

Murphy, Micheál Cantillon, 2014, *Childhood Bereavement: An Investigation into Teacher Perceptions and Experiences of Childhood Bereavement and Grief in County Cork Primary Schools.*

ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

This dissertation focused upon the experiences, interactions and perceptions of teachers in a cross section of County Cork primary schools, with the topic of childhood bereavement and grief in classrooms. A review of the available literature indicated a lack of research on childhood bereavement in an Irish schooling context. This project aims to fill some of this deficiency and provide a basis for further research. Six County Cork primary schools of varying demographic catchment areas (rural, sub-urban & urban) participated in questionnaire-based research, in which teaching members of staff only participated. The sample response size was fifty- one (N=51).

The primary aim of the research was to explore teacher perceptions surrounding the area of grief and loss within a classroom context. A further aim was to examine the level of curricular interaction (formal and informal) with the topics of death and grief in the classroom environment. Finally, it was also intended that, through this research, an awareness and insight may be obtained as to the impact that bereavements have upon children's learning and social interactions in the classroom.

The study found that teachers view death, bereavement and grief to be very real and substantive matters of concern in their classroom teaching. Formal curricular interaction with the topic of bereavement and death was found to be at a low level. However, informal interaction with the topic, through incidental teaching, proved to be higher than expected. Of those who experienced pupil- related bereavements, learning and social interactions were impacted negatively, with many expressing an adverse effect upon child concentration and social withdrawal.

The research strongly recommends that the Department of Education and Skills devise relevant school systems to help bereaved children make a full transition back to normal school life following incidents of bereavement and loss.