

DEATH CONCERNS IN THE PRESCHOOL

by

NANCY CHRISTINE REEVES

B.A., University of Victoria

1976

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS

in the Faculty

of

Education

ACCEPTED
FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

DEAN

DATE JUL 23 1979

We accept this thesis as conforming

to the required standard

(Dr. Roger Ruth)

(Dr. Rey Carr)

(Dr. Jack Adamowicz)

© NANCY CHRISTINE REEVES

UNIVERSITY OF VICTORIA

April 1979

All rights reserved. This thesis may not be reproduced in whole or in part, by mimeograph or other means, without the permission of the author.

Supervisor: Dr. Roger Ruth

ABSTRACT

This study explored preschool teachers' informational needs, attitudes, feelings, and experiences with death concerns in the classroom, and examined the relationship between the teachers' perceived needs and their feelings and attitudes about death.

Sixty-three British Columbia government-licensed preschool supervisors (teachers) who had taught 2,002 preschool children (3-5 years old) throughout the school year 1977-78, completed a questionnaire consisting of semantic differential and essay-type questions.

Results indicated preschool children experience the deaths of people and/or animals they know in sufficient numbers (21 per cent of the population) to involve most preschool teachers. Few participants (4%) expressed a negative orientation toward death. Respondents indicated a high frequency of occurrence of child-initiated death discussions in the classroom. All participants stated that discussing death has some place in the classroom and most stated that, regardless of satisfaction with their methods of dealing with

death concerns, they need more knowledge and/or skill development in this area; notably in understanding childrens' views of death.

Implications of these findings and others regarding teachers' personal attitudes about death and about discussing death in the classroom are considered. Specific recommendations for future study are suggested.

Examiners:

[REDACTED]
Dr. Roger Ruth

[REDACTED]
Dr. Rey Carr

[REDACTED]
Dr. Jack Adamowicz

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
Title Page	i
Abstract	ii
Table of Contents	iv
List of Tables	vi
List of Figures	vii
Acknowledgements	viii
 <u>Chapter</u>	
1 Statement of the Problem	1
Introduction	1
The Purpose of This Study	3
Research Question	3
11 Review of the Literature	5
Introduction	5
The School's Role in Death Education	6
Prevention and Crisis Intervention	7
Importance of Teacher Preparation	8
Development of Death Concepts in Children	10
Experiences Affecting Concepts of Death	13
The Grieving Child - Stages and Symptoms	16
Methods for Teachers to Develop Know- ledge and Awareness About Death Concerns	17
Studies Relating to Teacher/Student Attitudes Towards Death Education	20
111 Method	24
Area Studied	24
Instrument Used	24
Sampling Procedure	25
Data Collection	27
Data Analysis	28

<u>Chapter</u>	<u>Page</u>
IV	Results 31
	Preschool Children and Death
	Experiences..... 31
	When and How Teachers Introduce
	Death Concerns 32
	When and How Children Introduce
	Death Concerns 37
	Children's Development of Death
	Concepts 38
	The Place of Death Concerns in the
	Classroom 40
	The Psychological Health of Children
	Who Think About Death 42
	Teachers' Attitudes Toward Death
	And Discussing Death 45
	Teachers' Reactions To Discussing
	Death 48
	Perceived Effectiveness in Dealing
	With Death Concerns 51
	Knowledge of Death Concerns and
	Methods of Obtaining This Know-
	ledge Needed by Preschool Teachers . 53
	Teachers' Perceived Needs for
	Knowledge and Experience 56
	Participants Thoughts/Feelings About
	The Questionnaire 58
V	Discussion, Conclusions and
	Implications 62
	Death Concerns in the Preschool 62
	Teachers' Personal Attitudes
	Toward Death 64
	Teachers' Effectiveness in Dealing
	With Death Concerns 67
	Other Considerations..... 68
	Implications for Future Research 71
	References 73
	Appendix A: Questionnaire Form 77
	Appendix B: Request for Return of
	Questionnaire 85

LIST OF TABLES

<u>Table</u>		<u>Page</u>
1	Childrens' Reactions to Experience With Death	33
2	Teachers' Reasons for Introducing Death Concerns in the Classroom	35
3	Methods That Teachers Use to Introduce Death Concerns in the Classroom	36
4	How Students Introduce Death Concerns in the Classroom	39
5	Similarities and Dissimilarities of Nagy-Hankoff Findings	41
6	Reasons That Talking About Death Should Have a Small or Large Place in the Classroom	43
7	Reasons For the Psychological Health of Children Who Think About Death	46
8	Teachers' Feelings in Response to Children Who Have Experienced a Death	50
9	Teachers' Actions in Response to Children Who Have Experienced a Death	52
10	Teachers' Perceived Effectiveness in Dealing With Death Concerns	54
11	Importance of Teachers' Perceived Needs for Knowledge and Experience	57
12	Participants' Feelings/Thoughts About the Questionnaire	59
13	Participants' Comments	61

LIST OF FIGURES

<u>Figure</u>		<u>Page</u>
1	Teachers' Degree of Ease In Discussing Death	49

Acknowledgement

To Bob, who now knows my thesis almost as well as I do, your support and encouragement was essential.

To David Stewart for helping me to understand and accept many of my feelings about death so that I can now help others more effectively.

To Vicki Drader for "turning me on" to group work and for helping me find my effectiveness.

To Don Knowles for believing this area is worthwhile, and freely giving me your energy, time, and expertise.

To my committee, Roger Ruth, Rey Carr and Jack Adamowicz, your support and technical advice helped make tolerable the labour of birthing this study.

Chapter 1

Statement of the Problem

Introduction

Death is an inescapable fact. How individuals deal with this fact, the fact that they do not have *complete* control over their lives, influences how they live from day to day (Feifel, 1959). An individual who deals with the fact of death in a negative manner may develop denial as a coping mechanism in life-threatening situations (Hankoff, 1975), or may attempt to defeat or take control of death through suicide, or live a fearful, restricted existence (Gordon & Klass, 1976). On the other hand, coming positively to terms with death can be a growing experience (Kubler-Ross, 1969), helping an individual to make the most of the present and to face life realistically. Coming to terms with death does not necessarily encourage an individual to devalue life. As Kurlychek (1977) states;

The goal of a death education course may not be for participants to refrain from using seatbelts as a result of having "conquered" the fear of death, but on the contrary, that they buckle up in recognition of the reality that injury and death are ever-present dangers on the highway (p. 46).

During the school years from kindergarten to grade 12, one of every 20 children will experience the death of a

parent (Stein, 1974). Getson and Benshoff (1977) project that in a school system with 6,000 students, an average of four students may be expected to die during a typical year. Death of students' relatives, friends, pets and acquaintances occur even more frequently.

A variety of authors have suggested that death education should be incorporated into the school curriculum in order to assist the child in his/her exploration of death. Such exploration might include an examination of his/her feelings about death as well as those of other people. The ultimate goal of such exploration would be to increase the enjoyment of life as a result of coming to terms with death (Kubler-Ross, 1975; Leviton, 1972; Bluestein, 1976; Gordon & Klass, 1976; Bennett, 1974). Some of the death educators cited above discuss the need for the teacher to initiate discussions or respond to students' interest in death concerns: others, the need for dealing effectively with the dying or grieving student in the classroom.

Teachers must be prepared to meet the death concern needs of students. Unfortunately, the knowledge that a teacher needs in order to effectively deal with death concerns is difficult to obtain solely through experience, and few teacher-training programmes offer courses in death education. Studies on teacher attitudes to death education

(eg., Moseley, 1976) are few and no extensive studies on teacher attitudes or needs assessment have been undertaken, so that the few existing teacher-training courses in death education have been developed without the benefit of a solid body of research findings.

The Purpose of This Study

The purpose of this study is twofold. Firstly, it is concerned with exploring preschool teachers' informational needs, attitudes, feelings, and experiences about death concerns in the classroom. Secondly, the study seeks to determine whether there is a relationship between types of feelings and attitudes about death and the perceived needs of preschool teachers.

Research Questions

In order to determine preschool teachers' informational needs, attitudes, feelings, and experiences, a number of questions are asked.

(a) To the knowledge of the teacher, how many children in the preschool experienced the death of someone they knew?

(b) How often are death concerns brought up in the classroom by the children?

(c) What effects (in feelings and behavior) did the children who experienced the death of someone they knew have on the teacher?

(d) How effectively do preschool teachers believe that they deal with death concerns in the classroom?

(e) To what extent do preschool teachers believe that it is a part of their role to deal with death concerns in the classroom?

(f) What knowledge do teachers who are unsatisfied with their manner of dealing with death concerns perceive they need in order to become more satisfied?

(g) In what ways would teachers prefer to acquire this knowledge?

Chapter 11

Review of the Literature

Introduction

This review will examine the role of the school in death education; the skills, attitudes, and knowledge necessary for effective management of this topic, and methods teachers can use to explore these skills, attitudes and knowledge areas. An *attitude* is something held as true. It is "a relatively enduring organization of interrelated beliefs that describe, evaluate and advocate action with respect to an object or situation" (Rokeach, 1968, p. 132). A *feeling* is an awareness of experiencing of a situation; emotion. *Grieving and mourning* include the whole range of feelings and behaviors associated with an unwanted loss of any kind. *Effectiveness* (in dealing with death concerns) includes behaviors exhibited by the helper that allow the helper and the helper(s) to continue their emotional and intellectual development without these being retarded or harmed by the death experience. A *death educator* is one who teaches death awareness or death education courses and/or workshops. A *thanatologist* is one who studies death and dying.

The School's Role in Death Education

The need for death concerns to be discussed in the school has been extensively considered in the literature (c.f., e.g., Kubler-Ross, 1975; Leviton, 1972; Clay, 1976; Bennett, 1974; Perkes, 1977). Lambert (1977) contends that death education "is the curriculum of ultimate relevance, one which touches or will touch each class member at their deepest core of being" (p. 66). As well as this inherent relevance, Crosbie and Garlie (1976) state that this topic "has the three basic requisites for inclusion in the curriculum - universality, inherent interest, and lack of knowledge" (p. 7).

Filiatreau and Rigger (1976) observe that the community is placing more demands on the school to deal with death concerns in the classroom. As a result of these demands the school administration needs to decide whether it should revise its current methods of handling death concerns which according to Filiatreau and Rigger (1976) are either ignoring or dealing ineffectively with these concerns. In dealing with death concerns, Steele (1973) professes that the school is in a unique position. He states;

The pool of death-related information in the modern morality environment includes at least three contributors; communications media (television, motion pictures, etc.), death-related business (life insurance companies, funeral businesses, etc.), and education. Of the three contributors only education has socialization as its manifest function (p. 11).

Prevention and Crisis Intervention

Death concerns in the classroom may be dealt with through either a preventive or a crisis intervention approach. The teacher can be very helpful in a crisis situation if he/she has developed skills such as identifying the child who shows maladaptive methods of handling grief; working with the child to provide support; and referring, when appropriate, to professional resources, e.g., school counsellors.

Stein, et al. (1975), observe that the preschool teacher has an important part to play in crisis intervention in that he/she is accessible to parents and young children, understands young children, and usually is seen by parents and children as non-threatening. A grieving child has an effect on the entire class so that the teacher may be called on to help more than the child directly affected by the death. A grieving child who has developed some maladaptive behavior associated with the death may harm both himself and others.

Caplan (1974) states;

There is plenty of evidence that, if not adequately treated, many emotional disorders of the child persist into adult life; or else they act as precursors of future adult breakdown by leaving weakness in the foundations of the personality which increases vulnerability to later stress (p. 63).

The second way to deal with death concerns is through prevention. A preventive approach (Caplan, 1974) strengthens the individual and his environment before a death occurs,

so that when he is in a grieving situation he has more personal resources to draw on. Although death usually produces the strongest emotional reactions, many kinds of loss are followed by some type of grieving. Loss of friends and home through moving, loss of status by failing a grade, parental separation or divorce, and the death of a pet all may be felt with much the same intensity by the child.

There is some evidence that the grief reaction is less severe and shorter in duration among those individuals who have the opportunity to examine their own understanding of death prior to experiencing a death (Bluestein, 1976). Factors which influence the effectiveness of a preventive programme include the content of death education (Bluestein, 1976; Leviton, 1972), the environment in which it is to be introduced (Hardt, 1976; Prouty, 1976) and the attitudes of the teachers who introduce it (Whitley, 1976; Gordon and Klass, 1976). Teacher preparation, which will be examined in the next section is another important factor.

Importance of Teacher Preparation

Before teaching, or even developing, a course or materials on death education, the teacher should become aware of his/her own feelings and attitudes on the subject. Gordon and Klass (1976) go so far as to state that, "the reason we have been unable to educate our own children

(about death concerns) is because of our own fears and ignorance about death" (p. 3).

More and more of the experienced thanatologists (Kubler-Ross, 1973), death educators (Clay, 1976; Bennett, 1974; Filiatreau & Rigger, 1976; Gordon and Klass, 1976; Perkes, 1977; Crase & Crase, 1976; Risky, 1977; Bloch, 1975) and counsellor educators (Bascue, 1974; Cheiken, 1977) state that self-exploration is the first, most important step for teachers to take. Because the teacher is older and, therefore, probably closer to death than his/her students, discussion of death concerns will often touch the teacher more deeply than his/her students (Whitley, 1976).

Although the authors cited above state that self-awareness is important, they agree that a complete knowledge of the teacher's own feelings and attitudes or an extensive knowledge of death concerns and issues is not necessarily required in order to deal with the topic effectively (Grollman, 1975; Risky, 1977). There are, however, certain areas of knowledge with which teachers should become familiar. Some of these areas are described by Perkes (1977), Kubler-Ross (1976), Ryerson (1977), Leviton (1972), and Cheiken (1977). These will be examined next, so that the reader will have some idea of their range and the necessity for some type of structured training to impart this information to the teacher.

Development of Death Concepts in Children

The concepts children develop around death issues depend on their mental ages and their prior experiences with death. There are three major stages in the child's development of death concepts, as described by Nagy (1959) and elaborated by Bankoff (1975). The stages will be listed and childhood experiences which influence these stages will be examined.

Developmental Stages

Age 0-5. The young child believes death is reversible. He attributes life and consciousness to the dead. Death is seen as another, special phase of life from which one can return. The child tends to associate life with movement; a wind-up toy is alive when it moves, a still, sleeping person may be thought dead. The child does not think about his own death unless he has experienced a long or severe illness. Death, per se, is not feared. The child's main fear is of abandonment, he doesn't distinguish between types; e.g. death or divorce.

Age 5-9. The child's concept of death as a temporary state begins to change. By age six, the child usually has a realistic view of the absoluteness of death and then becomes fearful of personal death. However, death is not

viewed as universal. Death often is seen as a potential punishment for wrong thoughts or actions. At this age, the child often believes his thoughts have the power to influence others. He may decide that he has contributed to or caused a death to occur by thinking "bad" thoughts about the dead person. Death is personified; when children talk about death they see it either as a separate entity (e.g., the Grim Reaper) or as the dead person; the word death is often used in place of "corpse". Some children in this age group will assign functions of the living, such as feelings, to the dead.

Age 9+. Death is recognized as universal and as the end of corporeal life. This age group consists of three substages.

Age 9-11. The older child begins to see death as a biological fact. He tries to give logical explanations and definitions of death; e.g., in death you can't breathe anymore. Death is not personified or viewed as a punishment. The child begins to realize that death is universal.

Age 11-14. The early adolescent, with a new-found interest in abstract speculation, explores every subject. He is preoccupied with self and is concerned with trying to understand his place in the world. The adolescent fails to differentiate between what is important to him and to

others and, therefore, tends to assume that others are also preoccupied with his appearance and behavior. It is as though the adolescent is continually playing before an imaginary audience. "One of the most common admiring audience constructions, in the adolescent, is the anticipation of how others will react to his own death" (Elkind, 1974, p. 92). The adolescent spends a lot of his time thinking about what personal death will be like (Kastenbaum, 1959). Through the media, he has seen and heard of many people dying of many different causes. However, part of him does not accept that he will die. The adolescent tends to think of himself and his feelings as unique and special, developing what Elkind (1974) calls a personal fable. The reality and inevitability of death is accepted for others but not for self. Struggling to see himself in relation to death and to "test" his immortality, the adolescent may place himself in life-threatening situations, e.g., playing "chicken". There is some indication (Hankoff, 1975) that if the adolescent has the opportunity to explore his feelings and attitudes about death through discussions and/or structured exercises, there will be no need to expose himself to dangerous situations.

Age 15-16. At this stage the imaginary audience of the early adolescent is usually exchanged for the real


audience. As the individual is able to distinguish between his and others thoughts and feelings he also begins to let go of his personal fable. The older adolescent is more ready to admit the possibility of his personal death and will not take as many risks with his life. Some adults, however, never do reach this level in their development of concepts. They continue to deny the reality of their personal death.

Experiences Affecting Concepts of Death

The child is more strongly affected by the manner in which the adults around him react to death experiences than by the death experiences themselves (Parness, 1975; Kubler-Ross, 1973). Fear of death is learned. In a study by Templer (1976) he found that death anxiety in high school students resembled that of their parents. The young child is very eager to talk about death and often will pick up and examine dead animals. If the adults around him encourage the child to talk about his feelings and thoughts about death, he is more likely to view death as natural and non-frightening. If the child is discouraged from exploring this topic, he may carry a fearful, unrealistic concept of death into his adult life (Grollman, 1975; Whitley, 1976).

Some adults believe they are protecting the young child by attempting to hide their grief. Children are very

sensitive to emotions and usually know something is upsetting the adult. "The child whose greatest fear is that of separation and abandonment by a parent frequently has his fears realized when the well-meaning parent completely cuts off communication in a crisis" (Stein, 1975, p. 363). Also, if the adult does not express his feelings openly the child may decide that it is wrong to feel hurt and sad when someone dies (Kliman, 1968). An adult who openly expresses grief does not necessarily overwhelm the child. Whitley (1976) found that the adult can serve as a useful model. Seeing the adult grieve, the child realizes that strong feelings are natural and that the pain of someone's death cannot be taken away but it can be made bearable if it is shared with others.

The information and lack of information a child receives  about death influence the attitudes he develops about the topic. If the child is given false information that he will later have to unlearn (e.g., Grandma went away on a long trip) he will often feel confused and betrayed by and angry at the adults who lied to him (Crollman, 1975). Children can accept that adults do not know, with certainty, what happens after death; that this is one more of life's mysteries. If adults refuse to talk about death with the child, his concepts will be built on his own fantasies and

on whatever information, correct or incorrect, he happens upon.

* The child's concepts will also be affected by the unrealistic perspectives he receives from television (Clay, 1976). "Children bear witness to 18,000 deaths on TV by the age of fourteen" (Sadker, 1976, p. 75). Death is seen as reversible on TV; directly, when cartoon characters are smashed into pulp and survive and, indirectly, when the individual killed on one show turns up in a following programme. Killing is often portrayed as an acceptable method of solving problems on TV. The hero is usually rewarded for his death-dealing skills. Death is, in most instances, seen as a punishment and is usually violent and painful. Most childrens programmes do not teach a respect for life; in fact, they encourage the opposite.

The literature supports the conclusion that if the child is allowed to explore the topic of death and receives information consistent with his age level and interest, he is more likely to develop a realistic concept of death. The teacher can also help the child by becoming aware of the grieving process and responding appropriately to it. The following section examines the grieving child in the classroom.

The Grieving Child - Stages and Symptoms

Many death educators believe that for teachers to be helpful to a grieving or dying child in the classroom they must be able to identify and understand the child's experiences and behaviors (Ryerson, 1977; Grollman, 1975; Kliman et al., 1968; Crase & Crase, 1976). Although the natural process of grieving is personalized, Kubler-Ross (1969, 1974, 1975) describes five stages that the dying and grieving person often experiences. These stages are denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. There is no predetermined duration for an individual to spend in each stage, and some individuals return to previously experienced stages for a time or skip stages altogether. To reach the level of acceptance of the death of someone significant may take months or years (Kubler-Ross, 1969; Jones, 1977).

Larson (1973) describes physiological and psychological grief symptoms that are experienced among all age groups. Physiological grief symptoms include nausea (50%), and diarrhea and/or constipation (80%). Psychological symptoms include poor concentration (90%) and poor memory (60%). Jones (1977) observes that grieving children in the classroom display behaviors consistent with the stages and symptoms outlined by Kubler-Ross and Larson. He states that

the teacher needs to understand the grieving process to identify a child who is grieving and realize that grieving will affect his ability to learn. The child who is not attending may be grieving rather than disinterested or rebellious. The teacher must also be able to reassure the child, who is often bewildered or alarmed by the changes in himself, that his experiences are normal.

This section concludes a general examination of areas of knowledge with which teachers, in order to be effective in dealing with death concerns, should become familiar. The next section deals with methods for teachers to obtain this knowledge.

Methods for Teachers to Develop Knowledge and Awareness About Death Concerns

Methods by which teachers can develop knowledge and self-awareness around death concerns are varied. Since studying and talking about death often can evoke strong emotions, it may be easier for interested teachers to work together (Nelson, 1977). Bennett (1974) concludes that all school faculty should take part in (some type of) inservice training in order to provide mutual support and understanding.

Death Education Courses and Workshops

Clay (1976) proposes that teachers should attend a course in death education in college, before they begin teaching, although in many cases this is not possible since there are few courses on this topic (Filiatreau & Rigger, 1976). The course or workshop format appears to have many advantages for providing an appropriate learning environment. These include the following:

1. A formal course or workshop permits the participant "to confront the subject of death in a relatively secure environment" (Bluestein, 1976, p. 117)
2. Formal death education provides participants with a means of changing their attitudes, thereby giving them an opportunity to overcome many of the fears associated with death (Mueller, 1975)
3. An ongoing course enables participants to examine the topic in more depth than a workshop does, and provides more contact with the instructor and group, while the participant is integrating the material.
4. A workshop is often easier for busy student teachers and experienced teachers to fit into their timetables than an ongoing course would be, and its shorter format may be less threatening to participants.

5. Both the course and workshop save participants time and energy by presenting an overview of the whole area of death education or of a specific area of interest. Participants can then be more aware of areas in which they need more knowledge and/or practical experience.

Reading

Of all the methods for developing knowledge and awareness, reading may be the most non-threatening and therefore, the easiest for the nervous or apprehensive teacher to approach the subject (Queen, 1976). Non-fiction can develop the teacher's knowledge of childrens' development of death concepts, grieving processes, adaptive and maladaptive behaviors and ways to help the child (Geston & Benshoff, 1977). Fiction in which a character dies, biographies and autobiographies of individuals whose deaths were faced realistically can be inspiring.

Interviews

Cheiken (1977), Bloch (1975) and Geston and Benshoff (1977) state that a valuable method for learning about our own and others reactions to death and dying is to talk with old and/or dying people in hospitals and nursing homes.

Informal Discussions

Nelson (1977) and Getson and Benshoff (1977) give many suggestions for more informal learning. These include talking with family or close friends about death concerns, making personal arrangements for death, (e.g., writing wills, deciding on types of funeral or services), and talking with others who deal with death professionally (e.g., clergymen, doctors, counsellors).

Personal attitudes and past experiences influence the method(s) that teachers choose to develop their knowledge and self-awareness. Studies concerned with teacher attitudes will be examined in the following section.

*Studies Relating to Teacher/Student Attitudes
Towards Death Education*

Few studies have been undertaken to determine teacher/student attitudes to discussing death concerns in the classroom. Most writers in the field appear to operate under the assumption that students want to talk about death and that teachers want to be able to help children with death concerns but, through lack of training feel incompetent to do so. These assumptions are based on death educators' personal experiences working either with children (Clay, 1976; Bennett, 1974; Hawke, 1974; Whitley, 1976; Crase &

Cruse, 1976; Koocher, 1973; Hankoff, 1975) or with university or college students training to become teachers or other helpers (Leviton, 1972; Bluestein, 1976; Lister & Gochros, 1976; Bloch, 1975).

An area that has received more research interest than attitude studies is the evaluation of death education courses. There are studies that find positive effects (Prouty, 1976; Myers, 1976; Leviton, 1972), negative effects (Gurfield, 1977), and no effect on participants' perceptions of death. Examination of studies that found negative effects shows that typically, there are certain shortcomings in the instruction and/or subsequent research. In some cases the instructor of the death education course being studied did not understand or take into account current knowledge about death concerns or group processes. In some cases the study was solely based on the instructor's self-reports (Gurfield, 1977).

The only study reviewed in which teacher attitudes were examined specifically, was done by Moseley (1976). The subjects were primary school teachers. Seventy-two teachers were approached and 51 per cent agreed to participate in the study. Fifty-one per cent of the participants agreed that the school should have a role in helping children develop their beliefs about death. They stated that the

school should take this role to either help an individual child adjust to the death situation or to help develop childrens' beliefs in all areas. Teachers who did not believe that death should be discussed in the school thought that death and religion are inseparable and the school should not become involved in religious indoctrination.

Teachers also were asked how they treated death in the classroom. They reported no planned discussion of death; all talks were spontaneous. Death of a child's relative or death of a classroom pet were the most frequent basis for interaction, followed, in order of frequency, by the use of stories, books and discussion.

Moseley's findings are a beginning toward understanding teachers' attitudes and experiences. A more extensive study of attitudes, as well as the number and type of death concerns found in the classroom and the informational needs of teachers, is needed. The purpose of the present study is to:

- (a) extend and replicate Moseley's (1976) study at the preschool level; and
- (b) to study teachers' and childrens' death concerns and needs in a more systematic and comprehensive fashion than has been attempted to date. This study has important implications for the development of comprehensive death

education programmes for teachers which are based on actual needs of participants as well as the available resources in any particular setting. As the literature suggests, such programmes are typically based on the death educator's assumptions about the needs of a particular group and as such, may not provide a comprehensive death education programme.

This section completes the review of literature. In the review, the needs for discussing death in the classroom (as prevention and crisis intervention) and for teacher preparation have been examined.

Chapter 111

Method

Areas Studied

Two areas were examined in the present study. The first considered preschool teachers' experiences, feelings, attitudes and needs about death concerns in the classroom. The second investigated whether or not there is a relationship between teachers' feelings, and attitudes and their perceived needs.

Instrument Used

A survey approach, using a questionnaire, was used to obtain all data. A self-report approach was indicated because the study's focus is on teachers' own experiences and perceived needs.

The questionnaire consisted of three sections. The first section dealt with demographic characteristics including teacher's age, sex, number of years teaching and whether she taught in the school year 1977-78. Information concerning the preschool's location and student size was also gathered. The extent of the correlation between these variables and teacher attitudes toward death was also examined.

The second section focused on general teacher attitudes towards death. Two semantic differentials asking: "What does death mean to you?", and "In general, discussions about death are . . ." were used. Correlational analysis was performed on these data to determine if there is any relationship between each question and the information from section I, and between each question and the information from section III.

The third section dealt with the existing situation in the preschool in regard to death concerns and teachers' feelings and attitudes about these concerns. Teachers were also asked what they perceived they needed in order to be more effective dealing with death concerns in the classroom. A semantic differential was used in order to determine teacher attitudes toward children discussing death. Questions asking for essay-type and one word responses were also utilized.

Sampling Procedure

The study population consists of B.C. government licensed preschool teachers who taught in the Capital Regional District of Victoria during the school year 1977-78. There are a total of 78 licensed preschools (28 group day cares, 49 part-time nursery schools and

1 "special day care"). The "special day care" (dealing with mentally and physically handicapped children) was not included in the study as their staff's training is more specialized. Teachers in 68 preschools (31 day cares and 37 part-time nursery schools) met the criteria for inclusion in the study, which brought the population to 97. The target sample size for this study was 85 or above. The minimum sample size was 50, anything below that being considered not sufficiently representative of the population. The sample size obtained was 63 (65%) and so was considered representative.

Of the 35 individuals who did not complete the questionnaire, 38 per cent stated that they did not want to fill out a questionnaire on death, 32 per cent gave no reason, 21 per cent stated that they refused to participate because they do not like questionnaires regardless of the topic, and 9 per cent agreed to complete the questionnaire but had not returned from vacations before the cut-off date.

Participants in the study were volunteers; consent forms were signed by all participants prior to completing the questionnaire and no teacher was coerced into taking part in the study. All participant responses were kept anonymous and confidential. To maximize independence of

responses, all teachers were told to complete the questionnaire privately, without discussing it with anyone but the researcher prior to filling it out. All participants were given the same information by the researcher; "The purpose of this questionnaire is to explore the feelings, attitudes and experiences of preschool teachers in relation to death concerns in the preschool. Your responses will remain absolutely confidential and names will not be used in the analysis of the data. The questionnaire will probably take about twenty minutes to complete."

Data Collection

The researcher attempted to contact all 68 preschools initially by telephone. At every preschool contacted, the supervisor was told the purpose of the survey and was asked to complete the questionnaire and assist the researcher in contacting other staff members who met the criteria for eligibility. Since co-operative preschools (those owned by parents' groups) do not publish their telephone numbers, the author visited each preschool personally. The author personally delivered questionnaires to every supervisor who expressed a willingness to participate and arranged for a convenient time to return for the completed form. In nine cases, three or more attempts to contact the teacher by telephone or visits failed and

the questionnaire was left in the preschool's mailbox, addressed to the teacher, with the note, "If you are willing to fill out this questionnaire, please call me to arrange pick up. Thank you." The note was written on the consent form, which gave an adequate description of the study.

To gather the questionnaires, the researcher returned to the preschool at the agreed time, or in cases where a time had not been arranged, telephoned after a two week period. Another telephone call one and a half weeks later was made to those teachers who had not yet completed the form. Following this, a letter requesting return of the questionnaire (see Appendix B) was mailed six weeks after the questionnaires had first been delivered. At preschools where no contact had been made and the questionnaires had been left in the mailbox, only the letter was sent.

Data Analysis

The questionnaire (see Appendix A) consists of closed and open-ended questions and semantic differentials. The structured responses are reported as frequencies and percentages and the open-ended ones have been content analyzed. Content was expected to fall within two categories:

(a) The first included participants who do not believe that death should be discussed in the classroom. It was hypothesized that this group would have a negative orientation toward death, would believe that it is abnormal for children to think about death and would be satisfied with their methods of dealing with death concerns in the classroom. They might also report a lesser amount of child expressed death concerns in the classroom.

(b) The second category was expected to consist of participants who believe that death should be discussed in the classroom. It was hypothesized that this group would have a neutral or positive orientation toward death, would believe that it is normal for children to think about death, and may or may not be satisfied with their methods of dealing with death concerns in the classroom. They might also report a greater number of child expressed death concerns than the first group.

The semantic differentials were used to determine teacher attitudes toward different aspects of death. Each participant was judged to have a negative, positive or neutral orientation towards death. Participants with a negative orientation towards death generally view death as unnatural, frightening, and negative, are unwilling to discuss the topic, and view childrens' interest in death as

harmful to them. Participants with a positive orientation towards death generally view it as natural, non-frightening and positive, are willing to discuss the topic, and view childrens' interest in death as normal and harmless.

Participants with a neutral orientation towards death generally view it as an inevitable fact, neither positive or negative. This group does not initiate discussions about death like the positively oriented group but, when asked, will discuss the topic. They believe childrens' interest in death is normal and harmless.

Using the semantic differentials' nine point scales, participants were divided into negative orientations (1-3), neutral orientations (4-6), and positive orientations (7-9). Pearson Product-Moment correlations were calculated to determine any association between each orientation and other variables of interest.

Chapter IV

Results

Preschool Children and Death Experiences

Participants were asked to indicate the numbers of preschool students they were aware of who had an experience with death during the school year 1977-1978. In a student population of 2,002, 415 (21%) students reported such an experience, and 86% of the participants answered in the affirmative.

Categories of childrens' death experiences included; 16, (4%), children who had an immediate family member die; 51, (12%), who had another relative die; 2, (.5%) who had a close friend die; 342, (82%), who had a pet or animal that was known to the child die; 2, (.5%), who had an acquaintance die; and 2, (.5%) who found a dead bird. Participants indicated that immediate family members, who had died, included relatives living with the child as well as parents and siblings.

In some cases the participants checked the category "class pet died", without indicating the number of children affected by the death. Although the researcher understood this to mean that the whole class experienced the death rather than a single child, the score was left as one.

Another question was concerned with the ways that the teacher saw her students react to the specific deaths. Participants described 95 situations involving; 38 grandparents, 26 child-owned pets, 13 class-owned pets, 9 relatives other than immediate family, 2 parents, and 1 sibling. Some participants described more than one child response to a death for a total of 114 reactions to the 95 situations. The most frequently described reaction, (26%), was a matter-of-fact acceptance of the death. Other reactions and respective scores are shown in Table 1.

When and How Teachers Introduce Death Concerns

A three-part question examined the frequency, reasons, and methods by which teachers introduce the topic of death in the classroom. The first part of the question, which asked about frequency, was answered by 94% of the participants. The greatest number of scores, (59%), were in the lower third ("never" or "rarely"); followed by those in the middle third (37%); and the higher third ("often"), (3%). Twenty-two per cent of the participants indicated that they never introduce the topic of death in the classroom. The mean response on the nine point scale was 3.2, the standard deviation was 1.7.

The second part of the question asked for reasons for the ratings described above. Seventy-nine per cent of the

Table 1.
 Childrens' Reactions to Experiences With Death

Number of Children	Reaction
30	matter-of-fact acceptance
13	sad
10	curious
9	confused
9	upset
7	talked a lot about the death
4	no reaction seen by teacher
4	concerned
4	upset when parent showed distress
3	anger
3	no reaction mentioned by teacher
3	quieter
3	tears
3	unpredictable behaviour
2	more aggressive
2	interested
1	fear
1	thumbsucking
1	tight jaw
1	denied death had occurred
1	told teacher about the death "with a look of glee"

Number of children = 95

Number of reactions = 114

participants responded to this part of the question. The most frequently described reason, (26%), was that the topic would be introduced whenever it was appropriate. The second most frequent reason, (22%), was that the participants never introduced the topic but would talk about it if a child introduced it. Other actual and paraphrased responses are shown in Table 2.

The third part of the question was directed to those participants who do introduce the topic of death in the classroom. Participants were given a list of methods which could be used to initiate discussions and were asked to indicate and rank order from most to least common methods they use. The most frequent method (80%), was talking about the life cycles of plants and animals. This was followed, in order of frequency, by childrens' fiction, (71%), explaining the significance of holidays associated with death, e.g., Remembrance Day, (68%), asking for childrens' experiences with death, (63%), and "other", which was discussing death during religious studies, (7%).

Some participants indicated the methods they use but did not rank them from most to least common. Table 3 shows the scores of the participants who did rank the methods.

Table 2

Teachers' Reasons for Introducing Death Concerns in the Classroom

Number of Responses	Reasons
13	I introduce the topic whenever appropriate
11	I never introduce it but would talk about it if a child introduced it.
10	I introduce it only if there is a need, e.g. a child grieving or asking questions about death.
4	I introduce it to help children accept death as part of life.
2	It's not a topic I'd bring up without having a reference point.
1	"If the time is right and I have a listening audience, I think it's great".
1	"There is seldom an occasion that demands it or creates a need for it", so I introduce it rarely.
1	"I don't feel too comfortable with the subject and I don't want to convey that feeling to the children".
1	"I don't believe in initiating something that might be upsetting to some" so I don't bring it up.
1	"I don't introduce it because I have a fear of death".
1	"I introduce it because children have a fear of the unknown".
1	"I introduce it because we live beside a church and there are funerals there quite often".
1	"I introduce it to explain natural events, life cycles".
1	I introduce it as a teaching lesson, e.g., if we hear of a child being killed by a car I warn my students to be careful crossing roads.
1	I introduce it "to emphasize the importance of life".
N = 63	Respondents to this part of question = 50

Table 3
 Methods That Teachers Use To Introduce Death
 Concerns In The Classroom

Number of Responses	Ranking (1 = most common)					\bar{x}	s.d.	Method
	1	2	3	4	5			
40	10	16	9	5		2.2	.97	childrens fiction
33	12	12	4	5		2.1	1.1	talking about life cycles of plants and animals
30	5	5	11	4		3.0	1.3	asking for childrens' experiences with death
36	2	4	10	9	11	3.6	1.2	explaining significance of holidays associated with death
4								religious studies

N = 63 Number of respondents to this question = 40

When and How Children Introduce Death Concerns

This concern explored the frequency and methods by which preschool children initiate discussions of death or show they are thinking about the subject. Ninety-five per cent of the participants responded to this question. The largest number of responses, (50%), was in the lower third (never or rarely introduce death concerns) of the nine point scale participants were given to rate. This was followed by ratings in the middle third (38%), and the higher third (12%), (often introduce death concerns). The mean response on the nine point scale was 3.7, the standard deviation was 1.8. Although the greatest number of responses were in the lower third, only 3 per cent of participants indicated that their students never bring up the topic in the classroom.

Participants, who indicated that their students do introduce death discussions, were given a list of methods which children could use for this purpose. Teachers were asked to check and rank order, from most to least common, those methods that are used by their students. The method most widely used (83%), was talking with the teacher about personal experiences. This method was followed by dramatic play/role play, (82%); talking about television programmes in which someone has died, (80%), talking with peers about

books that deal with death, (72%). The most widely used method refers to that which is used by the greatest number of children. This differs from the most common which refers to the method that is used most often. The most common method was dramatic play/role play. Table 4 indicates the most to least common methods and their distribution of scores.

Childrens Development of Death Concepts

Participants were given Nagy (1959) and Hankoff's (1975) descriptions of the death concepts that are held by children 0-5 years old. They then were asked to indicate the extent to which they believed the description by rating on a nine point scale; "one" equalled "dissimilar to your experience with children" and "nine" equalled "similar to your experience with children". Ninety per cent responded to this part of the question. Most scores, (70%), were in the higher third; 21% in the middle third; and 9% in the lower third. The mean response on the nine point scale was 7.1, the standard deviation was 2.0.

Seventy-nine per cent responded to the second part of the question which asked: "In what ways are they similar or dissimilar?". The most common similarity, (46%), was that children in this age range do see death as reversible.

Table 4
 How Students Introduce Death
 Concerns In The Classroom

Number of Responses	Ranking (1 = most common)								Method
	1	2	3	4	5	6	\bar{x}	s.d.	
43	23	9	5	3	2	1	2.0	1.3	dramatic or role play
43	3	6	12	9	10	3	3.6	1.4	talking among themselves about personal experiences
43	9	3	9	9	11	2	3.4	1.6	talking with teachers about their experiences
41	2	4	7	7	16	5	4.1	1.4	talking about books that deal with death
39	9	14	4	8	3	1	2.6	1.4	talking about TV programmes in which someone has died
<hr/> N = 63 Number of respondents to this question = 43									

Television was mentioned by 12 per cent as contributing to childrens' beliefs in the reversibility of death. The most common dissimilarity to the Nagy/Hankoff descriptions was that children do not typically associate life with movement. Table 5 shows other similarities and dissimilarities as well as the number of responses associated with each.

The Place of Death Concerns in the Classroom

This concern was addressed through a two-part question. In the first part participants were asked to indicate the place they believe death concerns have in the classroom using a nine point scale ("one" equalled "has no place" and "nine" equalled "has a large place"). Ninety-two per cent of the participants responded to this part of the question. Most participants, (53%), checked in the middle third of the scale; 36 per cent checked in the higher third; and 17 per cent, checked in the lower third. The mean response on the nine point scale was 6.1, the standard deviation was 1.9. No participant indicated that talking about death has no place in the classroom.

The second part of this question asked for participants' reasons for their ratings in part one. Ninety-one per cent of the participants responded to this part of the question. Their paraphrased answers generally fell into

Table 5
 Similarities and Dissimilarities of
 Nagy-Hankoff Findings

Number of Responses	Actual or Paraphrased Responses
Similarities	
23	The child sees death as reversible.
16	The child's main fear is of abandonment.
7	The child associates life with movement.
6	Everything in the paragraph is similar.
7	The child does not think about death until a situation involves him personally.
6	Death, per se, is not feared.
3	Seems similar but haven't enough experience to know.
3	Death is seen as another, special, phase of life.
2	The child doesn't distinguish between types of abandonment.
2	Abandonment is a big fear.
Dissimilarities	
4	The child sees death as irreversible.
5	Life is not associated with movement.
3	Children sometimes think of their own death without having personal experience with it.
2	Children don't attribute life and consciousness to the dead.
3	Children do distinguish between different types of abandonment.
1	Children whose parents believe in Christ have a healthy attitude towards death. Others fear death.
1	"Some children see death realistically."
1	"Some children handle death quite well."
1	"Children don't feel or think about their own death except in dramatics - which wouldn't be a real feeling."
N = 63	Number of participants who responded to this part of question = 50

the three categories; those participants who checked in the lower (1-3), middle (4-6), and higher (7-9) thirds on the nine point scale in the first part of this question. Some responses, however, were found in more than one category. Of these, two were by far the most frequently chosen reasons. These two will be described here, the others are shown in Table 6.

The most frequently offered reason for determining the place of death concerns in the classroom, (46%), was that if death concerns are brought up by the children they should be dealt with. The second most frequently offered reason, (23%), was that death concerns need to be talked about, but not emphasized, because they are a part of life.

The Psychological Health of Children Who Think About Death

Participants were asked to indicate how psychologically healthy or unhealthy they believe children are who think about death. Ninety-four per cent of the participants responded to the nine point scale in which "one" equalled "disturbs or disrupts psychological growth", and "nine" equalled "is essential for psychological growth". The largest percentage of participants, (80%), scored in the higher third of the scale, 17 per cent, scored in the middle third, and, 3 per cent, scored in the lower third.

Table 6

Reasons That Talking About Death Should Have A Small or Large Place in the Classroom

Number of Responses	Categories of Responses (1 = has no place, 9 = has a large place)									Actual or Paraphrased Responses	
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9		\bar{x}
										More Than One Category of Response	
25	2	3	3	6	8	2	1	3	5.6	2.0	Necessary to deal with if brought up by the children.
13	1	1	5	2	1	2	1	5.8	1.7	1.7	It is a part of life and needs to be discussed in moderation.
6	2	1	2	1	6.8	1.7	1.7	6.8	1.7	1.7	It is a part of life and children need to accept this fact.
4	1	1	2	7.8	1.9	1.9	1.9	7.8	1.9	1.9	Kids are curious and need answers.
2	1	1	7.0	1.4	1.4	1.4	1.4	7.0	1.4	1.4	The teacher can be more objective and therefore help the child.
2	1	1	7.0	1.4	1.4	1.4	1.4	7.0	1.4	1.4	Listening and accepting childrens' feelings seems essential.
										Responses in the Lower Third (Has Little or No Place)	
1	1										"Children are confused enough about death. I wouldn't bring it up unless the children did."
1	1										"Death is beyond the understanding of 3's and 4's."
										Responses In The Middle Third	
2	1	1	5.5	7.0	7.0	7.0	7.0	5.5	7.0	7.0	It is a normal and natural part of all life.
1	1										"Most people know someone who is dying or has died so we shouldn't deny or ignore that death happens."
1	1										"Death should be talked about but not in a structured package."
1	1										"Should be a comfortable topic."

Table 6 (Continued)

Number of Responses	Categories of Responses (1 = has no place, 9 = has a large place)									Actual or Paraphrased Responses	
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9		\bar{x} s.d.
1								1			"We are with the children 9 or 10 hours a day so they need to be able to talk about anything with us."
1								1			"It can be part of the learning programme and introduced naturally."
1									1		"It is a very confusing subject to most children and adults."
1									1		"Not enough people talk about it."
1									1		"Many parents feel at a loss to know how to handle it at home."
1									1		"Ideally the death of a class pet is an appropriate time."
											No Rating Scale
1											"Children don't talk about death."
2											Whatever the children want to talk about should be accepted.
N = 63 Number of respondents to this question = 57											

The mean response on the nine point scale was 7.6, the standard deviation was 1.6. No participant indicated believing that thinking about death disturbs or disrupts psychological growth in children.

Participants were also asked for their reasons for their ratings. The most frequently offered reason, (41%), was that death is a subject that involves all living things and it has to be seen and felt as a natural process. The other paraphrased reasons as well as numbers and ratings are shown in Table 7.

Teachers' Attitudes Toward Death And Discussing Death

Participants' attitudes toward death were examined by using three semantic differentials. Forty-six (73%) of the sample responded in sufficient amounts to each question (four or five out of five scales) to be included in the computations.

Participants were categorized as having a negative orientation (4%), a positive orientation (46%), or a neutral orientation (50%) towards death by combining the five scales in each question, summing the questions and calculating the means. Pearson Product-Moment correlations were then computed. Each of the three questions described above were taken individually and correlated with each of

Table 7

Reasons For the Psychological Health of Children Who Think About Death

Number of Responses	Categories of Responses									Actual or Paraphrased Responses		
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	\bar{x}	s.d.	
	More Than One Category of Response											
23						2	4	3	14	8.3	1.1	Death is a subject that involves all living things and must be felt as a natural process.
11			1		1	2	2	3	2	6.9	1.8	If the child is facing the situation he needs to think and talk about it.
8						2	2		4	7.8	1.4	If the child can think and talk about death it becomes less unknown and therefore less fearful.
3					1		1		1	7.0	2.0	It is psychologically healthy to think about death at the level they are able to comprehend it.
3					1		2			6.3	1.2	It is healthy in moderation.
2			1		1					4.0	1.4	Very young children do not think too often about death.
	Responses In The Middle Third											
1					1							It depends on the individual child.
1					1							"Death is as natural as birth. Is it healthy or unhealthy to think about birth."
	Responses in the Higher Third											
5						1	1	3		8.4	.90	Children need to understand and talk about their feelings about death.
1						1						"Too much talk about the unknown causes fear."
1							1					It helps the child to have a religious belief.
1								1				"It is important to their maturing and development of a well-rounded personality."
1									1			"Children are constantly confronted by death and it is healthier to question than to submerge this concern."
1									1			"I believe that until a person learns to accept death (his/her own in particular) he/she will have no context or real meaning to her/his life."
	No Rating											
1												"If the subject is avoided, ignorance and fear may hinder development of a healthy personality. False information may do the same."
1												If the child is facing the situation he needs to think and talk about it.

46

N = 63 Number of respondents to this question = 56

These significant correlations should not be emphasized too greatly since with the number of correlations computed, two could be expected to occur by chance.

Correlations were not significant between attitudes and age, number of years teaching, and geographical location - rural or urban.

the three questions: "What place do you believe that talking about death has in the classroom?, How satisfied are you with your manner of dealing with death concerns in the classroom?, and How psychologically healthy or unhealthy do you believe it is for children to think about death?". With the low percentage of negatively oriented, this group was left out of the computations. The only significant correlations were between, "Children who want to talk about death are . . ." and "What place do you believe that talking about death has in the classroom?", ($r = .33$ significant beyond $.02$) and between "Children who want to talk about death are . . .", and "How psychologically healthy or unhealthy do you believe it is for children to think about death?", ($r = .58$ significant beyond $.005$). Therefore participants who believed that children who want to talk about death are positive, natural, harmless, welcome and interesting also believed that children who think about death are psychologically healthy and that discussions of death have a large place in the classroom. These significant correlations should not be emphasized too greatly since with the number of correlations computed, two could be expected to occur by chance.

Correlations were not significant between attitudes and age, number of years teaching, and geographical location - rural or urban.

Teachers' Reactions to Discussing Death

Two questionnaire items considered the teachers' feelings and actions in response to real and hypothetical death discussions.

Teacher Feelings. Participants were asked about hypothetical death discussions with students and parents of students. The data (illustrated more fully in Figure 1) indicated that the greatest number of teachers believed that it would be "easy" for them to talk with students at either a conceptual or emotional level and with parents at a conceptual level, but that it would be "difficult" for them to hold this discussion with parents at an emotional level.

Asked more specifically how they had felt toward children in their classes who experienced the death of a person or animal they knew, 50 subjects listed 91 situations and a total of 101 affective reactions. The most common of these, (30%), was one of caring about the child's concerns. Another frequent reaction (22%) was one of sadness. Other responses are shown in Table 8.

Teacher Actions. Teachers who described their feelings toward children who had experienced the death of a person or animal they knew also described 141 actions they took in 91 instances. The most frequent of these (29%), was that

Figure 1

Teachers' Degree of Ease In Discussing Death

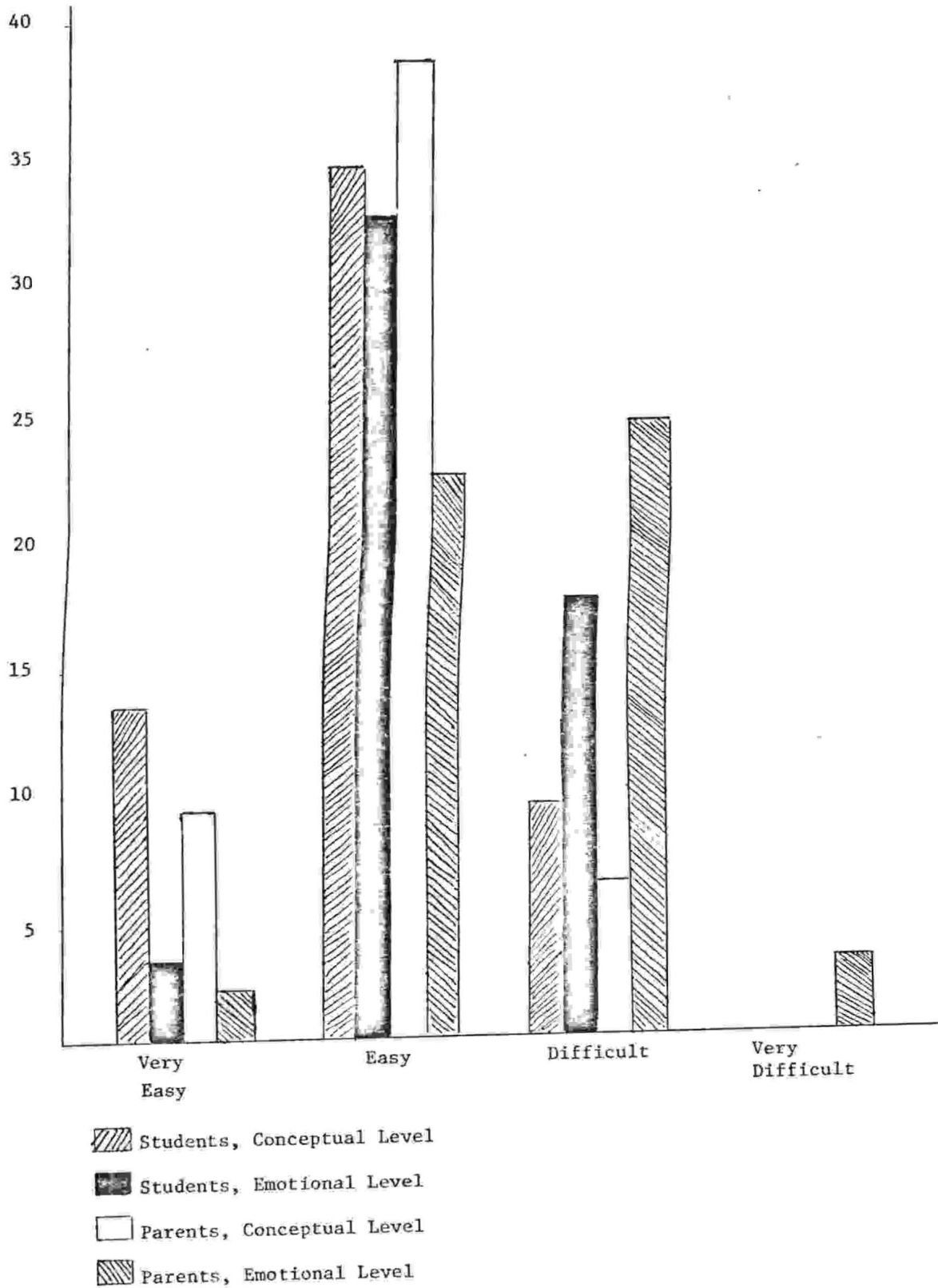


Table 8

Teachers' Feelings in Response to Children Who Have Experienced a Death

Number of Feelings	Feelings
30	caring
22	sad
8	understanding
8	no feelings mentioned
6	calm
4	accepting
2	upset
2	comfortable
2	no feelings
2	angry
2	confused
2	worried about child's reaction
2	helpless
1	can't remember
1	impressed with way child handled it
1	hurt
1	protective
1	I wouldn't touch the dead animal
1	distant
1	inadequate
1	delighted with the child's way of handling it
1	very horrified at child's reaction

N = 63

Respondents to this question = 50

Number of feelings = 101

of listening to and encouraging the child's talking about the incident. Other responses are shown in Table 9.

*Perceived Effectiveness In Dealing
With Death Concerns*

Participants were asked to indicate how satisfied they were with their manner of dealing with death concerns in the classroom. Their responses were indicated on a nine point scale; "one" equalled "very unsatisfied", and "nine" equalled "very satisfied". This part of the question was responded to by 94 per cent of participants. The higher third (very satisfied), received most of the responses (54%), followed by the middle third, (34%), and the lower third (very unsatisfied), (12%). The mean response on the nine point scale was 6.3, the standard deviation was 1.9.

Further examination of this concern occurred by asking for "comments". Sixty per cent of the participants responded to this part of the question. A large number of participants (32%), responded to the nine point scale but did not provide comments. Of these, 70 per cent were in the higher third, 25 per cent, in the middle third, and 5 per cent in the lower third.

Responses to the request for comments were of two types; how the teacher handles death concerns and how she feels about her effectiveness. Many participants, (40%),

Table 9
 Teachers' Actions In Response To
 Children Who Have Experienced A Death

Number of Actions	Actions
41	listened to and encouraged child to talk
13	encouraged child to talk and reflected child's feelings
13	explanations to child
12	reassured child
11	talked to parents about the death
10	read a story about death to the child(ren) involved
5	talked to and listened to the group about the issue
5	answered the child(ren)'s questions
4	buried the dead animal with the children
3	cuddled the child
3	no action stated
5	accepted and understood the child's behaviour
3	comforted the child(ren)
2	stayed with the normal routine didn't do anything special
2	watched for times the child needed special attention
1	expressed condolences to the child, no discussion
1	disposed of the dead animal while the children slept
1	observed the child, didn't bring up the subject
1	moved the cage and all traces of the pet, kept my feelings (anger) to myself
1	watched while another teacher picked up the dead animal. I wouldn't touch it.
1	did not want to upset the child more by talking about it so didn't bring it up
1	child didn't bring it up so I didn't
1	avoidance until I had talked to parents and then positive
1	told child how sad it was and how sorry and talked about traffic
<hr/>	
N = 63	Respondents to this question = 50
	Number of actions = 141

indicated that they wanted to become more effective, regardless of their rating on the nine point scale. Another common response, (13%), was that life experiences had influenced their effectiveness. Some participants indicated that they now handle death concerns satisfactorily because they had dealt successfully with their own grief in the past. One teacher stated, "So much of how I feel about death has to do with losing people of major importance in my life. I try to listen to the feelings the child expresses, but feel that often the child has been encouraged to change real feelings of sadness, pain etc., for pretend ones of the joy of going to heaven. Sometimes I hated heaven as a child." One participant indicated she had not dealt successfully with her past grief and now feels ineffective and afraid of death. Table 10 shows other actual and paraphrased comments and their respective ratings.

*Knowledge of Death Concerns and Methods of Obtaining
This Knowledge Needed by Preschool Teachers*

This essay-type question was directed toward participants who were not satisfied with the manner in which they dealt with death concerns. They were asked to indicate resources/support which they felt would help them become more satisfied. Forty-six per cent of the participants

responded to this question. To become more satisfied in dealing with death concerns the largest number of respondents, (62%), wanted more contact with books that dealt with death concerns. Specifically they wanted information about and access to childrens' fiction and non-fiction that shows dying and grieving in a realistic and natural manner, and adult non-fiction that would explain to teachers and parents how children grieve and perceive death, and how to be helpful to children who have encountered a death.

The second most frequently perceived need, (31%), was for a course or workshop on death and dying. Other needs included more experience in dealing with death concerns, (17%), counsellors and resource people available to speak to parent groups and deal with individual concerns, (10%), a strong religious faith on the part of the teacher, (10%), discussions with other preschool teachers, (14%), a resource library for children and adults, (7%), knowledge of the development of childrens' concepts of death, (10%), knowledge and skills about helping grieving children, (4%), and a better understanding of childrens' grief patterns, (4%).

*Teachers' Perceived Needs For Knowledge
And Experience*

This concern was directed to all participants, regardless of perceived satisfaction in dealing with death concerns. A list of topics was given, and participants were asked to indicate and rank the importance of each topic that would be useful to them.

This question was answered by 95% of participants. However, some participants answered only one part of the question; either indicating topics that would be useful to them or ranking the importance of the topics. The topic indicated as most useful (93%), was understanding young childrens' development of concepts of death. This topic was followed in order of usefulness by understanding normal and abnormal grief patterns, (73%), learning ways to talk to children about death, (63%), knowing teaching materials related to death, (63%), exploring personal feelings, experiences and concerns about death, (62%), and meeting with other teachers to share concerns, experiences and feelings about death concerns in the classroom, (58%). A topic not provided in the questionnaire, learning ways to understand and talk to parents of students about death concerns, was suggested as useful by 3 per cent of the participants. The ranking (most to least important) of each topic is shown in Table 11.

Table 11

Importance of Teachers' Perceived Needs For Knowledge and Experience

Number of Responses	Importance of Topic (1 = unimportant, 9 = very important)									\bar{x}	s.d.	Topic
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9			
56	1	1	1	1	5	1	8	9	30	7.8	1.8	understanding young childrens' development of death concepts
43	2	2	4	5	5	7	7	1	15	6.4	2.5	meeting with other teachers to share concerns, experiences and feelings about death concerns in the classroom
51	1	1	1	4	3	7	7	28	7.8	1.7	understanding normal and abnormal grief patterns	
47	1	2	1	7	2	6	5	23	7.4	2.0	exploring teachers' personal feelings, experiences and concerns about death	
50	1	1	2	1	5	6	7	7	20	7.2	2.1	knowing teaching materials related to death
50	1	1	3	4	5	4	4	29	7.7	1.9	learning ways to talk to children about death	
2								2				learning ways to understand and talk to parents of students about death concerns

N = 63 Number of participants who responded to this question = 60

*Participants' Thoughts/Feelings About
The Questionnaire*

Participants were given an opportunity to indicate thoughts or feelings they had about the questionnaire and 87 per cent responded. Some participants recorded more than one feeling or thought, to make 80 separate responses. Responses fell into three categories; feelings/thoughts referring to the questionnaire's purpose, (31% of participants), feelings/thoughts referring to the questionnaire's structure, (40% of participants), and feelings/thoughts about filling out the questionnaire (73% of participants).

The most frequent response referring to the questionnaire's purpose was a desire to see the results of the study, (16%); and the most frequent response referring to the questionnaire's structure was that the attitude scales in part 2 and part 3(1) were confusing to fill out, (18%). The most frequent response about filling out the questionnaire was that it gave participants a chance to examine their own feelings and attitudes about death, (18%). Table 12 lists the responses by category, showing distribution of scores and actual and paraphrased comments.

Table 12
 Participants' Feelings/Thoughts About
 The Questionnaire

Number of Responses	Actual and Paraphrased Responses
Feelings/thoughts about the questionnaire's purpose	
9	I am interested in reading the results.
3	I think it's an important topic.
3	I'm pleased you are interested in my opinions.
2	Death should be talked about more in daily life.
Feelings/thoughts about the questionnaire's structure	
10	The attitudes scale (pt. 2 and pt. 3(1)) was confusing.
6	It was hard to answer questions in the abstract about death.
4	A personal interview would have been easier to do.
1	"It is impossible to consider death apart from the Lord Jesus Christ. Difficult to fill out a questionnaire which made no mention of Him."
Feelings/thoughts about filling out the questionnaire	
10	It's given me time to explore my own feelings and attitudes.
6	Interesting.
4	I don't mind doing it.
4	I've had little experience in dealing with death concerns so the questionnaire took some thought.
3	Christmas was a bad time to fill out a questionnaire - busy.
2	I don't like to talk about the topic because it's close to my personal experience.
3	Fine.
1	Stimulating!
1	I wonder how accurately I'm answering the questions.
1	No thoughts.
1	The questions weren't hard but it was hard for me to answer.
1	"Made me realize I'm relatively out of touch with how the children under my care respond to death."
1	"It was good for me to fill it out - I like to feel that I am open to talking about death, but I'm not as open as I should be."
1	"At first, who needs this. After I got started I realized I should explore my own feelings about death and really come to terms with them . . . thank you for making me realize I should do some more studying on this important subject."
N = 63	Participants who responded to this question = 55

Participants' Comments

The last question asked for "Comments". Forty-six per cent of participants included at least one comment; some included more for a total of 32 separate comments. Comments fell into five groups. The largest group, (38%), discussed an attitude about talking about death in the classroom. The other groups included; participants reported a personal experience they had with death concerns, (24%), an attitude about personal death, (21%), teaching materials that were useful in dealing with death concerns in the classroom, (4%). The respective numbers of responses and actual and paraphrased comments are indicated in Table 13.

Table 13
Participants' Comments

Number of Responses	
7	Participants described a personal experience with death.
1	"While I think it <u>could</u> be a healthy thing to discuss the subject, I wouldn't lik to see too <u>much</u> emphasis put upon it".
2	Children are very nonchalant about death.
2	The child will react the way his parents do.
1	"Shoving children off in a corner keeps them from accepting death".
1	"It is an area that should be given more instruction".
1	It is confusing for the child when my and their parents beliefs are different. I tell them no one knows for sure.
2	The subject is generally ignored or spoken of in euphemisms. It's healthier to discuss it openly.
1	"It needs to be talked about more".
2	It has seldom come up in my years as supervisor.
1	"Why spend life worrying about death? Depressing but necessary subject".
1	"I don't mind dying - I just don't want to be there when it happens! I felt I should end on a jolly note".
2	Believing in God and Jesus Christ really helps.
1	"Death is walking out of one room into another".
1	"My previous experiences may have influenced my thinking and responses".
1	"Books are so valuable and the best way I've dealt with children and death".

N = 63

Respondents to this question = 46%.

Chapter V

Discussion, Conclusions and Implications

Death Concerns in the Preschool

The most crucial implication of this study is that death concerns do occupy a place in the preschool. A majority of the participants indicated that at least one child in their classroom experienced the death of someone they knew. Children experiencing the death of an immediate family member were 16 or .8% of the total student sample. Although this age range (three-five years) was not included in Stein's (1974) study (during the school years from kindergarten to grade 12, one of every 20 children will experience the death of a parent) the percentages are compatible. It is logical to assume that as children and parents become older the likelihood of parental death becomes greater.

Preschool children do not often introduce death concerns in the classroom but only 3 per cent of the participants stated that their students never bring up the topic. Therefore children three to five years of age who do have experiences with death or who wish to discuss the topic are not rare.

Death educators (Gordon & Klass, 1976; Whitley, 1976) state that adults who refuse to talk about death concerns or who do not accept the child's feelings about death may contribute to that child developing a negative, unrealistic attitude towards death and his own life. Participants in this study indicated that the most frequent manner in which students introduce death concerns was by talking with the teacher about personal experiences. This finding compliments Stein et al. (1975) discussion that preschool teachers are important in dealing with death concerns because they are seen by students as accessible and non-threatening. The teacher, then, is being used as a psychological model by the children and her attitudes about death will affect those children.

All participants indicated believing that talking about death has some place in the classroom; the majority, 89%, checked in the upper two-thirds of the continuum. Moseley (1976), reported that 51% of the primary school teachers participating in her study agreed that discussion of death has a place in the classroom. These different findings may have been due to the difference in roles of the preschool and primary teacher. The preschool teacher, especially the day care teacher who may care for the children nine or ten hours a day, has traditionally been given more of a parenting role than the public

school teacher. Therefore she may be more willing to deal with issues that the primary school teacher would leave to the home.

Additionally, those participants in Moseley's study who stated that death should not be discussed in the classroom viewed death and religion as inseparable, and considered that the teacher should not become involved in religious indoctrination. In the current study, the only teachers who viewed death and religion as inseparable taught in religiously oriented preschools and regarded religion as an important aspect of all subjects.

A final reason for the different findings may relate to the fact that Moseley's focus was on childrens' attitudes and experiences about death. Examination of teachers' attitudes occupied only a small part of her study and, therefore, her results are not as specific and detailed as those obtained in this investigation.

Teachers' Personal Attitudes Towards Death

These findings were surprising for there was not, as was hypothesized, a large number of participants who had a negative orientation towards death. Participants were split nearly evenly between neutral and positive orientations. It was also hypothesized that participants with a negative

orientation would believe death should not be discussed in the classroom and that it is psychologically unhealthy for children to think about death. This hypothesis was not supported by the results observed in this study; these participants indicated that discussion of death has a place in the classroom and children who think about death are psychologically healthy. They also indicated that they would welcome help in changing their negative orientation.

The hypothesis that participants with neutral and positive orientations towards death would believe that death should be discussed in the classroom and that children who think about death are psychologically healthy has not been rejected. There was no difference, however, between the two groups intensity of beliefs.

Teachers, who refused to complete the questionnaire, were asked for their reasons and 68 per cent responded to this request. Some of the non-respondents stated that they did not like the topic or did not wish to answer questions about death. If these teachers were assumed to have a negative orientation and were added to the two participants who were shown to have a negative orientation this group would still be only a small percentage of the population.

There are two implications to the findings that the vast majority of participants have a neutral or positive orientation towards death. The first is that preschool teachers have the psychological potential for dealing effectively with most death concerns in the classroom. If they are not effective it is through lack of information or skill, not an appropriate attitude. Therefore more attention should be given to the training of teachers and less to providing them with professional "grief counsellors". As Caplan (1974) discusses, it is easier to use a preventive approach than a crisis intervention one.

The second implication is that with a neutral or positive orientation there is little concern that workshops or courses in death education and awareness will be too psychologically intense for participants to handle. In a workshop or course there is little time for much one to one contact between leader and participant and large numbers of negatively oriented people might not receive the support and attention they need. Therefore a course or workshop seems an appropriate vehicle for dispensing information about dealing with death concerns.

*Teachers' Effectiveness In Dealing
With Death Concerns*

The preschool teacher is aware of her students death concerns and is asked by the children to discuss them. Although only a few teachers indicated that they were very unsatisfied with their manner of dealing with death concerns nearly half, regardless of degree of satisfaction, wanted to become more effective. Also, nearly 100 per cent of the participants listed some skill or knowledge area which would be useful to them in dealing with death concerns. These findings indicate that preschool teachers would welcome courses or workshops dealing with this topic.

An indication of teachers' effectiveness was received by examining participants' reactions to specific situations in which a student experienced a death of someone they knew. In most cases when the child reacted to the death in an accepting, matter of fact manner, the teacher also handled the experience well; being available to talk to the child, accepting his/her feelings, and cuddling the child when needed. When the child reacted to the death with a lot of emotion or with behaviors the teacher could not easily understand as grieving, e.g., anger, denial of death, aggressiveness, unpredictable behavior, the teachers were also less successful. Teachers were more likely to try to rationalize the death with the child, be unaccepting of

the child's feelings, feel helpless or angry at the child, or act as if nothing unusual was happening. The few teachers who showed an intellectual awareness of the grieving process handled these unorthodox situations more effectively. This finding strongly supports a system of structured information-giving (course or workshop) so that teachers are able to deal with all grieving situations they encounter in the classroom either by working personally with the child or by referring to an appropriate professional helper.

Participants indicated that a course or workshop would be most beneficial to them if it included descriptions of the ways that children deal with death. The topic most frequently requested was that of childrens' development of death concepts.

Other Considerations

A procedural implication arising from this study is that it is important for anyone wishing to study death concerns to have knowledge of, and effectiveness in using, counselling skills. Counselling skills are helpful for two reasons. The first is that without these skills and without personal contact with the researcher there would have been a lower percentage of questionnaire return.

In more than half of the initial telephone contacts there was, at first, a slight withdrawing on the part of the prospective participants. Their voices often sounded shocked or disbelieving and common statements were; "You want to study what?", or, "Why would you want to study that topic?". The researcher used empathic responding to acknowledge these feelings of shock or disbelief and most participants moved from these feelings to an expressed willingness to complete the questionnaire. Teachers often talked on about their initial feelings identifying a nervousness or even slight fear of the topic. It is quite probable that if participants had had no personal contact with the researcher or if she had not been able to respond effectively to the teachers' concerns they may have retained their initial feelings and been unwilling to participate in the study. In one case a teacher did refuse to participate but after the researcher acknowledged her feelings she decided to take part. It is important that researchers do not use counselling skills to coerce or manipulate people into participating. They need to have their feelings accepted and understood no matter what their decision.

The most important reason that the researcher have counselling skills is to assist participants who have a strong negative psychological reaction to the topic.

In two cases, the researcher helped teachers examine and accept their decisions not to participate. One brief case example will be used as illustration. A supervisor was contacted by telephone to arrange a pickup time for the completed questionnaire. She had originally agreed to participate. On the telephone she initially stated vague feelings about the topic. These feelings became more specific as she described a personal grieving experience which she felt she had not resolved. As she spoke she started to cry and told of her fear of death. The researcher was able to help her become more aware and accepting of some of her feelings and discuss ways she could get more emotional support for herself. After over an hour on the telephone the teacher's voice sounded stronger and calmer and she was not crying. The researcher assessed that asking her to complete the questionnaire would only reawaken the painful experiences she had had; so she encouraged the teacher not to participate in the study. If the researcher had not been able to use counselling skills effectively some teachers may have been left feeling frightened, angry at the researcher, and may even have needed to apply for professional counselling assistance.

These experiences support Koocher's (1973) conclusion that when designing death concern studies researchers should be more concerned with the participants than with the data.

Implications For Future Research

Replication of this study with a sample that included male preschool teachers would show whether attitudes towards death are sex related. This study indicated that there were no differences between age, number of years teaching or geographical position (rural or urban).

The finding that only a small percentage of teachers have a negative orientation toward death needs to be examined more closely. The results could have been distorted by participants who had a negative orientation but were unwilling to indicate that fact. Also, a number of participants indicated that they were confused by the attitude scales so that some of their scores may have been distorted. Psychometric refinement of the attitude scale would be highly desirable for future studies.

It should be stressed that the results of this study do not warrant generalizations beyond the preschool level. It is highly probable that a structured curriculum as well as the increasing intellectual and cognitive maturity of students in the public school system, could present the teachers with different needs and challenges in dealing with death concerns in the classroom. Future research might be directed towards the elucidation of such needs and concerns as well as towards the development of

effective techniques to deal with death concerns in the classroom including perhaps courses in thanatology for teachers.

References

- Bascue, L.O. *Counsellor Responses to Death and Dying*. Paper presented at the meeting of the American Personnel and Guidance Association, New Orleans, April 1974.
- Bennett, R.V. *Death and the Curriculum*. Paper presented at the meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Chicago, April 1974.
- Bloch, S. A clinical course on death and dying for medical students. *Journal of Medical Education*, 1975, 6, 630-632.
- Bluestein, V. Notes and observations on teaching "the psychology of death." *Teaching of Psychology*, 1976, 3, 115-8.
- Caplan, G. *Support Systems and Community Mental Health*. New York: Behavioral Publications, 1974.
- Cheiken, M. The counselor and the dynamics of grief. *NY State Personnel and Guidance Journal*, 1977, 1, 9-12.
- Clay, V. Children deal with death. *School Counselor*, 1976, 3, 175-83.
- Cruse, D.R. & Cruse, D. Helping children understand death. *Young Children*, 1976, 1, 20-25.
- Crosbie, J. & Garlic, N.W. *Death Concern and the Helping Professional*. Paper presented at the meeting of the Canadian Guidance and Counselling Association, Halifax, May 1976.
- Elkind, D. *Children and Adolescents*. NY: Oxford University Press, 1974.
- Fiefel, H. (ed). *The Meaning of Death*. New York: McGraw Hill, 1959.

- Filiatreau, W.K. & Riggen, T. *Dying and Death of Children: Implications for Special Education*. Paper presented at the meeting of the Council for Exceptional Children, Chicago, April 1976.
- Getson, R.F. & Benshoff, D.L. Four experiences of death and how to prepare to meet them. *The School Counselor*, 1977, 5, 310-314.
- Gordon, A. & Klass, D. The facts of life and death: the role of the schools in teaching about living and dying. *American Teacher*, 1976, 8, 8-10.
- Grollman, E.A. *Explaining Death to Children*. Paper presented at the meeting of the National Council of Family Relations, Salt Lake City, August 1975.
- Gurfield, M. On teaching death and dying. *Media and Methods*, 1977, 6, 56-9.
- Hankoff, L.D. Adolescence and the crisis of dying. *Adolescence*, 1975, 39, 363-89.
- Hardt, D.V. A measurement of the improvement of attitudes towards death. *Journal of School Health*, 1976, 5, 269-70.
- Hawke, S.L. Death and dying - a living study. *Profiles of Promise 35*, Colorado: Social Science Educational Consortium Inc., 1974.
- Insel, S.A. On counseling the bereaved. *Personnel and Guidance Journal*, 1976, 3, 127-9.
- Jones, W.H. Death-related grief counseling: the school counselor's responsibility. *The School Counselor*, 1977, 5, 314-315.
- Kastenbaum, R. *Time and Death in Adolescence. The Meaning of Death*. New York: McGraw Hill, 1959, 99-113.
- Kliman, G. et al. *Facilitation of Mourning During Childhood*. New York: Centre for Preventive Psychiatry, 1968.

- Koocher, G.P. *Talking about death with "normal" children. Research, strategies and issues.* Paper presented at meeting of the American Psychological Association, Montreal, August 1973.
- Kubler-Ross, E. *On Death and Dying.* New York: Macmillan, 1969.
- Kubler-Ross, E. *Questions and Answers on Death and Dying.* New York: Macmillan, 1974.
- Kubler-Ross, E. *Death and Dying.* Colorado: USER Services, ERIC/CHESS 1975.
- Kurlychek, R.T. Death education; some considerations of purpose and rationale. *Educational Gerontology*, 1977, 1, 43-48.
- Lambert, R. Books on death and dying. *Media and Methods*, 1977, 6, 66-7.
- Larson, C.U. *Communication during Grief.* Paper presented at the meeting of the International Communications Association, Montreal, April 1973.
- Leviton, D. *Education for Death, or Death Becomes Less a Stranger.* Paper presented at the meeting of the American Psychological Association, Honolulu, September 1972.
- Lister, L. & Cochros, H. Preparing students for effective social work practice related to death, *Journal of Social Work*, 1976, 1, 35-90.
- Moseley, P.A. *Developing Curricula for Death Education: How do Children Learn About Death?* Paper presented at the meeting of the American Educational Research Association, San Francisco, April 1976.
- Mueller, M.L. Fear of death and death education. *Notre Dame Journal of Education*, 1975, 1, 84-91.
- Myers, J. "Werewolves in literature for children. *Language Arts*, 1976, 5, 552-56.
- Nagy, M.H. The child's view of death. *The Meaning of Death*, New York: McGraw Hill, 1959, 79-98.

- Nelson, R.C. Counselors, teachers, and death education. *The School Counselor*, 1977, 5, 322-329.
- Parness, E. Effects of experiences with loss and death among preschool children. *Children Today*, 1975, 6, 2-7.
- Perkes, A.C. Classroom animal death - its learning potential for death education. *School Science and Mathematics*, 1977, 2, 93-96.
- Prouty, D. Read about death? not me. *Language Arts*, 1976, 6, 679-82.
- Queen, R. *A Mirror To My World - Stories To Ease the Pain*. 1976 (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 126465).
- Riskey, R.J. Reflections on death education. *Forecast for Home Economics*, 1977, 6, 72-73.
- Rokeach, M. *Beliefs, Attitudes and Values*. San Francisco, Jossey-Bass, 1968.
- Ryerson, M.S. Death education and counseling for children. *Elementary School Guidance and Counseling*, 1977, 3, 147-173.
- Sadker, D. et al. Death - a fact of life in childrens' literature. *Instructor*, 1976, 7, 75-84.
- Steele, S.F. *Socialization of Death-Related Behavior: Environmental Factors and Social Organization*. 1973 (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 122187).
- Stein, M. et al. Beyond benevolence - the mental health role of the preschool teacher. *Young Children*, 1975, 5, 358-372.
- Stein, S.B. *About Dying*. New York: Danbury Press, 1974.
- Templer, D. Two factor theory of death anxiety: a note. *Essence: Issues in the Study of Ageing, Dying and Death*, 1976, 2, 91-93.
- Whitley, E. Grandma - she died. *Childhood Education*, 1976, 2, 77-79.

*Appendix A*Questionnaire Form

DEATH CONCERN IN THE PRESCHOOL QUESTIONNAIRE

CONSENT FORM

The purpose of this questionnaire is to explore the feelings, attitudes, and experiences of preschool teachers in relation to death concerns in the classroom. Your responses will remain absolutely confidential and names will not be used in the analysis of the data.

Signing your name below, indicates your consent to participate in this research and that you understand the purpose of the research. I am available for discussion about the questionnaire or your reactions to it. Please call me evenings at 595-4665. Thank you so much for your cooperation!

Your signature _____

(2) In general, discussions about death are -

negative	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	positive
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	
natural	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	unnatural
harmful	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	harmless
welcome	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	unwelcome
interesting	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	uninteresting

Part 3

Place a checkmark (✓) above the line that best describes your attitudes.

(1) Children who want to talk about death are -

negative	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	positive
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	
natural	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	unnatural
harmful	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	harmless
welcome	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	unwelcome
interesting	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	uninteresting

(2) Suppose you are in a situation where you are approached by someone to talk to you about death. How would it be for you to talk to the people listed below? Use very easy, easy, difficult, very difficult.

_____ your students, talking on a conceptual level

_____ your students, talking on an emotional level

_____ parents of students, talking on a conceptual level

_____ parents of students, talking on an emotional level

(3) In the past school year (1977-78) to your knowledge, how many of your students had an experience with death? Please place numbers in the appropriate places.

_____ immediate family member died

_____ other relative(s) died

_____ close friend died

_____ pet or animal that was known to child died

_____ other (please explain)

Briefly describe the child(ren)'s reactions to the death(s) mentioned above. Also, briefly describe as specifically as possible what you felt and did in response to the child(ren). Use the back of this questionnaire if necessary.

Situation Child's Reaction Your Feelings Your Actions

- (4) What place do you believe that talking about death has in the classroom? (check 1)

has no place has a large place
 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

Please state your reasons:

- (5) How satisfied are you with your manner of dealing with death concerns in the classroom? (check 1)

very unsatisfied very satisfied
 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

Comments?

- (6) How often do you bring up the topic of death in the classroom? (check 1)

never often
 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

What are your reasons?

- If you do bring up the topic, what methods do you use to introduce it?
Rank from 1 (most common) to 5 (least common).

_____ childrens' fiction
 _____ talking about life cycles of plants and animals
 _____ asking for childrens' experiences with death
 _____ explaining significance of holidays associated with death
 e.g. Remembrance Day
 _____ other (please explain)

- (7) How often do your students bring up the topic of death in the classroom? (check 1)

never _____ often
 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

In what way? Rank from 1 (most common) to 6 (least common).

_____ dramatic play, role play
 _____ talking among themselves about personal experience
 _____ talking with you about their personal experience
 _____ talking about books which deal with death
 _____ talking about TV programmes in which someone has died
 _____ other (please explain)

- (8) How psychologically healthy or unhealthy do you believe it is for children to think about death? (check 1)

disturbs or disrupts _____ is essential
 psychological growth 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 to psycho-
 logical growth

Briefly state your reasons for your response.

- (9) If you are not satisfied with the way you deal with death concerns, what resources and/or support do you think you need to help you?

- (10) Place a checkmark (✓) beside the topic(s) which would be useful to you and then rank the importance of each on the scale provided below each item.

_____ understanding your childrens' development of concepts of death
 unimportant 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 very important

- _____ meeting with other teachers to share concerns, experiences and feelings about death concerns in the classroom
 unimportant very important
 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
- _____ understanding normal and abnormal grief patterns
 unimportant very important
 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
- _____ exploring your own feelings, experiences and concerns about death
 unimportant very important
 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
- _____ knowing teaching materials related to death
 unimportant very important
 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
- _____ learning ways to talk to children about death
 unimportant very important
 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

- (11) Nagy (1959) and Hankoff (1975) discuss the concepts children 0-5 years develop around death issues. They state that the young child believes death is reversible. He attributes life and consciousness to the dead. Death is seen as another, special phase of life from which one can return. The child tends to associate life with movement; a wind-up toy is seen as alive when it moves, a still, sleeping person may be thought dead. The child does not think about his own death unless he has experienced a long or severe illness. Death, per se, is not feared. The child's main fear is of abandonment, he doesn't distinguish between types, e.g. death or divorce. How similar or dissimilar are these observations to yours in your work with children? (Check 1)

dissimilar to your similar to
 experience with your experience
 children with children

In what ways are they similar or dissimilar?

(12) What are your feelings/thoughts about filling out this questionnaire?

(13) Comments?

*Appendix B*Request For Return of Questionnaire

January 7, 1979

Dear Preschool Supervisor:

In December I gave you a questionnaire entitled Death Concerns in the Preschool. This research is my thesis for a Masters degree in Education-Counselling Psychology, at the University of Victoria. I need a high percentage of completed forms in order to have meaningful results which can be used to expand our knowledge of preschool teachers' concerns and to enable early childhood educators to develop more effective teacher-training programmes.

I would like to have all questionnaires completed by January 15th. If you have any questions or wish me to pick up a completed questionnaire please call me evenings at 595-4665. Thank you for your participation.

Yours very truly,

A large black rectangular redaction box covering the signature area of the letter.

Nancy C. Reeves
Graduate Student
Education

VITA

Surname: REEVES Given Names: NANCY CHRISTINE

Place of Birth: Victoria, B.C., Canada

Date of Birth: April 27, 1952

Educational Institutions Attended, With Dates of Entering
And Leaving:

University of Victoria 1970 to 1971, 1974 to 1976,

1977 to 1979

Camosun College 1972 to 1974

Degrees Awarded, With Dates and Names of Institutions:

B.A. (Child Care) 1976 University of Victoria

Honours and Awards:

B.C. Government Scholarship, 1970

Publications:

PARTIAL COPYRIGHT LICENSE

I hereby grant the right to lend my thesis (the title of which is shown below) to users of the University of Victoria Library, and to make *single copies only* of any other university, or similar institution, on its behalf or for one of its users. I further agree that permission for extensive copying of this thesis for scholarly purposes may be granted by me or a member of the University designated by me. It is understood that copying or publication of this thesis for financial gain shall not be allowed without my written permission.

Title of Thesis

DEATH CONCERNS IN THE PRESCHOOL

Author Nancy Christine Reeves



(Signature)

April, 1979

(Date)