Drawing sadness: what are young children telling us?

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ABSTRACT

This article reports on the emotional factors that contribute to children's sadness. As teachers are the most appropriate caregivers to detect problems and to address the impact of these challenges, 30 teachers asked 224 children (N=224) to draw and describe their experiences of sadness. From these drawings, two distinctive themes emerged, namely violence mostly relating to bullying, and experiences of loss. This article provides empirically derived insights which are important in the understanding of young children's emotional and social needs within the broader society and have implications for teacher training curricula at higher education institutions. Student teachers need to be made aware of the factors that impact on the child's emotional well-being. Teachers should also be equipped to support and deal with these adversities in a school situation. Future research studies relating to children's experiences of violence and loss should be conducted in more diverse contexts where ethnicity and socio-economic backgrounds should be considered.

KEYWORDS: Children's experiences; children's drawings; violence; bullying; loss; teachers.

Introduction

South Africa is one of the most violent countries in the world (Burton & Leoschut, 2012) and in addition also has the highest incidence of people living with HIV/AIDS. It is estimated that there are more than six million people in South Africa living with HIV/AIDS, which consequently leaves the country with a large population of orphans (Zissette, 2015, p. 1). The nature and orientation of young children's emotional experiences are therefore significant where these and other social adversities impact children's lives negatively. Andrews, Skinner, and Zuma (2006) point out that children's emotional experiences are often not expressed externally, therefore they remain unnoticed and trauma may be overlooked. This article argues that if teachers do not know what the emotional experiences and needs of learners are, they cannot address nor accommodate these essential needs in the classroom situation.

Objectives of research

This study was undertaken with the following objectives in mind:

. To identify what saddens young children, in other words, pinpointing factors impacting their emotional well-being.

. To include these findings in teacher training curricula in Life Skills education at higher education institutions in South Africa in order for student teachers to be equipped to assist young children in debriefing and processing disturbing events.

Literature and theoretical overview

According to the Bernard Van Leer Foundation (2004, p. 113), 'what happens to children in their first days, months and years of life affects their development, the development of our society and the development of our world'. The challenges which young children are exposed to receive increasing global recognition in various policy documents. In this regard, the World Bank's Systems Approach for Better Education Results – Early Childhood Development (ECD) uses three criteria when measuring countries' prime ECD outcomes: (1) Establishing an enabling environment; (2) implementing it widely and (3) monitoring and assuring quality (SABER Country report, 2012, p. 2). In this article, the focus is on the first condition for optimal childhood development, namely an enabling environment. Mbebeb (2009, p. 9) advises that it is crucial for nations to ensure that a favourable climate is created and sustained where young children can develop into balanced and contributing citizens who will be able to act as 'agents of change with the potential of taking a leading role in tackling Africa's future development challenges'.

The teacher is in the ideal position to establish a space where children can experience safety, sustenance and security. Research increasingly indicates that the pastoral role of the teacher is gaining momentum because of the decline in parental involvement (Hay, 2015; McDevitt & Ormrod, 2007). The subject Life Skills has been introduced in the national school Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement with the aim of 'guiding and preparing learners for life and its possibilities, including equipping learners for meaningful and successful living in a rapidly changing and transforming society' (Department of Basic Education, 2012, p. 9). It is, therefore, clear that the emphasis in Early Childhood Education (ECE) should not only be on academic knowledge; but institutions involved in ECE should also recognize the importance of equipping young children with non-academic knowledge and skills. Joseph and Strain (2003, p. 65) refer to the latter as 'social-emotional curricular programs' and describe these as focusing on 'protective factors and reducing risk factors associated with academic and social problems'. In other words, non-academic knowledge involves survival and coping skills to assist an individual in overcoming specific challenges which may be faced in all dimensions of life.

Numerous empirical studies have been conducted on factors that may impact negatively on child development (Marais & Meier, 2010; Rothstein, 2015), but there is a scarcity in research relating to the experiences of South African children in determining the root causes of emotional distress. In our study, children in the age group 6–9 years were requested to draw anything that made them sad. This article builds on findings from the descriptions and drawings of 224 young children. Two distinctive themes emerged, namely violence and loss.

Violence

Exposure to violence has a cumulative effect on young children and being exposed to trauma can have a harmful impact on mental health (Kaminer, Hardy, Heath, Mosdell, & Bawa, 2013). Furthermore, Hills, Mercy, and Saul (2016) warn that incidences of violence have the potential to have a lasting detrimental effect on the development of the child.

In South Africa, children grow up in a particularly violent society. According to the Institute for Economics and Peace Global Peace Index, South Africa is the eighth most violent country in the world. Lancaster (2013) reports that the homicide rate in South Africa is five times that of the global average. Kaminer et al. (2013, p. 321) assert that 30% of youth living in major metropolitan areas have been victims of violent crimes. The impact of violence goes far beyond physical scars and injuries. Violence has major psychosocial and health consequences for children. Being exposed to these factors can impact on cognitive as well as psycho-social adjustment, resulting in an increased risk of violent and anti-social behaviour. Children who are exposed to violence in their early years are at risk of revictimization or perpetration as they get older (Mathews, Jamieson, Lake, & Smith, 2014, p. 29). Although some researchers believe that young children cannot be held accountable for aggressive and harmful

behaviour due to lack of emotional competencies (Sims-Schouten, 2015), Caravita, Gini, and Pozzoli (2012, p. 456) hold that children as young as three years know if they violate moral rules, as they are capable of emotions such as sympathy and empathy and therefore will be aware if another child is hurt.

It is widely accepted that schools are microcosms of the broader communities in which they are located. For this reason, the social ills prevalent in communities are known to permeate the school environment to various degrees (Burton & Leoschut, 2012, p. 54). Ntuli (2015), in her report on the SA Democratic Teachers Union seminar on violence at schools, asserts that South Africa is ranked second in the world when it comes to violent incidents in schools. In the same vein, a report by Muntingh and Ballard (2012) claims that 75,453 South African children were charged by the police for various crime-related reasons from April 2010 to March 2011.

Benjamin (2005, p. 20) refers to Erikson's stages of psychosocial development when explaining that young children's meaning making, understanding of, and response to the world are determined by significant people such as parents and teachers. In agreement, Brendgen et al. (2013, p. 329) note that 'behavioral modeling, emotional contagion, as well as social comparison processes are stronger when they [children] involve social agents that [they] feel close to'. Moreover, most children are exposed to violence by watching television and other sources of media on a daily basis. The impact of excessive media exposure, particularly television in the case of young children, has also been found to cause poor social skills and problems with peers (Verlinden, Tiemeyer, Veenstra, & Jansen, 2014, p. 158).

According to Dennis and Kelleman (2009), it is only during middle childhood that children develop cognitive skills which enable a regulated emotional response to adverse events. Sims-Schouten (2015, p. 243), therefore, regards the formation of the young child's social competencies as the responsibility of parents, as young children model the social behaviour that they are exposed to. The emotional scarring might be hidden, but how young children retaliate is often manifested in bullying behaviour. Vlachou, Andreou, Botsoglou, and Didaskalou (2011, p. 336) indicate the correlation between bullying and negative parental behaviour and suggest that 'peer victimization is associated with inconsistent, punitive, hostile and/or abusive parenting, high negative expressiveness, or high levels of family conflicts or violence'.

Bullying

Various factors influence the definition of bullying, and this phenomenon can also be delineated on the basis of different developmental phases. Caravita et al. (2012, p. 457), in their research with children in the age group 9–11 years, define bullying as 'an instrumental form of aggression, in which attacking another person is mainly used as a tool to gain or keep a prominent position among peers and obtain higher levels of resource control'. In younger children, bullying manifests in verbal and physical harm, social exclusion and the spreading of rumours (Vlachou et al., 2011, p. 333). Ey, Taddeo, and Spears (2015) also mention the increasing incidence of cyberbullying in young children, and report on a European project which found that 31% of children between the ages of 6 and 14 had encountered cyberbullying.

Peer victimization

Good peer relations have a direct impact on the child's self-concept. To illustrate, Haridhan (2012) reports that apart from parental acceptance, positive affect friendship proved to have the highest outcome on children's subjective well-being as it promotes a sense of belonging. Being a victim of bullying causes anxiety, depression, low self-esteem and stress (Brendgen et al., 2013; Gourneau, 2012, p. 118; Verlinden et al., 2014). Abdirahman, Fleming, and Jacobsen (2013) associate negative school experiences (such as social marginalization, rejection by peers and low self-esteem) as consequences of being bullied.

Traditionally, it was believed that young children do not have the capacity to experience grief as they do not understand the concept of death, and also because the conventional expression of grief cannot be observed (Schoen, Burgoyne, & Schoen, 2004). Current research (Wiseman, 2013; Wolfelt, 2001) indicates the ability of children to experience sadness and loss, but agrees that experiences of grief are very difficult to detect, as these manifest in different ways and in many cases are not expressed externally, therefore often remaining unnoticed (Andrews et al., 2006). In this regard, Doka (2002) has coined the term 'disenfranchised grief' in order to explain the experience of loss that is not expressed externally and therefore not acknowledged. Dyregrov and Dyregrov (2013, p. 296) also use concepts such as 'inhibited grief', 'grief with delayed onset', 'masked grief' and 'suppression of grief' to explain how children experience grief. Steele and Kuban (2013, p. 68) explain that trauma is experienced in 'implicit memory' which is situated in the right hemisphere of the brain, where there is no 'reason or language'. This implies that words cannot express nor communicate the experiences of the griever. Horn (2014, p. 51) furthermore distinguishes between grief as an inner experience and mourning, which is the 'outward reaction a person expresses while adapting to death'.

Dyregrov (2008) maintains that a child's perception of and response to death depend on the level of understanding and maturity (age), while Wiseman (2013) adds the role of the child's sociocultural context in the experience of loss, which in turn informs, according to Cohen, Mannarino, and Deblinger (2006), different levels of grief. Machajewski and Kronk (2013, p. 443) agree and furthermore assert that 'this journey through grief is intertwined within the developmental stage of the child, who does not have the coping strategies or life experiences of an adult mourner'. Bradbury (2004, p. 101) indicates the connection between cognition and emotion when maintaining that:

> to understand children and their interactions with death in a comprehensive and responsible way, it is necessary to pay attention to their developmental level, but development is not merely a cognitive affair, rather it involves emotions, behaviours and values as well.

Piaget (1978) and Erikson (1980) are the two most well-known theorists who described the child's development in various domains. When trying to fathom how the child understands death cognitively, the concrete-operational stage of Piaget has relevance for this study. At this level, the child has the ability for logical thinking and multiple aspects of a situation can be considered (Papalie, Gross, & Feldman, 2003, p. 266). Therefore, the child is able to reason rationally about concrete features of the world, and is capable of understanding that death is irreversible. Siegler, DeLoache, and Eisenberg (2010) conclude that consequently children at this age are capable to experience grief, as death is understood to be inevitable and unavoidable to all living things.

In understanding how the child develops emotionally and socially, Erikson (1980) proposed eight stages, each characterized by a crisis. According to Erikson (as quoted in Santrock, 2010, 24), 'the more successful the individual resolves the crisis, the healthier his or her development will be'. His fourth stage, Industry versus Inferiority, has relevance. Erikson (as quoted in Santrock, 2010) observed that the child realizes that he/she will get approval by producing things (Industry); therefore, all energy is now focused on mastering knowledge and skills. This stage can, therefore, be characterized by a learning surge. Should the child not succeed in acquiring these skills or knowledge, the child may experience feelings of inferiority. The child needs an adult to assist and support in the acquisition of these skills, thereby overcoming feelings of inferiority. If the child loses a parent or someone significant the crisis may sway towards inferiority, implying that the loss will impact negatively on the child for the rest of his/her life (Siegler et al., 2010, p. 349). Machajewski and Kronk (2013, p. 447) elaborate by arguing that if the child experiences loss at this age, it implies that he/she does not conform to the norm anymore and the loss may cause the child to feel inferior. McClatchey and Vonk (2009, p. 307) reiterate that the child's own well-being is foremost at this stage, and the loss of a care giver could cause intense fear and feelings of helplessness. In this regard, Horn (2014, p. 52) views grief as a 'collective activity', which

means that the loss of a significant adult in a child's life does not only involve coping with grief for that person, but 'a child has the added experience of losing the constitution of all structure that wove an identity for them'. Dyregrov and Dyregrov (2013, p. 296) conclude that although grief manifests itself differently by various age levels, few studies provide accurate descriptions of such differences. 'It's also hard to put them in a "box" of a diagnosis, when grief is so personal and individual' (Dyregrov & Dyregrov, 2013, p. 298).

Through this study, the researchers hope to give a voice to young South African children. By asking the children to draw their understanding of the emotion 'sadness', the researchers wanted to gain a deeper understanding of the everyday experiences of young South African children. The study is, therefore, situated within a social constructivist paradigm which holds that reality can only be accessed through social constructions such as language, consciousness and shared meaning (in this case drawing) and that 'human life can only be understood from within' (Nieuwenhuis, 2007, p. 59).

Young children and drawing

Research conducted over the past few years has focused on utilizing children's drawings as valuable data as well as an important diagnostic tool. Researchers (Hall, 2010; Steele & Kuban, 2013) postulate that drawings may present a safe vehicle for children to express what talk alone cannot express. Furthermore, most children experience drawing as a spontaneous activity that allows expression of desires as well as fears (Hawkins, 2002).

Drawings can assist children to 'elaborate on elements of their experiences' (Steele & Kuban, 2013, p. 81), as young children often do not have the verbal ability to express their emotions. In this regard, Malchiodi (1998) asserts that children's drawings are thought to reflect their inner worlds, depicting various feelings of both conscious and unconscious meaning and relating information concerning psychological status and interpersonal style. Although children may use drawing to explore, to solve problems or simply to give visual form to ideas and observations, the overall consensus is that art expressions are uniquely personal statements.

Therefore, one can argue that drawing has been undeniably recognized as one of the most important ways that children express themselves, and has been repeatedly linked to the expression of personality and emotions. As the participants in this study were young children, aged 6–9, we deemed drawings as the most suitable instrument to give information-rich data on what they regard as emotionally taxing.

Research methodology

This study was situated within the interpretive paradigm, as it allows for understanding 'human meanings and their behaviour, without intervening in the process' (Mills, Durepos, & Wiebe, 2010, p. 487). According to Williamson (2006, p. 84), the interpretivist paradigm refers to knowledge being constructed from observations that are made in a real and natural setting, and therefore this paradigm was especially well-suited to this study as children were requested to draw pictures in a familiar setting namely the classroom environment. The children in this study were therefore free to construct meaning through the medium of drawing, without the researcher intervening in the process (Mills et al., p. 487). After they completed their drawings, they told their stories in the familiar setting of the classroom to the teacher (fieldworker), a person they knew well.

For the purpose of this research, 30 fieldworkers, who are ECE teachers, requested the children in their own classes to make drawings of things that made them sad. As mentioned before, these teachers have already established a relationship of trust with the children. The children could therefore draw pictures in the safety of their own classrooms, and also get the opportunity to discuss the drawings with their teachers. At the time of the study, the children were between the ages of six and nine years. The research was conducted at 30 randomly selected private and government schools in the Gauteng region

of South Africa. The schools were located in urban settings and the participants came from diverse cultures, languages and socio-economic backgrounds.

The present study was conducted as part of a larger research project within the field of social sciences and used a descriptive phenomenological approach to explore children's lived experiences of sadness. 'This approach provides a rigorous means for elucidating and describing the psychological essence of a particular phenomenon as it was lived by the subject' (Sadowski & McIntosh, 2015, p. 3). The researchers deemed it important to determine the specific challenges that young South African children are faced with on a daily basis. In line with the interpretivist paradigm, it was also important to determine what these children regarded as sad and challenging situations, to understand their unique perspectives and life worlds. Qualitative content analysis of the findings was done by a psychologist and independently verified by a senior researcher in social sciences. According to Bauer and Gaskell (2000), qualitative content analysis is an explicit procedure for textual analysis in social research and by utilizing this technique, the researchers wanted to reduce the complexity of a collection of drawings and descriptions and use it as a medium of expression (Bauer & Gaskell, 2000). Elo and Kyngäs (2008) describe the aim of qualitative content analysis as a way to attain and condense the broad description of the phenomenon under study. Therefore, this method is focused on identifying categories and themes that can clearly describe the phenomenon. Open and axial coding (Bauer & Gaskell, 2000) was used to determine the themes relevant to the study. The researchers analysed 224 drawings of children between the ages of six and nine years. A small sample of drawings was initially selected to analyse. Important themes and categories were highlighted. A coding system was constructed. The complete sample was analysed using the coding system. Interconnecting categories were established and continuous comparisons were made until saturation was reached. After the analysis process, an independent researcher verified the themes.

The researchers obtained ethical clearance from the University of Pretoria's ethical committee to conduct the research. The clearance involved that informed consent was to be obtained from the principals of the schools, as well as from the parents of the participants. All children were requested to draw pictures, but those who did not want to draw something that makes them sad, could draw anything that they preferred. All interviews were transcribed and observations were noted. All names were replaced by pseudonyms.

Results

When the children in this study were asked to draw and explain things that made them sad, the most significant themes that emerged were related to physical and verbal violence in the form of bullying, as well as experiences of loss.

Physical and verbal violence

A significant number of children drew pictures depicting physical and verbal abuse, mostly at the hands of other children. A number of children also noted verbal and physical abuse by friends and family. The young children often indicated that along with the feelings of sadness, they also felt frustrated, lonely and rejected, as illustrated next.

John, a 7-year-old boy, in a government school (School 7) said the following when asked about his drawing: ' ... children beating up other children by boxing, kicking and pointing'. He was a bystander when this incident took place and it clearly made a vivid impression on him. He drew a picture with vibrant colours of a group of boys who are verbally and physically abusing another child.

To emphasize his feelings and experiences, he added speech bubbles to his drawings depicting verbal abuse and belligerent language. With protruding teeth, the perpetrators demonstrate their upper hand in the situation, and hands and arms attest to physical assault (Figure 1).

Sarah, a 7-year-old girl from a government school (School 14), said the following when asked about things that made her sad: 'People are busy bullying me and I don't like it when they bully me.' The drawing of herself depicts a neat little girl, with hair beautifully tied with a bow. She wears ear rings and a necklace and her whole posture spells out indignation but also isolation. She drew herself bigger than the other children, with tears running down her face and a mouth turned downwards, showing her unhappiness. The other two children in the drawing were presented smaller with their tongues sticking out, as if they were teasing her (Figure 2).

Six-year-old Lily from a government school (School 7) explained that she had a broken heart and that she gets sad when her friends are mean to her and leave her out. She drew herself with big tears streaming down her face, while it is raining outside. Her eyes are shut tightly and her mouth shows clearly that she is distressed. Her arms are stretched out as if she wants to experience nature's tears in solidarity with her sadness. Her outstretched arms can also indicate a cry for help. She was shy and needed constant reassurance from her teacher when completing the task (Figure 3).

More examples of physical and verbal bullying are described in the next section. Eight-year-old Themba from a private school (School 11) drew a picture of another boy punching him for apparently not liking him. He indicated that this really made him feel very unhappy. He mentioned that he did not have any friends in his class. Nine-year-old Kgala from a government school (School 2) mentioned that it was upsetting to her when she had physical fights at school and when the older children bullied her and her friends. Her drawing depicted a child being beaten by a person with a mean expression on his face. She included a drawing of a girl with fists in the air who is trying to intervene in the beating. She mentioned that her father can assist her with her problems, but that he is often away from home due to work commitments. Romy, a six-year-old girl from a private school (School 22), mentioned that it was even upsetting when children laughed at her because of the way she was standing. Her picture was of two boys pointing at her and laughing. She drew herself in the middle of the picture with tears running down her face and feet that are turned in.

Figure 1. John (7 years).

Figure 2. Sarah (7 years).

Figure 3. Lily (6 years).

Loss and bereavement

Another significant theme in this study related to loss and bereavement. Several children drew and talked about the loss of a parent, sibling, grandparent or family member. Some of the children also indicated that the loss of a pet was a significant event in their lives. In the next section a few of the drawings and discussions are given.

Niel, a nine-year-old boy from a government school (School 5), drew a picture of a heap of ground in black, with a big spade also in black. A cross with a red ribbon was drawn at the one end of the grave, with a person standing with his hands in a prayer-like position. Niel offered little information and only said that it is very sad when someone dies and must be buried.

Muja, eight years old from a private school (School 13), drew a picture of a graveyard with the graves of his uncle and cousin who had died a few weeks before the research was conducted. The two significant deaths of his family members were foremost in his mind and the graves stand out from the rest, with a few males standing around. This funeral clearly made a big impression on him and Muja explained that this was very upsetting to him. He also mentioned that he never knew his grandfathers as they had also passed away. He describes the sad event as follows: 'When someone dies and they are dead, because I never got to meet my grandfathers.'

Anni is a nine-year-old girl from a government school (School 2). She drew a grave in the middle with a few people surrounding the grave. Everybody is dressed in black, indicating their grief. The females in the drawing are all crying, while the males' faces depict their sadness. Her grandmother, whom she loved dearly, had passed away. She stated that it is very upsetting when someone passes away.

Examples of other descriptions of loss were, for instance: Ricky (6) from a government school (School 4), who described the loss of his puppy; and Sihle (7) from a government school (School 27), who mentioned that he hated it when someone passes away. He wrote the following on his drawing: 'My uncle is in the box, he passed away.' He also stated that he started feeling better after the funeral. Erin (8), from a private school (School 5), stated that he is sad when someone passes away and turns into an angel. He mentioned that he was very scared of dying and death. The uncertainty of death was particularly troubling to him. Erin had lost his aunt a short while before the research. Helen (8), from a private school (School 5), mentioned that it was upsetting to her when a fellow classmate lost his little brother. She also mentioned that the teacher's mother and her own grandmother's death also touched her deeply. She was confused about the fact that people had to die and also did not understand why 'good' people died.

Discussion

In selecting these pictures, we as researchers attempted to get a representation of various contexts that were portrayed in the drawings. A common feature in the first theme was peer victimization. Levine and Tamburrino (2014, p. 272) report that there are two main categories of bullying, namely physical aggression and relational aggression. Nail, Simon, Bihm, and Beasley (2016, p. 26) claim that boys engage more in overt physical aggression, whereas girls tend to bully in terms of social and relational aggression, which include indirect actions such as exclusion, gossiping, termination of friendships, teasing or spreading of rumours.

Children's experiences of violence (and in this case bullying) are often indirect, as they take on the role of bystanders, although the impact remains damaging on psychosocial development. In the case of John, the details in his picture (namely the facial expressions of the perpetrators, their use of language and their body language) indicate that this incident made a lasting impression on this young boy. Chapin and Brayack (2016, p. 426), in their research on bystander intervention in bullying, report that the main reasons adolescents give for not getting involved revolve around wanting or choosing not to get involved, fear, not knowing what to do, and thinking that intervention is not necessary. Research on

younger children (Sims-Schouten, 2015) indicates that, although children as young as two years know the difference between right and wrong, 'happy victimiser' research explains why bullying is acceptable for younger children. Even though the child may realize that moral and behaviour rules are being transgressed, 'younger children expect a perpetrator to experience positive emotions, such as happiness and pride, by concentrating solely on the personal gains and advantages attained through immoral conduct' (Conway, Gomez-Caribello, & Talwar, 2016, p. 506). In other words, young children do not associate immoral behaviour with emotions like sympathy or guilt, although this mismatch disappears as children get older. Rock and Baird (2012, p. 421) postulate that development in cognitive and socio-emotional skills may also determine the difference in how younger and older children behave during a bullying episode. The fact that Kgala's drawing depicted another girl who tried to intervene may point to Kgala wishing a friend would stand up for her, and she mentioned that her father would have helped her, if he was around.

Six-year-old Lily from a government school (School 7) explained that she had a broken heart and that she gets sad when her friends are mean to her and leave her out. She drew herself bigger than the other children with tears running down her face and a mouth turned downwards, showing her unhappiness. The other two children in the drawing were presented smaller with their tongues sticking out, as if they were teasing her.

Bystander behaviour may play a major contributing role in how children experience their feelings when bullied. A common theme that emerged from the drawings on bullying, was that of loneliness and exclusion. Because the bully often wants an audience (Gourneau, 2012), the victim stands out as the centre of negative attention. Six-year-old Lily mentions that 'she gets sad when her friends are mean to her and leave her out', and drew herself alone outside while sobbing. Sarah (7 years) drew herself very large to indicate the extent of her misery, as well as to emphasize her isolation and unhappiness. Eisenberg, McMorris, Gower, and Chatterjee (2016) highlight emotional distress as an outcome of being bullied in young children. Gourneau (2012, p. 120) refers to Webster who describes bullied children as 'anxious, insecure, afraid of confrontation ... cry or become upset easy, and have a few friends'.

Also interesting to note was the way in which the two girls drew themselves, and this coincides with McClatchey and Vonk (2009) belief that the child's own well-being is foremost at this stage, and also with Bradbury (2004) who maintains that the child at this age is egocentric. Sarah paid much attention to her looks; her hair, dress and demeanour in date that she views herself as noteworthy and that she has a good self-image. Although Lily concentrated more on her distress, her hair was long and beautiful and she wore a purple dress with matching shoes. Research (Eisenberg et al., 2016; Levine & Tamburrino, 2014; Nail et al., 2016) indicates that the self-concept of bullied children is negatively impacted through prolonged exposure to being bullied. Radliff, Wang, and Swearer (2001, p. 1985) postulate that with each incident in which bullying takes place, the victim assesses the situation by why it occurred; what the consequences may be; and lastly, what it says about the self.

Older children (eight and nine years of age) in general drew pictures that related to loss. Various researchers (Bradbury, 2004; Cohen et al., 2006; Dyregrov, 2008; Machajewski & Kronk, 2013; Wiseman, 2013) point to maturity when explaining how children experience loss. This can be attributed to Piaget's theory, which maintains that children in the concrete operational phase are capable of understanding that death is irreversible. It is very clear that Muja (Figure 4) is well aware of the permanence of death and in his broken English he also made the connection to his grandfathers who had passed away. Niel's picture (Figure 5) speaks louder than words. Although this boy did not offer much information, the detail in the black heap of gravel and the single male in a praying position paint a picture of intense personal grief. The words of Terasawa (2014, p. 65) come to mind: 'He lacks a language to identify his emotions and therefore cannot assign meaning to his loss.' Researchers (Andrews et al., 2006; Dent, 2005 ; Dyregrov & Dyregrov, 2013; Schoen et al., 2004) agree that young children often do not express their grief externally, but that grief is an inner experience (Horn, 2014).

Figure 4. Muja (8 years).

The sub-theme of support also emerged. Anni (Figure 6) drew herself together with family members around the grave of her grandmother. Unlike Niel (Figure 5), who drew an isolated figure, Anni's grief is shared by family members, which also implies a support system.

Both Erin (8) and Helen (8) in their narratives indicated that they thought about death. Although there was no indication that these two children had experienced the death of a close relative, the incidents to which they were exposed had triggered some speculation about death. Way (2013, p. 144) claims that when young children face death, 'they are often confronted with the realities and consequences of mortality for the first time' and this can be very distressing. Helen wonders why good people die, indicating her belief that only bad people deserve to die. Erin worries about his own death and is uncertain about what death actually involves. He mentions that when someone dies, the person 'turns into an angel' but clearly, this thought did not alleviate his fears. This issue raises the question as to how adults explain death, and whether they adjust their explanations to the child's developmental age. In this regard, Way (2013, p. 147) argues that 'bereavement
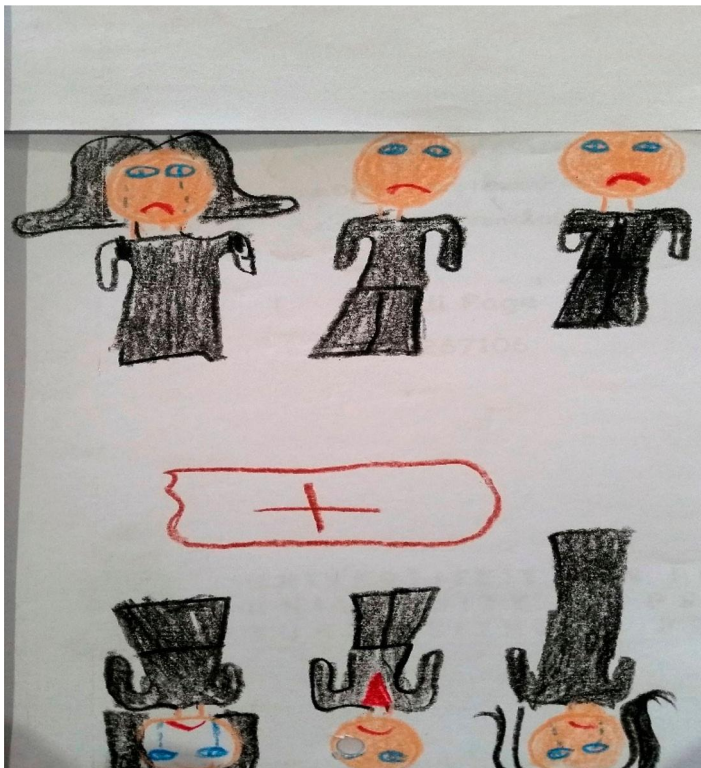

Figure 5. Niel (9 years).

Figure 6. Anni (9 years).

can challenge a person's beliefs and worldview'. Her research on children aged five to eight years led her to conclude that the developmental stage of the child is not the only determinant in how a child understands death, but that the child's worldview is also important. The role of the adult is, therefore, of the utmost importance, not only in offering support, but also in shaping the child's worldview and ensuring that there is no discrepancy between experiences surrounding death and what the child believes. It is also important that educators understand how young children experience loss and bullying in order to adequately support these children and their families.

Limitations

Limitations of this study may relate to the fact that children's responses may differ based on ethnicity and socio-economic status. Field workers were predominantly white female teachers, whereas the majority of children were black. Cultural responses to violence and loss were not taken into account in the interpretation of data, which may attenuate the real meanings that children assign to their experiences.

Recommendations

In view of the findings of this study, the following recommendations can be made:
Teacher training institutions should include training in identifying and recognizing experiences of loss, as well as including debriefing skills in the Life Skills curriculum.

Pre-service teachers should be trained to identify and recognize bullying behaviour and acquire skills to handle both perpetrator and victim.

Courses for in-service teachers should address awareness of grieving and bullying behaviour, as well as equipping these teachers with skills in supporting children and assisting them to 'bounce back' to normal life (Adegoke, 2015).

Conclusion

This article focuses on what makes young children sad. Although the examples of drawings displayed here may be typical of children's concerns universally, to us as South African researchers, the data are a reflection of the broad social issues in our country. Two distinctive themes have emerged, namely bullying as a form of violence and loss, which can be directly linked to primary social challenges, namely the high incidence of violence and the high incidence of Aids-related deaths. Through a descriptive phenomenological analysis of children's drawings, we provide concrete examples of the impact of these two phenomena on children. The findings have implications for teacher training curricula at higher education institutions, as student teachers need to be made aware of what factors impact on the child's emotional well-being, and simultaneously be equipped to support and deal with these adversities in a school situation. The insights gained in this research make a valuable contribution to the understanding of young children's emotional experiences. In the words of Hills et al. (2016): ' ... we do have it in our power, to replace the violence children experience with safe, stable, and nurturing environments in which children can thrive'.

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