

# Supporting Foundation Phase children experiencing disenfranchised grief

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**Supporting Foundation Phase children  
experiencing disenfranchised grief**

by

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
of the degree

**Magister Educationis**

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## CERTIFICATE OF EDITING

This is to testify that I, JS Wium (B.A. (Hons) Linguistics, UP), edited the following dissertation paying close attention to all linguistic components of the original text. No edits were made to change the meaning of any sentences or passages written by the author.

### **SUPPORTING FOUNDATION PHASE CHILDREN IN COPING WITH DISENFRANCHISED GRIEF**

By Fatima Aboobaker

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree  
Magister Educationis

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Signed



Date

26/10/2016

## Declaration

I, Fatima Aboobaker, student number 28093349 hereby declare that this dissertation, “*Supporting Foundation Phase children experiencing disenfranchised grief,*” is submitted in accordance with the requirements for the Magister Technologiae degree at University of Pretoria, is my own original work and has not previously been submitted to any other institution of higher learning. All sources cited or quoted in this research paper are indicated and acknowledged with a comprehensive list of references.

.....

Fatima Aboobaker

31 October 2016





RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

**CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE**

CLEARANCE NUMBER: EC 13/11/04

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MEd

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21 July 2014

**DATE OF CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE**

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## ABSTRACT

A cultural belief held that young children lack the ability to experience grief, based on the assumption that children have not yet developed to understand, or to be emotionally affected, by the concept of death. 'Disenfranchised grief', a term first coined in 1989, refers to grief that escapes notice due to emotions not finding expressive outlets. Disenfranchised grief afflicts young children in particular. The aim of this study was to provide guidelines and identify support structures that teachers can use to help a child that is experiencing grief in the Foundation Phase classroom due to loss of a parent, sibling or grandparent.

Multiple case studies were utilised to investigate children's experiences with disenfranchised grief within different contexts, and existing support systems for children who suffered the loss of a loved family member. Three Grade 3 learners experiencing grief were purposively selected from a state school to participate in semi-structured individual interviews, drawings activities and verbal narratives. Three themes emerged from the data: experiences of grief, emotional experience and support. The findings indicate that children do experience grief, but need support in giving expression to their emotions, and to process their losses. Recommendation is made to teacher-training institutions to incorporate counselling as part of their teacher-training curriculum.

### Key Words:

- Experience
- Disenfranchised grief
- Foundation Phase



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## CHAPTER 1 BACKGROUND AND ORIENTATION

*“The grief within me has its own heartbeat. It has its own life, its own song. Part of me wants to resist the rhythms of my grief, yet as I surrender to the song, I learn to listen deep within myself”*

*~ Alan Wolfelt*

### 1.1 INTRODUCTION

Traditionally it was believed that children do not have the ability to experience grief (Schoen, Burgoyne & Schoen, 2004). It was assumed that children do not really understand the concept of death and therefore it will not have an emotional impact on the child. Schoen et al. (2004) ascribe this idea to society wanting to protect children from the emotional implications of death and feelings of grief. Conversely, Wolfelt (2001:34) believes that anyone who is old enough to love is old enough to grieve. According to Wolfelt (2001:16) grieving is an emotion that one needs to feel and not understand; the author further argues that children who cannot speak can also experience grief.

Grieving in children is an extremely sensitive and complex topic, as one does not know exactly what a child is experiencing, since children tend to express their grief in different ways (Worden, 2005:153). Doka (2002) coined the term “disenfranchised grief” in 1989 and explains it as loss that is not socially sanctioned, which can also be interpreted as loss that the griever is unable to express and consequently is not recognised by the outside world. This manner of grief may occur when a child loses a favourite toy, a pet or anything of importance to them (Kupferman, 2011). Andrews, Skinner and Zuma (2006:269) also mention that disenfranchised grief can occur when a child loses a loved one, such as a parent. Disenfranchised grief in simple terms is grief that cannot be displayed outwardly and is therefore unrecognised.

Due to the high prevalence of AIDS-related deaths in South Africa, numerous children have experienced grief. The United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF, 2013) estimates that there are 3.7 million orphans in South Africa, with

approximately 150 000 children who are living in child-headed households. The high rate of divorce is another contributing factor to experiences of loss and grief. Statistics South Africa (Statistics South Africa, 2012:11) reports that 21 998 divorces occurred in 2012 alone, involving 19 713 children (Statistics South Africa, 2012:11). Complicating this situation is the fact that many of these children are school going and require emotional support from adults. This study focused on grade 3 learners and their experiences of grief due to loss of a parent, sibling or grandparent. This study's purpose was to provide guidelines for teachers in order to be able to assist grieving learners after having lost a parent, sibling or grandparent.

## **1.2 RATIONALE**

I have been a Foundation Phase teacher (Foundation Phase being the phase for children 6-9 years of age) for the past four years. I have experience of numerous learners from broken homes, who are sometimes forced to adopt adult responsibilities such as taking care of their siblings, cooking and cleaning – but they are still children. Teachers are so overwhelmed with various responsibilities that few notice that there are learners in their classrooms who are struggling to handle their challenging circumstances. The emotions, traumas and wellbeing of the child are often overlooked because children tend to “resume their day-to-day routines” after experiencing loss and therefore it “may be interpreted that children are recovering quickly from their loss” (Wiseman, 2013:3).

The real needs of the grieving child, along with my background, led to my interest in this topic. At the age of sixteen my mother died due to a sudden illness. It was an extremely traumatic experience for me as her death was unexpected, and I was in a very vulnerable stage of my life. My younger brother was only nine years old, and I instinctively sensed the need to take care of him since his primary caregiver had passed away. The trauma led to him suffering from depression; he also appeared to be in confused and distraught states, acting in absentminded ways. He received no emotional support from his teacher, who even picked on him for having lost his mother. It affected my brother to the extent that he hated school, and refused to go. Our family then sent him to another school where the teachers were more accommodating and accepting of our situation, which helped to ease the pain in his

life. My brother was fortunate to have a family aware of the challenges he faced; who could assist in making his situation more bearable. This prompted me to question: what about all the children who do not have any support? Will those children's grief never be acknowledged? Is the manifestation of their grief misunderstood?

Teachers act as *loco parentis* (Conte, 2000:195), meaning that at school they are the substitutes of parents. In this regard Steyn (2015:84) refers to McDevitt and Ormrod (2007:31), who remark that "school is rapidly replacing the family as the primary education environment, resulting in the teacher being one of the main influences in the child's life". Richert (2016) agrees when emphasizing that the school should be regarded as an extension of the child's home and should in fact be their second home. Goldman (2000a:10) agrees when suggesting that as children spend a large part of the day at school, it is the responsibility of the teacher to monitor the child's emotions, behaviour, and relationships with peers as well as their concentration levels. The teacher also needs to note the child's emotional, mental and physical abilities in terms of the working environment as well as social and outdoor play to determine the child's overall wellness (Rowling, 2003:175). Teachers should therefore be able to identify the signs of grief and know how to support the child. Gilbert (2009) maintains that the child who experiences loss may appear to be quiet, withdrawn, distracted and tired. These children are often hastily labelled as sufferers of Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD), being undisciplined or having learning difficulties, and without thorough investigation some children may be discounted by their teachers as troubled individuals needing professional therapy – an endeavour that many teachers may believe lies outside the scope of their own abilities (Gilbert, Hieftje & Murray, 2009:36).

There is little research literature available on grieving children, and even less on ways to assist young children that are experiencing disenfranchised grief. Disenfranchised grief is not a well-known term even though many children experience it daily. This study will fill the gap in the existing literature, aiming to provide guidelines and identify support structures that teachers can use to help a child that is experiencing grief in the Foundation Phase classroom due to loss of a parent, sibling or grandparent.



### **1.3 PROBLEM STATEMENT**

“[W]hat happens to children in their first days, months and years of life affects their development, the development of our society and the development of our world” Bernard van Leer Foundation (2012: 55). In this regard Berson and Baggerly (2009:375) state that the effect of widespread disintegration of value systems as well as moral decay forces the school to take responsibility to protect children, assist the family and community and develop a social network for the child. Pratt (2002:6) states that incidences such as loss can be regarded as a chronic stressor for the child and may have a negative impact on the child if emotional support is not provided. Field (2010) concurs that many children are mourning the loss of loved ones without any support in overcoming their grief.

As a person who experienced loss, and having witnessed my younger brother unable to cope at school due to the lack of teacher support. On this basis, the following research questions are posed:

#### **1.3.1 Primary research question**

What support does a Foundation Phase child need in coping with disenfranchised grief?

#### **1.3.2 Secondary research questions**

- What are the symptoms of disenfranchised grief?
- How do Foundation Phase children experience grief?
- What guidelines can be suggested for teachers in the Foundation Phase to help children cope with disenfranchised grief?

#### **1.3.3 Research aims**

- To explore what are the symptoms of disenfranchised grief?
- To explore and describe how Foundation Phase children experience grief?

- To provide guidelines for teachers in the foundation phase to help children cope with disenfranchised grief

This study aims to provide guidelines and identify support structures that teachers can use to help a child that is experiencing grief in the Foundation Phase classroom due to loss of a parent, sibling or grandparent. It is important that teachers are aware of the symptoms that children display when experiencing disenfranchised grief, enabling them to identify such symptoms and offer support in an appropriate manner. The early identification of these symptoms may serve as the basis for support structures that teachers can utilise and implement when a Foundation Phase learner experiences loss.

## **1.4 CONCEPT CLARIFICATION**

For the purpose of this study the following terms will be explained in detail: experience, disenfranchised grief, Foundation Phase and Foundation Phase child (learner).

### **1.4.1 Experience**

Experience, as defined by the Merriam-Webster dictionary (2013) is the direct observation or participation of events based on knowledge. It is the fact of gaining knowledge through direct observation, practical knowledge, and skills or practices derived from observation. According to Kayes (2002:137) experience is also synonymous with emotions and their deeper meaning. Forlizzi and Ford (2000:419) define experience as a constant stream of emotions between moments of consciousness. They further suggest that a singular experience is made up of a number of small experiences, which relate to context, people and products. For the purpose of this study experience is regarded as the feelings and emotions that result from disenfranchised grief.

### **1.4.2 Disenfranchised Grief**

Disenfranchised grief is a term coined by Doka in 1989; it is used to explain grief that cannot be demonstratively displayed. Fontaine and Fletcher (in Thupayagale-Tshweneagae, 2008:353) define disenfranchised grief as grief that is “socially unacceptable and an inappropriate grief”. Lenhardt (in Davidson, 2010:10) states that disenfranchised grief occurs when a person is afraid to express his/her emotions and when these “emotions are not confronted, processed, or expressed they are likely to become intensified.” For the purpose of this study disenfranchised grief refers to grief that children experience that goes unnoticed and unrecognised by the teacher.

### **1.4.3 Foundation Phase**

“[T]he Foundation Phase routes under the umbrella term of Early Childhood Development, which in its turn applies to the processes by which children from birth to at least nine years grow and thrive physically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually, morally and socially” (Department of Education 2001:3). Bosman (2009:16) further explains that the Foundation Phase is the first phase of the General Education and Training Band with a focus on primary skills, knowledge and values, and the laying of a proper foundation for further learning.

“The term “Foundation Phase” refers to Grades R-3, and includes learners from six to nine years of age. This is a four-year phase, starting with the Reception year. The learning programs which are important in this phase are Numeracy, Literacy and Life Skills” (Mahlo, 2011:17).

### **1.4.4 Foundation Phase child (learner)**

For the purpose of this study, the Foundation Phase child is in Grade 3, indicating an age of 8-9 years old. This age group is used in particular as the child is at a more understanding and expressing age and will be able to provide rich data in relation to the study.

## **1.5 LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **1.5.1 Introduction**

To contextualize this study, the role of the teacher in the experience of grief will be presented.

### **1.5.2 The role of the teacher in the experience of grief**

Cohen, Mannarino and Deblinger (2006:8) warn that death is a very drastic event in a child's life; the teacher should be aware of the severity of the impact this loss can have, and be equipped to address the situation accordingly. Teachers often overlook loss and grief in a Foundation Phase classroom, assuming that children simply carry on without actually needing support due to their young age (Dyregrov, Dyregrov & Idsoe, 2013:125). Holland (2008:411) emphasizes the important role that teachers play in guiding children affected by death and advises that teachers should be comfortable enough with the concept of death in order to have empathy with children's situation. Teachers play an important role within a child's life; they are not only meant to educate the child but they are also role-models; they regulate interactions between other children and they provide emotional support (Alisic, Bus, Dulack, Pennings & Splinter, 2011:137). In this regard Perry (2016) agrees that teachers need not be wary to talk about the sensitive topic of death in their classroom, and suggests that if a teacher opens up to the children and expresses his/her own loss, then it will encourage children to talk about their own experiences as well. Teachers need to prompt the grieving child to talk about their feelings in order to relate to their experience of grief, and provide useful support (Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2013:125). Milton (2004) opines that although teachers may be good listeners and good communicators, they need to be able to use the language of loss, grief and death easily and naturally. Young children often have trouble expressing themselves verbally; they can, however, express themselves through other media such as drawings, paintings, puppets, drama and dance. Some children create murals or memory scrapbooks for the person who has passed away. Other children simply need to talk to come to terms with their grief (Holland, 2008:411).

Holland (2008:412) asserts that when children experience loss, they require support and they need to know that they have someone who listens and cares.

According to Goldman (2000a:112) teachers need to recognize when children are suffering through loss. In this regard Richert (2016) advises teachers to sit with the learner and assist in schoolwork as well as homework. Milton (2004:58) furthermore suggests that by providing a stable and caring environment and re-establishing routine as soon as possible after the loss has occurred, the teacher can provide opportunities for the children to confide in them and discuss what happened. Teachers provide important assistance and support by answering their questions honestly, allowing them to express their feelings and by accepting their feelings as real and normal. As Wolfelt (2001:55) asserts, teachers are not just teachers at school, they have to be confidants and trusted caretakers, as children spend most of their waking hours at school. Goldman (2000a:116) adds that teachers can accommodate the grieving child by allowing them to leave the class or contact home if necessary. In terms of their academic work, the workload can be reduced and even adapted if the topic under discussion deals with the lost person or object.

Dyregrov et al. (2013:125) assert that teachers need to display empathy towards a child after they have experienced grief, as they do not forget about the death easily and are in a very vulnerable state of mind. Children need to feel secure and free to discuss anything and everything with their teacher. Wolfelt (2001:71) states that a teacher needs to be observant, a good listener, patient, honest and always available to the child. Teachers also need to ensure that children see a professional counsellor if the need arises (Richert, 2016).

Seibert, Drolet and Fetro (2003:44) recommend that a teacher is able to view the event from the child's perspective to truly understand and help the child. In this regard Perry (2016) maintains that the key to helping the child is, understanding that recovery from loss requires the reshaping of existing relationships in the child's life. Seibert et al. (2003:45) further assert that when teachers respond according to their own understanding of such events it can cause more harm than good, since it may be contrary to the child's experiences and hence the child may be misunderstood. Teachers need to create a "welcoming and open" environment where children's

feelings and questions are accepted (Seibert et al., 2003:10). Goldman (2000a:116) believes that teachers are in the perfect position to identify behaviours and expressions associated with children's grieving emotions.

Dyregrov et al. (2013:133) mention that teachers are often unsure whether they are able to help a bereaved child by themselves, and whether they need to be referred to a specialist. A differentiation between teachers and other resource personnel such as counsellors or therapists, is necessary (Alisic, 2011:152). In this regard, Dyregrov et al. (2013:130) posit that teachers often feel as if they have no support from school structures in trying to help any children that are suffering grief; they are left to their own devices to support children in whatever manner they feel is suitable.

Goldman (2000b:116) suggests that children "acting out" or "acting in" are "crying" for help in terms of grief. A SAFE environment (see below) needs to be established to encourage children to talk about death. Teachers need to be patient, affording children the opportunity to respond and to think before they act, thereby creating a safe environment for children dealing with grief (Dyregrov et al., 2013:130). 'SAFE' denotes an anagram created by Goldman (2000b:116) that teachers may use to encourage children to open up about their loss.

- S - *Seize the moment*: guide the child to the correct answer instead of condemning a wrong answer.
- A - *Act*: when in doubt, reach out. It is effective because children sense the sincerity.
- F - *Find strengths within each child*: Children are taught to ignore their feelings, but those feelings are revealed in different ways. If the teacher truly understands what motivates the child to act out, the child would not be harshly judged.
- E - *Establish a relationship*: have a private conversation. Let the children understand that you are aware of their circumstances and that they have an open channel communication.

Ogina (2010:2) states that increasingly, "teachers and schools in most African countries are expected to respond to the changing educational, social, and economic environment and the contextual realities of schooling, and that includes caring for the

children that have experienced loss.” In meeting these expectations, several roles are listed for a teacher to fulfil. The National Education Policy Act No. 27, (South Africa, 1996) stipulates certain norms and standards for teachers, including the seven roles that a teacher should abide by. These roles relate to this study in the sense that they enhance the teacher’s ability to assist a grieving child in the classroom, and each are now briefly discussed.

### **1.5.3 The seven roles of the teacher and how they relate to the grieving learner**

The first role is that of being a learner mediator, meaning that the teacher will facilitate learning in a manner sensitive to the diverse needs of learners (South Africa, 1996). In terms of the study this brief definition can be understood that the teacher will ensure that learning takes place in an appropriately sensitive way to enable the child to learn, regardless of the child’s state of mind (Perry, 2016).

The second role is that of interpreter and designer of learning programmes and materials. In this role the teacher will understand and interpret provided learning programmes, design original learning programmes, identify the requirements for a specific context of learning, and select and prepare suitable textual and visual resources for learning (South Africa, 1996). This role helps to clarify that the teacher will additionally help the child who is battling to cope and meet the academic demands. A child in a state of grief may not function optimally in a school setting (Steele & Kuban, 2013:48). The teacher should modify the home- or schoolwork to enable the child to cope better with his circumstances (Richert, 2016).

The third role denotes being a leader, administrator and manager. In this role the teacher will make decisions appropriate to the child’s developmental level, manage learning in the classroom, carry out classroom administrative duties efficiently and participate in school decision making structures. For instance, the teacher can ask the class to vote for a class leader based on the behaviour during the prior week, or the learners can vote to do spelling tests either in the middle of the week or on a Friday. This allows the teacher to be a democratic leader and to demonstrate a responsiveness to changing circumstances and learners’ needs (South Africa, 1996).

With regard to this study it means that the teacher will be responsible for creating an ideal classroom environment for learning and to ensure that no discrimination or disparaging insults will be suffered by the children that have experienced loss (Goldman, 2000a).

The teachers' fourth role is being a scholar, researcher and lifelong learner. A teacher will achieve ongoing personal, academic, occupational and professional growth through the pursuit of reflective study and research in their learning area, in broader professional and educational matters, and in other related fields (South Africa, 1996). This role allows the teacher to seek further insight and research about children who have suffered grief, to better equip them to manage any classroom situations (Cohen et al. 2013:125).

The fifth role is the community, citizenship and pastoral role. Here the teacher is expected to practise and promote a critical, committed and ethical attitude towards developing a sense of respect and responsibility towards others (South Africa, 1996). The pastoral role of the teacher refers to the counselling of learners who experience challenges (Steyn, 2015). It is important to understand that people – and in this case children - grieve in different ways. There is no right or wrong way to suffer a loss (Richert, 2016). Steyn (2015:85) suggests that it is the pastoral role in which teachers advise, listen, comfort and guide learners. Ogina (2010:7) asserts that teachers need to take on multiple roles as they are expected to meet the “material, social and emotional” needs of the learners. Teachers need to have knowledge about the child’s social problems, which may include “emotional, physical, sexual abuse, substance abuse poverty and HIV/Aids” (Pillay, 2012:170). Cormeir and Hackney (2005:16) add that teachers need to possess empathy to be good counsellors. Empathy will enable the teacher to have insight into the child’s perspective and painful experience, to understand their feelings and circumstances without getting immersed to the extent that the child’s feelings are transposed to the self. Steyn (2015:88) mentions that if a teacher really wants to help a child they need to be “genuine”. The learner needs to be comfortable in the teacher’s company, and experience the teacher as being “open, accessible and not putting up a false front.” If a teacher endeavours to help a learner, the learner needs to feel the teacher can be trusted and that he/she is in a safe environment where they can give expression to



their true feelings (Steyn, 2015:89). Egan (2010) states the most effective manner to help and understand is by active listening, or when a person listens intently, sourcing an accurate meaning. The art of counselling is about understanding the other person's story (Steyn, 2015:91).

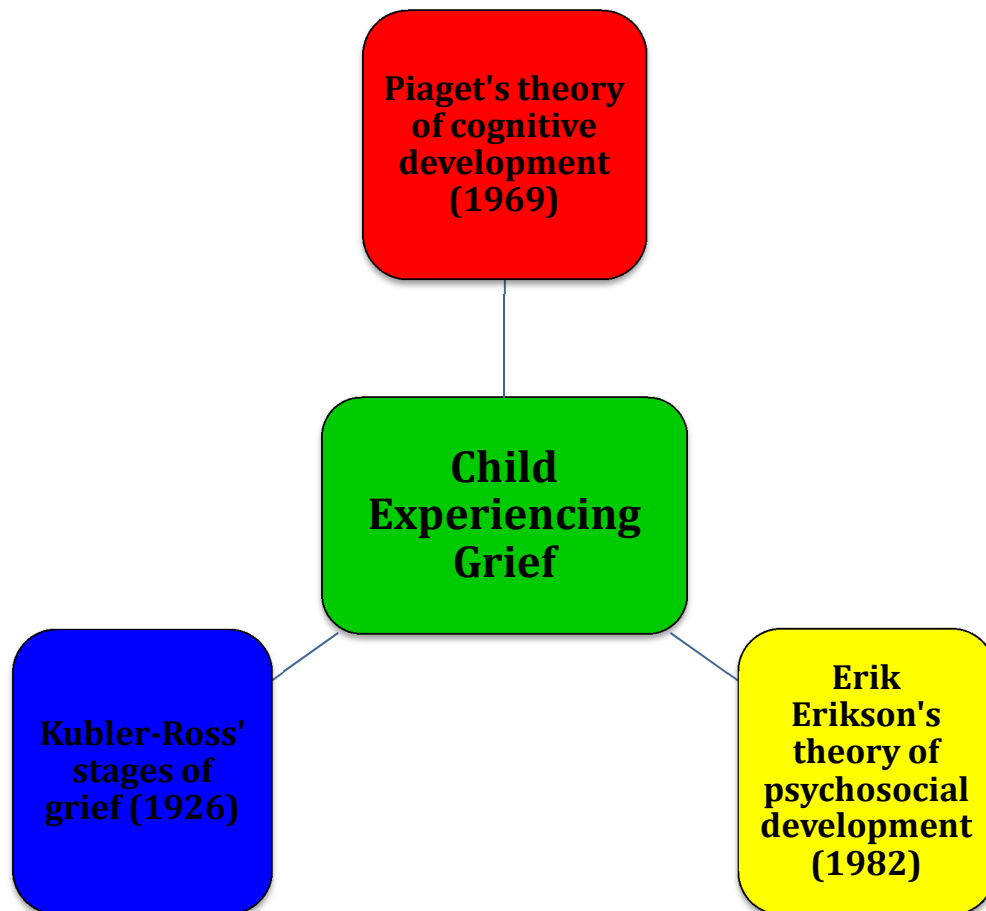
In the sixth role the teacher is an assessor. The teacher will understand that assessment is an essential feature of the teaching and learning process, and know how to integrate it into this process (South Africa, 1996). This means that although a teacher needs to transfer knowledge to the children, at some point the teacher will need to assess the learners in order to see how much of the content the learners are grasping. Goldman (2000a:117) emphasises that it is important for a teacher to understand a child's state of being, as it determines the child's performance. It is best to find the learner's strengths and assess accordingly, states Goldman (2000a:117).

The seventh and final role is being a learning area/subject/discipline/phase specialist. In this role the teacher should be well versed in the knowledge, skills, values, principles, methods, and procedures relevant to the discipline, subject, learning area, phase of study, or professional or occupational practice. The teacher will be skilled in different approaches to teaching and learning, and how these may be adapted to be appropriate to the learners and context (South Africa, 1996). This role allows the teacher to equip his/her teaching environment to positively impact on the children in the classroom; to enrich their thoughts and help them to process feelings of loss, and to be empathetic learners (Perry, 2016).

## **1.6 CONCEPTUAL AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

According to Creswell (2013:121), a conceptual framework is used "to guide how researchers think about the study's topic." Creswell (2013:122) explains that a conceptual framework also adds value to the quality of the study as it provides researchers with a framework for investigating the research topic. Maree (2012:42, 43) states that the conceptual framework is used as the "underlying theory that describes the situation and explains what is happening. It shows the extent of one's thinking and if it is logical, critical and original." The conceptual framework – used in

this study – served as a lens through which I conducted the literature review and guided the data interpretation. For the purpose of this study the theoretical framework involves child development theories and particularly their relevance to understanding grief. The graphic design (Figure 1.1) below represents the theoretical perspectives relevant to this study.



**Figure 1: A graphical representation of the theoretical framework used in this study**

The focus is on grade 3 learners' experiences of disenfranchised grief due to loss of a parent, sibling or grandparent. The cognitive development of a child will first be discussed based on Piaget's theory of cognitive development (1969), concentrating on the years that affect the Foundation Phase such as the preoperational age (2-7 years) and concrete operational age (7-11 years). Erik Erikson's theory of psychosocial development (1982) will be discussed to explain the child's emotional and social development. The relevant stage in Erikson's theory that applies to the

Foundation Phase, namely industry versus inferiority, will be outlined. Finally, Elizabeth Kubler-Ross's (1926-2004) stages of grief will be discussed to clarify the progression of stages that a grieving person experiences. Those stages consist of denial/isolation, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance. All the above mentioned theories will be discussed in detail in Chapter 2.

## **1.7 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The following section clarifies the research methodology used in this study. Chapter 3 elaborates further on the methodology itself. This section introduces the manner in which the study was conducted and the involved participants. The research methodology consists of the research design and the research method.

### **1.7.1 Research design**

According to Creswell (2013:286) the “research design is a logical set of procedures that researchers use to collect, analyse, and report their data in a research study.” Leedy and Ormrod (2014:76) suggest that the research design serves as the overall structure for the procedure used by the researcher, encompassing data collection operations and the analysis of the organised data. The research design consists of the research paradigm, research approach and research type.

#### **1.7.1.1 Research paradigm**

Different paradigms exist within qualitative research, such as interpretive, constructivist, positivist or critical theories (Maree, 2012). A study is situated within an interpretive paradigm when a researcher aims to acquire insight into the experiences and perceptions of the participants (Ferreira 2013:35). Cohen et al. (2013:17) suggest that the interpretive paradigm requires that the researcher “examine situations through the eyes of the participant.” My research was conducted within the interpretive paradigm as it allowed the child to express his/her experiences of grief, and it afforded me as the researcher an understanding of the ways in which children experience and make meaning of grief.

Cohen et al. (2013:298) recommend that the interpretive paradigm be selected for case study research, since it utilises different data collection methods such as “semi-structured and open interviews, observation, verbal narratives, document, diaries, maybe also tests and other methods.” The interpretivist paradigm is suited for this study because semi-structured interviews, drawings, verbal narratives and an open qualitative questionnaire were my data collection methods.

### **1.7.1.2 Research approach**

The research approach is a description of the process in which the research will be conducted (Maree, 2012). The study was conducted using a qualitative research approach. Qualitative research is descriptive and interactive and deals with exploring and understanding the central phenomenon related to the specific study (Creswell, 2011:204). This study interacted with participants to gain insight into their lives, their feelings and their experiences through their losses (Maree, 2012). Qualitative research is an in-depth kind of study using a face-to-face technique to collect data. It is explanatory as well as exploratory, in terms of emphasizing a rich design, understanding, verbal narratives and flexible designs (Creswell, 2011:205). This method suited my study, as Hennink, Hutter and Bailey (2011) note that qualitative research is an effective approach to explore people’s experiences in detail. In order to understand the participants’ experiences semi-structured interviews and drawings were incorporated, requiring face-to-face interaction and allowing me as the researcher to be completely involved with and understand the learners’ recorded experiences.

### **1.7.1.3 Research type**

The aim of this study is to explore the lives of children and their emotions and feelings, and to explore ways to establish a support structure that could help them cope with their circumstances. A phenomenological approach is suitable for such an investigation (Creswell, 2014:105). This is an inductive research with an explorative and descriptive nature aiming to accurately describe persons’ actual experiences (Vaisali, 2011). It is furthermore geared towards building an understanding of a person’s perspective and views of a particular experience. Creswell (2014:106)

suggests that phenomenology is based on personal perspective, interpretation and personal knowledge. A phenomenological approach is appropriate for this study since its primary purpose is to explore learners' lived experiences of a phenomena (grief) and their feelings regarding those experiences.

Creswell (2014:106) states that a case study requires an interpretive perspective as it aims to derive a holistic understanding of how the participant will relate to, interact and make sense of the phenomenon. In this regard Rule and John (2011:4) opine that a case study is a "systematic in-depth investigation of a particular instance in its context in order to generate knowledge." My study meets these criteria as I explored grief in a specific participant's life to understand how the participant experiences and copes with grief. Woodside (2010: ix) reports that case study research aims to achieve high accuracy in explaining, understanding and predicting the thought process involved in the study. My study involved three cases that helped me to explore and understanding of the ways in which children interpret and experience their grief, by means of their semi-structured interviews, drawings, verbal narratives.

According to Creswell (2014:106), case studies can involve either a single or multiple case studies that are examined in depth. For this study, multiple case studies were used as no two persons' experience grief in the exact same way (Dyregrov & Dyregrov, 2008:47), and I wanted to explore how each participant experienced disenfranchised grief within their respective contexts. I selected three Grade 3 children who experienced different types of grief.

### **1.7.2 Research methods**

According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010:8) the research method describes procedures and locations where research data is collected, and how the data will be analysed. Research methods consist of these elements: participants, data collection and data analysis.

### **1.7.2.1 Research site and participants**

I decided to conduct the research in an urban government school in Pretoria. The school was selected using purposeful sampling, which simply means that participants are selected because of some defining characteristics that make them needed for the study (Nieuwenhuis, 2007:79). The school comprises predominantly African children, many of whom live far away from school and their families. Other children whose parents are in the military and are frequently away from home on courses or serving on active duty elsewhere, causing the children's lives and routines to be unsettled or unstable. Many of these children travel a few hours just to get to school. English is not their native language either and they only hear English in their school environment.

The unit of analysis is children who experience disenfranchised grief. Due to the type of research conducted, a sample adhering to specifications must be selected. This type of sampling is called purposeful- or purposive sampling. According to Creswell (2013:489) "purposeful sampling means that researchers intentionally select sites and individuals to participate in a research study to learn about or understand the central phenomenon." As the researcher I recognised the need to apply purposive sampling, since the study required children who had specifically experienced loss within the previous twelve months, who would be able to express their feelings of loss.

### **1.7.2.2 Three Grade 3 participants**

With the assistance of the Head of Department (Foundation Phase) at the school I identified children who had experienced grief. I asked the teachers to identify children who experienced loss of any parent, sibling or grandparent within the previous year. The purpose of selecting three children is to secure a multiple case study and to collect a variety of experiential data, to ensure that adequate guidelines for support can be developed for children suffering from disenfranchised grief.

Participant One had very recently lost her grandfather and baby brother within two weeks. Participant Two had lost her mother and father. Participant Three had lost

her grandmother. Various situations pertaining to grief were deliberately selected to secure data rich with a variety of emotions, thoughts and responses experienced amongst the children.

### **1.7.2.3 Teachers as participants**

I approached the Grade 3 teachers at the school and explained the purpose of my study to all of them, and what I required from them. I informed them that I need their consent to select any learners from their classes, and that their willingness to participate would be appreciated. Their participation involved their identifying learners who experienced loss during the previous 12 months. As the researcher I prepared an open qualitative questionnaire (see Appendix F) for teachers to fill in. Information harvested from these questionnaires gave me a deeper appreciation of the losses experienced by the children, and I received indications of the extent to which those teachers may have helped their respective learners (if at all) since their losses. The motivation for prompting the teachers to fill in the questionnaires, was to negate any personal biases of my own by obtaining knowledge of the ways that the teachers viewed the particular children in their classrooms. This strategy enriched my findings on the children.

### **1.7.2.4 The role of the researcher**

The main role of the researcher is to gather information, collect data and analyse the data (Creswell, 2013:38). I adopted the role of participant observer, which Creswell (2013:489) explains as “an observational role adopted by researchers in qualitative research when they take part in activities in the setting they observe.” I was involved in conducting semi-structured interviews with each learner individually. I also prompted the learners to make drawings, and asked them to explain what they had drawn and how they felt about their experience reflected in their drawings, which constituted the verbal narrative. As the researcher spends time with the participants and cultivate healthy conversations about their loss, they become increasingly immersed in the discussions, and open up. This provides the researcher with opportunities to relive the participants’ experiences of loss and their related feelings, during those momentary periods in their company (Creswell, 2014:105).

### **1.7.3 Data collection**

Collecting data refers to the process of identifying and selecting individuals for a study, obtaining their permissions to be subjects of research, and gathering information by asking people questions or observing their behaviours (Creswell, 2014:9). The data collection strategy for this study comprised semi-structured interviews, drawings, verbal narratives and open qualitative questionnaires.

#### **1.7.3.1 Semi-structured interviews**

A qualitative interview occurs when researchers ask one or more individuals general, open-ended questions and record their answers. The researcher then transcribes the data into computerised formats for analysis (Creswell, 2014:217). The semi-structured interviews in this instance were intended to create a comfortable environment for those Grade 3 learners, and to give me as the researcher a clear understanding of their backgrounds and the grief they experienced. This study's purpose was to provide guidelines for teachers in order to be able to assist grieving learners after having lost a parent, sibling or grandparent. More importantly, these semi-structured interviews were utilised to get to know the children on personal levels, ensuring mutual trust and their comfort with the situation.

#### **1.7.3.2 Drawings**

I decided to make use of drawings as Steele and Kuban (2013:81) advise that drawings can assist children to “elaborate on elements of their experiences”. They suggest that drawings can act as safe mechanisms for children to give expression to their emotions, which may be difficult for them to do verbally.

I asked the selected three learners in Grade 3 (age 8/9) to draw pictures of thoughts they would like to share regarding their feelings – to me as a researcher those drawings represented visual expressions of their thoughts. I read a book, *Sam's Birthday Surprise*, to each learner individually before asking them to do their drawings. I explained to each child that it is a book I wrote while studying, and that it was my own way of expressing my grief. This story set the scene for the next step, which was the drawings. Each learner individually had the opportunity to draw as



many pictures as they wanted, as those activities would assist me in my researching role to adequately understand their feelings and experiences.

### **1.7.3.3 Verbal narratives**

Parker (2004:71) opines that verbal narratives respects each individual and values his or her story as a measure of personal identity. For the purpose of this study verbal narratives were employed after the drawing sessions were completed, when I asked the learners to explain what they had drawn. Each learner tapped into his/her emotions and feelings, projecting their thought processes onto paper. I then wanted them to express their feelings by telling me what their pictures really meant to them. The motivation was to gain clear insights into the thought processes invested in their drawings, making it possible for me as researcher to identify their points of grief.

### **1.7.3.4 Open Qualitative Questionnaire**

“Open qualitative questionnaire is the process of gathering open-ended, first-hand information by observing people and places at a research site”, writes Creswell (2011:214). I carefully observed my participants’ behaviour during my contact sessions with them (also known as the semi-structured interviews and drawing activities) to evaluate their behaviour and recognise possible signs of grief. Seabi (in Maree 2012:91) asserts that open qualitative questionnaires involve a systematic process of data collection that relies on the researcher’s ability to gather valuable data by utilising their senses. During observations I concentrated on their expressions, reactions and responses to questions and instructions. I made brief notes of any expressions that I captured.

The use of open qualitative questionnaire provides a means of gathering different types of data in different ways; the questionnaire can consist of checklists, schedules, notes or questions regarding observations, and they can establish what elements may achieve prominence in sorting and analytical processes (Rule & John, 2011:81). As described above, I made use of open qualitative questionnaires together with semi-structured interviews, narratives and drawings as means of data collection.

Open qualitative questionnaires have both advantages and disadvantages (Creswell, 2011:214). Banister (2011:71) mentions that the opportunity to record information in its “real-life” naturalistic setting, is among the advantages included in the use of open qualitative questionnaires. Disadvantages include limitations to the specific observation site, as there is little room for variety or difference of opinion (Creswell, 2011:214). To evaluate my own opinions noted during the semi-structured interviews with the learners and their drawing activities, I compared my personal findings with the recorded remarks of their teachers, and all that they indicated in the open qualitative questionnaires I designed for them to complete.

Questions relating to the children’s conduct during daily activities were included in the open qualitative questionnaires (see Appendix F) completed by the teachers. Involving the teachers as observers helped to avoid the situation where the researcher becomes the sole subjective source of evaluation, which would have compromised the study.

#### **1.7.3.5 Thematic data analysis**

Parker (2004:140) asserts that thematic data analysis is a careful re-description using some categories from a particular framework. Rule and John (2011:77) explain that coding is the process of choosing themes and assigning them to different parts of data. In my study I conducted thematic analysis, first analysed all the semi-structured interviews and found similar themes within all the interviews. I then began assigning data in accordance with the stated labels.

Themes need to be elaborated, and divided into categories and sub-themes. The themes and categories all lead up to the main themes and correlate with each other (Maree, 2012:228). I elaborated on the themes and labels that I assigned and further probed the collected data. A consensual theme should be recognised throughout the analysis in order to generate a conceptual and pragmatic understanding (Asmussen & Creswell in Rule and John, 2011:87). I reanalysed all the data and found common threads throughout the analysis that lead to a conceptual understanding, from which conclusions can be drawn.

To ensure quality assurance and trustworthiness of my study I provide a detailed description of the trustworthiness issues relevant to my study.

#### **1.7.4 Trustworthiness**

Validation of data is conducted through various techniques to ensure that the findings are accurate and credible (Creswell, 2008:266). Rule and John (2011:107) opine that trustworthiness consists of scholarly rigour, transparency and professional ethics in the interest of qualitative research's assuring levels of trust. Trustworthiness guaranteed my research to be true, honest and reliable (Maree, 2007:80). The following aspects explain the trustworthiness of my research:

##### **1.7.4.1 Transferability**

Transferability is the process of providing thick descriptions of each case and its context (Rule & John, 2011:105). Woodside (2010:117) defines it as the ability to transfer the data from the original study to other contexts. Transferability therefore refers to research situations when data used in one context is also legitimately useful in other contexts, depending on their respective needs (Willis, 2007:222). I anticipate that my research contains information and data that could be of significance to research in other classroom contexts, or studies involving other age groups.

##### **1.7.4.2 Credibility**

Woodside (2010:117) states that credibility is the process of using multiple realities in order to examine a process adequately. The data collected during my semi-structured interviews, drawings, verbal narratives and open qualitative questionnaire enabled me to obtain insights into the disenfranchised grief that the participants experienced. Their caregivers were notified and gave consent for their child to participate in the research (Appendix D). The children were asked during each stage if they were comfortable and if they would like to continue with the data collection process. The teachers' open qualitative questionnaires presented different perspectives on the participants, helping to ensure an unbiased analysis of the compiled data.

### **1.7.4.3 Dependability and confirmability**

Woodside (2010:117) opines that dependability refers to the use of multiple human investigators to enhance internal stability of all measures taken. Dependability “dispenses with positivist notions of replication and focuses on methodological rigour and coherence towards generating findings that will be confidently acceptable” (Rule & John, 2011:107). By utilising the teachers as added data providers, multiple human investigators were effectively involved, raising the degree of internal stability. Confirmability seeks neutrality and objectivity from external sources to ensure that the research findings presented in the study, are recognised elsewhere in similar studies (Woodside, 2010:117). In order to ensure confirmability, dependability needs to be guaranteed, since new researchers would not consider reusing the data if dependability cannot be established beyond any doubts. The issue of dependability will be noted in the following chapters, as the data collection and analyse methods will be harnessed to ensure consistency in research procedures. This process will be further elaborated in Chapter 3.

### **1.7.4.4 Triangulation**

Triangulation is employed in qualitative study to ensure research that is rigorous, respectable and of high quality (Rule & John, 2011:108). Woodside (2010:6) adds that triangulation involves multiple methods of obtaining data within the same source. For the purpose of this research I used semi-structured interviews, drawings, verbal narratives and open qualitative questionnaire to obtain data from an adequate amount of sources to enable verification of findings, thereby adhering to triangulation principles.

## **1.8 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

According to Maree and Van der Westhuizen (2007), ethical considerations must be recognised to ensure the anonymity of participants, and confidentiality regarding processes, results and findings, as required. Due to the fact that participants in this study were younger than 18 years old, the ethical considerations assumed a critical importance (Hedges, 2001:3). To be allowed to execute the research procedures

described previously, I applied for ethical clearance from the Ethics Committee of the University of Pretoria (**REFERENCE:EC 13/11/04** – see Appendix H). I then submitted this application to the Department of Education to obtain permission to conduct research on school premises in Gauteng Province.

Once clearance and permissions were granted, I approached the selected school with my proposal and informed them of the study I wished to conduct. I obtained consent from the school as well, before commencing with the research (see Appendix B). Consent was acquired from the caregivers, and a meeting was arranged to explain the nature of the research (Appendix D). I made sure that the children understood that it was a completely voluntary participative process, and that they could withdraw from participation during any stage, if they wished to. Informed assent regarding the planned procedures were obtained from each of the participants, validating the voluntary nature of their participation (Appendix C). I made sure that the participants always understood what I was doing, thereby securing their trust, which is vital since this research project will become a futile effort if the central participants are wary of the researcher's intentions.

## **1.9 CONCLUSION**

Chapter 1 serves as this study's foundation by providing an overall representation of this study, while outlining its nature and purpose. The Chapter collates the researcher's background and motivation for conducting this study, together with stated rationales, research aims, then a literature review allowing a clear understanding of the nature of the information and goals to pursue, and finally a brief description of the applicable research design and methodology to be applied. This research aims to assist teachers to provide guidelines in supporting children who are experiencing grief or have recently experienced grief to allow such children to cope better with their challenging circumstances.

In the following Chapter the theoretical perspectives underpinning this study will be discussed. Such perspectives were valuable for my research endeavours as to understand children on a more holistic level, by taking heed of their cognitive

development, psychosocial development and the stages of grief that children experience.



## **CHAPTER 2**

# **THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES ON THE EXPERIENCE OF GRIEF IN YOUNG CHILDREN**

### **2.1 INTRODUCTION**

Meintjies, Hall, Marera and Boulle (2009) report that there is a significant increase in the number of children who, due to various reasons, are losing their parents, leaving many children to fend for themselves. The authors add that this loss often forces children to become independent and to deal with their grief by themselves. Other causes of children's grief relate to parents being separated or divorced, and loss of innocence through violence and rape (Burton & Leoschut, 2012). This study focuses on grade 3 learners and the grief experienced in the Foundation Phase after the death of a parent, sibling or grandparent. It furthermore focuses on teachers as support structures, as teachers are regarded the "first in line" (Hay, 2015:60) to help a grieving child; teachers can implement coping to help children overcome their grief.

The effects of grief on a child is discussed in more detail in this Chapter. The vulnerability of the young child and the ways in which a child conceptualises death are explored, followed by a further discussion of a child's experience of grief as viewed through the lenses of Piaget's theory of cognitive development (1967), as well as Erikson's theory on psychosocial development (1982) pertaining to children eight to ten years old. The Chapter concludes with a discussion of Kubler-Ross's stages of grief.

### **2.2 VULNERABILITY OF CHILDREN**

Andrews et al. (2006) describe a vulnerable child as having little or no access to basic needs and rights. Vulnerable children include those who have experienced the loss of a parent through death or other causes such as desertion, chronic illnesses, poverty, hunger, lack of access to services, inadequate clothing or shelter, overcrowding or deficient caretakers. Other factors specific to children are included here, such as disability and being victims of physical or sexual violence (Andrews et al., 2006). Seifer (2003:67) postulates that several key obstacles may trigger

vulnerability within children. These obstacles include marital, health or other familial problems, as well as inadequate parent-child relationships. Aubrey and Dhal (2006) have a slightly different perspective, describing vulnerable children as those having special educational needs, those who do not live with their own parents and those in circumstances where social workers have to monitor children's welfare.

Seidman and Pedersen (2003:354) emphasise that vulnerability can be inflicted on children by any negative impact such as drug abuse, depression or death which can further manifest into a series of negative developmental outcomes. Seifer (2003:35) suggests that "child negativity may be indicative of a constitutional difference in a subset of at-risk children, perhaps identifying the most vulnerable." Du Preez (2015) indicates in her study how parents' attitudes towards their children and subsequent responses can severely impact children and their levels of resiliency or vulnerability. Zucker, Wong, Puttler & Fitzgerald (2003:84) suggest that the vulnerable child has increased emotional activity, due to the emotional reactions within themselves and a low self-esteem due to lack of support.

Vulnerability affects ages and genders in different ways. The vulnerability of boys manifests itself in external disorders, whereas girls are more likely to suffer from internal disorders (Luthar, D'Avanzo & Hites, 2003:108). Cauce, Stewart, Rodriguez, Ginzler and Cochran (2003:390) suggest that disruptive or single parenting may heighten the risk of a child becoming vulnerable; a stable household with both parents present can serve as a buffer against any risk factors (mentioned above) that the child may encounter. UNICEF (2006) states that when disaster strikes, it is often the children that are faced with devastating impacts that consist of limited access to food, shelter, social support, and health care; all of which are factors that may increase children's vulnerability to grief.

Peek (2008:5) identifies three main types of vulnerability that children encounter in disaster situations: psychological, physical and educational. Psychological vulnerabilities include post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, anxiety, emotional distress, sleep disorders, somatic complaints and behavioural problems. Physical vulnerabilities consist of death, injury, illness, disease, malnutrition, heat stress, and physical and sexual abuse. The causes of educational vulnerability



include missed school sessions, poor academic performance, delayed progress, and failure to complete education. As the focus of this study is on the grade 3 learner who experiences loss, the link between vulnerability and loss will now be discussed.

### **2.2.1 Vulnerability and loss**

Sandoval (2009:162) illuminates the fact that vulnerability in children is exacerbated “through the death of someone close”. Peek (2008:3) agrees when stating that children are the most vulnerable when death occurs at a stage when they are still highly dependent on adults. In this regard Calhoun and Tedeschi (2006:86) add that vulnerability affects children’s identities, their social relationships, their abilities to maintain control over their lives as well as their senses of life’s meaningfulness. “[A]n important consequence is that the presence of multiple risk conditions often goes undetected, leaving the most vulnerable child without much-needed assistance”, states Seifer (2003:45). Agid, Kohn and Lerer (2000:164) suggest that the loss of a parent while they’re young significantly impacts their intellectual and emotional abilities as children may be prone to depression when they encounter loss again later in life. Zucker et al. (2003) suggest that the pain from loss is also related to the nature of the relationship, the history of other losses, the vulnerability of the particular child and the support system available. If a child is close and dependent upon the lost loved one, he or she is likely to experience more severe levels of distress.

Wiseman (2013:2) alludes to the developmental stage of the child, which determines to a great extent how death is understood and how the loss is experienced. Agid et al. (2000:136) suggest that early parental loss can leave a child feeling very vulnerable due to a sudden lack of support that the child is dependent on. This may significantly impact not only on a child’s current development, but may still affect the child in later years. Agid et al. (2000:137) emphasise that point by stating that children who experience loss and vulnerability before the age of 17 are at risk of experiencing neurological disorders later in their lives. Children are left vulnerable when the person(s) responsible for their care has died as they will lack emotional, physical, mental and social needs that will inevitably impact on their life (Peek, 2008:4). According to Geiselhart, Gwebu and Krüger (2008:120) “children who

become orphans, have to cope with the death of their parents or other family members and may find themselves in different homes where they are not treated well. A child's vulnerability is aggravated by changing family structures, impaired inter-generational knowledge transmission, and ruptured inter-generational sustenance." Death of a loved one, as indicated by Peek (2008:10), is amongst the psychological factors that influence a child's vulnerability. Peek then emphasises that, to understand children's vulnerability in a state of trauma, it is vital to gain children's perspectives of their experiences from themselves, and not only from their parents or other caregivers.

### **2.3 THE CONCEPT OF DEATH**

Silverman and Kelly (2009:20) allude to the fact that "the concept of death is confusing and mystifying for everyone, but especially for those who lack a framework of reference for catastrophe." This implies that children are highly vulnerable to the experience of death, as they are not yet prepared to process such a severe intervention in their lives. According to Stillion and Attig (2015:115) adults know that "death is constant and expected. Although it is emotionally straining to cope with loss, it is not out of the ordinary to cope with grief." Chadwick (2012:14) argues that the younger the child, the more complex the concept of death appears to be, and he maintains (2012:21) that it is only after the age of six that the child may soundly grasp the concept of death and the inevitability of it. Chadwick (2012:21) indicates too that the inevitability of death leads to experiences of loss and grief.

The cause of death and the child's direct exposure to the reality of death present other influences on a child's experience of grief (Silverman & Kelly, 2009:126). In this regard Heath, Leavy, Hansen, Ryan, Lawrence, Gerritsen Sonntag (2008) propose that while a child may accept that old people die, a friend's unexpected death may be much more difficult to acknowledge. If the child is present and witnesses the death, the reality of death becomes close and personal, often overwhelming their limited coping skills. Worden (2009:4) explains that grief is further complicated by the child's relationship to the deceased. If the deceased is a family member, particularly a mother or father, the child suffers the loss of an integral supportive relationship (Worden, 1996).

Chadwick (2012:23) advises that children need to be taught that expressing grief is both healthy and normal. Dyregrov and Dyregrov (2008:71) suggest that children need to be informed of the harsh realities of death and warns that using euphemisms may cause avoidable confusion and result in a greater misunderstanding of death. Silverman and Kelly (2009:13) advise that during the death of a loved one it is essential to remember “children are going to be scared, confused and lost and they will need help in trying to make sense of what is going on around them.” Silverman and Kelly (2009:237) agree with Dyregrov and Dyregrov (2008:79) by explaining that a child’s perception of death and response to it, depends on his/her level of understanding and maturity. Maturity is related to age, cognitive ability, and life experiences.

Favazza and Munson (2010) assert that knowledge of how children perceive loss, especially death, at different chronological ages and developmental stages help teachers to respond to children’s experiences in healthy, helpful, and developmentally appropriate ways. Dyregrov and Dyregrov (2008:13) state that “[c]hildren’s understanding of death develops in parallel with the child’s cognitive maturing through childhood.” In order to clearly understand grief in children, their cognitive development and subsequent understanding of death must first be discussed.

### **2.3.1 Cognitive development**

Cognitive developmental theorists try to understand developmental changes in children’s behaviour and feelings in terms of thought (Steinberg, Belsky, & Meyer, 1990:17). In the domain of cognition, Cartwright (2001) believes that Piaget’s (1969) theory on cognitive development has been tremendously influential as he identifies a sequence of stages of a child’s cognitive development. Piaget’s cognitive development theory (1969) is based on the belief that children actively construct their knowledge of the world by incorporating new information into existing knowledge schemes through assimilation.

Feeney, Christensen and Moravick (2010:148) explain that according to Piaget, children progress through a series of four qualitatively different developmental

stages in which a child's mind develops a new way of operating. The developmental stages consist of the following:

- Sensorimotor stage (birth to 2 years)
- Preoperational stage (between 2 to 7 years)
- Concrete operational period (between 7 to 11 years)
- Formal operational period (between 11 and 15 years)

As this study focuses on the grade 3 learner in the Foundation Phase (6-9 years), the preoperational and concrete operational stages will be discussed, to indicate how the child's cognitive abilities develop to accommodate the concept of death, and by implication, how to comprehend the experience of grief.

### **2.3.2 Pre operational Stage (two to seven years)**

This is the age, according to Spencer (2010:2), where children think of death as a temporary and reversible state. Stillion and Attig (2015) further state that children at this age do not have the cognitive ability to understand death fully. Cohen et al. (2006:34) state that “preschoolers (3–6 years old) cannot typically comprehend the word *forever* and often believe that death is reversible.” They often associate death with concrete behaviour and believe the person is sleeping or has left for a while. According to Ginsburg and Opper (1969) as well as Louw (1991), this stage can be divided into two sub-stages: preconceptual thought (2–4 years old) and intuitive thought (4–7 years old). Santrock (2010:184) compares a concept to a class of things that have something in common, which allows them to relate to each other. Preconceptual thought implies that the child does not fully understand concepts or what they entail. The nature of the pre-conceptual child's thinking, makes it difficult for the child to understand relative terms such as “bigger” or “longer”; items tend to be “biggest” or “longest” (Siegler, DeLoache & Eisenberg, 2011).

Santrock (2010:197) postulates that intuitive thought is based on perceptions from which conclusions are drawn. In the preoperational stage, children become able to represent their experiences in language and mental imagery; this allows children to

remember experiences for longer periods of time and to formulate more sophisticated concepts (Siegler et al., 2011:131). The major achievement during this stage is expansion in the use of symbolic thought (Papalia, Gross & Feldman, 2003:256). Santrock (2010:283), however, argue that children form stable concepts in the preoperational phase and begin to reason, but the “preoperational” label emphasises the fact that the child does not yet perform operations. Preoperational thought is the beginning of the ability to reconstruct in thought what has been established in behaviour.

Bradbury (2004) maintains that the preoperational stage is characterised by egocentrism, as a child believes that everyone views the world exactly like he/she does. According to Hopkins (2002), egocentricity refers to the lack of differentiation between the internal world and the surrounding world, and between the child’s own point of view and that of others. Hopkins (2002) asserts that this state of uncertainty and non-differentiation induce emerging concepts in the child’s thought processes. Therefore, in terms of death and in this context, it can be accepted that the child is not yet ready to grasp or acknowledge the finality of death during the preoperational phase. Their egocentric thinking inspires ways to keep the deceased alive, in their minds.

### **2.3.3 Concrete operational stage (seven to eleven years)**

According to Di Ciacco (2008), the concrete operational stage denotes the 7–11 years age range, where a more advanced level of conceptual and operational thinking occurs. During this stage, children can perform concrete operations, and they can reason logically as long as they can apply their reasoning to specific or concrete examples (Santrock, 2010:283). They can think logically because they can take multiple aspects of a situation into account (Papalia, Gross & Feldman, 2003:266). This means that children begin to reason rationally about concrete features of the world (Siegler et al., 2011:139). Webb (2002:5) suggests that children at this age would prefer believing that they are exempt from dying, “as the thought of death being an inevitability can become threatening, unpleasant and ineffective towards the child’s future.”

Wass (1984:4,5) suggest that the child in this stage understands and is able to accept that death is irreversible. Di Ciacco (2008:98) maintains that children at this age do not need someone to fight their battles but to teach them how to fight and handle their own battles in a constructive way, meaning that children must be assisted in processing the death of a loved one themselves (Di Ciacco, 2008:102).

This stage for children becomes very complex as they view death as an inevitable finality for all living things, except themselves (Seibert et al., 2003:32). Children also begin to understand the depth of loss and that death is personal; this helps a child to fully understand the concept of death. A child at this age is also very interested in the physical details of the death, and will be curious about every process involved in the burial and grieving. According to Di Ciacco (2008:98) this age can be very confusing for children as they may harbour feelings of compassion, yet simultaneously act quite mean to others. They form allegiances with other peers who may not be as compassionate, especially towards a child who has suffered a loss. “[T]oday, with cell phones and Internet, one’s peers can gossip anonymously and viciously, leaving a bereaved child feeling even more vulnerable”, Di Ciacco (2008:98) observes. Webb (2002:6) believes that children understand the finality and irreversibility of death by the age of 9-10.

## **2.4 PSYCHOSOCIAL DEVELOPMENT**

Child psychiatrist Erik Erikson’s (1902-1994) theory of psychosocial development (1982) shifts the focus from the aforementioned Piagetian views on learning and cognitive development to a substantially greater focus on emotions and personality (Bukatko & Daehler, 2004:27). Erikson proposed eight stages of human development in his psychosocial stage theory (Siegler et al., 2011:347), each characterised by a unique psychological issue or crisis (Santrock, 2010:24).

Psychosocial development consists of the following life stages as well as the crises attached to each stage.

**Table 2.1: Erikson’s Psychosocial Development (Newman & Newman, 2011:70)**

<b>LIFE STAGE</b>	<b>PSYCHOSOCIAL CRISIS</b>
Infancy (birth to 2 years)	Trust versus mistrust
Toddlerhood (2–3)	Autonomy versus shame and doubt
Early school age (4–6)	Initiative versus guilt
Middle childhood (6–12)	Industry versus inferiority
Early adolescence (12–18)	Group identity versus alienation
Later adolescence (18–24)	Individual identity versus identity confusion
Early adulthood (24–34)	Intimacy versus isolation
Middle adulthood (34–60)	Generativity versus stagnation
Later adulthood (60–75)	Integrity versus despair
Elderhood (75 until death)	Immortality versus extinction

Erikson postulates that the more success the individual has in resolving the crisis, the healthier his or her development will be (Santrock, 2010:24). Supporting their view, Bukatho and Daehler (2004:24) explain that triumph in earlier stages will set the foundation for successful negotiation of later stages. Therefore, the manner in which children resolve developmental challenges at each stage affects their abilities to cope with future developmental tasks (Steinberg et al. 1990:11). The psychosocial crisis related to the child in the Foundation Phase (6-9 year old), as indicated in the table above, will next be discussed.

#### **2.4.1 Industry versus Inferiority**

The fourth stage of development includes Grades 1, 2 and 3 of the Foundation Phase school years and is regarded by Siegler et al. (2011:349) as the most important stage as the child masters cognitive and social skills. Newman and

Newman (2012:322) define “industry” as an eagerness to acquire skills and perform meaningful work. In Erikson’s view (1987:232), the inner self seems all set for “entrance into life” during this stage, although the children’s lives are still dominated by school life. According to Santrock (2010) children now need to direct their energies toward mastering knowledge and intellectual skills. Instead of using initiative, the child now learns to gain recognition by producing things (Erikson, 1987:233). At no other stage of life is the child more enthusiastic about learning than at the late phase of early childhood’s period of expansive imagination (Santrock, 2010:67). This means that the child is developmentally ready to build, construct and question the composition of objects. School seems to be a culture all by itself, with its own goals and limits, its achievements and disappointments (Erikson, 1987:233). According to Elkind (1967:11), Erikson argues that the psychosocial dimension that emerges during this period has a sense of industry at one extreme and a sense of inferiority at the other.

The negative outcome is that the child may develop a sense of inferiority feeling incompetent and unproductive. Newman and Newman (2012:322) explain that “children who cannot master certain skills experience some feelings of inferiority”. Successful experiences can make a child feel competent, but failure can lead to excessive feelings of inadequacy or inferiority. The role of the adult such as parent or teacher is to assist the child to master the skills, thereby overcoming feelings of inferiority. If the child loses a parent or someone significant, the crisis may sway towards inferiority, and as illustrated before, this may impact negatively on the child for the remainder of his/her life (Siegler et al., 2011:349). Machajewski and Kronk (2013:447) concur that the child experiencing loss at this age renders a child different according to his/her peers, triggering a sense of inferiority in the child. Whether the child develops a sense of industry or inferiority no longer depends solely on the caretaking efforts of the parents, but on the actions and offices of other social institutions like schools and teachers – the child’s increased exposure to social interaction away from home becomes an important parameter in this circumstance (Elkind, 1967:11). A child’s well-being is of utmost importance at this stage in his/her life, and the loss of a parent or caregiver may cause feelings of intense fear and helplessness (McClatchy, Vonk, & Palardy 2009:307). Horn (2014:52) explains that he envisions grief as a “collective activity”, meaning that the child not only



experiences the loss of that person, but loses his entire structure of life as well as his identity.

An essential element of this study is knowing how these stages influence grief. According to Maercker, Bonanno, Horowitz, and Znoj (1998), "industry" can be interpreted as the satisfaction associated with achieved goals and gained self-esteem. In terms of death, Maercker et al. (1998) refer to the prominence of inferiority as a negative effect that is expressed toward the deceased or the self. Inferiority in this sense is defined as self-diminishment or the result of being inadequately recognised. From these statements it can be deduced that death can be understood by the growing child; however, it can negatively impact on the child's psyche, depending on the way the child perceives him/herself. If the child has a low self-esteem, then it becomes more likely that the child will adopt a negative frame of mind regarding the loss, and this internalisation will continue to affect the child until he/she learns how to constructively deal with the loss. Seibert et al. (2003:32) explains that when children understand the inevitability of death, then they will realise that circumstances will not forever remain the same, and they will have to acquire mental skills to overcome losses and grow in the process.

Thompson (1994:25) illuminates the connectedness between emotional development and the relationships that the child is involved in. Thompson (1994:25) writes "relationships in general are considered to be a critical context for the development of emotionality." This means that it is important for the child to have friends and family since it increases the child's emotional prowess, which in turn will help the child during a time of need. Bradbury (2004:101) notes the interrelation between cognition and emotion when maintaining that "to understand children and their interactions with death in a comprehensive and responsible way, it is necessary to pay attention to their developmental level, but development is not merely a cognitive affair, rather it involves emotions, behaviours and values as well." Trauma, as a result of the death of a loved one, can have a very negative effect on a child's physical as well as emotional state of being (Steele & Kuban, 2013:51).

Dyregrov and Dyregrov (2008:71) explain that emotional development is a crucial element of a child's life. Lewis (2009:16) adds that the Foundation Phase child

“reflect a greater sense of emotional maturity and development with a noticeable change from helplessness to independence and self-reliance.” Dyregrov and Dyregrov (2008:72) warn that if children experience death during this phase, their emotional state gets severely affected, and they may tend to ignore their current grief and simply desire their lives to return to normal. Steele and Kuban (2013:48) further emphasise that traumatised children have significant difficulties with learning, emotional regulation, integrated functioning, and social development. Bereaved children have higher levels of emotional disturbance and symptoms than non-bereaved children for up to two years after the death of a parent, and despite the risk of major psychiatric disorders developing, mental health services are not offered routinely to grieving children (Dyregrov & Dyregrov, 2008:72).

The theoretical frameworks by Piaget (1896-1980) and Erikson (1902-1994) explain how the child’s development level impact on their understanding and processing of death. The theories indicate that a child’s comprehension of death determines the severity of grief. Children in the Foundation Phase have the ability to understand that death is inevitable (Seibert et al., 2003:31), and are therefore capable of grieving.

## **2.5 GRIEF IN CHILDREN**

Loss is the state of being that occurs when a person is deprived of someone or something valued (Howarth & Leaman, 2001). Di Ciacco (2008:37) explains that when a child experiences loss of a loved one, the very being of the child is impacted: his world is shaken up, beliefs are shattered and expectations are destroyed. The loss of a parent or beloved is heart-breaking at any age, but the loss of a primary caregiver can be the most difficult grief to recover from for an inconsolable child (Becvar, 2001:146). Webb (2002:13) mentions that children have limited abilities to express their feelings and to tolerate the pain generated by loss. Marshall (1993:51) adds that children become grief stricken and cannot find peace in such situations; they crave the presence of the person who passed on, and as a result feel that they have been abandoned. A child’s routine – the only routine he/she is accustomed to – is grievously disrupted when a loved one within the household passes away, and so many norms and aspects of his life change so quickly that his existence feel like a form of torment (Kast, 1988:15). Machajewski and Kronk (2013:444) concur that

bereaved children can be severely affected if they do not have adequate emotional support to assist them during their grieving processes. Kast (1988:15) warns that the child experiences a sudden identity crisis, as the person who once meant so much no longer exists.

Marshall (1993:66) discusses the following determining factors affect the way in which a person can react to loss:

- **How a person died:** The manner of death influences the severity of grief. If a long illness precedes the death, then it's a form of relief for those having had to witness the deceased's suffering (Marshall, 1993:39).
- **Sudden death:** The death is a severe shock to the deceased's loved ones. Whether the cause of death was medical (e.g. a heart attack), or being a victim of crime or an accident, the bereaved is taken by surprise and the grief is likely to be of a traumatic nature.
- **The quality of the relationship with the deceased:** The strength of a relationship affects the manner or severity of grief. Death in the family is naturally more traumatic than the passing away of an acquaintance known only in passing (Marshall, 1993:18). Kast (1988:11) agrees that close ties within a family and the specific bond between two members of a family are determining factors in the experiences of grief. Parents, spouses, children, siblings and grandparents are all closely related in the familial sense, and any death within those relations will generally be traumatic and difficult to overcome.
- **The support structure during grief:** The availability of support is very influential as a mechanism to help a bereaved to cope with loss. It is not unheard of for grieving persons to attempt suicide when faced with a severe personal loss (Kast, 1988:105). Any form of support is beneficial when dealing with loss – it is important to stay close to family, friends, and to talk to supportive people who are trustworthy and responsible. Access to a constant support structure is of prime importance during times of grief (Di Ciacco, 2008:25). Webb (2002:45) suggests that when a family suffers a loss, then a type of support structure formed by the school (teacher), and sectors both

religious (church) and secular (community), should be established to assist the family members in overcoming their loss. Steele and Kuban (2013:123) suggest that it is important for teachers and other school personnel to be “trauma informed”, so that when death occurs within the school environment, they will be better equipped to support the grieving child adequately. For teachers to assist bereaved children “special attention should be given to the age and level of cognitive understanding of the children, as well as to the nature of the death and the quality of existing support” (Webb, 2002:66). Webb (2002:210) further suggests that the teacher should be able to provide children with a “safe place and permission to confront and express feelings.”

- **Experience of loss in the past:** A person who has experienced loss before is more accustomed to adjust to the stages and feelings of grief than a person who is experiencing it for the first time. However, no two deaths are the same, nor are the grieving process, but having experienced it before removes the initial shock of uncertainty and suspense (Kast, 1988:69). Goldman (2000b) suggests that complicated grief may transpire after multiple losses, and after sudden or traumatic death.

Webb (2002) states that the most difficult aspect to cope with regarding death, is to manage the grief that follows. Webb further asserts that there is no blueprint for grieving; there are merely stages of grief and guidelines for coping or support, though none are guaranteed (Webb, 2002). Shiver (2004:9) refers to Elizabeth Kubler-Ross (1926-2004) who developed a model for understanding the different stages of grief, which can be used to better understand and support the grieving person. For the purpose of this study, the model will be applied to the grieving child. Those stages of loss as identified by Kubler-Ross will be explained by linking Piaget’s (1896-1980) stages of cognitive development and Erikson’s (1902-1994) psychosocial stages of development to better understand grief in terms of a child’s development.

## 2.5.1 Stages of grief

This model consists of various stages that, according to Kubler-Ross and Kessler (2005:39), are mere guidelines to indicate what the child may experience according to their ages. Those guidelines may serve to assure the bereaved that their intense feelings and emotions are normal, and they may assist counsellors, caregivers of teachers to provide emotional support to the griever (Kubler-Ross & Kessler, 2005:472). The stages described here are normally experienced in this order though they are not sequentially fixed, and aspects of these stages may be experienced at any given time.

### 2.5.1.1 Stage one: Denial/isolation and shock

According to Kubler-Ross and Kessler (2005:39), denial is the first stage of grief that is often misunderstood, as it may seem like the grieving person is in disbelief. Jacobs (1997) believes it is easier to believe something terrible didn't happen than accepting that it did. Kubler-Ross and Kessler (2005:40) further state that "for a person who has lost a loved one, denial is more symbolic than literal." They emphasise that it means the realisation that the deceased will never again be seen alive, slowly sinks in, and not that the griever wholly denies the fact that their loved one has died. Axelrod (2006) posits that children need this phase as a defence mechanism, used to buffer the initial shock. In the initial stage (Brasch & Keen, 2008), it may well be easier for children to convince themselves that the person is on vacation and will be returning soon, rather than them being dead. According to Piaget's pre-operational stage, death is commonly seen by children as temporary and reversible (Spencer, 2010:2), because it is easier for them to believe that death is not permanent, instead of accepting the harsh reality of death.

Denial is often followed by shock, and feelings of anxiety or panic in the cases of children. Worden (1996:92) explains that children experience anxiety initially due to the fear of loss, and a fear that they may lose another person or item that they love. Goldman (2000b:58) states that the child will develop an overwhelming sense of attachment to the remaining parent and will often morbidly fear the loss of that parent. Children need time to rebuild trust. The child's feelings of anxiety may be

exacerbated by a realisation that death may also visit themselves. Worden (1996) mentions that anxiety is experienced to a deeper extent one year after the incident than immediately afterwards.

It is of importance to this study to understand the link between the cognitive development of a child and the feelings of grief that a child experiences. According to Piaget's concrete operational stage a child would prefer to believe they are exempt from death simply because they cannot imagine dying. Kubler-Ross (2005:40) interprets daydreaming as an act of denial: the child is yearning and pining due to dampened emotions and his/her nomadic state of mind (Di Giacco, 2008:98). Erikson's psychosocial model is used to better understand the developing child in terms of grief. In the industry versus inferiority state it is noted how denial ties in with a feeling of inferiority, as children experience a diminished sense of self-worth and purpose. In this scenario a child would rather pretend the person never existed than deal with their death (Worden, 2009:45).

#### **2.5.1.2 Stage two: Anger**

Brasch and Keen (2008) state that once the denial of death wears off a more enduring emotion is needed, and this finds expression in the form of anger. The bereaved realises the harshness of their situation when the reality of death becomes more apparent (Axelrod, 2006), triggering their emotions to evolve towards anger. Kubler-Ross and Kessler (2005:48) state that anger is a difficult and limitless emotion to contain. Anger is not only directed at friends and family, but the bereaved often direct their anger at God, questioning God indirectly about their loss. Personal pain underlies anger – a pain that leaves the grieving child feeling deserted and abandoned.

In terms of psychosocial development, a child is learning to master certain skills at this age. However, Newman and Newman (2012:322) explain that “children who cannot master certain skills experience some feelings of inferiority.” The responsibilities that parents/teachers have to assist children in mastering these skills, aids the process of overcoming feelings of inferiority. If the child loses a parent or someone significant, the crisis may sway towards inferiority, implying that this may

have a negative impact on the child for the rest of his/her life (Siegler et al., 2011:349). Goldman (2000b:56) suggests that anger is an expressive outlet for the child during his grieving period, and it needs to be directed accordingly to avoid a build-up to greater problems, such as the child acting out later in life or becoming violent as an adult.

In terms of the cognitive development of children, a child cannot grasp death fully while in the preoperational stage (Stillion & Attig, 2015), and the inability to give expression to their emotions leads to outbursts, such as anger. In the next stage – the concrete operational age – children become in turns compassionate as well as mean (Di Ciacco, 2008:98). A child living through loss has to deal with many overwhelming emotions that his friends are not aware of (Di Ciacco, 2008:104). Any small or even insignificant remark by a friend may trigger this vulnerable state, leaving the child feeling hurt, who will then want revenge (becoming mean) due to resulting anger (Kubler-Ross & Kessler, 2005:161). In terms of the child's psychosocial development it can be inferred that when a loved person who taught the child certain skills dies, the child will find it significantly more challenging to continue with those skills, causing a sense of inferiority that leads to anger (as already illustrated), followed by guilt. According to Di Ciacco (2008:41) guilt and anger can be reciprocally negative influences, resulting in an amplified net negative impact on the child.

### **2.5.1.3 Stage three: Bargaining**

Kubler-Ross and Kessler (2005:50) explain that persons would go to extreme lengths to prevent the loss of anyone they love. People may beg and plead with friends, family or even God, to save the person that is in danger of dying. According to Di Ciacco (2008:41) guilt is often used as companion to bargaining during this phase of grief. Consequently, people tend to use any possible means of escape, however unreasonable, from the pain of loss. This stage, according to Jernigan (2010), is a quite complex stage for children, as they tend to bargain with God. Bargaining can be easily recognised in the preoperational age, as a child who cannot fully understand death yet (Stillion & Attig, 2015) will endeavour to bargain with God in order to have the loved one return alive. In the concrete operational stage children

are very logical (Santrock, 2010) and hence do not fathom death as a spiritual force of nature, and will resort to bargain with actual objects in the effort to comprehend the nature of the loss that has occurred.

Axelrod (2006) cautions that this is a very vulnerable stage for a child, since the child believes that he can become a 'better' child if that which has been taken away is returned to him, the child prays for an impossible feat. It is vital that children in this phase are properly managed, as they may venture beyond the limits of reason in the effort to 'please' God and regain what they lost (Kubler-Ross & Kessler, 2005:57). As stated above, Santrock (2010) suggests that children need to direct their energy toward mastering knowledge and gaining intellectual skills. When the outcome is not achieved, in this instance the plea to have the loved one return from death, the child may develop a sense of inferiority, feeling incompetent and unworthy. In the context of this study, inferiority is understood as the inability of the child to master certain skills, due to the absence of the person who was supposed to teach him/her those skills.

Guilt is another emotion that affects grieving children. Goldman (2000b:51) suggests that young children frequently misinterpret messages from their parents and blame themselves for any incidence that occurs thereafter. Children often experience guilt after the death of a close relative due to a suspicion that it happened only because they have or haven't done specific things (Di Ciacco, 2008:41). Children tend to regret the things that they have done, but also regret not telling the person how much they loved them, or not apologising for any transgressions, resulting in a worrying sense of guilt (Goldman, 2000b:58). That feeling of guilt can linger with the child as long as two years. Some children have great difficulty in accepting the death, and commit suicide as a direct result (Worden, 1996).

#### **2.5.1.4 Stage four: Depression**

After bargaining, the reality of the loss sets in (Kubler-Ross & Kessler, 2005:65). Kubler-Ross and Kessler (2005:65) propose that feelings of emptiness enter the heart, causing grief to descend to a much deeper level, forming a depressive state of mind that the sufferer is convinced will never disappear. With regard to grief, "It is



important to understand that the feeling of depression is not a sign of mental illness” (Kubler-Ross & Kessler 2005:64). Depression causes the suffering individuals to believe they have nothing to live for, resulting in an unwillingness to face life on a daily basis. This stage of depression is very difficult for children to manage (Jernigan, 2010) and may cause insomnia, binge eating and reclusiveness in children (Axelrod, 2006).

Brasch and Keen (2008) suggest that any person (child or adult) may experience a whole range of destructive feelings in the aftermath of death – including guilt, anger, frustration, sadness, regret and hopelessness – convinced that they will never again feel the same as before. Children need to be monitored carefully to prevent them attempting suicide as a means of escape from these feelings. They need a solid support structure, and feel they can rely on available assistance whenever the need arises (Kubler-Ross & Kessler, 2005:475).

In terms of cognitive development, depression occurs regularly in both the preoperational and concrete operational stages. In the preoperational stage it is easy to understand the child becoming depressed as they do not yet have a comprehensive understanding of life’s harsh realities (Stillion & Attig, 2015). Children quickly sense the lack of a person to which they have grown accustomed. In the concrete operational stage, the child can get stuck in a rut of depression once they blame themselves for the loss that has occurred, as they begin to fully understand the inevitability and finality of death (Seibert et al., 2003). According to psychosocial developmental theory, a child who cannot master certain skills while in the stage of 'industry versus inferiority', often adopts an inferiority complex and a negative perception of life (Maercker et al., 1998). This child’s vulnerability will manifest itself in a sense of “worthlessness”, resulting in serious depression. The inherent danger in this situation is found in children’s potential inability to modify their perceptions, and becoming stuck in a depressive state (Di Ciacco, 2008:108).

#### **2.5.1.5 Stage five: Acceptance**

This stage signifies the moment when the grieving person finally accepts that the person has passed away and that this new reality is a permanent reality (Kubler-

Ross & Kessler, 2005:76). Healing brings the bereaved closer to the person they have lost, as they remember all the rewarding times spent together. “Healing looks like recollecting, reorganising and remembering” (Kubler-Ross & Kessler 2005:72). This is a stage some children never reach (Jernigan, 2010), if they cannot overcome the challenges of previous stages – this is a possibility for children who may not yet have developed the cognitive skills to comprehend the permanence of death (Piaget, 1971). Axelrod (2006) states that this is the final stage when children realise that life ahead will always be without the person they lost, and that they need to resume their daily activities. The child finally deals with reality (Brasch & Keen, 2008).

Acceptance is the final stage of grief. In terms of cognitive development, the act of acceptance can be fully understood and applied by children in both the late concrete operational and formal operational stages, provided they received care and support from the moment they experienced the loss. Seibert et al. (2003) emphasise that it is only in the transitional stage between the concrete operation stage and formal operational stage that children can begin to understand and accept the finality of death. Within psychosocial development, a child will tend to accept death only if they perceive death from an industrial point of view, and absorb the positivity of the life the deceased has lead (Maercker et al. 1998).

Support provided by a capable person, preferably a teacher or parent is essential for helping a child to move through all the above mentioned stages and ultimately reach the stage of acceptance. The following section will explore some guidelines for teachers or other assistants in the pursuit of supporting a grieving child.

## **2.6 GUIDELINES FOR EMOTIONAL SUPPORT**

Webb (2010) suggests that adults often lack patience and do not value or respect the amount of emotion attached to a loss, as experienced by children. This stunts their ability to assist the child in emotional acceptance and personal resolution of their loss, grief and bereavement. Rowling (2003) warns that adults tend to be logical and may dismiss children’s feelings without realising that they are effectively ignoring their real needs, which in turn prompt children to cease communication related to

their emotions and loss. The grieving process will be easier for a child who can open up to a supportive adult (Rowling, 2003).

Dyregrov and Dyregrov (2008:141) states “support comprises different emotional and non-emotional expressions”. Kubler-Ross and Kessler (2005:275) posit that support is very important in times of death as it helps a grieving person achieve closure on the situation. Di Ciacco (2008) explains that emotional support has a significant impact on the child’s grieving ability and expression of emotions. Goldman (2006:77) highlights that “although young children may not express grief in the same way as older children, they still need to be supported through loss”. People grieve in different ways, therefore support should be accommodating to differing needs. Some grievers need physical support, others need to vent verbally; whatever kind of support may be appropriate, it is always welcomed during a time of grief (Dyregrov & Dyregrov, 2008:47).

Dyregrov and Dyregrov (2008:141) explain that the providing of support encompasses all the actions like being present, exchanging hugs, sharing tears, squeezing a hand and many other gestures of sympathy. Di Ciacco (2008) stresses the importance of being considerate towards a child’s emotional state. This is achieved by relating to children on a personal level and acknowledge the depth of their feelings; helping them to feel safe and accepted in one’s presence, while signalling a willingness to communicate and listen (Di Ciacco, 2008).

Rowling (2003) emphasises the benefits of emotional support to help children overcome their grief. Emotional support is instrumental in allowing the child to be comfortable and encouraged to discuss their feelings and reveal their emotions. Emotional support can also be provided through empathetic listening and an understanding of the required amount of consolation needed to be given. These forms of support may not always seem significant, but for children who experience grief for the first time, access to a confidant may have long-lasting benefits (Dyregrov & Dyregrov, 2008:141).

Another strategy to support grieving children involve using appropriate games or other activities by care givers (Kellett, 2011). In this way caregivers can recover

children's sense of emotional security. Field (2010) suggests that the caregiver should adopt a nurturing nature to improve a child's emotional state. An adult caretaker may accomplish this through reading and responding to the child's emotional signals. Dyregrov and Dyregrov (2008:141) posit that those who offer support need to be 'receptive', meaning that they need to be good listeners, and be willing to listen to exhaustive repetition of stories. Support can potentially be rendered by anyone close to the child (Kubler-Ross & Kessler (2005:275).

Steele and Kuban (2013:169) suggest that younger children have difficulty giving verbal expression to emotional experiences, while they need opportunities to express those feelings in a physical sense. Cohen et al. (2006) emphasise the importance for a caregiver to offer emotional support to allow the child to feel that they are in a space of safety. Rowling (2003:52) advises that people who offer support to the bereaved need to be honest, trustworthy and truthful; they need to keep all communications with sufferers confidential, and continue their support through to completion. However, the supportive adult needs to have a grasp of the extent to which support should be administered. Dyregrov and Dyregrov (2008:141) concur that in order for any support network to succeed, the bereaved must be able to rely on this network to keep personal matters confidential.

The moment will arrive when the bereaved progresses and no longer require as much support as before, at which point the person offering the support will have to recognise that support work is nearing completion (Dyregrov & Dyregrov, 2008:142). The emotional development that occurs as a result of supportive actions is relevant to this study, as it improves cognisance of children's experiences of grief.

### **2.6.1 The role of the teacher in supporting the child emotionally**

Dyregrov and Dyregrov (2008:180) postulate that the teacher is the most important person to offer support to a grieving learner in a school environment. Rowling (2003:37) suggests that proper support cannot be given if the teacher is unaware of the learner's domestic situation; teachers need to speak to family members too, who can shed light on circumstances at home. Teachers need to be understanding in

terms of a child's performance at school after they experienced loss, since their intellectual, physical and emotional wellbeing has been affected by the loss (Rowling, 2003:23).

Rowling (2003:37) suggests the best strategy in supporting a grieving child includes avoiding extra attention projected at the child during lessons, inquiring in private if they are coping if they became upset in any way, allowing them to leave class if needed, requesting a friendly classmate to comfort and support them when they leave, and talking often to the child often to learn how support can be improved during this difficult time. It is important that the teacher reads, encourages and responds to children's emotions and behaviours in order to support them (Di Ciacco 2008:90).

Teachers can fortunately adjust homework and teaching sessions to suit the grieving learner and add comfort to the period of adjustment (Dyregrov & Dyregrov, 2008:181). Teachers need to be accommodating to any outbursts by grieving learners since they may serve as emotional outlets, depending on the nature of their situations (Rowling 2003:27). Dyregrov and Dyregrov (2008:181) posit that the most important conditions for successful support is the presence of trust and empathy between teacher and learner. Rowling (2003:33) states it is a teacher's duty to ensure that the grieving child feel secure in a psychological sense, inside and outside the classrooms. Seibert et al. (2003:49) advise that the more often a teacher shares experiences and feelings with a grieving learner, the more unguarded and trusting the child will become in turn. In this way a support structure is established between the teacher and learner, encouraging the child to confide in the teacher. Teachers need to be in regular contact with the bereaved learner to determine if the learner is coping well enough. It is in the teachers' best interest to adapt to the needs of the learner, by making their learning environment comfortable as well as informing the fellow learners of their friends' loss, urging them to be sympathetic and supportive (Dyregrov & Dyregrov, 2008:181).

If teachers can reassure learners that they truly care and support them during such challenging periods, the learners will likely turn to their teachers when they are ready to confide and discuss their experiences (Dyregrov & Dyregrov, 2008:181). In

instances where the deceased is a close relative who shared a household, Rowling (2003:39) advises the teacher to visit the child at the house or attend the funeral, to make the learner aware of the active support that the teacher is making available. Seibert et al. (2003:4) stresses the need for teachers to acknowledge a child's feelings, and help them to verbalise those feelings, thereby assisting their effort to cope with their realities. Di Ciacco (2008:90) agrees that teachers can acknowledge children's feelings by reassuring them that they matter and are accepted, regardless of their circumstances.

Children and adults all suffer losses, and prior experience of related feelings is mandatory for adults to skilfully "explore, accept and discuss children's feelings" while providing emotional support (Seibert et al. 2003:48). Rowling (2003:22) emphasises the teachers' importance in providing young sufferers of grief with effective coping mechanisms. Potts and Potts (2013:103) agrees that teachers have to approach bereaved learners with utmost compassion and concern, as the children are still in vulnerable states of mind.

Teachers have to be comfortable discussing death, and be able to handle any questions in the classroom relating to death. Children are quick to interpret a teacher's mannerisms and responses, and will instinctively withdraw or change the topic if they sense the teacher's discomfort (Seibert et al., 2003:53). Rowling (2003:23) believes it is imperative that teachers boost the bereaved child's self-esteem when the child returns to school, as it will help the child improve on intellectual, physical and emotional levels. Seibert et al. (2003:79) posit that a child may undergo behavioural changes as a result of loss, necessitating the teacher's awareness of the event and willingness to monitor the learner. Typical traits and symptoms that should be tolerated for a certain amount of time include a lack of desire to participate in activities, diminished appetites, insomnia, persistent nightmares and recurring stomach-aches without physical cause. Teachers have to be aware that if these behavioural patterns persist, then it is advisable to incorporate professional therapy (Seibert et al. 2003:79).

Di Ciacco (2008:54) suggests that teachers need to utilise resources to provide coping mechanisms that will enhance children's emotionality and inner strength at

the time of grief. Children tend to become angry at the time of death as they find it difficult to deal with all the confusing emotions that they experience anew. Hart and Garza (2013:307) advise that engaging learners in activities helps them to express their feelings of grief. Children in the late primary years find it challenging to cope emotionally at the time of loss, so Rowling (2003:24) suggests to teachers that they should encourage outdoor activities for the learners, such as hiking or swimming. Constructing classroom memorials provide an effective way to encourage learners to offer passionate responses (Heath & Cole, 2011:246). A teacher has to help grieving learners to verbalise their emotions, and guide them to find acceptable physical outlets to help them come to terms with their emotions. In this way the learners will achieve self-sufficiency and become equipped to manage future emotional stressors (Di Ciacco 2008:106).

Rowling (2003:23) prompts teachers to understand the children's perspectives and to include them in the proceedings that follow losses. Di Ciacco (2008:107) advises teachers to use positive reinforcement techniques with bereaved children to help them to remain positive, thereby instilling balanced outlooks on life. One productive technique may be for the teacher to mediate between the grieving child and another learner who has suffered a similar loss, to enable a comfortable environment where they can share their feelings and elevate their collective spirits. Heath and Cole (2011:246) suggest that it is beneficial to remind learners that the deceased lives on in our memories, and that they are allowed to talk about the deceased and express their related feelings.

The school offers a unique environment where learners form relationships with friends and teachers, creating potential for support networks to aid bereaved learners. It is imperative that learners return to school as soon as possible after their loss, as this maintains some form of cohesive structure to their lives, as opposed to a sombre and spiritually draining atmosphere at home (Dyregrov et al., 2013:125). Hart and Garza (2013:307) indeed found that it is beneficial for learners when teachers resume their normal routine as quickly as possible, considering that the learner yearns for a sense of normalcy after the shock of bereavement.

## 2.7 CONCLUSION

This Chapter focused on theoretical perspectives on the experience of grief by the child (6-9 years). As children at this age often do not express their grief externally, it is important for caregivers and especially teachers to know and recognise the symptoms of grief, and how to support the grieving child. Piaget's as well as Erikson's theories on childhood development were used to illustrate the various stages that children undergo, and what their skills and abilities are at specific stages in their development. Kubler-Ross's model was finally discussed to give clarity to the various stages of grief. In the following Chapter the research design and methodology will be discussed in greater detail.





## **CHAPTER 3**

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 INTRODUCTION**

Chapter 3 details the research design and the methods used to conduct the empirical study that focused on the experiences of children who encountered loss. In order to gain insight into the experiences of children who were exposed to grief, rich data should be gathered (Rule & John, 2011). This Chapter starts by explaining the research design, by first describing the paradigm in which my study was situated. It is followed by a discussion of the qualitative approach where I made use of a multiple case study to gather data with the express purpose of answering the research questions. Descriptions of research methods and research sites precedes motivations for a chosen way of selecting participants to this study. Data collection strategies and methods of analysis will be explained in detail, followed by an exposition on standards of trustworthiness associated with my research. Ethical measures are discussed.

#### **3.2 RESEARCH DESIGN**

Research design is seen as the general strategy for solving a research problem (Leedy & Ormrod, 2014:76). Luttrell (2010:4) explains that a research design is not a blueprint that is drawn up in advance and set in stone; it is rather a plan that follows an ongoing set of principles that guide decision-making throughout a qualitative study, consisting of elements such as the paradigm that guides the study, the approach the study follows as well as the type of method that the study uses. These sub-sections of the design will now be explained.

##### **3.2.1 Research Paradigm**

Within qualitative research there are many different paradigms that comprise interpretive, constructivist, positivist or critical theories (Maree, 2012). Paradigms serve as a "lens" or organising principles by which reality is interpreted

(Nieuwenhuis, 2010:48). This means that the researcher is allowed to view a phenomenon according to a certain perspective. Burton and Bartlett (2009:18) report that a research paradigm describes models of research that reflect a general agreement on the nature of the world and how to investigate it. A paradigm for qualitative research focuses on people's social construction of their ideas and concepts" (Maree, 2007:54). Shkedi (2005:1) states that a paradigm presents a way of analysing the world in order to understand how different views interrelate and connect with reality.

This research was conducted within the interpretative paradigm, as it allowed me as the researcher to "understand human meanings and their behaviour, without intervening in the process" (Mills, Durepos & Wiebe, 2009:487). Hennink, Hutter and Bailey (2011) suggest that the researcher needs to be flexible, particularly when children as participants are involved. The interpretivist paradigm is therefore appropriate for this study, as it requires the child's interpretation of their lived experiences of grief. The researcher needs to listen to the children and their experiences, and must endeavour to determine possible ways that these children need support that can be used by the teacher to support them.

The strategy of inquiry, according to Denzin and Lincoln (2005), requires a number of skills, assumptions and practices. As the researcher, I had the responsibility to put the paradigm of interpretation into motion. The purpose of the interpretative paradigm is therefore to understand and explore the nature of social life, in relation to what the teacher/caregivers experienced within the classroom (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011).

As the researcher utilising the interpretive paradigm at an applicable location selected by myself, I chose to select the school where I am a Grade 1 teacher for convenience. It is a sensible selection, as it presented the most natural setting for me to gather relevant data, with learners still within the Foundation Phase. I selected learners in Grade 3, as I did not want to risk any personal bias by targeting learners from my own grade whose circumstances I may know in advance.

Considering Piaget's stages of development, I concluded that the concrete operational stage would be the most appropriate stage within Foundation Phase education to utilise as a research parameter. A child in the concrete operational stage is able to understand my instructions and to respond in the ways I require for this study. It seemed sensible therefore to have chosen learners in Grade 3, who are generally nine years old. Had I selected an even younger age group, explanation of the research goals and interpretation of my instructions to them could become questionable and problematic, due to a younger child's potentially more limited understanding of the research and my requirements as researcher.

I conducted semi-structured interviews, drawings and verbal narratives allowing both me and the participating child to get to know each other well enough to establish an acceptable level of trust. The topic of discussion was very personal to myself, and without mutual trust I may have had difficulties to obtain valuable information from the participating children. I recorded, transcribed and carefully observed the learners throughout the research procedure. All data collected through interviews, drawings, verbal narratives and an open qualitative questionnaire (teachers) were interpretive in nature (Gerring, 2006:69). It was helpful to me as researcher to construct a profile for each participant in order to understand him/her better. The profiles contained information about the learners' backgrounds in terms of family and home language, as well as their ages on the days when meetings took place. The profiles enabled me to know the participants well enough to gain an understanding of their domestic contexts, and to make more informed interpretations of their contributions to research data.

The interpretivist paradigm suited this kind of research well, because it allowed me as researcher to recognise each participant as an individual with a uniquely personal experience of grief, affecting each persona in varying ways (Gerring, 2006:69).

### **3.2.2 Qualitative approach**

Hennink, Hutter and Bailey (2011) define 'qualitative research' as an approach that examines people's experiences in detail. This study followed a qualitative research

approach involving case studies that rely heavily on participants' points of view, and not merely on published literature (Creswell, 2008:46). Creswell and Maree (2007:257) state that qualitative research focuses on a phenomenon where the data is mostly obtained through non-numerical means from participants in a study. The qualitative approach is also valuable in understanding the research process that was implemented. Qualitative research is descriptive, interactive and deals with exploring and understanding the central phenomenon related to the specific study. This strategy requires direct interaction with participants to obtain their information to be studied (Maree, 2012). The following table (Table 3.2) provides the characteristics of a qualitative approach, and how those were applied to my own research study.

**Table 3.1: Characteristics of a qualitative approach in this research study (Creswell, 2014; Creswell, 2011; Nieuwenhuis, 2007)**

Characteristics of a qualitative approach	Application in my research study
<p><b>Exploration</b></p> <p>Exploring a research problem and identifying an understanding of a central phenomenon (Creswell, 2011:16)</p>	<p>The phenomenon of this study was grief that children experienced. Exploration of a phenomenon led to the understanding of the phenomenon of grief and the support needed for Foundation Phase learners.</p> <p>This research is used to explore and understand children experiencing grief aiming to provide guidelines and identify support structures that teachers can use to help a child that is experiencing grief in the Foundation Phase classroom due to loss of a parent, sibling or grandparent.</p>
<p><b>Natural setting</b></p> <p>“[Q]ualitative researchers tend to collect data in the field at the site where participants experience the issue or problem under study” (Creswell, 2014:638).</p>	<p>The teachers of the participating learners also filled in an open qualitative questionnaire based on their experiences with the child in their classroom to further enhance the natural setting and understanding of the learners. Three</p>

Characteristics of a qualitative approach	Application in my research study
	Grade 3 learners were my participants for this study where data was collected via semi-structured interviews inside the classrooms.
<p><b>Convenience sampling</b></p> <p>Convenience sampling is sampling in which “respondents are chosen based on their convenience and ability (Babbie, 1990 in Creswell, 2009:148).”</p>	The school was selected by means of convenience sampling
<p><b>Purposeful sampling</b></p> <p>Purposeful sampling simply means that participants are selected because of some defining characteristics that make them needed for the study (Nieuwenhuis, 2007:79).</p>	I intentionally selected these three participants as they met the requirements for this study, which can be interpreted as having experienced loss during the previous year.
<p><b>The researcher as the key instrument</b></p> <p>In qualitative data researchers collect data themselves through “examining documents, observing behaviour, or interviewing participants” (Creswell, 2014:640).</p> <p>The researcher’s involvement and immersion in the changing, real world situation is imperative, as the researcher needs to record the details discovered throughout the study (Nieuwenhuis, 2007:79).</p>	The open qualitative questionnaires were given to the teachers and collected as they were completed. As the researcher I explained the and the purpose of my visits. I was able to write notes regarding different observations made by the children during conversations. The semi-structured interviews as well as the drawings occurred in the same environment, on different occasions.
<p><b>Participants meaning</b></p> <p>In qualitative research the researcher reserves special attention for the participants as they play a pivotal role in</p>	I initiated a drawings activity with each learner individually, asking them to explain the meaning of their drawings, which constituted the verbal narratives.

Characteristics of a qualitative approach	Application in my research study
the research process instead of the literature (Creswell, 2014:641).	
<p><b>Multiple sources of data</b></p> <p>Creswell (2014:640) states “Multiple sources of data: Qualitative researchers typically gather multiple forms of data, such as interviews, observations, documents, and audio-visual information rather than rely on a single data source.”</p>	<p>Although the research made me understand the concept of “grief” better, this research study itself granted me more information through open qualitative questionnaires with teachers of the three participants, interviews, drawings and narratives to understand the phenomenon in the context of my study.</p>
<p><b>Analysis of data</b></p> <p>The interviews conducted were audio recorded and the data gathered from there is transcribed and coded according to themes and categories (Nieuwenhuis, 2007:87)</p> <p>The researcher’s reflections assist in the investigating and understanding of the data (Creswell, 2008:56).</p> <p>The data analysis affirms categories, which are then categorized into patterns (Creswell, 2008:58).</p>	<p>After interviews and drawings activity with the three participants, the audio material was transcribed and themes and categories emerged from this process. I have made use of thematic analysis.</p> <p>Studying the transcribed notes and data from the open qualitative questionnaires, I began identifying themes that correlated with one another and labelled them accordingly.</p> <p>There were distinct relationships among the categories, which enabled me to construct patterns.</p>

The information contained in this table became evident throughout the research processes, and clearly indicate that a case study design was best suited for this specific research project.

### 3.2.3 Multiple case study

Woodside (2010:1) defines case study as providing a deep understanding of the thought processes, intentions, and contextual influences that are identified within case study research. According to Rule and John (2011:7), multiple case studies can consist of either single or multiple case studies and can be analysed in many different ways. Case studies can include multiple cases where more than one case gives insight to the phenomenon being studied (Creswell, 2008:477). In my study there were three participants, each of whom involved a case, as each experienced loss of a different family member or close person. Rule and John (2011:5) suggest that a “case study is used to refer to the process of conducting an investigation, the unit of study and the product of this type of investigation.” The authors add that case studies consist of four main strengths: depth, flexibility, versatility and manageability. In the following table these strengths and how they apply to my study will be discussed.

**Table 3.2: Four main strengths of Case Study Research (Rule & John, 2011:7)**

Four main strengths of case study research	Application in my research study
<p><b>Depth</b></p> <p>Depth allows the intensity of the data collection procedure enabling rich data (Rule &amp; John, 2011:7).</p>	<p>In order to ensure depth, I made use of three participants with whom I spent some time to conduct the semi-structured interviews, drawings activities as well as verbal narratives. It was not merely a matter of collecting the data through various methods, but being able to interact with each participant personally and collect rich data.</p>
<p><b>Flexibility</b></p> <p>Flexibility allows for various methods of collecting data and analysing depending on the particular case (Rule &amp; John, 2011:7).</p>	<p>Four methods of collecting data were used. Firstly, an open qualitative questionnaire was given to the teachers of each participant selected</p>

Four main strengths of case study research	Application in my research study
	<p>for this study. This enabled me as researcher to obtain an unbiased (external) opinion of the learners and their characteristics within the classrooms. Secondly, semi-structured interviews gave me the opportunity to get to know the children better and for them to understand the purpose of my study. Thirdly, I arranged a drawings activity based on the child's feelings and their state of grief. I did not interpret the drawings, but instead elicit discussion (verbal narratives), to guide them to explain to me what they had drawn, and to shed light on their feelings that inspired those drawings.</p>
<p><b>Versatility</b></p> <p>Versatility can be used in combination of other research approaches (Rule &amp; John, 2011:7)</p>	<p>This research was versatile as it involves phenomenology, in the sense that I fully immersed myself into the objects of my study, gaining first-hand insights into the lives of these children and their states of grief, as 'lived experiences'.</p>
<p><b>Manageability</b></p> <p>Manageability allows for focus on one particular study, which can be delineated and distinguished from other units of study allowing accuracy to the study (Rule &amp; John, 2011:8).</p>	<p>This study was manageable, as it did not consist of many different approaches, and only three participants were involved. I utilised a reasonable amount of data collection methods to render the study applicable and accurate.</p>



### **3.3 RESEARCH METHODS**

According to Creswell (2014:114), “research methods involve the forms of data collection, analysis, and interpretation that researchers propose for their studies.” It describes how decisions are made with regards to locations, data collection strategies, and data analysis processes. The research method in this study is discussed here according to the selected research sites, participants, and data collection and analytical procedures.

#### **3.3.1 Research site and participants**

In this section it is explained where the research was conducted, what steps were taken in selecting the participants, as well as certain precautions taken due to the minor age and vulnerabilities of the children who participated.

##### **3.3.1.1 Research site**

The research site is of fundamental importance to the study, as it is the place where children spend time on a daily basis, and can be regarded as their second home (Creswell, 2014:816). It therefore makes sense that emotional support is also given at the school location. This research site is also the place where the data is collected (Creswell, 2014:368). The school, which served as research site, was situated in a suburb in Pretoria. The school hosted learners from different countries as well as in and around Pretoria. This particular school has a very rich history. It opened first in 1917 as an English medium government school. In 1937 it changed to an exclusive Afrikaans school. Finally, in 1995 the school became a multicultural school accommodating all races. Thus the school accommodates many different languages and cultures that exist symbiotically in classrooms, with English as the main language of instruction. There are approximately 35 learners per class, amounting to a population of 1100 learners attending. I am a Grade 1 teacher at the school, and I chose to enact my research on Grade 3 learners, as they are old enough to understand and explain concepts, yet not old enough to shy away from displaying their emotions. The school was selected by means of convenience sampling. I also knew it would not be wise to select learners from my own Grade 1 class for such a

sensitive research topic, as these are children I know too well to risk allowing my own emotions and opinions of them to cloud my judgement. I had a slight but inconsequential bond, no more than a passing acquaintance, with the three Grade 3 learners selected, having briefly seen each other during weekly assemblies or extramural sports activities. It is a public school, and because I required learners from another grade as my own, consent had to be granted from both the school principal as well as the learners' teachers (see Appendices A & B).

### **3.3.1.2 The selection of participants**

Nieuwenhuis (2010:79) states that the selection of participants using the strategy of sampling, is simply the practice of selecting a representative portion of the population for a study; it is to purposefully select participants with certain characteristics that make them viable for contributing to useful data needed for a study. Participants are the individuals selected to participate in a research study, and from whom data is acquired in order to resolve the questions suggested in the study (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006:119). The participants in this study were three Grade 3 learners and their teachers.

- Participants

Creswell (2011:206) states "In purposeful sampling, researchers intentionally select individuals and sites to learn or understand the central phenomenon." I approached my principal and explained the nature of the assistance I require from other teachers for this research study. The principal and I then held a meeting with the Head of Department and the Grade 3 teachers, so that I could clearly explain to all of them what the research processes entail, and why a need existed for their involvement in the study. I requested the teachers to help me identify specific learners that had experienced recent grief. I gathered and spoke to the profiled Grade 3 learners, then picked my sample according to the nature of their losses, and the time when they experienced their grief. The learners had to have experienced grief in the form of death of a parent, sibling or grandparent. Three learners who had experienced such grief within the previous year were selected. These three learners attended separate classes and had experienced grief of different kinds.

Once I was sure the learners understood what was required from them, I sent letters of informed consent for their caregivers to sign and grant me permission to involve their respective children for my study (Appendix D).

After consent was given I met the learners again after regular school hours to help us all get acquainted, while I made them aware of the background to this study, its purpose and all its elements relevant to them, and exactly what was required of them. I also assured them that they have the right to withdraw from the process at any stage, if they wished to do so. I showed and explained their letters of assent to them (Appendix C). I then asked them to decide and indicate their decision by crossing over a face on the letter. With all prior ethical procedures adhered to, the data collection operations commenced.

- Teachers as participants

I held a meeting with the Grade 3 teachers explaining my research project and the relevance of their participation in my study. I also explained the technical matters such as objectivity and ethical issues involved with such young learners, and asked them for their consent to participate (Appendix A). The teachers helped me to identify learners experiencing grief, based on their knowledge of the learners in their classrooms. The teachers, who all agreed to participating, were then expected to fill out an open qualitative questionnaire which I, as the researcher, generated. This questionnaire gave me further insights into the children's situations. The motivation for incorporating the teachers into the data gathering process, was to gain perceptions of the children different to my own, for example an unbiased view of the way those children were regarded in the classrooms. The teachers' contributions enriched my findings on the children's data, and helped me to understand how I could assist the children in some way, had they not overcome their grief.

- The role of the researcher

My role as researcher was as a participant-observer. According to Creswell (2011:237), the participant-observer is a person wholly involved in the activities at a research site. A participant-observer is not merely a researcher but a participant as well (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010:350). Maree (2007:85) suggests that being a

participant-observer is related to active research, and this kind of study do require the researcher to be actively involved. I felt that being a participant-observer suited the study perfectly, as the procedures were undertaken in all of the participants' natural schooling environment, and the researcher and participants were already familiar with one another. I participated in the semi-structured interviews as I asked the children questions, while I took notes and conversed with them in a casual manner to help them feel at ease, even if sensitive topics were discussed. I also participated by initializing the drawing activities, which included me reading them a story I had written myself. I then prompted them to draw pictures that would depict how they felt about the grief that they had experienced.

Creswell (2011:237) states that the participant-observer needs to be observing within the setting and while the activities are taking place. I observed each learner as they drew their pictures, noting the expressions that reveal their emotions, as well as their feelings as it emerged in their drawings. I then had more conversations with them, prompting them to tell me what they had drawn and why – also very casually to encourage an openness. Everything was recorded and transcribed.

### **3.3.2 Data Collection**

Collecting 'personal data' can provide the research with rich information needed for the study (Creswell, 2011:246). Maree (2007:37) suggests that as the researcher it is important to collect reliable data in a natural setting about the specific topic. Data can be gathered through many different methods. To collect my data, I made use of semi-structured interviews, drawings, narratives and open qualitative questionnaires.

#### **3.3.2.1 Open qualitative questionnaire**

Creswell (2008:221) suggests that an open qualitative questionnaire is a process of observing and recording information obtained from the selected participants. I generated such a questionnaire (Appendix F) for each teacher to complete, to record their perceptions of the grieving children. I also strove to establish how much individual attention was given by each teacher towards the relevant child in the classroom, being aware that the child has experienced loss. The purpose here was

to establish whether my findings correlate with literature proclaiming the belief that many teachers do not assist the child in any manner, since most teachers allegedly assume that the child is too young to experience or understand the emotion of grief (Dyregrov et al., 2013:125). The answers provided by the teachers could reveal how involved they were with the grieving children.

Creswell (2008:224) recommends that all observations made by the researcher are immediately recorded in text format to ensure that no details of events, activities, behaviours or reactions slip through the cracks, reducing the study's validity and integrity. It is only in the case of the open qualitative questionnaires that no extra observations could be noted. I asked the teachers to complete the open qualitative questionnaire (Appendix F), as I needed to know how they perceived those children in their care over the course of the previous year, and whether they paid attention to the children's losses, and any resultant behaviours or performances in their classes.

### **3.3.2.2 Semi-structured interviews**

Semi-structured interviews are utilised to basically define the line of inquiry (Nieuwenhuis, 2007:87). The semi-structured interviews used in this study set the scene for the Grade 3 participants. I explained to them what will happen during their time with me and what exactly the research entailed. A qualitative interview occurs when researchers ask one or more participants general open-ended questions, and record their answers.

I prepared basic questions (Appendix E) to use with the interviews that I conducted, and elaborated on questions if the need emerged, depending on a child's response. I then transcribed the interviews, typing the data into a computer file for analysis (Creswell, 2014:217). I explained to the children that although I took minor notes, I recorded the interview for review and transcription purposes.

Nieuwenhuis (2007:87) advises that the researcher needs to be attentive to the responses given by the children so that new emerging lines of inquiry can be established and probed for later analysis. A semi-structured interview, according to Seabi (in Maree, 2012), is an interview that is neither fixed nor wholly free or natural

it is flexible. I wanted to explore each child's point of grief, what they felt at the time of their losses, and how they felt as I conducted the study. It was important for the research for me to be able to gauge their emotions, tone of voice, and manner of interaction during the interviews. I believed that notes made regarding their respective body languages could better inform my understanding of their behaviour and the feelings they experienced during their losses.

The questions were basic and non-threatening. I didn't want to delve too deep into their feelings of grief and make the participants uncomfortable as a result. Openness and trust is essential in research of such a sensitive nature. This semi-structured interview (Appendix E) was meant to solidify the foundation of my study, guided by the research aims and objectives.

### **3.3.2.3 Drawings**

Theron, Mitchell, Smith & Stuart (2011:4) in the book, *Picturing Research: Drawing as Visual Methodology* posits that drawings "encourage them [children] to reflect and gain a different perspective on complex issues in their lives". Similarly, MacEntee and Mitchell (2011:89) assert that "museums and libraries are full of objects and documents that appear to tell the stories of childhood but are actually the creations of adults."

The purpose of the picture (drawing) activity was to give young children a voice through their pictures (drawings), to express what they regard as difficult situations in their lives. I comprehended the sensitive nature of the research topic that could easily make a child feel overwhelmed, as it is usually quite difficult to discuss one's own emotions. This motivated me to incorporate a picture (drawing) activity as a credible means of obtaining the information I needed from the participants. I started each picture (drawing) session by first reading a short story to the participant (see section 3.3.1.2). This purpose here was to help them understand that there are many others who experience loss, and that there is nothing to be ashamed or afraid about regarding their thoughts and feelings.

On separate occasions, I met each learner again after school hours to conduct the picture (drawings) activity. I first read them a story I had written during my own studies, called *Sam's Birthday Surprise*. The main character is a little girl who also experienced grief. She had a dream about her birthday party and imagined her mother had planned it, but in real life her mother had passed away. I explained to them that I too had lost my mother, and that I wrote the book to help me express my feelings.

Afterwards I asked them to draw pictures, as many as they liked, based on the grief that they experienced, and about how this process made them feel at that moment. Once they had completed their pictures (drawings) I asked them some questions about it, prompting them to tell me about the thoughts that went into those pictures (drawings), and what they felt while drawing it. The purpose of this activity was to help me gain insight into the feelings they experience when they think of their loss. I made notes and recorded the conversations (verbal narratives) for transcribing. I believed that those pictures (drawings) would help me to understand their emotions and experiences during their periods of grief. These pictures (drawings) were not interpreted or used for diagnostic analysis at all. Instead I asked the learners to explain what their pictures (drawings) signified, avoiding the possibility of misguided interpretations by me as the researcher.

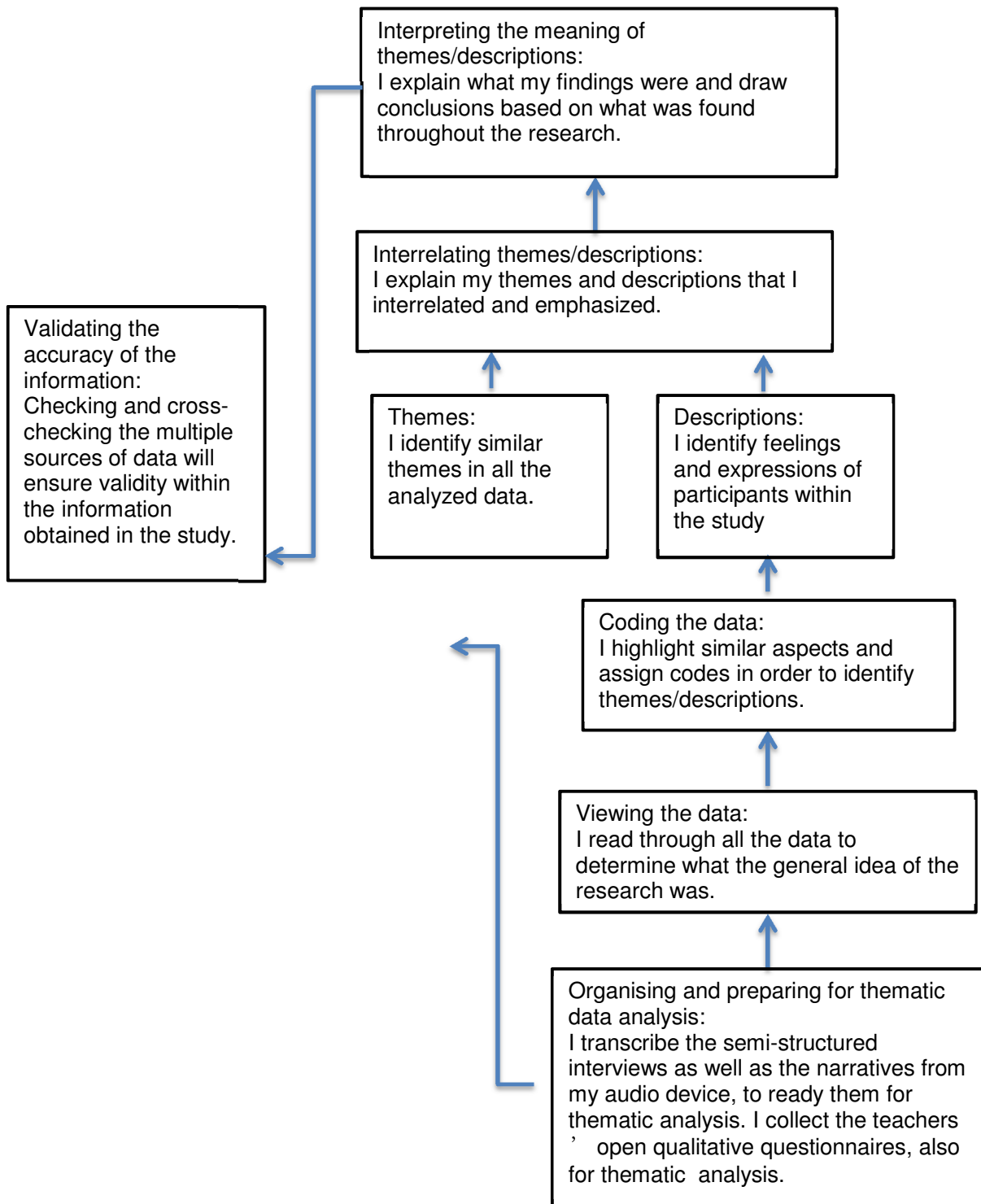
#### **3.3.2.4 Verbal narratives**

Goodley (2011:129) explains that narratives are used to make sense of ourselves and the selves of others. This means that stories are productive entities, being narrative portrayals of the self. The narratives in this study happened after the learners had drawn their pictures. I asked each learner individually to explain what they had drawn and the feelings that were invested therein. I asked them to verbally explain to me each aspect (and its purpose) of their drawings. All these explanations were recorded and transcribed as part of the study's data. It was imperative that I had a clear understanding of their drawings, as it would become helpful in understanding whether any learners have already successfully dealt with their grief.

### 3.3.3 Data Analysis

Rule and John (2011:75) explain that data analysis and interpretation constitute a critical stage of the research process, in which the researcher needs to construct comprehensive descriptions, identify themes, generate explanations of relevant thoughts and actions, and to theorise the case as well. Maree and Van der Westhuizen (2007:37) postulate that qualitative research can be situated within the interpretive paradigm, suitable for an inductive data analysis. This allows the researcher to identify multiple realities that influence the identifying of patterns and connections among patterns that are present within a particular research. Data analysis consists of themes that emerge inductively from careful examination of the data, or it is derived from the literature on the given topic (Di Fabio & Maree, 2012:139). Creswell (2011:259) states that to “[analyse] qualitative data requires [an] understanding how to make sense of text and images so that you can form answers to your research questions.” Di Fabio and Maree (2012:139) further explain that data analysis relates to the researcher’s own values or experiences, or are pure rational constructs. Developing a system for organising the data before data collection begins, and then using this system in the data collection procedure will help the researcher to manage and monitor the process (Rule & John (2011:76). The following diagram represents the data analysis procedure I followed.





**Figure 3:1: The Data Analysis Process (Creswell, 2014:674)**

My collected data comprised practical speaking patterns and manners of personal interactions with the child. I needed to be fully involved in the study at all times. I could not afford to take an overabundance of notes, only to miss an expression or ignore something important in the conversation. I decided to record the interviews as well as the conversations about the drawings and take minimal notes. Notes were made of certain outstanding elements that I believed would be valuable information. Although the making of transcriptions is tedious and time consuming, I preferred recording to allow me to pay close attention to the children. When the participants explained their drawings, I interacted on a personal level with them as a kinship between us had developed, since I have also experienced a great loss in my life. After I read them a story I wrote about a young girl losing her mother and wishing for the best birthday ever, I explained to them how I felt about my own loss and asked them to draw pictures. While they drew I closely observed their expressive emotions, all the while making notes of this. I then asked them to explain their pictures, which I audio recorded.

I made an effort to establish general patterns, themes and emotions that emerged throughout the interviews. I reflected upon their facial expressions and tone of voice, adding it to the collected information. All transcriptions were done on a computer and stored accordingly in computer files. I needed to read through all my data numerous times to get a general impression of the gathered data.

Rule and John (2011:78,79) emphasise the rigour involved in analysing data and the importance of the findings, which shape the research, and model the theory generated. I identified themes and colour coded them into various categories. I then looked for similarities between the categories to identify emerging patterns within those categories. I checked and crosschecked all the data to ensure that I included and reviewed every single shred of information, and exhausted all possible avenues. I did not find it necessary to return to the field as I was ultimately satisfied with the amount and quality of obtained information.

### **3.3.4 Trustworthiness**

Creswell (2011:285) states that qualitative research requires validation to ensure accuracy to findings. Validity in qualitative research design involves the degree to which interpretations have shared meaning for both participants and researcher (Maree & Van der Westhuizen in Di Fabio & Maree, 2012:139). Trustworthiness will now be defined before discussing its aspects (transferability, credibility, dependability and confirmability), followed by a discussion of triangulation.

Guba (1981) in Rule and John (2011:107) states that “trustworthiness of qualitative studies is achieved by giving attention to the studies transferability, credibility, dependability and confirmability.” I will discuss these points accordingly to provide an overview of the trustworthiness of my own research.

#### **3.3.4.1 Transferability**

In qualitative research the aim is not to generalise findings across a population, but rather to gain insight into the participants’ perspectives, experiences, attitudes and behaviour (Nieuwenhuis, 2010:115). Rule and John (2011:105) opine that transferability in case study research allows the researcher to understand the strongest phenomenon within a case’s context. Transferability allows for rich, thick, detailed description to ensure a solid framework within the study, to remove doubt from other researchers interested in the transferability of a case study. Di Fabio and Maree (2012:140) concur that transferability refers to the extent that results of a study can be generalised and applied to other research contexts.

I believe that my data and research may be useful to other research endeavours, especially since many teachers underestimate children’s grief. My research can be used as a basis for understanding grief of children in the Foundation Phase. Teachers need to recognise that children grieve and that it can affect them in many ways: physically, mentally, socially and emotionally. This study can help teachers, psychologists and any other relevant role players in supporting children who are experiencing grief.

### 3.3.4.2 Credibility

Guba, (in Rule & John, 2011:107) suggests that credibility refers to the originality of the case study method, and the recording of the data presented in those studies. Credibility of data refers to factors such as the significance of results and their credibility for participants and readers (Miles & Huberman, 1994 in Maree & Van der Westhuizen, 2012:140). Credibility therefore is a substitute for internal validity that credits what a qualitative study represents.

- To ensure credibility I made use of various data collection methods such as interviews, open qualitative questionnaires and a drawings activity. I made use of triangulation as I compared these methods. I cross-validated the collected data to ensure credibility in my research (Maree & Van der Westhuizen, 2012:140).
- My research process was transparent. Letters of consent were given or sent to caregivers and teachers to create awareness of the research taking place, and informing them that their children will participate in this study. Their rights of refusal were acknowledged. The caregivers were allowed to request any data from the research at any time for their own verification (Maree & Van der Westhuizen, 2012:140). Rich description of research design methods was provided.
- As a teacher in the school the children were familiar with me and had no qualms regarding this research, conversing willingly and openly. They were informed that they may withdraw at any time. During the drawings activity the children gave me their opinions of their own drawings, which ensured that I did not make any assumptions about their work. All parts of conversations were transcribed, and the data given was used accordingly with the transcriptions (Maree & Van der Westhuizen, 2012:140).
- I generated an open qualitative questionnaire to gain the respective teachers' points of view as well, to gain an even clearer insight into the children, since it is their teachers who spend the most time with them at school. This also introduced new perspectives untainted by my own biases and feelings, which

would have been based only on a few hours spent with the participants (Maree & Van der Westhuizen, 2012:140).

#### **3.3.4.3 Dependability**

As explained by Rule and John (2011:107), “dependability dispenses with positivist notions of replication and rather focuses on methodological rigour and coherence towards generating findings and case accounts which the research community can accept with confidence.” Di Fabio and Maree (2012:140) state that dependability refers to the consistency and regularity of the research process, the approaches used and the degree of control in the study. According to Woodside (2010:131), dependability is the process of using multiple processes of checking and crosschecking the validity of the analysis conducted. To ensure dependability in this study I monitored the quality of the recordings, as well as all transcriptions and other data gathering procedures (e.g. open qualitative questionnaires and notes).

#### **3.3.4.4 Confirmability**

Guba (1981) in Rule and John (2011:107) defines confirmability as “the way of addressing concerns about the researcher’s influence and biases on the study.” Maree and Van der Westhuizen (2012:141) suggest that confirmability refers to the objectivity of data and the absence of research errors. Confirmability deals with the objectivity of a study and renders “full disclosure of the research process, including the limitations, research positionality and ethical requirements” conducted within the study (Rule & John, 2011:107). Results are considered conformable when they are derived from participants and evaluated through data analysis, rather than the researcher’s opinion (Maree & Van der Westhuizen, 2012:141). Chapter 2 evidences all the study literature reviewed by me, which was necessary for credibility and confirmability of this study. To further ensure confirmability, different research methods and data analysis strategies were combined within the study. I used semi-structured interviews, drawings, verbal narratives and open qualitative questionnaires in order to obtain data in different ways, and to collect a sufficient amount of data to analyse and interpret.

### 3.3.4.5 Triangulation

The purpose of triangulation, as suggested by researchers, within qualitative study and case study is to achieve “high quality, rigorous and respectable research” (Rule & John 2011:108). According to Di Fabio and Maree (2012:141), triangulation involves using different sources of information, methods, research theories and types of data. Rule and John (2011:108) add that the “logic of triangulation is that the multiplicity or diversity of sources, methods and other aspects that would strengthen the truthfulness of the assertion or finding by eliminating the inaccuracy or bias introduced by reliance on single source, method, theory or researcher.”

Triangulation, according to Creswell (2014:716), involves using multiple sources of data collecting strategies in order to ensure correctness and strengthen reliability and validity. Instead of only making use of interviews with the learners and the drawings activity, I asked them to explain their drawings to me. This formed part of the verbal narratives, during which I used the opportunity to observe the participants’ emotions and expressions throughout the sessions. I made notes about my observations at that moment, adding to the richness of the data. The teachers’ responses to questions in the open qualitative questionnaire provided a new perspective with regards to their experiences and observations on the grieving children in their classrooms, and gave indications of the measure of their own involvement with their learners’ situations.

Similar to triangulation is the concept of crystallisation. According to Rule and John (2011:109), crystallisation “points to the multi-faceted nature of reality, where additional sources and methods show up additional facets rather than confirming some true position as with triangulation.” Richardson (2000) in Di Fabio and Maree (2012:142), emphasises that crystallisation is carried out by using different data collection methods, which increases the trustworthiness of a study and hence provides in-depth understanding of the complexity of the issues involved within the study. By using multiple methods of obtaining research data in this study such as interviews, an open qualitative questionnaire, a drawing activity and verbal narratives, it ensured and increased the trustworthiness of my study. Not only did the various methods add value, but the variety of aspects related to different participants gave me as researcher a broader perspective in term of analysis and interpretation.

### 3.4 COMPLIANCE WITH ETHICAL STANDARDS

Banister, Bunn, Burman, Daniels, Duckett, Goodley, Lowthom, Parker, Runswick-Cole, Sixsmith, Smailes, Tindall & Whelan (2011:223) define ethics as the part of philosophy that is concerned with what is acceptable. According to Elias and Theron (2012:150), adherence to ethical standard is more than individual responsibility: it involves expectation of individuals, groups, colleagues, departments and higher education environments from where this research is conducted. Banister et al. (2011:217) advise that ethical standards have to be taken very seriously and special precaution must be taken when dealing with children, as they are still minors and vulnerable on several levels. “Ethical relationships and practices are also key aspects of the research quality; conducting research in an ethically sound manner not only enhances the quality of research, but contributes to its trustworthiness” (Rule & John, 2011:111). To obtain ethical clearance for this study I had to adhere to the ethical procedures stipulated by the University of Pretoria. I applied for ethical clearance from the Ethics Committee of the University of Pretoria (Maree, 2012:225). My application was revised by an ethics committee and upon approval, an ethical clearance certificate was granted (**REFERENCE:EC 13/11/04** – see Appendix H). Permission to conduct research at school, informed consent and assent, avoiding harm and maintaining confidentiality and privacy is discussed in the following sections.

#### 3.4.1 Permission to conduct research at school

Creswell (2014:354) mentions that it is important to gain access to the research site as well as participants before conducting the research. A key principle in conducting the research is to gain permission from gatekeepers and informed consent from participants (Rule & John, 2011:112). I was employed as a teacher at the particular school where I intended to do the research, and was therefore already familiar with the school principal who gave me permission to conduct research on the school premises. I also knew the teachers from whom I had to request permission to firstly consult the learners in their classrooms, and secondly for their own participation in the study. The school is a public (state) school and I hence had to obtain written consent from the principal to conduct research. The principal signed this consent

form and the school stamp was added as proof (Appendix B). Since Grade 3 learners were going to be participants, I had to request formal permission from their teachers to consult the learners in their classrooms (after school hours). The teachers' informed consent letter is attached as Appendix A.

### **3.4.2 Informed consent and assent**

It is imperative that all participants involved are aware of the research proceedings, and that they have granted informed consent, either written or verbally (Creswell, 2014:366). Rule and John (2011:112) concur that informed consent involves autonomy, which ensures participants' privacy, confidentiality and anonymity. Participants should grant consent willingly and be informed that their participation is voluntary and can be terminated at any point (Creswell, 2014:366). Consent involves informing participants of the study processes, providing a guideline for participants. For the purpose of my research study, the caregivers were given a consent form (Appendix D) where the research process was explained as well as my assurance that their children will always be in a safe environment. The caregivers were assured that their children would not be forced to participate, and that they would give their own assent before the research commenced. The caregivers and participants were also informed that they could withdraw from the study if they felt uncomfortable at any stage.

The participants were minors and not allowed to give their own consent; hence after their caregivers gave consent for the researcher to involve their children in research, the children were given assent forms. The assent form (Appendix C) consists of two columns: the one column features images explaining the process, while the second column contains a written description of the research processes. I explained to the participants that they did not have to take part in the study if they did not want to, and that they could withdraw at any point after proceedings began. The assent form contained a happy face indicating that the child is willing to participate, and a sad face indicating that he or she did not want to participate. They could circle or cross out any face on the document, according to their decision. The children as well as caregivers were aware of the fact that pseudonyms will be replacing the participants names wherever necessary, to protect their privacy. A copy of the assent and



consent form appears in Appendices C and D. The caregivers were notified that all recorded data, and the complete study would remain in the university's archives for fifteen years, as per the University of Pretoria's policy requirements.

### **3.4.3 Avoiding harm**

Rule and John (2011:112) emphasise non-maleficence, stipulating that at every stage of the research process, the research participants, their organizations and communities are not maligned or harmed in any way. I had to be cautious while working with the participants, and therefore had to avoid disclosing information that might harm them or put them in a position in which they might be harmed (Creswell, 2014:357).

The caregivers received an informational letter of consent that explained the research proceedings and the voluntary nature of their children's participation, and that pseudonyms would be used to protect their identities. By signing the letter of consent, the caregivers gave me as researcher permission to involve their children as participants in my research. The children then received an assent form that had visual as well as written information explaining the processes they may expect, with an assurance that they are not forced to participate in the study, and that they could withdraw at any time if they so wished.

### **3.4.4 Maintaining confidentiality and privacy**

Creswell (2014:852) mentions that a policy of confidentiality offers a participant a choice regarding a disclosing of their identity. In research studies it is preferable to ensure the participants' confidentiality and anonymity according to their preferences (Rule & John, 2012:112). Banister (2011:204) explains that anonymity is to assure that a participant will not be recognised through information displayed in publicised research. I made use of semi-structured interviews, a drawings activity and verbal narratives in which learners indicated and stated their identities. I removed all traces of their names from research documentation – by using pseudonyms instead – to ensure the protection of their privacy. None of the participants or their families can be linked to any discussions, data or results published on behalf of this study.

### 3.5 CONCLUDING REMARKS

The purpose of this Chapter was to provide a detailed explanation of the research methodology conducted within the study. This study aimed to provide guidelines and identify support structures that teachers can use to help a child that is experiencing grief in the Foundation Phase classroom due to loss of a parent, sibling or grandparent. This study can be used to gain a fresh understanding of the nature of children's grief in the Foundation Phase, to ultimately improve the measures of assistance and support given to learners who suffer losses.

I made use of a qualitative study, consisting of various data collection methods to obtain information and data for analysis. As a participant-observer I was given the opportunity to become a virtual part of the participants' lives, observing how they felt and expressed themselves having suffered recent losses in their families, and to attempt to develop supportive strategies for teachers to help any grieving learners.

Multiple case studies were used to explore different aspects of grieving, and multiple methods of collecting data were utilised. The data collection methods comprised semi-structured interviews, drawing activities followed by verbal narratives, and an open qualitative questionnaire that the teachers of the participants had to complete. All these methods gave me a better understanding of the state of grief that a child experiences. The data was recorded, decoded accordingly, analysed and interpreted. Due care was given to the ethical considerations relevant to this study.



## **CHAPTER 4**

### **DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION**

#### **4.1 INTRODUCTION**

Chapter 3 provided a detailed description of the research designed methodology utilised in this study. It consisted of methods and strategies used to identify grieving learners and discussed the various data collection methods that were used to obtain rich information, based on the grief the learners experienced due to loss of a parent, sibling or grandparent.

Focus now shifts to data analysis, as well as data interpretation. The process of conducting the research lasted approximately eight months as each participant had participated on an individual basis, and due to the sensitivity of the research topic the participant could not be rushed through the research process. The participants initially participated individually in a semi-structured interview, which allowed for familiarity and trust. Thereafter the drawings activity added insight into the experiences and feelings in relation to their grief due to the loss of a parent, sibling or grandparent. Subsequent verbal narratives allowed me to understand their feelings and emotions encompassed in the drawings. The open qualitative questionnaire (Appendix F) completed by the teachers added additional information as to how the teachers experienced the participants, and additional information on possible kinds of support offered to the children who experience grief. These questionnaires consisted of questions that probed the teacher's perspective on the grieving learner in terms of academic performance, emotions and interaction.

#### **4.2 DATA ANALYSIS**

The research was conducted using an inductive data analysis strategy. This strategy, according to Maree and Van der Westhuizen (2007:37), allows for multiple realities that influence the identifying of patterns, as well as the determining of connections between data elements. This research also featured a multiple case study method, and each case is discussed and dealt with separately in this Chapter. Each participant has the right to privacy; hence pseudonyms are used to protect their identities. Information related to particular participants are colour coded to facilitate

the tracking of their analysis throughout the Chapter. All the information provided is taken from transcriptions of the semi-structured interviews (Appendix E) and verbal narratives on their drawings (Appendix I); and the open qualitative questionnaire (Appendix F) that was completed by the teachers.

A thematic data analysis procedure was used. Rule and John (2011:76) suggest that researchers should have a system for organising their data before the data collection process commences, in order to expedite the analytical procedures. I used Creswell's (2014:674) data analysis procedure to guide my own data analysis process. I listened and transcribed all the audio files that were recorded, then carefully viewed all the data elements to ensure they were noted correctly. Next I re-read all data saved in computer files and established themes by adopting a holistic view of the collected data. I then started highlighting similar themes and assigned colour codes, to connect related information visually. I then explained my themes and interpreted them according to my understanding of identified patterns. I validated the process by checking and rechecking all the data to ensure accuracy within the study.

The participants' biographical information will now be discussed, followed by the data analysis.

#### **4.2.1 Participant A: Keabetswe**

Keabetswe was a previous learner of mine when she was in Grade 1. In grade 3, she suffered a double loss while I was conducting my study, making her a natural choice for inclusion as participant. Keabetswe's case was very traumatic on a personal level, rendering it a valuable case strictly in terms of this study and the data collection process.

- Biographical description

**Table 4.1: Participant A: Keabetswe (girl)**

<b>Biographical Information</b>	
<b>Age</b>	Eight years and nine months
<b>Favourite colour</b>	Pink
<b>School background</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Very eager learner</li> <li>• Top achiever in the class</li> <li>• Obedient and well-mannered</li> </ul>
<b>Home background</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stable environment</li> <li>• Set routine</li> <li>• Obedient child</li> </ul>
<b>Siblings</b>	New born baby brother (who passed away)
<b>Parents</b>	Married and very involved in child's life
<b>Loss</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New born baby brother</li> <li>• Grandfather</li> </ul>

When I began the research process and asked the Head of Department as well as the Grade 3 teachers to help me identify learners who had experienced grief, Keabetswe was not yet considered, as her family was intact and on the verge of expanding with a new baby due soon. At the end of the first term of the year, word reached us of the death of her mother's father. Only a week later her one-month-old baby brother died. At the start of second term I called Keabetswe in and handed her

the consent forms for her parents to complete. Since her grief was recent and still having a severe impact on her life, her thoughts and feelings would add immense value to the research. Having been a teacher to Keabetswe, her parents were acquainted with me, they took some time to reach a decision, understandably, and after many concerns were discussed, they finally agreed to allow Keabetswe to participate in the study.

Commencing my research with Keabetswe, I explained the process to her and asked her to sign the assent form that would allow me to officially start the gathering of data. Keabetswe was always fond of me as her teacher and this helped in easing any discomfort with the situation. She was initially overwhelmed and emotional, and found it very hard to speak or express herself as we started the semi-structured interview. As we conversed she gradually eased up, becoming more comfortable and shared detailed lived experiences.

Keabetswe is the kind of learner that required love and attention. I noticed that while her mother was pregnant she would often approach me for hugs, and would happily tell me about events at home or in school. The grief-stricken child that now sat with me and revealed her thoughts about everything she experienced within the previous month, was like a different person. Keabetswe was forced to grow up and look after herself and be a 'big girl' in a very short period of time.

When her grandfather (on her mother's side) passed away Keabetswe was sent to live with a family friend as her mother was too distraught, barely managing the shock. Keabetswe would visit at her grandmother's house every few days. About a week later her baby brother passed away. It was even more sudden and unexpected than her grandfather's death, deeply affecting her family. Keabetswe herself was highly distraught since the family awaited this baby for many years, she was so excited to have a brother, but suddenly, even before getting used to his presence, he too had passed away.

Due to her parents' severe grief, they decided that she should stay with her father's mother for some time, until they all dealt with their grief. During the time of this research, Keabetswe would meet her mother about once a week, and her dad would

attempt to visit her daily. It compounded her sadness to see her parents mourn, hence her mother deciding it would be in Keabetswe's best interest if they kept some distance for a while, to allow each to heal in their own way.

#### 4.2.1.1 Interview analysis

Initially Keabetswe was too overwhelmed to talk about her experience. She was somewhat shaky, looking down at her hands and rubbing them. I began asking her questions based on the semi-structured interview (Appendix E). She was a little teary when she began speaking as I asked her who passed away: *"My grandfather from my mother's side."* Keabetswe explained how emotional she was at her grandfather's funeral: *"I was crying and when they asked if I wanted to see the body I said no because I didn't want to faint."* She was also feeling a little lonely, explaining: *"My mother couldn't come to the funeral, she left me because she had to look after my baby brother and there was too many people, so she didn't say goodbye to my grandfather".*

She loved her grandfather dearly, but the loss of her brother had a more profound impact, since she had long been eagerly awaiting the arrival of the new family member. *"That day my grandmother called me, she said my baby brother passed away."* Sadness again engulfed Keabetswe: *"I cried and cried."* They then started preparing the house for the baby brother's funeral. The day of the funeral was highly emotional, and Keabetswe could not control herself. *"I saw it and I crrriieeddd and I cried. But they opened the body, not the whole thing just the face, I came and saw him, I wanted to say goodbye the last time."* It was extremely difficult for Keabetswe to recall and reiterate her memories of the funeral procedure, as it was still only a short while after the death, and she was evidently still in a fragile emotional state.

Keabetswe described how they often visited both gravesites in the days afterwards, so that *"we could sit and spend time with my grandfather and baby brother and pray for them."* Her parents told her *"they are both safe and they are with God, and we must not be sad because they are in heaven watching down at us."* It amazed me to witness such religious devotion in a child of such a tender age.

I redirected my line of questioning towards Keabetswe's feelings, emotions and support systems in the wake of the two funerals. Keabetswe explained that *"I feel sad to have to go to two funerals... but I felt fine, and I said that at least I spent time with my grandfather and spent a few times with my baby brother but he's still always up at God."* I asked how she feels about everything now after some time has passed. She replied, *"Uhm... now I feel comfortable talking but when I think about it I cry a little bit, but I do not cry too much."* Keabetswe described her mother's state of paranoia regarding safety and security since the passing of her brother: *"Even my mother before we were going to the funeral she told me I must tie my seatbelt she was so scared and she cried when I had to go to school because I will be leaving her for the whole week and I will only see her on the weekend."*

When I asked Keabetswe about her mother, I could see an expression of concern in her eyes. She explained that *"she's still finding it difficult, like if you show her something she would cry."* Keabetswe's mother is finding it very difficult to deal with the double loss, and has opted to live with her own mother for a while, while Keabetswe stays at her father's mother. Keabetswe is definitely missing her mother, evidenced by her wish: *"I would like to hug her, and kiss her and be with her when she is sad."*

I then shifted the topic to her teacher, classmates and school, to gauge the level of support she received in the school environment. She lost a bit of composure and became teary while she explained what had happened when she returned to school for the first time since the losses. *"When I came with my father to school my father told my mam the bad news and my mam started to cry. [...] my mam told the class, my grandfather and my baby brother passed away."* Keabetswe's teacher indeed appeared to be involved and supportive, as Keabetswe further explained: *"She wrote a few things and gave me a card and said if I wanna cry I could go to the bathroom and cry. If I wanna hug I could hug her and she told the children they must be supportive."*

When I asked Keabetswe who she missed the most, she said, *"Uhhh... I miss my mother and I miss my baby brother and I miss my grandfather."*



Keabetswe negotiated the interview very well. She was very informative and descriptive, in spite of the emotional difficulties. It was evident that she was hurting from the grief she was still experiencing. However, she has also accepted her grief, firmly assured that her grandfather and baby brother are with God, and that they will always be watching down on her. Keabetswe will miss them, which is natural, considering that she has experienced death of two very close and important family members in her young life.

#### 4.2.1.2 Drawing and verbal narratives

I read Keabetswe a story related to loss, and asked her to draw a picture for me about her feelings in relation to her loss. I informed her that she could draw anything she felt like, and as many pictures as she wanted. While I explained this I could already detect her mind developing ideas for a drawing. The moment I finished explaining, she began drawing.



**Figure 4.1 Keabetswe's drawing**

When she was finished I asked her to explain her drawing (Figure 4.1) to me. She said, *"Before I could come to school, when we went to my grandfather's funeral, and*

*my baby brothers because it was in the same place. We saw them and I saw my mother was crying and I felt unhappy, but she told me God and my grandfather and my baby brother are always watching us and I thought of that and I smiled and I think in my head it's going to be alright. I'm gonna calm down.*" Keabetswe's picture of her family at the gravesite contains a lot of expression. Her mother is crying, she is sad while a thought bubble protrudes from her head with her baby brother inside, smiling down on them. When I asked if her father accompanied them to the graveyard, she responded, *"Oh yeah, did he come with me? I do not know..."* She was unsure about her father's presence at the graveyard, but then added him into the picture. When I enquired what her motivation was for doing that, she replied, *"I remembered he was with."*

Keabetswe's picture contains a couple of hills, on which she drew gravestones and trees, as well as a cloudy background and a sun. Keabetswe made it easy for me to understand the scene and her motivations behind it, but she did not explain the detail and significance of all objects that she drew. I had to ask her about each element and prompt her to answer all my questions. It is evident that she values her mother and is worried about her grief, as she easily remembered her mother's presence at the graveyard, but was initially not sure about her father being present too. Her mother's experience of grief is definitely impacting on Keabetswe more than her father's grief, as he is not displaying as much emotion. The importance of her family and religious values, combined with all life lessons she learned at home, appeared to serve as effective coping mechanisms for dealing with her losses.

#### **4.2.1.3 Open qualitative questionnaire**

Keabetswe's teacher is a kind, loving and passionate person. She stays involved with her learners, caring deeply for them. She has experienced a significant amount of loss herself, hence her sympathetic and emotional reaction to Keabetswe's case. She is generally regarded as an empathetic person, always trying to assist, regardless of the situation.

- **When did Keabetswe experience her loss?**

This question was designed to establish if the teacher actually knew the learner, and whether she was aware of the loss experienced by the learner. Her teacher answered briefly, *“Around the 16 March, just before the March holidays the grandfather passed away as he was sick. Then the baby brother Thapelo passed away a week later with meningitis.”*

- **Did Keabetswe’s behaviour change due to the loss?**

This question attempts to establish whether there were significant changes in Keabetswe’s regular behaviour. The teacher responded: *“Keabetswe is extremely strong, but she cried when we talked about it. CRIED A LOT, when I prayed for her.”* The teacher also indicated that Keabetswe didn’t give her full attention to her work: *“Her concentration also wavered a little.”*

- **What type of emotions do you think the participant was experiencing during her loss?**

The teacher answered concisely: *“Loss – Grandfather, baby brother, mother, father.”* Interestingly, her teacher included the mother and father, who are alive. She then explained further: *“And loneliness - everybody was busy ‘coping’ with his or her own loss but I do not think we really know how lonely Keabetswe felt.”*

- **Did the participant’s behaviour change towards her peers?**

The teacher mentioned that Keabetswe, normally friendly and outgoing, began avoiding other children, but she kept close to her best friend: *“Her friendship with all her friends changed only to friendship with Bontle.”* This could indicate that Keabetswe was looking for the attention and emotional closeness of her one friend.

- **What strategies did you use to try and help her to cope better?**

This teacher lovingly demonstrated her support with physical displays of sympathy: *“Support her by holding her whenever she needed to be held.”* Empathy is further displayed: *“We cried together and prayed together.”* This

teacher also explained to the class what Keabetswe was going through, motivating them to give her the necessary support.

- **As a teacher, what do you feel the participant needs to help her cope?**

My question here focuses on factors that would help Keabetswe to be resilient. It was the teacher's view that Keabetswe would have handled the loss better if only one of her loved ones passed away: *"I think the whole process would have been a lot more different had the loss not been doubled."* The teacher did not directly answer the question, but her answer implied that the mother should have given more attention and support to Keabetswe, but because of her own loss, was not able to: *"The mother could not cope with losing a parent and a child in such a short amount of time. I do not think any parent will ever 'cope' after losing a child."*

- **As the teacher what impact does this participant have on you?**

With this question I wanted to determine what the personal relationship between participant and teacher is, and also how having a child that experienced loss, would impact the teacher herself. The teacher responded as such: *"I love her with all of my heart and all of my soul"*. The teacher's own experience with loss made her more empathetic: *"As I lost a mother and a 'child' (cat) within one month, I remember the pain as if it was yesterday. I am glad that God chose me to be there for her and her family."*

- **What do you think a teacher need to be equipped with to deal with bereavement in the classroom situation?**

The teacher referred to reading material such as *"a booklet, pamphlet to help a teacher, that has not experienced death before."* She also felt that a joint counselling session, where parents, the child as well as the teacher can be present, will be of great assistance.

Keabetswe's teacher is highly understanding with regards to death, and the experiences that others go through. Her suggestion above is therefore worthy of attention, as many teachers may not know how to cope with death, loss or grief in

the classroom. If they have not experienced grief for themselves, then it may be difficult for them to understand it from another person's perspective. A booklet or guidelines for grief would be a useful tool.

Keabetswe is lucky in the sense that she has loving parents and a very supportive teacher. She found it extremely hard to be sent away from her parents, especially her mother, thus having to deal with the loss of her grandfather and baby brother on her own, coupled with the loss of her mother's support, love and presence as well. This case made me realise that adults are not necessarily aware of the depth of children's emotional experiences, as I believe Keabetswe's parents would never have sent her away to her grandmother, had they known how intensely she would miss their presence. Based on all the evidence collected Keabetswe is coping with her grief; as difficult as it initially was, she is definitely managing better with the passing of time. She has also had effective kinds of support during her grief, even though her family may not have considered the extent of her grief, they were still there for her to provide adequate support. Her teacher provided a much needed support system, with her care clearly originating from experience and empathy. Keabetswe also mentioned that her conversations and interactions with myself during the course of this research process, also aided her healing, and ability to cope with her loss.

#### 4.2.2 Participant B: Refentse

- Biographical description

**Table 4.2: Participant B: Refentse (girl)**

Biographical Information	
Age	Nine years
Favourite colour	Purple
School background	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reclusive learner</li> <li>• Not achieving</li> <li>• Obedient and well-mannered</li> </ul>
Home background	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unstable environment</li> <li>• No routine</li> <li>• Responsible and independent</li> </ul>
Siblings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No consistency with siblings</li> <li>• Many brothers and sisters</li> <li>• Seems as if there is a biological little brother and older sister</li> </ul>
Parents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parents passed away</li> <li>• Lives with grandmother</li> </ul>
Loss	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mother</li> <li>• Father</li> </ul>

Refentse's teacher immediately recommended her as a potential participant, as Refentse had experienced a severe loss just prior to this research. Refentse's father passed away in 2010 due to an illness and she has now recently lost her mother who died from AIDS. Refentse's initial loss of her father when she was five years old, significantly affected her school performance as she does not seem to adjust well to any schooling activities. She seems absent-minded and aloof regarding concepts and tasks. This case has very sad elements since the participant lost her primary

care givers at a young age, and seems to have very little experience of a stable household.

Refentse has droopy, tired eyes and a generally sad expression. Refentse was very reclusive upon meeting her, she kept to herself and did not seem interested. On the surface it seemed as if she had difficulty understanding me while I spoke to her and asked questions. She gave brief answers to questions, and regardless how much I coaxed her for clearer answers, her responses remained somewhat abrupt and brusque. Refentse's grandparents seemed not to have understood the letter of informed consent either, as they took a long time to sign it (also signing it in the incorrect place). Refentse lives with both her grandparents. She was unable to tell me if she had always lived with them, or whether it was only due to her mother's recent passing. She was also unsure about her siblings and the amount of people that she lives with. Her insecure behaviour in relation to general questions is a legitimate cause for concern.

#### **4.2.2.1 Interview analysis**

Refentse seemed very absent minded throughout the interview. She answered my questions in a straightforward fashion, though with little discernible emotion. In an attempt to put her at ease, I first asked her about her siblings, and how many brothers and sisters she has. She initially said: *"Two, Ma'am"*, but when I asked their ages it became very confusing. She said, *"One is 14, and one is 16. And my brother is 24. And my little brother is 3 years old."* When asked whether she then had four siblings, she confirmed, yet the number of siblings kept fluctuating as she added a couple more siblings, only to say later that they are her sister's family. Unfortunately, there was never consistency in her answers regarding her domestic situation, the number of people she lived with, or who she regarded as immediate family.

I directed conversation towards the deceased, asking her who passed away, and she answered, *"My mother and my father."* Asked to explain how her parents died, she mentioned that her father was *"sick"* and her mother *"was having AIDS."* I enquired about her feelings upon their passing. She said, *"I was feeling, I was feeling very sad, I was crying a lot."* I then wanted to ascertain if she remembered anything

about her father's death, how old she was and how she felt about it at the time. She replied, *"Yes Ma'am, I was sad and I was five years old."* I then asked about how she feels now in relation to all that has happened to her. She answered, *"I feel, I feel nice Ma'am, I am happy and it is getting better."*

I deemed it pertinent to note her living circumstances, wanting to know how her life may have changed in relation to earlier days when both her parents were alive. I asked her who she lives with at present and she said, *"My grandparents."* I then asked how she feels about that, and she responded, *"I feel sad."* I found this to be an unusual answer and ventured to know more that could explain why she was sad about living with her grandparents. She said, *"I miss them."* I enquired if she missed her parents, and she confirmed, *"Yes, Ma'am."* I asked what it is that she missed about her parents, and she replied, *"I miss all of the things that they did for me."* This was a very sad moment for me as recognised the sadness in her voice, and detected the longing in her eyes.

I wanted to understand why Refentse found it so difficult to live with her grandparents after her parents had died. She explained, *"They had always lived with me and they are still the same."* This surprised me as it signifies that she might actually be used to living with them under the same roof. I restated her answer to verify that I am recording accurate information, which she confirmed.

The next topic of discussion related to the kinds of support she received throughout her grief. I enquired first about her teacher and whether her teacher had changed in her attitude towards her since her mother's passing. She replied, *"Ma'am, she likes me and when I talk, she say I must keep quiet."* I then enquired if her teacher helps her and in what way. She responded, *"Ma'am, at my house ne, they want to go to the SASSA ne, to get money, then she phoned my grandmother."* This made little sense to me as I referred to emotional or physical assistance within the classroom, but Refentse did not give any indication of such support. I enquired about her friends and whether they had changed or if they were being supportive. She responded, *"I do not know ma'am."* I cried and asked, do they take away the loss that you feel sometimes? Do they help you to remember better things? She responded, *"No, Ma'am."* I then asked if she still felt sad all the time, and she answered, *"Yes."* After



confirming that she still feels hurt and sadness all the time, she added, *“I stopped crying, Ma’am.”*

When I enquired about the type of support she would like to receive to combat the perpetual feelings of hurt and sadness, she replied, *“I do not know.”* However, she did state a belief that one day she will be better, and no longer be sad. When I enquired who she misses the most, Refentse replied, *“I miss my mother more than my father but when I think about my father I still feel sad.”*

Refentse’s mother had only passed away recently (at the time of this research), and it is clear that she is struggling to cope with her loss, as she cannot adequately describe or explain the nature of any of her feelings, experiences and interactions. Either the grief is affecting her ability to process her reality, or she has difficulty understanding the language, which would inhibit her ability to sufficiently respond to questions. She exhibits a very confused state of mind and an unsettling persona.

#### **4.2.2.2 Drawing and verbal narratives**

Following the same procedure as with Keabetswe, I read Refentse a story related to loss, and asked her to draw a picture for me to illustrate her own feelings regarding her own loss. I explained to her that she could draw anything she felt like and as many pictures as she wanted. While she agreed to all my explanations, Refentse simply retained a blank expression, with no spark in her eyes to reveal any impressions that the story or my instructions may have left on her. I observed her closely for a while after explaining to her what she needs to do. Refentse seemed unsure about what she wanted to portray, and erased a few attempts before she settled on this drawing below.



**Figure 4.2: Refentse's drawing**

When Refentse was finished I asked her to explain to me what she had drawn. All she could say about her picture was, *"Sometimes I feel happy and sad."* I pried a bit more, to try and understand when she feels happy and when she feels sad. She explained that she is *"happy when I stand and play with toys and my friends."* She is sad *"when at my house they say, they shout at me, they say I must keep quiet, I feel sad."* I asked who shouts at her to be quiet and she said, *"It's my brother, Ma'am."* I then asked her if the shouting makes her miss her parents more, upon which she responded, *"Yes, Ma'am."* Refentse had no other observations or thoughts to add to the picture that she had drawn. She said it is exactly the way it is seen: sometimes she is happy, and sometimes she is sad. However, she misses her parents daily.

Refentse was very unsure about her feelings as she erased and redrew a couple of attempts before she was ready to colour in. Her feelings alternate between happiness and sadness, but there is little evidence to suggest that she would cope better with her grief in the near future.

### 4.2.2.3 Open qualitative questionnaire

I requested Refentse's teacher to answer the open qualitative questionnaire in terms of Refentse's academic performance, emotions and interactions. Refentse's teacher was teaching Grade 3 for the first time, and was not yet as accustomed to the behavioural characteristics of the learners in class. Even though I had informed her about the purpose of the questionnaire (Appendix F) her responses were very brief.

- **When did Refentse experience her loss?**

The first question on the questionnaire refers to the time at which the learner experienced the death of the relative. To my surprise, this teacher sent me a note asking when Refentse experienced her loss, as she had no documentation of such losses. Since she recommended Refentse to be a participant, it is not unreasonable to expect that she would have availed herself of the facts regarding Refentse's background, but since this was not the case, it can be concluded that little care or support is directed to Refentse in the class.

- **Did Refentse's behaviour change due to the loss?**

This question is intended to help me understand the teacher's response in terms of the child's behaviour. Refentse's teacher replied that "*she has always been a quiet child but became more quiet and reserved after her loss.*" The teacher also mentioned how Refentse's work was affected, stating that "*her work took a dip and she would also be absent a few times a week due to her circumstance.*"

- **What type of emotions do you think the participant was experiencing during her loss?**

The teacher did not answer this question.

- **Did the participant's behaviour change towards her peers?**

I do not know if the teacher misunderstood this question. The teacher responded, "*As a class, we talked about loss of a parent in general and the*

*children showed respect by listening and supporting those who experienced the loss.”*

- **What strategies did you use to try and help her to cope better?**

In terms of support that the teacher believed she could offer the learner, she responded: *“She was supported by me, and her peers by showing love and respect.”* The teacher supported Refentse by being loving towards her and allowing her peers to be loving towards her.

- **As a teacher, what do you feel the participant needs to help her cope?**

This question is based on the teacher’s experience of the child and their resiliency. The teacher felt that Refentse needed *“a support structure to help her physically, emotionally and academically at home. A stable environment.”* This could have helped Refentse on a holistic level, as children who feel like they have no consistency in their circumstances, automatically do not function optimally.

- **As the teacher, what impact does this participant have on you?**

Here, I wanted to determine what the personal relationship between participant and teacher is, and also how having a child that experienced loss would impact on the teacher herself. The teacher replied, *“It is heart-tearing to see and experience this for a child and all I can do is make her current environment and structure as stable as possible.”*

- **What do you think a teacher need to be equipped with to deal with bereavement in the classroom situation?**

The teacher responded, *“We love and respect each other and talk about current life skills situations. So I try to make it a safe environment for questions if need be.”*

The teacher did not answer all the questions, and answered some in a way that bear little relevance to the questions. Those questions are void as they do not add to the research.

Refentse has no support system to draw from, as she does not experience her grandparents' house as a secure, loving space where her struggles are recognised. Her teacher seems loving and supportive at first glance, but her responses to questions in the questionnaire indicate little involvement with her learner, and no practical effort in trying to reduce Refentse's grief, nor is she doing anything in real terms to help Refentse cope with her unfortunate situation. For a young and desperately unfortunate child, this is a tragic merging of negative circumstances. I have tried to remain in contact with Refentse, but she is still very reclusive and refuse to volunteer or express her thoughts and feelings about her efforts to cope. She still appears depressed to me, so it is my conviction that she needs and deserves special attention from professional individuals to help her asses her grief and overcome it.

#### 4.2.3 Participant C: Precious

- Biographical description

**Table 4.3: Participant C: Precious (girl)**

<b>Biographical Information</b>	
Age	Ten years
Favourite colour	Pink
School background	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coping at school</li> <li>• Obedient and well-mannered</li> </ul>
Home background	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stable environment</li> <li>• Set routines</li> <li>• Responsible</li> </ul>
Siblings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Three sisters</li> <li>• Two brothers</li> </ul>
Parents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lives with mother and father</li> </ul>
Loss	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Grandmother</li> </ul>

Precious lost her grandmother shortly before this research who lived with her, and who had looked after her most of the time, due to her parents' job routines. I sensed Precious would be ideal for this research, as I needed participants who each suffered different types of losses. Each participant's relationship to the person they had lost, is unique and contextual.

On the surface, Precious appeared calm and stable. She carries herself as any other ten-year-old normally does. She had a stable family background, and stayed with both her parents as well as her siblings. Her grandmother passed away approximately one month before I commenced with research at the school. The death was recent, and its effects were still impacting on her. Her parents welcomed this study and immediately signed the consent letter. They understood the study's purpose, and how it would benefit not merely myself as the researcher, but Precious as well. Precious was very straightforward in her answers. All experiences are relevant. She seemed assured of the validity of her answers. Her personality can be described as soft and kind-hearted, and she seemed to be getting on well with her life, considering her sad circumstances of grief.

#### **4.2.3.1 Interview Analysis**

I explained to Precious all that is needed for the research to take place, as well as the assent form that she needed to fill in. She was understanding, completed everything correctly, and was very straightforward throughout the entire interview. She simply answered all the questions clearly and audibly without getting bogged down in details or descriptions. When I asked Precious about her siblings she was very sure as to how many siblings she had, but not very sure on their ages, and became a little confused regarding her brothers. She initially said, *"I have two brothers,"* but when asked about their ages she said, *"My brother is 20, my brother already turned 25 years and the other one is 6 years."* She therefore could have three brothers. She could not definitely remember her three sisters' ages, but she did let slip a mention that *"I play with my small sister, she is three years old."* There is a possibility that she mixed up her brothers and sisters in her initial statement of having *"three sisters and two brothers"*, or she made a simple nervous mistake.

Precious's most important people are *"my father and my mother."* She explains that she recently lost her grandmother, and was also able to tell me exactly when her grandmother passed away: *"On 15 of May."* When I enquired what had happened to her grandmother, she said, *"She was sick, she had a tummy ache. [...] A long time. For lots of days before she passed away."* I asked about her grandmother's whereabouts as she passed away, and Precious explained, *"She was at the hospital and she passed away there."*

The next topic of discussion related to the feelings and emotions that she experienced during and after the death. Precious could not really express how she felt throughout the time her grandmother was sick, as it seems the family did not know that her illness could be fatal. I asked how she felt when her grandmother had passed away, and she replied, *"Sad, I cried."* Even though our interview was conducted approximately a month and one half after her grandmother had passed, she responded this way when asked how she felt now: *"I cry and I am sad."* When I asked if she feels as if her life is getting better from the time her grandmother had passed away, or if it still feels the same, she answered, *"It is getting better."* She did not voice any other feelings in terms of her loss.

I questioned her about the kind of support she received at home, at school with her teacher as well as amongst her friends. Regarding support received at home, Precious says that *"everything is still the same."* Her parents have not changed in any way and neither have her siblings. I questioned if her teacher at school changed in any way towards her since her grandparent passed away, and she confirmed, *"Yes."* I prodded and asked in what way her teacher changed, and what did she do to make life more bearable for her in class. Precious replied, *"She was saying sorry to me about my grandmother dying. [...] She did not change any work."* I then enquired about her friends in class, asking, *"Did your friends change in school? Did your teacher tell all your friends that your grandmother passed away?"* Precious answered, *"The school did write the letter, so my friends know."* This means that it was published in the school's newsletter that Precious's grandmother had passed away. This newsletter is distributed to the entire school. The teacher ought to have had opportunity to announce it to Precious's class first. I asked if her friends help to make her feel any better and she replied, *"Yes."* She added that her friends *"play*

*more gentle*” with her since she has experienced her loss. Asked if she knows what her family, teacher or friends could have done to make her feel better, she responded simply, *“I do not know.”*

Precious clearly misses her grandmother because of the favours that grandparents typically offer their grandchildren. Her grandmother looked after her daily while her parents were working. It is only natural that she misses her grandmother-companion dearly, and it will take some time before she gets used to the idea of never seeing her grandmother again. She seems to be coping well at a basic interactive level, but I am not sure that she is coping well on an emotional level, based on some tentative answers.

#### **4.2.3.2 Drawing and verbal narratives**

As in the cases of the other two participants, I read the aforementioned story to Precious the story revolving around a little girl who had lost her mother and dreamt about her birthday party. Precious enjoyed the story, listening attentively and peering at the pictures as I flipped through the pages. I then explained to her that she will be required to draw a picture that illustrates how she feels when she thinks about her loss, and what 'picture' comes to her mind during those times. I explained that she could draw anything and as many pictures as she liked. While I explained this to Precious, she looked at me and acknowledged what I explained her. I do not know if she already knew what she would draw, but she drew a picture that tells a beautiful story.





**Figure 4.3: Precious' drawing**

After she had completed her drawing (Figure 4.3), I asked Precious what she drew. She said, *"I drew [sic] a swing and a tree and a gate and grass and an ant."* I noticed that she did not mention the two persons that she had drawn, but only the objects within the picture. I asked, "How does your picture make you feel?" She answered, *"It makes me feel happy."* When asked who the people are in her drawing, she responded, *"It's me and my little sister."* It surprised me a bit, as I expected it to be her and her grandmother instead. So I asked: "Okay, so what does this picture have to do with your grandmother passing away?" She replied, *"It was my favourite... It was my grandmother's favourite place to sit on."* She referred to the swing that she drew that looks rather like a slide in the drawing. She explained how her grandmother loved to swing with them at this specific park. I asked where the park is and if she still visited the park. She answered, *"Yes, when we go to Venda."* She explained that *"my grandmother used to live in Venda, then she got sick and came to live with us this year."*

I then asked her if she would like to tell me anything else related to her drawing. She said, *"I do not cry that much, I cry when they talk about my grandmother."* I agreed, telling her I can understand that it would be a heart-breaking feeling when everybody

around her spoke about her grandmother, to which she also agreed. She had nothing extra to add.

Precious's picture was very original and thought-provoking, containing many different colours. While she explained the elements in her drawing, her thought processes were clear and easily understood. She made me feel as if I could have been there in the park, watching them play on the swing and enjoying the outdoors. Her picture is full of positivity with its effects and blends of colours. Precious is not negatively dwelling on her loss, but she treasures the good times she shared with her grandmother, which is a positive form of healing in terms of coping with grief.

#### **4.2.3.3 Open qualitative questionnaire**

Precious's teacher was requested to fill out an open qualitative questionnaire to provide me with more background knowledge about the learner, her teacher's insights on behaviour and Precious's coping mechanisms may constitute valuable data. Her teacher gave brief answers. They indicate that she was aware of the learner in her class experiencing grief, but she was under the impression that it will not really affect the child's life.

- **When did Precious experience her loss?**

The teacher did not indicate knowledge about any dates, though she was aware that the learner's paternal grandmother had passed.

- **Did Precious's behaviour change due to the loss?**

In terms of behaviour the teacher was aware that her behaviour had altered *"from being a quite reserved child to being either more reserved or quite talkative."*

- **What type of emotions do you think the participant was experiencing during her loss?**

I asked about the child's emotions to ascertain how aware the teacher was regarding the child's emotional state. In terms of emotions and general behaviour, she wrote, *"Emotions and actions vary a lot." In terms of loss the*

teacher indicated that she believes the child experienced emotions such as “sadness, confusion, concern and [being] unsure.”

- **Did the participant’s behaviour change towards her peers?**

The teacher briefly noted, “Not really any different.”

- **What strategies did you use to try and help her to cope better?**

In terms of coping strategies, the teacher “encouraged her to speak about the loss and what it meant to her. Allow classmates to share similar experiences. Discussed the death of people in general.”

- **As a teacher, what do you feel the participant needs to help her cope?**

This question was based on the teacher’s experience of the child and their resiliency. The teacher believed that “extra support and love” would assist in her coping efforts.

- **As the teacher what impact does this participant have on you?**

She replied that Precious “brings out my compassionate side strongly.” Knowing this teacher briefly from interaction, she does not appear to be the compassionate type of teacher on the surface, but after experiencing such interactions with the learner suffering grief, it seemed to rekindle her compassionate side.

- **What do you think a teacher need to be equipped with to deal with bereavement in the classroom situation?**

The teacher emphasised that children who are experiencing grief within the classroom situation often have “mixed emotions and behaviour for a short period of time.” So the teacher needs to be open to these emotions and behavioural changes in order to deal with the classroom as a whole, as well as with the individual child experiencing grief.

Based on the information gathered Precious is coping well and is dealing with her grief. It may have affected her behaviour as well as her stability but it is

understandable based on the nature of the loss that she experienced. With continued supportive efforts from her parents, teachers and friends.

### 4.3 THEMES AND CATEGORIES FROM THE RESEARCH DATA

The relevant themes and categories that were derived from the above information are demonstrated in the table below.

**Table 4.4: Themes and categories**

Themes	Categories
Various forms of grieving	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Type</li> <li>• Process</li> <li>• Manifestation</li> </ul>
Emotional experience through grief	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sadness</li> <li>• Fear</li> <li>• Anxiety/shock</li> <li>• Overwhelming uncertainty</li> <li>• Insecurity</li> <li>• Trust</li> <li>• Vulnerability</li> </ul>
Sources of support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Family</li> <li>• Friends</li> <li>• Teacher</li> </ul>

Three themes emerged from the data. Theme 1 relates to grief, and the following categories could be identified: type, process and manifestation. Theme 2 relates to the emotional experiences through grief, which entail sadness, fear, anxiety, overwhelming uncertainty, insecurity, trust and vulnerability. Theme 3 relates to sources of support, comprising family, friends and teachers.

#### **4.4 DATA INTERPRETATION IN TERMS OF THEMES AND CATEGORIES: FINDINGS**

Creswell (2013:685) emphasizes that data interpretation determines the outcome of the study, by distinguishing between what has been learnt that can benefit and add value to the study outcomes, and what is not relevant for the study. The themes and categories will be discussed in relation to the theoretical perspectives outlined in Chapter 2.

##### **4.4.1.1 Theme 1: Grief**

When a child experiences loss of a loved one, the very being of the child is affected, the child's world is shaken, his beliefs shattered and expectations destroyed (see section 2.5). The healing process of children who experience grief of a loved one at a young age may be most problematic, as they may experience limited abilities to express their feelings, as well as limited capabilities to tolerate the pain generated by loss. A noticeable element in this research, is the various forms of grieving that the respective participants experienced, as well as the differing reactions to that grief.

No two deaths are the same, nor are the grieving processes that follow (see section 2.5). Participant Keabetswe encountered two deaths of close family members in a span of one week, but grieved about each loss differently. Her grandfather was her role model ('hero'), the person she looked up to. At the time of his loss she was sad and cried a lot, yet was more concerned about her mother who could not attend the funeral on account of her new-born baby (Keabetswe's baby brother). The news of her baby brother's unexpected death one week later, contrarily, shocked her to her core and affected her much more, as she had eagerly waited so long for her baby brother, taken away almost as soon as he arrived.

Keabetswe chose not to see her grandfather's body before the burial, but wanted to see her little brother one last time to say goodbye. Keabetswe may have felt overwhelmed by having to see her grandfather without her mother, and was afraid of "fainting", hence her declining. However, she may have been experiencing feelings of shock and anxiety, and chose the safer option in order to avoid something embarrassing happening to her (see section 2.5.1.1). Keabetswe understood that

her grandfather passed away, being already old and ill, but it's also understandable that she needed to see her baby brother's face in death, in order to comprehend and face the reality of his passing. She also had her mother as a source of support at her brother's funeral, which made it easier for her to compose herself. In terms of dealing with her grief, she handled herself remarkably well throughout the research procedures, she responded well and gave informative answers.

The reason for Keabetswe's grief for her baby brother's death overshadowing her grief for her deceased grandfather, may possibly be because of her emotional attention having shifted in entirety to her baby brother and that loss is the primary loss that she most needs to cope with, and recover from.

"Healing looks like recollecting, reorganizing and remembering" (see section 2.5.1.5). This statement is evident in her drawing figure (picture) of her family and her baby brother up in heaven smiling down at them. In her drawing figure (picture) her mother is still crying, her dad looking sad as well, yet the baby brother is happily smiling down at them. This reveals Keabetswe's progressed level of acceptance with regard to the passing away of her baby brother and grandfather. She understood that both of them were up in heaven, and that they would be proudly watching down on her. She recollected a happy moment shared with her baby brother, and placed it within the context of their daily lives via her drawing figure (picture); in that way emphasising that life goes on for those still alive, but the deceased is still remembered in a positive manner. Keabetswe accepted the losses that she had experienced, made her peace with reality and is able to move on in her life as a balanced and happy person.

This research reveals how the griever is affected by the nature of the relationship between deceased and griever, and the impact it has on the grieving process itself. The closer the relationship, the more traumatic the experience, and the harder it is to overcome (see section 2.5). Refentse was significantly affected by her father's death when she was five. Her mother's death a few years later shocked her to the extent that she shut her emotional existence down, in an effort to deal with that unbearable amount of pain. Literature describes a higher plane of adaptability for a person who had already experienced grief, in comparison with a person experiencing grief for the

first time (see section 2.5). In Refentse's case this was not the outcome, however, her double grief, all while she was still young and dependent on her parents' care, cruelly impacted her entire being and forced her to shut down mentally, physically and emotionally. Empty feelings enter the psyche and grief takes itself to a much deeper level: a depressive state that feels as if it will never go away (see section 2.5.1.4). Refentse, having experienced multiple griefs, seems to be stuck in that highly depressive state echoed in literature, which indicates that grief may push a child towards experiencing guilt, anger, frustration, sadness, regret, hopelessness, insomnia and reclusiveness (see section 2.5.1.4).

The anger, hopelessness and frustration may stem from Refentse's position of insecurity at home, having to live unhappily with her grandparents. The sadness, regret, insomnia and reclusiveness stem from Refentse's lack of communication and ability to socialise, as she finds it hard to trust anyone and to grow close to someone else without being reminded of the risk of losing their companionship too. Depression can be a condition the child can become trapped in, as they may easily blame themselves for the loss that has occurred, since they are only beginning to comprehend the finality and inevitability of death (see section 2.5.1.4). Psychologically, in terms of loss the child will suddenly feel extremely vulnerable and hence without "worth", tempted to resort to a negative view of their lives. This is dangerous, because if the child does not change their outlook on life, they risk getting terminally stuck in a depressive state (see section 2.5.1.4). All these statements in this passage reflect the behaviour of Refentse and the desperately unhappy life she leads; she is deeply trapped in a depressive state, and finds it hard even unwilling to comprehend her losses and life's often harsh realities. She finds no purpose or happiness in her daily existence. 'Acceptance' is a stage some children never reaches, as they fall into a rut in a previous stage, where they lack the mental and emotional faculties to progress from (see section 2.1.5.5). She needs extensive counselling and other forms of support, if she hopes to overcome her grief, and get back on track before she loses her entire childhood.

The way in which a person dies often determines the severity of grief. In some instances, if the death is of a loved one who had been sick for a long time, the passing may come as a form of relief for those that had to bear witness to the

deceased's long suffering (see section 2.5). This statement rings true in Precious's life, who watched her grandmother gradually deteriorate with illness. It was difficult for her to let go of her ideal of her grandmother, as she was very fond of her, though ultimately there is reason to believe there is a measure of relief that she no longer has to watch her grandmother suffer.

A strong bond between survivor and deceased will make the grieving process more difficult and traumatic (see section 2.5). Precious was overwhelmed at the death of her grandmother and certainly found the initial stages of her grief difficult she was forthright in acknowledging how sad she felt and how much she cried in the wake of her grandmother's death. It may sometimes be easier to believe something terrible did not happen, than accepting that it really did (see section 2.5.1.1) more so in the case of young children.

Precious found it at first very hard to open up and speak about her feelings and the sadness she experiences during her bereavement. Initially it can be understood that Precious encountered feelings of denial as she found it hard to understand that her grandmother had died. Children need to go through this phase, as it is a defence mechanism used to buffer the initial shock (see section 2.5.1.1). This would make sense with regard to Precious and her resiliency and ability to deal with her grandmother's death after the initial period of shock. Researchers highlight the importance of having any form of support from the initial stages of illness of a loved one until their passing (see section 2.5). For full recovery from grief, it is important to realise there is someone to talk to, trust in, rely on and to lean on for support. Precious's parents initially carried on with life as normal, as well as her siblings and teacher, as they did not think or suspect that the grandmother's death had affected her in any significant way. This is unfortunately a great and popular misconception that many adults have with regards to the emotional depth of young children experiencing grief (see section 2.6). Had Precious received the support she needed from the beginning, she would have overcome her grief much quicker and dealt with her loss in a more advanced manner.



#### 4.4.1.2 Theme 2: Emotional experience

The title of this study refers to "disenfranchised grief", which is essentially defined as grief that goes unnoticed. Researchers maintain that experiences of grief are difficult to detect in children, as these manifest in different ways (see 1.2). What I found remarkable as researcher was the variation of grieving behaviour amongst the three participating learners, as well as variations in the intensities of my participants' emotional experiences, which they encountered as a result of a traumatic loss in their lives.

Where sadness characterised Keabetswe's and Precious's experiences, it was striking to note the emotional detachment and depression that Refentse displayed. Although not an overtly cold-hearted demonstration, her lack of emotion spoke even more clearly than tears or words could. Dyregrov and Dyregrov (2013:296) explain this kind of grief as "inhibited grief", "masked grief" and "suppression of grief". I did recognise sadness in all of their eyes as the participants each spoke about the deaths of their lost loved ones, concurring with references in literature (see section 2.3.3), when the grieving child begins to understand the depth of personal loss and the entire, devastating concept of death.

All three participants belonged to the higher age bracket of the concrete operational stage. According to Piaget (see section 2.3.3), children at this age realise that death is final and inevitable, and hence are getting their first exposures to the harsh reality of the fact that they would not see their loved ones again, resulting in intense feelings of grief. Although each child is on the concrete operational age level, they experience their grief differently.

When comparing the three participants, we note that Keabetswe is grieving, but she is able to still complete all her schoolwork and perform well according to her teacher. Children at this age are able to understand the finality of death (see section 2.3.3) and hence know that they have no control over it. Refentse reacts to her loss by displaying emotional numbness. Her father had passed away when she was only five years old, and according to the pre-operational stage definitions, children are not yet able to understand death fully (see section 2.3.2). At the age of nine, however, she

was very aware of the permanence of death when now her mother passed away. Precious, in almost direct contrast to Refentse, displayed personal resilience while it was clear that she was also able to understand the finality of her grandmother's passing. According to her teacher her work was not greatly affected by the loss that she had experienced.

Vulnerability influences a child's emotional experience, which in turn affects the child's emotional state (see section 2.2). It is clear that Keabetswe, Precious as well as Refentse lacked support at the time of the funeral. This initiated feelings of vulnerability, leading to feelings of anxiety, insecurity, fear, sadness and uncertainty. The lack of either parent or a stable support system impacts on the child, as an emotional "buffer" does not yet exist, which may exacerbate feelings of vulnerability (see section 2.2).

The death of someone close already leads to severe vulnerabilities in the cases of young and dependent children. Feeling vulnerable may affect the child's identity, social relationships, and control over his/her own life, resulting in a loss of an appreciation of the meaningfulness of life (see section 2.2.1). The absence of social relations or inability to explain the impact her friends had in her life displays a deep-seated lack of trust and social cohesion in her life, especially having nobody close enough to confide in and feel close to.

Each of the participants experienced the uncertainty and fear that engulfed their hearts as they realised the permanence of their losses, and felt the lack of control and diminished significance that their lives are spiralling into. Keabetswe and Precious experienced a malfunction (relatively speaking) in their family as family members of theirs were not there anymore. Refentse though, had lost her sense of security, control and meaningfulness in life when her mother also passed, exacerbating her emotional insecurity (see section 2.4.1). She seemed to have 'shut down' in terms of finding meaning to her life, which can be explained by the fact that the pain from loss is also related to the nature of the relationship (see section 2.2.1). In the case of Refentse both her primary caregivers passed away, whereas Keabetswe lost her grandfather and brother, who were a step further away from her closest emotional circle. Precious had lost her grandmother who had looked after

her, but she still had her supporting mother and father to look after and take care of her. The relationship with the deceased will impact on the manner in which a person grieves (see section 2.5).

Early parental loss leaves a child vulnerable, which further impacts the child's developmental stages both cognitively as well as psychosocially (see section 2.4.1). According to Geiselhart, Gwebu and Krüger (2008:120) "children who become orphans, have to cope with the death of their parents or other family members and may find themselves in different homes where they are not treated well." This is indeed the case with Refentse, as she mentioned during the interview how she does not enjoy staying with her grandparents as they make her feel "sad."

According to Erikson's psychosocial developmental stages, death impacts a child in many ways and may have a lasting negative impact on the child (see section 2.4.1). Refentse lost her father at the age of five years old, meaning that she was still in the pre-operational stage of development at the time (see section 2.3.2). Refentse thus have not yet learnt to express her feelings verbally when she suffered grief, impacting on her abilities to explain or discuss any social interactions as she grows older. This seeming inability may be explained by a sense of inferiority which she experiences due to the loss of both her parents. This has a recurring negative impact on her when linked to her grief, as she strongly harbours and displays feelings such as insecurity and uncertainty.

The pre-operational stage of development is seen as a very egocentric stage (see section 2.3.2). Refentse could have only seen herself in this situation, experiencing all those confusing emotions without being able to reach out and call for support, getting overwhelmed and hence her emotions shutting down. Keabetswe and Precious experienced more feelings of sadness as they spoke about their grief throughout their interviews. Their grief did not seem to consume their lives. It has affected them, but thanks in large part to a safety net of supporting systems, they are able to move beyond the grief and assess life as balanced individual children again.

#### 4.4.1.3 Theme 3: Support

A popular misconception exists, stating that young children are not able to understand loss through death, causing many adults to believe that children do not need support when death in the family occurs. The support that a child needs may differ from case to case, as some children may need physical support and others may need to verbally express their feelings in a psychologically safe environment (see section 2.6). There is need for support irrespective of a child's age, and literature indicates that emotional support is crucial for the processing of grief (see section 2.5). A support structure can consist of many different sources such as a friend, a teacher, family members as well as community groups (see section 2.5). What is noticeable within this study is the wide spectrum of support experienced by the three participants: from a complete lack of support to empathetic support. Keabetswe experienced phenomenal support from her teacher; she did lack family support, however. Precious experienced limited support from her family and lacked support in every other aspect. Refentse was the most affected in terms of support, as she had not received any significant measure of support from any person. It is important for a child to find someone that they can trust and speak to, and who is willing to offer support in order to make their grieving process easier (see section 2.6).

Support is a prerequisite at the time of grief, as it helps the bereaved to attain closure (see section 2.6). The death of a loved one is often a significant life stressor with effects across emotional, physical, behavioural, cognitive, social, spiritual and financial domains (Aoun, Breen, Howting, Rumbold, McNamara & Hegney 2015:2). The severity of the impact that the death of a loved one has on a child could clearly be detected in all three participants. Keabetswe and Precious, who have experienced support, were able to find closure. They were able to comprehend their losses, speak about it and analyse their own emotions that are linked to the losses that they encountered. Refentse, conversely, received no emotional support while being left to her own devices, resulting in a dispiriting demeanour in which she seems detached from her surroundings, and out of touch with her emotions.

Emotional support is crucial for children as it allows the child to invest trust in the person who offers support, which in turn aids in overcoming grief (see section 2.6). Keabetswe certainly had emotional support as her teacher was there for her to confide in, to hug and to let her know that a reassuring presence was never too far away. Precious had partial support, as her parents were both still alive, thereby providing support in their physical presence at home, though it seemed that they were unaware that she needed emotional support as well. Her teacher was not very supportive in every aspect; she did ask Precious brief questions in the beginning of her grieving period, but did not offer continuous support. Refentse did not attain support from either home or school, hence her unresolved grief is understood.

Support should take place in a space where children feel free to give uninhibited expression to their grief (see section 2.5). Although her grandmothers and parents dearly loved Keabetswe, it was clear that she was left without any support immediately after the passing of specifically her baby brother. Keabetswe was fortunate to have a teacher that was emotionally involved, who cared about her loss and who supported her throughout, making her grieving process easier. Refentse and Precious were unfortunately not so lucky to have teachers with the same levels of awareness and willingness to offer caring support. Refentse's teacher was not even sure whom she had lost, or in which years she had experienced the losses. This symptomized the lack of interest and interaction that the teacher had with her learner. Precious's teacher was semi-supportive at times, and attempted to help her where necessary. At the same time, her teacher was more focused on class work than the needs of a child experiencing loss and grief.

Literature indicates that the most appropriate person that can play an active role in supporting a grieving learner is the teacher (see section 2.6.1). At the same time, it is difficult for the teacher to support a child without knowing that the child is experiencing grief, or to understand the child's circumstances without speaking to the child (see section 2.6.1). The teacher should speak to the grieving child, as well as the child's family or caregivers in order to find out what is really happening in the child's life, and how to help the child in the best manner possible.

In terms of full support from her teacher, Keabetswe was very fortunate as her teacher kept contact with her family throughout the process, and still speaks to all of them regularly. This form of support was invaluable in assisting Keabetswe in overcoming her grief. Support can be shown by teachers in different ways, such as allowing the child to be excused if emotional matters become too overwhelming, to speak to the child privately, to allow a close friend to be with the child at all times, and more (see section 2.6.1). These are the types of support that Keabetswe's teacher have shown to her, and they collectively proved to be very efficient.

A teacher needs to be comfortable with death (see section 2.6.1) in order to be able to speak about it, and share a child's experiences in support. Keabetswe's teacher was very experienced in grief, as she had lost her husband, mother as well as her pet cat. She was able to share her stories and cry along with Keabetswe in helping her to overcome her loss.

It is important for the school to holistically support the child as well as the teacher, as it is a very emotional process (see section 2.6.1). The school that these children and teachers attended or worked at, acknowledged that the children experienced losses, but then merely published it in an information letter. No additional support was offered to the teacher or child by the school.

#### **4.5 CONCLUSION**

Chapter 4 consisted of the analysis, interpretation and presentation of the findings of the study. Three themes were derived from the data, which served as guidelines to construct meaning from the findings. Chapter 5 provides a conclusion to the study and answers the secondary research questions as well as the main research question along with recommendations.



## **CHAPTER 5**

### **SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **5.1 INTRODUCTION**

In Chapter 4 the research findings were provided in accordance to theoretical frameworks of Piaget and Erikson, Kubler-Ross's model as well as the literature consulted on children experiencing grief.

Chapter 5 concludes this study by first providing a summary of the literature findings as well as the empirical findings. The research questions that have been guiding this study will then be answered. The secondary questions will be answered in relation to the findings within the empirical study, followed by an answer to the main research question. Recommendations are presented to teacher training institutions, school principals, teachers and parents as well as further research.

#### **5.2 SUMMARY OF THE LITERATURE AND EMPIRICAL FINDINGS**

This section includes a summary of the key findings pertaining to the consulted literature as well as the most pertinent empirical findings.

##### **5.2.1 Overview of the key literature findings**

Grief within children has become a reality within most families today (see 2.1). A significant increase in the amount of child headed households exists, especially in South Africa (see 1.1). Children frequently lose loved ones, be it a parent, grandparent, sibling or a friend. The study also focused on grade 3 learners and their experience of grief after having experienced loss of a parent, sibling or grandparent. This study also aimed at finding support strategies that teachers can use in order to support the grieving learner (see 2.1).

Due to the young age of the Foundation Phase child, vulnerability often affects children especially when they have experienced loss through the passing away of a parent, caregiver or other person with whom the child had a close relationship. Vulnerability affects a child the most when they lose someone close that they are

most dependent on (see 2.2.1), associated with a subsequent loss of a support structure (see 2.2).

The presence of parents as main caregivers plays a major role in reducing the vulnerability of their children. When both parents are present and can provide support for their child during any traumatic experience, then the child will probably not fall into the vulnerable category. However, if one or both parents abandon the child, pass away or display no interest in the child and their life, then the child is most likely going to suffer from vulnerability (see 2.2). A child's developmental level will also be a deciding factor in the manner in which they experience grief, and the degree of severity of vulnerability. A young child who experiences loss of a loved one will encounter severe distress, leading to a sense of vulnerability which in turn affects them mentally, physically, emotionally and socially (see 2.2.1).

Maturity is an important parameter in determining how a child will understand and respond to loss of a parent, sibling or grandparent. This means that a child's cognitive development impacts his understanding of death and ability to overcome it (see 2.3). Piaget's theory on cognitive development was used as one of the theoretical perspectives that guided this study. In the preoperational stage children do not typically understand the finality of death and find it hard to grasp the permanent loss of a loved one. In the concrete operational stage children have a more advanced level of understanding, and are able to comprehend the finality and inevitability of death, which is a relatively new and traumatic concept for them.

Erikson's psychosocial development was used as another theoretical perspective in this study. The stage that's applicable to the study is industry versus inferiority, which occurs between the ages 6 – 12 years. In relation to the severity of the experience of grief, death can be understood and overcome in the case of a child whose development is progressing well. However, death may have an extremely debilitating effect on an underperforming child with low self-esteem (see 2.4.1).

When a child experiences loss of a parent, sibling or grandparent it has a significant impact on the child's entire life, since a vitally important person whose existence the child took for granted, has been permanently taken away (see 2.5). Children often



find it difficult to express their grief or explain their experiences with regard to dealing with their losses. Children who do not have adequate support are even more affected during this grieving process (see 2.5). The manner in which a person dies, and the relationship that the child had with the deceased, play vital roles in the child's ability to process and overcome the grief. The closer the relationship of the deceased to the child, the more traumatic the loss will be. If a child has experienced loss before, then it could mean that the child is already better prepared when loss is encountered a second time. However, in other instances multiple losses may affect a child deeply on mental and emotional levels, making it very difficult for the child to overcome his/her grief (see 2.5).

Kubler-Ross's stages of grief explain the various stages that people, in relevance to this study, children, pass through to process their grief (see 2.5.1). If support is experienced, the final stage of acceptance is reached. Children who are cognitively competent will grasp the concept of acceptance and will understand the grief that they have overcome. They will be able to talk about the deceased, recollect memories and be comfortable with the topic (see 2.5.1.5). Children who experience obstacles in terms of cognitive ability and development, will find it difficult to reach that stage of acceptance as they often get stuck in a previous stage. These children need additional support in order to achieve a level of acceptance (see 2.5.1.5).

Emotional support plays a vital role in a child's ability to deal with loss. Adults are often not patient enough or do not pay the child the necessary attention to perceive the child's real needs and emotional state (see 2.6). A child needs an adult that they can talk to, that offers them support and makes them feel comfortable and trustworthy. Support can also be shown through physical means, such as sharing hugs, tears, a tender squeeze of a hand, or anything to let the child know that someone else cares (see 2.5). Emotional support entails empathetic listening as well as administering of consolation (see 2.6).

The Foundation Phase teacher spends a lot of time with learners and can therefore play a vital role in supporting a child to overcome grief. A teacher needs to be actively involved in the child's life in order to provide capable support. The teacher has to address the needs of the child by convening with the child regularly, assisting

through appropriate response to their behaviour and emotions (see 2.6.1). Teachers can also adjust homework assignments or tailor their assessments to better accommodate the grieving learner. The teacher must ensure that the child is aware that the teacher may be at any time approached for comfort or just to talk to, as an outlet of their emotions (see 2.6.1). The school itself must also play a supportive role to the child and assist the family in any way that will make their grieving processes easier.

## **5.2.2 Overview of the empirical findings**

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with three learners in Grade 3 who had experienced losses during the preceding twelve months. Different types of loss were experienced: one learner lost a grandparent and sibling, another lost both parents and the third lost a grandmother who was very involved in her life. After the interviews a drawings activity was conducted with each learner, directly followed by a discussion about the drawing (verbal narratives) to gain an understanding of their drawings. Open qualitative questionnaires were given to the class teachers to obtain the teachers' perspectives on their grieving learners.

Through data analysis and interpretation, the following key findings were identified, categorised according to three prominent themes that emerged during data analysis.

### **5.2.2.1 Grief**

Grief is difficult to identify within Foundation Phase children. However, children in reality are severely affected by loss and the process of grief (see 4.4.1.1). They often find it difficult to express their feelings and to tolerate their inner pain. All three participants experienced grief, though different intensities of loss and support were experienced by each.

Participant A had experienced multiple losses within a short period of time, also experiencing two different types of grief during each of those events. When she lost her grandfather she was sad and cried, but her feelings included a greater concern regarding her mother and new-born brother. When her baby brother passed away

approximately one week later, it affected her on a deeper personal level, meaning she truly experienced the severe effects of grief.

Participant B had also experienced multiple losses, but during different stages of her life. Her father had passed away when she was very young, and due to the cognitive stage she was in (preoperational), could not yet comprehend the nature of her loss. Because of a lack of support, she could not come to terms with her feelings in an adequate way and realise the effects that her father's passing had on her life. When her mother passed away some four years later, she was old enough to understand that death is permanent, and to sense its impact on her life. It was a harsh reality she had to face, having lost both parents, and with no support system to rely on at home as well as at school, that reality gave rise to a troubled state of emotional despondency.

Participant C had lost her grandmother who she knew very well. She was initially shocked and found her situation hard to accept, but with time and limited support she managed to overcome her grief.

#### **5.2.2.2 Emotional Experience**

Each participant experienced loss and the associated emotions in a different manner. The degree of support received in each case substantially impacted on their ability to deal with their emotional experiences (see 4.4.1.2). A variety of emotions engulf children when they are experiencing a loss.

Participant A and C were able to work through their emotions and categorise their feelings in order to understand them better, but participant B was trapped in a depressive state and could not deal with any additional loss, emotion or feelings.

#### **5.2.2.3 Support**

Only one participant was supported well during her period of grief (Participant A). She received most of her support from her teacher and was able to express her feelings and emotions to her teacher without feeling threatened (see 4.2.1.2). The participant had lost her grandfather as well as baby brother within a very short time,

leaving the family distraught. Due to the fact that the entire family was affected by the loss, they were unable to offer support to the participant (4.2.1.2). The teacher spoke to the participant daily, offering physical and emotional types of support at all times (see 4.2.1.2). Judging by the participant's responses during the semi-structured interview and her impressive drawing, it was clear that she had achieved the stage of acceptance in her grief. The participant was able to speak about past experiences and recollect memories in a cheerful manner (see 2.5.1.5). Her verbal narrative indicated she believes that those whom she has lost are with God, and that they are contently looking down on her from heaven (see 4.2.1.3). The participant seems to understand her loss and the consequences thereof, and is coping well thanks to the assistance of those supporting her.

The remaining two participants were less fortunate in experiencing support during their periods of grief. It seems as if their caregivers assumed that they were not experiencing real grief and found it unnecessary to offer the children support (see 4.2). Participant B had encountered the loss of her father at the tender age of 5, but due to the mother being ill (resulting from AIDS) the child was never adequately supported through this first loss. Then the mother died a few years later leaving the child with her grandparents, whom the child was not comfortable living with (see 4.2.2.1). This left the participant feeling very vulnerable, reclusive and lonely. Due to her lesser developed cognitive stage at the time of her father's passing she could not yet clearly understand how his death impacted on her, but as she had entered a higher cognitive stage by the time her mother passed away, the full implications of her mother's death could be well understood. The realisation of what this double loss meant to her prompted the participant to resort to shutting down mentally, physically and emotionally (see 4.2.2.1). Had the participant received adequate support for the initial loss or even during the second loss, she would have found it easier to cope with. Any form of support is appreciated when dealing with loss (see 2.5). This participant is unfortunately stuck in the stage of depression as she displays an unwillingness to live (see 2.5.1.4) and to seek joy in the world or happiness for her future (see 4.2.2.1).

Participant C was partly supported during her grief. She had lost her grandmother who often looked after her while her parents were working. Her grandmother fell ill

and was rushed to hospital where she passed away. The participant was not prepared for the loss of her grandmother and found it initially very difficult to accept, as she was saddened and cried often (see 4.2.3.1). The support of having her parents as well as older siblings to comfort her made it easier for her to deal with the loss after the initial shock (see 2.5.1.1). In her narratives she explained the illustration of herself and her sister visiting the park her grandmother used to accompany them to. This displayed the participant's ability to recollect and reminisce about events that had taken place when the deceased was still alive, which can be a signifying factor in the acceptance stage (see 2.4.1.5). It took the participant a long period of time to understand the finality of the situation, so she still tended to be weary at times, but she has accepted the fact that her grandmother has passed away. The participant has therefore moved on with her life.

### **5.3 RESEARCH CONCLUSIONS**

This study has been guided all along by the research questions asked in section 1.3.1. The secondary research questions are answered first, leading up to the main research question.

#### **5.3.1 Secondary research question 1: What are the symptoms of disenfranchised grief?**

Disenfranchised grief is grief that cannot be demonstratively displayed, as children have not yet developed the skills to accurately portray their feelings through expression the grief therefore goes unnoticed (see 1.4.2). The symptoms therefore consist of inner grief, which is not expressed externally. Emotions cannot be confronted, processed or expressed and are likely to become intensified (see 1.4.2).

Research findings revealed that most of the participants experienced grief but were not sure how to display it. Participant A mentioned that she feared she might faint if she were to view her grandfather's body in the casket (see 4.2.1.1). Participant B had lost all forms of emotional awareness due to multiple losses suffered (see 4.2.2.1). Participant C was the most emotionally expressive of the three participants, but calmed down after the initial shock (see 4.2.3.1). Children tend to be reclusive, emotionally distraught, display uncanny behaviour, act out irrationally, or cry

uncontrollably when dealing with disenfranchised grief, however all children do not display these symptoms. Teachers need to be aware of and look out for these symptoms, however within my study all the teachers were either informed by a family member of the participant of the family's death or by the participant themselves.

### **5.3.2 Secondary research question 2: How do Foundation Phase children experience grief?**

According to the research findings and literature review conducted, children experience grief and go through the stages of grief like any adult would (see 2.5). However, children find it more difficult to express their feelings, and rely on adults for assistance with their current experiences. Children younger than six years old will find it difficult to understand the concept of death and grasp the finality of it. Children above the age of six begin to understand grief, and by the age of nine they are able to understand the finality of it (see 2.3). Research indicates that when children encounter grief, they experience feelings of being scared, confused and lost (see 2.5). Maturity also plays a role in the manner that a child experiences loss: the more mature the child, the more comprehensive his understanding of death (see 2.5). A child's cognitive ability also influences his/her understanding of grief.

### **5.3.3 Secondary research question 3: What guidelines can be suggested for teachers in the Foundation Phase to help children cope with grief?**

According to the literature reviewed, teachers need to be able to support a child emotionally (see 2.6.1). The teacher needs to understand the child's background and cognitive status in order to support the learner suffering grief. The teacher is advised to approach the vulnerable child privately and offer support, act with empathy, and show the child that the teacher really cares (see 2.6.1). The teacher must monitor the child's performance, behavioural patterns and emotional state within the classroom to be able to identify the child's needs, and to recognise when the child may need additional support. The teacher needs to be empathetic, caring and approachable in order to create a safe environment. The teacher also needs to display qualities of competency, trust and openness making it easier for the child to address the teacher.

The teacher has to be comfortable with the concept of death and be able to talk about it, as children can sense when teachers are not comfortable with a certain topic and will therefore hesitate to talk to the teacher (see 2.6.1). The teacher must ensure that the child feels safe and trusting at all times. Teachers can help children express their feelings and emotions by playing different games with them, and encouraging outdoor activities. Lastly, teachers must be able to help the child verbalise their emotions through finding acceptable physical outlets, that will help them cope with their emotions and becoming more self-sufficient (see 2.6.1).

#### **5.3.4 Main research question: What support does a Foundation Phase child need in coping with disenfranchised grief?**

The reviewed literature and empirical findings indicate that support is needed to process grief and to reach the final stage of acceptance as postulated by Kubler-Ross. The Foundation Phase child is still very young and requires physical, emotional, cognitive and psychosocial support. The teacher can offer cognitive support by adjusting the academic demands on the child, and by explaining to the rest of the class what has happened, can offer emotional assistance. Emotional support is crucial for children as it allows them to trust another person, to share their experiences and feelings with them, ultimately allowing them to overcome grief (see 2.6). A psychological safe space should be created where the child will be able to express his/her grief (see 2.5).

Without any support a child is left distraught and will be unable to pass through all the stages of grief. The child will become stuck in one of the stages of grief if no aid is available to help them progress to next stages until eventually overcoming their grief (see 2.5.1.5). Any source of support is welcome when dealing with loss, be it from a friend, family member, support group, or anyone that can be trustworthy and responsible (see 2.5). Support is a prerequisite at the time of grief as it helps one attain closure (see 2.6).

## **5.4 RECOMMENDATIONS**

With regards to the research findings, the listed recommendations that follow can guide teacher training institutions, principals, teachers and parents in supporting learners, while further research may aid in finding more ways to assist Foundation Phase children during their periods of grief.

### **5.4.1 Recommendation for teacher training institutions**

The following recommendation is directed to universities and colleges who are preparing student teachers for the profession.

- **Recommendation 1**

Curricula at universities should include a module on counselling, where student teachers can be equipped to counsel and support children who experience grief. This knowledge will equip student teachers once they are employed at schools to identify grieving learners. If they are aware of the symptoms and emotional behaviours that children who are suffering from loss display, then it will be easier for them to provide adequate support to the child.

### **5.4.2 Recommendation for schools**

The following recommendation is directed to schools in order to make schooling easier for supportive teachers and bereaved learners alike.

- **Recommendation 2**

The school needs to support teachers so that they in turn are enabled to support grieving learners. The teacher and learner must be allowed time and space to deal with the learner's needs. Should the teacher believe the child needs counselling, therapy or additional support, then the school should facilitate such assistance.



### 5.4.3 Recommendations for principals

The following recommendations are directed to the principals in order to make the school a better environment for teachers as well as learners.

- **Recommendation 3**

Principals should ensure that teachers are informed about the loss that learners experience. This will enable teachers to respond timeously and sufficiently to the type of loss the child has experienced, and offer the relevant support.

- **Recommendation 4**

Principals as custodians of schools should emphasise the pastoral role of the teacher so that it becomes second nature for teachers to be on the lookout for any sign that a learner experiences emotional challenges, and respond accordingly. This will ensure that all teachers are aware of their responsibilities and to pay close attention to a child's emotional display.

### 5.4.4 Recommendation for teachers

The following recommendation is directed to teachers in order to promote support within a Foundation Phase classroom when learners are experiencing grief.

- **Recommendation 5**

Teachers, who do not yet have the required background, should attend in-service training to equip them to identify and support children who experience grief.

### 5.4.5 Recommendation for parents

The following recommendation is directed to parents to aid them in supporting their children as members of families having to deal with the effects of grief.

- **Recommendation 6**

Parents should be made aware that children are also capable of experiencing grief and that this grief may be expressed in a different way than adults and that some children are not able to express their feelings and emotions. This realisation will enable parents to support a child in the best possible manner.

#### **5.4.6 Recommendation for further research**

The following recommendations are made for further research in order to broaden the scope for supporting Foundation Phase children who are experiencing grief.

- **Recommendation 7**

This research focused primarily on support for Foundation Phase learners that are experiencing grief. To understand the full extent of children's experiences of grief, one needs to know how children grieve. Further research can be conducted into children's experiences of grief, to achieve better understanding on ways to accommodate and support grieving children. Once more information is obtained on the mechanisms underlying children's grief, support strategies for grieving learners can then be implemented and officiated. Further research will assist parents, adults, teachers and caregivers to better understand how to appropriately and effectively support a grieving child.

### **5.5 CONCLUDING REMARKS**

The aim of this study was to provide guidelines and identify support structures that teachers can use to help a child that is experiencing grief in the Foundation Phase classroom due to loss of a parent, sibling or grandparent. Through the review of relevant literature and an empirical study, it was evident that some teachers as well as parents are unaware of the grief that Foundation Phase children experience, and that they truly need support and care during this time. The research also revealed how children who are offered support deal with their grief and are able to continue with life in a normal manner. It is important to acknowledge the necessity of providing support to children that are experiencing grief.

Disenfranchised grief is grief that cannot be demonstratively displayed, as children have not yet developed the skills to accurately portray their feelings through expression, the grief therefore goes unnoticed as mentioned in the study. It is therefore important for caregivers to note the behaviour and unnatural symptoms that their child may be displaying due to grief that they have experienced in order to aid in detecting disenfranchised grief and then being able to support the child.

As South Africa features among countries with high percentages of orphans, I trust that this research study will contribute in raising awareness amongst various stakeholders such as family members, parents, schools, teachers and caregivers about the nature of children's experiences of grief, so that these children can be sufficiently supported in overcoming their losses. Efficient support will enable children to be resilient, and to face life successfully in spite of their grief.



## 5.6 BIBLIOGRAPHY

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## Appendix A: Informed Consent Letter to Teachers

### INFORMED CONSENT LETTER

Dear Teacher

I am a student studying through the University of Pretoria. I am currently enrolled for my Bed (Masters) in the Faculty of Education. I have to complete a research module and one of the requirements is that I conduct research and write a research report about my work. I would like to ask you for your permission to conduct the research in your classroom.

The topic of my research is: Supporting Foundation Phase children in coping with hidden grief. Grief is a very important emotion that all people experience at some time in their lives. It is also important to note that children also suffer from grief. Many people disregard a child's feeling towards death as they think that they do not understand the concept and hence cannot grief. This has been proven wrong and therefore my aim is to explore how children experience grief, what support systems are available to them, and to set guidelines for teachers to assist these children in the classroom situation.

The benefit of the study is to propose guidelines to make it easier for the foundation phase teachers to help the children cope with the grief that they are experiencing.

If you agree to allow me to conduct research in your class, I will ask you and the HOD, Mrs. Roos to assist me in finding three children in grade 3 that have experienced grief due to loss of a loved one during the past year. I will approach these children and conduct semi-structured interviews, which will be more like a discussion between the children and myself. This is where we will get acquainted and I will explain to them my purpose and what my aims with this study is. The semi-structured interview will be conducted at a venue and time that will suit you the teacher, but it will not interfere with teaching time. It will be audio taped and transcribed by me for analytic purposes. Only my supervisor and I will have access



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to this information. I attached a copy of the interview discussion (Appendix E) for your information.

Thereafter during another encounter the children will participate in a drawings activity and they will interpret to me what they draw. This will be audio recorded and again transcribed, which only be accessed by the supervisor and myself.

Lastly as the teacher of the child I will ask you to conduct an observation and answer a sheet (Appendix F) that has been provided that will be used to further help describe the child and their current emotions and feelings. All these notes will be put together to form the basis of my data. It is important to note that as the teacher you need to remain objective in answering the observation sheet as well as honest at all times. As the researcher I am aware that this may take up time but I assure you that it is for the benefit of these children that encounter loss so often and go unrecognised. I require assistance with regard to the observations and need a little time from the teacher. The documenting of the observation will not be an immediate thing required at the exact time but something that is recorded later that day or within two days so that it is not forgotten by the teacher. The teacher will not require more than a week to complete the observation sheet. It will not take longer than 2-3 hours but the teacher can decide at what pace she will fill the form out in selecting many afternoons or to fill it out in one seating, it is up to the teacher. The sheet will only be filled out once.

As the teacher please note that participation is voluntary and can be withdrawn at any time. The identity of the school and all participants will be protected. Only my supervisor and I will know which school was used in the research and this information will be treated as confidential. Pseudonyms will be used for your school, you as the teacher and learners during data collection and analysis. The information that will be collected will only be used for academic purposes. Collected data will be in my possession or my supervisor's and will be locked up for safety and confidential purposes.

After completion of the study, the material will be stored at the university's Early Childhood Education Department. At the department, data is required to be stored

for a minimum period of ten years after the completion of the original project but if intellectual property is involved, or if there are particular statutory or contractual requirements, a longer period may well be required. Special consideration about the length of storage should also be given to cases where a potential conflict of interest or misconduct is involved. In some cases, and in particular where experiments with humans are concerned, funding bodies may require that all raw data be kept indefinitely.

In my research report and in any other academic communication, pseudonyms will be used for the school and teachers and no other identifying information will be given. If you agree to allow me to conduct this research in your school, please fill in the consent form provided below. If you have any questions, do not hesitate to contact my supervisor or me at the numbers given below, or via E-mail.

Signature of student

\_\_\_\_\_

Name of student: Fatima Aboobaker

Contact number for student: 084 786 667

E-mail of student: [fatima606@hotmail.com](mailto:fatima606@hotmail.com)

Consent form:

I, \_\_\_\_\_(your name), teacher of \_\_\_\_\_agree / do not agree (delete what is not applicable) to allow Fatima Aboobaker to conduct research in my classroom. The topic of the research being: Supporting foundation Phase children in coping with hidden grief.

I understand that three grade 3 children will be interviewed about this topic for approximately one- two hours at a venue and time that will suit the teacher, but will not interfere with school activities and teaching time. The interview will be audio recorded.I understand that a drawings activity will be done with these three learners that will further enhance the research and give the researcher better perspective. I understand that this will also be audio recorded.



As the teacher I will conduct observations on the children during class time for a period of time that is suitable for the me and the researcher, the role of the researcher will remain objective and non invasive.

I understand that children and their caregivers will receive letters of information regarding this research project and their consent.

I understand that the researcher subscribes to the principles of:

- Voluntary participation in research, implying that the participants might withdraw from the research at any time.
- Informed consent, meaning that research participants must at all times be fully informed about the research process and purposes, and must give consent to their participation in the research.
- Safety in participation put differently, that the human respondents should not be placed at risk or harm of any kind e.g., research with young children.
- Privacy, meaning that the confidentiality and anonymity of human respondents should be protected at all times.
- Trust, which implies that human respondents will not be respondent to any acts of deception or betrayal in the research process or its published outcomes.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix B: Informed consent letter to headmaster



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### INFORMED CONSENT LETTER

Dear Headmaster

I am a student studying through the University of Pretoria. I am currently enrolled for my BEd (Masters) in the Faculty of Education. I have to complete a research module and one of the requirements is that I conduct research and write a research report about my work. I would like to ask you for your permission to conduct the research at your school.

The topic of my research is: Supporting Foundation Phase children in coping with hidden grief. Grief is a very important emotion that all people experience at some time in their lives. It is also important to note that children also suffer from grief. Many people disregard a child's feeling towards death as they think that they do not understand the concept and hence cannot grief. This has been proven wrong and therefore my aim is to explore how children experience grief, what support systems are available to them, and to set guidelines for teachers to assist these children in the classroom situation.

The benefit of the study is to propose guidelines to make it easier for the foundation phase teachers to help the children cope with the grief that they are experiencing.

If you agree to allow me to conduct research in your school, I will ask the HOD, Mrs. Roos to assist me in finding three children in grade 3 that have experienced grief due to loss of a loved one during the past year. I will approach these children and conduct semi-structured interviews, which will be more like a discussion between the children and myself. This is where we will get acquainted and I will explain to them my purpose and what my aims with this study are. The semi-structured interview will be conducted at a venue and time that will suit the teacher, but it will not interfere with teaching time. It will be audio taped and transcribed by me for analytic purposes. Only my supervisor and I will have access to this information. I attached a

copy of the interview discussion for your information.

Thereafter during another encounter the children will participate in a drawings activity and they will interpret to me what they draw. This will be audio recorded and again transcribed, which only be accessed by the supervisor and myself. Lastly the teachers of each class will conduct an observation and create notes that will be used to further help describe the child and their current emotions and feelings. All these notes will be put together to form the basis of my data.

The children and caregivers will receive a letter to inform them about the research that will be conducted. Teacher as well as learner participation is voluntary and can be withdrawn at any time. The identity of the school and all participants will be protected. Only my supervisor and I will know which school was used in the research and this information will be treated as confidential. Pseudonyms will be used for your school, teachers and learners during data collection and analysis. The information that will be collected will only be used for academic purposes. Collected data will be in my possession or my supervisor's and will be locked up for safety and confidential purposes.

After completion of the study, the material will be stored at the university's Early Childhood Education Department. Data is required to be stored for a minimum period of ten years after the completion of the original project but if intellectual property is involved, or if there are particular statutory or contractual requirements, a longer period may well be required. Special consideration about the length of storage should also be given to cases where a potential conflict of interest or misconduct is involved. In some cases, and in particular where experiments with humans are concerned, funding bodies may require that all raw data be kept indefinitely.

In my research report and in any other academic communication, pseudonyms will be used for the school and teachers and no other identifying information will be given. If you agree to allow me to conduct this research in your school, please fill in the consent form provided below. If you have any questions, do not hesitate to contact my supervisor or me at the numbers given below, or via E-mail.

Signature of student

\_\_\_\_\_

Name of student: Fatima Aboobaker

Contact number for student: 084 786 667

E-mail of student: fatima606@hotmail.com

Consent form:

I, \_\_\_\_\_(your name), Headmaster of \_\_\_\_\_ agree / do not agree (delete what is not applicable) to allow Fatima Aboobaker to conduct research in this school. The topic of the research being: Supporting foundation Phase children in coping with hidden grief.

I understand that three grade 3 children will be interviewed about this topic for approximately one- two hours at a venue and time that will suit the teacher, but will not interfere with school activities and teaching time. The interview will be audio recorded.

I understand that a drawings activity will be done with these three learners that will further enhance the research and give the researcher better perspective. I understand that this will also be audio recorded. The teacher will conduct observations on the children during class time for a period of time that is suitable for the teacher and the researcher, the role of the researcher will remain objective and non invasive.

I understand that children and their caregivers will receive letters of information regarding this research project and their consent.

I understand that the researcher subscribes to the principles of:

- Voluntary participation in research, implying that the participants might withdraw from the research at any time.
- Informed consent, meaning that research participants must at all times be fully informed about the research process and purposes, and must give consent to their participation in the research.

- Safety in participation; put differently, that the human respondents should not be placed at risk or harm of any kind e.g., research with young children.
- Privacy, meaning that the confidentiality and anonymity of human respondents should be protected at all times.
- Trust, which implies that human respondents will not be respondent to any acts of deception or betrayal in the research process or its published outcomes.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix C: Childs assent form










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### ASSENT FORM FOR YOUNG CHILDREN

Project title: Supporting foundation phase children in coping with disenfranchised grief

Researcher: Fatima Aboobaker

Oral Description	Visual Description
<p>1. I want to tell you about my research project. When a person does research, it means that they want to learn more about something. I want to learn more about you and get to know you better</p>	
<p>2. I will meet with you and a few of your friends to have a little talk and ask you a few questions that will tell me a little more about you. I want to also know more about your loss and what you experienced.</p>	
<p>3. I will then ask you to draw a picture for me that better explains the feelings you are going through or went through when you experienced your loss</p>	

Oral Description	Visual Description
<p>4. I will ask you to explain to me the picture you have drawn and why you have drawn it, what does it mean to you and how does it make you feel?</p>	
<p>5. It is also important for you to know that all our discussions will be recorded</p>	
<p>6. It is also important for you to know that if you feel uncomfortable at anytime and want to stop that we can stop at anytime.</p>	
<p>7. Before you decide if you are willing to help me, you may ask any questions that you want to know more about.</p>	

The following box contains two faces. The first one is the smiling face that is showing thumbs up and the second one is a sad face that is showing thumbs down. If you would like to participate in this study, you can cross the face that is smiling. If you do not want to participate in the study, you can cross the face that is sad.



**Yes**, I want to be a participant

**No**, I do not want to be a participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of the child:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of the child (written by themselves)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Person obtaining the

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_



## Appendix D: Informed consent letter To caregivers



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### INFORMED CONSENT LETTER

Dear Sir/Madam

I am a student studying through the University of Pretoria. I am currently enrolled for my BEd(Masters) in the Faculty of Education. I have to complete a research module and one of the requirements is that I conduct research and write a research report about my work. I would like to ask you for your permission to conduct the research using your child as a participant.

Your child has been selected and I hereby requested to you to allow him/her to participate in the research study that I will be conducting based on the **research topic: Supporting Foundation Phase children in coping with disenfranchised grief**

The purpose of this study is to explore how children in foundation phase experience grief, what support systems are available to them, and to set guidelines for teachers to assist these children in the classroom situation.

There are many children in Foundation Phase who go through grief. People tend to believe that children are too small to experience grief. It was assumed that children did not really understand the concept and hence cannot experience the emotions involved. Through research we understand that anyone who is old enough to love is old enough to grieve and hence children do experience grief.

For children grief is very sensitive as they find it hard to express themselves. They go through disenfranchised grief. Disenfranchised grief is grief that is unrecognised and that cannot be outwardly displayed. As you are aware your child has experienced disenfranchised grief and I as the researcher would like to help and assist the child in coping with his/her grief and develop coping mechanisms that

teachers can use to help the child in the classroom situation as children spend most of their waking hours at school.

The participation involves your child getting to know me better in a semi structured interview where I will explain to them what I am going to do and ask them basic questions it is going to be more like a discussion. The interview will allow me to gain insight as to what the child is experiencing and going through. I will introduce myself and get to know the children a little better. It will not be overwhelming but I will try and gain the learners trust and get comfortable with them as the study is very sensitive and I will need to know them well in order for them to let me in and conduct the research.

I will further ask the child to create a drawing for me based on the feelings the child experienced during their grieving period and explain it to me. The teacher will conduct the last bit of research, as the teacher will create observational notes on the child based on their behaviour throughout the schooling day for a short period of time. The research project will have no direct benefit to you, but will assist in identifying ways of addressing the educational needs of young children and aid in helping them cope with grief. Your child's input will help in identifying factors which contribute to grief. These inputs will be used as guidelines for teachers so that it can assist the teachers to help children in other schools also going through the same thing.

The research results will be made available on request after the completion of the project. The research data will be stored both in electronic format and as a hard copy at the University of Pretoria for 15 years in compliance with the ethical requirements of the University. Results may also be shared with other professionals in articles or conference presentations and all persons who will have access to the research data will be identified.

Participation in this study is voluntary and your child may withdraw from participation at any time without any negative consequences and the data would be destroyed should you withdraw. Please be assured that all information will be treated with the

strictest confidence and your child's personal particulars will not be divulged to any person

I do hope that this letter will provide you with adequate information to enable you to consider giving your consent for your child to participate in the proposed study. In order to grant your consent to participate in this study, you are requested to sign the *Informed Consent Letter*.

Kindly e-mail me or deliver by hand, your Informed Consent letter indicating your consent/non-consent to participate in the study.

Should you require any further information, you may contact me at **0844786667** or at the following e-mail address: **fatima606@hotmail.com**

Kind regards

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Fatima Aboobaker  
Researcher  
084 478 6667  
fatima606@hotmail.com

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Dr M.G. Steyn  
Supervisor

Consent form:

I, \_\_\_\_\_(your name), Parent/caregiver/guardian of \_\_\_\_\_agree / do not agree (delete what is not applicable) to allow Fatima Aboobaker to conduct research with my child. The topic of the research being: Supporting foundation Phase children in coping with hidden grief.

I understand that my child will be interviewed about this topic for approximately one-two hours at a venue and time that will suit the teacher, but will not interfere with school activities and teaching time. The interview will be audio recorded.

I understand that a drawings activity will be done with my child that will further enhance the research and give the researcher better perspective. I understand that this will also be audio recorded. The teacher will conduct observations on my child during class time for a period of time that is suitable for the teacher and the researcher, the role of the researcher will remain objective and non invasive.

I understand that the researcher subscribes to the principles of:

- Voluntary participation in research, implying that the participants might withdraw from the research at any time.
- Informed consent, meaning that research participants must at all times be fully informed about the research process and purposes, and must give consent to their participation in the research.
- Safety in participation; put differently, that the human respondents should not be placed at risk or harm of any kind e.g., research with young children.
- Privacy, meaning that the confidentiality and anonymity of human respondents should be protected at all times.
- Trust, which implies that human respondents will not be respondent to any acts of deception or betrayal in the research process or its published outcomes.

Signature:\_\_\_\_\_ Date:\_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix E: Semi-structured interview questions



### Semi-structured interview questions

Project title: Supporting foundation phase children in coping with disenfranchised grief

Researcher: Fatima Aboobaker

1. What is your name?
2. How old are you?
3. What's your favourite colour?
4. Who do you live with?
5. How many brothers and sisters do you have?
6. Who do you spend your days with?
7. What do you enjoy doing for fun?
8. Who do you play with?
9. Who is the most important person in your life?
10. Who did you lose?
11. How long ago was it?
12. How did you feel then?
13. How do you feel now?
14. Did you have anyone to look after you at the funeral and just after the funeral?
15. How did you feel with the person who now looked after you?
16. Did they act any different towards you?
17. Did your teacher change in school towards you?
18. Did your friends change in school towards you?
19. Did they make you feel any better?
20. How do you think your friends and family can help you, deal with your loss?

## Appendix F: Open qualitative questionnaire



UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA  
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA  
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

### Open Qualitative Questionnaire

Project title: Supporting foundation phase children in coping with disenfranchised grief

Researcher: Fatima Aboobaker

Teacher: \_\_\_\_\_

Child: \_\_\_\_\_

1. When did the learner experience their loss?

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2. Who/what was it in relation to them?

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3 How did their behaviour change?

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4 What did you notice with the child?

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5 How did they react initially?

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6 How did their behaviour change over time?



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7 What type of emotions do you think the child experienced during their loss?

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8 How did they react in relation to their peers?

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9 How was their work affected?

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10      What strategies did you use to try and help them to cope better?

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11      How are they coping now?

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12      As the teacher what do you feel the child needs to help him/her cope?

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13 As the teacher what impact does this child have on you?

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14 What do you experience daily within the classroom with the children who are suffering?

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15. What else have you observed will be needed for the study?

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## Appendix G: GDE Research request



GAUTENG DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

RESEARCH REQUEST FORM

REQUEST TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN INSTITUTIONS AND/OR  
OFFICES OF THE GAUTENG DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

PARTICULARS OF THE RESEARCHER

<b>1.1</b>	<b>Details of the Researcher</b>	
	<i>Surname and Initials</i>	Aboobaker
	<i>First Name/s</i>	Fatima
	<i>Title (Prof / Dr / Mr / Mrs / Ms)</i>	Ms
	<i>Student Number (if relevant)</i>	28093349
	<i>ID Number</i>	9006060280086

<b>1.2</b>	<b>Private Contact Details</b>	
	<i>Home Address</i>	<i>Postal Address (if different)</i>
	566 Van Leenhof Street	P.O.Box 1764
	Erasmia	Pretoria
	<i>Postal Code 0183</i>	<i>Postal Code 0001</i>
	<i>Tel: ( 012 370 3288)</i>	
	<i>Cell: 0844786667</i>	
	<i>Fax: n/a</i>	
	<i>E-mail: fatima606@hotmail.com</i>	

## PURPOSE & DETAILS OF THE PROPOSED RESEARCH

2.1	Purpose of the Research (Place cross where appropriate)	
	<i>Undergraduate Study -</i>	
	<i>Postgraduate Study – Med. General</i>	✓
	Private Company – Commissioned by Provincial Government or Department	
	Private Research by Independent Researcher	
	Non-Governmental Organisation	
	National Department of Education	
	Commissions and Committees	
	Independent Research Agencies	
	Statutory Research Agencies	
	Higher Education Institutions	

2.2	Full title of Thesis / Dissertation / Research Project	
	Supporting Foundation Phase children in coping with disenfranchised grief	

2.3	Value of the Research to Education (Attach Research Proposal)	
	<p>Traditionally it was believed that children do not have the ability to experience grief (Schoen, Burgoyne &amp; Schoen, 2004). It was assumed that children did not really understand the concept of death and therefore couldn't have an emotional impact on the child (Schoen et al., 2004) ascribe this idea to society wanting to protect children from the emotional implications of death and feelings of grief. Wolfelt (2001) on the other hand disagrees when alleging that anyone who is old enough to love is old enough to grieve.</p> <p>Grieving in children is an extremely sensitive and complex topic as one does not know exactly what a child is experiencing, as children tend to express their grief in different ways (Worden, 1996). Doka (2002) coined the term "disenfranchised grief" in 1989 and explains it as loss that cannot be socially sanctioned. In other words it is loss that the griever is unable to express and consequently it is not recognized by the outside world.</p> <p>As children spend a large part of the day at school, Goldman (2000a) suggests that teachers should monitor the child's emotions, behavior, and relationships with peers and concentration levels. The teacher also needs to note the child's emotional, mental and physical ability in terms of the working environment as well as social and</p>	

outdoor play. Gilbert (2009) maintains that the child who experiences loss may appear to be quiet, withdrawn, distracted and tired. These children are often labelled as ADHD children, naughty children or children with learning difficulties, and without further investigation the child is written off by the teachers as a troubled child that needs further help, something the teacher believes he/she is not equipped to address (Gilbert, Hieftje & Murray, 2009).

There is very little research available on grieving children, and less on ways to assist young children that are experiencing disenfranchised grief. Disenfranchised grief is not even a well-known term even though many children experience it daily. In this study I shall qualitatively seek to explore the experiences of children who are subject to grief, and also what support systems are available to help these children cope. My study will specifically focus on the role of the teacher as teachers are in the ideal position to identify and assist the grieving child, because children spend most of their waking hours at school (Wolfelt, 2001).

Foundation phase teachers need support in helping them cope with supporting children that have suffered thorough grief. This study aims at helping these teachers determine support strategies to aid the child that is going through grief. The main focus of the study is the children, however the teachers are used as facilitators to help gather more data on the child to complete the study. Instruments used for the study are all beneficial in attaining information based on the child.

The instruments are firstly the semi structured interviews that will be used by me the researcher during my first discussion with the learners that will allow me to get to know the children better and explain to them the nature of the study. The second instrument is the drawings activity that will take place with the children and myself. The teacher is only going to be aware of the activity, taking place but will not be part of the activity.

I will also ask the children to explain to me what they have drawn and describe their picture the way they see it; this will be recorded and transcribed accordingly as stated in the ethics form.

The third instrument that will be used is the observation sheet that the teacher will need to complete as the teachers input is very valuable as the teacher spends most of the day with the child and will be able to give more insight on the child and his/her behaviour.

Therefore there is alignment between the instruments and the child.

The benefit of the study is:

To propose guidelines to make it easier for the foundation phase teachers to help the children cope with the grief that they are experiencing.

The district involved is Tshwane south and there will be three participants used for the study from grade 3 at the age of about 9 years. It is not yet identified whether the learners will be boys or girls that will be identified when it is discovered who of the

learners are suffering from disenfranchised grief.

In order to give clarity the teacher is not the main focus of the study but the children are. The teacher is just the facilitator that adds more enriching information to the study.

The main focus is establishing support that a foundation phase child will need in coping with disenfranchised grief.

Primary research question:

What support does a foundation phase child need in coping with disenfranchised grief?

The focus is not on the teacher but on the child that is suffering grief. Therefore the instruments focus on the child.

Secondary research questions:

What are the symptoms of disenfranchised grief?

How do foundation phase children experience grief?

What guidelines can be suggested for teachers in the foundation Phase to help the children cope with their grief?

2.5	Student and Postgraduate Enrolment Particulars (if applicable)	
	Name of institution where enrolled	University of Pretoria
	Degree / Qualification	M.Ed
	Faculty and Discipline / Area of Study	General
	Name of Supervisor / Promoter	Dr. M G Steyn

2.6	Employer (where applicable)	
	Name of Organisation	University of Pretoria
	Position in Organisation	Lecturer
	Head of Organisation	Prof Irma Eloff
	Street Address	University of Pretoria/Groenkloof Campus
		Corner George Storrar and Leyds
	Postal Code	0181
	Telephone Number (Code + Ext)	(012) 420 - 5289
	Fax Number	(012) 420 - 5594
	E-mail	mg.steyn@up.ac.za



2.7	PERSAL Number (where applicable)
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2	8	0	9	3	3	4	9
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**PROPOSED RESEARCH METHOD/S**

(Please indicate by placing a cross in the appropriate block whether the following modes would be adopted)

Questionnaire/s (If Yes, supply copies of each to be used)

YES		NO	x
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Interview/s (If Yes, provide copies of each schedule)

YES	x	NO	
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Use of official documents

YES		NO	x
If Yes, please specify the document/s:			

Workshop/s / Group Discussions (If Yes, Supply details)

YES		NO	X
A foundation phase class will only be requested to draw pictures, and the learners will explain their drawings.			

Standardised Tests (e.g. Psychometric Tests)

YES		NO	X
If Yes, please specify the test/s to be used and provide a copy/ies			

SOURCE	TEST	DURATION

#### INSTITUTIONS TO BE INVOLVED IN THE RESEARCH

Type of Institutions (Please indicate by placing a cross alongside all types of institutions to be researched)

Primary Schools	×
Secondary Schools	
ABET Centres	
ECD Sites	
LSEN Schools	
Further Education & Training Institutions	
Other	

Number of institution/s involved in the study (Kindly place a sum and the total in the spaces provided)

Type of Institution	Total
Primary Schools	1
Secondary Schools	
ABET Centres	
ECD Sites	
LSEN Schools	
Further Education & Training Institutions	
Other	
<b>GRAND TOTAL</b>	<b>1</b>

Name/s of institutions to be researched (Please complete on a separate sheet if space is found to be insufficient)

Name/s of Institution/s
A school in the area near where the researcher lives will be used. Only one school will be used and the sample will be drawn from this school. The participants are minimal as the study is a qualitative study. I apply for this permission in advance, as the Ethics Committee at the University of Pretoria also needs to give approval and then only can the school be identified and action taken towards conducting the research.

District/s and other GDE Offices where the study is to be conducted. (Please indicate by placing a cross alongside on all districts to be canvassed)

<b>District</b>	
Johannesburg East	
Johannesburg South	
Johannesburg West	
Johannesburg North	

District	
Gauteng North	
Gauteng West	
Tshwane North	
Tshwane South	×
Ekhuruleni East	
Ekhuruleni West	
Sedibeng East	
Sedibeng West	

Office/s (Please indicate)
n/a

**NOTE:**

If you have not as yet identified your sample/s, a list of the names and addresses of all the institutions and districts under the jurisdiction of the GDE is available from the department at a small fee.

Number of pupils to be involved per school

Grade	1		2		3		4		5		6	
Gender	B	G	B	G	B	G	B	G	B	G	B	G
Number					Approxiamately Three							

Grade	7		8		9		10		11		12	
Gender	B	G	B	G	B	G	B	G	B	G	B	G
Number												

Number of educators/officials involved in the study

Type of staff	Teachers	HODs	Deputy Principals	Principal	Lecturers	Office Based Officials
Number	3	1				

Are the participants to be involved in groups or individually?

Participation	
Groups (semi structured interview/discussion)	X
Individually (drawings)	X

Average period of time each participant will be involved in the test or other research activities (Please indicate time in minutes)

PARTICIPANTS	SOURCE	TEST	DURATION
		Semi structured interviews/discussion	60 minutes
		Drawings	60 – 80 minutes

		Learner Observations	One week
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Time of day that you propose to conduct your test/research.

School Hours	During Break	After School Hours
		X

School term during which the research would be undertaken

First Term	Second Term	Third Term
		X

DECLARATION BY THE RESEARCHER	
I declare that all statements made by myself in this application are true and accurate.	
I have taken note of all the conditions associated with the granting of approval to conduct research and undertake to abide by them.	
Signature:	
Date:	

<b>DECLARATION BY SUPERVISOR / PROMOTER / LECTURER</b>	
<i>I declare that: -</i>	
<i>The applicant is enrolled at the institution / employed by the organisation to which the undersigned is attached.</i>	
<i>The questionnaires / structured interviews / tests meet the criteria of:</i> <i>Educational Accountability</i> <i>Proper Research Design</i> <i>Sensitivity towards Participants</i> <i>Correct Content and Terminology</i> <i>Acceptable Grammar</i> <i>Absence of Non-essential / Superfluous items</i>	
Surname	Steyn
First Name/s	M
Institution / Organisation:	University of Pretoria
Faculty / Department (where relevant):	Department of Psychology, Faculty of Education
Telephone:	012 420 5734
Fax:	012 420 5594
E-mail:	mg.steyn@up.ac.za
Signature:	
Date:	2013-11-14

N.B. This form (and all other relevant documentation where available) may be completed and forwarded electronically to Nomvula Ubisi at [nomvulau@gpg.gov.za](mailto:nomvulau@gpg.gov.za). The last page of this document must however contain an original signature and may be faxed or hand delivered.

Mark fax - For Attention: Nomvula Ubisi at 011 355 0516 (fax) or hand deliver (in closed envelope) to Room 525, 111 Commissioner Street, Johannesburg.

## Appendix H: Ethics approval



UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA  
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA  
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA  
Faculty of Education

Faculty of Education  
Ethics Committee  
21 July 2014

Dear Ms. Aboobaker,

**REFERENCE: EC 13/11/04**

We received proof that you have met the conditions outlined. Your application is thus approved, and you may **continue with your fieldwork**. Should any changes to the study occur after approval was given, it is your responsibility to notify the Ethics Committee immediately.

Please note that this is **not a clearance certificate**. Upon completion of your research you need to submit the following documentation to the Ethics Committee:

1. Integrated Declarations form that you adhered to conditions stipulated in this letter – Form D08

**Please Note:**

- **Any amendments to this approved protocol needs to be submitted to the Ethics Committee for review prior to data collection. Non-compliance implies that approval will be null and void.**
- **Final data collection protocols and supporting evidence (e.g.: questionnaires, interview schedules, observation schedules) have to be submitted to the Ethics Committee before they are used for data collection.**
- **Should your research be conducted in schools, please note that you have to submit proof of how you adhered to the Department of Basic Education (DBE) policy for research.**
- **On receipt of the above-mentioned documents you will be issued a clearance certificate. Please quote the reference number **EC 13/11/04** in any communication with the Ethics Committee.**

Best wishes,



Prof Liesel Ebersöhn  
Chair: Ethics Committee  
Faculty of Education



## Appendix I: Verbal narratives



### Verbal narratives

Project title: Supporting foundation phase children in coping with disenfranchised grief

Researcher: Fatima Aboobaker

#### Questions:

1. Tell me what you drew?
2. How do you feel about what you drew?
3. Explain to me what you drew?
4. How does it make you feel?
5. What were you thinking as you drew the picture?