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CHILDREN'S COGNITIVE AND EMOTIONAL REACTIONS  
TO A TELEVISION PORTRAYAL OF DEATH

by

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to the required standard



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#### ABSTRACT

This study describes and assesses changes in children's cognitive and emotional reactions to the concept of death as a result of viewing the film "Where's Pete?" portraying the death of a sibling. In order to evaluate any significant changes, a pretest, treatment, posttest design was conducted with 16 volunteer girls and 10 volunteer boys between nine and eleven years old. These children were selected from four different schools of the Greater Victoria School District. Each child was interviewed individually for approximately an hour by one of eight graduate students trained by the researcher. The Atwood (1984) questionnaire regarding the concept of death was presented to the children during the pre and posttests. Two interviews focusing on emotions toward the concept of death were conducted with the children, one during the pretest and one during the posttest. The film "Where's Pete?" was presented to the children as the treatment procedure. The questionnaire regarding the children's understanding of the film was presented during the posttest. Children were also asked during the pre and posttests to draw pictures expressing their thoughts and feelings about death. A conservation task was conducted at the beginning of the procedures to assess children's cognitive developmental period. Children's responses to these questionnaires were audiotaped, transcribed, analyzed with content-analysis and were attributed to appropriate categories. The McNemar test for the significance of change which is applicable to those "before and after" designs was

used to analyze the data. The significance level was set at  $p = .10$ . Children's emotional reactions did not change significantly as a result of viewing the film "Where's Pete?". The children reported feelings of sadness when talking about the concept of death in general, and after viewing the film, the children mentioned feeling even sadder because they were relating what they were seeing in the film to their own life experiences. Children's understanding of death, specifically their understanding of permanency, inevitability, irreversibility and universality did not change significantly as a result of viewing the film. However, the children had an opportunity to think about their understanding of death, and to express their values and beliefs. The emotional reactions reported by the children about the possible sudden death of their sisters or brothers, were not statistically significant as a result of viewing the film "Where's Pete?". The children reported that if their sisters or brothers would die suddenly, they would experience feelings of sadness and loss and would lack the relationship which existed with their deceased sibling. In the conclusion, suggestions for further research are presented, and specific guidelines to help children cope with death are discussed.

EXAMINERS:

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## Chapter I

### INTRODUCTION

There are many factors related to the comprehension of death during childhood. In terms of the understanding of death, Solnit and Green (1963) suggested that:

Adults' own problems in coming to terms with death can have particularly unfortunate effects upon the thought and behavior of their children. Children may become adults who are tongue-tied on the subject of death, offering to their own children cliché and evasion rather than candor and depth. (In Grollman, 1967, p. 92)

Often, the problems children encounter with death and grief arise from dishonest ways in which adults interact with children about the topic of death (Rando, 1984). According to Rando, "The more openly issues are dealt with, the better will be the child's chances of working through the loss and making a successful adaptation" (p. 172). So, educating adults and children would be beneficial, in order for them to understand and to cope more effectively with the concept of death. Also, knowing how to use the television medium would be an asset, in order to help children whose age-related cognitive limitations affect their emotions, perceptions and understanding of television portrayals. The developmental capacities of children and their age-related concerns about death are factors which need to be taken into account. Being aware of children's cognitive and emotional development is then necessary to provide appropriate guidance.

When the concept of death is presented through the television medium, an adult should be present nearby, in order to explain to the children how television presents death, and how to make a distinction

between the reality and fantasy. If the adult fails to discuss death or to discuss the message the television transmits of death, children may begin to create their own legends and discover their own information or misinformation about the concept of death (Nelson, 1977). As Nelson argued, "The use of straightforward terminology seems specially important with young people" (p. 325). According to Rando (1984), the adult would need to be aware that if a child talks about death in a way that is contradictory to his external behavior, the discrepancy should be acknowledged by the adult in order to understand what is really going on for the child. Often a child may send hidden messages to the adult about his concerns and it is by checking out and by listening to the child that the adult may pick up on these messages.

Parents, counsellors and teachers would be recommended to discuss death with the children, when this event occurs in their lives (Buckingham, 1983). Knowing more about the feelings which can be expressed at the time of a death, and knowing about the normal grieving phases, would be helpful for the children in order to go through a healthy grieving process.

The purpose of this thesis was to evaluate and describe children's cognitive and emotional reactions to a film portraying the death of a sibling, as well as to observe if there are any changes occurring in the children's perceptions of death between the early and later phases of what Piaget called the concrete-operational period (Scarr, Weinberg & Levine, 1986). A discussion concerning whether children should be categorized into different cognitive developmental

stages or whether the focus should be on individual development, was also presented.

To date, no studies concerning children's emotional reactions to a television portrayal of death were located in the literature. Even studies related to children's emotional reactions to television portrayals of dramas were extremely rare to find. There is no doubt that more research would be needed in the area of television and children's perception of death.

The rationale for this study is first that a better understanding of children's cognitive development and emotional reactions to television portrayal of death may open new areas of research, and second that a specific set of guidelines helping counsellors, parents, teachers as well as TV people and film producers in how to portray death on television, will enable children to get a better understanding of death, and will help them to feel more comfortable with their feelings about death. As Arena, Hermann and Hoffman (1984) suggested, the rationale for any intervention model is that:

1. The responsibility of the adult community in ensuring the security needs of its children should be reinforced to whatever degree realistically possible;

2. The responsibility of the community in assisting children to learn healthy ways of coping should be supported (p. 107).

Three main research questions were investigated in this thesis. First, emotional reactions reported by the children when viewing a film portraying family members' reactions to the death of a sibling and portraying death as final and permanent were studied. Reactions

included denial, avoidance, anger, sadness, anxiety, depression, loneliness, guilt and acceptance. Second, the changes in children's understanding of death, specifically their understanding of permanency, inevitability, irreversibility, and universality, occurring as a result of viewing the film "Where's Pete?" were investigated. Further, changes likely to occur among children in the concrete-operational period were described. Third, any particular emotional reactions that the children had about the idea of a sudden death of their sisters or brothers as a result of viewing the film were examined.

The main goals of this study were: first, to describe children's cognitive understanding and emotional reactions to the concept of death; second, to describe any change that might have occurred in their cognitive understanding and emotional reactions, as a result of viewing a film portraying the death of a sibling; third, to observe how children in the concrete-operational period react to the film's portrayal of death; and fourth, to develop guidelines for healthy grieving and effective portrayal of death on television or in film.

## Chapter II

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The present study was based on three areas discussed in the professional literature: (a) children's cognitive development of the concept of death, (b) children's emotional reactions toward death, especially the death of a sibling, and (c) children's emotional reactions to a television portrayal of death, as well as their understanding of television.

#### Children's Cognitive Development of the Concept of Death

Children's cognitive development of the concept of death is defined with the understanding of constructs such as permanency, inevitability, irreversibility and universality. The child's concept of death is dependent upon the resources available at a particular stage in his or her development (Grollman, 1967). According to Feifel (1977), "The particular view of death that a child presents at any one time reflects his or her social, psychological and intellectual experiences and concerns at the time of the interaction" (p. 61).

Many studies suggest that it would be important for the counsellor, teacher, parent, or producer of a television program portraying death to understand how a child experiences a death. Studies have shown that children's chronological age is highly correlated to the level of cognitive development. However, Knowles and Reeves (1979) suggested that, "Healthy reactions to a loss are varied,

grieving patterns are very individual" (p. 12). According to Stambrook and Parker (1987):

Death is conceptualized first as a temporary and reversible state, like sleep or a separation, and later as an internal and universal biological process that results in the complete cessation of bodily functions. There is a disagreement however as to the precise nature of the developmental trend and about the ages at which different beliefs are held. (p. 153)

Buckingham (1983) mentioned that the development of the concept of death can be explained with stages which are related to the "normal developmental sequence of biological and psychological growth" (p. 31). Because this study involved children between nine and eleven years old, more attention will be given to this stage of "middle childhood." The period of childhood located from six to ten years old, was described as "latency" by Freud (1965) and "industry" by Erikson (1968). Piaget, on the other hand, referred to this period as the "concrete-operational" (Hostler, 1976) and located it between seven and eleven years old. In this phase, the child is perceived as less egocentric than in the preoperational phase. He can focus on several aspects of a situation at one time, is conserving, can understand reversibility and can deal with finality.

However, it is possible for some children between nine and ten years old to retain preoperational characteristics in their understanding of death or, conversely to have some formal operational characteristics in their understanding of death. The child might be able to demonstrate conservation of number and matter though demonstrating characteristics of the formal operational period, and on the other hand might not be able to show conservation of volume or

area though demonstrating characteristics of the preoperational period.

Tuddenham (1970) mentioned that the correlations between the Piagetian items he used were generally very low. He concluded that "the data strongly suggested that the attainment of concrete operations on one problem is no guarantee that the child will achieve a comparable level when another problem is posed" (p. 323).

In their study, Candy-Gibbs, Colby-Sharp and Petrun (1985) found that even though the children in the different stages of development demonstrated a "mixture of reasoning abilities," the older children were the ones who demonstrated a higher understanding of death.

A few authors suggested that each child is different and should be studied individually. Vigotsky (1978), a Soviet psychologist, worked to maximize the potential of each individual child. He argued that "the mechanism of individual developmental change is rooted in society and culture" (p. 7) and not in the biological environment as Piaget suggested.

However, as Otaala (1973) suggested after reviewing research regarding Piaget's theory:

Despite much variation in methodology and in cultural settings of the children, there is considerable consistency of findings supporting certain features of Piaget's theory. The sequence more than the timing of the stages described by Piaget, has received almost unanimous confirmation. (p. 19)

As observed, there are contradictions between theories of human development, and it is important to be aware of those different schools of thought.

Returning to the development of the concept of death, Nagy (1948) provided one important study regarding the maturation of the concept of death within a "cognitive development framework" (in Townley & Thornburg, 1980, p. 18). She concluded that a relationship exists between the type of responses children were giving to questions and the children's ages. She identified three developmental stages in children's understanding of death. The third stage which is of interest to this study involves children around ten years old, who can understand and accept a mature explanation of death. They can see the death as final and inevitable (Atwood, 1984; Postel, 1985). However, Rando (1984) noted "That a child of this age is still unable to accept the finality of his personal loss although the finality and irreversibility of death in general is recognized" (p. 161). During this developmental period, the child has a concrete curiosity about death which motivates him to understand the physical aspect of death. So by the end of the period, the child arrives theoretically to an acceptance of the finality and irreversibility of death (Knowles & Reeves, 1979).

According to Hostler (1976), "The concrete operational period is marked by more mobility in thinking because of the transition from static to dynamic, centration to decentration, and irreversibility to reversibility" (p. 12). Reciprocity skills are also developing with the onset of concrete operations. According to Koocher (1973), "Until reciprocity is learned the child cannot use the observed experiences of others in thinking about death" (p. 374).

All these concepts of permanency, inevitability, irreversibility, universality and reciprocity are important in the understanding of death and have an effect on children's emotional reactions. It would seem that comprehension and emotions are related. When the child has mastered these concepts in his cognitive development, he will also have attained a maturity in his emotional development. The child will be able to understand his own feelings, the feelings of others, and will comprehend the normality of expressing feelings.

Going beyond the description of these stages, it is important to keep in mind that younger children can think about death despite the constraints imposed by their level of cognitive development (Kastenbaum & Aisenberg, 1972).

**Factors related to the concept of death.** Many factors are related to children's concept of death. The children's attachment to the object of loss, their stage of psychological development, the circumstances of loss, the previous experiences with death, the religious concepts, and the attitudes of their parents toward death are examples of such factors (Buckingham, 1983).

A parent who attempts to protect his child by stopping him from the experience of death, is only confusing the child and making him anxious. Even though the adult is not talking to the child about death and his feelings toward the dying person, the child still perceives the adult's non-verbal clues which are transmitted by his tone of voice, his facial expression, his body posture as well as the house atmosphere (Buckingham, 1983). Children are very sensitive to their

environment and when they encounter negative attitudes toward the issue of death, they might feel discouraged to face death, to mourn, to talk about death or to express their feelings about death. Society has made a taboo of the topic of death and considers that children are not capable of understanding what is happening, and that the adult should only face and think about death when it occurs in his life. If it does occur in his life, the child should be protected from the pain which is experienced. According to Buckingham (1983), when there is a discussion of death and dying, "the conversation is conducted in whispers and stops abruptly when children enter the room. This behavior frightens children more since they know something is going on and they have only the vaguest notion of what it is" (p. 38).

Children who have experienced the death of a significant other may understand death to be final much earlier than the ages suggested by the findings from some researchers. Religious experiences may also affect children's level of death understanding. According to Candy-Gibbs, Colby-Sharp and Petrun (1985), "Regional differences within religions may also exist" (p. 331). These researchers studied the cultural and religious background effect on children's understanding of death and found that these variables "are just as salient as chronological age is in relation to differences in death understanding" (p. 344). Their data indicated that the differences in the cultural and religious groups occurred in children's beliefs about the inevitability of death, and that both groups shared a tendency to distance death from themselves.

In conclusion, despite the different factors which may influence children's concepts of death, Atwood (1984) suggested that older children have had more time to develop a "schema" to help them have a more realistic understanding of death. "Older children can be expected to have had more linguistic interaction, and other forms of social transmission with others on death-related topics" (Atwood, 1984, p. 26).

Although there are contradictions in the literature, most authors agree that the majority of children achieve some understanding of the concept of permanency, irreversibility, inevitability, nonfunctionality and universality between the age of five and seven years old (Speece & Brent, 1984). Spinetta (1975) suggested that "there most probably exist multiple levels of death awareness before the child uses adult language to discuss the adult concept of death" (p. 17). But Bluebond-Langner (1977) argued that adults' conceptions of death are not different from children's conceptions except in terms of style and language. According to Reilly, Hasazi and Bond (1983), children between six and ten years of age are in a transition phase where the concept of death evolves rapidly, and indeed the operational thinking is important in having realistic ideas about death. When a child is ten or eleven years old, he is expected to be able to separate the "fantasy" world from the "real" world. The child has completed his basic development of the concepts of time, space, quantity and causality.

### Emotional Reactions to the Concept of Death

Emotional reactions are defined as children's disclosures of feelings such as denial, anger, sadness, fear, anxiety, depression, guilt and others. Knowles and Reeves (1979), who studied children's emotional reactions to death, mentioned first that it is important to be aware that fear of death in children increases as its finality is understood. As mentioned above, factors such as past experiences with death, participation in mourning activities, family beliefs, and religious beliefs may affect the reactions children have to a portrayal of death. According to Knowles and Reeves (1979), the reactions of important adults, the child's level of intelligence, the preparation, the circumstances of death, and the relationship of the dying or the dead person to the child may influence the child's concerns and reactions about death.

Studies have found that the fears of the nine to twelve year old children are often related to personal and physical injuries such as accidents, death, diseases, violence, and natural disasters. Fears of the death of a relative also become more frequent during this age period (Cantor, Wilson & Hoffner, 1986). Rando (1984) suggested on the basis of her observations that when a sudden death occurs, children between eight and twelve years old often experience shock, denial, and may experience anxiety and distress. Rando stated that, "In this age group, more than any other, there is a tendency towards fearfulness, phobic behaviors, and some hypochondriasis" (p. 161).

To elaborate further on the reaction of fear in children, Kalish (1969) suggested that there are different reasons for the child to

fear death. First, the child might think that because of his misbehavior, he produced the death of the loved one and as a result could be punished and face death soon or later. Second, the child might fear that God will make him die because he behaved improperly. So the child may also feel angry and hostile towards God or towards the dead person for leaving him alone. Also, instead of experiencing those emotional reactions, the child may deny the death of the loved one. He might not be able to accept the death and the separation, and will often cry over a television program or a story portraying death which will enable him to release the painful feelings kept inside (Buckingham, 1983). According to Buckingham:

Denial is a defense used by children in traumatic or stressful situations. Children and adolescents, therefore, tend to keep the dead person very much alive in their minds. Often they appear to be able to discuss and accept death on one level of functioning, and simultaneously, deny it on another level. (p. 35)

Children feel sad, lonely and "like crying" for a while, but that period lasts for a moment. Wolfenstein (1966) calls that period "short sadness span" which represents "the limited capacity for tolerance of acute pain in children" (Buckingham, 1983, p. 35). According to Wolfenstein (1966), children aged between seven and thirteen years old do not seem to be able to tolerate acute pain and intense distress, and that is why they often use this particular defense mechanism called denial, which helps them to be protected.

**Children's emotional reactions to a sibling's death.** It is very important to mention how the death of a sibling can affect the child's grief. According to Rando (1984), the death of a sibling may be

traumatic for a child because of the experiences they shared together. The death of a sibling is also disturbing because it demonstrates to the child that he or she can die too. Rando believed that "one factor that may complicate responding to sibling death is the intense guilt that results from previous hostile wishes and feelings of ambivalence in the relationship" (p. 163). Rando pointed out that it is important to be aware of what she referred to as "magical thinking"; that children tend to make "causal" connections between their personal wishes or actions and the death of the loved one.

For instance, if as a revenge the child wished for something to happen to his brother, and then a week later his brother died, the child would feel guilty and would even fear punishment in return. The fear of punishment that the child might experience during his bereavement was studied by Freud who called that process "the omnipotence of thought" and by Piaget who called it "the efficacy." Those terms are defined by the tendency the child has to "think that his own wishes have power to influence events without physical intervention" (Anthony, 1971, p. 137).

**Children's mourning behaviors to a sibling death.** As Helen Rosen (1985) pointed out in her article called "Prohibitions Against Mourning in Childhood Sibling Loss," the child who suffers the death of a sibling may experience one, two or three sets of prohibitions engendered mainly by his environment. According to Rosen, there are prohibitions at the "intrapsychic level" which implies that the child is not able to live the intense emotions the death of his sibling has

produced, and will tend to deny the fact that the death has occurred. The second set of prohibitions are at the "family system level." The child feels prohibited by the covert rules of the family system to talk about what happened and about his feelings toward the death. The third set of prohibitions occurring during bereavement is at the "social system level." The society seems to convey to people the strong belief that death is an issue which should not be discussed in order not to disturb people's well-functioning. Because the grieving process is not very well understood and accepted by the society, it is not surprising to see many people who have trouble grieving the loss experienced. Rosen (1985) mentioned that "children who lose a sibling in childhood or adolescence are at a high risk for failing to grieve the loss" (p. 315). That failure to grieve the loss implies that the children are not permitted or will not permit themselves to express their feelings, and will then not be able to resolve the loss that occurred in their lives.

Often, families as well as social support groups send covert messages to the survivor siblings conveying the idea that they should not grieve, and give instead more attention to the needs of the parents. Parents and children have different ways of mourning the death of the loved one. Nager (1970) suggested that, "For the adult the death of a close relative is frequently a traumatic event. For the child, the death of a close relative such as mother or father is not only a traumatic event, but a serious developmental interference" (Buckingham, 1983, p. 34).

Rando (1984) offers three wide phases which express the psychological reactions to normal grief. The first phase is called "avoidance" and implies emotional reactions such as shock, denial, and disbelief. The second phase is called "confrontation" and implies intensive feelings because the survivor is confronting the loss of the loved one. The third phase is named "reestablishment" and implies a resolution of the grieving process and a new emotional stability. The child might move back and forth among those phases, depending on his needs and on different variables. Bowlby (1980) suggested three major variables that may influence children's emotional responses to the death of a loved one. These variables are:

First the causes and circumstances of the loss (what the child is told), second the family relationships after the loss (how patterns of relationship changed as a result of the loss) and third the patterns of relationship within the family prior to the loss. (Rando, 1984, p. 162)

According to Burton (1974), children often use a coping mechanism to substitute the lost relationship with "a fantasy relationship which is kept going, or the mother is asked to have another child, or a new friend may be endowed with the characteristics of the lost sibling" (p. 197). So the child will protect himself and will not have to endure those painful emotions. However, as has been stated earlier, the child might overreact to a television program portraying death or to the death of a pet or a friend's brother. Burton (1974) says, "By becoming unusually upset they are in fact enabling themselves to work on their feelings of loss and hopefully adjusting to it" (p. 197).

Raphael (1983) mentioned that children need to give themselves time to grieve and need to choose a time where they feel that their

environment, families and friends are more secure and stable enabling them to mourn and to express feelings of sadness and loss.

**Funeral.** Buckingham (1983) recommended that children should be allowed to go to a funeral if they wish to do so. If they are forbidden to go, children may then create their own fantasy around the concept of funeral. Buckingham mentioned that "by attending the funeral the reality of the situation will be reinforced in the children's mind and prevent them from developing unrealistic ideas or fears about the death of a loved one" (p. 40). Children might be exposed at the funeral to confused and crying adults, but they need to learn that those feelings are normal to be expressed. Buckingham suggests, however, that it would be appropriate for the child to be accompanied at the funeral by an adult who is not emotionally involved, in order for the adult to be able to be totally present for the child.

### **Emotional Reactions to Television Portrayal of Dramas**

There are very few studies which have been done on children's emotional reactions to television portrayal of death. In fact, no studies were located on the topic of death. One study, which is related to children's emotional reactions to television portrayal of death, was conducted by Cantor, Wilson and Hoffner (1986). Their study was called "Emotional Responses to a Televised Nuclear Holocaust Film." Through their experimental study, they demonstrated that children between four and eight years old often had emotional

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reactions related to the concrete, perceptible properties of a stimulus, whereas older children aged between ten and thirteen years old were more upset and affected by abstract qualities. According to these researchers, younger children were less responsive to abstract characteristics of stimuli and less responsive to a variety of emotions than older children, when there was no direct contact to the "emotion-provoking stimulus," and when the children were not able to relate the stimuli to their own "real-world" experiences (Cantor, Wilson & Hoffner, 1986). Also, younger children did not respond to threats which were transmitted in an abstract fashion as did the older children.

Cantor, Wilson and Hoffner (1986) argued that the degree to which a child was feeling upset was "significantly correlated with the child's age in years, again controlling for the amount of exposure" (p. 270). The validity of this study should be taken into consideration. This study used a survey to collect the data and all the questionnaires were administered by phone. It would be interesting to know to what extent the researchers were able to control variables such as the amount of exposure, the discussions undertaken with family members and the truthfulness of the answers given to the questionnaires. However, the observations made through their study as well as children's self-report of their own experiences suggest that different factors are related to the emotional reactions to death.

**Understanding of the mass-media.** Children react to television content for many reasons: (a) because of the plausibility of it, (b)

because of the violence which is demonstrated through the television media, (c) because children do not have an adult near them to explain how television programs are made and to tell them what is real versus what is fictitious, and (d) to explain how all the special effects make impossible situations appear real on the screen. It is important to be aware that television is a mass-medium and that the children and adults who watch it, operate on different levels of cognitive development and abilities (Quarfoth, 1979).

In terms of how children understand television, Piaget argued that:

During the first stage of animism the child of about six years or younger will endow any object with consciousness so long as the object is associated with some kind of activity. During the ensuing stages, the child learns to attribute consciousness only to those organisms that move of their own accord and that experience a finite life span. (Quarfoth, 1979, p. 211)

According to Piaget, after a period of years, the child starts to realize that it is not because an object moves that it is conscious. Thenceforward, the child's view increasingly approaches the adult's one. Quarfoth (1979) suggested that on the average, children at each grade level (kindergarten, first, second, third and fourth grade) did not respond as well when being asked to choose characters that were moving by themselves as when being asked to choose characters that were alive.

The understanding of death is characterized by the use of very specific and concrete ideas. The cause of death and the effects are understood in basic physical ways. Many of the causes of death shown

on TV seem improbable, and fit with the remoteness of death for most children (Knowles & Reeves, 1979).

There is, then, a development in the cognitive understanding of television. The older the child, the better is his understanding. Studies have been done on the differences in children's perceptions about television. For example, Rubin (1977), found that nine year old children were more likely to agree that television was presenting things as they were in real life than were the thirteen and seventeen year olds. Lyle and Hoffman (1972) confirmed Rubin's findings by stating that first-graders were also more likely to accept television characters as "true-to-life" than were sixth and tenth-graders.

These studies have demonstrated that children between six and nine years old have difficulty discriminating what is real from what is pretend, as well as discriminating the different types of television characters presented on the medium. As Sharapan (1986) observed, children tend to take events or words in a "literal" way and this can lead them and their parents into confusion if the adults do not take the time to explain to the child what is happening. Because of a lack of explanation or cognitive ability, children may have trouble in comprehending the real message transmitted by the television medium.

Talking to children about death as portrayed on TV. Sharapan (1977) developed some guidelines suggesting how to talk to children about death. She suggested that: (a) emotions toward death need to be expressed with realism and need to be well-portrayed - it is alright

to express remorse, sadness, anger, crying, disbelief, remembering, etc., (b) it is important to provide children with simple and straight forward answers to their questions, and (c) it is important to encourage children to ask questions because they are healthy, and that wondering is natural.

Some other authors also reported such guidelines. Fred Rogers (1970) and Romero (1976) suggested that: (a) it is important to work on memories with the children because they reaffirm the presence of the lost loved one, they are part of who the child is now and who he grows up to be, (b) it is important to have caring, attentive and articulate loving adults who are not afraid to show grieving behavior, (c) it is important to present the idea that death is final, irreversible and unavoidable and (d) the film or television program should not present a personification of death as a macabre force or as a skeletal figure. Bryant and Anderson (1983) also suggested that it is important for parents to provide age-appropriate guidance for children by using modeling and simple vocabulary when discussing with children the death that occurred.

Having discussed children's cognitive development and emotional reactions to the concept of death and to a sibling death, it will be possible to investigate further in these areas with the help of the film "Where's Pete?" used in the present study. The death of a sibling portrayed in the film was also investigated in order to see any effect on children's emotional reactions and understanding of death.

It will also be possible to discuss guidelines suggesting how a television portrayal of death should be thought and organized for the well-being and good understanding of children.

## Chapter III

### METHOD

#### Subjects

Twenty-six children aged between nine and eleven years old were recruited from four different school settings (Torquay, Frank Hobbs, Cloverdale and View-Royal), in order to cover as much as possible the various socioeconomic areas of Victoria, B.C. No specific religious and ethnic background information was collected. Sixteen girls and ten boys participated in the study.

The researcher contacted the teachers of the classes, chosen and suggested by the principals, in order to arrange a time to instruct the children about the study. A week before the beginning of the test period, the children were instructed about the purposes of the study as well as about the way it would proceed. The children were told that their involvement in the study was voluntary and that it would be preferable for them to think about the offer and to discuss it with their parents. In order to do so, the children were asked to take home an informed consent form (see Appendix G) instructing the parents about the study, the time it would be undertaken, as well as asking them for their approval. Also, it was specified in the informed consent letter that for ethical reasons, only children who had not experienced death in the last three years were eligible to participate in the study. For more information, the parents were welcome to contact the researcher.

Confidentiality as well as anonymity were guaranteed to the children and parents. The researcher also arranged that if by

coincidence, a child would have trouble dealing with the issue of death, and would demonstrate some kind of emotional disturbance, the researcher would take the responsibility of contacting a licensed psychologist or counsellor who would be effective in helping the child.

The researcher received between five and eight informed consent forms from each of the five classroom groups containing 25 to 30 students. Since at least five informed consent forms were needed from each classroom in order to have a sample of 25 children participating in the study, the researcher was not able to randomly select the children for a few schools. However, when more than five informed consent forms were received, the researcher was able to randomly select the children's names by drawing them from a hat.

### Instrumentation

#### Pilot Study

Four children aged between eight and thirteen years old were asked to participate on a voluntary basis to this descriptive study in which the film "Where's Pete?" portraying the death of a teenage boy was shown, in order to evaluate the children's emotional reactions and understanding of it. This evaluation was measured by the Atwood (1984) questionnaire (Appendix A), by an interview designed by the researcher focusing on emotions regarding the concept of death (Appendix B) which was administered to the children before the presentation of the film, by another interview designed by the researcher focusing on emotions concerning the film (Appendix D), a questionnaire related to the

understanding of the film, also designed by the researcher (Appendix C) and the Atwood questionnaire presented to the children after the viewing of the film.

The pilot study was conducted in order to assess the acceptability and intelligibility of the questions from the respondent's point of view. In addition, going through the pilot study, helped the interviewer to clarify possible misunderstandings of the questions and helped to clarify the steps to be followed during the procedure. During the pilot study, four children were interviewed together, and interestingly, the children aged between eight and nine years old seemed to be influenced by the answers of the children aged between twelve and thirteen years old. This observation helped me decide to interview the children individually, in order to collect their personal opinions about the film. It was also interesting to note that during the pilot study, the older children were more talkative about the film and needed to debrief longer about what happened during the session than the younger children. This pilot study led me to revise certain questions, to delete useless questions, and to add others.

#### Atwood Questionnaire

This questionnaire was constructed by Virginia Atwood at the University of Kentucky (1984), and was based on children's concepts of death. The twelve questions of the questionnaire included the different constructs used to define the understanding of death which were the concept of permanency, inevitability, irreversibility, and

universality. The data were scored with frequency count based on descriptive categories determined with content-analysis (Appendix A).

### Interviews Focusing on Emotions

These two interviews were related to the children's feelings regarding the concept of death. However, the second interview (Appendix D) also focused on the children's feelings concerning the film "Where's Pete?". These two interviews were constructed by the researcher and assessed throughout the pilot study in order to improve their format, clarity and content. The data were scored with frequency count based on feeling categories formed with content-analysis (Appendix B and D).

### Questionnaire Related to the Film

This questionnaire, which was designed by the researcher and improved throughout the pilot study, intended to assess children's understanding of the film as well as to gather useful information for the creation of appropriate guidelines. The data were also scored with a frequency count based on categories determined with content-analysis (Appendix C).

### Drawings

This means of expression was used before and after the presentation of the film in order to assess children's emotional reactions to the concept of death. The information gathered was evaluated with children's disclosures to such questions as: "What do

you think death looks like and how do you feel about it?" asked during the pretest, and "How do you feel about Pete's death?" asked during the posttest.

### Film

The film "Where's Pete?", written and directed by Jim Purdy was produced by Michael Scott and by the National Film Board of Canada, Ontario Center (1987). The film explores the responses a seven year old boy has to the accidental death of his teenage brother. This film was chosen for this study for several reasons. The film portrays the death of a sibling and the reactions of the family members, which was a factor investigated in one of the research questions of the study. Also, the film follows the main guidelines of how to talk to children about death which were discussed earlier in the review of literature.

### Interviewers

Eight graduate students doing their Master's degree programs in Counselling, and in Learning and Development, at the University of Victoria, agreed to be interviewers in the study. All of them had the necessary skills to be interviewers which meant that they knew how to ask open-ended questions and to ask for clarification if needed. In addition, the interviewers were informed and trained about the specifics of the study, which were the ethics surrounding the topic of death as well as the procedure to be followed. To do so, each interviewer had an individual training session with the researcher in order to be ready to start the interviewing process. Since the topic

of death is sensitive, the interviewers were asked not to demand but to elicit as much as possible an answer to every question from each child. Clarification was elicited with phrases such as, "Could you tell me more about that?", "How does it make you feel?" or "Anything else?" The children were also encouraged to elaborate on the questions, if their discussions were relevant to the topic (Atwood, 1984). The researcher was part of the interviewing process, which helped to direct the other interviewers when necessary.

#### Procedure

A pretest, treatment, posttest design was conducted during the study. Before starting the interviewing process with the children, the researcher visited each school a week before the testing period, in order to introduce herself, the topic of the study and to distribute the informed consent forms to be brought back at the interviewing session. Over a period of two weeks, the four different schools were visited on seven different days. For three of the schools, four interviewers were invited to come with the researcher to start the interviews. For these three schools, five children were selected and were interviewed individually by the five interviewers. Some interviewers participated two or three times in the interviewing process, and others only once. For the fourth school, two of the interviewers helped out in the interviewing process with three different children; one interviewer worked with one child in conjunction with the researcher who was also interviewing a child, and the other interviewer came at another time to interview two children

in a row. The rest of the interviews for this school were conducted by the researcher only.

Each session spent with the children lasted approximately one hour. The same interviewer interviewed the same child for the pre and posttests. When five interviewers were interviewing individually five children at the same time, the whole session then lasted an hour.

### Interview Setting

Three schools made available a big room for the use of the researcher and interviewers. It was then possible for each interviewer to get isolated to work individually with the children. The fourth school was not able to offer a big room to work in, and instead made available a small office where it was still possible for two interviewers to conduct the interviews at a certain distance from each other. A VHS video machine was also needed to show the film, and was made available by all four schools. Each child was also audio-taped during the whole procedure and the records were later transcribed.

### Pretest Period

During the interview process, each child was first pretested with a conservation task, as discussed by Piaget, in order to determine whether the child was in the concrete-operational period or not (Appendix E). Second, the children were pretested with some questions related to the understanding of mass-media (Appendix F), third with the Atwood questionnaire (Appendix A), and fourth with an interview focusing on feelings regarding the concept of death (Appendix B). The

subjects were also asked to draw pictures representing their thoughts and feelings about death.

### Treatment

The treatment period was to view the film "Where's Pete?" which is a thirty-minute film portraying the death of a teenager. The children who were interviewed individually during the pretest period were asked to view together this portrayal of death which is based on guidelines for approaching death realistically. At the end of the film, the children were asked to return to their individual interviewers in order to get ready for the posttest period.

### Posttest Period

During the posttest period, each individual child was interviewed with the questionnaire related to the film (Appendix C), an interview concerning the children's feelings about the film (Appendix D), and with the Atwood questionnaire (appendix A). The children were asked again to draw pictures reflecting how they felt about the film and about the idea of the finality of death. At the end of each interview, a closing discussion was held with all the children, in order for them to feel comfortable with the research procedures.

In the week after the interview process, a follow-up discussion was held at each school by the researcher with the children who participated in the study, in order for them to discuss any unresolved concerns or particular questions. This discussion usually lasted for approximately fifteen to twenty minutes. The teachers and children who

were not interviewed during the study were offered an opportunity to view and discuss the film after the study was completed.

### Data Analysis

#### Interviews

All interviews were audio-taped and transcribed for each individual child. In order to analyze the transcriptions, categories were determined with content-analysis of the data and a frequency count was used. Category verification involved three graduate students with Master's degrees in Counselling, who were considered as judges for the study. The categories were defined and explained in order for the judges to make a decision on their reliability and validity. The judges were told that each child's response could be assigned to one or more category at a time depending on the different themes mentioned in the response.

The three judges agreed with the researcher's assignment of responses to the different categories 90% of the time for all the responses given by the children. Two judges agreed 95% of the time with the researcher's assignment of responses, and the third judge agreed 85% of the time.

#### Pretest Assessment

First, a conservation task was conducted with the children at the beginning of the study in order to verify whether they were in the concrete-operational period or not. A frequency count was used to report the data as it is observed in Table 13. If the children

responded correctly to the questions corresponding to each different task, they were classified as conservers, and if the children did not respond correctly to some of the questions corresponding to some tasks, they were categorized as non-conservers. The frequency count of the number of conservers was an indicator of the concrete-operational characteristics involved in the children's cognitive development.

Second, the children were asked to answer the Atwood questionnaire which was administered also during the posttest, in order to assess any significant change. The McNemar test for the significance of change which is applicable to those "before and after" designs, was used to compare the children's responses which demonstrated a marked difference between the pre and posttests. According to Bowker (1948), "to test the significance of any observed change by this method, one sets up a fourfold table of frequencies to represent the first and second sets of responses from the same individuals" (in Siegel, 1956, p. 63). The level of significance in this study was set at  $p = .10$ . Since this study was preliminary in the area of children and death, it was important to try to avoid a Type II error.

Third, an interview focusing on emotions toward the concept of death was also conducted with the children. Most of the responses were assigned to different categories and were discussed in the context of the study. However, five questions of this interview were also asked during the posttest, in an interview focusing on emotions concerning the film, and were treated with the McNemar test in order to assess any significant change as a result of viewing the film.

Fourth, the children were asked to draw pictures regarding their thoughts and feelings about death. The children's disclosures were used to describe their pictures and were commented on in relation to the first research question on children's emotional reactions toward the concept of death.

#### Posttest Assessment

In addition to the interview focusing on emotions concerning the film in which most responses were also assigned to different categories and discussed in a descriptive way, an interview focusing on the understanding of the film was conducted with the children. Some of the questions which were similar to the ones discussed during the pretest were analyzed with the McNemar test. Otherwise, the responses were assigned to different categories and discussed in the context of the study.

The children were also asked to draw pictures representing their feelings about Pete's death in the film. The same procedure as described in the pretest assessment was followed to analyze the drawings.

## Chapter IV

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The first research question concerned the emotional reactions reported by the children when viewing a film which portrayed family members' reactions to the death of a sibling, and which portrayed death as final and permanent.

The feeling which was most often reported by the children to express their emotional reactions toward the film "Where's Pete?" was the feeling of sadness. Before viewing the film, the children reported feelings of sadness when talking about the concept of death in general, and after viewing the film, the children reported feeling even more sad because they were relating what was happening in the film to their own life experiences. For example, before viewing the film, when the children were asked to think about death and to tell the interviewer how they felt about it (see Question 1, Appendix B), the predominant feeling mentioned was of sadness; a small number of children mentioned feeling scared (see Table 1-A). As an example of sadness, one child said, "Sad because my grandma, she died and we remember her, it was really sad because we didn't see her because she wasn't here, she was far away, so it's sad. Ya, I knew her, my mom too." The feeling of sadness was often related to the fact that the dead person would not come back and that the survivor would not see the person again. As an example of feeling scared, one child said, "Sort of wanting to find out what happens after that. After you're dead. The other half of me doesn't want to."

Table 1

Children's Feelings Regarding the Concept of Death

| Feeling categories | Number of responses for each question                |   |
|--------------------|--|---|
|                    | (A) Feelings regarding the thought of death. Pretest | (B) Feelings about the death of a known person. Pretest |
| Sad                | 15   | 19  |
| Like crying        | 1  | 8   |
| Scared             | 5  | 0   |
| Sorry              | 3  | 2   |
| Angry              | 2  | 1   |
| Guilty             | 0  | 1   |
| Unhappy            | 3  | 4   |
| Curious            | 1  | 0   |
| Really upset       | 0  | 3   |
| Normal             | 1  | 0   |

Note: (A) Question 1: When you think about death, how does it make you feel? (Appendix B)

(B) Question 2: How would you feel if you would hear that the person you know is dead? (Appendix B)

When the children were asked to talk about how they would feel if a person they knew died (see Question 2, Appendix B), the children answered again predominantly with the feeling of sadness, but several children also mentioned that they would feel like crying (see Table 1-B). For example, one child said, "I'd probably cry. I'd feel really sad. Maybe I'd seen them and I'd remember lots of good things we had together and now they're just dead." Another child mentioned, "I felt, well I talked with my Mom. My Mom started talking about how he died and I just started crying." Perhaps the children were feeling like crying because they knew the person they were talking about, and were involved in a relationship with that person.

To assess the children's feelings about adult's emotions over death, the children were asked how they would feel if they would see a person crying over the death of a loved one (pretest, see Question 4, Appendix B). The children mentioned predominantly feeling sad and sorry. For example, one child said, "I would feel sorry for the person who's crying because if it's somebody they know and it's dead, they would be sad too." Other feelings were not mentioned as frequently as the two described above (see Table 2-C). Interestingly, in the "not-applicable" responses, the children were not talking about their feelings but about what they would do to help the person who is crying. They said, "I would tell the person not to think too much about him," and "I'd say something that she'd forget it: 'Don't worry, you did have a good time and that'," and "I would try to cheer them up and talk over and do things like that."

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A second question regarding children's emotional reactions to adult's emotions over death, which was asked after viewing the film, was concerned about discussing with the children how they felt when they saw Chad's father crying on the stairs (see Question 5, Appendix D). Half of the children mentioned the feeling of sadness. One of the children said, "Sad because Chad didn't know what to do." Many children mentioned feeling sorry. For example, one child said, "I felt sorry for him because I think the father might have known Pete for a longer time than Chad." As reported in Table 2(D), three children mentioned the feeling word strange, apparently due to their uneasiness of seeing an adult crying. One child said, "I felt pretty strange, I haven't seen my parents crying." Another child said, "Kind of funny because I never saw my dad crying." Finally, one more child said, "I felt kind of 'weird' about that but it could happen because it was his own son." As observed in Table 2, a larger proportion of children mentioned feelings of sadness when thinking about seeing a person they know crying over the death of a loved one, than of those seeing a stranger crying over the death of a loved one. However, the difference in the proportion of responses given for the feelings of sadness was not statistically significant ( $\chi^2 = 0.44, p > .10$ ) as tested by the McNemar test. This means that the children who reported feelings of sadness when seeing an adult's emotions toward death were not necessarily the same children who mentioned feelings of sadness when seeing Chad's father crying over Pete's death.

The children also expressed their feelings toward the concept of permanency. Both before and after viewing the film, the children were

Table 2

Children's Feelings Regarding Adults' Emotions Toward Death

| Feeling categories | Number of responses for each question                   |                                       |
|--------------------|---|---------------------------------------|
|                    | (C) Feelings about seeing a person crying over a death. | (D) Feelings about Chad's dad crying. |
|                    | Pretest   | Posttest                              |
| Sad                | 8   | 13                                    |
| Sorry              | 8   | 7                                     |
| Upset              | 3   | 1                                     |
| Normal             | 2   | 1                                     |
| Mad                | 1   | 1                                     |
| Like crying        | 1   | 0                                     |
| Unhappy            | 2   | 0                                     |
| Concerned          | 0   | 1                                     |
| Strange            | 0   | 3                                     |
| Horrible           | 0   | 1                                     |
| N/A                | 3   | 0                                     |

Note: (C) Question 4: How would it make you feel if you would see a person crying over the death of a loved one? (Appendix B)

(D) Question 5: How did you feel when you saw Chad's dad crying on the stairs? (Appendix D)

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asked how they felt when they heard that death was final and permanent (see Question 3, Appendix B and D). Again, most of the children mentioned feelings of sadness. One child said during the pretest, "Sometimes mad, sometimes sad because I won't see the person anymore." The same child said during the posttest, "Sad, sometimes I think the person will go in another country and won't come back." The proportion of responses given for the feelings mad and upset was higher during the posttest than during the pretest as reported in Table 3(E). As an example of feeling upset, one child's pretest comment was, "I feel sad and depressed." During the posttest this same child said, "I feel worse than I felt to start with, because I know the person is not coming back, I feel pretty bad." The McNemar test ( $\chi^2 = 0.44, p > .10$ ) demonstrated that the difference in the proportion of responses given for the feeling upset between the pre and posttests was not statistically significant. This means that the children who were feeling upset before viewing the film were not necessarily the same children who were feeling upset after viewing the film.

A second question related to the feelings regarding permanency involved children's reactions to the scene in which Chad asked questions about his brother Pete and was answered that Pete was dead and would not come back (see Question 2, Appendix D). Again, a predominant feeling mentioned by the children was that of sadness (see Table 3-F). One of the children said, "I felt that if Pete was my brother, I would be really sad. I'd cry my head off..." Several children mentioned feeling sorry and one of them said, "I thought that... I felt sorry for Chad and I thought it was unfair that he

Table 3

Children's Feelings Regarding the Concept of Permanency

| Feeling categories | Number of responses for each question       |          |  |
|--------------------|---|----------|--|
|                    | (E) Feelings about the permanency of death. |          | (F) Feelings about seeing Chad facing the permanency of his brother's death. |
|                    | Pretest                                     | Posttest | Posttest   |
| Sad                | 14  | 13       | 16   |
| Sorry              | 3   | 1        | 5  |
| Scared             | 4   | 2        | 1  |
| Angry              | 2   | 4        | 1  |
| Upset              | 3   | 7        | 3  |
| Lonely             | 1   | 0        | 0  |
| Unhappy            | 3   | 1        | 0  |
| Normal             | 0   | 1        | 0  |
| Good               | 0   | 0        | 1  |
| Horrible           | 0   | 0        | 1  |
| N/A                | 1   | 1        | 1  |

Note: (E) Question 3: How do you feel when you hear that death is final and permanent? (Appendix B and D)

(F) Question 2: When you saw Chad asking questions about his brother Pete and being answered that Pete was dead and would not come back, how did you feel? (Appendix D)

couldn't come back. It's just unfair." One child said he was feeling good and said, "I felt that it was the truth and it's good to tell someone like that the truth." It is interesting to observe how often the children related what was happening in the film to their own personal life, like the example given earlier for the feeling of sadness, and how much the children's values were incorporated in the comments they made to the interviewer.

Also related to the first research question were the feelings regarding the ritual of funeral. The children's feelings when seeing Chad standing in front of the coffin remembering the good times he had with Pete (see Question 7 and 9, Appendix C and D) were investigated twice during the posttest, in two different questionnaires, in order to assess if there were any changes in the answers given. When first asked the question, the children mentioned predominantly feeling sad (see Table 4-G). One child said, "I felt that if I was Chad, I'd miss Pete, I felt it was sad like it's unfair he is dead. He had a longer life to go." Some children responded that they would feel happy. One child said, "I felt a bit happier. He remembered something good about Pete." Others mentioned feeling good. For example, one child said, "I felt good. Not really good, but in the sense he remembered Pete and the things he did with him." In contrast, the second time the children were asked the question they mentioned predominantly feeling happy and good. One child said, "Real happy because he remembered the good time." Another child said, "I felt good because he remembered the good time and not the bad time." As can be observed, the main difference in the responses given to the two subsequent questions regarded the

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Table 4

Children's Feelings Concerning the Ritual of Funeral

| Feeling categories | Number of responses for each question         |      |  |   |      |  |
|--------------------|---|------|--|---|------|--|
|                    | (G) Feelings about seeing Chad at the coffin. |      | (H) Chad's feelings about seeing Pete in the coffin. | (I) Chad's mom putting away Pete's stuff. |      |  |
|                    | Post  | Post | Post   | Post                                      | Post |  |
| Sad                | 13  | 3    | 17   | 10  | 8    |  |
| Good               | 5   | 5    | 0  | 5   | 0    |  |
| Upset              | 0   | 0    | 4  | 3   | 2    |  |
| Angry              | 0   | 0    | 0  | 7   | 5    |  |
| Lonely             | 0   | 0    | 0  | 1   | 1    |  |
| Unhappy            | 0   | 0    | 3  | 4   | 3    |  |
| Strange            | 0   | 1    | 0  | 1   | 1    |  |
| Sorry              | 2   | 2    | 0  | 0   | 2    |  |
| Confused           | 0   | 0    | 3  | 0   | 0    |  |
| Happy              | 6   | 8    | 2  | 0   | 0    |  |
| Anxious            | 0   | 0    | 2  | 0   | 0    |  |
| I don't know       | 3   | 0    | 0  | 0   | 0    |  |
| N/A                | 0   | 1    | 1  | 0   | 4    |  |

Note: Questions 9 & 7: How did you feel when you saw Chad standing in front of the coffin at the funeral remembering the good time he had with Pete? (Appendix C and D)

Question 8: How do you think he felt when he saw Pete in the coffin? (Appendix C)

Questions 12 & 8: What did you think/feel when you saw Chad's mother putting away Pete's belongings shortly after the funeral? (Appendix C and D)

feeling of sadness. The McNemar test ( $\chi^2 = 5.1, p < .10$ ) indicated that this difference was statistically significant at  $p = .01$ . A significant proportion of children who were feeling sad when first asked the question were not feeling sad the second time the question was asked. According to the data, when first being asked the question, the children seemed to be more preoccupied by Pete's death and the fact that he would not come back. The second time they were asked the question, the children seemed to have been able to process the question and to feel happy and good at the thought of seeing Chad keeping memories for himself. It would be important to mention that for six children out of twenty-six, the interviewers omitted by mistake, the question a second time which could have influenced the results reported in Table 4.

The children also expressed, after viewing the film, their feelings about seeing Pete in the coffin (see Question 8, Appendix C). Again the predominant feeling expressed was the one of sadness. One child said, "Real sad because he was his best friend and his best brother." The other feelings mentioned by the children are also interesting. For example, one child said, "Chad thought that Pete was just sleeping. He thought he didn't have his legs. He was scared because he thought that this wasn't Pete. I felt worried because he thought he would be cooked in the oven." These results are reported in Table 4(H).

Another question related to the feelings concerning the ritual of funeral was asked twice of the children after viewing the film, in a fifteen-minute interval, in order to see any differences in the

responses given. The children were asked how they felt when they saw Chad's mother putting away Pete's belongings (hockey stick, trophies) shortly after the funeral (see Question 12 and 8, Appendix C and D). Again most of the children answered that they felt sad. One of the children said, "Well, I felt really sad and I think Chad felt sad too. And he said that it was Pete's room too and he didn't want her to put his stuff away, but I don't think he really understands that Pete's dead." However, several children said they felt angry. For example, one child said, "That made me feel real mad. Like if my sister or brother would die I'd keep all his stuff and I'd keep it in the same place." All the children who mentioned feeling angry, directed their anger at the mother for putting Pete's belongings away. They would have liked to see his belongings left in the same place.

Contrary to the first time the question was asked, four children shared comments which did not express specific feelings the second time the question was asked. For example, one child said, "If he was close to me I would like her to put those things away because if you left them out it would keep reminding you of him and I wouldn't like you to kind of staying sad." Another child said, "I felt that it was unfair because Chad could show the trophies to his friends, and he could use the hockey stick for himself." Another interesting difference was that several children mentioned feeling good the first time the question was asked, but not the second time (see Table 4-I). These children considered that to put Pete's belonging away helped Chad to go on with his life and to forget about Pete. However, according to the results, it seems that for most of the children it is

important to have memories or objects to remember the dead one or the lost loved one.

Feelings regarding the concept of reversibility--defined by Atwood (1984) as the concept of irrevocability--were also related to the first research question. When asked how they felt about the scene at the end of the film in which Pete said to Chad that he would not see him in the morning (see Question 13, Appendix D), most of the children mentioned feelings of sadness. One of the children said, "Sad because Chad didn't listen very well and said 'see you in the morning' and he pretended he was sleeping when Pete said 'I won't see you in the morning'." The other comments shared by the children with the interviewers are also interesting. One child's answer was categorized as "confused" by three judges, even though the child did not mention the feeling word "confused." The child said, "Well, I felt that it's kind of weird, unusual. He won't come back. I think he might dream that Pete was coming back. I felt that it was nice to talk for the last night. It was unusual for Pete to say he wouldn't see him in the morning because he's dead."

Two of the children's answers have been categorized as "non-applicable" because the children did not mention how they felt but rather talked about Chad's feelings and tried to process what had happened in the film. One of them said, "It would not make him feel good. I might say that, that he would understand that he was still dead," and another child said, "I felt that it's not fair that he'll never come back." The results are reported in Table 5(J).

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Table 5

Children's Feelings Regarding the Concept of Reversibility

| Feeling categories | Number of responses for each question                                       |  |  |
|--------------------|---|--|--|
|                    | (J) Feelings about Pete saying to Chad that he would not come back.<br>Post | (K) Feelings about Pete coming back to talk to Chad.<br>Post | (L) Feelings about the hockey stick.<br>Post |
| Sad                | 13  | 4  | 0  |
| Happy              | 0   | 10   | 5  |
| Confused           | 2   | 0  | 1  |
| Mad                | 2   | 1  | 0  |
| Upset              | 3   | 0  | 0  |
| Good               | 2   | 5  | 8  |
| Sorry              | 2   | 0  | 0  |
| Lonely             | 1   | 0  | 0  |
| Strange            | 0   | 1  | 0  |
| I don't know       | 0   | 1  | 0  |
| N/A                | 2   | 2  | 11   |

Note: (J) Question 13: How did you feel when Pete at the end of the film said to Chad that he would not see him in the morning? (Appendix D)

(K) Question 10: How did it make you feel when you saw Pete at the end of the film coming back to talk to Chad? (Appendix D)

(L) Question 12: How did you feel about the hockey stick Pete gave to Chad at the end of the film? (Appendix D)

A shift in the feelings mentioned by the children can be observed in answer to the other questions regarding the children's feelings toward the concept of reversibility (see Table 5-K&L). In answer to the post-test question about how the children felt when they saw Pete at the end of the film coming back to talk to Chad (see Question 10, Appendix D), almost half of the children chose the feeling of happiness. One child said, "That made me feel happy cause when he gave the hockey stick he made me feel happy because what Chad will try to do is turn it down so he can play hockey with it. He will probably call it 'Betsy' like Pete called it 'Betsy' too."

Several children also reported feeling good. One of them said, "It made me feel good like Chad pretends Pete is there to solve his problems." One of the children whose comment was "not-applicable" said, "I felt that it was kind of nice cause he can carry on the hockey stick in the family." Even though most children were aware of the impossibility for a dead person to come back to life, most of them liked the idea of seeing Pete come back for a last visit to say "good-bye" to Chad.

The children were also asked how they felt about the hockey stick Pete gave to Chad at the end of the film (see Question 12, Appendix D). Almost half the children gave "non-applicable" responses. They were not mentioning feelings, but rather were processing the question in a cognitive way. For example, one child said, "Well I felt like Pete was trying to tell Chad that he was the one who would play hockey from now on, 'you can keep it now'," and another child said, "I felt that that was a nice present to give to Chad because he scored his

first goal and he was proud of himself. It was sort of a going away present." Some of the children whose responses were categorized as "non-applicable" tried to find an explanation to this particular sequence of the film. One of the children said, "I felt, I think it was just a dream. I think it was a dream. I felt for him not for me. Here he was dead and now there's the hockey stick." Another child said, "He didn't really give it to him because he was dead. I think he took the hockey stick and put it by his bed and then he woke up and saw it and didn't really remember." However, several children mentioned feeling good about seeing Chad in the film with Pete's hockey stick. One of the children said, "Good. He scored a lot of goals with it. It will bring him good luck." Also one child admitted that he was feeling confused and responded, "He's dead and he can't come back and he's not there." It seems that the children's reactions to this sequence of the film depended upon their values, beliefs and development. However, as reported in Table 5(L), in terms of reversibility of death, the majority of children felt either happy or good about seeing Pete come back to life.

### Further Results

This section is related to the first research question and describes the children's emotional reactions in another means of expression.

The children were asked before the presentation of the film to draw a picture expressing their thoughts and feelings about death. They were also asked after viewing the film to draw a picture

representing their feelings regarding the concept of death. The researcher was hoping to gather more information and details about their emotions concerning the topic of death.

Four sets of pictures will be examined. The first set of pictures was drawn by a nine year old girl who disclosed during the pretest, "This is someone who is dying and who goes to heaven. This one is happy to die. But some people are not happy to die" (see Figure 1). For the posttest, this girl mentioned, "This is Pete in the coffin and Chad is there and he's sad. Pete has a sad face. I was going to draw Chad with a bubble gum to put in Pete's pocket, but I didn't put Chad close enough from the coffin" (see Figure 2). Interestingly, the first picture represents an angel with a happy face who looks quite like a "fairy." However, the picture representing feelings regarding Pete's death looks more realistic and demonstrates feelings of sadness.

The second set of pictures was drawn by a ten year old girl. This girl disclosed during the pretest:

This is a gun. I don't like when people get killed. My dad was shot once in the leg. He's not dead, he's alive. I just drew anybody. I don't feel good when people shoot other people, and when they stab them with knives. I don't like it because people die. Like it's sadder when people are sick and they die, but I don't like to watch this shooting and all the blood. (see Figure 3)

For the posttest the same girl mentioned:

The mom is feeling sad when she puts the trophies away. She was putting the clothes away and she was crying. Chad, he was crying when he put the gum in Pete's coat and when he had the hockey stick, and the dad was crying. He was trying to tell his feelings to Chad with his puppet, and Pete had his skates with a hockey stick. Everybody was sad except for Pete because he never knew he would die. I felt sad when I drew the drawing because they were probably a happy family. Now he's gone. They had good times with him and he's gone.



Figure 1. Nine year old girl's pretest drawing.

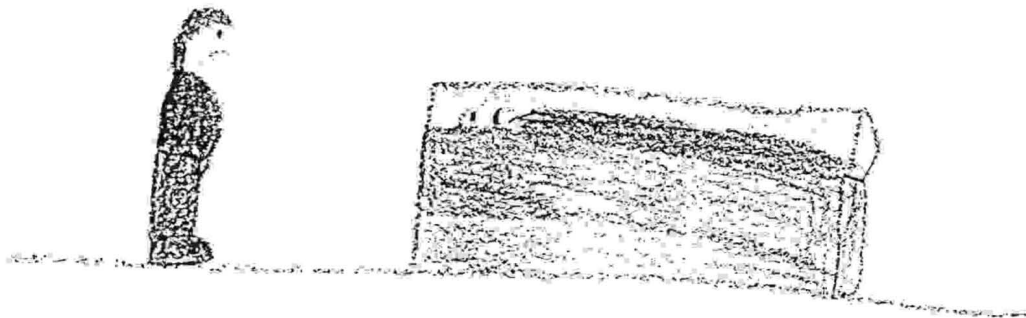


Figure 2. Nine year old girl's posttest drawing.

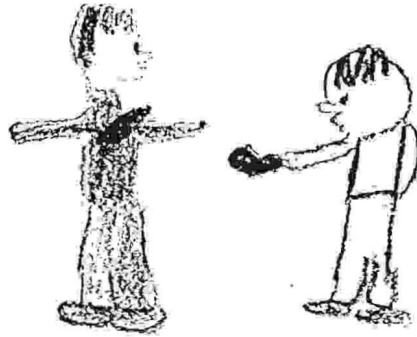


Figure 3. Ten year old girl's pretest drawing.

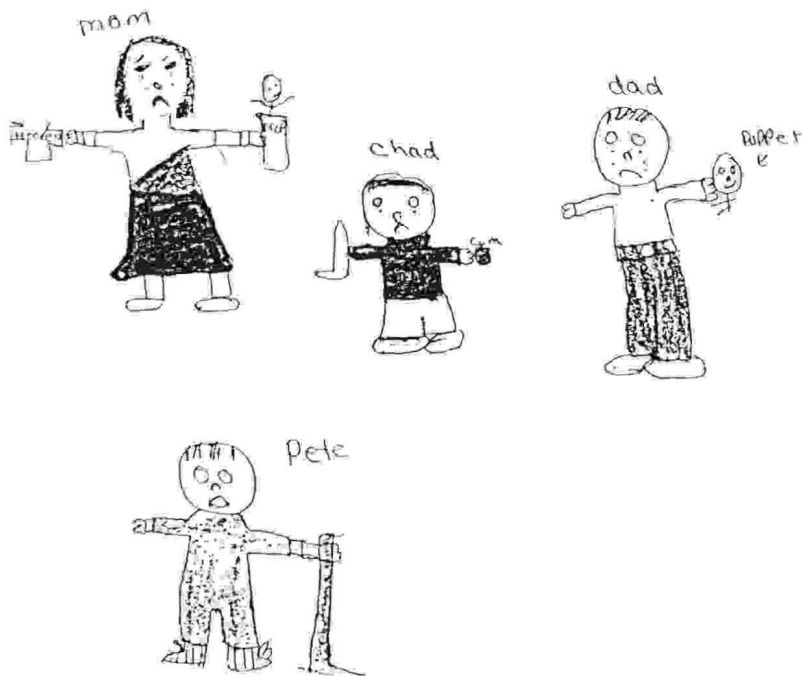


Figure 4. Ten year old girl's posttest drawing.

They'll probably have good times but not with the same person. So that's kind of sad. (see Figure 4)

As a result of viewing the film, this child represented feelings of sadness which are quite different than the picture drawn during the pretest, which represented feelings of violence and anger.

The third set of pictures was drawn by a ten year old boy who seemed to be practical in his representation of death during the pretest (see Figure 5), and quite mystic in representing his feelings regarding Pete's death. It seems that as a result of viewing the film, this child felt comfortable drawing Pete around Chad, expressing feelings of happiness (see Figure 6). During the pretest, this child disclosed:

This picture represents someone who died. The person is in the coffin. After the funeral, the gravestone is to show that it is in the graveyard. I don't know the person. I pass by the Oak Bay cemetery and that is what it reminded me of. This is the sun and clouds. The sun is behind the clouds because it sort of... It shows that if it would be a happy picture like for a wedding, it would be all sunny but since it's behind the clouds, it shows that it's unhappy and it's a 'gloomy' day. (see Figure 5)

It is interesting to notice how detailed the child was in representing death before viewing the film. Unfortunately, the tape did not record the child's description of the posttest picture.

The fourth set of pictures was drawn by an eleven year old boy who represented a violent death during the pretest (see Figure 7), and expressed feelings of sadness as a result of viewing the film (see Figure 8). During the pretest, the child disclosed, "This person died. He got killed by someone." And during the posttest, the child mentioned:

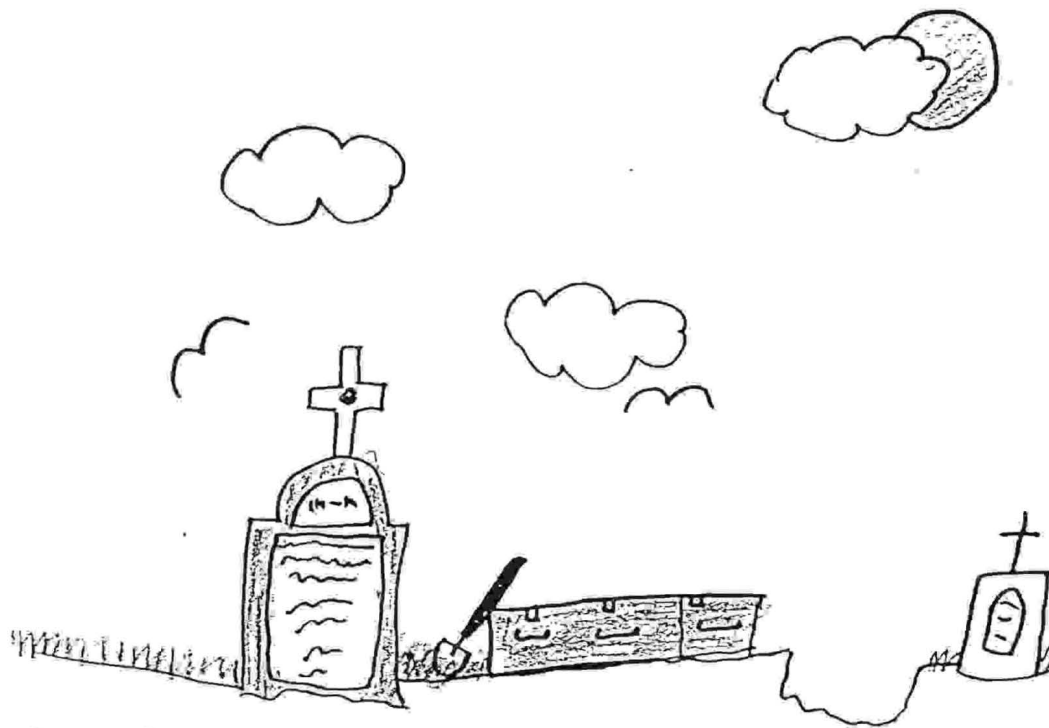


Figure 5. Ten year old boy's pretest drawing.

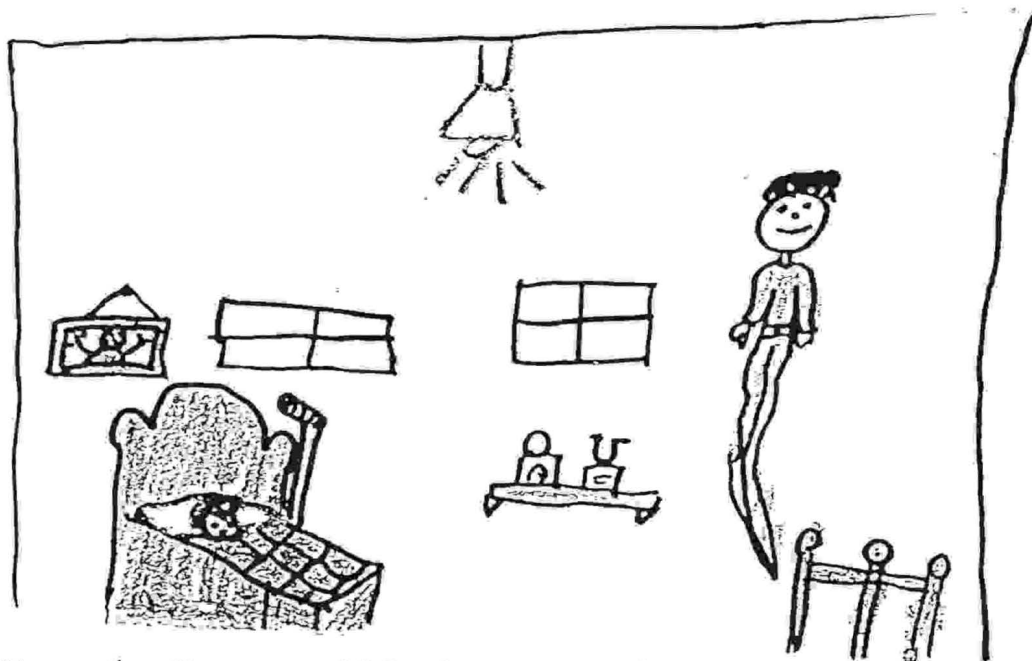


Figure 6. Ten year old boy's posttest drawing.

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Death Looks Like a dead  
 person or someone who is  
 being killed by someone





Figure 7. Eleven year old boy's pretest drawing.



Figure 8. Eleven year old boy's posttest drawing.

He feels sad and he is on the sundeck of his house. He remembers Pete a lot, he's sad and feels awful and he cries. It's Chad. I feel sad and happy. I felt sad when Chad's father said that Pete was in a car accident. I felt happy when Chad remembered the good time he had with Pete with the bubble gum. If my brother died, I'd feel sad the same way as Chad and I'd cry. It could be me on the sundeck.  
(see Figure 8)

Interestingly, most pictures drawn by the children after viewing the film represented feelings of sadness. This finding supports the results discussed earlier in the first research question.

The second research question concerned the changes in children's understanding of death, specifically their understanding of permanency, inevitability, irreversibility and universality, occurring as a result of viewing the film "Where's Pete?".

According to the results, the children did not show any significant changes in their understanding of death after viewing the film. However, the film "Where's Pete?" assisted the children to think about their understanding of death as can be observed by their comments which expressed their values and beliefs.

The children's responses to the Atwood (1984) questionnaire were categorized as physiological (which refers specifically to a living physical state such as sleeping, waking, and which refers to the body, cremation, funeral, age), spiritual (which refers to heaven, hell, ghost or when the person is coming back), feelings, social (which refers to relationships, the loss of a sibling), social-external causes (which implies accidents, being shot or killed), and cognitive (which refers to an explanation which is not related to the other categories of description). The categories were formed through the use

of content-analysis of the interview transcripts, and the agreement of three judges.

The children expressed in different ways their values and beliefs in conveying their understanding of death throughout the study. For example, half of the children used cognitive explanations of death both before and after viewing the film when talking about the meaning of death, and emphasized the loss of the relationship (see Question 1, Appendix A). One child said before viewing the film, "It's a loss in a family or a loss of a friend. They're gone and they won't come back." The same child mentioned after viewing the film, "Death is when somebody goes out of your life and they won't come back. You're losing somebody." Similar results occurred before and after viewing the film as can be seen in Table 6(A).

The children were asked what it meant to be dead (see Question 2, Appendix A). Again, almost half the children answered in a cognitive way. One child mentioned during the pretest, "It means that their lives are gone. You're dead, you're not coming back, and you're gone forever." Several children also answered in a physiological way to the question. For example, during the pretest one child said, "It's like going to sleep and not waking up." The results are reported in Table 6(B).

In order to assess if the children were able to distinguish between the terms "death" and "sleep," they were asked if going to sleep was the same as death (see Question 4, Appendix A). The majority of children answered negatively to the question, both before and after viewing the film. A few more children answered negatively during the

Table 6

Children's Understanding of the Concept of Death, Inevitability and Universality

| Response<br>Categories     | Number of responses for each question |      |                         |      |                     |      |                       |      |                          |      |
|----------------------------|---------------------------------------|------|-------------------------|------|---------------------|------|-----------------------|------|--------------------------|------|
|                            | (A)What is<br>death?                  |      | (B)Meaning<br>of death. |      | (C)Sleep/<br>death. |      | (D)Why<br>people die. |      | (E)Does<br>everyone die? |      |
|                            | pre                                   | post | pre                     | post | pre                 | post | pre                   | post | pre                      | post |
| Physiological              | 5                                     | 3    | 7                       | 8    | 8                   | 4    | 19                    | 18   | 3                        | 5    |
| Spiritual                  | 1                                     | 5    | 2                       | 4    | 0                   | 0    | 3                     | 4    | 0                        | 0    |
| Feelings                   | 6                                     | 3    | 2                       | 2    | 0                   | 0    | 0                     | 0    | 0                        | 0    |
| Social<br>(relationship)   | 6                                     | 4    | 4                       | 1    | 0                   | 0    | 0                     | 0    | 0                        | 0    |
| Social<br>(external cause) | 2                                     | 0    | 0                       | 0    | 0                   | 0    | 10                    | 7    | 1                        | 1    |
| Cognitive                  | 13                                    | 13   | 12                      | 10   | 16                  | 17   | 2                     | 3    | 9                        | 4    |
| I don't know               | 0                                     | 0    | 1                       | 0    | 0                   | 0    | 0                     | 0    | 0                        | 0    |
| N/A                        | 0                                     | 0    | 1                       | 0    | 0                   | 0    | 0                     | 0    | 0                        | 0    |

Note: (A) Question 1: What is death?  
 (B) Question 2: What does it mean to be dead?  
 (C) Question 4: Is going to sleep the same as death?  
 (D) Question 5: Why do people die?  
 (E) Question 6: Does everyone die?

posttest than during the pretest, but the difference was not significant as tested by the McNemar test ( $\chi^2 = 2.25, p > .10$ ). A few children answered "yes and no" to the question during the pretest; during the posttest these children answered either "yes" or "no." However, no significant change is noticed between the "yes" and "no" responses given by the children during the pretest and the "yes" or "no" responses expressed during the posttest as expressed by the McNemar test ( $\chi^2 = 2.25, p > .10$ ). Perhaps before viewing the film the children were a bit confused about the meaning of the terms "sleep" and "death", but after viewing the film more children seemed to be clearer about the definition of these terms.

The reasons given in response to the question just discussed were categorized to study changes between the pre and posttests. As reported in Table 6(C), more than half of the children gave a cognitive reason for their response to the question in the pre and posttests. However, a few responses were expressing at the same time a cognitive and physiological reason. For example, during the pretest one child said, "No, when you go to sleep you're breathing and you're still alive. You can wake up in the morning or another night but when you're dead it's like an 'internal sleep', you're asleep but you won't going to wake up." During the posttest one child, who also answered with a cognitive and physiological reason, said, "No, when you go to sleep you're going to wake up everytime, but when you're dead you're asleep forever and you'll never wake up." The proportion of children answering with a physiological reason during the posttest was not as large as the proportion of children answering with that reason during

posttest than during the pretest, but the difference was not significant as tested by the McNemar test ( $\chi^2 = 2.25, p > .10$ ). A few children answered "yes and no" to the question during the pretest; during the posttest these children answered either "yes" or "no." However, no significant change is noticed between the "yes" and "no" responses given by the children during the pretest and the "yes" or "no" responses expressed during the posttest as expressed by the McNemar test ( $\chi^2 = 2.25, p > .10$ ). Perhaps before viewing the film the children were a bit confused about the meaning of the terms "sleep" and "death", but after viewing the film more children seemed to be clearer about the definition of these terms.

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the pretest. However, this difference was not significant as tested by the McNemar test ( $\chi^2 = 1.5, p > .10$ ). Even though the analysis of the data indicated that after viewing the film the children were more precise in distinguishing the terms "sleep" and "death," the examples presented above show that the children were still using the term "sleeping" when talking about death after the film. Also, some children who said "no" with a physiological reason before viewing the film answered negatively giving a cognitive reason after viewing the film.

In order to elaborate more on the meaning of death, the children were also asked to explain why people die (see Question 5, Appendix A). Many children offered physiological responses to the question. For example, one child said during the pretest, "Old age, older, become weaker, ill, sometimes people can be wanted by somebody and they can be killed in a car accident or get shot." During the posttest another child said, "Because they die of old age or sometimes they get an accident, they get killed." In the last two comments, the children were using sentences evoking social-external causes such as "can be killed or shot." The social external reasons given by the children in the pre and posttest were the next most predominant responses expressed by them. The McNemar test ( $\chi^2 = 0.125, p > .10$ ) and Table 6(D) do not demonstrate any significant change between the pre and posttests for the social external reasons shared by the children with the interviewers. Other reasons were also mentioned by the children but were not as major as the ones discussed above. During the pretest

one child mentioned a cognitive, physiological and social-external reason in responding to the question, "Why do people die?":

Because if people wouldn't die, the planet would be crowded and we would not be able to survive and people would get weaker and older and it would be too crowded and there wouldn't be enough resources. It's the way life is, it's hard to explain when you get old, and people get sick, heart attack, cancer and food poisoning or people can be shot.

Another child's pretest comment which expressed a spiritual reason was "Because sometimes God thinks life was long enough and calls back a person up and then he wants you to go to heaven." Overall, before viewing the film, most of the children had a good idea of why people die, and viewing the film did not seem to affect their opinions about the question according to the data reported in Table 6.

The children's conception of universality of death was studied by asking them if everybody dies (Question 6, Appendix A). Most children answered positively to the question both before and after viewing the film. However, a few children answered negatively before viewing the film and one child answered negatively after viewing the film. For example, one child said during the pretest, "Well no, because everyone has to live in a way. Some people have been mean and they have to live. If everyone would die there wouldn't be a world." In the post-test, the same child said, "No, because everyone just... you'll still have people living." The reasons related to the children's answers were grouped together (Table 6-E). Almost half of the children gave cognitive reasons during the pretest. For example, one child said, "Everybody has to die, but not everybody is dead now. Yah, everybody dies after a while." In the pretest, a few children gave physiological reasons, such as "Yes, everybody will die eventually. If someone would

keep on living they would be weird because they would be all wrinkly and really old." The proportion of physiological reasons given by the children increased in the posttest (Table 6), and the proportion of cognitive reasons decreased. However, as tested by the McNemar test ( $\chi^2 = 1.5, p > .10$ ), the difference in the proportion of cognitive reasons given for the pre and posttests was not significant. The fact that not all the children gave reasons with their answers could have affected the results.

Related to the universality and the inevitability of death, the children were asked if they would die (see Question 8, Appendix A). All the children answered positively to the question for the pre and posttests. The children seemed quite aware of the inevitability of death and gave physiological and spiritual reasons. The physiological reasons were related to longevity. The spiritual reasons were related to external causes such as God who would influence the time of death. As an example of a physiological reason for the pretest, one child said, "When I'll be old. I can't live forever, in a long time from now. I'll probably die only if I have a cancer and I die younger but if I take care of myself I'll probably die around one hundred years old." An example of a spiritual reason given by one child during the posttest was, "Yes, cause I'll get old too and I may even die when I'm young cause God sometimes wants people in heaven."

The children were also asked if the interviewer would die (see Question 9, Appendix A). All of them answered positively for the pre and posttests. Most of the reasons given by the children were physio-

logical. One child said during the pretest, "You'll die when you will be older or if you get some disease."

When the children were asked at what age people die (see Question 7, Appendix A), almost half of the children answered "at any age" for the pre and posttests. During the pretest a few children said people usually die at about ninety years old and one child said "of old age." During the posttest the results were approximately the same as for the pretest (Table 7).

The question about the permanency of death was also discussed with the children (see Question 12, Appendix A). The majority of children answered positively during the pre and posttests (Table 8). A few children who answered negatively to the question during the pretest responded with "yes and no" during the posttest, demonstrating some confusion in their understanding of the permanency of death.

To assess children's conception of what happens after death, the children were asked if people are different after they die (see Question 3, Appendix A). Almost half of the children answered positively to the question. However, several children answered negatively to the question (Table 9-G). A few children were also unsure in responding to the question during the pre and posttests and answered "yes and no." No significant change was found between the pre and posttests for the "no" responses ( $\chi^2 = 0.25, p > .10$ ) and the "yes and no" responses ( $\chi^2 = 0.25, p > .10$ ) as tested by the McNemar test. In order to get more information from the children's responses, the reasons offered by them were grouped together and are reported in Table 10(H). The majority of children mentioned physiological reasons

Table 7

Children's Understanding of Time and Age in Relation to Death

| Response categories | <u>Number of responses for the question</u> |          |
|---------------------|---|----------|
|                     | pretest                                     | posttest |
| 60-70               | 0   | 1        |
| 70-80               | 3   | 1        |
| 80-90               | 2   | 3        |
| 90 +                | 4   | 3        |
| 60-100              | 3   | 2        |
| get old             | 1   | 1        |
| any age             | 8   | 10       |

Note: Question 7: At what age do people die?

Table 8

Children's Understanding of the Concept of Permanency

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| Response categories | <u>Number of responses for the question</u> |          |
|---------------------|---|----------|
|                     | Pretest                                     | Posttest |
| Yes                 | 18  | 16       |
| No                  | 1   | 2        |
| Yes and no          | 1   | 3        |
| I don't know        | 1   | 0        |

---

Note: Question 12: Is death permanent?

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Table 9

Children's Conception of What Happens After Death

| Response categories | Number of responses for each question |      |                                     |      |
|---------------------|---------------------------------------|------|-------------------------------------|------|
|                     | (F)Dead person to come back to life.  |      | (G)People different after they die. |      |
|                     | pre                                   | post | pre                                 | post |
| Yes                 | 3                                     | 3    | 10                                  | 10   |
| No                  | 20                                    | 19   | 9                                   | 7    |
| Yes and no          | 3                                     | 3    | 2                                   | 4    |

Note: (F) Question 6 & 11: Do you think it is possible for a dead person to come back to life?  
(Appendix B and D)

(G) Question 3: Are people different after they die?  
(Appendix A)

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Table 10

Reasons Given in Response to "What Happens After Death?"

| Response categories     | Number of responses for each question |      |   |      |
|-------------------------|---------------------------------------|------|---|------|
|                         | (H)Differences after death.           |      | (I)What happens to people after they die? |      |
|                         | pre                                   | post | pre                                       | post |
| Physiological           | 10                                    | 9    | 17  | 13   |
| Spiritual               | 2                                     | 2    | 7   | 12   |
| Feelings                | 2                                     | 2    | 1   | 1    |
| Social (relationship)   | 3                                     | 2    | 3   | 1    |
| Social (external cause) | 0                                     | 0    | 0   | 0    |
| Cognitive               | 6                                     | 6    | 4   | 5    |

Note: (H) Question 3: Reasons given in response to the question, Are people different after they die? (Appendix A)

(I) Question 10: What happens to people after they die? (Appendix A)

in the pre and posttests. For example, during the pretest one child said, "Yes, because they're not alive and they don't move. They can decompose and there's nothing but bones left." During the posttest one child said, "Yah, because they don't move and they don't feel anymore." Several children also expressed cognitive reasons in answering the question. For example during the pretest one child said, "Not really, they're just the same. It's just that they're gone. They leave." As observed by the data reported in Table 10(H) and by the children's comments, the children did not seem to change their opinions and reasons as a result of viewing the film.

The children also shared their opinions about what happens to people after they die (see Question 10, Appendix A). More than half of the children answered with physiological reasons (Table 10-I). For example, one child's pretest comment was:

They're put in a coffin and then they make a hole in the ground in the graveyard and then they put the coffin in and put the body in the coffin and someone is carrying the coffin with their gloves on. Some ladies put something in their hair like white things and they put roses on the coffin.

Overall, the children in answering the question after viewing the film were more "spiritual" in their comments than before viewing the film, which could be related to some factors presented in the video such as seeing Pete come back to life and being around Chad. Thus, several children gave spiritual reasons during the pre and posttests. One child's pretest comment was, "They go to a different place, they might be a better soul. Might be able to watch us." The slight increase of responses which occurred for the spiritual category during the

posttest was statistically significant at  $p = .10$  ( $\chi^2 = 3.20$ ,  $p < .10$ ) but not at  $p = .05$  ( $\chi^2 = 3.20$ ,  $p > .05$ ) as tested by the McNemar test.

The children were asked about the possibility of having a dead person come back to life (see Questions 6 and 11, Appendix B and D). Most children answered negatively to the question for the pre and posttests. A child during the pretest mentioned that it was not possible to come back to life unless it was in a movie, and another child during the posttest mentioned that it was not possible to come back to life because when someone is dead he does not have any life in him and cannot do anything. A small number of children answered positively to the question both before and after viewing the film. They gave comments such as, "Yes, it is possible to come back to life, if you are reincarnated or in dreams you can come back." A few children did not know how to answer the question and gave comments such as, "Well, if it is reincarnated then you can come alive but not like from the ground or something like that," and "No, but I think that if a ghost comes back, then it can walk around." The results are reported in Table 9(F) and do not show statistical significance.

To collect more information about the children's understanding of the film "Where's Pete?", an individual discussion concerning the circumstances of Pete's death was initiated. In the discussion about what happened to Pete (see Question 3a, Appendix C), most children who mentioned that Pete was dead felt comfortable saying the word "died." However, a few children preferred to use sentences such as "He was in a car crash with his friends." When asked where they thought Pete was now (see Question 3B, Appendix C), the majority of children said, "In

heaven," or "Up somewhere, probably in heaven." One child said in "hell" and a few children gave physiological reasons such as, "They buried him, he's cremated, he's in a graveyard now or in that box, coffin." In response to how they would picture where Pete is now (see Question 3c, Appendix C), some children did not know how to picture the place but a few others described heaven in gentle terms. The children used sentences such as, "It's really peaceful and quiet", "There are clouds and it's soft", and "It's probably a beautiful place, like a dream, it's happiness, everyone has their own unit." One child said, "It's a nice place to live because you get to see all your friends who died," and another child said, "It's a different world for spirit. It would be like our world, but no killing in it, nobody would be dead. It would be for spirits, and the bodies would be buried." One child described hell as "Hot and stuff. There's forks. There might be devil, and in heaven there are angels." And one child described cremation as "Like just burning wood. It turns into ashes."

Also related to the conceptions of what happens after death, the children were asked what they thought Pete was doing now (see Question 4, Appendix C). Most children described physical activities such as, "He's playing hockey or he's sleeping or he's riding his bike." A few children gave spiritual responses such as, "He's thanking God for bringing him up in heaven, thinking that he can see his family and he can see Chad playing hockey." It seems that for many of the children, Pete in the film was still "doing" something even though he was dead (Table 11).

Table 11

Children's Conception of Activities Occurring After Death

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| Response categories<br>(activities)      | Number of responses for the question |
|--|--------------------------------------|
| Physical                                 | 19                                   |
| Spiritual                                | 3                                    |
| Social                                   | 1                                    |
| Miscellaneous<br>(cognitive explanation) | 3                                    |
| I don't know                             | 2                                    |

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Note: Question 4: What do you think Pete is doing now? (Appendix C)

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The children were also asked if they thought Pete was different now that he was dead (see Question 6, Appendix C). Half of the children answered positively, giving physiological reasons such as, "He looks different because he is probably a skeleton right now," and "Yes, because we can't see him anymore and he can't feel. Everything is different, he's not at school, he's not at home, and he can't play hockey anymore." On the other hand, the other half of the children answered negatively to the question, giving spiritual reasons such as, "He's the same all the time. He's never going to age." As can be seen, the children had different reactions to the question. The children who answered positively to the question seemed to focus more on the physical aspect of the dead person; children who answered negatively focused on the spiritual aspect of what happens after death.

The children were also asked if they thought Pete would come back often to talk to Chad as he was doing at the end of the film (see Question 13, Appendix C). The majority of children answered negatively to the question. One of the children said, "It was just a vision, it was in his imagination, because Pete is not really alive, because Pete said he wouldn't come back." Two of the negative reasons given tended to imply that Pete was coming back or that he could come back. For example, one child said, "I think that if he dreams more, Pete will come back, but if he stops dreaming he won't come back." And another child said, "It was the last time." One child answered positively to the question saying, "For a while. He'll probably get used to the idea that Pete died." Interestingly, one child commented, "Maybe, or Chad

may think that Pete will come back, that'll be fine." Thus, a few children thought that Pete could still come back to life, but only for a while.

To investigate further, the children were asked to discuss the possibility of someone who had died coming back to life as Pete was doing. Most of the children answered negatively to the question and gave clear and precise explanations such as, "Because when you're dead, you can't come back," and "Chad was probably dreaming. Pete was really dead in real life." These children seemed to be able to distinguish between what was reality and what was fiction. A few children answered positively to the question but did not give further reasons, except for one child who said, "Maybe, like just to visit. Nobody would see him except the person who had seen him before cause he remembered him so well." Also a few children answered to the question with a "Yes and no" response which expressed more their spiritual life and values. For example, one child said, "It should be the spirit which could only come back," and another child said, "Unless he is reincarnated. But not from the ground." One child made an interesting comment by saying, "I don't think that he would really live exactly the way he was doing. He probably just talks. If he would want to talk he wouldn't probably come down, he would probably just talk about hockey. There would be a voice but no body." These comments support the results reported earlier about the permanency of death (Table 8).

The children were also asked whether or not they thought a dead person could continue to have feelings (see Questions 5 and 4, Appendix B and D). As reported in Table 12(J), almost half of the children responded that a dead person could not have any feelings since he was dead. For example, during the pretest, one child said, "Nothing because he can't, he's dead." However, several children reported feelings of sadness and talked about the dead person's feelings by saying that the dead person "Might feel really sad and might feel like crying." During the posttest, more children reported feelings of sadness and talked about how Pete, being dead in the film, was feeling. For example, they gave answers such as, "I think that they'd feel sad that they were dead and that boy was thinking about it." The children seemed to get to know Pete by watching the film, they shared his life and perhaps they related to how Pete was feeling even though he was dead. One of the feelings expressed by one child was happiness. This child said, "I would feel sort of happy that people cared so much about me, but sad to see the people down crying for me." The results do not show statistical significance for the pre and posttests (Table 12-J).

The children were also asked during the pre and posttests about the possibility of the dead person to hear, feel, think or get hungry (see Question 11, Appendix A). The majority of children answered negatively. A few children seemed unsure, and responded by "Yes and no." During the posttest, only one child answered by "Yes and no." Also, contrary to the pretest, a few children answered positively to the question during the posttest. However, this difference was not

Table 12

Children's Conception of a Dead Person's Feelings

| Feeling categories | Number of responses for each question        |      |                                     |
|--------------------|--|------|-------------------------------------|
|                    | (J) Thoughts about a dead person's feelings. |      | (K) Thoughts about Pete's feelings. |
|                    | pre  | post | post                                |
| Angry              | 1  | 1    | 0                                   |
| Sad                | 6  | 9    | 8                                   |
| No feelings        | 11   | 9    | 4                                   |
| Anxious            | 1  | 2    | 0                                   |
| Unhappy            | 3  | 2    | 3                                   |
| Lost (lonely)      | 2  | 1    | 9                                   |
| Upset              | 1  | 3    | 0                                   |
| Happy              | 0  | 1    | 0                                   |
| Good               | 0  | 0    | 5                                   |
| Cheated            | 0  | 0    | 1                                   |
| N/A                | 1  | 1    | 0                                   |

Note: (J) Question 5 & 4: How do you think a dead person feels?  
(Appendix B and D)

(K) Question 5: How do you think Pete is feeling now?  
(Appendix C)

statistically significant as tested by the McNemar test ( $\chi^2=2.25$ ,  $p > .10$ ). According to the data, what seemed to have happened is that the children who were unsure in answering the question during the pretest seemed to have been more positive and opinionated when answering the question during the posttest. The children seemed to be influenced by Pete's role in the film when answering the question.

More specifically, the children were asked to share their thoughts about how Pete was feeling now (Question 5, Appendix C) to compare their responses to those received for the question, "How do you think a dead person feels?" (Question 5, Appendix B). The majority of children said that Pete was feeling lonely and sad. One of the children who mentioned "lonely" said, "He's feeling lonely because he misses his brother and he probably thinks 'I'm dead now. I wish he would come up here with me'." One of the children who said "sad" commented, "Kind of sad because he can't see his parents and brother." Several children mentioned the feeling word "good" and said, "Good. When you're dead, you're dead, it's peaceful and you get to rest." The results are reported in Table 12(K). Interestingly, when asked if a dead person could feel, most children answered in a negative way; when asked how Pete was feeling now that he was dead, the children talked about Pete's feelings. As observed, there is quite a difference in the children's perception of the questions. It seems that the factor of attachment to the deceased person could be a major one in the children's perception and understanding of death.

The second part of the second research question verified if the changes in children's understanding of death mentioned in the question were likely to occur among children in the concrete operational period.

According to Piaget's definition, the children in this study were considered to be in the concrete operational period. In order to evaluate whether or not the children retained preoperational characteristics in their understanding of death, a conservation task was given to the children at the beginning of the research (see Scarr, Wrinberg & Levine, 1986). This conservation task had six different levels of conservation which were the conservation of liquid, matter, number, length, area and volume (see Appendix I). For the conservation of liquid, matter, number and length, most children conserved and were able to distinguish differences among the tasks presented to them. However, for the conservation of area and volume, the children had difficulty conserving. Perhaps this was because those tasks had formal-operational characteristics which did not correspond to the children's cognitive development.

To answer the second part of the second research question, attention was given to the two preoperational children found in this study, in order to verify if there was any difference in their understanding of death as compared to the concrete operational children. The Atwood (1984) questionnaire was studied (Appendix A) as well as the Questionnaire Related to the Film (Appendix C). According to the results, most of the responses given by these two children were

not different than most of the responses given by the concrete operational children.

A small difference was noticed in one of the two preoperational children's responses for the question, "Why do people die?" (see Question 5, Appendix A). The child answered the question in a cognitive way which was a low-rated category when the concrete operational children responded to the question (see Table 6-D). For example, the preoperational child's pretest comment was, "People have to die sometimes," and his posttest comment was, "Everybody has to die." The concrete operational children tended to answer the question in a physiological way and gave comments such as, "Because they are old," or they talked about social-external causes such as, "Because you can be killed." The answers given by the two preoperational children to the question, "What did you think/feel when you saw Chad's mother putting away Pete's belongings shortly after the funeral?" (Question 2, Appendix C), were similar to the responses given by the concrete operational children. One preoperational child's comment was, "Mad because Chad could have kept it. So he could remember Pete and not throw away Pete's belongings." The other preoperational child said, "Sad because he wasn't there anymore. His belongings were taken away." Those two feelings of sadness and anger were the predominant ones mentioned by all the concrete operational children (see Table 4-I).

Thus, whether the children were preoperational in their cognitive development or concrete-operational, their understanding of death was not affected as a result of viewing the film. However, perhaps the

results would have been different if the sample of children used in this study had been larger; and if more children had been preoperational in their cognitive development. The results are reported in Table 13.

The third research question concerned any particular emotional reactions that the children would have about the sudden death of their sisters or brothers as a result of viewing the film. In order to emotionally prepare the children to discuss such a concern, a few questions regarding the death of an acquaintance were examined with the children.

During this preparation stage, the children reported feeling sad and sorry when discussing the death of an animal, the death of a friend's pet or the death of a friend's grandmother. However, when answering the third research question, the children commented that if their sisters or brothers would die suddenly, they would feel mainly sad and lost. They would specifically miss the relationship with the deceased sibling.

In the preparation stage discussion, the children expressed during the pretest their feelings about seeing a graveyard (see Question 8, Appendix B). Almost half of the children reported feeling frightened. One child said, "I would feel kind of frightened because at some places they're a statue grave and you may step on a carpet but it's a person underneath and it's kind of frightening for me." Several children also mentioned feelings of sadness (see Table 14-A). One child said, "I would feel very sad because all those people have

Table 13

Conservation Task Results

| Children            | Number of children for each task |        |        |        |               |        |
|---------------------|----------------------------------|--------|--------|--------|---------------|--------|
|                     | Liquid                           | Matter | Number | Length | Area          | Volume |
| Conservers          | 23                               | 25     | 26     | 25     | a) 21<br>b) 6 | 19     |
| Non-conservers<br>1 | 3                                | 1      | 0      | 1      | a) 1<br>b) 13 | 6      |
| No answer           | 0                                | 0      | 0      | 0      | a) 4<br>b) 7  | 1      |

died." Also a few children answered with responses which did not express feelings but rather described a cognitive reason. For example, one child said, "It makes me feel that it is a happy resting place for people who have died instead of like an animal just being left out."

Also, the children expressed during the pretest their feelings about seeing a dead animal on the road (see Question 7, Appendix B). Most of the children mentioned feeling sad and sorry. Almost half of the children reported feelings of sadness and gave comments such as, "Gross, you could bring it to the vet... You'd feel like kind of sad for him. And if the doctor couldn't fix it and would need to put it to sleep, then I'd feel real sad. Because it would be too late. If it would be dead, I'd feel more sad." Several children also mentioned feeling sorry and said, "I would feel sorry for that animal. Animals can't see and they can just cross the road and they might be hit by a car." One child responded feeling horrible and said:

When I saw a squirrel on the road and my dad hit it and like I didn't know what we hit and then I saw it on the road and I felt horrible and the next day, I took my bike and I went down to the park where they usually stay and then I went down where my dad hit the animal, someone came and 'banged' it and it made me feel horrible.

A number of the answers given by the children lacked expression of feelings. Rather, the children expressed what had happened to the dead animal or talked about the circumstances surrounding the accident. For example, one child said, "I saw two dead cats on the road. I don't know. I don't watch them. They got hit, they should watch out. But it's not like that." The results are reported in Table 14(B). It seems that on one hand, the children tend to feel sorry and sad when seeing

Table 14

Children's Feelings Concerning the Death of an Acquaintance

| Feeling categories | Number of responses for each question |                |                 |      |                     |      |                     |
|--------------------|---------------------------------------|----------------|-----------------|------|---------------------|------|---------------------|
|                    | (A)Graveyard                          | (B)Dead animal | (C)Friend's pet |      | (D)Friend's grandma |      | (E)Friend's brother |
|                    | Pre                                   | Pre            | Pre             | Post | Pre                 | Post | Pre                 |
| Sorry              | 1                                     | 8              | 9               | 7    | 9                   | 5    | 5                   |
| Upset              | 0                                     | 4              | 2               | 2    | 2                   | 5    | 4                   |
| Horrible           | 0                                     | 1              | 0               | 0    | 0                   | 0    | 0                   |
| Sad                | 6                                     | 9              | 15              | 18   | 14                  | 14   | 18                  |
| Unhappy            | 0                                     | 1              | 0               | 3    | 0                   | 0    | 0                   |
| Frightened         | 11                                    | 0              | 0               | 0    | 1                   | 1    | 0                   |
| Like crying        | 2                                     | 0              | 0               | 0    | 0                   | 0    | 0                   |
| Lonely (lost)      | 0                                     | 0              | 1               | 0    | 0                   | 1    | 2                   |
| Good               | 0                                     | 0              | 0               | 0    | 0                   | 2    | 0                   |
| Mad                | 0                                     | 0              | 0               | 0    | 0                   | 0    | 1                   |
| Shocked            | 0                                     | 0              | 0               | 0    | 0                   | 0    | 1                   |
| O.K.               | 3                                     | 0              | 1               | 1    | 0                   | 0    | 0                   |
| I don't know       | 1                                     | 0              | 0               | 0    | 2                   | 0    | 0                   |
| N/A                | 4                                     | 4              | 1               | 0    | 0                   | 0    | 0                   |

- Note: (A) Question 8: How does it make you feel to see a graveyard? (Appendix B)
- (B) Question 7: How would you feel if you would see a dead animal on the road? (Appendix B)
- (C) Question 9 & 15: How would it make you feel if your friend's pet died? (Appendix B and C)
- (D) Question 10 & 16: How would it make you feel if you would hear that your friend's grandmother died in her sleep? (Appendix B and C)
- (E) Question 11: How would it make you feel if you would hear that your friend's brother died in a car accident? (Appendix B)

a dead animal on the road, and on the other hand, they tend to feel frightened when seeing a graveyard (Question 8, Table 14-A).

Approaching a more sensitive topic of discussion, the children were asked to express their feelings about a friend's pet's death (see Questions 9 and 15, Appendix B and C). This question was asked before and after the presentation of the film in order to see if there was any change occurring in the answers given. The majority of children reported feelings of sadness and several of them mentioned feeling sorry. More than half of the children during the pretest reported feelings of sadness and gave comments such as, "I'd feel sad for her because it would be her best pet. And if it was still a baby it would be hard because it would be gone." Several children also mentioned feeling sorry and said, "It would make me feel sorry for that pet but not as sorry as if it would be my pet. If it would be my pet I'd be more sad." Some of the children who were feeling sorry said that they would not feel as sorry for the pet as "If it would be the mom and dad of the person who died." The proportion of responses given for the feelings "sad" and "sorry" did not differ significantly from the pre to the posttests. The results are reported in Table 14(C). The children who were feeling sad during the posttest commented, "It will be sad but it's not the same feeling as when it is a human being dying. Because pets are animals." And the children who were feeling sorry mentioned, "I kind of feel sorry for my friend. You can get another pet but not the same person. I'd feel bad but not that bad because it's just a pet."

The children reported that they would feel worse to hear about a person's death than to hear about an animal's death. To prolong the discussion, the children were asked to discuss both before and after the presentation of the film how they would feel to hear about the death of their friend's grandmother (see Questions 10 and 16, Appendix B and C). Again the predominant feeling mentioned during the pre and posttests was the feeling of sadness. More than half of the children mentioned feelings of sadness both during the pre and posttests. One child's pretest comment was, "It would be sad because my grandma died too. So I know how it feels." During the posttest the same child said, "It would be sad because like if we were friends we would probably have the same feelings that she had about her grandmother." Several children also mentioned the feeling word "sorry" during the pre and posttests. One child's pretest comment was, "I'd feel sorry for him, because my friend just a couple of months ago, his grandmother died in her sleep and he had to go out of school for a while and he went to the cemetery. He might have known her very well, like not to want it to happen." The same child commented during the posttest, "I'd feel sorry for my friend because he would be in a lot of misery." A decrease in the proportion of responses given for the feeling word "sorry" during the posttest was statistically significant at  $p = .10$  ( $\chi^2 = 3.13, p < .10$ ) but not at  $p = .05$  ( $\chi^2 = 3.13, p > .05$ ) as tested by the McNemar test. This means that the children who mentioned feeling sorry during the pretest were not stating that they were feeling as sorry during the posttest. Also, after the presentation of

the film, the children felt as sorry as they felt upset to hear about their friend's grandmother's death.

The children also discussed the possibility of their friend's brother dying (see Question 11, Appendix B). The question was asked during the pretest and the majority of children responded with feelings of sadness. One child mentioned, "I'd feel sad, really sad. I'd know his brother and I'd probably like him. I like most of my friends' brothers." A few children mentioned feeling sorry and one of the children processed his response in an interesting way. He said:

Well first of all, it's like if he was drinking or something well like, and he crashed into another car and it'd be mostly his fault, I'd still feel sorry for my friend but if there was somebody else who first crashed in him because they were drunk then I would say it is unfair and if the person in the car was still living and she hit my friend's brother, she should die. My friend's brother should still be alive. It's just like my grandpa, he was hit by a car and my grandpa died, his neck broke. It's not fair, it's not fair.

This comment is very rich in details and seems to contain many hidden feelings. The results are reported in Table 14(E).

The following discussion concerned the death of a sister or brother and was used to answer the third research question. The children were first asked during the pre and posttests, to discuss how they would feel if their brother would die (see Questions 13 and 15, Appendix B and D). The majority of children mentioned feelings of sadness. During the pretest, almost half of the children mentioned that they would feel sad. For example, one child said, "I'd feel sad. I wouldn't go outside or do anything for a couple of months. I'd sit in my bedroom. My brother is 14 years old." A few children said that they would feel upset and gave comments such as, "We usually fight,

but if he would die I'd feel upset. We fight but we don't want to get hurt. It's just that each of us wants to be right." Several children also mentioned that they would feel lost if their brother would die and said, "I'd feel, well he used to tease me a lot but I would miss the spirit because he used to be really nice." During the posttest, it can be noticed that the proportion of responses given for the feeling of sadness increased slightly but was not significant as tested by the McNemar test ( $\chi^2 = 1.13, p > .10$ ). The results are reported in Table 15(F).

When asked to discuss during the pre and posttests how they would feel if their sisters died (see Question 14 and 16, Appendix B and D), almost half of the children mentioned feelings of sadness. One child's pretest comment was, "It would make me feel pretty sad. We're just two kids in the family and if it was just me, I was pretty unhappy because I didn't have anybody to play with. My sister is 5 or 6 years old." One child's posttest comment was, "Same way as for my brother. Sad just means sort of an empty feeling." Similarly, several children mentioned during the pre and posttest, that they would feel lost if their sisters would die. One child's pretest comment was, "I don't know. I'd not feel so bad because... like they're so... well, I love them and if they'd go away I'd miss them very much. Specially the twin sisters, I'd miss them a lot." The results are not significant as reported in Table 15(G), which means that the children's emotional reactions about losing a sister or a brother did not change as a result of viewing the film, "Where's Pete?".

Table 15

Children's Feelings Concerning the Death of a Sibling

| Feeling categories | Number of responses for each question |      |                       |      |                        |      |
|--------------------|---------------------------------------|------|-----------------------|------|------------------------|------|
|                    | (F) Death of a brother                |      | (G) Death of a sister |      | (H) Death of a sibling |      |
|                    | pre                                   | post | pre                   | post | pre                    | post |
| Sad                | 9                                     | 13   | 10                    | 10   | 19                     | 23   |
| Like crying        | 3                                     | 2    | 0                     | 0    | 3                      | 2    |
| Guilty             | 1                                     | 2    | 0                     | 1    | 1                      | 3    |
| Upset              | 4                                     | 3    | 1                     | 1    | 5                      | 4    |
| Unhappy            | 2                                     | 1    | 1                     | 2    | 3                      | 1    |
| Angry              | 1                                     | 2    | 1                     | 1    | 2                      | 3    |
| Lost               | 4                                     | 2    | 6                     | 5    | 10                     | 7    |
| Horrible           | 0                                     | 1    | 1                     | 1    | 1                      | 2    |
| Scared             | 0                                     | 0    | 1                     | 1    | 1                      | 1    |

Note: (F) Question 13 & 15: How would you feel if your brother would die? (Appendix B and D)

(G) Question 14 & 16: How would you feel if your sister would die? (Appendix B and D)

(H) Is questions 13, 14, 15, 16 together.

The two questions concerning the death of a sister or brother were treated together in order to get a better perception of the results just discussed. The majority of children, both before and after viewing the film, mentioned that they would feel sad, with an increase of responses noticed during the posttest (Table 15-H). However, the McNemar test ( $\chi^2 = 0.44, p > .10$ ) demonstrated that the difference in the proportion of responses given for the feelings of sadness was not statistically significant. This means that the children who reported feelings of sadness during the pretest were not necessarily the same children who were feeling sad during the posttest. Thus, most of the children mentioned that they would feel sad and lost if their brother or sister would die, and it seems that the viewing of the film did not affect their main feelings toward that issue. Interestingly, one child said that when she was saying the feeling word "sad," it meant for her "like an empty feeling." So the meaning of the feeling of sadness could have had different significance for each individual child. Another important point to note is that during the posttest treatment, the children put more intensity in expressing their feelings than during the pretest treatment and reported words such as "very, very sad" or "really upset."

The reasons related to the answers given by the children to express their emotions about losing a sibling, were grouped together with the agreement of three different judges, in order to assess any change occurring between the pre and posttests. Three different categories of reasons were used to analyze the responses. The physiological category implied missing some physical activities undertaken

with the late sibling, the empathic category implied missing the personal qualities of the late sibling, and the relationship category implied missing the relationship with the late sibling. Almost half of the children reported that they would miss the relationship with their sibling (see Table 16). To summarize, the children reported feeling sad because of the loss of the relationship which existed before the sibling's death.

The following discussion was also concerned with the death of a sibling but was related to the viewing of the film. The children were asked to discuss their feelings about the scene in which Chad loses his brother Pete in the film (see Questions 17 and 14, Appendix C and D). As reported in Table 17, the majority of children mentioned feelings of sadness. For example, one child said, "Real sad again. It must be hard to lose a brother." Another child said, "I felt sad because if I'd lose my brother, I'd feel sad or if my friend's brother would die I would probably feel worse. Really sad like I had tears in my eyes." Also, almost half of the children reported feeling sorry for Chad. For example, one child said, "Sorry for Chad, he lost him without saying 'goodbye'. Pete was his best brother." The reasons related to the feelings expressed by the children were grouped together with the agreement of three judges in order to analyze thoroughly the children's responses. Four different categories were used as reported in Table 18. The physiological category included reasons which expressed the physical state of the child answering the question. For example, one child said, "That made me feel horrible. I was mad. I couldn't probably really sleep for two weeks or something."

Table 16

Reasons Given in Response to the Question Concerning  
the Death of a Sibling

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| Categories    | <u>Number of responses</u> |      |
|---------------|----------------------------|------|
|               | Pre                        | Post |
| Physiological | 3                          | 2    |
| Empathic      | 2                          | 3    |
| Relationship  | 10                         | 10   |

---

Note: Reasons given in response to children's feelings concerning the death of a sibling.

Table 17

Children's Feelings Regarding the Scene in Which Chad Loses Pete

| Feeling categories | Number of responses for the question |  |
|--------------------|--------------------------------------|--|
|                    | Posttest                             |  |
| Sorry for Chad     | 12                                   |  |
| Sad                | 18                                   |  |
| Like crying        | 5                                    |  |
| Upset              | 5                                    |  |
| Unhappy            | 3                                    |  |
| Scared             | 2                                    |  |
| Angry              | 2                                    |  |
| Lonely             | 2                                    |  |

Note: Question 17: In the film, how did it make you feel to see Chad losing his brother? (Appendix C)

Question 14: How did it make you feel to see Chad in the film losing his brother Pete? (Appendix D)

Table 18

Reasons Given in Response to the Question Regarding  
Chad Losing His Brother Pete

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| Categories    | Number of responses |
|---------------|---------------------|
|               | Posttest            |
| Physiological | 1                   |
| Empathic      | 2                   |
| Relationship  | 10                  |
| Personal      | 6                   |

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Note: Reasons given in response to the questions about Chad losing his brother Pete

The empathic category included reasons which demonstrated a concern for the dead sibling; the relationship category expressed concerns about the kind of relationship the child and the deceased had together; and the personal category included reasons which expressed the children's fears about the possible death of their own sibling. For example, one child said, "Scared because I think that my sister would do that. I'd lose my sister if she'd get in a car accident." It seems that when seeing Chad lose his brother Pete in the film, the children were mainly concerned about the relationship Chad and Pete had together, and it reminded them of the relationship they have with their own brother and sister.

The children were also asked during the posttest, if it would have been easier for Chad to lose his grandmother instead of Pete (see Question 17b, Appendix C). The majority of children answered positively to the question. Most of them were saying that Chad and Pete were very close and that Chad was not as close to his grandmother as he was to Pete. Also they mentioned that Pete was still young and that it would have been normal for his grandmother to die first since she was older. A few children answered negatively to the question and the main reasons they gave were that the grandmother and Pete were both part of the family. One child answered "Yes and no" and said, "It would be more difficult to lose Pete if he was living with them. But if the grandmother was living with them, then it would be as hard."

### Further Results

The next section involves additional results gathered throughout the study, and is concerned with the children's opinions regarding the film "Where's Pete?". The following points discussed in this section could be used in the formation of a guideline suggesting what is appropriate to present to children and not to present in a film portraying death.

The children were asked to discuss their feelings about the film "Where's Pete?" (see Question 1, Appendix D). As reported in Table 19(I), the majority of children mentioned feeling sad. For example, one child said, "It makes me feel glad and sad because, sad because he had to die. Chad could never see him again, and glad because of this last visit he had." Several children also mentioned feeling happy and one of the children said "Sad when he dies, happy when he does things fun." Also several children responded feeling worried and one of them said, "Worried sometimes when I think about it, I think something can happen to me and I worry."

The children also expressed what they liked in the film (Question 1, Appendix C) and the majority of them said they enjoyed seeing Pete give the hockey stick to Chad at the end of the film. Also several children liked to see Pete scoring the goal when he played hockey with Chad. A few children mentioned they enjoyed seeing Chad remembering the good times he had with Pete. Interestingly, a few children said they liked seeing Chad thinking that his brother was still alive.

Many children seemed to like everything in the film. However, several children mentioned that they disliked seeing Chad feeling sad because of Pete's death. Also a few children disliked the scene in which Chad was looking at Pete in the coffin. One child did not like the scene in which Chad thought Pete would come back to talk to him. However, just earlier on, a few children mentioned liking the scene in which Chad was thinking that his brother was still alive. Despite those mixed feelings, it seems that the majority of children liked the sequence of the film where Chad was imagining Pete alive and around him. This scene did not seem to have a detrimental effect on the children.

At the beginning of the film, after Chad found out about his brother's death, his father came to him at night and said "sleep tight son." To this sequence of the film all the children responded that they would not have been able to sleep in Chad's place (Question 11, Appendix C). The children said they would have felt sad, upset and like crying. For example, some children said, "It would be hard to sleep. I'd be really sad and I'd probably cry. Because just to see where he slept would make me feel very upset." Some other reasons given by the children were more physiological such as, "It would be a bit 'creepy' to see him going through the door, even though he was dead. Because I would keep thinking about if I would see him again. Because it is his brother, he was used to play with him and now he knows that he might lose in hockey by the grade 3."

The children were also asked to comment whether or not Chad knew what would happen at the funeral (see Question 7, Appendix C). Almost

all the children thought that Chad did not know what to expect at the funeral because of his laughing and the questions he was asking of his mom. For example, one child said, "Chad was asking all those questions. He didn't seem to understand what was going on. He had to touch Pete's skin to find out." Another child said, "Chad is pretty young and he wouldn't have been in a funeral before and it was his only brother." However, a few children answered positively to the question and one of the children said, "Because if Chad saw Pete's dead body, then he probably knows that he died. Probably because maybe his parents told him what would happen."

In the film, Chad was asking his mother in front of the coffin where was the real Pete (see Question 6, Appendix D) and the children were asked to share their feelings about this scene. The children expressed a wide range of feeling words, however there was no predominant feeling mentioned by the children. They were feeling sad, confused, upset, sorry, good and guilty. A few children did not know how to answer the question and several children did not express their feelings but rather talked about how Chad in the film was confused about what was going on. For example, one child said, "I don't have an expression. Pete was there and his Mom was telling Chad that it wasn't the real Pete. So Chad was feeling sad because he was thinking 'well, if it's not the real Pete well where is Pete?'" One of the children who was feeling sad said, "I felt sad because Chad thought that it was the real Pete, I got confused here and sad." Also one of the children who seemed to feel confused said, "I felt kind of funny because when she said his body was there but not his soul I just wondered where was

the real Pete?" Another child who did not know how to express his feelings mentioned, "I don't know because his mom didn't really tell him were he was, she just said he was dead and that he would not come back." By looking at the children's comments, it seems that most of the children were feeling confused about this scene of the film, because of both the lack of clarity and information given by the adult.

The children were also asked to share their feelings about the scene in the film in which Chad got angry at his mother for putting away Pete's belongings (see Question 8A, Appendix D). Almost half of the children mentioned feelings of sadness. For example, one child said, "It makes me feel sad for Chad because he had to go through all that and like he's just in grade 2." Several children also mentioned feeling upset and one of the children commented, "Upset because Chad wants to keep the spirit in his room." Several children reported feeling sorry and interestingly, one child said he was feeling sorry for Chad's mom. For example, he said, "Sorry for his mom. Chad was really angry and it seems that he was going to punch his mom cause she's just trying... Well it's for his own good." The results are reported in Table 19(J).

The children discussed how they felt when they saw Chad's father using a puppet to talk about his feelings (see Question 9, Appendix D). Many children felt more comfortable processing the question in a cognitive way than to express their feelings. For example, one child said, "I liked it. It's easier to talk about those things when you use an instrument like this," and another child mentioned:

Table 19

Children's Feelings Regarding Particular ScenesPresented in the Film "Where's Pete?"


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| Feeling categories | Number of responses for each question |   |   |
|--------------------|---------------------------------------|---|---|
|                    | (I) Feelings about the film.<br>Post  | (J) Chad's reactions to his mother.<br>Post | (K) Chad's father using a puppet.<br>Post |
| Sad                | 18                                    | 10  | 6   |
| Sorry              | 1                                     | 5   | 0   |
| Upset              | 2                                     | 6   | 1   |
| Happy              | 4                                     | 1   | 3   |
| Worried            | 4                                     | 0   | 0   |
| Angry (mad)        | 0                                     | 2   | 1   |
| Good               | 0                                     | 0   | 7   |
| Strange            | 0                                     | 0   | 1   |
| Awkward            | 0                                     | 1   | 0   |
| O.K.               | 1                                     | 0   | 1   |
| I don't know       | 0                                     | 1   | 0   |
| N/A                | 1                                     | 4   | 8   |

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Notes: (I) Question 1: When you think about the film "Where's Pete?", how does it make you feel? (Appendix D)

(J) Question 8a: How did it make you feel to see Chad's reaction? (Appendix D)

(K) Question 9: How did you feel when you saw Chad's father using a puppet to talk about his feelings to Chad? (Appendix D)

I felt that it was a bit 'fakey.' He should have just told him face to face like he did on the stairs instead of using an instrument. He was trying to hide his feelings. He was trying to talk about something in a cheery way. But he was talking about death which is not interesting or happy or nice to talk about. It made me feel that he didn't use the right way of communication.

As reported in Table 19(K), several children commented on feeling good and one child said, "I felt good, I don't think I'd like to be talked to by someone. I'd rather be talked to by a puppet or something. I hate talking face to face with my father, he screams like crazy. I liked the puppet." However, several children also mentioned feeling sad and one child said, "It made me feel sad because Chad didn't want to do anything because he lost his brother." Interestingly, three children out of twenty-six mentioned their disagreement in using a puppet to talk to Chad. They would have preferred the father talking face to face to Chad.

When the children were asked how they would have liked the film to end (see Question 18, Appendix C), the majority of children reported liking to see Pete coming back alive and not being dead. Several children liked the way the film ended and a few children said they would have liked to see some rituals around Pete's death, such as going to the grave and saying 'goodbye', and looking at a family album to remember Pete.

## Chapter V

### CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

#### Conclusions

As discussed in the results section, the data gathered for the three research questions investigated in this study did not demonstrate any significant change in children's understanding and emotional reactions to the concept of death as a result of viewing the film "Where's Pete?", although a few minor changes were noticed for certain response categories. However, this study was successful in providing a description of children's cognitive and emotional reactions to the film portraying the death of a sibling, and in helping to evaluate any changes occurring in their cognitive developmental period called "concrete-operational."

Atwood questionnaire. The Atwood (1984) questionnaire was administered in this study in order to assess children's concepts of death, and interestingly, minor differences in the responses given by the children were noticed between this study and the Atwood study.

One of these differences concerned the responses regarding the distinction between the terms "death" and "sleep" (Question 4, Appendix A). In this study the majority of children were able to distinguish the two terms and answered with cognitive reasons. In Atwood's study, the majority of children were also able to notice differences between the two terms except for the Kindergarteners who were vacillating between giving a positive or a negative answer to the question. Most of the Atwood subjects gave physiological reasons

related to their responses. According to Hardgrove and Warrick (1974), "The child may confuse sleep with death because he recognizes both states as still. He needs special reassurance that death is not simply a long sleep; the sleep he takes each night is 'rest'" (p. 159). As observed, the way the child answered the question could have depended upon the language used between the parent and the child.

To the question concerning the universality of death (Question 6, Appendix A), most children answered positively to the question both before and after viewing the film, except for one child who mentioned after viewing the film that some people would stay alive if they had been mean. The results were similar in the Atwood study with the exception of a few children who commented that some people would not die because they were loved too much.

When the children were asked to discuss the age at which people usually die (Question 7, Appendix A), the responses given by the children in this study were similar to the ones received in the Atwood study. In this study a few children mentioned that if they would take care of themselves, they would not die before being old. Their answers were related to the results gathered in Candy-Gibbs, Sharp and Petrun (1985) study. In their study "both groups of children shared a tendency to distance death. That is, even though death appears to be eventually inevitable, if you are young and don't get ill, and you protect yourself from having an accident, you can delay death" (p. 341).

In the two studies, it can also be noticed by the results gathered for the question concerning the capability of a dead person

to feel, think, hear or get hungry, that after viewing a film presenting the concept of reversibility, the children had a tendency to believe that a dead person could either feel, think, hear or get hungry. Perhaps their religious and cultural background was related to their belief.

Throughout the study, the researcher noticed that when children answered questions or viewed the film, they often related their perceptions to their own life experience. So depending upon their previous experiences with death, their religious concepts, their parents' attitudes toward death, and their psychological development, the children were cognitively and emotionally reacting differently to the concept of death (Buckingham, 1983).

**Emotional reactions to the concept of death.** The film presented the avoidance phase, the confrontation phase, and the beginning of the re-establishment phase discussed by Rando (1984), in which the father was able to start communicating his feelings of grief to Chad. Chad on the other hand was having more difficulty in expressing his feelings of grief during the film and seemed to stay in the denial or avoidance phase. This comment was made by several children throughout the study. A few children were puzzled about not seeing Chad cry in the film. It seems that for them crying was a sign of sadness. A few children also wondered whether or not Chad was aware of the reality of Pete's death, since he was imagining Pete around him in his bedroom and on the hockey rink.

As mentioned above, Burton (1974) suggested that children often use a coping mechanism to substitute the lost relationship. In the film, Chad used a "fantasy relationship" which was kept going with Pete. By doing so, Chad was able to protect himself and was able to endure the painful feelings that Pete's death had produced. Most children in this study, expressed feelings of happiness at the scene in the film in which Pete came back to visit Chad. The "fantasy relationship" existing between Chad and Pete in the film, was explained to the children at the closing and follow-up discussions. The children were also provided with a description of the normal grieving phases people go through when a loss occurred, as well as a description of the emotional reactions that could result from the loss.

Interestingly, the researcher observed that the emotions children expressed throughout the study were defined in different ways and had different meaning for each individual child. The literal meaning of the feeling word was probably the same for each child but the personal experience triggered by the feeling word was different. This finding was made apparent during the study.

**Cognitive development of the concept of death.** Children's understanding of the concept of death was not significantly changed as a result of viewing the film "Where's Pete?" However, the children had, throughout this study, an opportunity to discuss their perceptions and understanding of death. In the two interviews (Appendix B and C) designed by the researcher and conducted before and after the

presentation of the film, the interviewer asked questions about feelings regarding an animal's death.

Interestingly two theoretical views are related to children's development of the concept of animals' death. Mitchell (1967) argued that the children's understanding of the concept of death develops through observations made in nature. So by experiencing an animal's death, the child is expected to be able to generalize the death to human's death and then to his personal death. On the other hand, Anthony (1971) presented the view that children's understanding of death is formed with their own experiences of humans' death. By experiencing separation, loss and feelings of grief, the child is expected to be able to generalize the loss to the death of living objects in general. Smilansky (1981) supports Anthony's view in that he believes that the understanding of the concept of death begins with the child's own experiences with death and gets generalized to other living objects.

Interestingly in this study, children mentioned that they would not feel as sorry for an animal's death as for a person's death. Based on these different views, it seems that future research would be needed first to verify their consistency and second to study the emotional component surrounding an animal and a person's death.

Children's cognitive development of the concept of death was not affected as a result of viewing the film, whether the children were in their preoperational period or concrete-operational period. Most children in this study had concrete-operational characteristics in their cognitive development. However, the study demonstrated that

several children did not conserve for the conservation task of area and volume. Since children react differently to different situations, and develop according to their life experiences and family environment, perhaps the individual child development of the concept of death should be the focus of interest.

### Limitations

In order to generalize the results of this study, the following points should be taken into consideration.

Even though the reliability and validity of the interviews focusing on emotions (Appendix B and D), and of the questionnaire related to the film (Appendix C) were established, replication of the study is needed to reinforce the consistency of the results.

The procedure undertaken in this study also has its limitations for two main reasons. First, only half of the eight interviewers were able to proceed with two sets of interviews in two different schools. As a result the consistency in the way the interviews were conducted with the children might have been affected. Second, because of a lack of space to perform the interviews in one of the schools, the procedure to conduct this study took longer and the researcher ended up conducting most of the interviews by herself. This unfortunate situation might have affected slightly the results, by offering the children an opportunity to discuss some of the questions with each other in between each interviewing session.

The criteria which the researcher and judges used to attribute children's comments to the different categories should also be

discussed. For instance, if a child was not using an "I" statement to express his emotions to a feeling question, his response was attributed to a non-applicable feeling category. Perhaps another researcher would have had different criteria, and would have analyzed the children's comments differently.

The topic of death is not easy to deal with, and there are only a few people who are starting to see the importance of having an open discussion about death in the school curriculum. Perhaps the sample of children used in this study would have been wider and probably randomly selected, if death as a topic, would be approached with openness and comfort.

### Implications

The results of this research have several implications in helping counsellors, teachers and parents to have a better understanding of (a) children's cognitive development toward the concept of death and (b) children's emotional reactions to a film portraying the death of a sibling, in order for them to be more effective in helping children to deal with the issue of death.

Counselling implications. In order to be more effective in helping children deal with a significant loss in their lives, certain guidelines were presented in the review of literature. In this study, the children were interviewed regarding their understanding and emotional reactions to the film "Where's Pete?" and other ideas useful in the formation of new guidelines were suggested.

1. According to the children, adults would need to normalize feelings such as sadness, confusion and anger in order for the children to feel comfortable and to accept those feelings as part of the grieving process.

2. When a sudden death occurs, children need to be comforted, to be invited to talk about their feelings, and to feel someone close by when going to sleep, since feelings such as fear of separation could occur.

3. When choosing to let a child go to the funeral, an adult who is not too emotionally involved in the loss should explain to the child what to expect at the funeral, and should accompany the child in order to give him support and understanding.

4. In order to avoid confusion and anxiety, an adult should take the time to talk to the child about death and to explain as clearly as possible what it means to be dead, as well as to be careful not to overwhelm the child with information that the child would not cognitively be apt to understand.

5. A few weeks after the significant loss, the child should be consulted to decide what to do with the deceased's belongings in order for the child to feel comfortable with the procedures.

6. In order to open channels of communication among family members, different means of expression could be used such as puppets, drawings, play, and open conversation.

7. Children should also be consulted and offered the choice of having particular rituals to remember the deceased, in order to help progression in the grieving process.

These guidelines are tools that the counsellor, teacher or parent could use when talking to children about death.

**Suggested future research.** This study could be replicated and compared to another group of children, using the same procedure but providing more time between the viewing of the film and the interviews conducted after its presentation. Such time could be used to think about the film and to discuss the issue of death with their families. Perhaps the differences in children's cognitive and emotional reactions to the portrayal of death would be quite noticeable between the two experimental groups. Factors such as cultural, religious beliefs as well as the degree to which a child is influenced by his family's beliefs and understanding of death, could be part of the main discussion.

Differences could also be noticed in children's cognitive and emotional reactions to a portrayal of death by comparing a larger sample of preoperational children to a larger sample of concrete-operational children.

Candy-Gibbs, Colby-Sharp and Petrun (1985), who studied "The effects of age, object, and cultural/religious background on children's concept of death," suggested that, "The influence of other 'environmental' variables such as cultural/religious background might profitably be explored in future research in relation to differences in life and death understanding" (p. 344). These authors also suggested that future research focus on other environmental variables which might influence the transition in which children accept the

inevitability and universality of death. They also mentioned from their data that, "Possibly television is influencing children's conceptions of death attribution" (p. 342).

### Concluding Comments

More people realize the importance of dealing with death in their lives. Too often the issue of death has traumatized people and has destroyed the joy of life that could be experienced every day. In order to be comfortable with the issue of death, it would be important to know how to deal with it at an early age. According to Zeligs (1974):

A great deal of children's fears and fantasies about death could be allayed if we did not make death a taboo subject but spoke of it freely and factually. This way children could satisfy their curiosity about what death is, the cause of the death of someone, and where people go when they die. (in Buckingham, 1983, p. 39)

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## APPENDIX A

Virginia A. Atwood (1984) Questionnaire  
on Children's Concepts of Death

1. What is death?
2. What does it mean to be dead?
3. Are people different after they die?
4. Is going to sleep the same as death?
5. Why do people die?
6. Does everyone die?
7. At what age do people die?
8. Will you die?
9. Will the interviewer die?
10. What happens to people after they die?
11. Can the dead hear, feel, think or get hungry?
12. Is death permanent?

## APPENDIX B

Interview Focusing on Emotions (Pretest Questions)

1. When you think about death, how does it make you feel?
2. How would you feel if you would hear that the person you know is dead?
3. How do you feel when you hear that death is final and permanent?
4. How would it make you feel, if you would see a person crying over the death of a loved one?
5. How do you think a dead person feels?
6. Do you think it is possible for a dead person to come back to life?
7. How would you feel if you would see a dead animal on the road?
8. How does it make you feel when you see a graveyard?
9. How would it make you feel if your friend's pet died?
10. How would it make you feel if you heard that your friend's grandmother died in her sleep?
11. How would it make you feel if you heard that your friend's brother died in a car accident?
12. Do you have a sister? a brother?
13. How would it make you feel if your brother would die?
14. How would it make you feel if your sister would die?

## APPENDIX C

Questionnaire Related to the Film

1. What did you like in the film?
2. What did you dislike?
3. What happened to Pete? Where do you think he is now? How would you picture it?
4. What do you think he is doing now?
5. How do you think Pete is feeling now?
6. Is Pete different now that he is dead?
7. Do you think that Chad knew what would happen at the funeral?
8. How do you think he felt when he saw Pete in the coffin?
9. How did you feel when you saw Chad standing in front of the coffin at the funeral remembering the good time he had with Pete?
10. What did you think when Chad put a bubble gum in Pete's pocket at the funeral?
11. At the beginning of the film when you saw Chad trying to sleep after he found out about his brother's death, would you have been able to sleep in his place?
12. What did you think/feel when you saw Chad's mother putting away Pete's belongings shortly after the funeral?
13. Do you think that Pete will come back often to talk to Chad as he did at the end of the film?
14. Do you think it is possible for someone who is dead to come back to life as Pete was doing?
15. How would it make you feel if your friend's pet died?

16. How would it make you feel if you heard that your friend's grandmother died in her sleep?
17. In the film, how did it make you feel to see Chad losing his brother?  
  
Do you think it would have been easier for Chad to lose his grandmother instead of Pete? Why?
18. How would you have liked the film to end?

## APPENDIX D

Interview Focusing on Emotions (Posttest Questions)

1. When you think about the film "Where's Pete?", how does it make you feel?
2. When you saw Chad asking questions about his brother Pete and being answered that Pete was dead and that he would not come back, how did you feel?
3. How do you feel when you hear that death is final and permanent?
4. How do you think a dead person feels?
5. How did you feel when you saw Chad's dad crying on the stairs?
6. How did you feel when you heard Chad asking his mother in front of the coffin where was the real Pete?
7. How did you feel when you saw Chad remembering in front of the coffin the good time he had with Pete?
8. How did you feel when you saw Chad's mother putting away Pete's belongings (hockey stick, trophies), shortly after the funeral?
9. How did you feel when you saw Chad's father using a puppet to talk about his feelings to Chad?
10. How did it make you feel when you saw Pete at the end of the film coming back to talk to Chad?
11. Do you think it is possible for a dead person to come back to life?
12. How did you feel about the hockey stick Pete gave to Chad at the end of the film?

13. How did you feel when Pete at the end of the film said to Chad that he would not see him in the morning?
14. How did it make you feel to see Chad in the film losing his brother Pete?
15. How would it make you feel if your brother would die?
16. How would it make you feel if your sister would die?

APPENDIX E

The Development of Conservation

Ref: (Scarr, Weinberg & Levine, 1986, p. 348)

Questions Related to Appendix E

1. The experimenter:

- Watch what I do. See, I am pouring a little water from this glass into that one.
- Now, is there as much water in this glass as in that one, or does one have more?
- Why?

2. The experimenter:

- Now watch what I do. See, I am making this ball into a hotdog.
- Now, is there as much play dough in this one as in that one, or does one have more?
- Why?

3. The experimenter:

- Watch what I do.
- Now, are there as many red chips as white chips, or is there more of one kind?
- Why?

4. The experimenter:

- Watch what I do.
- Now, is the bottom rope as long as the one above, or is it longer or shorter?
- Why?

5. The experimenter:
- Watch what I do.
  - Now, is there as much wood in this one as in that one, or does one have more?
  - Why?
6. The experimenter:
- Watch what I do.
  - Now I flatten one ball of clay and I put it in the water.
  - Is the water level the same in both glasses, or does one glass have more water?
  - Why?

## APPENDIX F

Questions Related to the Concept of Mass-Medium

1. Is there a difference for you between someone who is hurt on TV or in a film, and someone who is hurt in real life? Why?
2. When you see someone crying and being angry on TV, do you think that it could also happen to you? Why?
3. Can people cry, be angry, be happy and sad on TV or in a film the same way they are in real life? Why?
4. If you would see someone hurt on TV, would you feel as sorry for him as you would feel for a close one in your life? Why?
5. When people die on television or in a film, are they really dead? Hurt? Why?

## APPENDIX G

Informed Consent Form

Dear Mr./Mrs./Ms.

I am a graduate student in Counselling Psychology at the University of Victoria and I am conducting a research project concerning people's perception of death. Permission to conduct this study has been obtained from the Human Subjects Committee of the University of Victoria, and from the Greater Victoria School Board.

I would like to ask your permission to allow your child to participate in the study. Such participation is voluntary and each child is free to withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences. Confidentiality is guaranteed. Whether a child participates, or does not participate, in the research project will have no effect upon the child's standing in a class or course of studies.

In the last two weeks of May, the children will be interviewed individually for approximately 15 minutes in order for me to gain an understanding of their perception of death. Then they will be asked to watch a video called "Where's Pete?" (produced by the National Film Board), which was broadcast last March on late afternoon television. Afterwards, a discussion regarding the film will be held individually with the child. A participating child should gain throughout my study an increased understanding of the grief process which could be valuable in his future.

The purpose of my study is to achieve a better understanding of children's emotional reactions to portrayals of death. Children who

have experienced death in their family in the past 2 or 3 years might not be eligible for the study.

If you have any further questions please do not hesitate to contact me at 385-5034. Thank you very much for considering this request and for your anticipated cooperation.

Yours sincerely,

Sophie Barbant

---

Informed Consent Form

If you agree to allow your child to participate in my study, would you please sign your name: \_\_\_\_\_

Student's name: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone number: \_\_\_\_\_

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

Could you please return this form as soon as possible to the teacher.

Thank you very much,

Sophie Barbant

## APPENDIX H

Thesis Title: Children's Cognitive and Emotional Reactions to a Mass-Medium Portrayal of Death.

Time Line:

Time required from the teacher and from the classroom:

- (a) First meeting with the teacher: 30 minutes.
  - procedures discussed
  - time setting
- (b) Meeting with all the children in the classroom: 15 minutes.
  - introducing myself and my research
  - informed consent form given
- (c) If needed and also part of the follow-up, discussion on loss and death: 20 minutes. (in the classroom)
  - activity: shields.

Time required from the children outside the classroom:

- (a) Five children needed for the testing period: an hour to an hour and a half.
- (b) Follow-up with the children a week after the testing period completed: 20 minutes.
  - Space needed: one classroom if possible.
  - Material needed: one VHS video machine.

If required from the parents:

- Presentation of my study and of the film, "Where's Pete?": one hour.
- Space needed: Gymnasium or one classroom.

VITA

Surname: Barbant Given Names: Sophie Marie-Paule

Place of Birth: Montreal, Quebec Date of Birth: Sept. 14, 1962

Educational Institutions Attended:

|                         |              |
|-------------------------|--------------|
| University of Victoria  | 1986 to 1990 |
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Title of Thesis: CHILDREN'S COGNITIVE AND EMOTIONAL REACTIONS TO  
A TELEVISION PORTRAYAL OF DEATH

Author:



(Signature)

SOPHIE MARIE-PAULE BARBANT

(Name)

April 24<sup>th</sup> 1990

(Date)