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A Phenomenological Study: Understanding Teacher Experiences with Grief in the Classroom

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A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY:
UNDERSTANDING TEACHER EXPERIENCES WITH GRIEF IN THE CLASSROOM

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APPROVAL OF DISSERTATION

We, the faculty supervising the work of Melissa Cyfers, affirm that the dissertation *A Phenomenological Study: Understanding Teacher Experiences with Grief in the Classroom*, meets the high academic standards for original scholarship and creative work established by the Curriculum and Instruction program and the College of Education and Professional Development. This work also conforms to the editorial standards of our discipline and the Graduate College of Marshall University. With our signatures, we approve the manuscript for publication.

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DEDICATION

      This paper is dedicated to my girls, Katelin and Zoe. I want them to know the sacrifices they had to make for me to pursue this project are truly appreciated. They were supportive in my doctoral journey and I am forever thankful for both of them.

Table of Contents

ABSTRACT

Teachers entering the classroom along with teachers who have been in the classroom for a long time often find themselves dealing with grieving students. Grief is something that everyone is familiar with, especially when dealing with a death. Often what is not so familiar are other events that can cause a grief response. Teachers spend a lot of time in training and being trained on many facets of education, emergency drills, and many things they may or may not encounter. Yet, a student expressing some type of grief is something nearly every teacher has encountered but has not been trained to handle. The purpose of this study was to gain insight into teacher experiences when dealing with grief in the classroom, to understand how teachers are trained to handle grief in the classroom and understand the support systems in place to support teachers in this endeavor. The study revealed teacher experiences that included grief triggering events and showed a lack of training for teachers to handle these grieving students. In addition to the lack of training, the study confirmed that there is no clear process to implement or support training for teachers to deal with grief in the classroom. The study also showed there is a lack of communication to assist teachers in dealing with grieving students and, in some cases, even recognizing grieving students. This study brings to the forefront the importance of training teachers to handle grief in the classroom along with the effectiveness of having a support system for the implementation of the training to produce positive outcomes.

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

Grief is the emotional response to a loss or a change that causes grief as the response (Hamilton, 2016). Many different factors can trigger a grief response. Each factor should have a place on the agenda for teacher training. During the school year, nearly every teacher in a classroom will face some type of grieving student. Training for teachers is widely available, but not much is known regarding the extent teachers are trained to handle grief in the classroom.

School shootings are traumatic and generally planned for in the realm of teacher training. In 2017, there were a reported 9 incidents of school shootings resulting in 15 deaths. In 2018, there were 12 incidents with a reported 27 deaths. Admittedly, that is far too many as there should be none, but statistically speaking, a teacher in a classroom has a far greater chance of experiencing a grieving student reeling from parental divorce, or the loss of a student to suicide, car accident, or health-related problem than from a school shooting (National Vital Statistic Report, 2019). Considering the statistics from the National Vital Statistic Report, time is spent in professional development courses learning about wound care, seizures, lockdowns and other safety measures; but are teachers trained on the proper ways to assist students in dealing with grief?

Problem Statement

Grief is not a sequential process and is not experienced by each person in the same way. Grief is not something that a student can be expected to get through in a specified period. Grief can evolve into something simpler which is handled or something more complicated (Worden & Silverman, 1996). Children who grieved over the loss of a

parent were more likely to show complicated signs of grief in the second year after the death of the parent (Worden & Silverman, 1996). This highlights the need for an ongoing support system for teachers. Grief training plans should be tiered and include long-term plans that support the teachers in helping the student deal with grief (Sandler, Wolchik, & Ayers, 2008).

There are at least three unanswered questions regarding grief in the classroom when discussing classrooms across West Virginia. First, "What training is available to West Virginia teachers regarding grief in the classroom?" Second, "If they are being trained, once trained what challenges arise?" Third, "What is the process within the West Virginia educational system to support the teachers in implementing the training?" The importance of these three questions becomes monumental as death rates climb due to overdoses, and now, a global pandemic that is causing increases in foreclosures, job loss, and many other factors that can cause grief. Along with that, the CDC reports West Virginia among the top five states with the highest divorce rate which is another factor that attributes to a grief response.

Teachers are consistently called upon to deal with students in situations that extend beyond an academic setting. The trends show teachers stepping in to fulfill roles more closely aligned with social workers, counselors, and other humanitarian and service industries to provide for needs that support the physical and mental health of students. These trends are indicative of meeting needs of changing curriculum, changing policies involving education, but predominately societal changes. The societal changes place a necessity upon teachers to redirect based on student needs and the changes in those needs (Day & Gu, 2007). Research indicates teachers with high confidence perform well in whatever task they are approaching, but there is concern that if teachers avoid dealing

with the grief response in a student it will offset the ability of the student to grieve in a healthy manner (Schoenfeld, Lichetenstein, Kline-Pruett, & Speese-Linehan, 2002).

Teachers are the center of progress for students when dealing with grief. If teachers are properly trained and are prepared to handle grief as it manifests in the classroom it benefits the student, classmates and teacher. The ability to successfully implement the training can be aligned to a study completed with emergency preparedness exercises, which included participants in all different fields of emergency responders. The range of those studied ranged from emergency doctors to bioterrorism responders and included eight different sectors of the government along with private sectors whose primary responsibility was to respond to an emergency. The responders within the health community felt they could only successfully perform their job when the training was adequate (Skryabina, Reedy, Amlot, Jaye, & Riley, 2017). Teachers, in general, feel inadequately prepared to handle death as a topic in the classroom with 51% reporting feeling overwhelmed or not prepared in a study by Reid and Dixon (1999).

Purpose of the Study

Teachers are experiencing grieving students in the classroom regularly that is sometimes known and sometimes unknown. The purpose of this study was to collect data regarding teacher perception of the impact of grief in the classroom and the training the teacher received to handle the impact. The research sought to understand and describe an in-depth look into the classroom from the eyes of a teacher when experiencing grief in the classroom to determine the challenges faced. The research also examined the type of training teachers received regarding grief in the classroom and how the training assisted in the experience. The research attempted to understand the support systems which are in place within the educational system to assist teachers to continue to handle grief in the

classroom. Teachers in West Virginia classrooms were interviewed to determine the training they received, their personal experience with grief in the classroom, and the process they followed for support systems to implement the training and assist grieving students.

Research Questions

Due to the phenomenological nature and theoretical sampling, the study initially began with three broad questions. These can be continued as the study progresses.

Q1: What training have West Virginia teachers had concerning grief in the classroom?

Q2: What are the challenges teachers face when dealing with grief in the classroom?

Q3: What processes are in place for the educational system to support teachers to handle grief in the classroom?

Significance of the Study

The findings of this study will benefit educational systems in any locale. The results of the study will be of great benefit to the following:

Teachers. The data collected will provide teachers with the knowledge of training accessible regarding grief in the classroom, a look at challenges faced by a variety of teachers, and the process for support in implementing the grief training. The data will enable teachers to best utilize the training and support systems available. The study will allow teachers to approach grief-related situations in the classroom with a more responsive sense of how to handle the grieving student. Teachers given the opportunity to deal with grief in the classroom give a level of comfortability to both student and teacher. The teacher has the most interaction with the student daily and students feel a certain

level of comfort confiding in the teacher to help deal with the process of grief (Reid & Dixon, 1999). Appropriately addressing grief can lessen the teacher's burden of ill student behavior and poor academic performance. Students are noted to have the often-misunderstood expression of their grief to manifest in anger, withdrawal, not paying attention, defiance and a lack of organization skills (Cullinan, 1990; Kirwin & Hamrin, 2005).

Students. The study will provide information that evaluates different types of grief faced in the classroom. The students can improve behaviorally and mentally, especially if placed in a classroom with a teacher appropriately trained. The National Center for School Crisis and Bereavement (2010) estimates that as many as 5% of American schoolchildren will experience the loss of a parent before they graduate high school (Reid & Dixon, 1999). The impact of grief is concentrated heavily on the student population with 1.5 million school-aged children receiving Social Security death benefits (US Social Security Administration, 2017).

County Board of Education. Each County Board of Education can benefit from the information secured from this research. The County Board of Education can utilize the information to evaluate strategies in enhancing knowledge and ensuring the availability of training. The County Board of Education will have the opportunity to improve teachers' capacities to recognize the needs of grieving students (Schoen, Burgoyne, & Schoen, 2004). The County Board of Education can tailor the training needs to fit individual schools or counties.

State Board of Education. Each State Board of Education can learn from the results of the study. The State Board can determine if the training given meets the challenges faced in the classroom. The State Board can also evaluate the current support system, if

any, utilized to assist teachers in handling grief in the classroom. Students' regression after a significant event that causes a grief response is highly likely and places enormous importance on a support process for teachers to be able to continue to support students (Gurwitch, Kees, Becker, Schreiber, Pfefferbaum, & Diamond, 2004).

Communities. The entire community will benefit from this study. Teachers who have access to meaningful training that can be implemented and supported to assist a grieving child helps everyone involved. The process of helping a child grieve healthily is a benefit to everyone in the community. While teachers are included in the community setting children rely on adults for stability and protection, but often the adults they trust are impacted by the same situation which is causing the students grief (Dopp & Cain, 2012). The disruption of family supports the student generally relies on may extend into other members of the community during a grievable event (Kirwin & Hamrin, 2005).

Operational Definitions

Grief. Grief is an emotional response to a loss or an event.

Teacher perceptions of handling grief. The teacher perceptions of handling grief were based on any input collected from interviews that were the teacher's account of incidents of grief in the classroom.

Teacher grief training. Teacher grief training was considered any training a teacher reported receiving that included any element of training to assist with grief in the classroom. This also included training during pre-service.

Challenges. Challenges were elements in the classroom that teachers reported as creating a difficulty where grief is a factor. These difficulties included incidents regarding incidents of grief that the teacher did not know how to handle as well as incidents that were handled to the best of the teacher's ability.

Teacher efficacy. Teacher efficacy was based on the teacher's perception of confidence in handling different situations regarding grief in the classroom.

Teacher responses to interview questions. Teacher responses to interview questions were all answers given to questions asked during the interview process which were reviewed and approved by the teacher.

Limitations and Delimitations

The limitations of the study included teacher understanding of grief, levels of training, and confidence level in handling grief. The understanding level of how to handle grief in the classroom was high for some teachers and low for others. Teachers varied in their degrees of training. Some teachers were confident and comfortable handling the subject of grief and others were not comfortable. Therefore, the conclusions of this study required consideration of the variations in these variables when summarizing data.

Delimitations of this study include the number of teachers interviewed and the time of the study. The study interviewed teachers until themes overlapped and saturation is met. Only teachers currently teaching in a West Virginia classroom were included. Ancillary data also emerged from a few retired West Virginia teachers. Interviews took place over five months in 2021.

CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

Recognizing grief in school-aged children requires cognizance and discernment among a circle of people around the student. Teachers are a large group within that circle and are often the first person to interact with a student who is grieving. Grief causes abrupt and sudden changes in the lives of people experiencing things that cause grief as a response. The sudden changes surmount additional duties in both personal and professional realms. Teachers and students are not exempt from these changes, and suffering loss, in general, contributes to that change.

This chapter gives background knowledge on the roles and expectations of teachers, the triggers of grief and the implication of those triggers in the classroom, and how teachers are trained to handle grief in the classroom. This chapter will look at addressing those grief triggers through training models and educational support processes. Chapter 2 will further look into gaining an understanding of the training West Virginia teachers receive and the challenges they face in implementing the training.

The chapter will also address the organizational structure within the West Virginia school system. The structure will be explored to determine which support mechanisms are in place to contribute to a successful implementation of handling grief in the classroom. The review of literature frames the questions of the research to determine what is known about the following: what training is available to West Virginia teachers regarding grief in the classroom, once they are trained what challenges arise, and what is the process within the West Virginia educational system to support the teachers in the implementation?

Ubiquitous Teachers

Teachers are everything. Teachers are increasingly seen as academic experts who have been asked to stretch themselves outside the primary objective of meeting state education standards. Teachers have progressively evolved into roles that must meet the human, financial, and physical needs of students (Mulford, 2003). Teachers are often known for ensuring students have clean clothes, food to eat, and other supplies when needed. Atkinson (1980) studied Death Education in schools along with teacher role in death-related issues in the classroom. The result of his study found that there was a large underestimation of how often teachers were dealing with grief in the classroom regarding death. Another study based on the findings of Reid and Dixon (1999) looked at teacher responses to a Death Attitudes Profile (DAP-R). The study showed that 51% of the teachers who participated felt overwhelmed and not prepared to handle death as a topic in the classroom. A majority of the teachers in the study reported they did not feel adequately trained to address grief in the classroom but did express a need for additional training.

The review of the literature shows that teachers think they are not equipped to handle grief in the classroom. The reporting is important because it shows a crucial gap in the way teachers think. While many researchers and practitioners believe the teacher is in an ideal position to help students dealing with grief and that it has a major impact on the classroom, (Cullinan, 1990, Felix et al., 2010) teachers do not necessarily agree. A study conducted by Cullinan (1990) found that 94% of teachers found it important and appropriate for teachers to help grieving children, 46% of the same sample felt this would be best handled by referring the child to a counselor. While the study implicitly implicates

the importance of teachers in assisting a grieving child, the lack of more recent studies reveals the need to further determine the training teachers are receiving to assist with grief in the classroom. The reframing of the teacher role as another piece that has been added beyond meeting academic standards may cause teacher avoidance when dealing with this topic (Schonfeld, Lichetenstein, Kline-Pruett, & Speese-Linehan, 2002).

Teachers handle aspects of their classroom with ease and confidence, but grief is a different story. Teachers reported low levels of confidence in handling grief in the classroom citing further harming a child if met with an inappropriate response (Cullinan, 1990). Teachers were overwhelmingly concerned about not knowing what to say or do in a situation involving grief in the classroom. Teachers reported not fully knowing what to do or say and feared the outcome of interfering being worse than not interfering at all. Boris (2020) explains that saying nothing says a lot. Saying nothing communicates to children that you are unaware or unconcerned about their loss. Saying nothing indicates to the student that you are unwilling to help them. According to Boris (2020), the silent approach may also signify that there is nothing the teacher can do to help the student adjust. But there is stronger evidence suggesting that the teacher's role in handling grief is imperative. Appropriate responses from teachers play a critical role in the short-term functioning and long-term success of grieving children (Cohen & Mannarino, 2011; Cullinan, 1990; Haine, Ayers, Sandler, & Wolchick, 2008; Tamborini, Cupito, & Shoffner, 2011; Reid & Dixon, 1999; Schonfeld, Lichetenstein, Kline-Pruett, & Speese-Linehan, 2002).

Teachers are called upon to handle situations without warning, especially situations that involve a grief response. For example, if a student dies the teacher must not only focus on supporting the students in the classroom who are grieving the loss of a

classmate, but also may be forced to deal with their grief. Students may respond to grief with any sort of reaction which can culminate into anger, guilt, frustration (Reid & Dixon, 1999). Teachers also must become a support to the family of the student, other students, and colleagues.

Grief comes to the surface in many ways and teachers deal with it through disruptive behavior, failing grades, and a variety of other ways. Teachers are forced to deal with grief, even if the grief trigger is unknown. A teacher is usually notified of a death, but limited information is shared or known when a student loses their home, watches a parent get arrested, or when a parent loses their job.

Overview of Grief

Grief is a deep, emotional response to any loss with each loss being as unique as the way each person handles it. Grief is a broad topic that covers various types of losses. Grief is also broad in the sense that it also covers a variety of emotions. While grief is the normal, emotional response to change or loss the conflicting emotions caused by grief do not always have a 'normal' route in which to proceed. It is important to note that almost everyone will experience different degrees of grief at different points in life. Everyone will lose a loved one, lose a capacity that was once honed, lose jobs that were relished, lose special locations that were enjoyed, etc. There are many ways and facets that can surmise as grief once lost. Kubler-Ross (1969) listed grief in five stages: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. These stages can be experienced as a sequence, all at the same time, or some may experience only particular parts of the sequence. Recent studies also discuss the stage-based theory of Kubler-Ross may not be one-size-fits-all. A study published supported by the National Institute of Health describes Kubler-Ross' theory as prescriptive (Stroebe, Schut, & Boerner, 2017). The study further

recognizes that Kubler-Ross indicates a bereaved person must follow the specified grieving process to cope with the loss. The study also reiterates that the stages may even be detrimental to those who do not go through the stages of grief when they are expected to as a bereaved person (Stroebe, Schut, & Boerner, 2017). Grief is complex and unique to each individual.

Every child is likely to experience something that causes grief. The term child will be used throughout and is addressed to school-aged children from ages 5-18 unless otherwise noted. The terms grief, bereavement, and trauma will be defined as they are intended for this review of the literature. Grief is a deep, emotional response to any loss with each loss being as unique as the way each person handles it. Grief is a natural response to the loss of someone or something you love or care about. Every child is likely to experience something that causes grief. Grief is a deep, emotional response to any loss with each loss being as unique as the way each person handles the process of dealing with the after-effects grief brings. Grief is an emotion and the underlying causes of grief are specific events (Leming & Dickinson, 2014).

Bereavement is the descriptive term for the state after which someone has lost a significant other due to death. Bereavement is also part of the alternative means to coping in the grieving process, which includes denial, avoidance, and defiance (Leming & Dickson, 2014). While bereavement is used in broad scope, Kirwin and Hamrin (2005) define bereavement as the "internal process of having lost a significant other" (p.67).

Trauma is considered a deeply distressing or disturbing experience. Trauma is an event. Trauma may also be referred to as a traumatic event. A traumatic event is defined by the Center for Disease Control (2020) as events that cause a lot of stress, helplessness, a sense of horror, serious injury, or the threat of a serious injury or death.

Trauma can include all or some of the aforementioned factors. While traumatic events can certainly cause a grief response it is important to understand the two terms and separate grief, bereavement, and trauma.

Events that Trigger Grief

There is certainty children are experiencing incidences that result in a grief response and those incidences are at an all-time high. Teachers are experiencing grieving students in the classroom regularly that is sometimes known and sometimes unknown. Many events trigger grief responses and school-aged children are facing these high-rate incidences in alarming numbers. Each scenario does not have to be a family member, it can be someone close to the child (neighbor, mentor, etc.). The following discussion presents several events or factors that would cause a grief response.

Coronavirus (COVID-19). In 2020, with the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, the US has confirmed over 320,000 deaths. Along with the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic deaths add the overall effect of a global pandemic. The National Institute of Health (2020) states that failure to respond to the grief and loss caused by the pandemic will result in poor mental and physical health of those enduring a grief response (Zhai & Du, 2020). Students are unable to be in classrooms which is adding stress and further isolates them in many instances. Both stress and isolation can trigger grieving responses.

Opioid crisis. The opioid crisis is impacting communities across the United States. The national opioid epidemic is causing many disruptions in the classroom today. The growing rate of children born to drug-addicted mothers is seeing that the first generation of the high statistic enters the classroom. In 2015, an estimated 26,000 pregnant women illegally used opioids and/or heroin (Center for Behavioral Health Statistics and Quality, 2015). In addition to this number, an unknown number used suboxone to prevent

withdrawals during pregnancy (and were done under physician supervision). Children

born to drug-addicted mothers are often born with drugs in their systems. Many of the

children suffer withdrawal but recover with often some cognitive delays. Children who are

not born addicted but live with parents who are illicit drug users also trigger a grief

response. Children may be left to care for themselves and other siblings, may not have a

clean environment to thrive, may not have a stable home, and all the other explosive

dynamics that surround a relationship with someone involved in addiction to an illegal

substance.

     Suicide. There are many indicators the number of students dealing with grief at one

level or another is growing. In 2014 alone, 425 middle school-aged children died by

suicide and according to National Public Radio (NPR) of West Virginia, thousands of

teens attempt suicide in the U.S. daily. The attempt leaves a multifaceted grieving

response all around the student who attempted suicide. The attempt leaves parents

feeling insufficient and sad, reeling about choices in child-rearing, what went wrong or

what could have been done. The same response is found in large part amongst

grandparents, aunts, and uncles. Siblings are often the hardest hit wondering how the

other sibling could have been so selfish or not have trusted them to talk to them. In the

case of only children, the grief response often reaches out into the closest circle of friends.

A suicide attempt is a traumatic event that affects everybody. A variety of emotions are felt

throughout the circle of family and friends and include anger, guilt, anxiety, betrayal, and

powerlessness (Suicide Prevention Council, 2020).

     The grief response also lingers in the person who attempted the suicide. Once the

aftershock and surprise wear off an overwhelming sense of loss and grief is felt. The life is

once known will not be that way again. For some, a happy, healthy life can be regained while others will take a second attempt at suicide (Suicide Prevention Council, 2020).

Only 10% of people who attempt suicide will die from the completed attempt, but 80% of people who die by suicide have made a previous attempt (Suicide Prevention Council, 2020). The United States Government, Center for Disease Control (CDC) lists suicide as the third leading cause of death for ages 15-24 and the third leading cause of death for ages 10-14. In younger teens, there were 3,971 suicides in 2001, which equates to 10.9 deaths per day or one every 2 hours and 12 minutes (Centers for Disease Control, 2020).

Death of a significant other. The United States Social Security Administration estimated that 3.5% of American children under age 18 will be impacted by the death of a parent (Haine, Ayers, Sandler, & Wolchick, 2008). A majority of students that fall into the age group of K12 school systems will be impacted by the death of a parent or other person close to them. In 2017, the United States Social Security Administration distributed monthly benefits to 4.2 million children because one or both of their parents were disabled, retired, or deceased. In 2004, there were 1.2 million children who received social security death benefits (Tamborini, Cupito, & Shoffner, 2011). Other factors to consider not placed within those numbers are deaths of other individuals in a child's family. These other individuals could include grandparents, siblings, caregivers, teachers, and it is also realized that this does not account for community members or other critical incidences (for instance COVID-19) that would impact multiple children in a community.

Divorce. Divorce rates vary across the United States with the national average being 7.7% in 2018 (United States Census, 2018). Arkansas had one of the highest divorce rates listed at 17.7%. West Virginia had a divorce rate of 9.8%, which was a drop

when compared to the prior averages. These averages were based on information collected from 2008-2018. On top of that, an estimated 40% of divorcees who remarry end up divorced for a second time which means 1 out of every 10 children who see their parents' divorce are likely to see 1-3 parental divorces during their lifetime (Cohen, 2002). Children of divorced parents are at increased risk for problem outcomes and grief is the natural response to the divorce (Stevenson, Braver, Ellman, & Votruba 2013).

Imprisonment. According to the United States Department of Justice, the total prison population in 2019 was over 1.4 million (United States Department of Justice, 2019). This number includes U.S. residents who are in prison and were sentenced to more than one year in prison. These numbers account for those in the federal prison. The West Virginia Regional Jail and Correctional Facility Authority lists daily incarcerations and the rolling monthly average is 34 admissions (West Virginia Regional Jail & Correctional Facility Authority, 2020). School-aged children are further affected by the incarceration of a parent. A study conducted by Lee, Fang, and Luo (2013) showed significant association in school-aged children whose parent(s) had been incarcerated to problems that trigger a grief response. The association was found to cause "depression, posttraumatic stress disorder, anxiety, high cholesterol, asthma, migraines, HIV/AIDS, and fair/poor [overall] health" (Lee, Fang, & Luo, 2013). The study associates the outcomes to the relevance of students whose parent(s) are incarcerated may be exposed to violence and lack a safe, stable environment or consistent relationships. Another study published in the Journal of Death and Dying (2007) further discovered that school-aged children are often placed under a stigma and judged harshly, especially if a parent is on death row.

Injury/Change in Health of Family Member. The West Virginia Department of Health and Human Services completes the West Virginia Behavioral Risk Factor

Surveillance System (BRFSS) each year to measure risk factors that affect the health of West Virginians. The information serves as a resource for not only the government but schools. According to the 2018 West Virginia BRFSS, the overall health status of West Virginians ranked the second-highest in the nation as either fair or poor. The prevalence of obesity in West Virginia was 37.7%, the highest in the nation. West Virginia also ranked first nationally in heart attacks (7.5%) and coronary heart disease (8.0%). Other health factors where West Virginia ranked poor and in the top seven nationally were overall cardiovascular disease, cancer, tobacco use and diabetes (West Virginia Department of Health and Human Services, 2018).

Gaining a New Family Member(s). The West Virginia Vital Statistics Bureau for Public Health in the Health Statistics Center (2010) reports an annual average of births in West Virginia at about 20,000. In addition to this, there are currently 6,289 children in the foster care system in West Virginia. These numbers impact a lot of families. The Adoption and Fostering Agency along with a study conducted by Dansey, John, and Shbero (2018) shed light on the stigma surrounding children in foster care. The large overarching theme showed foster children internalized stigma for fear of bullying. Several components can result in a grief response.

Foster care is another widely spreading area where school-aged children face grief. Children in foster care (and those adopted) suffer grief in many areas. The Center for Adoption and Support Education explains that children lose their opportunity to grow up with their biological family. Children in foster care begin to grieve this loss as they realize they have lost something and begin to experience feelings of loss and grief. This is generally realized when the foster child is between the ages of 6-11 years of age. (Center for Adoption and Support Education, 2018).

The Director of Clinical Services of Fairfax County Government, Mari Itzkowitz, in conjunction with the Center for Adoption and Support Education also stress the additional grief factors among foster care children as the loss is less socially recognized, it can be lifelong, often has no connection with the loss figure, and there are no rituals to commemorate the loss. Amidst the grief factors are multiple losses that the child may experience and these [can] include "loss of culture, loss of religion, loss of racial connections, medical information, birth history, physical connections, siblings, and language" (Fairfax County Government, 2018). The ambiguous loss is devastating as there may be no resolution for an undetermined amount of time, if ever.

Foreclosure. The Federal Housing Finance Agency (2020) reported 493,066 foreclosed properties in 2019. The current report of foreclosed properties represents 0.36% of all U.S. housing units. In 2018, the Federal Housing Finance Agency reported 2.23% of all U.S. housing units were in foreclosure filings. As a general consideration for a grief response, there were over 1,000 foreclosed properties listed on a foreclosure listing website for the state of West Virginia. It is unclear if the 1,000 listings included all counties within the state, but it is notable that the verified listings alone are enough to impact families across the state. Students often feel a stigma surrounded by losing their homes. An exploratory study on the experiences of children under the age of 18 who had experienced a foreclosure determined that their personal and social identity was threatened, family relationships were harmed, routines were upended, and they suffered the emotional attachment and experiences of a loss (Collins & DeRigne, 2020).

National Public Radio (NPR) and Children's Health (2010) joined forces to look at the chaos caused in children when a home is foreclosed upon. In 2010, amidst the housing bubble burst the rate at which homes foreclosed was brought to the national

spotlight. At the time of the report, NPR reported that over 2 million children had been dealing with home foreclosures. The most notable data that appeared in the study conveyed children with two school changes in two years were half as likely to be proficient in reading and math. This is considering just a regular move. There is not enough information to determine if a foreclosure move is different from other moves.

Job Loss (of Parent or Provider). The United States Bureau of Labor Statistics reports, as of November 2020, the West Virginia unemployment rate is 6.9%. The national unemployment rate is 6.7%. While this number may be trending upward due to job loss pertaining to COVID-19 it is still a statistic that can impact families across West Virginia. The average unemployment rate for West Virginia has ranged from 3.6% (in September 2008) to 15.8% (in April 2020) according to the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Job loss is scary for kids too. While job loss results in financial insecurity, children depend upon their parents for emotional security. Job loss related stress trickles down to the school-aged child and manifests into insecurity if parents feel tense, upset, or strained from the financial difficulty. Grief responses in children when responding to a parent losing a job are noted as "sleeplessness, digestive disturbances, headaches, angry outbursts, and appetite changes" (NYU Child Study Center, 2020).

Grief Responses

Grieving can be very hard work for students. Grief affects many aspects of a student's life causing responses that may be out of character for the student. The effect can be found academically, socially, physically, emotionally, spiritually, and behaviorally. Students exhibit grief responses in a variety of ways. The effects on the academics of a student can include an inability to focus, poor quality of work, forgetfulness, increased absences, inattentiveness, and even failing or declining grades. The emotional effects can

range from fear, guilt, anger, rage, regret, depression, to an "I don't care about anything" attitude. The behavioral exhibits that arise from the grief response are noisy outbursts, disruptive behaviors, fighting, non-compliance to requests, isolation, high need for attention, and often the need for checking in on a surviving parent. The social implications stemming as effects of grief are withdrawal from friends, withdrawal from activities or sports, use of drugs or alcohol, changes in relationships with teachers and peers, changes in family roles (taking on the role of a parent), and stealing. The effects often lead to physical disruptions like stomachaches, headaches, low energy, nausea, and rapid heartbeat. In addition to those, it is not uncommon for students to request increased visits to the school nurse. The spiritual effects offer questions to a higher being – "Why me?" "Why now?" These are combined with anger at God, feelings of being alone in the universe, and questioning what is important (National Grief Center for Children and Families, 2020).

Grief in the Classroom

In an average classroom, there are at least two students in the class who are grieving the death of a loved one at any given time (Lawhon, 2004). While deaths alone constitute a good reason to begin to understand the training teachers receive about handling grief in the classroom, there are many more factors that contribute to a grief response. A study by Jon Reid and W. Dixon (1999) addressed how teachers handle grief in the classroom. The overall finding of the study suggested that teachers are currently uncomfortable discussing death. The findings ranged from different feelings based on the loss. For example, teachers who expressed being very to slightly comfortable discussing loss with an individual student ranged from 49% if it was a pet to 14% if it was a parent. Using the same measure from the study ranging from very comfortable to slightly

comfortable, when asked about addressing an entire class the number rose from 68% if it was a pet to 23% if it was a parent (Reid & Dixon, 1999).

Teachers are often the first to interact with children after the news of a death. Teachers experience the impact of the loss firsthand. If the grief response is to death, teachers are often caught off guard as much as students. Many teachers are handling the grieving process by allowing a release of feelings and encouraging students to journal, write letters, write poems, and have open discussions. Some teachers placed focus on lost academic time and redirection, stating that the role of the teacher is to keep the routine "as normal as possible" throughout the incident. While yet other teachers wanted to honor the memory, especially in the loss of a student and participated in exercises such as tree planting, balloon release, or a memorial plaque to be hung in the school. Teachers note the importance of counselors and overall indicate that counselors are helpful to their role in the classroom but feel that the response is always reactive and not proactive (Balk, Zaengle, & Corr, 2011).

Grief Training and Educational Theories

A survey conducted by the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) along with New York Life listed the following findings taken directly from an AFT Press Release:

- "92 percent of educators—including teachers, teacher assistants, counselors and staff—say childhood grief is a serious problem that deserves more attention from schools.

- 50 percent of classroom teachers gave their school a grade of C or lower for the job it does in helping them support grieving students.

- More than 2 in 5 teachers say their school pays more attention to the way students are dressed than to student grief.

- 93 percent of classroom teachers report never receiving bereavement training; only 3 percent say their district offers it.

- Less than half of educators report their school has a protocol for how to respond when a student experiences a close personal death" (American Federation of Teachers, 2012).

Crisis intervention in the public school system has determined the lack of training as an obstacle to the implementation (National Commission for Children and Disasters, 2010.) In a study of teachers who completed a crisis intervention training, Taylor and Hawkins (1991) found that of 161 teachers surveyed most were willing to intervene in a crisis if they had an understanding of the specific behaviors to look for rather than the types of the events that trigger the need for crisis intervention. The type of training is as important as the content (Sela-Shayovitz, 2009; Taylor & Hawkins, 1991). The teachers felt the training they received should have focused on the specific behaviors rather than the events.

Molnar-Stickels (1985) did a study using 20 teachers in which some were surveyed and others were placed into training in addition to the survey. The training consisted of a developmental framework that focused on grieving children's reactions and needs. The major difference between groups was the training group was able to discuss different ways to discuss things with grieving children and express their thoughts about death in general. The study concluded with surveys to each group. The training group expressed a better understanding of grief, how children conceptualize grief, and the resources available.

A training experience can enhance the ability to implement the knowledge gained, as concluded in a study by Hare and Cunningham (1988) "the knowledge alone did not

22

significantly. . . change attitudes and behaviors" (p.350). Several educational theories support training models, which increases the likelihood of implementation. The educational theories discussed in this section have strong support for being able to apply what is learned. The ability to attend training is far more effective when coupled with a model that increases applicability.

Erikson. Erik Erikson's Stages of Psychological Development have played a key role in the educational system. The eight stages are considered in the development of student psyche and social aspects from PreK through adulthood. This theory can be applied as a look into Stage 6. In Stage 6, Intimacy vs. Isolation, it is generally listed as age group from 18-40 years of age. If we apply the same classroom context to teacher training, a lot of teachers fall into this category. The description of Stage 6 in the Stages of Psychological Development focuses on students' progression to maintaining strong relationships with others. The other key factor in Erikson's stages is that he believes a sense of competence motivates not only behaviors but actions. Training used as a place to build competence increases the chances a person will act in the sense of what they have been trained to do (Miller, 1973).

Knowles. Knowles model of The Adult Learning Theory can also be used as a framework for grief training and the theory makes 5 assumptions about the adult learner:

1. Self-concept
2. Adult learner experience
3. Readiness to learn
4. Orientation to learning
5. Motivation to learn

The process is that a person moves from being a dependent person to a self-directed person. The person matures and uses experiences as a resource for learning. The person's readiness to learn becomes increasingly devoted to the tasks of his/her social roles. The devotion becomes an immediacy of application which means the focus can shift from one subject or need to another. The motivation to learn then becomes internal. In Knowles model, 4 principles should be applied to yield the most in adult learning – adults need to be involved in the planning and evaluation of their instruction, experience provides a basis for learning activities, the subject should have immediate relevance (in a job or personal life) and the learning is problem-centered, not content-centered (Kearsley, 2010).

Beyond the assumptions is the application of the knowledge obtained. In the Adult Learning Theory, there is a need to explain why the information is being taught and to keep the learning task-oriented and focused on common tasks. In an adult learner situation, the instruction should allow learners to discover things, but guidance needs to be offered (Knowles, 1984). Bringing Knowles Theory and Erikson's Theory into further perspective, the training for handling grief in the classroom when delivered to teachers could use either of the theoretical frameworks to promote knowledge and success in implementation in the classroom. This would lead to a desirable question in the research – how are West Virginia teachers trained to handle grief in the classroom?

Maslow. In Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, there is a prioritization of needs where the lower basic needs such as food and shelter, must be met before higher needs can be accomplished such as self-actualization. In describing self-actualization, Maslow (1943) said:

Self-actualization. . . . refers to the desire for self-fulfillment. This tendency might be

phrased as the desire to become more and more what one is, to become

everything that one is capable of becoming (p. 375).

This prioritization of needs can be aligned when working with grief in the classroom. Often

the physical effects of grief can cause physiological disruptions – the student may be

unable to eat or unable to sleep. Popular trauma therapies such as Eye Movement

Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR) equate to meeting those basic needs by

focusing on the physical, then behavioral, cognitive, and emotional (Wilson, 1997).

Bandura. Albert Bandura has derived much meaning from the social learning

theory. Bandura (1986) explains that people do not always behave as they should even

when they know what to do. Bandura also uses the social learning theory to give

understanding to the insight that students may not always be grieving healthily. The social

learning theory (Bandura, 1978) could be used as a framework for school faculty, staff,

counselors, and parents to demonstrate healthy ways to grieve (McGlaufilin, 1998; Willis,

2002). Students are representative of their environments and react to social, emotional,

and physical cues from their environment and how they have been taught or perceived to

react.

Grief Training Supports and Challenges

Grief in any form, but especially related to death often becomes a difficult topic to

address. Cullinan (1990) found that 46% of teachers reported a low confidence level in

handling grief and cited discomfort with the topic or fear of doing the wrong thing as

reasons for a low self-confidence report. This discomfort with dealing with the topic could

be a detriment when not trained properly or not trained at all. This reluctance of sort also

indicates a teacher may choose avoidance as the proper implementation tool when they

are not comfortable dealing with it (Schonfeld, Lichetenstein, Kline-Pruett, & Speese-Linehan, 2002).

The importance of an accessible training process and a systematic process of support is that grief is not a sequential process that children get through in a specified time. Grief is an evolving form of expression. As a child begins to grieve, they may develop more complicated grief reactions, and this can occur over some time. Worden and Silverman (1996) used behavior checklists and found that children who grieved the death of a parent were more likely to show complicated grief reactions in the second year after the grievable event. This latter expression resulted in the authors determining that the ongoing support and processes in place for grieving children were inadequate. Training for teachers as the child moves through different grade levels should include long-term plans and support both teacher and student (Sandler, Wolchik, & Ayers, 2008).

Counselors. Counselors serve as a support system for any crisis interventions or any of the grief triggering events. Most mental health professionals need more specialized training regarding grief awareness (Knox & Roberts, 2005). Research has indicated that school counselors and school psychologists lack specific training for grief awareness and crisis intervention (Adamson & Peacock, 2007; Allen, Burt, Bryan, Carter, & Durkan, 2002). Counselors and psychologists within the school system report that their training consisted of an educational course that touched on the subject of death and dying. An overwhelming majority also report that the depth of their knowledge comes from personal private studies, conferences, or seminars (Adamson & Peacock, 2007; Allen, Jerome, et al., 2002).

This could lead back to the discomfort in dealing with the topic as a detriment when not trained properly or not trained at all. This could create a reluctance of sort with the

counselor, who is typically support for the teacher, and the counselor similar to a teacher may choose avoidance as the proper implementation tool when they are not comfortable dealing with it (Schonfeld, Lichetenstein, Kline-Pruett, & Speese-Linehan, 2002).

Supports. There are supports for teachers in dealing with grief in the classroom. Each locale or district has different measures of support. There are a few common threads of support throughout the United States. A library of resources about grief and loss is generally widely available to teachers, students, and staff. A school counselor is often direct support for teachers handling grief in the classroom. School culture also played an important role in the support system. Many school crisis response protocols reinforce the counselor role regarding grief responses, which leaves the teacher feeling restricted in what they should do in the classroom (Black, 2005).

It is important for administrators, counselors, and psychologists to collaborate to implement a training program that allows faculty members to develop confidence and clarity in how to interact with a grieving student. Many studies address the inadequate training of school faculty when dealing with grieving students (Adamson & Peacock, 2007; Allen, Burt, Bryan, Carter, & Durkan, 2002; Allen, Jerome, et al., 2002; Aspinall, 1996; Munson & Hunt, 2005; Pratt, Hare, & Wright, 2001; Reid & Dixon, 1999). The inadequacies seem aligned to the level of interaction teachers have with students. While teachers work closely with students daily and often know their students better than anyone else within the educational system, counselors and psychologists are typically trained to work with grieving students, but teachers are not often given that type of training.

At any one given time, an average of two students per classroom is grieving the loss of a loved one (Glass, 1991). In addition to death, the many other factors that trigger

a grief response maintain high incidence rates too. It is important to recall that grief is a response and can also be felt by students who are injured and no longer play a major sport, who have a close friend move away, or a variety of other triggers (Charkow, 1998).

While much of the research concurs that it is beneficial for schools to have a set plan in place for grieving students (Aspinall, 1996; Munson & Hunt, 2005) the research mainly offers suggestions and it is little developed as far as a curriculum that can be used. A suggestion put forth is to have schools teach the concept of death to students to better prepare them to handle and understand their own emotions (Aspinalll, 1996; Lawhon, 2004; McGlauflin, 1998).

A study regarding a brief instructional unit in death education was conducted at the elementary level (Molnar-Stickels, 1985). The study focused on implementing a death education instructional unit into an elementary health class using prospective elementary school teachers. The study revealed that in addition to helping students understand perceptions of death, the study also assisted future teachers in being more comfortable discussing death with children. The results effectively changed how the prospective teachers interacted with the students and would handle grief in the classroom.

Challenges. Teachers often feel they must place their feelings of grief on hold to fulfill their professional role (especially when dealing with the death of a student), managing one's grief while assisting children with their grief is not generally included in teacher preparation studies (Rowling, 1995). A study of early childhood teachers (Pratt, Hare, & Wright, 1987) found that a majority of the teachers in the study felt completely unprepared [or minimally prepared] to deal with grief in the classroom. The study focused particularly on dealing with death and dying in the classroom. The study concluded that teacher attitudes impacted their ability to offer assistance. The study revealed that

teachers with more training felt more comfortable and were more likely to actively deal with questions from students when they asked about death. Reid and Dixon (1999) expanded on the study conducted by Pratt, Hare, & Wright (1987) to include teachers of older students. The study showed teacher religion as a factor in determining teacher ability to deal with death in the classroom. In the Reid and Dixon (1999) study this was termed as approach acceptance. "There is some evidence that fear of death is lowest in people who have either strong faith or no faith," (Wong, Reker, & Gesser, 1994, p.127). Another highly considered factor in the Reid and Dixon (1999) study was death avoidance. Teachers used avoiding the topic altogether as a coping mechanism.

Teachers often feel their training has not sufficiently prepared them to support students through the grieving process (Reid & Dixon, 1999). There is a mismatched problem of practice with the grief response being a legitimate response to many different variables. As previously discussed, a majority of school-aged children across the United States will be impacted by an event that will trigger a grief response. Similarities have been drawn between grief and reactions to divorce (Sandler, Wolchick, & Ayers, 2008), exposure to violence (Pynoos, Goenjian, & Steinberg, 1998), and natural disasters. Teachers are concerned they may not recognize the grief components of all the different circumstances that trigger a grief response. These responses often unfold in the classroom and teachers are unaware of the long trajectory the grieving process can have, as Worden and Silverman (1996) discovered that it could take as long as two years to even manifest in some children.

National Center for School Crisis and Bereavement Teacher Training Program

The National Center for School Crisis and Bereavement (2020) has assisted schools and communities throughout the United States in supporting students through

crisis and loss. The National Center for School Crisis and Bereavement (NCSCB) is an interdisciplinary team of doctors, mental health professionals and school professionals that offers training for school staff and teachers. The NCSCB offers confidential on-site (or remote) consultation for K-12 leadership. The NCSCB provides ongoing support after a crisis or throughout a grief response that is considered a long-term recovery period. The NCSCB offers educational resources along with crisis management tools to ensure their dedication to grieving students. The educational materials along with expert consultation and training for school professionals help prepare for crisis events.

The National Center for School Crisis and Bereavement was initially established in 2005 to provide training, technical assistance, and consultation to schools and communities who were either preparing for or recovering from the crisis.

The NCSCB has been able to add new programs and initiatives to include the Coalition to Support Grieving Students. The Coalition to Support Grieving Students is a collaboration of teachers, principals, superintendents, school board members, central office staff, school counselors, school nurses, school psychologists, school social workers and other support personnel who have one thing in common which is the belief that grieving students need the support and care of the school community. The purpose of the Coalition to Support Grieving Students (The Coalition) is to create and share a set of industry-endorsed resources that will empower school communities across the United States to support grieving students. The Coalition recognizes a current gap in the availability of resources to help educators support and care for grieving students. The Coalition states the reason they exist and the plight of their organization as (their direct self-description):

Childhood bereavement is all too common: in the United States, approximately one

in 20 children will lose a parent by the time they reach 16 years of age and the vast

majority of children experience a significant loss by the time they complete high

school. Yet grieving children are vastly overlooked—both in society at large and in

schools in particular. Schools have a critical role to play in the grief journeys of

children who have lost a loved one. Teachers' and classmates' responses to a

student's grief can either serve as a source of support and stability during a difficult

time or as an additional hurdle to surmount. Moreover, grief can have a serious

impact on learning for school-age children; bereavement can manifest itself in

decreased academic performance, social withdrawal, and behavioral problems

(The Coalition to Support Grieving Students, 2020, paras. 3-4).

The Coalition offers teacher training regarding grief in the classroom. The training

is a specific teacher training placed in modules that contain three parts. Each module

builds on understanding how to cope with grief in the classroom. Module 1 helps the

teacher along with all school staff understand the experience of a grieving student. This

module includes information about a child's conceptualization of death. Module 2 gives

practical suggestions about initiating the conversation with a student and how to offer

support to a grieving student. Module 3 presents practical guidance regarding resources

to help in assisting a grieving child. The specific 3 module teacher training can be

completed in addition to other modules titled *Impact on Learning*, *Guilt & Shame*, *Other

Reactions*, and *Grief Triggers*. This training is available nationwide as a self-paced study

or as a group presentation.

The Coalition to Support Grieving Students is an outreach of the National Center

for School Crisis and Bereavement and is another accessible tool to assist teachers in

handling grief in the classroom. The Coalition along with the NCSCB is focused on grieving students who have experienced a death.

The National Association of School Psychologists

The National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) maintains a list of specific "to-do" items when handling a grieving student. The tips are broken down into age groups beginning with preschool, elementary school, and middle and high school are together. The following fact sheet with 8 specific checklist items to address when dealing with a grieving student is listed under Resources and Publications in *Addressing Grief* on the NASP mental health resources website and is taken directly from their Brief Facts and Tips sheet:

1. Grief is not solely related to the death of a loved one. The symptoms, characteristics, and process of grieving can be similar after other types of loss (e.g., divorce, transition, moving).

2. Grief is personal. There is no right or wrong way to grieve. How people grieve can be influenced by developmental level, cultural traditions, religious beliefs, mental health, disabilities, family, personal characteristics, and previous experiences.

3. Grief is often characterized by sadness, emotional pain, and introspection in adults. However, children's grief reactions differ according to age and developmental level:

- Preschool - Regressive behaviors, decreased verbalization, increased anxiety
- Elementary - Decreased academic performance, attention/concentration, and attendance; irritability, aggression, and disruptive behaviors; somatic complaints; sleep/eating disturbances; social withdrawal; guilt, depression, and anxiety; repeated re-telling of the event

- Middle and High School - Decreased academic performance, attention/concentration, and attendance; avoidance, withdrawal, high-risk behaviors or substance abuse, difficulty with peer relations, nightmares, flashbacks, emotional numbing or depression

4. Grieving does not have a timeline. Schools should be aware of anniversaries, birthdays, developmental milestones, and other factors that could affect students months or years after the loss.

5. Grieving involves meeting specific milestones. Individuals are likely to experience (and often re-experience) some or all of the following adjustments/responses:

- Accepting the death

- Experiencing the feelings and emotional pain associated with death and separation from the deceased

- Adjusting to changes and an altered environment that no longer includes the deceased

- Finding ways to remember and memorialize the deceased

6. Grieving is a normal response to loss but may require some support. Additional assistance should be provided when the following are noted:

- Marked loss of interest in daily activities

- Changes in eating and sleeping habits

- Wishing to be with the deceased loved one

- Fear of being alone

- Significant decreases in academic performance and achievement

- Increased somatic complaint

- Changes in attendance patterns (e.g., chronic absenteeism)

7. Things to avoid:

- Euphemisms when referring to the deceased such as "they are sleeping," or "they went away"

- Minimizing statements such as "it was only your great-grandmother, (or dog, neighbor, etc.)"

- Predicting a timeframe to complete the grieving process such as, "it has been a month, you should be getting over this," or "the pain will fade soon"

- Over-identifying, (e.g., "I know how you feel")

- Too much self-disclosure (e.g., I lost my mom to cancer) as not everyone handles self-disclosure the same way and the focus should remain on the student's grief

8. Things to do:

- Maintain routines as normal as possible

- Ask questions to ascertain the youth's understanding of the event and emotional state

- Give the youth permission to grieve

- Provide age and developmentally-appropriate answers

- Connect the bereaved with helping professionals and other trusted mentors and adults

- Encourage students to adopt adaptive coping strategies, particularly ones that will involve interaction with other students (e.g., sports, clubs)

- Educate teachers and families about what is healthy grief and how to support the student (The National Association of School Psychologists, 2020).

West Virginia Department of Education Teacher Training

The West Virginia Department of Education (WVDE) eLearning for West Virginia Educators offers courses for teacher training. None of the courses listed on the current calendar offered training based on grief, death, bereavement, or trauma. There was a total of 39 courses listed on the training calendar (West Virginia Department of Education, 2020). The West Virginia Department of Education does offer a myriad of ways to assist in planning for crisis, prevention, and response. The Health and Grief Incidents plan is designed to assist school administrators, teachers, and crisis team members to respond to the needs of students and staff after a loss has impacted the school environment. The loss is listed as the death of a student or staff member, or when the death affects many people in the community. There is a specific protocol to follow for the death of a student or staff member. The protocol states a fact sheet of information should be prepared and that teachers should be notified as soon as possible and should be provided with information regarding what happened, how to deal with grieving students, and how students or staff can get support. The event aid sheet further states that faculty who feel they cannot discuss the situation with their class should have a Crisis Response Team member assigned to them (West Virginia Department of Education, 2020).

The West Virginia Department of Education (WVDE) also provides a manual *Addressing Mental Health in School Crisis Prevention & Response* (WVDE, 2020). The manual contains a Teacher/Counselor Training Resource section which provides a link to the Mayo Clinic portal for help with grief. There are specific charts regarding Suicide Response that give a clear checklist for the Crisis Response Team, there are other charts about other events. A rubric is given in Appendix 1.7 of the manual that states the activity and accommodations after the crisis, calling for a debrief with families and other

stakeholders requesting debriefing be explained along with expected emotional responses, best practices, and crisis response resources. The person tasked with completing this according to the manual is the School Mental Health Crisis Response Team (WVDE, 2020).

Each school should have a School Mental Health Crisis Response Team (SMHCRT). The SMHCRT should be ready to respond in the event of a crisis and should be trained in crisis triage and mental health interventions. The West Virginia Department of Education uses the Maryland School Psychologist Association Crisis Team Resource Guide to develop the three stages of the response process: triage, evaluation, and response interventions (low, moderate, or high-risk). The response process is geared toward crisis response (WVDE, 2020).

Additional information in the Appendix of "Addressing Mental Health in School Crisis Prevention" (DIX 1.3) lists brainstorming objectives and tasks the Mental Health Crisis Planning Team with prompts but suggests each one is developed into individual goals for each specific school. The target prompts are improving the school environment, zero suicides, reducing bullying, sexting, and social media awareness, preventing substance abuse, and reducing school violence. There is no specific mention of grief, but several items of concern would fall into one or more of the triggers of grief categories (WVDE, 2020).

The Crisis Response Plan states that the WVDE in conjunction with Homeland Security and Emergency Management lays out the requirements for school-specific School Crisis Prevention and Response Plans. The plan lays out eight major steps:

1. Creation of the Crisis Response Planning Team
2. Creation of the Crisis Response Team

3. Creation of the Mental Health Crisis Response Team

4. Identification of community resources, including mental health officers

5. Identification of vulnerable students and staff

6. Scheduled exercises or drills

7. Education of the School Crisis Response Team and the School Mental Health Crisis Response Team

8. Annual training of school staff on procedures, practices, policies, and protocols, including training and orientation of new staff (Crisis Response Plan, 2020).

The WVDE also provides the West Virginia Mental Health/Technical Assistance Center to provide professional learning opportunities about trauma to equip school staff to support students, families, and each other. The focus of this is student behavior/mental health needs.

The WVDE has a Child Trauma Toolkit for Educators that was adopted from The National Child Traumatic Stress Network. The project was undertaken and funded by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration in conjunction with the US Department of Health and Human Services. The National Child Traumatic Stress Network has a primary mission of raising the standard of care and increasing access to services for traumatized children and their families (National Child Traumatic Stress Network Schools Committee, 2008). The research includes tips for educators and lists childhood traumatic stress as events where children and adolescents are exposed to traumatic events to the point the exposure overwhelms their ability to cope. This study is specifically targeted to situations where children feared for their lives, believed they could have been injured, witnessed violence, or tragically lost a loved one (Child Trauma Toolkit for Educators, 2008).

Summary

The practices in place to train teachers on handling grief in the classroom and the support measures for teachers to use to assist in the process are nearly as far spread as the elements of grief itself. It is unclear exactly how teachers in West Virginia are trained to handle grief in the classroom. While it does seem there are measures in place it seems more fragmented by departments than having any continuity across the state. This study will determine how West Virginia teachers are trained to handle grief in the classroom.

There are many challenges that teachers face when dealing with grief in the classroom. The challenges range from identifying grief responses to taking the appropriate action in meeting the need of the grief response. The challenges discovered in this literature review were based widely on national responses to surveys and studies conducted throughout the United States. This study will hone in specifically on the challenges West Virginia teachers face when dealing with grief in the classroom.

This study will also further explore the process in place within the West Virginia Educational System to assist and support teachers when dealing with grief in the classroom. The literature review revealed several components but seemingly appeared to fall on school districts or individual schools in some places to put the measures in place. This study will seek to find any continuity among the West Virginia schools about the support processes.

CHAPTER 3 METHODS

This chapter represents a study that examined the training teachers received to address students who are experiencing grief in the classroom. The study also sought to determine how the educational system further supported teachers in implementing the training. This study also gathered information about the challenges teachers faced when dealing with grief in the classroom. This chapter provides an explanation of the research design, the participants, and the data collection and analysis methods.

The research potential was to identify any successes or gaps in the process teachers utilize to facilitate or manage grief in the classroom. The research also sought to understand the extent of grief in the classroom from the teacher's perspective. This study focused on grief but also categorized emergent themes based on interviews.

This study provided insight into how West Virginia teachers are trained to handle grief in the classroom to ensure students are healthily coping with grief. The research aimed at creating knowledge about the process, which resulted in successful bereavement approaches for teachers in the classroom.

Research Design

Due to the exploratory and emotional nature of this research, a qualitative study was the best option to move forward (Merriam, 2009). The qualitative study helped clarify the how and why in addressing grief in the classroom. There was a need to understand the experiences and attitudes of the professionals in the classroom. The teachers in the classroom may or may not have been trained to handle grief. The teachers may or may not have had insight into the factors that cause grief as a response. The teachers gave insight into the circumstances around the grief response, even if they did not recognize it at the time as a grief response. In this phenomenological research, the aim was to identify

the essence of a phenomenon through an individual's experience of that phenomenon (Bazeley, 2013). The unique expression and dealing with grief lent to the phenomenological study.

Teachers from across the state of West Virginia who was employed in a K-12 classroom were interviewed with a specific list of questions. Additional questions were asked if further information or deeper understanding was needed, but all participants were asked the same specific list of questions. Teachers were interviewed using virtual rooms (i.e.. Zoom) online. All interviews were recorded, transcribed, and sent back to the teacher for confirmation of approval.

Participants

The participants were full-time K-12 teachers in the West Virginia public school system. The participants were chosen using a stratified purposeful sampling method. The participants were gained by seeking volunteers from the elementary, middle, and high schools across the state of West Virginia by requesting volunteers within a private social group *West Virginia Public Employees UNITE*. The group is a private discussion forum for teachers across the state to communicate on issues related to the teaching profession that range from insurance questions to specific curriculum in the classroom. All participants were solely volunteers.

Research Questions

Due to the phenomenological nature and purposeful sampling, the study initially began with three broad questions. These were continued as the study progressed.

Q1: What training have West Virginia teachers had concerning grief in the classroom?

Q2: What are the challenges teachers face when dealing with grief in the classroom?

Q3: What processes are in place for the educational system to support teachers to handle grief in the classroom?

Interview Questions

Interviews began by collecting the interviewee's name, ages, gender, several years of teaching, school name, and location; all of which will be kept confidential. The specific interview questions were asked of all teachers but may have included new or additional questions based on answers given during the interview. The following questions were asked during each interview:

1. How do you define grief?

2. How do you think your students would define grief?

3. How do you know if your student(s) are grieving?

4. When your students are grieving, what type of behaviors do you notice?

5. What plan is in place to inform you, the teacher, of a grieving student?

6. Once you are informed, what plan is in place to notify the rest of the student body (or your classes)?

7. Describe your experience in dealing with grief in the classroom. (Tell your story. Who was involved? What happened? What did you do? What did the students do? How did students react?)

8. Consider your classroom learning objectives and outcomes: When a student is grieving, what impact, if any, do you think it has on classroom learning outcomes?

9. What type of training, if any, have you been offered or able to take in dealing with grief in the classroom? (Was it offered by the school? Outside source)

10. Did you have or were offered any type of training involving grief in the classroom during your teacher pre-service?

11. Was the training, if any, scheduled based on a reaction to an occurrence or something that was already planned?

12. Were you ever offered training in dealing with grief in the classroom that you declined to attend?

13. How prepared do you feel to handle grief in the classroom?

14. When a student experiences grief, how could the school system better support you in handling the situation?

Data Collection

The researcher used a stratified purposeful sampling method. A stratified method is a common form of purposeful sampling. To use the purposeful sampling method strategy, the researcher requested volunteers to participate in the study from the private social group, *West Virginia Public Employees UNITE*. The researcher purposefully chose respondents to interview using those who were an acceptable representation of areas across the state of West Virginia. The forum resulted in several respondents, but the researcher interviewed a maximum of 15 which represented an overall sample across the State of West Virginia. All participants were read the verbal consent and notified that they are not required to answer questions and may stop at any time.

Face-to-face interviews were the primary source of data collection. Those were completed online using virtual rooms through Zoom. Interviews were conducted in places with minimal distractions. Most questions were open-ended which was paramount in keeping with the nature of the phenomenological study.

The participants were read the verbal consent at the beginning of each interview. The researcher answered any questions of the participant during that time. If at any time the participant did not wish to answer a question, they had the right to skip the question, stop the conversation, or stop the interview.

The researcher informed the participants about the purpose of the study and why it was important. Each interviewee was assigned a unique identification number by the researcher to maintain anonymity. The number protected the confidentiality of the participant. If any participant referenced their county within the interview, all counties were coded in the final research findings to keep anonymity. The only person who knows which teachers participated in the interviews is the researcher. At no time were participant names, personal information, or school identifications given out. Confidentiality was strictly protected.

The use of structured questions was used to collect demographic data. This consisted of age, gender, location, years teaching, and grade level taught. The semi-structured questions assisted in data collection.

The interviews were recorded on two high-quality recording devices. Two devices were used to act as insurance in case one of the recording devices malfunctioned. Once the data was recorded, the researcher transcribed the data via transcription software (NVivo Version 12, QSR International, Melbourne, Australia). The digital data was then transformed into a printable form as a PDF file. The researcher emailed the PDF files to each participant to read and verify the data was correct. The participants sent the verified data back to the researcher, and the researcher analyzed the verified data.

Data Analysis

Within the phenomenological research framework, the notion to depict the basic structure of the experience (Merriam, 2009) and to bring forth facts from everyday life and social action (Schram, 2003) lent to the emergent themes that were used to code the data which began after the first interview. The data underwent constant comparative analysis to determine the thematic network of the data.

NVivo software was used to assist in the development of trends and themes from the interviews. In this study, the researcher simply used computer-assisted software as an organizational tool. The codified data was placed into conceptual themes based on the teacher's experience.

CHAPTER 4 RESULTS

This chapter presents the findings of this phenomenological study through the collection and analysis of the data using the constant comparative method. Through the analysis of data, themes emerged. Through the continued analysis of the themes, gaps were discovered and will be discussed further in the subsequent sections of this chapter. A full exploration of emergent themes allows for the complete phenomenological study to be captured in teacher experiences. In phenomenological research, the aim is to identify the essence of a phenomenon through an individual's experience of that phenomenon (Bazeley, 2013). The researcher provided the information garnered to substantiate the phenomenon of grief in the classroom, some of its triggers, and the experiences of each teacher interviewed.

Implementing the Methodology

After receiving approval from the IRB of Marshall University (See Appendix A), the author implemented the protocols, procedures, and processes discussed in Chapter 3. The collection of data began on May 1, 2021. The formal conclusion of data collection ended on July 3, 2021. All data were collected by face-to-face interviews using Zoom rooms.

Central to the results section is the focus of the research questions. The research questions were focused on the teacher's experience with grief, the classroom experience with grief, and the training mechanisms to handle grief in the classroom, thus fulfilling the phenomenology of the teacher's experience. The research questions served as a guide to furthering the understanding of the study. As any phenomenological study allows, the researcher had the prerogative to move into various aspects and inclinations as the constant comparative analysis unfolded (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Thus, the research

questions provided an inductive starting point that led to a more substantial understanding of the experiences.

Restating the Research Questions

As context and a reminder, the following were the research questions for this phenomenological study:

Q1: What training have West Virginia teachers had concerning grief in the classroom?

Q2: What are the challenges teachers face when dealing with grief in the classroom?

Q3: What processes are in place for the educational system to support teachers to handle grief in the classroom?

Teacher Profiles Within the Study

There were a total of 12 participants. They were from eight different counties across West Virginia. They ranged in grade level from kindergarten to twelfth grade. A brief introduction to the participants based on teacher experience, grade level, county, and memoing is included. The decision was made to purposefully leave out certain aspects of the participants to ensure anonymity.

Teacher 1: Teacher 1 in County A currently teaches kindergarten. She explains her experiences with grief as a person who has dealt with the loss of a husband and a child in her own life. She sees children grieving at her school, and sometimes in her classroom.

Researcher's Memo on Teacher 1: The following entry provides some key aspects of memoing, reflection, the interview with Teacher 1, and thinking as it relates to Teacher 1. Teacher 1 is a former nurse who pursued teaching as a second career. Her familiarity

with grief, especially from the aspect of death, is understood on a personal level. Teacher 1 states that grief is a loss and then describes loss to her personally as:

> "I've lost a child. I've lost a husband and I've lost a mother. Through different situations, like losing the baby, it was something that was out of my control. Well, all of it was out of my control, but it was with preeclampsia and I was 20 weeks of gestation and, you know, it was either deliver and or if I didn't deliver, we would lose me and him both."

This personal account of dealing with grief through loss, she believes, helps her in the classroom when dealing with a student who is experiencing grief.

Teacher 2: Teacher 2 in County B is the teacher of a fourth-grade classroom. Her description of grief includes loss but she believes it doesn't necessarily have to be a loss of life. When asked to define grief she states:

> "I think grief, a lot of times it, is a loss but it doesn't necessarily have to be a loss of life. The feeling that they have lost something in some way and usually a feeling of sadness that goes along with that is how I would kind of define grief."

Researcher's Memo on Teacher 2: Teacher 2 has had experience with grief in her classroom. Teacher 2 is willing to help students in the classroom and took a training course called "Capturing Kid's Hearts". This was training provided by an outside company that revolves around trust. Teacher 2 uses components of it in her classroom but reinforces that it would be more effective as a school-wide initiative and not just a single classroom. She previously worked in County Y and an outside company came in for this training and it was implemented in this school, but not her current school. She has received no training at her current school which is in County B.

Teacher 3: Teacher 3 in County C teaches English to both 11th and 12th-grade students. Teacher 3 cites grief as being a "broader spectrum than maybe we give it credit for" and continues to explain grief as any type of loss. She further explains a personal experience she had with two students in her school, one of which was in her classroom.

Student 1 had a sibling, Student 2. Student 2 passed away with cancer, leaving Student 1 to deal with the grief of the loss. Teacher 3 feels like not only was she and the school system a failure in addressing that issue but further explains how Student 2 developed PTSD as a result of losing her sibling. Teacher 3 describes the experience:

> "About two months after Student 2 died, I was no longer the wonderful teacher that was doing great things because I didn't understand it. I was looking at grief and the loss of a sibling. I don't know what that's like on a personal level, but Student 1 developed PTSD with the loss of her sibling. So it wasn't just typical grief and sadness, but she had PTSD. They didn't disclose that to us then. And even if they had, I was so ignorant of mental health stuff at that point in my career, I wouldn't have understood the impact of PTSD on learning and academics. So early on in my career, I dealt with grief in the classroom and had some wins in some areas and failed miserably and others."

Researcher's Memo on Teacher 3: Teacher 3 has insight about lasting effects of grief after experiencing a student grieving a loss then developing PTSD. As a result, she obtained a mental health first aid certification. This certification is not offered through the school but she obtained it through Marshall University through a grant-funded project. She expresses that COVID has brought to the forefront the importance of addressing issues of mental health and grief.

Teacher 4: Teacher 4 in County D teaches Career and Technical Courses for a local high school that includes grades 11 and 12. Teacher 4 defines grief as "the process that people go through after losing someone or something that's very close to them that they hold dear to them." She describes being very in tune with her students as she is with them for 8 hours each day and not in 45- or 50-minute increments as typical high school class periods might be.

Researcher's Memo on Teacher 4: Teacher 4 is unaware of any set plan in place to notify teachers if anything grief-related is going on with a student. She would guess that it

would be more suited to a family would notify the school or that she would hear through word of mouth and even social media. She describes less of a protocol, but more teacher-led or teacher-inspired decision making.

Teacher 5: Teacher 5 is a high school special education teacher in County E. Teacher 5 describes her high school as one in a small, rural community and describes grief as losing someone. She further describes an experience she had that involved a student in a car accident. The student passed away and other students were finding out about it on social media before the start of the school day. She describes the experience:

> "What we do with that situation is we talked to the students on our own because they already came in knowing about it. Most of them did find out about it. We would try to calm them down as best as we could. Then the guidance counselors and the school psychologist were called in. We don't get any training for that at the beginning of the school year. That's just something, like at my school when it happens, we just think on our feet. Then we depend a lot on the guidance counselors and the school psychologist to come in from the county because of their training for it. So we just started to do our best to calm the students down and be there for the students."

Researcher's Memo on Teacher 5: Teacher 5 explains a need for training, but also describes the staff and group at school coming together to help. Teacher 5 has experienced grief in the classroom on several occasions. Two experiences were students in the school, another experience directly impacted her classroom. A student in her classroom lost both of his parents at the same time in a car accident.

Teacher 6: Teacher 6 is a middle school teacher in County F. This is the last year of teaching for Teacher 6 and she will retire. Teacher 6 describes several events of grief throughout her tenure as a teacher. She describes grief as a "loss or suffering a student is going through." She has had students pass away, dealing with students who have lost a

grandparent, and also has experienced the death of another teacher who worked in the same building, a co-worker.

Researcher's Memo on Teacher 6: Teacher 6 explains her journey through different schools in her career and describes the leadership of the school as either a support or deterrent when it comes to grief in the classroom. She describes the experience of losing a teacher friend who was well known and retired in County F. Teacher 6 explains the scenario with leadership:

> "A group of us asked the principal if we could put condolences to the family of this particular teacher who passed away, or something on the outdoor marquee sign just thanking the deceased teacher for the years she spent in our building. To our surprise, the principal would not let us. She pretty much reprimanded us and told us it was against some sort of county policy. Which we later learned, there was no such policy."

Teacher 7: Teacher 7 is a 5th-grade teacher in County F. She describes grief as a loss, change, or sadness among her students. She states that she is newer to 5th grade and while she has not knowingly experienced grief in her classroom she attributes it to lack of communication. She clarifies with this:

> "What I mean by that is I had a student all year, and with COVID, and all this going on he was so disruptive and I hate to say but sometimes just mean. I kept thinking about this kid…what is wrong with this kid. I try to be supportive but you know sometimes you are just like what in the world. I found out, after school went out, that his mom had just left him. I felt so bad. How could I not know that?"

Researcher's Memo on Teacher 7: Teacher 7 describes a lack of communication from those with more information than a teacher has access to. She was truly bothered by not knowing this about her student. She explained that she tried to be patient and supportive with the student, but had she known more details she may have been able to offer different supports. She also mentions the importance of acknowledging the grief and

how sometimes that is not done within the school system, school itself, or even the classroom.

    Teacher 8: Teacher 8 is a high school math teacher in County G. Teacher 8 works in a school in a more affluent neighborhood than most of the rural area schools but still describes grief as a major concern.

"At the high school level, students are experiencing a lot in today's world. When you think about grief and what kids are exposed to, I mean it could include death, drugs, job change, neighborhood moves, just anything like that."

    Researcher's Memo on Teacher 8: Teacher 8 is very open to helping students through grief. Teacher 8 has never taken nor been offered any training about grief in the classroom. Teacher 8 states there is often no communication regarding when a student is experiencing grief. The school where Teacher 8 works use the Handle with Care messaging.

    Teacher 9: Teacher 9 is a middle school teacher in County A. Teacher 9 describes grief through one of his own experiences of a student who committed suicide during his eighth-grade year. The teacher described the event as chaotic. He stated that students were finding out about it during lunchtime as it was posted to social media and the students gained the information from Instagram, Snap Chat, and other forums.

"It was difficult because the students returned from lunch and knew about it, but none of the teachers knew yet. The administration decided to 'shut down the chatter'. We were not allowed to discuss it or allow the students to discuss it. It was hard, the students were just scared and needed guidance."

    Researcher's Memo on Teacher 9: Teacher 9 has taught for 18 years in the school system. He has experienced many facets of grief during his time in the school system. He noted the student who killed themselves. He also discussed a coach in the community who had passed away several years ago and the devastating impact on the school.

Teacher 10: Teacher 10 is a 6th-grade teacher in County G. Teacher 10 describes grief as an outlet for students. "It is a way for students to handle what happened. I would say crying is grieving." Teacher 10 states that her administration is very supportive, but oftentimes the administration does not have access to the things they need to help students. She explains that her school has not set a protocol for dealing with grief "other than sending all the counselors from other schools to our school."

Researcher's Memo on Teacher 10: Teacher 10 expresses the need for overall communication and county and state boards to support individual schools. She describes her school as having a reactionary response when it comes to dealing with students in grief.

Teacher 11: Teacher 11 is a high school science teacher in County H. This teacher explains grief as "a way to validate one's feelings." Teacher 11 further explains that "Grief can consist of many facets and emotions."

"A student in grief may express their grief in many ways. Let's say one could be crying, and crying every day but another student you may never know they are grieving on the outside. Maybe that student goes home and uses a punching bag. That action can still be grief."

Researcher's Memo on Teacher 11: Teacher 11 believes grief can be a wide variety of things and that dealing with that pain can be expressed in just as wide a variety of things. Teacher 11 thinks grief impacts the classroom he is in and he thinks sometimes he does not even know the full extent his students suffer. He notes that communication is key and often the one thing that does not happen.

Teacher 12: Teacher 12 is a middle school science teacher in County G. Teacher 12 explains grief in a broad sense.

"A lot of times people attribute grief to death specifically, but I think grief goes with any type of loss. Whether you're looking at a loss of, as far as students are concerned, a loss of income in the family that can cause grief, or loss of loved ones or pets or any major life shift really can cause grief. You may not even realize that's what you're experiencing until somebody is nice enough to point it out to you."

Researcher's Memo on Teacher 12: Teacher 12 is very embracing about the idea of having her classroom be a safe, nonjudgmental place for students. She expresses students need time to grieve, no matter what life shift has occurred but also expresses teachers need time for this grief too.

Emergent Themes

Phenomenological studies are important to emergent themes. As participants discuss their experiences, certain phenoms overlap in the overall experience. The relationships between the themes, the classrooms, and the overall experience give a better understanding of the overall study.

The themes were developed using the phenomenological approach. The phenomenological approach was specifically chosen to not only explore the themes which developed but also to allow further delving and questioning into those themes. The researcher was able to explore methodologies provided by the nature of the phenomenological study by exploring social phenomenon (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) of grief in the classroom. The phenomenological basis of this study was the only methodology that fully allows the development of these themes given the nature of the study – grief.

The questions used in the interview process were semi-structured and unstructured, this resulted in the following themes: communication, leadership, training, and protocol. The themes relate to the original research questions.

Communication. Communication as a theme emerged mostly as a consensus among those interviewed as a lack of communication. Communication was described as sporadic, incomplete, or nonexistent. Several teachers interviewed noted that their school used the Handle with Care system as a way to notify teachers if a student had experienced something difficult. While teachers agreed something needs to be in place there were mixed feelings about this particular system.

Teacher 1 stated that she remembered getting an email "that had a kid's name on it and Handle with Care." Teacher 1 explained that she gets no other information. She has no idea if the child had a death, something traumatic, she does not know from the email. When asked if the Handle with Care model is followed up with any instructions on how to handle the child or any other things to equate to the nature of how to treat the child Teacher 1 said there is not anything further.

Teacher 2 is also in a school that uses Handle with Care. She explains that she is happy they have to Handle with Care but it does not give her any insight into what she is dealing with. She explains that she gets an email that "simply says Handle with Care and the student's name. They don't give me any information. They don't give me any background. One time I asked what happened and was told well the cops were called. I don't know why or what for, just that the cops are called and they have now designated a Handle with Care."

Teacher 2 further explains that she understands confidentiality and rules about it but sometimes it would be beneficial to know a little background information and feels she could better help the student if she knew what she was dealing with.

Teacher 3 states that her county does not officially use the Handle with Care system but the guidance counselor at her school will use the Handle with Care notation in the subject line of an email and send it out to the teachers in certain circumstances. "For example, the subject line will say Handle with Care and the student's initials and when you open it the body of the email will just say Jamie's family has encountered a difficult circumstance, please handle with care."

Teacher 4, stated that her particular high school does not use the Handle with Care system. She stated that "We don't always know a lot about that. We get very limited information, but I do understand the confidentiality can be a part of that sometimes too."

Teacher 7 stated that her school will send the student's name along with the Handle with Care tagline, but that she receives no other information. "Sometimes it would help if you just knew if it was a death or not and especially where we are from with drugs being so rampant a simple note that a family member overdosed or was arrested on drug charges would help when dealing with the student. It is just hard because you don't want to cross the line between private information and helpful information, but a little communication goes a long way."

Teacher 12 thinks her school may use the Handle with Care to communicate that a student needs to be handled with care. Teacher 12 is unsure how the notification works. "I have known of students to have a grandparent die, who was raising them and never got any notification at the school. Unfortunately, we usually get our information from social media or other people. Then it's like awkward to talk to the student because a week has passed before you even knew what they were going through."

Leadership. Leadership emerged as a theme and overall teachers felt that leadership at the school level can make a difference in how grief is handled within the classroom. Some of those in leadership positions were very helpful in assisting teachers with the students in their classrooms, but others were not.

Teacher 5 believed the leadership at her school was very helpful in pulling the teachers together to say they would have counselors available or whatever teachers needed. "Even though it was more on the teacher to do something, we did feel like she was there to support us."

Teacher 6 expressed concern over leadership at her school, the principal, not wanting to allow teachers to express condolences on an outdoor sign to a retired teacher in the community. "This teacher was well-known and impacted many students and families in general in our community. It was devastating that we could not create any type of memorialization for that. The other thing, we were not allowed coverage to attend the funeral. I mean most of us took the day off, but instead of having 8 or 10 teachers absent and be short subs for a whole day wouldn't you rather allow coverage for an hour or so and let everyone attend? It upset a lot of teachers." Teacher 6 further expressed her feelings that leadership could make or break certain situations.

Teacher 9 had a similar experience with leadership when a student in middle school killed himself. Teacher 9 almost broke into tears describing the event as "really terrible for the students, but the teachers too." Teacher 9 said to the principal, "Caused everyone to hold in their grief and did not allow anyone to talk about it. We had students in crisis, balling. I care about my job, but we had to address it with the students. It was very

stressful. Many teachers just in our classrooms said we had heard the rumors and that we were sorry but we had been directed by the administration to not discuss it yet."

Teacher 11 said he worked for a principal whom he would not have trusted to handle a situation, but his current principal is "on top of everything." He stated the current principal was able to get resources and assist the teachers when they experienced a student death. "It was not easy but counselors were available and sent to our classrooms to help us allow the students to grieve properly."

Training. Training emerged as a theme that was surrounded by inconsistencies in the types of training and availability of training.

Teacher 1 stated that they did not have any type of training offered for grief in the classroom. She further elaborated that her previous training as a nurse gave her some confidence in handling grief, but she had never had any training about grief during her employment as a teacher. Teacher 1 also stated that "Sometimes when there is training, and we have not had any on grief, but say a couple of people can go this time and a couple of people next time. Again, there was none on grief but would we get to go? Maybe, maybe not."

Teacher 2 explained a training called, Capture Their Hearts, which she had participated in that is not at her current school, but a previous school in West Virginia. She had taken training that was not grief-based but did deal with "helping kids that had trauma and different things going on in their life. It was a big behavior training." She explained the training was created by a gentleman who took on foster kids and he focused on "building trust and just really capturing their hearts."

Teacher 3 describes the lack of training in her county and the attitudes. "I have not been offered anything in my county. My county is very backward when it comes to mental health issues." Teacher 3 sees students suffering and believes some of it may be grief and thinks there is a need for teachers to intervene. "I have set out on my own and obtained a Youth Mental Health First Aid Certification." There is a need for training for teachers for this. "I think we are at a place of increased awareness because we are now in this COVID era."

Teacher 4 relates her training to "a 30-minute chat" in her undergraduate courses. When asked if she had taken or been offered any grief training she stated, "None. Nothing official. When I was in undergrad we had maybe a 30-minute chat about it and it might have been a paragraph in our textbook." Teacher 4 explains the need for training and elaborates on her experience when her student died, "When my student passed away, I went to the internet and started researching – what do I need to do? What do I need to be aware of? It would have been nice to know sooner what to expect."

Teacher 5 said she had never had any grief training. "My county hasn't offered the teacher training. If something happens, they pull us in really quick and say the counselors or coming." Teacher 5 did follow up with a special education course she had taken during her Master's work and she recalled a brief segment in a class that "touched on grief and some emotional situations."

Teacher 6 said she had never been offered any training and did not know of any training about grief in her county or surrounding counties. She stated that throughout her long teaching career she has experienced dealing with grief on numerous occasions. She

said, "I have had students die, I have seen students lose parents, I have lost co-workers. It is a real situation that teachers need the insight to handle in different ways."

The remaining six teachers within the study have never taken or been offered training on grief in the classroom. Teacher 8 did participate in a positive behavior training which focused on positive behavior interventions and supports, often referred to in the education industry as PBIS. Teacher 8 stated that the training, "was not just a grief training, but sometimes the student behavior can be because of grief."

Protocol. The protocol emerged as a recurring theme during the teacher interviews. The protocol is considered a procedure or system of rules to address different things that occur. When asked about protocol for the schools regarding a student in grief the teachers expressed no specific protocol within their school. All teachers mentioned that when there is a student death that counselors from all the other schools in the county are sent to the impacted school.

Teacher 7, when specifically asked about protocol, discussed losing a co-worker. Teacher 7 stated there was no protocol but described it as "a Facebook thing, letting everyone know that she had passed. The school did not do anything specific, but one of the bus drivers drove all of the teachers to the funeral on the bus." Teacher 7 had mixed feelings about some of the events, describing the comfort of all the teachers going to the funeral as a group but then discussing the co-worker's classroom. She described the point where they were cleaning out her co-worker's classroom. "It was like nobody wanted to go in there and then they just started cleaning it out. I think everybody handles grief differently but when they did go in to clean her room out and give it to someone else it just makes you feel kind of like they were fired."

Teacher 8 described the need for a protocol. "We had to sit down with students twice this year, we had a secretary who passed away from COVID and we lost our gym teacher but that wasn't COVID related, it was other health issues." Teacher 8 described each event surrounded by a lot of unknowns. "We want to do what is best for the students. But what is that? At one point I just sat beside a girl that was upset and I just hugged her."

Teacher 9 said he gets most of his information from others in the community. "The grapevine seems to be where the information comes from." Teacher 9 reiterates that even a simple protocol for teachers with procedures to follow would be helpful. Teacher 9 further describes that sometimes he is caught off guard or unprepared as a student may just come into class and blurt out something that happened with everyone unaware. He described a recent incident in his classroom, "The student came into my class and just said his dad died over the weekend. I was completely unaware and I knew his dad. His dad was at every football game, cheering from the crowd. We had no idea he had died."

Teacher 10 expresses understanding for confidentiality but further explains once the event is at the point the student needs help "I think dispelling the information at that point is more beneficial to the student than being hush-hush." She also states that to her knowledge "there is no set plan to share with teachers, we just go with the flow." Teacher 10 explains that she has experienced death and grief within her school and it seems to be surrounded by a lot of uncertainty. She expresses the need for a protocol – "something in place, even if it is just basics, so we can be comfortable that we are doing the right thing."

Teacher 11 says, "we do not have a plan for that," when explaining the protocol at his school regarding grief whether it is regarding death or another triggering event. Teacher 11 equates the lack of protocol to the same measure as the lack of

communication. "It goes back to what we talked about, half of the time we do not even know if a student is grieving. If we do not know their situation we aren't going to know what to do to help them." Teacher 11 says, "a protocol would be helpful and say if it is the death of a student that all teachers would be expected to do this or at least this is what you can expect from the administration. I don't know but it seems like we could do better as a whole."

Teacher 12 states there is no protocol that she is aware of in her middle school. She, like the other teachers, reiterates that the counselors are sent to her school. She supports that measure but says that "we need to consider too that some kids are not comfortable saying – 'hey I need to go talk to a counselor." Teacher 12 went on to explain that she believed this might especially be true when the counselors are from other schools and not known to the students.

Other Emerging Information

The study revealed other important information that came through in the teacher interviews. The information, while not classified as themes, is very revealing of other things that teachers did experience in the classroom when dealing with grief. All twelve teachers had experienced grief in the classroom at some level. Other emergent information obtained from the direct interviewing of the teachers in this study were relationship building, journaling through grief, not utilizing other training, and lack of teacher time to grieve.

Relationship building. Teacher 4 went into detail about attending a memorial service for a student and recalls how at that moment she realized that she needed to build better relationships with students. She wanted to know her students better. She explained the situation as follows:

"This particular student that passed away was a senior. It was in February. I feel like when I went to her memorial service….I feel like I did not have enough genuine stories to tell. I am with my students sometimes more than their families. That just kind of shook me to my – to where I thought I need to slow down and work on building relationships with my students."

Teacher 4 further explained how she thought she did a decent job knowing her students, but this experience made her stop and think. She wanted to begin to listen to her students and get to know them. She wanted to, as she stated, "know who they are on the inside."

Journaling through grief. Teacher 3 discussed having looked into some type of journaling and noted some research that had been proven beneficial when individuals write about the problems they are facing. She discussed several different issues with students that involve death and PTSD and said she considered using some type of journaling through grief within her class as therapy but did not know how the school administration would react. Teacher 3 thought this could be beneficial to all students, but especially those going through something very difficult that would fall into the grief triggering category. Teacher 3 explained, "I wouldn't even have to read them. It would not even really need to be for a grade other than participation – you journaled for 20 minutes today, check."   Teacher 3 further explained that it would be more of a means to vent or get the frustrations out onto the paper.

Failure to utilize other training. Another teacher interviewed in this study stated a failure to use the training provided. He asked that I not reference his direct quote as he thought he could be identified. He explained his thought as a broken process. He thinks there are bits and pieces of training that could incorporate other pieces of training but they are not utilized. He also mentioned when moving counties there are inconsistencies. Teacher 2 also mentioned something similar, when she was in a particular county she had participated in a training called "Capturing Kid's Hearts" and she thought the training was

effective but not everyone used it so the overall effect was not as good. Teacher 2 also mentioned when she moved to a different county in West Virginia that no one in that county had the training so she was unable to use it as it would be ineffective if used only in her classroom. She stated it was more a "schoolwide initiative" that would take "everyone to be on board" to get the full impact of what the training was intended for.

Time for teacher grief. Teacher 9 explained how there is no time for teacher grief. He said often teachers are so caught up in the chaos of trying to figure out what to do that there is no time for the teacher. He mentioned, "it would be nice if someone could cover a class and give you a break or time to talk to one of the counselors yourself."

Ancillary Data

The most surprising portion of this study came from the number of retired teachers who had stories and wanted to share or discuss. The researcher strictly followed the protocols for the study outlined in Chapter 3. The requirements precluded teachers who were retired, not certified, or substitutes. Due to the nature of these requirements when the announcement to participate in the study was posted to the private social group many who did not meet the participant criteria still requested to speak to the researcher. Messages and phone calls were returned to inquire about the nature of the information and just to listen to the information. The following depicts the information ascertained from these conversations.

There were a total of 5 former teachers with whom the researcher engaged as part of additional interviews, conversations, and discussions that could be relevant to the study but are not deemed part of the study. In the first call, a retired teacher began discussing how she had a student who lost his home and further explained how she had a great relationship with the student. The teacher stated that she wish she had known more or

could have done more. The teacher also stated that she felt there was no support outside her classroom to do anything for the student. The retired teacher was in tears by the time she ended her story only to explain that she did not know what happened to the student but she knew he was grieving when he was withdrawn from the school.

The second call was regarding a male elementary student with whom the retired teacher had built a relationship and then later found out the boy had been abused for several years before moving to her school and being placed into foster care. The teacher talked about the potential of the student and how she had given him several books and he read way above his grade level. The foster parents were then faced with drug charges and the boy was not seen at school again. The retired teacher explained how she just felt empty and she wondered how the student would work through this as he was just getting to the other side of the grief he had already been through. The teacher described the helplessness she felt as gut-wrenching sadness.

The stories began to sound familiar with a student in distress, with a grief-triggering event and the teacher left with no recourse, training, or ability to do what is best for the student. The third call began as an inbox message that stated, "Please call me, we need to talk. I have a story you need to hear." The third retired teacher to share her experience began with, "this is going to break your heart." As the former teacher shared her story it spanned over many years. She taught in the same school for many years and was located in a small town where most everyone knew everyone. She began explaining how a family of four brothers that were involved in sports along with the mom and dad being very active in the school as coaches and volunteers and just always involved. The dad unexpectedly killed himself and the teacher just recalls not being able to do anything for the boys. The teacher stated multiple times that these were her boys, like her own kids. The

administrative staff she worked under at the time felt it would be hurtful and embarrassing to discuss suicide in front of the class. The teacher began sobbing on the phone and stated that she regrets not doing more to this day and that this incident has been twenty years ago. During the phone conversation, the teacher was asked if she had ever had any training regarding how to handle grief in the classroom. The teacher said she did not.

The fourth teacher was also a retired teacher who just reached out to let me know that my study was important. She had referenced several times that she faced the death of a student and any means to help handle that with the other students would have been most beneficial.

The fifth teacher was a certified teacher who had formerly worked in the classroom but made a career change several years ago which disqualified her as a participant. She discussed in depth a child from her elementary class who had gotten run over by a school bus. The teacher always felt not enough was done or enough information was given to help her or the other students through the tragedy. The teacher stated that she felt training in this subject is imperative. The teacher further discussed how knowing a little bit about what to do could have been helpful but reiterated that she did everything she knew to do at the time.

These stories further support the need for teacher training. None of the retired or former teachers were considered as part of the study, yet their stories show the same thing regarding training and lack of communication from building administrators. The five former teachers discussed in this section were from different counties than the 8 counties already represented in the study.

CHAPTER 5 SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

The purpose of this chapter is to inform the research questions emphasizing teacher experiences with grief in the classroom. In this chapter, the implications, analysis, discussion, conclusions, and recommendations for further research are presented based on the qualitative data collected from interviews. Interviews were conducted with teachers from several counties throughout West Virginia to gain insight into their perceptions of their experiences with grief in the classroom.

Conclusions

It appears some of the schools across the State of West Virginia are attempting to put a process in place to assist in teacher training in dealing with grief in the classroom. Teachers interviewed for this study mentioned "Handle with Care" as a system but there is still nothing consistently in place. The WVDE (2020) does list frameworks, such as the Child Trauma Toolkit, and access to the West Virginia Mental Health Technical Assistance Center to assist in a crisis for events that undoubtedly would trigger a grief response. The current research is unclear regarding the systematic process for these frameworks and the research currently suggests the majority of the process is delegated down to the school level.

Interviews revealed for West Virginia schools, the response plans seem school-specific. Each school is responsible for developing a school-specific crisis plan. For example, among those plans listed in the WVDE framework are a Crisis Response Planning Team, Crisis Response Team, Mental Health Crisis Response Team, and Community Resource Identification Plan. The frameworks suggest the identification of vulnerable staff and students, practice exercises, and a plan to educate the School Crisis Response Team and the School Mental Health Crisis Response Team. The frameworks

also suggest annual training of school staff on procedures, practices, policies, and protocols, including training and orientation of new staff (WVDE, Crisis Response Plan, 2020).

Teachers interviewed in this study described a multitude of challenges when dealing with grief in the classroom. The teachers described not knowing when a student is grieving as a challenge. The teachers also discussed not knowing what to do or when to do it as a common challenge. The teachers explained the reactive nature, especially when dealing with a death, as an overall concern and challenge. The biggest challenge that was repeated by most teachers in the interview process was the lack of communication from the building administration (principal or assistant principal) to the teacher. The communication could be regarding a student dealing with grief but also lack communication when something did happen. After a grief-triggering event, most teachers were left not knowing what to do or what the plan might be. Several teachers expressed a reactive approach and not a systematic response.

The findings from the interview revealed that there is no solid process for communication to occur when a student has experienced grief triggering event and then returns to the classroom. There were no consistent methods of communication among any of the schools from which teachers were interviewed either at the building level, county level, or state level that would identify the student along with the grief triggering event. Teachers do not know where to look for or receive communications regarding events concerning their students and classrooms. The teachers interviewed expressed receiving emails, phone calls, finding out on social media, or not knowing at all through lack of communication. The expressed communications could be from a principal but in some cases, teachers were notified by community members. Teachers also expressed

that information would be communicated to some teachers, but not others causing a breakdown of the information if teachers were expected to tell other teachers. The overall consensus of the teachers interviewed was the communication often was chaotic, responsive, or nonexistent. Kelvin-Iloafu (2016) studied communication as an organizational tool. She determined communication to serve as a vital piece within organizations in achieving many goals. Her alignment of communication as a strategic management tool bids the same for school systems. School systems need a specific and purposeful means to communicate to teachers events and information that surround a grieving student.

Many of the teachers interviewed during this study shared there is no process in place for implementation or support. When asked directly about the process currently in place, all twelve teachers interviewed could not define or explain a process to assist with support or implementation of generalized training and nothing specific for grief support. When further asked how teachers could be supported to handle grief in the classroom, the teachers suggested training, better communication, universal training, a list of good questions to ask a student, a checklist of do's and don'ts, and training at the beginning of the year.

Han and Weiss (2005) studied implementation factors of school-based mental health programs and reported a lack of teacher-training processes as the breakdown in the program implementation. A lack of teacher training is a huge piece, but once training is incorporated it must be met with a process of support and implementation to remain sustainable and beneficial. Han and Weiss list subsequent sustainability measures when incorporating the process to include teacher training and performance feedback.

The overwhelming conclusion of this study suggests that teachers are not prepared to handle the needs of grieving students in the classroom. The researcher believes that the ill-preparedness stems from the unrecognized need for training, the lack of communication, and the absence of a process to support the implementation of any training that would make a sustainable model for teachers to deal with grief in the classroom. The National Commission for Children and Disasters (2010) reports that the lack of training is an obstacle to implementation when dealing with crisis intervention and can be used in the same understanding for grief in the classroom.

Conclusions of Ancillary Findings

The contributory information gained from the retired and former teachers complemented the data obtained from the active teachers. The stories and information shared revealed the same information that teachers are not trained to handle grief in the classroom. The ancillary findings further concluded that teachers want to help grieving students but often do not know what to do for them. Teachers are concerned about not doing enough or even doing the wrong thing. Teachers noted that often there is no outside support for the teacher in the classroom when dealing with grief in the classroom. All teachers from the ancillary findings were never offered or given the training to handle grief in the classroom, yet each of them faced grief in the classroom.

Implications

Teachers Need Training. The research addresses training for teachers regarding grief in the classroom. Overall, participant teachers reported a lack of training or a training gap. The lack of training creates a large deficit that results in a disservice to grieving students. Studies show that teachers who are well trained to deliver appropriate responses to grief play a role in the long-term success of students who exhibit grief in the

classroom. Cohen and Mannarino (2011) completed research showing that a key contributor to assist in the grieving process for children who have undergone a traumatic grief experience was an educator's ability to recognize the symptoms in a school setting. Cullinan (1990) looked at the same topic in a study to determine how teachers feel about helping grieving students. The study found that teachers felt ill-equipped to handle grieving students due to lack of training and lack of knowing what to do for the student. The study showed that teachers also hold differing anxiety levels when it comes to dealing with grief. Haine, Ayers, Sandler, and Wolchick (2008) listed parental death as one of the most traumatic events that could occur in childhood. The study conducted on parentally bereaved children showed that even though these children were at elevated risk for negative outcomes those who used school resource-related models showed positive outcomes.

A successful model includes a framework that designs purposeful interventions that include each aspect of a grieving child's life to include school personnel. Another study conducted by Reid and Dixon (1999) specifically showed that preparation for teachers to deal with grieving students is important but not included in teacher training. The study portrayed teachers in a unique position to be able to help grieving students, but further looked into the hesitancy of teachers to do so when not properly trained.   The Taylor and Hawkins (1991) study showed that teachers were willing to intervene in crises if they had an understanding of specific behaviors to look for when addressing the issue.

For the most part, the teachers interviewed for this study were unaware of any school-specific plan for addressing grief in the classroom. The teachers interviewed for this study have not had grief-specific training for handling grief in the classroom. However, the analysis of participant results brought forth a couple of training teachers had been

offered or had sought on their own time. The components of these training often had a small section that addressed grief, but would not be considered grief training. The data collected indicated that the teacher participants have not had training that would assist them when dealing with grief in the classroom. The participants all spoke to their experiences in dealing with grief in the classroom, but the interactions and dealings with students were not based on any formality or training. The lack of training is exposing the teacher to a missed opportunity to assist a student due to a lack of familiarity with the type of grief the student is experiencing versus what the student needs for this particular grief trigger.

As the interviews progressed, the researcher asked participants to explain any training they have received regarding grief in the classroom. The participants could not articulate any formal training that was focused on handling grief in the classroom. The teachers struggled to think of any training they had attended that mentioned grief or had grief as a component. The participants were surprised at themselves when they realized they were more prepared to handle a school shooting than a grieving student. The participants were almost embarrassed by the simplicity of being able to describe a protocol for a school shooting, but not being able to come up with any steps or procedures when dealing with a grieving student.

This study showed taking training a step further could prove beneficial in the interim as schools seek to provide training or figure out a better communication plan. A specific list, something similar to a checklist, that describes what teachers can say and do to address specific grief triggers could be useful to a teacher on the spot. For example, as described by participants, when a crisis did occur for a student, a teacher was issued a Handle with Care notice but was not informed of the specific crisis for a student. With the

71

established checklist, the teacher could associate that student with a crisis code number from the list, and then the teacher would have a checklist under that code number of things that would help that particular student.

The making for successful handling of grief in the classroom that includes assisting the student and supporting the teacher are compiled in an effective teacher training, a support system that allows implementation, and a student maintaining a trusted relationship with a teacher. This research showed a need for awareness and teacher training regarding grief in the classroom. The research also showed that grief is a multifaceted area that includes many different factors. The movement of this important piece depends upon the collaboration of administrators and teachers. The educational infrastructure of the school itself, the county Board of Education, and the State Department of Education must all work together for teachers to successfully be equipped with the proper training and tools to address grief in the classroom.

This research suggested that effective outcomes are possible when teachers are trained properly, with research showing that teachers with high confidence levels in any particular tasks perform well in that task (Schoenfeld, Lichetenstein, Kline-Pruett, & Speese-Linehan, 2002). It would stand to reason, teachers who were well-trained in handling grief in the classroom would be confident and effective in handling the grieving student.

Teachers Need a Support Plan. This study supports the need for schools to implement training for teachers on how to effectively handle grief in the classroom. The training for this specific topic must be developed with grief triggers in mind. The training must incorporate discussion of many grief triggers with appropriate responses. The understanding of the grief triggers along with responses that students may give under

72

each circumstance would go a long way in assisting the teacher in knowing what they are dealing with in each case. As with any training component, there must be a commitment on all levels to incorporate and support the training. The school leaders, along with upper-level support, must develop protocols and systems that support best practices and recognize the need for the training to be implemented.

The training should encompass the specific behaviors caused by the triggering event and steps teachers can take to effectively work with the student to help process the grief emotion. Based on the Taylor and Hawking (1991) study, when teachers have an understanding of the specific behaviors to look for they are willing to intervene and assist. In a separate study, teachers also reported the importance of the type of training and that the training needs to be specific to behaviors and how they can handle those reactions (Sela-Shayovitz, 2009; Taylor & Hawkins, 1991).

Teachers Need Effective Communication. An effective communication plan is vital to the school community. Communication plans and public relations are major predictors of successes in handling crisis-related events, which would certainly be those that cause a grief response (Marra, 1998). The main purpose of a school communication plan is to get the right message to the right people at the right time. An effective communication plan gives the entire intended audience the same information at the correct time. For schools to develop communication plans, there should be a policy-driven effort to provide information. All stakeholders can be part of a communication plan – students, parents, community members, and teachers. Each stakeholder can be given specific communications based on their affiliation and the information they need. Formal school communication plans are becoming more popular as part of strategic planning due to the multitude of events and announcements that need to occur within the school systems. The

73

National School Public Relations Association (2020) offers planning resources to assist schools in developing a communication plan suitable to each school's needs while taking into consideration the district rules.

Suggestions for Further Research

Recommendation 1: A study to determine if schools are equipped to create their training plan. A recommendation for further research is to conduct a similar study to identify if schools in West Virginia are equipped to create their training plan. The WVDE has frameworks but is delegating the planning down to the school level. Are the resources available for schools to develop and implement training plans within the frameworks?

Recommendation 2: A study to determine barriers administrators face. Another recommended study from the researcher is to survey administrators in K-12 schools across West Virginia and ask about the barriers they face when trying to implement such a training program for the teachers.

Recommendation 3: A study to expand the participant area. Another recommended study is to expand the scope of the study. The study could be broadened to include teachers in other states besides just West Virginia. For example, a tri-state study could be conducted including West Virginia, Kentucky, and Ohio.

Recommendation 4: Longitudinal Study. A study that collects pre-and post-surveys based on pre-service teacher training (once implemented) on handling grief in the classroom followed by yearly surveys assessing how they implemented their training on the job once they entered the classroom. This study could prove beneficial in sharing teacher experiences and determining if any other training needs could be utilized.

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APPENDIX A: IRB Approval

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Office of Research Integrity   FWA 00002704
Institutional Review Board
One John Marshall Drive   IRB1 #00002205
Huntington, WV 25755   IRB2 #00003206

April 29, 2021

Edna Meisel, Ed.D.
College of Education and Professional Development

RE: IRBNet ID# 1751925-1
At: Marshall University Institutional Review Board #2 (Social/Behavioral)

Dear Dr. Meisel:

Protocol Title:	[1751925-1] A Phenomenological Study: Understanding Teacher Experienceswith Grief in the Classroom
Site Location:	MU
Submission Type:	New Project APPROVED
Review Type:	Exempt Review

In accordance with 45CFR46.104(d)(2), the above study was granted Exempted approval today by the Marshall University Institutional Review Board #2 (Social/Behavioral) Designee. No further submission (or closure) is required for an Exempt study **unless** there is an amendment to the study. All amendmentsmust be submitted and approved by the IRB Chair/Designee.

This study is for student Melissa A. Cyfers.

If you have any questions, please contact the Marshall University Institutional Review Board #2 (Social/ Behavioral) Coordinator Anna Robinson at (304) 696-2477 or robinsonn1@marshall.edu. Please includeyour study title and reference number in all correspondence with this office.
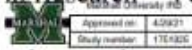
Sincerely,

Bruce F. Day, ThD, CIP
Director, Office of Research Integrity

APPENDIX B: Interview Consent

Consent to Participate in Research – Verbal Presentation

Hello, my name is Melissa A. Cyfers. You have volunteered to be in a study about Grief in the Classroom. This study involves research. The purpose of this research study is to understand teacher experiences when dealing with grief in the classroom. This will take about an hour of your time. The Marshall University Institutional Review Board has approved this study. If you choose to be in the study, I will ask you some questions about your experiences in the classroom and you will be expected to answer truthfully and to the best of your knowledge.

This interview will be recorded and transcribed. The transcribed pages will be sent to you for accuracy. Once you are in agreement that the interview was transcribed properly and reflects your answers the data from the interview will be used. Upon completion of the data collection the recordings will be permanently deleted.

There are no foreseeable risks or benefits to you for participating in this study. There is no cost or payment to you. If you have questions while taking part, please stop me and ask. Your responses will remain confidential. Your name will not be associated with any responses you give. I will link your answers to you by coding them. All participants will be referred to as Teacher 1, Teacher 2, etc. All counties mentioned will be referred to as County A, County B, etc. In the event the counties surpass the alphabet counties will be double lettered County AA, County BB, etc. Only the researchers will know the participant responses.

If you have questions about this research, or study related problems, you may call Melissa A. Cyfers at 304-654-6290. If you feel as if you were not treated well during this study, or have questions concerning your rights as a research participant call the Marshall University Office of Research Integrity (ORI) at (304) 696-4303.

Your participation in this research is voluntary, and you will not be penalized or lose benefits if you refuse to participate or decide to stop. May I continue?

Melissa A. Cyfers

4721 Green Valley Road • Huntington, WV 25701 • (304) 654-6290 • mcyfers@yahoo.com

Education

Marshall University   Present

Doctor of Education (Curriculum & Instruction)

Currently ABD (expected completion August 2021)

The emphasis in Educational Methodologies and Technology

Clemson University   August 2019

Masters of Biological Sciences

Liberty University   May 2016

Master of Arts in Teaching

Cincinnati College of Mortuary Science   December 1995

Baccalaureate of Mortuary Science

Associate Degree in Applied Science

Teaching Experience

2020 – present   FINE Mortuary College   Norwood, MA

Chief Academic Administrator & Program Director

- Instructing Anatomy I
- Curriculum Development/Implementation Specialist
- Curriculum Alignment and Mapping
- Accreditation tracking
- Program Development
- Faculty development in curricular procedures and implementation

2018 – 2020   Marshall University   Huntington, WV

Adjunct Professor

- Instructing BSC 104 (Cell Biology)
- Instructing BSC 105 (Human Biology)
- Instructing BSC 227 (Human Anatomy)

2018 – 2020   Teays Valley Christian School   Scott Depot, WV

High School Science Teacher

- Designed and taught courses for Biology I, Biology II, Physical Science, Anatomy & Physiology, and Chemistry
- Developed and delivered content for ACT Math Prep Course
- Developed and delivered content for Crime Scene Investigation summer camp (NGSS aligned)
- Developed and delivered content for Coding summer camp (NGSS aligned)
- Geometry/Algebra I and II math tutor
- Worked with a diverse population of students to include ESL
- Education Committee Member
- VOYA Unsung Heroes grant award for innovating teaching idea (NGSS aligned idea)
- Coordinated and delivered STEM Day for grades 7-12 (NGSS aligned)

2012 - 2018   Lincoln County Board of Education   Hamlin, WV

Science Teacher

- Responsible for lesson planning, instruction, and assessments in the classroom
- Worked with NASA Learning Center to do a simulated Hurricane tracking in the classroom (NGSS aligned)
- Leadership Committee
- Integrated use of SmartBoard
- Competent in Office products to include OneDrive
- Lexile framework science/reading program (eScience 3000) improved student reading in scientific content on average of 600 Lexile points
- STEM based activities both in class and schoolwide (NGSS aligned)
- Volunteer LEGO Robotics Mentor and Coach
- Grant funded project: Make Nitrogen Last (STEM)
- Grant funded project: Photosynthesis Lab (and animation) STEM
- Technology grant ($8,000)
- Student test scores (grades 7 and 8 increased overall by 30% in 2 years)
- Online application award winner for virtual Lego robotics
- Team Mentor for team that competed in state competition for Robotics

Contract / Consulting Work

2021   McGraw-Hill Higher Ed Group   New York, NY

Educational Consultant / Focus Group (Remote)

 Groundwork for developing *Connect Master: Why Biology?* (With author, Michael Widelspecht)

Summer 2020   Merit Academy   San Jose, CA
Educational Consultant / Biology (Remote)
1:1 in depth student learning in Biology

2020-2021   Focus Eduvation (FEV Tutor)   Woburn, MA
Educational Consultant / Curriculum Writer (Remote)
MS Physical Science NGSS Domain (published)
MS Engineering, Technology, and Applications of Science NGSS Domain
HS Biology NGSS Aligned Course

2013 – 2019   Cyfers Enterprises   Huntington, WV
Funeral Service Consultant / Trainer

- Developed and designed leadership and development training in entrepreneurial mindsets that allow for expansion, business development, educational and training assistance to meet CEU requirements, marketing and communication strategy as it pertains to privately owned funeral homes as well as corporate partners.
- Customize training based on data analysis of P&L and market share

2021   Appalachian Pulmonary Health Project   Charleston, WV
Educational Consultant
- Consultation as curriculum specialist for Partners in Health Network in developing, implementing and strategically assisting with delivery of youth tobacco prevention.
- Integration of CATCH My Breath into WV & KY Middle Schools

Other Work Experience

1997 - 2012   Carriage Services   Milton, WV
Managing Partner
- Oversee daily operations of two funeral establishments
- Responsible for every aspect of daily activities, fiscal and daily
   budgeting, all funeral home related tasks
- Manage, assign, direct, and review all facets of employee functions
- Oversee all preneed and OSHA compliance
- Responsible for all preneed sales and at need sales
- Interviewing/ hiring and firing
- Develop and train all employees via workshops/seminars
- Retention strategies

- Business strategy reporting
- Responsible for integrity, entry and delivery of computer database information
- Market share programs (community events)
- Employee files to include I-9 documentation, W-4's, etc.
- Policy implementation and training in regard to workplace safety, discrimination, and wage and hour laws
- Meet with families to arrange every aspect of funeral service
- Embalming
- Monthly community meetings for grief facilitation
- Responsible for interviewing, hiring, firing, and employee appraisals
- Organize, plan, and implement all programs to benefit the community
- Oversee all preneed contracts, all service-related items, embalming procedures, and OSHA adherence
- Business strategy reporting
- Meet with families to arrange for funeral service
- Embalming
  Employee files to include proper I-9 documentation, offer letters, W- 4's, etc.
- Handbook and policy training in all areas

Professional Interests

- Charter member of Delta Kappa Pi professional sorority for women in funeral service
- First Lego League Robotics instructor and coach
- GVMS Leadership Team
- Teacher of the Year nominee (2016/17)
- RESA Exemplary Teaching Methods nominee
- TVCS Education Committee
- VOYA Unsung Heroes Award
- Member ABFSE (American Board of Funeral Service Education)

Presentations, Workshops, & Invited Lectures

Melissa A. Cyfers, "Entrepreneurial Mindset: For Existing Funeral Homes," Workshop Facilitator, presented at various funeral homes throughout Kentucky and Tennessee.

Melissa A. Cyfers, "Focus Groups to Enhance Your Business," Guest Lecturer, presented at Carriage Services Headquarters, Houston, TX.

Melissa A. Cyfers, "Workplace Safety and OSHA Requirements," Trainer and Coordinator, presented at Heck Funeral Home, Milton, WV and Beard Mortuary, Huntington, WV.

Melissa A. Cyfers, "Outdoor Learning Center," Speaker, presented to administrative faculty and staff at Guyan Valley Middle School.

Melissa A. Cyfers, "Looking Ahead Doctoral Seminar: Expert Student Panel." Committee Member and Speaker, presented at Marshall University Professional Building, South Charleston, WV.

Melissa A. Cyfers, "Grief in the Classroom: A Pedagogical Approach," presenter, Eastern Education Research Association (EERA) at Myrtle Beach, SC.

Melissa A. Cyfers, "Safety in the Workplace," invited guest, presented to the faculty at Ashland Technical and Community College Science Division.

Other Training

Technology in the Classroom.
West Virginia Department of Education. Charleston, WV.

Published Works

Cyfers, Melissa A. (2020). *Structure and Behavior of Matter: Understanding Matter*. Focus EduVation. FEV Tutor: Woburn, MA.

Cyfers, Melissa A. (2020). *Chemistry of Matter*. Focus EduVation. FEV Tutor: Woburn, MA.

Cyfers, Melissa A. (2020). *Energy, Motion, and Force*. Focus EduVation. FEV Tutor: Woburn, MA.

Cyfers, Melissa A. (2020). *Energy and Waves*. Focus EduVation. FEV Tutor: Woburn, MA.

Cyfers, Melissa A. (2020). *Thermodynamics and Gas Laws*. Focus EduVation. FEV Tutor: Woburn, MA.

Cyfers, Melissa A. (2020). *Pressure.* Focus EduVation. FEV Tutor: Woburn, MA.

Contributing Works

Mayer, Robert G. (2021*). Embalming: History, Theory, and Practice, 6th Ed*. McGraw-Hill: New York, NY. Contributor: Melissa A. Cyfers. (To be released March 2022).