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research article

Dying to talk? Co-producing resources with young people to get them talking about bereavement, death and dying

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The Dying to Talk project in Bradford, UK aimed to build resilience in young people around the topic of death, dying and bereavement. Starting conversations early in life could buttress people's future wellbeing when faced with bereavement and indeed their own mortality. Research indicates that a key feature in young people's experience of bereavement is 'powerlessness' (Ribbens McCarthy, 2007). Drawing on the principles of co-production, young people led the development of the project aimed at encouraging young people to talk about death, using archaeology as a facilitator to those conversations. The partnership between the University of Bradford, the voluntary sector and the young people proved to be a positive and empowering one. It laid the foundations for future collaboration and developed a framework for engaging young people in talking about death, building their resilience for dealing with death and dying in the future – a step towards building a 'compassionate city' for young people (Kellehear, 2012).

Key words death • dying and bereavement • young people • co-production • resilience • archaeology

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Introduction: the Dying to Talk project

The Dying to Talk project (Bradford, West Yorkshire, UK, 2017–18) was a transdisciplinary collaboration between the University of Bradford, local voluntary organisations and a group of young people aged 16–24. The project aimed to test whether using archaeology would act as a facilitator to get young people talking comfortably about death, dying and bereavement. The project also aimed to work

1 co-productively with young people, and relevant local voluntary sector organisations,
2 to produce resources and a 'Festival of the Dead', as a way of breaking down taboos
3 around talking about death, building the resilience of young people around the topic
4 of death, dying and bereavement, and thus enhancing their (future) wellbeing.

5 As the data from our project evaluations indicate, the project outputs were well
6 received by the young participants, as well as the school groups that took part in the
7 festival event and their teachers. The project succeeded in empowering the young
8 people to co-produce resources and build a framework for engaging young people in
9 talking about death and dying. While the evaluations showed that some areas of the
10 project did not always reflect the principles of co-production, the partnership was a
11 positive and creative one, laying the foundations for future collaboration in order to
12 develop the scope and reach of the project. Nonetheless, reflecting on the process
13 has highlighted the conditions and adaptations to professional practice required to
14 work co-productively with young people.

16 **Death, dying and bereavement**

18 Wellbeing is a state 'in which every individual realizes his or her own potential, can
19 cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is
20 able to make a contribution to her or his community' (WHO, 2014). This definition AQ3
21 encompasses the aim and direction of the Dying to Talk project – to improve
22 young people's wellbeing by developing their resilience towards death, dying and
23 bereavement.

24 Death is a universal event experienced by all living beings. However, the
25 professionalisation of death, in which we devolve responsibility to health and social
26 care professionals, diminishes the 'ordinariness of death' (Kellehear, 2012: ix), taking
27 care out of the community, and diminishing our capacity, as individuals, family
28 members and friends, to deal with death and dying. As sources such as the World
29 Health Organization, Dying Matters (a coalition in England and Wales aiming to help
30 people talk more openly about death, dying and bereavement) and the UK's National AQ4
31 Health Service recognise, it is important to recognise death as a natural part of life.
32 Work around the concept of the 'compassionate city' (Kellehear, 2012) emphasises
33 the inclusivity of death, which 'goes on in every community, every day, this very
34 moment' (Kellehear, 2012: viii). The concept of the compassionate city promotes
35 the idea that communities should embrace 'the care of the dying' and 'those living
36 with loss' (Kellehear, 2012: 94). Indeed, talking about personal experiences of loss
37 is a powerful way of healing the self, improving wellbeing as well as strengthening
38 the potential for individuals to support each other. However, this is reliant on 'those
39 friends and family know(ing) what to say and what to do in these circumstances
40 i.e. the circumstances of death or loss, expected or otherwise' (Kellehear, 2012: ix).
41 Therefore, we need to learn to talk about death.

42 Starting that conversation early in life, by getting young people to feel more
43 comfortable talking about death and dying, could buttress people's future health and
44 wellbeing when faced with bereavement and undoubtedly their own mortality. Not
45 only that but research has indicated that a key feature in young people's experience
46 of bereavement is 'powerlessness' – not being able to 'deal with their bereavement
47 experiences at the time ... to have their feelings socially acknowledged', and often
48 'excluded from key family decisions (such as whether or not to attend a funeral), as

well as being deprived of information about the terminal illness or death of a family member' (Ribbens McCarthy, 2007: 293). Indeed, bereavement is frequently treated 'as a marginal issue in the lives of children and young people, relevant to only a small, if unfortunate, minority' rather than, in fact, bereavement being 'a statistically "normal" part of growing up' (Ribbens McCarthy, 2007: 287–8). Bereavement for young people is complicated by social and cultural processes that discourage 'everyday' conversations about death, dying and bereavement, and privileges the adult's experience of grief over that of the young person (Holland, 2001).

This lack of a voice on the subject of death places young people 'at risk' from developing negative outcomes such as depression (Ribbens McCarthy, 2007). However, the agency of young people can be enhanced through constructive relations with their peers (Holland, 2001), with 'close supportive relationships with peers' able to mitigate against the 'power differences and control that may occur in relationships with parents' (Ribbens McCarthy, 2007: 294). Therefore, getting young people to talk comfortably about death and dying, particularly with their peers, could support the foundations for compassionate communities, challenging the taboos surrounding the discussion of death and potentially enhancing their future wellbeing and the wellbeing of those around them.

National context

Child Bereavement UK notes that, at any time, one in six young people have experienced a significant bereavement (www.childbereavement.org.uk). Harrison and Harrington (2001) reported that 78% of young people aged 11–16 in their study had experienced the death of either a close relative or a friend. Other studies indicate that one in 29 school-age children have suffered the bereavement of a parent or sibling – 'that's a child in every class' – and more than 10,000 deaths of babies, children and young people occur a year, 'that's 28 every day' (www.childbereavement.org.uk). Furthermore, bereavement is a socioeconomic issue, with the death of a parent more likely to be experienced by children from low-earning families, and the death of a peer more likely to be experienced by children with disabilities.

However, services for young people, including those in the statutory sector and the community and voluntary sector, are at the receiving end of major economic cuts.¹ This has led to a generation of young people coping with bereavement with little formal support. The detrimental effects of child bereavement have been well documented by Aynsley-Green (2017). His studies demonstrate that while some responses to grief may be short-lived, many persist into adulthood. These include depression, smoking, risk-taking behaviour, unemployment, poor educational attainment and criminal activity. The British Medical Association (2014) notes the correlation between bereavement in childhood and prison populations. Drawing on a study of 6,000 young offenders carried out by the Prison Reform Trust (PRT), it states:

[T]he experience of bereavement is also a significant feature of the lives of children and young people in custody, with 1 in 8 of the PRT's sample known to have lost a parent or a sibling. Others from the same sample had experienced the death of a close friend, and several seemed to have been powerfully affected by the loss of another close relative, such as an uncle or grandfather. (British Medical Association, 2014: 24)

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1 The impact of bereavement on young people can vary, influenced by the intersection
 2 of variables such as gender and socioeconomic class, individual attributes and family
 3 relationships. Akerman and Statham (2014: 31) found that ‘bereavement can be
 4 particularly harmful for those who have experienced multiple difficult events or
 5 bereavement in disadvantaged circumstances’. The National Children’s Bureau (2016)
 6 found that young people who had suffered the bereavement of a parent were less
 7 likely to discuss any anxieties, including those not related to the bereavement, placing
 8 them at increased risk of poor mental wellbeing. Nonetheless, positive relationships
 9 and attributes ‘may contribute to a level of protection or resilience for some young
 10 people’, with some young people able to ‘develop higher expectations for themselves,
 11 or find new strengths, while others may be overwhelmed and demotivated, reducing
 12 their expectations of life’ (Ribbens McCarthy and Jessop, 2005). Therefore, support
 13 services can be especially valuable if family members are not in a position to offer
 14 support, where they are bereaved themselves. Underlying the situation is a general
 15 reluctance to discuss death in broader society, making talking about grief a specialist
 16 area rather than an everyday occurrence (Kellehear, 2012). As children spend more
 17 than six hours per day in school, schools and peers are pivotal to their experiences.
 18 Projects helping schools to support bereaved children have seen positive wellbeing
 19 results for both children and staff (Birch and Bridge, 2018).

20 21 **Local context: why Bradford?**

22
23 According to the 2015 Index of Multiple Deprivation, Bradford ranks as the fifth most
 24 income-deprived district in England. While the number of households in Bradford
 25 overall reported that they found it difficult/very difficult to manage on their income,
 26 not dissimilar to the national average (27%), some wards were experiencing severe AQ9
 27 deprivation. For instance, 64% residents of the Tong ward found it difficult/very
 28 difficult to manage on their income.

29 Nearly 29% of children in Bradford live below the poverty line, compared with a
 30 national average of 20%. Only 26.8% of the Bradford population have a qualification
 31 at National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) Level 4 and above, compared with 36.8%
 32 nationally, and 15% of the population have no qualifications at all, almost double the
 33 national average. Such deprivation has an impact on health and wellbeing. Individuals
 34 born in Bradford can expect to live two years fewer than the national average of
 35 79.5 years for men and 83.2 years for women. However, ‘life expectancy is 9.6 years
 36 lower for men and 8.7 years lower for women in the most deprived areas of Bradford
 37 than in the least deprived areas’ (Public Health England, 2014). Meanwhile, infant AQ10
 38 mortality is one of the highest in England, with a rate of 6.9%, compared with 4.1%
 39 nationally; that is, 1% of babies born in Bradford die before they reach the age of one.

40 Despite having some of the highest rates of mortality and morbidity in the UK,
 41 public and voluntary services for young people dealing with loss and bereavement
 42 in Bradford are scarce. Bradford Bereavement Support² reported to us that it was AQ11
 43 acutely aware of the general lack of bereavement services across Bradford, and that it
 44 lacked the capacity to deliver specialised bereavement support for young people in
 45 particular. In addition, Child Bereavement UK³ (which has a regional office based in
 46 Bradford) reported to us that bereavement services for young people in Bradford were AQ12
 47 dependent on the geographical area they live in, with areas recognised as suffering
 48

1 from multiple deprivation being able to attract more funding, leaving many young
2 people without timely support.⁴

3 Given the high levels of deprivation in Bradford, and the potential impact on
4 increased mortality and morbidity, there is a vital need to provide services for young
5 people living with bereavement now, as well as to support the ability of young people
6 to deal more effectively with bereavement in the future, by reducing the stigma
7 attached to talking about death and dying.

9 The importance of co-production

11 The fact that, when experienced by young people, bereavement is linked to a sense
12 of powerlessness, highlights the need to listen to young people and to value them as
13 experts in their own needs. Young people should be at the centre of decision making
14 about the resources that would be appropriate for and appealing to them, to get them
15 talking about bereavement, death and dying. Therefore, the Dying to Talk project
16 drew on the principles of co-production. Indeed, Article 12 of the United Nations
17 Convention on the Rights of the Child states: ‘States Parties shall assure to the child
18 who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views
19 freely in all matters affecting the child.’⁵ Policy makers and service providers have
20 increasingly recognised the value of the young person’s voice – and the expertise of
21 their parents and/or carers – in making decisions about the design and delivery of
22 services for young people (see, for instance, [Hallett and Prout, 2003](#)). In the UK, the
23 Laming Report into the death of eight-year-old Victoria Climbié in 2000 ([Laming, AQ13](#)
24 [2003](#)), and the subsequent Children’s Act 2004, called for children’s services to become
25 more open, where ‘dialogue, reflection and discussion help shape policy and practice
26 and where contributions from all are encouraged and everyone is valued’ ([Gasper,](#)
27 [2010: xix](#)). The Lamb Inquiry (Lamb, 2010: 3) continued this development, arguing for [AQ14](#)
28 the need to treat young people ‘as equal partners with expertise’ in their own needs.
29 Indeed, [Kotzee \(2012: 167\)](#) talks about the expertise of lay people as a ‘different form’
30 of ‘expertise’, not one that negates the knowledge and training of professionals and
31 practitioners working with service users, but one that supports ‘a real and objective
32 ability to accomplish something in the world that enables the expert either to give
33 advice to others, or to act on others’ behalf’.

34 Co-production recognises the value of different ‘expertises’, and the importance of
35 giving the individuals and communities who use welfare services an equal voice in
36 the commissioning and delivery of those services. Advocates of co-production believe
37 that ‘greater citizen participation in the provision and delivery’ of welfare services has
38 ‘the potential to provide significant economic, political and social benefits’ ([Pestoff,](#)
39 [2018: iv](#)). Co-production requires ‘negotiation, participation [and] cooperation ...
40 based on compromises and mutual understanding, and a more equitable distribution
41 of power and resources’ ([Vigoda, 2015: 476](#)). For Ostrom, who developed the
42 term, ‘co-production’ relates to ‘inputs from individuals who are not “in” the same
43 organization’ and those inputs ‘are transformed into goods and services’ (Ostrom,
44 1996: 110, in [Durose et al, 2017: 136](#)). Thus, co-production demands the ‘space and [AQ15](#)
45 opportunity for individuals to contribute’ to finding solutions to local problems
46 where professionals and practitioners ‘had previously exercised full control’ ([Strokosch,](#)
47 [2013: 376](#)). While there is a great deal of debate about the meaning and practice
48 of co-production ([Brandson et al, 2018](#)), it is viewed by many theorists as leading

1 to more effective services and potentially empowering service user communities
 2 ([Strokosch, 2013](#)). This is because, positioned at the top of the ‘ladder’ of user and carer
 3 involvement ([Arnstein, 1969](#)), co-production moves beyond simply consulting user
 4 communities. Instead, it promotes a transformation in the balance of power between
 5 service providers and user communities ([Keohane, 2009](#); [Pestoff, 2018](#)). AQ16

6 However, co-production has some ‘elasticity’ as a concept and as a practice
 7 ([Needham, 2008: 224](#)). This is because it is a term that has been adopted by and applied AQ17
 8 in a range of public, voluntary and private contexts ([Brandsen et al, 2018](#)). Despite its AQ18
 9 heavy usage in policy circles, the practice of co-production does not always reflect the
 10 language and spirit of co-production ([Dunston et al, 2009](#); [Steele, 2017](#)), as practitioners AQ19
 11 frequently lack the resources, opportunities, knowledge – and sometimes the will – to
 12 pass responsibility for community services to the communities themselves ([Booth,](#)
 13 [2019](#)). In relation to academic research, co-production denotes a transformation of
 14 power between the researchers and those being researched. It implies ‘mutual respect,
 15 no hierarchy of knowledge forms, fluid and permeable disciplinary and professional
 16 boundaries, ... [and] test(ing) knowledge in the context where the application is
 17 required and where implementation will take place’ ([Campbell and Vanderhoven et](#)
 18 [al, 2016: 12](#)). Therefore, careful reflection during the process of designing services is
 19 essential. The participatory mechanisms in the Dying to Talk project, as described by AQ20
 20 [Strokosch \(2013\)](#), offered a model to empower the young people, drawing on their
 21 expertise as residents in the local community, as students in the local schools and
 22 the university, and as individuals living with loss and bereavement. The mechanisms
 23 employed centred around reframing the relationship between the professionals – the
 24 adults – and the young people.

25 26 Using archaeology

27
 28 To prompt discussions about death and dying, experiences of using archaeology
 29 as a catalyst for conversations were drawn on, using the work of the Continuing
 30 Bonds project.⁶ The Continuing Bonds project ([Croucher et al, in preparation](#))
 31 used archaeological examples (case studies of funerary practices from the past) and
 32 ethnographic examples (from around the world), demonstrating how people in a
 33 variety of cultures and time periods responded to death and treated their dead (see
 34 [Büster et al, 2018](#)). Images, films and objects were shown to participants as prompts
 35 for discussion. Examples ranged from more familiar topics such as Ancient Egypt
 36 mummification and South American ‘Day of the Dead’ festivals, to more challenging
 37 practices, such as the use of the bones of the dead in architectural arrangements in
 38 ossuaries, and the circulation of bodily remains in the past, such as in some prehistoric
 39 examples, or the plastering of the skulls of ancestors in Neolithic Middle East
 40 (for example, [Croucher 2017](#)). The case studies challenged perceptions of what is
 41 ‘right’ or ‘normal’ around death and dying. Participants, who were health and social
 42 care professionals and students, were asked to complete pre- and post-workshop
 43 questionnaires and a follow-on survey one to three months later, to gauge changes in
 44 their perceptions. Of the post-workshop questionnaire responders, 93% believed that
 45 archaeological materials can be used to facilitate discussions and/or training about
 46 death, dying, bereavement and loss. For most, the follow-up questionnaire identified
 47 considerable personal and professional impacts of the workshop. The project also found
 48 that the workshops helped participants to reflect on differences in cultural attitudes to

1 death and dying, with 83% saying the workshop helped them think differently about
2 death, dying and bereavement. Eighty-one per cent of the respondents remembered
3 archaeological case studies, which was affected by how interesting and emotive they
4 perceived the material to be, and more than half agreed that the workshop would
5 impact on their approaches to death, dying and bereavement in professional practice
6 (Croucher et al, in preparation).

7 As archaeology reminds us, our families, friends and communities ‘have always cared
8 for the dying’ (Kellehear, 2012: 2), although people respond to death in a variety of
9 ways. We found that archaeology presented an opportunity to talk openly, prompted
10 by material that was fascinating yet distanced from personal experience and therefore
11 a ‘safe’ way in. When presented with images of other practices, participants quickly
12 moved from talking about the past, to talking about their own experiences and those
13 of people close to them. Drawing on the Continuing Bonds project as a starting point,
14 the Dying to Talk project investigated whether the same strategy could be used with
15 young people, using the safe and distant past to prompt conversations. It was anticipated
16 that this approach would allow young people to be active agents in the process of
17 exploring bereavement, allowing them more power in the process, and reducing
18 risks of negative outcomes associated with bereavement (Ribbens McCarthy, 2007).

20 Aims and objectives

21
22 Given the context of the challenges of discussing death and bereavement, the Dying
23 to Talk project aimed to use archaeology and co-production as tools to equip young
24 people to discuss them, building their resilience to future loss. We aimed to co-produce
25 a toolkit to aid this discussion, which could be used in a school setting, along with
26 designing a ‘Festival of the Dead’ to promote the discussion of death and bereavement
27 for young people.

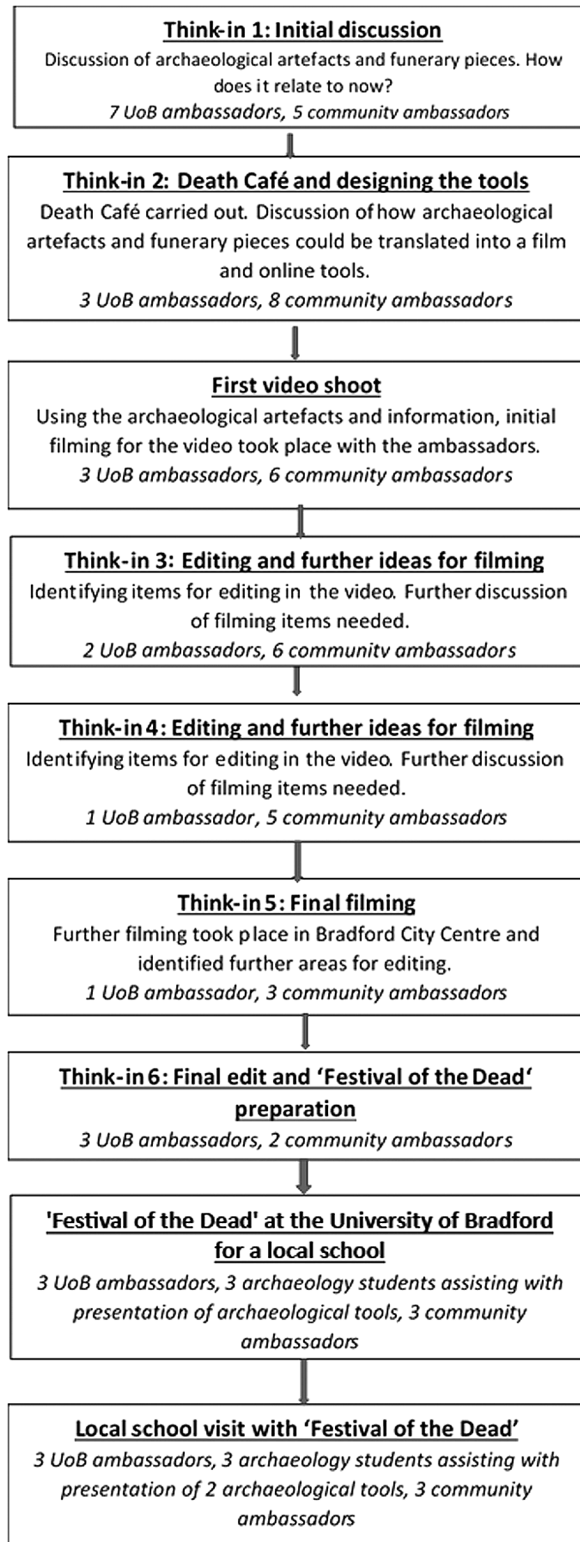
28 The project objectives were as follows:

- 29
- 30 • to recruit young people to co-produce a resource, using archaeological materials
31 and case studies, to help young people to discuss death, dying and bereavement;
- 32 • to use this resource in a ‘Festival of the Dead’ for school children, delivered by
33 our ‘ambassadors’, to aid conversations about death, dying and bereavement;
- 34 • to evaluate the effectiveness of the use of archaeology, and the resource, in
35 encouraging discussion and comfort around death, dying and bereavement;
- 36 • to evaluate and reflect on the process of adults (practitioners and academics)
37 working co-productively with young people.
- 38

39 Methodology

40
41 Our methods covered: recruitment; production of a video resource; use of the resource
42 and related activities in a Festival of the Dead; and our evaluation of the ambassadors,
43 project partners and Festival of the Dead participants (school children and teachers),
44 along with the effectiveness of using archaeology to discuss death with young people.
45 In order to draw on the expertise of voluntary sector organisations in relation to
46 bereavement, a working group was formed with Bradford Bereavement Support,
47 Child Bereavement UK and two other local groups that had expertise in working
48 with young people: MakingYour Mind Up (MYMUP),⁷ a local organisation offering

Figure 1: Schematic diagram of the project procedure



1 web-based digital resources promoting wellbeing and self-care for young people; and
 2 Speakers' Corner, a voluntary group that works to empower young people in Bradford.
 3

4 *Recruitment of ambassadors and establishment of a working group*

5
 6 Fifteen young ambassadors were recruited in total, aged between 16 and 24, of
 7 whom only one was male. Eight were young people recruited from local schools. To
 8 recruit these community ambassadors, an advertisement was circulated by MYMUP
 9 to the young people they work with, and their local school networks, with some
 10 schools putting the advert in their student newsletter. The recruitment was managed
 11 by MYMUP and Speakers' Corner. In addition, seven psychology students were
 12 recruited from the University of Bradford. The recruitment process within the
 13 university was restricted to psychology students, as they would have some insight into
 14 mental health and wellbeing that could be utilised in the co-production of project
 15 outputs. It would also provide the students with an opportunity to apply academic
 16 knowledge, embedding their learning and enhancing their employability skills (Reddy
 17 et al, 2011). Recruitment adverts were circulated via email and through the students'
 18 Virtual Learning Environment.

19 As the project only had the capacity to fund 16 ambassadors, the young people
 20 who applied had to write, or film, a short statement about why they were interested
 21 in participating in a project about death and dying. In the selection process we
 22 were particularly keen to recruit young people who had personal experience of
 23 bereavement, giving them some 'expertise' to draw on. In total, 19 applications for
 24 involvement were received and, as already mentioned, 15 ambassadors were appointed.

25 These young ambassadors joined the project working group, together with a
 26 staff member from MYMUP, a staff member from Child Bereavement UK, a staff
 27 member from Bradford Bereavement Support and three other staff members (the
 28 authors of this article: two academics from the University of Bradford and one from
 29 the University of Wolverhampton). All took part in the co-production aspect of the
 30 project. Five of the staff members were female. Again, only one was male. All of the
 31 staff were Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checked.
 32

33 *Co-producing project resources*

34
 35 The working group came together to design and produce the video and materials
 36 for the Festival of the Dead; 'think-ins', rather than formal 'meetings', were used.⁸
 37 The think-ins created open and safe spaces for all participants to talk and share
 38 their opinions, with no formal roles, such as a chair. Participants frequently worked
 39 in smaller sub-groups to develop different aspects of the project – with the young
 40 people choosing which group they wanted to move into – which also served to
 41 enhance the ability of some of the young people who were less confident in the larger
 42 group to contribute. The intention was to avoid what Jupp Kina (2012: 000) calls AQ21
 43 'the disjuncture in the dialogical relationship between what we feel, think and do'.
 44 Six think-ins and two filming sessions were run (see Figure 1). Not all ambassadors
 45 and staff members were present at every think-in, due to other commitments, such
 46 as work/school priorities, caring commitments or illness.

47 We adopted the method of co-production within the design of the project tools.
 48 First, given the power relationship between adults and young people, and between

lay people and academics, it was decided to ‘employ’ and pay the young people to be ‘ambassadors’. In this way, all of the participants in the working group (responsible for the design of the project resources) were paid for their time and expertise. Second, at the request of the young ambassadors, the second think-in of the project working group was in the ‘Death Café’ (Impermanence, 2016) format. In this forum, all participants could share their experiences, thoughts and emotions about death, dying, loss and bereavement, reflecting Kellehear’s (2012) motivation that members of a compassionate community should support each other by talking about death. The young people felt this was important as, in the words of one young ambassador, we needed to “practise what we preach”. However, it also served to allow ‘the intellectual current to acknowledge the emotional’, important not only because of the sensitivity of the subject matter, but also in challenging the cultural barriers between adults and young people, to enable ‘more transparent’ decision making (Jupp Kina, 2012: 216). The Death Café ‘levelled the playing field’ between adults and young people, between providers of education and students, and between youth leaders and young people sharing the common experience of grief and the prospect of death.

Using ‘enhanced’ co-production would enable young people to be at the forefront of the creation of the project’s resources. By drawing on young people’s perspectives, such as the most accessible means of communication and the barriers to young people in talking about death and dying, the project would be more likely to succeed in engaging – and meeting the needs of – young people. By co-producing activities it would enhance the likelihood of those activities being engaging and accessible to young people, and allow investigation into the benefits of and barriers to co-production between adults and young people. It would also present the opportunity to assess the potential impact of a proactive approach to talking about death and dying, aimed at enhancing future wellbeing – finding sustainable ways of supporting young people living with bereavement – as well as enhancing understanding of the conditions necessary to work co-productively with young people in the future.

Delivering the Festival of the Dead

In addition to the recruited ambassadors, three archaeology students (two males and one female) were employed to help in the delivery of the Festival of the Dead with schools.

A two-hour Festival of the Dead was held in Gallery II at the University of Bradford, attended by 22 Year 9 and 10 students (aged 14–15) and three teachers, and a two-hour Festival of the Dead was held at a local school for children with emotional, social and behavioural needs, attended by eight children and two teachers.

Materials for the Festival of the Dead

The name ‘Festival of the Dead’ for the school engagement events was a deliberate choice, chosen in collaboration between project ambassadors and staff precisely because it already had a cultural context, using a celebration that was already familiar to the ambassadors.⁹ The name aptly described the content of the event – challenging the taboo of talking about death – rather than using commonly used euphemisms that play

Table 1: Mean (standard deviation) level of agreement (out of 5) of the ambassadors over the progression of the project

	Think-in 1	Think-in 2	Think-in 3	Think-in 4
I have had conversations recently about death and bereavement outside of the think-in.	2.62 (1.19)	2.60 (0.84)	3.88 (1.36)	3.40 (1.52)
I am comfortable talking about death.	3.71 (0.91)	3.60 (1.08)	4.13 (0.84)	4.00 (0.00)
Archaeology helps people to talk about death.	3.54 (0.88)	4.10 (0.57)	4.13 (0.35)	4.20 (0.45)

into the taboo. The young ambassadors designed and filmed a 17-minute interactive video and resource pack of activities for the festival. Guided by the academic staff, they used archaeology and Continuing Bonds project resources as a foundation for the video and resources. In addition, at their instigation, the ambassadors expanded the content to include contemporary experience, including personal accounts of bereavement given by the ambassadors. The video was then trialled with two secondary schools in Bradford, through a Festival of the Dead. The video included pauses, with on-screen prompts – allowing the school groups to discuss their thoughts, reactions and opinions in terms of each section of the video. This was followed by a range of activities (run by the Dying to Talk ambassadors) including laying out a replica skeleton, death Jenga, painting death masks, Day of the Dead face painting, making a funeral song playlist, creating a cremation tattoo, modelling grave goods, designing their own coffin and participating in a Death Café. There was also the opportunity to view and discuss some of the archaeological case studies used in the Continuing Bonds workshops, and the festival and drew on materials (such as poetry and drawings) from the Continuing Bonds' Dying Matters Awareness Week 2018 exhibition.

AQ23

Evaluation

At the beginning of the project, ambassadors were given a semi-structured questionnaire to find out whether they had ever experienced bereavement, if they had ever sought support for bereavement and how they felt about using archaeology to engage young people in conversations about death. We also asked them what they thought about the steps we took in the project to support the co-production of project resources. The ambassadors were asked to complete questionnaires after each think-in until think-in 4, to evaluate whether the project was affecting how comfortable they felt in talking about death and whether they thought the use of archaeological tools was proving useful to prompt young people to talk about death. The ambassadors were given a final questionnaire after the Festival of the Dead.¹⁰ Questionnaires were also given to the school pupils and teachers following the Festival of the Dead to determine the effectiveness of the event. All data were collected using questionnaires with a closed question format (a five-point Likert-scale response format or a tick-box response format) and open-ended formats.

Table 2: Number of ambassadors who had conversations about death with different groups of people

Think-in 1	Think-in 2	Think-in 3	Think-in 4
Counsellor/medical professional (2)	Counsellor/medical professional (1)	Counsellor/medical professional (1)	
Friend (5)	Friend (5)	Friend (6)	Friend (6)
Parent/carer (5)	Parent/carer (2)	Parent/carer (4)	Parent/carer (4)
Sibling (4)	Sibling (4)	Sibling (7)	Sibling (7)
		Teacher (1)	

Results

Characterisation of ambassador experience

From the first questionnaire it was found that 60% of the ambassadors had prior experience of bereavement. Only one of these had received any support (medication, therapy and family support). All 15 respondents (100%) believed there was not enough support for young people. The ambassadors varied in their reporting of what types of support they would like to see. These were:

AQ24

- individual therapy (35%);
- group therapy (30%);
- mentoring (30%);
- online resources (20%);
- information leaflets (less than 10%);
- a telephone helpline (less than 10%).

Of the 15 respondents, eight said they knew where they could get support from. This included:

AQ25

- school and college (20%);
- counselling service at university or school (20%);
- Samaritans (15%);
- Bradford Bereavement Service (less than 10%);
- First Response (less than 10%);
- Childline (less than 10%);
- Noah's Ark Charity (less than 10%);
- youth club (less than 10%);
- general practitioner (less than 10%).

One ambassador said they did not know where to access support for bereavement for young people.

In terms of level of comfort in talking about death, at the beginning of the project the ambassadors reported a relatively high level (see Table 1) and had had a moderate amount of conversations about death (see Table 2 for who they had had conversations with). Over the course of the project, comfort level in discussing death generally increased and there was also a general increase in the numbers of conversations they

Table 3: Mean (standard deviation) agreement (out of 5) of the students, teachers and ambassadors who took part in the Festival of the Dead

	Pupils	Teachers	Ambassadors
I have had conversations recently about death and bereavement outside the Festival of Death.	2.04 (0.95)	4.00 (0.63)	–
Are you comfortable talking about death and bereavement?	3.56 (1.06)	4.00 (0.71)	4.63 (0.48)
Are/were you comfortable talking about death and bereavement with the students?	–	4.75 (0.43)	4.45 (0.66)
Did you enjoy the Dying to Talk video?	4.35 (0.56)	4.50 (0.50)	4.27 (0.45)
How successful do you think the video will be in raising awareness about death, dying and bereavement?	3.69 (0.79)	4.60 (0.49)	4.45 (0.50)
Level of agreement that archaeological case studies about death and burial are helpful in getting people to talk about/ think about death.	4.07 (0.83)	4.00 (0.00)	4.63 (0.48)
Do you think the students enjoyed the Dying to Talk video?	–	4.00 (0.00)	4.27 (0.45)

had on the subject of death. Interestingly, those conversations were predominantly with their peer group (friends and siblings), supporting the research literature. The ambassadors also reported that their views on death had changed over the course of the project, but they did not elucidate on this point further. In addition, the ambassadors were positive about the efficacy of using archaeology to discuss death, with this increasing over time.

Evaluation of the Festival of the Dead

The Festival of the Dead was well received by teachers and pupils alike (see [Table 3](#)). Initially, the pupils reported not being very comfortable talking about death. At the end of the festival they reported that the archaeological case studies and the video had been good tools to prompt such conversations. The pupils reported liking the video, and the teachers confirmed this. Some of the comments from the pupils included:

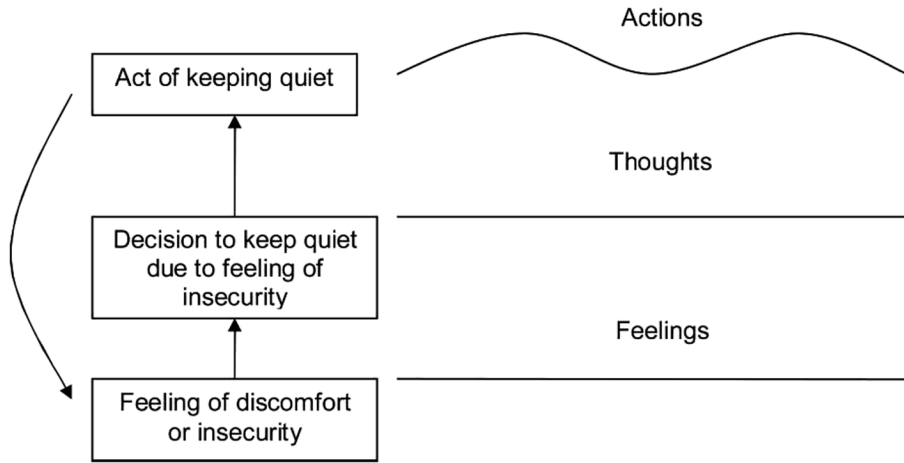
Very useful because it breaks the idea that people have to suffer in silence. Archaeological findings have helped us understand how people dealt [sic] with death through history. The case studies help you to tune in to your emotions. Also this will help other people going through bereavement as it will help them manage their emotions.

AQ26

These comments demonstrate that the festival had a substantial impact on the young people, helping them to identify their emotions and talk about their feelings and being empowered to do this in a supportive environment. The pupils also enjoyed the Dying to Talk video:

Figure 2:

AQ22



Source: Redrawn from Jupp Kina (2012: 215)

Everybody grieves [sic] differently. That death is inevitable but that doesn't mean it needs to be sad.

I learnt that it is okay to talk about death and say the words die or dead without feeling bad.

I learned that death isn't about the dead, it's about coming together and caring for each other.

That everybody deals with death differently and you should always be nice to somebody who has lost someone.

AQ27

Thus, the video led to some insightful remarks from the young people with regard to appreciating the differences in the ways people grieve and that people should be supportive of one another. They also confirmed that it was acceptable to talk about death.

Describing the Festival of the Dead, the majority of pupils found it 'interesting', 'thought-provoking', 'relevant', 'worthwhile' and 'enjoyable' (see Table 4). The teachers found the festival 'thought-provoking', 'relevant' and 'interesting'. Interestingly, the pupils and teachers did not find the Festival of the Dead too emotional or upsetting, with the exception of a small group (13%) of students who had recently experienced a close bereavement and were supported in the festival to be able to talk about their experiences.

All the teachers and ambassadors, and 87% of pupils, thought that the activities at the festival were age appropriate, with only one student disagreeing and two 'did not know'. When asked about the appropriateness of the activities:

Nothing was sugar coated and it felt like a mature discussion.

Good to talk about death and not shi[e]ld children.

It was educational and fun.

AQ28

However, there were some less positive responses: 'Some elements were. But I would've (personally) preferred a more academic approach'; 'Some activities may be seen as too old'. Others thought that the activities 'were childish'.

Table 4: Frequency of words selected to describe the Festival of the Dead by students, teachers and ambassadors

	Pupils	Teachers	Ambassadors
Interesting	21	2	5
Thought-provoking	15	4	6
Relevant	14	3	3
Worthwhile	14	1	5
Enjoyable	14	1	9
Inspiring	8	1	4
Productive	8	1	4
Empowering	5	1	7
Moving	4	0	2
Boring	2	0	0
Irrelevant	1	0	0
Sad	4	0	1
Distressing (* Death Café)	3	0	1
Other (creative, 'shrekstastic')	2	0	1

When asked how useful the pupils found the activities, comments included:

It helps us express our thoughts and feelings in an engaging and enlightening [sic] way.

Very because people shared things that were on their chest.

Very valuable – your [sic] teaching people that death isn't taboo and shouldn't be seen as one.

AQ29

This demonstrates that the activities served their intended purpose of stimulating conversations about death, providing an open and supportive space for the young people to express their thoughts. When asked about how important they thought engaging young people in such discussions about death was, a real need for these types of activities and discussions was apparent:

Very to give people more understanding of what to do or where to go.

Death can be confusing for a lot of people so the more information and help out there the better.

Its [sic] very important coz [sic] some familys [sic] don't discuss it.

Its [sic] valuable because it gave a wide experience on death.

The teachers were also positive about the festival and the activities reporting: "The energy created was very positive and the difference of opinions and practice shared created an environment where our learners were able to talk about their own experiences" and the young people "learnt that they can talk about death in a non-morbid way". The teachers also commented on how valuable they thought the festival was for their students: "It was valuable because you created a fun environment to talk about death and burial even though it is not a fun topic to talk about" and "this opportunity can help the person with future events which involve death and

AQ30

bereavement”. They said that such events are “[r]eally important – prepares them for future experiences and/or helps them deal with previous ones”. In terms of the utility of the festival and activities, teachers commented that the activities show an “interesting historical view; not personal” and that “[i]t depersonalises death and makes it more normal part of life”. Thus, encouragingly, “[t]eens have learnt practical steps in dealing with death more openly” and learning “[t]hat death is a normal part of life”.

Evaluation of the process of co-producing project resources

We were keen to find out how the young people felt about their role in the project, and whether they felt empowered by the adoption of co-production to guide the relationship between the adults and the young people. At the start of the project, all participants attended an introductory meeting, which included a presentation on the principles of co-production, and a group discussion about how to implement these principles. This was also designed to provide some rules of engagement for all co-producers, to remind the adults that they were not ‘in charge’.

In the final questionnaire, all of the young people (100%) agreed that the project implemented co-production ‘totally’ or ‘somewhat’,¹¹ with 12 out of the 15 ambassadors (80%) feeling that their ideas ‘totally’ influenced project outputs and outcomes as they were able to contribute as much as they wanted to. This is likely because the relationship between the adults and young people was nurtured throughout the project. The working group team communicated regularly through WhatsApp chat – this was used to ask questions, to make suggestions and to set meeting dates. We held ‘social’ events, such as meals at a local restaurant, inviting the ambassadors to university events they may be interested in and bringing tea and cakes to the think-ins. We started all think-ins with a ‘what has your week been like?’ conversation starter directed at all participants (adults and young people) to enhance the sense of belonging, encouraging and valuing all contributions, and nurturing the confidence of the young people to speak in a group.

The final questionnaire revealed that all the young ambassadors felt that confidence was an essential factor in the achievements of the project, confirming [Jupp Kina’s \(2012: 215\)](#) theory that young people will ‘make the decision’ to not participate if they feel insecure or uncomfortable. In relation to how we enhanced that confidence in the project, all the ambassadors reported that they felt a valued part of the team. They also reported that future projects should ensure that young people take “the main role” in the project and “never isolate them from anything”, communicate “without any barriers”, “giving them a role structuring the project” and allowing them “to talk openly”. In order to ensure an equal relationship between the adults and young people, which was prioritised by all respondents, it was felt that it was the adults’ responsibility to have the right “attitude” by “talking personally rather than as an authoritarian figure”, with “equal chances in creating ideas”. Indeed, the building of “casual” relationships, rather than ones based on professionalism, was identified as being an important part of this project and should be repeated in future projects. As an academic team we injected humour into the think-ins, by sharing humorous stories during our conversation starters, and finding humour in some of the funerary practices we discussed. This created a more enjoyable and relaxing atmosphere.

The issue of training young people to work with adults/professionals was not deemed important, with only five ambassadors (30%) saying that this was very important. The

AQ31

1 ambassadors did not feel that a signed agreement about working co-productively
 2 was important. Instead, they reported that the *attitude* of the professionals/adults was
 3 more important in supporting young people to feel empowered. However, they liked
 4 the idea of having a formal recognition of their involvement, such as a certificate,
 5 with 90% of them seeing this as ‘important’ or ‘very important’. As one respondent
 6 stated: ‘I want to show off!’
 7

8 Discussion

9
 10 In conversation with local groups supporting young people in Bradford, it was apparent
 11 that provision to support young people living with bereavement was inadequate.
 12 To respond to this gap in services, this project produced a video resource to aid
 13 discussions about death, dying and bereavement, using co-production methods, and
 14 inspired by archaeological material. In addition, the Festival of the Dead helped the
 15 young people in their ability to talk about death, empowering them to discuss difficult
 16 topics, evidenced by their taking conversations outside of the project and feeling more
 17 comfortable discussing what can be a societally challenging subject.

18 The project was a multidisciplinary one, drawing on the experiences of researchers,
 19 with backgrounds in sociology, psychology and archaeology. In addition, it embraced
 20 multi-agency support, seeking the expertise of local voluntary groups working with
 21 young people, namely Child Bereavement UK, Bradford Bereavement Support,
 22 Speakers’ Corner and MYMUP. These groups reported that, despite research showing
 23 the lasting impact of loss for young people, funding for bereavement services is lacking.
 24 As one practitioner stated:

AQ32

25
 26 ‘The funders are not thinking about the knock-on effects of bereavement. It’s
 27 every other aspect you can’t see – “the unseen aspects of death” ... the mental
 28 health, academic achievement, attendance ... because often the funding is
 29 limited to... “We’re funding an asylum seeker project” or “we’re funding
 30 a mental health project” ... and the outcomes are ... you have to fit in ...
 31 and that’s the problem with austerity, people chase the money.’
 32

33 The digital resource – filmed and co-produced by the young ambassadors and project
 34 partners – and the activities for the Festival of the Dead were well received by the
 35 schools, both pupils and teachers. The project confirmed that ‘they were ... much more
 36 effective in getting messages across to their peers than an adult could’ (Bovaird and
 37 Loeffler, 2012: 1135). In light of reduced access to face-to-face bereavement services,
 38 an accessible online resource would be a useful means of reaching young people,
 39 although ideally it needs to be used in a supported environment. Our evaluations
 40 of the Dying to Talk project revealed an increased confidence among the young
 41 participants in talking about death and dying. However, this increase in confidence,
 42 in future projects, would need to be mapped over time to see whether it endures.
 43 Using diverse examples of the treatment of the dead and dealing with bereavement
 44 from across the world and through time, opened up the topic for discussion. The
 45 resources were particularly valued by teachers as a method of engaging young people
 46 who may be bereaved, as well as facilitating a school environment more at ease with
 47 conversations about death and dying.
 48

1 However, there were areas that did not fulfil the conditions for co-production.
 2 The young people took charge of the filming of the video, creating the script and
 3 storyboard, and designing the resources for the Festival of the Dead. However, some
 4 of the content for the video, specifically the use of archaeology, and the decision to
 5 trial the resources at local schools, had been decided on because of the ‘expertise’ of
 6 the practitioners and academics involved in this project.

7 The practice of co-production can be hard to navigate, particularly in view of
 8 the power differentials between service providers and service users and, in this case,
 9 between adults and young people. As Rowlands (1998: 17) argues, an authentic
 10 approach to engaging communities requires observation of the barriers that prohibit
 11 empowerment that are in our control, and recognition of those obstacles that are
 12 beyond our control. Thus, for this project, ‘enhanced co-production ... achieved
 13 through the use of participative mechanisms’ would have been more likely to support
 14 a ‘deeper engagement’ (Strokosch, 2013: 377) of the young people, which could
 15 strengthen the effectiveness of project outcomes, as well as empowering the young
 16 people to become active citizens in the future (Burgess and Durrant, 2018). Therefore,
 17 this project learnt that it is important to be mindful of the ‘subjective and subtle ways
 18 that both emotion and power are played out within participatory processes within
 19 both research and practice’ (Jupp Kina, 2012: 202). Professionals working with young
 20 people must recognise the power differential between adults and young people and
 21 adopt practices that enhance the equality of opportunity to influence service design
 22 – what Friere calls having ‘constant vigilance over ourselves’ (Friere, 2001, in Jupp Kina,
 23 2012: 216). Sometimes that was manifest in the simple gesture of ‘who holds the pen’.

24 Indeed, what was not anticipated was the deference that the young people frequently
 25 paid to the adults. As Verschuere et al (2012: 1088) state: ‘[C]itizens are not like a
 26 “jack-in-the-box”, just waiting for someone to push a lever that will immediately
 27 release their energies and result in their engagement in ... co-production.’ What is
 28 more, it was often challenging for the staff members involved in the project to help in
 29 facilitation (in terms of keeping to time and costs) without impacting on the power
 30 dynamics of the working group. This is something that needs to be reviewed in future
 31 projects. The project outputs are likely to have been different if the young people had
 32 been the driving force from the inception of the project. However, for Brandsen and
 33 Honingh (2018: 13), this is the distinction between co-production and co-creation:
 34 ‘[W]hen citizens are involved in the general planning of a service—perhaps even
 35 initiating it—then this is co-creation, whereas if they shape the service during later
 36 phases of the cycle it is co-production.’ One of the practitioners agreed:

AQ33

38 ‘It is not about letting them just go off and do it by themselves and really
 39 come up with everything. They might not know what the parameters are
 40 ... they’ll need ... kind of support. Like they wouldn’t have known about
 41 any of the archaeology stuff, would they? They wouldn’t have known ...
 42 the routes we can actually take, or the networks into schools and all that ...
 43 they’d have limitations. So if we all work together in partnership ... we can
 44 all bring what we’ve got ... to the table ... that’s my kind of ideal.’
 45

46 Although the young people were not involved in the co-design of the initial parameters
 47 of the project, there were many occasions when our contributions, as professional and
 48 academic members of the project team, were limited to a supporting role; the young

1 people were co-producers. For instance, the suggestion to use Facebook to engage
2 young people was vetoed by the young ambassadors, who reported that young people
3 are more likely to use Instagram and Snapchat. Furthermore, the expertise of the
4 professionals was frequently sought by the young people to help them make evidence-
5 based decisions about project outcomes. By sharing our expertise as academics, the
6 power gradually shifted from the adults to the young ambassadors, who were not
7 only becoming more comfortable talking about death and dying, but also gaining
8 confidence working in a room of multi-agency professionals.

9 Working with young people was a learning experience for the project team, and
10 the learning was undoubtedly two-way. It was enlightening hearing perspectives of
11 young people's lives and grief today. However, it was apparent that it is challenging
12 to shift the power dynamic and to fully empower young people – having closer
13 involvement of young people in a project's bid writing may help to counter this,
14 along with clearer briefing about the roles of the academic team at the outset. There
15 were differing minimal outputs for academic and professional team members (one
16 focusing on co-production, one on the use of archaeology, one on volunteers and
17 one on the production of the resources/video), meaning the project was co-produced
18 rather than co-designed. Nonetheless, the results demonstrate the value felt by the
19 young ambassadors, school learners, teachers and the project team, and the team has
20 learnt from the process, which will feed into future projects.

21 While there were limitations to the project (see below), it demonstrated the potential
22 benefits of a collaborative approach in tackling the taboos around death and dying.
23 Future work should involve a longer-term evaluation of the impact of the project
24 on the wellbeing of the young people involved: the ambassadors themselves and the
25 pupils using the resources (and their teachers/parents). Initial evaluation indicates that
26 the project aims were met and that the resources were well received and have the
27 potential to build wellbeing and resilience. While the project measured the impact
28 of the project on the confidence of the young ambassadors to talk about death and
29 dying, the project did not directly measure any change in the 'powerlessness' (Ribbens
30 McCarthy, 2007) felt as a result of engaging with the project's resources. Future projects
31 should include such a before- and after-measure more explicitly.

33 Limitations

34
35 There were a number of limitations to the project and its evaluation. First, there were
36 aspects of the project that did not reflect the practice of co-production (as discussed
37 earlier). Second, student ambassadors were self-selecting, chosen from an open
38 application, which likely attracted those who already had an interest and some level
39 of confidence in discussing death. Third, while there was a diversity of ambassadors in
40 terms of ethnicity, with a strong black and minority ethnic representation, there was
41 only one male ambassador. In future it would be important to ensure an even gender
42 balance to ensure that the male perspective is represented. However, a gender balance
43 of pupils trialling the resources at the Festival of the Dead was achieved. Fourth, some
44 ambassadors did not attend all the think-ins and thus evaluations of their ability to
45 influence project outputs – as well as their confidence in talking about death – may
46 have been negatively affected. Finally, the evaluation relied on self-reporting and thus
47 the answers given, even though anonymised, may have suffered from exaggeration,
48

1 with the young ambassadors reporting higher levels of efficacy because of their close
2 affinity with the academic staff and practitioners.

3 4 **Conclusion**

5
6 This project confirmed that co-producing bereavement services with young people
7 and local voluntary organisations offers the potential to enhance young people's
8 sense of agency in talking about death and dying. Adults making decisions about
9 young people are in danger of not reflecting their worldview, particularly around a
10 sensitive topic such as death, prohibiting young people from having 'their emotions
11 ... acknowledged' and having 'nowhere to express them, or talk about them' (Ribbens
12 McCarthy, 2007: 292). This project provided some confirmation that young people
13 are more likely to speak to their peers than seek counselling or support from paid
14 professionals. Future projects should reflect this. Indeed, the places that young people
15 might have once occupied, such as youth clubs and community projects, which
16 brought them into contact with their peer group as well as welfare professionals,
17 have all but disappeared as a result of austerity, leaving less spaces for their needs to
18 be noticed and their voices heard. While the Dying to Talk project was conceived
19 before the recent COVID-19 pandemic, the impact of the pandemic on mental
20 health and wellbeing adds further pressure on resources for young people. As one of
21 the voluntary sector partners stated:

22
23 'You only have to go to a meeting with the ... people that make the
24 decisions ... to know they don't understand what's actually happening
25 down on the shop floor because they've never actually been down into
26 an estate in Bradford, and see whatever is ... affecting their lives, whether
27 bereavement or whatever ... they don't get a real gist of what's happening
28 in the communities ... it comes down to the business decision of the person
29 at the top who maybe doesn't understand.'

30
31 The use of archaeology as a safe facilitator to conversations around death and dying
32 with young people was evidenced in the project, demonstrating the valuable 'way in'
33 that thinking about other cultures through time can bring. By highlighting the wide
34 variety of different approaches to dealing with death and bereavement, societal norms
35 are challenged and, prompted by curiosity, conversations are sparked about the past,
36 about practices today and around personal experience. Furthermore, by involving
37 university students as ambassadors in the co-production of the project outputs, they
38 were able to apply their undergraduate studies to a real situation, gaining working
39 experience of voluntary service provision, as well as working alongside young people
40 from the local community. Student engagement has the potential to support and
41 enhance local services, while enhancing students' citizenship, making their subject
42 learning more meaningful and increasing their ability to work co-productively in
43 the future (UNESCO, 2014; Booth, in press).

44 Drawing on Jupp Kina (2012), it was hoped that the Dying to Talk project would
45 not only contribute to the longer-term aim of enhancing the future wellbeing of
46 young people through building resilience, but also empower them to take a more
47 proactive approach to talking about death and build their own means of providing and
48 receiving mutual support – reflecting the principles of the 'compassionate city'. The

AQ34

1 project illustrated the criticality of the young person's voice in designing resources
 2 that will successfully engage young people. However, working in partnership requires
 3 a shift of power and resources away from professionals, the institutions, the funders,
 4 the researchers, 'us'. Indeed, as the project progressed, we, as professionals and adults,
 5 often had to audit ourselves and reflect on how some of our practice reverted to the
 6 'default' power differential between adults and young people; and service providers
 7 and service users. To empower young people, not only to develop a more effective
 8 service but also to develop their confidence to be more empowered citizens in the
 9 future, requires a change in the praxis and culture of working; in the way we position,
 10 talk to – and talk about – young people. In any project or activity working to support
 11 young people, this necessitates 'constant vigilance' (Friere, 2001). Whether it is called AQ35
 12 co-production or co-creation (Brandsen et al, 2018), the voices of young people need
 13 to be embedded in the foundations of compassionate communities.

14 Co-production requires partnerships 'founded on mutual respect, and recognising
 15 that expertise is not just sited in educational institutions, but that local communities,
 16 organisations, and citizens also have great expertise and knowledge' (Stone, 2015:
 17 9). In order for co-production to be a motif for a more inclusive decision-making
 18 process that draws on young people's expertise and worldview, practitioners need to
 19 engage young people in 'a collaborative, iterative process of shared learning' (Campbell
 20 and Vanderhoven, 2016: 12). For this process of co-producing services not only
 21 enhances the design of services but also has the potential to empower. In the words
 22 of a voluntary sector partner: AQ36

24 '[They are] having mental health problems, so, struggling ... wanting to kill
 25 themselves, wanting to hurt themselves ... they've got this, you know, kind
 26 of worth that participation gives them. And it's that peer support, you know,
 27 that participation and co-production brings: you're doing something together
 28 as a unit ... participation; co-production ... is the best type of therapeutic
 29 intervention you can ever give somebody.'

31 Given the devastating potential impacts of childhood bereavement, embedding in
 32 our young people the skills to talk about, share and reflect on their experiences will
 33 normalise talking about death and bereavement, and in time it will build resilience
 34 and equip future generations with the skills to talk openly about death and challenge
 35 the societal taboos that currently exist. This is particularly poignant in the era of
 36 COVID-19. With the death rate rising in the UK – and across the world – as a
 37 result of COVID-19, young people may find themselves not only affected directly
 38 by the loss of a loved one, but also having to engage with the intense media attention
 39 about the threat of death that this virus poses. Thus, our next steps continue with
 40 the agenda of generating a model, based on Kellehear's (2012) 'compassionate city',
 41 for young people in Bradford and beyond; responding to what is now an imperative
 42 to support young people to deal with the concept of death, both theoretically and
 43 personally. A model capable of engaging young people in conversations about death,
 44 dying and bereavement, which organisations such as schools and youth groups can
 45 adopt to enhance the present and future wellbeing of young people, is needed now
 46 more than ever.
 47
 48

Notes

- ¹ See, for instance, Puffett, N. (2020) Youth services ‘suffer £1bn funding cut in less than a decade’, *Children & Young People Now*, 20 January, <https://www.cypnow.co.uk/news/article/youth-services-suffer-1bn-funding-cut-in-less-than-a-decade>
- ² Bradford Bereavement Support works to strengthen the Bradford community through the provision of a range of bereavement services for everyone aged 16 or over who has experienced a bereavement.
- ³ Child Bereavement UK provides valuable support for bereaved young people nationally. It is also providing local support for young people dealing with bereavement in Bradford, but it has a time-limited funding future in this regard.
- ⁴ One bereavement officer stated that for these young people it was “at least a two-year waiting list”.
- ⁵ https://downloads.unicef.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2010/05/UNCRC_united_nations_convention_on_the_rights_of_the_child.pdf?_ga=2.14895030.1845113503.1583247457-1799231783.1583247457, p 5.
- ⁶ ‘Continuing Bonds: exploring the meaning and legacy of death through past and contemporary practice’ was funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC), 2016–18. The Dying to Talk project was supported by Continuing Bonds project resources and staff time, and was an affiliated project, meeting a Continuing Bonds project objective in liaising/trialling ideas with schools.
- ⁷ MYMUP is a community interest company based in Bradford, which bases its work on Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs, addressing the seven levels of needs digitally to achieve self-actualisation. MYMUP works with young people, including providing web-based resources to enhance their mental health and wellbeing.
- ⁸ Inspired by Speakers’ Corner’s ‘Women of the World’ planning events.
- ⁹ The ambassadors talked extensively about the Pixar animation film *Coco*, released in 2017, which was based on the Mexican holiday ‘Day of the Dead’.
- ¹⁰ Due to the repetition of the questions and the plateauing of the answers, we did not survey the ambassadors for think-ins 5–6.
- ¹¹ It has to be noted that the ambassadors were unsure about the meaning of co-production when asked about it in the initial questionnaires, reporting a mean of 1.86 (out of 5) in their understanding of the term. This reported low level of understanding remained low by think-in 4, only reaching 1.90 (out of 5). However, this is contradicted by the qualitative data from the open-ended questions in the final questionnaire, suggesting that they did not understand academic definitions of the term, but they did feel they experienced it in practice throughout the project.

AQ37

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AQ38

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Conflict of interest statement

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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AUTHOR QUERIES

Author Please Answer all Queries

AQ1—talk now has a lower case t in the title as it's not referring directly to the Dying to Talk project – ok?

AQ2—talk now has a lower case t in the title as it's not referring directly to the Dying to Talk project – ok?

AQ3—WHO, 2014 – missing reference – please supply. Also please supply a page number for the quote if possible.

AQ4—I have added this brief explanation for those who are unfamiliar with the organisation – ok?

AQ5—Add 'in the UK' after 'young people'?

AQ6—Add ',in the UK,' after 'that'?

AQ7—British Medical Association, 2014 – missing reference – please supply.

AQ8—Missing reference – please supply.

AQ9—The wording here is a little unclear. Please check.

AQ10—Public Health England, 2014 – missing reference – please supply.

AQ11—I have added 'to us' otherwise I would expect a citation/reference – ok?

AQ12—I have added 'to us' otherwise I would expect a citation/reference – ok?

AQ13—I have added 'into the death of eight-year-old Victoria Climbié in 2000 (Laming, 2003)' and add the following reference to the References – all ok? Laming, Lord (2003) *The Victoria Climbié Inquiry*, London: HMSO.

AQ14—Lamb, 2010 – missing reference – please supply.

AQ15—Durose et al, 2017 – missing reference – please supply.

AQ16—Arnstein, 1969 – missing reference – please supply.

AQ17—Keohane, 2009 – missing reference – please supply.

AQ18—Needham, 2008 – missing reference – please supply.

AQ19—Dunston et al, 2009 and Steele, 2017 – missing references – please supply.

AQ20—I have added 'in the Dying to Talk project' for clarification as the rest of this paragraph and indeed this section, is talking in general terms – ok?

- AQ21—What page number should be added for the Jupp Kina 2012 quote?
- AQ22—Please add a caption to Figure 2 and mention it in the text where appropriate.
- AQ23—Should ‘and the festival and drew on’ be changed to ‘and the festival drew on’?
- AQ24—I have added ‘15’ here, assuming you are talking about all 15 – ok?
- AQ25—Of the 15, 8 knew, which should leave 7 who didn’t know, and yet in the sentence after the following bulleted list, it says that only one didn’t know. Please provide clarification.
- AQ26—Quote marks have been removed from these quotes, which I assume are written quotes from the questionnaires. Journal house style is to have no quote marks for such extracted quotes. All ok?
- AQ27—Again, quote marks have been removed – ok?
- AQ28—Again, quote marks have been removed.
- AQ29—Again, quote marks have been removed – ok?
- AQ30—Please clarify whether the quotes in this paragraph are written quotes (in which case they should be in single quote marks) or verbal quotes (in which case they should stay in double quote marks).
- AQ31—Please clarify whether the quotes in this paragraph are written quotes (in which case they should be in single quote marks) or verbal quotes (in which case they should stay in double quote marks).
- AQ32—I have assumed that the following is a direct speech quote. Journal house style for extracted direct speech is for single quote marks, and double quote marks within. Ok? If not, it should be no external quote marks and single quote marks within.
- AQ33—I have assumed that the following quote is direct speech, so single quote marks as it is an indented extract as per house style – ok?
- AQ34—I have assumed the following is a direct speech quote and so is in single quote marks, which is the house style for extracted direct speech quotes – ok? If it is a written quote, there should be no quote marks at all for extracted ones.

AQ35—Missing reference – please supply.

AQ36—I have assumed the following is a direct speech quote and so is in single quote marks, which is the house style for extracted direct speech quotes – ok? If a written quote, it should have no quote marks at all.

AQ37—Please confirm that this is a direct speech quote. Otherwise, if a written quote, it will need single quote marks.

AQ38—Is it possible to spell out what IP stands for before the abbreviation?

AQ39—This acknowledgements section has been rejigged a little – all ok?

AQ40—Change PI to principal investigator? No need for abbreviation.

AQ41—Please spell out what CoIs stands for instead of using the abbreviation.

AQ42—For Booth, in press, is it possible to add the journal in which the article is going to appear? Or the name of the publisher if a book?

AQ43—Pestoff et al 2012 isn't cited anywhere. Is it ok to delete the reference?