

THE UNIVERSITY OF HULL

**The Nature of Informed Bereavement Support and Death Education
in Selected English Primary Schools**

**Being a Thesis submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Education
In the University of Hull**

by

**Sarah James
BSc (Hons), University College London
MA, University of Hull**

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Dedications

This thesis is in ever-loving memory of my father,

Geoffrey Frank Wooldridge (1926-2010);

And of my friends

Richard Wells (1950-1993) and Jane Campbell (1966-2007).

I would also like to dedicate this thesis to my beautiful grandson,

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ABSTRACT

School-based bereavement support provision in England is considered to be improving, but remains problematic (Child Bereavement United Kingdom [CBUK], 2013; Potts, 2013; Holland & McLennan, 2015; Holland & Wilkinson, 2015). Representing an aspect of pastoral care, evidence from the literature not only indicates that schools can play an important role in bereavement support, but that training is required (Cranwell, 2007; Holland, 2008, for example), particularly given the discomfiture many school staff feel when discussing death-related issues (Holland et al., 2005; Ribbens McCarthy & Jessop, 2005). This appears to relate to socio-historical events which began in England after World War I (Gorer, 1965; Berridge, 2001; Walter, 2012) and to modernity's secularisation in many European countries (Ariès, 1974). The result appears to be the sequestration of death as taboo (Mellor, 1992; Mellor & Shilling, 1993). Despite signs that death is undergoing something of a revival in England (Walter, 1994) the concept of death education, which is recommended by bereavement support training programmes, appears to remain problematic in English schools (Clark, 2006; Potts, 2013).

In recognition of the bereavement support context in English schools, and with a personal interest in enquiring about how provision was 'informed' by specialist training courses, this led to the formulation of the main research question [MRQ] for the thesis: *'What are the perceptions of key actors with respect to the nature of 'informed' bereavement support and death education within selected English primary schools?'* The resulting

qualitative study was conducted in eight primary schools, in which data were collected utilising semi-structured interviews from seventeen richly-informed key actors. The perceptions-based predominantly qualitative data were coded and analysed within the interpretivist paradigm, which complements the study's underpinning anthropological leanings.

This empirical study has elicited rich, qualitative data from key actors in selected English primary schools offering bereavement support provision 'informed' by suitable training. In all eight schools, bereavement support provision was found to be proactive and nurturing, yet effectively 'compartmentalised', which also appeared to affect death education provision.

Chapter 1: Introduction to the thesis

1.1 Personal and professional contexts

The professional, theoretical and personal contexts for the research presented in this thesis are borne of a somewhat iterative career pathway. This started with a nursing career in Westminster Hospital, where I encountered many grieving people and nursed the dying in a variety of cultural contexts and situations. In 1984 I left nursing to study anthropology at UCL, through which a profound interest in the cultural variations in funerary rituals and grieving, both contemporary and over the millennia, developed. These studies - coupled with the experiences from my nursing career - seemed to indicate that non-English cultures (and, more specifically, non-Protestant English cultures) ritualised death more cathartically and inclusively (van Gennep, 1977; Turner, 1995).

Between graduating from UCL and training as a primary teacher, I was a health science publisher in London for eleven years, during which time I commissioned and published a number of evidence-based books on loss and bereavement (Wells, 1988; Stewart & Dent, 1994; Lindsay & Elsegood, 1996; Tschudin, 1996, for example) and likewise attended many conferences and events in this area. In 1999 I undertook a career change and trained as a primary teacher. Shortly after qualifying I commenced my Masters studies, whereupon my continuing interest in the fields of bereavement and thanatology led me to undertake a small-scale research

study on Year Five children's written questions about dying and death (James, 2002). The predominantly qualitative research highlighted the extent to which children aged ten had quite 'burning' questions about death (less so about dying which they saw as akin to being extremely ill, and thus something they could relate to more), but which they felt unable to voice. In other words, the children appeared to recognise the taboo status of death which constrained their natural curiosity. During the process of organising the study, I was informed by the class teacher that two children in the class of twenty-four had a parent who had died. This is roughly the considered average for the UK, bereavement statistics for which suggest that by the age of sixteen, seventy-eight per cent of children have lost a 'first or second degree relative or close friend' (Harrison & Harrington, 2001: 159). My concurrent training with the *Lost for Words* [LfW] programme (Holland et al., 2005) identified the need for such issues to be proactive whole-school concerns, and as a result of both the Masters research study and the LfW training, a pastoral loss and bereavement team was created at the primary school in which I worked.

Soon after this I began my academic career, during which time my interest in bereavement support – and wider pastoral care and wellbeing issues – continued. Through extensive analysis of the school-based and wider thanatological and anthropological literature, it became evident that bereavement support provision in English primary schools is often inadequate (Cranwell, 2007; Holland, 2008; CBUK, 2013). Recent survey-based studies in particular have highlighted the need for teachers and

support staff to be appropriately trained (Potts, 2013; Holland & McLennan, 2015; Holland & Wilkinson, 2015). Whilst such studies are both persuasive and indicative, owing to their larger-scale questionnaire-based research designs, there were no qualitative studies at the time which focused on bereavement support and/or death education provision in English primary schools *informed* by appropriate training. This empirical study sought to get to the heart of what informed bereavement support and death education provision are in English primary schools, by eliciting rich, perceptions-based data from key actors, and is the first such study of its kind.

1.2 The main research question

Given the empirical research study's underpinning contexts, focus and aims, the main research question [MRQ] for this empirical research is: *What are the perceptions of key actors with respect to the nature of 'informed' bereavement support and death education within selected English primary schools?* To address the MRQ, five sub-research questions [SRQs] have been developed, designed collectively and individually to yield findings from the literature, and rich qualitative data from richly-informed key actors in primary schools where bereavement support provision is informed by specialist training:

SRQ1: What does the literature say about the nature of school-based bereavement support? This SRQ is answered through detailed analyses of both the direct and indirect literature, presented in Chapters 2 and 3, and

yields opportunities for further research and formative recommendations for practice discussed in Chapter 7.

SRQ2: What does the literature say about the nature of school-based death education?

Compared with the available literature on bereavement support in English schools, there is a paucity of direct evidence from the literature relating to death education in English primary schools. Chapters 2 and 3 therefore include evidence from indirect sources, as well as from relevant studies directly concerned with death education conducted in the UK and abroad. This SRQ likewise yields substantial findings, conclusions and recommendations.

SRQ3: How does thanatological literature inform this study?

Given the socio-cultural and anthropological underpinnings which relate to the ways in which people mourn, and ritualise death – both in contemporary societies and throughout history – this study draws on thanatological literature, particularly in Chapter 2, to provide a richer, evidential context. This is particularly relevant with respect to the taboo, ‘sequestered’ status of death in England during much of the twentieth century (Mellor, 1992; Mellor and Shilling, 1993; Walter, 1994).

SRQ4: What are the perceptions of key actors in selected English primary schools with respect to informed bereavement support and death education?

Due to the lack of perceptions-based evidence within the existing literature – i.e. of what key actors think and feel about informed bereavement support and death education issues in English primary schools – this SRQ represents the central concern of the thesis. The empirical study's qualitative data relating to SRQ4 are presented in Chapter 5. Deeper analyses and discussions are then explored in Chapter 6, following which pertinent conclusions and recommendations – specific to this SRQ and to the MRQ as a whole – are identified in Chapter 7.

SRQ5: What are the best means of investigating these issues?

This SRQ relates to the empirical study's methodology and research processes, justified in Chapter 4 following sections in which underpinning philosophical and theoretical issues and considerations relating to research ontologically and epistemologically are critically discussed and evaluated. The decision to collect perceptions-based data by interviewing key actors in selected 'informed' primary schools represents a desire to identify the features of bereavement support provision through 'thick description [in which] the voices, feelings, actions, and meanings of interacting individuals are heard' (Denzin, 1989: 83). Accordingly – and with reference also to the study's anthropological underpinnings – an interpretivist approach is utilised in the data analysis processes, in which positionality (Milner, 2007) and Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* (Bourdieu, 1977) are also considered.

From SRQs 1 to 5, recommendations are drawn from this study regarding the nature of informed bereavement support and death education provision in the English primary school context. At an appropriate point in the future, the findings and recommendations will also be shared with the study's participating key actors, thus acknowledging a formative and ethical imperative that research should be both purposive and pervasive (Clough & Nutbrown, 2007).

1.3 The thesis structure

The thesis structure is designed to facilitate an iterative methodological approach, and is summarised in Table 1, below. Chapters 2 and 3 are both literature reviews. Chapter 2's focus begins to address SRQs 1, 2 and 3 by examining the many underpinning arguments for informed bereavement support provision; the nature of school-based bereavement support and training; and how bereavement relates to the concept of wellbeing. Since specialist bereavement support training programmes recommend that children begin to explore what death is, Chapter 2 also examines thanatological literature in relation to death education, and the socio-cultural, anthropological and historical contexts relating to views of, and the rituals associated with, death in England.

Chapter 3 extends and contextualises the scope of Chapter 2 by examining the literature with respect to key issues which relate to, inform and appear variously to constrain both bereavement support and death education

provision in English primary schools, including issues relating to school leadership and emotion.

Chapter 4 outlines the methodological approaches used in the empirical research. Following a section on epistemology and ontology, the second main section relates to justifying the qualitative, interpretivist approach adopted for the study. The third section details the empirical research design, stages and processes.

Chapter 5 provides a detailed and critically evaluated account of the empirical findings, following which Chapter 5 discusses and further analyses the key findings and themes, relating them also to the relevant findings from the literature.

Chapter 6 again draws on both the empirical findings and those from the literature in order to present the study's overall findings and conclusions with respect to the SRQs and the MRQ. In addition to identifying the formative applications to the educational context, through indicative recommendations both for school-based practice and further research, the final chapter also provides a critical and reflexive analysis of the empirical research undertaken. In this sense the degree to which the research has been transformative is also shared.

A summary of the research process, and the thesis structure, is presented below in Table 1.

1.4 Conclusion

The empirical research presented in this thesis offers a unique insight into the perceptions of key actors with respect to the nature of ‘informed’ bereavement support and death education in English primary schools, and of the extent to which this has been ‘compartmentalised’. Comprising interviews with headteachers and non-teaching practitioners [NTPs], coupled with evidence from the available literature, the study’s findings are situated within, and further enriched by, socio-cultural, historical and political processes.

SRQs	Main Chapters
SRQ1: What does the literature say about the nature of school-based bereavement support?	Chapters 2 and 3 – Literature Reviews Chapter 7 – Conclusions and recommendations
SRQ2: What does the literature say about the nature of school-based death education?	Chapters 2 and 3 – Literature Reviews Chapter 7 – Conclusions and recommendations
SRQ3: How does thanatological literature inform this study?	Chapters 3 (and 2) – Literature Reviews Chapter 6 Chapter 7 – Conclusions and recommendations
SRQ4: What are the perceptions of key actors in selected English primary schools with respect to informed bereavement support and death education?	Chapter 5 – Results Chapter 6 – Discussions and analyses Chapter 7 - Conclusions and recommendations
SRQ5: What are the best means of investigating these issues?	Chapter 4 - Methodology

Table 1.1 How the SRQs are addressed in the thesis and research process.

The starting point for the thesis and the research process is to address the first three SRQs which concern the nature of school-based bereavement support and death education in English primary schools, and the ways in

which thanatological literature inform, and relate to, school-based provision. Chapter 2 thus presents an analysis of the available literature on bereavement support and death education, and offers insights also into the socio-cultural, historical and anthropological contexts and constructs relating to death and mourning.

Chapter 2: Bereavement Support and Death Education in English Primary Schools

2.1 Introduction

As a key part in the process of addressing the main research question [MRQ], *‘What are the perceptions of key actors with respect to the nature of ‘informed bereavement support’ and death education within selected English primary schools?’* this chapter is framed around three key sub-research questions [SRQs]. SRQ1: *‘What does the literature say about the nature of school-based bereavement support?’* SRQ2: *‘What does the literature say about the nature of school-based death education?’* and SRQ3: *‘How does thanatological literature inform this study?’* Whilst Chapter 3 reviews both the direct and indirect evidence from the available literature with respect to the contextual and related issues in schools which inform and appear - variously - to constrain school-based bereavement support and death education, this chapter focuses on what school-based bereavement support and death education are, particularly in the context of primary education in England.

With respect to the MRQ and SRQ4, which refer to the concept of ‘informed’ bereavement support in primary schools, generic outlines of school-based loss and bereavement support training are also provided in this chapter. The relationships between pastoral care provision - which includes school-based bereavement support - and key constructs of

‘wellbeing’ are also described, particularly with reference to social ecology, and to the English National Curriculum (DfE, 2013). The chapter also explores attachment theory (Bowlby, 1960; Bretherton, 1992) and death anxiety with respect to loss and bereavement, along with key bereavement theories and children’s understandings of death.

As death is both a biological and socio-cultural/socio-historical event (Ribbens McCarthy & Jessop, 2005), aspects of which change over time, the wider socio-cultural and historical influences on English attitudes to death are also critically analysed in order to locate and contextualise the arguments both for bereavement support and death education in primary schools. This section includes an analysis of the sequestration thesis (Mellor, 1992; Mellor & Shilling, 1993), and also of the way in which death is being ‘revived’ in England (Walter, 1994; 2012).

Towards the end of the chapter, anthropological and philosophical insights are provided which locate the human quest to explore the nature and meaning of death. National mortality and bereavement statistics are also given which further highlight the imperative for effective bereavement support provision in English primary schools. The chapter concludes by summarising the means by which SRQs 1, 2 and 3 have been addressed and the key arguments presented; by identifying questions for the empirical research; and by positioning Chapter 3’s foci in relation to the contextual school-based issues which inform, constrain and underpin both bereavement support and death education.

2.2 Bereavement Support in Primary Education

Bereavement support in primary schools is an aspect of pastoral care provision (Best et al., 2000; Goddard et al., 2013), and as such relates to the *in loco parentis* responsibility of schools and teachers to have a duty of care to pupils in relation to their safety and welfare (Crown, 1988; National Union of Teachers, 2012). Whilst national statistics verify the prevalence of childhood bereavement (ONS, 2013), and thus the relevance to school pastoral care provision, bereavement support in schools is generally important, yet often appears problematic and challenging (Chadwick, 2011; Cranwell, 2007; Holland, 2001, 2008; Goddard et al., 2013; Potts, 2013; Holland & McLennan, 2015; Holland & Wilkinson, 2015).

One of the key pieces of English research in the field – and the first to utilise a child-centred methodology - is that of Cranwell's (2007) child bereavement project. The research was conducted using semi-structured interviews with thirty children (thirteen boys and sixteen girls), aged between six and twelve years, all of whom had a parent who had died between six and thirty months prior to their interviews. Several very pertinent findings emerged. Regarding school-based bereavement support, interviews with the children identified the following points:

- There was no consensus about how long children needed to be off school [which suggests schools should negotiate this with families on an individual basis];
- Staff were not always sensitive to the children potentially having difficulty concentrating, especially when some time had passed and

teachers seemed to feel that the child should be ‘putting the death behind them’;

- Staff responses varied: many tried to be sympathetic, but have no training. Those employed as mentors [referred to in this empirical study as ‘non-teaching practitioners’, or ‘NTPs’] who had attended bereavement support programmes were able to help children considerably;
- The bereaved child sometimes needed to go out of class for short periods. They [*sic*] found it difficult having to explain each time. Others had systems of non-verbal signals that enabled them to leave the room without explaining;
- While some of the children found a staff grief specialist helpful, the class teacher is important as the primary reactor;
- Bereavement support resources need to be part of the ‘tool kits’ of all professionals responsible for child care.

(Cranwell, 2007: 33)

These findings suggest that bereaved primary school children need support within school, and that the children themselves have a part to play in ensuring school-based provision meets their needs, especially given some of the following reactions by adults in the study:

[t]he reaction of many to the request for access to bereaved children seem[ed] to reflect the negative attitudes of some towards grief. For example, one reaction, ‘talking will cause upset’ is paralleled by the reaction ‘talking about bereavement makes it worse’. A more bizarre objection to these interviews, by a member of a Local Medical Ethics Research Committee, held that children in the north would react to bereavement differently to children in the south.

(Cranwell, 2007: 11).

The quotation above, coupled with the fact that over two hundred and fifty primary schools were requested to take part in Cranwell’s research, epitomises not only the ethical difficulties found by many researchers who wish to ‘give voice to children’ in potentially sensitive areas (Grover, 2004; Smith, 2011, for example), but also to many adults’ misconceptions about child bereavement, possibly borne of an inherent discomfort about death more generally. Such issues highlight the essentially paradoxical

nature of bereavement support in schools – and possibly more generally of bereavement issues in mainstream English society – in that whilst children themselves have identified the need for bereavement support in schools, decisions are being made by adults for and on behalf of children, without understanding or giving credence to the children's own views and needs. In short, there appears to be a need for children to have *agency*, and for their voices to be sought and listened to (Messiou, 2002; Tangen, 2008).

The issue of children and agency is highlighted also in the wellbeing literature. In common with many other events, situations and circumstances, bereavement - not surprisingly - affects a child's sense of 'wellbeing', and thus of his or her potential to succeed in school and possibly in later life (Lindsay & Elsegood, 1996; Parkes, 2006; Statham & Chase, 2010; Bradshaw, 2011). The juxtaposition and interrelatedness of wellbeing and schooling yields an imperative for school communities to be cognisant of each pupil's sense of wellbeing, and of the issues which may compromise it. Since primary schools play such a pivotal role in children's lives, they have the potential to provide opportunities for wellbeing to be developed and sustained, and likewise for the provision of effective pastoral care (Brown et al., 2011; Formby, 2011; The Children's Society, 2012). Indeed, parental death is known not only to sometimes affect academic performance in school (Berg et al., 2014), but also emotional wellbeing and mental health – in childhood and beyond (Parkes, 2006; Stroebe et al., 2007; Tracey, 2008; Brent et al., 2012). Thus substantive research evidence suggests an *absence* of bereavement

support, whether in schools or in the wider family and community contexts, can have a deleterious effect on children and young people, possibly sustained into adulthood (Hurd, 1999; Kaufman & Kaufman, 2006; Parkes, 2006; Cranwell, 2007; Akerman & Statham, 2011).

Where bereavement support is available in primary schools, it generally comprises two key approaches. Holland (2008: 411) describes support that responds to a bereavement relating to an event that has already occurred as *reactive*, possibly characterised by the referral of a child to outside agencies, such as a school counsellor or nurse, or the region's counselling services. In contrast, the term '*proactive*' (Holland, 2008: 411) refers to bereavement support provision in schools informed by bereavement support training programmes such as *Lost for Words* (Holland et al., 2005) or those delivered by national charities, such as Child Bereavement UK. In the 1990s, all English schools received a free copy of Yule and Gold's (1993) book: *Wise before the Event: Coping with Crises in Schools*. The literature since then has generally continued to argue for schools to offer proactive bereavement support in schools, accessing outside agencies if and when needed for 'those with higher levels of depressive symptoms' (Akerman & Statham, 2011: 12), but emphasising that specialist support is rarely needed (Holland, 2001, 2008; Harrison & Harrington, 2001; Prigerson et al., 2009; Potts, 2013; Holland & McLennan, 2015; Holland & Wilkinson, 2015).

2.3 Wellbeing and social ecology

Comprising an aspect of earlier constructs of social ecology theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), concerning ‘the nested arrangement of family, school, neighborhood, and community contexts in which children grow up’ (Earls and Carlson, 2001: 143), the significance of childhood wellbeing is well-documented in the literature. A predominant theme, until relatively recently, is that the measurement of child wellbeing frequently considers *poverty* a key indicator (United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund [UNICEF], 2007; Fernandes et al., 2012). Heavily critical of the use of income poverty as, effectively, a proxy measure of wellbeing, UNICEF’s (2007) report into the wellbeing of children in rich countries utilised forty separate wellbeing indicators ‘relevant to children’s lives and children’s rights’ from which six key dimensions were identified: ‘material wellbeing, health and safety, education, peer and family relationships, behaviours and risks, and young people’s own subjective sense of wellbeing’ (UNICEF, 2007: 2). In relation to ‘subjective wellbeing’ in which children’s own perceptions are analysed based on ‘health, school life and personal wellbeing’, the UK came at the bottom of the European table – under nineteen other European countries (UNICEF, 2007: 34). To investigate this more closely, UNICEF commissioned Ipsos MORI & Nairn’s (2011) comparative study into children’s perceptions of wellbeing, from a social ecology perspective, in Spain, Sweden and the UK. The results again indicated that UK children’s levels of wellbeing were markedly below their Spanish and Swedish peers, and through their underpinning use of the social ecology model

(Bronfenbrenner, 1979), the complex interplay between materialism, inequality and wellbeing identified that:

The children in all three countries have the same needs and wants and concerns. Yet the response to these by each society is quite different. It seems that children are more likely to thrive where the social context makes it possible for them to have time with family and friends, to get out and about without having to spend money, to feel secure about who they are rather than what they own, and to be empowered to develop resilience to pressures to consume.

(Ipsos MORI & Nairn, 2011: 73).

The results of such wellbeing studies resulted in some notable and weighty political responses. David Cameron's speech delivered to *Google Zeitgeist Europe* conference in 2006 elevated wellbeing beyond economics, declaring it to be '...the central political challenge of our time' (Cameron, 2006 n.p.) cited in Stratton (2010: 14). In wider international terms, a study of child and adolescent mental health (Kieling et al., 2011) revealed that between ten to twenty per cent of all children and adolescents worldwide have mental health problems, and is of particular concern in countries where mental health support services are underdeveloped. Although written from a mental health provision perspective, this also appears to have implications for schools worldwide, and may relate to aspects of globalisation.

With only relatively recent attempts to include children's subjective perceptions in wellbeing studies, it is perhaps not too surprising that many policies on childhood wellbeing - as with child bereavement reports - often reflect objective, adult-centric measures and concepts. Where wellbeing studies have specifically sought the views of children, their concepts of

wellbeing appear quite different from those of adults, presenting a clear argument again for the meaningful inclusion of children's voices (Statham & Chase, 2010), and further justification for issues to do with wellbeing – including bereavement support provision – to be considered within socio-cultural and ecological contexts. Amongst the first studies to seek children's perceptions of wellbeing were those conducted with eight to twelve year-olds in Ireland (Gabhainn & Sixsmith, 2005; Sixsmith et al., 2007), in which children identified their interpersonal relationships with family members, friends and their pets, along with engaging in positive activities, as their key indicators for wellbeing.

The most substantive UK survey to date of children's wellbeing is *The Good Childhood Report* (Children's Society, 2012) which surveyed approximately thirty thousand children aged eight to sixteen. The key findings clearly demonstrate both what children regard as important for their subjective wellbeing, and the degree to which schools can play a significant role in this:

First, children identified the nurturing aspects of their relationships with adults as fundamentally important. The amount of care and support they receive from parents, teachers and other key adults is vital. So is their sense of safety and security in these relationships. On the other hand, children also identified the importance of adults treating them with respect, recognising their increasing competencies as they grow up and allowing them freedom of choice and expression.

(Children's Society, 2012: 59)

Such findings suggest that children feel the need to be nurtured, safe and secure, as proposed by Maslow's (1943) theory of motivation. They also value being treated with respect, and having agency. Most significantly,

children's relationships with adults appear central to their perceptions of subjective wellbeing. In the bereavement context, the significance to children of relationships resonates with attachment theory.

2.4 Attachment, death anxiety and bereavement

Although generally accredited to John Bowlby (1907-1990), and even referred to as 'Bowlby's attachment theory', the empirical research by Mary Ainsworth during a forty-year collaborative partnership with Bowlby is regarded as having provided evidence to support his theoretical constructs (Bretherton, 1992; Goldberg et al., 2009; Bretherton, 1992). Of particular pertinence to the context of this thesis is Bowlby's (1960) seminal work: *Grief and Mourning in Infancy and Early Childhood*, in which he posited that even very young infants grieve when separated from their mothers. Further proposing that infant grief has an 'intimate relationship' with separation anxiety (p. 48), Bowlby's work, amongst others', now underpins much of the understanding about attachment and loss in bereavement support training programmes for schools. Thus, the degree to which a child (or an adult) feels attached to someone or something will both affect and effect his or her sense of grief if the attachment is compromised or severed. Assumptions, however, should not be made by adults about the nature of an attachment or the sense of grief felt by a child (Bluebond-Langner et al., 2012; Klass et al., 2014a). Anecdotal evidence for this was shared during a recent event hosted by a local group of bereaved young people, in which a teenage girl described to the audience details of how the death of her grandmother – who she

described as her ‘best friend’ – affected her profoundly. In sharing the news of her grandmother’s death with a teacher at her secondary school, in an attempt to gain access to some pastoral support, the teenager reported feeling that her grief was insufficiently recognised or valued, and that her grandmother’s death was deemed comparatively less ‘significant’ than other bereavements. This, and similar experiences by other teenagers, prompted them to launch a bereavement support awareness event for schools and bereavement services in the region (Longhorn, 2014).

2.5 ‘Informed’ bereavement support in schools

In relation to the empirical research context, the term ‘*informed* bereavement support’ is used to refer to primary school bereavement support provision based on, and informed by, specialist training. In this sense the term ‘informed’ is thus an alternative to that of Holland’s (2008: 411) use of the term ‘proactive support’. In view of the fact that schools offering informed bereavement support can sometimes only *react* to a child’s bereavement in the case of sudden death; or that informed schools may also offer *proactive* support to pupils who have a parent, friend or other family member suffering from a terminal illness, for example, this thesis uses the terms *proactive*, *reactive* and *informed* accordingly, but not interchangeably. Proactive provision in ‘informed’ schools in this thesis also includes death education, discussed in more detail below.

Several key recommendations have been made for schools to receive bereavement support training (Holland, 2003; Select Committee on

Health, 2004; Tracey & Holland, 2008; Aynsley-Green, 2010; Potts, 2013). Whilst responses to such calls - and the issues which relate to, inform and appear variously to constrain bereavement support provision in English primary schools - are discussed in Chapter 3, it is appropriate to outline the nature and scope of bereavement support training in order to facilitate a deeper understanding of what informed primary school provision generally comprises.

2.6 Support Training for Schools

Bereavement support training is usually offered as a one-day course. The focus is on enabling staff (usually teachers and teaching assistants) to feel sufficiently confident to be able to support bereaved pupils or those facing an impending bereavement, but also to know when and how to approach outside agencies for more specialist support (Holland et al., 2006; Rolls & Payne, 2004, 2007; Potts, 2013). Though there are differences in the way such courses are delivered, and of their foci, training courses tend to begin by exploring the myriad losses experienced by children, before moving on to bereavement as a more specific form of loss. Owing to a degree of cultural discomfiture surrounding death (Ribbens McCarthy & Jessop, 2005), there is a well-known tendency in mainstream English culture to use euphemisms to refer to death – epitomised in Monty Python's *Dead Parrot* sketch (Cleese & Chapman, 1969). Training courses thus encourage the avoidance of euphemistic language as this is known to confuse many children, and can lead to both anxiety and 'magical thinking' (Doka, 1995; Talwar, 2011). It is easy to see, for example, that phrases

such as “We’ve ‘lost’ Granddad” may confuse some children, especially in the absence of any organised attempt to find him.

As a child’s behaviour can understandably change in response to bereavement, the ways in which school staff can both recognise and support various behavioural responses is another key part of bereavement training provision. Emphasis is placed both on more obvious behaviours, and also on ‘hidden’ behaviours with which children may mistakenly be seen by staff to be ‘unaffected’. Unlike adult grief, which can so often be all-encompassing, children often ‘flit’ from sadness to normal emotional frames of mind, even within a sentence or period of play (Huntley, 2002; Boyd Webb, 2010). The emphasis, then, is on trying to have empathy with bereavement from the child’s perspective, rather than by grafting adult-centric attitudes on to expressions of grief (Chadwick, 2011), and to do so with honesty and compassion (Traeger, 2011). The use of children’s fiction is also included in bereavement support training programmes. Used effectively, fiction is a well-known pedagogical tool for introducing children to life’s many events and issues, and to sensitive, potentially emotional topics (Moore & Reet, 1987; Markell & Markell, 2008). The degree to which story can enable - or indeed confuse - a child’s understanding; its relevance in relation to a child’s developmental stage; and also the appropriateness of any underpinning religious or spiritual messages are all key considerations when using fiction with bereaved children (Berns, 2003; Markell & Markell, 2008; James, 2012).

2.7 Key bereavement theories

One of the key elements of bereavement support training concerns models and theories of grief. Various models and bereavement theories have been suggested over the years, the most widely known of which is undoubtedly Elizabeth Kübler-Ross's (1969) 'Five Stages of Grief' model, in which grieving individuals are said to experience denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance, though not necessarily in that order. Criticised more recently for being too formulaic and linear (Corr, 1993; Parkes, 2013), subsequent and more reflexive models have emphasised the nature of bereavement as a personal journey through which the grieving individual continues to have a bond with the deceased (Klass et al., 1996, 2014; Epstein et al., 2006), and where the concept of 'closure' is not seen as the ultimate goal (Boss & Carnes, 2012).

2.8 Children's concepts of death

Training courses also provide an overview of children's understandings of death. Seminal Piagetian research studies by Nagy (1948) and Childers and Wimmer (1971) remain so influential that many educational sector professionals still tend to assume that pre-school children are 'too young, or too developmentally immature to even begin to 'understand death'' (James, 2012: 136), and that only children aged seven or over are capable of conceptualising it. Subsequent research challenges such findings. A longitudinal study conducted in Italy in 1989 by Vianello and Marin, for example, found:

[A]t the age of 4-5, most children reveal a particularly well-structured understanding of death, implying the substantial

comprehension that they do not consider death as something which may happen only to others, but also to their parents and to themselves and that death is irreversible, universal and consists in the cessation of vital functions.

(Vianello & Marin, 1989: 97).

Similar results were found by Panagiotaki et al. (2014), whose comparative research into children's understandings of death amongst White British, Muslim British and rural Pakistani Muslim children indicates that children generally gain a mature understanding of death between the ages of four and seven, and that 'aspects of children's reasoning are influenced by culturally-specific experiences, particularly those arising from living in rural versus urban settings' (p.1), again implying socio-cultural and ecological contexts.

Writing on the understanding of death in modernity, Beit-Hallahmi (2011) observes there to be:

...two kinds of dual cognitions held simultaneously and operating in context. One has to do with the fuzzy religious denial of death, which operates by teaching children to hold beliefs about the eternal soul separate from the ephemeral physical body. The other is that of the universal, natural narcissism, which creates an illusion of personal immortality once we learn that the facts of life and death apply to all humans.

(Beit-Hallahmi, 2011: 56)

Whilst the degree to which children may be capable of understanding death is perhaps no longer considered in purely developmentalist terms (James, 2012; Callanan, 2014), whether or not children are enabled to explore what death might be in schools probably varies quite considerably and is a key aspect of this empirical research project. English bereavement support

training courses thus refer to the way in which death is often perceived as a taboo subject, rather as sex education and issues relating to sexuality and gender remain problematic in English schools (Lees, 2014). The subject of death as taboo is discussed in more detail below as it is of cultural significance in England. It is also pertinent to one of the arguments for death education, and likewise to gaining an insight into the empirical research context. Generally speaking, though, and in more micro-cultural terms, bereavement support training courses tend to emphasise that as England is an increasingly culturally and ethnically diverse nation, there is a need for schools to be responsive to, and respectful of, a child's and his or her family's values and beliefs (Holland et al., 2005).

2.9 Death education

A key recommendation within bereavement support training courses relates to the need for children to explore concepts relating to loss, bereavement and death through proactive, 'normalising' learning opportunities in the curriculum (Clark, 1998; Holland et al., 2005). Cranwell's (2007: 34) research with bereaved children similarly identified a need for '...appropriate teaching at school on how everything that lives has a life span which eventually ends, [and] how changes affect us all emotionally and practically'.

Usually referred to in the literature as 'death education' as a proactive and normalising approach, it is also seen as synonymous with loss and bereavement education and support (Gordon & Klass, 1977; Combs, 1981;

Warren, 1989; Morgan 1997; Wass, 2004). As a proactive form of education, as distinct from a reactive approach to learning about death and bereavement through personal experience, death education has been described by Morgan (1997) as aiming to a) remove the taboo aspect of death and death language; b) develop skills enabling emotionally intelligent interactions with the dying; c) educate both children and adults about death; d) minimise death-related anxieties amongst people; e) understand the dynamics of grief; and f) to explore and value socio-cultural 'death systems'.

Unlike the literature on bereavement support in schools, the specific literature on death education in English or UK schools is comparatively sparse, especially given the previously mentioned ethical issues in relation to researching about death with children. One of the only UK-based research studies to be conducted with primary school children is Bowie's (2000) small-scale study, conducted specifically on death education in Scotland, which posed the question: 'Is there a place for death education in the primary curriculum?' To minimise ethical difficulties Bowie framed her questionnaire around wider health topics 'in such a way that they would not be aware that this issue was being highlighted' (Bowie, 2000: 23). Notwithstanding retrospective ethical concerns that her approach might constitute covert research (Hill, 2005), a significant finding was that seventy-three per cent of the study's one hundred and seven pupils (aged about ten) thought about death 'to some extent', of whom thirty-six per

cent revealed death to be the issue they most worry about (Bowie, 2000: 23).

Whilst not offering a direct definition of death education, Bowie's paper implies death education to be a proactive learning process in which children have opportunities to discuss and explore end of life issues in a sensitive but normalising way. The understanding of death education in the empirical research context is that it is a proactive approach to enabling children to ask questions, discuss and learn about death and bereavement as natural - albeit challenging - aspects of life, with associated rituals, beliefs and practices. It can be delivered through specific lessons and non-statutory programmes such as Personal, Social and Health Education [PSHE] (DfE, 2011) and Circle Time, discussed more fully on page 79. Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning [SEAL] (Department for Education and Skills [DfES], 2005) was developed to complement PSHE, and whilst there is a recognised degree of 'overlap' between them, the non-statutory SEAL materials for primary pupils provide:

'...an explicit, structured, whole-curriculum framework and resource for developing the social, emotional and behavioural skills of **all** pupils (not just those whose behaviour or poor social skills cause problems [*sic*]), using current curricular arrangements... [with] the potential to teach children how to use thinking skills and feelings together to guide their behaviour, using, for example, taught calming-down, problem-solving and conflict management techniques'

(DfES, 2005: 12)

In relation to death education, therefore, PSHE and SEAL have the potential to facilitate learning opportunities for primary school pupils relating to social and emotional aspects of *life*, as well as of learning, which

may include learning about bereavement, and of the ways in which people respond socially and emotionally. Such formative learning programmes may also help children to develop resilience, 'the maintenance of competent functioning despite an interfering emotionality' (Newman and Blackburn, 2002: 1). Death education learning opportunities can also be facilitated through core and foundation subjects such as English, Science, History, and Religious Education [RE] (DfE, 2013). Through 'normalising' death in the curriculum, and in addition to bereavement support provision, children are further enabled to develop aspects of their social, emotional and spiritual senses of wellbeing and personhood; to learn important coping mechanisms when faced with challenging situations; and to minimise the possibility of death anxiety in childhood.

Clark (1998) also refers to an emerging presence in the UK of 'informal death education', arguing that this most notably began in 1997 with the death of Diana, princess of Wales. For Clark, media coverage of death is:

...the means by which most adults become better acquainted with issues beyond their immediate circumstances and, for most people, television is the chief form of transmission, closely followed by newspapers and radio.

(Clark, 1998: 394).

In historical terms, death education – despite its relative lack of representation in the UK literature compared with loss and bereavement – is not a particularly recent area of interest, especially in the United States of America [USA]. The book *'They Need to Know: How to Teach Children about Death'* (Gordon & Klass, 1979) reflects and challenges the concerns in the USA at the time regarding whether or not children should

be ‘protected’ from death. Considerable progress has been made in the USA since then where the issue is not so much whether children *should* learn about death, but *how best* to facilitate it in relation to socio-educational issues such as age, personal experiences, diversity, values and so on (Corr & Balk, 2010). Another key publication of historical interest, but with prevailing relevance – again from the USA – is *Death Education and Research: Critical Perspectives* (Warren, 1989). Despite its publication date, this erudite, evidence-based title builds on traditional western philosophical and existentialist sources, in addition to research findings, to consider death education as a natural extension of the universal human psychological interest in death. Paraphrasing Illich (1971), Warren criticises education for being both ‘over-institutionalised’ (p 141) and also ‘...a process of building up one’s knowledge and skills and that one’s worth as a human being is bound up with the amount of knowledge and skill accumulated’ (Warren, 1989: 141). Today’s emphasis in English schools for academic achievement and educational league tables (DfE, 2013a) appears to resonate with Warren’s concerns. Warren proposes that death education is, or ought to be, a lifelong process, beginning with very young children. This is akin to the *life education* programme, which includes death education, more recently introduced in Taiwan by its government in response to concerns about rising suicide rates amongst teenagers and young adults (Houng, 2000). Much of Warren’s arguments concerning death education challenge developmentalist notions about children’s understandings of death, referred to previously (Nagy, 1948, for example). Focusing instead on cognitive development across the lifespan,

and in favour of death education across all educational phases, Warren cautions us that:

...we cannot assume that all *adults* are operating at the level of formal thought or that aging and lifestyle do not affect thinking and general intellectual capacities.'

(Warren, 1989: 78).

In theoretical terms, Warren's own view (but with reference to Freire, 1970) is that death education – as with education as a whole - is dialogic. In other words, death education can be seen '...as a mutual searching for knowledge and understanding by both teacher and taught... [and] developed within respective personal construct systems...' (Warren, 1989: 141-142). At its time, such views were considered somewhat radical in mainstream educational circles: the modernist taboo nature of death (Feifel, 1959; Walter, 1994), and the belief by some that children should be 'protected' from the harsh realities of life - almost to the point of Disneyfying childhood (Giroux, 1995; King, 2006) – are considered viable arguments for those seeking to protect the construct of innocent childhood (Buckingham, 2013). Children's rights documentation (Children's Rights Alliance for England [CRAE], 2013; Unicef, 1989), however, acknowledges the importance of preparing children for life's many and varied challenges, of which trying to come to terms with death - whether as an adult or child - is for many the toughest challenge of them all.

Whilst it is commonplace for adults, including educators, to try to protect children from emotionally challenging issues such as death (Holland, 2001, 2003), there is substantial evidence that this is often detrimental in

both the short and long terms (Kübler-Ross, 1983, 1997; Harrison & Harrington, 2001; Ens & Bond, 2005; Parkes, 2006). Though not a statutory requirement, the former Select Committee on Health (2004) recommended:

...that death is taught as early as Key Stage 1, so that children can begin to learn appropriate language and develop an awareness of death based on fact. If children are not taught about death until they are older, they are likely to have already encountered loss and grief without adequate support.

(Select Committee on Health, 2004: 3).

James (2012) further argues for learning about loss and death to begin in the early years education phase, especially in response to natural occurrences:

Just as young children need formative, inclusive support to grieve, they also need more generic opportunities within the curriculum to explore death as a natural event and concept. Keeping pets such as hamsters is not as popular as it used to be in educational settings [...]. When a hamster or goldfish dies, it may be tempting, possibly in deference to a belief in children's inability to understand death 'fully', and/or to protect their feelings, to purchase a seemingly identical hamster or goldfish. A more constructivist alternative would be to explain to the children that 'Hammy' had sadly died overnight; to allow the children to look at and stroke Hammy (with the usual health observations); and to extend the moment into a wider learning opportunity, including child-centred ritual burial.

(James, 2012: 137).

One of the earliest arguments for death education in English primary school education was made following research by Jackson and Colwell (2001, 2002), whose attitudinal questionnaires, completed by 250 fourteen and fifteen year-olds, strongly suggested that sixty-five per cent of the study's teenagers felt that death should be introduced in the primary school; that 'technical' and medical information should be included (sixty-eight per cent); that death should be taught as a school subject (fifty-eight

per cent); and that ‘it is better to talk about death than avoid it’ (sixty-two per cent) (Jackson & Colwell, 2001: 324). An unpublished small-scale study by James (2002), in which twenty-four ten year-olds in Year 5 (comprising fifteen boys and nine girls) were asked to write down any questions they had about death or dying, revealed data which supported Jackson and Colwell’s (2001) findings. On average each child had four questions about dying, and eight about death. Qualitative analysis of the questions about death revealed that this was an issue the children thought about a great deal, but that they felt unable to voice, suggestive of an understanding of the taboo nature of talking about death. One girl even stated in one of her questions that she often lay awake at night worrying about death. Giving children such as these opportunities to voice their questions, which in this study comprised a mixture of questions about the biological aspects of death, and those of a more existentialist nature, is theoretically relatively straightforward in pedagogical terms to facilitate in the classroom with honesty and openness, though it is likely some teachers would find this potentially challenging. In many ways teaching such issues complements the approaches inherent in *Philosophy for Children* [P4C], a classroom-based programme in which children and young people formulate and discuss philosophical questions, thus developing thinking, listening and reasoning skills through dialogue (Trickey & Topping, 2004; O’Riordan, 2013; Society for the Advancement of Philosophical Enquiry and Reflection in Education [SAPER], 2015). The key, however, is for learning opportunities in primary schools to be provided either through

curricular programmes of study, or through the wider school curriculum. For English primary schools, this is potentially problematic.

2.10 Death education and the National Curriculum

The current *National Curriculum in England: Key stages 1 and 2 framework document* (DfE, 2013), emphasises the delivery of core knowledge, but allows schools a degree of creativity and flexibility with non-statutory curricular provision (DfE, 2013), such as with PSHE (DfE, 2011) and SEAL (DfES, 2005). There are, however, calls to make PSHE statutory in England (PSHE Association, 2015; Lucas, 2014), but the government's own deadline for reviewing the proposal was missed at the end of 2015 (Commons Select Committee, 2016).

In respect of the Education Act (Her Majesty's Government, 2002), it remains a requirement for state-funded schools to:

...offer a curriculum which is balanced and broadly based and which... promotes the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of pupils in the school and of society, and prepares pupils at the school for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of later life.

(DfE, 2012: 5).

Given that bereavement is implied in the above quotation, as a life experience, one might draw a sense of the implicit value of - and need for - death education. The quotation is, however, framed as a preface to both the primary and secondary programmes of study, but it is not until a child reaches secondary school that she or he will statutorily study Citizenship, or indeed sex education (DfE, 2013). To this end it appears, therefore, that

potentially detrimental decisions about primary school children's learning were made by the previous coalition government. This is in sharp contrast to the preceding New Labour government's draft National Curriculum (QCDA, 2010) which included opportunities for children to begin learning about loss in Key Stage One. Due to the timing of the general election in May 2010, New Labour's revised primary curriculum was decommissioned by the coalition government just a few months before it was due to become effective (Williams, 2010).

Compared with the previous National Curriculum (DfEE/QCA 1999), or its proposed successor developed by New Labour (QCDA, 2010), the potential for death education to be facilitated in English primary schools through the new National Curriculum *statutory* programmes of study is limited, although government plans to make all schools academies (Mansell, 2014) may yield greater curricular freedom .

Table 2.1, overleaf, identifies statutory requirements for pupils which appear to relate to the concept of death education in Key Stages One and Two, whereby death education opportunities in the new primary curriculum are more specifically indicated in the science programme of study. In contrast, Table 2.2 which follows outlines the learning opportunities for both loss and bereavement awareness (essentially death education) in the primary curriculum for England developed by the previous government (QCDA, 2010):

Statutory National Curriculum Subjects	Key Stage 1	Key Stage 2
<i>Science</i>	<p><i>Year 2</i></p> <p>Explore ‘things that are living, dead, and things that have never lived’ (p. 151).</p> <p>Learn about ‘the basic needs of animals, including humans, for survival’ (p. 152).</p>	<p><i>Year 3</i></p> <p>‘Identify that humans and some other animals have skeletons and muscles’ (p. 158).</p> <p><i>Year 4</i></p> <p>Recognise how environments can pose dangers to living things.</p> <p><i>Year 5</i></p> <p>‘Describe the changes as humans develop to old age’ (p. 168).</p> <p><i>Year 6</i></p> <p>‘Recognise the impact of diet, exercise, drugs and lifestyle on the way their bodies function’ Functions of the heart and circulatory system.</p>
<i>History</i>	<p><i>Years 1 and 2</i></p> <p>Learn about ‘the lives of significant individuals in the past’ (p.189).</p> <p>‘events beyond living memory’ with national or global significance (p.189).</p> <p>‘significant historical events, people and places in their own locality’ (p. 189).</p>	<p><i>Years 3 to 6</i></p> <p>‘The achievements of the earliest civilizations... and a depth study of one of the following...’ (p. 191). [<i>Ancient Egypt</i> is included in the list].</p>

Table 2.1: Statutory content with death education potential in the *National Curriculum in England: Key Stages 1 and 2 framework document* (DfE, 2013).

Early*	Middle*	Late*
<p>Understanding physical development, health and wellbeing (E19):</p> <p>Separation and loss – in the context of identifying relationships and their importance.</p>	<p>Understanding physical development, health and wellbeing (M18):</p> <p>Separation, loss and bereavement – in the context of forming and maintaining relationships.</p>	<p>Understanding physical development, health and wellbeing (L21):</p> <p>Separation, loss and bereavement – in the context of changing relationships.</p>
<p>Religious education (non-statutory guidelines) (E5):</p> <p>Naming and thinking about sadness.</p>	<p>Religious education (non-statutory guidelines) (M5):</p> <p>Wondering what happens when people or animals die.</p>	<p>Religious education (non-statutory guidelines) (L5):</p> <p>Considering responses to questions such as whether there is life after death.</p>

Table 2.2: Curricular opportunities for death education in New Labour’s decommissioned primary curriculum (based on QCDA, 2010).

In other parts of the current National Curriculum (DfE, 2013), opportunities for primary children to learn about either bereavement or death are notably absent, even in the non-statutory guidance provided for indicative content. Apart from the frankly weak statutory opportunities outlined in Table 2.1, therefore, the degree to which English primary school children are enabled to receive bereavement and death education is entirely dependent on two key issues. The first issue relates to how schools choose to develop their curricular provision, and the extent to which curricular and attainment demands on schools, particularly for maths and

English, take precedence over the need to promote ‘a curriculum which is balanced and broadly based’ (DfE, 2014: 4). Put another way, bereavement and death education opportunities in primary schools are potentially vulnerable depending on the degree to which schools value and include the wellbeing agenda in their curricular provision – discussed in more detail in Chapter 3. The second and successive key issue relates to whether or not it is considered appropriate for wellbeing learning opportunities, such as those inherent in SEAL (DfES, 2005), to *include* death education.

For *informed* primary schools, where bereavement support training has potentially heightened an awareness of the need for death education opportunities to be included in the school curriculum, and where this has been extended through staff development training to that of a whole-school approach, the expectation would be for such learning opportunities to continue as part of the delivery of the new primary curriculum. But this may not always be the case: in some primary schools, pastoral care may be facilitated by non-teaching staff members (Kerry, 2005; Groom & Rose, 2005; Wilson and Bedford, 2008; Edmond and Price, 2009; Kendal et al., 2014) who may have little or no influence on curriculum planning, and which may have bearings on Cranwell’s (2007) findings in which children indicate the pivotal role the primary class teacher has in bereavement support. Furthermore, bereavement support staff may retain concerns about discussing death with children as a sensitive topic, despite bereavement support training which will have suggested otherwise (Bowie, 2000; Holland, 2008). Such issues are discussed more fully in

Chapter 3 with respect to policy and practice issues in primary schools. A relatively succinct outline is needed here, however, of the socio-cultural and historical contexts in England which appear pertinent with regard to the discomfiture many English people, including teachers, have about death, and the tendency by some to wish to ‘protect’ children from it.

2.11 Thanatological insights: English socio-cultural and historical contexts

The socio-cultural and historical contexts of death and funerary traditions in England share a significant proportion of their deep-history with other British and European traditions. Until fairly recently, archaeological and anthropological evidence suggested that the earliest hominins to have ritually buried their dead were Neanderthals (Gargett, 1989; Pettitt, 2002; 2002a; Taylor, 2002) living in Europe, including Britain, roughly two hundred thousand to thirty thousand years ago. In addition to their burial customs, which often included grave goods and specific flowers, thus suggesting a belief in the afterlife, Neanderthals are believed also to have demonstrated altruism – as evidenced by the ritual burial of an elderly man who was born severely physically disabled, and whose skeletal remains demonstrate that he must have received life-long care despite his likely inability to contribute purposefully to his group (McCormick, 2004). Archaeological evidence from a burial site in Atapuerca, Northern Spain, suggests symbolic and ritual burial might also have been practiced by *Homo heidelbergensis* 350,000 years ago (Rincon, 2003) thus predating Neanderthal burials. More recently, anthropological evidence relating to the newly-discovered hominin species, *Homo naledi*, suggests a South

African cave in which thousands of *H. naledi* bones were found may indicate ancient burial – possibly between two to three *million* years ago (Berger et al., 2015).

As the capacity for intellect developed, such hominins, as well as early modern humans, undoubtedly pondered and debated issues relating to the meaning of life, seeking to make sense of the key physiological and binary rites of passage – birth and death - and to attribute or question a spiritual significance (Lewin & Foley, 2004). Over time, such musings have been both complemented and challenged by scientific findings, philosophical and religious developments. These have contributed to elaborate and diversified belief systems, including those which profess a belief in an afterlife, and beliefs which do not. For all cultures, though, the purpose or meaning of life - and of death - are generally predominant themes in both the religious and philosophical literature (Enright, 1987; DeSpelder & Strickland, 2002).

The socio-cultural and historical literature on customs and values relating to death in England generally reveals an interesting variance of interpretation: whilst the literature on early human settlement in the British Isles (Sykes, 2006); on Anglo-Saxon and later burial customs (Houlbrooke, 1998; Litten, 2002; Thompson, 2004) is more open to interpretation, given the survival of mineral-based archaeological evidence only, this is also the case for Victorian and post-Victorian accounts, despite the richer evidential basis. One such key issue of interpretation relates to the timing of, and likely reasons for, the demise in the ‘visibility’ of death

and funerary ritual associated with the Victorian era. Berridge (2001) cites late Victorian publications suggesting that elaborate mourning observances and 'the fear of death' were beginning to be replaced a preference for emphasising 'the joy of life' (Berridge, 2001: 9). Even so, Victorian funeral traditions are ultimately considered to have been displaced due to World War I's mass annihilation of human lives, whereby *in situ* burials caused '...the emphasis [to be] shifted from the body to memory' (Berridge, 2001: 9). Accordingly, for those in mourning for First World War soldiers to have adopted the previously *de rigueur* Victorian attire and customs, the nation's morale would have been detrimentally affected; women would have been precluded from attending to duties formerly held by those serving or deceased; and conscription to the army might have declined (Berridge, 2001).

Gorer's (1965) post-war survey of attitudes to death and mourning concurs with this view, whereas Ariès (1974) suggests that cultural, denominational and positivist influences and differences during the nineteenth century between Britain and continental Europe – including increased secularisation - are key factors, and that although 'a fault line became evident [by World War I] the crack would widen toward the middle of the twentieth century' (Ariès, 1974, 81). For Ariès, and in contrast to Berridge's perspective - the 'widening crack' relates particularly to modernity's 'displacement of the site of death' from home to hospital, and thus to the medicalisation of death (Ariès, 1974: 87) - as with birth. In structuralist terms, therefore, birth and death, both of which as binary opposites are associated with Nature rather than Culture (Lévi-

Strauss, 1963), thus enter the controlled, cultural domain in which health and illness might be seen as operative poles, juxtaposed with anthropological concepts of pollution, purity and danger (Douglas, 1966). If death is polluting, therefore, the place of death is vulnerable to contamination. By removing the place of death from the home to the hospital, death and the process of dying are moved - in structuralist terms - from Nature to Culture.

The cultural preference for dying in hospital is borne out by statistics for 2005 which indicate that seventy-seven per cent of deaths in the United Kingdom occurred in hospital, whilst only twenty-three per cent occurred at home (Office for National Statistics [ONS], 2006). There is more recent evidence that suggests this is changing. About eighty percent of respondents to a UK national survey in 2012 concerning end of life care preferences stated that dying at home was the preferred choice, although only forty-nine per cent actually did so (ONS, 2013a). Similar data for 2005 concerning patients' preferences are unfortunately unavailable, so the extent to which recent preferences for home deaths may reflect the increased provision for home-based palliative care; mistrust in hospital provision; or attitudinal changes in response to the natural death movement (Callender et al., 2012) remain uncertain.

2.12 The natural death movement and the 'revival of death'

Rather like the natural birth movement, which emerged in the 1930s but gained popularity in the 1960s and 1970s (Metoyer, 2007), the natural death movement seeks both to personalise the social relations of death and

dying, as well as to embrace ecological principles more holistically (Mitford, 1998; Wienrich & Speyer, 2003; Howarth, 2007). This may hint at the notion of the *reflexivity* of late modernity (Beck et al., 1994; Mythen & Walklate, 2006) perhaps evidenced by what might be termed an increase in ‘death awareness capital’.

Walter has focused much of his academic writing on what he has named ‘the revival of death’, where rituals and practices appear to be emerging from a post-Victorian sequestered place in modernity (Walter, 1994; 2009). The *sequestration thesis* (Mellor, 1992; Mellor & Shilling, 1993) has its roots in socio-historical analyses of post-Victorian death practices and values – particularly those of Ariès and Gorer, referred to above - and from Giddens’ (1991) work on self-identity in high modernity (Walter, 2009). The main characteristics of the sequestration thesis are summarised by Walter as follow:

...i) death, and in particular the dying body, is hidden from general view, ii) the experience of death and dying is cut off from everyday routines, and iii) dying people are left to themselves to make sense of their experience. In other words, dying is hidden, and its meaning privatised.

(Walter, 2009: 2)

For some English people, death remains such a taboo that their personal effects are left unresolved at their death (Smith, 2015). Evidence from the popular media, however, suggests that death’s taboo and sequestered status may indeed be dissipating in England and other parts of Europe (Kellaway, 2008; O’Faolain & Finucane, 2008; Schels & Lakotta, 2008; Maddrell, 2012; Holloway et al., 2013). This seems to have been embedded – as referred to previously - in the nation’s cultural narrative by the untimely

death and unprecedented mourning in 1997 for Diana, Princess of Wales (Clark, 1998; Walter, 1999; Holland, 2008), following which the much-publicised deaths of high-profile celebrities such as Steve Irwin, Michael Jackson, Jade Goody and Amy Winehouse have provided further opportunities for death to be part of the public domain, as public consumption for both children as well as adults (Gibson, 2007; Davies, 2010).

2.13 Philosophical insights

Simon Critchley's (2008) study of the philosophical beliefs and subsequent deaths of key philosophers – from the ancients to those recently deceased – supports his own view that 'in learning how to die we might also be taught how to live' (xiv); and that - critically – '[i]t is in relation to the reality of death, both my death and the deaths of others, that the self becomes most truly itself' (Critchley, 2008: 280). In essence, this is the same view that underpins contemporary proponents of both death education and thanatology, or 'death studies' (DeSpelder & Strickland, 2002). Similarly, sociological and anthropological studies of death, dying, and their associated rituals provide an array of insights into the ways in which both death – and life – are regarded and valued: from the highly ritualistic and cathartic practices of rural Greece (Danforth & Tsirias, 1982; Pentaris, 2012), for example, to the discrete sanitised and emotionally constrained practices in many Anglo-American communities (Holloway, 2007; Howarth, 2007; Metcalf & Huntington, 1991; Mitford, 1998; Seale, 1998).

Given Walter's (1994) notion of the 'revival of death' in English society from its sequestered, taboo status, and the media's coverage of death in television dramas and in response to celebrity deaths, it is highly likely that children's own death awareness capital is increasing. The degree to which primary schools continue to regard death as taboo remains to be seen, but there appear to be compelling arguments for the taboo nature of death to be lifted in schools. Perhaps the most compelling argument of all relates to the prevalence of bereavement in English primary schools.

2.14 National mortality and bereavement statistics

Child bereavement statistics for the UK predominantly relate to the loss of family members. One of the first indications of childhood parental bereavement was by Wells (1988) who calculated that it affects forty children per day in England and Wales, amounting to fifteen thousand children annually in these two countries. Harrison and Harrington's (2001) research revealed that by the ages of eleven to sixteen, seventy-eight per cent of children reported the death of a 'first or second degree relative or friend' (p. 159). This may appear hard to believe for a developed country, with a modern health care system, but national statistics indicate variously that between twenty to twenty-four thousand children in the UK each year are bereft of a parent, equivalent to the death of a parent every twenty-seven minutes (Office for National Statistics [ONS] 2005, cited in Children and Young People's Services Scrutiny Panel [CYPSSP], 2006: 4; Winston's Wish, 2014). In an average-sized primary school classroom,

this equates to approximately one or two pupils being bereft of a parent through death, or about eighteen children in a medium-sized primary school with two-form entry.

The UK child bereavement charity, Winston's Wish, further contextualises key facts and figures relating to bereavement in childhood, stating that:

- approximately one in 25 children and young people have experienced the death of a parent or sibling;
- 6% of 5 to 16 year-olds have experienced the death of a close friend of the family, equating to 537,450 children in the UK;
- the incidence of childhood bereavement in youth offenders can be up to ten times higher (41%) than the national average;
- approximately two children under 16 are bereaved of a parent every hour of every day in the UK;
- Thirty thousand children and young people are supported annually by Winston's Wish.

(Adapted from Winston's Wish, 2014:n.p.).

Whilst the above excerpt provides poignant indicators for the prevalence of bereavement in children and young people, with a particular emphasis on child bereavement following the death of a parent, national child mortality statistics also reveal the extent to which bereavement in childhood can also follow the loss of a sibling or friend.

For females in the one to four years age group, for example, all causes of death are 'clinical' (i.e. due to illness or congenital anomalies). Five per cent of male deaths in this category, however, are from 'homicide or probable homicide' (ONS, 2013: 1). ONS (2013) data also reveal consistently higher death rates for males in all age groups with the exception of those aged eighty years or above. In the five to nineteen years category, the leading causes of death for females are again 'clinical' in

nature. For males, however, accidental deaths, and ‘suicide and injury/poisoning of undetermined intent’, are the two leading causes for this age group. Whilst the underpinning issues for such causes of death for young males appear to need exploring more in relation to wellbeing and lifestyle choices, pastoral care provision and so on, the issue is unfortunately beyond the scope of this thesis. Related issues are, however, discussed in the final chapter.

Children and young people are also affected by the death of a sibling, especially babies (Dyregrov & Matthiesen, 1991; Stewart & Dent, 1994). Although the UK’s neonatal death rate is comparatively low (at around 3.3 per one thousand births), by adding the national stillbirth rate (almost one in every 200 births), the loss of babies to families is clearly more prevalent than one might imagine (Confidential Enquiry into Maternal and Child Health [CEMACH], 2009). Even more prevalent is loss during pregnancy: the term ‘miscarriage’, also known in the health professions as ‘spontaneous abortion’, refers to the natural cessation of a pregnancy with fetal death up to the twenty-third week of gestation. Approximately twenty per cent of pregnancies end in miscarriage, eighty per cent of which occur in the first trimester (Atkins, 2010). For the year 2012-13, 39,800 miscarriages occurred in England resulting in hospital admissions, with a further 11,191 ectopic pregnancies recorded (Health and Social Care Information Centre, 2013). Miscarriages, although common, can nevertheless be the cause of grief – sometimes profound in nature – and may, therefore, affect children (Gergett & Gillen, 2014).

2.15 Summary and conclusion

The central themes of this chapter relate to three sub-research questions [SRQs]. SRQ1: *‘What does the literature say about the nature of school-based bereavement support?’* has been addressed and explored through critical analyses of the literature concerned with the nature of bereavement support provision and training in ‘informed’ schools, and the many arguments which underpin the need for such informed provision (Cranwell, 2007; Holland, 2008) including the national bereavement statistics presented towards the end of the chapter.

As a complex area, bereavement support provision is linked with the concept of childhood wellbeing, and as such the chapter has explored national and international wellbeing studies, and the extent to which – as with bereavement support – the child’s voice and the concept of child agency have emerged as compelling imperatives (Grover, 2004; Cranwell, 2007; Smith, 2011). This is also linked to the wellbeing agenda, which the literature has revealed to be potentially vulnerable in curricular and policy-based terms (Aynsley-Green, 2010). The chapter has also explored the nature of bereavement in relation to Bowlby and Ainsworth’s attachment theory (Bowlby, 1960; Goldberg et al., 2009; Bretherton, 1992), and the appropriateness of considering such issues from a social ecology theory perspective (Bronfenbrenner, 1960; Ipsos MORI & Nairn, 2011).

This chapter has also explored issues in some detail with regard to SRQ2: *‘What does the literature say about the nature of school-based death*

education?’, and in so doing has revealed evidence from thanatological literature which positions death education within its socio-cultural and historical contexts. In this respect the chapter has additionally contributed to SRQ3: *‘How does the thanatological literature inform this study?’* The concept of death education - both as a lifelong process as suggested by Warren (1989), and with respect to English primary education – has been critically examined through the thanatological literature – including those from anthropology and philosophy - which reflect something of the human preoccupation with death, and the meaning of life, over the millennia. English attitudes to death, however, have been shaped inexorably by socio-historical events and themes, particularly since World War I (Gorer, 1965; Ariès, 1974; Berridge, 2001). This has led to the sequestration of death (Mellor, 1993; Mellor & Schilling, 1993; Walter, 2009) which is only more recently appearing to dissipate (Walter, 1994; Clark, 1998). Whilst this may be so for mainstream, adult-centric English society, however, the extent to which primary schools may continue to see death education as taboo remains to be seen, despite the fact that bereavement support training recommends death education as a prominent element in proactive bereavement support provision (Cranwell, 2007; Talwar et al., 2011; Potts, 2013).

In order to position the direct and indirect literature as close to the empirical context as possible, the main foci of Chapter 2 have been to explore the concepts of ‘informed’ bereavement support provision and death education in English primary schools. The following chapter reviews

further evidence from direct and indirect literatures in order to identify wider, contextual issues concerning primary school contexts; the significance of leadership; and the policy landscape.

Chapter 3: Bereavement Support and Death Education in English Primary Schools: Values, Attitudes and Practices

3.1 Introduction

This chapter provides analyses of the available literature with respect to school-based and other contextual issues, in order to provide additional insights into bereavement support and death education provision in English primary schools. Whereas Chapter 2's focus was on identifying the literature-based evidence for the nature of school-based bereavement support and death education, this chapter essentially contextualises SRQs 1 and 2 in relation to the macro-level policy-based landscape, and to more micro-level and school community-based issues. In other words, to understand the nature of bereavement support and death education – whether 'informed' or not – the wider context also needs to be explored.

Accordingly, the chapter continues to address SRQs 1, 2 and 3 for which SRQs 1 and 2, in their combined form, is: '*What does the literature say about the nature of school-based bereavement support and death education?*' SRQ3, which asks how thanatological literature inform the study, remains pertinent to this chapter, but comparatively less so than in the previous chapter.

As a prerequisite to the empirical data processes and analyses, this chapter provides insights into both ‘informed’ primary schools (i.e. schools that have received bereavement support training), as well as for schools that have not necessarily received bereavement support training, thus capturing more cross-sectional, attitudinal and practice-related data from the available literature. Similarly, focused evidence from the available literature in relation to death education is also presented, and again this includes data from schools in which staff may not have received bereavement support training. Given the structure of English primary schools, sections on school leadership and national and international policy contexts then follow, which appear variously to inform and constrain English primary schools’ bereavement support and death education provision.

The chapter concludes by summarising and contextualising the key evidence and arguments presented in the literature; by identifying the ways in which it has contributed to addressing SRQs 1 and 2; and by introducing key, iterative considerations for the empirical research methodology as a lead in to Chapter 4: *Methodology*.

3.2 The context-based literature with respect to English primary schools’ bereavement support provision: direct evidence

There are a number of sources in the available literature which suggest that bereavement support in English primary schools is variable, albeit improving (Lowton & Higginson, 2003; Cranwell, 2007; Holland, 2008;

Potts, 2013; Child Bereavement UK [CBUK], 2013; Akerman & Statham, 2014; Holland & Wilkinson, 2015). As referred to in Chapter 2, research in loss and bereavement support provision not only reveals the extent to which bereavement support training may have an impact (Holland, 2004, for example), but also the degrees to which a) bereavement support provision changes over time, and b) socio-political and historical complexities underpin provision (Reid, 2002; Lowton & Higginson, 2003; Holland, 2004; Holland, 2008; Tracey & Holland, 2008). The context in which this empirical research is being conducted is thus part of a non-linear, transformative and iterative process in which English primary schools are both variously responsive to social, cultural and policy-based influences and imperatives, and – at the same time – formative in the degree to which schools and leadership values may respond.

Chapter 2 identifies evidence suggesting that it is important for English primary schools to value the need for effective, ‘informed’ bereavement support provision, both in proactive and reactive ways, and the extent to which this is also linked to the wellbeing agenda. Holland (2008), for example, notes:

...that teachers consistently over time rate the area of loss and bereavement relatively highly as an issue in school, but some of them feel that they lack the skills to support bereaved children.

(Holland, 2008: 415)

At the time Holland’s research was conducted, fifty-four per cent of schools (both primary and secondary) in his study’s city had a named individual with responsibility for loss and bereavement support. Compared

with more recent research by Child Bereavement UK [CBUK] (2013), in which eighty per cent of schools surveyed had not received any bereavement support training, the figures for the 2008 research study may well reflect the impact of the *Lost for Words* training pioneered in the same area (Holland, 1997; Holland et al., 2005).

Potts' (2013) research, in which she sent out questionnaires to seventy primary schools in the north-west of England, but received a response rate of only thirty-one per cent, representative of twenty two primary schools, reveals something of the complexities underpinning bereavement support practices, values and attitudes. Close analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data reveals all but one respondent felt bereavement support should be part of primary school provision, which Potts says 'suggests a significant change in attitude over recent years' (2013: 9). Ninety-one per cent of the respondents reported having had a bereaved child in their primary class, yet only fifty-four per cent had received any bereavement training, which 'fully endorses the imperative for more bereavement training for school staff' (Potts, 2013: 6). Furthermore, just under a third of the surveyed primary schools had any form of bereavement support policy or protocol in place which is

...particularly concerning as it carries the implication of reactions to bereaved children being randomly applied according to the perspective and experience of individual staff members.

(Potts, 2013: 6).

The quotation above, though aware it may be assumptive, nevertheless suggests primary schools may lack cohesion in relation to both the

practices and values underpinning bereavement support provision. This has potential leadership implications and will accordingly be referred to later in the chapter.

Potts' research questionnaire comprised five closed-answer questions, and an optional open-ended question in which respondents were invited to write reflective comments about a fictional but representative narrative concerning a bereaved six year-old girl's thoughts. The study's qualitative data analysis on this optional question, which was addressed by sixty-five per cent of the study's primary teacher respondents, revealed a 'conviction that [primary] teachers are generally not unwilling to offer support to bereaved children – but often hesitant' (Potts, 2013: 8). Qualitative data also suggest that there may be an age-related or length of teaching service correlation between responses to the narrative story of six year-old 'Lizzie'. Of the fifteen respondents who chose to address this part of the questionnaire, one comment criticised the narrative for being '[n]ot the thoughts of a six year old' (Potts, 2013: 8). This appears reminiscent of some of the developmentalist notions concerning children's understandings of death referred to in the previous chapter.

In terms of the contribution made in relation to SRQ1, Potts' (2013) research thus offers direct evidence which suggests that the majority of primary school teachers within her research sample appear genuinely to recognise and value the need to support bereaved children. The imperative for bereavement training and support interventions was also identified, as was a recognition by thirty per cent of respondents on the 'importance of

allowing children to talk – and listening perceptively’ (Potts, 2013: 9). More will be discussed in relation to the possible implications for teacher training in the section on policy contexts, further on in this chapter.

3.3 The context-based literature with respect to death education: direct and indirect sources

Death education in English primary schools appears to be a far more ‘hidden’ and sensitive issue than bereavement support provision. As discussed in the preceding chapter, the arguments for death education – essentially the idea that death is taught as a normal life event to help facilitate children’s understanding of it, and to help develop social and emotional skills (Warren, 1989; Morgan, 1997; Cranwell, 2007; Corr & Balk, 2010) - is endorsed as a proactive pedagogical approach by bereavement support training programmes (Holland et al., 2005; CBUK, 2013). Potts (2013) contends that:

Education, around the topic of death and grief, which is accessible and age-appropriate, is a powerful tool that could equip young children, and their teachers, with a repertoire of survival skills when facing some of the traumas life will inevitably generate.

(Potts, 2013: 10).

Compared with the literature on bereavement and school provision, however, there is a paucity of available literature on death education in relation to the English primary school context. The following analyses of the literature are therefore based on both direct and indirect sources, beginning with the latter.

In the USA, the underpinning imperative for elementary school-based death education provision stems partly from the high rate of suicidal thoughts amongst teenagers (Thompson & Range, 1993), for which ‘death education causes adolescents to think about death in more realistic ways’ (Dennis, 2009: 198). This is very akin to the underpinning philosophy and imperative in Taiwan, where a life education programme introduced by the government was prompted by concerns over escalating suicide rates amongst teenagers and young adults (Houng, 2000; Yang & Chen, 2009), and to programmes in Hong Kong aimed at young people due to similarly high suicide rates (Lai Kwok & Shek, 2010).

The increasing prevalence of childhood bereavement – including through homicide in the USA – represents the other key imperative for elementary school-based death education provision (Dennis, 2009). In this sense death education in the USA, Hong Kong and Taiwan may, therefore, be considered proactive measures with comparatively specific and somewhat differing objectives from Morgan’s (1997) wider aims for death education, outlined in Chapter 2.

In Europe, death education research from Ireland (McGovern & Barry, 2000) challenges two key concerns that may relate to death education in English schools: firstly, the concern that children’s abilities to understand death is purely age-related; and secondly, the concern that death education provision may lead to death anxiety amongst children. As a ‘cross-sectional survey of the knowledge, attitudes and perspectives of Irish parents and school teachers concerning children’s grief and the concept of

death education' (McGovern & Barry, 2000: 325), the research sample is especially significant in that the 142 teachers and 119 parents consulted were from the primary education sector (where the children were aged between five to twelve years). The authors begin by referring to O'hEithir's (1982) comment that Ireland was then '...one of the most funeral conscious countries in the world' (O'hEithir, 1982: 152; cited in McGovern & Barry, 2000: 325), with the traditional community-centred wake providing children of all ages – as well as adults – with normalising death education opportunities, as well as opportunities for supported grief and emotional development. Whilst Ireland is clearly not the only country or culture in which community-centred mortuary rites are, or have been, predominant - Jamaican traditions, for example, are whole-community events (Paul, 2007; Hope, 2010) - the close proximity of Ireland to England, coupled with the long history of Irish immigration to English cities such as Liverpool (Brennan, 2009), suggest that the Irish wake has effectively become a sub-culture within England in comparison to the more hidden and restrained contemporary English way of death (Litten, 2002). It would be inappropriate, however, to assume that the tradition of the Irish wake is itself immune to modernity, and cultural transition:

[...] traditional house wakes are being replaced with a more clinical approach to death, allowing little participation for children in death rituals. Increasingly, schools are being asked to provide educational and counseling [*sic*] support to students experiencing situations involving death, suicide or grief trauma.

(McGovern & Barry, 2000: 326).

Relatively recent changes in the dominant macro-level Irish funeral culture appear to have occurred, therefore, which seem rather more aligned to contemporary English practices and values. Furthermore, McGovern and Barry's (2000) research suggests a possible correlation between the decline in Irish community-centred wakes and an increased need in schools for grief and bereavement provision:

Views on the inclusion of death education in the school's curriculum were very positive with 72% of parents and 70% of teachers agreeing that it would be an acceptable subject on a lifeskills program. Only 11% of parents and 21% of teachers were of the view that death education programs would scare children. However, 62% of teachers and 50% of parents agreed that death education was best carried out in the home. [Conversely]...The majority of respondents disagreed that death education in schools would interfere with the parental role. Of the total sample, 90% collectively agreed that further training for teachers would be desirable to undertake the teaching of death education.

(McGovern and Barry, 2000: 329).

More recent research on Irish provision is unavailable (and a recent email to McGovern has unfortunately not yet yielded a response). Anecdotal evidence from relatives in County Galway, however, suggests that the tradition of the wake is still practiced in rural communities.

A profound example of what might be called a 'first-hand death education experience' was reported in the British and Australian media in relation to a primary school in the Dutch village of Someren (Glenn, 2007; Leidig, 2007). When a forty year-old primary teacher found she had only months to live, she approached her crafts teacher colleague to ask him to build her coffin. His response was to suggest that her pupils (aged four to eleven) made it instead:

In the liberal Netherlands, learning about death is not seen as morbid, as it is in some countries, and the reaction from the pupils' parents has been positive. But in neighbouring Belgium, the case has caused uproar: bereavement therapists are worried that pupils will have difficulty dealing with their teacher's death. Mrs Van den Biggelaar [the terminally ill teacher] said the controversy showed how necessary it was to tell children about death, mourning and pain.

The Natural Death Centre in London... said it would support British teachers who wanted to take similar action. Mike Jarvis, the centre's director, said: "You would have to take careful consideration of the psychological effects. But we regret the way that death is seen as a taboo, and as something that only happens in institutions."

(Glenn, 2007: 11)

Such examples suggest there is a degree to which primary school pupils may be directly or indirectly influenced - in a social ecology context - by the macrosystem's cultural values and laws (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Berk, 2000), and which vary according to geographical location as well as to the chronosystem's socio-cultural and historical parameters.

3.4 Direct evidence from the UK

In the UK, discussions relating to death education appear slightly later in the literature when compared with the USA. In the late 1990s, research by Holland (1997) included questions about death education specifically aimed at secondary schools, but not to the primary schools included in his study. The reason for this decision is not argued in his paper, but it may have been considered a more appropriate subject for post-primary school pupils. At the time, seventy-seven per cent of secondary schools in the study confirmed they taught pupils about death, for which forty-four per cent of provision was through PSHE programmes; thirty per cent through religious education [RE]; and the remaining three per cent through English

and humanities lessons, school assemblies and 'life skills' lessons (Holland, 1997: 9).

Kenny (1998) writes with a strong health and psychology underpinning, in which a largely Piagetian developmentalist approach to death education, based on when children are able to 'understand' death, is predominant. Schools and death education are briefly referred to by Kenny, whereby her narrative identifies death education as an embryonic concept in the UK at that time, but cites an example from the USA (Friedrich et al., 1988) in which a death education programme in a school was developed when an eleven year-old pupil became terminally ill. Kenny's account generally appears supportive - in principal - of death education, but likewise indicates the very limited way in which it was covered in English primary schools at that time:

In a sense death education is presented indirectly in the curriculum in most schools at primary level when children are encouraged to categorise things that are alive, dead and have never lived. However, collaboration between education and health professionals, and the resultant holistic program [*sic*] such as that provided by Friedrich [*et al.*, 1988] is still very much the exception rather than the norm. Indeed, even Friedrich's program is only provided when a school has to deal with a terminally ill child and is not a part of the standard curriculum in the United Kingdom.

(Kenny, 1998: 117)

Kenny's views on death education therefore appear influenced by examples from the USA, and whilst she demonstrates some knowledge of the former National Curriculum's science programme of study (Crown, 1988), it is also highly probable that at least some schools at that time read books such as *Charlotte's Web* (White, 1952) which – potentially, at least

– yielded opportunities for death education. For Kenny, death education relates more to supporting bereaved children *reactively* rather than as a proactive approach through which children may begin to explore concepts and rituals surrounding death.

The first death education book aimed specifically at UK teachers followed on from a research study by Jackson and Colwell (2001). Their informed, very practical handbook (Jackson & Colwell, 2002) epitomises the reasons for - and approaches to teaching about - death as a natural part of curricular provision. Whilst most of the book is concerned with pedagogical approaches, and key information to teach children about (such as the medical causes of death; approaches to funerals and other mortuary rituals), the book's purpose is framed and contextualised by underpinning views revealed in their (2001) research, in which:

Many teachers felt [in the research study] that children didn't need to know anything unless they asked about it, but the predominant feeling was that they ought to address the issue but were unsure how to start. There was an assumption that particular skills were involved in talking about death to children and the subject should only be tackled by 'experts'.

(Jackson & Colwell, 2002: 12)

Further insights relating to the values, attitudes and practices in schools with regard to death education are provided in relation to English post-World War II socio-historical and cultural contexts outlined in Chapter 2, and to the taboo nature of death in mainstream English society. Bowie's (2000) research in Scottish primary schools also refers to death as a societal taboo, which suggests Scotland's attitudes to death may also have

been influenced by modernity, and similarly sequestered (Mellor, 1992; Mellor, & Shilling, 1993; Walter, 1994). Bowie's (2000) findings are remarkably similar to those of Jackson and Colwell (2001), and Kenny (1998) with respect to how schools regarded death education, with a prevalent belief amongst the respondents (comprising primary teachers, heads and student teachers) that death education 'should be discussed as the need arises – that is, if a bereavement occurs' (Bowie, 2000: 25).

Inferences from the bereavement support literature can be made in relation to death education in the sense that where there is an absence of trained individuals in primary schools, this may also suggest that there is a proportionate lack of awareness about the need for, and relevance of, death education. A new initiative by CBUK is to host 'Elephant's Tea Parties' in primary schools in a bid to address the taboo nature of both bereavement and death, so-called to reflect the known grieving behaviours exhibited by elephants (CBUK, 2013; King, 2013). In 2013, eighteen thousand pupils across the UK participated in these parties, prompting a 'positive media debate around breaking the taboos that exist around death and dying, [and] gaining a media reach of over 20 million people' (CBUK, 2013: 5). Amongst the national headlines were 'Children as young as three to be given lessons on how to cope with the death of a sibling' in the *Daily Mail* (Nolan, 2013), with a similar header in *The Independent* (Manning, 2013).

In all, the attitudinal evidence relating to in English primary schools with respect to both bereavement support and death education suggest there is

now a general agreement that bereavement support is warranted, but that training to enable this is a prerequisite (Cranwell, 2007; Holland, 2008; Potts, 2013). That so many primary teachers articulated a perceived need to undertake bereavement support training (Potts, 2013) is therefore of concern. Child Bereavement UK's annual report (2013) stated the charity had trained four thousand school professionals in bereavement support across the UK, representing 'an increase of 12.5 per cent' in their annual training course delivery (CBUK, 2013: 8). In addition, a grant by the Department of Health has enabled CBUK to set up regional multi-disciplinary bereavement support groups in areas considered to be socially deprived 'where there are few quality services and limited opportunities for young people' in six English regions, and four in Scotland (CBUK, 2013: 7). As a member of one of these regional groups, and following discussions during the earlier meetings, it appears that the regional selection criteria related more to areas considered to be *economically*, deprived. Given the local availability of *Lost for Words* training (Holland et al., 2005), which CBUK now acknowledges as having had a greater impact than in other UK regions (CBUK, 2014), the regional group nevertheless appears to be benefiting from focused meetings and networking, and with ongoing projects.

Primary school bereavement support and death education provision may also reflect, to a greater or lesser extent, the predominantly indirect evidence from the available literature with regard to English primary schools' senior leaders.

3.5 School leadership and bereavement support: direct evidence from the literature

Once again there is a notable paucity of direct evidence in the available literature regarding school leadership, bereavement support and death education. The key paper which specifically refers to this area utilises an eco-systemic approach and relates to both primary and secondary school leadership in England (Reid, 2002). Based on a case study involving a Lincolnshire family whose young daughter, 'Jane', died in an accident, Reid qualitatively examines the interactions between several schools and the bereaved family, and also with those between Jane's closest friend 'Max' and his primary and secondary schools over roughly nine years following Jane's death. Neither of the secondary schools attended by Jane's two sisters provided any bereavement support, which their mother considered 'may be due to teachers' lack of knowledge about how to respond to children in distress, rather than a lack of care' (Reid, 2002: 196). For Max, who was only four when Jane died, however, the experience in his primary school was moderately better, but this is perhaps the case due to Jane's mother's involvement in the school as a play leader:

Despite the open and positive approach taken by Lynne's and Max's families, in the schools there was avoidance of communicating about death; this demonstrates the need for addressing the whole eco-system surrounding the child. Positive support systems within the family need to mirror positive systems within the school, and vice versa. Where the two systems show conflict, the messages for the child are confusing and ineffective.'

(Reid, 2002: 201).

Commenting on the reasons why teachers may be unable to respond to a child's questions or attempts to converse about death, or grief, Reid

suggests this is not about ‘teachers who fail to care, but [about] teachers who have perhaps been unable to address their own grief reactions’ (Reid, 2002: 203). Given the evidence presented in Chapter 2, this view seems to relate to the post-World War I socio-cultural and historical ‘chronosystem’ – with respect to eco-systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) – in which death has been sequestered and made taboo (Mellor, 1992; Mellor & Shilling, 1993; Walter, 1994). In terms of school leadership, therefore, Reid suggests school leaders and senior managers are:

‘... responsible for an eco-system that permeates every aspect of a child’s experience within [his or her] school. The experience of bereavement extends far beyond the school gates, so the eco-system must link the school to the child’s whole community. Managers are crucial in creating the training opportunities, sense of priority, atmosphere of support, care for carers, time and money resources where necessary, and in offering leadership and example in the personal qualities needed in and beyond the school. In order to provide this, managers and teachers need, in their initial and continuing training, to visit and revisit the research on motivation, emotional intelligence, transference and the bereavement process.’

(Reid, 2002:206).

3.6 School leadership and bereavement support: indirect evidence from the literature

Whilst it has not been possible to find any further direct evidence in the available literature with respect to school leadership and bereavement or death education, the indirect evidence, however, provides insights into the complex and changing landscape in which primary school leaders are positioned, and the degree to which personal characteristics amongst leaders are also significant. Clearly the issue of bereavement in a school relates to, and involves, emotions. Hargreaves (1998), in writing about the

‘emotional politics of teaching and teaching development’ (p. 315), and the implications for leadership, argues that:

‘...the discourse of educational reform and school leadership must acknowledge and even honour the centrality of the emotions to the processes and outcomes of teaching, learning, leadership and caring in our schools.’

(Hargreaves, 1998: 331).

Crawford (2009) expands Hargreaves’ work through an exploration of ‘how emotion interrelates with leadership throughout the organisation’ (p. 160), and that ‘personal emotional coherence [amongst school leaders] is related to others in the organisation’ (p. 161). Referring to the ‘rational/emotional binary embedded in mainstream literature on educational leadership and management’, which began to be challenged in the 1990s, however, Blackmore (2011) offers a feminist deconstruction of school leadership and emotionality, suggesting:

...there is a need to understand the deep emotions underpinning empathy, compassion and care, fear, anger. If leaders are to address the complexity of the culturally diverse school populations and communities, of organisational change and entrenched educational inequality, Boler [*sic*] [(Zembylas & Boler, 2002: n.p)] suggests the need for ‘a pedagogy of discomfort’. Central to this pedagogy is the need to address deep not superficial emotions that challenge professional and personal identities and ‘naturalised’ power relations based on gender, race and class. A pedagogy of discomfort requires leaders to feel uncomfortable about themselves as emotional beings. This requires them first to be reflexive about their own positionality. For example, it may be about recognising their ‘whiteness’ and/or ‘masculinity’ and ‘knowledge expertise’ as positions of dominance [(Blackmore, 2010)]. From this reflexive framing of the ‘problem’, this requires leaders to be emotionally astute as to how power relations work and how they are positioned with respect to ‘the Other’.

(Blackmore, 2011: 224).

Zembylas and Boler’s (2002) suggestion that there is a need for a ‘pedagogy of discomfort’ appears to resonate with the English macro-level

socio-cultural discomfiture surrounding death. Normalising death in English primary school curricula might, therefore, require school leaders to engage in socio-cultural and emotional reflexivity, especially if the desired goal of education is to bring about organisational and social change (Blackmore & Sachs, 2012).

Since schools are recognised as communities (Sergiovanni, 1996; Brown, 1997, for example), it seems appropriate and pertinent to consider the nature of leadership in a community context. Stern (2001), writing about the Scottish philosopher John Macmurray, offers insights into ‘persons-in-relation’ notions of schools as communities, which seem to get to the heart of what ‘being human’ might mean:

We are not individuals in our own right; and in ourselves we have no value at all, since we are meaningless. Our human Being *is* our relations to other human beings and our value lies in the quality of these relations.’

(Macmurray, 1995: 72; cited by Stern, 2001: 25).

For Macmurray, education’s key aim ought to be to teach children how to live, but that this aim ‘has been crowded out by a multiplicity of little aims’ (Macmurray, 1968: 14, cited by Stern, 2001: 34). One such relative ‘little’ aim, for Stern, is the ‘widening agenda’:

The narrowing functional agenda for schooling, for Macmurray, is inappropriate, and so is any *widening* agenda. That is, the use of schooling to promote ‘national’ (or ‘international’) aims above those individuals – what he refers to as treating a group of people as if they were a single organism – would be wrong.

(Stern, 2001: 35).

Similar to the ‘little aims’ referred to above, Bottery et al. (2013), in comparing primary school leaders in England and Hong Kong, suggest

there are ‘multiple forces’ which include the ‘legislative architecture’ (p. 52) which impact on contemporary schools and their leaders, some of which are ‘so pressing that [school leaders’] energies had to be devoted to issues that distanced them from their concerns for the children’ (Bottery et al., 2013: 52). Given the extent to which external pressures – albeit of a somewhat different nature and character - affect both primary schools in Hong Kong and England, their research study, by focusing closely on the school leaders’ own characters, identified that:

...similar contexts can generate very different reactions due to very different personalities. There is, then, no simple explanation for individual reactions: one has to know both the person and the context to understand why they feel the way they do about their ability to influence the school’s goals.’

(Bottery et al., 2013: 49).

With respect to the context of this thesis, therefore, the indirect evidence from the literature may appear to suggest firstly that English primary school leaders’ values are at least potentially constrained by external forces; and secondly, that personal values and personalities are also at play. In other words, there may be an extent to which primary schools’ values, and practices with respect to bereavement support provision and death education need to be viewed in the wider context, with the possibility that the ‘being human’ elements of the role are constrained, and/or that school leaders’ individual values are variable in these regards. It may even be the case that Stern’s (2002: 155) notion of egalitarian and magnanimous yet undemocratic [‘EMU’] school leadership, in which headteachers are ‘great-souled’ in the Aristotlean sense, are pertinent to the bereavement provision context in primary schools.

Evidence from more recent literature regarding school leadership and values suggests leaders need to be intellectual, ‘rooted in a dialogic and critical process, from which genuine transformatory possibilities emerge’ (Stevenson, 2012: 345). Bush and Glover (2014), however, identify the impact of external forces on school leaders, and the degree to which it can potentially detract from child- and community-centredness, and on transformative processes:

The English system may be seen to require school leaders to adhere to government policies, which affect aims, curriculum content and pedagogy, as well as values. In this respect, transformation may be a unilateral process of implementation, not a context-specific assessment of the needs of individual schools and their communities’.

(Bush & Glover, 2014: 6).

Few studies have considered the way in which pupils might view a school’s ecology. Waters et al. (2010), who conducted research in Australian secondary-level schools, define a school’s ecology as its ‘structural, functional, and built aspects, coupled with interpersonal interactions’ (p. 381). Their specific research focus was to identify adolescent pupils’ perceptions of school ‘connectedness’, which they argue is a predictor to wellbeing, and is thus also pertinent to this thesis given the associations between bereavement support, death education and wellbeing discussed in the previous chapter.

The nature and context of primary school leadership identified through the direct and indirect literature, and the degree to which leaders’ individual characters and values appear significant in a school’s ecosystem, clearly

appear complex, and are revisited in Chapter 5's analysis of SRQ4. Reid's (2002) account, as the only direct evidence from the literature with respect to leadership and the empirical research context, identifies that school leaders have the capacity to create meaningful support systems and to 'open communications about death' (p.193). Writing from a constructivist, social ecology position, Alexander (2013) further suggests:

'... pupils themselves contribute to a school's curriculum capacity, through the knowledge and understanding they bring from outside school to a classroom and the insights that perceptive teachers gain from watching and listening to them work and play.'

(Alexander, 2013: 1)

There may therefore be an extent to which primary school pupils are themselves influencing non-statutory curricular content – through dialogue, for example - with respect to death education and wider wellbeing-related subjects, particularly if English primary schools are choosing to include non-statutory subjects and pedagogies, such as Personal, Social, Health and Economic education [PSHE] (PSHE Association, n.d.) and 'Circle Time' (DfES, 2005: 51). PSHE is a non-statutory programme of learning which 'addresses personal safety and mental health and prepares pupils for life and work in a changing world' (PSHE Association, 2015: 4). It is taught in many but not all primary schools predominantly through timetabled lessons covering wide-ranging issues relating to emotional health and wellbeing, though some schools also integrate PSHE with other lessons (Formby et al., 2011). 'Circle Time' is a classroom-based technique designed to develop self-esteem (White, 2009), in which pupils and staff sit in a respectful circle. A special

object is passed from person to person, but participants are only permitted to speak – if they wish – when the object is in their hands. In addition to developing self-esteem, Circle Time is also considered to develop emotional literacy (Roffey, 2006).

3.7 National and international policy contexts and inspection criteria which variously inform and constrain English primary schools

In analysing the available literature on school leadership, in the section above, it appears evident that ‘multiple forces’ and complexities are affecting school communities, their staff, pupils and leaders (Bottery et al., 2013: 52). Although writing in the context of education for sustainable development, Bottery, Wright and James (2012) identify accordingly that school leaders:

...need to have internal moral compasses, yet be aware of the complexity of the external world, and of their own personal and epistemological limitations. They must know that they need to listen to others, and to adopt a ‘provisionalist’ attitude to the world, but one which increasingly recognises a future orientation, an ecological awareness, and the greater embrace of notions of global public good and cooperation, as opposed to national or private self-interest and competition.

(Bottery et al., 2012: 240).

Most if not all English primary school leaders today will likely identify the key external mediators affecting their schools as those of the Office for Standards in Education [‘Ofsted’], and its frequently changing inspection criteria and politically-driven agenda (Ratcliffe, 2014), coupled with the continual pressure for schools and pupils to perform to national targets (DfE, 2014) and international league tables, such as the Programme for

International Student Assessment [PISA] (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2012). This ‘high stakes’ climate in which English schools currently operate is considered sufficient to put off many potential school leaders from applying for leadership roles (Exley, 2013). Whilst the Department for Education’s executive agency, the National College for School Leadership [NCSL], states the current shortage of primary head teachers is explainable demographically in relation to the retirement of the ‘baby-boomer generation’ (DfE/NCSL, 2012: 3), Exley (2013: n.p.) reports that inspection and league table pressures, along with the ‘threat of forced conversion to academy status’, are the reasons given by head teachers for the recruitment crisis. Furthermore, the leader of the National Association of Head Teachers [NAHT], Russell Hobby, is cited as suggesting ‘pushy parents’ are also a significant cause of stress for school leaders (Boffey, 2014: 7).

Ofsted’s current inspection framework (Ofsted, 2015) identifies areas in primary schools which relate to the wellbeing agenda. The following quotation indicates the central tenets of the inspection process and ideology:

Inspectors are required to report on the quality of education provided in the school and must, *in particular* [my italics], cover:

- the achievement of pupils at the school
- the quality of teaching in the school
- the behaviour and safety of pupils at the school
- the quality of leadership in and management of the school

When reporting, inspectors must also consider:

- the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils at the school.

(Ofsted, 2015: 5).

In terms of the grades awarded to schools by the Ofsted inspection process, schools judged to be ‘outstanding’ in their ‘overall effectiveness’ exemplify the ‘thoughtful and wide-ranging promotion of pupils’ spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and their physical well-being [which] enables pupils to thrive’ (Ofsted, 2015: 37), whereas schools judged to be ‘good’ are those within which ‘[d]eliberate and effective action is taken to promote pupils’ spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and their physical well-being’ (Ofsted, 2015: 37).

The extent to which English teacher training programmes include curricular content on wellbeing, and indeed on loss and bereavement awareness, clearly represents an avenue for future research: the current standards for teacher training in England (DfE, 2013) include only indirect, somewhat oblique references which may relate to loss and bereavement support:

A teacher must:

- Have a secure understanding of how a range of factors can inhibit pupils’ ability to learn, and how best to overcome these (Part One, Standard 5: p. 11)
- Communicate effectively with parents with regard to pupils’ achievements and well-being (Part One, Standard 8: p. 13)
- [A teacher is expected to have regard] for the need to safeguard pupils’ well-being, in accordance with statutory provisions (Part Two, p. 14)

(DfE, 2013: 11, 13 and 14).

Hargreaves (1998: 332), referred to in the previous section, calls for the emotional dimensions of teaching to be incorporated ‘into learning standards or curriculum targets for students, and into professional

standards or competencies for teachers and administrators'. Crawford's (2009: 161) concept of 'emotional coherence', whilst referring principally to school leaders, seems an appropriate term to adopt with respect to Hargreaves' appeals. That Potts's research (2013) indicates that eighty percent of teaching staff (in both primary and secondary schools) have not received bereavement awareness or support training suggests, however, that calls for emotional dimensions to teaching remain pertinent. This brings us back again to issues relating to and influencing primary education as a whole; to those evident in primary school communities; to the juxtaposition and inter-relatedness of governmental values and the criteria by which they are measured; and to the extent to which bereavement support and death education provision may or may not have a place in such a potentially complex and vulnerable education system.

3.8 Summary of chapter contents and relevance to context-based aspects of SRQs 1, 2 and 3

This chapter has analysed the available literature concerning bereavement support and death education which provide insights into the various macro- and micro-level policy-based and attitudinal contexts influencing English primary schools. Due to the relative paucity of direct evidence, this process has, by necessity, considered indirect evidence also.

The direct evidence in relation to bereavement support provision suggests that it has improved over time, but that there remains a reluctance or hesitance by a significant number of primary school staff to support

bereaved children – or indeed to teach about death – due to a perceived need for bereavement support training (Potts, 2013; Akerman & Statham, 2014; Holland & McLennan, 2015; Holland & Wilkinson, 2015). Indeed, around eighty per cent of schools surveyed in the UK relatively recently have not received such training (CBUK, 2013). There is also recognition of the socio-political and historical complexities which underpin English provision and attitudes to grief and death (Bowie, 2000; Reid, 2002; Lowton & Higginson, 2003; Clark, 2006). Thus death education provision remains somewhat more controversial, with a belief by some school staff that it is more appropriate in a reactive context – i.e. as part of the bereavement support process (Kenny, 1998; Clark, 2006; Cranwell, 2007). For others, proactive approaches to death education are supported and encouraged (James, 2012; Potts, 2013), which include hosting ‘Elephant’s Tea Parties’ (CBUK, 2013) at primary schools. Values, attitudes and practices in English primary schools are therefore changing, and being challenged, with evidence to suggest that this may be particularly notable in the empirical research region (CBUK Advisory Group Minutes, 2014; Holland & Wilkinson, 2015). Whilst there may be a ‘revival’ of death in mainstream English society (Walter, 1994; 2012), however, it appears possible that some primary schools continue effectively to ‘sequester’ death (Mellor, 1992; Mellor & Shilling, 1993).

This chapter has also shed light on the complex array of pressures which impact upon English primary schools and their head teachers (Bottery et al., 2013; Exley, 2013; Boffey, 2014, for example). There is also evidence

to suggest that – notwithstanding such pressures – individual school leaders’ own values and personalities may have a significant role in the way in which a school’s values, attitudes and practices are shaped (Bottery et al., 2013). This may have a bearing on the extent to which schools operate as ‘real communities’ (Stern, 2001, 2002) and/or as ‘ecosystems’ (Reid, 2002). It also appears to relate closely to school leadership and emotion (Hargreaves, 1998); ‘emotional coherence’ (Crawford, 2009: 161); and Boler and Zembylas’s (2002: n.p.) notion of a ‘pedagogy of discomfort’.

The extent to which pupil wellbeing is valued and facilitated is thus potentially variable and possibly vulnerable given the way in which the wellbeing agenda appears less prominent politically in recent years (Cameron, 2006, cited in Stratton, 2010; Children’s Society, 2012).

3.9 Conclusions

The combined literature review chapters have identified the nature of school-based bereavement support provision and death education; why they are considered important; and the ways in which thanatological literature inform the study (SRQ3). Both chapters have also provided insights into relevant policy-based issues in English primary schools; the significance of leadership and emotionality; and the wellbeing imperative. As an essential part of an iterative research process, therefore, the literature reviews provide indicative evidence to underpin the empirical research in

English primary schools, for which specific methodological approaches are described in the following chapter.

Chapter 4: Research Methodology

4.1 Introduction

This chapter relates to SRQ5: ‘*What are the best means of investigating these issues* [i.e. the empirical study’s MRQ]?’ Commencing with sections on the philosophical underpinnings and positions of research in terms of the nature of social reality, and with particular emphasis on the ontological and epistemological relevance to the thesis, the chapter proceeds with sections on examining key research methodology paradigms, and the methods designed to attain both a knowledge and understanding of social reality.

Following the initial section, the chapter then progresses to the second key section in which justifications are provided for the empirical research and MRQ, and for utilising an interpretivist position (Lincoln et al., 2011). This section also comprises sub-sections on the empirical research design; ethical considerations; methodological issues relating to the concepts of ecological validity and trustworthiness; and of the processes involved in formulating the semi-structured interview questions, and how the pilot study was utilised iteratively and reflexively.

The third and final key section in this chapter relates to the actual research processes. The empirical data collection and analysis methods and processes are presented in detail, which likewise illustrate the sequential

processes and methods utilised in the process of generating a body of data, and the issues encountered during the research process.

The chapter concludes by summarising its key features and emphases in relation to the empirical study's philosophical and methodological arguments and justifications; the degree to which the chapter has addressed both the MRQ and SRQ5; and by introducing the themes and content for the following chapter.

4.2 Section 1. Philosophical Considerations: Ontology and Epistemology

Ontology is essentially 'the study of being and everything involved with beings such as human relationships and the ontological worlds they create' (Burgess et al., 2006: 53). More succinctly, ontology is also referred to as the study of 'social entities' (Bryman, 2008: 696), and as the study of the 'nature of reality' (Asif, 2013: 14). There are two main philosophical approaches to, and positions concerning, the concept of 'reality' in social science. Known as the 'nominalist-realist debate' (Cohen et al., 2011: 5), nominalist positions generally reject the existence of abstracts or universals (Manson & Barnard, 2012). Realist positions, in contrast, contend that 'objects have an independent existence and are not dependent for it on the knower' (Cohen et al., 2011: 6). Thus an objective, ontologically realist position assumes an 'inescapable and ultimate reality that we are all part of' (Plowright, 2011: 176).

There are several key ontological paradigms, all of which offer differing views on the existence or nature of reality (i.e. in its singular noun form), or in relation to the existence of multiple realities (Andrews, 2012; Maxwell, 2012). Such ontological positioning will be discussed below in conjunction with the concept of epistemology, thus aligning their respective metaphysical and philosophical relationships.

Where ontology is the study of being, from either nominalist or realist positions, *epistemology* is concerned with the nature of knowledge: what knowledge is or might be; how it appears to be - and can be - constructed; and whether there are different types of social knowledge (Hartas, 2010; Bryman, 2008). Thus ontological positions in turn correlate with epistemological approaches considered 'valid' representations of 'reality'. Newby (2010), however, identifies the extent to which the concept of validity is itself relative:

...the issue of validity is, in the end, not always absolute but often a question of what someone believes to be valid. The 'truth' that results from belief in a faith is very different from what I believe to be true from the perspective of a social scientist and both are likely to be different from what a physicist would accept as truth.

(Newby, 2010: 93).

In relativist terms, concepts of truth and validity can also change over time (Hammersley & Gomm, 1997): as humans, our perceptions, enquiries and analyses of the world in which we live can be seen to be based - in materialist terms - on our human capabilities, which include our socio-cultural constructs and cognitive interpretations. An example of this is the view once held that the 'heavens' orbited Earth. Galileo's defence of

Copernican heliocentrism resulted in the Catholic Inquisition's declaration of it as heretical and effectively 'untrue'. Today heliocentrism is accepted by both the Roman Catholic Church and the scientific community (Langford, 1992; Plowright, 2011). In future many currently accepted scientific 'facts' may also be refuted, though hopefully in a safer and less life-threatening way than encountered by Galileo.

There are two key epistemological paradigms. Firstly, the scientific, naturalistic paradigm (Guba & Lincoln, 1994) - also referred to as the 'scientific method' (Cohen et al., 2011: 14) – which professes an ontologically objectivist view of a singular external reality, within which logical positivism effects 'a type of science that is based strictly on the mathematical notion of proof' (Hartas, 2010: 36). Until fairly recently, logical positivists advocated:

...that the methods of natural science constitute the only legitimate methods for use in social science...[through] the manipulation of theoretical propositions using the rules of formal logic and the rules of hypothetico-deductive logic.

(Lee, 1991: 343).

In relation to the development of the social sciences, positivism was adopted and modified by Emile Durkheim (1895, 1982), yielding a form of epistemological social realism based on a robust scientific methodology (Jones, 2005; Young, 2007). Karl Popper, however, proposed that inductive methods in science are unreliable, owing to the potential for counter-evidence to be generated through re-testing. His hypothetico-deductive model (Popper, 1959, 2002) both utilised and extended positivism by proposing that *falsification* – the means by which a

theoretical output is deductively tested for contrary results - provides the key to scientific rigour and the generation of genuinely valid results. Perhaps not too surprisingly, however, such absolutist claims 'have been the focus of sustained and sometimes vehement criticism from some quarters' (Cohen et al., 2011: 14), particularly in response to Popper's concept of falsificationism:

A central difficulty of falsification is behavioural rather than theoretical – falsificationism is an ideal. Scientists do not, in practice, jettison theories in response to a single falsificatory instance.

(Williams, 2012: 1)

The second key epistemological paradigm which, in a structuralist sense (Lévi-Strauss, 1963) may be seen as the binary opposite of logical positivism, is *constructionism* (Crotty, 1998) which '...claim[s] that reality is mind-dependent and is socially constructed through the relationships, psychological activities and shared understandings that we all take part in' (Plowright, 2011: 177). Ontologically, therefore, constructionism aligns itself with more relativist positions in relation to social reality constructs. In non-scientific epistemologies, concepts and processes such as falsification as a method for ensuring validity are rejected in favour of concepts such as *trustworthiness*, especially with regard to qualitative data-generating research methods (Morse et al., 2002). Thus 'validity' in non-positivist epistemologies concerns concepts such as 'credibility, transferability, dependability, [and] confirmability' (Richards, 2005: 139). These are discussed further below, in the context of the empirical research.

The philosophical underpinnings of research, and indeed the history of the philosophy of ideas, are – as the previous narrative describes – complex and never static. Whilst some research is conducted utilising an epistemology borne of a specific ontological position, for others the research question and context drives or suggests the epistemological and methodological alignment (Punch, 2013). In the following section, in which research methodologies are discussed, attention is also given to the types of data generated by research, and the degree to which data also relate to ontological and epistemological considerations and debates.

4.2.1 Research methodologies

In education, research generally utilises a range of methodologies, the three predominant categories of which are a) quantitative; b) qualitative; and c) mixed (generating both quantitative and qualitative data) (Burton & Bartlett, 2009; Burgess et al., 2006). More recently, a fourth, ‘post-paradigmatic’ approach has been proposed, known as the ‘integrated method’, in which the divisive nature of the so-called ‘quan-qual’ paradigm, and the associated debate surrounding the validity of data generated, are ‘transcended’ (Salomon, 1991: 10) or rejected (Plowright, 2011). Whilst most educational research projects are conducted using mixed or qualitative methodologies (Cohen et al., 2011), some quantitative research methods are also utilised (Tolmie et al., 2011; Bryman, 2008; Burton & Bartlett, 2009).

Two key criteria appear to be utilised for selecting a methodological approach: firstly, some methodologies are chosen because they are considered *de rigueur* within an academic field – such as the hypothetico-deductive method referred to above, utilised in many natural sciences. The second key approach considers the research question and context as the starting points (Scott & Usher, 2010), and/or the type of data required in order to effect a research design where ‘data remain a central concern throughout the research, and the research process is organized as a means to an analytic end...’ (Hartas, 2010: 60).

4.2.2 The nature of data

There are two main types of data: quantitative data, which embody numbers or numerical values; and qualitative data, which are essentially non-numerical, such as word-based forms, images, and so on (Newby, 2010). Quantitative, qualitative and mixed methodologies thus refer to the types of data being collected, categorised and interpreted (Burton & Bartlett, 2009; Bryman, 2008). Quantitative data can be categorised hierarchically through data transformation processes, comprising data enlargement and reduction (Punch, 2013). The resulting hierarchy of data, with ratio data at the ‘validity apex’, seems entirely appropriate in the logical positivist paradigm. In social sciences research, however, it ‘has the effect of privileging numerical data over narrative data’ (Plowright, 2011: 121). Arguing for an integrated rather than a mixed methods framework, Plowright (2011: 120) thus considers the terms ‘numerical’ preferable to ‘quantitative’; and ‘narrative’ preferable to ‘qualitative’, as

‘[a]ll data, whether numerical or narrative, result from the intervention of the researcher in that part of the social world that is chosen for study’. Newby (2010:141) concurs with this view, stating, ‘Data are neutral; they just sit there waiting to be discovered and waiting for their ‘message’ (their informational content) to be extracted’. Such arguments remind us of the human processes and interventions involved in the collection of data, regardless of their type. In view of the various ontological and epistemological positions and arguments, and the main research question’s centrality in the thesis, consideration now needs to be given to articulating the empirical research methodology and its underpinning values.

4.3 Section 2. Justification for the Research Approach

This section builds iteratively on the previous section’s narrative by considering epistemological and ontological positions pertinent to the empirical study, from which justifications for the study’s underpinning philosophical and methodological positions and approaches are argued.

4.3.1 Specific philosophical underpinning for the thesis

The main research question [MRQ] in this thesis is: *What are the perceptions of key actors with respect to the nature of ‘informed’ bereavement support and death education within selected English primary schools?* The MRQ accordingly lends itself to the collection of qualitative, perceptions-based data, within an interpretivist paradigm (Scott & Usher, 2011), also discussed further below. In epistemological terms, the research is framed within the empiricist tradition in which ‘experience is seen as the

only source of knowledge' (Hartas, 2010: 442). As the study's respondents are highly experienced school leaders and bereavement support practitioners in primary schools, the predominantly qualitative data elicited during the study's semi-structured interviews are therefore empirical in their own right. Utilising an interpretivist approach for analysing the empirical data thus generates empirical findings and theory, identified and discussed in Chapters 5 and 6 of this thesis.

As part of an iterative and reflexive research process (Bourdieu, 1990; Srivastava & Hopwood, 2009; Punch, 2013) commencing with in-depth analyses of the available literature specific to the thesis, and indeed from the wider thanatological body of publications, both the MRQ and SRQs are borne of a specific interest in finding out about primary schools in which '*informed*' bereavement support (i.e. support informed by specific training programmes, which generally promote death education) is in place. This angle of enquiry contrasts with many previous studies which have sought to enquire about bereavement support provision, but through more randomly selected schools which may, or may not, be offering *informed* bereavement provision (Potts, 2013, for example). Many of Holland's school-based bereavement support studies, however, have been conducted in the city in which *Lost for Words* (Holland, Dance, MacManus and Stitt, 2005) has been pioneered over several decades, and often utilises training programme databases to assess and evaluate bereavement support provision in local and regional schools (Holland, 2003; 2008; and Holland & Wilkinson, 2015, for example). Whilst this empirical study is being

conducted in the same city, which is considered to be comparatively ‘mature’ in terms of school-based bereavement support (Holland & Wilkinson, 2015: 52), the empirical study differs in several key respects, discussed in Section 2, below.

To facilitate the research enquiry, and in recognition of the MRQ’s composite parts, the sub-research questions [SRQs] are, accordingly, as follow:

- SRQ1: What does the literature say about the nature of school-based bereavement support?
- SRQ2: What does the literature say about the nature of school-based death education?
- SRQ3: How does thanatological literature inform this study?
- SRQ4: What are the perceptions of key actors in selected English primary schools with respect to informed bereavement support and death education?
- SRQ5: What are the best means of investigating these issues?

In more philosophical terms, and in view of the context- and perceptions-based research foci, an ontology based on interdependent, socially-constructed notions of reality, or multiple realities, is preferred to absolutist notions of an objective, external reality. Since positivist epistemologies are therefore incongruous, an *interpretivist* approach, which originated from the Chicago School (Bulmer, 1986), is considered appropriate for the empirical research. In social science, interpretivism ‘provides the basis for a critical approach that does not so much reject science as seek to reconfigure it’ (Scott & Usher, 2011: 27). It inherently recognises the fluidity and situational contexts in which actors’

‘behaviour-with-meaning’ (Cohen et al., 2011: 17) is based on individual interpretations and those gained through reflexive, social interactions - which may be *constrained* by social institutions, but are not determined by them (Blumer, 1969). An interpretivist researcher therefore ‘regards [...] individuals as able to construct their own social reality, rather than having reality always being the determiner of the individual’s perceptions’ (Gage, 2007: 153).

Interpretivism is an approach which might also appear to align itself with, or at least lend itself to the adaptation of, aspects of Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) social ecological model, as researchers utilising an interpretivist methodology ‘must recognise not only the complexity of their practice but also, more importantly, its location in culture and history’ (Scott & Usher, 2011: 28). Bronfenbrenner’s social ecology model appears to lend itself to adaptation: rather than placing the developing child in the model’s centre, any person or issue could potentially occupy the central zone, such as an adult, or a theme such as bereavement support provision. In so doing, the adapted social ecological model facilitates analysis in relation to the individual person or theme’s outer systems in a more holistic, potentially dynamic way than might otherwise be the case. In relation to bereavement and the socio-cultural context of death, therefore, the ‘outer systems’ described in Bronfenbrenner’s model, such as the ‘macrosystem’ and ‘chronosystem’, respectively recognise the significant influences in a child’s life of cultural values and laws (Berk, 2000), and of the

chronosystem's recognition of the significance of time, as referred to in the preceding literature reviews.

Whilst Bronfenbrenner's model and related terminology are referred to in the empirical study, and is indeed informed by it, the methodology in itself cannot be said to be based on either his early work (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), or his more mature theory (Bronfenbrenner, 2005, for example). This decision is based on several considerations: firstly, Bronfenbrenner's social ecology theory essentially relates to child development, and although developmental issues comprise important considerations in bereavement support and death education, whether developmentalist or social constructivist in nature, this empirical study is not *focused* on child development- related provision or issues. Secondly, the situated and dynamic bioecological, socio-cultural and historical contexts and systems figuratively influencing child development in Bronfenbrenner's model relate to anthropological considerations, which are already embedded in this thesis. Finally, Tudge et al., (2009) provide convincing methodological criticisms of studies purporting to utilise Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theory of human development:

To consider his ideas as simply relating to contextual influences on development or even as a plea to examine person-environment interrelations is to do his theory a gross disservice. This theory has a great potential to allow us insight and understanding of the processes of human development and deserves to be tested appropriately.

(Tudge et al., 2009: 208).

Accordingly, whilst Tudge et al. (2009) invite bioecological theory-based studies, they consider it necessary to ensure authenticity in relation to the

breadth of Bronfenbrenner's theoretical works, and to methodological designs in which theory can be tested. Although considered inappropriate for the empirical study, using bioecological theory to consider child development in bereavement or death-awareness contexts represents interesting further research opportunities.

The research context's anthropological and thanatological underpinnings (Carverhill, 2002; Thorson, 1996) are thus reflected by adopting an interpretivist epistemology, in positionalist terms (Milner, 2007), along with other reflexive 'life journey' influences referred to in the *Introduction*. In this respect, Bourdieu's (1990) argument for 'vigilant reflexivity in the research process' (Rawolle & Lingard, 2013: 131) is pertinent.

4.4 Section 2: The empirical research design, methods, approaches and key criteria: identification and justification

The decision was made to identify the *perceptions* of key actors in schools where bereavement support provision has been 'informed' by relevant training, using interviews. As discussed in the literature reviews, this represents a unique methodological research approach for a study concerned with bereavement support and death education, and affords an epistemological advantage by eliciting rich data (Charmaz, 2006) from 'richly-informed participants' (O'Riordan, 2013: 93). This in turn yields 'thick description [in which] the voices, feelings, actions, and meanings of interacting individuals are heard' (Denzin, 1989: 83). Ponterotto (2006) further identifies the ways in which a 'thick description' of data:

...presents adequate “voice” of participants; that is, long quotes from the participants or excerpts of interviewer-interview dialogue. Again, a sense of verisimilitude is achieved as the reader can visualize the participant-interviewer interactions and gets a sense of the cognitive and emotive state of the interviewee (and interviewer).

(Ponterotto, 2006: 547).

4.4.1 Key actors: identification and justification

For the purposes of collecting rich, qualitative data from richly-informed key actors in selected English primary schools, it was necessary to identify who such key actors are with regard to the empirical enquiry. A significant proportion of the available research literature on bereavement support provision in primary schools, discussed in Chapters 2 and 3, focuses on primary teachers as key actors or participants (Holland, 1997a; Holland, 2008; Tracey & Holland, 2008; Potts, 2013, for example). It was thus assumed that key actors in ‘informed primary schools’ for the empirical research would also be teachers, predominantly. It was also important that head teachers’ perceptions were sought, given the evidence presented in Chapter 3 for the many significant ways in which school leaders influence and manage both provision and ethos (Reid, 2002; Bottery et al., 2013; Bush & Glover, 2014). The actual process of enquiring about provision - prior to arranging to interview each of the selected schools’ key actors - ultimately led to the identification of named bereavement support practitioners, none of whom in the selected primary schools were qualified teachers. Whilst this was surprising, initially, the expanding and diversifying roles of primary school teaching assistants is well-documented in the literature (Kerry, 2005; Groom & Rose, 2005; et al., 2012). Such roles nowadays appear also to include pastoral care provision

in both primary and secondary-level education (Wilson and Bedford, 2008; Edmond and Price, 2009; Kendal, Keeley and Callery, 2014).

The selected schools' '*non-teaching practitioners*' [hereinafter referred to as NTPs] thus had various job titles reflecting their roles, but which broadly comprised titles indicating positions relating to behaviour management, emotional wellbeing, and safeguarding. In all cases though, and regardless of the predominant role or specific job title, the NTPs had all received bereavement support training, and were their respective school's assigned member of staff in relation to pastoral care and bereavement support provision. The other main group of key actors comprised head teachers, with the exception of one primary school where the deputy head was interviewed as the head teacher was on secondment to another school.

4.4.2 Eliciting rich data

During the planning stages, significant attention was given to how best to elicit the required rich data, and two key research methods were identified for consideration: firstly, the option of developing questionnaires to send to selected schools, with follow-up interviews; or secondly, to by-passing the questionnaire stage and designing a semi-structured interview schedule to utilise with each primary school's key actors. The latter approach was chosen for several key reasons. Firstly, given the perceptions-based, interpretivist underpinning of the research enquiry, the gathering of rich, qualitative data was considered to be of paramount importance. Mixed

methods research questionnaires typically comprise closed- and open – ended questions, from which the latter form elicits more qualitative data (Bryman, 2008). The completion rate of questionnaires in primary schools is generally not high: Potts’ (2013) research, for example, yielded a return rate of twenty questionnaires from seventy posted. Furthermore, the quality of the responses may have been compromised: in a field in which form-filling is often considered something of a necessary evil (Seith and Hepburn, 2013), it may be the case that completing a research questionnaire would be undertaken with a degree of reluctance. A more personalised interviews-based approach, in contrast, offers opportunities to facilitate the same questions at a mutually convenient time, and to *be with* the interviewee in a more participatory and supportive role. From an interpretivist perspective, interviews also provide both the interviewer and interviewee with opportunities to seek clarification on questions or responses; to provide additional narratives to illustrate certain points or responses; and for what might be termed ‘active, *in situ* reflexivity’.

In short, interviews provide the potential for rich data to be collected, and can be mutually personable and rewarding experiences. Feedback from participants both during and post-interviewing confirms the extent to which participants appeared to value the interview process, and to have actively and reflexively considered the research context and pre-sent questions prior to the interviews.

4.4.3 Validity, reliability and trustworthiness

Research methodologies are required to exemplify rigorous methods to maximise the potential for concepts such as validity and reliability (Bryman, 2008). Quantitative, qualitative and mixed or integrated methods and approaches may be viewed together as a continuum (Lund, 2012), in which methods and epistemologies may be visualised and interpreted comparatively (Creswell, 2013; Hartas, 2015). In quantitative methodologies, where high numbers of participants are yielded through surveys, for example, the concepts of *reliability* – ‘the measure of a concept’ (Bryman, 2008: 149) – and *representativeness* – the accurate reflection of a population as a ‘microcosm’ (Byman, 2008: 698) – are both considered to be methodological ‘virtues’. Quantitative methodologies are, however, constrained by the imposition of research structures designed to ensure that ‘validity’ is exemplary.

Qualitative ethnographic methods involving participant observation generally involve low participant numbers, but with a comparatively high personal involvement of the researcher. The issue of unrepresentativeness, or of a lack or absence of generalisability, however, are seen as criticisms of qualitative research methods (Schofield, 2007). The application of concepts associated predominantly within quantitative methodologies has accordingly been questioned by many social science researchers (Guba, 1981; Lincoln, & Guba, 1985; Shenton, 2004; Cohen et al., 2011, for example). Bassey (2001), however, suggests:

...it is possible to formulate the outcomes of empirical research as *fuzzy* generalisations, and these can be useful to both practitioners

and to policy-makers in education and probably in other fields of social research.

(Bassey, 2001: 5).

As discussed above, the epistemological and ontological positions of quantitative and qualitative methodologies are so diverse that trying to apply quantitative criteria for qualitative research studies, or *vice versa*, is metaphorically akin to hammering a square peg in a round hole. The concept of *trustworthiness* in qualitative research was thus developed by Guba (1981) as a viable alternative to positivist principles. Four key criteria apply with respect to the concept of trustworthiness: credibility; transferability; dependability; and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Shenton's (2004) work develops these criteria further, offering guidelines on methods and approaches for qualitative researchers to enable trustworthiness to be exemplified, and is adapted in Table III.1 (in Appendix III) with regard to the empirical study.

4.4.4 Ecological validity

The concept of ecological validity relates to the applicability of findings from qualitative data to 'people's everyday, natural social settings' (Bryman, 2008: 693). Cicourel's (1982) work on ecological validity argues that findings through semi-structured interviews, for example, can yield ecologically *invalid* findings if the interviewing environment is effectively inauthentic. Cicourel further suggests that the potential for ecological invalidity is less likely when conducting ethnographic participant-based observational fieldwork, where everyday activities and dialogues are being observed in a more authentic context, though there are

no guarantees to this. Conducting semi-structured interviews which have ecological validity therefore require ‘...our instruments [to] capture the daily life conditions, opinions, values, attitudes, and knowledge base of those we study as expressed in their natural habitat’ (Cicourel, 1981: 15). Given the ‘informed’ primary school context of the empirical research, the ‘everyday’ values and practices and so on in relation to bereavement support provision and death education ought – if ecological validity is present – to filter through the data and analyses. In this sense the ‘natural habitats’ or ecological communities for the research are the participating primary schools, and it is therefore wholly appropriate for the interviews to be conducted *in situ*. The verification of ecological validity thus requires the empirical data to demonstrate a degree of ‘representativeness’ (Bryman, 2008: 516). Part of the data analysis process will therefore be to establish whether or not ecological validity is evident:

When the same questions are used across different groups or with the same group at different times, and similar, or the same, patterning emerges, then the researcher feels considerably more confident that the [interview] is reflecting something significant about the respondents.

(Cicourel, 1981: 19).

Ecological validity is present, therefore, when representativeness is evident in the data. To *effect* the potential for ecological validity, however, it is also important to consider, and to exemplify, key criteria within the research design and methods utilised. Since the empirical research is qualitative, and interpretivist, the design for the semi-structured interview questions needs also to maximise the potential for ecological validity.

Similarly important in qualitative interview-based research is the concept of ‘data saturation’ (Guest et al., 2006: 59), in which one gains the sense – confirmed during the data analysis processes – that no new data or themes are being revealed. Research conducted by Guest et al. (2006), in which sixty interviews were analysed specifically to evaluate the concept and features of data saturation, concluded that:

‘...data saturation occurred within the first twelve interviews, although basic elements for metathemes were present as early as six interviews. Variability within the data followed similar patterns’.

(Guest, Bunce and Johnson, 2006: 59).

Data saturation is discussed further in this chapter, and also in Chapter 7.

4.4.5 The decision to conduct a pilot study

Richards (2005: 78) suggests – interestingly, if not controversially – that ‘[q]ualitative projects quite normally have no ‘pilot’ stage in which the research ‘tools’ ... are tested’. Undertaking a pilot study is, however, strongly recommended by many other qualitative researchers (Sampson, 2004; Maxwell, 2008, for example). Indeed, Morse et al. (2008: 20) suggest in qualitative data-based research, the role of the pilot study is ‘to refine data collection strategies rather than to formulate an analytic scheme or develop theory’. For Seidman (2012), certain research processes may be considered ‘rites of passage’ (p. 32), which is particularly pertinent for what might be termed the ‘research novice’ undertaking a doctoral study.

Those proposing that pilot studies are an important part of the research design and process (Bryman, 2008; Cohen et al., 2011) do so for several key reasons. Firstly, where interviews are concerned, a pilot study provides opportunities to:

- i) Consider the relevance, order and efficacy of the questions in relation to gathering rich data pertinent to the MRQ and related SRQs;
- ii) Revise and fine-tune the order and content of the interview schedule if reflective analyses by both the interviewer and pilot study interviewees indicate these may be beneficial;
- iii) Give additional, close consideration to the nature of the questions and context in relation to ethical considerations and emotional discomfiture, positionality (Milner, 2007) and to Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* (Bourdieu, 1977);
- iv) Build confidence in interviewing techniques – both dialogically and in relation to technical and administrative issues.

It was considered highly pertinent and appropriate, therefore, to conduct a pilot study, the processes of which are detailed in Section 3 of this chapter.

4.4.6 Data analysis: identification and justification of methods and approaches in the empirical research design

Qualitative data analysis requires considerable sensitivity and care in order to maximise the potential for eliciting and interpreting meaning (Richards,

2005; Silverman, 2006; Maxwell, 2008; Grbich, 2012). As an essentially iterative process (Richards, 2005; Thomas, 2013), data analysis requires a process by which emergent themes are elicited from the data:

By handling the data records sensitively, managing them carefully and exploring them skilfully, the researcher ‘emerges’ ideas, categories, concepts, themes, hunches, and ways of relating them.

(Richards, 2005: 68).

The process of facilitating the emergence of such themes or eventual theoretical insights comprises several key approaches in interpretive research, usually beginning with ‘constant comparison’ of the data (Thomas, 2013: 235). During this early stage of data analysis, data or sections of data considered ‘especially interesting’ (Richards, 2005: 71) are interrogated by asking *why* data appear interesting, and/or relevant to the empirical research. In so doing, interrogating data elevates the process from focusing on the descriptive, to the beginnings of an analytical and conceptual process. As an iterative and reflexive process, Richards (2005: 74) advises the creation of reflective memos to capture even ‘wild ideas’ as they occur, and that such memos and notes not only help expand the data conceptually, but also become part of the data collection. As the empirical data are perceptions-based, the concept and analysis of ‘thick description’ (Geertz, 1973: 310) are of particular relevance. In common with other social science research projects, the analysis of qualitative data relating to bereavement support provision and death education thus requires contextual understanding and reflective - if not empathic - analysis (Thomas, 2013). Details of the actual processes involved in the

empirical data analysis, including the approaches to and types of coding used and developed, are described in Section 3, below.

4.4.7 The issue of utilising automated or manual coding

A considerable amount of attention was given to the issue of whether or not qualitative data software, such as NVivo™, should be used. Proponents of such software programmes consider them beneficial for mixed methods research projects, especially where research teams are involved in coding (Rademaker et al., 2012; Bazeley & Jackson, 2013). Richards (2005: 93), however, acknowledges the benefits of using qualitative data software, but suggests that it ‘won’t automate interpretation [as] such ‘autocoding’...software is not reflecting on the meaning of your text’. For the empirical research, therefore, the considered decision was made to code *manually* rather than to code using software, especially given the study’s interpretivist epistemological position and the essential need for the perceptions of key actors to be analysed with contextual sensitivity. Furthermore, software can also exacerbate the potential for falling into what Richards (2005) refers to as the ‘coding trap’, where

...there are effectively no restrictions to the number of categories you can code data at, or the number of times you can code very rich data. So coding can be a way of never finishing your project.

(Richards, 2005:100).

To reduce the potential for over-zealous coding, manual coding which is based on sensitive and contextual interrogation in relation to *why* data are

interesting, and how they inform the MRQ and related SRQs, is thus advisable (Moghaddam, 2006; Rubin & Rubin, 2011).

4.4.8 The call for ‘pervasive’ research

An additional and significant issue for this research study relates to Clough and Nutbrown’s (2012: 49) views that social research should be a) ‘pervasive’, through its ability to see beyond or for looking radically; b) through its positionality; and c) through its political and purposive dimensions. The underpinning issues relating to childhood bereavement identified and discussed in Chapters 2 and 3 reveal the extent to which bereavement affects wellbeing – not just during childhood but potentially throughout life. Since childhood wellbeing *matters*, the intentionality of the research methodology relates to the desire for formative and enabling outcomes through the study’s conclusions and recommendations (presented in Chapter 7). The empirical research also has a political dimension relating to the potential ‘vulnerability’ of non-statutory social and emotional development provision in English primary schools, argued in Chapter 3 and discussed also in Chapter 6. Previous research into bereavement support in primary schools (such as by Potts, 2013; and Holland & McLennan, 2015) has identified how variable provision is in parts of England. Bereaved children thus represent potentially ‘hidden populations’ who need advocacy through research such as this (Iwaniec & Pinkerton, 1998: 143).

4.5 Section 3: The empirical research processes

The third and final key section within this chapter focuses on the actual processes and methods employed within the empirical research, the structure for which largely complements the order in which key methodological practices and considerations unfolded.

4.5.1 Ethical considerations

Newby (2010: 357) suggests ‘all research generates ethical concerns, [but] obtaining data through interviews and focus groups can pose particular questions’. Known as the ‘costs/benefits ratio’ (Cohen et al., 2011: 75), researchers need to be cognisant of the ethical dilemmas which may arise in the pursuit of data gathering (i.e. the ‘benefits’), and of the potential costs to the subjects in relation to their human rights, values and wellbeing (British Educational Research Association [BERA], 2011). In a research field such as bereavement support and death education, sensitivity and emotional intelligence (Goleman, 1996), as well as standard ethical considerations, seem additionally pertinent. As bereavement is a universal human condition (McCall, 2004), any discussion, including formal interviews in schools concerning bereavement support provision and death education, is highly likely to strike emotional chords with participants (Thorson, 1996; Rolls & Relf, 2006). This was particularly evident in the study’s second primary school [PS2] as on arrival at the school news broke out that the mother of two pupils had just died from cancer. Offers to reschedule were politely but firmly turned down by all three participants,

but it was clear that it was an emotionally-challenging set of interviews for some. It was also acknowledged that the research context and enquiry was particularly pertinent, and this experience was wholly reinforcing in terms of the need to enquire about bereavement support provision in schools, and to enquire about the ways in which this particular school articulated its processes. Ethical issues also extended to considerations regarding whether bereaved pupils' views should also be sought, as in Cranwell's (2007) research. Fairly recent attempts to replicate a small-scale study which analysed children's questions about death and dying (James, 2002), however, proved extremely difficult, owing to a reluctance by parents to grant permission for their children to be involved. For this empirical study, therefore, the decision was made to focus data collection on adults only, with a view to considering seeking pupils' perceptions as an area for future research.

All participants in the empirical study were encouraged to answer frankly and honestly (Shenton, 2004; DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). To emphasise this, interviewees were reassured before the interviews began, and on occasion during the interviews, that the research was not about eliciting the 'right' or 'desired' answers, but that their honest and informed responses would be of immense value. This approach appeared to alleviate anxiety amongst the interviewees, which in general was more evident on a few occasions amongst the non-teaching (NTP) staff members.

All documentation relating to the proposed research study – comprising both sets of interview questions; draft letters to potential participants; and draft permission forms (presented in Appendices 1 and 2) - were submitted to the Faculty's Ethics Committee for scrutiny prior to the pilot study, and likewise prior to any contact with potential participants or schools. Particular attention was drawn to the emotional sensitivities typically inherent in thanatological research studies (Carverhill, 2002), with the following information included in the ethics proforma:

Some school staff members may feel emotionally upset in interviews if they refer to any specific cases of bereavement – e.g. through the loss of a pupil. However the interviews will be conducted in such a way as to avoid probing the emotional aspects, and will also include opt-out clauses, breaks and so on should any participant feel uncomfortable at any time, or for any reason. This research relates to emotional wellbeing, and it is imperative the participants' wellbeing is also assured.

(James, 2014: 3)

Consent was awarded in June 2014 (see Appendix 1), although it should be noted that the MRQ has since been revised to reflect the perceptions-based underpinning, but with no requirement to resubmit the ethics proformae.

4.5.2 The pilot study

Pilot study interviews were conducted in two local schools. In both schools, interviews were piloted with non-teaching bereavement support practitioners (NTPs) and senior leaders, and all staff involved were sent the questions well in advance of the mock interviews. This approach maximised the potential for participants to reflect on the questions' issues and contexts in advance, thus maximising the potential for eliciting rich

data. It also afforded participants a greater opportunity to a) make fully-informed decisions concerning their consent to, or withdrawal from, their involvement in the project; and b) to peruse and reflect on the questions to maximise the potential for providing richly-informed responses. As a pilot study, a key consideration therefore related to the need for the questions and interview processes to be critically-evaluated by the participants both prior to, and at the time of the pilot interviews.

In addition to the need to ascertain the internal validity of the questions (van Teijlingen & Hundley, 2001) pilot interviews effectively allowed the whole interviewing process to be rehearsed and reflected upon, and then discussed in a research supervision meeting.

Two different but local school settings were used for the pilot study: a primary school, and a secondary school. The primary school selected was one in which informed bereavement provision was in place, but it was known in advance that the headteacher did not wish her school to be involved in the main part of the study due to an anticipated Ofsted inspection, and for various undisclosed reasons. This arrangement was considered perfectly suitable for the purposes of piloting the interviews as it allowed participants to see the interviews solely in the context of the pilot study, and thus to feel more at liberty to engage critically and formatively in the process. It also avoided any potential risk of data ‘contamination’ which can arise:

...where data from the pilot study are included in the main results; [and] where pilot participants are included in the main study, but new data are collected from these people.

(van Teijlingen & Hundley, 2001: 36).

The inclusion of a local secondary school in the pilot study may seem somewhat incongruous given the empirical study's focus on primary provision. It proved to be very formative, however, as not only were the questions piloted with a greater range of both teaching and non-teaching bereavement support practitioners, they also proved to be sufficiently generic to elicit rich, qualitative data regardless of the type of school being studied. Contextual considerations in the secondary school relating to subject-specific teaching, larger and more complex pastoral care teams, and curricular differences were all noted and of interest, but did not compromise the pilot study's purpose and ability to elicit rich data: if anything, it reinforced the extent to which interviewing in primary schools, which are smaller and thus more aware of potentially whole-school issues such as child bereavement, are able to generate more pertinent data in this regard. To elucidate further, the interview schedules for the primary schools cohort comprised questions for the head teacher, as well as for each school's active practitioner(s). In a secondary school context, with comparatively large senior management teams, the head teacher or principal may not be involved in, or aware of, child bereavements within his or her school, whereas this proved absolutely *not* to be the case in all primary schools interviewed in the main empirical study. In terms of seeking to gather data relating to each school leader's ethos and values with respect to bereavement support provision and death education,

therefore, this is a significant methodological consideration, and is one which is considered to have enhanced the study's ecological validity.

As significantly, the pilot study also compels a researcher to 'test-run' the intended research process. This also requires a reflexive approach: not only are the practical aspects tested, such as interview technique, and operating audio equipment, the piloting process also facilitates opportunities for the interviewer to consider issues such as bias – whether conscious or sub-conscious – in the delivery of, and verbal and non-verbal responses to, the interviewing process. Bourdieu's (1990) concept of *habitus* - one's deep, often pre-reflexive dispositions – seems pertinent here. Indeed, reflective journal notes made immediately after the pilot study interviews reveal that the initial neutral interviewing stance 'evaporated' about half-way through the first interview to the extent that both interviewee and interviewer were effectively conversing in such a way that our respective habitus appear to have merged. This issue was immediately recognised and a more neutral interviewing stance was adopted for the second interview. Knowing both interviewees predicated the need to explain this aspect of the interviewing technique to reassure them that it was purely for methodological reasons, which was wholly accepted.

Both interviewees had independently read through the interview questions prior to the scheduled interviews, and considered all questions appropriate, comprehensive and fit for purpose. Post-interview discussions about the questions' scope, clarity and design revealed the same independent

considerations that the questions were appropriate and complete. During the successive interviews in all eight primary schools, this remained the case with one slight exception whereby a deputy head suggested *Question One* was rhetorical, described also in Chapter 5. Following the pilot study, it was also evident that some questions generated answers which then seemed to merge into issues relating to other questions, and so participants were advised not to worry if the script was not strictly adhered to, and that in fact this is commonplace as it reflects the complex and interwoven nature of the research focus.

4.5.3 The main empirical study: identifying the selected primary schools and their key actors

As argued above, the MRQ is deliberately focused on the perceptions of key actors from primary schools ‘informed’ by bereavement support training. As a key criterion, therefore, it was important to identify each school’s key actors by contacting primary schools in order to enquire about their bereavement support provision.

Local primary schools were initially identified in relation to the following criteria:

- They were all within the city council’s domain
- They had all been inspected by Ofsted within the last year or so, and received ‘Good’ or higher grades. This reduced the likelihood of interview schedules being disrupted by inspections, but – more significantly – it also provided a degree of ‘sameness’ in schools

which are otherwise potentially individualistic in terms of their ethos, values and practices. It was also appropriate to avoid schools which were judged ‘inadequate’ (Ofsted, 2014: 23) as this could be disruptive for staff members, and might also suggest that their leadership - and possibly their pastoral care provision - were such that the desired rich data may not be as formative.

- All schools selected have pupils from diverse socio-economic backgrounds, and/or from backgrounds which are considered economically disadvantaged. Childhood bereavement is present across all social strata, but there is evidence – both from research and through professional experience – that schools in which children are from economically- or socially-challenged backgrounds often place considerable importance on pastoral care and social pedagogy (Wood & Warin, 2013; Kyriacou, 2014). On the balance of probability, therefore, such schools might be more likely to facilitate informed bereavement support as part of their social and emotional wellbeing provision.

It was immediately evident in ‘informed schools’ that the administrative staff members who field external calls were cognisant with this aspect of their schools’ provision, and knew also the key staff members associated with bereavement support. If it seemed apparent from these early discussions with school administrators that bereavement provision was being offered, a further telephone conversation was then held with the school’s head for an introductory discussion about the research aims. In

most cases such initial, informal conversations with head teachers appeared to be met with interest in the research theme, and a keenness to participate. Head teachers were then asked two key questions during this process to establish a) who the school's active participants were; b) whether or not such staff members had received bereavement support training. The head teachers then provided contact details for their 'active practitioners, and again, initial and essentially informal telephone conversations and/or email correspondence took place to further verify their bereavement support provision roles, and whether or not they had undertaken relevant training. Upon confirmation of the criteria, potential participants were then invited to participate in the study via more detailed and formal emails informing them of the research project's scope, methods and interview questions, along with formal invitations to participate including the ethical permission forms and documentation (Appendix 1). Of the fifteen primary schools identified as offering informed bereavement provision, eight primary schools' key actors agreed to participate.

4.5.4 The semi-structured interview questions

In consideration of interviews as a method for collecting data, Newby (2010:340) describes the 'trade-off between the quantity of data collected and its richness'. Semi-structured interviews have the benefit of facilitating opportunities to deviate from the indicative questions, thus eliciting clarification, if needed, and also for unanticipated data to be voiced and collected (Seidman, 2012). The semi-structured questions were thus designed to enable 'rich and deep' data to be gathered (Newby, 2010:

340), but through questions that were generic enough to allow all participating schools' interviewees to demonstrate both their 'normal' values and practices, as well as to illustrate their responses with more individualistic accounts and examples.

Two sets of questions for semi-structured interviewing were designed to reflect the differing roles between the non-teaching 'active practitioners' (those who actually support bereaved pupils in primary schools, referred to as the 'NTPs'), and headteachers (whose leadership values and practices, including the allocation of budgets for staff training, may both effect or affect informed bereavement support provision). In all eight primary schools, the 'active practitioners' were non-teaching staff members. This is discussed in more detail in Chapter 5, as it represents a significant finding.

Table 4.1 on the next page outlines both sets of questions and their comparative – as well as their distinct – features, and a basic indication of the questions' underpinning contexts and justifications:

Headteacher Questions	Justification and Context	Non-teaching Practitioner [NTP] Questions	Justification and Context
1 <i>Why did you enable your staff to undertake bereavement support training?</i>	Proactive or reactive? Incidence of bereavement? Wellbeing? School values and ethos?	1 <i>What led you to be particularly interested in this area?</i>	Proactive or reactive? Incidence of bereavement? Initiated by headteacher?
2 <i>What bereavement support training have staff members had to date?</i>	Local provision of LfW training? Other courses, such as CBUK's, or 'Rainbows'? Active practitioners' reasons for undertaking training -?	2 <i>Why did you undertake bereavement support training?</i>	Local provision of LfW training? Other courses, such as CBUK's, or 'Rainbows'? Active practitioners' reasons for undertaking training -?
3 <i>Can you give me an example of when the bereavement training has been helpful, please?</i>		3 <i>What bereavement support training have you had to date?</i>	
N/A		4 <i>What did you think of the training?</i>	Enabling or reassuring? Critical evaluations? Impact?
N/A		5 <i>How much did the training help you?</i>	
5 <i>Is bereavement support considered a whole-school issue/approach, or are bereaved pupils supported more discreetly?</i>	Potentially complex underpinnings: agency/ schools as caring communities/ the concept of the 'need to know' basis/ death as a social taboo?	7 <i>Is bereavement support considered a whole-school issue/approach, or are bereaved pupils supported more discreetly?</i>	Do NTPs liaise with other members of staff? If so how? Are bereavements announced in staff meetings etc? Liaison with families?
7 <i>What are your views on the concept of 'death education' [the normalisation of death in the curriculum]?</i>	Is bereavement support separate or do children also have proactive opportunities to learn about death? What are the underpinning values and perceptions on this?	9 <i>Did your bereavement support training cover the concept of death education [normalising death in the curriculum]?</i>	To what extent are NTPs aware of death education? Are they involved in curricular planning/delivery? Curricular awareness?

Headteacher Questions	Justification and Context	Non-teaching Practitioner [NTP] Questions	Justification and Context
11 <i>What part of your bereavement support approach do you think works really well?</i>	Designed to elicit reflective accounts and analyses of provision perceived to be effective.	13 <i>What part of your bereavement support approach do you think works really well?</i>	Designed to elicit reflective accounts and analyses of provision perceived to be effective.
12 <i>Are there ways in which you feel your current bereavement support approach needs developing?</i>	Designed to elicit reflective and formative considerations about enhancing provision.	14 <i>Are there ways in which you feel your current bereavement support approach needs developing?</i>	Designed to elicit reflective and formative considerations about enhancing provision.

Table 4.1: The semi-structured interviews.

4.5.5 The semi-structured interviews

In addition to the design of the semi-structured interviews, consideration was also given to the order in which participants were interviewed in each school. Each participant was aware of who else was being interviewed, and likewise of both sets of questions. This effected a degree of transparency in the process, designed to minimise any potential anxieties - particularly for the schools' active practitioners who are generally non-teaching members of staff. The decision was made, therefore, to interview headteachers first, followed immediately, if possible, by each school's active practitioner(s). There were several benefits to this arrangement:

- Had active practitioners been interviewed first, the possibility for – or the fear of – information being divulged

to headteachers was reassuringly seen by the active practitioners to be negated;

- By interviewing headteachers first, a far deeper impression of the school and its bereavement support provision was gained, which facilitated a more meaningful and pertinent line of enquiry when interviewing the active practitioners. It likewise revealed any gaps in the headteachers' knowledge, which again facilitated the enquiry process with active practitioners;
- A greater level of potential ecological validity within each school's interview responses was possible through interviewing headteachers first, given the above considerations;
- All participants were informed of the ethical underpinning relating to the decision to interview headteachers first, and likewise of the importance of confidentiality.

Following the post-pilot study selection processes outlined above, eight suitably 'informed' inner-city primary schools were selected to participate in the study. A total of eighteen separate interviews were conducted with seventeen participants, comprising seven headteachers and one acting head, and nine non-teaching practitioners [NTPs]. The headteacher in PS3 was interviewed twice owing to time constraints, such that the first interview was conducted on a Friday afternoon just before he took a whole-school assembly, and the second interview on the following Monday

afternoon. All interviews were recorded with each participant's permission using a portable Sony voice recorder placed on a table in front of the interviewee. In a bid to ensure full participation in each interview, written notes were not made, though journal entries were noted immediately afterwards. In all, over eleven hours of interviews were recorded and converted to mp3 audio files.

4.5.6 The interview settings

All eighteen interviews were conducted in two phases 'on location' within each primary school between nine o'clock in the morning and four o'clock in the afternoon, during term time. Phase One interviews were conducted in three primary schools [PS1, PS2, and PS3] during the second half of the Summer Term in 2014, and Phase Two interviews were conducted after the summer vacation in the first half of the 2014/15 Autumn Term in five schools [PS4 to PS8]. All interviews with headteachers were conducted in their offices, and interviews with NTPs were predominantly conducted in the 'nurture rooms'/offices used by NTPs to support bereaved pupils. The interview with NTP3 was conducted in an unoccupied classroom; and the interview with NTP6 utilised the school's unoccupied library. All interviews were conducted in privacy and behind closed doors, though some brief interruptions occurred during the interviews with headteachers on a few occasions, during which time the voice recorder was paused and offers were made to provide the staff concerned with privacy.

Audio files were submitted to a professional transcription service at the end of both interview phases. After proofreading and anonymising each transcript, electronic copies were sent to the relevant interviewee for perusal, with the option to listen to the audio file also. As a consequence of this, one transcript was amended at the headteacher's request such that personal comments concerning family bereavements were removed.

4.5.7 The interviewing approach

Though the pre-interview processes ensured that all participants were cognisant of the nature of the research enquiry; of the semi-structured questions; and of the ethical considerations, additional and detailed explanations were given in the minutes before each interview began. Ethical permissions were obtained at this stage also, but each participant was also fully aware of his or her right to withdraw from the process at any stage. In every case, all participants had read the questions prior to the scheduled interview, and often made reference to the fact that they had given quite considerable thought to each question in the period between receiving them by email and being interviewed. Whilst this is an important element in the process of collecting rich data, there nevertheless remains a modicum of concern that pre-interview 'deep-thinking' may generate more measured responses in a bid to show the school in a 'good light', and/or to please the interviewer. These issues were pre-empted at the start of each interview by reassuring each participant of the validity of their genuine, authentic views and perceptions, and that the aim was not to make 'judgements' about schools or their respective bereavement support

provision. With regard to the quest for ecological validity, therefore, such considerations needed to be embedded in the data analysis process.

A friendly but professional manner was adopted for conducting the interviews. There were times when the interviews became more like natural conversations, and this appeared to be a mutually positive aspect of the research process (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Nevertheless, the importance of remaining ‘warmly neutral’ throughout the interviews, to minimise the risk of influencing participants’ thoughts and responses, was key to eliciting authentic data. An emergent sense of ‘data saturation’ (Guest et al., 2006: 59) was apparent after the first few schools’ key actors had been interviewed, and upon completion of all seventeen interviews, this was strongly evident.

4.5.8 Restrictions, limitations and concerns with respect to the interview process

Owing to ethical considerations relating to conducting research in sensitive areas such as loss and bereavement, previously discussed on page 111 - coupled with time constraints relating to the research schedule - it was not considered appropriate to include pupils in the interviewing process for this study – though this is discussed as an area for future research in the final chapter. Such research would require significant preparation and planning with both staff, parents and pupils to enable informed and ethical consideration to be made by potential participants. Likewise, opportunities to conduct a third phase of interviews with teachers – perhaps as focus

group interviews in the selected schools - would have yielded more enriching data, particularly in the light comments made by some NTPs during the interviews concerning both bereavement support provision and death education (see Chapter 5).

4.5.9 Reflexivity and follow-up interviews

The transcripts for all interviews revealed the extent to which the semi-structured interview process enabled a considerable amount of richly-informed data to be collected. A degree of reflexivity is also evident amongst some of the participants with regard to the ways in which the interview questions and processes prompted them to consider, and sometimes re-evaluate, their thoughts and perceptions. As such, this aspect appeared almost to mirror the inherently iterative nature of the thickly-descriptive data analysis process, and appears, therefore, to enhance some key actors' sense of ownership of their data. It was additionally important to provide opportunities for all key actors to read and consider their transcribed interviews in order to maximise the potential for further reflexive and iterative input, and to enhance ecological validity (Marshall and Rossman, 2010).

4.5.10 Qualitative data analysis and coding

The analysis of qualitative data contained three main initial stages and processes in order to interrogate the data analytically and conceptually. At the end of Phase One of the data collection, just at the start of the long summer holiday, the recordings from the first three schools (PS1 – PS3)

were submitted for transcription. During the summer, Stage One of the coding and analysis processes from Phase One commenced. This comprised close reading of each transcript, along with an interrogation of the data to consider the following issues and questions:

- Have sufficiently rich data been collected in each interview?
- Is further clarification needed on any responses?
- Do recurring perceptions and themes seem to be evident within the data?
- Are there any apparent limitations on the part of the research tools and processes?

This process thus provided reflexive opportunities prior to commencing Phase Two of the data collection interviews in the Autumn Term. Richards (2005) suggests this complements naturalistic research approaches as

...working up from the data can loop you back to the research design... Unlike in variable analysis, there is no imperative for the qualitative researcher that the design or approach should be constant throughout the project.

(Richards, 2005: 77).

Following completion of the second phase of data collection, colour-coding was initiated. Initially this was done on hard copy using highlighter pens whilst simultaneously proofreading each transcript (to also ensure all participants and settings were anonymous). This stage was then replicated electronically whilst adding any corrections from the proofreading process, so that themes and concepts were more readily identifiable across

the data record. In all, three main coding processes were employed (Richards, 2005):

- i) *Descriptive coding*: comprising the storage of case-based information and documentation, coupled with basic information regarding the date, location, and so on.
- ii) *Topic coding*: this comprised labelling and colour-coding data, and noting linkages and cross-references to other transcripts; and
- iii) *Analytical coding*: the key element in qualitative research in which data are interrogated and interpreted.

4.5.11 Topic coding

To initiate topic coding, six key SRQ-related areas were identified. Table 4.2, below, identifies the main topic codes and their related colour codes, SRQs and respective interview questions:

Colour Used in Coding	Key Themes Highlighted	Associated Interview Questions		Relevance to SRQs
		Heads	NTPs*	
Yellow	Perceptions of bereavement support	1-6; 11 - 12	1-8; 13	SRQ4 [and SRQ1; SRQ3; SRQ6]
Green	Perceptions of death education	7-9	9-11	SRQ4 [and SRQ2]
Pink	Perceived recommendations for bereavement support provision	11,	13, 14	SRQ4 [and SRQ7]
Blue	Perceived recommendations for death education	11 -12	14	SRQ4 [and SRQ7]
Grey	Other pertinent issues and perceptions	13	15	SRQ4 [and SRQs 1, 2, 3, 6 and 7]
Olive	Perceptions of cultural issues	10	12	SRQ4

Table 4.2: Thematic Codes in Relation to Interview Questions and SRQs.

All three coding processes were used on a transcript-by-transcript basis, before moving to the next stage of the coding process. This approach engendered a deeply respectful awareness of each key actor's perceptions-based data, and of the emergent values and themes. As more topic coding themes and labels were identified with each transcript, this approach further added to a progressively deeper analysis of each data set.

4.5.12 Analytical coding

To prevent later transcripts being comparatively more interrogated or analysed than the Phase One transcripts, the entire data set was revisited in order to ensure all possible topic codes were identified, interrogated, and labelled as MRQ-related themes, concepts and codes.

4.5.13 Emergent themes and theory

The processes outlined above combine to elevate data to a point where strong themes, theoretical indications, 'Fuzzy predictions with best-estimates-of-trustworthiness' (Bassey, 2001: 20), and significant findings can be interpreted as having *emerged* from the data (Ritchie et al., 2013; Thomas, 2013). Corbin and Strauss (2014) suggest that theory emergence in qualitative data analysis is essentially a social construct, which seems a logical consideration given the interpretivist processes utilised. Whilst the empirical research has emphatically not used a grounded theory approach, the similarities between the emergence of themes and theory described in

grounded theory, and with the naturalistic approaches utilised in this research project, are – in this limited respect – comparable. Though very heavily critical of grounded theory, Thomas and James (2006: 767) nevertheless concede that ‘the procedures [of grounded theory coding] admittedly provide signposts for qualitative inquirers’, and it is in this sense that the constructed key themes and theory can be seen to have emerged from the perceptions-based empirical data.

This research also benefited from deeper reflexivity (Bourdieu, 1990) in consideration of the processes involved in writing Chapter 6. Given the iterative nature of the research process inherent in a qualitative doctoral study such as this, more meaningful insights and contextual findings thus appear to develop from the empirical data analysis stage by re-considering the significant findings in relation also to the available literature.

As an empirical study relating to a poignant aspect of primary school provision, the final part of the research process will involve the period after the study has been examined. Part of the process of engaging schools in the empirical study was the promise made to the key actors that the study’s findings, conclusions and recommendations will be shared. It is thus hoped that this research will have some formative outcomes, to the benefit – ultimately – of primary pupils and their school communities. This resonates with Clough and Nutbrown’s (2007: 49) calls for ‘pervasive’ research, and with reflexivity in the research process (Bourdieu, 1977).

4.5.14 Summary of chapter contents and relevance to SRQ5

This chapter began with an analysis of ontological and epistemological issues in relation to the wider nature of research, and the various philosophical underpinnings which are debated in the literature. As a qualitative data-based social science project, the empirical research is located within the interpretivist paradigm, and the justification for this has been provided within the chapter. The chapter also identifies the ways in which the empirical research design and methods are such that the elicitation of rich data from ‘informed’ participants is central to the interpretivist enquiry. This represents a unique methodological approach when compared with published research in bereavement support to date.

As a qualitative data-based study, the chapter also demonstrates the importance and significance of ecological validity, and the iterative and reflexive processes which underpin the thesis in both philosophical and *habitus*-based aspects (Bourdieu, 1977). As the research is positioned within a potentially sensitive field, the significant ethical considerations have also been identified and described, as have the pervasive and formative dimensions of the empirical study’s context and ethos. In addition to justifying the methodological approaches for the empirical research, this chapter has also outlined the research processes with cross-references to related documentation in the Appendices.

Having addressed both the wider and specific aspects of SRQ5 in relation to the best means of investigating the MRQ and related SRQs, therefore, the following chapter presents the findings of the empirical study's interviews and interpretivist analyses.

Chapter 5: The Results of the Empirical Study

5.1 Introduction

The previous chapter positioned the empirical research ontologically and epistemologically, justifying an interpretivist approach to the qualitative data analysis. This chapter specifically addresses SRQ4: *What are the perceptions of key actors in selected primary schools with respect to informed bereavement support and death education?*

The chapter reveals some significant findings in relation to both bereavement support provision and death education, particularly regarding the way in which bereavement support is firmly ‘nested’ within concerns for pupil wellbeing. The empirical data also show that the selected primary schools have embedded learning opportunities within their curricula to facilitate social and emotional development, and likewise to enable pupils’ wellbeing needs and problems to be identified and supported. This is especially significant given the non-statutory nature of subjects such as Personal, Social and Health Education [PSHE] (DfE, 2011) in the National Curriculum (DfE, 2013).

Another key finding relates to the way in which all eight primary schools in the study have effectively ‘compartmentalised’ bereavement support provision to one non-teaching staff member. Whilst there are many positive aspects of this arrangement, bereavement support provision data

also reveal there to be some associated constraints and concerns. Similarly, the chapter reveals the extent to which macro- and micro-level socio-cultural issues both enhance and constrain bereavement support provision and death education in the selected schools. Such socio-cultural elements include constructs of childhood; the concepts of child-centredness and agency; and religious practices and beliefs.

Given the contextual underpinnings relating to the empirical findings, and in order to position the results contextually and meaningfully, the main body of the chapter begins with a section designed to reacquaint the reader with some important considerations from the preceding chapters regarding a) the significance of child wellbeing in relation to both bereavement support and death education; b) the staffing arrangements for bereavement support provision in the selected schools; and c) the concept of ‘informed provision’. The chapter then proceeds to present the detailed empirical results in two parts, and with direct relevance to SRQ4:

Part 1: The selected schools’ and key actors’ values, practices and attitudes with respect to bereavement support;

Part 2: The selected schools’ and key actors’ values, practices and attitudes with respect to death education.

The chapter concludes by summarising the key findings and themes from the empirical study; by illustrating the degree to which the findings for both bereavement support and death education are inter-related; and by

introducing the successive chapter's iterative discussions and analyses of the significant themes.

5.2 Contextual considerations: wellbeing, staffing, and the concept of 'informed provision'.

5.2.1 Wellbeing

As the reader will recall from the literature reviews, child bereavement support is positioned within a wider concern in primary schools for pupil wellbeing. Evidence from the literature suggests that children's perceptions of wellbeing relate strongly to attachments with adults (particularly family members and teachers), and to friends and pets. Where attachments are compromised or severed, various forms of grieving are experienced, and wellbeing may be adversely affected (Bowlby, 1960; Bretherton, 1992). The literature also documents the extent to which issues known to compromise wellbeing – such as bereavement – can effect changes in behaviour, and/or the ability for children to learn actively and effectively. In spite of the significance of pupil wellbeing to learning attainment, however, the reader may recall that programmes of study associated with developing pupil wellbeing, such as Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE) (DfE, 2011; Formby, 2011) and Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL) (DfES, 2005) are non-statutory elements in the English National Curriculum, though schools are at liberty to include such provision in their curricula (DfE, 2013).

Part 1's results include significant findings with regard to the key actors' recognition of the importance of pupil wellbeing, and of the extent to

which concerns for supporting pupils whose wellbeing is compromised are central to - and essentially 'nested' within - pastoral care provision in the selected primary schools. Rather than responding *reactively* to pupil bereavements and other wellbeing concerns, pupils in the selected schools are *proactively* enabled to explore issues relating to bereavement, and likewise to develop essential social and emotional skills. Such proactivity is, however, variable with regard to curricular provision.

The concern for child wellbeing is relevant also to the concept of – and arguments for – 'death education' (i.e. where death and related issues are opportunistically 'normalised' in the curriculum, as distinct from being taught as a discrete, timetabled subject). Rather than perpetuating death as a societal taboo – thus protecting or 'buffering' children from it - proponents of death education consider it to enable pupil wellbeing, and to minimise the possibility of death anxiety in childhood and beyond. The findings presented in Part 2, however, reveal that both death education provision – and the key actors' values and attitudes to it – are variable: whilst some regard death education as 'essential', others profess caution in its delivery or are against it entirely, which may be an impediment to the wellbeing agenda. Such findings in part reflect the extent to which the staff members responsible for the majority of bereavement support provision in the selected schools have little - if any - involvement in curricular planning, which remains the domain of qualified teachers. This is explained in more detail in the section to follow.

5.2.2 Staffing issues

As reported in the previous chapter, the results are derived from interviews conducted in eight selected English primary schools - all within the same city-based education authority. As the reader will recall from Chapter 4, schools which met certain generic criteria were initially contacted by telephone to determine whether or not any staff members provided bereavement support ‘informed’ by specialist training. In all eight selected schools, administrative personnel fielding external telephone calls were fully cognisant of their respective bereavement support provision, and of exactly who the ‘active practitioners’ were. Further conversations with the schools’ headteachers, which included requests to conduct the research, revealed that in all cases the appointed staff members responsible for trained bereavement support provision were *non-teaching* personnel. This was somewhat unexpected, as recent research in bereavement support – especially by Potts (2013) – focuses on *teachers’* views about, and experiences of, supporting bereaved pupils. It was necessary, therefore, to design interview questions accordingly.

Although unavailable at the time of conducting the interviews, more recent research by Holland and McLennan (2015: 121) suggests that 37 per cent of the 71 schools in their survey have a trained staff member responsible for bereavement support provision, though details relating to who these staff members are is unclear, and was not a focus of their research. Holland and Wilkinson’s (2015) research, which compares bereavement support provision in primary and secondary schools in Hull and North Suffolk,

reveals that responsibility in Hull schools lies variously with headteachers, Special Educational Needs Coordinators [SENCOs], ‘auxiliaries and mentors’ (p. 55) – but specific details concerning primary schools, and the roles and profiles of such ‘auxiliaries’ - are unclear, though email correspondence with Holland (2015) confirms that they are non-teaching support staff.

To reinforce the empirical study’s findings that in all of the selected schools bereavement support provision is predominantly the domain of non-teaching staff, this chapter henceforth refers to them as *non-teaching practitioners* [NTPs], thus emphasising their active, practitioner roles and non-teaching status. With the exception of one NTP, who is employed by PS2 on a part-time basis as a school counsellor, and who has a social work background, the remaining eight NTPs are all employed full-time whose roles generally comprise a wide range of administrative and pastoral care issues, such as ‘emotional wellbeing work’ and behaviour management as well as bereavement support. Some NTPs additionally have responsibility for providing class-based learning assistance and pupil intervention; for coordinating child protection cases, and/or for business management. In a few of the selected schools other staff members had undertaken bereavement support training, and in PS5, which adopted *Rainbows Bereavement Support Great Britain* (2015) - a Christian-based programme of loss and bereavement support, hereinafter referred to as ‘Rainbows’ - the whole school had been trained. Nonetheless, the empirical study’s

findings reveal that in all of the selected schools, an appointed NTP is the key bereavement support staff member.

5.2.3 The concept of ‘informed provision’

The predominant underpinning for the interviews with both headteachers and NTPs relates to the study’s concept of ‘informed’ bereavement support provision – i.e. to provision underpinned by specialised bereavement support training. The empirical study is thus distinct from previous survey-based studies referred to in the literature reviews, which sought to identify whether or not school staff had received any specialised training, and to gain insights into the nature and extent of their bereavement support. Such studies (by Potts, 2013, for example) provide insights into bereavement support provision in England and the UK, and likewise of the extent to which provision is inadequate in some areas and schools.

Holland and Wilkinson’s (2015) comparative study describes Hull as a ‘mature area’ in terms of its bereavement support and training, compared with North Suffolk which is developing its provision. Since the empirical study is being conducted in the same ‘mature area’, the intention, methodologically, was to capitalise on this by eliciting rich data through interviews with key actors in schools informed by bereavement support training. It is therefore anticipated that the empirical study’s findings will complement previous studies on bereavement support.

Another significant aspect with regard to the concept of informed provision relates to the promotion of death education by bereavement support training programmes, for proactive, enabling reasons referred to in the wellbeing section above. Accordingly, all key actors were asked three interview questions enquiring specifically about the values, attitudes and practices of death education. Although this is a relatively small number of questions specific to death education, data from some of the other questions have also contributed to a greater understanding and interpretation of this aspect of informed provision, from which some significant findings and themes have emerged.

The chapter now proceeds to describe the empirical study's findings in detail, beginning with Part 1 which relates to informed bereavement support provision. This is then followed by Part 2, relating to death education.

5.3 Part 1: The selected schools' and key actors' perceptions with respect to the nature of bereavement support.

5.3.1 Bereavement support training

Given that the eight selected schools all offered bereavement support informed by specialist training at the time of the interviews, it was essential to the empirical study to enquire about the bereavement support training staff members had undertaken, and what prompted this. All non-teaching practitioners [NTPs] were asked to name any relevant loss and bereavement training courses they had undertaken (Question 2); whilst headteachers were asked to comment on why they enabled staff to

undertake bereavement support training (Question 1); and on the types of training courses undertaken (Question 2).

All headteachers reported there to be a discernible need for training to support bereaved children and other forms of loss. The following quote from HT2 illustrates what he described as PS2's whole-school recognition of, and decision to address, the range of problems that can affect pupils' learning and wellbeing:

...what became apparent very early on, is, if we want to be a caring school that supports children with these issues, we need to be appropriately trained for that.

(HT2: 1)

Similarly, data from PS8's participants suggest a proactive approach to accessing bereavement training in recognition of what they perceived to be '*a clear, identified need for some specialist skills for children*' (HT8: 1).

In addition to recognising the proactive need for bereavement support training, HT6 reveals a more reactive underpinning in response to a former pupil's tragic death that occurred just before the head's appointment, which had a significant impact on the school's community.

With respect to the bereavement support training undertaken by the study's participants, the interviews revealed that five out of the eight participating schools employ members of staff – predominantly NTPs – who have undertaken more than one bereavement awareness training course. Six of the eight schools have been trained by the *Lost for Words* [LfW] training

programme (Holland, Dance, MacManus and Stitt, 2005), which runs from the education department in the city's hospice, and two schools have undertaken Child Bereavement UK's [CBUK] training programme. Whilst all of the NTPs are trained, only two headteachers have also received bereavement awareness training, one of which was with LfW, and the other was with 'Rainbows', which incorporates a whole-school training approach.

All participants who have received bereavement support training commented positively about the perceived benefits to them of their respective training programmes. NTP9, for example, found the open discussions on death and bereavement '*quite new*' (NTP9: 1); whilst five NTPs commented on the extent to which training increased their confidence in dealing with a sensitive subject area. HT6 similarly referred to the discomfiture some people have in discussing bereavement and death, and how this can be transferred:

... it's all the euphemisms that we use about death, that nobody dare have a frank conversation with a child... and it gets passed on to the children.

(HT6: 2).

One of the few headteachers who had undertaken bereavement support training commented also on the extent to which it had helped her to support parents unsure about supporting their own children at home.

In spite of undertaking bereavement support training, and working with bereaved pupils, NTP4 refers to having a personal '*issue with death*', and

that supporting bereaved children is consequently ‘... *a real tough one, I think, for me*’ (NTP4: 2). Whilst bereavement support training programmes address the issue of death anxiety, this tends to be more as a concept in relation to societal attitudes and schools: such programmes generally do not provide sufficient time to enable participants to work through any personal death anxieties, though awareness of them is facilitated. Related to this, the interview with HT6 referred to her previous primary school in which one of the reception class teachers, who had attended the *Lost for Words* [LfW] bereavement support training course (Holland, Dance, MacManus and Stitt, 2005), was unable to inform the children that the class hamster had died, and therefore asked the headteacher to do so on her behalf. Both ‘death anxiety’ examples from the data suggest that bereavement support training is insufficient in itself, and that underlying personal issues may constrain bereavement support provision on occasions. NTP3, who is a highly-qualified school counsellor, further argued that bereavement support training ‘...*ain’t worth anything if you can’t talk to the child*’ (NTP3: 2), and that *liking* children is an essential prerequisite to effective bereavement support.

In all, the results indicate that decisions by headteachers in the selected schools to enable staff members to undertake bereavement training were borne of predominantly proactive values – i.e. in recognition of the more specialist nature of bereavement support, and the need for training to inform such provision. HT4, for example, recognised the need for informed bereavement support provision, and gained approval for this

from the school's governors and staff, *'because it isn't just about responding to a situation; it's much more about awareness'* (HT4: 1).

The need for a proactive approach was particularly pertinent in PS2 as, upon arriving at the school to conduct the interviews, news broke out that the mother of two pupils had just died. The school knew of the mother's terminal illness, and had been supporting her two sons proactively, but the attitudes, practices and values of the school appeared significantly more transparent and poignant on that occasion. It was also evident that the school's bereavement support provision appeared to be very well-coordinated: as the interviews within PS2 were scheduled just before the start of the long summer vacation, arrangements were already in place for the school counsellor to continue supporting the two bereaved pupils during the holiday period. Provision had also been made for the older Year Six pupil's transition to secondary school, to facilitate further pastoral care and bereavement support.

5.3.2 The nature of bereavement support

Rather than adopting a whole-school approach to bereavement support, provision at the time of the interviews was chiefly the domain of each school's non-teaching 'non-teaching practitioner' [NTP]. The exception, in theory, at least, was in PS5 in which the entire staff body – including lunchtime supervisors and the caretaker – had all received training with *'Rainbows'* (see also Chapter 3), yet in practice bereavement support was still predominantly the responsibility of the school's part-time NTP. A

particularly significant finding in this research, therefore, relates to the fact that whilst all participant schools recognised the need for bereavement support provision, it has been effectively *sequestered* or compartmentalised – to a greater or lesser extent – to non-teaching staff.

In general all NTPs appeared to be experienced, empathic and nurturing individuals, who recognised the need for more holistic insights into their pupils' lives, both in and out of school. NTP1, for example, described how he ensures he is on the playground every morning and afternoon to greet both pupils and families, and thus to increase his awareness of any wellbeing and/or behaviour issues.

All of the NTPs in the study had a room or office in which children can be supported. Although the rooms varied in size, they all appeared to be very nurturing environments, with cushions, comfy chairs, children's pictures and toys. The majority of primary schools allowed pupils open access to see the NTPs, though NTP7 felt that this was relatively less common as their 'Talk-To Box', positioned in the school's entrance foyer so that children can post notes asking for support, facilitated more direct liaison between the NTP and bereaved pupils. In spite of the 'Talk-To Box', however, NTP7 suggested that it is possible some children's emotional and wellbeing needs remained hidden, and that class teachers were not always aware of their pupils' bereavements or other emotional needs (see NTP7: 8).

As witnessed so poignantly in PS2, coordinated support was also evident in all of the selected primary schools, exemplified by accounts of close and respectful liaison with pupils' families and with key members of staff. For some schools this was a fairly discreet arrangement, in which the key members of staff in relation to the pupil were involved in knowing about and/or providing bereavement support, whilst for some of the other schools information seemed to be shared more widely. In PS8, for example, a daily morning circle was reported to be held with all staff, who were *'used to dealing with an absolutely massive range of unusual, distressing circumstances with these children'* (HT8: 2). Raising staff awareness in such a way has the potential to widen the support experience for bereaved primary pupils. Playtime, for example, affords opportunities for children to share significant events, as cited by HT6:

[A] child came up to me on the playground, I was on duty yesterday, and said to me, 'Oh something's happened at the weekend.' I said, 'Oh what's that?' She said, 'Oh my granddad died.' I said, 'Oh that is really sad. Were you expecting it?' And she said, 'Well yes he was in hospital and he was ninety-two and he'd been trying to pull the drip out of his hand.' She was really matter of fact, so I thought that's been dealt with really well by her family.

(HT6: 3)

A raised awareness of significant events – such as bereavements - in the wider school community has the potential, therefore, to enhance what might be considered the school's 'emotional support capital'. Conversely, schools in which staff are generally unaware of significant events and wellbeing issues from a whole-school perspective may, therefore, miss opportunities to extend emotional support to bereaved pupils. Any

corresponding behaviour issues – such as on the playground or in the school’s canteen – may be dealt with less empathically and contextually.

5.3.3 Bereavement policies

For a variety of reasons, identified in Chapter 3, bereavement training courses recommend that schools develop loss and bereavement policies. Suggested formats and templates for such policies are readily available – both in training course documentation, and online – which are designed to enable policies to be ‘fit for purpose’, and for the development process to be less arduous. Data show, however, that only two of the training-informed participating schools (PS7 and PS8) had policies which specifically related to, or included, bereavement support. Of the six primary schools for which no bereavement support policy was in place at the time of the interviews, two schools appeared reluctant to have such a policy. PS1’s caution related to the perceived need for flexibility and respect relating to ‘*various beliefs and views*’ (HT1:3), and that it is ‘*[h]ard to put it into black and white... hard to nail it down to a policy*’ (NTP1: 3). Similarly, the relevant interview question prompted HT6 to consider whether having a policy might help her school’s bereavement support provision to be more sustainable – i.e. to furnish staff with information for the occasions when the NTP is unavailable – but there was a discernible reluctance for any ensuing policy to be ‘scripted’ which could potentially detract from supporting bereaved pupils on an individual basis. NTP2 also appeared to oppose overly-bureaucratising schools, suggesting ‘*you’d write policies on everything, wouldn’t you,*

really?' (NTP2: 3). NTP6 stated that his school planned to adapt the 'Rainbows' policy template, utilising a whole-school approach to drafting it. Such an approach is generally advocated by all bereavement support training programmes. Given that the majority of staff who attend bereavement support training programmes are non-teaching NTPs, however, the extent to which they feel empowered to initiate such policies is a subject for further research.

5.3.4 Wellbeing and child-centredness

Significant findings relating to the concept of wellbeing were articulated in all eight participating primary schools, and it was evident also that the NTP roles are substantially concerned with it. In PS1, the NTP's full-time role as a behaviour support worker appeared to be constructed entirely on the premise that pupil wellbeing has a recognised impact on behaviour, and that uncharacteristic behaviour can signify emotional and other wellbeing problems. PS2's headteacher encapsulated the significance of wellbeing by saying that '*unless children are feeling happy and safe and secure, then they're not going to learn*' (HT2: 1). Similarly, PS5's wellbeing provision was built on the view that pastoral care is a central concern, and that emotional needs hinder children's learning. PS5's headteacher further commented that '*pupils' emotional needs have just grown incredibly over the past two or three years... which is hindering their learning*' (HT5: 6).

Loss, bereavement and wellbeing were seen as interconnected and ‘nested’ in all eight schools. HT3, for example, spoke at length about the ‘*different layers of bereavement*’ (HT3, Interview One: 1), and of the extent to which the personified school is ‘*the most consistent person in children’s lives*’ (HT3 Interview Two: 2). The ‘layered’ nature of bereavement was also referred to by the headteacher of PS4 in – amongst other things – the contexts of the school’s refugee population, and in delayed or hidden wellbeing issues. Data from PS4’s headteacher further suggests that a proactive approach to bereavement provision needs to include a preparatory element for an impending situation that could lead to a bereavement, and that ‘*you would be failing the child if you didn’t prepare*’ (HT4: 3). This clearly relates to HT4’s school’s wider approach to education, embodied by its concern with pupil wellbeing, and also with enabling pupils more generally to be able to prepare for challenging situations:

Happiness, apart from anything else, all that research into what makes people happy, is largely concerned with people’s perceptions of what’s coming up and their ability to cope with it...And you have to train that in them, so when I see that in six and seven year olds, I think, this is successful education.

(HT4: 7 and 8)

Facilitating pupil wellbeing in the selected primary schools was observed to comprise two main approaches. Just as bereavement provision may be considered either proactive or reactive in nature, data from the interviews reveal that all eight schools similarly appeared to operate both proactively and responsively to wellbeing issues. Proactive provision comprised curricular activities and approaches designed to facilitate social and

emotional wellbeing, and represents a significant finding given the extent to which the wellbeing agenda has not received the same curricular emphasis due to its non-statutory nature. Thus Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning [SEAL] (DfES, 2005) was part of the weekly curricular provision for four of the selected schools; and Personal, Social and Health Education [PSHE] (DfES, 2005) was delivered in three primaries, also on a weekly basis. Whilst NTPs generally did not appear to have an in-depth knowledge of curricular provision, and were not normally included in teacher-led planning meetings, the NTP in PS6 was, however, aware that her school's PSHE programme of study for Key Stage Two [KS2] included learning opportunities for managing emotions when someone dies. For the faith school, the diocesan Religious Education [RE] Agreed Syllabus was also considered by the headteacher to be integral to emotional development and wellbeing provision, as was *Philosophy for Children* [P4C] in two of the selected primary schools (PS4 and PS8).

'Circle Time' (DfES, 2005: 51), also referred to in Chapter 3, was practiced regularly if not daily in seven of the eight participating primary schools. This practice affords opportunities for both proactive loss and bereavement awareness, and responsive bereavement support provision, through the exploration of wider wellbeing themes and issues, concurrently facilitating opportunities for social and emotional development. 'Circle Time' in PS6 was reported by the headteacher to be compulsory for all classes in the school every Monday, as it afforded opportunities for children to 'unburden' what might have happened at the

weekend. HT2 likewise revealed the benefits of ‘Circle Time’ as an opportunity within which pupils know they can be ‘*very open and very honest*’, and where the teachers will not dismiss something as ‘*inappropriate*’ (HT2: 5), though some sensitive issues may be directed to more private conversations with the child concerned.

The recognition by participating schools’ key actors of the relationship between bereavement, wellbeing, learning, and behaviour is further evidenced by data from the interview with HT3, in which he described a pupil’s exclusion from school owing to inappropriate behaviour following his father’s imprisonment. In conversation with the pupil’s mother, HT3 suggested that her child was ‘*grieving, and unless you address that you are never, ever going to change what is happening*’ (HT3 Interview Two: 2). The concept of bereavement was similarly viewed on a wider loss spectrum: in reference to a conversation with her school’s family link worker, HT4 said they both agreed that they ‘*tend not to see bereavement as something as distinct from other rather similar situations*’ (HT4: 1). NTP1 elucidated on this concept further, with reference to divorce and separation, for which ‘*that loss that a child feels can be just as strong as grief. Particularly if a parent goes away to another part of the country*’ (NTP1: 4). In the primary school context, attachments to personal belongings, such as to ‘*your favourite pair of shoes or something... or your favourite toy*’ (HT1: 3-4), can also be significant. As an important aspect of pupil wellbeing, therefore, the

significance of loss and attachment are included in the discussions and analyses in Chapter 6.

5.3.5 Child-centredness and agency

The concept of engendering a child-centred approach was another discernible theme within the empirical data. Related to this, and of significance, was the way in which some of the participating schools appeared not only to have considered the needs of the child to be a central concern and ethos, but also appeared to be attempting to place the child in control of his or her bereavement journey. In PS2, for example, where the mother of two pupils had died just before the interviews began, the headteacher cited a conversation he had witnessed that morning between the older bereaved pupil and one of the two NTPs interviewed:

[The NTP said to the bereaved pupil] 'You're in control, we're here for you. If you want to be in your class and not talk about it, we'll do that for you. If you need at any point to come out and come and talk to us, we're here for you'. The teacher said, 'well I think we need to tell the class.' I said, well let's put the child in control here; let's find out... he doesn't want a big announcement.

(HT2: 3).

Similarly, PS8's NTP referred to giving a pupil choice regarding his bereavement:

We've had a bereavement this week, actually, and that little boy wanted to tell all of his class, tell his teacher and then come in here [to the school's nurture room] and tell me, [and] that's fine.

(NTP9: 3)

HT7 also referred to the option for pupils *‘to actually let the other children know [about personal issues, such as bereavements], in a sensitive circle’*, again suggesting a child-centred approach. Such a position is resonant through much of the empirical data: in PS4, for example, the headteacher referred also to the importance of *‘pupil voice’* (HT4: 10), and of children’s rights. What seems to be evident is that the concept or ethos of child-centredness can have more than one meaning. In one sense it literally implies that a school’s pupils are central to the school’s concerns, and at the heart of their provision. Data from some participating key actors, however, suggest that child-centredness can go even further to include the facilitation of child agency. One key actor identified how children’s minds and feelings can *‘completely change direction within seconds’* (NTP3: 2), hence the need, in some respects, to put the child in control:

...so it’s not just grown-ups saying, ‘you’re not coming in because of this,’ or, ‘you’re going out because of this’. It’s like saying, ‘What would you like to do?’ And... if that doesn’t feel right then ... just sit outside and then come back in again.’

(NTP3: 5).

Data from the interview with NTP4 confirm that giving the child agency was an approach she shared with her school’s headteacher: *‘I think it’s very easy for adults to ignore children, and ignore the fact they are upset: “what do they know anyway, they are just children”, you know?’* (NTP4: 9). For HT4, a degree of agency was also associated with the understanding that children need to feel ready to begin exploring their own bereavements, rather than *‘prising’* them open (HT4: 3).

The emerging theme of child agency became a subtle line of enquiry in Phase Two's interviews. In contrast to notions of facilitating child agency, however, HT6 was clear in describing the extent to which the pupils' *families* were placed in a central position of control and agency, rather than the bereaved pupil. In this respect, child agency may relate to different constructs of childhood, and of the extent to which children are regarded by adults as capable of voicing their own needs, views and choices.

5.3.6 Socio-cultural issues

Four of the selected primary schools are situated in areas of predominant economic deprivation, whilst the remaining four are in catchment areas comprising mixed private and social housing. Each of the primary schools' participants conveyed information relating to their respective schools' socio-cultural composition and diversity. This is significant to the thesis in a number of aspects: firstly, it provides context in relation to both macro- and micro-level values, beliefs and practices which help enrich interpretative analyses of bereavement support provision-based data. Predominantly 'mono-cultural' primary schools may have different experiences of family- and faith-based values and practices when compared with schools in which pupils are from ethnically and culturally diverse backgrounds. Interview questions relating to socio-cultural issues and practices were thus designed to elicit information in this regard. Since pupils also share and reveal details of their home lives, curricular learning opportunities through PSHE, RE and 'Circle Time', for example, also have the potential to enrich the learning experiences of both pupils and

staff alike, as well as to enable social and emotional development. In this respect, enquiring about socio-cultural issues revealed data which contributed to the interpretation of both bereavement support provision, and of aspects relating to death education. This aspect of the study might also contribute to the notion of children, teachers and NTPs as ‘ethnographers’ (Sitton, 1980) – in other words, that the adoption and practice of socio-cultural enquiry in schools may enrich both a child-centred approach to bereavement support provision, and to a more meaningful and contextual learning experience for pupils and staff members alike.

Key actors from all eight schools reported an increase in their schools’ enrolment of pupils for whom English is an additional language [EAL], particularly with the city’s relatively recent arrival of eastern Europeans. Although all schools also have pupils on roll from increasingly diverse ethnicities, only two of the eight schools (PS4 and PS8) reported they had a significant proportion of pupils from non-European backgrounds. Cultural diversity in PS8, for example, accounted for thirty-seven different languages being spoken by pupils at the time the interviews were conducted, representative of fifty-five per cent of the pupil population.

The locality of PS3 provided an interesting example of what might be described as a predominant micro-culture, though this appeared to be changing due to the arrival of culturally and ethnically diverse migrants to the area. In one of the two interviews with HT3, he described how his

school is situated in a predominantly white English, economically-disadvantaged area, comprising social housing built to accommodate some of the city's fishing community's families after the industry began to decline in the 1960s. Descendants of the original inhabitants still live on the estate, which HT3 described as continuing to function as a 'matriarchal society' (Interview Two: 5). Upon further enquiry, HT3 explained that he understood this to be a legacy of the community's former fishing industry roots in which the women characteristically ran their homes and families, and supported each other through loyal and extended kinship and friendship networks. In terms of loss and bereavement support provision, therefore, it appears evident from HT3's account that most of his interactions with pupils' families were with their mothers, and that most families were able to access significant community-based support. This example further illustrates the extent to which bereavement support practitioners need to gain an awareness of socio-cultural contexts and individual needs. The significance in the study of socio-cultural issues is further discussed with respect to death education in Part Two of this chapter.

5.3.7 Teachers and bereavement support

One of the results from the empirical research, as previously mentioned, is that bereavement support in the eight selected primary schools was found to be the predominant responsibility of non-teaching support staff. Data from the interviews with both NTPs and headteachers illustrate that communication between pupils, parents, class teachers, headteachers and

any outside agencies was also coordinated by the appointed NTPs. What is less clear, however, is the extent to which class teachers are involved in offering bereavement support to their pupils, or whether they solely refer pupils to the NTPs for bereavement support. Since data from the interviews with head teachers indicate that the majority of teaching staff had not received any bereavement awareness training – with the exception of PS5 which has received whole-school ‘*Rainbows*’ training – it appears to be the case that pastoral care, including bereavement support, has largely been sequestered in this respect. As a significant finding, the extent to which this may reflect something of a paradigm shift, from teacher-based pastoral care provision in primary schools, is a focus for further analysis in the following chapter, and is likewise an area for further research. Nevertheless, class teachers have the potential, at least, to operate ‘at the frontline’ of enabling pupil wellbeing through curricular and other activities; of noticing unusual behaviour or learning patterns; and of facilitating emotional and other forms of wellbeing support – including bereavement support – by liaising with key staff members and parents/carers. One school’s *modus operandi*, for example, utilised a contact sheet approach ‘...so every child who says they have a bereavement, the teacher. or whoever member of staff that might be, will notify me’ (NTP4: 6). Similarly, class teachers in PS7 were reported to record significant issues in the classroom ‘*wellbeing book*’ (NTP8: 6), and through a wellbeing ‘*traffic lights system*’ (HT7: 5). Non-statutory curricular opportunities by PS7 class teachers through the delivery of

SEAL also appeared to be proactive in both facilitating emotional wellbeing and enabling pupils to voice any wellbeing issues.

5.3.8 Outside agencies

The context for this sub-section relates to the findings from the literature which emphasise that bereavement support training is normally seen as sufficient for providing support to bereaved pupils, but that outside agencies can be referred to by schools for advice, reassurance and also for providing more specialist bereavement support when needed. All participants were therefore asked about the use of outside agencies in Question Four for headteachers; and Question Six for NTPs. The results, summarised in Table 5.1 below, show that all eight schools had either routinely or on occasion used outside agencies, and for a variety of reasons – both generic and specific. Similarly, all NTPs reported that parental involvement and permission was always a prerequisite for engaging outside agencies with specific pupils.

Selected Schools	Outside agencies
PS1	Barnado's and KIDS (organised by the mother of a pupil whose father is terminally ill)
PS2	School nursing team only School counsellor (NTP2)
PS3	School nursing team; Barnardo's; Dove House; Macmillan; Candlelighters; Leeds General Infirmary (for two pupils with leukaemia) Tends to signpost pupils/families, to Cruse, GP etc
PS4	Barnardo's – in the past. NTP aware other outside agencies can be contacted 'if needs be' (NTP5: 2)
PS5	City Psychological Services
PS6	Cruse – (came into school to see a pupil whose father was about to be released from prison, having killed the pupil's mother: pupil's behaviour had deteriorated as her father's release date got nearer). Effective outcome.
PS7	School nursing team WYNGS (no longer available); NSPCC; Barnardo's; Dove House; Cruse.
PS8	WYNGS; Family Assistance Support Unit [FASU]

Table 5.1: Summary of participating schools' contact with outside agencies, and contexts where relevant.

5.3.9 Reflections on provision: perceptions of 'what works well'

Typically participants were reluctant to identify what they considered to 'work well' in their provision. On occasion, to enable participants – particularly the NTPs - to articulate their reflections for Questions 11 and 13 (for headteachers and NTPs, respectively), the relevant question was rephrased so that participants could identify what they thought sufficiently

valuable to share with other primary schools. The results comprise three main elements:

- i) A nurturing, family and community-centred ethos and provision;
- ii) Child-centred provision, often in which children have agency and control;
- iii) Specific curricular approaches and activities used with bereaved pupils.

Data from all participating schools have already revealed the extent to which their provision appeared to be nurturing and caring. Some participants articulated these qualities as perceived benefits they would share with other schools, including the *'three-tier approach'* in PS2, comprising the school's caring ethos; the full-time NTP's supporting role; and access to a highly-specialised part-time counsellor (NTP3) who can see children during the school holidays as well as in term time. To help facilitate the school's caring ethos, HT2 also stated that *'every advert I put out for any teacher has the word 'caring' in it... I can't appoint somebody unless they've got that empathy'* (HT2: 8). Referring to the same primary school, the part-time school counsellor, who also works with other schools in the region, emphasised the need for provision to be team-based, where there is *'professional respect for each other... And, of course, a good head'* (NTP3: 10).

For some schools, liaison with families was considered to be a key example of what worked well: the emphasis on family liaison work in NTP1's school was principally to ensure that pupil support was individually-tailored. This was also something valued by HT7, who felt strongly that the school's caring ethos should include families, ensuring '*they know we're here for them*' (HT7: 12). Such notions were articulated further in the interview with NTP4, who considered the '*package*' to be '*...not just about the family and the child, [but] about looking after the staff as well*' (NTP4: 11).

In PS1, both the headteacher and the NTP considered the NTP's designated pastoral care role to be pivotal in their provision:

...teachers are very busy, you know, and they might - if they've got a bereaved child in the class - they might see it as being naughty, and totally react the wrong way. Whereas in our school I'm here and available every day, all day. And I think that is what works really well here.

(NTP1: 5).

Part of a nurturing, caring approach also seems to relate to confidence in bereavement support provision, and to not being '*frightened to deal with it*' (NTP5: 6). Many schools also identified issues which suggest a child-centred approach to bereavement support works well, and for some this approach extended to placing the child's perceived needs at the centre, and to giving bereaved pupils agency:

[Bereavement support is] determined by what you are dealing with at the time, what the bereavement is, and who the child is that you are dealing with, I suppose, and I don't think it's a one glove fits all bereavement [support approach]... I think you have got to very much see what you are dealing with at

the time, the child and the family, find out first of all exactly what you think they need, what the child is telling you they need, see what package you can put together, signpost them from there...

(NTP4:11).

The NTP9 took this ethos further, by describing a child-centred approach in which pupils were seen to be given agency. Thus, in response to asking about ‘what works well’, NTP9 suggested two key areas:

Two things. I would say, time; not bombarding with questions but just let them talk. Lots of TLC and indulgence, just niceness. But then ask the child, “What do you want? What would make you feel better? If there’s something I could do for you every day what would it be?” And the little girl, she’s got a file in here... there’s her file, she comes in, she draws a picture for us in that file and that’s enough for her. The boy, he will come in and use half a box of tissues for a couple of days and then he will go, and it has to be what they want. And that would be my thing, ask them, “What will make you feel better? Is there anything I can do that will make you feel a little bit better when you are in school?” And they will tell you what they want. They might say, “Nothing”. They might come back two days later and say, “I’ve changed my mind, I want to do this”.

(NTP9: 6).

Specific activities were also proffered by some participants as things worth sharing with others. NTP4 referred to bereaved pupils being given a notebook to take home with them in which they could write down their feelings or draw pictures ‘*anything they want, really... which seems to work really well*’ (NTP4: 3). PS6’s ‘Talk-To Box’, referred to earlier in this chapter, was described as another easily replicable wellbeing ‘tool’, which not only appeared to help school staff to identify and respond to pupils with needs, it also seemed to offer pupils a degree of privacy. Related to this, NTP7 referred to a Year Six class teacher in the school

who was reluctant for pupils to indicate on a classroom chart how they were feeling, as it was too ‘public’ (see NTP7 transcript, page 13), adding that assumptions about the extent to which a child’s bereavement should be more widely known should not be made solely, if at all, by staff.

Drawing - as a therapeutic activity - was specifically referred to in several of the participating schools. NTP3 had undertaken specialist training in this area, but NTP9 also referred to it as a surprisingly positive yet simple aspect of her bereavement support provision. Likewise, the school counsellor in PS2 considered the need for imagination, creativity and empathy to be essential qualities in bereavement support, and that when talking with children he became ‘*almost like them*’ (NTP3: 14). The same NTP also considered it important for children to ‘*have realistic outcomes. They need to be able to understand what’s going on*’ (NTP3:14).

For PS5, the faith school in the empirical study, two key features of its provision were considered to work well: firstly, its whole-school adoption of ‘*Rainbows*’; and secondly, its close relationships with pupils’ families. PS5’s NTP added also that one should ‘*Listen more than you speak. Always tell the truth. Have respect for the people you’re with...*’ (NTP6: 6). This seems to echo the words which perhaps best exemplify the three core values discernible from the empirical data in relation to informed bereavement support, voiced by NTP3 (p.15): ‘*Empathy, congruence. And respect. Those are the three*’.

Closely related to recognising one's perceived provision strengths – and perhaps something that many reflective practitioners find easier to address - are perceived development needs, coupled with data suggestive of possible constraints to bereavement support provision, identified below.

5.3.10 Participating schools' perceived development needs and constraints with respect to bereavement support provision

All participants were asked specific questions about their perceived development needs. Participants from two schools (PS2 and PS3) suggested they needed to consider developing a bereavement policy. For PS5, the fractional contract NTP suggested more time was a requirement.

Three schools' NTPs, from PS1, PS7 and PS8, all identified the need for class teachers to be trained in bereavement support. For NTP8, bereavement support training should extend to the whole school, so that pupils are able to approach staff members with whom they feel most comfortable:

I do think it's necessary and I think, as I said before, some children don't just want to come to me, they don't just want to come to a teacher, you know. And I think to be fair to the rest of the staff, I wouldn't like them to be in a position where they didn't know what to do, even though they think they might know what to do.

(NTP8: 9).

NTP1 also implied that as some pupils form attachments with teachers, bereavement support training for teaching staff would facilitate more child-centred bereavement support provision:

Obviously there'll be teachers that are not that way inclined, but I think the more staff that are ready to be there when needed, I think

the better. Because children do latch on to certain teachers, they do bond with specific teachers sometimes...

(NTP1: 5).

NTP7 similarly felt it necessary for her school to develop a more whole-school approach to its provision, so that staff were more aware of pupils' and families' needs - including the need for privacy by some (see the transcript for NTP7, pages 11 and 12). For HT6, who identified '*the cultural barrier of the white population*' (HT6: 9), a perceived development need concerned a more macro-cultural issue:

... [T]he euphemisms, that's what I'd like to get rid of... And schools are expected to change society. But if it's a taboo subject it's harder to change'

(HT6: 9).

5.3.11 Constraints concerning professional and personal issues

Whilst there were no specific interview questions asking participants about their perceived constraints to bereavement support provision, two themes are evident from the empirical data, namely a) perceived constraints relating to school frameworks, targets and inspections; and b) constraints concerning professional and personal issues. With regard to the first theme, several participants commented in the interviews about the extent to which primary schools were required to be increasingly responsive to government-led targets and inspection frameworks. Whilst the wellbeing agenda appears to have disappeared from the inspection framework and targets-based agenda (see Chapter 3), the participating schools evidently valued the importance of pupil wellbeing:

It's all focused in standards. We can't say that attainment and progress is separate to wellbeing, because it's got to be wellbeing first before they can actually do their best learning.

(HT7: 4)

There was a sense from HT5, also, that despite the fact that wellbeing is not a key indicator in inspections and school targets, it had been placed pivotally on the school's own agenda and within its cultural ethos and values system:

Respondent: I don't think [wellbeing] is top of the list. Well, the other indicators are really writing and maths, in Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2, they are the indicators - and absence, of course.

Interviewer: And safeguarding?

Respondent: Oh yes. I mean five or so years ago, it might be even more than that, when they changed the framework, one of the frameworks they changed, it was all about safeguarding, and you could easily have failed an Ofsted inspection as some schools did in the area, just on some ...Not having a fence in the right place. So I don't think wellbeing is top of the list.

Interviewer: But in a sense, as a head teacher, you have recognised that wellbeing is important, regardless of what external...

Respondent: Oh I know what is top of the list in our school.

(HT5: 6).

Professional and personal constraints also appeared evident in the data, and relate to the issues outlined above concerning the perception that bereavement support training should be delivered to all teaching staff. Given that bereavement support and other forms of pastoral care are the domain of trained NTPs, coupled with the fact that there is usually only

one staff member per school in this role, it is easy to imagine that such staffing arrangements pose potential sustainability issues and may also constrain bereavement provision to a greater or lesser extent. This is perhaps most evident in the comments made by NTP6, who only works for one quarter of a day per week, especially in consideration of the whole-school provision of bereavement support through its adoption of ‘*Rainbows*’:

You go see her, go and see him, or we’ll take you – because they’re the person who does death. That member of staff does death, whereas actually what it needs to be is, we all do, we all acknowledge.

(NTP6: 4).

A key constraint in the bereavement support provision of the participating schools therefore seems to be that primary teachers were typically neither trained to support bereaved pupils, nor able to provide the type of support that the participating schools’ NTPs delivered, due – amongst other things - to the demands on their time, availability and teaching responsibilities. Furthermore, the extent to which primary teachers engaged in recording wellbeing issues, and/or in liaising with the NTP, appears variable: data from the interview with NTP8, for example, suggest the school’s classroom wellbeing logs were not used by all teachers.

Though insufficient data exist in this study regarding possible *personal* constraints to provision, the openness with which NTP4 declared her fear of death, and the ways in which her role therefore required her to suppress her anxieties, suggest that further research is needed to identify whether or not a discomfiture with death and bereavement may be more prevalent

among primary school staff. Indeed this also seems to have been the case with the reception class teacher referred to above, who had undertaken bereavement training yet was unable to inform her pupils that the hamster had died. NTP1 also referred to '*staff who are frightened of it*' (NTP1: 5). Perhaps related to this are the use of euphemisms, identified by HT6, and the '*cultural barrier of the white population*' as possible constraints to bereavement support provision (HT6: 9). Similar themes appear quite closely related to those identified below, concerning the perceived constraints to death education.

5.3.12 Summary and conclusion to Part 1

Several significant themes and issues have been identified from the data relating to the selected schools' and key actors' values, practices and attitudes with respect to bereavement support:

- i) In all schools pupil wellbeing, attachment, learning and behaviour were considered to be inextricably linked and 'nested', and pupil wellbeing was a central concern both in terms of pastoral support, and in relation to curricular provision. The two schools delivering P4C appeared to exemplify especially pertinent learning opportunities for social and emotional development;
- ii) Nevertheless, the effective 'compartmentalisation' of bereavement support to designated non-teaching NTPs suggests access to support by pupils may be compromised when such NTPs are absent, and/or when pupils may wish to seek support from another member of staff. Access to additional support by a school counsellor in PS2 appeared

to provide continuity of care for bereaved pupils during school vacations;

- iii) Both reactive bereavement support provision, and proactive curricular learning opportunities relating to loss and bereavement, are embedded in socio-cultural contexts at both macro- and micro- levels. Such socio-cultural contexts include constructs of childhood and concepts such child-centredness and agency; family and community networks and ‘belonging’; and secular and religious belief systems. Socio-cultural diversity in primary school communities appears to enrich curricular provision where pupil dialogue is facilitated.

Part 1 has presented results from the empirical study relating to SRQ4, with respect to key actors’ perceptions of informed bereavement support. The following section will now address SRQ4 with respect to death education.

5.4 Part 2: The selected schools’ and key actors’ values, practices and attitudes with respect to death education.

As discussed in Chapters 2 and 3, bereavement support training programmes for schools advocate curricular learning opportunities for pupils to explore not only about social and emotional issues such as loss and bereavement, but also about death as a normalised - albeit a significant - life event. This section therefore presents the results relating to death education.

5.4.1 Curricular provision

In response to specific questions about death education (Questions 9-11 for HTs; and 7-9 for NTPs), data from the interview transcripts reveal that all eight participating schools had some form of curricular provision relating to death. While no data are available suggesting the national prevalence of death education (suggesting a strong need for further research), the statutory National Curriculum (DfE, 2013) includes the study of life cycles in its science programme of study, therefore offering potential – albeit minimal - death education opportunities for all English primary schools. Other statutory National Curriculum subjects, such as History, likewise have the potential to provide learning opportunities in which death is normalised, particularly through the study of ancient Egypt. Schools are at liberty, however, to select from a range of indicative History topics, so death education provision cannot be assumed in this regard. Further insights into curricular learning opportunities are provided in Table 5.3, below.

For the empirical study, the majority of data relating to curricular provision are derived from the interviews with headteachers: most NTPs were unsure of curricular learning opportunities for death education in their respective schools, as they worked in schools in which curricular planning were more firmly the domain of teaching staff. The most evident exception for this was in PS4, both transcripts for which refer in detail to teacher-led awareness-raising topics relating to lymphoma and Ebola. Likewise, curricular death education opportunities appeared most evident

in PS4 and PS8 due to their whole-school delivery of *Philosophy for Children* [P4C]. PS4 additionally embedded children's rights-respecting programmes of study in its school curriculum for all pupils.

In most primary schools, death education provision is predominantly limited to RE lessons and science, irrespective of whether or not the schools' headteachers are in favour of primary children learning about death. Table 5.3, below, summarises the curricular-based death education provision in the participating primary schools, with cross-references to the relevant transcripts. The table also includes a column summarising participants' values with regard to whether or not primary schools should include death education within their curricular provision. Those participants noted as being 'in favour' held the view that primary school children should learn about death as a natural life event; in contrast, those noted as 'cautious' regarded death education as sufficiently sensitive an area to be much less in favour of a proactive approach to death education in their respective primary schools at the time of the interviews.

The table overleaf, and the data which inform it, suggest that death education - as a curricular concept - was seen as controversial in some of the selected primary schools. This is a significant – if perhaps unsurprising – finding, and is further analysed in Chapter 6. The following section presents results which relate to socio-cultural issues, and which may, therefore, further inform some of the underpinning issues and values about death education.

Participating schools	Curricular DE provision	Values and views about DE
PS1	RE; science; PSHE	HT cautious; respect needed; NTP in favour of DE, but 'down to individual teachers'
PS2	Science – life cycles; History – Ancient Egypt 'when something happens' 'Circle Time' ; PSHE	HT in favour NTP2 cautious NTP3 in favour
PS3	'everyday living' NTP unaware of curricular provision 'death talks' with bereaved pupils	HT cautious in 1 st interview; in favour in 2 nd interview NTP cautious ('they just need to be children')
PS4	P4C; SEAL; Science; RE – Easter and crucifixion. Children's rights PoS (suicide and death penalty); Awareness events – Ebola; Lymphoma (children's play performed to whole school). NTP aware of whole-school events, as above.	HT in favour; NTP in favour
PS5	Regular prayers for the dead; Easter RE	HT in favour but cautiously, and age-sensitively; NTP in favour
PS6	PSHE and science 'Circle Time' RE	HT in favour – 'from the very beginning'; NTP in favour, but 'depends on how it's handled'
PS7	PSHE, science (life cycles and human development stages) RE – ceremonies, including funerals; Biography – Anne Frank; History – Ancient Egypt	HT in favour – crucial HT7, p.8); NTP in favour but unsure of curricular provision.
PS8	Science; 'Circle Time' ; and in response to children's questions; RE; NTP unsure of curricular provision except 'from the scientific side of things'	HT in favour NTP in favour, but cautious

Table 5.2: Summary of participating schools' death education provision and participant's values relating to death education in primary schools.

5.4.2 Socio-cultural issues and death education

The empirical data comprise a comparatively complex mesh of issues and themes, which are often inter-related - not only in an ecological sense within the socio-cultural domain, but also with regard to many themes and issues discussed previously within this chapter. Positioned within the context of a faith school, NTP6, who is Irish, considered macro-level societal values concerning death to be pivotal in explaining predominant English values, attitudes and practices – including the use of euphemisms:

I think it's an English thing. I think it's an Anglo-Saxon thing. Us Celts tend to be a little more comfortable with death anyway. We laugh about it more. There are more jokes about it than anything else... I do find it very, very odd [in England]. Because there's no script, nobody knows what to do, and therefore the danger is you say nothing.

(NTP6: 3).

Referring to his Irish Catholic context, in which children in the family and local community are included in wakes, NTP6 further purported that death education is embedded as a normal part of life and of growing up – in contrast to his experience of the English non-Catholic context. NTP3, who is part-time, also referred to the exclusion of children from funerals as a feature of English culture, and that as England is becoming increasingly secular, funerals are less community-centred, *'so a blow like a death is much harder because it's got to be experienced by fewer people, probably'* (NTP3: 9). In terms of openness in English society, however, HT3 considered death to have previously been a taboo topic of discussion, *'whereas now as a nation we do talk about it'* (HT3 2 of 2: 7). This is similar to NTP1 who commented that *'people are getting better... at talking about it [death]'* (NTP1: 7).

Whilst such English or ‘Anglo-Saxon’ macro-cultural values and practices might appear evident to some key actors, other data from the interviews reveal the extent to which more *micro*-cultural values concerning death are also evident. HT6, for example, who originates from a different English county, and whose school is positioned in a predominantly white, mono-cultural area, considered the city in which the research was conducted to have its own micro-culture compared with the locality in which she grew up:

It’s different. I know I found it, a) because I think [this city] is so insular, so they’re sort of looking in on themselves. And this big thing about, I don’t know, their outpourings about death as like making sure it goes in the papers so people know about it, about having these sort of floral monstrosities at funerals and things like that. But they’ll do all that sort of thing but they won’t talk about it. It’s like a way of showing that you care about somebody’s death, for other people to see, but you can’t actually articulate it.

(HT6: 7).

Other participating schools are situated in richly diverse multi-cultural communities. HT4 referred to the benefits of a multi-cultural school community in relation to discussions about death in the school’s P4C programme of study:

‘And because, I think, we have so many Muslims, there’s often a spiritual dimension to these discussions, and some of our children could even talk about having a good death’.

(HT4: 2).

Such discussions offer potentially transformative death education opportunities for primary pupils – and, no doubt, for the adults present in the classroom, too. A similar example of this was provided by the headteacher in PS8 – a school which also delivers P4C:

There is cultural difference in the exposure to death that different cultures have, is what I would say. So a couple of times we've had children that have seen the body of a relative who has passed away. It's quite normal within the culture to have, to have a proper wake and have the body there and to do all of that stuff. They've come into school and talked about it in their circle or wherever and that's been quite shocking to other people, but they've had a conversation and they just move on... There is a difference in how the exposure which children have to death is different, in some of our [families'] cultures.

(HT8: 6).

Demonstrating a proactive enquiry-based approach in preparation for our interview, the NTP from PS4 spoke with a Muslim colleague about Islamic values and practices about death, and death education. Her findings again suggest that many Muslim children are more naturalistically included in death-awareness learning opportunities:

*And she said, it is quite interesting actually what she said. When the corpse is at the home, they read the *Qur'an*, and she said there is a lot of them in the same room praying, and they will all be there, because in some families within the white British ethnicity, they are closed away, aren't they? But she said they have everybody, and I said, "what about the children?" And she said we teach death from a very early age... [Islam] prepare[s] their children a lot more than what we as a society do.*

(NTP5: 4).

In socio-cultural terms, informal death education opportunities for children are also available through television and digital media. HT4's school facilitated opportunities for dialogue in response to the news items of interest, citing the example of Turkish pupils who wanted to raise money for Syrian refugees in Turkey so that they could access learning (see HT4: 6). Whilst this example is not directly related to death education *per se*, it demonstrates, nonetheless, that responsive child-centred and enquiry-based learning can facilitate death education opportunities,

especially given the extent to which death is a prevalent media theme. Classroom-based discussions and learning relating to death can also be prompted by pertinent teacher-led questioning:

And I would say too that... there are children in school who'd be able to understand the concept of death as a release. And some of them will have discussed that in Philosophy for Children. 'Could you imagine a situation where you would be suffering so much that you would want to die and that it's okay to want to die?' Because some of our children have got very, very strong faith, which tells them that it is absolutely... wrong, a very, very profound sin, to take your own life. So, that balance, I think, will come up in a cycle in Philosophy for Children discussions. You know, accepting that it's wrong, the principal of suicide is wrong, but is there a time when you think it isn't or it's less wrong?

(HT4:7)

5.4.3 Personal issues in adults relating to death, death education and constructs of childhood

All of the participants interviewed recounted personal, or school-related bereavements. NTP4, who was very open about her personal fear of death, recounted a situation in which her daughter was affected by discussions in school one Easter about the crucifixion, whereas it '*never fazed*' her son (NTP4: 7). This perhaps suggests that even within families where an adult has a self-declared fear of death, transference does not always follow.

Table 5.3 also identifies participants who were both in favour of death education, and those who were cautious about it, suggesting informed bereavement support provision – i.e. based on specific training which recommends death education – does not necessarily imply the provision of death education in schools. Compared with the uniform agreement of

the need for bereavement support in all eight primary schools, the views about death education amongst the study's key actors are noticeably more at variance. NTP2, and NTP4, for example, both questioned the extent to which children may be too young to understand death, and/or need protecting from it. This appears to resonate with some constructs of childhood which view children as innocent and in need of protection from the harsh realities of life.

There is a sense also from several participants that having pets can enable children to begin to learn about death, with HT1 suggesting that some parents have pets deliberately to enable their children with this in mind. Pet loss is also mentioned throughout the transcripts as a significant wellbeing issue for many children, and clearly relates to attachment. Thus, discussions in class - such as through 'Circle Time' - concerning pet loss and other attachment issues can also be seen to offer opportunities for a less obvious form of death education.

5.4.4 Reflections on death education provision: what works well; development needs and potential constraints

As detailed previously, data concerning death education are mainly derived from three specific questions in the interviews conducted with both headteachers and NTPs. All key actors were also asked generic interview questions designed to elicit reflective considerations relating to all aspects of informed provision, including death education. Where such questions prompted reflective responses with regard to bereavement

support, comparatively few responses were directly concerned with death education. This is not because of any lack of opportunity on the part of the participants to discuss death education, but is more an indication of their personal and professional concerns. The results that follow therefore benefit from being considered in this context.

5.4.5 Perceptions of what works well

No data are evident in either the headteachers' responses to Question 11, or the NTPs' responses to Question 13 in the interviews. Through the data analysis processes, however, and from some of the related results presented above, there is evidence to suggest that the selected schools which facilitated death education learning opportunities did so through school curricula embedded with non-statutory programmes of study such as *Philosophy for Children* [P4C]; Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning [SEAL]; and regular 'Circle Time' sessions. Whilst National Curriculum subjects such as Science and History also offer potential death education opportunities, the extent to which such opportunities are facilitated remains to be seen, and will also be discussed in the following chapter.

5.4.6 Perceived constraints to death education

The data relating to death education have identified that death education provision is variable in the selected schools. NTP1 noted that death education is '*down to individual teachers*' (NTP1: 4), and HT2, in discussing the school's current provision, said that the school's PSHE

programme of study was being reviewed in order to identify more explicit opportunities for death education (see HT2, p. 6).

There is also some direct evidence from the data concerning the extent to which death education, as a sensitive subject area, may be potentially constrained by concern for pupils' emotional wellbeing. NTP4, who has a self-declared fear of death, expressed concern at the prospect of death education being more explicitly included in her school's provision, and that '*it would make my job in the nurturing team a lot harder...*' (NTP4: 7). Similarly, NTP2 (p. 4) considered primary school children '*a bit young really to, to cope about death and things*'; and that children learn through direct experience of bereavement, and through studying the life cycles of plants and animals. Whilst concerns that primary school children are too young for death education are not new, such findings are nevertheless significant when expressed by key actors from schools informed through bereavement support training. Accordingly, the following chapter reconsiders this theme, and considers the extent to which the literature identifies the benefits of death education with respect to pupil wellbeing. In the context of presenting the empirical findings, however, it is pertinent to note at this point that cautionary views on death education may be paradoxical and an impediment to the central concerns for pupil wellbeing in the selected schools. The research process itself, however, which included some degree of discussion about death education, appears to have ignited in some key actors a reflective stance. There is a potential link, therefore, between dialogue and a more reflexive appreciation of

appropriate ways in which death and related issues may be proactively included in primary school curricula. HT2, for example, identified a need to review his school's death education opportunities by including discussions with staff on teaching sensitive subjects more generally. A similar development need was identified by the headteacher of PS4, who wished to gain insight from colleagues *'about what we do and how we do it in order that we have consistency across the school'*, adding *'I'd rather avoid being too prescriptive... staff have to feel comfortable about it and there are certainly ways of not going about it'* (HT4: 14). HT7 referred to the research process as having helped her to consider whole-school death education developments, and that she would like to do a study on her school's death education provision:

This has helped actually because...does every class deal with the life cycle and deal with death, talk about death, let the children talk about death and see it as natural? How are [teachers] feeling about talking about it and how can we help them to be more comfortable with it?

(HT7: 12).

As a school in which death education provision appeared comparatively strong, HT8's perceived development need is, similarly, to consider the potential variability in pupils' death education, and ways of effectively ensuring curricular provision is more evenly distributed. The quotation below also reveals evidence of *'in situ reflexivity'* and impact in the research process:

Well now I'm talking to you, I'm thinking death education; we need to maybe have a look at it...Now I'm talking to you and reflecting on what I've said, I'm thinking, because of the systems in place and the culture that we have, the P4C, the restorative practice and the circles and you know, the community that we have on offer here, it crops up incidentally and that's a good thing. It's a good thing that we respond at the level we think that, you know, just that next little

bit for the kids. But I am reflecting on whether we, whether I need to track it, not in a crazy way, but let's really just step back and think, Are we doing enough pro-actively to stimulate the conversation? Even if it's just because some children in this school will get a different experience of death education than others.

(HT8: 7-8).

Perhaps the most poignant evidence for the way in which the research process engendered considerations about death was apparent in the second interview with the headteacher of PS3, whose interviews were split between a Friday afternoon, and reconvened the following Monday. In this example the headteacher referred to the research process as ‘*antagonistic*’ – fortunately qualifying the term with ‘*in a nice way*’ – but it was evident that the first interview prompted some reflections during the interim weekend, so that by Monday’s interview his views were that ‘*we need to think about death, don’t we?*’ (HT3, 2 of 2: 13)

The participants’ reflective interactions with the research process, even if ‘antagonised’, seem, therefore, to have prompted considerations about death, and death education, which may otherwise have remained less articulated. This appears to relate to socio-cultural issues concerning the discomfiture with death for many people in the macro-level English, or ‘Anglo-Saxon’ context. In short, death education appears to be a far less straightforward area in the selected primary schools when compared with bereavement support provision. The extent to which this relates also to socio-cultural values will thus form part of the analysis in the next chapter.

5.4.7 Summary and conclusion to Part 2

Data relating to the selected schools' and key actors' values, practices and attitudes with respect to death education have identified several significant themes and issues, as follow:

- i) Curricular provision is predominantly limited to the study of life cycles in science, and to RE, though social and emotional development provision such as SEAL, PSHE and 'Circle Time' also afford potential opportunities for learning about loss and death. Two selected schools appear to offer a comparatively greater level of death education through Philosophy for Children (P4C), in addition to other curricular learning opportunities, and in PS4 provision is also facilitated through children's rights-respecting work;
- ii) Sensitivities evident from the data in relation to death education as a proactive curricular approach appear to relate to developmentalist and wellbeing concerns. This may be paradoxical and an impediment to the wellbeing agenda;
- iii) Macro-and micro-level socio-cultural issues appear variously to constrain or enable children to explore issues relating to death, both at home and/or in school;
- iv) Whilst bereavement support training programmes advocate normalising death education in the curriculum, the beneficiaries of such training programmes are predominantly NTPs in the selected schools, none of whom is directly included in curricular planning.

5.5 Chapter summary and conclusions

This chapter has presented the empirical study's results in response to the fourth sub-research question [SRQ4], '*What are the perceptions of key actors in selected English primary schools with respect to informed bereavement support and death education?*' The results were presented in two sections: Part 1 with respect to bereavement support; and Part 2 with respect to death education.

The main findings in contextual, more generic terms reveal that all participating schools valued pupil wellbeing, and that wellbeing, attachment, learning and behaviour were considered to be inextricably linked and 'nested'. As such, school curricula included non-statutory learning opportunities to help develop pupils' social and emotional skills and wellbeing through programmes of study and pedagogies such as SEAL, PSHE, and 'Circle Time'. Two of the participating schools also delivered Philosophy for Children [P4C]; and one school additionally had a children's rights-respecting underpinning.

In all schools, an appointed member of the non-teaching staff was employed as the 'non-teaching practitioner' [NTP] for pastoral care, which included bereavement support. The extent to which teachers also supported bereaved pupils in the selected schools remains to be seen, and requires further research. The results nevertheless suggest that NTPs liaised with class teachers, but that pupil support was generally the domain of the appointed NTP. As will be seen in the following chapter, this finding

is unique in the English school-based bereavement support literature to date. The appointment of such NTPs also represents a possible sustainability issue, and for this and wider issues, such as pupils' attachments to teachers, many NTPs stated they considered it necessary for teaching staff to undertake bereavement support training.

Both macro- and micro-level socio-cultural issues also appear, from the results, to play a significant part in bereavement support provision, and in the values, attitudes and practices of the selected schools. Such socio-cultural values include constructs of childhood, and of the essence of primary education and schooling. Liaison with pupils' families was evident in all participating schools, with the additional identification of pupil agency in some.

Despite the promotion of death education in the school curricula by bereavement support training programmes, the extent to which death education appeared evident in the selected schools was variable. All participating schools referred to the science programme of study providing pupils with an understanding of life cycles. Non-statutory programmes of study and pedagogies relating to social and emotional development also seemed to have the potential to provide learning opportunities about death. Schools which additionally delivered P4C evidently provided further opportunities for children to explore death-related themes and issues. Where participants expressed a level of unease about death education, it appeared out of concern for pupils' wellbeing and the possibility that

children may find it upsetting. This seems to relate also to constructs of childhood; to socio-cultural values; and – in one participant’s case – to personal death anxiety. The overall results therefore suggest that the concept of normalising death in primary school curricula was perceived by some key actors in informed schools to be sensitive and/or controversial. Given the recommendation in bereavement support training programmes for schools to normalise death in the curriculum, and the evidence from the literature which purports that death education minimises or negates the development of death anxieties in later life, sensitivities about death education appear to be paradoxical and an impediment to the wellbeing agenda. Table 5.3 provides a summary of current and potential provision in relation to both bereavement support and death education in the selected schools, based on typical themes and findings from a ‘best fit’ analysis of the empirical results.

	Current Bereavement Support Practice	Current Death Education Practice	Potential Bereavement Support Practice	Potential Death Education Practice
Non-teaching Practitioners (NTPs)	✓	x	✓	✓
Headteachers	x	x	✓	✓
External Agencies	✓	x	✓	✓
Teachers	x	P	✓	✓
KEY	✓ = YES P = PARTIALLY X = NO			

Table 5.3 showing current and potential bereavement support and death education practices in the selected schools.

Whilst current provision in bereavement support is largely attributable to the work of NTPs, with support from external agencies when needed, this can potentially be extended to include teaching staff through wider bereavement support training. In so doing, bereaved pupils would be able to access support from their class teachers, with whom many children form strong attachments, whilst still having access to support from their school's NTPs. Furthermore, by training class teachers and teaching-based senior leaders, awareness of the significance of proactive death education is raised, thereby enhancing the potential to extend death education provision through curricular planning, assemblies, visits from outside agencies, and so on.

Having presented the results with regard to SRQ4, the following chapter further discusses and analyses the significant themes from the empirical study in conjunction with evidence from the literature. In so doing, the MRQ is addressed more iteratively and reflexively, from which conclusions are drawn and recommendations made in the final chapter.

Chapter 6: Discussions and analyses

6.1 Introduction

The previous chapter presented the empirical study's results, addressing sub-research question four [SRQ4]: *What are the perceptions of key actors in selected English primary schools with respect to informed bereavement support and death education?* To complement SRQ4's focus on two key aspects of provision, the results were presented in two parts, in which Part 1 presented the results relating to informed bereavement support, and Part 2 focused on death education. Both parts presented several significant findings. With respect to bereavement support provision 'informed' by specific training, significant themes and issues concerning pupil wellbeing, and the 'nested' arrangement between wellbeing, attachment, learning and behaviour, were described. As all of the selected primary schools had appointed non-teaching staff (the 'NTPs') as the principal bereavement support providers, the results indicate that bereavement support provision was effectively 'compartmentalised'. Whilst there are benefits to this form of bereavement support provision, however, constraints were also evident. Finally, the results indicate that bereavement support provision in the selected schools was embedded within, and similarly informed by, both macro- and micro-level socio-cultural characteristics. As such, both pupil bereavement and primary school bereavement support provision are situated within variable and transitional

micro- and macro-level socio-cultural contexts. This is also further discussed and analysed below.

The results concerning death education presented in Part 2 of the previous chapter reveal overlapping and interrelated themes and issues with those corresponding to bereavement support provision. As such, death education provision is variable with respect to statutory and non-statutory curricular provision, and to varying perceptions by key actors about death education as a curricular area. This appears to relate in part to the ‘compartmentalisation’ of bereavement support provision, in that NTPs, as the recipients of bereavement support training, were not directly involved in curricular planning such that the selected schools appear only partially ‘informed’. Sensitivities to the idea of teaching potentially ‘upsetting’ topics were also evident amongst some key actors, which may be an impediment to the wellbeing agenda. As with bereavement support provision, death education in the selected primary schools also appeared to be both constrained and enabled by socio-cultural issues and values at macro- and micro-levels, the dynamics of - and features for which - appeared transitional and variable at community, family, and school levels.

This chapter builds on the empirical study’s significant themes and issues outlined above by providing a deeper discussion and analysis. Pertinent evidence from the literature presented in Chapters 2 and 3 – whether supportive or contradictory - is included in this chapter’s analyses and discussions, and where empirical findings are new to the body of evidence,

this is also indicated. In so doing, a more iterative and reflexive narrative emerges within which deeper insights about both bereavement support provision and death education are articulated. This chapter thus relates to, and builds on, SRQs 1, 2, 3 and 4 (outlined initially on pages 3 to 5) and contributes significantly, therefore, to the MRQ: *What are the perceptions of key actors with respect to the nature of 'informed' bereavement support and death education within selected English primary schools?*

To effect deeper discussions and analyses of the empirical results, this chapter comprises four main sections, commencing firstly with discussions relating to pupil wellbeing and curricular provision, drawing on issues concerning both bereavement support and death education to emphasise their interrelatedness. The chapter then proceeds to the second section which revisits bereavement support in the selected primary schools, and the extent to which provision has been compartmentalised. This is further explored with respect to the attitudes and practices concerning death education which appear to relate – in part, at least – to compartmentalised provision. The chapter's third key section comprises discussions and analyses concerning macro- and micro- socio-cultural issues, again with respect to both bereavement support and death education. The final and fourth key section in this chapter summarises the significant discussions, analyses, and more iterative emergent themes, and leads the reader towards the final chapter's conclusions and recommendations.

6.2 Section 1. Pupil wellbeing: nested arrangements and curricular provision

The relationship between pupil wellbeing, learning and behaviour is relatively well-documented in the literature, as is the extent to which bereavement can affect wellbeing (Statham & Chase, 2010; Bradshaw, 2011; Parkes, 2006). The empirical study's findings concerning the selected schools' non-statutory wellbeing provision, however, appear unrepresented in the literature at the present time. Whilst previous international studies on child wellbeing, such as those conducted by UNICEF (2007) focused on economic wellbeing indicators, studies in which children's own perceptions of wellbeing were articulated indicate that relationships with family members and other significant adults, friends and pets; and engagement in positive activities, were more authentic wellbeing indicators for children (Gabhainn & Sixsmith, 2005; Sixsmith et al., 2007; Ipsos MORI & Nairn, 2011). In the bereavement context, therefore, attachment theory (Bowlby, 1960; Bretherton, 1992), including the concept of separation anxiety, are of particular relevance.

As primary schools informed by specialist bereavement support training, in which bereavement is defined as part of a wider loss spectrum (Holland et al., 2005), and that significant attachments to both people, pets and material possessions can generate a sense of grief when compromised or severed, it was clear that the key actors in the empirical study were cognisant of these complex issues, and that pastoral care was a central area of concern and provision. When considered in the context of the absence

in statutory provision for social and emotional development in the English National Curriculum (DfE, 2013) it is of significance that empirical data reveal that all of the selected primary schools not only value the importance of pupil wellbeing, but also that their respective curricula include enabling non-statutory subjects and pedagogies, such as PSHE and 'Circle Time'. This may suggest, therefore, that primary schools within which wellbeing provision is well-developed are potentially predisposed to further developing bereavement support provision. As such, the presence in schools of well-developed wellbeing provision may also be seen as an encouraging predictor in the bereavement context and in attitudinal terms, despite the non-statutory status of related curricular provision.

Two schools in particular (PS4 and PS8) appeared to exemplify their concerns for pupil wellbeing by additionally facilitating the whole-school development of active, enquiring minds through *Philosophy for Children* [P4C], and with children's rights-respecting work in PS4. As discussed in Chapter 3, it certainly appears to be the case that calls by Alexander (2013) for primary school leaders to adopt 'curricular freedoms' (p.8), and for school leaders 'to break the mould' (p.10), have been variously exemplified in the selected primary schools. Such calls, however, need to be cognisant of O'Riordan's (2013) findings concerning P4C in primary schools, in that curricular provision can represent a 'counter-cultural practice' if contrary to national curricula demands (O'Riordan, 2013: 166). Given the increasing number of schools becoming free schools and

academies (Mansell, 2014), and the associated degree of curricular freedom many schools now have, there appears to be an opportunity for further research to identify whether or not such curricular freedoms may lead to improvements in wellbeing and/or bereavement support provision. As curricular provision is chiefly within the *teaching* domain, rather than within the domain of NTPs, any future research in this area needs to be cognisant of the effective compartmentalisation of NTPs, and of any associated limitations concerning curricular provision and planning.

Further related to the theme of non-statutory curricular provision, several other potential areas for further research arise, such as to examine whether free schools and academies utilise their curricular freedoms to embrace programmes such as P4C, and death education. Such research could explore whether schools which are in a position to plan their curricula more freely embrace subjects like death education more so than when they were previously limited to statutory curricular provision. Likewise, such research could also explore why some schools might choose *not* to embrace subjects such as P4C or death education.

Whilst curricular provision appeared to be strong in the selected primary schools in terms of social and emotional development and bereavement support, this was not as evident with respect to death education. The results indicate that some key actors' concerns about delivering potentially upsetting subjects in primary schools appear to relate to constructs of childhood which purport to protect children from perceived threats to

wellbeing. This is a significant and interesting finding in that it appears to stem from a combination of macro-level socio-cultural attitudes towards death described by Mellor (1992) and Mellor and Shilling (1993) in their sequestration thesis. In this respect, the concept of death education as the normalisation of death in the curriculum appears itself to be similarly ‘sequestered’ – or compartmentalised - in some English primary schools, with the exception, perhaps, of the statutory teaching of life cycles in science. Evidence within English society of a ‘revival of death’ (Walter, 1994; 2012), therefore, appears non-uniform and transitional in primary school settings and the wider communities in which they are situated. This is further evidenced by data from the selected schools where there was variance amongst key actors about the need for death to be normalised in their respective curricula. As such, only five of the eight primary school headteachers, and five of the nine NTPs interviewed were firmly in favour of death education. When analysed on a school-by-school basis, this equates to only three of the eight selected schools’ key actors expressing shared values concerning this aspect of their provision. Furthermore, of the NTPs who expressed varying degrees of concern about death education, one was clear in her belief that pupils ‘just need to be children’ (NTP4:6). This NTP also openly declared her anxiety with death, and the extent to which supporting bereaved pupils was challenged in this regard.

Such values and attitudes also appear to be developmentalist in origin – i.e. in relation to research by Nagy (1948) and Childers and Wimmer (1971) concerning children’s understandings of death. More recent

research by Vianello and Marin (1989); and Panagiotaki et al. (2014), discussed in Chapter 3, suggest that developmentalist assumptions about children and their potential for death-awareness cognition are now highly controversial, if not refuted.

Given the extent to which death education is considered to alleviate and/or prevent death anxiety from developing in childhood and later life (Schonfeld & Kappelman, 1990; Neimeyer, 1994), concerns about normalising death in the curriculum may appear, therefore, to be an impediment to the wellbeing agenda. As significantly, it may also be the case that an absence of such provision is preferable to ill-informed or insensitive provision. Schools such as PS4 which deliver P4C and whole-school child-led enquiries into issues such as lymphoma and Ebola, however, appear to openly refute concerns about adversely affecting children's senses of wellbeing, preferring instead to develop pupils intellectually, as well as emotionally and spiritually. Both PS4 and PS8 also benefit from - and formatively build on – their multi-cultural pupils' and families' life experiences, traditions and experiences, such that all pupils and staff seem to benefit. This approach appears enormously enriching, and might well indicate the extent to which multicultural communities in England are contributing to the revival of death in primary schools, and an increase in death awareness capital. Potential contributions to death education by both multi-cultural and multi-social factors would thus appear to warrant further research.

For the headteacher in PS8, however, an awareness of the contribution made by her school's pupils to discussions in class about death and bereavement was insufficient, and prompted her to commit to ascertaining the extent to which such provision was being facilitated throughout the school. Such a decision reflects two considerations: firstly, the belief by this headteacher that all pupils in her school should be benefitting from this aspect of education; and secondly, a concern that such learning opportunities might not be facilitated by all teachers in the school. Thus, and in response to SRQ2: *What does the literature say about the nature of school-based death education?*, curricular provision with respect to death education appears limited and vulnerable, even in schools where headteachers are strongly in favour of it, but especially in schools where the headteacher professed caution. The vulnerability of death education is further discussed below in relation to the findings concerning bereavement support provision by appointed NTPs.

6.3 Section 2: Bereavement support in the selected primary schools, and the extent to which provision has been 'compartmentalised'

In all eight of the selected primary schools NTPs had been appointed specifically to provide pastoral care, and had all attended various bereavement support training programmes. Research by Holland and Wilkinson (2015) published after this empirical study was conducted has also identified the presence of non-teaching 'auxiliaries' providing trained bereavement support in schools, where in 39 per cent of the study's schools, only one person on the staff was suitably trained. As non-

teachers, the evidence from this empirical study suggests the extent to which such staff members are sufficiently empowered to offer CPD to teaching colleagues, and/or to make recommendations for curricular provision, remains unclear. Data referred to in Chapter 5 also reveal the extent to which NTPs consider such issues to be part of the teaching domain.

Several key issues are evident with respect to the effective compartmentalisation of bereavement support to NTPs. Firstly, it appears evident that class teachers in the selected schools – with the exception of those in PS5 which has adopted '*Rainbows*' – have not received bereavement support training. This is not unsurprising as recent school-based studies (Potts, 2013; Holland & McLennan, 2015; Holland & Wilkinson, 2015) have all highlighted the paucity of teachers trained in bereavement support, coupled with the recognition by teachers of their need for such training. Evidence from the empirical data also indicate that class teachers generally refer pupils to the school's NTP for bereavement support (and other pastoral care needs) such that the degree to which class teachers are involved in pastoral care is undetermined, and warrants further research. From a wellbeing perspective, pupils with particular attachments to members of staff other than the school's appointed NTP may, therefore, be unable to access adequate and/or 'informed' bereavement support, as cautioned by Cranwell's (2007) research findings. In a primary school setting, where attachments to class teachers and teaching assistants tend to

be strong (Sixsmith et al., 2007; Statham & Chase, 2010), the lack of choice for bereaved pupils may additionally compromise pupil wellbeing.

The compartmentalisation of bereavement support provision by the selected primary schools also represents a potential sustainability issue: should the NTP be absent, or leave his or her school, bereaved pupils may be unable to access 'informed' support for temporary or sustained periods. Teachers and teaching assistants may be very unsure of how to support such pupils, having not undertaken any bereavement support training. When a school's NTP is absent, therefore, the bereaved pupil is potentially vulnerable. Holland and Wilkinson's (2015) research concurs with these issues, suggesting that one trained practitioner in a school is sufficient so long as he or she 'ensures the development of the area' (p. 124). Their paper also argues, in contrast, that such an arrangement may lead to an over-reliance on one individual, and to other staff members being de-skilled in such aspects of pastoral care.

The compartmentalisation of NTPs and bereavement support provision also yields a related issue with respect to death education. Since the empirical data show that death education is generally limited to learning about life cycles in science in terms of statutory provision, and to discussions in class relating to loss and bereavement through non-statutory lessons such as PSHE and SEAL, the research-based promotion of death education by bereavement support training programmes is likely to be unrealised by teaching staff unless opportunities for wider dissemination

and CPD are facilitated in schools. In this sense, the existing practice in the selected schools of enabling a single appointed NTP to receive bereavement support training has little, if any, curricular benefit with respect to normalising death in the curriculum. By extending bereavement support training to teaching staff, therefore, informed decisions about curricula provision can be more readily facilitated, including those which relate to anxieties about death education as a sensitive curricular subject area. Dialogue and training informed by further research are thus needed to deconstruct concerns about death education, and to provide ‘intellectual confidence’ (Hunter et al., 2012: 6) to primary school staff in this regard, as also discussed in Chapter 3.

The analysis of empirical findings in relation to bereavement support provision has thus contributed to the findings from the literature with regard to SRQ1: *What does the literature say about the nature of school-based bereavement support?*

6.4 Section 3: Macro- and micro- socio-cultural issues with respect to both bereavement support and death education

Findings from both the empirical study and from the literature refer to the significance of socio-cultural issues, themes and constructs. As such, the values, attitudes and practices in the selected schools with regard to bereavement support and death education appear variously to both reflect and challenge macro-level societal practices and values with respect to death, as discussed above. Whilst Walter’s (1994, 2012) evidence suggests that wider English society is exhibiting a ‘revival of death’, some

constructs of childhood evident in the empirical data purport that children should remain innocent of sensitive subjects like death, unless this is unavoidable due to a bereavement. This appears to relate also to Piagetian developmentalist concerns about children's limited and age-related abilities to understand death (Nagy, 1948; Childers & Wimmer, 1971), though these have since been challenged by more recent research and constructivist analyses (Vianello & Marin, 1989; James, 2012; Panagiotaki et al., 2014). Chapter 3's review of the literature in this regard also proffered that the effective Disneyfication of childhood (Giroux, 1995; King, 2006) appears to challenge the ideological need for children to begin to explore the concept of death. Data from key actors within the empirical study, however, suggest that child-centred bereavement support provision is prevalent, and that bereaved pupils are given agency (with the exception of PS6). This appears further to suggest that the majority of the selected schools value children's cognitive abilities to articulate their emotional and other wellbeing needs, and that liaison work with the child's family helps to ensure a coordinated, child-centred approach. As a bereaved child's significant family members are usually affected by the same bereavement, sometimes to the extent that supporting their bereaved children is very challenging, the school's values and practices in this regard are vitally important if bereaved children are to receive effective and formative support. Schools operate, therefore, as micro-communities within wider communities, for which school leaders play a pivotal role. Notwithstanding the significant pressures which affect English primary schools and their head teachers (Crawford, 2009; Bottery et al., 2013;

Exley, 2013; Boffey, 2014), the empirical study's inclusion of headteachers in the interviewing process revealed evidence of the extent to which individual headteacher's interests, values, and beliefs appear to influence the school's culture and practices. Such findings support those by Bottery et al. (2013), discussed in Chapter 3, who argue that schools are shaped by school leaders' personalities and values. For primary schools to function as 'real communities' (Stern, 2001, 2002), in which child-centred bereavement support is an embedded aspect of its concern for wellbeing as well as for academic attainment, the head teacher's role appears to be one of envisioning and enacting key values, and of orchestrating them throughout all aspects of a school's life and provision. For Stevenson (2012: 345), this would also require school leaders to be intellectually 'rooted in a dialogic and critical process', thus enabling transformation in a school's socio-cultural fabric, such as those exemplified by the headteacher in PS4. With respect to Bush and Glover's (2014) anxieties about the extent to which external forces, such as policy demands and inspections, can deleteriously impact on a school's ability to be a caring community, however, the empirical data appear to confirm that the selected schools' headteachers held pupil wellbeing as a central concern. It also suggests that the selected schools' headteachers exemplify emotional coherence, which Crawford (2009) argues significantly enhances organisational culture.

At a more micro-level, schools resonate socially and culturally in relation to those living in the wider community; to people's values, beliefs,

attitudes and practices; and to transitional factors, such as changes to a community's cultural and ethnic diversity, and to wider media influences. In this respect, schools in which staff members may currently appear to be keen to protect children – or to 'buffer' them at least – from sensitive issues are likely to be undergoing more subtle socio-cultural transitions. Left to their own devices, it is possible that macro-level socio-cultural changes relating to death may permeate through to schools and to children, especially as England becomes more culturally and ethnically diverse, though this may take time. The empirical study's schools in which a greater level of socio-cultural and ethnic diversity is evident, when compared with those of a more mono-cultural dimension, appear already to be benefitting from the contributions made to curricular provision – especially when such provision is underpinned by dialogical and situated learning, such as through P4C which is delivered in two of the selected schools (PS4 and PS8). Both of these schools also benefit from – and formatively build on – their multi-cultural pupils' and families' life experiences, traditions and experiences, such that all pupils and staff seem to benefit. This approach appears enormously enriching, and might well indicate the extent to which multicultural communities in England are subtly contributing to the revival of death in primary schools, and an increase in death awareness capital. Potential contributions to death education by both multi-cultural and multi-social factors would thus appear to warrant further research. Where staff members in multi-cultural schools tend to be drawn from more mono-cultural, English backgrounds, the ability to adopt an ethnographic, enquiry-based approach – and to

facilitate this amongst pupils – has the potential to greatly enhance provision, and for schools to become more authentic learning communities.

Anthropological insights into bereavement practices and ritual amongst non-English communities, such as those in Jamaica (Paul, 2007; Hope, 2010), reveal that death is typically seen as a natural - albeit distressing – part of life. Children are included in all aspects of ritualised mourning practices, such that it is likely to be unnecessary for death education to be part of a school's provision. Nevertheless, the prevalence of mental health and wellbeing problems known to affect between ten to twenty per cent of the world's children and adolescents (Kieling, et al., 2011) – also discussed in Chapter 3 – strongly suggests that child wellbeing should be a global concern for all schools, both in terms of supporting children, and also in terms of maximising wellbeing and emotional development.

The discussion and analyses in this section in relation to socio-cultural issues have accordingly contributed to SRQ4: *What are the perceptions of key actors in selected English primary schools with respect to informed bereavement support and death education?* This section has also further informed SRQs 1, 2 and 3 by situating both bereavement support and death education in their socio-cultural and historical contexts. Since such aspects are essentially in transition, further research which seeks to identify inter-generational values, attitudes and practices around bereavement and death

would be of immense value in positioning this aspect of life in its transitional socio-cultural and historical contexts.

6.5 Section 4: Summary of the significant discussions, analyses, and more iterative emergent themes

This chapter has presented discussions and analyses based on the empirical study's key findings from Chapter 5, and to the related findings from the literature. In this respect, SRQ 4 has been further addressed in elaborating on key actors' perceptions with respect to 'informed' bereavement support and death education. Given that the empirical findings have also provided some new insights, this chapter has additionally contributed, therefore, to SRQs 1 and 2 which enquire more widely about school-based bereavement support and death education.

To reflect the categories within which the key findings are principally located, the chapter has discussed and analysed key issues and themes within three sections: pupil wellbeing and curricular provision; bereavement support and the 'compartmentalisation' of provision; and thirdly, socio-cultural issues with respect to both bereavement support and death education. Whilst these sections comprise sufficiently distinct issues and themes, it is wholly evident also that bereavement support and death education – and their myriad issues and characteristics – are interrelated. This is particularly the case - in two respects - with regard to the way in which all eight selected primary schools have effectively compartmentalised their bereavement support. Firstly, provision is predominantly by referral to NTPs, such that bereaved pupils are unable to

receive support from their class teachers or preferred staff members. Secondly, the research-based recommendation for death education, embedded in bereavement support training programmes and the wider literature, appears unable to filter through to teaching staff, such that curricular provision in the selected schools is generally limited and variable in this regard. The nested relationship between wellbeing, attachment, learning and behaviour, however, is a central and known concern in all eight selected schools.

The empirical findings also confirm that bereavement support provision, informed by specialist training courses, ensures that the needs of bereaved pupils and others are met, often utilising a child-centred approach in which the child has a sense of agency. Curricular provision to facilitate wellbeing and to develop pupils emotionally and socially was also very evident in the selected schools, especially those which offered dialogical and situated learning opportunities through activities such as ‘Circle Time’, and programmes such as P4C. This is a finding worthy of celebration given the non-statutory status afforded programmes such as PSHE and SEAL in the current national curriculum (DfE, 2013). Death education provision, however, is far more variable and is considered by some key actors to be too sensitive for young children. Whilst this appears to be an impediment to evidence from the literature which suggests that death education can enhance wellbeing, and reduce death anxiety, it could also be argued that the minimal level of death education taught through the statutory science curriculum is probably preferable to ill-conceived or uniformed provision.

Both bereavement support and death education provision are in a vulnerable position owing to the compartmentalisation of bereavement support to NTPs. Calls in the literature for teachers to be trained in bereavement support (e.g. by Potts, 2013; Holland & McLennan, 2015; and Holland & Wilkinson, 2015) would greatly enhance child-centred bereavement support opportunities by giving children more choice, and also by minimising a deficit in provision when a school's NTP is absent or leaves. Likewise, teachers trained in bereavement support provision will also be informed about death education, and would then be more likely to normalise death in the curriculum without compromising pupil wellbeing.

Such considerations reflect the extent to which schools are socio-cultural microcosms which may appear distinct, but are susceptible to both micro- and macro-level socio-cultural influences. The chapter's discussions and analyses in these regards have included issues and themes relating to the head teacher's positionality in a school, and the extent to which his or her personal values, and intellectual and emotional capital, influence a school community's values, attitudes and practices. Such issues appear particularly pertinent with respect to death and mourning which are both natural and cultural human events, especially in a country such as England in which death still remains for many a modernist taboo (Mellor & Shilling, 1993; Morgan, 1997; Bowie, 2000; Walter, 2012). As death is 'revived' in English culture (Walter, 1994), and children become more included in family and community-based rituals and events, the extent to

which death education remains a considered imperative may, therefore, become questionable.

Having addressed SRQ4, and further enhanced the findings with respect to SRQs 1, 2 and 3, the following and final chapter of this thesis presents conclusions to the study as a whole, and recommendations. Given that the empirical study comprises iterative and reflexive research processes (Bourdieu, 1990; Srivastava & Hopwood, 2009; Punch, 2013), the recommendations which follow include, where appropriate, those informed by the literature, as well as from those which are derived from the empirical research. The recommendations for further research which have emerged in this chapter will also be deliberated upon further.

Chapter 7: Conclusions and recommendations

7.1 Introduction

As the final chapter in this thesis, the content has a more holistic imperative with regard to concluding the study as a whole and to demonstrating that the MRQ has been answered. Accordingly, the chapter begins by reminding the reader of the MRQ, following which summarised conclusions specific to each SRQ are provided. After addressing SRQs 1 to 5, the chapter then proceeds to present the formative recommendations that can be drawn from this study regarding a) bereavement support and b) death education, including recommendations for further research, some of which have been indicated in preceding chapters. The MRQ is then revisited and addressed. The chapter draws to a close by summarising its content, and by emphasising the conclusions to the study as a whole and with respect to the MRQ.

7.2 The MRQ and related SRQs: summarised content, analyses and conclusions

As outlined in the *Introduction* to the thesis, the main research question [MRQ] which both underpins and scaffolds the empirical study is: ‘*What are the perceptions of key actors with respect to the nature of ‘informed’ bereavement support and death education within selected English primary schools?*’ Prior to answering the MRQ, summaries of the findings are now provided for each of the five sub-research questions [SRQs].

7.2.1 SRQ1: What does the literature say about school-based bereavement support?

The need for informed bereavement support provision in English primary schools is well-represented and argued in the literature (Cranwell, 2007; Chadwick, 2011; Potts, 2013; CBUK, 2013), and particularly so by Holland (1997; 1999, 2001, 2003, 2004, 2008, for example), who noted:

...that teachers consistently over time rate the area of loss and bereavement relatively highly as an issue in school, but some of them feel that they lack the skills to support bereaved children.

(Holland, 2008: 415)

Whilst there is evidence to suggest that bereavement support in schools is improving over time, inadequate provision in English primary schools remains a concern (Potts, 2013; Holland & McLennan, 2015), even in areas considered comparatively 'mature' in this respect (Holland & Wilkinson, 2015: 52). This is also connected to the need for more primary school staff to be trained in bereavement support, especially teachers (Cranwell, 2007; Potts, 2013; CBUK, 2013), and for bereavement support provision to be more sustainably embedded in schools (Yule & Gold, 1993; Reid, 2002; Holland et al., 2005; Holland & Wilkinson, 2015).

The bereavement literature also recognises that loss relates to attachment theory (Bowlby, 1960; Goldberg et al., 2009; Bretherton, 1992), and to the nested interrelationships between wellbeing, learning and behaviour (Statham & Chase, 2010; Akerman & Statham, 2011, 2014). The statistics for bereavement amongst children and adolescents in the UK are

surprising, if not alarming (Wells, 1988; Harrison & Harrington, 2001; CBUK, 2013), and equate roughly to one or two pupils in an average-sized primary classroom being affected by a parental death (James, 2012). When other significant losses and bereavements are also considered, the prevalence of grief – or the potential for primary pupils to encounter it – signifies that this aspect of pupil wellbeing ought to be a key area of concern for all primary school communities. Tracey’s (2008) study of adults whose mothers had died during their infancy or childhood reveals the extent to which significant bereavements can have life-long deleterious consequences, especially when bereavement support is either absent or inadequate. Whilst current bereavement theories indicate the continuing bonds nature of grief (Klass et al., 1996; 2014), such that notions of relinquishing attachments, or achieving ‘closure’ are deemed inappropriate if not unhealthy (Epstein, Kalus, & Berger, 2006), bereavement support and awareness in which children are enabled to grieve and also to maintain their bonds are crucial for wellbeing, both in the shorter and longer terms (Lindsay & Elsegood, 1996). This is further supported by a significant body of literature concerning mental health problems associated with ‘unresolved’, protracted or inadequately supported grief (Parkes, 2006; Stroebe et al., 2007; Tracey, 2008; Brent et al., 2012).

In the school-based bereavement support context, there is additional, compelling evidence within the literature for children to be given voice (Messiou, 2002; Tangen, 2008); to have agency (Grover, 2004; Cranwell,

2007; Smith, 2011); and to have opportunities for socio-emotional development (Brown et al., 2011; Formby, 2011; The Children's Society, 2012). Primary schools which profess a child-centred ethos – particularly where the child is seen in his or her social ecology context (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 2005; Reid, 2002; Ipsos MORI & Nairn, 2011), and where schools are 'real communities' (Stern, 2001, 2002), appear to facilitate meaningful and more holistic learning experiences for pupils. Such schools in which teachers are aware of the emotional nature of their work (Hargreaves, 1998), and are led by headteachers who have 'emotional coherence' (Crawford, 2009: 161), appear to exemplify the values, attitudes and practices needed for effective bereavement support and pupil wellbeing.

7.2.2 SRQ2: What does the literature say about school-based death education?

Death education is the term used to denote the normalisation of death in the curriculum (Clark, 1998; Holland et al., 2005; James, 2012), and is recommended by specialist bereavement support training courses to enable children and adolescents to begin to explore concepts relating to death and grieving as normal - albeit challenging – human experiences. Accordingly, bereavement support programmes recommend that schools normalise death through a variety of both statutory and non-statutory curricular learning opportunities (Bowie, 2000; Holland et al., 2005; Clark, 2006).

The wellbeing agenda in primary schools also relates to the recommendation within bereavement support training programmes for death education (Cranwell, 2007; Talwar et al., 2011; Potts, 2013). Since many aspects of English culture appear to reflect the modernist notion of death as taboo (Walter, 1994), death education is considered to enable children and adults to explore death and its related rituals and emotions (Warren, 1989; Bowie, 2000; Clark, 2006; James, 2012). Death anxiety is not uncommon (Combs, 1981; Neimeyer, 1994; Ens & Bond, 2005), and since many parts of the world are concerned about the rise in suicide amongst young people (Kwok et al., 2010), death education is also considered to have the potential to enhance emotional wellbeing and social and emotional capital. In some countries, death education forms part of life education programmes, designed for people of all ages to encourage meaningfulness in life (Houng, 2000).

7.2.3 SRQ3: How does thanatological literature inform this study?

As humans, death - and its associated rituals and responses - are universal human concerns (Lewin & Foley, 2004). As such, any study relating to death and/or bereavement benefits from thanatological literature, by enabling socio-cultural, historical and anthropological evidence to enhance our understanding, and to help provide context. Thanatological literature has therefore informed this study by situating school-based bereavement and death education within a period of change in England, in which macro-level attitudes to death appear to be 'reviving' from death's more sequestered, modernist position (Gorer, 1965; Ariès, 1974; Mellor, 1992;

Mellor & Shilling, 1993; Walter, 1994; Clark, 1998; Berridge, 2001), particularly since the death of Diana, Princess of Wales in 1997 (Clark, 1998; Walter, 1999). The natural death movement (Mitford, 1998; Wienrich & Speyer, 2003; Howarth, 2007); the emerging culture of individualised funerals in England (Holloway et al., 2013); and the rise in social media memorial sites (Maddrell, 2012) all seem to be features of a socio-cultural desire for more meaningful interactions with dying, and with death and its associated rituals. As English macro-level culture continues its apparent trajectory towards more naturalistic approaches to death, children in primary schools – and their families – are therefore likely to benefit from home and family-based exposure to, and participation in, personal and *real* forms of death education, just as children do in countries such as Jamaica (Paul, 2007; Hope, 2010). The current imperative for school-based death education may, therefore, gradually diminish over time.

7.2.4 SRQ4: What are the perceptions of key actors in selected English primary schools with respect to informed bereavement support and death education?

‘Informed bereavement support’ in English primary schools relates to provision that is based on, and thus informed by, specialist bereavement support training programmes aimed specifically at staff members working in schools and other educational settings. It appears to be related to a genuine concern in primary schools for pupil wellbeing, in which there is a recognition of the ‘nested’ relationship between wellbeing, learning and behaviour. Whilst all eight of the primary schools selected for the

empirical study offered informed bereavement support to pupils, recent studies by Potts (2013), Holland and McLennan (2015), and Holland and Wilkinson (2015) reveal that there remain many English schools in which informed bereavement provision in schools is either unavailable or inadequate. Owing to several decades of pioneering work initiated by 'Project Iceberg' (Holland, 1999), the city in which the empirical study was conducted is considered to be a comparatively 'mature' area in school-based bereavement support terms (Holland & Wilkinson, 2015: 52).

In all eight of the selected primary schools, bereavement support was provided by non-teaching practitioners (the 'NTPs'), all of whom had undertaken bereavement support training courses. The majority of the NTPs were employed on a full-time basis, but were the only staff members given the role in each school. In this respect the study has identified that informed bereavement provision is 'compartmentalised'. As such, bereaved pupils were referred to each school's NTP for support – generally on an open access basis – but this essentially limited a degree of choice for pupils wishing to access support from other members of staff, as cautioned by Cranwell's (2007) research with bereaved children. The allocation of bereavement support to NTPs also represents a potential sustainability problem on the occasions when staff are absent or leave. Pupils in schools such as PS2, which employ a part-time school counsellor, benefit from bereavement support throughout both term times and the school holidays.

Overall, the empirical study's findings also indicate that bereavement support provision in the selected schools was child-centred, and that pupils were frequently given agency. Liaison with families was strong, and outside agencies were relatively rarely contacted by the NTPs. All of the selected schools appeared to be deeply compassionate, and had nurturing, child-friendly rooms in which NTPs met with bereaved pupils. A variety of creative approaches and bereavement support tools were utilised to effect emotional support, including books which the children were able to take home.

In respect of pupil wellbeing, all eight primary schools embedded non-statutory curricular provision and pedagogies designed to effect social and emotional development, such as PSHE (DfE, 2011), SEAL (DfES, 2005) and 'Circle Time' (DfES, 2005: 51). Two of the eight selected primary schools additionally delivered *Philosophy for Children* [P4C] (Trickey & Topping, 2004) which aims to enhance socio-cultural and intellectual development, but also affords opportunities for death education, relating to SRQ2, below.

Data from the empirical study, however, indicate that whilst death education was present through teaching about life cycles in the statutory science programme of study (DfE, 2013), the values, attitudes and practices amongst the study's key actors and their primary schools were variable and predominantly minimal, with the exceptions of PS4 and PS8 in which P4C was delivered. Sensitivities to the notion of death education

were also evident amongst seven of the key actors (comprising three headteachers and four NTPs), which appeared variously to relate to an inherent discomfiture with subjects which may upset pupils, or to constructs of childhood in which children are considered to need protecting from the harsher realities of life unless directly affected by them. Data also revealed developmentalist notions from some key actors that children may be too young to ‘understand’ death.

Both pupils and staff in schools situated in multicultural communities benefited from enquiry-based learning opportunities, most notable in PS4 and PS8. The processes by which the taboo nature of death in England appears to be dissipating from its sequestered status (Walter, 1994, 1999; 2009) may, therefore, be enabled by facilitating multi-cultural learning opportunities, and also by engaging children in dialogue about events portrayed in the media. Overall, the compartmentalisation of bereavement support to NTPs in the selected schools appears to have constrained the potential for death education provision: given that most NTPs are not involved in curricular delivery or planning, recommendations for death education by bereavement support training courses appear self-limiting, but may be more effective if such training is extended to teachers.

A profile of informed bereavement support in English primary schools has emerged from the empirical study, comprising ‘fuzzy generalisations’ (Bassey, 2001: 10) in which bereavement support provision is part of what appears to be an authentic concern for pupil wellbeing and its ‘nested’

relationship with attachment, behaviour and learning. Bereavement in the selected primary schools was viewed as one part of the wider loss spectrum, and as wellbeing issues seem to be affecting many children (Kieling, et al., 2011; Kendal et al., 2014), pastoral care provision in primary schools appeared to be an authentic area of concern. Significantly, in all of the selected primary schools, bereavement support was delegated to non-teaching staff members - referred to as non-teaching practitioners [NTPs] in the empirical study - most of whom were full-time employees. Such practitioners typically saw pupils on an open-door basis such that pupils were able to access such support when needed. In one school (PS2), a full-time NTP was supported by a part-time, highly-qualified school counsellor, as the head teacher felt the NTP knew '*her limits*' (HT2: 2). In PS5, the study's only faith school, a part-time lay chaplain was appointed to support bereaved pupils for a quarter of one day per week. Interim pastoral care was provided in the chaplain's absence, as the whole school had received training with 'Rainbows' (2015).

NTPs appeared to be very caring and compassionate individuals, and recognised the individuality of grief and the ways in which children may 'flit' between 'normal' behaviours, and grieving patterns more familiar to adults. Data likewise revealed that bereaved pupils were supported using a child-centred approach, in which pupils were often given agency. The notable exception to this was in PS6, where bereaved pupils' parents or carers were given agency. In all schools, bereavement support provision included significant liaison with pupils' families, who were often part of

the school's support process. This appeared to be in recognition of the need for support approaches to be replicated or continued at home, and likewise of the fact that a bereaved pupil was usually living amongst other grieving individuals.

The bereavement training undertaken by the study's NTPs appeared to enlighten some with a deeper, less taboo-affected approach to discussing bereavement and death; to increase confidence and remove fear; to clarify the need to speak honestly and without the use of death-related euphemisms; and to know when and how to refer bereaved pupils (and/or their families) to outside agencies. Despite recommendations by bereavement training programmes for schools to develop policies, however, only two of the selected schools had policies in place which specifically related to bereavement. Whilst four of the six schools with no policy in place determined they would develop one, two schools felt that such policies might result in an inappropriately uniform approach to supporting bereaved pupils.

A significant finding of the study is the compartmentalisation of bereavement support provision by NTPs, especially given that most schools employed only one individual in this role. This has several implications for bereavement support: firstly, and most importantly, the structures in place generally directed bereaved pupils to access support from specific members of staff. Whilst bereaved pupils may have been able to approach and seek support from members of staff to whom they

felt a special attachment, ultimately they were referred to the NTP who then liaised with relevant members of the teaching staff. This became very apparent during the research process, and was also identified as such by the majority of NTPs, along with the need for teaching staff to be trained in bereavement support.

The second issue concerning the compartmentalisation of provision to NTPs is that it places schools – and bereaved pupils - in a potentially vulnerable position, for example when the NTP is absent from school, or leaves. This was recognised by many key actors, again reinforced by calls for whole-school training in bereavement awareness and support.

As the eight selected primary schools offered bereavement support informed by training programmes, the empirical study included interview questions designed to collect qualitative data on key actors' values, attitudes and practices with respect to death education. In the selected schools, death education provision was found to be variable. In terms of statutory curricular provision, death education was included in all of the selected schools as part of the science programme of study in relation to the study of life cycles (DfE, 2013). Some aspects of death education relating to exploring concepts such as loss and bereavement were provided through non-statutory subjects and pedagogies such as Personal, Social and Health Education [PSHE] (DfE, 2011), Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning [SEAL] (DfES, 2005) and Circle Time (DfES, 2005: 51). Two primary schools (PS4 and PS8) delivered *Philosophy for Children* [P4C]

(Trickey & Topping, 2004), through which dialogic and situated death education learning opportunities appeared evident, particularly in PS4 which also engaged in whole-school awareness-raising topics such as Ebola and lymphoma. Both PS4 and PS8 were also situated in multi-cultural and multi-ethnic communities, the key actors from which all referred to ways in which the pupils' and their families' situations and input enriched the learning experiences of both pupils and staff alike. The headteacher in PS4 spoke additionally of the way in which some of her pupils '*could even talk about having a good death*' (HT4: 2).

There was also evidence in the data indicating the extent to which death education represents a sensitive subject, and several key actors, including head teachers, expressed concerns that it could be upsetting for pupils, and/or that they were too young to understand death. For one key actor (NTP4) this concern appeared to stem from her self-declared death anxiety. Given that some key actors who expressed concerns about death education had received bereavement support training, this suggests another 'fuzzy generalisation' (Bassey, 2001: 10) that attending such courses is not necessarily sufficient to alleviate inherent misgivings or concerns about death education. This appears to relate to macro-level socio-cultural attitudes to death in England, discussed more fully with respect to SRQ3. It may also be the case that in compartmentalising bereavement support provision to NTPs, who are not generally involved in long- or medium-term curricular planning, the underpinning, research-based arguments for the promotion of death education remain hidden. Attending such courses

may also involve a degree of selectivity in terms of active and formative learning: it may be the case that teachers and non-teaching school staff members who attend bereavement support training courses respond to programme content in terms of their own professional contexts, without seeing the bigger picture for their schools and pupils. This is referred to again in this chapter as another potential area for future research.

7.2.5 SRQ5: What are the best means of investigating these issues [i.e. the MRQ and related SRQs]?

In order to identify and examine the nature of bereavement support and death education provision, the empirical study was conducted entirely in eight primary schools all of which offered bereavement support by a trained member of staff. In this respect the research design is unique when compared with other studies in which schools are selected randomly (such as Potts' (2013) questionnaire-based study of teachers' and bereavement support), or where schools known to offer informed bereavement support are evaluated and compared using questionnaires (Holland & Tracey, 2008, for example). The empirical study's qualitative, semi-structured interview-based findings thus add to, and complement, the growing body of knowledge pertaining to studies on how schools support bereaved pupils.

By focusing on interviewing key actors in the selected primary schools, comprising head teachers and non-teaching practitioners [NTPs], the empirical study yielded rich, qualitative data from richly-informed

participants regarding the *nature* of informed provision. This was significantly aided by sending both sets of indicative interview questions to all participants well in advance of the scheduled interview dates, which not only ‘demystified’ the research, it also afforded participants more time to think about their values and practices. Since the research design focused on key actors’ perceptions, an interpretivist approach to analysing the data was selected (Scott & Usher, 2011). Accordingly, the data were subjected to interrogative analyses through vigorous levels of coding, from which significant themes and issues were identified and classified.

As indicated above, the key actors interviewed comprised two main groups: a) headteachers, who were able to provide extensive data concerning specific issues relating to both bereavement and death education, as well as to those concerning each schools’ values, attitudes and practices; and b) NTPs who had day-to-day, active responsibility for supporting bereaved pupils and their families, and who generated richly-informed data about the specific nature of their provision, and of the ways in which it could be improved.

Whilst the empirical study has revealed significant findings, the nature of such small-scale qualitative studies has its known limitations. Although the study’s small numbers mean generalisability is clearly inappropriate and untenable, Bassey’s (2001: 5) concepts of ‘fuzzy generalisations’ and ‘predictions’ do, however, apply. Similarly, the empirical study’s interpretivist underpinning and approach embody Guba’s (1981) concept

of trustworthiness and its four criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability, developed by Lincoln and Guba (1985). Ecological validity (Cicourel, 1981:15) was also achieved by capturing the ‘daily life conditions, opinions, values, attitudes, and knowledge base’ of all key actors, from which a keen sense of ‘data saturation’ was firmly evident (Guest et al., 2006: 59).

7.2.6 Recommendations with respect to school-based bereavement support and death education

The recommendations presented in this section with respect to bereavement support and death education provision build upon those made by the key actors in response to specific questions designed to elicit such data, and others which are borne more reflexively from the empirical study as a whole (Bourdieu, 1990).

7.2.7 Recommendations regarding bereavement support

Relating specifically to English primary schools, the recommendations which follow are divided into three sub-sections, comprising 1) bereavement support training and provision; 2) supporting and enhancing pupil wellbeing; and 3) recommendations for further research.

7.2.8 Recommendations regarding bereavement support training and provision:

- i) Bereavement support training should be an imperative for all primary school staff working alongside pupils, even if the main

support role is designated to particular individuals whose professional remit is to provide pastoral care to pupils during school hours. In the primary school context, where pupils form comparatively strong attachments to their class teachers, it is particularly important for teachers to undertake basic bereavement support and awareness training. Ideally, this could be in the form of whole-school training by a visiting trainer or organisation.

- ii) Bereavement support training should form part of initial teacher training [ITT] programmes, and should relate to training about pupil wellbeing, and the emotional aspects of teaching.
- iii) Senior primary school leaders and NTPs are recommended to ‘cascade’ and update information during staff meetings so that all staff working with pupils – including breakfast club and lunchtime supervisors – are aware of bereaved pupils, and those with pending or possible bereavements.
- iv) It is recommended that specific policies relating to loss, bereavement and other significant wellbeing concerns are developed by primary school staff and governors, utilising readily-available templates, but also ensuring that such policies reflect the individuality of grieving, and the need to adopt reflexive child- and family-centred approaches in which the bereaved pupil has agency, wherever possible.

- v) Effective liaison with pupils' parents and carers needs to be encouraged so that information relating to a pupil's bereavement is communicated both proactively and reactively between home and school.
- vi) Bereavement support provision, 'informed' by appropriate training, needs to be essentially proactive in nature wherever possible, as well as sensitively reactive when a pupil is grieving. Such provision needs to be ongoing, even if staff may feel the pupil 'should be over it by now', and information relating to bereavements should be communicated to successive teachers, teaching assistants and schools as part of the 'handover' processes of transition.

7.2.9 Recommendations for supporting and enhancing pupil

wellbeing:

- i) The 'nested' relationship between pupil wellbeing, learning and behaviour, and the need to promote wellbeing, ought to be central concerns in all primary schools.
- ii) In relation to i), above, it is recommended that curricular provision, such as PSHE, should be part of the statutory National Curriculum for English primary schools.
- iii) In addition to supporting pupils whose wellbeing may be compromised, proactive measures to enhance and maximise pupil wellbeing need to be embedded in primary school curricula, through subjects and pedagogies such as PSHE (DfE,

2011), SEAL (DfES, 2005), ‘Circle Time’ (DfES, 2005: 51); and P4C (Trickey & Topping, 2004; O’Riordan, 2013). The use of fiction to enhance social, emotional, intellectual and spiritual development is also recommended (Moore & Reet, 1987; Markell & Markell, 2008).

- iv) The use of a ‘Talk-To Box’ for pupils, as featured in PS6, in which pupils can discreetly post messages about their concerns, is particularly helpful for pupils who may find it difficult to communicate their needs more directly. ‘Feelings charts’ in classrooms can be very effective, but may compromise pupils’ anonymity, as referred to by the NTP in PS8. ‘Talk-To Boxes’ may be of benefit to primary pupils if placed in a central area of the school, as well as in each classroom.
- v) To minimise the potential for death anxiety amongst pupils, and in later life, death education opportunities should be part of curricular provision (see Part b), below).

7.2.10 Recommendations for further research with respect to bereavement support and wellbeing provision have emerged during the course of the empirical research process, and are presented, as possible MRQs, below:

- i) How empowered are NTPs in relation to enacting wider policy and curricular issues stemming from their roles and from bereavement support training programmes?

- ii) How compartmentalised is bereavement support provision to NTPs in English primary schools, and to what extent are class teachers involved?
- iii) How prevalent is a discomfort with talking about death and bereavement amongst English primary school employees, and to what extent does bereavement support training alleviate this?
- iv) Given the curricular freedoms bestowed upon an increasing number of academies and ‘free schools’ (Mansell, 2014), to what extent are such schools embedding programmes of study which benefit the development of pupil wellbeing, and/or relate to exploring concepts surrounding loss and bereavement?
- v) As attitudes towards death and its ritualisation appear to be changing in England, how do inter-generational attitudes and values compare?

7.2.11 Recommendations regarding death education

Again relating to English primary schools, the following recommendations concerning death education provision are presented below in 2 sub-sections: 1) recommendations for curricular provision; and 2) recommendations for further research.

1) *Recommendations for curricular death education provision*

- i) It is recommended that English primary schools, including Foundation Level classes, facilitate curricular opportunities

for death to be ‘normalised’ through subjects and topic-based learning, and through *ad hoc* learning opportunities and discussions (James, 2012).

- ii) Given that death and bereavement are potentially sensitive subjects, considerations regarding pupil wellbeing, especially where pupils may have a known bereavement, are important.
- iii) In view of point ii), above, training in bereavement support provision, and in death education, should therefore be essential for all NTPs and teachers.
- iv) Curricular death education opportunities are potentially relevant in all primary school subjects – both statutory and non-statutory – but are particularly relevant in *science*, through the study of life cycles and nature more generally; through *history*, especially the study of Ancient Egypt and the Victorians, through which ‘then and now’ comparisons can be readily explored; through RE, in relation to beliefs, both secular and religious, pertaining to death and its associated rituals; and through English fiction and drama. Such learning opportunities should ideally be viewed as part of the spiral curriculum, starting with the youngest pupils.
- v) As the empirical study included two schools situated in richly diverse communities, which enhanced provision and dialogue amongst pupils, a related recommendation is for all primary schools – regardless of how diverse their communities are – to embed multi-cultural curricula, and to facilitate learning

enquiry in which both pupils and staff adopt ‘ethnographic’ learning approaches.

7.2.12 Recommendations for further research relating to death education

- i) What contributions are made in English primary schools to death education by multi-social and multi-cultural factors?
- ii) What contributions are made to death education through P4C?
- iii) To what extent does training alleviate death education anxieties, and promote ‘intellectual confidence’ (Hunter et al., 2012:6) in primary teachers?
- iv) Does death education – as an aspect of life education – minimise or negate teenage suicide?
- v) To what extent are intergenerational attitudes towards discussing death with children changing?
- vi) What lessons can English primary schools learn about how nearby European nations, such as The Netherlands, facilitate death education?

Having presented summarised conclusions to all five SRQs, and made recommendations both for primary school provision and further research, the final part of this chapter provides a synopsis of the MRQ, and a conclusion to the thesis as a whole.

7.3 In summary: the perceptions of key actors with respect to the nature of ‘informed’ bereavement support and death education within selected English primary schools

The need for bereavement support informed by specialist training courses was a recognised value amongst all eight headteachers in the empirical study. This was evidently part of a wider and genuine concern for pupil wellbeing, and a recognition of the nested relationship between wellbeing, learning and behaviour. Despite the range of socio-economic geographies in the eight selected primary schools, the prevalence of issues in pupils’ lives which affected - or could potentially affect – children’s wellbeing was such that in seven of the eight schools bereavement support and other pastoral care provision was the responsibility of full-time non-teaching practitioners (the ‘NTPs’). One of the eight primary schools (PS2) additionally employed a highly-qualified school counsellor for two days per week, and over the school holidays, so that continuing support was available. Whilst the NTPs provided compassionate and child-centred support, to which pupils had free access, there was a sense among many NTPs that pupils additionally needed their class teachers, or other staff members with whom they may have a particular attachment, to provide bereavement support. Similar views were expressed by bereaved pupils in Cranwell’s (2007) research. Both the empirical data, and findings from the literature, strongly support the need for teachers to be suitably trained in bereavement support, in schools and during initial teacher training programmes, and for pupils to be enabled to exercise more choice in their support provision. The deployment of bereavement support to NTPs in the selected primary schools effectively ‘compartmentalised’ provision,

which – in addition to the issues outlined above – also placed the schools and their pupils in a potentially vulnerable position.

Of the eight selected schools, only one primary school (PS5) had received whole-school loss and bereavement support training. As such, the main recipients of bereavement support training in the remaining seven primary schools were the NTPs, to whom the recommendations for death education in the literature, endorsed by bereavement support training programmes, appeared not to have made any real impact in terms of curricular provision. In other words, since NTPs are generally not involved in either curricular input or planning, this aspect of the training appeared similarly compartmentalised. It remains to be seen whether this was due to a lack of empowerment by NTPs to make recommendations to teaching colleagues, or whether those attending bereavement support training courses tended to consciously or subconsciously ‘de-select’ elements of the training that appeared less relevant to their professional roles.

Death education provision in the study’s eight primary schools varied from discussing death in the context of life cycles during statutory science lessons, to PS4’s approaches which yielded significant learning and discussion opportunities through P4C, their children’s rights-respecting studies, and through enquiry-based projects initiated by pupils on issues such as lymphoma and Ebola. P4C was also an embedded part of curricular provision in PS8, which, like PS4, was situated in a richly diverse community. In both of these schools, pupils’ contributions to their

curriculum were encouraged and valued in similar ways to those recommended by Alexander (2013). Death education is perhaps most effective in primary schools when it occurs through formal or informal dialogical learning opportunities.

Bereavement is, in many respects, the bitter aspect or consequence of forming close bonds and attachments. Our experiences of bereavement, and our expressions of grief - both private and public - are influenced by complex socio-cultural, bioecological and historical frames of reference. There is also a mystery attached to death, and one that has preoccupied humanity since early hominins began to ponder on existentialist issues. In the primary school context, therefore, death education can be seen ‘...as a mutual searching for knowledge and understanding by both teacher and taught... [and] developed within respective personal construct systems...’ (Warren, 1989: 141-142).

Both supporting bereaved pupils, and enabling children to begin to explore concepts relating to death, would seem to require adults in primary schools to engage in a ‘pedagogy of discomfort’ (Zembylas, 2002: 163). Whilst macro-level English social and cultural changes appear to be in transition, from death’s sequestered, taboo status (Mellor, 1992; Mellor & Shilling, 1993), social and emotional change can also be activated through leadership (Blackmore & Sachs, 2012), so long as pupil wellbeing is always at the heart of provision.

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APPENDICES

Appendix I Ethics documentation

A PROFORMA FOR

STAFF AND STUDENTS BEGINNING A RESEARCH PROJECT

FACULTY OF EDUCATION

Research Proposer(s): **Sarah James**

Programme of Study EdD

.....

Student No: 199920706

Research (Thesis) Title:

Bereavement support and death education in primary schools: values, attitudes and practices [working title]

Description of research (please include (a) aims of the research; (b) principal research question(s) (c) methodology or methodologies to be used (d) who are the participants in this research, and how are they to be selected.

This research will utilise a largely qualitative, pragmatic approach in which the main research question [MRQ] will be addressed through interviewing informed participants from 'richly informed' primary schools [i.e. those in which bereavement support training and practice have already been identified].

The MRQ is: *What are the values, attitudes and practices of English primary schools with respect to end of life issues?*

The sub-research questions (SRQs).

1. *What is death education?*
2. *What does the empirical research say about school values, attitudes and practices with respect to death education in English primary schools?*
3. *What is the best means of investigating this?*
4. *What are the values, attitudes and practices of English primary schools [in relation to DE]?*
5. *What recommendations can be drawn from this study?*

Approximately 5-7 local partnership primary schools will be involved in the research, all of approximately larger than average size, and all in receipt of fairly recent Ofsted inspection Grade 2s ('Good'). The research interviews will be piloted in a non-participatory primary school prior to the main data collection phase. Notions of 'trustworthiness' and 'truth value' will be more pertinent to the principally qualitative research methodology, in favour of 'validity and reliability' which are more typically associated with quantitative and mixed methodological approaches.

The research process will be actively participatory throughout in that interview schedules and key questions (though these will be semi-structured interviews) will be shared with participants in sufficient time to enable them to give consideration to the issues prior to the interview itself. Anonymised data and analyses will be shared with all participating schools at the project's completion, with a view to facilitating formative opportunities and sharing practice.

Proforma Completion Date: **19 June 2014**

This proforma should be read in conjunction with the Faculty of Education research principles, and the Faculty of Education flow chart of ethical considerations. It should be completed by the researchers. If it raises problems, it should be sent on completion, together with a brief (maximum one page) summary of the problems in the research, or in the module preparation, for approval to the Chair of the Faculty of Education Ethics Committee prior to the beginning of any research.

Part A

1. Does your research/teaching involve animal experimentation? N.
If the answer is 'YES' then the research/teaching proposal should be sent direct to the University Ethics Committee to be assessed.
2. Does your research involve human participants? Y
If the answer is 'NO', there is no need to proceed further with this proforma,

and research may proceed now. If the answer is 'YES' please answer all further relevant questions in part B.

Part B

3. Is the research population under 18 years of age? **No**

If yes, will you taking the following or similar measures to deal with this issue?

(i) Informed the participants of the research? Y/N

(ii) Ensured their understanding? Y/N

(iii) Gained the non-coerced consent of their parents/guardians? Y/N

4. Will you obtain written informed consent from the participants? **YES**

If yes, please include a copy of the information letters and forms requesting consent

If no, what measures will you take to deal with obtaining consent?

5. Has there been any withholding of disclosure of information regarding the research to the participants? **NO**

If yes, please describe the measures you have taken to deal with this.

6. Issues for participants. Please answer the following and state how you will manage perceived risks:

a) Do any aspects of the study pose a possible risk to participants' physical well-being (e.g. use of substances such as alcohol or extreme situations such as sleep deprivation)? **NO**

b) Are there any aspects of the study that participants might find humiliating, embarrassing, ego-threatening, in conflict with their values, or be **otherwise emotionally upsetting**?* **YES**

Some school staff members may feel emotionally upset in interviews if they refer to any specific cases of bereavement – e.g. through the loss of a pupil. However the interviews will be conducted in such a way as to avoid probing the emotional aspects, but will also include opt-out clauses, breaks and so on should any participant feel uncomfortable at any time, or for any reason. This research relates to emotional wellbeing, and it's imperative the participants' wellbeing is also assured.

	c)Are there any aspects of the study that might threaten participants' privacy (e.g. questions of a very personal nature; observation of individuals in situations which are not obviously 'public')?*	NO
	d)Does the study require access to confidential sources of information (e.g. medical records)?	NO
	e)Could the intended participants for the study be expected to be more than usually emotionally vulnerable (e.g. medical patients, bereaved individuals)?	NO
	f)Will the study take place in a setting other than the University campus or residential buildings?	YES
	Interviews will be conducted in participating primary schools	
	g)Will the intended participants of the study be individuals who are not members of the University community?	YES*
	*They will, however, be members of staff from UoH Primary PGCE partnership schools	
	*Note: if the intended participants are of a different social, racial, cultural, age or sex group to the researcher(s) and there is any doubt about the possible impact of the planned procedures, then opinion should be sought from members of the relevant group.	
7.	Might conducting the study expose the researcher to any risks (e.g. collecting data in potentially dangerous environments)?	NO
8.	Is the research being conducted on a group culturally different from the researcher/student/supervisors?	NO
	<i>If yes, are sensitivities and problems likely to arise?</i>	
	<i>If yes, please describe how you have addressed/will address them.</i>	
9.	Does the research/teaching conflict with any of the Faculty of Education's research principles?	
	(please see attached list).	NO
	<i>If yes, describe what action you have taken to address this?</i>	
10.	Are you conducting research in the organisation within which you work?	NO

11. If yes, are there any issues arising from this .e.g. ones of confidentiality, anonymity or power, because of your role in the organisation N/A
- If there are, what actions have you taken to address these?
12. If the research/teaching requires the consent of any organisation, will you obtaining it? YES
- If no, describe what action you have taken to overcome this problem.*
13. Have you needed to discuss the likelihood of ethical problems with this research, with an informed colleague? YES
- If yes, please name the colleague, and provide the date and results of the discussion.*

Professor Mike Bottery and I discussed ethical issues on 19

June 2014 and concurred that it is vital that schools and individual participants feel comfortable with the research process and research focus at all times, and with careful attention to ensuring participants are free to opt out and/or break from the process at any time.

It has also been recognised that many of the key participants will be Teaching Assistants and other non-teaching staff members, as well as the schools' headteachers or principals. In this respect Professor Bottery suggested that in each school the Headteacher is interviewed first to avoid any potential discomfort by other staff participants who may worry that their opinions – despite the anonymity – will become evident to their headteachers. This relates to the notion of trustworthiness also, in that non-headteacher participants are thus more likely to convey rich data if they feel their anonymity is protected.

If you have now completed the proforma, before sending it in, just check:

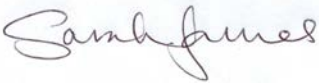
- a. Have I included a letter to participants for gaining informed consent? ☐ Y
- b. If I needed any organisational consent for this research, have I ☐ N*
- included evidence of this with the proforma? * In hand.

- c. If I needed consent from the participants, have I included evidence for the different kinds that were required? ☐ Y
- d. If I am taking images, have I completed the Image Permission Form ☐
N/A

Lack of proof of consent attached to proformas has been the major reason why proformas have been returned to their authors.

This form must be signed by your supervisor and the Faculty of Education Ethics Committee representative for your area. Once signed, copies of this form, and your proposal must be sent to Mrs Jackie Lison, Centre for Educational Studies (see flow chart), including examples of letters describing the purposes and implications of the research, and any Consent Forms (see appendices).

Name of Student/Researcher **SARAH JAMES**

Signature  Date 20 June 2014

Name of Supervisor/Colleague

Signature Date

Name of Ethics Committee member

Signature Date

**Centre for Educational
Studies**

T 01482 465988

E j.lison@hull.ac.uk

**ETHICAL PROCEDURES FOR RESEARCH AND TEACHING
IN THE
FACULTY OF EDUCATION**

PERMISSION TO PROCEED WITH RESEARCH: ETHICAL APPROVAL

Reference Number:	13/363
Name:	Sarah James
Student No:	199920706
Programme of Study:	PhD
Research Area/Title:	Bereavement support and death education in primary schools: values, attitudes and practices
Image Permission Form	N/A
Name of Supervisor:	Professor Mike Bottery
Date Approved by Supervisor:	23 June 2014
Date Approved by Ethics Committee:	24 June 2014

INDICATIVE EMAIL FOR INFORMAL AND INITIAL REQUEST FOR PARTICIPATION

Dear [NAME OF INTENDED PARTICIPANT]

I am a colleague of Richard English at the University, and until recently worked full-time on the Primary PGCE Programme, so I'm sure we have met in the past.

I am contacting you both on this occasion with regard to some research I am conducting in local partnership schools, looking at how bereaved children are supported. I understand this is very much something your school offers, so I would be extremely interested in gaining your permission to come in to interview key staff members (please note children will not be involved).

More information will follow, but at this stage I am contacting schools informally to identify – in principal – whether this might be feasible.

The process will be transparent and ethical throughout, and will involve interviews arranged at your convenience for sometime in July (in preference to September). Prior to the interviews taking place, an interview schedule identifying the key questions and areas of interest will be sent in order to a) ensure you feel more at ease with the process, and b) to give you time to consider your answers.

One key criterion relates to whether or not you have any members of staff who have undertaken some form of bereavement support training, so I'd be very grateful if you could let me know this as soon as possible.

Please call me on [MOBILE NUMBER] if either of you would like to discuss this, or feel free to email me. Alternatively, if you are happy in principal at this stage for your school to be involved in this research, please simply email me accordingly. Following analysis of the data I will openly share information with all participating schools, and the emphasis is very much on enabling formative outcomes to the benefit of children and their families; schools; and local organisations.

I look forward to hearing from you as soon as possible, with the hope also of your school's participation.

Very warmest wishes

Sarah

Sarah James

**Lecturer in Education
& Academic Coordinator for International Student Support**
Centre for Educational Studies
Faculty of Education
University of Hull
s.james@hull.ac.uk

+44 (0)1482 465813

Name

Address

Faculty of Education
Centre for Educational Studies

T: 01482 465813

F: 01482 466133

E: s.james@hull.ac.uk

02 July 2014

Dear

Re. Research project: bereavement support and 'end of life issues education' provision.

I sincerely hope this letter finds you well. On the recommendation of your Head, Mr X, I would very much like to invite you to participate in the above study.

Aims of the project

This project aims to identify through interviews in selected primary schools known to be providing informed bereavement support, the values, attitudes and practices in relation to bereavement support and more general 'end of life issues' educational provision. By selecting schools with existing bereavement expertise I am seeking to gather 'rich data' from 'richly informed participants'.

The procedures involved

The project comprises a series of individual one-to-one interviews with key staff members identified prior to the research. Typically interviewees will be with the following personnel:

- The Headteacher or Principal of the primary school
- The main person(s) involved in offering bereavement and emotional wellbeing support to pupils
- AN Other staff member – such as a class teacher – with significant experience in supporting a bereaved pupil.

For most primary schools this will probably involve interviews with two or three individuals.

I will interview the Headteacher/Principal first, then other relevant staff member(s) on an individual basis. The interviews will be semi-structured to allow for interviewees to offer related insights which may not otherwise come out from a more prescriptive approach. The indicative interview questions have also been sent to you with the covering email to give you time to consider your responses, and to help alleviate any anxiety about the process. This approach also gives participants additional time to consider withdrawing from the project if they feel uneasy in any way. Please note, however, that any participant is entitled to withdraw at any stage in the research process.

Interviews will be conducted on your school premises in a room of your choosing. Time will be taken to ensure each participant is fully aware of the research methods, timings and any ethical considerations, prior to being asked to sign the Ethics Consent Form. As the research subject is a sensitive one, additional consideration will be given should anyone feel emotionally compromised at any stage in the process.

Schedule and duration of interviews

My appointment with Mr X is on **Tuesday 8th July, at 09.00**, so ideally I would very much like to interview you afterwards – but at your convenience. Please accept my apologies for this being at a very busy time of the school year, but this arrangement will enable me to analyse the data over the summer. It is anticipated that interviews will last approximately forty-five minutes, depending on individual interview exchanges and dialogue.

Data collection, data protection and confidentiality

Interviewing equipment will consist of a digital voice recorder, with a back-up device, and I may make a few notes to ensure key items of data are also recorded on paper, in case of technical problems. I will likewise provide ID upon my arrival to your school. All interviewees and primary schools will be given a coded pseudonym which will ensure strict anonymity and confidentiality. Data will be stored in a locked cabinet in a secure location at the University.

Research complaints mechanism

Should you (the participant) have any concerns about the conduct of this research project, please contact the Secretary, Faculty of Education Ethics Committee, University of Hull, Cottingham Road, Hull HU6 7RX; Tel (+44) 1482 465988.

Formative research outcomes

I very much wish this research to be shared with participants and – if appropriate - the wider community. I will thus be delighted to visit your school at the project's completion to discuss the findings and any formative outcomes. It is also highly likely that the research – or elements of it – will be offered for publication in the academic literature, but this will again be strictly anonymised.

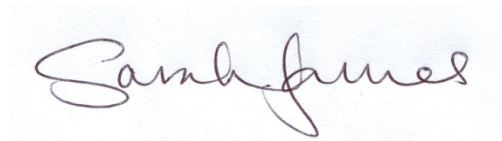
I very much hope that this documentation explains the research process sufficiently at this stage, but please feel free to contact me should this not be the case.

Confirmation of receipt of this letter

Please **email** me at s.james@hull.ac.uk .confirming your receipt of this letter, and whether our meeting for Tuesday 8th July at 09.00 is convenient.

With very best wishes

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in purple ink that reads "Sarah James". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large 'S' and a long, flowing 'James'.

Sarah James RN, BSc (Hons), PGCE, MA

Lecturer in Education

Centre for Educational Studies

University of Hull

(+44) 1482 465813

The FACULTY OF EDUCATION ETHICS COMMITTEE

CONSENT FORM – For Institutions/Organisations

(to be completed by the person legally responsible) (delete italics before use)

I, of

.....

Hereby give permission for to be involved in a

research study being undertaken by **SARAH JAMES** and I understand that the purpose of the research is **to identify through interviews with selected staff members the values, attitudes and practices in participating primary schools in respect of bereavement support and ‘end of life issues education’ provision**, and that involvement for the **school** means the following:-

I understand that

1. the aims, methods, and anticipated benefits, and possible risks/hazards of the research study, have been explained to me.
2. I voluntarily and freely give my consent for the institution/organisation to participate in the above research study.
5. I am free to withdraw my consent at any time during the study, in which event participation in the research study will immediately cease and any information obtained through this institution/organisation will not be used if I so request.

3. I understand that aggregated results will be used for research purposes and may be reported in scientific and academic journals.
4. The institution/organisation ~~MAY~~/ MAY NOT be named in research publications or other publicity without prior agreement.
5. I / We DO / DO NOT require an opportunity to check the factual accuracy of the research findings related to the institution/organisation.
6. I / We EXPECT / DO NOT EXPECT to receive a copy of the research findings or publications.

Signature:

Date:

The contact details of the researcher are: **SARAH JAMES, Centre for Educational Studies, Faculty of Education, Wilberforce Building, University of Hull, Cottingham Road, HULL HU6 7RX. Tel: 01482 465813; 07429 409106; s.james@hull.ac.uk [mobile and email preferred).**

The contact details of the secretary to the Faculty of Education Ethics Committee are Mrs J Lison, Centre for Educational Studies, University of Hull, Cottingham Road, Hull, HU6 7RX.

Email: J.Lison@hull.ac.uk tel. 01482-465988.

In some cases, consent will need to be witnessed eg. where the subject is blind/intellectually disabled. A witness must be independent of the project and may only sign a certification to the level of his/her involvement. A suggested format for witness certification is included with the sample consent forms. The form should also record the witnesses' signature, printed name and occupation. For particularly sensitive or exceptional research, further information can be obtained from the Faculty of Education Ethics Committee Secretary, eg, absence of parental consent, use of pseudonyms, etc.

The FACULTY OF
THE FACULTY OF EDUCATION ETHICS COMMITTEE

CONSENT FORM: (**INTERVIEWS**)

(Please amend to suit participants)

(delete italics before use)

I, _____ of _____

Hereby agree to be a participant in this study to be undertaken by **SARAH JAMES**

and I understand that the purpose of the research is **to identify through interviews with selected staff members the values, attitudes and practices in participating primary schools in respect of their bereavement support and 'end of life issues education' provision.**

I understand that

1. the aims, methods, and anticipated benefits, and possible risks/hazards of the research study, have been explained to me.
2. I voluntarily and freely give my consent to my participation in such research study.
3. I understand that aggregated results will be used for research purposes and may be reported in scientific and academic journals.

4. Individual results will not be released to any person except at my request and on my authorisation.
5. I am free to withdraw my consent at any time during the study, in which event my participation in the research study will immediately cease and any information obtained from me will not be used.

Signature:

Date:

The contact details of the researcher are: **SARAH JAMES, Centre for Educational Studies, Faculty of Education, Wilberforce Building, University of Hull, Cottingham Road, HULL HU6 7RX. Tel: 01482 465813; 07429 409106; s.james@hull.ac.uk [mobile and email preferred).**

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In some cases, consent will need to be witnessed eg. where the subject is blind/intellectually disabled. A witness must be independent of the project and may only sign a certification to the level of his/her involvement. A suggested format for witness certification is included with the sample consent forms. The form should also record the witnesses' signature, printed name and occupation. For particularly sensitive or exceptional research, further information can be obtained from the Faculty of Education Ethics Committee Secretary, eg, absence of parental consent, use of pseudonyms, etc)

NOTE: In the event of a minor's consent, or person under legal liability, please complete the Ethics Committee's "Form of Consent on Behalf of a Minor or Dependent".

Appendix II Interview questions

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS for headteachers/senior managers

- 1) Why did you enable your staff to undertake bereavement support training?
- 2) What bereavement support training have staff members had to date?
- 3) Can you give me an example of when the bereavement training has been helpful, please?
- 4) Does your school also access bereavement support from outside agencies, e.g. charities?
- 5) Is bereavement support considered a whole-school issue/approach, or are bereaved pupils supported more discreetly?
- 6) Does your school have a bereavement policy, or another policy in which bereavement is featured?
- 7) What are your views on the concept of 'death education' [i.e. the 'normalisation of death in the curriculum', for example within PSHE/SEAL/RE lessons]?
- 8) What are *your own* views regarding 'death education' in primary schools?
- 9) How and when do you think children learn about end of life issues?
- 10) In your experience, are there cultural variations in the ways in which children and their families support each other when someone has died?
- 11) What part of your school's bereavement support approach do you think works really well, and why?
- 12) Are there ways in which you feel your current bereavement support approach needs developing?

.....

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS for ‘active practitioners’ [i.e. those who support bereaved pupils].

- 1) What led you to be particularly interested in this area?
 - 2) Why did you undertake bereavement support training?
 - 3) What bereavement support training have you have had to date?
 - 4) What did you think of the training?
 - 5) How much did the training help you?

 - 6) Does your school also access bereavement support from outside agencies, e.g. charities?
 - 7) Is bereavement support considered a whole-school issue/approach, or are bereaved pupils supported more discreetly?
 - 8) Does your school have a bereavement policy, or another policy in which bereavement is featured? [why did the school consider this necessary]
 - 9) Did your bereavement support training cover the concept of death education [e.g. ‘normalising’ death in the curriculum, and within PSHE/SEAL class sessions?]
 - 10) What are your own views regarding ‘death education’ in primary schools?
 - 11) How and when do you think children learn about end of life issues?
 - 12) In your experience, are there cultural variations in the ways in which children and their families support each other when someone has died?
 - 13) What part of your bereavement support approach do you think works really well?
 - 14) Are there ways in which you feel your current bereavement support approach needs developing?
-

Appendix III

Table III.1: Provisions that may be made by a qualitative researcher wishing to address Guba’s four criteria for trustworthiness – adapted from Shenton (2004: 73).

Quality criterion	Possible provision made by researcher	Actual provision made by researcher
<i>Credibility</i>	Adoption of appropriate, well recognised research methods	Qualitative methodology within interpretivist paradigm
	Development of early familiarity with culture of participating organisations	Researcher is steeped in familiarity with primary schools
	Triangulation via use of different types of informants and different sites	The participants came from eight primary schools, and comprised school leaders and non-teaching ‘active practioners’
	Tactics to help ensure honesty in informants	Robust ethical procedures shared with participants; strong encouragement for frankness in interviews
	Iterative questioning in data collection dialogues	Natural, dialogic probing techniques were utilised in the interviews to elicit clarification, and/or to relate to previous points or issues made
	Debriefing sessions between researcher and supervisor(s), and peer scrutiny	Regular meetings with supervisor; critical analysis and reflexivity
	Use of “reflective commentary”	Reflective journal entries facilitated further reflexivity, and informed the thesis.
	Thick description of phenomenon under scrutiny	Thick description provided in Results chapter
	Background, qualifications and experience of the investigator	Shared with all participants. All participating schools familiar with the Faculty. Reinforced trust and

	Examination of previous research to frame findings	<p>authenticity, and location of ‘habitus’ (Bourdieu, 1977).</p> <p>MRQ formed iteratively from detailed knowledge of related studies, and the thesis as a whole is framed as a response to the wider literature.</p>
<i>Transferability</i>	<p>a) the number of organisations taking part in the study and where they are based;</p> <p>b) any restrictions in the type of people who contributed data;</p> <p>c) the number of participants involved in the fieldwork;</p> <p>d) the data collection methods that were employed;</p> <p>e) the number and length of the data collection sessions;</p> <p>f) the time period over which the data was collected.</p>	<p>a) Eight primary schools, all from same inner-city location;</p> <p>b) no restrictions;</p> <p>c) seventeen participants, comprising eight school leaders; one counsellor; and eight non-teaching ‘active practitioners’;</p> <p>d) qualitative, semi-structured interviews;</p> <p>e) twenty-five interviews in total, including follow-up interviews;</p> <p>f) Pilot study and Phase One interviews conducted in July 2014; Phase Two interviews conducted September to November, 2014.</p>
<i>Dependability</i>	Employment of “overlapping methods” and in-depth methodological description to allow study to be repeated	Follow-up interviews provided a degree of method overlapping, and for any post-interview reflexive thoughts or actions to be obtained. Details of the study would enable it to be replicated.
<i>Confirmability</i>	<p>Triangulation to reduce effect of investigator bias, and admission of researcher’s beliefs and assumptions;</p> <p>Recognition of shortcomings in study’s methods and their potential effects.</p> <p>In-depth methodological description to allow integrity of research results to be scrutinised;</p>	<p><i>Habitus</i> and associated methodological considerations at the forefront of data analysis processes;</p> <p>Critical and reflexive analysis employed throughout.</p> <p>In-depth descriptions included in thesis facilitating opportunities for critical analysis and scrutiny.</p>