

olds may:

- Feel helpless, frightened, or numb;

- Regress in behavior;

- Vacillate between behaving in an adult manner and wishing to be taken care of;

- Experience guilt about teen behaviors which were part of the parent-child
  separation process, which occurred near the time of death;

- Use anger to avoid feelings of helplessness; and/or

- Behave in a self-centered way.

Asserting that Nagy's findings have not been replicated and that there are serious

methodological problems with Nagy's research (e.g., varying assessment methods, use of

leading questions, asking children to draw abstract concepts, a failure to consider environmental, cultural, and psychosocial factors), Cuddy-Casey and Ovraschel (1997) examined the recent literature on children's understanding of death. They argue that a mature or scientific understanding of death consists of four foundational constructs. These include (a) universality/inevitability—an awareness that all living things die; (b) irreversibility/finality—once a living thing dies, it cannot come back to life; (c) nonfunctionality/cessation—all life functions stop at the time of death; and (d) causality—living things die as a result of biological causes. Cuddy-Casey and Ovraschel found consensus in the literature for the following principles: that children appear to develop an understanding of these foundational concepts at a chronological or mental age of nine years, that universality and irreversibility develop first and serve as prerequisites to the understanding of non-functionality and causality; and that age, cognitive development, verbal skills, and exposure to death are factors that influence a child's comprehension of death, with religion and culture playing a less significant role.

Webb (2010) asserts that all children, even very young children, grieve the loss of a caregiver, but that the grief may look different depending on their cognitive development. Webb notes that very young children react strongly to the absence and loss of a loved one and show their reactions by going through Bowlby's (1969) stages of protest, despair, and detachment. She argues that "separation anxiety" is a grief response even though the child may be too young to understand that death is final or to proceed further through the mourning process. Sims (2009) agrees, poignantly stating that "if a child is old enough to love and attach, he is old enough to grieve (2009, at 7)." Sims further explains that young "children do not have to know the reason *why* (emphasis

added) something happens in order to experiences the emotions of grief because

something *did* happen (emphasis added) (Sims, at 8).

Because a child's ability to grieve is limited by his/her immature cognitive

development, the child's reactions may appear unusual or counterintuitive when viewed

through the lens of adult grief. When teaching bereaved children, it is important that

educators understand how a child's cognitive development impacts the child's

expressions of grief. They must be able to recognize what is typical for a bereaved child,

given the child's cognitive development and know with confidence how best to intervene

or support the child within the classroom. They must also be able to identify behaviors

that are atypical and when to seek out professional support.

Theories of Bereavement

The two predominant theories of bereavement are the psychoanalytic theory of

bereavement and the constructivism theory of bereavement. The psychoanalytic theory

posits that the bereaved person must comprehend the significance, seriousness,

permanence, and irreversibility of his or her loss (Krueger, 1983). This theory also asserts

that a person must first disengage from their attachment to the deceased in order for grief

to be resolved and that only then will the bereaved person be able to form new

relationships (Wolfenstein, 1969). This theory postulates that in order to "recover" from

grief-related depression and resume a "normal" life, the bereaved person must gradually

learn to emotionally "let go" of the deceased family member and "move on" with one's

life (Neimeyer, 2001).

The constructivism theory of bereavement, on the other hand, emphasizes the

mourner's continued connection with their loved one through remembering and honoring

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cherished memories of their loved one (Klass, Silverman, & Nickman, 1996). Under this theory, the mourner's attempt to maintain a connection to the deceased is seen as an active effort to make sense of his or her experiences and to make the death of a parent part of his or her reality. Hagman (2001) and Niemeyer (2001) expand the constructivist theory by asserting that mourning is a crisis of meaning that threatens the structure and substance of a person's life. They believe the bereaved person must reorganize his or her sense of self through outward-directed communication and by strengthening relationships with others. Once the bereaved person understands how the death impacts his or her life, he or she can then construct a meaningful life within the context of this loss.

Webb (2010) asserts that these two theoretical paradigms have profound implications for how grief is approached with children. The constructivist view of death differs from the psychoanalytic approach in that it asserts that it is healthy and even desirable for the bereaved person to maintain a continuing bond with their deceased loved one. Therefore, instead of focusing on detachment, this theoretical perspective believes that attachment should continue, but be transformed, in light of the practicalities of the loved one's death. Also, the psychoanalytic theory assumes that the mourning process related to parental death interferes with the normal course of psychological development. Constructivism theory, on the other hand, asserts that an ongoing emotional relationship with the deceased parent helps the child cope with the death and other life stresses.

Under the psychoanalytic approach, children were not considered capable of working through grief until their teenage years when the developmental process of individuation typically occurs (Webb, 2010). Until then, the child continues to see the

parent as alive and views them in an idealized fashion. Upon adolescence, the child is then encouraged to sever his/her attachment to the deceased parent.

Under the constructivist view, mourning is seen as a series of psychological tasks that are accomplished over time (Webb, 2010). Because detachment is not considered essential to the mourning process or the focus of grief work, the child is encouraged to maintain, but reframe, their relationship with the deceased parent. The child is taught to shift his relationship with his deceased parent from one that is environmentally-based to one that lives within the child's heart and mind. It considers the child's attachment to the mental image of the lost parent as important in the child's later psychological development. Attachment is reframed through conversations with supportive persons, internal and imagined conversations with their deceased parent, and through artistic and spiritual expressions (Webb, 2010). The followers of constructivist approach, aligned with attachment theory, believe that by helping the child to re-establish mental and emotional proximity to their deceased attachment figure, the intensity of the child's grief response is assuaged (Stroebe & Schut, 2001).

The constructivist view is the prevailing view held by most researchers and practitioners today. Therefore, educators need to understand that maintaining continuing bonds (e.g., keeping mementos, having internal conversation with a deceased parent) with a deceased parent is a form of healthy coping with bereavement. They should respond positively to a grieving child's efforts to continue these bonds and should not actively encourage bereaved children to let go of their attachment to their deceased parent.

Childhood Grief

Because grief does not depend on one's ability to understand that a loved one is dead, but instead depends on one's ability to sense separation and feel emotions, any child who feels attachment or love will grieve (Wolfelt, 1983). Children like adults feel shock, anger, sadness, and longing, but they have a limited ability to verbalize their feelings or tolerate the intense pain generated by the open recognition of their loss (Webb, 2010). Children have a "short sadness span" (Wolfenstein, 1966) and process grief in very short spurts. The younger the child, the shorter the child grief span (Sims, 2009). Rando (1991) notes that because of their limited ability to tolerate intense feelings of grief for long, children often grieve intermittently for years through an approach-avoidance cycle with respect to these painful feelings. Webb suggests that children frequently use play to both avoid their pain and to process and gain mastery over their painful feelings about death. Poignantly, Webb observes children process grief during play and play is often their language of grief.

To process grief, bereaved adults and children must reconstruct their understanding of the world as one without the deceased person (Webb, 2010). They accomplish this grief work by working through the following psychological tasks or stages:

- Accepting the reality of their loss;

- Experiencing the pain and emotional aspects of the loss;

- Adjusting to the environment in which the deceased is missing; and

- Recreating, reconstructing, and maintaining an internal relationship with the deceased, choosing also to invest in new relationships, and forging a new identity without the deceased.

Though referred to as stages in the literature, these tasks are not completed in discrete, one at a time, temporal stages. Instead, bereaved persons typically move back and forth between tasks, often working on several tasks at the same time.

During the initial acute stage of grief, children typically experience shock, sadness, fear, and difficulties with concentration, focus, and planning. Because children have a short grief-span, they often forget their grief and re-engage with their environment, only for grief to unexpectedly re-emerge when memories are triggered by events in their environment. This can be quite destabilizing for the child, causing the child to feel incapable of controlling his or her emotions. Additionally, children often grieve intermittently through an approach-avoidance cycle with respect to their painful feelings, using play to both avoid their pain and to process and gain mastery over their feelings about death (Rando, 1991).

Webb (2010) summarizes the differences between adult and childhood grief as follows:

- Children's immature cognitive development interferes with their understanding about the permanence, universality, and inevitability of death.
- Children have a limited capacity to tolerate emotional pain.
- Children may experience intense feelings of loss intermittently over many years.
- Children have a limited ability to process grief verbally, but can express their feelings through play.

- Because children may believe that a parental death makes them different from their peers, they may not wish to acknowledge the death of a parent.

As children cope with bereavement, they oscillate between grief-focused (e.g., intrusion of grief emotions, denial of change) and restoration-oriented coping strategies (e.g., attending to life changes, doing new things, developing new goals, taking on new roles) (Stroebe & Schut, 1999). According to the Dual Process Model of Coping with Bereavement, healthy coping is exhibited as the bereaved child spends progressively more time using restoration-oriented coping strategies and less time using loss-oriented strategies. Teachers are in a unique and profound position to encourage grieving children to use restorative-focused coping skills such as regulating of emotions, building friendships, exploring new interests, setting and working towards goals, and managing real-world problems. However, to be most effective, it is important for the educator to understand the grief of a child often looks very different from the grief of an adult. The educator must understand the fluidity of emotions presented by the grieving child; that the child may appear fine one minute and emotionally overwhelmed the next and that grief may present as anxiety, confusion, or anger rather than sadness and crying. The educator must also understand that healthy grieving frequently includes attempts by the child to continue a psychological bond with the deceased parent by keeping cherished objects, engaging in internal conversations with the deceased parent, and feeling the presence of the parent. By understanding what healthy grieving looks like, the educator can better support the child.

Mitchell, Wesner, Garand, Gale, Havill, & Brownson (2007), advanced practice registered nurses led a series of eight support groups to assist bereaved children to cope

with the deaths of family members from suicide.[1] Relying on clinical judgment rather than findings from mental health evaluations, these nurses found that support groups helped these children by:

1. Replacing uncertainty with credible explanations of suicide, death and dying, and the grief process;

2. Providing a safe place to explore troubling cognitive beliefs and ambivalent or angry emotions;

3. Using narratives to help the child re-take control over their lives;

4. Teaching problem solving skills and methods of obtaining help;

5. Developing a sense of hope by noticing that good things still happen for them;

6. Realizing that others have shared their experiences (universality);

7. Learning how to talk with others about their circumstances of the death of their loved one and their grief journey, specifically that they control the amount and type of information shared; and

8. How to continue the relationship with the deceased family member by learning ways to honor and hold on to memories.

Although this study focused on helping bereaved children whose parents committed suicide, its findings are also applicable to the support of all bereaved children. And, though the classroom teachers will not be conducting support groups, these themes can be

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[1] Research indicates that there is an increased risk for psychiatric disorders and social maladjustment in children grieving the loss of a parent due to suicide (Sethis & Bhargava, 2003). Bereavement is considered by some researchers and practitioners to be more complicated for children coping with the death of a parent caused by suicide because these children must also cope with abandonment issues associated with the parent's choice to end his or her life, stigma placed by society on suicide, and family secrecy about cause and circumstances of death from suicide (Campbell, 1997).

reinforced within the context of the typical school day, across a wide variety of instructional activities, and within the teacher's interactions with the bereaved child.

In summary, children go through the same bereavement stages as adults, but their progress is complicated by their immature, but ongoing cognitive development. This ongoing cognitive development causes the child to continually move back and forth between stages, reworking each stage of grief with increasingly mature cognitive skills. Triggered by environmental reminders, this process frequently causes children to continually re-experience intense, unexpected surges of grief. This "re-grief phenomenon" is further complicated by the child's limited ability to process emotions through language, the child's limited ability to use language to learn needed coping skills, the child's progressive loss of memories of the deceased parent, and by the child's brief "grief span" (Webb, 2010). The educator must understand that childhood bereavement looks very different from what is typically observed in adults. The educator must also understand that the bereaved child will, in all likelihood, be working through grief throughout his or her academic career, and possibly well into adulthood (Schonfeld & Quackenbush (2010).

The Harvard Childhood Bereavement Study

The Harvard Childhood Bereavement Study (Worden, 1996) is a comprehensive and seminal study that compared 125 bereaved children with a control group of non-bereaved children, matched with the bereaved students by age, gender, grade in school, family religion and community. This study used child interviews, interviews with surviving parents, and a variety of standardized assessments to gather information about these two groups of children. This study then described common experiences of bereaved

children at four months, one year, and two years following parental death and identified mediating factors which both support and complicate the grief process for children.

In the early months following a parental death, 20% of the bereaved children reported difficulties in school and with concentrating. A small group of students reported an improvement in school performance. At one year post-parental bereavement, only 15% of the students reported learning difficulties, which was not significantly different than was reported by their non-bereaved counterparts. Girls were more likely to report improvement with boys being more likely to report school difficulties. Unfortunately, this study did not include teacher interviews, so it is unclear if the perceptions of these children matched the perceptions of their teachers. There was also no information as to the level of support provided to these children by their teachers or school. It is possible that these children may have been doing well in school because they received significant support from educators and that the level of support provided by school personnel was not captured by the research methodology employed by this study.

This study concluded that significant differences between bereaved and non-bereaved children often do not appear until two years following parental death, with one-third of the bereaved children exhibiting increased anxiety, withdrawal, social problems, and difficulties with self-esteem and self-efficacy when compared with their non-bereaved counterparts. For about 22% of these children, these difficulties interfered with a child's school performance (Worden, 1996). Finally, Silverman and Worden (1996) observed that healthy involvement in death rituals, healthy functioning of the surviving parent, family support, the support of peers and school, and the child's belief in his or her

locus of control or sense of self-efficacy were mediating factors supporting resiliency in the bereaved children studied.

The Harvard Childhood Bereavement Study (Worden, 1996) has significant implications for educators. First, it asserts that bereaved children often appear to be doing well immediately following the death of a parent. However, it fails to capture the level of support provided by school. Second, this study found that about one-third of the bereaved children studied experience delayed difficulties, such as anxiety, social problems, loss of self-esteem, and loss of self-efficacy. Finally, this study suggests that school interventions which focus on creating a culture of caring, reducing anxiety, encouraging meaningful involvement in the school community, teaching problem-solving strategies, and providing experiences where the child feels success in both learning and social activities can improve the outcomes for bereaved children. Because educators interact with the bereaved child seven hours per day, 180 days per year for possibly 12 years, they can play a powerful role in developing a school-based community that nurtures and supports bereaved children.

Conclusions

In conclusion, Bowlby's attachment theory (1969; 1972; 1980) defines the relationship between a child and his or her primary caregiver and explains the intense emotional response children feel when they experience the death of a parent. Nagy's cognitive theory of bereavement (1948), when placed within the context of Piaget's theory of cognitive development, describes the challenging developmental tasks facing the bereaved child as he or she copes with a parental loss. The constructivist theory of bereavement (Webb, 2010) then summarizes the grief work that bereaved persons must

work through to cope with the death of a parent. The Dual Process Model of Coping with Bereavement (Stroebe & Schut, 2001) describes how bereaved persons emerge from the shock of grief to re-engage with people and events within his or her environment. Finally, the Harvard Childhood Bereavement Study (Worden, 1996) describes how bereaved children differ from non-bereaved children, identifies mediating factors which support and complicate a child's ability to cope with a parental death, and offers intervention pathways to guide educators in their support of bereaved children.

Grief, Bereavement, and Childhood Resiliency

Existing research on bereavement is just beginning to examine why and how some children are able to use their bereavement journey to grow as individuals. This research sheds light on social, environmental, risk, and protective factors that can lead to better outcomes for bereaved children. This literature review will address (a) coping styles used by bereaved children; (b) mediating factors associated with better outcomes following childhood bereavement; and (c) developing resiliency in bereaved children.

Coping with Childhood Grief

The loss of a parent, though traumatic in and of itself, may also result in secondary losses for the child. The child may be required to move from his or home or learn to live with new family members or to adjust to lifestyle changes resulting from changes in family finances. He or she may also be required to adjust to a home life with very different roles and responsibilities. For example, the deceased parent may have been the parent that provided the child with most support in his or her school related responsibilities. So in addition to dealing with the loss of a parent, the child may be required to cope with significant changes in his or her family life.

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Fortunately, most children are able to cope with parental loss (Worden, 1996). Schaefer and Moos (1998; 2001) found that persons using approach-focused coping strategies are better able to deal with bereavement than persons using avoidance-focused coping strategies. Approach-coping strategies are those strategies used by a bereaved person to re-engage with the world. They are positively related to personal growth and include the ability to analyze death logically, reframe death and grief in a positive light, take positive action, and seek help from others. Avoidance-focused coping strategies are those strategies used by a bereaved person to avoid re-engagement with people and events. They are not associated with increased personal growth and include strategies such as minimizing problems, denying the need to change expectations, and believing that there is nothing that can be done to solve problems.

Stroebe and Schut (1999) developed the Dual Process Model of Coping with Bereavement which also describes how persons cope with death and bereavement over time. Stroebe and Schut theorize that bereaved persons oscillate between loss-oriented coping and restoration-oriented coping, with loss-oriented coping predominating during early bereavement. Loss-oriented coping include those strategies used by the bereaved individual to deal with shock, upheaval, and distress resulting from the death of a loved one. These strategies include ruminating over the loss of the deceased and denying the need to change one's life. Restoration-oriented coping, on the other hand, are those strategies that focus on forging a new life and identity without the deceased person, including taking on new roles, doing new things, and attending to life changes. Stroebe and Schut argue that coping is embedded in everyday life and that bereaved individual spends their time using both avoiding and confronting their loss. They further assert that

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healthy coping occurs as the bereaved person spends progressively more time using on restorative-oriented coping strategies.

Mediating Factors Associated with Better Outcomes for Bereaved Children

Research indicates that a strong sense of self-efficacy, self-esteem, internal locus-of-control and an ability to maintain a positive sense of self during adversity predisposes a bereaved child towards a positive outcome following parental deaths (Worden, 1996). Generally, mediating variables which lead to positive outcomes from bereavement include the following:

- Environmental resources, including the individual's financial, home, and social situation. These include the individual's relationship with and social support from family, friends, and community. Persons who have positive family functioning and who seek out social support have been shown to have grown personally from their grief experience.

- Personal resources, including the individual's socio-demographic characteristics, self-confidence, resilience, and existing coping skills. Persons with a life-course perspective are able to use positive reappraisal to make meaning from traumatic events, thereby minimizing their threat and impact.

- Event-related factors, including the nature, timing, and context of the death including its suddenness and controllability. Persons who experience sudden and violent deaths of their loved ones have more difficulty, while persons with advanced knowledge of impending death adapt better and tend to experience personal growth from the experience.

- Cognitive appraisal and coping responses, including the acquisition of new coping strategies developed as a result of the death. These new coping strategies become personal resources that can be used when faced with future trauma.

Resiliency in Bereaved Children

Resilience is not just the absence of pathology. It refers to the adaption and the advancement of health and well-being following a traumatic event (Luecken, 2008). Resiliency is affected by social and environmental influences, risk factors, and protective factors. It is also affected by the coping styles used by children as they respond to adversity. Risk factors include the inability of the surviving parent to provide for the emotional needs of the child, the disruption of daily and social routines, financial burdens, and restricted expressions of grief. Protective factors, which lead to resiliency, include maintenance of a child's basic needs, positive parenting with warm and consistent discipline, family cohesion, positive family events, and a sense of social relatedness (Worden, 1996).

There is also a small body of research that finds that grief, even in childhood, can transform a child in positive ways. Dealing with grief can build a child's independence, self-reliance, self-efficacy, wisdom, compassion, and tolerance (Tyson-Rawson, 1996, Calhoun & Tedeschi, 1990; Simon & Dratell, 1988). For example, Hogan and DeSantis (1996) studied adolescents who experienced the death of a sibling and found that upon emerging from bereavement, adolescents reported a shift in focus from themselves to others, an appreciation of life's finiteness, and an increase in the value they placed on their relationships with others. Through grief, these adolescents learned to reflect on life

events in a search for meaning. Researchers also find that personal growth can occur when bereaved persons actively confront their loss in an attempt to give meaning to their loved one's life (Nerken, 1993).

Conclusion

A child's journey through grief can serve as a catalyst for profound personal growth. Bereaved children can learn to reflect on life events, make meaning from their experiences, use new coping mechanisms to deal with future life challenges, and use their experiences to build deep and enduring relationships with others. It would be a mistake for educators to view the child's journey through bereavement as ending when the acute pain associated with grief dissipates. Educators must do more than feel empathy and concern. Educators should also empower these children to use their grief experience to develop their repertoire of coping skills, enabling them to better manage future life adversities.

Bereavement research certainly provides helpful information about how children grieve and the impact of grief on the emotional growth of children. Bereavement practitioners clearly acknowledge that schools have a significant role to play in supporting the bereaved child. But the focus of bereavement research is to inform professional mental health providers of intervention strategies that can be used within the context of individual and family counseling. Information provided to educators is primarily limited to helping educators deal with acute grief responses and fails to address supporting children experiencing issues related to delayed grief. The following questions still remain: how can educators, within the context of the regular education classroom and school environment help a bereaved child reclaim his or her sense of self-efficacy, self-

esteem, internal locus of control, and positive sense of self following the shock of a parental death? Are these personality traits and protective factors something that a student either has or does not have? How can educators support these children through their grief journey so they become resilient adults? The body of research on childhood resiliency offers hopeful and promising insights into these questions.

Childhood Resiliency

To close the achievement gap, educators and researchers have studied children who were not academically successful to identify personal, family, and social factors associated with low student achievement. This research led educators to hypothesize about what was "deficient" or "wrong" with low performing students. Believing that schools could "fix what was wrong," educators responded by providing special programs and interventions. They believed that once identified risk-factors were managed and resolved, these students would then thrive academically. Unfortunately, the special programs and interventions intended to address student risk issues have proved ineffective in closing the achievement gap (Benard, 2004; Henderson & Milstein, 2003; Waxman, Padron, & Gray, 2004; Thomsen, 2002).

In the last fifty years, educational research has shifted emphasis from identifying and addressing youth risk factors to developing strength-based personal and environmental assets that empower at-risk children to grow into competent, caring, and connected adults (Benard, 2004; Henderson & Milstein, 2003; Waxman, Padron, & Gray, 2004; Thomsen, 2002). This approach focuses on building student resiliency, and it has demonstrated success in closing the achievement gap (Garmezy, 1983; 1987; 1991; Rutter, 1979; 1981; 1985; 1987; 1991; Resnick et al., 1997).

Resiliency researchers argue that the mission of the public schools is to build the resiliency of every student, not just those students deemed to be "at-risk" (Brown, D'Emidio, & Benard, 2001). They assert that public schools already have (a) the vision, mission, and beliefs; (b) caring adult and peer relationships, and (c) organizational structures necessary to build personal and environmental assets associated with student resiliency. They argue that schools can change the life trajectories of all students, not just at-risk youth, not through special programs, but through resiliency-building practices embedded within the structure and culture of the school (Benard 2004; Henderson & Milstein (2003); Waxman, Padron, & Gray, 2004; Thomsen 2002; Werner & Smith, 1992; 2001).

Resiliency researchers believe that educators do not realize or use the full power of school relationships and culture to help students develop their ability to cope with life's adversities (Benard, 2004; Henderson & Milstein, 2003). In response, these researchers have attempted to provide educators with a pedagogical framework which allows them to think and act in terms of "building resiliency." They assert that when educators "intentionally" notice, name, and value strength-based strategies or assets, they can easily capture the power of the school culture and their personal relationships with students to build resiliency. Fundamental to their theoretical framework is the assumption that educators can teach at-risk students academically, personally, and socially as these students "struggle to cope" with life's adversities (Benard 2004; Brown, D'Emidio-Casten, & Benard, 2001; Henderson & Milstein, 2003; Waxman, Padron, & Gray, 2004; Thomsen 2002; Werner & Smith, 1992; 2001).

This section will examine the historical development of resiliency theory, the conceptual framework of resiliency theory, school implementation models, effective school practices that build student resiliency, and leadership practices used by schools successful in building resiliency of both its students and staff. Resiliency theory will serve as the primary lens through which this study will examine the relationships between educators and the bereaved students they teach. In Chapters Four and Five, this study will use the language of resiliency to analyze the instructional approaches and interventions provided by these educators in their day-to-day instruction with these students. This study will also use the language of resiliency to identify leadership practices which supported these educators to build both their own resiliency and the resiliency of their bereaved students.

Historical Development of Resiliency Theory

To close the achievement gap, education and social science researchers began examining individual, family, school and community risk factors associated with low student achievement. This research led educators to assess their students for these risk factors, label them as "at-risk" for future learning difficulties, and provide them with interventions and special programs intended to ameliorate these risk issues. Many of these interventions punished youth when they engaged in high risk behavior (e.g., suspensions, expulsions, zero tolerance approaches). Others provided remediation programs designed to teach discrete sets of life and decision-making skills. These programs typically taught these skills isolated from the real world context of need. However, according to resiliency researchers, this risk assessment model of intervention is not just ineffective, but can result in negative student outcomes (Benard, 2004;

Henderson & Milstein, 2003; Waxman, Padron, & Gray, 2004; Thomsen, 2002). For example, Brown (2004) observed that after participating in risk-based interventions, students reported feeling even more alienated from the adults at their schools at the very times when the students had the greatest need for adult connectedness. He further found that because students were punished for using the only coping strategies they knew, students learned not to trust adults with deeply personal information about their lives and thinking. These students also reported that life skills programs frequently advocated overly simplistic, "adult accepted" solutions that were not relevant or responsive to complex problems present in their lives.

Resiliency research constituted a major paradigm shift in how educators and social scientists viewed children identified as "at-risk." Instead of focusing on risk factors and assuming a negative outcome for at-risk children, resiliency researchers began examining how these children learned to cope, adapt, and learn from life's difficult challenges. By looking at resiliency instead of risk, research on at-risk children moved to a place of hope and celebration, honoring the struggle of children as they learn to manage situations that typically cause despair and despondency. These researchers found that the "experience of struggling to cope" with adversity teaches children essential problem solving skills ultimately leading these children, as adults, to become exceptionally competent in managing life's challenges (Benard, 2004; Henderson & Milstein, 2003; Waxman, Padron, & Gray, 2004; Thomsen, 2002; Werner & Smith, 1992; 2001).

The research of Emmy Werner (1989; 1992; 2001), Norm Garmezy (1983; 1987), and Michael Rutter (1979; 1981; 1985; 1987; 1991) has been credited by resiliency researchers and practitioners as laying the foundation for the resiliency movement

(Benard, 2004; Henderson & Milstein, 2003; Thomsen, 2002). Their collective work set in motion the theoretical paradigm shift from risk to resiliency—acknowledging what educators already knew—that caring educators make a profound difference in the lives of their students and that an educator's influence can span across the lives of their students, empowering these students to develop into compassionate and productive adults.

Leading researchers in the resiliency movement describe the work of Emmy Werner as pioneering, groundbreaking, and as "not only an important line of resilience research, but *one of the most valuable social science studies ever conducted [Emphasis added]*" (Brown, D'Emidio-Casten, & Benard, 2001, p.15). Research on childhood resiliency began in earnest in 1977 when Werner & Smith (1989; 1992; 2001) examined how at-risk children overcame life's obstacles to become "competent, confident, and caring individuals." Werner and her research team conducted a longitudinal study that followed 700 children born in 1955 into adulthood. Of these 700 children, they found one-third to be high risk because they lived both in poverty and/or in troubled families (e.g., alcoholism, mental illness, divorce). One-third of this group grew into competent young adults. These researchers then found that five out of six students identified at-risk in adolescence (e.g., poverty, delinquency, substance abuse, abuse and neglect, death of family members) were able to successfully cope with life's challenges to become productive citizens as adults at ages 32 and 40 years. As adults, these participants reported that they were in stable marriages, satisfied with their relationships with their children, and responsible citizens in the community. Only one out of six of the at-risk participants reported chronic financial problems, domestic conflict, violence, substance abuse, mental health problems, and/or low self-esteem as adults.

Werner and Smith (1989; 1992; 2001) found that at-risk children who developed into productive adults had at least average intelligence, approached challenges proactively, had a competency and an inclination to communicate with others, had a sense of personal agency, had an inclination to interact with others, and approached challenges proactively. Werner and Smith also found that young people with "affectional" ties with family, school, and community members grew up to be resilient adults. By rewarding and celebrating their competencies and determination, these adults initiated the young person into a positive belief system by which to live.

Norman Garmezy (1987; 1991), founder of Project Competence at the University of Minnesota, studied resiliency across risk factors. Initially, Garmezy was interested in understanding how mental illness developed across the lifespan of individuals. While studying the children of seriously mentally ill mothers, he noticed that most of these children developed skills that allowed them to effectively cope with adversity. He was surprised by these findings as he expected that most of these children would have significant problems. Through Project Competence, Garmezy broadened his research to look at the competence of children across a broad range of risk issues, including but not limited to children born with congenital heart defects, physical handicaps, children of poverty, children in homeless shelters, and young war refugees. He then began studying "resiliency" or what made a difference in the lives of these children that improved their outcomes. Garmezy defined resiliency not as a trait, but as a global approach to managing life adversities—"a life pattern"—or an observable track record of "doing okay" across time and settings (Masten & Powell, 2003). Garmezy and his team of researchers

identified the following attributes of individuals, their relationships, and their

communities or environments that led to resilient outcomes (Masten & Powell, 2003):

- Individual Differences

    o Cognitive abilities (intelligence, attention, organizational skills);

    o Self-perceptions of competence, worth, confidence (self-efficacy);

    o Temperament (adaptability, sociability);

    o Self-regulation skills (impulse control, regulation of emotions); and

    o Positive outlook on life (hopefulness).

- Relationships

    o Parenting quality (affection, structure, expectations);

    o Close relationships with competent adults; and

    o Connections to pro-social and rule abiding peers.

- Community Resources

    o Good schools;

    o Connections to pro-social organizations;

    o Neighborhood quality (safety/supervision, libraries, recreation centers);
    and

    o Quality of social services and health care.

Garmezy recognized that that these "protective factors" moderated the impact of

adversity on one's life. He also theorized that "adaptability" is a normal developmental

process for all individuals. Finally, his conceptual framework captured the idea that

resilience was transactional and dynamic—that it developed within a complex set of

actions and reactions occurring between an individual and others in his or her

environment. He asserted that it was within these complex transactions that sustained growth in adaptability and competency occurred (Masten & Powell, 2003).

Sir Michael Rutter (1979; 1981; 1985; 1987; 1991) a physician from Great Britain, who was knighted for his contributions in the field of child psychiatry, was another foundational researcher in the resiliency movement. Rutter studied 125 children of mentally ill parents over a 10 year period. He found that about half of these children grew to be well-adjusted adults. He then looked closely at those that were well-adjusted. First, he found that these well-adjusted children attached meaning to their challenges and incorporated their challenges into their belief system about life. They had a sense of agency and ability to plan. Second, he found that these children did not simply react, but tended to respond proactively and strategically to challenges. Finally, he found that they had positive self-esteem, a strong sense of self-efficacy, and a facility in using a range of problem solving strategies—all of which had been fostered by stable, caring relationships and successful problem-solving experiences.

Rutter (1985) observed that the most influential prior protective factor in developing resiliency was a good school experience that provided the student with social relationships and creative, athletic, or academic success. He noted that good schooling made it more likely that a student would learn to "exert planning." He found that "success in one arena of life led to a feeling of self-efficacy, enabling [the student] to then cope more successfully with subsequent life challenges…. (p. 604)." Rutter concluded that meeting challenges and overcoming difficulties was a normal developmental task and that resilience is promoted when young people experience opportunities to practice and

successfully manage life challenges. Finally, Rutter recognized the power of "one" good, caring relationship in the development of lifelong resiliency.

Emmy Werner (1989; 1992; 2001), Norman Garmezy (1983; 1987), and Michael Rutter (1979, 1981; 1985; 1987; 1987) all found, to their surprise, that most children who struggle with significant adversity grow up to be productive community citizens. They found that these "resilient" children exhibited an "inclination to act" which allowed them to practice and acquire a growing repertoire of problem-solving strategies— first to solve an immediate problem, but then to use these strategies, again and again, to manage future adversities. Each observed that this inclination to act was nurtured through caring relationships with adults. These researchers offer a clear, compelling, and unambiguous argument—that authentic caring relationships between children and adults are the primary vehicle in which long-term resiliency is cultivated. However, two questions remain: what happens within these caring student-teacher relationships that builds student resiliency; and how can schools capture the power of these relationships to intentionally and further develop the resiliency of its students. Contemporary researchers are seeking answers to these questions.

Conceptual Frameworks of Resiliency Theory

The good news is that all children have a capacity to build resilience (Werner & Smith, 1992). Resiliency is the successful adaption to challenging and threatening circumstances. Resiliency rests on three basic principles. The first is that resiliency is not an innate, static, or exceptional personality trait that one either has or does not have. Instead, it is the normative human developmental capacity to adapt to life which can be facilitated, deepened, and expanded through interactions with one's environment

(Benard, 2004; Masten & Reed, 2002; Werner & Smith, 1992). The second principle is that human beings are biologically programmed to develop and build resiliency across their lifespan and that these skills are fundamental to survival (Masten & Reed, 2002). Finally, the third principle is that the environment or ecology plays an integral role in building the resilience of children (Benard 2004; Milstein & Henry, 2008; Thomsen, 2002).

This study is informed by the following three conceptual resiliency frameworks that capture these basic principles. These include the developmental, asset, and social ecology theories of resilience. These theories are not mutually exclusive, but instead reflect a progressively more sophisticated understanding of the construct of resiliency that has occurred over time and research. The following is a brief summary of the contributions and limitations of each conceptual framework.

Developmental Theory of Resilience. Werner and Smith (1992) observed that participants who grew up to be well-adjusted adults exhibited a set of personal competencies that helped them make their way in the world. They viewed these competencies as "developmental possibilities" present in all individuals, that when engaged, assist individuals to further develop their abilities to cope with adversity. This theory emphasizes that assets or competencies are not static personality traits, but are "skills for adaptation" that are developed through struggle and practice within interactions with others. They can be learned. The developmental theory of resiliency is a conceptual framework uniformly adopted by educational leaders in the resiliency movement.

Developmental Asset Theory of Resilience. The developmental asset theory of resilience, as conceptualized by the Search Institute asserts that resilient children have a set of psychological and external assets that they can draw upon to overcome adversity (Starkman, Scales, & Roberts, 2006). Asset researchers from the Search Institute identified a set of 40 particular psychological and environmental attributes or assets that are associated with resiliency (Search Institute, 2013). These assets include attributes in the areas of support, empowerment, boundaries and expectations, constructive use of time, commitment to learn, positive values, social competencies, and positive identity. These researchers assert that children with a greater number of internal and external assets exhibit better outcomes. The usefulness of this theory is twofold. First, it holds that resiliency is not simply the absence of adversity, but rests on the interaction of the individual with his or her environment. Second, it names and defines internal and external assets giving educators, community programs, and mental health professionals a lexicon enabling them to talk about and intentionally build these environmental assets within their school, program, or community structure. The usefulness of this theory lies in its simplicity of conception and application. However, its simplicity is also its shortcoming. This framework fails to capture the complexity of teacher-student interactions which builds resiliency. This theory rests on the correlation of assets to the construct of "resiliency." It fails to address what actually happens within relationships or school communities that results in or causes children to develop an increased capacity to adapt to adversity.

Social Ecology Theory of Resilience. Social ecology theorists argue that the development of childhood resilience depends on the social and physical environments or

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"ecologies" that surround them. According to Unger (2012), resilience is a shared quality of the child and his or her social environment with the social environment playing a far more important role than the individual factors in explaining why children are able to overcome adversity to become productive and happy adults. These theorists assert that "nurture trumps nature." They reject the notion that psychological assets or the agency of the child alone is dispositive in building resiliency. They argue that the likelihood that a child's interactions with his social environment will promote well-being under adversity depends on the meaningfulness of these opportunities and the quality of resources provided. These theorists emphasize the role of "steeling effects"— that is resilience is fostered, not from being protected from adversity, but from successfully encountering adversity, over and over again. Anthony (1987) asserts that the environment creates "a kind of psycho-immunization" against future stress and adversity. Unger further observes that as environments change so do factors correlated with positive developmental outcomes. By analyzing interactions between the person and his environment, this theoretical framework attempts to describe "how" resiliency is built. The power of this approach is that it goes beyond correlation and attempts to examine causation and describe the complexity of what happens within resiliency building relationships.

In conclusion, this study accepts that resiliency is not a static personality trait, but a set of adaptation skills that are developed over time as individuals successfully cope with challenges. This study also accepts that resiliency is developed through interactions with caring people and a nurturing environment. Finally, this study rests on the assumption that in the ordinary course of teaching and learning, caring school environments provide powerful supports to children as they cope with serious life

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challenges and that these supports teach coping skills that become available for use when these children are faced with further life difficulties.

School Implementation Models

Benard (2004) and Milstein and Henry (1994) are educational researchers who have embraced the resiliency paradigm. They have written extensively about how educators can incorporate resiliency principles into educational practices. The following section describes school implementation models advocated by these researchers.

Benard's School Implementation Model. Bonnie Benard (2004) consolidated the disparate social science literature and built a comprehensive school implementation model which gives educators practical tools to capture the power of school-based relationships and the structure of the school community to help all students learn to adapt to challenge and grow from adversity. In *Resiliency: What We Have Learned (2004)*, a seminal work, Benard shares four hopeful messages from resiliency researchers that should drive how educators interact with students. These include:

1. All youth have the capacity for successful healthy development and successful learning.

2. Certain personal strengths are associated with healthy development and successful learning.

3. Certain characteristics of families, schools, and communities are associated with the development of personal strengths and in turn healthy development and successful learning.

4. Changing life trajectories of children and youth from risk to resilience starts with changing the beliefs of the adults in their families, schools, and communities.

Benard translated these core beliefs into a series of actions that schools can take to build relationships and organizational structures which demonstrably change the life trajectories all students and adults within those schools. Benard argues that it is the responsibility of the student and his or her family, school community, and the community-at-large to actively build the resiliency of all students. Finally, she forcefully asserts that if schools intend to grow resilient students, schools must also invest in building staff resilience.

Benard (2004) believes that all youth have the capacity for success, healthy development, and successful learning. She also believes that schools can be instrumental in changing life trajectories of children and youth from risk to resilience. First, she outlines those personal strengths that are associated with healthy development and successful learning. She then describes the characteristics of families, schools, and communities that are associated with the development of these personal strengths, which in turn, lead to healthy development and successful learning. In the next two sections, I will summarize Benard's views on both the personal strengths associated with resilient students and what schools can do to build these competencies within their school populations.

Personal Strengths and Competencies of Resilient Youth. Benard's resiliency model encourages educators to shift their attention "from seeing only risk to also seeing the resiliency of young people, especially those facing a whole range of challenge and

adversity" (Benard, 2004, p. 36). Benard reviewed the social science and resiliency research and organized a multitude of overlapping labels used to identify the personal competencies of persons described as resilient into the following four major categories: (a) social competence, (b) problem-solving, (c) autonomy, and (d) a sense of purpose. The following is a brief description of each of these competency categories:

Social Competence. Social competence is the ease with which a person is able to form positive relationships with others (Benard, 2004). Children with social competence have a positive outlook and are able to regulate their emotions. These children are also able to search out relationships and elicit positive responses from others. They learn to recruit friends and enlist help from them to achieve their goals. These children learn to communicate assertively with others in a manner that helps them achieve their goals while at the same time maintaining positive relationships with others. They know how other people feel and understand the perspective of others. These children notice when others need help, offer assistance, and take steps to alleviate the emotional distress of others. Children exhibiting social competence are responsive, empathic, compassionate, and skilled at communicating their own emotional needs and the emotional needs of others.

Problem-Solving. Problem-solving is the ability to plan, be flexible and resourceful, and think critically (Benard, 2004). Planning allows individuals not only to think long-term, but to develop short-term objectives designed to reach their long-term goals. Flexibility is the ability to explore and try different options when attempting to meet short and long-term goals. Resourcefulness includes the ability to take initiative, seek help, and identify novel ways to overcome obstacles. Critical thinking includes the

ability to understand perspective, identify the reasons for opinions and conclusions, and use metacognition or an understanding about how one learns to increase knowledge and problem solving strategies. Critical thinking also allows an individual to recognize mistreatment or unfairness, but to move beyond a view of themselves as victims. It also includes insight which allows children to question family assumptions that keep them enmeshed in dysfunctional relationships, thereby allowing them to realize the possibility of building healthy and satisfying relationships outside their immediate family.

Autonomy. Autonomy is the ability to act independently and to feel a sense of control over one's life (Benard, 2004). These students believe that the power to change their circumstances resides in themselves (internal locus of control) and that they "really can" achieve their life purpose. This strong sense of self-efficacy and internal locus of control allows them to initiate, maintain, and persist with goal directed behavior, even in the face of repeated obstacles. It also allows them to disengage from dysfunctional relationships and circumstances (adaptive distancing) and to reject negative messaging from others. Finally, individuals with a strong sense of autonomy see humor in their circumstances and are nonjudgmental about their own missteps and the missteps of others. They can reframe negative life experiences to see their positive impact, enabling them to move quickly past negative emotions.

Sense of Purpose. A sense of purpose is the belief that one will have an optimistic future (Benard, 2004). Persons with a sense of purpose exhibit a relentless determination not just to survive, but to build a life of joy and contribution. This sense of purpose translates into school completion, the development of special interests, imagination, and creative arts, an ability to deeply concentrate on a task, a belief that obstacles can be

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overcome, and a sense of spirituality. Finally, persons with a sense of purpose embrace their "struggle," using it to bring special meaning to their lives enabling them to deeply connect with others. Their struggle to cope becomes transformational.

   Environmental Protective Factors. Benard (2004) argues that resiliency is not developed through short-term social skills programs, but must be learned experientially through interactions within family, school, and community environments that provide support, modeling, and practice opportunities in natural settings for authentic purposes. Across each of these environmental spheres,[2] Benard identified three environmental factors which function as a dynamic triad to create a resiliency-building system for youth. These protective factors include caring relationships, messages of high expectations, and opportunities for participation and contribution. The following is a brief summary of each of these factors along with a summary of the research relied on by Benard in the development of her operational definitions:

   Caring Relationships. Caring relationships refers to relationships that offer "simple, sustained acts of kindness" (Benard, 2004; Higgins, 1994). Compassionate actions model caring and solution-based behavior. Small acts of kindness have been found to be so powerful that Meirer (1995) cautioned educators not to underestimate the power of these brief acts of kindness in helping youth to cope with adversity. Often an adult that reaches out may not even realize the effect that his or her simple act of kindness may have on a youth. Youth then learn to replicate caring behavior and incorporate "caring" into their identity and their characteristic responses to others (Eccles & Gootman, 2002).

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[2] This study focuses only on the school environment.

High Expectations. High expectations include both academic and social expectations that are clear, positive, and youth centered. They include routines and disciplinary procedures that are developed with youth involvement, and which are perceived as fairly implemented. They also include nonjudgmental responses to problem behaviors that look for the cause of the behavior and teach appropriate coping skills. Benard notes that it is important that these high expectations be based on the student's aspirations, not on what authority figures determine to be best.

Opportunities for Participation. Opportunities for participation and contribution include opportunities for youth to participate in engaging, challenging activities that allow them to explore personal interests, creativity, and imagination while developing relationships with others that can later become a part of a student's social support network. These activities provide a forum for reflection and dialogue in which they can voice their opinions, make decisions, and give back to their friends and community.

Henderson and Milstein's Implementation Model. Henderson and Milstein (1996) extended Benard's (1991) work by developing a resiliency model that captures the ideas of building resiliency, while at the same time mitigating risk factors in the environment. The Henderson and Milstein Resiliency Model sets out six themes, three for building resiliency and three for mitigating risk factors. The first three themes for building resiliency were taken from Benard's work. They include (a) providing opportunities for meaningful participation, (b) setting and communicating high expectations, and (c) providing caring and support. The second three themes for mitigating risk factors were taken from the work of Hawkins, Catalano, and Miller (1992). They include (a) increasing pro-social bonding, (b) setting clear, consistent

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boundaries, and (c) teaching life-guiding skills. The usefulness of this model is that it provides educators a paradigm not just to talk about the resiliency of students, but also to talk about the resiliency of families, educators, schools, and communities. Henderson and Milstein's Resiliency Model has been widely implemented in school improvement efforts throughout the nation (Henderson & Milstein, 1996; Milstein & Henry, 2008).

In their school implementation model, Henderson and Milstein rely heavily on the work of Steven and Sybil Wolin (1993). Based on counseling work conducted with their own clients, Wolin and Wolin developed an approach to resiliency that can easily guide the interactions of educators with their students. These practitioners advocated an approach in which people are viewed as having had "damaging experiences, "but not being "damaged." Instead, people with damaging experiences are viewed as being able to use their experiences to grow psychologically stronger. Wolin and Wolin argue that without adversity, one cannot become "resilient" and that without adversity a person has not had the opportunity to build coping skills. Wolin and Wolin identified the following internal resiliencies or coping strategies: initiative (proactive perspective, "can-do" attitude), independence (emotional distancing from problem people and situations), insight (reflection), relationships (connections, fulfilling ties), humor, creativity (coping through the arts), and morality (seeing one's self as good).

When helping a student work through adversity, Wolin and Wolin (1993) acknowledge that although it is important to validate a student's struggle, it is even more important to help the student to "reframe" their difficult experience in terms of active problem-solving. They emphasize the role of the adult is not to solve the problem for the child, but to empower the child to solve the problem himself or herself. The intention is

to build a child's sense of personal agency (self-efficacy) and an understanding that solutions to difficulties always rest within the child. Wolin and Wolin believe by naming a student's successful coping strategies, the student comes to recognize and "own" what he or she has done to survive. The strategy becomes part of their identity, available for use when the student is faced with new challenges. They assert that through celebration, dialogue, and reflection, caring adults help a student build ownership, agency, and pride in his or her ability to cope with life's challenges.

School Leadership Practices for Building Resilient Students: Culture of Caring

Sergiovanni (2005) argues that for a principal to lead a successful school, the principal must guide the school community to develop of a "climate of support for learning and caring in the home, among peers at school, and in the school itself" (p. 208). He states that to develop this "community of caring" within a school, school leadership must lead staff, students, and families to create a "community of mind" in which caring is valued and a norm system is developed in which caring behaviors are taught and rewarded and non-caring behaviors are discouraged and "frowned upon."

Sergiovanni (2005) defines a community as "a collection of people who are together bound to a set of shared ideas and ideals" (p. 209). He asserts that effective leadership builds a tight consensus around these shared ideals which not only brings people together in a common cause, but also allows room for individual self-expression of these ideals. To create a community of mind around the ideal of "caring," Sergiovanni states that it is essential for principals to set "caring" as a purpose around which action occurs. He argues that when school community members are bound to this ideal, it becomes part of the "heartbeat of the school community."

Nel Noddings (2005) also believed that "caring" was foundational to learning. She asserts that caring is a pedagogical starting point and a continuous framework for support. She argues that it is not enough for an educator to care; the student must also recognize that he or she is cared for. For "caring" to be transformational in teaching and learning, Noddings states that teacher caring must be embedded in an authentic relationship between the teacher and the student and grounded in dialogue, trust, and respect. She states that caring opens up the "carer" to motivational displacement in which all of the educator's energy and motivation flows to the needs and wants of the student. The teacher becomes "engrossed" with the needs of the student and is "all attentive."

According to Werner and Smith (1992), if a child has a relationship with a caring adult, the child is highly likely to develop trust, autonomy, and initiative. This relationship is typically provided by the parent, but it can also be provided by a parent surrogate. This relationship does not have to be perfect, it only has be to "just good enough" (Benard, 2004; Rak, 2002; Rutter, 1985). Further, it is parenting/mentoring style, not parenting/mentoring structure, that offers the warmth, caring, connection, guidance, expectations, and autonomy that makes the difference for children at-risk (Benard; 2004; Steinberg, 2000). Finally, families and caring adults that are "autonomy-granting" actively teach decision-making. Autonomy-granting occurs when the adult gradually releases responsibility and control of actions to the child. However, this granting of autonomy must be appropriate to safety risks presented by the child's community (e.g., high crime or gangs) and developmentally appropriate (Boykin & Allen, 2001). When families and nurturing communities require children to engage in caregiving or help adults with caregiving tasks for younger children, these acts of

"required helpfulness" teach compassion, decision-making, and autonomy and are positively correlated with resiliency in at-risk children (Benard, 2004). School communities that incorporate "required helpfulness" within its culture encourage its members to both value and act to help others within their community, thereby teaching children how to give back to others and their community.

Although parents and extended families clearly provide the most influential caregiving environment for children, when families are unable to provide this support, Benard (2004) asserts schools can do much to fill in the gap for these students. She states when schools meet the basic psychological needs of belonging and affiliation, a sense of competency and meaning, and feelings of autonomy and safety, that students who lack family support will thrive cognitively and socially. Benard argues when schools provide caring relationships, high expectations, and meaningful participation they create a learning environment that can close the achievement gap for these students. The following is a summary of Benard's recommendations for school action.

Caring Relationships in Schools

Research is clear that perceived caring and connectedness to others is important in successfully supporting at-risk children. A repeated finding in resiliency research was that successful at-risk youth often found this perceived caring and connectedness within their school community (Benard, 2004). However, frequently it was not the school itself that provided this caring and connectedness, but it was instead a single teacher that played this pivotal role in helping a child move from at-risk to resilient. Many times, these "turnaround teachers" were unaware that their simple acts of kindness and support had a transformative impact on a student struggling to cope. These turnaround teachers

were described as caring, being quietly available, having positive regard, and offering simple acts of kindness. When a school meets a student's basic psychological needs of belonging and safety, schools are then able to tap into a child's intrinsic desire to learn. These students gain competence, feel what they are learning is meaningful, and develop autonomy in both learning and decision-making (Benard, 2004).

High Expectations

Through caring relationships, turnaround teachers communicate positive expectations which guide behavior and challenge students to accomplish more than they think they are able to do (Benard, 2004). However, high expectations are not enough; there must also be sufficient support to assist students to achieve high expectations. Turnaround teachers encourage students to set their own high expectations and aspirations by using the student's own dreams and goals. They coach students to help them reach their goals and build confidence. But most importantly, they engineer opportunities for the student to learn problem solving skills under conditions that are likely to lead to positive outcomes (Weinstein, 2002). Finally, turnaround teachers help students to recognize their own personal power and view themselves as people capable of solving their own problems and reaching their aspirations (Benard, 2004). According to Benard, turnaround teachers recognize a student's strengths and "mirror" these strengths back to the student through authentic, compassionate conversations, thereby building in each student a sense of his or her own autonomy and competence.

Additionally, high expectations are communicated and supported through curriculum, organizational structure, and practices of the school (Weinstein, 2002). Deficit models that include tracking, heavy reliance on high stakes testing, and high

teacher-control instructional methods (compliance and punishment focus) are associated with poor outcomes. However, a challenging experiential curriculum, *with* supports and interventions to ensure that students succeed in that curriculum, is associated with positive outcomes. According to Benard (2004), educational practices associated with positive outcomes include:

- Individualized instruction is designed to meet the needs of a broad range of students.

- Learning opportunities are structured so that success is ensured.

- Art, music, and outdoor experiences and projects are embedded within the regular curriculum.

- Students have a choice of interest-based after-school clubs.

- Cultural differences are valued (e.g., language, history, relationships).

- The curriculum actively develops critical thinking, inquiry, and problem solving skills.

- The curriculum provides opportunities to develop a critical consciousness allowing students to explore themes of social justice.

- The implementation of fair behavioral interventions which encourage increased connection to the school.

Opportunities for Participation and Contribution in School

Benard (2004) argues that when schools offer students opportunities to voice one's opinion, make choices, actively problem-solve, express one's imagination, help others, and give back to the community, schools develop social competence, problem-solving skills, autonomy, a sense of self, and a belief in the future of its students.

According to Benard, giving students space to safely make mistakes within a caring environment is essential to building resiliency:

> This connection between autonomy and belonging is mutually reinforcing: the stronger someone's sense of self, the more able he or she is to form healthy connections to other people, with those healthy connections, in turn, further nurturing the sense of self (Benard, 2004 at 79).

Benard reports that the following school characteristics provide students with opportunities for autonomy and control:

- Student choice and decision-making is embedded within the instructional curriculum and the school culture.

- The curriculum offers experiential, inquiry, arts-based learning opportunities.

- Group processes (e.g., collaborative learning tasks, opportunities for reflection, student focus groups) are designed to build interpersonal skills, recognize the contributions of others, work towards a mutual goal, and contribute to the life of a school occur throughout the instructional day.

- Students participate in service learning opportunities.

- Students are encouraged to take responsibility for behavioral issues by making amends, restoring harmony, and contributing to the well-being to those affected.

Educator Resiliency Practices

When Michael Rutter (1979) examined schools that were successful in helping at-risk students to become resilient, he made three significant findings. First, the positive effects on at-risk students of these schools were cumulative. Second, schools that were able change the trajectory for at-risk students created a school community that supported resilience; not just for its students but also for its staff. Finally, schools that fostered resiliency had the following characteristics: (a) a quality core academic program; (b)

small learning communities; (c) high expectations for all students; (d) empowerment of decision-making for students, teachers, and administrators; (e) effective professional development; (f) a sense of health and safety; (g) family engagement in the education of their students; and (g) a strong school-community and school-work linkages.

Benard (2004) and Henderson and Milstein (2003) assert that if schools want to develop resilient students, they must first invest in building the staff resilience. Nan Henderson and Michael Milstein argue that "it is unrealistic to expect students to be resilient if educators are not (2003, p. 34)." They point out that educators cannot model or build student resiliency if they themselves are "barely coping." They advocate for the educational leaders to use the same principles set forth in their resiliency model for students to also build educator resiliency. These include: (a) increasing bonding, (b) setting clear and consistent boundaries, (c) teaching life skills, (d) providing caring and support, (e) setting and communicating high expectations, and (f) providing opportunities for meaningful participation. Milstein and Henderson make the following recommendations for educational leaders:

Increase pro-social bonding. Henderson and Milstein (2003) observe that struggling educators often feel isolated from other educators, have little incentive to cooperate, and have only sporadic and low intensity interactions with other adults in the school. They note that teachers spend their professional lives interacting with students, not their professional peers and that most systems of evaluation and professional rewards are based on their individual efforts with little attention given to cooperative efforts. Milstein and Henderson believe that educational leaders should create regular opportunities for teachers to interact with others across status differences and provide

organizational recognition for cooperative efforts. They state that educational leaders should also make sure that the vision and mission of the school are clearly communicated and agreed upon, that teachers are supported through positive interactions, and that equity and positive risk-taking is promoted.

Set clear, consistent boundaries. Henderson and Milstein (2003) find that because teachers are not part of the policy development process, teachers are often confused about expectations and think many rules are meaningless. They assert that educator growth and creativity is possible when rules are not arbitrary, but applied equitably and evenhandedly. To build educator resiliency, they recommend that educational leaders provide rationale for policies, include teachers within the rule making structure, and review rules to ensure that they are reasonable and manageable.

Teach life skills. Henderson and Milstein (2003) assert that resilient educators are professionally prepared educators with high quality pedagogical knowledge and skills. They recommend that professional development be meaningful and responsive to the needs of teachers. They assert that professional development activities should address both pedagogy and interactive processes such as critical thinking, conflict management, cooperative skills, and goal setting. Finally, they recommend that educational leaders find creative ways to reward individual growth.

Provide caring and support. Henderson and Milstein (2003) assert that when educational leaders focus on compliance, they often obtain only minimal staff performance. They recommend that educational leaders spend quality time with staff celebrating success, providing meaningful and supportive feedback, promoting

cooperation and a sense of belonging, and develop a reward system that recognizes contributions and cooperative efforts.

Set and communicate high expectations. Henderson and Milstein (2003) recommend that educational leaders recognize, appreciate, and celebrate educator achievement. They observe that educators are motivated by causes greater than themselves and when educational leaders tap into this sense of a common mission, they move an organization towards excellence and away from mediocrity.

Provide opportunities for meaningful participation. Henderson and Milstein (2003) observe that resilient educators offer more than is required by the narrow role definition of a teacher. They assert that it is up to educational leaders to capitalize on the special talents of their staff by creating opportunities for their special talents to be used and recognized.

Patterson and Kelleher (2005) also applied the resiliency paradigm to school leadership. They assert that school leaders that are most able to cope with challenges of school leadership are "realistically optimistic." The realistically optimistic leader sees adversity as a challenge. He or she then seeks out pathways to manage the controllable aspects of the adversity. They take the long view and "are able to maintain a positive outlook in the face of adversity without denying the constraints of reality" (p. 20). They also "seek to understand fully what is going on, including how they may have played a role in causing the adversity. Most importantly, they believe they can make a difference in the future despite the constraints imposed by reality (p. 5)."

Patterson and Kelleher (2005) argue that resilient leaders also operate from a set of personal core values that "live inside their heart, soul and mind." They then

persistently work within the organization to achieve these values. However, these personal core values are viewed as greater than the organization. They provide the leader clear direction and move the leader from being driven by events to being driven by ideas. Patterson and Kelleher assert that effective leaders align their core values to their statements and action, and without action core values are simply platitudes.

Patterson and Kelleher (2005) recommend that educational leaders build their own resiliency by developing their own personal sense of self-efficacy. They define personal self-efficacy as a person's beliefs about his or her ability to accomplish challenging goals and a person's confidence in his or her ability to make an impact. They note that self-efficacy is a contextual and dynamic process that results from interaction between a person and his or her environment, that one's sense of self-efficacy grows with success at coping with adversity, and that this success generates the motivation to invest energy into more ambitious goals and to persevere when faced with obstacles. They observe that one's sense of self-efficacy is a filter through which one evaluates past experiences and makes judgments about what goals to set for the future. People with a strong sense of self-efficacy tackle more challenging goals and accomplish greater achievements. Finally, Patterson and Kelleher argue that school leaders must take resiliency principles to the educators in their schools, thereby building resiliency among staff and within teams of educators.

Conclusion

One in every twenty students will experience the death of a parent. In a typical school of 600 students, it would not be unusual for a school to be serving ten to twenty students that have experienced the death of a parent. Unfortunately, most educators do

not realize that childhood grief looks very different from adult grief and looks different from what they might expect. They also do not know how to intentionally marshal their personal and school resources to support these children to learn while grieving.

These children will be in different places in their grief journeys. However, to adequately support the emotional needs of these children, the research is clear. Teachers need to understand how bereaved children grieve. They need to understand that because children are still developing cognitively, their grief will look very different from adult grief and that these children will need support not only during their acute stages of grief, but throughout their academic careers. Because one-third of bereaved children may experience more difficulty in school two years following a parental death, educators will need to make concerted efforts to assist these children to build their sense of safety, agency, and self-esteem by establishing caring relationships, holding high expectations for them, teaching them critical problem solving skills, and making sure they are involved in the learning and the culture of the school community in ways that are meaningful to them.

The good news is that the practices, interventions, and supports that build resiliency in bereaved children also build resiliency in all children. Bereaved children do not need special pull-out programs but instead need a culture of caring embedded within their school community. Most importantly these children, as do all children, need guidance and coaching from compassionate educators who closely observe them and intentionally design learning experiences which encourage them to engage in learning, become involved in their school community, build problem-solving skills, and regulate their emotions within the everyday school environment. They need relationships with

caring adults within the school environment that know them well and are knowledgeable about what actions schools can easily take to build resiliency for all students.

Because it takes resilient teachers to develop resilient students, school leadership has a daunting task (Benard, 2004). The research indicates that to build staff and student resiliency, educational leaders must create a culture of caring around both the school staff and its students. Sergiovanni (2005) and Milstein and Henderson (2003) assert that successful educational leaders build a culture of caring. They encourage a collegial supportive professional culture, fostering collaboration, setting high expectations for professional behavior, providing opportunities for meaningful participation in decision-making, offering opportunities for career growth, and delivering high quality and professional development responsive to the needs of the teachers and students.

This study examines how this high performing school supports and builds the resiliency of its bereaved students within the ordinary course of a typical school day. This study uses the conceptual nomenclature of bereavement and resiliency research to analyze the stories of these educators and this school. By looking at educator thinking, including the thinking of school administrators, this study will attempt to describe educator relationships with their bereaved students, how they made instructional decisions to support these children, and how they responded to the emotional needs of these children.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design and Rationale

This study used a qualitative research design to understand how one elementary school tackled the issue of child bereavement within the context of the regular elementary school classroom and the general school community. The study examined the essential understandings that guided 15 educators as they made decisions to support bereaved children. A qualitative design is appropriate when the purpose of a study is to understand how participants make sense of events and how their perspective informs their actions (Maxwell, 2005). A qualitative design is also appropriate when the purpose is to understand the process by which events and actions take place (Maxwell, 2005). This study was limited to constructing an understanding of current practices and then comparing current practice with essential understandings and recommended practices proposed in bereavement and resiliency research. The examination of the decision-making process of these educators should provide important information that will help other elementary schools better support their bereaved children.

Participants and Setting

Participants

This is a study of two groups of elementary educators as they provided support for seven bereaved children over two academic school years. This study began as a pilot

study conducted during the 2010/2011 academic year. Three bereaved children were supported by this first group of seven educators. Following the pilot study, one student transferred and no longer attended this school. The remaining two students moved on to new teachers during the 2011/2012 academic year. Their new teachers joined this study during its second year. After the data collection period of the pilot study, three more students experienced the death of a parent. The teachers of these students participated in the second year of this study during the 2011/2012 academic year. Therefore data were collected over two academic years, 2010/2011 and 2011/2012. The participants were those educators who were teaching or serving bereaved children during those respective years.

The bereaved children were not participants of this study. Instead the educators were the participants. During interviews, each educator was asked to develop his or her theory of the bereaved student he or she taught or served. Then using each educator's description of the bereaved student, the student's story was constructed from the educator's point of view. The student's story, as told by the educator, was embedded within the educator's narratives to capture the context or frame of reference for the thinking of each of the educators of that child.

These educators were from one suburban elementary school located in the southeast United States. This school was a high-performing school that had been recognized for both academic achievement and for closing the achievement gap. Further, this school implemented a school-wide positive behavior support program, designed to emphasize positive behavioral interventions, teach social skills and friendship strategies, develop a caring community, and prevent bullying behaviors (Office of Special

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Education Programs, 2009). This school was also in a high-performing district in which both the district and the school had met Annual Yearly Progress pursuant to the No Child Left Behind legislation for the preceding three years of this study. This school and district charged its elementary school educators to actively build classroom and school community and used a constructivist approach to teaching both literacy and content area subjects. Access to this school was gained through the principal. I am also a teacher at this school and worked professionally with the educators who participated in this study.

The first group of educators consisted of one principal, one guidance counselor, and five classroom teachers. This group served three bereaved children during the 2010/2011 academic year. The principal is White, in his mid-fifties and had been an administrator for more than 25 years. The guidance counselor was also White and in her mid-forties. Four of the five teachers were White and one was Black. All were female. One teacher taught a student in the second grade, one teacher taught a student in the third grade, and two teachers, as a team, taught one student in the fourth grade. Additionally, a former third grade teacher who had previously taught this fourth grade student participated, providing a retrospective account of her experiences when she taught him as a third grader. More specific demographic and background information on these participants will be provided in Chapter 4 of this study. All classroom teachers who taught a bereaved child were invited to participate in this study and all accepted.

The second group of educators consisted of a different principal, the same guidance counselor, and seven different classroom teachers. This group served six bereaved children during the 2011/2012 academic year. A second principal, Ms. Johnson, replaced the principal from the first group upon the retirement of the first principal, Mr.

Cannon. Ms. Johnson is White, in her late thirties, and served at this school as assistant principal and administrative assistant principal two years prior to her promotion as principal. She did not participate with the first educational group as she was on medical leave when data was collected. The guidance counselor participated both years.

The teachers in the second group were a different set of teachers from the first group. One teacher was a White male and one teacher was a Black male. The remaining teachers were White females. One teacher taught a student in first grade, one teacher taught a student in the third grade, and four teachers taught four students in the fifth grade. Several fifth grade teachers, as a team, taught the same bereaved children. Additionally, one special education teacher participated. She provided inclusion support for one fifth grade student with high functioning autism. Each classroom teacher who taught a bereaved child was invited to participate in this study and all accepted. More specific demographic and background information on the participants is provided in Chapter 4 of this study.

Setting

This elementary school is a high performing suburban school in the southeastern United States that serves approximately 700 students. This school met Adequate Yearly Progress pursuant to No Child Left Behind legislation for both years of this study. Additionally, the school received state wide recognition for student achievement and for closing the achievement gap. Approximately 70% of its students were White and 30% were Black, Asian-Pacific Islander, Hispanic, and/or American Indian/Alaskan. Approximately 25% of students received subsidized meals and 5% were students with limited English proficiency. Student teacher ratios were approximately 18-19:1 lower

than the state median for elementary schools of 19-20:1 and dollars spent per pupil was approximately $1000 more per pupil than the state median for elementary schools. No students had been suspended or expelled for violent or criminal and/or criminal offenses during the 2010/2011 or 2011/2012 school year

Data-Gathering Methods

Educator Interviews

To understand how educators made decisions as they supported bereaved students, in-depth interviews were conducted to learn about each participant's lived experience and to explore the meaning each participant assigned to his or her experience (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Each participant was interviewed in-person at the school separately once for 60 to 90 minutes using a semi-structured format. Interview questions were crafted to elicit information on each participant's background, bereavement history, understandings about bereavement, personal theory of each bereaved child as a learner, interventions provided, and their perceived support by school leadership. In depth questions were used to explore each educator's understanding of childhood reactions to parental loss, bereavement stages, common grief reactions in children, and healthy/unhealthy coping strategies. In depth questions were used to discern how each participant used information about what they knew about the child and what they knew about bereavement to make decisions to support the child educationally, socially, and emotionally in the classroom and/or school environment. Additional questions were asked to seek each participant's understanding of: (a) the grief process; (b) the problems presented by the bereaved child; (c) the factors considered when choosing an intervention or response; (d) issues of uncertainty; (e) the conceptual foundations for decisions;

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resources relied upon to make decisions; and (f) the outcome of those decisions. The questions which guided these interviews can be found in Appendix A. Following each interview, a written narrative for each teacher was prepared. Each educator was provided a copy of this narrative to review to determine whether the narrative captured his or her thinking. Several teachers clarified their comments. These clarifications were included in the final draft of each teacher's narrative. A second interview was held with several participants to address unresolved questions following a preliminary analysis of the first interview.

Focus Groups

Two focus groups were conducted at the end of each school year of the study to gather information regarding how each group of educators identified issues and designed interventions. These two groups of educators were also asked to assess current practice and make recommendations for future practice. Prior to these discussions, background information on how children grieve was presented to each group. The purpose was to give the focus group participants knowledge about how children grieve, how childhood grief differs from adult grief, how children cope with death, and how to help bereaved students develop lifelong resiliency. Information provided also addressed uncertainties and misconceptions that appeared within educator narratives.

Focus groups are effective for both member checking and to develop further insights and understandings (Glesne, 2006). These focus groups were used to member check and to encourage the group to brainstorm how this school, as an educational team, responded to bereaved children and how it could be even more responsive. Clarifying questions were asked to seek (a) the participants' beliefs and understandings of grief, (b)

problems presented by the bereaved child, (c) the factors considered when choosing

interventions and/or responses, (d) issues of uncertainty, (e) theoretical foundations for

decisions, (f) resources relied upon to make decisions, and (g) the outcome of their

decisions. Clarifying questions were also asked to understand what the participants

believed the school did well, what they believed the school could do better, and what

information and resources were needed to enable educators to be more responsive. A list

of issues addressed by the focus groups can be found in Appendix B. Each focus group

lasted approximately 90 minutes.

All participants were invited to participate in the focus group interview held

during 2010/2011 year of this study. Five educators participated in this focus group.

Participants from both 2010/2011 and 2011/2012 years were invited to participate in the

focus group interview held during the second year of this study. Five educators also

participated in the second focus group.

Data Collection, Organization of Data, and Data Analysis

Each interview and focus group was audio-recorded and then transcribed. A

narrative or story for each educator, which incorporated the teacher's view of the

bereaved student they taught, was prepared. Quotations from the interviews were used to

develop each narrative. Using childhood bereavement and resiliency paradigms,

narratives were coded in accordance with the following three overarching themes:

- Childhood Bereavement: Understandings, Preparation, and Practice;

- Resiliency-building Instructional Practices; and

- School Leadership Practices.

Within each of these overarching themes, transcriptions of each interview were used to find common sub-themes across educators. These themes included (a) bereavement experiences, (b) childhood bereavement understandings and misconceptions; (c) each teacher's theory of the student as a learner; (d) interventions used to support each bereaved student; (e) instructional decision-making; time following bereavement; family/school interactions; (f) acute grief indicators (e.g., confusion, shock, crying); (g) attenuated grief indicators (e.g., anxiety, withdrawal, difficulties with self-esteem, self-efficacy, and managing emotions); (h) resiliency-building practices; (i) bereavement issues addressed by educators; (j) type of school support; (k) leadership role/activities; and (l) uncertainties or recognized need for information or resources. Computer files for memos relating to subjectivity and conclusions were maintained. Field notes following the interviews and focus groups were also dictated. (Glesne, 2006).

Trustworthiness and Member Checking

Triangulation

Data collection was triangulated by using multiple participants, perspectives, and data collection methods (Glesne, 2006). Data was collected twice, once per year over a two-year period. A variety of people with different roles, backgrounds, and perspectives on supporting bereaved children were interviewed. These included two administrators, one guidance counselor, and 12 teachers. Educators who supported children from two weeks post-parental death to four years post-parental death were interviewed. Several teachers taught the same student during the same academic year. Others taught the same child across several years. A variety of data collection methods, which included both

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structured and unstructured questions, were used during interviews. Educators were also brought together in a focus group to reflect on their common experiences.

Member-checking

Following each interview, interpretations were verified with each participant. Throughout interviewing, summaries of understandings of each participant's views were restated for clarification and confirmation. Following interviews, narratives were prepared that included quotes, interpretations, and findings for each person interviewed. These narratives were then provided to each person interviewed. Each participant was asked to clarify any misconceptions they found in their narrative. Their responses were then included in final narratives (Wolcott, 2008).

Rich, Thick Descriptions

The context for each educator's experience was included. Each bereaved student was described by his or her teacher. Each educator's grief background and perspective was provided using extensive direct quotations to support this study's findings and interpretations. For enhanced understanding, context and appropriate syntax was included within each quotation. Also for increased readability, extraneous speech utterances such as "um" and "and" were also omitted.

External Audit

A licensed professional counselor reviewed narratives, coding, analysis, and interpretations to verify and obtain a professional mental health opinion about coding, analysis, and interpretations.

Subjectivity and Positionality

Subjectivity

In 1968, my father was killed in Vietnam when I was 12 years old. For the last 15 years I have been an active member of Sons and Daughters in Touch, a support group of adult who as children experienced the death of their fathers during the Vietnam Conflict. As part of this support group, I have participated in sharing circles, Father's Day Memorial Day activities, and other support activities designed to support grief recovery. Throughout these activities, members of this support group frequently spoke about school events and educators who supported their healing and/or complicated their grief. I believe my experience with bereavement offered additional insight as I was more likely to understand the circumstances and issues affecting the learning of a bereaved child. I do not believe my subjectivity negatively impacted this study.

I was a resource teacher at this elementary school and taught one child for three years—from 3rd grade through 5th grade, who had experienced the death of her mother and later the same year the death of her grandmother, who had become one of her primary caregivers. This child was not one of the bereaved students supported by the educators studied. I observed and supported this child within the context of providing tutorial assistance in the resource classroom. From this experience, I realized how closely I was able to observe her and how important it was for me and her classroom teachers to support her in building friendships, regulating her emotions and concentration, building her sense of self-efficacy, and re-engaging her interest in learning and participating in school activities. For the three years I taught her, I chose not to speak to her directly about the death of her mother or grandmother. However, I remained constantly aware that

she was grieving, and I vigilantly watched her for signs of distress. I noticed that she wore a ring that belonged to her mother daily and that she had bent the ring so that it fit her very small finger. I observed her panic when she thought she lost this ring. We stopped class at that very moment to find the ring. I also observed her anxiety when her father failed to show up for a school performance. I allowed her to repeatedly call him until she reached him. I noticed that she routinely came to school disheveled and inappropriately dressed for the weather. I noticed that when she was in the third grade, she seldom spoke to others and was often confused and disengaged during most classroom discussion. I chose not to call on her directly as she also had significant articulation difficulties which interfered with her intelligibility. But whenever she showed an interest in any subject matter, I followed her lead ensuring that all communicative attempts were well-received by her peers. I also observed that she enjoyed teaching younger students and provided her ample opportunities to engage with younger students. Over the course of the three years I taught her, I had the privilege of watching her slowly re-engage in learning and begin building friendships with her peers. When she graduated elementary school in the fifth grade, she had grown up into a very competent young lady with very strong opinions. She was able to make things happen for herself.

When designing this study, I contemplated how vigilant I was as I observed this student and how frequently and carefully I designed special learning experiences which encouraged her to engage with others. I wondered whether other teachers also vigilantly monitored their bereaved students and how they intervened when they observed these students struggling in school.

Positionality

Although I was a teacher at this elementary school, I did not have a supervisory position with respect to any of the participants. I did not provide instruction to any of the bereaved children served by the participants.

Ethical Issues

Because I interviewed educators about how they supported at least one bereaved student, there were times when a name or identifying information about the student was mentioned. I cautioned the educators I interviewed not to mention names or identifying information. At the beginning of each interview, I asked each educator to use a pseudonym for each child. When a student's name was inadvertently mentioned, I transcribed the pseudonym, instead of the student's actual name. I omitted any identifying information from my transcription of the interview.

I obtained the written consent of all educators who participated in this study. A copy of this Consent can be found in Appendix C. The names of all educators were kept confidential. No identifying information (such as the particular school studied) was reported.

Limitations/Considerations

The school that was the subject of this study used a constructivist approach to literacy and learning. Because constructivism forms the theoretical foundation for bereavement and resiliency research, the results of this study may not be applicable to schools that do not take a constructivist theoretical stance to learning. This study examined how one school provided bereavement support for seven elementary school students. Because elementary children have different cognitive challenges than older

students, the results of this study may have limited applicability to middle and high school students. Also, educators who that were studied provided support to students who experienced the death of a custodial parent. Research shows that this type of loss has far greater impact on school performance than the loss of other family members or non-relatives in a student's life. The findings of this study may not be useful in studying the support provided to students who experienced the loss of persons other than parents. Also the findings of this study may not be useful in understanding how educators support large numbers of children who experienced a common loss, such as the death of a teacher or peer. Finally and importantly, this research was intended only to address how educators provide bereavement support within the regular education classroom and school community. This research was not intended to address counseling needs of these children, which should be provided only by a qualified mental health provider. Finally, because this research studied educators at one well-resourced, high performing, suburban, predominantly White elementary school, these findings may not be applicable to children across cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic groups.

Conclusions

Qualitative research methods were used to study how educators at one elementary school supported bereaved elementary children within the context of a regular education classroom and general elementary school community over two academic years. This study explored how these educators made instructional decisions to address the instructional and emotional needs of these students and how a culture of caring was developed at this school that was responsive to bereaved children. School leadership strategies that were in place that allowed for these instructional decisions and

interventions to occur were also examined. However, given the limitations set forth in

this chapter, this study is intended to provide guidance to educators to assist them in

improving school support and interventions to bereaved students.

CHAPTER 4

NARRATIVES

`   This study examined the key understandings, practices, and interventions used by educators (including the principal, the guidance counselor, and teachers) at one elementary educational school when supporting bereaved children. This study also investigated how school leadership supported these educators as they taught bereaved children and how their day-to-day interactions reflected sensitivity for the bereaved child, diverse family views of bereavement, and the emotional needs of the bereaved children and families.

First, this study examined the beliefs, understandings, and staff expectations of both principals in this study as reflected through his/her leadership philosophy on the issue of childhood grief. Second, this described the role the school guidance program played in supporting bereaved children. Thirdly, this study examined the understandings, practices, and interventions employed by the teachers as they supported seven bereaved children, four of whom had experienced the death of a parent or both parents within four months of educator interviews, one that had experienced the death of a parent within one year of educator interviews, and a two who had experienced the death of a parent more than two years prior to educator interviews.

Chapter 4 includes each individual teacher's narratives which outlined: (a) each teachers training on childhood bereavement; (b) influences on each teacher's thinking as

they supported a bereaved child; (c) each teacher's understanding of the bereaved child as a learner; (d) the difficulties each teacher observed as each student and their family struggled through grief; (e) the actions each teacher took in response to the difficulties they observed; (f) each teacher's process of instructional decision-making; (g) each teacher's confusions about supporting bereaved children; and (h) a description of the support each teacher received from school leadership. These narratives attempted to capture the thinking of each educator as he or she made instructional decisions in the moment, framing their responses within the language of childhood bereavement and resiliency theory.

Throughout these findings, extensive quotations which describe how each educator used their personal grief experiences, their understandings of the grief experiences of others, their experiences as a parent, and other life experiences to guide their instructional decision-making as they provided for cognitive, social, and emotional needs of grieving children and families are provided. This study also presents interview excerpts to demonstrate how educators considered the diverse aspects of bereavement, including ethnic, racial, religious, and linguistic bereavement practices and how their day-to-day teaching reflected sensitivity to these diverse perspectives. Finally, this study examined the understandings, practices, and interventions of these educators regarding how childhood grief was expressed, how they responded to grieving children, their expectations and misconceptions about grieving children, and how they helped these children build coping skills leading to lifelong resiliency.

This study also presents a consolidation of themed findings across educators in Chapter 5. Within Chapter 5, this study also presents the leadership practices that

supported these educators as they responded to the emotional needs of these students. Finally also in Chapter 5, this study describes the articulated beliefs and expectations of two groups of educators as they examined ways this school could be more responsive and proactive in addressing the needs of these special students.

School Leadership: Understandings, Practices, and Interventions

The principal sets the tone, attitude, and staff expectations of every school. He or she empowers staff and garners necessary resources to carry out these expectations and leads staff, students, and families to develop the school culture and climate. Therefore, the principal's beliefs, leadership practices, and staff expectations are critical in determining how well a school supports its grieving children. Two principals participated in this study. Mr. Cannon was the principal of this elementary school for the first year of this study (2010/2011). Following Mr. Cannon's retirement, Ms. Johnson served as principal for this elementary school during the second year of this study (2011/2012).

Mr. Cannon, Principal 2010/2011

Background. Mr. Cannon reported that he had not received specialized training in childhood bereavement in his teacher preparation program, his educational leadership program, nor through on-going professional development. Instead, he relied on his 19 years of experience as an administrator, information from school guidance counselors which he obtained as he supported bereaved families, and his own personal grief experiences, including the grief experiences of his children, to make decisions about how this school should support bereaved children.

Bereavement Preparation. During his 19 years as an administrator, Mr. Cannon led several school communities as they responded to the deaths of students, teachers, and

staff. During these difficult situations, he relied heavily on school and district guidance counselors for practical information. He learned that it was best to avoid euphemisms for death such as "going to meet one's maker" or "passing away," and to use clear terminology such as "has died" and "her death." He noted that children can be confused by unclear phraseology. He also learned that it was important for children to have the opportunity to express grief through memorials. He believed that it was important for staff to attend funerals and visitation whenever one of their students experienced a parental death.

Bereavement Leadership Influences. Mr. Cannon used his own personal grief experiences, the grief experiences of his children, and his life experiences as a parent to guide his decision-making when supporting bereaved children. He described three experiences that helped him understand the grief reactions of children. First, he experienced the death of a close childhood friend when he was 12 years old. He reported that he knew that children feel "real pain" when a loved one dies because he, as a child, had felt this same pain. He explained:

> Probably the first real experience of dealing with a child's death was when I was 12 years old and a very good friend of mine who lived on the beach with us, was in Boy Scouts, played sports activities, played baseball with him, played football with him, you name it… He was struck by lightning… one summer. His family had a home on the lake. A big storm came up. He and his cousin ran to the biggest tree that they could find and got under it. Lightning hit the tree. So, my Boy Scout troop was the honorary pall bearers. We were 11, 12, 13 years old. I happened to be 12… Yes, I guess maybe the grief—I think the experience of that kind of grief at that kind of age probably helps you understand that a child's grief is real, that there is real pain involved there because you, yourself, experienced it.

Second, Mr. Cannon supported his two adult daughters when they experienced the death

of their mother, Mr. Cannon's former wife. He described his feelings of helplessness as

he tried to help his own children through their grief.

> [The death of their mother] was very difficult for my children… I think it is difficult as anything. When it is a family member it's tough. But then when you see your own children grieving, that is… just as tough as anything you can experience because you want to protect your own children and you don't want them to go through and feel pain. You want them to learn some things the hard way, but you don't want them to learn the tough things the hard way. You don't want them to learn what it feels like to lose a parent at an early age. Death is one of those inevitable things. Everybody is going to have it, the certainty and the finality…, but you want to protect your children from that kind of grief... Having that experience with my own children, having lost their mother, I think, helps me to understand the permanence and the realness of [death]… when you see them go through that grief. I think that nothing hits you like something that hits you at home.

Finally, Mr. Cannon recounted a conversation he had with the father of a young

elementary-aged student who died in a car accident. Again, he referred to his own

feelings of helplessness and of being emotionally present with another father as that

parent openly grieved the loss of his wife and daughter:

> My first year as a principal, we had a child and a mother to die in an automobile accident. It was one of the most touching. Her father was about 6'5" and about 300 pounds—a big huge man. He broke down and cried. It was one of the most chilling things that I had ever been around. The mother and child were buried in the same casket. With that one, we had to remove the desk before the children came in because there was just a sense of that empty desk was going to be really difficult to deal with for a group of children. She was killed in an automobile accident, her and her mother, on a Sunday. We found out about it Sunday night. I got in the classroom before the children got in there the next day. We removed the desk and things like her books and that kind of thing.

School Bereavement Practices. Mr. Cannon believed that the school should

respond to the needs of its bereaved children and their family, through both practical and

emotional support. He believed the school should inform the family of available services.

Mr. Cannon observed that family roles and resources often change, and the family may need support services, such as free and reduced lunches or access of the school social worker. He emphasized that the school should be respectful of the desires as expressed by the family. In the following excerpt, Mr. Cannon addressed the need to balance privacy and family autonomy while at the same time supporting a family through an emotional time.

> Some of it is trying to find that balance… between privacy… reaching out. Some of it is trying to figure out, do I do this. If… I do this, then is this going to be viewed someway differently than I intended for it to be… My approach is that I don't really like to tell people how to run their family unless they either invite us or it is obvious that they are really struggling. Then we start to do some things that help them to manage their family kinds of turmoil. For the most part, I don't think it is our job, as school people, to tell people how to run their family, unless… a child is being neglected or a child is being abused. Those kinds of things, we have no choice. That is something we do because of the people that we are and the responsibility that we have… I don't like to interfere with the running of their household unless I am invited to do so. So, we try to figure that piece out.

Mr. Cannon communicated to staff that he expected each person to "think about" then "do" what was in the best interests of every child. He also believed it was important to trust teachers, who were in closer proximity to the child, to assess a child's emotional needs. This expectation set forth a clear purpose along with a moral imperative. He then granted teachers autonomy to do what they thought was best for that child. His only guiding admonition for staff was to address the emotional needs of each student in the same manner as they would address the emotional needs of their own children.

> You try to figure out what is in the best interest of the child. You would do for a child the same thing that you would do for your own child. While they were in school and in your care; they are like your own children. At the end of the day, my answer… is "What would I have done for my children under similar circumstances? Is this what I have done for them?" If you can answer that one, I think that you probably can go home and

sleep at night pretty easily. That is usually my measure. If I can sleep… I feel pretty good. If I can't, then I know that I need to come back the next day and do something about it. That's a long explanation of what I expect teachers to do… To do for the child what they would want somebody to do for their children in a similar… circumstance.

Conclusions. This principal, with 39 years of experience as an educator, had not received formalized research-based training or professional development in childhood bereavement. Though he obtained the advice of the school guidance counselor, he also heavily relied on his own grief experiences and the grief experiences of others as he made leadership decisions. From his own experience as a youngster, he understood the "real pain" that accompanies grief when children face the death of someone close to them. He also experienced feelings of helplessness as he tried to console both his own daughters and members of his school community as they responded to deaths of loved ones. He believed that school communities should support families during bereavement. Although he recognized the need to consider the family's privacy and autonomy, he also expected school staff to rely on their experiences as parents and treat each grieving child how they would want and expect their own child to be treated.

Ms. Johnson, Principal 2011/2012

Background. Ms. Johnson was a first year principal at this elementary school. She was White and in her mid-thirties. She had two daughters, one a preschooler and the other a kindergartener. Before serving as principal of this school, Ms. Johnson also served as the assistant principal and administrative assistant principal of this same school. She had a bachelor's degree in sociology and political science, and a master's degree in public administration as well as in educational leadership. Prior to serving in an administrative capacity, Ms. Johnson taught for five years in a special education self-

contained classroom for students with autism at another school in this district. Ms. Johnson was on medical leave during the first year of this study and began her participation during the second year of this study.

Bereavement Preparation. Ms. Johnson had no formal educational preparation in the area of childhood bereavement. However, she believed the knowledge she obtained in pursuing her sociology undergraduate degree, along with her religious beliefs, consultation with the guidance counselors and school psychologists, and her own grief history informed her decision-making on how best to support bereaved children.

Bereavement Influences. Ms. Johnson experienced the deaths of two of her best friends. As a teenager, Ms. Johnson was involved in a car accident which caused the death of her best friend. As the driver of the car, she experienced a great deal of guilt and trauma both from the accident and from the reaction of her best friend's family. This trauma was transformational for Ms. Johnson. To heal emotionally, she developed a life view in which she decided to value and honor her relationships with others, be emotionally aware of the emotional pain of others, and positively influence others to help them grow. She made a conscious decision to use her trauma to create meaning and a life purpose.

> When I was 15, I was driving in the car. My best friend, since second grade, was in the car with me. I lost control of the car. She flew out and died. My brother was actually on her lap. My brother is my best friend in the entire world and he, by a miracle, stayed in the car. She flew out. That changed everything for me—my perspective about life; my perspective about how to treat people; my perspective; my everything. Everything changed at that moment. I realized I was still here for a reason. I was going to make sure that I fulfilled every mission that I'm supposed to be on.
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> Her sister blamed me. The parents did to some extent. They still live in the area. It is still very, very uncomfortable—very painful actually. There is a

lot of guilt there. [I] actually had to go to therapy because of the guilt and what it did to me. So, I'm very cautious and respectful. It really helped me to never offer advice and never talk too much—just to say I am here. I use a lot of the good and the negative that was done to me during those experiences… I try to pull from what worked for me as to how I deal with situations and how I interact with the people.

Eight years later, Ms. Johnson experienced the death of another best friend who died of a brain tumor. She stated, "My best friend in the world got a brain tumor, and I had to watch her… She died almost one year to the day from her diagnosis. I watched her pass and what it did to her." Ms. Johnson reported that during this extended illness, there was little she could do other than be emotionally present and available to her friend. She believed this experience taught her to listen for the emotional needs of the families at this school. She mentioned speaking to a mother expecting to die from cancer about how this mother wanted the school to care for her children upon her impending death. Following the death of this parent, Ms. Johnson met with the child's father and teachers to ensure that the school provided its resources seamlessly. She cut through red tape, accessed available supports, and removed obstructions. She also made sure each student had a mentor, specifically recruiting a former teacher for one of this mother's children.

> We had a parent here last year that was dying of cancer. She met with me a couple times about her children that were here. The next school year, the teachers and the husband met with me… I used my experience with… my friend… when dealing with this family, I was able to make phone calls at the right time, say things the right way, decide when a school procedure or policy—not a board policy but a school procedure— could be broken because this was a different situation. I knew right when I heard about the diagnosis that I needed to get very good mentors for these children. We had two here at the time. I had actually sought out one of the student's past teachers that had retired to be one of the mentors. [I] pretty much begged her to do it. I didn't realize at the time—that ended up being one of the best things for her.

Ms. Johnson used her grief experiences to build a culture of caring at this school. Recently, Ms. Johnson led this school community as it supported a staff member and the staff member's son (who was also a student as this school), following the death of a newborn child. Prior to this child's death, this newborn received extraordinary medical interventions to help him to survive. Ms. Johnson spoke about being emotionally present for this staff person during the course of her son's extensive hospitalization, listening for, and then communicating to school staff the needs of the family. She also spoke about the school staff being a second family and the need for staff to come together to plan and be united in support of this teacher and her family.

> It was very, very, very difficult on multiple levels. Personally, I had a child, a little over a year ago. So, it really hit home. Also all during the process, this teacher called me at night to talk to me, because she just needed somebody that was not connected to the situation to listen. All the teachers have my cell phone number. I expect them to use it whenever they need it because they don't need to worry at night. So, she would call me. I was able to process along the way the situation because she allowed me to be a part of it. I didn't share it with anyone. That is also very difficult to keep… So, I stepped back. I really thought, "If it were me, how would I want it to be handled?" Your work is your second home. I thought a long time about it. I thought about the culture of our school and our community—how she is such a huge part of that community. So, I handled it the way I would want someone to handle it if it were me, that had lost a loved one so very dear. Then I stayed in close contact before I did anything. I stayed in close contact with this teacher. [I] said, "This is what I'm thinking—are you okay with it?" We dialogued back-and-forth, many times. I got her permission on the way with everything way before I did it. There were rumblings about the situation the day before. But she had not given me permission to discuss it with the staff. So, I did not meet. Then, it just didn't feel right handling something like that via email. So with all the teachers in our community, I felt like a family meeting was the most appropriate way to make sure everyone was informed. You could answer all the questions. Then we would all have a plan together… be united. Hearing from that teacher, it… made a huge difference because that teacher also has a son here. [He] was very worried [about] how he was going to be received. All the work that the group, the school, and the teachers and staff members did ahead of time... The son said, "I was so worried about coming back. It has been great. No one has asked about

anything. I was able to just be a kid." He was very happy. The teacher shared the same thing with me. She was like amazed at how the kids just went on. "That is what I needed. I needed this to be a refuge [where] I can get away from it."

Ms. Johnson believed that her grief history provided her two transformational gifts that she frequently and purposefully used when emotionally supporting both students and staff. The first gift was the ability to be emotionally available, sometimes for extended periods of time, when others are coping with trauma. Her personal grief history allowed her to tolerate emotional distress people commonly feel when they observe others struggling through trauma and crisis. Being emotionally available to others became a core personal value for her. When Ms. Johnson marshaled staff support for this grieving teacher and her son by calling "a family meeting," she communicated this core value to staff intending to strengthen a culture of caring within the school community. She communicated what was happening, set forth staff expectations, and opened dialogue. She ensured that school staff was emotionally present for this teacher to simply do what could be done.

Ms. Johnson's grief experiences offered her a second gift which she described as "perspective." She defined perspective as the ability to assess what is important in life, emphasizing a holistic or big picture point of view grounded in making life meaningful and fulfilling a life purpose. She described the following conversation she had with a young student in which she helped this student reframe her perspective to see the bigger picture and value personal effort.

> I give them perspective… I had a student a couple of weeks ago, hysterically crying because she did not make honor roll. So we sat down and talked about it… I said, "Did you give it your all? Did you work the hardest you could work? Did you do the best you could do?" She was like, "Yes." Then, I said, "That is the accomplishment that you want. Honor

roll is just a piece of paper. It is all about perspective." [She said,] "My parents are going to kill me." [I responded,] "Are they really going to kill you? No. Maybe they are going to be a little disappointed. All you have to say to them is, "I worked the hardest I could work." Grades are just a letter."

I am less in the discipline role. I do a lot of coaching. "Are you a good person; are you trying your best?" I also let them know I was at best a C student in elementary school. It was difficult for me. I was a different learner. The resources were not there… I was younger. It took me a while to figure out how I learned and what worked for me. It took until college for me to really make everything click. I was never in a [the gifted program]. I would say, "Do you think I'm smart?" "Oh yes, definitely!" "Do you think I'm successful?" "Absolutely!" "Being in a [gifted program] in elementary school does not make you smart or successful. Doing well on some tests, and that's great, but it didn't mean that people who didn't do as well aren't very smart too." So, I do a lot of that, that's kind of my big... All three administrators have their own niche and role. I typically catch the students that are down on themselves about their academic performance. I put it all under perspective. Then, I personalize it.

School Bereavement Practices. Ms. Johnson estimated that at this time, there were six to seven students at this school that experienced the death of a parent. This school served approximately 700 students, grades pre-kindergarten (four-year-old kindergarten) to fifth-grade. She reported that this elementary school provided a variety of support services for bereaved students, which included: (a) guidance support, (b) grief counseling by guidance counselor and/or school psychologist, (c) teacher/staff consultation with guidance counselor and/or school psychologist, (d) consultation with the family, consultation with outside counselors, (e) a mentoring program, and (f) administrative monitoring through both student assistance teams and behavior management teams. Both the student assistant team and behavior management teams were comprised of administrators and educators who reviewed each student's progress, developed intervention plans, and monitored their progress. In additional to educators, the

student assistant team also included parents as participants. Finally, for special education

students, behavioral support and accommodations are provided through a student's

Individual Education Plans (IEPs).

The guidance counseling program included both a grief group and check-ins with

both students and teachers. The guidance counselor also serves as an advocate for the

bereaved child.

> We have small groups for them. Our guidance counselor has started an art project with them. They are in small groups. They do art projects and talk about things. Our guidance counselor is like their safety person. She has books for them and she counsels them, as needed. She checks in with them. She lets the teachers know about the situation. Every child is different and how they handle it [is different.]

The school also consulted with the school psychologist and outside mental health

professionals. Ms. Johnson described the difficulties presented by one special education

student and how the school mobilized a variety of school resources to assist him. She also

discussed the necessity of consulting with professionals with mental health expertise

beyond that which can be provided by educational professionals was required.

> We have one [student] that is having extreme difficulties right now. He has counseled with our school psychologists. We realized as a team, it was beyond the scope of what a school guidance counselor is trained in. We needed to go to the school psychologist [who] would be trained more efficiently. Then the case manager was going to get permission to speak and have dialogue with his outside therapist, as well.

> We have a check-in/check-out system… Because that child was having a lot of difficulties, with just compliance, doing his work, very depressed— tests show he's actually suicidal. So, the… [special education teacher] developed a system where he gets positive praise when he's doing what he's supposed to be doing throughout the entire day by multiple people. There are a lot of people at the school that he responds well to. [We're] just trying to give him everything we have got. It has been difficult with our school psychologist being out. He had developed a really [good rapport with her]. And now, we have had multiple school psychologists coming in, which I am sure added to some of the stress.

During her tenure as principal, Ms. Johnson ensured that school leadership informed classroom teachers of any student who had experienced a parental death. She also believed it was important "to monitor [these] children and watch them in the steps of grieving and know when to give them some space." Typically the guidance counselor checked in with both the student and his teacher to learn of possible difficulties.

> We always let the new teacher know. They know what is going on. Our guidance counselor checks in with [the students] throughout the year and makes sure they understand she is a safe place to go to and she is a safe person to talk to. She does groups for [these] students. We have a student that lost his mom five years ago, and he is in that group. It depends, some students do not want to be a part, but typically they do.

School leadership provided indirect support to bereaved students by preparing his or her peers for the bereaved student's return to school. During conversations with peers, Ms. Johnson directly taught classmates social skills that would allow them to welcome the student back to school, be a compassionate friend, and interact and talk with the bereaved student. Ms. Johnson noticed that this dialogue was particularly helpful for another student, who had experienced a parental death the year before. He gave his classmates advice about what helped him. Ms. Johnson also sent out letters to parents of the child's classmates so the parents would have the tools to continue the conversation with their son or daughter. In this excerpt, she described these peer conversations:

> We tell the students just the basics of what happened. We keep a lot of the details out. We acknowledge their fears. You know at the elementary age, they automatically think, "This could happen to one of my parents." When they go down that road, we acknowledge that that is completely normal. We give them what to say to the student when [their friend] return[s].

> Unfortunately, this has happened so much, we have a system down. We will begin the conversation with, these are the facts and this is what happened. Then the guidance counselor will take over the more in—depth emotional part of it. We give them what to say which is, "Welcome back,

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we missed you and we're glad you're here." We let them know, [that saying] "I'm sorry" and things like that will trigger something that they don't need. We emphasize that school needs to be a safe place and they just need a place where they don't have to think about it if they don't want to. We also encourage them, [by saying] that, "It's okay [to talk about the death of the parent] if they seek it out. If the child that lost someone comes to them and wants to talk about it, then talk about it, [but] don't ever begin that conversation with them." So, that is a lot of what we do.

A neat thing that happened is, when we had a student that had lost his father earlier this calendar year. The guidance counselor and I always go and speak to the classes… We give the other students the tools [they] to interact with the student when they come back. After we had been in one class, [another] student who had lost his parent the year before that never really started to open up… told what he liked and what people did and the things that really upset him. So, it was a really good dialogue. I have seen him really blossom since that experience. He is just more happy, open, and confident. He has actually talked to one of the school psychologists that had been here about it. He really didn't talk about the situation and what happened last year. So, it's been really neat that a tragedy brought a good thing out of another student.

Finally, when appropriate, this school offered community mentors to be adult friends for a grieving student.

For the students who are open to it and the parents were open to it, we have mentors assigned. Typically, they spend one hour a week. Typically it is more—just giving a moment of positive adult influence… They have an end of the year event that's a lot of fun. It is just being aware. Some of the students want to talk about it and want to engage.

Student Resiliency-Building Leadership Practices. Using a positive, strength-based perspective, Ms. Johnson accepted the challenge of implementing one of the first School-Wide Positive Behavior Support Programs (SWPBIS) within the district and the State at this elementary school (Office of Special Education Programs, 2009). This was not just a program for her, but a signature initiative and a "way of thinking" which allowed her to translate and incorporate her core values of positive perspective and responding to emotional needs of others into a cohesive culture of caring. During the

2010/2011 and 2011/2012 school years, this school was in its first and second year of program implementation. Ms. Johnson described the following five major tenets of this program:

Explicitly teach expected behaviors across environments. According to Ms. Johnson, this elementary school, as a whole school initiative, directly taught social skills expectations at least twice a year. Common lesson plans were provided to the teachers. A behavior matrix which set school-wide behavioral expectations for various school settings, such as the classroom, restroom, or cafeteria, was developed and reviewed in all classrooms and throughout the school. These expectations were posted throughout the school and on-line for parents. Ms. Johnson believed that through explicit teaching, these behavioral expectations became internalized by the students to the extent that the students themselves enforced these expectations as community norms. She explained, "The students who were the outliers, stood out significantly, and the other students tended to squash [their inappropriate behavior] before administration or teachers had to get involved… It [was] no longer an acceptable part of our culture."

Frequent Recognition of Positive Behavior and Accomplishment. When expected behaviors are observed, school staff gave out both compliments and frequent tangible, positive reinforcements intermittently throughout the day. Staff focuses attention on positive behaviors rather than negatives. Students are given "school dollars" that can be used to buy stickers and items at the school store, purchase a pass to eat in a private dining room with a friend, or attend special fun activities scheduled throughout the year. The school also implemented a positive office referral system as well, in which students that accomplished something exceptional, put forth extraordinary effort, or went

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above and beyond expectations were recognized by an administrator, his or her parent, and celebrated as part of a weekly school-wide community forum. Ms. Johnson described several examples of excellence exhibited by the students at this school and how the school provided recognition.

> So, we have school dollars, as well as, the positive office referrals. We focus really on… the positive. The negative is going to be there. But it is just not there as much.

> We plan dances. We plan on having a [disc jockey] out at lunch. We have… a picnic coming up in a grade level that goes above and beyond. I am going to give them "a recognition."

> We had a group of third-grade students on a field trip. On the field trip [were students from] a bunch of other schools… I heard this from multiple parents and the staff members here at school… The students [from the other schools] were… running around the school, acting up especially during lunch. Our students sat, had conversations, ate their food, and were very respectful. There was a huge difference between the two. So, I pulled them out and recognized them. To me, when there is great effort… taking that [school-based] behavior outside the community—that deserves huge celebration. That is the hardest thing to do when you're in your safe little bubble of the school. [But then] it's kind of what you do, you take it out there. That is just amazing.

> Like the fourth grade students that did extra chores. They turned in their school store money. They raked leaves, mowed lawns, and collected all this money to buy… three pigs and school supplies for third world country–and medical supplies. So, I recognized them.

Encouragement of Leadership and Positive Risk-Taking. Ms. Johnson stated by noticing, naming, and valuing positive student accomplishments, initiative, effort, and positive risk-taking both learning interacting with others is encouraged. She noted that reinforcement of effort rather than accomplishment encouraged risk-taking and student leadership. She explained:

> I work really hard to encourage [our students] to go the extra mile and not to get caught up in things our society wants us to get caught up in, but to get caught up in the intrinsic motivation and the feelings they get from

doing amazing things. So, that is the culture I have really tried to get to permeate this school.

To me, that says, "We're doing a really good job of encouraging [our students] to take risks. Who cares if they succeed or not? You got to get out there. You never know what will happen. When you are encased in a really positive safe climate, then you're more willing to do that. We celebrate the effort more than the outcome.

It makes them want to do more positives. It also encourages them to be leaders. We started [our behavior management program] last year, with a huge push. What is interesting to me is [our former] students that are currently at the middle school–three out of the four elected positions [in student government] were [students from this school].

[During writing on the State Writing Test—on average [fifth grade] kids wrote for two and a half hours, some of them for four hours. To me I don't care about your score. That effort is phenomenal. So, I wheeled the stereo out at recess with the iPod, rocking it. [I] bought Push Pops because I wanted them to know how proud I was of them [for] going the extra mile—to recognize them at Friday morning meeting, have them stand up, and have everyone cheer for them. Students need to know that, in my opinion, it's not about the grades or the numbers that are attached to them. It's about what they give. If they give it their all–did they learn? Did they try?

Monitoring and Providing Progressively More Intense Intervention for Students Struggling to Meet Behavioral Expectations. Ms. Johnson developed a team that focused on students with behavioral difficulties. This team met weekly, reviewed their progress and needs, and developed intervention plans. The team considers a variety of interventions including: (a) social skills instruction; (b) increased supervision;(c) leadership opportunities; (d) counseling and feedback from school personnel; (e) parent consultation; and (f) behavior plans emphasizing coaching and increased recognition of positive behaviors.

Continued Program Review, Evaluation, and Modifications. Ms. Johnson continued to reassess the effectiveness of the positive behavior initiative using data on the

behavioral incidents and from teacher/student surveys to adjust this initiative so that it

would be more responsive to behavioral challenges faced by this school's students:

> [Next year, we plan to have] more frequent events that they can earn. I think that really helps. I am going to time them strategically…. It has really helped us to get over a lot of humps that we have seen in the past. During fall and winter break, we did not have that major decline because we had the [school dance] for our third fourth and fifth [grades] right before winter break. So, they knew they needed to show that solid [school-based] behavior. So, every time we have it, it is strategically timed during those times we have historically had behavior decline.

> I want to hear more from the teachers and their thoughts. We're going to do a survey to get their input about where we should go with SWPBIS. I think we were at a really good place with SWPBIS. I think we can always improve. I [am going to] ask the students what they think.

> **Theory of Leadership.** Ms. Johnson's theory of leadership was to be positive,

use humor, encourage fun, reduce anxiety, communicate honestly, give staff advance

notice of change, and to lead by example. She also tried to find creative ways to

recognize staff for effort. She expressed an understanding that how she handled herself

served as a model to other educators.

> I have worked really hard. I will tell you my efforts. You never know, it's not an exact science. I have worked really hard… I am an honest person. I am a direct person. You can trust me. I am going to tell you what I know. If I've got a problem, I am going to tell you. If I see good things, I'm going to do my best to catch you and tell you. I believe I am leading by example. So, I try really hard to be upbeat and happy. Even if I'm having the worst day ever, I will walk through the office and say, "I just need to get my cup filled." I will go and just hang out with some kids.

> So, I'm trying constantly to model what I want the teachers and the other administrators to be like. We work in an amazing school with [about 700] phenomenal children. We need to honor that and enjoy that.

> [I avoid] harping on the negative. I start there. With our [behavior management system], we have [a teacher recognition board] where we recognize the teachers. Actually, the teachers recognize other teachers. I love that… The PTO has gotten me… extra incentives for the teachers who come to the evening things, because it is hard when you have your

own family… It's mainly being positive. I encourage the teachers to have fun and enjoy their jobs instead of always being so serious and worried about some hammer that is going to be dropped on them.

I hope that I have made it so they know that if an issue begins to arise, I am going to come to you and say, "This is a concern." [I will] let you know it's coming before I come slam it down, and you're caught off-guard. So, I try to keep communication open. I meet with the grade levels about changes that are coming down the pike… even if it's not set in stone, even if the budget has not been accepted. I am going to let you know if changes [that affect you] are going to happen.

Teacher Development. Ms. Johnson discussed her theory of teacher development by describing her efforts to build one teacher's competency in behavior management. First, she looked at the teacher's strengths. She decided that this teacher cared about her students and had a strong pedagogical background. She then made the decision to shift this teacher's perspective on classroom management from a focus on compliance and discipline to a focus on recognition and celebration. Next, she engaged this teacher in frequent professional conversation, provided her new knowledge, encouraged retrospection and reflection, modeled student interactions, taught her to use data for decision-making, and intentionally noticed and celebrated her developing strengths and skills. Through deep dialogue and joint problem-solving, she guided this teacher as she reconstructed her theory of behavior management. Ms. Johnson invested in the long-term growth of this teacher through a strength-based intervention. In this next excerpt, Ms. Johnson described her thinking and decision-making:

I can think of… a teacher who, it took me two years, to get her where I wanted her to be—probably three, actually. So, I guess about three years ago, I noticed that one teacher was referring children for discipline issues an exorbitant amount of time. She, by far, passed every other teacher in the school. I would probably get five to 10 discipline referrals from her a week on her students. [From] other teachers, I would get one a month. That gives you some perspective.

I started going in to observe the climate of the classroom and how classroom management was going. That was probably three or four years ago when I started that—just to… get information….

Now, at the core she was a good teacher. I didn't need to go the write-up route. I always figure that out, "Do I need to start writing a teacher or staff member up? or "Do I need to go to develop… teach, and to work with a teacher?" That is typically where I go. You can go the other way.

So, I decided that at the core she was a really good teacher, but she just had a limited scope. So, I started gathering some data and having some really good professional conversations [with her]… I would ask her questions like, "Talk to me about this." "What do you think about this?" "In retrospect, would you have handled it the same way?" It was all about classroom management and discipline.

We started the School Behavior Program (SWPBIS). I worked very, very closely with this teacher. I was very intentional about recognizing what I saw, about speaking in a very nice, respectful way to her students when they did something awesome. I was just really very intentional. I never smothered. I don't even think she realized that I was doing it, but I was just very intentional about what I said to her, when I visited her, and the feedback I gave her.

By the end of last year, she came up to me… said, "You know SWPBIS and these other supports have made me a better teacher." We have gotten maybe one or two discipline referrals from her all year. She is happy. She dances. She enjoys her classroom. She goes above and beyond constantly. She's taking courses to add onto her certificate—just because she wants to be a better teacher. She is doing all of this research. Somebody just needed to switch gears with her.

I do that with a lot of teachers. It is hard when you're a self-contained teacher. You are in that room all the time [with the] same students. You're planning all four subject areas. It's intense. You often times lose perspective. You don't try to stay fresh. You get stuck in the rut doing the same thing over and over. It's my job. You call it flavor. It is my job to spice it up because it not only benefits the students, but it benefits the teacher because they need excitement.

Ms. Johnson planned for teacher growth and tried to respond to teacher needs.

Next year, Ms. Johnson's planned to shift emphasis on teacher growth from SWPBIS to the implementation of the new common core standards. She intended to first provide

information and then to build teacher confidence by empowering them to shift paradigms

from current standards to common core standards.

> My plan is to dive deep into some of the teacher's classrooms to provide support… So, they can feel more confident about what they're doing because there are areas of instruction some teachers need development in. With the launching of common core, that is going to be our focus of professional development that…all [teachers] feel as confident as possible with this huge initiative. You know this huge, shifty… change.

Ms. Johnson monitored the stress levels of staff, asking staff to speak to her about their

concerns especially when they felt stressed. She also thought of creative ways to

recognize positive accomplishments and efforts of staff. She stated:

> Any time a teacher's down… I'm very blessed because it has been my fifth year so I know all of [their] personalities. I know the good, the bad, and the ugly, and I know how [they] respond. I also just know if [someone is] not having a good day. So, I can go to you, and I can tell in your eyes typically if there is something wrong. I can say, "What is going on?" "Come on talk to me." "Are you alright?" or if you just need a little handwritten note saying, "Excellent job." I have these post notes that say "Fabulous" and stuff like that I will leave. So, I try a lot of little things, not all of them have been successful.

Ms. Johnson reported that she solicited teacher feedback through formal meetings and

teacher surveys. She also offered different ways for teachers to provide input. She sought

opportunities for candid conversations with staff and looked for innovative solutions to

make improvements. Importantly, she recognized that the vision of highly skilled

teachers pushes both her and this school towards excellence.

> There are multiple ways [I obtain teacher feedback.] Have a meeting [of administrative staff] every Monday. We talk about what is going on, and then we talk about how we all are going to help and be a part and support and which role we're going to take and which things we're going to delegate. For the teacher input, I am actually working on developing a survey for their input on professional development for next year.
>
> Then I worked through meetings with unit leaders… to find out alright, "This is my idea. I want to know if you all support it or not." I will ask the

teachers a lot at our Tuesday meetings, "What do you think about this? Are you in support of it?" I had this realization, with the help of a couple of first grade teachers that I really needed to do a better job… I should kind of throw something out as an idea on one Tuesday afternoon. Let you process it. Then, instead of as a group, letting me know, "Yea" or "Nay." You can either—through your unit leader or personally through an email or swing by and let me know whether you think that's a good idea or not— because some people do not feel comfortable talking out in front of the big group. So, that was one of those moments where I learned a lot from it. So, I try to get teacher input as much as possible. Then, if I have an idea, I will just walk through the halls and who I come across I'll ask, "What do you think of this?"

I love the honesty that most of the teachers have here. I don't care if you agree with me all the time. That is not my thing. I want to know—like you honestly tell me things. I love that. We do not always agree. But we find a way to meet in the middle and that is what I appreciate. I don't want people in this building that are mindless drones [and] that do whatever I ask. I want people who are strong, know what they're doing, and who are very competent in their field—so they can serve our students of the best of their ability.

District Leadership. Ms. Johnson felt supported by district office staff in that they provided her needed expertise and gave her autonomy to be creative and have fun as she does her job.

They are very supportive. Anytime we have had major issues, we haven't had too many that have needed district support, but I'm trying to really be proactive and go to them as soon as things begin to bubble before they get to the point.

I guess the biggest district support would be special services with some of our students. They will come in and provide support at meetings and they will provide support ahead of time. Sometimes I would like more. I would like that a stance be taken, lines to be drawn. That's not always the case.

A neat thing, though, is [that] I met with the superintendent a couple weeks ago…. He said, "I didn't just hire you to share your personality with this school. I hired you to share your personality with the district office." So, he has asked me to kind of liven up the principals meeting which is desperately needed. So I have enjoyed that. Yesterday, I brought a group of teachers and student to the principals meeting and we danced [our school dance] to lighten it up. I realized we are in a great occupation and

we can't let all the paperwork, the insanity, the unhappy parents… cloud [what is] phenomenal.

Conclusions. Ms. Johnson had not received educational preparation on childhood bereavement. However, as a child, she experienced the death of two close friends, which was very traumatic for her. She used these experiences to develop guiding principles for creating a purpose for her life. These guiding principles included valuing and honoring relationships, being emotionally aware of the emotional pain of others, positively influencing others to help them grow, and recognizing what is really important in life. She reported using these guiding principles daily to inform her decisions and interactions with staff, students, and parents.

Ms. Johnson believed that schools should respond to the emotional needs of its students. When supporting bereaved students, this school implemented the following interventions: grief counseling, teacher consultation with guidance counselor, explicit peer instruction on how to be a good friend to a grieving student, and mentoring program. Additionally, the progress of bereaved students is monitored through both the student assistance and the behavior management teams.

Ms. Johnson spent the past two years implementing a school-wide behavioral management program that: (a) explicitly taught behavioral expectations, (b) focused and celebrated positive student behavior, leadership, and positive risk-taking, and (c) provided interventions for those students that had difficulty behaving in accordance with behavioral expectations. Interventions were developed using a problem-solving perspective rather than a compliance or disciplinary approach and focused on increased supervision, coaching students on social skill strategies, and recognition for pro-social

behaviors. This behavior approach set a school climate that was strength-based and built a culture of caring.

Finally, Ms. Johnson supported educators at this school by using the following resilience-building leadership strategies: (a) responding to the emotional needs of teachers; (b) recognition of effort and achievement; (c) encouraging candid conversation; (d) keeping staff informed; (e) seeking feedback; (f) being positive, (g) using humor; (h) encouraging fun; and (i) reducing anxiety. Finally, she believed she was supported by district staff by allowing her the autonomy to be creative and fun, but also by providing expertise when needed.

The School Guidance Program: Understandings, Practices, and Interventions

The school guidance program coordinated this school's response to grieving students. The Guidance Counselor also played a significant role in developing the school climate.

Ms. Jennings, Guidance Counselor

Background. Ms. Jennings had been the guidance counselor at this school three years prior to this study. She also participated in both years of this study. Ms. Jennings was in her early forties and the mother of two children. She has an advanced degree in school counseling. She experienced the death of her father as an adult. She served on the school student assistance team that developed plans to assist children with academic needs. She also served on the behavior management team that addressed the needs of students with challenging behaviors and reviewed the effectiveness of the school-wide behavior management plan.

Bereavement Preparation. The guidance counselor had not participated in specialized training in childhood bereavement in her teacher preparation program, her guidance counseling education program, or through on-going professional development. However, she believed that her understanding of general counseling principles was sufficient to allow her to provide effective support to teachers, bereaved children, and bereaved families. She stated that if she needed more information, it was her responsibility to obtain it.

Bereavement Understandings and Influences. The guidance counselor reported that she used her own grief experience and her experiences as a child of divorce to help her to understand the experiences of bereaved children. She stated that she learned that everyone grieved differently and that grief was a long process that continues over the course of one's life. These experiences allowed her to empathize with children that had been traumatized.

> The loss of my grandparents and others collectively has shown me that everyone deals differently. Grief is a long, long process that doesn't necessarily end. I guess it gives me more respect and empathy for what [our students] are going through… I come from a family of divorce. All of those life experiences make me such a better counselor because I can feel it for them and with them. I don't "boo-hoo" all day… but… I am there with them.

> There are times when I have talked with other kids about their grief, especially when my dad passed away and I would be more sad… I was fresher in grief. But anytime a child tells me about a loss and is crying and sad or abused or whatever, there are times that I feel very sad for them and maybe tear up a little, because it is so sad… It grabs your heart.

> Being a "mother" brought the guidance counselor insights that were helpful to her when she made counseling decisions. She believed that she better understood how

children think, feel, and interact with others. She also believed that the ability to feel compassion is fundamental to meeting the emotional needs of all children.

> I have seen phenomenal [counselors] who have never had kids. But, I do think that being a mom made me a much better counselor in general… I understand kids' minds a lot better. Seeing them at school, living with kids, and seeing their friends… has made me a much stronger counselor… I think you can be exceptional, without being a mom though… [Exceptional Counselors]… have to have the heart for the kids.

Guidance Services. The school guidance counselor was charged by both principals to coordinate services to support this school's bereaved children and their families. The guidance counselor provided direct counseling services to grieving children by helping them understand death, the role emotions play in the grief process, and how they could participate in the family's cultural bereavement practices. She also helped grieving children adjust to new roles and family expectations resulting from the death of a parent or other loved one. She collaborated with families to ensure that the school was responsive to the needs of the family. Finally, the guidance counselor collaborated with teachers to help them respond to the emotional needs of the child on an as-needed basis.

Generally, educators reported that the school counseling program provided helpful direct support to the child and collaboration. The guidance counselor provided both direct and indirect support to bereaved children to help them cope with grief in the school setting. She consulted with teachers and the child's family to ensure that this school was appropriately addressing their needs. She also provided grief groups and individual counseling for bereaved students. She stated that there was not a school or district protocol that specifically addressed the guidance services for bereaved students or consultation for school personnel as they serving bereaved children. She believed that such a protocol would be helpful.

Counseling. The guidance counselor believed having an ongoing relationship

with a child before the child experiences a difficult event is especially helpful. She stated,

"All of the children know me simply because they come to my classroom… all the

time.… I have one less step than an outside person because I generally have rapport with

the students here."

When she learns about the death of a parent, she first assesses where the child is

with the grief process. Her primary goal is to make sure that the student feels that the

school, classroom, and the guidance office are safe places.

> I would talk to [the child] individually [to] kind of see where they are with
> it. A lot of times, kids are pretty shut down, in which case sometimes I feel
> like my role is just the contact, not necessarily processing that much, if
> they are not ready to process. So, sometimes I see myself as just the caring
> adult, safe place they can come to. So, with some kids it is really just that,
> with other kids who are working through grief—and grief as you know
> comes in lots of different ways. So, first is the contact, the relationship,
> [to] see where they are. Are they talking? Are they asking questions?

The guidance counselor further described how she built a safe environment for a second

grade student that recently experienced the death of both of his parents. She emphasized

that her role as a school counselor was to help the child adapt to school as he or she

worked through the grief process. Her primary goal was to support the grieving child as a

learner within the school community. Helping the child process their feelings of grief was

a secondary goal. She was also very careful to recognize her own professional

boundaries, noting that she was not a therapist.

> We are just very much trying to protect and build safety. That's my goal.
> He doesn't really talk… He comes to guidance and the first time was very,
> very uncomfortable—like why am I in here? But I wanted him to know
> where my room was. So, I got him yesterday with [a family member] and
> they came. We will play a game. He had seen my games and was really
> excited about that. He… had the most fun. He was laughing and silly, and
> really it was so good. I just want to be here for him and have a safe place

for him to go where he can come and talk to me… I would never go to that child and say let's talk about your mom and dad. That's not my role as a school counselor. My role as a school counselor is to support him where he is. I am not a therapist. As a therapist, I might go there, but he is here to learn. He is not here to go through an hour of crying and whatever, and then send him back to class. It is truly not, in my mind.

The guidance counselor also provided direct counseling to bereaved children to help them understand cultural responses to death. In this excerpt, the guidance counselor described how she explored "what death was" with a grieving child. She helped the child understand that he could talk with his family and choose how he might participate in the funeral process. In this excerpt, she helped a child build his sense of self-efficacy and personal agency:

> So, I would pick them up individually. I do individual counseling… It is their first grieving experience. So, we talk about what that process is, what death is, and what death means. Because with some kids you really have to start there, because they don't really understand… the idea of funerals and expectations. If it is someone who is back at school before the funeral, sometimes we will talk about what [their] role will be [that] Moms and Dads [will] help you figure out, "Are you going to go the burial?" "What is a funeral…" Parents are really consumed with the grief of it, understandably. So, I try to help [kids] understand what the ceremony of death is.

> Sometimes kids are worried about… the dead body… Sometimes kids are really worried about that. We talk about how that is something they need to talk with their parents about. That's not always the case, but you certainly can be part of some things and not others—if you are not comfortable with it.

The guidance counselor believed it was important that children understand that their emotional responses to grief may vary. She also helped children adapt to changing routines and family roles brought about by the death of a loved one.

> I am not a therapist. So, basically I try to meet them where they are… I try to explain about what grief is; that there are different stages. We talk about, "It is okay to be angry." We talk a lot about the feelings that go along with it. A lot of what we talk [about] "kids crying"—sometimes kids

feel bad if they don't cry. We talk about that there is no one right way to grieve. Some of us cry, some of us don't cry. Some of us get really angry. I don't go far into that… We are going to do a lot about "feelings in your body," and kids and anger. But, I think it is important to understand… that they are going to be angry about it.

The child… is building a lot of new routines. So, a lot of what we are talking is, "How are things at home?" "How is it going with dad and older brother." "What are you doing now?" So, a lot of it is about the situation as well—with him—so the more day-to-day stuff. But basically talking about the feelings, answering questions, letting them know and just however… it is okay. Don't second guess. There is no way it should be or go or anything like that.

Teacher Consultation. The guidance counselor routinely consulted with teachers

to provide them information and collaborate with them adapt the instructional

environment to the emotional needs of the bereaved student.

The teachers… will ask me, "Do you think this is normal? Do you think this is okay? How should we approach this?" If they have a question or concern—like when the second grade student was coming… I went in and we talked about where he should sit… just strategic things. I don't mean [the teacher] could not have done that on her own. As you know, it helps… to work through that with somebody. So, [I] check and see how it is going.

Family Collaboration. The guidance counselor ensured that the school had

ongoing relationships with each grieving child's family. However, she did not believe

that she should necessarily be the person to have direct contact with the family. She

believed that many times direct contact should occur between the family and the

classroom teacher. In this excerpt, she described how she responds to the cultural, ethnic,

and racial backgrounds of the bereaved children and their family. She observed that

families may perceive her in a position of bureaucratic power and may not trust her with

important emotional issues.

I just see every kid as different. So, it's like I respect their culture. But, every family is so different… So, I guess my view is—it is so individual.

You know I have tried to–with the third grader—he is African American and … I don't want to say all, because it is really just some families, a little mistrust of schools or my position at school. Why would you go to the school counselor? Something is wrong… I don't really have a relationship with that family. I have gone through the teacher. Because my sense is that his dad is so overwhelmed. The teacher is kind of handling that relationship, going through grandma a lot more.

Because of the comfort level, I don't want to overwhelm a parent and be in her face about it. So, I just have a sense that with that family, that some of it is cultural, maybe some of it is socio-economic, whatever it is, [this] is not someone… who is going to come in my office and want to talk. So, I have just kind of let that go through the teacher. Whereas the second grade situation, the guardian came there—right in and told and was very up front... A lot of how I handle it, kind of depends on how the family [wants to handle school communication].

She noted that families will inform the school about important events that may have a profound impact on the life of a child, including the death of a parent, in a variety of ways:

The way I find out is, generally teachers or parents call me. Sometimes the kids tell us and say, "This is what is going on." It kind of depends. And some parents—the kid tells us. We don't know. Sometimes a child comes to school upset and the teacher calls us—so it comes a lot of different ways.

Ms. Jennings, 2011/2012

Counseling. During the second year of this study, Ms. Jennings continued her own self-directed research to learn more about appropriate activities for bereaved children. She also started a grief group this year to support the children who have experienced the loss of a loved one that has focused on art therapy to encourage "continuing bonds" between a student and his or her loved one. Jen had eight students in this group. She believed that the students were responding positively to the art activities.

The resources I have and I have gotten on the Internet. I have tried to do a good bit of research on it so. There are not a lot... There are art therapy books, but they are not for kids. It is a different sort of level. There are

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other things, a lot of it is worksheets, which you might do with an individual but not really groups. It's been a good bit of research.

I have eight kids now in a grief group that I have started. It is an art group because there is so much diversity in what not only who the kids have lost, it is all close family members, but some of them it's a parent, some of them it is a sibling, a couple of kids it has been very violent thing… So, it's not really appropriate to have sort of a talk group. So, we have done different art projects. It has been really good and the kids have enjoyed it. We started out on more general projects to just kind of get comfortable. Then, we made a picture frame. Next, we are doing a little *Wordle* with words on the computer that represents things about that person. We are going to do a flowerpot in plant a flower and do lots of different things. So, that's what we're doing. It is the first time I have done a grief group at the school. Because usually, it is more individual [counseling]. Again, a talking group isn't really appropriate. So, we have kind of come up with this. It seems to be helping….It's a great group of kids. So they are so excited about coming and so it is a good thing.

Teacher Consultation. During the second year of this study, Ms. Jennings also continued consulting with the teachers of each student to check on their progress and to offer suggestions and support for the teachers.

[I provide] consultation mainly, informing, consultation, and just checking in. "How is he doing?" Are there any issues?" Like our little girl in the first grade had some issues with people saying things to her and it was kind of upsetting. So, I will check in or they will check in with me or administration.

Staff Support. This year, Ms. Jennings and the principal coordinated school support provided to a staff person and her son who had experienced the death of a loved one following an extensive hospitalization. She had conversations with this teacher's students about what to say and what not to say. School sensitivity to the trauma experienced by this family throughout a long hospitalization and subsequent bereavement required significant information management and teamwork. Ms. Jennings played a significant role in managing the school's response during this period.

Family Interactions. Ms. Jennings stated that this elementary school continued to coordinate with the family of its bereaved students. She believed that it is imperative to communicate with the family and to make sure information is appropriately disseminated to both staff and students. She emphasized the importance of following family preferences and desires. Finally, she discussed the importance of preparing peers for the return of the bereaved child to school, to ensure that they interact appropriately with the bereaved student.

> First, we always make sure that there is an appropriate contact to whatever family member it is so that the proper appropriate information is disseminated…. We want to make sure we do not ever share whatever the family is not comfortable sharing, but we also feel like there is a balance if we don't share [our families may] find out times on *Facebook* or in their neighborhoods. There are lots of questions and lots of rumors so they're sort of the information management piece.

> [We] help… people to know the right things to do when the individual gets back to school so they are not bombarded with questions or even too many well wishes that would just make them uncomfortable.

> I think that just keeping everyone informed is good because if you don't know, you don't know what to do, so I think that as well. I think we have gotten better at that.

School Leadership. Ms. Jennings coordinated with the school principal to develop a positive and caring school culture. She believed that the sense of caring among staff and students was a particular strength of this school community. She noted that most of the students grew-up with staff at this school and that many teachers formed long-term relationships with the students they taught.

> So much of the research shows that the relationship with one caring adult makes such a difference. At our school, our kids have relationships with many caring adults, So, I feel that is one of our greatest strengths of our school is that we have such a strong community and our teachers, first grade teachers, their kids that are in the fifth graders now, [They] follow…

[the children they taught] and everybody is just a community. I think that really helps the kids.

She believed it is important for students to be leaders within the school community. She led the peer mentoring program that places students in leadership (e.g., student government, safety patrol) positions within the school community. This program gives students a purpose and opportunity to be a friend to a younger student. She also reported that she strategically placed students that really need a connection with an adult with an adult that is willing to coach them. Ms. Jennings also accessed mentors from the District's community mentoring program for additional support for those children needing a relationship with a caring adult.

> It is a district program. We match a mentor with a student and they meet once a week…. Some of them are parents and some of them are staff. Some of them are greater community people who want to mentor. It is pretty small because it is a substantial commitment once a week every week and it is one of those things that if you're not going to do it right it's not worth doing. So, that is why it is small.

Finally, Ms. Jennings believed that the ability of the staff to work as a team was critical to supporting both the staff and students. She described it as "looking, watching, and helping." She stated that most staff felt that they could ask for support and were certain it would be provided. She also believed that having a good sense of humor about events that go awry builds staff cohesion. She noted that the principal encouraged staff to express concerns so they could be effectively handled. She saw close relationships among staff, monitoring hotspots, monitoring students in need, and effective communication as critical to getting people the support they need.

> I think support. I think that is one of the things our principal has done exceptionally well in her first principal year. She has made us feel that were all part of a team. People can talk, feel supported, and know they are going to be supported. I think we can all laugh together about things.

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When it is a rough time of the year, when there's lots of things going on, our principal will say or joke about specific things, recognizing what is going on.... Like open[ing] up on Saturday because she knows teachers are stressed, you know those kind of things, looking at what is going on, seeing what the school climate is, what concerns are. Those kinds of things, really addressing concerns and being kind of tied into what's happening.

I honestly think it is overall relationships. [I] cannot give you an example because it is a thousand different things a day, every little moment of how we treat each other and it's following up on with the specific kid. "Now there's a student in Miss Teacher's class. He is having serious parents stuff going on." So, I let the principal know, not all the details just saying there is stuff going on because if the child gets in trouble, I don't want it to—because if there is context there, keeping the key people filled in checking with the kids… I think that's it. We all meet and we know where the hotspots are. We know who needs support, whether it is the teacher that needs support with a particular student or the student needs support. Oh, I think it is really working as a team. As I say, it is not one specific thing, my job is just putting out fires…. I am constantly moving and it's not any [one thing], it's just the overall day-to-day, I will put out thirty fires a day—just like other people in the school. So, it is more about that to me in any one particular thing—that we are looking and watching and helping.

Ms. Jennings viewed this elementary school as a learning organization in which staff was still learning how to respond to novel problems. She recommended that the school continue to build protocol so people know what to do. She states:

We are still in the growing phase of building more protocol. I think we are working on that, we still need some protocol for things—other situations not necessarily grief situations. Like if there were certain things happening. I think that is something we are working on and still being a very young school.

Conclusion. At this school, district and school leadership believed that responding to the emotional needs of bereaved children was an important part of its mission as a school. The school guidance programs played an integral in coordinating a cohesive school response to the needs of bereaved children and his or her family. The program provided direct counseling services to the child, helping the child to understand

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death, the emotions he or she might feel, and the family's cultural bereavement practices. The program helped the child adjust to new family roles and changes in family structure, dynamics, and expectations arising from the death of one or both of his parents. The school guidance program collaborated with families to ensure that the school was responsive to their needs and desires. Finally, the guidance program collaborated with teachers to help them respond to the emotional needs of the child and family on an as-needed basis.

Ms. Jennings believed that the school leadership and educators at this school developed a strong culture of caring. She noted that students had grown up with the teachers at this school and that educators worked collaboratively with each other, were watchful, and willing to help. She described this school as a learning organization in the midst of developing procedures and protocols for addressing new situations. She believed that the principal had developed a safe environment in which staff could ask for help and report concerns. Finally, she believed that school staff was attentive, nimble, and able to respond in the moment to a multitude of issues.

Teacher Understandings, Practices, and Interventions

This study further examined how the teachers responded to the needs of seven children, Sally, Marshall, Stuart, Joseph, Sissy, Andy, and Jimmy each of whom experienced the death of one or both of their parents. Stuart, Marshall, Sallie, and Jimmy experienced the death of a parent(s) within two months of the interviews for this study. Timmy experienced the death of his parent within one year of his teacher interview. Joseph and Sissy experienced the death of their mothers more than three years prior to their teacher interviews. With all students except Joseph, teacher interviews occurred

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during the time each teacher was teaching the bereaved child. These interviews captured a snapshot of each teacher's thoughts and impressions as they taught a bereaved child. With Joseph, interviews with his fourth and fifth grade teachers occurred during the time they were teaching Joseph. However, the interview with his third grade teacher was retrospective, in which she was asked to describe her recollections about teaching him from the previous year. Therefore, this study was able to take retrospective case study approach with Joseph, looking at how the school responded to his changing emotional needs over three academic years as seen through the eyes of four teachers. With Stuart, teachers across two years were interviewed, which allows the reader to obtain a sense of how his school life changed over time.

The grief stories of each child provided a necessary and important context in which to explore each educator's understandings, practices, and interventions. Only by first understanding the grief journeys traveled by each child, can the reader appreciate the intricate, graceful, and very subtle teaching moves employed by the teacher as he or she prodded and encouraged each child to re-engage with their learning community and build coping skills needed for lifelong resiliency.

Therefore, this study will present findings on teacher understandings, practices, and interventions, within short narratives about each child. This study introduces the reader to each child, as viewed by his or her teacher(s). It is the teacher who is telling both the child's story and his or her own story, as the child's teacher. In each narrative, this study attempted to capture how each teacher's personal grief history, experiences as a parent, and other life experiences informed his or her instructional decision-making as he or she interacted with each bereaved child. Using the language of resiliency, this study

described, in rich detail, the teacher's instructional decision-making, teaching moves, actions-reactions, and uncertainties as he or she responded to a grieving child. This study also described each teacher's relationship with the family, how each teacher supported the family, and how each teacher showed sensitivity to religious, cultural, and desires of the family. Finally, this study described how the culture and leadership of this elementary school empowered each teacher to effectively respond to the emotional needs of these children.

This study avoided reducing teacher experiences to simplistic findings and explanations. It instead revealed each participant's unique perspective and the complexity of their thinking and decision-making as they provided interventions and emotional support to grieving students and their families (Wolcott, 2009). Chapter 4 includes educator narratives which address educator background, training, influences, resiliency-building interventions, school leadership support, and conclusions. Chapter 5 presents consolidated themed findings to capture the essence of the experiences across all educators as they supported these very special children.

Sally, a First Grade Student

Sally was a White, first grade student whose mother passed away within the past six to eight months from a terminal illness. Because her death was expected, Sally's mother spent several months preparing her children for her impending death. Sally now lived with her father, paternal grandmother, and two sisters. Sally's grandmother moved into the family home to help Sally's father with caregiving responsibilities.

Before Sally's mother died, the principal spoke with Sally's mother about her impending death to reassure her that Sally would be well cared for. She also closely

monitored Sally's progress and arranged for Sally to participate in the school mentoring program. This program matched Sally with a caring adult, with whom she spent time with once per week.

Sally and her First Grade Teacher, Ms. Andrews

Background. Sally's first grade teacher, Ms. Andrews, participated in the second year of this study. Ms. Andrews was White, in her forties, and the mother of two children. She had taught elementary school for 23 years. She has an undergraduate degree in elementary education and early childhood. She also completed her master's degree in reading this past summer. Ms. Andrews had not experienced the death of anyone close to her until she was 27 years old. Until that time, both parents, both sets of grandparents, and two great grandparents were active in her life.

Bereavement Preparation, and Instructional Influences. Ms. Andrews had not participated in professional training in childhood bereavement. Ms. Andrews stated that when making instructional decisions about Sally, she frequently thought about her own children. She expressed confidence that with time and support, Sally would be able to handle the loss of her mother. She felt it particularly important that the death of Sally's mother not define her. She would give the following advice Sally's teacher for next year:

> You think about, "What if my children did not have me or had to go through that?" I thought about it like last year when [Sally's] mom was going through all of that—all of those girls. Sally's oldest sister is my daughter's age. It is just heartbreaking. I know that they will be fine. I know or I shouldn't say I know, but I feel confident that [Sally and her sisters] will be fine. They have other good people in their life, but this will shape who they will become.

> This is a big event in Sally's life but yet—it will shape who she becomes and who she is as a person—but it does not need to define her either. So, I don't know. I guess I don't consciously decide not to make a big deal of it, but yet, I think we need to be aware of it. But it is not that she needs a

whole lot of exceptions either. So I think, I would just tell the person… if it was someone that didn't know that she had lost a parent, that—yeah, she had lost a parent. But does that hamper her in school? So far, no. Just be aware that dad is trying to raise three girls on his own. I would hope that anyone would think about that.

Ms. Andrews consulted with the guidance counselor as issues arose. The guidance counselor provided her helpful advice guidance about how to handle peer inquiries about Sally's mother. She also reported that Sally enjoyed the time she spent with her peer mentor, remembered her appointment time, and asked to go.

Sally as a Learner. Ms. Andrews described Sally as very bright—that academics came easy for Sally. She followed classroom procedures and directions and was never a child that had to be "called down for anything." At school, she had developed good relationships with both adults and peers. Ms. Andrews also said that Sally was independent and did not lean on other students for anything. However, Ms. Andrews also described Sally as shy and quiet. She stated, "You really have to call on her and make her talk." Ms. Andrews noticed that, even though Sally was quiet, she enjoyed participating in classroom performances. Ms. Andrews found that Sally she did not seek out peer friendships and seemed happy to play by herself.

Resiliency-Building Teaching Practices. Ms. Andrews used a variety of resiliency-building teaching practices. She encouraged peer interactions, helped Sally talk with her peers about the death of her mother, taught goal-setting, encouraged Sally to become independent in managing her homework, and adjusted language and instructional activities to minimize possible grief responses.

To encourage peer interactions, Ms. Andrews recently structured an opportunity for a peer interaction by asking Sally to help a peer. She hoped that Sally would continue

to engage with the student she was helping, but Sally did not pursue the interaction. Ms.

Andrews expressed uncertainty about whether Sally needed support building friendships

or whether she simply preferred to play alone.

> She is a little more shy than typical… She gets along with everybody. Of course, everybody is aware of her situation too. She is somewhat of a loner. I don't know if you can call first graders loners. Do we? But today on the playground, she was kind of by herself a good bit. She came over to the soccer field where I was officiating. I got her to help another child who needed a Band Aid. But then, she came back by herself again. She didn't… start playing. But then a lot of times, she is playing. So, it's kind of hit or miss. She is kind of hard to figure out…. I don't know if it is just her personality.

Ms. Andrews stated that Sally did not talk about her mother. However, the other

first graders expressed curiosity about Sally's mother's death and began asking Sally

questions. Ms. Andrews was unsure how to handle their curiosity.

> At the beginning of the year… we were writing… our "All About Me" books… We were talking about our families. I did not say anything about it [be]cause we were just talking about families being different. I walked by her table and they were doing some writing. I heard some little chit chatter about it. They were asking her questions like, "What day did she die?" "Was it a Thursday?" That kind of thing. So, I did not know how to handle it as far as what do we do. I thought about calling [her] dad—to see what he wanted. But it was one of those things that I had to… I didn't want to make more out of it than it was… So, I pulled her back and talked to her and just said, "People are curious. Do you want to talk to the class about it?" She said, "Yes." I said, "Why don't we just… Like you can call on people and let them ask you questions as a class, just once. We are not going to talk about it anymore." That is what we did. She really only had three questions… I don't remember what the questions were, but it wasn't anything that I felt like was inappropriate or that made her feel bad. I think it was just something that she had to deal with.

Ms. Andrews believed that if the other children could ask their questions about the death

of Sally's mother, Sally's situation would no longer be novel for them and they would

lose interest in the subject. Ms. Andrews described her thinking:

I [was] watching her body language, just thinking about just being compassionate about the fact that she lost her mom. The kids were bombarding her with questions. She got flustered. She would kind of (sigh) that kind of thing, huffing, and breathing heavy, kind of rolled her eyes at some of them—that kind of thing.

I said something about, "They sure have a lot of questions don't they…" She said, "Yeah." That is when I pulled her and talked to her… I wanted to give her that choice – not to ignore it, but yet, not to push her into something if she did not want to talk about it or if she did not want… I actually gave her that choice. I said, "Do you want to talk to the class about it or do you want to go the library and let me talk to the class so they will stop asking you questions." She wanted [to talk to the class herself]…. She was okay with that.

Ms. Andrews effectively addressed peer curiosity and created a safe and supervised conversation in which Sally could respond to the questions from her peers. Ms. Andrews believed that answering frequent, unexpected questions about her mother would be more difficult than addressing peers questions "once and for all" when she was emotionally prepared for the conversation and had the support of her teacher to help her. Ms. Andrews prepared Sally for the conversation, giving Sally as much control over the interaction as possible. She then set the expectation for the class that once these questions were answered, there would be no need for any further questions. Ms. Andrews carefully guided Sally through the first of many difficult conversations Sally would be required to have in which she informed other people about the death of her mother.

Ms. Andrews described a second situation in which she expressed uncertainty about how to handle peer interactions dealing with the death of Sally's mother. In writing workshop, the students were paired up and each was writing the biography of the other. Sally's partner wrote the following biography about Sally:

Her dog is jumping. Sallie lives with her dad and Lisa and Susan and her dog. She likes to swim and do art. Her favorite color is blue. Her favorite food is mango. Her favorite animal is dolphin and her favorite movie is

Dolphin Tale. When she grows up she wants to be a dance teacher. Her Mommie died. She misses her very much.

Her classmate illustrated the book with a picture of Sally's family that included Sally, Sally's father, and Sally's two sisters. She also drew Sally's mother in the picture. Ms. Andrews expressed uncertainty about how to handle the page in the biography about Sally's grief and wondered if she should remove it. Ms. Andrews didn't know if the inclusion of this page would cause Sally distress or whether she should include it because it honored Sally's love for her mother.

Ms. Andrews also taught Sally's older sister. She noticed that Sally was not getting as much help with homework from home that her sister received. Ms. Andrews attributed this as being a result of the mother's death; that it had been her mother's role in the family to make sure homework was being completed. To address independence with homework for all students, including Sally, Ms. Andrews developed a self-monitoring system for homework completion in which the children choose two assignments from nine possible assignments, each week. The children colored in circles when they completed their chosen assignments and then received stickers and school dollars for completed assignments. Ms. Andrews reported Sally's responded positively to this classroom behavioral support system and was completing her homework independently. Ms. Andrews provided Sally the necessary structure to allow Sally to manage her homework on her own, building independence and her sense of self-efficacy.

Finally, Ms. Andrews was uncertain about how to talk about "family" in the normal course of the school day. She stated it was her practice to tell the children to take their work home to show their "moms and dads." To avoid possible discomfort for Sally,

Ms. Andrews tried instead to say "someone in your family." She also expressed anxiety

about how to handle Mother's Day. The following excerpt described her concerns:

> It is probably more me than her. Because as a teacher you are so used to saying, "Take this home to mom and dad." I feel bad doing that all the time… The other kids do not say, "She doesn't have a mom." They do not do anything like that. But ever since the first of the year, I have tried to make a conscious effort to change it to "someone in your family…" But after 22 years of "mom and dad," it is hard to change that. So, she has never said anything. She doesn't really react. What am I going to do about Mother's Day? I started thinking about that too, because we usually do a Mother's Day Gift and so…

Conclusions. Ms. Andrews had not received training in childhood bereavement.

When making instructional decisions, she thought about how life would be for her own

children if they experienced the death of a parent. Thinking of Sally, she recognized that

the death of her mother would shape who she was, but she also hoped it would not define

her.

Ms. Andrews carefully watched Sally for grief-related behaviors. She noticed she

had difficulty with homework completion. She recognized that because homework

monitoring had been done by Sally's mother, Sally's father was having supervising this

task. Ms. Andrews set up a class-wide homework completion program. Sally was

responsive to this intervention and accepted responsibility for completing her homework

independently. Ms. Andrews observed Sally's frustration when her peers questioned her

about her mother. Ms. Andrews also helped Sally to answer their questions and took steps

to ensure that no more questions would be asked. She also encouraged Sally to engage in

peer interactions.

Ms. Andrews found that the guidance program and the mentoring program

helpful. She frequently consulted with the guidance counselor when issues arose. Sally

seemed to enjoy visiting with her mentor. Finally, Ms. Andrews believed that school administration monitored Sally's progress.

Marshall, As a Third Grade Student

Marshall was a third grade, Black, male student. His mother died two months prior to the interview of Ms. Kane from complications from a chronic medical condition. She was young and her death was unexpected. Upon her death, Marshall moved to the home of his father and grandmother.

Marshall attended this elementary school before her death. Marshall's mother died during an extended school break two months before the commencement of this study. Marshall returned to school following this break. When in the hallway and as Ms. Kane took the class to Spanish, Marshall informed Ms. Kane that his mother died over the weekend. Ms. Kane was unable to comprehend what he said and continued to ask him to repeat what he just said. He repeated that his mother died over the weekend three times before Ms. Kane was able to comprehend what he had just said. The family had informed office personnel, but no one had informed Ms. Kane. This communication failure triggered an extensive conversation among the educators in this study about the need for a coordinated communication protocol. (This conversation is more fully addressed later in the focus group discussion found later in this chapter.) Ms. Kane immediately informed the principal, Mr. Cannon and the Spanish teacher. But before she returned to pick up Marshall from Spanish class, Marshall had already gone to speech therapy. Marshall then informed the speech/language pathologist about the death of his mother, who came back to inform Ms. Kane.

Ms. Kane attempted to inform other staff who had contact with Marshall. However, the entire school staff was not notified. One teacher, Ms. Holder, who also participated in this study, was not informed of school arrangements to support the family. Her family had a close relationship with this child's family, but she had not been notified of the death of Marshall's mother. She expressed concern that there was no school-wide communication protocol to inform staff about the death of a child's parent. She would have liked to participate in the school's response of sympathy and support to the family and felt the opportunity to participate should have been extended to all staff. Marshall's story was transformational for the educators that participated in this study. She felt left out. This focus group discussion resulted in an affirmation by these educators that a child should *never* be the first person to communicate the death of his or her parent to staff or peers. An informal communication protocol was developed in which staff was to be notified of deaths by school leadership and invited to attend/participate in funerals and other arrangements to support bereaved students and staff.

Marshall attended second-grade at this elementary school and then transferred to another school over the summer. Therefore only one of his teachers participated in this study. She participated in the first year of this study.

Marshall and his Third Grade Teacher

Teacher Background. Marshall's teacher, Ms. Kane, was White, in her mid-forties. She had three children, two daughters in college and one daughter in middle school. Ms. Kane's undergraduate degree is in education. She is a National Board Certified Teacher.

Bereavement Preparation and Instructional Influences. Ms. Kane received no

training on childhood bereavement as part of her teacher preparation classes or through

professional development opportunities. She believed that quality training would help her

better respond to the needs of bereaved children. She reported that her instructional

decisions were guided by her own grief experience following the death of her father,

from an extended illness. She noticed that she felt a strong sense of compassion for

Marshall and realized that every day would be different for him. She compared her own

experience with the death of a parent with Marshall's experience:

> Every day is going to be different. You have no idea how you are going to
> be that day… I am trying not to feel sorry for him. For a lot of reasons,
> because I had the best of the best—for as long as I needed. I am an adult. I
> have got everything. He, at nine, should lose [his] mom? She was a very
> hands-on [parent.]

Ms. Kane also reported that she had previously taught two other children that experienced

the death of a parent. When reflecting on what she learned from having taught two other

grieving children, Ms. Kane noted that every family has different expectations, and that it

was important to maintain contact with the family to learn about their needs and desires.

> Every family treats it differently. Every family wants to be treated
> differently. Some are hands-on, some are hands-off. One was a situation
> where… I was called by [non-custodial relatives] and was told that, "we
> don't really care what the school system says. If she looks like she is not
> being taken care of or if her hair is not brushed, we want to be called." So,
> I was… put… in middle of [family conflict]… One was a situation where
> we are just not going to talk about it… [Marshall's situation] is the most
> open situation I have been in.

Ms. Kane believed that the response of a school to the emotional needs of its

students has important, long-term impact on grieving students. Ms. Kane described one

of her previous students, who experienced the death of her mother. She believed that her

relationship with this student made a difference for her and that many times teachers have

no idea how profoundly they change the lives of the children they teach. She described being a "turn-around" teacher:

> I [taught] one little girl [who] is now the eighth grade, I happened to see her about three weeks ago. She came up to me. I thought she had moved to Georgia… but I saw her. Now I am back in contact with her. So, what I learned from it, as a teacher—just with normal kids, normal being no death, no tragedy—you have no idea what you do for them… We were in an auditorium of 300 people. This child found me and came over to me.

Marshall as a Learner. Ms. Kane described Marshall as an honor-roll student, very easily excitable, a good friend, and very easy to keep positive and teach. He was doing well in all his academic subjects. However, since the death of his mother, Marshall had difficulty concentrating and frequently appeared lost, "blocked," and unable to process what was happening in class. Ms. Kane observed the shock, confusion, and paralysis many children feel immediately following the death of a loved one.

Ms. Kane had taught Marshall since the beginning of this school year and was able to establish a relationship with his mother that lasted for about five months. Ms. Kane had frequent contact with Marshall's mother during this time which allowed her the opportunity to know Marshall through the eyes of his mother.

Resiliency-Building Teaching Practices. Ms. Kane made instructional decisions intended to minimize Marshall's grief in the classroom and to encourage him to re-engage in learning. She closely watched Marshall to determine how he was coping with the academic expectations of school. She monitored his ability to (a) concentrate, (b) prompted him in the moment to re-engage in the classroom community, (c) complemented him as made attempts to participate, (d) minimized grief triggers by changing her language and avoiding discussion of death within classroom lessons, and (e) encouraged him to remember fond memories of his mother.

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Ms. Kane noticed that Marshall now had significant difficulty following classroom procedures. She frequently intervened to help him quickly re-engage and feel a measure of control over his environment. She described her interventions:

> I have seen what in a normal student, would be called lazy. In him, I would call it a block, a stop, just, "I can't move," sort of, "What do I do now?" Just, "I can't do anything right now." It's almost a fall down. For instance, he would come in and unpack. He would sit and have his book out. Then just stop. It's just… He can't process and his little eyes would just look at me and almost beg me to… "What do you want me to do?" "What can I do?" His eyes—just reaching to me. If I would just stop, coach him, and give him just absolute, positive reinforcement. "I know you can do this. You are my honor roll student. You make excellent grades. Just do one and I will be right back." [She would then return and say,] "You did that right. See, I knew you could do it. Do two." Just, baby steps.

Ms. Kane recognized that Marshall was experiencing shock and numbness, a typical grief response. She then strongly reaffirmed her belief in his ability to cope with school activities, reminding him that he was "her honor roll student." She then provided immediate step-by-step scaffolding in the moment it was needed. She was careful to break the task into small "baby steps" that she was confident that he could accomplish. She then left, letting him take these baby steps independently. She quickly returned, noticing out-loud that he took those baby steps, again her expressing her full confidence that she knew he could do it. This teacher helped this child, in the midst of shock and despair, to just take the next step. Her compassion was profound and served as a guiding compass for her interventions. She carefully supported him as he re-engaged in the school community. Her teaching moves were tightly aligned to Marshall's emotional needs, given seamlessly at the very moment he needed them. She just as seamlessly withdrew, letting him try on his own, but quickly returning noticing his success.

In the next few excerpts, Ms. Kane again discussed Marshall's difficulties with

concentration, commenting on the small, gradual steps Marshall took as began to re-

engage in class activities:

> [Immediately following his mother's death, he exhibited] a lack of ability
> to concentrate. Almost a lack of "Why should I?" "What hammer is going
> to fall?" He gets very emotional very fast, which is different. [Prior to his
> mother's death,] he did not get very emotional quickly…. He [would] do
> his work and he [was] very proud of his work. Just today, he said. "My
> handwriting is just so good!" He did all of his work today.
>
> [Concentration] is harder for him… He will stop what he is doing and look
> around and not do. I would just call his name and say, "Do you need any
> help with what you are doing? Do you have all of your materials?" He will
> go back to whatever he was doing.

Ms. Kane flexibly changed her activities to minimize this child's grief response in

the days immediately following the death of his mother. She changed books that she

planned to read and she sensitively reframed the Mother's Day activity given out to all

children at school:

> I did not read a book about a little girl whose mother was in the Arctic and
> the child was upset [be]cause her mother was away and she was very
> teary. So, I was reading ahead in that book—we did not read that book. I
> usually read *Ruby Holler* and her mother dies—we did not read that book.
> So, anything about "a mother" we are not doing. The Mothers' Day
> cakes—I gave the [flyer] out. I gave it to him personally. I said, "Maybe
> you can make this for [your] grandmother." So, I am just very sensitive to
> mother things.

Ms. Kane also noticed that Marshall was remembering and learning to again talk

about his mother without being overcome with emotion. She was careful to

respond, encouraging him to remember fond memories.

> Once… last week, he has mentioned [his mother]… twice. He said
> something about his clothing, "My mom bought me this." Then, actually it
> was yesterday, he said, "My mom took me to the state museum." We were
> talking about our field trip. He said, "My mom took me there."

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Ms. Kane monitored Marshall's interactions with others, as well. She expressed frustration when another teacher reprimanded Marshall because he was late to her class. Ms. Kane believed, under the circumstances, the teacher should have taken into account that this child was feeling the typical emotions of shock and sadness and that he was not yet able to independently plan his day or follow his schedule. She believed that it was important for educators to treat grieving children with compassion and to take steps to minimize possibly overwhelming and unnecessary stressors for them. In this situation, Ms. Kane advocated the use of a problem-solving approach to this possible problem behavior. She expressed her frustration at looking at his behavior solely from a disciplinary frame of reference.

> Because he is nine! His world is turned completely upside down. So he was 10 minutes late for one appointment. So, what is so important about one appointment that he needs to be embarrassed and fussed at in front of other children to the point that he cries…
>
> That is not really that important for any kid at this age. Habitually if they are missing their appointment and they are playing in the bathroom— that's a big deal. They have another agenda. They know exactly what they are doing. I don't think he had an agenda. He intentionally did not miss [her class]. He was not on his regular routine. He just forgot. A child who's in the position he is in. Every break… we need to give him, we need to give him.

Ms. Kane offered the following advice for other teachers that might have contact with Marshall, "Just be gentle, just be gentle, and have an open heart for him. Just be easy and gentle."

Family Interactions. Immediately following the death of Marshall's mother, Ms. Kane contacted Marshall's family. Ms. Kane visited the family following the notification of the death of Marshall's mother. She arranged for meals to be delivered. She also called

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Marshall's grandmother weekly to inform her about Marshall's progress. Because Ms. Kane took her lead from the family, she believed that she responded to the cultural, racial, or religious differences between herself, a White woman and Marshall's Black family. She emphatically stated, "I go right in their house. I sit down. We talk. We hug. There is no racial boundary." She believed she was responding to the family by letting them set the boundaries and by being open, informative, and providing good news about the child they loved.

Since his mother's death, Ms. Kane maintained contact with Marshall's grandmother at least twice per week. She informed her of classroom events and how Marshall was adjusting in school. Ms. Kane also noticed how the family struggled with the possibility that maybe the death of Marshall's mother could have been prevented with proper medical management. She commented that since the death of his mother, his grandmother was taking steps to prevent Marshall from also developing this same medical condition. She noticed that he was well rested and cared for he when came to school. Ms. Kane felt reassured knowing that he was loved and that his health needs were being well-managed.

School Leadership Practices. Ms. Kane stayed in constant contact with the guidance counselor and found this collaboration helpful as she responded to Marshall's needs.

> The guidance counselor and I are in constant communication. If I need anything, I feel she would have it right here. I knew so much about him. I am finding out more about him. As his teacher, I feel I am… doing everything I can through grandmother, through dad, and through the guidance counselor. Every time she has a meeting with him, I know about it and what happens.

Conclusions. Ms. Kane had not received research-based training on childhood bereavement prior to teaching Marshall. She strongly believed that it was appropriate for a school to provide emotional support for children that are grieving and that knowledge about childhood bereavement would help teachers to respond to the needs of grieving children. In the absence of research-based knowledge, Ms. Kane used her experiences as a parent and her experiences teaching other bereaved children to guide her instructional decision-making. She specifically articulated the powerful role a teacher can play in the life of a student, especially when he or she supports a child during times of emotional trauma.

Ms. Kane used a variety of resiliency-based interventions to encourage Marshall to re-engage in learning by using approach/restorative-focused coping strategies. She diligently observed him, looking for indicators of signs of emotional distress (grief/avoidance-focused coping strategies). She provided scaffolding to help regulate his emotions, re-engage in learning, and obtain a sense that he could anticipate and manage environmental demands. She frequently guided him through the use approach/restorative-focused coping strategies, prompting him to simply take the very next step to re-engage in learning. She prompted him with routines and procedures and used a problem solving approach when dealing with behavioral difficulties. She also built a bond with Marshall's grandmother, respecting family wishes and desires for Marshall, sharing progress and good news, and appreciating their difficulties in coping with the death of Marshall's mother. She confidently balanced high expectations for academics with time and space for grief.

Ms. Kane strongly believed that school leadership supported her emphasis on meeting Marshall's emotional needs. She formed a collaborative relationship with the school guidance counselor, and found her to be responsive, helpful and supportive. She also felt comfortable advocating for Marshall with other teachers when Marshall was struggling to get to class on time. Finally, and importantly, she repeated the story about learning about the death of Marshall's mother from Marshall himself. She explained the trauma she felt when informed and how her response may have inadvertently added to Marshall's trauma. Her willingness to tell this story and the willingness of school leadership to hear this story, allowed the educators at this school to make the commitment that information about the death of a child's parent or close family member would be quickly and appropriately communicated to both staff and students.

Stuart, As a Second and Third Grade Student

Stuart was a White, male, elementary school student. Both of his parents were killed during violent criminal act. The death of his parents occurred two weeks before the interview of Stuart's second grade teacher. Following the death of his parents, Stuart moved in with his aunt and her family. His aunt decided to transfer him to this school because she believed that it would be better for Stuart if he was not around peers who were familiar with the traumatic events surrounding his parents' death. At the time of his enrollment, Stuart spoke very little in school. This was surprising to his family as his aunt reported that he spoke to others both at home and at school. His school records from his previous school indicated that he was a "quiet" student but gave no indication that refusing to speak was a problem.

Stuart's second and third grade teachers both participated in this study. Therefore, educators viewed his grief journey across two academic years. When Stuart transferred to this school in the second grade, he spoke very little to his teacher and peers. He continued to speak very little in the third grade. But Stuart's third grade teacher believed he was becoming more engaged in the school learning environment. Stuart was in regular self-contained classrooms for both second and third grades and was taught all major academic subjects by one teacher.

Stuart and his Second Grade Teacher, Ms. Martin

Background. Stuart's teacher, Ms. Martin was White, in her early forties, and the mother of two teen-aged daughters. She had taught elementary school students for 19 years and was a former special education teacher. She had not experienced the death of any close family or friends, but her daughter had a close friend whose mother died when he was in elementary school.

Bereavement Preparation and Instructional Influences. Ms. Martin had not received training in childhood bereavement in either her teacher preparation classes nor through professional development opportunities. Ms. Martin reported that she relied on the personal skills she learned being a parent to help her respond to Stuart's emotional needs. She stated that she did not know how a teacher could be effective with a grieving child without having had the experience of being a parent first. She stated that being a parent allows a teacher to be particularly watchful for a child's emotional needs. Ms. Martin believed that the way in which a school community responds to a grieving child has a long-term impact on the child. She also believed that information on research-based practices would help her to respond to the special needs of a bereaved child. She recited

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the following story that helped her to understand the difficulties grieving children experience:

> It reminds me of my daughter's boyfriend [who] turns 21 tomorrow. His mother committed suicide when he was seven… My daughter told me this story—he won't talk about it. When he came back from the service and the funeral, the class had collected a box full of toys for him. So, the whole class knew. My daughter says he still has that box of toys. He has never opened any of them, but he can't part with any of them and he turns 21 tomorrow. She says he still has the box of unopened toys.

Stuart as a Learner. Ms. Martin developed a tentative hypothesis of Stuart as a learner. She noticed that Stuart chose not to speak to unfamiliar people in school. But she also noticed that he spoke spontaneously and frequently to family members. She concluded that Stuart could talk, but chose not to. She was unsure whether his decision not to talk was a response to trauma, whether he was shy when meeting new people, or whether it was his temperament to be watchful and quiet.

Ms. Martin described Stuart as an average student. Because he rarely responded to questions requiring a verbal response, she had to be creative in assessing his academic skills. She analyzed his written responses and testing scores. She also set up situations, which allowed her to gather information from his behavior. She believed that he was able to do grade level math. She monitored his growth in math by analyzing his written responses in his math journal and observing what math problems he could solve both with and without prompting. She was unsure how to monitor his progress in reading. She noticed that he read silently during independent reading and wrote in his writing journal during Writer's Workshop. In this excerpt, she thought about how to assess his reading. Because assessing reading in beginning readers requires an analysis of miscues from an oral reading sample, it was difficult for Ms. Martin to identify his reading level or to

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provide targeted reading instruction. She also felt anxious deviating from district protocol

which required her to analyze samples of oral reading and report her findings on a school

database for school-wide student progress monitoring. She commented:

> I had him sitting close to me so I can watch him. So, like today I said, "Can I see your math journal and show [the class] what you did?" He won't say what he did, but he will hand it to me… I can tell from watching him do math… he is on grade level or a little above. Reading—I cannot ask him to read to me yet, because he won't respond to me.

Resiliency-Building Instructional Practices. Ms. Martin worried that she might

be "coddling" Stuart too much. She discussed her dilemma with fellow educators during

the focus group interview. The following conversation captured the concerns expressed

by the teachers as they problem-solved how to assess reading and set expectations for

him:

> M: I don't know how much to push my child…He doesn't talk. He can talk but he doesn't want to, but apparently I have been told he has been like this [since] before his parents' death. So, he is a very quiet child. Well, now he will raise his hand and he will say one word answers like in math, but like I haven't sat and tried to do a [reading assessment] because I think it will totally freak him out. However, last week I thought, "Okay, I am going to start pushing him a little bit and see what happens." So, I squatted down next to him, he was reading and said, "I need to get to know you as a reader and I said, 'I have been looking at the books you are picking out and I need to know which words on this page are tricky for you." So, he points to the words. He can read but he will point to the words. And his aunt says he reads all the time at home out loud and he won't be quiet, but he won't say a word to me.

> M: I told him because he has seen me doing [reading assessments] with other kids and before long you're going to need to sit and read with me. I just kind of placed that idea in his head that he is going to have to sit and read with me and I am letting him think about that… I am just struggling with how hard do I push him. I feel like I need to start pushing him a little bit, but what is too much. I don't know.

K: Just ask him, "Do you want to come and sit and read with me?"
      Maybe don't start with a [reading assessment].

M: Sometimes he will give me a response, sometimes he just looks at
      you [demonstrating how the child looks at her but doesn't answer.]

K: [Continuing with her suggestion] "Pick one of your books and
      come read with me."

M: He is an average second grader. He has got the ability. But I feel
      his main thing is now emotional and that is where I need to be
      providing [support].

M: The speech teacher had talked to the speech teacher [at his
      previous school] and she said he is just a quiet kid to start with.
      Now, he is just completely quiet. But I just don't know how much
      to push him. So, I also thought I would talk to the aunt and just
      say, "What do you think he is ready for me to do?"

These teachers balanced Stuart's academic and emotional needs, giving priority to

meeting Stuart's emotional needs first. This discussion showed an inclination to set

higher academic expectations, but with the intention to maintain flexibility if the attempt

did not work as intended. The solution discussed, giving Stuart an anticipatory prompt,

gave Stuart sufficient time and space to think about the academic expectations set for him

before he was asked to respond. This discussion also demonstrated that these teachers

were primarily focused on maintaining the positive relationship the teacher had with this

child. These teachers did not look at his behavior through a disciplinary perspective.

Instead, their proposed solution intentionally avoided a power struggle with this child

which could have damaged Ms. Martin's long-term relationship with Stuart.

Ms. Martin observed Stuart in the classroom and made instructional decisions

intended to help him through the grief process, encourage him to re-engage in his

learning community, and develop skills to build lifelong resiliency. She watched Stuart

closely to determine his academic progress, including his responses to classroom

procedures and his interactions with his peers. Based on her observations, Ms. Martin intervened to build academic skills, strengthen his sense of self-efficacy and control over his environment, and encourage interpersonal relationships within the school community. She also adjusted instructional activities to minimize potential grief reactions.

Because this was a new school for Stuart, Ms. Martin helped Stuart to quickly learn school and classroom procedures and routines. When the class deviated from classroom routines, Ms. Martin took anticipatory action, letting Stuart know how a change in routine would affect him. She also gave him verbal directives to help him plan and cope with these changes. This anticipatory action strengthened Stuart's sense of control and improved his ability to comfortably respond to changes with a new environment.

> He seems to be fairly organized. I am not seeing an issue with that. He has caught right on to the stuff he has to take home every day and where to put the papers. He has caught right on that… He is organized, very organized. He doesn't have papers falling out of his desk. He is putting them all in the right places and he is bringing home what he should be, some of my kids don't do that. He is doing it like this now. That is a sign of resilience.

> He is staying away but he knows where I am there and that's what I kind of want him to know. I am here. I am not going to bother you. But I am here. Like every day when we come back from Related Arts, he has to go to the bathroom on the green hall. I have a whole group of car riders I have to get out. But I tell him, "We are going to wait here for you." So, he goes right in and comes right out. I don't want him to feel, "They have left me, I am alone here out in the hall in this strange place that I have only been here two weeks." So, I try to be very aware of him.

Ms. Martin watched Stuart closely, looking for indicators of grief. In this next excerpt, Ms. Martin determined that Stuart's behavior was inappropriate for the classroom. However, she also realized that he had disengaged in learning and was having difficulty coping with the classroom environment. He was sitting under his desk, poking

it with a straightened paperclip. She did not approach this problem behavior from a disciplinary point of view. Instead, she targeted her response to prevent injury or damage by taking away the paperclip. Then recognizing that he was having difficulty coping, she allowed him time and freedom for physical movement.

> [F]or the first two weeks, he has followed directions to the tee. "Come down to the floor," he automatically sat crisscross [cross-legged]. I had to remind the others. But today, I noticed that he seemed a little off today. [He] almost got under a desk. He had a paper clip… He had it straightened out and he was poking it in the desk. He is not with me today. Today was the first time I have seen that… I held my hand out. He gave me the paper clip and we just kept moving on.

Ms. Martin watched how Stuart responded to instruction, using this information to plan further instructional moves. In the following excerpt, Ms. Martin pushed Stuart academically. She attempted to engage him in conversation, but he was not ready to talk to her. Regardless, she set a higher academic expectation for him and again sought a verbal response. When he again refused to answer her, she also offered him an alternative way to meet her expectation, by writing his response. She immediately withdrew from the interaction before Stuart had an opportunity to reject her overture. During the course of the interview, she checked his writer's notebook and found that he responded to the higher academic expectation she set for him:

> Well, I will ask him several times a day—I will go over to him and ask a question to see if I can get a response, but I do not push it if I don't…. We were doing Writer's Workshop. I knew he had written one sentence about the guinea pig and I wanted him to write more. I said, ["Do you know the name of your guinea pig?"] He just gave me a look. I said, "What's his name?" He gave me a look. I said, "You could write that in your story." I walked off. I didn't push. So, I am giving him the opportunity to talk but I am not forcing that. I am thinking he just can't handle that.

> [The teacher gets his writing journal and reads his entry] "I have a guinea pig that's sweet a lot. Her name is Bella and Bella is scared of us. And she

drinks a lot..." So, he did add the name… and took my suggestion! But there were some writing issues though.

This teacher was clearly pleased that Stuart responded to her intervention. However, the statement, "But there were some writing issues though…" showed her assessment of his work and her uncertainty about how to balance his academic and emotional needs.

Ms. Martin observed Stuart's interactions with his peers. She noticed that he responded to invitations to play and participated in unstructured play with his peers at recess, but was not speaking to peers. She knew he was choosing not to speak because he frequently engaged in spontaneous conversation with his cousin when playing at school.

> I haven't seen him talk to peers. He will participate and play with them… We had indoor recess and some of the kids were playing, *Jenga*, the little block game where they make the tower and they pull out the blocks. One of the other little boys invited him to come over. He didn't say, "yes" or "no," but he went over and sat down and took his turn. When it was his turn, I didn't hear him say anything.

> [On the playground], he is playing with other kids, running around, mainly {with another family member] because he is living with him. I have seen him talking to his cousin and his aunt when the aunt comes for lunch.

Ms. Martin also assessed Stuart's level of participation and how it changed over time. Mentally, she kept a running tally of his verbal responses, noting the circumstances under which each verbal response occurred. She observed an increasing engagement in the school community and learning. She, again, expressed confusion about balancing academic expectations and time for grief. In this excerpt she explains her observation and confusion:

> Part of [his reluctance to communicate] was a pre-existing problem which has now been compounded by the loss of his parents. I am not pressing him. I feel it hasn't even been a month. He did [speak] last week. I am letting him come on his own terms. He did ask me two questions. One was the third day he was here. He came up to me voluntarily, and said, "What do I do with these?" He had his colored pencils and did not know what to

do with them. A couple of minutes later he asked me another question, "Where do I put this?" So, he has said two complete sentences to me. Now, last week he raised his hand in math three times and would answer questions. So, he is starting to raise his hand. But as far as engaging in a conversation, I am not ready to do that yet. I don't think he is ready for me to do that.

Even though Stuart rarely spoke to Ms. Martin, he showed her his sense of humor laughing when she good naturedly teased another child. She realized that she was slowly building a relationship with him and that she could use his quick sense of humor to strengthen this relationship:

> I saw a smile the other day. I was teasing one of my other little boys who takes everything very literally. He wasn't packing up his book bag and getting out the door… and I said, "[other student's name], I have to stay this afternoon to work. Maybe you could stay with me and we could do some math together" [The other boy] got this look of horror on his face. I looked… at Stuart and Stuart is smiling—like he got the joke. (Teacher laughs.) He didn't laugh, but there was a real smile. So, he has a sense of humor. But he is not ready to share much.

Ms. Martin modified her instructional activities to minimize possible grief reactions. How to talk about families in the classroom was an area of confusion for Ms. Martin. When reading stories about families with mothers and fathers, Ms. Martin watched for signs of distress. On another occasion, she changed the wording of an activity from *Mothers and Fathers* to *Men and Women* to avoid referring to these family members. Finally, she sought advice from the guidance counselor and Stuart's family about how to talk about families in the normal course of teaching. She described her confusion:

> We were reading *Ramona Quimby, Age 8* and it has the mom, the dad, and the sister and everybody in there. I felt a little uncomfortable the first day with him, reading it. I just watched him, seeing his response. He seemed fine. I did go to the guidance counselor later that day. "Am I okay reading this?" She said, "Yes. It's just a story. That is something he has got to get used to. You can't really avoid it to that degree in second grade because a

lot of things are mom, dad, and the family." There was one poem, that same week that he arrived. We were using it for Word Study. It was called *Mothers and Fathers*. I changed the words to *Men and Women…* I thought I cannot do that this first week with him. So, I changed the words to men and women, but we are still reading *Ramona Quimby*. He seems okay with that.

Ms. Martin also expressed confusion about how children grieve. Since it had only been two weeks since the death of his parents, she expected Stuart to cry frequently and be clingy. She was surprised that he was able to focus on school work. He was not behaving as she expected. He had not spoken about his parents, but sometimes used the restroom a lot. She believed he retreated to the restroom when he felt stressed and needed to pull himself together.

> Considering what he has been through, I am pretty amazed that he can function at all in a school environment right now. So, for him to be able to stay focused on school work to me is a pretty miraculous thing right now… I thought he might be very needy, clingy, wanting me all the time. He has not been like that at all.

Family Interactions. Ms. Martin collaborated with both Stuart's aunt in making instructional decisions. She contacted Stuart's aunt several times, both with phone calls and through email, keeping her informed of his activities and adjustment to school. Stuart's aunt reported that Stuart did not want the class to know details about the deaths of his parents. This preference was respected by the school staff. Ms. Martin expressed understanding and compassion for Stuart's family and maintained frequent contact with his aunt. She considered that they were going through their own grief and respected their desires about informing others about Stuart's circumstances.

> So, he has… been with me only two weeks…. I emailed her the day he asked me two questions… She has approached me. Then she has come to lunch two days. So, about four times in the last two weeks. That's because she has wanted to be supportive in a new school, knowing he is going through a lot… I think I emailed her about something else he did.

The family doesn't really have suggestions because the family is still grieving too. This was the loss of her sister—the aunt that he is with. She is just staying [in] close contact. I don't think she knows exactly what to do more than what we are already doing…. So no, the aunt has not really given me suggestions.

So, but the family wants… the faculty to know what his background is. But not the students… He did not want to go back to his old school because he knew things were not going to be the same. He wanted to come here, I think, to be anonymous. So, we are trying to make this… that the rest of the class has no idea. We figure if he chooses to tell, then that is his choice.

School Leadership. Ms. Martin consulted with the guidance counselor frequently about strategies for supporting Stuart. She found this consultation helpful to Stuart and responsive to her need for information and guidance about how to teach him. The guidance counselor also monitored Stuart's adjustment by observing him in the classroom and making herself available to him for conversations.

[The guidance counselor advised that I continue doing] kind of what I am doing. Let him come around on his own terms at this point. If he is tearful or upset, she is there for him. She has introduced herself to him and pulled him out for a few minutes. We are trying not to make him appear different.

Maybe workshops [would be helpful]. Because I am not a counselor. I am not real sure if I should be doing something different… Then I sometimes wonder if I am coddling him too much. I am not giving him special attention because I don't want other kids to think, "Why is she giving him a lot of attention?" He is assigned a buddy. So, he's got a buddy that helps him. But I am watchful. I don't think the other kids know I am watchful. So... maybe some grief counseling, like as a teacher how to deal with it, but the guidance counselor has done a good job. She has sat one-on-one with me one afternoon and just said, "If this is going to happen, feel free to call me." So, she has been supportive.

Conclusions. Ms. Martin had not received research-based training on childhood bereavement prior to teaching Stuart. She believed that it was appropriate for a school to provide emotional support for children who are grieving and that knowledge about

childhood bereavement would help teachers to respond to the needs of grieving children. In the absence of research-based knowledge, Ms. Martin used her experiences as a parent, the grief experience of her daughter's boyfriend, general knowledge about bereavement, and recommendations from the guidance counselor to guide her instructional decision-making. She expressed confusion about how grieving children behave, how they progress through the stages of grief, and how to support them within the regular classroom curricula.

Ms. Martin used a variety of resiliency-based interventions to encourage Stuart to re-engage in learning. She diligently observed him, looking for indicators of what he could do academically, signs of emotional distress (avoidance/loss-focused coping strategies), and attempts he made to engage in learning (approach/restorative-focused coping strategies). She provided routines and procedures, encouraged interactions with peers, used a problem solving approach when dealing with problem behavior, communicated with his family, and balanced high expectations for academics with time and space for grieving. She found that direct counseling and teacher consultation provided by the school guidance program were both helpful in meeting Stuart's needs.

Stuart and his Third Grade Teacher, Mr. Hawkins

Teacher Background, Bereavement Preparation, and Instructional Influences. Stuart returned to this elementary school for the 2011/2012 school year. Mr. Hawkins was Stuart's third grade teacher. Mr. Hawkins was a Black male teacher in his early thirties. Mr. Hawkins had taught for seven years, the last five of these years at this school. He has a bachelor's degree in elementary education and a master's degree of

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education. He has four daughters. Mr. Hawkins experienced the death of his grandfather one year ago.

Mr. Hawkins had no formal training or professional development in childhood bereavement or child resiliency. He expressed his views about death as follows:

> I think I kind of take death as… inevitable. It is ironic that we are saying that in the sense of many times…it's out of your control. Yet, you feel that compassion and you feel the sorrow about them leaving, but many times it becomes selfish because you want them to be always there.
>
> I think as an adult you feel compassion… I have kids. So, if they were to get hurt… I would feel sympathy for… what happened to them. But death is something you can't prepare for. You can't. I can prepare for a test. I can prepare to go to the store to buy something. Death comes just— [snap]—like that. [It is] something that you can never prepare for. So, even for the kid's sake, he never would have imagined that it would happen.
>
> So, even as an adult, we know eventually it will happen. I don't have a sense of where I gained that compassion. All I know is that you live your life according to ultimately what God has planned for you. So, that's the way I see things. Who's to say in the next hour, it's not my time. So, it's just living like some people say, day-by-day, just enjoying every day as if it were your last and having the idea that you want to make sure that you gave your all throughout the day.

Mr. Hawkins worried how the death of Stuart's parents would continue to affect Stuart in the future. Teaching Stuart helped Mr. Hawkins contemplate his role as a father for his own children and the potential lifelong impact he could have on the students he taught.

> But… my only concern is still later in life whether it's "I am about to graduate. I wish my mom and dad could be here," or "I'm about to get married, I wish my mom and dad could be here." So, my thing is that it's probably weighing on him now, but when he gets to the age that he really understands life and he understands the goals he wants to achieve in life, I think that's what's really going to matter to him. Almost like, "I would just love to see my parents see me graduate or my eighth-grade recital or my first band audition…"

Teaching him made me step back and… think about how I relate to my family because at any point in time, my kids could be in the same situation. [I want to make] sure I leave a memorable impression on them because I am not really sure what kind of impression that his family has left on him. Now his aunt and uncle have to be the backup plan. But even as a teacher, it makes you really step back. It's almost looking from the outside in and realizing we are addressing [the needs of] all these kids. But every one of them has a different scenario that they're going through. It is just so poignant that his is such a huge one. But today or tomorrow that could be any other kid. So I think really just teaching them, even him, or even myself—learning that you just have to step back sometimes.

Stuart as a Learner. Mr. Hawkins described Stuart as a "very smart kid, a teacher-pleaser, very reserved, does his work, and is a perfectionist." Mr. Hawkins was aware that Stuart spoke very little last year. Mr. Hawkins wasn't sure whether Stuart's reluctance to talk was related to the trauma of his parents' death or whether it was related to possible speech difficulties. In this excerpt, Mr. Hawkins was expressing confusion about how children grieve.

I think the fact that he does attend speech [therapy]… that it might've been one of those factors… where he doesn't want to have to communicate with someone in fear of having to remember everything that he had to remember for speech as well. You can tell that he has attended speech. But many times, if he asks a question, it's clear. Otherwise, it's often, when he talks, you are, "Wow, this kid does actually talk."

Mr. Hawkins observed that Stuart did not participate in classroom activities. According to Mr. Hawkins, Stuart "just sits there," and does not laugh or show joy. Even though Stuart's emotions were flat in the classroom, he talked frequently to family about what was going on in the classroom. Mr. Hawkins noticed several behaviors indicative of grief. He also noticed times when Stuart was psychologically engaged in learning and the classroom community. His thinking was as follows:

He grasps everything that is going on in the room, but… it's almost as though he is without any kind of emotion. There is no smiling or anything

like that. But as far as anything in particular like something that really stands out. He's just here…. When you really think about his situation… you probably… think that he would be one of the students… that just goes through the motions, but yet… when he gets home, everything he doesn't say at school, he is rattling off [to his aunt] at home.

If you see him in the classroom, to see him at lunch, or even at recess because he does have family members here, he communicates with them.

Resiliency-Building Instructional Practices. Mr. Hawkins recognized that Stuart chose not to participate in classroom activities, an indicator of grief. To encourage participation and positive risk-taking, Mr. Hawkins was invitational. He cleverly orchestrated learning situations in which he did not give Stuart the option of refusing to participate. He encouraged engagement, healthy risk-taking, and the development of a sense of self-esteem. From observing Stuart's response, Mr. Hawkins believed that Stuart was "gradually starting to come out of his shell."

We were outside. We were just playing, throwing footballs to each other. I'd say, "Hey, do you want to play?" He came over and played. I got him interacting with other students.

I often pair him up with someone who really… wouldn't do well on an activity and get him to explain it to them. So not only is he communicating with his classmates, he also… comes back and… confirm[s] to me… he was able to teach that concept to the other student…. I think he really strives hard to do well to share the idea with someone else. He enjoys it.

If we are in the hallway, I say, "Once you exit the door," I say, "Make sure you're not talking." Well for him, he is not talking… I am saying, "Why don't you be just like Stuart..." Many times, he proves that point or if we are in the classroom and we are doing something, I often use him as an example to say, "Hey, he was able to do it, everybody else should."

Mr. Hawkins believed that a caring personal relationship was essential to effective teaching. He defined a "caring relationship" as one based on fairness, trust, and high expectations. He also believed that teachers should develop individual goals for each student and provide necessary support to ensure each student achieves these expectations.

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He recognized that he had the potential to significantly influence the long-term cognitive and emotional growth of his students. He intended to be a "turn around" teacher for all of his students.

> You got to be fair, but you can be firm. But the kid has got to still feel…at the end of the day, each kid matters to you in some sort of way. It's a personal connection with all of them. I know every need of each child and how I need to make sure that I'm addressing their needs. [This year] might be the only year for them to actually [share] all of their thoughts and their concerns [with a caring teacher.]

Through the year, Mr. Hawkins worked hard to build a personal, trusting relationship with Stuart. He realized that he first had to convince Stuart that he was a safe, caring person. With time, Mr. Hawkins noticed increasing engagement in class activities. This passage described his efforts:

> At the beginning of the year, I did not know about his circumstances until after. It really crushed me after I found out. So, after I found out the whole scenario, I would ask him to go take something to the office… he didn't want to. I didn't push. But over time, I have seen where he has actually… warmed up to me and he knows that I am the same way whether I'm having a good day or a bad day. But I think he understands my demeanor now. [When] I say, "Would you mind taking this down," he'll politely go and do it. But before it was kind of.... hate to relate to this, but it's like meeting a stray dog... they want to smell you. They want to get to know you first—to know if you are a gentle giant or are you a giant that's ultimately going to be cruel to [them]. So, I think the same thing with him—he is just really warming up. Now, if I ask him to do something, usually he does.

Mr. Hawkins consistently monitored Stuart's self-confidence and used humor, irony, and subtlety to build rapport, set high expectations, and encourage positive risk-taking. Mr. Hawkins described his efforts to build Stuart's confidence:

> Because obviously.... I think he's confident… But he's confident in a silent way—like "I know I can do this. I can." Whether it is… writing, his penmanship, or him doing all his stuff to make sure he makes a good grade…. He is very stealthy. He does his work and he doesn't have to get a

pat on the back, like everyone else. He knows [that] he is capable of doing it.

I usually tell him… when he gets a good grade, "You need to study harder." So, he's looking like, "Really?" So he looks at his paper and he has 105. So, that's my way of saying "good job" to him.

In a sense, it's almost like this. You're always making a 100… When you make that 99, you feel like your whole world is falling apart. So, with him if he's continuing to do well, then I feel as though he will continue to aim to make good grades. "You need to study harder." "But I made a 100." "But that means you don't eventually slack off." So, it's a way of doing it, discreetly without saying, "Hey, keep up the good work." I said it in a different tone to keep him motivated—so definitely just becoming independent [and having] self-discipline. Eventually, I think it will lead to where he will actually step out and step up and be really like a leader. But right now, I think there's so much on him. [He feels,] "I would rather stay inside my own bubble and do what's expected of me than to venture out to possibly fail."

Mr. Hawkins embedded life skills instruction into the regular classroom procedures and routines. He believed that he, as a male teacher, had a special responsibility to initiate boys into their future roles as men in their community. He provided explicit, direct instruction to help the boys in his class negotiate ambiguous gender roles they might find in the community at large. In these excerpts, Mr. Hawkins recognized that because he is with his students for most of the day, he was in a unique position to teach life skills and the values that his father taught him, thereby continuing his father's legacy. Note that in this excerpt, Mr. Hawkins thought of these boys as if they were his own children. He also observed that by sharing his father's legacy, he was also fulfilling a joy to himself.

First of all, I have all girls and so ultimately every guy in here is like a son to me. So it's one of the things… that I am fulfilling a joy to myself. "Hey, this is what you should be doing." Ladies should not have to hold the door. So, teaching them skills that my parents and my father taught me—to carry [them] on with someone else. Ultimately, his uncle is there. He is going to teach him things. But guess what. He's spending more time with

me throughout the day. So, what better way than to teach him some of those things that are essential as a male?

Like I said.... having all girls at home, this is my outlet for having those young guys. It could be anything as simple as "Pull up your pants." Those types of things—like how you present yourself or the way you carry yourself… really matters to me… "Yes, I want you to know the book stuff, [but] that there are things in life that you have to learn as well...."

One of my things is time management. I often tell them, "If I say, you got five minutes to get [your belongings] cleaned up and have this out, you shouldn't be doing it in the last minute. You have five minutes to prepare, whether you use that one minute to clean up and the other four minutes to prepare." So teaching him… "If I have to be at work at 10:30, I don't leave the house at 10:28. I got to prepare myself so that I … leave on time." So, it's just the little things. But like I said... it's… touch and go.

One of the things is that…. in the afternoon, "Make sure that you are picking up after yourself." Like this morning I said, "When company is coming over, you don't leave your bloomers in the middle of the floor, you pick them up." So, as a male, you're becoming more responsible. Or if it's cleaning up something because typically that's not a role that… is actually done by a male, or like chivalry, "You should be holding the door. By no means should one of the young ladies in the classroom be holding the door."

Mr. Hawkins intentionally created a learning environment which encouraged positive risk-taking, goal-setting, and planning. He described setting up a safe and accepting classroom environment. He then gradually increased expectations, providing necessary support so each student could meet these higher expectations.

I always set my classroom up where it was challenging. It was meaningful and I had high expectations. So when the kids came in …they are going [to first] think it's a free for all… [but] when they develop these routines and my expectations are… straight forward to them. Then they know, "I can take risks and [no one is going to look me differently if I don't succeed]. I know that the teacher is actually going to help me achieve my personal goals as a student" and [help me achieve the goals my teacher has for me]." The kids know they can actually fulfill them.

Mr. Hawkins stayed vigilant, adjusting his teaching and language, in the moment, to avoid possible emotional triggers for Stuart. He described his thinking as he taught:

At first, it was definitely a weird situation because many times when you say certain things, you have to be mindful… Like, if I said. "Take this home to your parents to get it signed," there are no parents at home. It was more, "So take this home to someone or an adult at home or whatever adults are at home with you." So, it made me begin to think about what he's feeling every time those words are said.

Some of the lessons that I might have taught, like Memoirs, I would dare not go into that because what memories does he have, other than the bad memories.

Some books that I would [typically] read, I wouldn't read them. If I used them in the past, I already know what's going to happen. Like if someone's going to die in it… I am kind of mindful about how [I] approach it. Some of them are required. But then some of them, [I] read ahead as [I] am reading [aloud] to change the wording so that doesn't… conjure up ideas of... what happened in the past.

School Leadership Practices. Mr. Hawkins described the school culture as safe, caring, and inviting. He believed this school provided a safe haven for students coping with trauma and difficulty. Finally, he believed the grief group offered by the guidance program helped Stuart explore his feelings, build friendships, and become more engaged in the school community.

You come to this school and it is inviting. There is not a person that is in the school that if you were alone, you couldn't go ask them for help. It is all conducive not only to a learning environment, but just feeling safe. I think everyone has the same idea what it means to have a safe environment. I don't think there is a person in the school that the kids do not know either by name or [through] a personal relationship.

I think some kids come to the school as an outlet from their outside issues. So to come here, it is a safe haven, and the kids feel that. I don't know of a better way to explain it…. But I think the kids feel as though it is definitely a place of relaxation with motivation.

Mr. Hawkins felt that he could ask school leadership for assistance. He observed that the educators at this school worked effectively as a team, with each team member contributing their own special expertise. Mr. Hawkins found the administration's

willingness to come into his classroom to address emotional issues with students as particularly helpful both for students and as support for him, as their teacher:

> If it's a touchy situation and I don't feel confident expounding upon it to the students, there is always someone else [that can handle it]… I don't want to be the bearer of bad news and then [my students] don't feel like they can come to me and explain something to me. So anytime I have a situation where it's touchy… for example, a kid that lost a pet or something–that might conjure up another idea for that kid who has lost a family member… I often have the principal or the guidance counselor… address the issue for me. So, I don't have to be that person.

Conclusions. Mr. Hawkins had not participated in any research-based training on childhood bereavement prior to teaching Stuart. He believed that it was appropriate for a school to provide emotional support for children that are grieving and that knowledge about childhood bereavement would help teachers to respond to the needs of grieving children. He also believed that school should be a safe haven for students coping with outside difficulties. In the absence of research-based knowledge, Mr. Hawkins used his own grief experiences, his experiences as a parent, his personal upbringing, and recommendations from the guidance counselor about how children grieve to guide his instructional decision-making. He expressed confusion about how grieving children behave, how they progress through the stages of grief, how to support them within the regular classroom curriculum, and how to talk to children about death and other difficult matters.

Mr. Hawkins used a variety of resiliency-based interventions to encourage Stuart to re-engage in learning. He diligently observed him, looking for indicators of what he could do academically, signs of emotional distress, his use of loss/avoidance-focused coping strategies, attempts he made to engaging in

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learning, and the use of approach/restorative-focused coping strategies. He provided high academic expectations, developed classroom routines and procedures, encouraged interactions with peers, creatively orchestrated learning situations which required Stuart to take positive risks when learning, subtly used humor to encourage him and build confidence, used a problem solving approach when dealing with problem behavior, communicated with his family, and balanced high expectations for academics with time and space for grieving.

Mr. Hawkins was comfortable asking and receiving help from school leadership and the guidance counselor. Finally, he believed that this school's culture of caring was particularly inviting and beneficial for Stuart and other children with emotional or other difficulties.

Sissy, as a Fifth Grade Student

Sissy was a White, fifth grader who experienced the death of her mother three years ago when she was in the second grade.

Sissy and her Fifth Grade Science Teacher, Mr. Crosby

Mr. Crosby was Sissy's fifth grade science teacher. She was in his classroom 45 minutes per day. Mr. Crosby was interviewed for a second student, Jimmy. His thinking about childhood bereavement and school leadership are analyzed under Jimmy's narrative. This narrative was included to capture Mr. Crosby's thinking as he taught Sissy.

Sissy as a Learner. Mr. Crosby viewed Sissy as doing well academically and able to get along well with her peers. Mr. Crosby had not seen Sissy exhibit any grief reactions or difficulties meeting school expectations. When speaking about the parental

death of another student, Mr. Crosby realized, because she seemed to be coping so well, that he seldom thought about Sissy as also being a bereaved student.

> She was pretty good. She gets her work done. She cares about school. She cares about herself. She is a clean kid. So, she cares about her appearance. She is average. She is not a high flier. She is not a low kid. She does what she is asked.

> I know that when [Jimmy's] father died, we were studying cells. We were talking about living cells and dead cells. I said to them, "We're going to have to be more careful about how we talk about dead cells and how death brings about change in your body when Jimmy comes back because we want to be sensitive..." But the whole time, Sissy was in there. I never even thought about her because that had just happened to him. Then, we talked about food chains and [how] decomposers are at the end of every food chain. So, it crosses my mind, but not enough to change my behavior.

Resiliency-Building Instructional Practices. Since Sissy was able to maintain high expectations for academics and behavior, Mr. Crosby did not see a need to intervene or provide her special support. He used collaborative learning groups and monitored her learning by frequently checking in with her group. He believed she responded to this teaching approach and that she was acquiring the necessary skills to learn independently.

> She's working with her group of people… I come and interject for a few minutes, and then I move on. I don't spend as much time with her [as I do with Jimmy]…. My thing is—if they're just doing what their asked, then I kind of let them do it. Then, I assess it. Like I said, she is quite average. If I had to say it, I would say she's at the high-end of average.

Family Interactions. Mr. Crosby met with Sissy's father and believed that Sissy had a strong family support system at home that included her father and her cousin.

> I didn't even know she had lost her mother until somebody else had told me…. I only teach her 45 minutes a day. So, she is just a normal learner. I don't really know much about how she changed. She stays with her dad. I have heard her dad say, "I don't push her." He is in a different type of situation. He is raising this child by himself… But she just seems to be… a regular learner. I teach her like I teach every other kid.

She gets along with the other kids. She plays with boys and girls alike. Her cousin is in my class. He calls her a tomboy. I think she stays with him. So, they're home together a lot. They are also in class together. They seem to get along pretty good. I wish my kids got along that well.

Conclusions. It had been more than three years since the death of Sissy's mother. Mr. Crosby believed that Sissy was meeting academic and behavioral expectations. He had not seen any emotional difficulties or any indications of grief. He also found that she got along well with her peers, completed assignments independently, and responded well to cooperative learning groups.

Andy, as a Fifth Grade Student

Andy's father was murdered at the end of the previous school year. It had been about one year since the death of his father. His death was both violent and unexpected. Additionally, law enforcement efforts and court proceedings which lead to the incarceration of the person who murdered Andy's father continued throughout this school year. Andy had lived with his father at the time of his death. His parent's did not live together and he was Jimmy's custodial parent. Following his father's death, Andy moved in with his mother and her parents. Because Andy's father died after the pilot study was completed, his fourth grade teachers did not participate in this study. Only his fifth grade teacher was interviewed.

Andy and his Fifth Grade Teacher, Ms. Seymour

Teacher Background. Ms. Seymour was Andy's fifth grade teacher. Ms. Seymour is White and in her early forties. She has two children, a son in high school and a daughter in middle school. She has taught for ten years, the last three years at this school. Her undergraduate degree is in education; however, she also has a master's degree in reading. Ms. Seymour taught a self-contained fifth grade class in which she was

responsible for all subjects with the exception of related arts (i.e., Spanish, music, art, physical education, and computer literacy).

Bereavement Preparation and Instructional Influences. Within the past five years, Ms. Seymour experienced the death of her mother and father, both from illness. Although Ms. Seymour had no formal training in childhood bereavement, she participated in church-related pastoral caregiver training. This training taught her "how to listen to people, give them what they need, and go away, or just hear them." Ms. Seymour expressed uncertainty about how to tease out grief from learning and behavioral difficulties that were present before the death of Andy's father. She wondered whether the problems she observed were pre-existing or associated from his father's death and whether grief "was a compounding or a separate effect."

Andy as a Learner. Ms. Seymour taught Andy about one year following the death of his father. Ms. Seymour saw Andy as struggling academically, socially, and emotionally "every day." His reading, writing, and math skills were not at grade level. She also described him as "content to do nothing." Because Andy did not attempt classwork or homework, she believed it unlikely he could catch up academically. She referred him to the school assistance team for consultation and assistance. Following a psycho-educational evaluation, Andy qualified for special education services to address his learning and emotional difficulties. However, because he qualified so late in the school year, these services were set to begin at the beginning of sixth grade.

Although Andy struggled academically prior to his father's death, coping with his father's death exacerbated these academic difficulties. According to Ms. Seymour, he did not take risks or push himself to learn. Instead, he chose to participate only in learning

activities that he could already do with ease and which he perceived to be safe. Ms. Seymour gave the following example:

> He fake reads sometimes or he rereads *Diary of a Wimpy Kid*—almost all the time…. He'll get into fiction… things with picture support, and high interest level—cars and things like that. He will read *Diary of a Wimpy Kid…* He's on his second round. He will read [this series of books] in order…. I don't know [why]—simplicity or comfort, humor. Hard to say.
>
> [When I tried to move him to a new book], it doesn't go anywhere… That, or "I don't have my book" or "I need to go to the library" or a lot of avoidance.

Resiliency-Building Instructional Interventions. Ms. Seymour was adamant that it was now time for Andy to re-engage and put forth effort in learning. She expressed frustration about how to create a learning environment for Andy with high expectations and which encouraged positive risk-taking when Andy's mother did not share the same vision for her son. Ms. Seymour believed:

> He does not read at grade level. He does not write at grade level. He is not "mathing" at grade level. He is not "anything-ing" at grade level… The challenge is, as it pertains to his grief, is that his mom excuses everything….
>
> But he was having these problems before the death and she didn't care then either. That's the only way I can describe it. She doesn't seem to care or doesn't know how to show "care." She doesn't have expectations that he will be successful academically. If he gets a D, she has a party. Not literally…"Oh yeah! Hey, he must be doing something!" If you're getting a D in elementary school, it means you're doing nothing. It means you probably deserved an F, but we try not to do that. So right now, it is especially challenging. Now, the excuse of the month is, "It's coming up on the anniversary," which I understand has got to be heavy on his heart and on his mind, but you [have] got to do something, sometime.

Ms. Seymour saw that Andy made little effort to plan or carry out his day-to-day school responsibilities, especially completing his homework assignments. Ms. Seymour encouraged him to do his homework during class. She noted that 15 out of 18 students in

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her room did their homework daily, but Andy "never, never, ever, ever" did his homework. Ms. Seymour did not grade homework. She did not think that grading Andy's homework would encourage him to take responsibility for getting it done. So instead, she repeatedly encouraged him to complete it in the morning when he came in. These prompts were only sometimes successful.

Ms. Seymour went beyond district expectations, providing homework and tutoring assistance outside the academic day, one afternoon per week. Ms. Seymour noticed that Andy's mother was unable to set a routine for attendance at tutoring and that her failure to set a routine contributed to Andy's sense of insecurity. Ms. Seymour then took the lead to schedule his attendance with his mother every Friday, ensuring that she knew when she needed to pick him up from school and he knew he was staying after school. At times, this was challenging. Ms. Seymour let Andy know she wanted and expected him to complete his assignments. She provided him a sense of routine and control over his daily life. Finally, she balanced Andy's need for academic support with his need for socialization, also allowing him time to play with peers and be around a caring adult.

> I... invited him to stay one afternoon a week for tutoring—free tutoring—on the day that mom doesn't work. Okay, she doesn't work on Fridays and he can stay here on Friday. I'll be glad until four o'clock—every Friday of my life—teaching your kid. But every single Friday, he doesn't know whether he is staying or not. So, it's not a priority for them. Where another kid that I have that stays after school, it's a given. "You're going to be here on that day and unless I hear otherwise…" But every other Friday, it's "I don't know if I'm staying or not."

> [They are] just not planning for it at all unless I remind mom and him… Around science fair time… I called mom to say that I'm not going to be there, just to remind her that I am going to be out tomorrow afternoon. I have plans… We talked for about a half an hour. We talked about the science fair. We talked about this, that, and the other thing. At the very

end of the conversation [I reminded her,] "Remember I'm not going to be here tomorrow. So, he'll just go ahead and ride the bus home as usual." Then the next day, at nine or 10 in the morning, she texted me and said, "What time do I need to pick Andy up this afternoon." I said, "I will not be here, so he will ride the bus." "Oh, oh, okay." I thought, "So, where were you for that whole conversation last night?" Who knows?

Sometimes, he stays and works. Sometimes, he stays and he just needs to be around someone. That's okay, too. Sometimes, he will actually stay and actually do some of the work. Mostly he wants to play. I understand the kid wants to play, especially if you are surrounded by older people… He lives out in the middle of nowhere. He doesn't have any little neighbor friends he can play with. He plays with his brother's friends… sister's friends. Those are the people he plays with after school. But every single Friday, I have to ask, "Are you staying? Are you staying?" Usually it's, "Uh, I don't know." "Let me call and make sure. Let me check." Whatever.

Ms. Seymour found Andy reluctant to make long-term plans or decisions about his academic life. Andy and his classmates were signing up for courses for next year when they would be attending middle school. This was typically a time of great excitement for fifth grade students. Representatives from the middle school had visited and explained how middle school was different from elementary school. For the first time, these students plan their academic day. Teachers typically discuss life goals with each child and then help them select courses to explore their career interests.

He won't talk about what he wants to be or what he wants to do… You ask him—what does he want to be? "I don't know." What he does know—is that he does not want to be in fifth grade again. But, he also doesn't necessarily want to be in sixth grade. Does that make sense?

We are doing a lot of registration—that sort of thing—for next year. "What do you want to take next year?" "I don't know, maybe this, maybe... I don't know." It's okay not to know. "But you [have] got to make a decision sometime, because they're going to put you in something. But if you don't know what you want to do, that's okay. You need to figure it out." But to ask what [him] you want to be when [he] grow[s] up, no. No idea.

Ms. Seymour observed that Andy had few non-academic interests. Ms. Seymour noticed that she had considerable difficulty thinking of something that Andy was particularly good at, curious about, or wanted to put forth a special effort to learn. She also observed that she was unable to engage him in deep or passionate conversation on any topic. When she compared her understanding of him as a learner with her understanding of other students as learners, she concluded that he, himself, had not developed a strong sense of himself—his likes, dislikes, and opinions and could not share a sense of himself with others. She noted that he participated in chorus, but enjoyed the interactions with his peers more than the music. But she also noticed that he liked to draw.

> He is just adorable. I know that sounds ridiculous. He has done a really good job in the chorus this year. Because I think it lets him be a kid as much as anything. I don't think he's a particularly gifted artist, although he enjoys it very much. He is not strong, academically, in any area. He doesn't have a high interest in any area either. Like usually, you'll have a kid that struggles, but when you're getting into really good social studies conversation, he might really enjoy the story.

> There is just nothing about him that strikes me as particularly strong. I never thought about that… That is just weird. Because every kid in my class, I can tell you who they are and what they are. He is a little boy who has just seen too much. As far as his talents, I don't know. He hasn't shown.

Ms. Seymour was concerned that Andy was wise beyond his years and had participated in inappropriate adult activities. He frequently talked about these events obtaining inappropriate attention from his peers. She noted, however, that he was interested in building friendships with his peers, an indicator of increased engagement in the school community.

He has the maturity issue as in he has been exposed to an awful lot. So, he has had some wisdom that other kids lack. So, that causes problems for him.

When the thing that he wants to share is that he went to the party this weekend for the friend… who they were sending off to the military, but the party involved skeet shooting… It was a cookout that lasted until midnight. There was lots of consumption of alcohol going on and that sort of thing. But he was real excited about the party for the friend, which may not have been the most appropriate place for an 11-year-old, who has seen too much. So, the kids, they get giggly and silly about the things he comments on. He also gets giggly and silly about pretty much everything… He doesn't have a hard time making friends. But the friends who give him attention back, they are kind of feeding on the more negative behavior kind of stuff than the positive stuff.

Ms. Seymour observed that Andy enjoyed interacting and playing with peers and needed time to interact with peers. She intentionally provided time and space for play and peer interaction. However, she noticed that his engagement oscillated between isolation and attention-seeking. But she also noticed occasionally he had important things to share during group discussion. Though Ms. Seymour perceived his inconsistent engagement as concerning; however, it may be that she was seeing his first efforts to re-engage with his world. She also found him to be kind and supportive of other students, especially regarding issues of fairness.

He is constantly, not constantly—it is one of two things. He is either isolating himself completely or he's doing anything he can to get someone's attention, squirming, fiddling, jumping, leaning… whispering—peer attention.

It is funny because it's back and forth. He seems either fully a part of the group—like he really enjoys having people around him that will listen to him. Sometimes he'll share things. You're like, "Wow, where did that come from? "Awesome! Thank you for sharing that." Then other times, he would just as soon not be here at all. You wonder, "Where would you rather be," because it is not necessarily home."

> If he is engaged in an activity, he might say, "Whoa, it's so-and-so's turn." Which I guess could be seen as being hyper-defensive. He is very protective over "It is this guy's turn."

At the beginning of the year, Andy refused to accept tangible reinforcers given for positive behavior. This school's positive behavior program provided comprehensive instruction in behavioral expectations along with frequent recognition and tangible reinforcers when students exhibited behavior aligned with these expectations. When positive behaviors were observed, teachers gave students school dollars. Students collected these dollars, exchanging them for fun school supplies and activities. Ms. Seymour encouraged Andy's participation in this community-building program and was confused about why he accepted verbal praise, but refused the tangible reinforcers. She considered many possible reasons for his refusal, even asking him why he did not want to participate. After persistent and frequent offers of school dollars, Andy recently began accepting them. Andy had now chosen to engage in community-building events—an indicator that he was increasing his engagement, spending more time using approach/restorative-focused coping strategies.

> There was a period maybe nine weeks long that he wouldn't accept a school dollar. He didn't care. He just didn't want the school dollar. He was still doing… the desired behavior but he'd be like, "Huh, I don't need it. I don't want it."

> I went through lots of possible situations. Is it that he doesn't want the instant gratification? He doesn't want to go get a sticker? That could be it—lots of fifth-graders don't want to get a sticker.

> Is it that sitting in the [private student dining room] with other kids is not important to him? That could be it. That's not important to a lot of them. Could it be that he doesn't think he deserves the recognition? It is possible. But he always appreciated the High-Five. Because I would say, "Have a High-Five." He'd be, "That's fine," with an eye roll. Fine. But, he just didn't care about having the school dollar itself."

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I guess there was something he wanted to do. I don't know if it was the dance or sitting with a friend. At some point he was, "Okay, I'll take it."

We had another friend in our class at the beginning of the year that is not with us anymore who took a lot of time and energy from all of us. I wonder if, maybe, it could be [because] the timing was very similar—[this student] went away and… [Andy was willing] to accept school dollars. There could also be the possibility that that kid was taking school dollars from him. You just never know. That was not something he would talk about. [I would ask,] "Why not? Why not?" [He would answer,] "I don't want it."

Ms. Seymour observed that Andy's affect changed over the course of the day "a half a dozen times." She monitored these changes, checking in with him, assessing his level of anxiety and/or agitation, providing reassurance, and/or handling an underlying problem.

He will have a stone cold, squinty eyed, furious face—like pursed lips. Later, he'll be happy-go-lucky, playful, and smiling—enjoying you and enjoying the kids and that's all great. Then, if you call his hand on anything, he will go right back to... even if you're going, "Hey buddy, how are you doing?" He'll go, "I'm good, I'm good, I'm good," Then the next thing you know it is.... That has been all year.

Ms. Seymour also noticed that drawing seems to have a soothing effect on Andy.

The only thing I can attribute [a grief response in the classroom]… is his constant need to draw. He prefers to draw over anything else. He will draw all the time… Like sometimes, he'll say, "I just feel like drawing." Okay. Then, fine. Draw.

[He is] not particularly [good at it], it's not like the kid that draws and you say "Wow!" Where you think that's maybe where they're coming from, maybe that part of their mind is firing. No, I just think it's something to do.

He likes to draw battle scenes… very fifth-grade boy. He likes to draw guns. You say, "Dude, we can't draw guns at school sorry—not appropriate." He likes to draw parachutes, and bouncy balls and little animation kinds of things—just doodle—boxes, squares, cubes, triangles.

Family Interactions. Ms. Seymour engaged in frequent contact with Andy's

mother and recognized that Andy worried about his own safety and the safety of his

mother throughout the day. She also expressed concern about Andy's relationship with his brother and sought the assistance of school leadership. He reported that his brother "beat him up." The school intervened to ensure his safety; however Andy later denied his brother was hurting him.

> There was a time when he wanted to sleep with [Mom], wanting to always be wherever she was. That sort of thing. She has a very active social life. They live with her parents. She has a very active social life and is not available a lot. She works as well. So, between her work schedule and her outside activities, there's not a lot of availability there. He spends more time with his grandparents or with his older brother or with his older sister that he has an unusually strong relationship with.

> This last couple of weeks, it is every day—sometimes five or six times a day, "Can I call my mom? Can I call my mom? Can I call my mom?" for this reason, or that reason, or the other reason. "I need such and such," "I need her to bring me a shirt because I spilled on it this morning," or "I need her to bring me a snack," or "I need her to bring me my book," or basically, "I need to see her or I need to talk to her."

> [I do not think he is calling her to help him organize his life.] I think he wants to have contact with her because it is not ever things that he actually needs. It is all stuff there is a way around. She has told me... at the beginning of the school year... the dad was murdered. So, that adds another aspect to it, I think. But at the beginning of the year, they were going to the arraignment and the trial stuff and all of that. So, that was heavy in his family's life at that point. So, you try to be patient and understanding about that.

Resiliency-Building Instructional Practices. Ms. Seymour responded to Andy's need for security by making sure he knew that *she* was aware of his presence in the room and setting age-appropriate, school-related boundaries between Andy and his mother. She balanced his need for security with his need to build independence.

> A thing that I have to do all the time, I have to say, "Andy, Andy, Andy, Andy, Andy, Andy" constantly making sure he knows [that] *I know* he's in the room.

> Mom and I talked about the phone thing. She doesn't want him calling her a hundred times. Something he really needs—that's fine and it's genuine…

But then, he will say, "Can I call my mom?" "For what?" I have to make the call, "Well, yes, you can call" or "No, you can't call…" which kind of puts me in a situation that I'm the bad guy. But I'd rather be the bad guy, than mom be the bad guy, at this point. To say, "Hey look, your mom doesn't want you to call her during the day, you might wake her up."

You try to accept that and understand how much that we can do to—where a kid is and where they would like to be—but again at some point, I don't understand. I just don't understand the mentality surrounding [the low expectations]. It's like, "That's okay." It's an okay reason for you—to not move on with your life. That is a real challenge.

Ms. Seymour also noticed that Andy was both inquisitive and fearful of the law enforcement officer leading the school D.A.R.E. Program. The D.A.R.E. Program intends to build positive relationships between students and law enforcement. Its mission is to provide children with "the information and skills they need to live drug-and-violence-free lives (D.A.R.E., 2013)." Participation in this program triggered worry for his mother's well-being, especially as it related to life style choices. He was also reluctant for the law enforcement officer to know where he lived. But he wanted to know more about the criminal justice process. Ms. Seymour cited the following incidents.

For instance, with D.A.R.E., every week is a trial for him. He is very curious about it. He wants to understand it, but it sends him right into.... Yes, it's very raw. Mom is a smoker and mom drinks—she doesn't think too much. Dad was an alcoholic. It is like he wants to know more, but when we talk about making a warning label for cigarettes—Silly me, I wrote, "Smoke these, you will die" The kids see that. All the ones who have parents that smoke are, *"Ooooohhhhh gosh! My mom is going to die! No! No! No!"*

When we started D.A.R.E., the kids were talking about what neighborhood they lived in. He didn't want to tell the D.A.R.E. officer where he lived because he [didn't] like the idea of anyone knowing where he live[d]—because they might come to his house.

Andy did not talk about his father and "for the most part he [was] just a closed up little shell." Ms. Seymour made invitations, encouraging him to both talk and write about

his father. She also openly talked about the death of her parents when relevant to a lesson. She noticed that he often responded positively and became very engaged when she talked about the death of her parents. Through these conversations, Ms. Seymour modeled for Andy how to think, remember, and talk about his father within the ordinary course of the day. At times, she also noticed that he became emotionally overwhelmed. When this happened, she encouraged him "to take a break." She did not teach this life skill as part of a "pull out" program or conversation. Instead, she taught him this strategy in the immediate moment that this strategy was needed. She embedded it within her day-to-day instruction. She also encouraged his classmates to give him time and space. Importantly, she also set the expectation for his peers that emotional reactions are common and they should respond with caring support. She was particularly pleased when Andy shared what he found helpful when he and his peers discussed how to be a friend to another fifth grade student who experienced the death of his father. Ms. Seymour was exuberant when Andy recommended "taking a break"—the strategy she taught him—when telling his peers what to do when experiencing intense emotions. Ms. Seymour noticed Andy was now using an approach/restorative-focused coping strategy. It had become part of his repertoire of coping strategies, available for future use.

> The only times that he has talked about [his father] would be if he feels like talking. Like sometimes, I'll get him to where he feels like talking about it. Sometimes he'll feel like it. He doesn't want to write about it, he refuses to write about it. It is been a struggle all year long. But finally, he is going to a grief group with the counselor…

> The kids know that my parents are both dead. So, sometimes I'll say something about one of them. I will say, ''I remember when my mama died" or something like that. It seems that there might've been times that he said, "When my dad died, I felt like" or he might [have been] avoiding or upset. It's hard to tell which is which. One of the kids will say, "Why is he not doing anything. I will say, "He just needs some space." We will let

it go. Later on, he might tell that kid, "I am thinking about my dad and I just needed just a minute to do that."

[My] decision [to talk about the death of my parents] is not specifically based on him… I'm telling a story. They just happen to know my parents are dead. [However,] he would respond. He doesn't clam up about that. Does it bother him? He usually will tune in more than ever.

But there was a time when I'm trying to think who it was. Oh yeah, when the other little fellow this year, when his dad died unexpectedly, we were talking to the kids about…"how to be a friend." He chimed in and said, "What you really need to do is let him breathe and give him some space." He just gave all kinds of wonderful advice about how to treat him. That was, *"Oooohhhhh!"* It was like, *"Yeah!"* He is in there and he does know how he's feeling and he is handling that.

Ms. Seymour believed an authentic caring relationship was fundamental to

effective teaching. She believed she developed a strong rapport with Andy and that he

responded to her high expectations, compassion for him, and sometimes tough, emotional

honesty. She described her relationship with him as follows:

It's about developing a personal relationship with another person who happens to be a child.

[He responds to] an honesty about life. About everything and having expectations for him . I have expectations and I understand. "Baby, I know that hurt, I know where you're coming from. You got a long life ahead of you. We have to do something about making you capable of living that life…. I think he appreciates that and good old-fashioned loving.

She also reported that she was affectionate with her students and Andy responded

positively to hugging, physical touch, and nurturing.

It's funny because all teachers who have had him speak to them and say, "Hey buddy, how are you doing?" He will be like, "Hey." [But then,] he'll go through spells where he randomly comes up to me and says he needs a hug. But it's not like I need a hug. It's *"HUGGGGG!"* [I respond], "Ok, come here baby." It's happy or it's usually in the middle of something— sometimes in the middle of direct instruction.

It was kind of in the middle of the year when I was seeing a lot of [affection]... I'm not right now. I wasn't really early on. He received

affection because I'm a hugger. I kiss all of them on the head. He received affection without bristling. He was always open to that. But as far as seeking it out, that was kind of in the middle of the year. Hasn't been the last little bit, I'm thinking now.

Ms. Seymour believed that Andy developed a positive, nurturing relationship with the other teachers and that he saw school as a safe place:

There are other teachers in the building that he has good relationships with…. He will talk to anybody who will talk to him back. He's not afraid of adults. He's not leery of adults. He is not any of those things. As far as the Related Arts teachers are concerned, I think he is under the radar there; that he likes them fine. I think he likes being at school.

Ms. Seymour believed her trauma history better prepared her to teach Andy and helped her to understand the depth of his emotional anguish. When dealing with her own trauma, she found that sometimes taking an emotional break was necessary. She encouraged Andy to also use this strategy. But, importantly, she tried to teach him the difference between taking a break and isolating himself. She also emphasized that it is sometimes necessary to begin the process of coping by going through the motions of life:

Just knowing that it keeps going and all you have to do every day is just wake up and breathe. Some days just suck. I know what it feels like, as an adult, to crawl underneath the counter back there and just stay for little bit. Then I am fine and I can come back. I know what it's like—not to want to talk about it—until you want to talk about it.

So, like today he needed a minute. I just knew he needed a minute. He wasn't here yet today. *He was here*, but *he wasn't here,* yet today. So, I needed something taken down to the computer lab. So, I said, "Dude, you need a little break? He's like, "no." [So I say,] "Will you do me an errand?" "Yeah." "Will you take this to the computer lab?" "Yeah." That was just giving him some space to do his thing.

When making decisions about how best to teach Andy, Ms. Seymour relied on "just working with kids entirely too many years" and her experience living life. She stated that teaching was "a balance… a dance you learn to dance, the more you deal with

children." She described it as an interactive process of gradual engagement. In this

excerpt, Ms. Seymour articulated her relentlessness. She simply would not give Andy the

choice to remain disengaged in her classroom.

> It's "Come here, come here, come here." Now, you can have some space. "No, no, no, no. Now, come back over here." "You can have a little space." You're taking two steps forward and ten steps back, but eventually those ten steps will turn to nine, then to eight. Eventually, you'll get to eight steps forward and no steps back. It's just a balance between what he's able to handle any day, what I'm able to handle on any day, and how we are able to be in each other's space. Every day is different. Every hour is sometimes different.

> I'm southern. I learned how to manipulate people [Laughter]. Well, that's the most raw way of expressing it. I got things that I need for you to be able to do for your sake and for my sake. At times, I'm happy to let it be for your sake. Sometimes it's going to be for my sake. Some days it's for both of us. *If I got something I need for you to be doing, ohhhh, I am going to get you to do it!* It may not be to the extent that I like. It may not be exactly the way I wanted it. But I can convince you that you think it's a great idea. I might even be able to get you to think it's your idea.

School Leadership Practices. Ms. Seymour observed that school leadership

supported Andy in a variety of ways. First, Andy participated in a grief group offered by

the guidance counselor. Second, she has referred him to the student assistance team for

consultation, support, and ongoing dialogue with his mother. Third, the student assistance

committee recommended assessment for special education eligibility which provided him

additional academic, behavior, and emotional interventions that she could not provide in

the classroom. School leadership also encouraged his mother to access additional outside

counseling.

> Having a counselor who is willing to work with individuals and small groups of children, instead of just teaching guidance, I think that makes a huge difference. He's finally opening up with the guidance counselor…. I think… the guidance that he has been offered, at least [to the extent that]… he's been able to receive it… has been extremely beneficial.

Early on, Mom did take him to a counselor. That did not go well. I guess it wasn't a good match to hear her tell the story. So, we got her some new names. I don't think that she has ever pursued any of those.

Ms. Seymour viewed the willingness of school staff to work as a team as critical when supporting a child struggling to cope. She explained that because children are complex, it is necessary to share information so everyone is able to make decisions in light of each student's full story. She believed when her fellow educators were aware of a student's circumstance, they were more likely to see the child's perspective and less likely to view problem behavior through a disciplinary or compliance perspective.

I think it's important that everyone is aware. There's a real fine line between "need to know" and "it sure wouldn't hurt if you know." I think we have just enough "it sure wouldn't hurt if you know." I don't know how different our experience would've been this year had I not known his history—not just his history as it pertains to his grief, his history all the way through elementary school history. His story is much more complicated than "My dad was murdered last spring." So, knowing all the different pieces of the puzzle that other people have observed, taking that and looking at what I see now—to try to make sense of who he is and what he's doing. I think that helps.

It helps for me that the other teachers on my team are aware of who he is because they knew some kid's dad got murdered last year. It is helpful for me, for them to know who he is so maybe—just for a split second— if he is doing something that he shouldn't be doing or they perceived that he shouldn't be doing—that maybe they could find just a shred of understanding… in that moment.

Ms. Seymour reported that she felt comfortable responding to the emotional needs of her students. She commented that school leadership held her to high expectations and standards, but also gave her the autonomy to plan her day and then adjust her plans in response to the immediate needs of her students, including their emotional needs.

The flexibility to—It's like autonomy. I can teach how I needed to teach this group of children. It is expected that I will teach them. It is expected that I will do my job. But it is not micromanaged. Yes, I know we're expected to have "x" number of grades in "x" number of days. But as long

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as I know philosophically where I'm coming from with a group of children, I can make a choice that doesn't fit that guideline. That's okay as long as I fit policies. We are good to go. So, being in a place where I can change my mind completely about what I'm doing that day. [I] don't feel compelled to follow a script. Being in a place where I can let my kids sit on the floor if they need to or I want them to or if a kid needs a break and lays down in a bunch of cushions and rests for a few minutes. Then I can check in and say, "Are you ready to come back yet?" Usually they are by the time I ask them. Having that flexibility and that understanding of what a classroom can be—that is it.

In terms of helping students like Andy, Ms. Seymour would like to see a conscientious effort to include more time for inquiry-based instruction as opposed to "teacher-telling" instruction. Ms. Seymour expressed frustration about teaching a large quantity of isolated facts that elementary students often do not find relevant to their everyday lives. She believed that it was more important for students to learn "depth rather than breadth." She also believed that when students have ample time to explore their curiosities, they (a) follow a natural learning process of wonder, curiosity, inquiry, and problem-solving, (b) learn to control and manage their own learning, and (c) learn "learning to learn" was more powerful than the specifics of any one learning project. She believed if Andy was given time and space to follow a self-directed learning process, he would develop a stronger sense of autonomy or self-efficacy. She then described her frustration when she lacked instructional time to allow Andy time to explore his curiosity. For the science fair, Andy wanted to build "an ice bulb." This had been one of the few instances of self-directed engagement and curiosity exhibited by Andy all year long. But there was not enough time allowed by the formal curriculum to finish his exploration. To make sure he met curriculum standards within the given time schedule, Ms. Seymour felt forced to shift him from his curiosity to an easier teacher-directed project. She made the following recommendation:

Get rid of the freaking tests, minimize the standards. We need fewer standards. We need an opportunity [to teach] for depth. We need to not have so much history that they have to learn. As fifth-grade children who really just want to understand the world around them—knowing who started the Spanish-American War and when it was over may be too much for 10-year-olds to have to remember. There's too much remembering in our curriculum as it is laid out by our great State. It's not the time—yes, it is. Yes and no. Time is sucked away because you have to "cover." I don't want coverage. I want us to be able to inquire.

It is very difficult because [Andy] has trouble coming up with anything he is interested in. For science [fair], the one thing he was interested in was something none of us knew what he was talking about—his parent included. He wanted to do something about an ice bulb, which I had no idea what it was. He found it online… Someone mentioned… He assured me that his family was helping him with it. His mom was, "I don't know what you are talking about. I have never heard of it. I don't know what he's talking about." [It is] where you… freeze water and then complete a circuit. I don't know. No idea… But then we tried… You have to experiment… So, he kept throwing thing after thing after thing and nothing. Then it came to the wire, and he wasn't doing anything at home. It was, "Guess what, you are doing… the Kool-Aid Experiment." He was "okay." He was fine once I gave it to him… But I wonder how much of that is because he has not been raised in a home where inquiry is valued.

I don't know if our school has offered him that culture of inquiry either. It's very difficult to do—that I understand—when you have tons and tons and tons of big nitty-gritty things you have to do. That's one thing I would change to make sure the kids get a variety [of instructional approaches]. The [school doesn't] follow any particular kind of track [or learning approach]. The [students] need to be prepared for either behaviorist or constructivist thinking as they go on. Ideally, I would like them all to have constructivist all the way up, but that's because [constructivism is my philosophy of teaching and learning].

Conclusions. Ms. Seymour had not participated in research-based training on childhood bereavement prior to teaching Andy. However, she strongly believed that it was the responsibility of schools and educators to provide emotional support for children that were dealing with outside emotional challenges. In the absence of research-based knowledge, Ms. Seymour used her own trauma history and coping strategies, her past experiences teaching, her relationship with Andy, and the strength of her personality to

guide instructional decision-making when meeting Andy's emotional needs. Although she observed many behaviors that could have been indicative of childhood grief, she did not consistently articulate recognition that these behaviors could be grief-related. Instead, she seemed to believe that, at times, Andy was unwilling to put forth effort and that his avoidance of difficult tasks was a function of his learning temperament. She also observed Andy's inconsistent efforts to re-engage with learning and his school community and expressed frustration she could not marshal the support of his mother. Ms. Seymour believed if Andy's mother also held high expectations for her son, that he would put forth more effort. It may be that Ms. Seymour was seeing Andy beginning his movement from relying primarily on avoidance/loss-focused coping strategies to an increased reliance on more approach/restorative-focused coping strategies. Regardless, she relentlessly pushed him to re-engage, refusing to allow him to use withdrawal and avoidance as primary coping strategies. Ms. Seymour was comfortable talking about death and difficult emotions when they came up in the regular curriculum. She modeled for Andy how to talk about the death of his father by talking about the death of her parents.

Ms. Seymour used a variety of resiliency-based interventions to encourage Andy to re-engage in learning (by using approach/restorative-focused coping strategies). She diligently observed him, looking for signs of emotional distress (avoidance/loss-focused coping strategies). She taught him how to work through difficult emotions, providing strategies and scaffolding to help him learn to regulate his emotions. She set routines to help feel a sense of control over his environment, encouraged positive risk-taking in learning, tutored him academically, and provided opportunities for peer interactions.

Most importantly, she created a caring, though sometimes uncomfortable, classroom environment in which she "demanded" his engagement, making it impossible for him to withdraw or avoid. Her tough-love approach may be just what Andy needed.

Ms. Seymour believed that the school leadership at this elementary school gave her the autonomy and flexibility to meet Andy's emotional needs. She also believed that offering Andy opportunities for inquiry-based learning would encourage the development of his sense of control over learning. Finally, she believed that grief counseling and the opportunity for Andy to advise his class about strategies that worked for him when discussing supporting another bereaved student were both beneficial.

Joseph, As a Third, Fourth, and Fifth Grade Student

Joseph was in the first grade when his mother died unexpectedly from complications during surgery. At the time of his mother's death, Joseph was in first grade and attended another elementary school. He then moved into the home one of his sisters and transferred to this elementary school. Joseph maintained contact with a part-time step-father. Several teachers that taught Joseph participated in this study. His third grade teacher was Ms. Coates. She taught him during the 2009-2010 school year. This was one year prior to the commencement of this study. But because she was available and willing to participate, her recollections were included. Ms. Davis and Ms. Holder were his fourth grade teachers and taught him during the 2010/2011 school year. This year was the first year of this study. Finally, Ms. Heath, Joseph's fifth grade science teacher participated during the second year of this study in 2011/2012. These interviews documented Joseph's development and adaptation to his mother's death over a three year period.

Joseph and his Third Grade Teacher, Ms. Coates

Background. Ms. Coates was in her forties and had taught for 18 years. Ms. Coates had a bachelor's degree in education. She had three children, all of whom were in high school.

Bereavement Preparation and Instructional Influences. Ms. Coates had not participated in any training or professional development activities addressing childhood bereavement. She, however, collaborated with the guidance counselor and found this collaboration helpful. However, she would like more information about how to discuss the death of a student's parent with his or her peers. She expressed concerned about student privacy and how to ensure that peers will be supportive.

> I wasn't sure how… you share with the other children in a way that is not putting that child on the spot or making them feel that that "People are really looking at me and I am really different" and also sharing with these kids how to be supportive. I think that is the really difficult thing. You want to make the child feel comfortable and some children don't want anyone to know and other children—depending on when it happens, how it happens, and how well known it is—it is going to be out there. So, how do you handle that in the most positive way for that child, I think is probably the only thing, I really felt like, "What do I do here?" or "Is there a policy for this?" or "How do we handle this?" That is kind of the piece that is missing.

Ms. Coates had not experienced the deaths of any close relatives or friends. However, her children experienced the death of their father two years ago. This was Ms. Coates' former husband. She believed that her experiences supporting her own children cope with the death of their father guided her interactions and decision-making when teaching Joseph. She compared the grief response of her own high school children with that of Joseph. From observing her own children, Ms. Coates believed it was important to provide Joseph a safe, predictable, classroom environment. She explained that children

grieve differently depending on whether a death was expected or unexpected and how old

they are. In this excerpt, Ms. Coates observed the attempts of her daughter to maintain

continuing bonds with a deceased friend:

> My children had four friends in two years that we had to bury, car
> accidents. Things like that happened here in high school. That was really
> overwhelming… I think my children responded differently than third
> graders because they are older. They have that real empathy for their
> peers… I am just thinking back about their grandfather because it was so
> matter-of-fact. When they were young, it was just a part of life. We loved
> them and that was sad. [But] when they were teenagers, it was devastating,
> especially my daughter. "Oh, I have so and so's bracelet… and I am never
> going to take it off…" I took away from [the grief experiences of my
> children]… to keep things as routine and normal as possible because when
> [Joseph] comes here, this is a safe place. This is a predictable place. This
> is going to be a safe place. It's that routine that he is used to.

Ms. Coates also spoke of her compassion for Joseph, noting that when she first

experienced the death of a family member as an adult, it was shocking to her. She then

tried to imagine how Joseph must be feeling.

> My first funeral was actually only six years ago. My first ever funeral…
> was maybe seven years ago. I [was] in my early thirties and it was quite
> shocking to me. A lot of people grow up and it is a matter of life... Maybe
> just the empathy of how I would feel. I can't imagine losing my mother. I
> have lost some other people in my life, but that type of relationship and
> especially at his age, not having a real strong support system at home. You
> just so feel for him. How you would feel in that situation?. It must be so
> difficult.

Ms. Coates observed that Joseph needed constant reassurance. She attributed her

responsiveness to his need for reassurance as "mothering" rather than as coming from her

role as his teacher.

> [I am] more mother to him, I think more than anything else. [A little
> mothering] is what he really needed, the reassurance and the "You're
> great!"

> Your heart goes out. Because [there is] no mama [at home] and [they are]
> babies—not baby babies—but, they are still so young… knowing the other

support system is not there at home….to fill the gap…. So, I think definitely as a mother, you want to fill that gap. The teacher-think is another part of it. But he so needed that… mothering and the coming along side and not just giving him the teacher-words… but also in the things I think, as a mother, you might teach him—that nobody is necessarily doing that at home. Whether you're saying, "Well, sometimes it is tough being a friend" or… "Well, you look like you're sad today..." I think definitely comes into the mothering stuff.

Joseph as a Learner. In the third grade, Ms. Coates described Joseph as having done well academically. He also interacted well with his peers and frequently supported them during times of emotional difficulty. However, she also reported that he had difficulty regulating his emotions and concentrating on academic work. He needed constant reassurance and lacked family support to help him with his homework.

Resiliency-Building Instructional Practices. Ms. Coates used a strength-based perspective when developing her theory of Joseph as a learner. In the following discussion, Ms. Coates described Joseph as "a good little reader, a real good reader." She considered that Joseph might be escaping into reading as a coping strategy. She then used his interest in reading to build a strong relationship with him. In this excerpt, Ms. Coates described Joseph's enjoyment of Harry Potter books. In this series of books, the major character, Harry Potter, attended a boarding school to develop his powers of witchcraft. Harry Potter, an orphan, was also working through his own grief journey from the death of his parents.

> He did like to read and so that was one of the [homework assignments] I could get back from him… I do notice that he is one of those kids, especially in boys, that you don't see… much, that he could disappear in a book. He is one of the ones that could get into a story… that was part of him coming up and sharing things with me because he would read a lot of stuff that I would like to read. We were reading a little of Harry Potter, he and I together, which was a little over his level, but he loved it. So, we were kind of working into that. But he is definitely one that I felt like escaped into books. You don't often [that] see in third grade, but I

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definitely noticed that with him. I felt that it probably kind of coincided with his home life situation.

For him, it was always the reading because that was his little escape and that was our connection. Because I know, as an adult for the first time I read a Harry Potter book… until 4 o'clock in the morning… [I said,] "That was amazing. I wish the book was longer." He totally related to that. We could sit anytime [with] a book and talk about the characters. It [was] meaningful because that was a real area of interest for him. It was something we shared together.

Ms. Coates also noticed that Joseph continued to experience acute grief difficulties. He had difficulty regulating his emotions and needed constant adult approval, which she intentionally and frequently provided. In this discussion, Ms. Coates explained her thinking. She again reported that she relied on what she knew to do "as a mother" to support him:

I would say the biggest thing I noticed was that he was very attention-seeking, just desperately needing affirmation on everything. "Is this right?" "Did I do right?" "Look at this." "Let me read this." If this is reading time, he would pop up every two to three minutes to come, "Look at this," and read me a sentence. Then it would be three sentences later, he would come and read me another sentence. But it was that constant really needing… especially female approval—mother-type of attention—that kind of thing.

Ms. Coates did not observe crying. Instead, she observed that Joseph had difficulty handling frustration and anger.

No crying. When he first came in, definitely. New school, also. But at the same time, not just being clingy to me, but had a quick, short fuse.

I don't remember him ever crying in my class unless once or twice if he was extremely frustrated. You know it was just that kind of frustrated stuff, because he wanted to be good at… everything. So if he felt… he wasn't one of the best ones or he was a little bit slow, it would really frustrate him… If somebody was disagreeing with something and he felt like he was right… he would tend to get really frustrated quickly. It improved throughout the year. I definitely noticed that in the beginning… he was constantly coming up talking to me… It was noticeable. I mean he could control it, but it was definitely something you would notice.

Finally, Ms. Coates noticed that Joseph had difficulty concentrating and needed to

wander both physically and mentally to stay engaged:

> [Concentration] was a struggle. If he wasn't reading… he would tend to
> wander, sometimes it would be the brain wandering, and he is not paying
> attention. Sometimes, he would actually wander. Yeah, I do think it was a
> struggle for him to concentrate all the time.

Ms. Coates noticed that Joseph very rarely spoke about his mother, but when he

did, other students were accepting. She also observed that Joseph frequently became quiet

when other students talked about their families. She believed that Joseph did not share the

death of his mother because he did not want to be different from his peers.

> What I noticed the most, he really did not talk about [his mother] much.
> He did mention it once or twice in class that his mother had died… He
> wasn't like sitting talking about his mom. It was probably, somebody
> saying something… and he said, "Oh, my mom died," or he would tell
> people, "I live with my dad and my stepsister" because he had an older
> sister that also lived in the house and she was kind of basically taking care
> of him because Dad traveled so much.

> The few times he talked about his mother, he would be quiet... He would
> say. It might be just a few of them talking, "Yeah, my mom died."

> [His peers responded.] Third graders… take a lot of stuff in stride and they
> will announce anything. I think so many of them have other stuff going on
> at home. They really take it in stride. They take in the information, catalog
> it, but they don't treat him any differently. They don't react any
> differently. They might say in conversation to someone else, "Oh, it's
> something, something and oh, his mom died." As an adult you are going,
> "*Ohhh*" But as a child very few of them really get what that means. It is
> just informational to them. So he would be a little bit quieter. I would have
> one or two little sensitive hearts be upset and realize it could have been
> "my mom." But for the most part it is really just informational.

In the next excerpt, Ms. Coates described strategies she used to assist Joseph to

build self-reliance. Note that in this discussion, Ms. Coates recognized that Joseph did not

have family support available to help him with his homework. She adjusted her

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expectations to allow Joseph to take full responsibility for his homework, making

assignments he could complete without adult assistance. She noticed that he took on this

responsibility, another indicator of his growing resiliency.

> He rarely got his homework done. Definitely, I think that had to do with home support. If I had something like reading log… I was asking someone to sign it every night. That never happened. I understood that situation. I would tell him, "You fill out the whole thing completely and make sure you sign it and that would be your responsibility and that would count…" He was maybe 80% consistent doing that himself, but you might not see the math coming in or the social studies. If there were three or four things for homework, you would probably get two of them back in, just because there was nobody to follow-up on that kind of thing. If he would get frustrated and not know how to do it, there was nobody to help him.

Ms. Coates discussed Joseph's strengths as a learner and his special ability to emotionally

connect with other children in the classroom, another indicator of his growing resilience.

> He actually was good at working in groups and getting people to work together. [He] could read other people's emotions. He was very sweet. If someone was upset, angry, or crying… he was one of my first ones to say, "That's OK, man. It's all right." Then [he would] kind of put his arm around them, being their friend.

> **Family Interactions.** Ms. Coates attempted to stay in contact with Joseph's

family. Even though they were not always responsive, she was not judgmental. She

simply recognized that his caregivers were very young and that his stepfather was

unavailable.

> He really missed out on that kind of attention and on a consistent basis. Dad was very good about it, but he traveled so much that it made it highly difficult for that to be consistent… The girls that were home… He had a really good relationship with the 16-year-old, but the 21-year-old had her own child. I think that was kind of difficult. I know the 16-year-old was wonderful with him. At the same time, she is in high school, taking care of her own stuff… She worked a part-time job too.

> **School Leadership.** Ms. Coates found it helpful to collaborate with the guidance

counselor. The guidance counselor briefed her on Joseph's history. They spoke about

how to best support Joseph emotionally in the classroom. Ms. Coates also believed that grief counseling provided by the school was beneficial for Joseph.

> Our guidance counselor… was actually his guidance counselor at [his previous school] so she gave me a lot of background information because I got very little from the family… I think the group they do in guidance… is awesome… The piece that is really good.

Conclusions. Ms. Coates had not received training on childhood bereavement. She would like to know more about how to speak about the death of student's parents with the student's peers. In the absence of research-based information, Ms. Coates used her experience as a "mother" to her own children to guide her instructional decisions. She reported that she frequently tried to provide Joseph "mothering" reassurance that he was "doing well." Ms. Coates also relied heavily on the guidance counselor for information. Finally, she believed that the grief group led by the guidance counselor was helpful for Joseph.

Ms. Coates used a variety of resiliency-building interventions with Joseph. First, she built a strong relationship with Joseph, using their shared interest in reading to encourage deep conversation. To build Joseph's sense of self-esteem, she gave him frequent reassurance that he was doing well in her classroom. She inquired how he was feeling, coaching him to manage his emotions. She also built his sense of self-efficacy by developing special procedures for Joseph so he could complete his homework independently. Finally, Ms. Coates believed the school counseling program was effective and provided her with background and support that allowed her to meet Joseph's emotional needs.

Joseph and his Fourth Grade Language Arts and Social Studies Teacher, Ms. Davis

Background. Ms. Davis was in her late 30's. She had an undergraduate degree in elementary education and had an advanced degree in educational administration. She was a National Board Certified Teacher and had taught for 13 years, five of these years at this elementary school. She had two children, a son in middle school and a daughter in pre-school. As an adult, Ms. Davis experienced the deaths of two of her grandparents.

Joseph as a Learner. In the 2011/2012 academic year, Ms. Davis taught Joseph language arts and social studies. It was now three years since the death of Joseph's mother. Ms. Davis described Joseph as doing average academic work, but capable of doing much more. His grades were C's and D's. She noticed that he was very engaged in classroom discussions, especially in history. However, she believed that his grades would improve if he regularly completed his homework. Ms. Davis contacted his sister, and she agreed to monitor his homework assignments, by signing off on his agenda. She also confronted Joseph about his failure to do his homework. She reported that he gave untruthful reasons why he had not completed his homework both to her and his sister. Ms. Davis expressed frustration about his "lying" and his failure to take initiative to get his assignments done. She viewed his failure to complete homework and subsequent "lies" about why it had not been completed as a compliance issue and responded to him using a discipline frame of reference. She did not consider whether his failure to take initiative or plan to complete his homework could be an indicator of grief or due to a lack of family support or instability. She required that he complete his homework during recess with her supervision. She found this approach effective. She noticed that Joseph

liked having the assistance of an adult available when he completed his assignments,

even though he was easily able to complete the assignment independently.

> I was going around collecting a workbook page. It was a vocabulary review workbook page. I went to him. He said he didn't have it and he left his workbook at home. Then I looked in his bookbag which was opened. His workbook was right there. I pulled it out and looked. It was there and he just did not complete it. So, then… he tried to lie his way out of it. But I told him I had caught him in a lie and I did not appreciate him lying.

> I called his sister about that… just to let her know that what he was doing… She… said that he had been saying that he did not have homework. So, he was lying to his sister about that and then he was also lying about completing homework when it hadn't been completed.

> He was saying to his sister that he thought the work was too hard for him, that he couldn't do it on his own. So his sister… emailed me to see if the work had indeed become more challenging or was it just something that he was just not being truthful about. I told her he had not be truthful…. I am not requiring them to do anything more they had been doing all year.

> Now, I am starting to say, "If you don't have your homework done, you're going to have to stay in." I have had to do that with Joseph. He does not like it, but he completes his homework then and he gets it done with pretty good accuracy.

> As a learner, he… is not real independent. He likes to have assistance with his work. He is capable of… doing it on his own, but I know that sometimes he wants… the attention of having the assistance of somebody to help him.

Ms. Davis believed that Joseph was a social learner and sought out peer attention.

She observed that Joseph was always in a good mood and happy to be at school. She

observed that he was always positive and enthusiastic, followed classroom routines, and

has good conversational and social skills.

> I am just impressed that he always appears in a good mood and he appears happy. He really is a ray of sunshine in the room. He comes in and he always has something good to say, and he looks like he is excited to be at school from the get-go. We have some kids that are barely awake and they are just kind of dragging their feet and he comes in and he's just ready to talk and he is ready to get going and do what he is supposed to do.

However, she also noticed that sometimes his desire to talk and engage with others interfered with the learning of his peers. He was also telling "tall tales" about his family. Again, she interpreted these comments as "lying" and did not consider that he might have had difficulty learning how to talk about his family.

> He is always very talkative. He is very social. He is a social learner too because if he is working on something he wants to be talking with someone else when he is doing it. Sometimes that is okay, but other times it is inappropriate… I have him one day a week for Morning Meeting. He always shares something from his own life… When he is with other kids, he is just very social. He wants to be a part of groups. For the most part… he seems to be accepted in his peer circles.

> [During class discussions], he would say, "You know my dad is the one who blew up Saddam Hussein's castle…" When we were studying Beringia, he said, "My dad was in a submarine and went under Beringia…" Wild stories. I do not know if he is doing it to look for attention but they just don't sound right; they don't fit.

Family Interactions and School Leadership. Ms. Davis closely observed Joseph's demeanor in the classroom. She recognized that the family might be having financial issues. She noticed that on several occasions he did not have lunch money. She discussed this with the principal, and they both made arrangements for him to eat lunch at school, without bringing any attention to him or his family.

Bereavement Preparation and Instructional Influences. Ms. Davis did not consider her own experiences with grief when making instructional decisions about Joseph. During this interview, she tearfully stated that she was profoundly impacted by her first experience with death. When her first grandmother died, she found it upsetting that at the viewing her grandmother did not look the same as she remembered her. She stated that she was so overwhelmed by this experience, that she chose not to attend the funeral of another grandparent who died a few years later. After reflecting on her own

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very emotional grief experiences, Ms. Davis began to consider whether the death of Joseph's mother played a role in his present academic and social difficulties. By the time the interview was over, she came to the conclusion that perhaps he was indeed struggling with the death of his mother, that she should have been more compassionate, and that, as a teacher, she should have been doing more for him. These two excerpts capture the change in her thinking about Joseph:

> I think… that death was so hard on me. I thought it had to be hard on him, too. I either don't know the signs or he is just choosing not to show them to me here at school. He is a kid who deserves a whole lot of attention and some maternal mothering going on... [I am] thinking, he is one of those kids that could use a hug… He is not one that is going to come up and ask for it. [He] so wants to please you and wants your attention. I think that he deserves that from me. I think that is something I have not been providing for him.

> I [thought I was not] going to get emotionally upset about that conversation with you [about my grandparents] and yet, I did. So, for it to be so raw to me as an adult and then that the death[s] were in relationships where it was time for them to pass away. It just kind of made me think, I need to do something more for this kid than I am doing right now. Just giving him a little bit more than the average student. If he doesn't have his homework, instead of making him feel bad that he doesn't have it, talking to him, giving him the opportunity to make it up, and not be frustrated with him. It goes the same with the talking too. Here I am saying I want this kid to show me some emotion, some kind of sign, he has been hurt by this process. Maybe that is what all the [excessive] talking is about. His need to connect with someone, because [of her death]… changes [my] perspective that now I want to interact with him on a deeper level.

Ms. Davis also spoke further of her confusions about childhood grief when she described her observations of a family of three sisters that also attended this school. This family was anticipating the impending death of the mother from cancer. Ms. Davis stated that she did not understand how Joseph or three other children at this school facing the death of their mother could possibly feel happiness when she, herself, was consumed with grief

when she thought of her grandparents. Ms. Davis had recognized the possibility that

childhood grief looks very different from adult grief.

> There's another lady that has… lung cancer, and her children go to school
> here and I see her children… She has a kindergartener. She's got an eighth
> grader and she's got a fifth grader. I see the kindergartener and the fifth
> grader, especially the fifth grader who, I know, knows what is going on—
> that the mother… really has a death sentence… They just seem so happy
> all the time… That just puzzles me because I would think.... if I was in
> that situation, I would just be a basket case and don't think I would be able
> to function in school.…

> Joseph reminds me of these other girls because he comes in and he is kind
> of the sunshine in the room in the morning. He never, never seems to have
> a bad day…

> I guess it just kind of bothers me that I don't see him with more emotion…
> on that matter. So, I feel like… with Joseph, and then with these other
> girls at the school that I must not know a whole bunch about how kids
> respond to this kind of anxiety. It's not the way I would respond.

> [I would have expected they would have appeared as] kind of just head
> hanging down, not wanting to make eye contact—kind of being lost in
> your own world. Just being sad. I don't know what life is like for them at
> home. Maybe school is a place where they can escape from it and
> everything is fine here… I know that is how we want our children to feel
> anyway. We want them to feel it is a safe place… They appear to think of
> this place as a safe place. So, that could be the reason why… I don't see
> the tears, the feeling sad, being antisocial. I just don't see any of that stuff
> with him.

Ms. Davis again returned to the topic of Joseph's homework, reflecting on how

she wished she had handled the issue differently. She came to the conclusion that because

she responded out of anger that he had lied, she missed a teaching opportunity. She then

made the commitment to look at his behavior within the context of his bereavement.

> I don't think I was drawing on [my own grief experience in making a
> decision] about what the problem was. What I needed to be doing was
> taking the time to teach him, that lying is not the way to go. Instead of just
> saying "I don't appreciate you lying to me," letting him know that lying is
> not what we do. I think he needs to have someone that holds him
> accountable for what he says and I think I have done a disservice to him

by not explaining, "You just lied to me and you did it because you thought it would be an easy way out, but all it did was make things more complicated."

I wish I would have [just used] it as a teaching point instead of just making me angry. Cause it did. It really made me angry that he would try to lie to me and then it not even be a good lie [laughter]. The bookbag was open. I could see the workbook right there. He didn't leave it at home. So, I think with him, I am going to be more sensitive to using situations as teaching points, instead of just reacting to what he does or what he says.

Ms. Davis had not been informed about the death of Joseph's mother, the circumstances of her death, nor how the death of a parent could impact a child's learning from school staff. She strongly believed that this information should have been communicated with her prior to the first day of school. (Ms. Davis later discussed the failure to notify her of the death of Joseph's mother in a focus group intended to improve this school's response to child bereavement.) She reported that she felt stunned and ill-prepared when Joseph told her about the death of his mother during the course of a classroom conversation. She stated that based on his facial expression, she first thought he was being a "smart aleck" and thought maybe it wasn't true. She was confused because his emotions did not match the significance of what he was communicating.

There was one time at the beginning of the year where I had said to him something like, "Show your mom" or I don't even know if I was talking to him directly or if I was talking to the whole class but he just said very matter-of-factly, "I don't have a mom... My mom died during—she had complications from a surgery." That was really all he said about it. There was no real emotion when he said it. It was a matter-of-fact type of thing and so he's never mentioned his mom since then.

I was shocked when he said, "I don't have a mom." Then to hear that she had died. So, looking back on it, nobody said anything about this is a kid whose mother passed away. I wish someone would have told me….

It was really uncomfortable for me—I don't know if it was uncomfortable for him to say, "I don't have a mom, but it was uncomfortable for me." In fact, the way he said it [I thought] he is being a smart-aleck. He is not

telling me the truth. I thought he was saying it to be funny, with the expression on his face.… [His demeanor] didn't match [what I expected] at all.

I don't know if it would have made a difference—*It would have made a difference!* I would not have said, "Make sure you show your mom's this. I would have said, "Make sure you show whoever it is that takes care of you sees these papers," or used the word guardian, or something like that.

School Leadership Practices. Once Ms. Davis learned about the death of Joseph's mother, she sought out assistance from the guidance counselor on several occasions. Each time she was assured that Joseph was "doing well." The guidance counselor answered questions posed by Ms. Davis as they arose. However, looking back on her consultation with the guidance counselor, Ms. Davis would have liked to have had much deeper conversations about how Joseph was doing. At the close of the interview, Ms. Davis came to the belief that Joseph's low grades, his lack of emotion when talking about his mother, his need to tell "tall tales" when talking about his family, his desire for adult and peer attention, and his inability to plan and take initiative regarding his homework were likely grief-related. She left the interview believing that Joseph was really not "doing well," that she had not been meeting his emotional needs as effectively as she could have, and that she needed to obtain more information on childhood bereavement.

Conclusions. Ms. Davis had not participated in researched-based training in childhood bereavement. She expressed confusion about behavioral indicators of childhood grief, how children move through the stages of grief, how children cope with the death of a parent, and how children talk about their grief, their deceased parent, and their family. This interview offered insight about how viewing behavior from the frame of bereavement can change a teacher's perspective when responding to problem

behaviors. This teacher initially observed problem behaviors through a compliance perspective in which she responded with discipline. However, once she began thinking about these behaviors through the lens of bereavement, she came to the conclusion that she could have handled them with more compassion and as opportunities to teach life skills.

Although Ms. Davis did not view Joseph's problem behaviors as related to bereavement, she nonetheless held high expectations for Joseph. She believed he was capable of far more academically than he was demonstrating in class, and she firmly believed if he completed his homework that he could meet these higher expectations. She persistently followed-up with family and confronted Joseph each time his homework was not completed. But she also provided the necessary support to make sure his homework was done by arranging for him to complete it under her supervision during recess. She insisted that he follow through with his assignments, refusing to allow him to choose disengagement or a passive coping strategy of helplessness.

Ms. Davis believed that this school provided a safe and nurturing environment for Joseph and that he was happy at school. However, she also expressed several concerns. First, Ms. Davis believed that no child should be placed in a circumstance that he or she should be the person to tell his teacher that his or her parent had died. She felt comfortable providing feedback to school leadership that there needed to be a school-wide protocol to ensure that no child should ever have to be the first person to tell his teacher about the death of a parent. This protocol was in fact implemented. She also recommended training in childhood bereavement for those teachers serving grieving

students. Ms. Davis believed that if she better understood how children grieve she could have been more responsive to Joseph's emotional needs.

Joseph and his Fourth Grade Math and Science Teacher, Ms. Holder

Background. In 2011/2012, Joseph was in Ms. Holder's fourth grade math and science class. Ms. Holder was a fifth year Black teacher. She was one of five Black teachers at this school. Her mother died when she was 17, immediately following her high school graduation. She was the mother of a three-year-old son.

Bereavement Preparation and Instructional Influences. Ms. Holder's mother died when Ms. Holder was 17. She reported that she relied on her grief experience when making decisions about how to support Joseph in the classroom. She viewed his behaviors through the lens of bereavement, keeping it in the forefront of her decision-making. She noticed that Joseph's family structure changed significantly. It wasn't just that his mother died, but he also lost daily access to his stepfather when he moved to Florida. Finally, Ms. Holder recalled how difficult it was for her to concentrate following the death of her mother. She commented that Joseph could be disguising his grief. She remained watchful, waiting for him to signal her that he needed emotional support. She continued to strengthen her relationship with him so that, if and when, he wanted to talk, he would have a safe place to express himself. In the meantime, she subtly built his confidence and minimized possible grief triggers.

> My mother passed away when I was 17. Three weeks after I graduated high school… That took a tremendous toll on me just because I was in the transition between high school and college. You think the summer after your senior year is supposed to be footloose and fancy free.… But that was just a wake-up call for me and has played a tremendous part in my life. Because I went to college six weeks later and [was] being severely depressed, my first year of college really hurt me as an individual and my grades. So, for the next four years I had to play catch-up trying to dig

myself out of the hole I had gotten myself into. In hindsight, if I really thought about it, I probably would've sat out a semester or year but it was just so difficult for me to concentrate on my studies as well as deal with my own grief issues. So, why I say with Joseph, it's been my own experience that when you are ready to share that, you will share. That is why I don't really press him and that may be more personal than about him…. It is just a generalized awareness… "Whenever you are ready to talk, let me know." Just being removed, but leaving the door open for him.

Yes, he has lost a mother. Yes, he has a very different family dynamics. Yes, you need to be aware of it, but that should not drive your focus or your interaction with him or your instruction. But put yourself in his shoes. How do you think that child feels when you say, "I am going to call your mom." "I don't have a mom." Just put yourself in their shoes and I don't know if some teachers would be able to sympathize or empathize for that matter because they still have their parents. Put yourself in their shoes and find a way to connect with that child so that if he doesn't have that outlet of counseling or small group or talking with someone or a mentor or something like that maybe he will become more comfortable and start to open up. Because I don't think that it is damaging him as far as it is building up, building up. [His grief] very well may be, just disguised very well. But then, I don't know what kind of grief processes he went through when his mom first died. It may be one of those things that he kind of has got it together now.

Ms. Holder recalled a teacher that had reached out to her following the death of her mother, noting that even as an adult she still felt a deep connection to her. Ms. Holder recognized that this teacher played the role of a "turn-around" teacher for her. She has also realized that her relationship with Joseph could also have a lifelong impact.

I know when my mom passed away I had just graduated high school three weeks before. I was three weeks from heading off to college, but only had one teacher that came to see me and to this day—she has helped me to get a job and she has helped me with college—but to this day that is the one person I really, really remember standing out because everything was a haze at that point. But that is the one thing that I remember specifically was this one teacher that I had in high school came to my house to see me and said, 'I just had to come check on "my girl" and that meant the world to me and if we could do that for these kids, I know that would mean a lot for them to have a person at school that they could talk to.

Ms. Holder did not receive training on childhood bereavement as part of her teacher preparation classes or through professional development opportunities. She believed that quality training would help her better respond to the needs of bereaved children, stating, "We receive training on how to deal with students with special needs and students that have allergies and I wonder why… [childhood bereavement] is… any different. I definitely think there should be some type of information or session." She believed a protocol that sets forth roles and responsibilities would also be helpful. Ms. Holder also believed the school should ensure that staff was informed of parental deaths so they could reach out to the family. She believed that specialized training in childhood bereavement would be helpful and that this school, which primarily served White middle-class families, should reach out to diverse families and encourage them to participate in the school community. Finally, she believed how a school responds to the emotional needs of a bereaved child has profound, long-term positive impact.

Joseph as a Learner. Ms. Holder used a strength-based approach to develop her theory of Joseph as a learner. Ms. Holder closely observed Joseph's ability to manage instructional tasks. She noticed that he was very focused in language arts and quickly learned content information. She described Joseph as "a very, very bright child, eager to please, loves to read; almost kind of like a "brainiac" of sorts; just into books, writing, and reading and math and those kinds of things."

Not only did she watch his academic progress, but she also observed his ability to pay attention, his response to classroom routines, and his relationship with his peers. Joseph exhibited several behaviors that caused Ms. Holder concern. First, he was unable to keep up with his belongings. He was not troubled when he could not find things he

needed and did not take action to become more organized. Joseph's inability to keep up with his belongings could be an indicator that he is having difficulty developing an internal locus-of-control.

> "It's here; it's there." And "I can't find it," "I don't have it," "I didn't do it," or "I haven't attempted to look…." [Joseph is] kind of a laid back— "much doesn't faze him" kind of guy. You call him down, "Hum, okay." Water just kind of rolls off his back and much doesn't upset him. Consequences, they are not dismissed, but he kind of just says, "Huh, Okay..." He just goes with the flow.

Secondly, Ms. Holder was concerned as Joseph rarely turned in his homework. Although Ms. Holder contacted his sister, she did not believe his family consistently checked to make sure that his homework was done. She also recognized that the family was having difficulty providing the structure necessary to ensure that Joseph was completing his homework. This could be another indicator that Joseph was having difficulty building an internal locus-of-control.

> He will say that he forgot his work and it is in his bookbag or he did his homework and it has not been done… Homework is a big issue and in talking… to his third grade teacher it was an issue then… The lack of support… maybe at home is an issue, not so much as lack of support as he is expected to do it…, [but] there's no one following up or checking to see that he did it. I think he is well taken care of at home. You know his needs are met, but as far as the nurturing aspect of it, maybe not so much.

Finally, Ms. Holder was concerned because Joseph frequently told "tall tales" when talking about his family, often telling peers that his family went on extravagant and exotic trips. Because Ms. Holder did not want to call undue attention to this behavior, she did not talk with him directly about these conversations. Instead, she redirected him and made comments intended to build his self-esteem. Ms. Holder reported she was uncertain about the role that grief might play in Joseph's telling of tall tales. She believed that he may be telling these stories to obtain the attention of his peers. She also wondered if he

believed that by telling these stories he could better fit in with students from more

traditional families. Finally, she considered whether tall tales were Joseph's way of

coping with the loss of his mother and with the subsequent loss of daily contact with his

stepfather, who had recently moved out of state.

> Joseph can come up with some imaginative stories for morning meeting…
> a bit exaggerated at times. For instance, I think Christmas break they went
> to Alaska or Alaska and Hawaii and lots of different exotic places over the
> break and I'm not really sure if that actually happened, but they went to
> many places—three or four, maybe even five places over the Christmas
> break. [I think he tells these stories] somewhat to fit in. Because part of me
> would like to think he did not travel very far for Christmas break but there
> are other students in the class that had gone places over the break and so
> maybe to fit in or be like the other students in the class that went places on
> and then also… just in a competitive nature because I have another student
> that does like to exaggerate stories in that nature, so just to see who can
> come up with the biggest story.

> [I feel] kind of confused… I was kind of wondering [if grief might play a
> role] but [I] didn't feed too much attention to it, because I did not know if
> the attention was what he was seeking or the validation of his classmates
> or people… was what he was seeking. [I responded by] just having the
> conversation, 'you're a really bright kid' and redirecting.

Resiliency-building Instructional Practices. Ms. Holder carefully adjusted her

language to ensure that it was inclusive of Joseph's family situation. She frequently

added the words "or your guardian" when she asked students get a parent to sign their

agenda or assignments. She also spoke with him individually when she discussed family

involvement in class and school activities, being careful to craft a message that was

appropriate to his family composition.

> I am very conscious when I say, "Take this home." But I am very
> conscious to say, "Take this home and get a parent or guardian to sign it,"
> knowing that mom is not there, stepdad is not there and it is usually sister.
> And if it is just one-on-one, I will say, "Hey, can you take this home and
> get your sister to sign it." Or if it is in a whole class, "Have the person that
> is responsible for you sign it.'

Seeing him at school-sponsored events while the kids are with their parents and it's one of the things you go, "Man!" Even today when passing out the advertisement for the [Mother's Day] cakes—you know one of those things where you want to pull the flyers out of the folder. I said, "*No*!" but you can't exclude him either…. I felt the need to shelter him from the pain of seeing it and bringing those emotions back up.

Joseph expressed a strong desire to spend more time with his stepfather, but he did not talk about his mother. Ms. Holder decided that she would not ask about his mother. Instead she remained "watchful, but not intrusive," waiting for him to start the conversation. She drew on her own grief experience in making this decision. She was also aware of the racial difference between herself and Joseph, stating that she was careful to set an appropriate example in her interactions with the child.

He doesn't talk very much about his family except his sister and his nephew… But he very rarely talks about family. [He] will tell a little bit about stepdad… In his writing notebook, we had a prompt about someone I love for Valentine's Day and he wrote about his stepdad. [He] talked about his stepdad's occupation and how he was not living with him at the time because of his job. He is in Florida. So, stepdad wants to move back here but there is not really the job market here for what he does and so he likes when stepdad takes him places and does things with him, but he doesn't get to see him often.

Conclusions. Ms. Holder had not participated in researched-based training in childhood bereavement. She believed that this training was important and should be offered. Ms. Holder experienced the death of her mother when she was 17. She viewed Joseph through the prism of her own grief, vigilantly watching him, looking for grief indicators, and subtly taking affirmative steps to minimize grief triggers. She expressed confusion when attempting to tease out the role Joseph's grief played with some of his problem behaviors.

In building resiliency, Ms. Holder focused on building a trusting relationship in which she made comments intended to build his confidence and self-esteem. She used a

problem solving approach to problem behaviors and considered the role grief might play in maintaining these behaviors.

Ms. Holder recommended the need for protocols to clarify the importance of making sure that staff were informed about a parent death and could offer support for the family. She also recommended that this school reach out to diverse families.

Joseph and his Fifth Grade Language Arts Teacher, Ms. Heath

Background. Ms. Heath was Joseph's fifth grade English/Language Arts teacher. Ms. Heath is White, in her early thirties and the mother of one daughter. She has a bachelor's degree in journalism and mass communication and a master's in elementary education. She has taught for seven years, three of these years at this elementary school. Ms. Heath experienced the deaths of her grandparents, aunts, and uncles. She taught one other child who experienced a parental death, which helped her to be more sensitive to the emotional needs of her student. Mr. Heath was interviewed for a second student, Jimmy. Her thinking about childhood bereavement and school leadership are analyzed under Jimmy's narrative. This narrative was included to capture Ms. Heath's impressions as she taught Joseph.

Joseph as a Learner. It has now been four years since the death of Joseph's mother. Ms. Heath learned about the death of his mother at the beginning of the year from the guidance counselor. According to Ms. Heath, this year had been a very good year for Joseph. She reported that Joseph had a very good relationship with the adults at school and obtained the respect of his teachers by being helpful and expressing concern for others. Ms. Heath described him as:

> Joseph is an energetic student, very kind, polite. He will just, in the middle of the day, "Ask are you having a good day?" to his teachers. He says that

to the other students too, but to his teachers… A lot of children don't typically ask that to adults in the middle of the day. He is a helper. He wants to help. He makes relatively good grades.

There are one or two boys that he spends a lot of time with at school. They're kind of goofy and kind of silly. I don't know about outside of school. I don't ever hear about him talking about having people over or him going to other people's houses. When he talks about going over to other people's houses, it is usually with an older brother and he is spending time with the older brother and his friends.

There have been one or two incidents this year that things… have taken place after school. Another parent and child have brought him. He enjoyed it and he loved it. One of the nights was the Winter Breakfast. He came with the parent and was so helpful, and so happy to be there. But other than that, I haven't seen him in any of the other events. He is not a member of any of the groups during the day. He has done safety patrol and he did seem to enjoy that. But as far as afterschool clubs, he doesn't do that.

Ms. Heath reported that Joseph did not talk about his mother and deflected peer inquiries.

He never, ever talks about his family. He never talks about parents. He does talk about his sisters and brothers because they are in the house with him. But, he never talks about mom. I don't know if that is because it happened when he was younger and he doesn't have a lot to say about it, or if he does have feelings and he doesn't know how to talk about it.

I'm not sure a lot of students know or remember that he has even had to deal with that. Like I said he never talks about it. So, I don't think students ask. There was a time at the beginning of the year where he desperately needed glasses. It took months and months to get them. The kids would say, "When is your mom going to take you to the eye doctor?" He would just kind of blow it off. He would never say, "Well, my mom's not here." Instead, he would say, "I am going to go soon."

Family Interactions. Ms. Heath was concerned that Joseph did receive the family

support as he needed:

There have been instances this year where I have worried about him. He doesn't always have the things that he needs. There's been times he hasn't had lunch money or it's 30 degrees outside and he has on shorts and a T-shirt.

School Leadership Practices. Ms. Heath believed that the administration kept "an eye on him" and took appropriate action when he had needs. She described the following incident.

> He didn't have lunch money, and he wasn't going to eat. He was afraid to ask. I made sure he got something to eat. I went and talked about it with the principal and she made arrangements to speak with his stepfather.

This year, Joseph seemed to be taking more responsibility for getting his homework done on his own. Ms. Heath saw him as pushing to get things done. She also observed more self-reliance than was observed by his fourth grade teachers.

> He.... the majority of time does [his homework]. There have been instances where he hasn't had it, and you ask him why, he will say because he had to clean the house... or they weren't home or things like that. But he is very independent and he is responsible at the same time. Oh, he does kind of push himself to get things done.

Ms. Heath's only recommendation was that Joseph be invited to join groups for students who had experienced a loss. (Joseph had been invited but chose not to participate.)

Conclusions. Ms. Heath reported significant emotional growth in Joseph's ability to cope with the death of his mother over the past three years. In the third grade, Ms. Coates, Joseph's teacher, reported that Joseph had difficulty concentrating on his school work, managing frustration, and completing homework. In the fourth grade, his teachers no longer observed difficulties with concentration or with emotional regulation, but they continued to observe difficulty with planning and following through with homework assignments. He was also telling tall tales about his family life. However, in the fifth grade, Ms. Heath saw a student who was fully engaged in learning and easily able to meet curricular and behavioral expectations for fifth grade students. She reported that he had good relationships with teachers and peers, helped others, and pushed to get his assignments done, including homework. In the past three years, Joseph moved beyond

confusion and to the point where he was easily able to concentrate on school assignments and manage his emotions. He still avoided talking about his mother, but was no longer telling tall tales about his family life.

Joseph's family continued to have difficulty providing for Joseph's basic care. He was often inappropriately dressed for the weather, without lunch money, and without needed glasses. School leadership took action to ensure that Joseph's health needs were met. Finally, Ms. Heath was informed of the death of Joseph's mother at the beginning of the year. She also felt supported when she brought issues relating to Joseph's care to the attention of leadership.

Jimmy, as a Fifth Grade Student

Jimmy was a fifth grade, White student whose father died unexpectedly from a sports-related injury during the second year of this study. At the time these interviews were conducted, it had been two to three months since the death of Jimmy's father. Jimmy had two older siblings. One was preparing for college and the other was in middle school. His father had been self-employed. Since his father's death, Jimmy's mother had taken over the management of the family business. Jimmy received outside counseling to help him better cope with the death of his father.

Because Jimmy's father died during the middle of the academic year, all teachers interviewed had taught him both before and after his father's death. Jimmy was a student with Asperger's Syndrome. Since Jimmy was strong academically, he qualified for accelerated instruction in academics. He also qualified for special education services as a student with autism. His individualized education plan (IEP) addressed difficulties with attention, peer interactions, and social skills. Four of Jimmy's fifth grade teachers

participated in this study: Ms. Marsh, his special education teacher; Ms. Adams, his English/Language Arts teacher; Ms. Heath, his social studies teacher; and Mr. Crosby, his math and science teacher. Along with the principal, the school psychologist, and the guidance counselor, this group of four teachers worked in concert to help Jimmy re-engage in learning and the school community.

Jimmy and his Special Education Teacher, Ms. Marsh

Background. Ms. Marsh was White and in her late thirties. She had two children, one in elementary school and the other in middle school. She had an undergraduate degree in education and an advanced degree in educational leadership. Ms. Marsh had taught for six years, and for three of these years, she taught at this elementary school. As an adult, Ms. Marsh experienced the death of a grandparent; and as a child, she experienced the death of her best friend. Ms. Marsh taught a self-contained autism class at this elementary school and provided inclusion support for students with autism that were mainstreamed in general education curriculum. Because Jimmy was easily able to meet academic expectations for accelerated curricula, Ms. Marsh provided Jimmy support with attention and social/life skills only. She consulted with his classroom teachers to help them manage Jimmy's difficulties. Ms. Marsh had worked with Jimmy for approximately two years prior to the death of his father.

Jimmy as a Learner. According to Ms. Marsh, prior to the death of his father, fifth grade academic work was easy for Jimmy. She described him as having "a lot of background knowledge on most of the things he [was] being taught and that "a lot of things come naturally to him." However, he had significant difficulty with attention,

regulating his emotions, and getting along with his peers. Ms. Marsh made the following

observations about Jimmy:

> [Prior to the death of his father] the work was easy. He was completing work, staying awake in class. Attention has always been an issue for him. He was doing pretty well.

> Processing [was] an issue. Processing those feelings and emotions are much harder for him… than academic[s]. He did have social issues before, especially working in groups. He wants to take over the group instead of being part of the group. Compared to most of my students, his social skills are much higher than the other children I teach.

> He always had his own ideas, and those were the "right" ones. So, he could problem-solve, himself. But when you're coming to a group decision, he didn't want to listen and take from the other students. He decided how he wanted to solve something. That's how it was going to be done.

Resiliency-Based Instructional Practices. Ms. Marsh reported that prior to his

father's death, Jimmy had made much progress and was doing well in class. She helped

Jimmy develop a five-point scale to assist him in identifying his emotions. She also

helped him develop strategies (life skills training) to use when he found himself getting

upset. She believed that Jimmy was getting along better with his peers and developing

friendships.

> So, we were just concentrating on the group work and dealing with positive and negative emotions appropriately. He uses the five-point scale. He was doing well with it…. He developed his own scale.

> He has always struggled socially with friends. In the past two years, his social skills were really doing well. He had developed a lot of positive relationships with children coming to his house and him going to their house. They had similar interests, similar academic ability.

> Following the death of his father, Ms. Marsh became seriously concerned about

Jimmy's ability to cope with the death of his father and the demands of school. He told

her he wanted to die, and she believed he was seriously depressed. Ms. Marsh

communicated her concerns to Jimmy's mother, and she arranged for outside counseling.

> I had a call from a teacher that said he was completely out of control. I went down there to get him and pulled him in—just two of us in a room and sat quietly. I said, "What is going on? This is how you were acting." I role-played a little bit and showed him what he was doing. We just got into an in-depth conversation and one thing led to another and [his desire to kill himself] came out.

> I talked with him. I talked with our school psychologist. The two of us tried to talk with him about it. It was clear that he was depressed. We notified his mother of the things we were seeing at school. She followed up with private counseling and a doctor. They altered his medications. We didn't see a difference for about three weeks.

> He has talked about [killing himself] in private counseling and he has talked about it a little bit here. He says… a lot [of things] about death—he is ready to go see his dad and die and he has even talked about how he would do that—he would take too much of his medicine… We had to notify mom about that to make sure that his medicines are put away in a proper place.

> He slept most of the day. Before, he really cared about his grades. He would say he "was on a straight-A streak." After his father passed away, he really didn't care what he made or what he did. So, he was a conscientious kid and that was out the window.

About three weeks later, Ms. Marsh observed that Jimmy was staying awake

more, but he still was not engaging in school activities. She then developed a behavior

plan with Jimmy which set up classroom expectations. She helped him identify his own

academic goals and worked with his mother to ensure that she reinforced these

expectations. Ms. Marsh noticed improvement. She accepted successive behavioral

approximations on the way to reaching the goals they set.

> Then, he was awake and alert a lot more. So, he was awake and present. But he still was not caring about how he performed in school. So, we developed a behavior plan for him and set forth some expectations. He developed it with us. "What do you think your teachers want you to do? What do you want to do at school? How can you be successful?"

And then, it carries over to home. How many points he gets a day carries over to a reward at home. So it's meaningful for him. That was another thing we discussed with him. We tried to find out what would motivate him. And the things that motivated him prior to his father's death were not motivating to him. So, that changed too. He would work for time on the computer, time on the iPad, getting to read a *Star Wars* book or doing something special during class time… Going to the library…

So, after talking to his mother, he really want[ed] an Xbox. So, what she's doing is—if he earns the points at school, she pays him 10% of those points. So, he has the opportunity to earn 100 points each week. If he earns hundred points, he gets $10 and if he earns 30 points, he gets $3— that kind of thing. That was the only thing we could get out of him and his private counselor could get out of him—was that he was motivated by money at this time.
It's been working well. It's been in place for two weeks. Completing his classwork has improved and his behavior in class has improved. It is still not where we want to be but.... baby steps.

Jimmy's behaviors also became more disruptive. His classroom teachers complained that they were unable to teach other students when he was in the classroom. Ms. Marsh arranged for special education assistants to help Jimmy organize and begin his classwork in the regular education classrooms. Ms. Marsh also brought him into her classroom and coached him through the completion of more difficult assignments. Finally, she brought Jimmy's sensory tools (e.g., exercise ball, squeeze toys) from the regular classroom to her classroom which allowed him more freedom to move without disrupting the learning of others.

[H]e was a completely itinerant, independent student. He now has use of our support staff at the beginning of each class and at the end of each class to get him started and to get him organized. Then the teachers will call if he's completely disruptive, and I will have to go. Whereas before, I could go a week without hearing from one of his teachers—that there was an issue. [It is now occurring] every day, every day.

Ms. Marsh also noticed that Jimmy had more difficulty with maintaining personal space since the death of his father. Ms. Marsh consistently gave him feedback, helping

him to see the perspective of other students in his class. She believed that he was

beginning to see how his behavior was connected to grief.

> [He] is all in their personal space. Whereas before he saw that they were in his [space] and he had a very guarded personal space. Now, there's like no boundaries. He's out of his space, in their space. He is saying inappropriate things to them. He is snapping at them. It is like all the social skills we have worked on with him is out the window. With the five-point scale, when we clearly see that he is having a bad day—he is about to erupt–we will ask him, "What number?" He'll say a "two, "when we see that he is clearly a "four" or "five." So, he is not ranking himself correctly anymore. So, he has kind of lost sight of that, too. I have had hard conversations with him. He said, "I don't have many friends anymore." I said, "Let me tell you why. You are extremely disruptive in the classroom. They are not able to learn and things—like getting under the desk and mooing like a cow, sitting on someone's shoe and pretending it's a dinosaur egg, screeching like a dinosaur—just completely oddball, off-the-wall, interruptive stuff…." So, it's like we are starting all over again.

> [His] processing is so slow. He did verbalize that "half of his boundaries had fallen off the earth."

Ms. Marsh incorporated the recommendations of his private counselor to tighten her

supervision and provide immediate and flexible intervention. She described the confusion

of the classroom teachers concerning how to balance high behavioral and academic

expectations for him with time and space to grieve.

> [Her] directions to us were—to tighten the reigns and give him those boundaries which is what we have done. He is improving. His regular education teachers did not know what to do. How much should they push him? How much should they demand from him? They did not want to upset him any more than he already was. So, nobody really knew what to do. So, once we got that advice—pull him back in and suffocate him with his boundaries because he is feeling anxious—he has improved.

> **Family Interactions.** Ms. Marsh also recognized that his family was

overwhelmed trying to adjust to life without Jimmy's father. She realized that, at this

time, the family was not able to provide the level of intervention Jimmy needed. Ms.

Marsh thought about how the death of her own husband would affect both her and her

children. By placing herself in the shoes of Jimmy's mother, this allowed her to consider how the death of Jimmy's father affected Jimmy's mother.

> He has been tardy to school a lot which is very upsetting to him because he comes in and things have already started. That ritual of coming in and doing the sensory (e.g., providing sensory and movement opportunities such as bouncing on an exercise ball, squeezing mushy toys). [Students with autism] like their schedule and they like the ritual.

> I had one conversation with the mother and she blames [arriving late for school] on [Jimmy]. In another conversation, she blames it on herself. I talk to him. It sounds like he's ready and she's not. I don't know what I would do if my husband died. I probably wouldn't be able to get out of the bed either.
> I called [Jimmy's mother] to tell her about the medication issue, and she dismissed it. He was just playing me and not being serious, which upset me. Confusion about what really is going on at home. You have to decide early that you can't control home. That's when I said I'm just going to keep him after school. We're going to get his work done. I'm going to teach him that he is going to do his work.

Ms. Marsh then made the decision to go beyond what is typically expected by this school district from a teacher as part of her employment. She decided to keep him after school to create an environment with both supervision and academic support to enable him to complete his classwork and homework. She wanted to maintain high expectations for him and was willing to provide the necessary supervision and instruction to ensure that he was successful in meeting these expectations. Although he was still not fully accepting responsibility for getting his work completed, "he [was] showing that he care[d] more when it's completed" and "a little bit more of that pride."

> Because he wasn't completing the class work and because his home life has been so out of sorts because the mother is trying to run the father's company and the sister is a junior in high school applying for college. Then there is a brother in the eighth grade. Whatever classwork he was not getting done with, piling on homework he wasn't getting done. Everyone at home was overwhelmed. His work was not seen as a priority because she has children going into college and high school. So, I volunteered to keep him every day until 3:10 pm, and we work on the classwork that he

hasn't finished. We work on the homework that he has to do. We did change his IEP. So, he does have abbreviated homework so he doesn't have as much to do. Because I felt like a child with autism needs to know that we still expect him to do his work and get it done. They still need to have that sense of responsibility and that sense of completion because if we allow him—oh, if we don't have him do his classwork or his homework, that becomes one of their patterns and that's not going to help him in a future. It is going to hurt him.

So, that's been working really well. When he gets home, he's not fighting with mom or fighting with brother and sister about doing homework, and he's enjoying those positive relationships. He did recognize that those relationships had changed, too. He didn't know really how to deal with that.

Ms. Marsh believed it was important to the grieving process to speak with Jimmy about the loss of his father. Whenever Jimmy brought up his dad in conversation, Ms. Marsh continued the conversation and encouraged him to remember pleasant times with his father. In this excerpt, she explained her thinking:

I know it's important to acknowledge the person that's no longer here. Because it's still real to them and to have that as part of their everyday conversation—that is very therapeutic. So, when he brings up something that is relevant to his father, I will say, "Yeah." Like he said he had a whistle the other day. I said, "Where did you get the whistle?" He said, "I got it biking," I said, "Was that over Thanksgiving with your dad?" He said, "Yes." So, we talked a little bit about him and his dad going biking.

So, he sees [that] it is okay to talk about his dad and remember his father. But other than that, I still treat him the same way I did before as far as the demands I place on him and the expectations I have of him. It has been helping the other teachers who see him more throughout the day kind of understand what they need to do.

Bereavement Preparation and Instructional Influences. Ms. Marsh had not received research-based training or professional development in childhood bereavement. She relied on a general understanding of the grief process and recommendations from the school psychologist. She reported that she used her "instinct" and "just knowing [Jimmy] the way that I do" when making instructional decisions. She thought it would be helpful

to know more about bereavement, especially as it relates to students with disabilities. She

believed that some children with disabilities process emotional trauma differently or at a

slower pace. She expressed concern that he might be "really behind" in working through

the stages of grief.

> I am just working on my own experience. I haven't read books lately
> about that kind of thing or know a lot about it. So, I probably don't have a
> lot of information. I was depending a lot on our school psychologist. She
> was doing a great book with him. He had a certain curriculum she was
> going through. So, it was like she was handling that aspect and I was
> handling the academics-functional side of it. [We were] kind of splitting it.
> Then she would share information with me.

> I had always heard and always seen that the grieving process had certain
> stages that you followed and went through. That's not the case for a child
> with a disability. They process at a much slower speed. And sometimes
> they don't process within the order which we normally process and so
> communicating with them deeper—you just sort of have to keep at it to
> figure out where they are and what do they need. Then meet them where
> they are.

> People go through the stages of grief and he is really behind… I can't
> remember the stages. His mom, his sister, and his brother who are not
> autistic are following that pattern, and he is still in the anger stage.

School Leadership Practices. Ms. Marsh believed that this elementary school

was highly responsive to Jimmy's needs. Ms. Marsh, as his special education teacher,

stayed in touch with his teachers and called meetings to work out the details of his

behavior support plan. She believed that the administration, his teachers, and support

personnel formed a cohesive team that communicated frequently and was able to flexibly

adjust supports as Jimmy's needs changed. She also believed that effective teamwork was

critical to balancing his difficulties coping with the death of his father, while also holding

Jimmy to high expectations for both academics and behavior.

> [What was most effective for Jimmy] was communicating and pulling in
> the school psychologist, principal, and all his teachers. I have had several

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meetings during their common planning… with them, like this is what we need to do, this is where we are, what do you see is your need, putting some of the sensory objects in the classroom that he would use which worked well for him before his father passed but now, are a distraction. He's on the bouncing ball bouncing like Tigger across the room and she can't teach. Whereas before, he would sit in the corner and attend to her lesson and bounce on the ball. So, we had to remove those things and bring them to my room. So, he has scheduled sensory breaks. Just talking to them. How can I help you help him and you still run your classroom the way it needs to be run?

Finally, she recommended that the district develop a bereavement policy that addresses how to handle giving grades immediately following the death of a close loved one.

Another thing I learned is that our district does not have a bereavement policy for children who lose a parent during the school year; so, we were better able to monitor and adjust at the elementary level than they are at the high school level, which your junior year is a critical year for grades and getting into college and that kind of thing. I know state colleges have bereavement policies. You lose a parent or you lose a roommate during the semester; they erase that semester. You start over. I think our district needs some type of bereavement policy because we were left here trying to consult with the principal and the assistant principal. We decided it was closer to the end of the second nine weeks. So, [we decided] not to count any grades he made in the time he came back from Christmas until the end of the third nine weeks. We just gave him the grade for the second nine weeks prior to Christmas. Then the third nine weeks, we started holding him accountable for his work again.

Conclusions. Ms. Marsh had not participated in researched-based training in childhood bereavement. She believed that this training was important and should be offered. Ms. Marsh had a generalized understanding of the stages of grief and used this understanding in making her decision to encourage Jimmy to talk about his father's death and remember the good times. She used this knowledge to conclude that Jimmy was "behind" the rest of his family in proceeding through the stages of grief. She also

expressed her belief that children with disabilities might take longer to work through the stages of grief.

Ms. Marsh used a wide variety of resiliency-building practices. She closely observed Jimmy in light of his capabilities prior to the death of his father, and she developed strategies to maintain high expectations for him based on these capabilities. She recognized grief responses such as confusion, withdrawal, and difficulty regulating emotions/behavior. In addition, she temporarily adjusted her academic and behavioral expectations to give him time and space to grieve. She carefully observed his gradual progress re-engaging with the school community. She accepted successive approximations and provided necessary supervision and support to ensure that he was successful in meeting expectations. Ms. Marsh also assessed problem behaviors using a problem-solving approach. She then adjusted his physical environment, advocated for him with other teachers, helped him consider the perspective of others, and explicitly taught him needed coping and life skills. Ms. Marsh helped Jimmy set his own academic and behavioral goals to encourage increased engagement in learning as well as a greater sense of control over his learning environment. She helped him develop "his own" repertoire of coping strategies and to self-assess his own progress when using them. Finally, she sought professional assistance when she recognized that Jimmy was thinking of harming himself.

Ms. Marsh believed that his teachers, administration, and other school staff built an effective team which communicated with both the family and outside mental health staff, which was able to quickly and flexibly respond to Jimmy's needs. Ms. Marsh

recommended that the school district develop protocols to provide guidance on grade adjustments for bereaved students.

Jimmy and his Fifth Grade Math and Science Teacher, Mr. Crosby

Background. Mr. Crosby is an elementary school teacher and the father of three children. He is a White male in his mid-forties. Mr. Crosby has a bachelor's degree in elementary education and a master's degree in educational administration. He has taught for 23 years, the last five years at this elementary school. He also received district awards for teaching excellence. As an adult, Mr. Crosby experienced the death of his mother who died from a long, debilitating illness.

Jimmy as a Learner. Jimmy was one of Mr. Crosby's students. Jimmy spent most of his academic day in Mr. Crosby's classroom which included one hour for math and 45 minutes for science. He also supervised him at lunch. Before Jimmy's father's death, Mr. Crosby described Jimmy as "an active student" who had difficulty learning in a traditional learning environment. In response, Mr. Crosby embedded physical movement into his teaching.

> Jimmy is a very active learner. He has a hard time staying in his seat. He has a hard time focusing. He has a hard time attending to the basic nuances of a traditional learning setting…. I noticed that I would be talking and teaching and he is taking the bookshelf and spinning it like it was on an axle, watching it go round and round, to see how many spins it would take to get the books to fly off—that kind of stuff. So, I noticed that he wasn't focused on me.
>
> He's one of those kids that thrive[s] on… "We were going to do… this part of the activity… in the back of the room [and] when you get back to your seat, you're [then] going to work in groups..."
>
> He is extremely smart. So, he can do all that goofy stuff he does, and he still scores better than most of the other kids that are sitting in his class. So, really, the worry with him, is more for the other kids… being

distracted by some of the goofy things that he is doing, while they are supposed to be focusing.

Family Interactions. Mr. Crosby taught Jimmy's older brother and sister and had an extended relationship with Jimmy and his family. Mr. Crosby observed that before the death of Jimmy's father, Jimmy and his family were highly involved in the school community.

> His family has been very involved in school functions. His mother is my room mother. His mother was my room mother when I had his brother earlier.

> She brings him with her everywhere. So, he already knew me quite well by the time he came through…. He is in afterschool math club and he is on afterschool newspaper staff. He comes to everything. Anytime the doors of the school are open, for the most part, he is here. I saw him grow up because… I had his other siblings. So, I knew him. He was in the talent show. He is very involved in the activities of school.

Resiliency-Building Instructional Interventions. Mr. Crosby balanced Jimmy's need for movement with the needs of other students to learn in a distraction-free environment. He worried that the frustration expressed by other students when working with Jimmy could impact Jimmy's self-esteem. Rather than pairing Jimmy up with other students, Mr. Crosby frequently chose to be his partner, which allowed for individualized instruction and prompting for focus and attention.

> The other thing that I did that was a big deal… I thought that other kids felt threatened by him. So, I pulled him and he got to work with me, one-on-one. So, I was able to interact with him more close[ly]. The [other kids] were [complaining] when I said, "You work with Jimmy." That's not healthy for Jimmy to hear, "I don't want to work with Jimmy."

> Another thing, Jimmy's group would be the last one to finish... It is also part of an accelerated curriculum class. So, you have a bunch of highly motivated learners in there… that are teacher pleasers. Because they are getting half the work done in the time they're supposed to get it all done or they are feeling like they're doing all the work just so they can be done. Then they feel like they have been cheated, which I believe. I agree. They

started complaining. As a way to save Jimmy additional embarrassment and to give him a chance to work with someone who is going to help him stay focused, he started [pairing up with] me—not every time, but a good many of the times. Then at other times, I would make… a rule. If it is groups of three, Jimmy can be a part of that. If it's a group of two... Jimmy really needs to have someone who can really lead him, [as he] was really not as focused as the other kids.

Because Jimmy had difficulty maintaining appropriate personal space with his peers, Mr. Crosby prompted Jimmy when his physical closeness made other students uncomfortable.

I have to tell him from time to time, "You're not allowed to touch." He has got friends. He is an interesting boy… Everything that I have read, people who are in that autistic situation, are very particular with personal space. He is not. He will come up and touch… It is the other kids that are uncomfortable with how close he can sometimes get. But, I don't really do much, other than social cues. If I see a kid that looks uncomfortable, but isn't saying anything, I will say, "Come on, man. Back off of her a little bit," but other than that, I won't do a whole lot of [intervention]…

After his father's death, Mr. Crosby noticed that Jimmy's difficulties with focus, physical boundaries, and getting along with others had gotten worse. He also began sleeping in class. Mr. Crosby attributed these changes in behavior to grief. He also noticed that Jimmy's affect was not what he expected. Mr. Crosby did not believe that Jimmy had accepted the finality of his father's death and believed that his disability made acceptance more difficult for him. Mr. Crosby was concerned that Jimmy was simply mimicking platitudes and comments that he had heard from others and was not coping as well as he verbally reported.

He was very close to his dad. It has been hard for him. Because of... the autism…. he lives in the moment. [I] don't know that he has put it together, the finality of his father's death, not being there anymore, like a regular education kid would. That is my own professional opinion.

Well, he probably understands that he's not going to see dad until he gets to heaven… He has said that before, without understanding that that dad's not going to be there to help him to learn to drive… or throw the football. Like you might understand, if your parents passed away and I understood

when my parent passed away—that things change when people exit for good.

> He started sleeping in class a lot…. He had to be pulled out a lot for grief counseling and that kind of stuff at school. So, it changed for him because he wasn't in class as much… I think for the most part, it really didn't change all that terrible much for him. I think it's because he lives in the minute. So, he is given the opportunity to say, "I am really okay with it." You can hear him. You can hear him mimicking back things that have been told to him.
>
> Our class collected money for a gift card for him… I handed it to him. It was just me and him together. I said, "This is just something to help you…. during this sad time. I know it's been hard for you," He said, "I am really okay, I will never be the same, but some days will be worse than others, but right now I'm pretty good." Almost like that, like it was rote [repetition].

Following the death of his father, Mr. Crosby decided not to change the way he treated Jimmy in the classroom. But he also stated that he had watched Jimmy carefully whenever he spoke about death within the curriculum. He then realized that he taught another student that had experienced the death of a parent, but had not paid particular attention to her reactions. (Mr. Crosby's assessment of Sissy is also discussed in this study.)

> I know that when [Jimmy's] father died, we were studying cells. We were talking about living cells and dead cells. I said to them, "We're going to have to be more careful about how we talk about dead cells and how death brings about change in your body when Jimmy comes back because we want to be sensitive..." But the whole time, Sissy was in there. I never even thought about her because that had just happened to him. Then we talked about food chains and that decomposers are at the end of every food chain. So, it crosses my mind, but not enough to change my behavior. [However] I make sure I watch them when I'm saying it… I don't want to sugarcoat it. I don't want to sugarcoat life for them. But at the same time, I want to be a regular person, a regular human being… It's like you need to understand from dust to dust. Then, this is the last stage.
>
> But I don't even know if they ever put two and two together. No one ever said anything. It's a standard the kids need to know for science that everything starts with the sun and ends with the decomposers. I can't really

sugarcoat that… I can't really water that down. They really have to know it anyway.

Mr. Crosby believed that other students had not changed the way they responded to Jimmy. He stated that immediately following the death of his Jimmy's father, his peers were more sensitive and tolerant of his behaviors, but after a few weeks, their relationships with him normalized. They continued to be annoyed by Jimmy's off-task behavior which frequently required Mr. Crosby to intervene to temper their responses to Jimmy.

> The kids that are buddies with Jimmy before the death happened are still buddies with Jimmy now…. Things that annoyed them about Jimmy's active learning style, still annoy them… They were maybe compassionate for the first week he came back… understanding that he is going through a lot and tiptoeing around him, but it was months ago. When he acts out, they're still in there with the "Shut up, Jimmy!" or "Sit down, Jimmy!" "I don't want to work with Jimmy!" It's gone back to the way it was, but then I have to be vigilant and make sure that Jimmy does what he's supposed to do but at the same time the kids are sensitive to him the way that I would expect them to be sensitive to each other.

Bereavement Preparation and Instructional Influences. Mr. Crosby compared the death of his own mother with the death of Jimmy's father. He contemplated the difference between expected and unexpected death, how grief differs following death from a long, debilitating illness, and the differing impact of death on people of different ages and relationships. He believed that with time and support of family members and friends, people still grieve, but learn to move on with life. Mr. Crosby spoke with Jimmy about his father's death only when Jimmy began the conversation. During these conversations, he stated that he felt like a father talking to his child:

> I have seen pets that have died…. No one as close as my mother because I'm 45 years old… We are not here forever. You know when an old person dies, it is sad but that stuff happens. When a person that's real close to you, even if they're older, passes—with mom it wasn't tragic, like Jimmy's…

Mine was after years of sickness and disease eating away at her body. So, I was almost relieved for her because the last five years weren't pleasant.

I think time heals. So, people are more resilient than what we give them credit for. I think when it happens real young or it happens in special situations like Jimmy, the healing is faster. Like my mother passed away a few years ago. I still think about her from time to time. I had her with me for 42 years. My kids, they talk about her a little bit and my youngest hardly at all. She didn't know her as well. So, there's that. The other thing is that with love and concern from the other parent, as well as, the people there in the life of the child that were left behind, eventually the wounds scab over. There's always going to be that missing puzzle piece there. But they learn to cope.

I understand that people go through lots of stuff. I knew that before. I guess losing a parent may have helped a little. But like I said, mine wasn't tragic… I didn't lose my parent when I was 10. When my parent did pass, it was kind of a relief, I think, for her. She didn't leave behind any little children. She left behind little grandchildren. I was sad for that. So, talking to Jimmy would have been more like a father talking to his kids than another person who is a partner in loss.

Mr. Crosby noted the difference between supporting his own children and supporting Jimmy as his teacher. He used his experience comforting his own children when he responded to Jimmy. He felt it was most important that Jimmy knew that he cared. He stated that although he did not bring up the death of Jimmy's father, he always responded to Jimmy when Jimmy brought it up. Mr. Crosby discussed his thinking when balancing compassion and a desire to help while also maintaining appropriate professional distance.

When mom died, I had to get with my own children who are grieving because they had lost somebody that cared for them. My kids always said, "I wish I had been raised by grandma." [Laughter] Because she had more expendable money… that wasn't the same way she raised me. So, they really missed that spoiling that they enjoyed when they would see her. So, that maybe was a little different.

I walked them through the different stages of grieving and letting them know that, "It's okay" to talk about it. With Jimmy, because I'm not his father and because there's a certain level of professionalism that I have to keep as his teacher, I could not enter in those same passionate areas of grief that I did with my own children. But at least I was there for him. I

did know what he went through. I was sensitive about it—what I did say and what I didn't say—based on what I had seen with my own children. For example, I made sure he knew that I cared, and was there. But I never brought up his dad. I left that for him to do. When he would, I would talk to him. Though I always kept it at Level C rather than diving any deeper because he was not my own child…

He was [a special education student]. So, I didn't want anyone to ever look back and say this man is acting inappropriately towards this special education child. But I like him. I like that kid very much. I would like to help him more. But while I'm his teacher, I feel like there is a certain.... I wouldn't mind helping in a way that would stand in the gap for the dad because we're about the same age. But the problem is the inappropriateness of being his teacher and being a neighbor. I'm not in the neighborhood. But I'm in the general area. Offering that to somebody— that is something the mother has to find and be comfortable with. While I said I would do anything I can, it pretty much has stayed as a professional student-teacher relationship—a caring teacher, but a teacher relationship.

Bereavement Preparation and School Leadership. Mr. Crosby had not participated in training or professional development on childhood bereavement. Mr. Crosby felt that he was supported by the leadership at this elementary school and believed that the school had done a good job of responding to Jimmy's needs. He believed the most important thing Jimmy needed was getting back into the learning environment as soon as possible and providing him one-to-one support when necessary. He also believed that talking to the other students about the death of Jimmy's father was helpful. This conversation between the guidance counselor and the principal taught his peers how to express compassion while also setting appropriate expectations. He also recognized that the death of a parent does not just affect the bereaved student but also has a ripple effect across the entire school community.

The school stepped up. The guidance counselor and the principal came to each of the classrooms and talked to the other children that were remaining, because it was a shock to them, because some of them live in that neighborhood with Jimmy and they played with him… The dad was

very involved in different activities. So, they were in sporting teams that he coached or things that he did and so that was a loss for them, too….

I think the best thing that we can do is to talk with other schools and show them what we do. Because I think we do a pretty good job of getting the kid back in the class and with other kids, about what to say and what not to say. Kids just have an ignorance and can say some pretty awkward things and not mean anything by it.

Finally, Mr. Crosby commended the school for putting the needs of Jimmy's family first and making sure that each of Jimmy's teachers attended the funeral. He believed it was important for bereaved students to see their teachers at the funeral. He also stated that quickly re-engaging Jimmy into the normal school routine, with necessary support, was important in helping Jimmy to cope with the death of his father.

The office came in and they did their thing. They gave us a chance to leave and go and be at the funeral without any worries [that] you got to be back by a certain time. "Do what you've got to do." It was like the [school] priorities all went to the back seat and what went to the front was caring for this family, and in particular, Jimmy, who is represented by the teachers that were there. Because really everybody else was there for the mother, the wife of the man who passed and there were friends from high school, but Jimmy is too young to have friends that can come… [His siblings] had friends that could drive and they got out of school and came. Jimmy had teachers. And the school was very good about letting us go and talk to him. So, I think we do a good job.

I went to the funeral. The brother and the older sister were racked with grief… He stayed separate. They had somebody watching him, a family member or loved one... He was just different—*He wasn't different.* He was just being same old Jimmy. He was a loving kid who was happy to see me there.

[What was most helpful was providing] intense one-on-one to get them back into the regular classroom into a normal setting as quickly as possible…. In regards to the grief or the learning abilities that come with the autism, yes, I feel like I have the support I need.

Conclusions. Mr. Crosby had not participated in researched-based training in childhood bereavement, but believed that this training would be helpful. Mr. Crosby

experienced the death of his mother and supported his children through the loss of their grandmother. Mr. Crosby used these experiences as touchstones when he responded to Jimmy. Mr. Crosby also spoke compassionately about the fact that Jimmy would no longer have nurturing father-son experiences. He articulated a desire to fill that void for him. However, he also recognized that he had to temper this desire by maintaining an appropriate professional distance with him.

In addressing Jimmy's difficulties with attention, social skills, and coping with the death of his father, Mr. Crosby used resiliency-based strategies to help Jimmy re-engage in learning. Mr. Crosby compared Jimmy's capabilities before and after the death of his father, recognizing the role grief was playing in the deterioration of Jimmy's behavior and ability to cope with school demands. He provided one-to-one coaching in life skills, encouraged appropriate physical boundaries, embedded movement opportunities within his instruction, coached other students to be understanding of Jimmy's needs, and prevented Jimmy from interfering with the learning of his peers. Finally, Mr. Crosby recognized that Jimmy's words and affect were disconnected to the seriousness of the situation and not what he expected from a student in the early stages of bereavement. Mr. Crosby believed that Jimmy was not doing as well as he professed. He worried that Jimmy did not really understand how his father's death would change his life.

Mr. Crosby believed that Jimmy was well supported by school leadership. He believed that teaching Jimmy's peers how to respond to a person grieving the death of a loved one was especially helpful. He believed that allowing staff to attend Jimmy's father's funeral showed Jimmy how much the school community cared and supported

him. Finally, he believed that school leadership set appropriate priorities allowing

teachers the autonomy and flexibility to ensure that Jimmy's emotional needs were met.

Jimmy's Fifth Grade Social Studies Teacher, Ms. Heath

Teacher Background. Ms. Heath was White, in her early thirties, and the mother

of one daughter. She had a bachelor's degree in journalism and mass communication and

a master's degree in elementary education. She had taught for seven years, three of these

years at this elementary school. Ms. Heath experienced the deaths of several of her

grandparents, aunts, and uncles. She had taught one other child who had experienced a

parental death, which she believed helped her understand the emotional needs of

bereaved students.

Bereavement Preparation and Instructional Influences. Ms. Heath had no

formal training or professional development in childhood bereavement. She thought it

would be helpful to have a mini-course on what to expect in the event of bereavement.

She stated that she would like to know more about:

> How to handle students when they first come back, as you're not sure what
> to do first. Should you talk about it or not talk about it? What should you
> expect? Maybe some sort of just mini-course, where these are… the things
> you should do and these are the things you should not do. I think that
> would definitely be helpful. Because I can't think of a time, I specifically
> have had that.

Jimmy as a Learner. According to Ms. Heath, Jimmy was "very bright, very

knowledgeable" and "well able to complete the work." Prior to the death of his father,

Jimmy had a hard time staying focused and completing his class work, but his grades

were excellent.

> Although he moves around a lot—even with the movement—he was able
> to comprehend and understand. Overall, his grades were excellent. You

might not think he was listening. But on a test or quiz or classwork, he was making A's. That was prior to the death of his father.

Ms. Heath also saw Jimmy as very involved in the school community. He participated on the school newspaper and the math club, both of which met after school. He also assisted with morning announcements. Although Jimmy had one good friend in the classroom, he had difficulty getting along with most of the other students in his class. On group assignments, he typically insisted that things had to be his way which often led to frustration and hurt feelings. However, he was responsive to coaching to help him see the point of view of others:

> If there was an issue at recess with a friend… an argument [or] he was excluded and had his feelings hurt, I could… talk to him. We [could] work it out… He would stay calm. He would be able to work through that.

After his father's death, Ms. Heath observed a significant deterioration in Jimmy's academic and coping skills. He was not showing an interest in his schoolwork and did not seem motivated. Ms. Heath believed that Jimmy no longer seemed to believe that he could solve his own academic difficulties. (A loss of sense of self-efficacy is frequently observed in students dealing with grief.) He began engaging in age-inappropriate behaviors like hiding under the desk. He also began having even more difficulty getting along with his peers.

> Prior to his dad's death... he had some behavioral stuff—like he couldn't stay seated, he couldn't stay focused. He still kept his grades up. He still cared about his grades. Since his father's passing, he just lost motivation…. Grades are just not a concern anymore. Whereas prior to his dad's death if he would have seen a bad grade—which would've been a rare occurrence—he wanted to work really hard to improve that. Lately, it's just, "There's nothing I can do about it. I can't fix it. I can't make it better." So definitely, [I saw] a change in his attitude.
>
> I think that [making friends] has become harder for him. He and his friend —what I understand they were even friends in previous years—this child

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was a huge support for him in those first weeks after his dad's death. But Jimmy has had a hard time dealing with his feelings. When he gets sad about something, he does not handle it as calmly anymore. And some of those behaviors we were seeing before, like picking his nose and things like that, [they have] gotten worse and in fifth grade, students notice.

Whereas before [his dad's death], it had to be his way or no way. It's even more so now. Not only… has [he] become a distraction to others because he moves a lot more, blurts out a lot more, [he] does things like sit under the table and hide under the desk… So, I would say he has had a hard time. I would say socially—that area has been the hardest since his dad's death.

Ms. Heath reported that Jimmy's ability to function independently also deteriorated significantly following the death of his father. He began needing adult support to move between classes and complete assignments.

Whereas before…he was a little bit more independent. He could get things done on his own. He could move from point A to point B. Now, I've had to assist him when getting his classwork done. Other teachers have come in to assist getting classwork done. Even with just taking his breaks, and moving from class to class, he needs reminders. The other day—it had been 10 minutes—his book bag, his lunchbox, and his jacket were in my room. So, I feel… now he's not as independent.

Resiliency-Building Instructional Interventions. Ms. Heath tried to hold high expectations for Jimmy while at the same time allowing him space and time to deal with the trauma of his father's death. She used her experience as a parent and imagined what life would be like for her daughter, if her daughter experienced a parental death to help her make instructional decisions.

I look at it more from a parent's standpoint. I haven't lost a parent myself… I do have a child. I imagine what it would be like for her if she lost a parent. So, I understand that he is broken-hearted. I understand that he is grieving. I try to keep that in mind while still holding the expectations high because I know that he is capable.

Ms. Heath adjusted fifth grade expectations for Jimmy and implemented a checklist for Jimmy to help him monitor his attention and work completion. She also provided him

frequent feedback. He was able to incorporate her feedback and began modifying his

behavior. He also began reclaiming some of his independence and sense of control over

the events occurring in his life.

> We are having to give him longer times to complete assignments because he has a hard time staying focused. We had to modify some of our assignments. Where we might give students in our class this one test, his might look a little bit different…. It might be length. We might shorten it. We might tell him just to hit on the big ideas….
>
> We have even incorporated a checklist of the things he needs to attend to. He checks off [the behaviors he accomplished] and brings it to us at the end of the class period. If we agree with it, we sign it. If we disagree, we have to talk with him about it. He makes those changes.
>
> He assesses his ability to complete work… stay in one spot, work quietly, use materials appropriately… and attend to the teacher. [He] has been pretty accurate. I think on the first day… he gave himself all checks—that everything had been done. Then we would have to say to him, "No, your class work was not complete" or "No, you did not sit quietly." He would fix it. But from then on his assessment of himself has been pretty accurate.

Ms. Heath began to see improvement. Jimmy seemed to feel he had more control over the

events in his life. He began to show happiness and was better able to independently cope

with difficulties. Jimmy became more responsive to coaching.

> I feel in the first few weeks after, maybe even the first month or so, he seemed more distant—almost like he couldn't talk to you about anything—*anything*. It didn't have to pertain to his dad. It could've just been school. He seemed to have this kind of glazed-over look [when] he was working or talking to adults. It has only been in the last, recent past few days he seems to be kind of opening up. I think that.... when I say opening up, I mean he is more receptive to your suggestions. Yesterday, we had a really good day and I made a point of saying, "You had a really good day. Let's do this again." He was really excited about that and happy about that and even told one of his teachers about it. Whereas a couple of weeks ago, he wouldn't have felt even two seconds longer about it, and so I see a recent, slight change in the way he deals with adults.

Ms. Heath monitored Jimmy's emotions, behavior, and affect. She observed that often

when Jimmy spoke about his father, his comments and affect were not what she would

have expected. It may be that Jimmy is just beginning to learn how to tell others that his father had died.

> He is very open. It's funny that I say open because he does not... We have the D.A.R.E. program on Fridays and the officer was talking to the students about someone being killed. He just blurted out, "My dad died." We were kind of like, "Okay."
>
> I know on a recent assignment, not from my class, but from another one of his classes, he had to define the word brevity, and draw an illustration. He talked about the brevity of his dad's life and he drew a man in a coffin.
>
> He has acknowledged [the death of his father]… One afternoon in car rider line, he was telling a joke. He told me that his dad had told him that joke, but he was sure to say that was before, "my dad died."

Ms. Heath also closely monitored his behavior, not just looking for sadness but for more Jimmy's subtle behaviors, that might indicate that he was feeling overwhelmed by classroom expectations. When she had the sense that he was feeling overwhelmed, she offered him short breaks. She also encouraged him to evaluate his emotions and choose for himself whether to take a break from the classroom. She taught him to monitor his own emotions and to actively decide to use an appropriate coping strategy. She found by giving him time and space, he was later able to return to the classroom and participate in learning activities.

> He has such a unique way anyway of dealing with things. I don't know that he completely comprehends... He knows that his dad has died or passed and his dad is no longer with us, but he is not an overly emotional person in terms like tears when being sad. You see more from him like very excited or somber, or like no expression at all. At the times where he is kind of, just very stoic or somber, that is when I try to approach him. "Was it a rough morning?" "Is everything okay?" "Do you need to go take a break?" Sometimes, he won't answer you at all and other times he will ask to take a break…. He will use a swing, or sometimes he goes to the library to read for a few minutes, or do something to take his mind off it. This gets him back into the swing of things.

Ms. Heath was particularly cognizant of possible grief triggers within the classroom. She

thought about the books she read and the language she used.

> I am [careful] when I select books that reference death or that deal with
> parents dying. [I am] being more careful when I say things like, "Take this
> home to get mom to sign." I say, "mom, dad, or grandmother, or aunt, or
> uncle, or even big sister. I just throw everybody in. Because I don't want to
> single [Jimmy] out. I… find myself stopping… and being more careful.

> **School Leadership Practices.** Ms. Heath believed that this elementary school

flexibly adjusted school expectations to respond effectively to Jimmy's needs. She

thought the principal and guidance counselor "kept an eye on things" and "when the

teachers noticed things were going in the wrong direction, [administration] handle[d] it

immediately." She explained:

> Just the sensitivity that our school has shown—just to slowly allow him to
> come back into the routine. That first week he was back, not only were we
> sensitive to him, and to his mother and his other siblings—"If you can just
> get to school today… It doesn't just have to be at 7:40 or 7:50, just get
> here." If the goal today is to just come to school and sit in the classroom,
> then that's just enough for today. I feel that the administration and staff did
> a good job being sensitive to that, that slow progression back into routine.
> But when some time had passed, still expect something from him—so he
> doesn't get caught in a downward spiral.

Ms. Heath believed that talking to the students in Jimmy's class about how to support

Jimmy was particularly helpful. She noted that when the school leadership tried an

approach that was not effective with Jimmy, school leadership was able to quickly adjust.

> I think the first few days, the first few weeks, the students were very
> sensitive. I think the guidance counselor did a good job... talking to the
> students. [She told the students,] "Well, if he wasn't your best friend
> before, don't make him your best friend now. Don't bombard him [or] hug
> him—that can make him more emotional. You should be kind. You should
> say, 'I'm thinking about you,' whatever you want to say, say that."

> **Conclusions.** Ms. Heath had not participated in any research-based training on

childhood bereavement. She thought it would be helpful to have a mini-course on what to

expect, how to respond to bereaved students, and how to talk to bereaved students about the death of their loved one. In the absence of training, Ms. Heath thought about how life would be for her own children if they experienced the death of a parent when she made instructional decisions. She also reported she felt much compassion for Jimmy.

Ms. Heath used resiliency-based strategies as she supported Jimmy. She held him to high expectations, but she also allowed him time to grieve. She compared how he was performing before and after his father's death, noticing a significant deterioration in his ability to concentrate, manage his emotions, get along with others, and keep up with his belongings. She also noticed that he was no longer able to manage academic demands, no longer showed an interest in his schoolwork, and expressed a sense of helplessness. Ms. Heath also observed that when Jimmy spoke about his father, his comments and affect seemed inappropriate to her. Ms. Heath viewed many of his behavioral difficulties as grief-related. She responded to problem behaviors through a problem-solving approach, rather than a disciplinary or compliance frame of reference. In response to his behavioral and academic difficulties, Ms. Heath modified expectations, and helped Jimmy implement a checklist to self-monitor his attention and behavior. She gave him regular feedback, noticed improvement, and commented as she observed re-engagement (approach/restorative-focused coping strategies). She made efforts to change her language to prevent Jimmy from experiencing possible emotional reminders and triggers. Finally, she monitored his emotional response throughout the day, offered him time for breaks, and explicitly taught him to regulate his emotions by choosing to ask for breaks on his own.

Ms. Heath believed school leadership effectively monitored and responded to Jimmy's emotional needs and was able to flexibly change directions when interventions were not effective. Finally, Ms. Heath believed talking to the students in Jimmy's class about how to support Jimmy was particularly helpful.

Jimmy and his Language Arts Teacher, Ms. Adams

Teacher Background. Ms. Adams was 28 years old, White, and the parent of one daughter. She had an undergraduate degree in English, a master's degree in literacy, and was certified to teach gifted and talented students. She had taught for five years, four of these years at this elementary school. During the second year of this study (2011/2012 academic year), Ms. Adams taught fifth grade gifted and talented students in English/Language Arts.

Bereavement Preparation and Instructional Influences. Ms. Adams stated that she had "her share of close people that passed away." Her father died when she was a toddler. She was also very close to both of her grandfathers; one died when she was eight and the other died when she was 13 or 14. Ms. Adams also experienced the death of her best friend's mother from cancer when she was in college. Ms. Adams's grief history informed her teaching in that when she told her students stories about her family, she stressed the importance of valuing and enjoying memories of those that have died. She also told her students that coping with the death of so many loved ones "made her a little bit wiser and that when people tell you to treasure every moment, you should." Ms. Adams emphasized how dealing with the death of a loved one can be transformational, helping one to appreciate the finality of life and value of relationships.

Jimmy as a Learner. Ms. Adams reported that prior to the death of his father, Jimmy was having a very fairly good year. Primarily, he had difficulty focusing on classwork for long periods of time and completing his work, especially when asked to write. Ms. Adams reported that he had "brilliant things to say," but it was hard for him to get his thoughts on paper, especially if a writing assignment required more than one or two sentences. She noted that Jimmy could easily write about things of interest to him, such as a comic strip or a song, "but if he has any kind of parameters, it [was] hard for him to accomplish that task." She observed that he wrote very little during the brainstorming process, tried to figure out what he wanted to say in his head, and then tried to write it perfectly the first time. Typically, she provided frequent prompts to help him get his thoughts written. For the most part, Ms. Adams found him responsive to coaching and making good progress.

Since the death of his father, Ms. Adams noticed that Jimmy's difficulties with concentration and focus became more pronounced. He also refused to complete assignments and became verbally disrespectful, which were new problem behaviors for him. She described the change in his behavior and how his peers were reacting to his behaviors.

> He is very busy now. It's hard for him to be still and some of the kids lose their patience with him a lot quicker now than before because he can be very distracting… [H]e doesn't even realize what's going on around him sometimes.

Ms. Adams was unsure whether the deterioration in his behavior was a result of less family support or if he was exhibiting more difficulty processing social cues. She described her uncertainty as follows:

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We were outside at a fire drill. A teacher was talking to her students telling them that they needed to behave and they were going to have to walk laps if they didn't. He said, "She is such a witch!" He just said it out loud, and I can't ever see him saying that before. It's like he doesn't… know that he was disrespectful to that teacher. He just said in front of everybody. I said, "You can't say that. You can't say everything you're thinking." Some of those social things, I hate to say the word "regressed," but at the beginning of the year, that would not have been a concern.

He is such a complicated case. He has so many other factors other than his dad passing away. So many of these things were evident before the passing. Some of them are manifested just a little bit more. But then, I'm seeing the new stuff, like the disrespect and those kinds of things.

Resiliency-Building Instructional Practices. It had been two months since the death of Jimmy's father. Ms. Adams believed Jimmy had not made the improvements in focus and concentration that she expected. Not only was she seeing disrespect and work refusal, now he was not completing his homework. Because Jimmy did his homework consistently before his father's death, Ms. Adams believed his family was not checking behind him to make sure his assignments were completed. She contacted his mother, but did not receive a response. To help him complete his missing assignments, she helped him to prioritize what needed to be done first and encouraged him to complete missing assignments when he had extra time in class. Ms. Adams adjusted her academic expectations and allowed break time when Jimmy was unable to focus. She then provided specific instruction in goal setting and planning, developing his sense of self-efficacy.

I'm trying to do things like modify some assignments. I have said he didn't even need to do them. It was more stressful for him to do them or to think he hadn't done them. He wouldn't be able to get the help at home, so I have said, "We are not to worry about that one. Why don't you focus on this one." He has had extra time to get things done in class. Like some days, he just wants to read. I'm okay with that some days. There is a fine line between accommodating and enabling him to not do anything.

However, Ms. Adams was also concerned that by altering curriculum expectations, it might appear that Jimmy was functioning more independently than he actually was. This worried her because even before his father's death, Jimmy needed more prompting and coaching than needed by typical fifth grade students.

> I think the independence was crucial before because of the autism. It was crucial for him to be able to function independently. Now, it's even more crucial because he has less of a support system at home. There again, it is like is he becoming independent or it may look like independence because he's doing everything on his own. He is not progressing in that. I do not know how to word that but it's not really independence. He cannot function on his own, but he's having to. There is not a lot of support at home I think.

> Ms. Adams noticed that Jimmy frequently made flippant comments about his

father's death. She was surprised by his tone and was unsure how to respond. She believed that he was recognizing "the reality part of it" and feeling some emotion, but "his comments seem rather crass in light of the situation… and [did] not acknowledge the sadness of how it happened." Again, Ms. Adams stated that she was unsure whether his inappropriate affect and comments were a function of his autism or whether he was having difficulty understanding the reality and significance of his father's death. She described the following situations:

> One day I wasn't here, but the sub told me they were sharing and he made some joke [about his father]. He said, "He can rest in peace." It wasn't sympathetic, but it was making light of the situation.

> When the guys would come in and do the fundraiser… in the afternoons. And [the guy] said something like, "When your dad....." and [Jimmy] said, "Not my dad. He's dead or he died," just very matter-of-fact.

> He also has done things, like we had a vocabulary activity and the word was brevity. [He wrote], "The brevity of my dad's life was sad."

Ms. Adams believed it was important to create a classroom climate that was safe for her students to talk about their emotions. However, she expressed uncertainty about talking about the death of Jimmy's father in class. She was concerned that it would trigger negative emotions for Jimmy and that a discussion about his father might upset his peers or the parents of his peers.

> I feel like my kids feel safe in this classroom. So, I feel like if they want to share something—that if they feel comfortable enough—that they would say something about it. And if they don't, then we're not to bring it up. But sometimes, I might ask something. I get scared that Jimmy is going to say something about [his father's death]. It's not that I don't want him to—because I think that's part of how you grieve, but....

> They just did a… practice test about who is your role model. So, if [Jimmy] chose to write about his dad, and then we were sharing those in class, all the kids would know it was him. He is probably going to include how he passed away. I would be scared that the kid would get upset if we read it because it would bring back memories and make him sad. And the other kids… still have questions about what happened. Do they want to comment about what happened? And you don't want to....

> I don't know where all the other kids are coming from—as far as death—if they have experienced it personally in their life or if their parents are trying to shield them or if they've ever been to a funeral… [I] want to respect everybody's family decisions and their values and their limits and I don't want the kids feel uncomfortable or embarrassed if they got upset. But like I said I think my kids feel safe and I don't think they would share unless they knew they could be open to cry or whatever.

> **Family Interactions.** Ms. Adams spoke to Jimmy's mother about how his family was framing the death of Jimmy's father in family discussions and tried to honor their religious beliefs. She stated:

> I know they're really strong a Christian family. The times I have talked to her, I know that their foundation for grieving… is understanding it in the big picture. That is mom's idea, that they don't understand, but it is all part of a bigger plan.

Bereavement Preparation. Ms. Adams had not participated in research-based training in childhood bereavement. She expressed a need to better understand the stages of grief and what to expect. She was particularly surprised that Jimmy was exhibiting more behavioral difficulties with the passage of time as she expected his ability to cope to improve.

> I guess, like I didn't see a change immediately… It has been about seven weeks since his dad passed away. The last three weeks there have been some negative kinds of behaviors showing up.

She also recognized that children may need support for many years after the death of a loved one. Ms. Adams also expressed a need to better understand how students with autism deal with bereavement and how to provide support.

> [I would like] more awareness about the different stages of the grieving process—what that looks like or what that could look like. I would imagine it is different for different people. I think about my friend whose mom died of cancer. She just acted like it didn't happen—for… three years. She was in denial for that long. Are the stages indefinite? As far as the time period... does is it usually happen within a certain time? Because even if it was a kid I had in the fifth grade whose parent died in the second grade, I would imagine they would still be in some stage of the grieving process, even if it was the last stage.

School Leadership Practices. Ms. Adams felt supported by school leadership. She found it helpful when the guidance counselor and principal spoke to the class about how they could support Jimmy when he returned to school. She noted that school leadership was able to flexibly adjust their approach to respond to Jimmy's needs.

> And he was out the whole first week after his dad passed away. The guidance counselor and the principal… talk[ed] to the kids about how to respond. So, the other kids were curious about how to respond like, "What do I say? Do I say I'm sorry? Do I act like I don't know what happened?"
>
> "You can say you're sorry." Then we found out with this particular student, that wasn't a good thing to say to him and so we had to go back and retract it. [We then told] all the students to not bring up the

situation…. I guess they were not realistic or he hadn't started the grieving process... I don't know if that was part of the autism... They said not to mention it to him because it kind of set him off.

Conclusions. Ms. Adams had not participated in researched-based training in childhood bereavement, but believed that this training would be helpful. She wondered what the different stages of grief looked like and how long the grief process took. She also wondered about whether the stages of grief were different for students with autism. Ms. Adams experienced the death of her father, two grandparents, and the mother of a good friend. She used her own grief experience to help her communicate to her students that they should treasure every moment they have with people they love. She was perplexed when Jimmy would make glib comments about his father's death, believing that perhaps he did not understand the seriousness of the situation. Finally, she was unsure about how to talk about death within the classroom, both to Jimmy and to his classmates.

In addition to Jimmy's difficulties with concentration and social skills, Ms. Adams then noticed that Jimmy had significant difficulty with attention, work refusal, disrespect, and getting along with other students following the death of his father. She expected that his behavior would improve over the time. But seven weeks after the death of his father, Ms. Adams continued to see behavioral deterioration. Ms. Adams was concerned that he was not making more progress. She incorporated several resiliency-based practices in her teaching. She tried to build a community of trust and caring within her classroom. She helped Jimmy prioritize and plan to complete missing assignments. She gave him feedback when she perceived his comments to be disrespectful. She also communicated with his family and respected their religious point of view on the issue of

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death, honoring how his family chose to frame the death of Jimmy's father when talking to Jimmy. Finally, she balanced her expectations for Jimmy while also giving him down time to cope with school demands. Ms. Adams felt supported by school leadership, that she had the autonomy to respond to his emotional needs. She believed that teaching his peers how to talk about the teachers the autonomy and flexibility to ensure that Jimmy's emotional needs were met.

Conclusions - Discussion of Educator Interviews

In this study, all educators reported that they had no educational preparation for dealing with childhood bereavement. Every educator believed it was important to help grieving children deal with intense emotions that accompanied grief. They also believed the emotional health of these children took priority over academic concerns. All teachers passionately described the difficulties these children had coping with the death of a parent while also re-engaging with school.

When describing their practice and how they made decisions, most teachers did not refer to educational theory or pedagogy. Educational theory and their understanding of effective educational pedagogy clearly formed the foundation of their instructional decision-making, but it remained in the background. Instead these educators spoke about their own grief journeys, their role as parents, the grief stories of their children, the grief stories of other children they taught or knew, and a general feeling of compassion for the grieving child. Each teacher recognized that how they interacted with each grieving child would have profound long-term implications for the emotional growth and adjustment of that child. Though none spoke explicitly about the role of the turnaround teacher in building resilient adults, these educators recognized they had an important role to play in

helping these children to cope with the school demands and embrace learning. They wanted to get it right.

At the same time, educators also spoke of their confusions such as (a) why grieving children do not cry, (b) why grieving children seem emotionally detached from the seriousness of their circumstances, (c) typical behaviors of grieving students,(d) how to balance curricular demands and the emotional needs of these students, (e) how to intervene with grieving students with learning difficulties, (f) how to talk with a grieving student about the death of a loved one, and (g) how to talk with the peers of bereaved students. Teachers who supported children that had experienced recent parental death(s) were easily able to recognize the acute signs of childhood grief, such confusion, shock, withdrawal, feelings of helplessness, and depression. Consistently, these educators turned to the guidance counselor and the family for assistance about how to best support each grieving child.

However, two teachers of students two to three-years post-parental death, Ms. Davis and Ms. Seymour, expressed uncertainty about whether problem behaviors they observed were grief-related or were issues of compliance, effort, and/or discipline. Because grief reactions had transitioned from acute, intense sadness and shock associated with bereavement to more subtle and chronic grief symptoms exemplified by difficulties with self-esteem, anxiety, self-efficacy, and socialization, these teachers were less likely to view problem behaviors as grief-related. Although these teachers recognized that these students needed support, they were unable to determine the role bereavement played in these difficulties. They noticed that these children avoided difficult assignments, were not taking on age-appropriate self-management responsibilities, needed excessive approval of

peers, and had difficulties talking about family. Though these teachers reached out to family for guidance, family disorganization prevented responsive, ongoing dialogue. It may be that these teachers observed the beginning efforts of these children to re-engage in learning—but these teachers, instead, expected full engagement in the learning community. An understanding that grieving students oscillate between avoidance/loss and approach/restorative-focused coping strategies, but spend progressively more time using approach/restorative-focused coping strategies as they heal, would have helped these teachers to understand that these children were making progress. Instead these teachers believed these students were not doing well. But, aside from consulting with the guidance counselor and remaining watchful, they lacked the informational resources to know what to do next.

Teachers carefully observed each of these students, noticing what they were able to do without support, with support, or not at all. They assessed each student's (a) academic development, (b) adjustment to classroom routines, (c) regulation of emotions, (d) concentration, (e) self-esteem, (f) self-efficacy, (g) independence, (h) locus of control, and (i) their relationships with others. Each educator subtly and skillfully adjusted the learning environment, providing carefully calibrated scaffolding to allow each of these children to experience success in the classroom.

Most educators reported that they felt supported by school leadership as they responded to the emotional needs of bereaved students. They expressed no doubt that school leadership believed that the school's role to support children and families emotionally. Teachers were given time to attend funerals. They interacted with families, respecting and responding to their concerns. Finally, educators found the guidance

program helpful, citing teacher consultation, grief groups, and conversations with peers

about how to be a compassionate friend as effective.

CHAPTER 5

FINDINGS AND BELIEFS

The purpose of phenomenology is to review the individual descriptions, perspectives, and contexts to develop a composite description that captures the essence of some phenomenon (Cresswell, 2007). A themed review of findings from educator narratives across the educators and students served by this school revealed 10 overarching findings. Additionally, four beliefs were obtained from two educator focus group interviews. Educator findings and beliefs with be presented in four sections: (a) Childhood Bereavement: Preparation, Understandings and Practice; (b) Resiliency-Building Instructional Practices; and (c) School Leadership Practices; and Educator Focus Groups Findings and Beliefs.

Childhood Bereavement: Preparation, Understandings and Practice

Finding 1 – School leadership and educators believed schools should provide cognitive, emotional, and social support for grieving students. All educators believed that when a school community responds to the emotional needs of a bereaved child, it has important, positive effects on grieving children.

All educators expressed the conviction that schools should provide cognitive, emotional, and social support for grieving children. This common value provided both purpose and cohesion that guided each educator to unequivocally take action when they observed a grieving child struggling academically, socially, or emotionally. Additionally, there was a clear bias towards active intervention. Educators did not wait for direction

from school leadership. Instead, educators thought for themselves and took independent action to support these children.

During the first year of this study, the principal, Mr. Cannon set the expectation that each educator should treat grieving children just as that educator would want his or her child to be treated. During the second year of this study, the principal, Ms. Johnson used her own traumatic grief journey to develop the core principles of being emotionally available to others and using a full life perspective when dealing with problems. She communicated these core principles through both open dialogue and leadership by example. Both principals charged the guidance counselor with (a) coordinating services for grieving students, (b) communicating with the student's family, (c) providing information and consultation on childhood bereavement to other educators, (d) counseling grieving students, and (d) teaching peers of bereaved students how to be a compassionate friend. Mr. Hawkins, Ms. Kane, and Ms. Martin reported that their daily instructional decisions were guided by the belief that their relationship with their bereaved student would have a long-term impact on the life of this student. Finally, all educators affirmatively reported that it was not just the school's responsibility, but *their own personal responsibility*, as educators, to teach students to cope with emotional difficulties within the school learning community.

Finding 2 – None of the educators received research-based information on childhood bereavement in leadership preparation programs, educator preparation programs, or professional development opportunities; however educators believed that if this information was provided, it would have informed their leadership decisions, instructional decision-making, and/or teaching practices.

All educators, including both principals and guidance counselor, reported that they were not provided with researched-based information about childhood bereavement

in their educator preparation programs, leadership preparation programs, nor through professional development opportunities. All educators agreed that this information would have helped them respond to the emotional needs of their grieving students. Teachers asked for additional information about (a) how to set academic expectations for grieving students, (b) how to differentiate learning difficulties related from grief from other learning difficulties, (c) how to talk to students about death, (d) behavioral indicators of childhood grief, and (e) "what to do and what not to do" tips to minimize grief triggers and encourage the use of healthy coping strategies.

The guidance counselor, in this study, reported that she had little formal training on the specifics of childhood bereavement; however she believed that she had the foundational skills in counselor education to appropriately serve these students and to assist fellow educators as they supported bereaved children. She reported that on her own initiative, she researched strategies implemented by school counselors to support bereaved students and used this information as she consulted with other educators.

Finding 3 – In the absence of research-based information on childhood bereavement, school leaders and educators used their personal grief experiences, their understandings of the grief experiences of others, and their life experiences as parents to guide instructional decision-making as they supported bereaved students.

In the absence of research-based information about childhood grief, educators instead relied on their own grief experiences, their understandings of the grief experiences of others, and their own life experiences as parents to guide their instructional decision-making when supporting bereaved children. Two teachers experienced the death of a parent as a child or teenager. At 17, Ms. Holder experienced the death of her mother. Following her mother's death, Ms. Holder was severely depressed and often found it difficult to concentrate on school activities. She reported that

one of her teachers visited her at her home, helped her find employment, and even helped her to enroll in college. She recognized that this teacher served as "a turnaround teacher" by encouraging her to responsibly transition from high school to college (Benard, 2004). She reported she used her own bereavement experiences as she taught Joseph and helped him to cope with the death of his mother. She was (a) highly observant, (b) took action to prevent possible emotional triggers, (c) exercised tolerance of Joseph's inability to manage his belongings and complete homework, and (e) thoughtfully communicated with him to build his self-esteem. At three years of age, Ms. Adams experienced the death of her father. Additionally, she experienced the death of several grandparents, with whom she was close. She reported that she shared her experiences of losing her father and grandparents with her students and encouraged them to cherish fond memories of loved ones. Ms. Adams taught her students the approach/restorative-focused coping strategy of maintaining continuing bonds with loved ones who had died.

As adults, Mr. Cannon, Ms. Johnson, Ms. Davis, Ms. Seymour, Mr. Hawkins, and Mr. Crosby experienced the death of parents and grandparents. Mr. Cannon, Ms. Johnson, and Mrs. Marsh, as teens and young adults, experienced the death of close friends. These educators reported that their own experiences with death helped them to appreciate and understand the grieving child's struggle to cope with a parental death, while also learning in school. From their own personal experiences, these educators reported that they understood that grief was real, intense, and often overwhelming.

Three educators, Mr. Cannon, Ms. Coates, and Mr. Crosby supported their own children through the bereavement process. Four educators, Ms. Andrews, Mr. Holder, Ms. Marsh, and Ms. Heath also imagined what life would be for their own children if

their children experienced the death of a parent. They used their feelings of empathy to guide them as they interacted with the grieving students they taught. Ms. Kane and Ms. Heath supported other students through bereavement and reported that these experiences helped them to know what to expect. Finally, Ms. Jennings and Ms. Coates reported that they relied on their own experiences as parents to reach out and support these grieving children emotionally.

Finding 4 - To meet the diverse needs of families, educators maintained contact with the family, understood that the family was grieving, showed sensitivity to various racial, religious, cultural, linguistic bereavement practices, and relied on the information obtained from the family in their guiding interactions with a grieving child.

Educators were aware that families responded differently to parenting and to the death of a loved one. Educators sought contact with families to learn about their racial, religious, cultural, and linguistic beliefs about death, as well as their ideas about how best to handle grief issues in the classroom. Ms. Adams knew that Jimmy's family had a strong Christian view of death and that his mother had explained to Jimmy that God had a reason for his father's death and that he would be reunited with him in heaven. Ms. Johnson met one with parent experiencing a terminal illness and discussed this mother's hopes and desires for her children upon her impending death. Ms. Martin respected Stuart's family's desires that peers not be informed of the circumstances of the death of Stuart's mother and father.

When a parent died, Mr. Cannon, and Ms. Johnson provided classroom coverage to allow educators to leave school to attend funeral services. Mr. Crosby reported that he felt his attendance at Jimmy's father's funeral was meaningful for Jimmy. Ms. Kane believed that visiting the family following the funeral built a bond with Marshall's family

that bridged racial differences and allowed her to better serve Marshall. Ms. Johnson, along with Ms. Jennings, the guidance counselor, prepared students for the return of the grieving student to school by setting forth clear expectations about how to interact with their grieving classmate. They also sent out letters to parents with information about how to talk with children about death. Ms. Andrews, Mr. Hawkins, Ms. Seymour, Ms. Heath, and Mr. Crosby believed that preparing peers to be compassionate friends was especially helpful in easing the return of the bereaved child to school.

Educators showed sensitivity to grieving families by having frequent contact with them about the child they loved, celebrating accomplishments, and seeking out their advice about how to respond to difficulties. Several educators stated that they understood because families were grieving, it was also difficult for them to fully respond and address the needs of the student. These educators intervened and provided academic, social, and emotional supports the families were unable to provide. Examples included:

- Both Ms. Seymour and Ms. Marsh provided after-school tutoring to help Andy and Jimmy with their homework.

- Ms. Coates remarked that Joseph's caregivers were young and doing the best they could. She adjusted homework expectations, allowing Joseph to sign off on his reading log.

- Ms. Andrews stated that Sally's father was raising three children on his own. She developed a homework management system that helped Sally complete her homework independently.

- Ms. Davis reported Joseph's difficulties completing homework to his family and worked with them to identify possible solutions. She then supervised the completion of his assignments during the school day,

- Ms. Kane, Ms. Martin, and Mr. Hawkins provided frequent progress reports to reassure families that Marshall and Stuart were re-engaging in school.

Finally, school leadership encouraged the classroom teacher to serve as the primary contact with the family. Ms. Jennings, the guidance counselor, recognized that there could be a power imbalance between families and school leadership. She believed that most parents were more comfortable with the teacher serving as their lead contact with the school.

Finding 5 - Educators consistently recognized acute indicators of grief (e.g., shock, confusion, sadness), but teachers did not consistently recognize remote and attenuated indicators of grief (e.g., anxiety, difficulties with self-efficacy, self-esteem, and regulating emotions) as being grief-related.

When a parental death was recent, within the first two months, most educators easily identified acute indicators of parental grief such as shock sadness, crying, confusion, and withdrawal. Marshall's, Stuart's, and Jimmy's teachers all recognized shock, confusion, and withdrawal as grief-related. Several educators, Ms. Davis and Ms. Seymour, expected grieving children to act much like grieving adults. They assumed that if bereaved children were not exhibiting acute indicators of grief (e.g., shock, despair, confusion) or did not look like a grieving adult, they were not actively grieving. This was a profound misconception.

Teachers also expressed uncertainty about behaviors that were exhibited by grieving students. Several teachers observed an incongruity of affect when grieving students spoke about their deceased parent. Ms. Davis assumed that because Joseph could

speak without exhibiting emotion about the death of his mother, he was no longer actively grieving. Ms. Adams and Ms. Heath reported Jimmy's comments about the death of his father as "odd," because his comments did not reflect the seriousness of the situation. Ms. Martin expected Stuart to be "clingy and crying" and unable to concentrate on school work. Clearly, it would have been helpful for each of these teachers to understand that children have a limited ability to tolerate the intense emotions of grief and that intense emotions trigger an automatic detachment response (Webb, 2010). This detachment response gives these children time away from intense emotions which they need to allow them a measure of happiness and the opportunity for cognitive growth. However, this detachment response offers only a brief reprieve from the immediacy of their grief. These teachers observed unexpected, but typical and common reactions of grieving children (Webb, 2010). In children, the absence of "apparent grief" is not necessarily indicative of effective coping. Often it is just as consistent with a child attempting to manage the unpredictable and overwhelming emotions related to the death of his or her mother or father (Webb, 2010).

It would have been helpful for these educators to understand that telling others about the death of a parent in a socially appropriate way is a skill which bereaved children have no choice but to develop and practice. It is a rite of passage for all bereaved children. Never before have these elementary children been required through circumstance, to communicate so emotionally intense information to others, while maintaining composure, reflecting the "seriousness of the situation," and reassuring an uncomfortable listener that he or she doing well and was easily able to share information about the death of his or her parent. It is not surprising that bereaved children often

communicate this information ineptly (Joseph, Sissy, Marshall, and Jimmy) or chose not to speak about their family at all (Sally, Stuart, and Joseph). It is a serious misconception to assume that because a child can talk about the death of a parent without apparent emotion—or because the child does not talk about a deceased parent at all— that they are not intensely grieving.

As a parental death becomes more remote in time, many bereaved children display an increased disbelief that they can control or manage to their environment (self-efficacy or independence) (Worden, 1996). These bereaved students may become more passive, disengaged, and less likely to plan and take action. Because these difficulties are more subtle and attenuated than acute grief, they are less likely to be attributed by teachers as grief-related. These more attenuated difficulties include (a) a loss of self-esteem, (b) difficulties with self-efficacy, (c) increased anxiety (concern about their own safety and the safety of other loved ones), (d) social problems (getting along with others), and (e) withdrawal (disengagement) (Worden, 1996).

Two teachers, Ms. Seymour and Ms. Davis, observed that the students they taught were exhibiting difficulties with disengagement and passivity. However, neither teacher considered these difficulties as possibly grief-related. Instead these teachers viewed these difficulties as compliance-related or as indicators of a lack of determination and effort. Ms. Seymour viewed Andy as unwilling to put forth academic effort and as a student who avoided planning and completing academic tasks. She responded by insisting that he complete these tasks under her direct supervision. Ms. Davis viewed Joseph's failure to complete homework as work refusal and his telling of tall tales about his family as "lying." Once she considered the possibility that these behaviors were grief-related, she

quickly and easily reframed her perspective. Once she realized that these behaviors were possibly grief-related, she regretted not having used a more skilled-based and compassionate approach. She reported that she would have "been less frustrated, "given Joseph some maternal mothering," "interact[ed] with him on a deeper level," and used these problem behaviors as "teaching points."

Fortunately, both of these teachers refused to accept disengagement as an option. They doubled their efforts; relentlessly encouraging the bereaved student they taught to participate. The persistence of these teachers will likely offer long-term benefits to each of these bereaved children. Both teachers clearly and unambiguously communicated that engagement (the use of approach/restorative-focused coping strategies) was expected and non-negotiable. They then provided the necessary support to ensure that these students participated in instructional tasks and met their expectations. However, it would have been less frustrating for both teachers to have understood that bereaved children often have (a) difficulty reclaiming control over their life, (b) letting go of their feelings of helplessness, (c) feeling confident in their ability to solve problems, (d) believing that they are physically and psychologically safe, and (e) fully re-engaging in their learning community. This knowledge would have allowed these teachers to recognize and celebrate each "baby step," as articulated by Ms. Kane and Ms. Marsh. This knowledge would have also assisted each teacher to more finely tune his or her interventions to needs presented by each child, preventing student frustration resulting from unrealistically high academic school demands.

Finding 6 – Educators monitored student behavior by recognizing efforts to cope with grief, but they reported uncertainty about how quickly students typically work through the "stages of bereavement."

All teachers monitored student engagement and identified the circumstances under which bereaved students were and were not engaged in learning. The term "re-engagement" seemed to capture the coping process of bereaved students as they transitioned from relying primarily on acute avoidance/loss-focused coping strategies (e.g. withdrawal from activities, avoidance of responsibilities) to spending progressively more time using approach/restorative-focused coping strategies (e.g., choosing to participate in the activities of life, form new relationships, take on new roles).

Educators frequently expressed uncertainty about how fast a bereaved student should move through the grief process to become fully re-engaged in learning. Several teachers expected that a student would progress faster through the grief process than was perhaps reasonable given the student's trauma. For example, Ms. Adams believed seven weeks after the death of Jimmy's father, she should be seeing improvement in his ability to cope and participate appropriately in class. She was surprised to see continued behavioral deterioration. Ms. Marsh also believed that Jimmy was not following the "typical" stages of grief when two months after the death of his father, Jimmy was not progressing as rapidly as his older siblings. Finally, one year after the murder of Andy's father, Ms. Seymour believed that it was time for Andy to emotionally separate from his mother during the school day and put forth concerted effort when completing his assignments.

It would also have been helpful for these teachers to understand that childhood bereavement looks very different from adult bereavement; that all people, but children

especially, do not move through stages of grief sequentially and/or through a typical or prescribed time frame (Webb, 2010). It would also have been useful for these educators to understand the "re-grief" phenomenon, which explains that it is common and to be expected that children will move back and forth between "apparent" coping and acute symptoms of grief (e.g., shock, longing, despair), as they develop cognitively. These teachers would have understood that the lack of linear, sequential improvement in engagement was to be expected and they would have anticipated recurring cycles of withdrawal and engagement across time. These educators would have also understood that these students will experience periods of unpredictable, intense emotions throughout their childhood and perhaps into adulthood (Webb, 2010; Schonfeld & Quackenbush, 2010).

Additionally, it would be helpful for these educators to understand that recovery and healing occurs as these children are able to spend progressively more time using approach/restorative-focused coping strategies (e.g., engagement) and less time relying on grief/loss coping-focused strategies (e.g., withdrawal). Ms. Davis and Ms. Seymour both expressed frustration with length of time their bereaved students were spending using avoidance/loss-focused strategies (e.g., lack of engagement, withdrawal, failing to plan and set goals, checking on the safety of others, and helplessness). However, they also noticed that both students exhibited time windows in which they actively participated in class activities. Ms. Seymour recognized that Andy began accepting school dollars for good behavior, tried to design a science fair project, sought peer attention, insisted that all participants have an opportunity to share in circle time, shared his experiences coping with the death of his father, and asked for hugs. Ms. Davis noticed

that Joseph was very social, "a ray of sunshine in the room," and was positive and enthusiastic about learning in class. Both teachers observed that each student was emerging from the fog and confusion of acute grief and beginning to spend longer lengths of time using approach/restorative-focused coping strategies (e.g., re-establishing friendships, finding new interests, exploring a curiosity). The most helpful instructional decision-making paradigm for each of these teachers would have been to first notice the circumstances and length of time which each of these bereaved students were able to fully engage in learning activities and then to encourage the bereaved student to expand the circumstances and extend the time in which he was able to remain engaged in learning.

The healing process can appear slow, especially when an educator does not understand what healing looks like across time. Although each of these teachers observed behaviors indicative of recovery, they simply did not realize that they were, in fact, observing healing. Another complicating factor for teachers is that coping with bereavement spans years; but teachers observe each bereaved student only within school-imposed nine-month intervals. As a result, when teachers assess a bereaved child's ability to cope with school demands, they may not see where the child began, nor will they see the growth the child will achieve in years to come. Their observations do not capture the full range of the student's recovery.

Joseph's story was illustrative. During the second year following the death of his mother, Joseph, as a third grader, was unable to focus or attend to instruction, needed constant teacher prompting, could not manage frustration, and did not complete homework. As a fourth grader, Joseph was able to meet academic demands with ease, got

along well with others, and was a "ray of sunshine" in the classroom. But he was still failing to complete assignments and was now telling tall tales when speaking to his peers about his family. However, by fifth grade, Joseph's social studies teacher, Ms. Heath viewed him as a well-functioning student academically, emotionally, and socially. As Ms. Heath reported, Joseph grew into a young man that "pushed to get his assignments done" and considered how others were feeling. He was a student who in the middle of the day would ask his teacher if she was having a good day. Joseph's teacher narratives described the last three years of Joseph's four-year grief journey. These narratives captured how long and gradual the healing process could be, as well as, the limited view each teacher had of Joseph's recovery over this three-year period. Consequentially, even when a teacher has had the experience of teaching a bereaved child for a typical school year, their personal experience does not provide them adequate time to observe and understand how a bereaved child eventually learns to cope with the death of a parent.

In conclusion, when teachers understand that as a parent's death becomes more remote in time, grief is often exhibited as (a) anxiety; (b) loss of self-efficacy (e.g., learned helplessness, withdrawal, lack of initiative); (c) loss of self-esteem (a lack of confidence that he or she can solve problems); (d) difficulty regulating emotions, and (e) difficulty managing interpersonal interactions, they are then able observe and recognize these issues of concern within the behavior exhibited by a bereaved child (Worden, 1996). Once these behaviors are noticed and observed, teachers are then empowered to address them through skill instruction and coaching within the classroom. Only when teachers understand the full dimensions of childhood grief and the significance of the

behaviors they observe, can they make the most appropriate instructional decisions for these children.

Resiliency-Building Instructional Practices

Finding 7 – Educators closely observed grieving children and made instructional decisions intended to minimize grief responses (the use of avoidance/loss-focused coping strategies), encourage students to re-engage in learning (use approach/ restorative-focused coping strategies), and build coping skills that lead to lifelong resiliency.

All teachers closely monitored how bereaved students functioned in the classroom. With the exception of Sissy, all teachers reported that they provided significant classroom support for the bereaved students they taught. The following summarizes these findings:

- **One year post-parental death.** Five students were supported within one year following the death of a parent. These included Sally, Marshall, Stuart, Andy, and Jimmy. Only one of these students, Sally, a first grader, seemed able to cope with classroom expectations without significant classroom support. However within one year post-parental death, the teachers of Marshall, Stuart, Andy, and Jimmy reported that each of these children needed significant classroom intervention to meet curricular expectations. These children exhibited anxiety, confusion, withdrawal, difficulties regulating emotions, disengagement, and difficulties completing assignments.

- **Two to three years post-parental death.** One student, Joseph was served two to three years following the death of a parent. Two years following the death of his mother, Joseph exhibited difficulties managing emotions, concentrating, completing assignments, self-confidence, and self-efficacy. By the third year

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following the death of his mother, Joseph's teachers reported that he could easily meet the academic demands within the classroom, got along well with others and no longer exhibited anger or anxiety. However, he was still experiencing difficulty completing assignments independently and talking about his family with peers.

- **More than three years post-parental death.** Two students, Joseph and Sissy were served three or more years following the death of a parent. Though Joseph's fourth grade teachers reported that he was still experiencing difficulties coping two to three years following the death of his mother, his fifth grade teacher reported that by the fourth year following the death of his mother, Joseph was coping easily with school demands, academically, emotionally, and socially. Four years following the death of her mother, Sissy's teacher reported that she was coping well with school demands. (This study did not collect data on how Sissy coped with her mother's death during the first three years following the death of her mother.)

In addition to observing how these children responded to academic instruction, they noticed: (a) how they responded to procedures and routines (e.g., self-efficacy); (b) their focus and concentration (e.g., anxiety); (c) their ability to regulate emotions (e.g., grief, anxiety, anger, frustration); (d) their ability to take responsibility for their own learning (e.g., independence, self-efficacy); (e) their confidence (e.g., self-esteem); and how they interacted with others (e.g., social problems). Though teachers used their own nomenclature for their actions and instructional intentions, many described specifically targeted instructional responses to the attenuated grief responses described by Worden

(1996) of anxiety, loss of self-esteem, impaired sense of self-efficacy, and social problems. Their actions and intentions clearly encouraged students to increase their use of approach/restorative-focused coping strategies, such as participation in the events of life, interacting with others, learning new skills, taking on new roles, and engaging in goal setting behaviors (Schaefer and Moos, 1998; 2001; Stroebe & Schut, 1999). Educator decisions and actions developed relationships of trust and caring, set high expectation for students, encouraged meaningful participation in learning and the school community, and explicitly taught coping skills, all instructional practices which build lifelong student resiliency (Benard, 2004; Henderson & Milstein, 2003).

Culture of Caring: Minimization of Grief Triggers. Educators created a culture of caring within the classroom for each bereaved child by building a strong teacher-student relationship and by protecting the child from distress (Benard, 2004; Henderson & Milstein, 2003). All teachers reported that they felt a strong compassion for the bereaved children they taught. Several teachers made extraordinary efforts to strengthen their relationship with these children. Ms. Seymour and Ms. Marsh provided after-school tutoring. Ms. Coates used a shared interest in Harry Potter books to build her relationship with Joseph. Mr. Hawkins and Ms. Martin used subtle humor to connect with Stuart.

However, two teachers described the complexity of balancing strong feelings of compassion and a desire to help a bereaved child while at the same time maintaining appropriate professional boundaries. Mr. Crosby articulated that although he felt almost a father-son bond with Jimmy, he intentionally tempered his sense of compassion to maintain an appropriate student-teacher relationship. Ms. Holder reported that because she had also experienced the death of a parent, she felt a close connection to Joseph. But

considering the possibility that the racial and gender differences between them could cause misunderstandings, she stated that while she still remained watchful, she also ensured that she maintained a clear professional distance from Joseph.

Each teacher minimized triggers for intense emotions and took action to reduce the need for bereaved students to use avoidance/loss-focused coping strategies (e.g., withdrawal, helplessness, avoidance of responsibilities.) They watched for varied signs of emotional distress and modified instructional activities to avoid emotional triggers. Many teachers (Ms. Kane, Ms. Martin, Mr. Hawkins, Ms. Davis, Ms. Holder, and Ms. Heath) changed activities and books they planned to read aloud when they concluded that these books or activities included possible triggering subject-matter. Mr. Crosby was careful to use appropriate language about death within the science curriculum (e.g., avoiding funny or irreverent comments about death). He also monitored Jimmy during these discussions to ensure he was able to cope with discussions about death. Many teachers (Ms. Andrews, Ms. Kane, Ms. Martin, Mr. Hawkins, Ms. Davis, Ms. Holder, Ms. Marsh, Mr. Crosby, and Ms. Adams) also reported that they broadened their language about families to be inclusive of nontraditional families, offered breaks, gave children the opportunity to wander and move about the room, and provided alternative ways for grieving children to respond to instruction.

Culture of Caring: Synchronicity and Attunement. For many teachers, there seemed to be a subtle, synchronized interaction between teacher and student. Nell Noddings (1995) referred to this process as "engrossment." Noddings stated that teacher engrossment occurs when instruction is embedded in an authentic relationship between

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the teacher and the student which is grounded in dialogue, trust, and respect and in which all of the educator's energy and motivation flows to the needs and wants of the student.

Teachers seemed to draw on their own bereavement experiences and their experiences as parents to allow time for grief, while encouraging re-engagement in learning. Most of the teachers vigilantly watched over their grieving students, looking intently for the very first indicator of emotional struggle. At the first sign of distress, these teachers quickly and adeptly adjusted the learning environment, providing "just enough" support to allow the child to use his own psychological resources to re-engage in the instructional task. As soon as the child began to successfully navigate through the assigned task, the teacher, just as quickly, backed herself/himself out of the interaction, but remained continually vigilant and ready to intervene again, if necessary. Each of these teachers told compelling stories of their interactions with their bereaved students. For example:

- Ms. Andrews watched Sally being bombarded with questions from her first grade peers and helped her choose the time, circumstance, and manner in which she would answer these questions from her peers about the death of her mother.

- Ms. Kane provided constant prompts to Marshall, when she observed that he was overwhelmed, paralyzed, and could not act to complete simple classroom tasks. She gave him a prompt for the "next action" he needed to take and then immediately checked back with him, affirming that he successfully took this next action.

- Ms. Martin communicated increased academic expectations for Stuart when he wrote about his guinea pig. When he refused to answer her, she set up an

alternative performance opportunity for him to demonstrate achievement, allowing him to include the expectation in his writing rather than requiring a verbal response.

- Mr. Hawkins creatively orchestrated situations (e.g., teaching others, invitations to play ball) which required Stuart to speak with peers.

- Ms. Coates provided constant and immediate reassurance that Joseph's work was "right," reducing his anxiety.

- Ms. Seymour repeated Andy's name over and over just to let him know she was aware of his presence in the classroom, thereby reducing his anxiety and keeping him engaged in learning.

- Ms. Seymour, Ms. Marsh, and Ms. Heath offered break and movement opportunities when they observed that Andy and Jimmy appeared agitated, anxious, or emotional.

These narratives were replete with examples of these highly attuned interactions. These teaching moves were subtle, seamless, and quick. They occurred within a finely tuned interaction or synchronicity between the teacher and the child. These intricate teaching moves often occurred within seconds, and they were a powerful resource to the child, allowing him or her to feel success, to rebuild his or her sense of agency, and to re-engage with his or her learning community. When teachers described the decision-making behind these actions, several reported they were guided by the depth of their own emotions when they experienced bereavement or as they helped others, especially their own children, work through grief. Others reported they were guided by what they intuitively knew to do "as a parent." This "synchronicity" was first described by Bowlby

(1969; 1972; 1980) when he studied bonding and attachment among parents and their children. It this same process of "attunement," that also defines highly effective, individualized, responsive teaching (Johnson, 2006; Owacki & Goodman, 2002; Noddings, 2005).

High Expectations, Successive Approximations, and Scaffolding. These teachers set realistic, but high expectations for engagement. They then provided instruction and scaffolding to ensure that these children met these expectations (Benard, 2004; Henderson & Milstein, 2003). Several teachers provided academic support (after-school tutoring, one-to-one support) and accepted successive approximations; adjusting and gradually increasing expectations over time until instructional goals were met. Others provided tightly aligned academic and emotional scaffolding that established trust while also building each student's confidence that they could, in fact, successfully meet school demands.

Engagement, Participation, and Independence. All teachers monitored student engagement and supported student efforts to build independence (Benard, 2004; Henderson & Milstein, 2003). Teachers used routines and procedures to make the environment more predictable. Ms. Kane, Ms. Martin, and Mr. Holder made classroom routines and procedures explicit through instruction and anticipatory prompts. Several educators also taught their bereaved student to take responsibility for their own learning by teaching goal-setting and planning. Mr. Hawkins taught time management skills. Ms. Marsh helped Jimmy to identify goals and develop a checklist to monitor his progress. Ms. Heath gave Jimmy feedback on his progress in meeting these goals. Ms. Andrews,

Ms. Coates, Ms. Seymour taught homework management. Ms. Seymour taught Andy how to research a subject about which he was curious.

Managing Problem Behaviors through Social Skills Instruction. To address problem behaviors, most educators used a problem-solving approach instead of a compliance-focused approach (Benard, 2004; Henderson & Milstein, 2003). These educators provided skill-based instruction and coaching by teaching social and problem-solving skills to ensure that these students could successfully meet learning expectations while regulating his or her emotions and behavior. They explicitly taught life or social skills such as: being a compassionate friend, working through conflict, asking for help, asking for a break, seeing the perspectives of other students, and sharing knowledge with others. These teachers noticed emerging social and coping skills, provided labels for these strategies, and celebrated progress and accomplishments with their students. By labeling coping strategies for the student, the student was then able to recognize the actions they were taking to manage difficult situations, becoming part of his or her identity. Coping was no longer happenstance, but a deliberate process which was under the student's control. By labeling coping strategies, the teacher assisted the student to develop a toolbox or bank of coping strategies—available for future use, thus leading to lifelong resiliency (Wolin, 1993).

Each of these teachers assisted bereaved students to engage or spend increasingly more time using approach/restorative-focused strategies (Schaefer & Moos, 1998; 2001; Stroebe & Schut, 1999). They built a culture of caring, strong personal relationships, and set high expectations with ample support to ensure that each of these children could accomplish these expectations (Benard, 2004; Henderson & Milstein, 2003). They also

taught a variety of coping strategies to build self-efficacy, foster self-esteem, manage

difficult emotions, and increase social connections (Worden, 1996). These strategies

included asking for help, goal setting, planning, being a friend, seeing the perspective of

others, taking a break, and solving conflicts with others. These teachers helped these

students set and monitor their goals. Finally, these teachers helped these children to

respond to routines and procedures, take responsibility for their own learning, assess their

own progress, explore new interests, and build relationships with others. Though these

interventions were intended to increase classroom engagement, they also provided the

bereaved student with useful and practical strategies to solve future problems.

School Leadership Practices

Finding 8 – At this elementary school, school leadership led educators to develop a committed culture of caring among students, staff, and families. This culture of caring created a strong foundation for educators to meet the emotional needs of bereaved students.

Educators consistently reported that this school encouraged a culture of caring

among students, their families, and educators. Both principals set the expectation that

educators meet the emotional needs of its students. Mr. Cannon set the expectation that

educators treat all children in the same manner that they would expect their own child to

be treated. This standard gave each educator personal autonomy to do what he or she

believed was right emotionally for the bereaved child. Ms. Johnson also set the

expectation that staff would meet the emotional needs of its students. She clearly

modeled this when she encouraged staff to attend funerals, met with peers to discuss the

bereaved student's return to school, and planned school support for a bereaved staff

member. Educators also confirmed they were personally committed to supporting the

emotional needs of their students. During both of the academic years covered by this

study, it appeared that this school's leadership had successfully developed a "community of mind" based on supporting the emotional needs of its students (Sergiovanni, 2005). School leadership built a tight consensus around this shared value, with each staff person being given autonomy for individual self-expression of this ideal. As expressed by Sergiovanni, this value became part of the "heartbeat of [this] school community."

Both Mr. Cannon and Ms. Johnson also articulated strong core values, which were greater than their organizational goals and guided their life purpose (Patterson & Kelleher, 2005). Mr. Cannon sought to treat students like he expected his own children to be treated. Ms. Johnson endeavored to be emotionally present for others who were experiencing trauma and to make decisions from a whole life perspective. Both principals articulated these values to staff and made decisions in accordance with these core values. When deciding how to support bereaved students, neither appeared event-driven, but instead seemed to be guided by their own personal ideals of "treating the bereaved child as one's own" or "being emotionally present for those experiencing trauma." Further, both principals demonstrated characteristics of a resilient leader, as set forth by Patterson and Kelleher (2005). Both were optimistic about their ability to make a difference in the lives of others and were able to reflect on whether they acted in conformance with their own personal values. Mr. Cannon reported that he asked himself:

> "What would I have done for my children under similar circumstances? Is this what I have done for them?' If [I] can answer that one, I think that [I] probably can go home and sleep at night pretty easily. That is usually my measure. If I can sleep… I feel pretty good. If I can't, then I know that I need to come back the next day and do something about it.

Ms. Johnson encouraged staff to let her know when and how things could be improved. She insisted that she did not want teachers "who were mindless drones," but wanted them

to be strong and honest in their opinions and actions. She believed that open communication would result in a school climate that was highly responsive to student needs.

In accordance with the recommendations of Henderson and Milstein (2003), educators reported that they worked as a team. They were comfortable asking for assistance from both the guidance counselor and the principal and believed they could inform leadership when problems occurred, without fear of retaliation. They also reported that leadership took appropriate action when issues were brought to their attention. For example, Ms. Kane felt comfortable reporting to Mr. Cannon that she had not been informed about the death of Marshall's mother. Mr. Cannon then made a concerted effort to ensure that teachers were informed immediately about issues related to student bereavement. This immediate response to bereavement issues continued during Ms. Johnson's tenure. Mr. Hawkins and Ms. Seymour also reported feeling comfortable asking for assistance. Mr. Hawkins asked school leadership to take the lead when talking about emotionally sensitive issues with his class. Ms. Seymour asked for academic assistance for Andy.

Finding 9 – School leadership and educators developed a school culture in which positive, caring behavior was encouraged by setting clear expectations, explicit teaching of procedures and social skills, and frequent recognition of student leadership and caring behaviors.

At the time of this study, this elementary school was in the first and second year of implementation of a behavior program based on school-wide positive behavior support principles (Office of Special Education Programs, 2009). This program provided clear behavioral expectations for students, explicitly taught procedures and expected behaviors, and provided frequent recognition and tangible reinforcement when students exhibited

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leadership and positive behaviors. This program focused on positive, rather than negative behaviors. As articulated by Sergiovanni (2006), educators at this school encouraged caring behaviors while discouraging uncaring behaviors. Generally, educators at this school went beyond assuming that problem behaviors were simply issues of noncompliance. Instead, educators were encouraged to analyze problem behaviors. They made sure students were adequately supervised, understood behavioral expectations, received instruction, and had opportunities to practice procedures and skills needed to prevent problem behavior. These educators ensured that students received appropriate coaching to meet behavioral expectations, and that ample positive recognition was provided when pro-social, caring behaviors were displayed. They taught and recognized the skills required for instructional independence, acting responsibly, being a good friend, managing emotions, and negotiating conflict.

The implementation of this behavior management program was a signature program for the school's second year principal, Ms. Johnson. She believed that through explicit teaching, behavioral expectations become internalized by the students. She observed that the students themselves enforced these expectations as community norms and they had become embedded in the school culture. Additionally, teachers routinely noticed, named, and recognized positive accomplishments, initiative, effort, and positive risk-taking throughout the school-day.

Ms. Johnson formed a behavior management team that focused on students with behavioral difficulties. This team met weekly to review student progress and develop intervention plans. The team considered a variety of interventions, including social skills instruction, increased supervision, leadership opportunities, counseling and feedback

from school personnel, parent consultation, and behavior plans which emphasize coaching and increased recognition of positive behaviors. Ms. Johnson and this team regularly assessed the effectiveness of the positive behavior initiative using data on behavioral incidents. They studied teacher/student surveys and adjusted this behavioral initiative to respond to behavioral challenges faced by this school's students. This program set the expectation that educators were to analyze problem behaviors using a problem-solving paradigm and then to provide needed skill-based instruction. Because program focus was on noticing the positive behaviors of students, it set in motion a culture in which students were celebrated for caring, building a sense of personal agency, taking healthy risks in learning, and engaging in leadership behaviors.

Finally within this study, educators generally viewed behavioral difficulties, through a problem-solving lens. These teachers carefully analyzed problem behaviors to determine whether procedures, social skills, regulation of emotions, or behaving responsibly needed to be explicitly taught and reinforced. Teachers used compliance focused interventions or negative consequences for problem behaviors (e.g., in school suspension, out of school suspension) only when positive interventions had been exhausted.

Finding 10 – Educators believed that the school guidance program helped the bereaved student cope with a parental death in the classroom and school community by providing direct counseling to the student and consulting with the student's teachers, as problems arose.

The school guidance program was charged with coordinating the school's response to childhood bereavement. The guidance counselor maintained frequent contact with the family and student, provided counseling for the bereaved child, consulted with teachers on an as-needed basis to help them support the grieving child, and coordinated

the school's response when difficulty was encountered. All educators believed that direct grief counseling provided to the bereaved student by the guidance counselor was helpful. Many educators also sought out the expertise of the guidance counselor for support and recommendations for classroom interventions. They reported that this consultation was helpful as they made instructional decisions when supporting bereaved students. Finally, there was a strong consensus that teaching peers to be compassionate friends eased the bereaved student's return to school.

Limitations of a Consultation Model. The use of a consultation model was clearly reported as helpful by the educators at this elementary school. But educator uncertainty and misconceptions indicate that a consultation model, though helpful, was insufficient in preparing these educators to support bereaved children in their classrooms. A consultation model first requires that an educator realize that he or she needs more information. However, because teachers did not realize that grieving children can laugh and engage in learning while at the same time grieving, the behavior of these children seemed counterintuitive to teachers that expected childhood grief to look like adult grief. When students did not present acute indicators of grief and when grief indicators became attenuated, teachers were less likely to consider behaviors as grief-related, intervene appropriately, and/or seek out assistance. Ms. Davis' narrative exemplified this problem. In this narrative, Ms. Davis reported that Joseph did not complete his homework and then "lied" about why his homework was not done. He also "lied" about his family, telling tall tales about the accomplishments of his step-father. After being reassured by the guidance counselor that Joseph was coping well with the death of his mother and that he seemed happy, Ms. Davis did not consider that these behaviors could be grief-related. She then

responded to these behaviors using a compliance perspective. It was only after answering in in depth questions about her own grief journey during her interview for this study, that she considered that these behaviors could have been grief-related. After several minutes of careful reflection during her interview, she emotionally came to the conclusion that she had not assessed the situation accurately and that these behaviors were, most likely, grief-related. She concluded that handling these behaviors as disciplinary infractions was not the most appropriate intervention and that a better approach would have been to use these behaviors as "teaching moments." She realized that Joseph may have told tall tales about his family because it was difficult for him to talk to his peers about his family. Finally, she recognized that Joseph lacked work management skills and did not have the family support to help him complete his homework. Looking back over her teaching interactions with Joseph, Ms. Davis courageously stated that she had "done a disservice to him" and that she wished she had handled his difficulties with more compassion.

Talking About Death in The Classroom. Additionally, many teachers stated that they felt uncomfortable talking to bereaved students about their deceased parent and/or about death within the classroom environment. Several educators consulted with the guidance counselor about how to talk with students about death and reported they felt supported as they took on this issue. Typically, the guidance counselor encouraged teachers to speak to students about the death of a family member only if the student initiated this conversation. She also told them it was acceptable to continue to read aloud stories about families because talking about families was part of everyday life.

Ms. Adams stated she was worried a conversation about Jimmy's father could be uncomfortable for him, the other students, and the parents of her students. She was

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uncertain how she should respond, if and when Jimmy brought up the subject. Ms. Davis reported that she felt uncomfortable when Joseph told her his mother had died. Ms. Holder chose to watch and wait for Joseph to speak about his mother. Mr. Hawkins stated that he relied on the guidance counselor and the principal to have conversations about death with his students. Ms. Andrews also reported uncertainty about how to handle a classroom of inquisitive first graders bombarding Sally with questions about her deceased mother. Finally, Ms. Kane reported her own shock and disbelief when Marshall told her about the death of his mother.

Several educators took on the challenge of talking about the death of a parent within the classroom environment. Though feeling uncertain, Ms. Andrews mediated Sally's first conversation with her peers about the death of her mother. Ms. Andrews taught Sally that Sally could control the amount and type of information shared, as well as time and circumstances when she chose to take on this difficult conversation with her peers (Mitchell, Wesner, Garand, Gale, Havill, & Brownson, 2007). Ms. Andrews ensured that Sally's conversation went as well as could be expected and supported Sally through this difficult rite of passage experienced by all bereaved children. Ms. Andrews reported that she consulted with the guidance counselor and found her advice about how to handle this issue helpful. Ms. Adams taught her students to treasure their memories of their deceased loved ones. Ms. Seymour told stories about her own deceased parents, modeling how to talk about loved ones who had died. Finally, Ms. Kane, Ms. Marsh, and Mr. Crosby believed it was healthy to talk to Jimmy about the death of his father when he brought his father up in conversation. They encouraged him to think about, remember, and share positive memories with others.

Although it would be important for teachers to understand that remembering a deceased parent maintains a continuing psychological bond and can be reassuring for the bereaved child (Webb, 2010), educators must also understand that discussions should be initiated and driven by the child, and that their role is one of support within the context of learning, and not that of a mental health or grief counselor. This directive was routinely and unequivocally communicated, both to teachers and peers, as the principal and guidance counselor prepared teachers and peers for the return of grieving students.

Focus Group Findings: Where Do We Go From Here?

Following both the first and second years of this study, a focus group of educators met to consider how this school could better respond to the needs of grieving students. Immediately prior to both of these focus groups, a short thirty minute presentation on childhood grief and resiliency was provided. The following topics, as outlined in the Review of Research included in Chapter 2, were included:

- Attachment Theory: Why Childhood Grief is so Intense. Children are born with an innate behavioral system that causes them to attach to their primary caregiver and that when their primary caregiver dies the child will go through a process of looking for their caregiver, protesting the caregiver's disappearance, and becoming despondent when the caregiver does not return. This system ensures that the child maintains close proximity to the parent in times of danger and insecurity.

- Cognitive Development and Childhood Bereavement. Childhood grief presents different than adult grief. Cognitive development affects how a child responds to the death of a parent. Children repeatedly re-experience surges of grief as they

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develop cognitively. Grief work includes: acceptance of loss, experience of pain and loss, adjustment to an environment without the deceased parent, and the need to construct a new relationship with the deceased, reconstruct a new identify without the deceased parent, and invest in other relationships.

- How Children Cope with Parental Death: The Re-grief Phenomenon. Children will re-experience grief as they grow cognitively and when they experience environmental triggers.

- Why Grief is Hard for Children. Grief is harder for children than adults because of their: (a) immature cognitive development, (b) short grief span, (c) desire to regain proximity to the deceased parent, (d) inability to use language to process complex emotions and learn coping skills, (e) progressive loss of memories, and (f) unpredictability of their emotions.

- The Harvard Childhood Bereavement Study. Most children learn to cope with the death of a parent, but one-third will exhibit late effects, two years post-parental bereavement, including difficulties with self-esteem, self-efficacy, anxiety, and regulating emotions.

- Effective coping: As children learn to cope they move from withdrawal, helplessness, and focusing on the loss of their loved one to reengaging, taking planful action, and focusing on new roles and relationships. Healthy coping occurs as the child spends progressively more time focusing on engaging, taking planful action, and focusing on new roles and relationships.

- The Power of a Single Teacher. Teachers help bereaved cope by being watchful, available, offering positive regard and sustained acts of kindness, teaching

children to ask for help, teaching children coping skills, Noticing and naming

effective coping skills when used, embedding these coping skills as part of their

identity, removing unnecessary obstacles, and providing "just enough" assistance

to allow children to solve their own problems.

- The Grief Journey: Meaning-making and Maintaining Continuing Bonds.

  Grieving children will need to learn to adjust to a world without the deceased

  parent and to reframe their relationship with the deceased parent within their

  hearts and minds.

- What is Resiliency? Resiliency is effective coping with adversity. It is an innate

  capacity that can be bolstered by environmental support, a caring school climate,

  and nurturing relationships. Student resiliency is not developed through a program

  but it is instead developed by the way educators act and think. Resilient children

  are able to analyze death in a logical way; reframe it in a positive light, take

  action, and seek help from others (Schaefer & Moos, 1998; 2001).

- Mediating Factors: Child-oriented mediating factors are associated with positive

  outcomes from bereavement include: (a) strong sense of self-efficacy, (b) strong

  sense of internal locus of control, (c) strong sense of self; ability to find meaning

  in adversity, and (d) the ability to enlist help from others. Environmentally-

  oriented mediating factors associated with positive outcomes following

  bereavement include: (a) stability of routines, (b) meeting basic needs, (c) warm

  consistent discipline, (d) family cohesion, and (e) strong family and social

  networks.

- Resiliency-building School Practices include: (a) strength-based perspective, (b) caring, (c) clean environment, (d) authentic assessment, (e) constructivist approach to learning, (f) collaborative learning experiences, (g) restorative discipline, and (h) active student participation.

- Teaching Practices that Build Lifelong Resiliency. Teachers help build student resiliency by maintaining a caring relationship with the student, holding high expectation for that student while providing necessary support and effective instruction, and encouraging the student to participate in learning and with his or her school community.

With this information, teachers were asked to then consider: (a) What was this elementary school doing well? (b) What do we want to know? (c) What more should we do? During the first focus group discussion, participants developed three core beliefs and made recommendations to address several issues of concern. The conclusions of this focus group were as follows:

Belief 1: School leadership should make a concerted effort to ensure that teachers are immediately informed when a child experiences the death of a close family member. No child should be the first person to tell a teacher about the death of their mother or father.

In the first focus group, two out of the five teachers learned about the death of a student's parents from the student, himself. All teachers found this unacceptable. They believed that the adults in the school should be informed by school leadership before they have contact with the student. These teachers believed that a parental death is so traumatic that no child should be placed in the situation where he or she has to inform a teacher that his or her mother or father had died. Ms. Davis described learning about the death of a parent from a child:

I wish someone would have come to me… and said something about [the death of this parent]. [Be]cause I was in a situation where I said to Joseph, "Go home and show this to your mother." He just matter-of-factly said, "Well, I don't have a mom." So, I said, "Go home and show it to your dad." He said, "I don't live with my dad. My stepdad doesn't live with us." So, it was an awkward situation. I don't think it was really awkward for him, but it was certainly awkward for me… then wondering, of course, if I had scarred him in any way or made him think about the unpleasantness of death, just saying those two things to him.

One third grade teacher, Ms. Kane, told the group that the bereaved student she taught was the first person to tell her that his mother died unexpectedly over an extended school break. In this excerpt, she observed that the child had to repeat that his mother had died three times before she was finally able to get beyond her own shock and disbelief, to comprehend his message, and then to respond appropriately to this child. She noted that because she had not been informed in time to inform his speech teacher, this third grade child was left to inform another adult at school.

I knew the day we got back from the snow. He came in and said, 'Ms. Kane, my momma died." We were walking down the hall…going to Spanish. The family had told the office… but they had thought the dad came in and told me. So, we were getting ready and for a whole 25 minutes, he sat there and didn't tell me until we were in the hallway— because I guess he didn't want anyone to know. I said, 'What now, what?' [Ms. Kane reflects on her thinking] "Surely, I did not hear you correctly!" [Marshall says,] "My momma died." I am pulling him aside and saying "What honey? What? Tell me. What?" [Ms. Kane reflecting with disdain, on the impact to the child,] I literally… Now, tell me three times. So, that is how I found out. He was crying. I said, "Okay, come stay with me." Yeah, it was true and what do you do?

In this excerpt, Ms. Kane commented, with disdain and sarcasm, at her own inability to understand what the child was saying to her when he told her his mother had just died. She observed that Marshall had to repeat the information about the death of his mother *three times* before she was finally able to comprehend with certainty he was actually saying to her. She described the chaos of the moment and the shock she experienced

when she realized that the child's mother had, in fact, died over the school break. Finally, she further acknowledged that her inability to react, regrettably, contributed further to the pain this child was already experiencing.

Throughout the next several days, Ms. Kane tried to inform all staff who might have had contact with this child. However, she had not conveyed the information to Ms. Holder, a fourth grade teacher, who also participated in this focus group. Ms. Kane did not realize that Ms. Holder knew Marshall's mother and that Ms. Holder's family had been close to Marshall's family. Ms. Holder had not heard through her own family that Marshall's mother had died in time to attend the funeral. However, when she realized that school staff knew before she had been informed, she stated, "I was hurt that we were not informed about it as a faculty. I think we are such a caring group of people— that we could have rallied around this child…. I could have gone to the service…. We could have done more."

The same week the focus group met, two siblings experienced the death of their mother from cancer. The school principal sent an email to all staff informing them that this parent had died over the weekend and encouraging them to participate in funeral or in the school's support efforts for the family. The educators believed that this email notification allowed the entire school community to prepare to meet the needs of these children and their family. The group recommended a school-wide protocol be developed to address staff notifications.

Belief 2: Educators can encourage grieving students re-engage in life and learn coping skills to build lifelong resiliency.

Following the training on childhood bereavement, the focus group discussed their confusions and misconceptions. They commented that this training gave them a better

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understanding of childhood bereavement as well as tools which would assist them to be

more effective as they supported the grieving children they taught. They observed that by

using their own grief experiences and their experiences as parents, they were, in fact,

meeting many of the emotional needs presented by grieving children.

> This is the first information I have been given about what to look for; what the stages are; what I can expect. Because like you say, your child bounces back and forth. I wouldn't know to look for that in Joseph. I would think he would be being silly if he was doing that or I would think he was seeking attention, but [I did not realize that this could be] related to his mother's death. So, I feel inadequate to address his concerns, although you talking to us today and saying we are teaching them to be independent; we are loving them and disciplining them and that is what they need, that makes me feel a little better—like it is just part of my job. I don't even realize I am doing it.

> Well, I think it is like you said before, being a parent helps a lot, but thinking of a fresh teacher just out of [undergraduate school] doesn't necessarily have that compassion, just yet. I think it is helpful for them to know [about childhood bereavement.] We have professional development on how to deal with autism… This is no different. We have to love… and to educate the whole child. This is a part of them and a part of their life. So, I think [childhood bereavement] is something that we do need more on.

This focus group also recommended that the emotional needs of children

be considered when placement decisions are made at the beginning of the school

year. Again, the group observed that many times dealing with the emotional needs

of children may be more important and may take more time than dealing with

academic needs. As stated by one teacher:

> I would rather… separate children with emotional needs rather than saying, "I am giving you this many high readers and this many this and this many this…" It has been such an incredibly exhausting year to be a full time momma to three boys that don't have one. It is so much of a larger need than if we gave you seven low readers—because it is constant, constant, constant…. These kids have so many emotional needs.

Belief 3: This elementary school should make a concerted effort to reach out to bereaved families, non-traditional families, as well as families that may be experiencing difficulties that affect a child's emotional well-being.

This focus group acknowledged that there are many children from nontraditional families as well as families dealing with trauma and crisis enrolled in this school and that it was the school's responsibility to reach out and ensure that the school was inviting to all families.

> I think as a school we need to be more open and embracing "to things that happen" and that not all of your families are your typical mom, a dad, two kids, and a dog. It's okay. Life changes, things change, people change. So, being open and inviting, not necessarily saying, "All the divorced parents come on down to the school tonight." But being open and inviting and saying, "Hey we understand that these changes have taken place." So, they feel more welcome to come into the school…. We do all of these things to beautify the school, to make it more inviting for people to come in, but at the same time we have to appeal to their emotions too—and their situation…. We cannot appeal to them if we don't stick our necks out and do so.

This focus group stated that it is the school's responsibility to help families understand that it is important for families to inform the school of events that affect the emotional well-being of their son or daughter. They believed that opening this avenue of communication would allow the school to establish a partnership with more diverse families, allowing teachers to better meet the needs of all children and their families.

Belief 4: School communities learn to respond more effectively to student needs by reflectively analyzing problematic situations and then designing and implementing new practices intended to prevent the recurrence of problem situations.

Following the interviews during the second year of this study, educators reviewed their progress from the first year and noted that the school had established a working protocol in which the principal and the guidance counselor ensured that each teacher and

the student's peers were informed by school leadership upon the death of a close family member. These educators believed that the classroom conversations with peers led by the principal and the guidance counselor were particularly helpful to both the students and teachers. Educators believed that explicit instruction with peers about what to say and what not to say eased the transition for the bereaved child to return to school. Participating educators reported that they were informed prior to the first week of school of those students with serious difficulties or circumstances. (However, within teacher interviews, two teachers reported that not been informed of the parental deaths of their students. Both students were three to four years post-parental death. Only one of these teachers participated in the focus group interviews and she did not raise this as an issue during the second focus group discussion.) They also noted that teachers were encouraged to go funerals during school hours and that staff rallied to cover classes to allow more teachers to attend. Finally, they celebrated that the educators at this school were able to look reflectively at their bereavement practices to make changes that contributed to the culture of caring at this school.

Focus Group Discussions

Following a professional development on childhood bereavement, the teachers in this focus group recognized just how responsive their practices and interventions had been for bereaved students. Based on their experiences of teaching grieving children, their experiences as parents, and their own grief journeys, these teachers identified three core beliefs. First, children should not be the first person to tell school staff that their mother or father died. Secondly, the school community should actively respond to the emotional needs of its grieving students. Finally, the school should actively reach out to

families that may be going through trauma and crisis. To implement these beliefs, this focus group recommended that school leadership:

- develop a protocol which communicates important student information to staff;

- provide professional development to address childhood bereavement;

- make class placement decisions considering the emotional needs of students;

- inform parents about the importance of informing the school of important family events that may emotionally affect a child at school; and

- offer a variety of ways for parents to contact school personnel to inform them about important life events that may emotionally affect a child in school.

Following the focus group interview after the second year of this study, teachers believed that:

- They had been informed of deaths within the school community.

- Upon any death of a close loved one, the principal and guidance counselor immediately provided each teacher necessary information to address the needs of the grieving students and his or her peers.

- Class placements decisions considered the emotional needs of the children.

- Prior to the beginning of school, teachers were provided information about the emotional needs of their students.

- Outreach to parents was provided through the school newsletter and by having more school activities to build stronger bonds with families.

- School leadership developed and implemented a working protocol to communicate notice of parent deaths to school staff.

- School leadership implemented procedures to respond to staff concerns.

Conclusions

None of these educators received research-based training on childhood bereavement, either in their preparation programs or through professional development. Educators reported uncertainty about how children grieve and how best to support bereaved children in the classroom. They were also unsure how to speak to bereaved children about their deceased parent, how to talk about death, and how to talk about the death of the child's parent with other children.

Generally, educators responded to the needs of bereaved children by relying on their own grief experiences, their experiences as parents, and their experiences supporting other grieving children to guide their decision-making as they supported a grieving child. In addition to relying on their life experiences, educators also collaborated with the school guidance counselor and the student's family to develop interventions. This collaboration occurred primarily in the months soon after the death of a parent, but occurred less frequently when the parental death was more remote in time. Collaboration focused on supporting the child through acute grief behaviors. Less support was provided to address the long-term consequences of parental death (e.g. building self-efficacy and internal locus of control, teaching a student to independently manage school responsibilities, helping a child to handle conversations about families).

If teachers were aware that grieving students often present as disengaged, anxious, unmotivated, emotionally reactive, and as having difficulty getting along with peers, teachers would recognize these behaviors as possibly grief-related and teach and encourage more the student's use of approach/restorative-focused coping strategies and social skills. If teachers also understood that as children are better able to cope with grief,

they increasingly use these more approach/restorative-focused coping strategies (e.g., engagement, planful action), teacher would have a gauge with which to measure progress in classroom. Finally, if the observed children continuing to rely on avoidance/loss-focused coping strategies (withdrawal, avoidance, helplessness) after classroom intervention and support, they would recognize the need to alert school leadership so increased expertise could be accessed. Understanding concepts of childhood bereavement and resiliency will develop teacher competence and effectiveness. Unfortunately, this information cannot be effectively communicated through a supervisory directive, a list of "do's and don'ts," or by responding to questions and concerns. This information is best communicated through professional development which includes a comprehensive discussion and dialogue about the needs of bereaved students.

Educators carefully observed grieving students, noticing their academic progress and their ability to respond to classroom routines, regulate their emotions, sustain attention, and interact with their peers. Teachers also noticed what they could do independently, what they needed support to accomplish, and what was beyond their capacity to accomplish. They responsively intervened, often in very subtle ways, to help these children re-engage with the school community. They taught these children coping strategies and helped them believe they could manage their emotions and school demands. Teachers used a variety of resiliency building practices including: (a) creating a caring culture (positive adult relationships); (b) building a sense of safety and trust (reduce anxiety); (c) maintaining high expectations; (d) accepting successive approximations; (e) providing successful experiences; (f) providing academic support; (g) developing a sense of routine (self-efficacy); (h) helping a child to regulate his or her

emotions (self-efficacy); (i) encouraging meaningful participation/engagement; (j) encouraging peer relationships (social engagement); (k) encouraging independence (self-efficacy, esteem); (l) teaching problem-solving strategies (self-efficacy); and (m) encouraging positive risk-taking (self-efficacy, esteem).

These educators shared a strong common value that schools should respond to the emotional needs of its students. They effectively developed a "culture of caring" in which educators collaborated to understand and meet the needs of each student, balance high expectations with time and support for grief, analyze problem behaviors in terms of skill deficits, and intervene to teach resiliency-based coping strategies as these strategies were needed. These teachers believed they could ask for assistance from school leadership and that assistance would be provided. They also believed that when they observed ways to improve the school climate, school leadership took their views seriously and responded to recommendations to improve the school culture. Finally, these educators believed that they needed more research-based information on childhood bereavement. They recognized that their actions in meeting the emotional needs of bereaved children and families would have profound long-term effects on the well-being of the grieving child and wanted to be fully prepared to address their emotional needs.

CHAPTER 6

DISCUSSION

This study examined the understandings, practices, and interventions used by 15 educators at one elementary school as they supported bereaved students over two academic years. Participants included two principals, one guidance counselor, and 12 teachers at a suburban southeastern elementary school as they supported seven children who experienced the death of one or both of their parents. Through social constructivist and resiliency frames, data was collected by interviewing educators during the 2010/2011 and 2011/2012 school years. The findings of this study revealed important insights which shed light on how educators think about and intervene with parentally bereaved children.

Both principals led the educators at this school to develop a shared vision in which educators were committed to support the emotional needs of students. Although all educators believed it was important to emotionally support grieving children as they learned within the school environment, none of the educators had received needed research-based training on childhood bereavement in either their educator preparation programs or through professional development opportunities. To fill this knowledge gap, these educators relied on their own grief experiences, their understandings of the grief experiences of others, and their experiences as parents to guide their decision-making as they addressed the emotional needs of grieving children. They also relied on the expertise

provided by the guidance counselor and advice from the families of the bereaved

children.

Teachers primarily used their observational skills to determine when and how to

intervene to support bereaved students. They carefully observed (a) how each student

responded to instruction; (b) adapted to classroom procedures and routines; (c) regulated

their emotions; (d) concentrated on instructional tasks; and (d) developed relationships

with their peers. As they assessed the bereaved student's adjustment, they noticed what

tasks the student could do independently, what tasks the student could do with assistance,

and what tasks the student could not accomplish at all. They modified the learning

environment and classroom expectations, providing just enough prompting and support to

ensure that each bereaved student successfully functioned in the classroom. These actions

helped each child to engage in learning, reduce anxiety, and obtain more control over his

or her life.

Teacher decision-making occurred in the moment, relying on what each educator

knew about grief from his or her life experiences. When the signs of grief were acute,

intense, and apparent, the teacher intervened in ways which helped the bereaved student

build resiliency, balancing expectations for learning with time for grief. Teachers tried to

assess how a child was feeling, emotionally soothe the child, and take steps to reduce the

child's anxiety and distress. They minimized stressors and carefully modified the

classroom environment and instruction to ensure success. They also made a concerted

effort to provide a stable learning environment with consistent behavioral expectations,

scaffolding to ensure that the child could successfully meet expectations, and

opportunities for positive interactions with peers. These interventions were provided

seamlessly by the teacher, often before the child exhibited significant distress. Teachers intended their interventions to develop resiliency, self-esteem, self-control, and positive relationships with adults and peers. Finally, when problem behaviors were exhibited, most teachers used a problem-solving approach and explicitly taught life skills intended to replace problem behaviors with pro-social coping strategies.

However, as a parental death became more remote in time and the child's grief response grew more attenuated, educators were less likely to associate problem behaviors with grief and were more likely to respond using a compliance or disciplinary approach. An inability of educators to recognize the need for continued emotional support may explain research findings that one-third of bereaved children develop problems with anxiety, social withdrawal, self-esteem, and self-efficacy two years following a parental death (Worden, 1996).

Because childhood grief looks different than adult grief, teachers often did not have personal experiences which would allow them to make sense of the behaviors exhibited by grieving children, especially children experiencing long-term grief. Teachers reported confusion about how children grieve. Specifically, they did not understand (a) why grieving children may not cry; (b) why bereaved children could talk about their deceased parent without apparent emotion, (c) how grieving children could focus on school work and still have fun, and (d) how to help grieving children talk about the death of their parent with peers. They were also uncertain about (a) how to encourage healthy coping strategies for bereaved children, (b) how to balance emotional support and instructional expectations, (c) how bereaved children cope cognitively and emotionally over time, (d) whether their interventions were appropriate or effective, and (e) how to

differentiate and provide interventions to address learning difficulties related and unrelated to grief.

When armed with accurate information about how children grieve and the coping behaviors used by resilient children, teachers are empowered to help the grieving child learn and use effective coping strategies (e.g., continue psychological bonds with their deceased parent, acquire friendships skills, develop a social network, take on new roles, explore curiosities, overcome obstacles in their environment). These interventions can easily be provided within the classroom in the ordinary course of the day, with very little advanced preparation. Generally, the only preparation that a classroom teacher needs is accurate information about childhood grief and resiliency. This information would enable the teacher to recognize signs of grieving, to know how to respond, and what adaptive coping and resiliency looks like. McGlauflin (1998) recommended that teachers be provided with professional development opportunities which present information about the grief process, how to be open to the grief process, and how to integrate the grief process into the school environment. Additionally, an understanding of approach/restorative-focused coping strategies (e.g., positive reframing, self-reliance, maintaining continuing bonds with the deceased, organizing one's environment) and avoidance/loss-focused coping strategies (e.g., disengaging with the environment, social withdrawal, passively responding to obstacles) would allow teachers to teach and encourage bereaved students to rely more on approach/restorative-focused coping strategies in the classroom, thereby building lifelong resiliency. Educators in this study believed by maintaining frequent contact with the bereaved child's family and by seeking

and implementing their desires and recommendations, they appropriately responded to family diversity

School leadership set the expectation that educators address the social and emotional needs of bereaved students. School leadership actively promoted a culture of caring between staff, students, and their families. Additionally, school leadership implemented a school-wide student behavior program that focused on encouraging caring behavior and discouraging uncaring behavior. This behavior program set clear, consistent behavioral expectations, provided explicit instruction on school and classroom procedures and social skills, and celebrated student effort, engagement, leadership, and caring behavior by providing a variety of positive incentives for caring behaviors. This approach to behavior management set the expectation and provided educators skill in analyzing problem behaviors in terms of skill acquisition, appropriateness of instruction and supervision, and reinforcement for positive behaviors.

Finally, educators recommended that school leaders should develop a communication protocol to ensure that staff is immediately informed of a parental death to enable them to personally offer support to grieving families. Teachers also emphasized the need for administrators to consider the emotional needs of children when making placement decisions. Finally, educators believed that schools should reach out to families to ensure that they were meeting the emotional needs of diverse families.

Implications

Implications for Educators

Bereaved children spend seven hours a day 180 days per year in elementary classrooms. When teachers are provided information on childhood bereavement and

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childhood resiliency, they can profoundly impact the cognitive and emotional trajectories of these children through typical classroom interactions. It is incumbent on educators and bereavement specialists to engage in both professional dialogue and research to ensure that information on bereavement and resiliency is provided to educators and used within the classroom and school community. Within the school community, educational leaders should ensure that schools respond to the emotional needs of its grieving students by:

- Providing research-based professional development to staff in the areas of childhood bereavement and resiliency. The following information should be addressed in educator training:

  - Stages of grief: How cognitive development affects bereavement, including discussion of the re-grief phenomenon;

  - Information on acute (e.g., sadness, withdrawal, confusion) as well as attenuated grief responses (e.g., anxiety, loss of self-esteem, loss of self-efficacy, social problems, disengagement);

  - Increasing engagement: Healthy grieving occurs as children spend progressively more time using approach/restorative-focused coping strategies and less time using avoidance/loss-focused coping strategies;

  - Resiliency-building instructional practices that minimize grief responses, increase engagement, and develop coping skills: These practices include:

    - balancing high expectations with time for grief;

    - setting high expectations with highly attuned scaffolding and support to ensure that expectations can be met;

- encouraging meaningful engagement in learning and in the school community;

- encouraging healthy peer relationships;

- building a culture of caring around the bereaved student; and

- analyzing problem behaviors to identify and teach needed social, problem-solving, and coping skills.

- Providing ongoing professional dialogue among educators about teaching coping skills and building student resiliency, not only for bereaved children, but for all children, especially those that are undergoing trauma or crisis;

- Monitoring the academic and social progress of bereaved students over their academic career, giving special attention to attenuated grief indicators such as disengagement, anxiety, self-esteem, socialization, regulation of emotions, and self-efficacy;

- Maintaining ongoing dialogue with families to address each child's coping difficulties, implement family preferences, and obtain an understanding of a family's racial, ethnic, cultural and linguistic bereavement practices;

- Developing partnerships with families of bereaved children to ensure that they are aware and have access to community and school resources;

- Developing procedures for addressing the emotional and other needs of its grieving students, to include staff communication and participation in funerals and family support efforts; and

- Assessing a teacher's need for information and support and providing this information and support when needed.

Implications for Further Research

Further research is needed to study the role schools and educators play in supporting childhood bereavement and resiliency. Both retrospective narratives of adults and older children who experienced a parental death at an early age would inform researchers about how school interventions supported them in the classroom. Additional longitudinal case studies which monitor children at four months, one year, two years, and three or more years following a parental death would identify educational practices that result in positive outcomes for bereaved children. Studies are also needed that look across cultural and linguistic populations to consider the efficacy of teacher support for bereaved children when child and teacher reflect different cultural or linguistic traditions.

<center>**Conclusions to this Study**</center>

A constructivist approach was used to study how educators at one high performing school supported bereaved elementary children within the context of a regular education classroom over a two year period. Through social constructivist and childhood resiliency frames, this study examined the understandings, practices, and interventions of educators as they supported seven bereaved children. This study also examined how these educators developed a culture of caring which empowered educators to respond to the diverse family perspectives of bereavement.

School leadership developed a culture of caring in which educators shared the mindset that responding to the emotional needs of its students would provide students with skills for lifelong resiliency. The educators in this study believed that supporting bereaved children in school was important, their personal mission and a mission of the school, and that their efforts would have profound long-term impact on the students'

emotional well-being. School leadership also developed staff resiliency by providing for the emotional needs of staff, celebrating success, granting staff autonomy to implement shared values, encouraging staff to ask for help, and using constructive feedback to make positive changes.

However, educators received little research-based information in their educational preparation programs or from professional development opportunities. They relied on their own grief experiences, the grief experiences of others, and their experiences as parents to guide instructional decision-making in the classroom. They also relied on the expertise of the guidance counselor and the desires and concerns of families of bereaved children to help them make decisions.

Reliance on life experiences, communication with the family, and the expertise of the guidance counselor were effective when educators supported children immediately following the death of a parent, when a child's grief reaction was readily apparent and often emotionally intense. Teachers carefully watched these children and intervened when they observed acute symptoms of grief. These teachers were highly attuned to the emotional needs of these children and seamlessly intervened to minimize emotional distress and build resiliency. There was a synchronicity between these children and their teachers. However, these educators reported confusion about how to balance emotional and academic needs. Several did not understand why grieving children did not cry or how to talk with grieving children and their peers about the death of a parent. Although their interventions were often effective, educators seemed to lack confidence in their decision-making. Research-based information on childhood bereavement would provide educators

with a firm foundation within which to ground their decision-making, leading to professional independence and confidence about their assessments and interventions.

Reliance on personal experiences, communication with the family, and the expertise of the guidance counselor was less effective when a parental death was more remote in time and the child's grief response was more attenuated. When supporting children experiencing long-term grief, educators noticed troubling behaviors and intervened. These teachers clearly intended to encourage engagement and independence. But they reported uncertainty about whether troubling behaviors might be associated with childhood grief. They did not recognize indicators of long-term childhood grief nor were they sure how to effectively address attenuated grief responses. Research-based information would assist these educators to make sense of the behavior exhibited by children who are experiencing long-term grief. If teachers recognize behaviors indicative of long-term coping difficulties and understand that these children need support to (a) reduce anxiety (e.g., consistent routines and discipline, problem-solving instruction, managing emotions); (b) build social support networks (e.g., friendships with peers, finding caring adults); (c) build self-esteem (e.g., noticing what they do well, expanding interests), and (d) develop self-efficacy (e.g., goal setting, planning, managing obstacles), educators could easily provide these interventions within the classroom and school environment.

Educators believed that ongoing dialogue with the family and an intention to follow the lead set by the family of grieving children ensured that they responded to the needs of diverse families. Though this approach demonstrated sensitivity to the needs of diverse families, was well-intended, and addressed the family's needs immediately

following a parental death, it is not clear that this approach would continue beyond the immediate period of family bereavement or that it would address the needs of diverse families over the child's school career.

Because children are in school seven hours per day, 180 days per year, educators are well-positioned to closely watch grieving children and powerfully intervene to help them re-engage with the learning community. Educators can help these children learn to cope and build skills needed for lifelong resiliency. Many of these children will use coping strategies, taught and practiced in the classroom, when faced with future adversity. A child's grief journey is certainly hard and tortuous for the child, but successfully coping with a parental death also offers these children powerful lessons for making their way in life.

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QUESTIONS FOR
CLASSROOM TEACHER

1. How was/is school for Tom (pseudo name)? Tell me about this student as a learner.

   I am looking for what the teacher noticed about the child in the classroom. I intend to probe further into having the teacher describe his academics, regulation of emotion, focus and concentration, friendship skills, family support and disorganization, and expressions of grief? I am also looking for the teacher's theory of Tom as a learner and a member of the classroom community. How did she develop this theory?

2. In your opinion, how did the death of Tom's mother change school for Tom? Here I am looking for the teacher's awareness of how grief impacts educational experiences and outcomes. I am trying to encourage the teacher to think about how the child's grief affected this child as a learner and a member of the school community.

   I am not particularly concerned about Tom. I am more interested in the teacher's thinking about Tom. I want to know how the teacher considered grief in her assessment of Tom as a learner. What kinds of things did she notice? What assumptions did she make? I am trying to capture any essential understandings, misconceptions, or gaps in knowledge?

3. Tell me about this child's grief journey in your classroom.

   Again, I am trying to learn what this teacher noticed about this child's grief. Is the teacher aware of cognitive stages of grief, common indicators of healthy vs. complicated grief, common grief reactions, and coping mechanisms? What assumptions did she bring to what she noticed?

   I will also ask her to recount a particular day in which she felt that Tom needed some special attention from her because of his grief or otherwise.
   Once the teacher begins to tell me things she noticed, I want to explore how she supported the child through these issues. What was her thinking? Why did she do

what she did? I am looking for essential understandings and misconceptions as defined by bereavement literature. I am also looking for ways in which she exhibited sensitivity to cultural, ethnic, racial, regional, religious, and linguistic bereavement practices. I would also try to explore an intervention that she felt was particularly supportive for this child and one that she struggled with. I want to know her thinking, why she did what she did? What were her goals and assumptions? How did she assess the effectiveness of her actions?

4. What key understandings did you rely on as you decided how to intervene? How did you develop these understandings?

5. How did Tom's experience impact his work day-to day in the classroom? What support did you feel was necessary in the context of everyday academic experiences? How did you provide that support? What do you wish you had done differently or how might you have provided more support during instructional practices?

6. What do you know about bereavement practices across cultural and linguistic groups? Have you had any experience at funerals or wakes or other bereavement practices outside your own cultural community? If so, describe them and what you learned from them about supporting children with beliefs different from your own.

   How does the school and the school system support the development of your understandings about cultural and faith-based bereavement practices? If they do now, how might they?

7. Have you experienced the death of a loved one? How did your grief experience guide your understanding of this child?

8. How did the educational team at this school help you understand Tom as a learner and to intervene appropriately. What would you suggest we could have done to better support you, Tom, and Tom's family particularly with regard to his day-to-day experiences in your classroom?

9. How would you describe your experience in teaching a bereaved child? How were you confused in responding to Tom as a learner or through his grief? What would you have wanted to know to better support Tom? Did you feel adequately prepared?

10. What did you learn from supporting Tom in the classroom? What advice would you give to another teacher or the educational team about how to support this child or another bereaved child?

QUESTIONS FOR THE GUIDANCE COUNSELOR

1.   How was school for Tom?

        I am looking for what the guidance noticed about the child in the classroom or as a member of the school community. How were academics, regulation of emotion, focus and concentration, friendship skills, family support and disorganization, and expressions of grief?

2.   In your opinion, how did the death of Tom's mother change school for Tom? Here I am looking for the guidance counselor's awareness of how grief impacts educational experiences and outcomes. I am trying to encourage the guidance counselor to think about how the child's grief affected the child as a learner and a member of the school community.

        I am not particularly concerned about Tom. I just want to know how the guidance counselor considered grief in her assessment of Tom as member of the class and school community. What kinds of things did she notice? I am trying to capture any essential understandings, misconceptions or gaps in knowledge? What assumptions did she make?

3.   Tell me about this child's grief journey.

        Again, I am trying to learn what the guidance counselor noticed about this child's grief. Is she aware of cognitive stages of grief, common indicators of healthy vs. complicated grief, common grief reactions, coping mechanisms, etc? What assumptions did she make?

        Once the guidance counselor teacher begins to tell me things she noticed, I want to explore how she supported the child and his family through these issues. What was her thinking? Why did she do what she did? I am looking for essential understandings and misconceptions as defined by bereavement literature. I am also looking for ways in which she exhibited sensitivity to cultural, ethnic, racial, regional, religious, and linguistic bereavement practices. I would also try to explore an intervention that she felt was particularly supportive for this child and one that she struggled with. I want to know her thinking, why she did what she did? What were her goals and assumptions? How did she assess the effectiveness of her actions?

4.   What key understandings did you rely on as you decided how to intervene? How did you develop these understandings?

5.   How did Tom's experience impact his work day-to day in the classroom? As a member of our school community? What support did you feel was necessary in the context of everyday academic experiences or as a member of our school

community? How did you provide that support? What do you wish you had done differently or how might you have provided more support?

6.   Have you experienced the death of a loved one? How did your grief experience guide your understanding of this child?

       What do you know about bereavement practices across cultural and linguistic groups? Have you had any experience at funerals or wakes or other bereavement practices outside your own cultural community? If so, describe them and what you learned from them about supporting children with beliefs different from your own.

7.   How did the educational team at this school help the classroom teacher understand Tom as a learner and member of the school community and to intervene appropriately? What would you suggest we could have done to better support the teacher, Tom, and Tom's family particularly with regard to his day-to-day experiences in the classroom or as a member of the school community?

8.   How were you confused in responding to Tom as a learner, his family, and the classroom teacher? What would you have wanted to know to better support them? Did you feel adequately prepared?

9.   What did you learn from supporting Tom, his family and teacher?

QUESTIONS FOR ADMINISTRATORS

1. How was/is school for bereaved students. Tell me about these students as learners and members of the school community. What services and interventions were offered?

2. What key understandings did you rely on as you decided how this school community should intervene? How did you develop these understandings?

3. Have you experienced the death of a loved one? How did your grief experience guide your understanding of bereaved children?

4. How did the educational team at this school help the teacher and other staff understand the bereaved child as a learner and to intervene appropriately? What would you suggest we could have done to better support bereaved students, their family and classroom staff family particularly with regard to day-to-day experiences in the classroom? As a member of our school community?

5. What would you have wanted to know to better support this school's bereaved students? Did you feel adequately prepared? How were you confused in responding to bereaved students as a member of the school community? What would you have wanted to know to better support bereaved students, and their family? Did you feel adequately prepared?

6. How did our school community learn from supporting bereaved students? What did you learn from supporting bereaved students at this school? What advice would you give to another teacher or the educational team about how to support this child or another bereaved child?

APPENDIX B

FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What do we, as a school, believe about supporting children with emotional or traumatic issues? How do we as a school respond to these children? What is important to us?

2. What do we know about bereaved children? Brainstorming about what we know.

3. How do we know what we know?

4. What are the actions we took as a school to support these children? Brainstorm. Then decide what was most important. Why?

5. How did we exhibit sensitivity to cultural, ethnic, racial, regional, religious, and linguistic bereavement practices? If we did not have that information, how could we gain it without generalizing across religions and cultural and/or ethnic and racial groups?

6. How did we communicate with each other about these children? Did it work?

7. What do we need to do in the future to ensure these children are supported educationally, emotionally, and socially? Brainstorming.

8. What do we want to know? What resources do we need?

9. What advice would we want to share with other schools to help them better respond to their bereaved children.

APPENDIX C

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORMS

STUDY TITLE: SUPPORTING BEREAVED CHILDREN IN THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
CLASSROOM

Dear _____,

My name is Sandra Ray. I am a graduate student in the Education Leadership Department at the University of South Carolina. I am conducting a research study as part of the requirements of my degree in Educational Leadership, and I would like to invite you to participate. I am studying how school educational teams support elementary students who have experienced a parental death in the elementary school classroom within the regular curriculum.

If you decide to participate, you will be asked to meet with me for an interview and participate in a group discussion about how you as a teacher and the educational staff at the _____ Elementary School have supported a bereaved child within the regular elementary school curriculum. These interviews and group discussions will take place at _____Elementary School or at a mutually agreed upon time and place, and should last about 1 hour each. These interviews will be audio-tapped so that I can accurately reflect on what is discussed. The tapes will only be reviewed by members of the research team who will transcribe and analyze them. They will then be destroyed.

You may feel uncomfortable answering some of the questions. You do not have to answer any questions that you do not wish to.

Although you probably won't benefit directly from participating in this study, we hope that others in the community/society in general will benefit by improving educational support to bereaved children.

Participation is confidential. Study information will be kept in a secure location at the University of South Carolina. The results of the study may be published or presented at professional meetings, but your identity will not be revealed. Participation is anonymous, which means that no one (not even the research team) will know what your answers are. During group discussion, others in the group will hear what you say, and it is possible that they could tell someone else. Because we will be talking in a group, we cannot promise that what you say will remain completely private, but we will ask that you and all other group members respect the privacy of everyone in the group.

Taking part in the study is your decision. You do not have to be in this study if you do not want to. You may also quit being in the study at any time or decide not to answer any question you are not comfortable answering.

We will be happy to answer any questions you have about the study. You may contact me at _____or _____or my faculty advisor, Doyle Stevick, Ph.D. at _____ or_____) if you have study related questions or problems.

If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Office of Research Compliance at the University of South Carolina at 803-777-7095. Thank you for your consideration. If you would like to participate, please sign and return the attached consent form to me.

With kind regards,

Sandra Ray

Research Study
Consent Form

Study Title: How School Educational Team Support Bereaved Elementary Children in the Regular Classroom.

Researcher: Sandra Ray

I have read the information contained in the letter/memo about the above titled study which describes what I will be asked to do as a participant of this study.

_____   Yes, I will participate in the study.
_____   No, I will not participate in the study

_____   _____
Participant's Signature   Date