1 **Title:** Teachers' perception of grief in primary and secondary school students in Spain:
2 Children's responses and elements which facilitate or hinder the grieving process

3 **Running title:** Teachers' perception of grief in school students

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26   **Abstract**

27   Introduction: Children's experience of grief is influenced by many factors, such as the

28   response of the school environment. The objective of this paper was to explore the grieving

29   children's responses, as well as the factors that facilitate and hinder the grieving process from

30   the teachers' perspective.

31   Methods: A qualitative-descriptive study design was used, which included a semi-structured

32   interview conducted with 63 teachers. A thematic analysis was conducted using Atlas.ti7.0.

33   Results: Great variability was found between different children's reactions to death

34   (decreased academic performance, isolation, etc.). The factors influencing the children's

35   reactions were both child-specific and environmental. The teachers pointed to

36   communication, emotional support, and spirituality as facilitating elements, but pointed to

37   discomfort when talking about death as a factor which hinders the grieving process.

38   Conclusions: In conclusion, although children can naturally adapt to a loss, both providing

39   emotional support and training in providing such support are necessary. Nurses can help in

40   the design and planning of specific programmes to help students cope with death and loss.

41   **Key words:** grief, death, children, school, loss, teachers.

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Teachers' perception of grief in Primary and Secondary school students in Spain:

Children's responses and elements which facilitate or hinder the grieving process

Introduction

Grief may be defined as the emotional experience of losing a loved one that includes physical, social, psychological, cognitive, and behavioural reactions (Stroebe, Schut, & Boerner, 2017). Reactions to the death of a loved one depend on the profile and previous experiences of the individual. Most of the time these reactions are adaptive, with variable courses and durations (Fernández-Alcántara, Pérez-Marfil, Catena-Martínez, & Cruz-Quintanta, 2017).

According to a systematic review and meta-analysis, in approximately 10% of adults, intense symptoms may develop affecting the individual's daily functioning, resulting in a prolonged or complicated grieving process (Lundorff et al., 2017). This figure varies between countries, as well as depending on the type of population being assessed, and in some cases may even exceed 25% (Fuijisawa et al., 2010). Although epidemiological data are not available for children, it is estimated that around 4% of young people in Western countries experience the death of a parent before the age of 18 (Dyregrov & Dyregrov, 2013). In addition, studies in the United States have shown that approximately 69% of teachers have had at least one of their students lose a loved one in the past year (American Federation of Teachers and New York Life Foundation, 2012).

For children, as for adults, complicated grief may have a different profile to that of depression or post-traumatic stress disorder (Spuij et al., 2012). Complicated grief has a wide range of specific consequences for children: it increases the probability of children being diagnosed with a mental illness due to the great variability of symptoms or experiences they may have; it may have negative effects on the academic performance of children; they may

present with an increase in externalising problems (disruptive behaviours) and/or

internalising problems (anxiety, depression, and guilt); and children may show greater

isolation and/or clear signs of social withdrawal, both at home and with peers (Gerhardt et al.,

2012; Heath & Cole, 2012; Lytje, 2018; Quinn-Lee, 2014).

Recent studies seem to indicate that the processing of grief in children and adolescents

may be more all-encompassing compared to adults, with children and adolescents being

unable to establish clear differences in the feelings, cognitions, or thought patterns they have

after losing a loved one (Spuij et al., 2017). In children and adolescents, the grieving process

is determined by many factors: factors related to that particular child or adolescent; to their

own concept of death; to having previously experienced stressful or traumatic situations; to

the type of death; and to their social environment (Gerhardt et al., 2012; Lane, Rowland, &

Beinart, 2014; Vazquez-Sánchez et al., 2018; Webb, 2011). The presence of a significant and

trusted adult figure, which may be a teacher, is especially important for adolescents and

children (Lane et al., 2014).

Unlike adults, children tend not to have social networks which may be of assistance

outside of the family and school environments. The actions of the teaching staff are crucial,

as they create opportunities to educate children about death, helping to demystify the taboo of

death and to provide resources that help children overcome present and future losses at the

lowest possible emotional cost (Dyregrov, Dyregrov, & Idsoe, 2013; Heath & Cole, 2012;

McEachron, 2014; Potts, 2013). In this sense, the way in which teachers approach death may

make them a role model for the child or adolescent who is processing a loss (Anewalt, 2010).

Recent studies highlight the importance of students returning to school soon after the

death of a family member, and it is therefore essential for the school to be able to support

them and meet their needs (Balk, Zaengle & Corr, 2011; Cohen & Mannarino, 2011;

Dyregrov et al., 2015; Heath et al., 2009). However, it has become apparent that the school's

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93   response is sometimes inconsistent. Teachers and classmates often do not know how to treat

94   grieving students, which is associated with many grieving children or adolescents feeling

95   isolated, ignored, and alone at school (Abdelnoor & Hollins, 2004; Lane et al., 2014; Quinn-

96   Lee, 2014).

97   Finally, the situation becomes more complex as teachers will be influenced by the

98   following factors: a) contextual factors, such as the educational system and the institution

99   (e.g. school values); b) factors related to students themselves (e.g. developmental needs); and

100   c) teacher-related factors (e.g. personal experience, poor or no preparation, etc.) (Dyregrov et

101   al., 2013; Lane et al., 2014).

102   The purpose of the present study was to explore the grieving children's responses, as

103   well as the factors that teachers believe influence the children's responses and the elements

104   that facilitate and hinder the children's grieving process.

105   Understanding the teachers' perception of grief and how they manage it can help

106   school nurses identify their main obstacles and strengths, as well as the coping mechanisms

107   they use in dealing with these events. As a result, appropriate interventions can be designed

108   and planned to support children and teachers in the face of loss and grief (Auman, 2007;

109   Lohan, 2006).

110   **Method**

111   *Design*

112   A qualitative descriptive design was used. Qualitative research designs are used to

113   explore perceptions and experiences of individuals (Lincoln & Guba, 2000).

114   *Sample and participants*

115   Convenience sampling (Flick, 2010) was used with primary (6-11 years) and

116   compulsory secondary school (12-16 years) teachers from four schools in the province of

117   Granada (Spain).

118   *Instruments*

119   An ad hoc semi-structured interview was designed based on previous research

120   (Dyregrov et al., 2013; Dyregrov et al., 2015; Lytje, 2018; McEachron, 2014) (Table 1). The

121   interviews were performed in Spanish, which was the primary language for all the

122   participants. In addition, the teachers' sociodemographic and professional data were collected

123   via an ad hoc questionnaire.

124   --------Insert Table 1 here--------

125   *Procedure*

126   Firstly, a list of educational institutions was obtained from the website of the Ministry

127   of Education of the Regional Government of Andalusia, Spain. The head teachers of four

128   educational institutions (two government-funded schools, and two privately-run schools)

129   showed interest in the study. Subsequently, an appointment was arranged with the teachers of

130   each institution and the objectives of the study were explained to the teachers. At this

131   meeting, the teachers had the opportunity to provide feedback on the interviews and none

132   proposed any suggestions or commentaries.

133   The interviews were then conducted in writing, presented alongside the questionnaire

134   on sociodemographic and professional data, the informed consent form, and a cover letter.

135   The teachers were encouraged to write down any thoughts they had on the questions, with no

136   space limitations. Finally, the teachers voluntarily and anonymously sent their interviews and

137   informed consent forms to the University of Granada in April and May 2017. A similar

138   procedure has been followed in other qualitative studies in the educational context (Ross,

139   Kolves, & DeLeo, 2017; Schäfer, et al., 2016). Approval was obtained from the local

140   University Research Ethics Committee.

141   One hundred and sixty-two forms were distributed, of which 66 were returned (40.79%

142   response rate). Two interviews were eliminated as they were illegible, and one interview was

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143   left blank, resulting in a total of 63 interviews being analysed. The teachers who did not

144   participate claimed lack of time or did not give a reason. Table 2 shows the data on the

145   institutions, as well as the sociodemographic and professional characteristics of the

146   participants.

147   --------Insert Table 2 here --------

148

149   *Data analysis*

150   The thematic analysis was guided by the work of Joffe & Yarkley (2004). The

151   interviews were coded using consistent labels, and subsequently, the categories were

152   analysed. Finally, the key elements of the phenomenon under study were grouped into

153   substantive themes using the categories previously established based on the content of the

154   semi-structured interviews. The coding was conducted independently by two researchers who

155   then discussed the definitions of the codes and categories to add rigour to the process.

156   Differences related to assigning a code to a quotation or to the relevance of a code to a

157   category were discussed until an agreement was reached.

158   A general analysis of all the answers was first carried out and the interviews were then

159   filtered according to the characteristics of the participants, i.e. sex, age, stage of education in

160   which they were teaching (primary vs. secondary), and type of school (government-funded

161   schools, vs privately-run schools). The entire coding process was carried out with the support

162   of Atlas.ti 7.0 software, offering the possibility of displaying the codes and categories in

163   diagrams or networks of interrelated concepts. An alphanumeric code has been included at

164   the end of each quotation: the participant's number, their sex (M = male, F = female), and the

165   stage of education in which they were teaching (P = Primary, S = Secondary).

166   The transcription and analysis of the interviews were carried out in Spanish. Once the

167   codes had been established and the most relevant quotations had been selected, they were

168 translated by a bilingual expert and reviewed by the authors of the manuscript to ensure that

169 the original meaning had not been changed.

170

171 **Results**

172   After the analysis of the responses to the questions in the script, the codes were

173 grouped together and three main categories emerged: (1) "Children's/Adolescents' reactions

174 to death and grief," (2) "Factors influencing the children's/adolescents' reactions to death and

175 grief," and (3) "Elements which facilitate or hinder the grieving process."

176 *Children's/Adolescents' reactions to death and grief*

177   With regard to the students' response, many teachers described this situation as a hard

178 time and a time in which pain is experienced. The teachers mentioned the emergence of

179 different emotions and pointed to sorrow/sadness as the most important and most frequent.

180 Also mentioned were anger, rage, frustration, serenity, fear,

181 uncertainty/bewilderment/confusion, alienation, and shock (see Figure 1).

182   --------Insert Figure 1 here--------

183   "They look very sad. They look downcast and have sudden mood swings. All of a

184   sudden, they're happy because they're having fun with their fellow students, but the

185   moment they remember what happened, they're down in the dumps" (Participant 22

186   F/P).

187   "I think it's a very hard time, regardless of age, but the younger ones may not fully

188   understand it, even though they experience a big change with their relative being

189   gone" (Participant 44 M/P).

190   "With dejection caused by the sense of loss, sometimes not understanding why it has

191   happened to them" (Participant 60 M/S).

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192   Most of the teachers mentioned the natural way in which children accept death,

193 indicating that children adjust quickly to the situation, while others referred to the fact that it

194 takes a long time to take it in. In addition, the teachers pointed out that, on many occasions,

195 children cope with the situation with fortitude and courage, accepting the reality of the loss.

196 Some of the participants stressed that sometimes the youngest children are not fully aware of

197 the situation.

198   "...a lot of pain, although they soon adjust to the new situation" (Participant 18 F/P).

199   "Rather spontaneously. They just come and tell you about it, so you can give them

200   some support" (Participant 48 M/P).

201   Unwillingness to perform tasks, decreased school performance, isolation, and the need

202 for support are among the consequences of this situation.

203   "Sad and unwilling to perform tasks" (Participant 2 F/P).

204   "With a sadness that sometimes drives them to isolate themselves, giving them an

205   introverted and sullen character" (Participant 57 M/S).

206

207 *Factors influencing the children's/adolescents' reactions to death and grief*

208   This category describes the factors that predate the children's experience of loss, which

209 can influence how children experience this loss in particular (Figure 2): the factors derived

210 from the students themselves and the factors derived from their environment may be

211 highlighted.

212   --------Insert Figure 2 here--------

213   With respect to the factors derived from the students themselves, there are certain

214 factors that have to do with their personal characteristics (personality, age, religious beliefs,

215 and maturity), and other factors that have to do with their attitude (whether or not they attend

216 school, whether or not they are willing to be helped).

217   "It is useful if the student wants to be helped, above all" (Participant 1 F/P).

218   "It depends a lot on the age of the child..." (Participant 7 M/P).

219   "It helps if the child is outgoing and sociable" (Participant 14 F/P).

220   The teachers also pointed out several aspects concerning both the family and school

221 environment of the students. The following aspects of the family environment are described

222 as being relevant: the level of education of their parents, the information provided to the

223 children/adolescents, and their parents' response to death.

224   "Their parents' level of education" (Participant 45 M/P).

225   "What they have heard at home about how to deal with this... It's up to their families.

226   It depends on how close they may have been with that loved one" (Participant 47

227   M/P).

228   "It depends on how they're told about it and how they experience it in their family"

229   (Participant 63 F/P).

230   As for the educational institution, some factors were noted, such as the capacity for

231 dialogue and training of teachers and peers regarding the topic of death and grief; previous

232 experience with death and grief; the ability of the institution to pay personalised attention to

233 or make time available for the particular student; the group atmosphere or encouragement of

234 companionship; good affective atmosphere and empathy towards the student; communication

235 with families; and collaborating when appropriate with the educational guidance team.

236   "The training of professionals and the rest of their peers in this respect" (Participant 4

237   F/P).

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238 "A pleasant atmosphere in the classroom, dialogue, lots of listening, teamwork, so

239   that they don't feel alone, working on friendship" (Participant 25 F/P).

240

241 *Elements which facilitate or hinder the grieving process*

242   This category describes the elements that may facilitate or hinder the children's

243 grieving process once the loss has occurred. Generally speaking, it may be argued that

244 teachers highlighted three main categories to work on with grieving children and adolescents:

245 (a) emotionally oriented interventions targeting grief and loss, (b) specific actions taken by

246 school staff, and (c) aspects specific to the individual teacher (see Figure 3).

247   --------Insert Figure 3 here--------

248   Regarding the emotionally oriented interventions, three main elements were identified:

249 communication, support, and spirituality. With regard to communication, the teachers

250 emphasised listening, telling them the truth, and making it easier for them to express their

251 feelings, in addition to answering their doubts, normalising their feelings, and explaining

252 death as a natural process.

253 "Answering their doubts, trying to be as sincere as possible, telling them that it is

254   okay to feel sad, teaching them to name their feelings" (Participant 19 F/P).

255 "They should be listened to, they should be able to express their feelings as many

256   times as they need to" (Participant 34 F/P).

257   Concerning support, a large number of nuances were noted. Of the most mentioned

258 nuances were that the children/adolescents feel loved, as well as affection and love from

259 others.

260 "They should feel loved and safe" (Participant 12 F/S).

261 "Affection, closeness, and understanding" (Participant 27 F/P).

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262   Other elements of support reported by teachers are the following, from most to least

263   important: being patient and giving children time to accept and overcome the situation; being

264   present or close to them; showing them empathy; understanding the situation; and respecting

265   the children's feelings.

266   "Patience and tactfulness when dealing with certain topics. Also, giving them space

267   and being by their side if they want" (Participant 23 F/S).

268   "Giving them time to accept the situation and express themselves whenever they

269   want" (Participant 42 M/P).

270   In relation to the third element, spirituality, aspects related mainly to religious beliefs

271   and to finding meaning in their loss were pointed out.

272   "Receiving affection, attention, and faith" (Participant 18 F/P).

273   "Speaking to them without beating around the bush, helping them talk about it, and

274   showing them that there is meaning in death..." (Participant 52 M/S).

275   The second main category was related to what the school can do in a more specific

276   way. Participants highlighted the following interventions: pedagogy and academic

277   difficulties; referral to the educational guidance team or other bodies; paying attention to the

278   child's behaviour; integration of the child with the rest of their peers; distracting the child

279   from the sorrow that is experiencing at home and avoiding suffering; and helping them to act

280   autonomously.

281   "They [the children] should integrate themselves with other children and be shaped as

282   individuals so that they will be able to be autonomous in the future" (Participant 3

283   F/S).

284   "A treatment that helps them overcome the psychological and pedagogical difficulties

285   that that situation entails" (Participant 14 F/P).

286   "They [the children] should keep themselves distracted for a few hours instead of

287   being sad" (Participant 22 F/P).

288   In addition, participants stressed the need to have a role model that provides support

289 and security. The importance of peers, companionship in the classroom, not being left out,

290 and being integrated into their own peer group was also mentioned. Within this support, the

291 teachers stressed the importance of not breaking with the daily routine, of trying not to make

292 too drastic life changes, and that they continue to do the things they used to do.

293   "It is important that their friends, family and teachers support or help them..."

294   (Participant 15 F/S).

295   "To integrate them into the daily routine and to not single them out" (Participant 11

296 F/S).

297   "By not breaking too much with their routine. Experiencing it as something natural,

298   something that people overcome sooner or later" (Participant 31 F/P).

299   Finally, with respect to aspects specific to the individual teacher, the teachers'

300 feelings may be an obstacle for approaching grief with the children. There were teachers who

301 feel uncomfortable or uneasy dealing with these issues. On the other hand, there are also

302 teachers who feel satisfied and comfortable in assisting grieving children. The following

303 concepts emerged: helplessness, sensitivity, responsibility, self-confidence, sadness,

304 spontaneity, concern, and learning from others.

305   "A little bit uncomfortable because I know it's a difficult topic to talk about"

306   (Participant 19 F/P).

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307   "Fine. Because I know that talking about death helps and liberates, although it is

308   painful to see a child suffer so much and be alone" (Participant 34 F/P).

309   "Many times I feel helpless because I can't do everything I'd like to do" (Participant

310   1 F/P).

311   *Individual analyses for each characteristic of the participants*

312   *Differences in terms of sex and age*

313   In terms of sex, no differences were found in the teachers' discourses regarding the

314   questions asked. However, there were relevant differences regarding the teachers' ages. For

315   instance, the concepts of helplessness and discomfort appeared much more frequently among

316   the youngest teachers (between 23 and 30 years old). The description of death as a natural

317   process occurred much more frequently among middle-aged participants (between the ages of

318   35 and 45). However, at older ages, there was again variability in the participants' responses,

319   with no specific pattern standing out.

320   *Differences in terms of stage of education*

321   According to the school stage the students were in, the teachers who were teaching in

322   primary school alluded more frequently to the experience of death under categories related to

323   family coping, while in the teachers who were teaching in secondary school this allusion

324   occurred less frequently. Furthermore, in secondary school, in comparison to primary school,

325   it was also pointed out more frequently that demanding less from the students was something

326   useful for them in the face of a loss, in addition to the importance of personalised care.

327   *Differences in terms of type of school*

328   As with the previous case, it was also found that, in privately-run schools, teachers

329   tend to consider that the student's reaction to the situation experienced depends largely on

330 how their family and environment react. In contrast, this code does not appear in any of the

331 responses of the teachers working in government-funded schools.

Discussion

333   The purpose of the present study was to explore the grieving children's responses, as

334 well as the factors that teachers believe influence the children's responses and the elements

335 that facilitate and hinder the children's grieving process. The results obtained seem to

336 indicate that the teachers perceive grieving children as being able to naturally adapt to the

337 situation of loss, but that providing company is still necessary in this process.

338   Firstly, with respect to the children's or adolescents' reactions to grief, the participants

339 in this research have observed a wide range of emotions that have also been reported in

340 previous studies, such as confusion, crying, fear, perplexity, and rage (Lytje, 2018).

341 Interestingly, the teachers surveyed have only emphasised the negative consequences of the

342 grieving process, which is in line with previous studies (Gerhardt et al., 2012; Heath & Cole,

343 2012; Lytje, 2018; Quinn-Lee, 2014). In a recent study on how teachers deal with grieving

344 children with intellectual disabilities, it was observed that addressing losses reactivated the

345 teachers' own grieving processes, thus making the intervention more difficult (McAdams-

346 Ducy & Stough, 2018).

347   However, the literature indicates that the grieving process in children may also provide

348 an opportunity to develop skills and personal growth, such as becoming kinder and more

349 compassionate and tolerant of others (Gerhardt et al., 2012). Further studies should explore

350 how to recognise and enhance the positive aspects of grief in children and adolescents.

351   Secondly, the factors the teachers identified as potentially influencing children's

352 responses or reactions to death and grief were the following: age, stage of development,

353 cognitive ability, emotional maturity, social skills, personality, and physical and mental

354   health. These are important factors, in consonance with what was found in studies such as

355   that of Lane et al. (2014). In this study, the teachers highlighted how important it was to

356   communicate with the living parent; although they also added the nuance that dealing with

357   when and how to communicate with parents was potentially complex due to the difficulties

358   involved in talking about death and mourning. In future studies, when assessing children's

359   reactions to grief, a potential variable worth considering for inclusion is whether children and

360   adolescents talk to their parents about death and grief.

361   Additionally, the participants reported on how the previous relationship with the

362   student had an impact on how the teachers responded. Furthermore, having previously dealt

363   with grieving students also influenced the participants' response. Other factors, such as sex or

364   type of death, have also been identified in previous studies, but have not been mentioned by

365   the teachers in this study (Lane et al., 2014).

366   Finally, with respect to the elements useful for a grieving child or adolescent, they

367   coincide with those found in the scientific literature: the need for compassion, concern for the

368   child/adolescent, and making time available to talk with the child (Potts, 2013); flexibility

369   (Heath et al., 2012); support, communication, identification, and emotional expression (Lane

370   et al. 2014); spirituality (Lee et al. 2016; McEachron, 2014); care, availability, importance of

371   communication, distraction from what is being experienced at home, kindness,

372   understanding, facilitation of learning, and referral to other professionals (Dyregrov et al.

373   2013; 2015); and relevance of the peer group (Gerhardt et al., 2012).

374   Some of the participants stated that they felt uncomfortable and helpless when

375   intervening in processes of grief and loss with the students. Literature shows that, even

376   though there are authors who point out that teachers are willing to offer their help (Potts,

377   2013), there is generally a deep sense of discomfort when dealing with death and grief

378   (Alisic, 2011; Dyregrov et al., 2013; Mak, 2012), as well as rejection, bargaining, depression,

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379 shock, disbelief, sadness, and feelings of guilt (Mak, 2012). The teachers who have to deal

380 with death and grief report a lack of training on this subject (Lane et al., 2014; Potts, 2013),

381 in spite of it being a common experience. In this regard, Lytje (2018) noted that 78% of the

382 teachers who had a specific grief protocol felt more confident in dealing with a grief

383 experience at school.

384   With regard to discourse differences according to the variables studied, some issues

385 have been identified. In the discourse of teachers in privately-run schools, one might expect

386 to find more codes related to spirituality and religion, given that all privately-run schools are

387 also church schools in this case. However, these codes appear equally often in both types of

388 schools. Spirituality is an important dimension in the processing of loss in children (Lee et

389 al., 2016; McEachron, 2014), which is pointed out by the teachers in the results. Recent

390 approaches to spirituality in cases of grief highlight above all that spirituality is a dynamic

391 aspect through which the individual seeks meaning, purpose, and transcendence with respect

392 to both the self and others (Puchalski et al., 2014; Alvarenga et al., 2019). In this sense,

393 spirituality would not be associated with religious practice, but is considered to be

394 independent of it. Further studies are necessary to delve deeper into how children experience

395 their spirituality in relation to grief.

396   The present study has important educational ramifications. First, the need for specific

397 education on grief and loss for schoolchildren is evident. Such education, tailored to the

398 students' ages and knowledge of death, may be a powerful tool with which to provide

399 students with emotional and coping resources (Packman, Horsley, & Davies, 2006; Potts,

400 2013; Riely, 2003). Haine et al. (2008) underscore the importance of educating

401 children/adolescents on the characteristics of the grieving process, the misconceptions that

402 children/adolescents often have attached to death, and helping them express their feelings or

403 concerns about it. Secondly, there is a need for specific training of teachers in emotional

404   skills and in emotional support at both primary and secondary school levels. Health & Cole

405   (2012) stressed the importance of working hand in hand with the educational guidance team

406   to create spaces, both physical and psychological, to work on emotions and experiences

407   directly related to grief and loss. Additionally, it is necessary to promote, among teachers,

408   tools to identify the risk factors of a potentially complicated or prolonged grief, as well as the

409   symptomatic manifestations thereof (Spuij et al., 2012).

410   As Schonfeld (1996) noted, teaching school children about sensitive or controversial

411   issues poses difficulties for different members of the educational community. Nonetheless, it

412   is essential that the entire educational community be involved in responding to these needs,

413   with everyone performing their specific functions. According to Auman (2007), school

414   nurses may be instrumental in meeting these needs for school-age children by performing

415   early and comprehensive assessments, educating the school administration on the benefits of

416   bereavement support, initiating appropriate referrals, and providing bereavement support

417   themselves. Lohan (2006) reported that bereavement is a common problem for school nurses,

418   although nurses can neither invest as much time in bereaved students as they would like to,

419   nor can they invest as much time in them as these students need. The nurses in this study also

420   demanded further education on death and grief, as well as evidence-based guidelines to

421   support bereaved children. Results such as these may contribute to a better understanding of

422   the teachers' perspective on children's grief and may also support the creation of guidelines

423   for school nurses.

424   As limitations of this study, it should be noted that using convenience sampling, which

425   implies a selection bias, although there is a wide variability with respect to the experiences

426   reported. It should also be mentioned that the heterogeneity of the ages of the students is a

427   factor to be taken into account when interpreting these data, although specific analyses have

428   been conducted to determine the variations in the discourses of the teachers of both

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429 educational levels. Other variables such as gender, or what kinship relationship the children

430 had with the deceased, are variables that are relevant to the way children experience loss, as

431 well as to the intensity of grief. Hence, future studies are needed to ascertain whether teachers

432 perceive differences in the experience of grief based on these variables. There were also

433 occasions when the participating teachers pointed out some other aspect that could facilitate

434 the children's grieving process, but failed to identify whether it should be implemented by the

435 school, the family, or the teachers.

436   In conclusion, with regard to the objective of determining the teachers' perspectives on

437 how children or adolescents experience the death of someone close to them, three relevant

438 categories were identified: emotions and feelings, ways of coping, and the consequences that

439 this situation has on children's lives. The factors that seem to influence how

440 children/adolescents experience grief include personal factors, such as the personal

441 characteristics and attitude of the child or adolescent, and factors derived from their

442 environment, such as family and school. From the teachers' point of view, there are three

443 categories that summarise what is useful for the children or adolescents who have suffered a

444 loss: support, communication, and spirituality. Finally, the teachers exhibit great variability in

445 reactions to having to deal with death-related issues with their students. These reactions

446 include discomfort and lack of skills and competencies, but conversely, a sense of satisfaction

447 in dealing with this situation with students is also exhibited.

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456

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589   Table 1

590   *Script of the semi-structured interview.*

How do children/adolescents experience death/the death of someone close to them?

What is useful for children/adolescents who have suffered a loss?

What do you think the families of grieving students expect from school?

What do you do when one of your students loses a loved one?

How do you feel about having to deal with death-related issues with your students?

What factors contribute to providing effective help to grieving students at school?

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608 Table 2

609 *Characteristics of both the institutions and participants (N=63).*

| Sociodemographic variables	Percentage (*n*) or Mean (SD)
Age (range: 23-63)	40.73 (11.9)
Years of experience (range: 1-53)	15.63 (12.4)
Sex:	
Female	61.9% (39)
Male	38.1% (24)
Stage of education:	
Primary education	50.8% (32)
Secondary education	49.2% (31)
Currently in charge of a group of students:	
Yes	60.3% (38)
No	39.7% (25)
Has dealt with a grieving student in the last five years:	
Yes	68.3% (43)
No	31.7% (20)
Funding of the institution:	
"Privately-run schools" (Church Schools)	52.4% (33)
"Government-funded schools"	47.6% (30)

610 *Note.* SD = Standard deviation
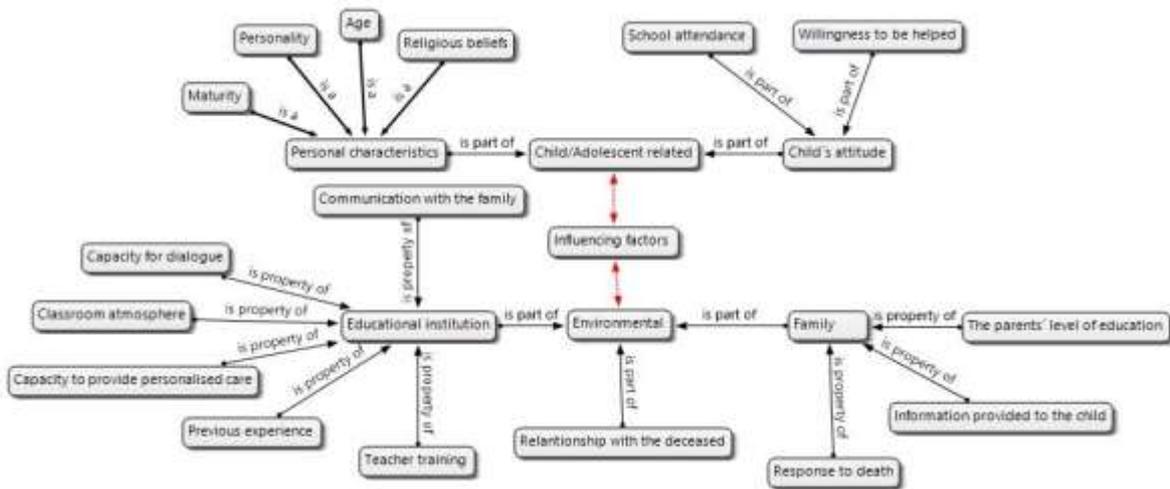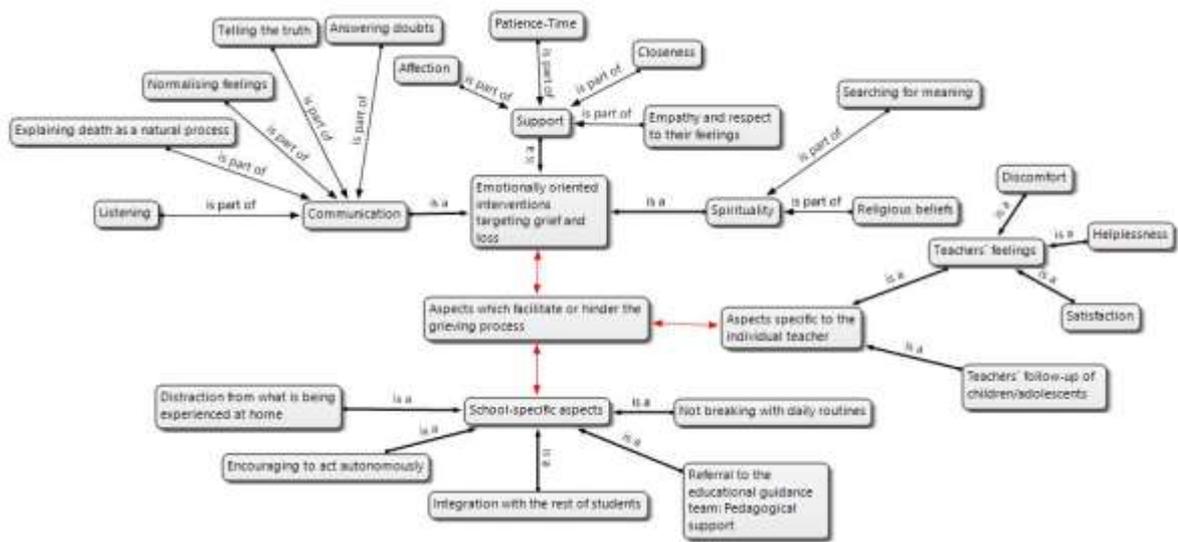
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614   Figure 1
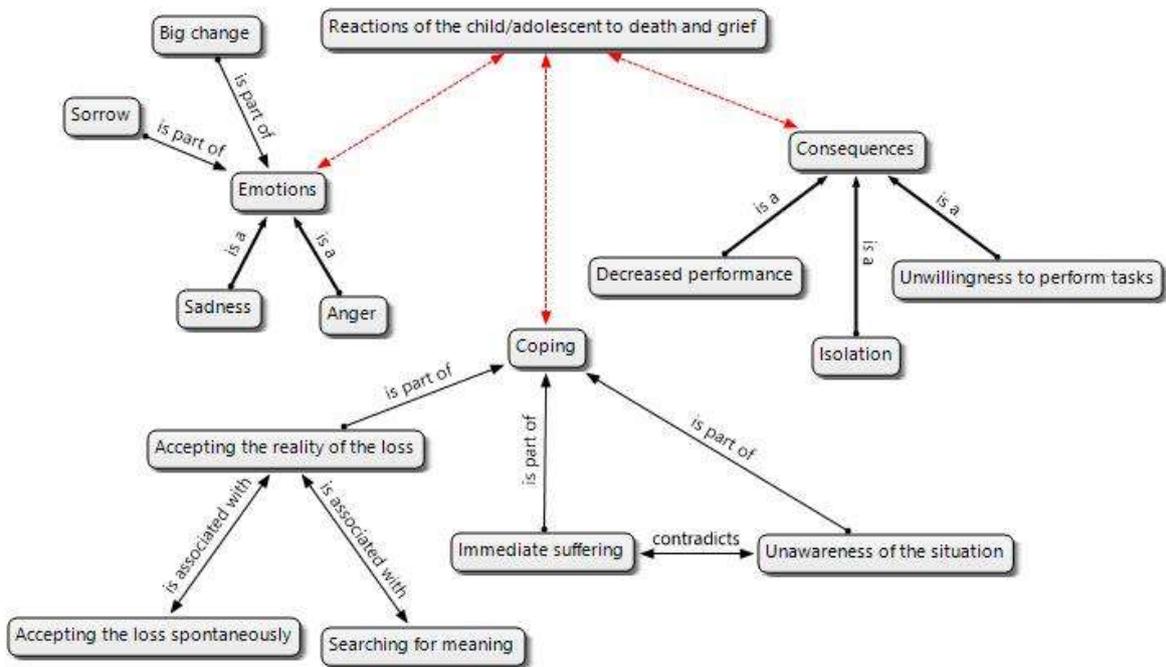
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