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Teaching Mourning

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Art Education at Virginia Commonwealth University.

by
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Abstract

TEACHING MOURNING

By Julie Ann Crowder, MAE

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Art Education at Virginia Commonwealth University.

Virginia Commonwealth University, 2011

Major Director: Sara Wilson McKay, Ph.D.

Interim Department Chair and Associate Professor, Art Education

As a researcher I sought to understand the following research questions: 1) What were the official policies and protocols that went into effect at William Fox Elementary School after the murder of the Harvey family in January of 2006? 2) What were the experiences of the staff and parents at William Fox Elementary School after the murder of the Harvey family? 3) What critiques and or suggestions do the employees and parents have of the personal or official policies or protocols, which were carried out after the murder of the Harvey family?

The purpose of this research was layered. This research was necessary in order to create an accurate picture of the difficult emotional reactions of teachers attempting to teach students how to mourn while mourning themselves. Additionally, this study identified how teachers were

able to continue about the business of every day life and education when they were dealing with difficult emotional issues. Participants at William Fox Elementary experienced the tragic death of the Harvey family on New Year's Day 2006. This research illuminated possible new ways of looking at mourning, the public/media, and ways of handling these difficulties. This research could lead to the creation of new policies or protocols that would better serve the mourning populations in schools, which lose members to violence.

The members of this study were William Fox Elementary employees or parents who were on present during and after the Harvey murders. Special attention was given to the IRB process. Seven participants who had a great deal of contact with Stella were selected. The PTA-funded Art Explosions teacher, Stella Harvey's classroom teacher, the principal, the guidance counselor, a parent, the music teacher, and the librarian were all participants.

Significant findings include: the importance of the speed and selection of information given to adults at the time of a tragedy, and the child information networks that form when children are not completely informed. Additionally a variety of information and thoughts are given on the subject of mourning, both public and private. Implemented and suggested healing techniques were investigated. Lastly, several uncomfortable issues that arose, such as race and rage were explored.

Chapter One Introduction

Background to the Problem

On New Year's Day of 2006, a family was murdered in their home in Richmond, Virginia. Two days later, an entire population of students and teachers who knew the family well returned to school and continued on with their lives as best they could. I was a member of the faculty at that time, and experienced first hand the internal conflict of trying to continue teaching while grieving a loss.

A great deal of scholarship existed about keeping violence out of school, how to prevent violence, and how to teach non-violence (Ashburn, 2007; Crowder & Wilson McKay, 2009; Sela-Shayovitz, 2009), but the specific ways in which art and other disciplines might be used to create a pedagogy of connected mourning has yet to be established. This is the area I set out to study. What follows is an explanation of the theoretical framework that shapes my investigation, statement of research questions and limitations, brief review of supporting literature and description of methodology.

For the purposes of this study, mourning is defined, as the releasing of a lost loved one over time. Mourning can look many different ways (Robinson, et al., 2003). Ornstein (2010) suggests that "mourning is not about forgetting; mourning is about remembering, a process that may take a lifetime" (p. 631). American culture does not have many uniform agreements about what mourning should look like, which can make it difficult to

describe. Some mourning possibilities include: reflecting on memories of the lost loved one, expressing sadness either verbally or in other ways, and taking actions which might help a person accept or process that they have lost someone important to them.

On New Year's Day of 2006 Ricky Javon Gray and Ray Joseph Dandridge murdered seven people in Richmond Virginia, including the four members of the Harvey Family. The Harveys were prominent members of the community. Tall, dark haired Kathryn Harvey owned a popular children's toy store. Bryan Harvey was a musician in a local band, and enjoyed working with computers. Stella Harvey was 9 years old. She loved soccer and music and art. Her little sister Ruby was 4 and had recently had a Wizard of Oz themed birthday party. The murder of this family of four was random. Gray and Dandridge were already in the house and hiding in the basement when Stella was dropped off by a friend from a slumber party. The two men were arrested on January 7, 2006, having been "at large" for a week, including the time school returned to session. They were convicted in August of the series of crimes they had committed. This event and its aftermath in a public elementary school frames my study investigating how a teacher or a school might go about teaching mourning. In a previously published article on the subject by Crowder and Wilson McKay (2009), I wrote a general timeline for the tragedy, as I understood it.

We were told to act as normal as possible when we returned to school. We were told the students needed their routine more than anything else to help them deal with this tragedy. Police came to the school and asked for all of Stella's class work and writing...The principal—new to our school that year—decided to tell all of the older students about the murders, but encouraged the teachers to tell the younger

ones on a need-to-know basis. The city provided extra counselors to the school for several days in a row. (p. 6)

Theoretical Framework

I approached this research problem from a combined constructivist and critical theorist point of view. My viewpoint was heavily informed by both Paulo Freire (1974) and bell hooks (1994). Constructivists claim that there is no fixed reality (Efland, 2002). For constructivists, individual people create reality, and though one version may differ from another, there is no true and singular reality (Efland, 2002). We each create our own *truth* (Lythcott & Duschl, 1990). Critical theorists differ in that they strongly wish to change society through their research and actions (Lythcott & Duschl, 1990). Critical theorists usually have an acknowledged political worldview and hope to work against inequality and oppressive ideologies (Creswell, 2008). Paulo Freire theorized that methods of education which are not dialogic are oppressive to students (Freire, 1974). bell hooks, who was deeply influenced by Freire, holds a similar viewpoint, but with a greater focus on how education can be racially and socio-economically oppressive (hooks, 1994).

I approached my research with a combined or *bifocal* lens. I began with a constructivist viewpoint in order to clearly construct and accurately portray the way in which each of my participants saw his/her role in teaching and modeling mourning. Because constructivists see reality as a construct, it was important to gain as much information from each participant as possible to illustrate the participant's reality. Then, in my conclusions I pushed to create change, I shifted my gaze to the critical theorists', reflecting throughout on Freire and hooks. I then outlined some possibilities for the

liberation of any oppressed parties—teacher, student, or administrator. My research is qualitative, which relies on the viewpoints of the participants and asks broad open-ended questions rather than narrow, fixed-answer questions (Creswell, 2008) in order to reveal or illuminate a problem.

Statement of Problem and Research Questions

In every area of life and society, tragedy can and will strike. As a large part of the U.S. social system, the U.S. public school system is partially responsible for teaching life skills to our youth. As Kleckley (2001) asserted: “...we view schools as disseminators of positive knowledge;” further she claimed that “there is also a reinforcement or reward for behaviors viewed as acceptable in a social setting” (p. 18). When tragedy occurs at an elementary school, students are learning not just about the immediate tragedy, but also about what is acceptable, and how a particular community handles tragedy (Robinson et al., 2003). Students learn how to grieve in part by doing what their teachers encourage them to do and also by imitating what their teachers or other adults actually do themselves. In the school system, students learn how to handle difficult life situations. This learning may or may not serve the best interests of either the students or the faculty.

As a researcher I sought to understand the following research questions: 1) What were the official policies and protocols that went into effect at William Fox Elementary School after the murder of the Harvey family in January of 2006? 2) What were the experiences of the staff and parents at William Fox Elementary School after the murder of the Harvey family? 3) What critiques and or suggestions do the employees and parents have of the official policies or protocols, which were carried out after the murder of the Harvey family?

Limitations of the Study

This study looked only at the employees and one parent of a child at William Fox Elementary School at the time of the Harvey murders. It did not include interviews of anyone hired after the murders occurred. This study only asked questions about the policies of Richmond Public Schools, which directly affected the population at William Fox Elementary at the time of the Harvey murders. It did not examine policies as they relate to high school or middle school, and did not examine how those same policies affected or continue to affect other elementary schools other than William Fox Elementary School. This study only interviewed teachers, one parent, and school employees that had direct contact with Stella Harvey (the third grader who was murdered), and who were themselves experiencing the loss as they attempted to teach their students or children how to do the same. It did not include interviews with people who did not know Stella or the Harvey family.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research is multilayered. This research was necessary in order to create an accurate picture of the difficult emotional reactions of teachers attempting to teach students how to mourn while also mourning. Additionally, this study identified how and if teachers were able to continue about the business of every day life and education when they were dealing with difficult emotional issues. This research illuminated possible ways of modeling and thinking about mourning in the school system. This research may lead to the creation of new policies or protocols that would better serve the mourning populations in schools that lose members to violence. A

review of relevant literature from various fields informed the research and guided my suggestions for new ideas about teaching and modeling mourning.

Literature Review

Prior to beginning this research project, I reviewed relevant literature from the fields of education, art education, psychology, and the mass media. Four major themes that emerged were, tragedies in a public setting, teaching and mourning, using art to connect, and violence prevention in schools. A more thorough discussion of the literature follows in chapter two.

Tragedies in a public setting.

The same feelings that pervaded the country at the time of 9/11 also appeared in the schools, and teachers tried to address the concerns of students. The literature on 9/11 reflects a lack of preparedness on the part of the teachers (Ray, 2010). A feeling of regret, and learning the right choices to make only through retrospect (Black, 2005) was reflected. The need for students to mourn was acknowledged by several scholars (Kelly, 1990; Naierman, 1997; Zenere, 2009). In addition to a need to mourn, or perhaps because of it, a renewed sense of patriotism appeared and was commented on (Salaita, 2008). 9/11 introduced the idea of a plan for how to handle tragedy in a school setting, but it was the tragedies that occurred later in U.S. schools that pushed the schools to expand and improve their disaster plans.

The literature on Columbine and Virginia Tech focused largely on the treatment and concern for students after a tragedy (Hammond, 2009; Mears, 2008). A disaster plan is suggested (Bonnie et al., 2009; Rikleen, 2007). Some suggested ideas for the disaster plan include simple things like mass texts and email listservs for emergency use (Rikleen,

2007), and keeping employees on staff who were there during the tragedy (Mears, 2008). This concept of a disaster plan applies to tragedies like Columbine and Virginia Tech, but was not big enough for a tragedy on the scale of Hurricane Katrina.

After Hurricane Katrina, the literature reflected the need for a modified and expanded disaster plan that is in constant flux (Black, 2005; Rikleen, 2007; U.S. Department of Education Office, 2003). Emphasis was moved from surface things like informing people to harder hitting issues like how to address students' emotional trauma (Bender & Sims, 2007). The literature suggested that it is in part the teachers' job to assist students to develop coping mechanisms both through directed activities and modeling (Robinson, et al., 2003). The literature also showed that in times of crisis, racial and socio-economic governmental biases become more apparent (Voorhees, 2007).

Teaching and mourning.

The literature on teaching and mourning reflected a shift in mourning practices in the U.S. from the more formal to the more informal (Bedikian, 2008). This less formal style of mourning looks different for everyone (Robinson, et al., 2003). This more modern approach involved remembering the loved one and showing outward signs of sadness (Ufema, 2005). The literature reflected the need in both teachers and students to mourn (Crowder & Wilson McKay, 2009; Naierman, 1997; Zembylas, 2009).

Using art to connect.

Distinguishing between art and art therapy is important when discussing the teacher's role in facilitating the processing of student trauma. The literature reflected a few important distinctions between art teachers and art therapists, one of which was the time frame for working together (Chilcote, 2007). The art therapist's time with a student

is a just a few weeks, while an art teacher remains with them for years. Art education literature pointed towards a social justice component (Holloway & Krensky, 2001; Stokrocki, 2000).

Violence prevention in schools.

The literature on violence in relationship to schools is largely aimed at preventing violence from happening (Collinge, 1997; Dillon, 2007; National School Board Association, 1994). Working with the police and deciding on specific punishments for violent behaviors were suggested (Dillon, 2007; National School Board Association, 1994). The literature indicated that developing relationships with parents was a viable preventative measure (Holloway & Krensky, 2001).

Gaps in the existing literature.

Policies on punishments, preventing violence in school, and tragedies at school were all reflected in the literature (Mears, 2008; Rikleen, 2007; Sela-Shayovitz, 2009; Zembylas, 2009). Resources were available for curriculum changes (Robinson, et al., 2003). The literature did not reflect an emphasis on teaching and modeling mourning, an examination of various schools' disaster plans, or how relevant literature on times of tragedy should be circulated.

Through my research, I examined how we addressed mourning and loss at William Fox Elementary School, the ways in which we were successful, and the ways in which we failed. As bell hooks said, "no education is politically neutral" (hooks, 1994, p. 37). When we, as William Fox Elementary School teachers, pretended not to mourn or mourned privately at home, were we teaching that public mourning is not acceptable and that adults do not do it? If so, this is a political act, by pretending that adults do not

mourn, we might be perceived as saying that we want our youth to grow up disconnected from their feelings when someone dies. Mourning, like any other behavior, needs to be modeled in order to be emulated. In order to research how William Fox Elementary went about modeling for its students, I chose to construct a case study.

Methodology

Background to the study.

According to Creswell (2008), a case study is “an in depth exploration of a bounded system (e.g. an activity, event, process, or individuals) based on extensive data collection” (p. 476). In 2009, I co-wrote an article with Sara Wilson McKay on the ways in which this death affected me personally, and changed the way I taught. Over time I grew more interested in how this tragedy might have affected and changed my colleagues, and I decided to research that. For my research, a case study made sense. I wanted to take an in depth look at my school and the way that this murder and the school policies about mourning affected the other people at my school. As I was a member of the staff when the Harveys died, I had a unique vantage point to research this subject. In addition to myself, there remained many other staff members who were at the school in 2006 and who were willing to be interviewed.

Design of the study.

The first step in this study was to design an interview protocol and apply to VCU’s Institutional Review Board for approval. Conducting qualitative interviews with several members of the Fox staff was the next step of this research project after I received notice of IRB approval. I used qualitative methods because I recognized that, “as researchers we need to listen to the views of participants in our study” (Creswell, 2008, p.

51). I conducted the interviews in the fall of 2010 and early spring of 2011, recorded them on a digital recording device, and then transcribed them myself. The people that I interviewed, who I referred to as my participants, answered my interview questions. The interview questions fell into such categories as: reactions to policies, recollection of events following the murders, ideas for new policies or curriculum specifically for students post-tragedy. However, I identified additional categories after reviewing all of the interview transcriptions. Some examples of questions that I asked my participants are: 1) Describe the first day of school after finding out that the Harveys had been murdered. 2) What do you think you were particularly successful at teaching at that time? 3) What stands out in your mind as a mistake we made as a community or that individuals made? 4) What was the most difficult aspect of teaching at this time? 5) How did your students react to these events?

Although I was looking for some specific answers to specific questions, the interview questions shifted and changed based on what the participant had to share. While one participant had a great deal to say about policy, another preferred to focus on how the murders affected and continue to affect her daughter who was a student in third grade at the time this happened. For this reason, the results of my interviews measurably varied from person to person.

Participants and location.

The members of this study are William Fox Elementary School employees or former employees who were on staff during and after the Harvey murders and one parent whose children attended William Fox Elementary in 2006. I paid special attention to the IRB process, and did my best to ensure my participants felt comfortable working with

me. I originally planned to look at five teachers in particular who had a great deal of contact with Stella Harvey, but after each interview another possible participant was either brought up by the participant or came into my mind. As a result, my list expanded and changed to include one parent, the principal and one additional teacher. The specials teachers in particular had contact with Stella Harvey every week for many years, so I interviewed all of them except the P.E. teacher who has since relocated. These teachers included the PTA-funded extra Art Explosions teacher, the music teacher, and the librarian. Stella's classroom teacher later agreed to be interviewed. I also interviewed the people responsible for implementing school wide policies. These participants included our principal and the guidance counselor. In total, there were seven participants.

The location of the research was not so much a location in real space, but more of the imagined family tree of William Fox. I recorded these interviews on a digital recording device in various locations depending on the participant's comfort zone. I conducted interviews over bowls of spaghetti in quiet corners of restaurants, sitting at the table my grandmother gave me in my dining room, in normally busy offices, or in the well kept homes of my colleagues, who showed great hospitality to me by sharing banana bread and ice tea. I took special care to insure the comfort and feeling of safety of the participants who, in reality, are my co-authors. They did not write or organize my writing, but without these interviews, I would have very little to write, as they orally traced for me the unfolding of events and their reactions to what happened following the Harvey family murders.

Methods of data collection.

I documented an oral history (Creswell, 2008) of these events by conducting a series of recorded interviews with several Fox employees in order to discover what they recalled about the murders and the aftermath of the murders. Questions addressed their critiques of the policies that went into effect at that time. I also included in my data writing from the time of the murders from my various participants if they provided me with any. I also offered to include other forms of evidence from these various teachers such as artwork that they created at that time or since then in response to these events. Some of the teachers were willing to consider imagining a curriculum and they have shared their subsequent ideas with me. These ideas also served as a source of data.

Data analysis.

Transcription is a time consuming process, but a process I felt was the best choice for this thesis. The free flow of language in a conversation can be quite different from written answers to prescribed questions. After listening to and transcribing all of the interviews from the fall of 2010 and spring of 2011, I grouped the data into sections. Some of the sections are: mourning, information, uncomfortable topics, and healing techniques. In order to expedite this process, I used the *find* function of Microsoft Word. With this tool, I was able to cross-reference any use of repeated words in the interviews more quickly. I also used a program called Wordle to create a visual representation of the ideas that came up the most in each interview. I used colored post-it notes and index cards with themes on them to find threads among interviews. I was looking for commonalities among teachers' perspectives, verbalized or implied. These commonalities and are the bulk of my conclusions.

Significance of the Study; Findings

The participants from William Fox Elementary School who I interviewed had a unique voice and viewpoint into the way we handled this tragedy in the days after the Harvey murders. There are various critiques and praise of the attempts the community made to process grief. The participants had some positive and negative views of what happened at William Fox Elementary School at that time. When asking permission to interview these people, I realized that they still had a great deal of emotion surrounding the subject and, for the most part, desired to talk about it so that something beneficial could come out of the difficulties they had to face. Some crucial ideas for working through tragedy in elementary schools have come out of these interviews. An example of one of these ideas was a child focused school wide funeral to help with student grief.

This research is important because it begins to fill in what I perceive to be a gap in the literature. The final product includes the thoughts of teachers who experienced these events first hand on the best ways to handle tragedy in a public school. These experiences and conclusions on the part of the participants could affect a change in policy. For the staff at William Fox there was no knowledge of any policy that had been put into place about what to do or what to teach immediately after a tragedy, or about how to handle mourning. This research could inform the creation of new, helpful policies. This research could also illuminate the multi-faceted job teachers have and how complicated it is for them to simultaneously model appropriate behavior, teach appropriate behavior, make sense of personal tragedy and teach content.

This research contributes to education in general, not just art education, and contributes specific ideas for modeling mourning, and healing techniques for the time following a tragedy. Through what I learned from my participants about their perceived

successes and regrets, this research informed my concept of teaching and how to behave during a tragedy. I became more connected not just to my co-workers, but also to the larger community who participated in our grieving process through gifts, guidance and assistance.

Limitations of the research.

My research is biased because I was present in the school community at the time the events investigated in this study occurred. This bias is acknowledged, and, in the end, I view it as a strength of the thesis while simultaneously limiting the research. The strength comes from being in an optimum position to think of pertinent questions to ask in addition to being sensitive to the needs of the participants. My research is further biased towards public mourning because of my reflection on my personal actions after the murders. The validity of my research is limited by the fact that I did not interview teachers in every school in Richmond, Virginia or the country, where tragedy has occurred, and I only looked at one elementary school in Richmond. I also did not interview every member of the staff at William Fox Elementary School. The interviews were limited to those who agreed to participate in them, and those who had direct contact with Stella Harvey and her classmates. Because it is a case study, generalizability is limited (Creswell, 2008). The suggested mourning and healing techniques, however, add to its transferability (Creswell, 2008). Although this research is limited, it does open several ideas for future research.

Suggestions for further research.

After this study, other schools and teachers could use the suggestions about modeling mourning and healing techniques to assist their students in mourning after a

tragedy occurs in school. Searching out and connecting the ideas gained in this thesis to other tragic events locally, nationally, or globally could be beneficial not only to the students but also to teachers, administrators and parents. We are not the only country to experience tragedies in our schools. Further study of the upper administration's lack of action could lend insight that may be useful to the Richmond school district, as well as other schools. Comparing and contrasting schools in a time of crisis could also be illuminating.

Conclusions

This research has changed my practice in that I see myself as a more empowered member of my school and see myself as an advocate for other victims of violence. Also, this research project cast light onto the invisible threads of the web that connects us. I am able to see myself in the teachers and parents around me, and they are better able to see themselves in me.

Tragedies that affect a whole student population need to be addressed by the whole school in order to teach students ways to mourn and process death (Robinson, 2003). Through this series of interviews I created a vivid portrait of a school family dealing with a public tragedy and illuminated both the successes and perceived failures of that family. By taking on this study, I have provided insight from the perspectives of the participants who lived through this tragedy, and other schools could benefit by having a clearer idea of what can be done and has been done. It also offers a view of what worked and what did not work in a post-tragedy school. Through analysis of data from these interviews, I suggested mourning and healing techniques for implementation in other schools for the next time tragedy occurs. This research study could help to create a

healthier mourning process and environment for students, teachers and the larger community.

Chapter Two Literature Review

This research project led to the exploration of relevant literature on the subject of violence, and the aftermath of violence in schools. Relevant literature has been published in response to several large-scale tragedies, which affected whole student populations. Literature on recent tragedies was abundant. When reflecting on the Harvey murders¹, it seemed appropriate to look into the ways that other tragedies have been handled by the school system. A review of the relevant literature that was available on these tragedies illustrated among other things, the ways in which music, art, art therapy and other creative processes were used to promote the processing of grief and mourning.

This literature review is structured in the following way. First, I examined several recent tragedies, and the literature surrounding them. Second, I reviewed literature on the connection between teaching and mourning. Next, I examined the literature on how art can be used to make a connection between teaching and mourning. Then I reviewed ideas about violence prevention and schools, and finally I outlined the gaps in the literature. Throughout the review, relevant connections to the events at William Fox Elementary School were inserted in italics.

Tragedies in a Public Setting

¹ In January of 2006 Ricky Javon Gray and Ray Joseph Dandridge murdered seven people in Richmond Virginia, including the four members of the Harvey family.

In this section, I examined literature about several recent tragedies and their impact on schools. I selected literature on tragedies that were widely written about, which affected large numbers of people. I focus on the events of 9/11, Columbine, Virginia Tech, and Hurricane Katrina.

9/11.

The destruction of the World Trade Center by two hijacked planes on September 11th, 2001² was witnessed across the country on television and in the headlines of every newspaper. I limited my review of related literature to that scholarship which addressed schools, and in doing so, I illuminated three key ideas about tragedy in a school setting. The literature focused on: a lack of preparation that day, a new focus on patriotism after 9/11, and the internal struggle with teachers to make sense of what they did that day.

No one was prepared. According to Ray (2010), the fact that 9/11 happened, “early in the school day, magnified teachers’ lack of preparedness. Many educators rushed to turn on televisions only to later realize that students were becoming traumatized by images of the destruction” (p. 58). No one knew what to do because this type of tragedy had not been imagined. According to another article by Ray (2009), “While teachers are expected to maintain the classroom environment, assuage students’ fears, and keep students informed using age appropriate strategies, many learned these skills on their own and in the moment on 9/11” (p. 305). Teachers decided what to do as they went along.

² On September 11th of 2001, two hijacked planes were steered into the twin towers of the World Trade Center in New York City, which resulted in the deaths thousands of people. Two other planes were hijacked that day, one of which was steered into the pentagon in Washington DC, and the other crashed in a Pennsylvanian field after passengers charged the hijackers.

Patriotism became prevalent in American culture during this time. American flags flew everywhere after 9/11, and according to some scholars, the multicultural voice was quieted (Salaita, 2008). According to Salaita (2008), “In modern American universities, which increasingly are seen as investments that ultimately must pay dividends, dissent—i.e., lack of patriotism—is conceptualized as irresponsible by enraged parents and conservative groups” (p. 146).

In this same way, after the Harvey murders, the William Fox community steered themselves away from mourning, and towards any action that might be considered memorializing for the family (i.e. a butterfly release and time capsule rather than outward indicators of sadness such as tears or wearing black).

After 9/11, teachers tried to make sense of what they did in their classrooms. Black (2005), in her article *From 9/11 to Katrina: Helping Students Grieve*, quoted a critique from a teacher on the subject of tragedy in a school setting: “I let those kids down...I went on as if nothing had changed. But in truth, for these children everything had changed” (p. 28). There was a call from many scholars (Kelly, 1990; McBeath, 1980; Naierman, 1997; Zenere, 2009) to acknowledge the need to mourn amongst students, and to discover how best to accomplish that goal.

A parallel may be drawn between the tragedy of 9/11, and the Harvey murders. For many, the twin towers were symbols of American industry and freedom. For me, and many in our school community, Stella and Ruby Harvey were symbols of youth, and the spirit of the Richmond community.

Columbine and Virginia Tech.

When looking to Columbine³ and Virginia Tech⁴ for relevant literature, the similarities first must be presented. These two events, while very different, both took place in schools. The Virginia Tech tragedy, and the Columbine tragedy were both perpetrated by students at the school and, in both of the events; the perpetrators took their own lives afterward. These two tragedies affected the whole school in profound ways. The literature reflected three main ideas of relevance to my study: the treatment and care of the students after a tragedy, attention to each individual student, and a new emphasis on fast communication.

The treatment and care of students became a focus after Columbine and Virginia Tech. Mears (2008) interviewed six parents of various students at Columbine. She found commonalities in the parents' recommendations for handling tragedy. These recommendations include avoiding rigid policies that increase anxiety for students, retaining faculty and staff who were present for the events, and creating a memorial which honors both victims and survivors (Mears, 2008).

After the case of Virginia Tech when one off-balance student murdered so many, one of the big questions in the U.S. became: how do upset and violent students escape our attention? Hammond (2009) quoted the principal from Columbine on the way he changed his practice: "I deliberately make contact with all kids in my school. After the tragedy, I started spending one to two hours in classrooms every day, and I do lunch duty daily" (p. 3). Bonnie et al. (2009) stated that, "since the tragedy at Virginia Tech, the state of

3 On Tuesday, April 20th 1999, Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold, two seniors at Columbine High School, brought guns into the school and killed 12 students and one teacher. Twenty-one students were injured by the gunmen as well.

4 On Monday April 16th 2007, Seung Hui Cho, a mentally disturbed Virginia Tech student opened fire in two separate attacks which were separated by two hours. In these attacks, 32 people were killed, and many others wounded before Cho committed suicide.

Virginia has reexamined the emergency evaluation process, modified the requirements for involuntary commitment, and tightened procedures for mandatory outpatient treatment” (p. 795).

Both the Virginia Tech and Columbine tragedies led some to ask the question: What is our plan of action, and what should our level of concern about safety be?

These types of questions circulated at William Fox as well. How do we know we are safe? How do we know our children are safe here at school? How will we be contacted if something happens?

Rikleen (2007) discussed the need for assuring safety based on the Virginia Tech shooting. She asserted that in order to keep a connection between students and staff, “college officials must develop a plan for immediate communication of all known information with updates as more facts become known” (Rikleen, 2007, p. 2). This emphasis on communication became a national endeavor among colleges and universities with texting and email policies becoming standard as a result.

If this new form of school-wide communication was necessary at the college level, then were such measures necessary in an elementary school?

Hurricane Katrina.

The literature surrounding the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina⁵ also had a bearing on the Harvey murders. After Hurricane Katrina, the policies and organizations that were set up by the government to assist in just such an event did not appear to function for one reason or another. Several themes emerged from the literature surrounding Hurricane

⁵ From August 23, 2005 to August 29, 2005 Hurricane Katrina made landfall on several areas in the Gulf of Mexico. On August 29th, the hurricane landed on the shores of Louisiana destroying the levee system in New Orleans and virtually destroying the city that is still feeling the effects 6 years later.

Katrina. The need for a disaster plan, examples of functional disaster plans, and a critique of socio-economic and racial bias were presented in the literature.

A typical suggestion in much of the research not just about Katrina, but other tragedies as well, was to have a crisis or disaster plan in place (Black, 2005; Rikleen, 2007; U.S. Department of Education Office, 2003). There were many resources on what this should look like, but these resources were lacking in a few areas. According to Robinson et al. (2003), these resources, “do not stress the importance of pre-planning and continuously updating the crisis plan, which are considered critical factors to managing crisis situations” (p. 140). William Bender and Rebecca Sims (2007), in their article on Hurricane Katrina, further offered, “...disaster plans typically involve school evacuation and so forth, many school safety plans do not include sufficient detail on dealing with the emotional trauma resulting from PWT (population wide traumatic) events” (p. 40). For Bender and Sims (2007), the need for a disaster plan, which gives attention to emotional trauma, is long reaching because, “early attention to emotional results of the PWT can often alleviate the need for years of emotional support later” (p.41).

The US Department of Education Office published a handbook on dealing with traumatic events in school likely prompted by Columbine and 9/11 (Robinson et al., 2003). It suggested, “An understanding teacher can make a significant difference in the ability of children to cope with normal fears or a specific crisis evoking a fear response” (p. 28). Further, “a role of the teacher may be to find ways to integrate activities and resources into the classroom that will help all children cope with fear and stress” (p. 30). This resource offered lesson plans, advice, suggested readings on loss and coping mechanisms, which could be helpful for students.

Why then, did we at William Fox Elementary after the Harvey murders in 2006, begin from scratch trying to figure out and implement a post-tragedy plan? And in the plan that we did create, why were we so reluctant to spend time in mourning?

Robinson et al., (2003) suggested:

Children are often reluctant to admit fears because our culture teaches them that they are supposed to be brave. This ‘fear of admitting fear’ can be overcome through capitalizing on teachable moments as they arise and providing many varied opportunities and activities for children to express their fears openly and in a nonjudgmental atmosphere (p. 30).

It is a similar cultural belief that we, as teachers, must keep a brave face that keeps teachers from mourning in front of our students.

Hurricane Katrina also illuminated, for many, the divide among socio-economic groups. Washington (2008) stated that “Katrina brought to the forefront what many Americans thought was long buried: the realization that poverty, race, and social class are a prevailing force used to make critical governmental decisions” (p. 2). Voorhees (2007) further offered, “As events unfolded in the Gulf Coast, it swiftly became evident that African-Americans and people in poverty were either predominantly carrying the burden of suffering, or the media coverage was focusing almost exclusively on them” (p. 416).

In this same way, critiques arose in the school that these murders got more attention than other tragedies had in the past because of the affluence of the family. Additionally, After the Harvey murders, the support structures that should have already been in place did not seem to be available or functional.

Teaching and Mourning

The tragedy of the Harvey murders did not affect just the students. Most teachers and faculty knew the family very well. We were not, however, encouraged to mourn the loss ourselves. Why?

What is mourning? Mourning is the gradual letting go of a loved one, and it looks different for everyone (Robinson, et al., 2003). Ornstein (2010) suggested that “mourning is not about forgetting; mourning is about remembering, a process that may take a lifetime” (p. 631). Bedikian (2008) stated that “Funeral rites allow us to honor our deceased...these customs are inherently traditional and static. However, rituals have meaning only as long as they are relevant to the needs of the culture” (p.36). Modern society does not mourn in the same ways that the culture did in the 1800’s. Bedikian (2008) described the shift from months of wearing all black to indicate mourning in the Victorian era, to now, where a black dress indicates a party. Society today has few rules about what mourning looks like, which makes it difficult to describe. Ufema (2005) did not think, “we ever find closure when a loved one dies. Nor would we want to. I’d never want to ‘get over’ the death of my parents” (p. 24) but showing the outward signs of sadness, talking about the departed and thinking of ways to best remember them is necessary.

The pretense that we teachers do not mourn our own students’ deaths is a regressive and oppressive myth (Crowder & Wilson McKay, 2009). As Ashburn (2007) put it, teachers, “need to encourage students to recognize the regressive myths and values learned in society which are internalized into consciousness” (p. 35). One of these myths was the myth that mourning is unnecessary (Naierman, 1997). We have therefore done a disservice to our students when we hide our mourning from them and would be better

served using art as a means to process it (Mears, 2008). Zembylas (2009) asked questions of the nature of our national mourning after September 11th. He questioned the motives of the type of patriotic mourning the U. S. participated in and wants society to replace successful (or finished) mourning with aporetic, or open ended and intentionally unfinished, mourning in order to create a connection between perceived enemies (Zembylas, 2009).

Using Art to Connect: Art Education vs. Art Therapy

What does all of this have to do with art? How can art be used to aid in the grieving and processing experience? The literature showed that there is a great potential for students to use art to connect with those around them; this connection is similar to what is called for by the authors who write on the subject of mourning tragedy (Crowder & Wilson McKay, 2009; Naerman, 1997; Ornstein, 2010; Ray, 2009; Ray, 2010). There are two predominant groups associated with art and children: art educators and art therapists.

Art therapists were a distinct and different group from art teachers, but both emphasized making connections between art and thought processes. The question might then be asked, what differentiates art therapy from art education (Greenstone, 2001; Malchiodi, 2001; Mallay, 2002).

The art therapist, according to Greenstone (2001) allows the child to make artwork or crafts, and then taking further steps, such as psychological diagnosis, and or discussion of the child's issues with the parent (p. 182). Mallay (2002) wrote, "Art therapy has been used as a means of treating those suffering from traumatic experiences. Children who are incapable of putting their trauma into words almost always can process

their traumatic event through creative activities” (p.157). Malchiodi (2001) too asserted, “children must have the opportunity to recount the details of the traumatic experience in order to successfully resolve it” (p.1).

The art educator, on the other hand, facilitates a deeper connection with art, and aims not at psychoanalysis, but at personal meaning making (Holloway & Krensky, 2001). Chilcote (2007) described a limited time frame of three to four weeks for traumatized children working with art therapists (p. 158). Art educators remain with the students all year, and focus not on solving one problem, but in learning ways to solve lifelong puzzles as they arise. On the subject of developing connection to other human beings through art education, Holloway and Krensky (2001) wrote, “Art Education with a social justice component allows students to learn about and develop a connection to their communities through art making as well as to develop the skills necessary to become engaged citizens in democracy” (p. 358). Seemingly, this connection that we seek in mourning could be accomplished through art. Students are capable of processing and expressing their feelings through their artwork and making connections between their feelings and others’ feelings (Stokrocki, 2000).

This art education connection could extend beyond life and into death. Cathy Smilan (2009) suggested, “The art-making process involves projection of human expression, which may lead to initial relief from past trauma. Through art experiences, individuals learn to recall and process schema from past experiences and express their feelings in concrete representations” (p. 2). This idea is reiterated in *Fears, Stress, and Trauma Helping Children Cope*, the resource made available in 2003 by U.S. Department of Education Office on processing grief (Robinson et al., 2003).

Violence Prevention in Schools

After a tragic event like the Harvey murders, rather than examining and processing our grief, as a culture we prefer to move towards solutions, prevention, and the eradication of violence.

The U.S. problem-solving mode was evident in much of the literature surrounding schools and violence. On the subject of violence prevention, Naomi Dillon (2007) suggested working hand in hand with the local police department to root out violent behavior in schools. She offered nothing, however on the subject of processing grief. On the subject of teaching non-violence, Collinge (1997) spoke about teaching non-violence. He believed teaching imagination would result in a student's increased ability to, "challenge inherited cultural meanings"(p. 6). He argued that challenging of the norm through art and imagination would therefore create peace loving and non-violent citizens. But what do these non-violent citizens do when faced with violence related tragedy? The National School Board's lengthy pamphlet on the subject of violence prevention outlined specific punishments that should be utilized if a student becomes violent, but offered no preventative or post-tragedy suggestions (National School Board Association, 1994). Holloway and Kleckley (2001) suggested that one of the ways in which violence can be prevented is through parental connection with teachers. She stated, "opportunities should be provided to develop relationships between the school staff and the parent/caregivers that would use conflict positively" (Holloway & Kleckley, 2001, p. 24). This same philosophy could be applied in a post-tragedy situation, but Holloway and Kleckley (2001) do not consider this possibility.

Gaps in the Existing Literature

Much of the literature around tragedies in schools focuses on violence in schools and about how to prevent violence from occurring in schools (Ashburn, 2007; Crowder & Wilson McKay, 2009; Sela-Shayovitz, 2009). There were pages and pages of policy on how to punish violent students for various infractions of school rules (National School Board Association, 1993). There was a great deal written on the subject of tragedy in schools (Mears, 2008; Rikleen, 2007; Zembylas, 2009). There were even resources available on curriculum changes that could be made to help students process grief (Robinson, et al., 2003). What was missing was an emphasis on teaching and modeling mourning, and an examination of various schools' disaster plans and self-reflective examination of how functional those plans were once in action. Further, additional omissions were the difficult questions of: if there were relevant and helpful resources out there, how were they circulated? If scholars were making the same suggestions at the conclusion of their research, why were we not following it? I examined, through my research, how we addressed mourning and loss at William Fox Elementary School, and in what ways we were successful, and in what ways we failed. As bell hooks (1994) says, "No education is politically neutral" (p. 37). That was to say that when we, as teachers, pretend not to mourn or we mourn privately at home with no explanation or acknowledgement that this is what we are doing, we are teaching that mourning is not acceptable and that adults do not do it. Would it not therefore be better for our students in general, based on what the literature suggests, to mourn publicly or give an explanation about the way we are choosing to mourn? Could we not mourn as a school, or discuss openly in class what happened, and what it meant to us personally? Mourning, like every other behavior, needs to be modeled in order to be emulated. This research study aimed

to contribute to the literature on how death and specifically tragic death is treated in schools.

The goal of this research was threefold. This study hopes to tell the story of one community's tragedy from inside William Fox Elementary. This research illuminated the self-critiques and accolades of the William Fox community as it struggled with that tragedy. This study suggested thoughts and alternatives to the ways that the William Fox community addressed tragedy.

Chapter Three Methodology

The methodology chapter included: a description of the purpose of the study, an exploration of the research design, and an explanation for the choice of a qualitative case study. A list of the participants as well as the time frame and location of this case study were given. I explained the data collection process, the data analysis process, and limitations of the study.

The purpose of the study was to look at the way the murder of the Harvey family was handled at William Fox Elementary School from multiple perspectives. By examining this tragedy through more than one lens, a more accurate view of the tragedy from the perspective of multiple participants was possible. In conducting this case study, I asked the following research questions: 1) What were the official policies and protocols that went into effect at William Fox Elementary School after the murder of the Harvey family in January of 2006? 2) What were the experiences of the staff and parents at William Fox Elementary School after the murder of the Harvey family? 3) What critiques and or suggestions did the employees and parents have of the official policies or protocols, which were carried out after the murder of the Harvey family?

By conducting this qualitative constructivist case study, I developed a multifaceted view of the events of 2006 at William Fox Elementary School, and what the experience of the school could offer as a teaching tool for other schools.

Background to the Study

Because talking about death and mourning with children was a very complex subject, I wanted to explore more personal explanations from my participants than I could get from a survey. I wanted to collect data that could be analyzed in a less linear way than quantitative surveys could afford. If a topic came up that was of interest to a participant I wanted them to have a place to share it, which is not easily possible in a survey. I did not feel that quantitative surveys would adequately express the participants' views on how William Fox Elementary handled this tragedy. For these reasons, I selected an instrumental case study as my methodology. Creswell (2008) described a case study as, "an in depth exploration of a bounded system (e.g. an activity, event, process, or individuals) based on extensive data collection" (p. 476). Creswell (2008) further described an instrumental case study as one that, "serves the purpose of illuminating a particular issue" (p. 476), in this case a school's response to tragedy. An instrumental case study was most appropriate for my research because this specific event allowed me to look at the way the policies, protocols, and culture of the school affected the students and teachers at the time of a tragedy. According to Creswell, (2008) "the case is separated out for research in terms of time, place, or some physical boundaries" (p. 476). In short, I was only looking at the bounded system of William Fox Elementary School in 2006 and the way that the tragedy and the policies, or lack thereof, affected that particular school's adult population. I also examined my case study through a constructivist lens. According to Yin (2003), constructivists believe that truth is relative and that it is dependent on a person's perspective. Because my case study was constructivist, the opinions of the participants are an important part of the findings. One of the benefits of a

constructivist viewpoint was the idea of multiple realities, rather than just one (Guba, 1990). This approach enabled the participants to tell their stories, and focus the interview on what was most important to each participant.

I had an unusual vantage point to research this subject, as I was a member of the staff when the Harveys died. This vantage point gave me access to many of the participants of the study, and likely made them more willing to share with me, however it did limit my ability to maintain some objectivity. This, however, was the nature of qualitative research. According to Hara (1995), “Qualitative research in education...maintains that the researcher's subjectivity is central. In consequence, the researcher's viewpoint and value judgments are deeply connected to the research. In this view, the relationship of researcher and what is being researched is impossible to separate” (p. 2). In addition to myself, there were many other staff members who were at the school in 2006 who still work there and were willing to be interviewed.

Anna Golden's case study thesis, *Making the Forest Together* (2006) looked carefully at Sabot School, a Reggio Emilia-inspired preschool, and how it differed from a public school. She did this by investigating several long-term art projects that students created. This was similar to what I was doing in this case study. Golden was investigating one school, and a few long-term projects. I was investigating one school one event that occurred in 2006, and the way it affected several teachers. Jaeger (1988) discussed the bounded system of a case study. A bounded system was some kind of entity with outlines or boundaries, like William Fox Elementary. A bounded system was one of the criteria for choosing to do a case study over some other kind of research. Jaeger (1988) talked about the difference between emic and etic issues in the case study. Etic issues are the

ones the researcher begins with, like the protocol research question I began with, and emic issues are the interesting new ideas that come out of the study, like the themes that emerged through data analysis discussed in chapter four. An instrumental case study was the best choice when a researcher plans to look at a similar issue in further research. Because my research was on mourning and death in the school system, by selecting an instrumental case study, I could use this research later in another study of tragedy at another school, and compare them.

Design of the Study

The first step in this process was to design my interview protocol, and apply to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for approval to conduct these interviews. Conducting qualitative interviews with several members of the Fox staff was the next step of this research project after I received IRB approval. I selected teachers who were at William Fox Elementary in 2006 who had either a direct connection with the third grade class that Stella Harvey was in, or who had a key role in the school-wide decisions made about how to handle this tragedy. The classroom teacher, the specials teachers, the principal and guidance counselor made the best choices for my participants. Through interviewing these key individuals, I was able to answer my research questions thoroughly and from multiple perspectives. I examined the policies and protocols through the perspectives of the participants. The selection of my participants also permitted me to examine the experiences of a small significant sample of the population along with their critiques and suggestions. Jaeger (1997) suggests that qualitative research questions differ from quantitative questions because, “the search is for understanding rather than explanation; the researchers are striving for adequacy of interpretation rather than prediction and

control” (p. 189). I used qualitative data collection and analysis methods because I recognize that, “as researchers we need to listen to the views of participants in our study” (Creswell, 2008, p. 51). Participants from many areas of the school provided understanding from multiple perspectives.

Some examples of questions that I asked the faculty/staff interviewees were: 1) Describe the first day of school after finding out that the Harveys had died. 2) What do you think you were particularly successful at teaching at that time? 3) What stands out in your mind as a mistake we made as a community or that individuals made? 4) What was the most difficult aspect of teaching at this time? 5) How did your students react to these events? I shifted these questions slightly when interviewing the parent to include her opinion not just of what she did, but what the teachers did. An example of this shift for question #2 was: What do you think the teachers were particularly successful at teaching at that time, and what do you feel you were particularly successful at teaching at that time?

Although I was looking for specific answers to these five questions, additional interview questions shifted and changed based on what the interviewee had to share. For example, the classroom teacher shared a great deal of information about various gifts and monies that were given to her classroom to help in the healing process. She described how she decided what to do with those gifts, how this affected her personally, how it affected the students, and how other teachers reacted to the gifts. I asked further questions about this subject because they seemed quite relevant to the interviewee, even though those questions were not initially outlined in my interview protocol. I had, however,

obtained permission through the Institutional Review Board (IRB) to include additional relevant questions beyond the scope of the original five questions.

Participants, Time Frame and Location

The members of this study are seven William Fox employees or former employees who were on staff during and after the Harvey murders in 2006, and one William Fox Elementary parent. I began my interviews in November of 2010, and completed them in January of 2011. I paid special attention to the IRB process, and did my best to ensure my interviewees felt comfortable working with me. I asked each adult before I even applied to the IRB if he or she would be willing and comfortable to be interviewed, in order to make sure that I did not put any pressure on anyone given the sensitive nature of my questions.

I planned to look at five teachers in particular who had a great deal of contact with Stella Harvey, but after each interview other possible interviewees came to mind, and so my list expanded to include a parent, and one additional teacher.

Demographics.

I selected teachers and parents who had significant contact with and knowledge of the Harvey family before the murders occurred. My participant population consisted of the following individuals:

1. Faithe, African American female, late 50's, school librarian
2. Pat, White female, late 50's, classroom teacher
3. Rob, White male, mid 40's, school music teacher
4. Lisa, White female, mid 30's, PTA-funded Art Explosions teacher
5. Daniela, White female, late 40's, Principal

6. Angie, White female, mid 40's, school Guidance Counselor

7. Kirsten, White female mid 40's, third grade parent

The “specials” teachers in particular had contact with Stella Harvey every week for many years, so I interviewed all of them first: the Art Explosions teacher (an extra PTA-funded art teacher who saw Stella every two weeks), the music teacher, and the librarian. After the initial interviews of the specials teachers, it became obvious that I needed to interview Stella's classroom teacher because so many of my participants referred to her. I added Stella's classroom teacher to my list, and she agreed to be interviewed.

I also interviewed the people responsible for implementing school-wide policies. These included the principal and the guidance counselor. I included one parent in my interviews because she and her children were referred to by all of the other participants. That parent was quite close to the Harvey family, and her daughter came up in several interviews, particularly around the topic of mourning and how to address it. In total, there were 7 participants I interviewed.

The location of the research was not so much a location in real space, but more of a comfortable space to address the interview questions that may be regarded as difficult. I recorded these interviews on a digital voice recorder in various locations depending on the interviewee's comfort zone. I conducted interviews in coffee shops, classrooms after school, my home, or the homes of the employees. I took special care to ensure the comfort and feeling of safety of the participants. I let them choose the interview location, and shared with them after the interviews anything that they wanted to know about my experience.

I think of the participants in my study as my co-authors, since it was with their in-depth self-analysis and reflective practice that I was able to interview them. These participants did not conduct the interviews or transcribe them. They did not do any of the writing or the analysis of the interviews, but the difficult work of revisiting such a sad time in their lives made them all beneficent co-authors to me.

Methods of Data Collection

My method of data collection was interviews. I documented the interviews by recording them on a digital voice recorder in order to understand or learn what the participants recalled about the murders and the aftermath of the murders. Questions addressed their experiences the first day back, what they were able to teach, if they mourned in front of their students, what critiques and praises they had for themselves, and what critiques and praises they had of our school at this time. I included some lyrics from a song that one participant wrote for Stella Harvey, which was used at the butterfly release at school four months after the murders.

My original interview questions were central to my research, but in the spirit of constructivism (Yin, 2003), I also included questions that were brought about by the interviews, and what the interviewees *wanted* to tell me. If an interviewee, for example, kept steering the interview back toward the way this tragedy affected their own child who was also a student at William Fox Elementary, I followed up with questions about that child. I began the interviews in the November of 2010, and completed them in January of 2011. I recorded them on a digital recording device and then transcribed them myself. Each interview took between an hour and two hours. During the collection process I

decided to focus on whichever questions interested the participants the most. This area of interest varied widely from participant to participant.

Transcription takes a great deal of time, but it was the best way for me to get a well-rounded view of what occurred in the school during the spring of 2006. Language in a conversation is markedly different than simple written answers to numbered questions. In order to transcribe the interviews, I sat down with each recording and listened to each one in its entirety through a set of headphones once without typing anything in order to get a sense of the content. Then, I listened to it again in 20 to 30 second sections, typing word for word as I listened. Once I got all the way through an interview, I went back and listened to it again while reading what I had written and altered the content if anything was missing. I wrote my own name in front of the questions as I read them, and the interviewee's name in front of each answer given. I added side notes of pauses and interruptions in parenthesis whenever necessary. If a pause lasted longer than ten seconds it was noted in parentheses. I also looked back at my notes that I took during the interviews and added any additional written notes that I made during the interview.

Data Analysis

After listening to and transcribing all of the interviews, I implemented several different techniques for coding and organizing the data. I went through all of the interviews once, and color-coded fonts based on themes to see what commonalities emerged. Then I went through each interview again with index cards. I put a theme on each index card, and listed the source and the page number of each interview that the theme emerged in. I went through the interviews again with colored and variously shaped post-it notes. I selected one color and shape post-it note for each participant. I put each

main idea that arose from each interview on a different note, and then grouped and regrouped those post-it notes looking for connections. Finally, I used *Wordle* (a word-grouping program based on word frequency) and put each interview into the program to see what themes emerged. Based on the frequency of a word that occurs in an interview, Wordle makes the word appear larger for greater frequency, and smaller for infrequency. This program gave me a visual, somewhat artistic view of what was occurring verbally in the interviews. For example, in Kirsten's interview, her daughter's name appeared very large in the center of the document. In Pat's Wordle, the word *know* was the largest. Despite the fact that Kirsten's daughter's name also appeared in Pat's Wordle, and the word *know* appeared in Kirsten's Wordle, the difference between these two documents illustrated and confirmed one of the differences between the two interviews. Pat was very concerned with knowing and being certain what to do with a classroom full of mourning students, whereas Kirsten was more focused on the fluctuating needs of her specific children.

The participants' answers to my questions initially fell into several broad categories: reactions to policies, recollection of events following the murders, and ideas for new policies/curriculum specifically for students post-tragedy. However, I identified additional categories after reviewing all of the interview transcriptions. Many themes arose from this process, some more valuable than others. The frequency of an idea or theme appearing in the set of interviews was one way I selected strong threads. Another way I discerned which themes were most important was if they came up frequently in just one of the interviews, if the participant wanted to revisit the idea in several different ways. Some of the topics that participants brought up repeatedly were: private and public

mourning, the dissemination of information, healing techniques used, and suggested healing techniques. I was looking for commonalities among participants' perspectives, verbalized or implied. These commonalities and links comprise the bulk of my conclusions.

Limitations of the Research

My research is biased in many ways, first because I was present for the events that are the subject of this thesis and additionally because the events affected me directly. This bias cannot be hidden and, in the end, it may be a strength of the study, since I was in a good position to think of pertinent questions to ask in addition to being sensitive to the needs of the interviewees. I made the decision not to include my own writing and thoughts as answers to interview questions in an effort to avoid my preconceptions. It is possible to see what themes I believed would emerge by examining the questions that I wrote down to ask, however the participants' opinions were varied and complicated, and I left room for their opinions to shift my questions so that my bias might not overpower my findings. It is impossible to leave all opinions behind when looking at the data, but I tried to let the data speak for itself and leave my opinion out in order to present a clearer view of the participants' ideas.

A few of the teachers that I would have liked to interview have left the school, and one has a health condition that made the logistics of interviewing her too difficult. The interviews were limited to those who agreed to participate in them, and those who had direct contact with Stella Harvey and her classmates. Additional limitations include that I did not seek interviews with anyone outside of the immediate William Fox Elementary community and that I did not seek approval from the IRB to interview any

children. Even though there are several limitations of this study, it gains transferability because of the common need of students who experience tragedy to process grief.

According to Huberman (2002), generalizability is something “many qualitative researchers actively reject as a goal” (p.172) because they perceive it as unimportant. The generalizability of my research was limited. It was limited by the fact that I did not interview every adult involved at William Fox School. I did not interview participants from every school in Richmond that has experienced a tragedy. I did not interview participants from every school in Virginia or the country that has experienced a tragedy. I only looked at one elementary school in Richmond, Virginia. Because this research was a case study, which was created “through detailed descriptions of their [participants’] cognitive and symbolic actions, and through the richness of meaning associated with observable behavior” (Wildemuth, 1993), generalizability was limited (Creswell, 2008). However, because a tragedy can impact any school, the study gained a great deal of transferability. Also, the mourning and healing technique sections helped the study to gain transferability because other schools that have experienced a tragedy could benefit from examining William Fox Elementary participants’ mourning and healing techniques and suggestions.

Conclusion

This methodology section explained the purpose of this case study. It explored the research design and it explained the choice of a qualitative case study. I presented the list of the participants as well as the time frame and location for the study. The data collection process is examined and then the data analysis process is also examined. Finally, the limitations of the study are presented. Because I am personally connected to

the participants I was both attentive to my methods, and also very sensitive to the needs of my participants. It was difficult to critique my peers, especially on such sensitive subject matter like mourning in the classroom, and how the tragedy affected the participants personally.

How questions are best suited for a constructivist lens. *Why* questions are best suited for a critical theorist lens. A case study was the best choice for asking *how* and *why* questions, because they were so open-ended. The value of doing a case study from a constructivist point of view, which sees the world as constructed by individuals, was that this school constructed a mourning, grieving, and healing process. From a critical theorist's point of view, the challenges that the participants faced in constructing this reality could be examined and questioned. Why did this school face this tragedy with no knowledge of or access to pre-existing resources? Why was it difficult to decide how to handle a grieving class? My own connection to this tragedy makes the data analysis all the more challenging, and I was therefore very careful and compassionate with my research methods.

Chapter Four

Data Analysis and Findings

In this chapter, I presented the major findings discerned from my analysis of the interviews. In addition to presenting themes in this chapter, I also simultaneously discussed the findings. Because the responses to each interview question I asked were so varied and rich, I organized this chapter into four themes rather than organizing it by my research or interview questions. The four sections were: Information, Mourning, Healing Techniques, and Injustices. In each of these sections, after the major themes from the interviews were presented, I included a discussion based on the data and my analysis of relevant literature. To make each participant's role clear, I listed them again at the beginning of this chapter. My participant population consisted of the following individuals:

1. Faithe, African American female, late 50's, school librarian
2. Pat, White female, late 50's, classroom teacher
3. Rob, White male, mid 40's, school music teacher
4. Lisa, White female, mid 30's, PTA-funded Art Explosions teacher
5. Daniela, White female, late 40's, Principal
6. Angie, White female, mid 40's, school Guidance Counselor
7. Kirsten, White female mid 40's, third grade parent

Information

In a school community, when something truly devastating happens, the way that information is relayed and how quickly individuals get it, becomes weighty, as was reflected in the literature on both the Columbine and Virginia Tech tragedies (Bonnie et al., 2009; Mears, 2008; Ray, 2010). The William Fox Elementary community was no different in their desire to be informed as quickly and thoroughly as possible. At William Fox Elementary, the information about the Harvey murders was difficult to relay immediately to adults before other sources revealed it first. Deciding what to tell students was also a challenge and adults edited out some aspects of the tragedy for them. The students themselves disseminated some information that was edited out of the story by adults for students.

Delivering information to adults: speed.

When the murderers of the Harvey family left the house, they attempted to cover up what they had done by lighting fire to the Harvey home. The fire in the Harveys' house after the murders brought so many people out of their homes to ask questions and learn news that the story unfolded very quickly for many families. Kirsten recalled that as she prepared for the Harvey New Years party: "One friend called me to say that their house was on fire 'cause at that point we were just getting dressed to go over there" (K. Perkinson, personal communication, January 7, 2011). Because of this aspect of the tragedy, the delivery of news to the rest of the school population had to happen at a very rapid pace.

Many Fox families were neighbors of the Harveys; even some of the faculty lived in the neighborhood. Daniela had a dual role of neighbor and principal to the Harveys. She described the way she found out there was a problem: "I live in the neighborhood so

I actually found out because one of my neighbors came over to ask me if I had seen the Harveys, because at that point there was fire in the house...smoke in the house and they couldn't find the family" (D. Jacobs, personal communication, November 20, 2010). It was easy to imagine how quickly people in the neighborhood, and friends of the family might relay this kind of information. It was unlikely any principal could inform every parent and teacher in the school before someone else told them.

After the murders were confirmed, as principal, Daniela had to put her own emotions aside and think fast about how to handle the event. She called to ask for advice and support from her superiors, but did not get any responses, perhaps because of the holiday, or perhaps another reason. She said: "It was really all my decision making, because honestly I couldn't reach anybody. The superintendent, the assistant superintendent, I couldn't reach anybody. I mean here I was a first year principal...ha ha ha...and I just had to figure it out" (D. Jacobs, personal communication, November 20, 2010). Daniela's first instinct to call her superiors did not work, so she created a "disaster team" from the Fox school faculty itself and they thought out a plan for the school community. Daniela recalled that the team consisted of: "the social worker, my vice principal, the guidance counselor, the psychologist intern at that time and, um, we kind of developed a plan of action of what we were going to do to greet families here at Fox" (D. Jacobs, personal communication, November 20, 2010). Angie, who was the guidance counselor and was on the disaster team, informed many Fox employees and families about the tragedy: "I remember having to be part of a telephone tree to some extent and having to communicate to different people what had happened" (A. Meccia, personal

communication, December 17, 2010). Angie felt the phone tree was somewhat disorganized and wished that a better one was in place before this event.

As quickly as the team worked to inform everyone about the murders, it could not move fast enough to inform everyone before another party did. Pat recounted being informed by a reporter from the newspaper who called at dinner time: “She said I wanted to get your thoughts about the Harvey murder, and I said what are you talking about, and she said oh, I’m so sorry, I did not know that you did not know this” (P. Kite, personal communication, December 16, 2010). Lisa also recalled being informed by someone other than the staff at Fox about the tragedy. Lisa recalled that a William Fox Elementary parent: “called me and let me know what had happened so I could be prepared for the day...when I went back to school” (L. Powers, personal communication, December 15, 2010). Rob was partially informed by the Guidance Counselor and recounted, “I heard some of it on the news because I went looking for it” (R. Winslow, personal communication, November 12, 2010). Being informed by a member of the press or another parent who might not have thought out the most sensitive way to deliver the information is not ideal.

The Harvey murders were a very public event. Many families witnessed the fire and informed other people. Daniela could not reach her superiors, and although there may have been support materials available for situations like this, she was unable to access them, and therefore created a disaster team to inform parents. The creation of this team had several implications. One implication of this series of events was that support materials were not readily available for William Fox Elementary School and may not be readily available for other schools that undergo similar experiences. In the literature on

9/11, Ray (2010) discussed how teachers had to figure out what to do as they went along, and had no resources to look to. This led to questions about where such materials should be in order to provide easy access to them. The literature suggested that they do exist, as reflected by Robinson et al. (2003). If such materials were available, why was William Fox Elementary unable to access them? Why did they need to start all over? Another implication is that a disaster team needed to move quickly in order to inform everyone in a timely manner, and, as is suggested by the Bonnie et al. (2009) literature on Virginia Tech, those methods such as automatic texting, email lists, and phone trees should have already been in place.

Delivering information to children: editing.

A school is a different kind of community, a community of a few adults and many children, and all of the participants recalled wanting to protect the students. The adult instinct for protecting students at William Fox Elementary translated into giving a modified version of the truth to the percentage of the student body that Daniela felt the tragedy affected the most -the third grade, fourth grade and fifth grade. No directive was given to teachers about what to say specifically, and so the story that was given varied slightly from participant to participant.

Each participant handled the delivery of the information to the students in their own way. Daniela recalled informing the students simply that: “Stella has died and she will not be back” (D. Jacobs, personal communication, November 20, 2010). Pat recalled that in her classroom: “I tried to protect my students as much as I could from knowing a lot of facts” (P. Kite, personal communication, December 16, 2010). The devastating news was difficult to deliver for all of the participants and so they hid parts of it, and

altered parts of it. This event was not a clear-cut murder at first. It took a while to realize that the Harvey family had been murdered, and about a week of police work before the killers were caught, and then several months before they were tried and convicted.

Daniela described the complexity of deciding what to say about this violent and frightening event: “Parents were editing...I edited the story for my own children. And they didn’t know them, they didn’t know the kids but just because we lived so close...it took a long time for me to tell them the true facts” (D. Jacobs, personal communication, November 20, 2010). Kirsten too, recalled the wide and varied editing that parents did for their kids at Fox: “There were many parents who decided not to tell their children anything” (K. Perkinson, personal communication, January 16, 2011). She continued on about a young girl in another family not being informed until 2011: “She is eight now, nine now... Many children thought they died in a house fire” (K. Perkinson, personal communication, January 16, 2011). Teachers did not want to contradict what parents said, or what other teachers said, but inevitably with so many versions of the story being told, slight contradictions occurred.

The goal of this editing for the students was to protect them from fears and needless anxiety. Mears (2008) discussed this same protective desire in parents after Columbine. The decision to edit the truth, however, has several implications. One implication is that students may get different stories from different teachers, and this raises suspicions about honesty from adults. Rikleen (2007) talked about the need to reassure students that they are safe. Informing students of all the facts, and not just part of them would require regular and continuing reassurance on the part of the faculty and community, who themselves did not feel safe. Another implication is that students may

grow to believe the worst about what happened because they discover that something is being hidden from them. Still another possibility is that students stop trusting adults to inform them of the facts, and begin to look to each other, which happened with some students at William Fox Elementary.

Child information network.

The adult editing process is certainly understandable, but children are capable and smart. The truth of the story did not remain hidden from all students because of their varied abilities to research the truth for themselves, and then share with each other. Daniela described the intelligence of children in tragedy: “Kids have kind of a wiseness when they know something is wrong but grown ups aren’t telling them yet” (D. Jacobs, personal communication, November 20, 2010). Students at the school developed underground networks of communication. They shared information with each other at recess and lunch. Kirsten described the moment when she realized that the students were sharing information with one another. She recalled her older daughter finding out details from other students that she had concealed: “She came home and asked some pretty specific questions...she came home...and said all the kids at school say they got killed with a hammer and a knife” (K. Perkinson, personal communication, January 16, 2011). Telling students specifics about the ways in which a tragedy has happened may be intimidating, but some students discovered the facts anyway and were not informed by loving and caring adults who could discuss the implications of the events with them.

William Fox Elementary students wanted to know the facts. They could tell that the adults were not giving them all the facts, and so they sought them out. They were able to learn and deliver the worst of the facts to each other through different means. Some of

them read the paper, some of them listened in to their parents' low talking, and some of them watched the news on television, or found answers on the Internet. Kirsten recalled the child-to-child dispersal of information: "They heard what their parents were talking about, some heard the news, watched the news, some of them even read the paper because they were in third grade by then" (K. Perkinson, personal communication, January 16, 2011). The assumption that students will only know what they are told by their teachers is a fallacy.

Teachers previously taught William Fox Elementary students how to be informed citizens, and when the newspaper stopped being delivered to the school, it raised suspicions among students about what was being hidden from them. Pat recalled that she felt it was a good idea of Daniela's to stop the paper. Ray (2009) in the literature on 9/11 talked about students being traumatized by too many recurring images of the twin towers being hit. Daniela's decision to stop the paper came from a hope that this would not happen to the students at William Fox Elementary.

Editing for students, although well intentioned, created a student network of information sharing, which had several implications. One implication was that once students do not trust adults, they put their faith in each other, and some children may guess at facts, make suppositions or even intentionally misinform each other. Another implication of the child information network was that children did not stop seeking the facts, even when they were hidden from them. A further implication of the children's information network was that the level of trust among adults and children and vice versa was compromised.

At William Fox Elementary after the Harvey tragedy, information was very important. The speed of information and who gave it to adults mattered to the participants. Additionally, concerns about student anxiety level caused adults to edit what they said to students. Lastly, students informed each other of the details that adults opted to leave out.

Mourning

In a family unit, when someone dies, the adults may be familiar with what to do because of a model set up by their parents or grandparents when they were young. Additionally, if the household had a religious belief, the religious leader and community may have a set of expectations for grief, and mourning. The act of grieving and mourning may have been modeled many times for adults by their parents, grandparents, or religious community. This would not make death easier, but there is a model. In a school however, when a student dies, it was difficult to discern how to act, because it is a different kind of family, a created family with a multitude of beliefs. The participants at William Fox Elementary did not know what to do when the Harvey family died. Different participants did different things. Some participants hid their mourning in order to seem strong. Some participants mourned openly because they believed that was the correct choice. Some participants thought that children who were in mourning should remain in the classroom, and some felt they should go home and be assisted by their parents.

Private mourning: concealing feelings.

Dealing with death in the school community brought some teacher participants into uncomfortable territory for two reasons. The first difficulty was the challenge of talking about death and mourning without having a frank and open conversation about

religious beliefs, which the participants did not feel comfortable doing. The second reason participants avoided public grief was a belief among some of the participants that teachers should model strength, and not mourning.

Three of the participants felt uncomfortable treading upon long held avoidance of spiritual questions in the public school arena. Faithe described her discomfort in talking about death: “I wouldn’t have felt comfortable doing it without some training...I pretty much try to steer clear of church and state so it would have been really difficult to do without bringing religion in” (F. Mickens, personal communication, November 10, 2010). She went on to elaborate on the possibility of her beliefs coming into conflict with others’: “You know if you are Christian, Jesus died to save you so therefore you’re going to have everlasting life...What about the Muslims? What about children from other nationalities? ...I wouldn’t want to touch that” (F. Mickens, personal communication, November 10, 2010). Rob, too, talked about the difficulties of navigating into the topic of death without touching religion: “I thought that we went to great depths to avoid talking about god, god in whatever form we believe in” (R. Winslow, personal communication, November 12, 2010). He continued on, and described the butterfly release as beautiful, but lacking depth. He said it needed a spiritual connection: “It doesn’t necessarily need to be denominational...whether it happens to be Jewish, Muslim...I think there was a kind of void in that kind of approach” (R. Winslow, personal communication, November 12, 2010). This concern about treading on church and state, although valid, prevented some teachers from taking an active role in student mourning and grief, or showing to their own.

For several participants, mourning occurred privately rather than publicly because of the idea that teachers need to be strong. Daniela, who concealed her grief, described her sadness coming over and over again: “every time we did an event that one of the Harveys would have been involved in it kind of just brought those feelings back up again...that was really hard” (D. Jacobs, personal communication, November 20, 2010). Pat recalled that when she felt the overwhelming need to mourn she: “took a day off, because, I mean I’m a pretty strong person having raised three children myself and all that stuff, but there is a limit” (P. Kite, personal communication, December 16, 2010). Three of the participants talk about teachers mourning privately because of a belief that teachers needed to model strength, not mourning. Kirsten, as a parent, ascribed to this idea: “One thing that I was glad about was that the teachers were strong” (K. Perkinson, personal communication, January 16, 2011). She further described what that strength looked like: “they just continued on...the normalcy...routines” (K. Perkinson, personal communication, January 16, 2011). For Kirsten, strength from teachers looked stoic. Two participants felt the sense that they needed to be strong despite what they felt inside. Rob talked about the need for normalcy and routine in students’ lives: “I think there is a time and place for that kind of thing, to meet those needs, but not to be drawn out all through the day so much so that it encourages [students] to stay in the pain” (R. Winslow, personal communication, November 12, 2010). The participants who talked about modeling strength believed that mourning publicly undermined the strength that students gained by being in a space with a calm adult.

The choice that some teachers made to conceal their mourning from their students was grounded in a concern for crossing boundaries of church and state. It was also

grounded in the belief that teachers should be strong. A model that presents adults as feeling no grief presents some problems, as reflected in the literature on mourning in schools by Crowder and Wilson McKay (2009). One of the problems was that teachers do feel grief, and in hiding it, presented a falsehood to students that teachers do not feel the same things that students are feeling. The other fallacy presented by modeling strength and not grief was that when students grow up, they may themselves not have a positive model for what adult grief looks like.

Public mourning.

There were a few members of the community at Fox, who did not consider mourning off limits to them. They did it openly and without regret. They believed it was the only choice, not a right or wrong one. These members of the William Fox Elementary community were people who saw themselves for one reason or another, outside of the confines of church and state.

Lisa, the Art Explosions teacher, who did not define herself as a “regular” teacher because the PTA paid her, felt it was within her role to mourn openly. Angie, the guidance counselor, who dealt regularly with the emotions of the children, also felt free to mourn openly. Kirsten, a parent felt it was acceptable for her to mourn in front of her children.

Art Explosions was a program at William Fox Elementary, which was initiated and paid for by the PTA, and Lisa, who ran the program was not paid by the state. Lisa described coming back to school after the murders and allowing her grief to be present in the classroom. She felt it was right to talk about her feelings with her students, and described what that was like for her: “I knew it...was gonna be hard to say it because

when I see the kids' faces, I see her face too in the crowd. Even though she's not there, I still see her" (L. Powers, personal communication, December 15, 2010). In spite of this difficulty, Lisa felt compelled to be open: "I could feel my heart just beating, just racing, and I was like oh my gosh, am I gonna start crying, what am I gonna do?" (L. Powers, personal communication, December 15, 2010). She went further to recall her words that day: "I hope everyone had a good holiday break, I know that you guys are having a really hard time right now... I am having a really hard time also" (L. Powers, personal communication, December 15, 2010). Lisa continued not only to describe her grief to her students, but also to allow the students to talk about their own feelings in the class setting. She said: "I cared a lot about Stella as well as you all, and I thought that today that we could just take the time to talk about her, about how we feel...if you feel like you need to go see one of the counselors, then you can do that" (L. Powers, personal communication, December 15, 2010).

Angie's role as the guidance counselor at the time gave her a special role as an emotional model as well as a teacher. She described living her grief transparently with her students. She said: "I don't think there's anything wrong with showing your emotions to children. I think there is something wrong with not showing your emotions to children" (A. Meccia, personal communication, December 18, 2010). Angie articulated that she mourned in front of several students: "I did mourn in front of them, if I'm gonna cry I'm not gonna push back the tears completely. I'm not gonna go all out, but, yes I did show emotion" (A. Meccia, personal communication, December 18, 2010). Angie went further to describe what that demonstration of emotion looked like for them: "They would have seen me cry, heard my voice quiver. I would have used words that showed I

was sad or angry maybe that this happened. Visually, they could tell I was upset” (A. Meccia, personal communication, December 18, 2010). Through this modeling of grief and mourning Angie felt confident that any students who came to her for support saw the fact of mourning in at least one adult.

The parents in the school community made a vast array of decisions with regard to how much emotion to show their children. They varied in how much they mourned openly and how much they hid. Kirsten made suppositions about the fallout among the parents and how they handled the deaths: “It can make you go crazy...I had a lot of friends who divorced after this, several couples, four I can think of right off the bat. It absolutely had to do with it” (K. Perkinson, personal communication, January 16, 2011). She went on to describe what she felt the reasoning was among other parents: “If something so tragic can happen in one fell moment like that, I think that people examine their lives quickly and irrationally... but I kept thinking, just ripples on the water, a couple of people had nervous break downs in those first couple of years” (K. Perkinson, personal communication, January 16, 2011). Kirsten’s description of the emotional aftermath among parents after the Harvey tragedy raises questions about hidden grief in adults, and what students learned about how to grieve.

Kirsten’s own mourning was both transparent with her kids, and somewhat hidden with her peers. She described the decision she made to talk about what she and her family loved about the Harveys, rather than the specifics of their murder: “We have an open environment with our kids. I mean if the Harveys come up, we mostly talk about funny memories...We don’t really talk that much about them dying” (K. Perkinson, personal communication, January 16, 2011). Kirsten, as a close friend of the Harvey family, went

on to describe the feeling of being at Fox and wanting to hide her grief from other adults: “I avoided people for a while because I didn’t want people to feel bad for me so much...I didn’t really know what to do; I was just kind of taking it hour by hour, a leaf in the wind” (K. Perkinson, personal communication, January 16, 2011).

The choice among the participants to mourn openly had some implications. One implication was that students would know that the adults in their community had feelings. This could be reassuring to them that the feelings that the students felt were normal. Students who saw several adults mourning knew that mourning could look several different ways. This could be beneficial, too, as everyone was different and this perspective of more than one way to mourn reinforces that idea. For Lisa, mourning looked like talking and shaking, for Angie it looked like crying. For Kirsten, it looked like a need to be away from other adults. Another implication of public mourning was that some big questions can arise among students about death, and that teachers would need to prepare for that.

Adult perceptions of child mourning.

Because of feelings of ambivalence towards death, and religion, and tragedy, the way William Fox Elementary handled student mourning was complicated as well. Three participants felt that the students, who were mourning the most, should be moved away from the rest of the group in order to keep a certain amount of normalcy. Three of the participants felt that the students who were mourning the most needed the benefit of being around other people in order to get back to normal themselves.

Pat described the first day back at school. She recounted that one student in particular, “Was a mess. Gosh she was crying and crying and crying and her mother was

in the auditorium at the adult assembly and I sent for her and I said maybe it's not a good idea for her to be here today" (P. Kite, personal communication, December 16, 2010).

Pat's vision of the child's need to go home was countered with the mother's view that she needed to stay. Pat defended her point of view: "When another child, particularly in third grade is upset, it upsets everybody" (P. Kite, personal communication, December 16, 2010).

For Pat, the group sense of calm was of the utmost importance. For Kirsten however, sticking together no matter what took precedence. Kirsten described her thinking about the same situation: "It was hard...because I decided to go to school because I thought the kids should be together for good or for bad ... I just kept thinking strength in numbers... I thought they'll be ok, they'll be ok, they'll deal with it, they'll work it out" (K. Perkinson, personal communication, January 16, 2011).

Just like adults, children are all different, and this difference is compounded by their age. When a trauma happens, the way it affects a six-year-old can look very different from the way that the same incident affects a nine-year-old. Kirsten recalled seeing a big change in her younger daughter at the time, which was different than the change that occurred in her older daughter. Kirsten recounts her younger daughter's mourning: "(My younger daughter)...who was always sunny and sweet and adorable, was dark and angry, for like four months. And I thought it had changed her personality, and it was really scary to me... she shut down and she was angry and dark" (K. Perkinson, personal communication, January 16, 2011). Kirsten went on to compare that grief with her older daughter's response, she said her daughter started: "being really mean to (my younger daughter) and hurting her physically, not torturing her, but hitting her too

hard, grabbing her a little too hard” (K. Perkinson, personal communication, January 16, 2011).

What should we do with a student who is more visibly mourning than the other students around them? Stokrocki (2000) suggested that using art to process grief is a key to dealing with student mourning. The implications of removing them from the classroom were that students learn that mourning is shameful and needs to be hidden. Freire (1974) claimed that it is humanity that should be emphasized in the classroom, and this would support mourning students remaining there. What was more human than grief? Black (2005) asserted that going on as usual without acknowledging the grief that is occurring in the classroom is dysfunctional. The implications of a mourning child remaining in the classroom were that the feelings around death are more important than teaching the formal curriculum. This came into conflict with pacing charts, and SOL tests, and a variety of other policy driven ideologies. This conflict would need to be reconciled in the teacher’s mind and supported by administrators in the school.

The participants in this study had no plan for how to behave when the Harvey family died, and so they did a variety of things. Two participants hid their mourning believing that the separation of church and state barred them from the conversations that would have been brought about by openly mourning. Two participants believed that it was the teacher’s job to be stoic and strong, and not to mourn and cry in front of the students. Two participants recalled mourning openly because they felt most comfortable doing that. Participants varied in what they thought that children who were in mourning should do. Some recalled believing that they should remain in the classroom, and some felt they should go home and mourn privately with their parents.

Healing Techniques

In addition to the decision to either mourn publicly or privately themselves, teachers also had to decide how best to address their students' needs as a whole around grief and healing. The participants made many attempts to help their classes move through their grief, sometimes by choice, sometimes because they had to. Pat recounted the way she helped her class mourn as a group. Lisa too outlined what she did with the third grade. In addition to the many actions taken by participants and the community to mourn as a group, several participants offered critiques and suggestions for better ways to handle grief in a school setting. Some examples of suggestions made by participants were Kirsten's idea of a child-centered funeral, and Faithe's idea that everyone could wear ruby red ribbons as a way to unify the school.

How William Fox Elementary healed.

The William Fox Elementary school community was not the only community affected by these murders. Numerous other individuals in the city were profoundly saddened by the loss. Some of those individuals offered to help William Fox Elementary students, and through those helping acts, perhaps helped themselves to heal. Many loving and compassionate deeds were offered to William Fox Elementary students from various citizens of Richmond, Fox parents, friends of the Harvey family, and other sympathetic individuals.

Pat recounted one story of her own class, which was Stella's class. By her account, someone in the community who preferred to remain anonymous came forward and offered 500 dollars to her class to help with their grieving process which set off a cascade of generosity from other people: "I had to agonize over how to spend this \$500

and I didn't want to do something cheesy...then it turns out it was a business person, and then the business person's husband found out about it and he matched it! So we had \$1000 to spend" (P. Kite, personal communication, December 16, 2010).

Through this money, Pat was pushed into making some serious decisions about what would be the best way for her students to intentionally heal. This took a lot of thought for her, and she finally came to the conclusion that while pampering themselves would be calming, helping others would be a good way to help themselves as well. She said: "I thought we could take a portion of the money and go shopping at World of Mirth," Kathryn Harvey's toy store; "and let them buy some things for themselves...you know maybe one or two things, and then buy some things for Ronald McDonald House" (P. Kite, personal communication, December 16, 2010).

This seemed to her like a beneficial mix of generosity towards other people and kindness towards her students. She told her class what she wanted them to do, and they picked a day to do it. They walked to the store together that day. When she and the class arrived at the store and told the people there what they were doing, the generosity of her community became even more evident, as Pat recalled: "Well, we got over there and the manager added to the pot (laughs) so it was something like, some insane amount of money" (P. Kite, personal communication, December 16, 2010).

Each student in Pat's class bought a toy or two for themselves, and several toys for the Ronald McDonald house. They all put on T-shirts with the Paul Frank monkey on them. "It was really cute," Pat recalled: "seeing everybody walking over there with their little bag and their little monkey shirts on, because Stella wore some variation of those shirts just about every day; she loved that brand" (P. Kite, personal communication,

December 16, 2010). This healing technique was just one of many that the community at Fox was either presented with or initiated themselves.

Pat's story illustrates a number of things. Pat, like two other participants, was uncomfortable making healing choices for her students. She preferred to remain strong and stoic. Through receiving this money for her class, however, Pat was pushed into making some healing choices for her students. Pat's choice to help them mourn through both helping others, and soothing themselves set up an interesting model for her students' future grieving. In some ways it calls to mind the critiques of what the U.S. President called the United States to do after 9/11; "After the 9/11 terrorist attacks President Bush didn't call for sacrifice, he called for shopping" (Time Magazine, 2009, p.1). In another way however, processing grief through service to others is an interesting model. Pat gave the students some control over what they did. She decided where they went, and what they planned to do, but encouraged the students to make all the decisions about what to buy. She gave them the power of choosing what other children might want and enjoy. She empowered the students to decide what facilitates healing for a child.

Like Pat, Lisa set up a model of healing. In Lisa's classroom, students began work on a memorial bench. Lisa described her thought process leading up to the design of the bench: "I kept walking by this bench and I was putting projects away and I thought we really need to do something with this bench because art always makes children feel better" (L. Powers, personal communication, December 15, 2010). She elaborated further on the childhood expression of sadness: "What they don't say, they can put on paper or make something" (L. Powers, personal communication, December 15, 2010). For Lisa, art always helped her work her sadness out, and since she knew it had helped her in the

past, she presumed it could help her students now. Lisa continued: “It made me feel like I was doing something...What could I do? I didn’t feel like I could do anything”(L. Powers, personal communication, December 15, 2010). Lisa thought and thought about what might be a good project for the students who were grieving to do, and finally decided that a memorial bench was the best choice. After deciding that the third grade classes would make the bench, Lisa then cleared her idea with the principal and presented the project to the students.

She invited students to make sketches to design the bench: “We talked about adjectives...about Stella...she was funny...she was crazy and she was spirited and they were getting really excited, the kids were just yelling out adjectives” (L. Powers, personal communication, December 15, 2010). After describing the family really well, the students began to make sketches. Lisa recalled students saying: “Yeah, that’s Stella with her soccer ball and paint brush!”(L. Powers, personal communication, December 15, 2010). More children got involved, and then one student suggested: “Maybe we should draw all of the family and not just Stella” (L. Powers, personal communication, December 15, 2010). Lisa encouraged the students after that to create drawings, not just of Stella, but also of the whole family. The students designed a symbol for each family member, which the class agreed represented that family member in some way. Bryan had a guitar, Kathryn got a rocket, and little Ruby was drawn with a pair of ruby slippers. For Lisa this type of artistic healing was the best way for her students to mourn because it helped them think about the Harveys and do something productive with those thoughts. It gave them a voice and way to release their feelings.

Lisa's choices for modeling healing illustrated another tactic. Lisa made the first initial choice in the artistic decision making process of the memorial bench. The rest of the decision-making she left to the students. In doing this, she empowered them and gave them some control over how best to process what they were feeling. In this model, a person can mourn through art, and do it however they like. By empowering the students to make so many decisions about what the bench should look like, what colors to use, what each person depicted should be doing or holding, the students became active participants in the process of healing. Lisa set up the model, but the students determined the outcome.

In addition to Pat's class trip to the World of Mirth, followed by the walk to the Ronald McDonald house, and the creation of the Harvey bench that Lisa facilitated, other individuals implemented other healing models. The parents at William Fox Elementary, even if they did not know the Harveys personally, felt the loss keenly and worked hard to assist those mourning around them. Parents orchestrated a butterfly release as a memorial for the family and a way for the students to let go. In addition to that, Daniela recounted that a local artist and William Fox Elementary parent: "put (the third grade student drawings) together in this beautiful book that was displayed at the memorial service" (D. Jacobs, personal communication, November 20, 2010). Kirsten discussed the various projects and gifts the school was given by parents and friends: "I appreciated the release of the butterflies...I did think it was right that they gave the little girls who were friends the blankets, the Paul Frank t-shirts" (K. Perkinson, personal communication, January 16, 2011). According to Kirsten, and Pat other people who had lost children, or felt some profound grief in their lives did what they felt would have helped them deal better with

their own losses, such as giving blankets to those students who were sad. This model of doing something for someone else that could make you feel better during a mourning period is reminiscent of the models that Pat and Lisa created for their students.

In addition to the gifts given by various parents and William Fox Elementary community members, other people offered assistance to the school. Community leaders and religious leaders approached and offered their services to Daniela and to William Fox Elementary School. Daniela decided to have a community meeting at school for parents when everyone returned the first day. With this decision, she admitted that she felt she was proficient in putting the right people in the right place: “Maybe because I lived in the neighborhood, people would call me up and offer me their services” (D. Jacobs, personal communication, November 20, 2010). Daniela arranged for representatives from many different churches and faiths to be at school to greet the frightened parents of students of William Fox Elementary. She wanted them there to, “reassure the parents that their children were still safe. Just kind of give them the update rather than them see it on the news” (D. Jacobs, personal communication, November 20, 2010). The clergy approached Daniela; she did not have to seek them out. She said that many of them: “just reached out to me so I just let them in” (D. Jacobs, personal communication, November 20, 2010). What Daniela did, by allowing the people in the community to step in and help sets up another model for mourning and grief. Daniela modeled allowing others to help you. She modeled allowing yourself to admit you need help, and that it is appropriate to ask others who are not mourning to step in and assist you.

Daniela and Kirsten felt that the meeting with the clergy, police, and neighborhood representatives was helpful to parents for a number of reasons. For one,

many religions and approaches to death and mourning were represented, and the school was not seen as leaning towards one religion or another. Another benefit of this meeting was that the students were not there, so the parents felt more free to be open with their feelings, which some were suppressing in order to give the illusion of strength. The literature reflected this same need in the parents at both Columbine and Virginia Tech (Viadero, 2009; Wilson, 2008). The meeting was meant to calm and inform the parents about what was happening and how they might best be able to cope. The meeting did not, however, offer services for the children, should they need or want any spiritual direction. That was left to the parents.

Desire for solidarity.

There were so many kind acts and tributes that it is hard to imagine asking for more, but no school is perfect. For several teachers, some administrative things could have been handled differently. For some members of our community, the immediacy of a funeral at the school would have been helpful and brought closure. For others, acts of solidarity were missing in what was done.

Several teachers mentioned a desire for some kind of unifying meeting where the administration would have informed them of exactly what to do and say, and how to handle these events. Faithe talked about her feelings of nervousness around how to handle the students: “Death is very personal, and every group, every culture has different opinions on it, so I didn’t feel comfortable without some training or some sign off from a parent that it’s really inappropriate for me to talk about it” (F. Mickens, personal communication, November 10, 2010). Angie too, suggested that a group meeting would have been helpful. She said: “I would have asked everyone to come in a little early if they

could...just say...we are gonna talk about this a little bit, talk about how we are going to deal with this as a staff” (A. Meccia, personal communication, December 18, 2010).

This kind of meeting could have served a number of purposes. It could have served to unify the staff on exactly how everyone was to behave, or to support the staff in making their own decisions about how best to grieve and model mourning.

Although the butterfly release was a beautiful tribute to the Harvey family, they died in January, and the butterfly release happened in the spring. For three of the participants, this was problematic. Pat talked about the release being nice, but that the timing of it brought feelings back up, which some people had already packed away. She said her feelings of grief: “flared back up when we did that butterfly garden which was much later, in the year, towards the end of the year” (P. Kite, personal communication, December 16, 2010).

Kirsten described the need for something more funeral like, something that put less emphasis on moving forward, and a little more emphasis on talking about the loss that had just occurred in child-friendly terms. She felt it might have been better to, “have some kind of funeral, or some kind of good bye. An assembly...I think it would have helped...even if they didn’t understand what happened, but they knew she was gone.” (K. Perkinson, personal communication, January 16, 2011). Kirsten imagined a funeral type of gathering and how it should look: “if a child dies, I think they should do it outside, say some words put some pictures up, just like you would at a regular funeral because I think kids need it” (K. Perkinson, personal communication, January 16, 2011).

One participant also imagined a symbolic action. Asking people to wear all black may be a little much for most people, but there are other ways to show a unified front.

Faithe suggested what some other groups had done: “You know we kind of had a precedent...you know with the ribbon wearing to kind of come out of Columbine and some other incidences. We probably could have worn ruby red ribbons or something to show solidarity” (F. Mickens, personal communication, November 10, 2010).

The idea of the faculty meeting, the child-focused funeral, and the unifying idea of wearing ruby red ribbons are all principles that could have led to solidarity. The wish for solidarity came up in every participant’s interview. Mears (2008) outlined a very similar desire for solidarity through action. The participants in that study professed a desire for a memorial, which honored the living and the dead after the Columbine tragedy. There are several implications for the desire for a funeral and other solidarity creating acts like the red ribbons. One implication is that the participants’ desires for support and connection would be met. Another of the implications is that all of the adults would have had to decide what they were going to say, which would be a time-consuming challenge. The suggested faculty meeting however, would have been a good place to decide how to handle mourning as a school. It also could have been a good time to approach the idea that everyone would have their own way of handling mourning, and to acknowledge that multiple ways of addressing mourning were okay. Another implication is that the selected age group that was informed would have had to expand if all teachers wore ribbons. Likely any student of any age would ask what they meant. The meeting to discuss the school’s plan would have had to address that aspect. The funeral as well, would make it nearly impossible to keep information from the younger students. Being transparent about this information means that the community would have to talk

about what they were going to say, not just to older students but, to every student; however, teachers and parents may feel more supported.

Injustices

This school was a community with disagreements and difficulties like any other community. The participants at William Fox Elementary did not all agree on how best to handle things. Without the benefit of some unifying meeting or reference guide to help decide how to handle a tragedy like this, teachers and the community were left to their own devices. They decided how to act, how to react, and how to treat each other. Some participants felt that the decisions that they made about how to handle this tragedy were critiqued too harshly, almost attacked which led to feelings of hurt and distrust. In addition to that, the race and socio-economic background of the Harvey family shaped some community members' perceptions of how this tragedy was handled, and this was largely unaddressed. Feelings of grief and sadness were not the only feelings occurring for participants at William Fox Elementary School. Feelings of fear and rage also abounded.

Accusations.

With such difficult decisions about mourning publicly or privately, and how to handle student grief, every participant spoke of a desire for community solidarity of one kind or another. One participant recalled teachers, perhaps fearful about the choices that were being made, scrutinizing each other's choices sometimes quite harshly.

Rob recalled putting a great deal of time and effort into the composition of a song about Stella to be performed at the butterfly release. Rob felt he was doing a disservice to his students by never talking about god but even so described working diligently to write

a song, which made no mention of god or his strong religious beliefs. Rob described the song like this: “It was called ‘You’re a Part of Me’ and it was about her spirit being around. Even though she wasn’t there physically, so it was about...when I feel the breeze, or am playing outside you’re still there” (R. Winslow, personal communication, November 12, 2010). After making himself vulnerable by performing this song in front of the school, he was approached by another teacher, who critiqued his work: “there was a teacher that came to me and said, ‘I just don’t understand why there’s not a separation between church and state...that song was...about god’, and I was like ‘no it’s not,’ it was written for and about Stella” (R. Winslow, personal communication, November 12, 2010). Rob went on to explain how he created the song and what it meant to him: “The words went... ‘When the sun comes out today; I know that you come out to play’... You know I think that god’s fun, but I don’t think he’s coming out to play on the playground” (R. Winslow, personal communication, November 12, 2010). For Rob this felt like a verbal attack, which was not helpful in his mourning process.

This vulnerability that teachers have to each other has several implications. If vulnerability is unrecognized, then hurtful things may be said and done among teachers who are themselves trying to mourn as best as they can. The literature reflected that possibility. Crowder and Wilson McKay (2009) address this idea of school community members sometimes turning on each other. If vulnerability is acknowledged, perhaps during the group meeting for teachers, the likelihood of compassionate conversations happening between teachers and other members of the faculty may increase. More people may feel exposed, and more vulnerable, and perhaps more compassionate.

Race and class.

In Richmond, murders happen frequently—not every day maybe, but often enough. The Associated Press (2007) reported that 81 homicides occurred in Richmond in 2006. Why then was this murder so significant to so many people including the press? One reason was that the murderers did not know the family at all. Another reason was that it was part of a string of murders that happened the same day. Some people would argue that another factor in the significance of this murder to so many was the affluence of the family, and the fact that they were a white family. There were a number of people who felt that this attention was unjust, some within the walls of Fox, and some outside.

Lisa recollected having some conversations with students about the racial and economic factors of this murder: “The one kid, this older kid said, ‘why does all of this stuff have to be done for one person? I don’t understand why we have to have all of these things.’...because at that point it wasn’t that day, it was...several weeks later, and they were doing the fish and the butterfly thing” (L. Powers, personal communication, December 15, 2010). This child was referring to the butterfly release, which was orchestrated by a parent, and the creation of a memorial garden fish sculpture orchestrated by another parent. Lisa went on to recount her perception of that student, she said: “There were a lot of people who were killed in the city. It seemed unjust. I’m not sure what his outside life was like but it was pretty tough, he had a tough life...I don’t know if it was even a race thing, or what it was” (L. Powers, personal communication, December 15, 2010). She continued to talk about the perceptions that she had of the whispering that was going on underneath some of the mourning that was happening: “A lot of people felt like if this had been another black family, it wouldn’t have been such a big deal...a lot of people felt like...because it was a nice white family, that we are gonna

blow all of this up and make a park for them, name a ball field after them” (L. Powers, personal communication, December 15, 2010). Kirsten, too, spoke of the racial aspect of the event and what her daughter would encounter: “I knew that she would hear some terrible things from the black and white community, which is very curious” (K. Perkinson, Personal communication, January 16, 2011).

The racial aspect of this crime made two of the participants uncomfortable. They shifted in their chairs when they talked about the racial aspect of these crimes. Race can be a very uncomfortable topic. Five of the participants did not mention race at all even though suppositions have been made about these murders in the press ever since they happened. The literature on Hurricane Katrina reflects that race is still a factor that people consider in tragedy according to Washington, et al (2008), and Voorhees (2007).

According to Lisa, the students, at least some of the students, were thinking about this aspect of the murders. Talking about race with students in relationship to death and murder has some implications. If the topic is avoided, the topic becomes more taboo, and the perceived injustices of race and class and how these aspects affect understandings of murder and crime remains status quo. If race is discussed openly the implications are that students who are mourning might feel a lack of sensitivity towards their feelings. Critical theorist bell hooks (1994) asserted that no education is politically neutral, so that deciding to avoid a conversation about race is a political decision to be silent on the issue.

Rage and fear.

The feelings around this tragedy were varied. Two participants described their mourning being affected by their feelings of deep rage. The mourning of three participants was compounded by their feelings of fear that something similar might

happen to them. The literature from Columbine and 9/11 reflect that these feelings are typical after a tragedy like this (Ray, 2009; Robinson, 2003).

For one participant, fear manifested in anger. Rob talked about the rage that he felt: “I was just angry at these guys, angry at the injustice. Angry that (the Harveys) had been defiled, is that the word? I mean controlling my emotions thinking about the way that they went, and specifically thinking about the way that the kids were strangled and cut and the whole thing” (R. Winslow, personal communication, November 12, 2010). Rob’s feelings of rage were a part of his mourning process. Rob was not the only one who felt that anger and rage. Lisa too discussed her rage about the murders: “you know you don’t want it to happen to anyone, but why them? Not Stella... I didn’t want it to be any other kid...but not Stella...to hear those words was like a knife in the heart” (L. Powers, personal communication, December 15, 2010).

Rage was not the only feeling that came along with the sadness at the time. Daniela talked openly about her fear, largely because the killers were not immediately apprehended: “I stopped running in the morning because I was afraid... everybody was fearful, I mean until they were caught. It was just until I got home everyone would stand in my driveway, and then after they would go home and lock it. I mean that was it” (D. Jacobs, personal communication, November 20, 2010). Daniela was not the only one who was scared. Kirsten recollected the fear that gripped her family, and how it manifested in her husband. She said that he had a very hard time: “when the Harveys were killed...he kept putting up lights and motion detectors around our house and putting things in every window, that whole first week (my husband) never slept. And was just protecting our

home, walking around putting baseball bats by every door,” (K. Perkinson, personal communication, January 16, 2011).

Kirsten also made observations about the fears that she saw in other people’s children: “There were a lot of children who were terrified, who couldn’t sleep at night because they heard such scary tales. They had sleep disturbances for years. I know (one child) slept on the floor for years after that happened and still does.” (K. Perkinson, personal communication, January 16, 2011). Angie discussed the fear that overwhelmed the students who came to her: “Lots of children were scared; they were scared it would happen to them” (A. Meccia, personal communication, December 18, 2010). Faithe discussed the fear that took over her daughter, a classmate of Stella’s: “it really brought up a lot of fear in her a lot of fear of death, she won’t stay in the house by herself ... She felt like if that could happen to her friend that it could happen to her. I think a lot of those little girls really felt that” (F. Mickens, personal communication, November 10, 2010).

Rage and fear were feelings that accompanied the feelings of grief and loss. These feelings were present in enough people that they could have been more fully addressed at the time. The implications of addressing these feelings are that people would have to admit to having them at the time, and then perhaps take some action, which might help to release these feelings. The Amish community in Pennsylvania, for example, tore their school down before rebuilding it after their school-related tragedy (Roncki, 2007). This release served to help the Amish families process their grief. These types of activities would have to be brainstormed and well conceived before doing them. Processing rage through brainstorming and deciding on a way to let out the rage that individuals might be feeling would involve a great deal more talking about death.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I presented the four significant findings from my analysis of the interviews of the participants from William Fox Elementary School. These four sections were: Information, Mourning, Healing Techniques, and Injustices. In each section, after presenting the findings, I included a discussion based on my data analysis and relevant literature. I presented the themes, which emerged in the interviews in this chapter and at the same time discussed the findings. I organized this chapter into four common themes that transpired from the interviews with the participants.

Chapter Five Significance of Study

In this section, I followed a similar organizational structure from chapter four, rather than organizing based on my original research questions. I have made this decision because, the findings are based on what the participants felt was important to share, and not just what I asked. Some of the findings addressed more than one research question, and I have indicated that in the significance of each finding.

This section is broken down into the following categories: Information, Mourning, Healing Techniques, and Injustices. In each section, I briefly reiterated the major findings, discussed the significance of the findings for me personally, and then elaborated on how these findings might be significant for teachers and art teachers in general.

Significance: Information

In our school community, when tragedy occurred, information became key. The speed at which information was given to members of the community became very important. What was told to the students is very important. Who gave the information to individuals and what was said also became weighty. All of these factors affected the perceptions of the participants at William Fox Elementary.

Delivering information to adults: speed.

The findings on the dispersal of information to adults were significant for a number of reasons. The majority of the participants felt frustrated about not being informed quickly enough. The literature on Virginia Tech reflected this same critique (Rikleen, 2007) and many schools have created an email list serve, and mass text service as a result the critiques following Virginia Tech. Daniela's interview reflected that she was very intentional in informing people quickly and efficiently, but the other participant interviews reflected that some participants found out in other ways before being informed by Daniela.

These findings were significant for me personally because had we had a phone tree, a text service, or an email listserv at the time, a majority of people could have found out about the tragedy in the same way at the same time. This immediacy would have had a dual purpose. Not only would everyone have been informed at the same time in the same way, but also this would have taken the burden off of a few individuals as well. Although this would have depersonalized the delivery of the information, what was lost in personalization may be made up for in the speed of delivery. When I imagined Daniela, and Angie, and everyone else who had to make those phone calls having to recounting the story and events thirty plus times, it is clear that this was an emotionally draining process for a person who was mourning as well, and in shock. Informing thirty plus people in one night might require several breaks, just to be able to continue emotionally. Those breaks alone would have made the process take longer than might be beneficial to other people in the community who also needed to be informed.

These findings were significant for other communities because it was clear both from the experiences of William Fox Elementary and from the literature (Mears, 2008;

Rikleem, 2007) that a phone tree, a text service, and or an email listserv would have been incredibly helpful in times of tragedy. This is something that would have been beneficial for any community to create before a tragedy occurs to get information out as quickly as possible and possibly further, to let the community know how the school plans to address a tragedy.

The findings on informing the adult community were in agreement with the literature on the delivery of information during a tragedy in a school setting. When faced with the prospect of informing young children, however, things became slightly less clear, and less obvious.

Delivering information to children: editing and the child information network.

The findings on the dispersal of information to children are also significant for a number of reasons. As a whole, adults at William Fox Elementary School edited the information that was given to children. Some age groups were told nothing at all, but even the older students who were informed got a modified version of the facts, and this modified version of the facts varied from teacher to teacher. If as educators we had a primary job, it had to be the one implied in the title—to educate. For me, this job of educating was a total one, and was in line with Paulo Freire’s and bell hook’s concepts of education. Teachers were co-investigating and co-learning and co-teaching with students. Editing information from students was not in keeping with Freire’s and hook’s ideas. Freire and hooks are both critical theorists, and see education as co-constructed with students (Freire; 1974, hooks; 1994). Our job was not just to educate our students on spelling, art, math, music, and science, but also how to become functional members of

society. The decision to edit what the students were told, for me, was a decision based largely on wanting to hide the sometimes ugly realities of the world from students, to paint a more beautiful, but fictitious, version of the world. This concept was not in line with a constructivist model of education. Freire (1974) offered,

Through dialogue, the teacher-of-the-students and the students-of-the-teacher cease to exist and a new term emerges: teacher-student with students-teachers. The teacher is no longer merely the one who teaches, but one who is himself taught in dialogue with the students, who in turn while being taught also teach. (p. 67)

The editing that the adult community at William Fox Elementary did had three significant implications for me personally. 1. Based on Kirsten's interview, it gave the students a mistrust of the adults in the school. 2. Based on Pat's interview, it undermined the teachable moments implied in a tragedy like this. 3. Based on Lisa's interview, it played a role in a murmuring racial divide. The racial divide I will discuss more fully in the section about race. The other two implications I will elaborate on here.

When students developed a mistrust of teachers and adults, a breakdown occurred in whom they turn to for learning what mattered to them. By looking to other sources, other students, the newspaper, or television, students became isolated in their discovery of the world around them. They stopped looking to teachers and adults to assist them to be as Freire (1974) described "critical co-investigators with the teacher" (p. 68). They ceased to work with teachers to contextualize, make sense of things, or sort the good information from the bad. During this tragedy, what mattered to students were the facts, and how to integrate those facts into a developing and functional world. In my view, it

was the role of a teacher to assist in that process. The findings about children and information supported my view.

When the participants made the decision to edit the facts rather than look at the situation as a teachable moment, students were pushed to learn falsehoods because they were easier to address for the teachers. Freire (1974) said that people “cannot enter the struggle as objects in order later to become men” (p. 55). I would argue that the same is true in reverse. Students could not enter their education believing they had a role in it, and then acquiesce when they were asked to give up that role. It didn’t happen. The sadness that came from a house fire was simpler to address for a teacher than the complexity of a murder of an affluent Caucasian family by two African American ex-convicts. That one sentence description of the event had so much to unpack in it that some members of the community just changed it. This tragedy was a hard reality to integrate and process for all of the participants, but it remained a reality worth investigating. As Freire (1974) said, “apart from inquiry, apart from the praxis, men cannot be truly human”(p. 58). It should be through investigation that we learn, not just the easy palatable things, but also the difficult and harsh realities of the world.

If we teachers had removed ourselves a little, and tried to teach around what happened, maybe we could have addressed race and class and how they affect the world. Maybe we as teachers could have addressed why someone would choose to be a law-abiding citizen when not everyone is. There were a lot of questions that could have been addressed if the school had decided to address them. Instead, participants altered the facts, and students looked to each other for answers, for good or for bad.

The decision to edit what teachers told students had the effect of empowering the child information network (or possibly creating it). Students, mindful that adults were editing what they told them, began looking to each other for more accurate information. They looked to the news, the Internet, and to the newspaper as well as other sources to acquire more information and share it with other students.

This is significant for teachers in general because it seemed to the participants at the time, easier and safer to alter facts. But the level of ability in students in third grade and above was too high to modify information that was readily available and accurate in other places. They sought it out, largely as teachers have taught them to do. They found it. It seems therefore that editing should not really be a viable option.

Mourning

Participants made a variety of choices about mourning based on their comfort level and belief about a teacher's role in the life of his/her students. Some participants mourned privately to appear strong. A few participants mourned publicly to teach their students how to mourn. Participants also had a variety of opinions on the best way to handle individual student mourning. Some participants felt a student mourning openly should remain in the classroom and work through it there, with the help of their peers. Other participants thought that openly mourning students should be removed from the classroom to mourn privately elsewhere and prevent other students from getting upset.

Private mourning: concealing feelings.

Some participants hid their grief and mourning from their students. They purported that they believed strength and stoicism was the role of the teacher, not modeling mourning.

The findings on teaching mourning were significant in a number of ways. It was fascinating to learn that the decision-making power was very largely, if not entirely, in our hands as a school. I initially thought before beginning this study that there were some official Richmond public schools policies about grieving and how to handle tragedy. I believed that there was a policy book in some dusty room that had not been examined in a very long time and required reworking for a more modern society. That false concept brought about my initial interests in this topic.

However, after discovering that William Fox Elementary School had so much control over what happened, over how we grieved, over what we said to each other and students, that there was no real dictum, only the perceived rules of society which everyone had all internalized, things looked very different. The question was no longer, did William Fox Elementary follow the policies that were laid out for the school, and did they agree with those policies. The question became one of reflective practice, as Freire (1974) described: “This discovery cannot be purely intellectual but must involve action; nor can it be limited to mere activism, but must include serious reflection: only then will it be praxis” (p. 52). What did each teacher and administrator do, and were they satisfied with what they did? Did they feel that the choices they made were the best ones for the students, or would they do something differently if this were to happen again?

Upon reviewing all of the data I collected about the decisions William Fox Elementary participants made, or did not make (which is a decision in and of itself) I came to a conclusion. The systems that keep teachers and community members from acting on their best instincts needs to be examined. Why did William Fox Elementary participants second-guess themselves? Why did some of them pretend nothing had

changed, and some of them mourn openly? Which of these choices made participants reflect back in a positive way, and which of these choices left them with regret? The interviews indicate that those teachers who took an active role in teaching a type of grieving process may have had a more difficult time addressing the tragedy with their students but had little criticism of themselves retroactively, and little criticism of the administration. The tone of their interviews was different. They spoke with confidence. They spoke without self-deprecation. Pat for example, expressed pride in the decisions she ultimately made about how to handle this tragedy with her students. Lisa, too, spoke with sadness, but confidence about how she handled the tragedy. These two participants were comfortable with the way they handled themselves. Faithe, on the other hand spoke with regret and criticism about not having been told more clearly what to do. Taking on that power and making those teaching decisions, although frustrating and difficult for some participants was ultimately rewarding for them as well.

Public mourning and perceptions of child mourning

A traumatic situation like this one could have been handled many different ways, because it was largely our choice how to handle it. The wished-for meeting at the beginning of the mourning process at William Fox Elementary could have been treated not just as an information session from the administration and police to the parents, but also as a brainstorming session on the best ways to handle this—to co-construct our future reality. The feeling that several teachers had that they needed approval and permission seems to be more of an internalized fear of embracing the power that we hold as teachers to teach what we hope is best. I do not know that this internalized belief could be changed by the simple act of a principal saying ‘do what you think is best’ or if as a

group we could have quickly decided on a set of guiding principles. It is important to note, however, that power ultimately belonged to the teachers, and some participants embraced and accepted it, and some did not. Freire (1974) suggested that this embracing of personal power, “cannot be carried out in isolation or individualism, but only in fellowship and solidarity” (p. 73).

Healing Techniques

Whether or not participants mourned publicly or privately, all of the participants acknowledged that it was the school’s role to assist students in mourning and working through their grief. Some participants believed that it was their job to facilitate mourning, and some participants thought it was the job of *other* teachers and members of the William Fox Elementary community to facilitate that process.

How William Fox Elementary healed and the desire for solidarity

There were three major attempts to teach around healing and mourning that the participants discussed at William Fox Elementary. Other healing techniques such as the butterfly release, the planting of the memorial garden, and the gift of blankets to Stella Harvey’s third grade class were implemented, but not by the participants themselves. Each one of these healing techniques arose from a different place. Pat’s technique of pampering the students while at the same time helping other people arose from a large financial gift from the community. Lisa’s memorial bench arose from her own belief that making art helps children process their grief. Some healing actions were imagined retrospectively through honest critique of what William Fox Elementary tried. Kirsten proposed that William Fox should have created a child-centered funeral, which happened

in a timely manner and offered closure for students. Faithe suggested that William Fox Elementary should have worn red ribbons in an act of solidarity.

These healing techniques, some acted upon, some wished-for, are significant to other schools going through something similar because William Fox Elementary was an example of both what to do, and what not to do. Pat's reflections after taking her students to Ronald McDonald house are all positive. She experienced a great deal of discomfort and agitation taking on the role of making the decisions that led her to take them on that walk, but felt very good about what she did after the fact. Pat was comfortable in her traditional way of teaching. This tragedy presented a dual problem of never having taught mourning before, and having no model to work from. This problem is reminiscent of what Freire (1974) described as freedom in teaching; "freedom to create and to construct, to wonder and to venture. Such freedom requires that the individual be active and responsible, not a slave or a well fed cog in a machine" (p. 55). Pat's discomfort with taking on the responsibility of deciding how to model mourning and healing could be seen as a discomfort in making the transition from a banking method of teaching to a problem-posing method. According to Freire (1974), "Banking education resists dialogue; problem-posing education regards dialogue as indispensable to the act of cognition which unveils reality" (p. 71).

Lisa, on reflecting back on her decisions, felt confident that the memorial bench was a good choice to help her students. Lisa had no regrets about her actions. She described them as very student-centered, the students made all but the initial decision to make a bench. This is similar to what Freire (1974) described problem-posing education. "In problem-posing education, men develop their power to perceive critically the way

they exist in the world with which and in which they find themselves; they come to see the world not as a static reality, but as a reality in process, in transformation” (p. 71). Kirsten did not agree with the school’s choice not to have a funeral, and suggested many ways that other schools might model a funeral after what the Fox community learned from the Harvey tragedy. For Kirsten the students needed and did not get the reality enforcement of a funeral. For her, the funeral would have been a fact made into action. This action/fact would have changed the reality of many students in her opinion, as Freire (1974) said: “There is no true word that is not at the same time a praxis. Thus, to speak a true word is to transform the world” (p. 75). Faithe, wishing for solidarity proposed that a school could wear ribbons. Any of these ideas, the ones William Fox Elementary actually used, as well as the ones that participants wished for would be viable options for another school going through a similar tragedy.

Injustices

A school community has its share of difficulties with one another, just as a family does. Without a unifying meeting or support structure, some participants felt attacked by others in the community for their best attempts at handling the situation. Additionally, race and socio-economic background of the Harvey family affected the perceptions of some members of the community. Finally it was not just grief and mourning that the participants experienced at William Fox Elementary, but also rage and fear.

Accusations.

The findings about accusations were significant because it seems they might have been avoidable. These accusations and critiques from one teacher to another might have been avoided had measures been taken to create solidarity among the staff. The idea of

the preliminary meeting, or the suggestion of wearing ribbons to remind the community that everyone was on the same side, and that kindness might be a better choice could have created a more supportive environment for those participants who put themselves out there to be critiqued. bell hooks (1994) described solidarity in a school environment “our solidarity must be affirmed by shared belief in a spirit of intellectual openness that celebrates diversity, welcomes dissent, and rejoices in collective dedication to truth” (p. 33).

This finding is significant for other schools going through something similar because maybe the decision about what action might best show or create solidarity is something that the students could be empowered to do also. A school doing nothing is not neutral, and does not lead to solidarity. This choice to do nothing comes from a fear of choosing the wrong thing, but as bell hooks (1994) said, “no education is politically neutral” (p. 37), and doing nothing is a political act, too. What if the students were presented with the question in art class, or music class, or another class: How could our school show solidarity with one another? What was a symbolic action that we could have taken to support one another? I think students would benefit from working through that problem just as they benefited from working through what should go on the Harvey memorial bench.

Race and class.

The findings related to race and class leave a great deal unsaid. Lisa was the only participant who spoke at length about what questions students presented about race and class at the time. If other teachers or participants noticed that race and wealth was being discussed, they did not mention it. Kirsten brought up race as a curiosity for some

members of the community but did not address it any further. Perhaps this is a finding in and of itself. Why was William Fox Elementary School so uncomfortable addressing issues of race and class with students if it was being brought up by them? Wasn't it a viable educational topic? Could it be that the participants themselves were unwilling or unable to speak about race, class, and wealth and the way it played into this tragedy? hooks (2003) said, "To build community requires vigilant awareness of the work we must continually do to undermine all the socialization that leads us to behave in ways that perpetuate domination" (p. 36). Race and class are entities that affect our culture and our school system, and affected some people's perceptions of this tragedy. Lisa was the only participant who recalled addressing any of the questions that students had about race and class and what role they had in this tragedy. hooks (2003) quoted Parker Palmer as saying, "The best thing for being sad is to learn something. That is the only thing that never fails...Learn why the world wags and what wags it" (p. 43). The students that Lisa spoke about were wrestling with their own questions about death. Not the sadness that some students were feeling about losing this particular family, but about why some deaths appear more important than others, and further why some lives do. These are important questions that this tragedy brought up for some students. Learning that the participants avoided them or largely denied a space for the questions to linger deserves attention in times of tragedy.

This finding has significance for other schools that might go through something similar, because race, class and socio-economic background are not issues that are specific to William Fox Elementary. They are social issues everywhere. These are "problem-posing" (Freire, 1974, p. 66) issues, like the solidarity question, that could be

presented to students for them to work through while teachers facilitate rather than hide from them.

Fear and rage.

The findings suggest that participants experienced a wide variety of emotions. It was not just grief and mourning that needed to be processed and addressed by the school. Participants referred to both rage and fear as common feelings that they experienced at the time of the tragedy and well beyond it.

These two emotions are significant to the study because addressing fear and rage might be even more difficult than addressing mourning. Rage in particular makes people very uncomfortable, but it is a feeling brought up by tragedy. How do we process this? How do we work through it? Is admitting shared vulnerability and creating safe spaces for such vulnerability a step in the right direction? Freire said, “ Students, as they are increasingly posed with problems relating to themselves in the world and with the world, will feel increasingly challenged and obliged to respond to that challenge” (p. 68). In other words, if students felt safe in their environment to openly discuss problems that they were having, they will also desire to come up with creative ways to address those issues. They will imagine ways to process their rage that teachers have not considered, and the teacher will be there as a guide to assist in that learning.

Limitations of the Study

In this section, I returned to my original research questions to address their limitations. As a researcher I sought to understand only the following three research questions: 1) What were the official policies and protocols that went into effect at William Fox Elementary School after the murder of the Harvey family in January of

2006? 2) What were the experiences of the staff and parents at William Fox Elementary School after the murder of the Harvey family? 3) What critiques and or suggestions did the employees and parents have of the official policies or protocols, which were carried out after the murder of the Harvey family? The limitations of my study are outlined in this section.

Limitation 1: Limited school view.

When I discovered that there were no official policies, I had to modify my concept of what happened at William Fox Elementary. With no official policies or protocols, the question changed to what did the school do, and how did the participants feel about what they did after the fact. The first limitation of the study was that it did not examine the way that any high schools or middle schools have handled tragedy, and did not examine how other elementary schools besides William Fox Elementary School have handled tragedy. A comparison between schools and grade levels was not done. Only William Fox Elementary was examined.

Limitation 2: Number of community participants.

A second limitation of the study was that this study only included interviews with four teachers, one parent, one administrator and one guidance counselor. It did not include interviews with every parent in the third grade or every teacher at William Fox Elementary School in 2006. Some teachers who would have been good participants for this case study left the school or became inaccessible for other reasons. Not every member of the staff was interviewed.

Limitation 3: Larger community.

A third limitation of the study was that it did not include interviews with people from the community who did not personally know Stella or the Harvey family. Some examples of people who might have been good subjects but did not know the family or Stella Harvey were: the superintendent, the vice superintendent, parents from other grade levels besides third, and some of the clergy or police who participated in the support session for parents on the first day back.

Limitation 4: My own role.

Another limitation of the study was that I, as the only researcher of the study, worked at William Fox Elementary School in 2006, creating bias with the subject matter of the study, and also in the research questions. Having spent a good deal of time thinking about the way this tragedy was handled from my own perspective, and having written an article on this tragedy previously, I found that I was biased in favor of public mourning. I made attempts to compensate for these biases by including in the protocol, the addendum that the participant could offer other commentary, questions, and ideas, which could be included in the findings. Additionally, selecting multiple teachers, a parent, the guidance counselor, and the principal as participants varied the perspectives included through the interviews.

Future Research

Although three research questions were explored in this case study, asking research questions and finding answers led ultimately to more and further interesting possibilities for future research questions. The research completed in this case study prompt several questions for future researchers to attempt to answer.

Future research area 1: Richmond Public Schools upper management policies and protocols.

One participant in the study discussed the difficulty in knowing what to do when the upper management in Richmond Public Schools she called for help were unavailable. This leaves some possible future research questions: What was the disconnect between the Richmond Public Schools superintendent, vice superintendent and principal in 2006? Why were there not published recommendations for handling school loss that could be made available to the administration at William Fox Elementary in 2006? Does this disconnect still exist or does Richmond Public Schools have a policy on tragedy now?

Future research area 2: Accessible resources.

The literature suggests that there are well-researched handbooks on student grief and ways to address it. This literature was unaccessed by any of the participants from William Fox Elementary. This presents the future research question of: How does access to and use of published materials pertaining to assisting at a time of tragedy in a public school shape the outcomes of the tragedy for the affected community? Where should these resources be housed and what is the best way to facilitate their access and communicate their availability in a time of need?

Future research area 3: William Fox Elementary's perspective.

Suggestions were made by the participants in this study about better ways to handle tragedy. Further research could be done on what those suggestions might look like were they implemented. A series of future research questions around this topic might be: If the suggestion of a team meeting lending support, solidarity, and encouragement to teachers in however they choose to handle teaching after a tragedy occurs, how does that

change what happens in the school? What becomes the priority? Are these priorities clear at all times or only during times of crisis? What kind of leadership (administrative, teacher, parent, student) is important for setting priorities for support and solidarity? Do more teachers mourn openly? What other models for mourning are created? What does a funeral in a school designed to support child grieving look like? Is it effective? What are the critiques of funerals that have occurred in schools in the past if they exist?

Future research area 4: Comparing schools.

The Harvey murders were not the first deaths to affect a public school in Richmond. According to the Associated Press (2007), in 2006 there were 81 murders in Richmond (p. 1). It would be interesting in the future to compare and contrast William Fox Elementary School's handling of tragedy with another school in Richmond. A research question in that area might be: In what ways did William Fox Elementary differ from other Richmond Public Schools when a tragedy occurred?

Future research area 5: Student input.

Given the limitations presented by the IRB, no students were interviewed by this researcher. Another possible area of future research might be around student thought. For example: What are the critiques of the students in the 3rd grade class of 2006 at William Fox Elementary of the way that the Harvey family death was handled?

Future research area 6: Embracing power.

Three of the staff participants saw themselves in control of what decisions they made during this tragedy, and two wanted to be told what to do. It would be interesting to see future research on ways in which teachers can learn to embrace their power to make decisions, or what stops them from doing that.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study was significant in a number of ways. The participants at William Fox Elementary shared a great deal of information and reflection on the aftermath of the Harvey tragedy in 2006. This reflection could be beneficial for other schools that experience a tragedy of their own and wish to benefit from William Fox Elementary School's successes and failures.

As reflected in the literature on tragedy in a school setting, the speed and delivery of information at William Fox Elementary was important. The participants desired getting the information to as many members of the community as quickly as possible. The delivery of information did not occur quickly enough for all participants to receive it from the school administration. This problem could be eliminated in the future by the proactive implementation of a texting service, an email list serve, or a working and functional phone tree.

Participants edited the facts of the events for students because they wanted to protect them from the facts. They did not want the students traumatized. According to Kirsten, the students sensed that some information was being kept from them and did research on their own. They discovered a variety of things from the newspaper, television, and each other. Editing for the students did not stop them from learning the facts of the case, it just changed where the students looked for information.

Participants varied in their decisions to mourn privately or publicly. Those participants who opted to mourn privately did so out of a belief that teachers should remain strong for their students and not show grief. They also felt bound by the rule of separation of church and state and did not feel comfortable expressing their beliefs to the

students about death. Participants who mourned openly in front of their students were individuals who did not feel bound by the same rules as other teachers. The Art Explosions teacher, who was paid by the PTA, and the guidance counselor, who saw her role as modeling emotions for students, were the two participants who modeled public mourning.

The participants at William Fox Elementary attempted several healing actions. Participants suggested other healing actions retrospectively. Pat took her students to the toy store owned by the Harvey family and directed them to buy a few toys for themselves and several for the Ronald McDonald house in order to teach them that service to others helps lessen grief. Lisa assisted students in creating a memorial bench dedicated to the Harvey family. Her students made all but the first few decisions about what it would look like and how to create it. She showed them how to use art as a tool for moving through grief. Kirsten suggested a child-centered funeral done in a timely manner to facilitate closure. Faithe suggested wearing ribbons as an act of solidarity. Any of these tools for healing would benefit another school going through a tragedy of their own.

Harsh teacher critiques, race, rage and fear were all uncomfortable factors in this tragedy for the participants at William Fox Elementary. Rob described being attacked verbally by another teacher. An intentional act of solidarity might avoid this happening somewhere else. Race and socio-economics came up for some students, but were not addressed to a high degree by any of the participants at the time. Rage and fear were emotions that came up for many participants and were largely unaddressed. Another school would be better served to address these uncomfortable topics head on in order to avoid frustration on top of grief.

This thesis sought to answer three research questions: 1) What were the official policies and protocols that went into effect at William Fox Elementary School after the murder of the Harvey family in January of 2006? 2) What were the experiences of the staff and parents at William Fox Elementary School after the murder of the Harvey family? 3) What critiques and or suggestions did the employees and parents have of the official policies or protocols, which were carried out after the murder of the Harvey family?

Because there were no official policies for William Fox Elementary, the focus of the study shifted to one of reflective practice and self-critique. Participants wished for solidarity. They sometimes felt uncomfortable making decisions, but ultimately had fewer critiques of themselves retrospectively when they embraced their own power over making decisions about how to handle and address mourning and healing. The reflective practice facilitated through this study will have ramifications for me and potentially for other schools that experience tragedy in the future.

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