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PICTURE BOOKS AND BOARD GAMES: CONVERSATIONS ABOUT DEATH AT SCHOOL

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Abstract: Although death is a universal human experience, it remains a distant topic from conversations in the school context. Educational institutions and teachers do not feel prepared to address the issue. However, communities recognize the importance of talking about death. Teachers, parents, and students see this as a possibility to prepare for death and support grief. Experts affirm that it is necessary to address death from the earliest educational levels. This is how students will be able to understand death early and be prepared to deal with it empathetically. In-depth treatment through mediation practices must be prioritized, and different voices and cultural contexts must be validated in understanding death (Pfeiffer, 2003; Eyzaguirre, 2006; Bolkan et al., 2015). Therefore, it is imperative for school institutions to support and guide students. This work reports two studies on education for death where conversation is the key. The first study refers to conversations that begin with reading books in primary education; the second, conversations based on a board game in high school. The results allow us to affirm that death is a topic that worries students, and that, in turn, they are available to address it. Furthermore, the use of educational devices, such as books and games, places the difficulty of the topic in a non-personal space. By separating it from life experiences, complexity is mitigated, and death becomes an approachable topic. The work constitutes a contribution to pedagogical spaces as it shows concrete ways to address situations of death, in a scenario where there is still precariousness in approaches and methodologies.

Keywords: Education for death; picture books; table games.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

TALKING ABOUT DEATH AT SCHOOL

Although death is one of the great certainties of life, it is not easy for adults to talk about it, especially when their interlocutors are children and adolescents. Death is a topic that generates discomfort: it is feared, avoided, and hidden since there is no education or the necessary tools to address it. To respond to this difficulty, in recent decades lines of research have been consolidated in both the Anglo-Saxon and Spanish-speaking worlds. For example, Mascarenhas and Testoni (2011) affirm that "Education for Death" seeks to prepare people to live and accompany death from an interdisciplinary approach that involves not only medicine but also psychology, philosophy, theology, and, Without a doubt, education. For their part, authors such as De la Herrán Gascón y Selva (2007) or Colomo (2016) focus their studies on education, pointing out the importance of incorporating the "Pedagogy of Death" into the official curriculum and, therefore, into the schools. This study is situated in the first approach of Education for Death, but with a proposal for the school as a training entity that constitutes an ideal place to address it. An interdisciplinary approach is chosen to serve educational purposes.

TEACHING DEVICES FOR COMPLEX TOPICS

Teaching devices or resources understood as tools to support teaching work in the teaching-learning process contribute to developing abilities, capacities and skills in students at all educational levels (Zoila-Adelina, 2023). Based on this premise, Colomo and De Oña (2014) and Colomo (2016) propose that the use of various teaching resources would be a way to bring the topic of death closer to the school context.

For example, they point out that songs or stories would be cultural and pedagogical instruments to converse, deepen, and enrich students' understanding of the topic of death. In this study, two other didactic resources are proposed to bring the topic of death in schools: the picture book and the board game. Both are put at the service of conversation and constructing meanings collaboratively. The basic assumption is that addressing this complex issue in a shared manner is more appropriate than doing it individually.

PICTUREBOOK

The picture book is a postmodern discursive genre (Dresang, 2008; Allan, 2018) that has managed to break with what is established by addressing the thematic taboos of adults: illness, depression, wars, migration, and death, among others (Beckett, 2018). Furthermore, he has stood out for his great expressive capacity that allows him to communicate through images, which is difficult to communicate through words. These books orchestrate verbal and visual sequences that imply a reader who recognizes both a text that he must read (Op de Beeck, 2018).

The communicative capacity of the picture book is produced by the combination of two different languages: verbal and iconic, in a relationship of dependency in which one is at the service of the other and vice versa. Thus, the picture book requires an active reader who must make an interpretive effort to make sense of the visual and written contents and to move between these two codes (Ruiz-Domínguez, 2014; Painter, 2018).

The presence of two codes or languages in the picture book shows its status as a multimodal text (Painter et al. 2013); that is, the use of two semiotic modes to construct meanings. Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006) propose that a multimodal text such as the picture book can be studied from three metafunctions: ideational, which studies how the world is represented; interpersonal, whose focus is on the interactions between the characters and/or reader; and the textual, which studies the composition of the text.

In a study, Colomer and Margallo (2013) showed that conversations based on a picture book that addresses a complex topic such as migration allow readers to link the story with their personal worlds and construct the meaning of the texts by reading both ways. They also showed that when talking about a text, it was possible to classify readers' responses into the following categories: *references* that try to translate into words the story explained by the images; *compositional*, focused on narrative aspects; *intertextual*, which relates reading to other texts, and personal, in which readers project their own experiences in reading. Lawrence Sipe delves into personal reading responses insofar as they link reading with the experiences of the world and in the world, the interests, preferences, and childhood and youth practices of readers. It is these personal responses that, ultimately, ensure that reading becomes meaningful for the reader (1998; 2002).

All of the above highlights the potential of a teaching resource such as the picture book to open conversations, reflect, and generate bridges between students and a topic as complex as death.

BOARD GAMES IN SCHOOL CONTEXTS

In recent times, research has shown that games have not only been used to entertain participants but also as a didactic tool to generate learning. Therefore, it is not surprising that games are being developed in different parts of the planet that deal with difficult topics: bullying, menstruation, sexual violence, and death, to name a few.

In Taiwan, Hsi-Ping Nieh and Wen-Chi Wu (2018), and in Canada, Kriglstein et al. (2020) developed games to promote prevention and awareness of the effects of *bullying*. In the first case, it was a collaborative board game; in the second, they were role plays, in which the participants had to put themselves in the role of victim or abuser. Virtual games have also been designed in which the participants witnessed the harassment. In both countries, the results showed that the players increased their knowledge about bullying, which was reflected in their attitudes and the increase in empathy between them.

Jain and Yammiyavar (2015) developed a digital game to inform and break down taboos around menstruation and puberty in India. Likewise, Salaric and Diehl (2019) tested two prototypes of a game that addressed menstruation with families to make women question old handed-down practices and make daughters feel safe in their homes. Besides, the aim was for the male members to learn about the topic and understand the women's experiences in their family group. The results of both experiences demonstrated that using the games created a positive atmosphere, opened spaces for conversation, and increased knowledge about the subject in the participants.

A similar experience was developed in Bolivia, where Long et al. (2015) created a board game to alleviate the discomfort that occurred in adolescents when talking about menstruation. The game contained questions in Spanish and Quechua (their native language), which allowed the participants to feel more comfortable and confident.

In Spain, Testón and Garrido (2020) created the "Mortician's Tale" game to discuss death from a Death-Positive perspective. The purpose was to promote player reflection and provide a more ethical and human experience.

In short, the use of teaching resources such as games in their different modalities (board games, role-playing or virtual games, etc.) brings positive results in the treatment of complex topics, promoting reflection and learning among participants of different ages.

This work reports two studies that use teaching devices to promote conversations about death at school. Picture books were chosen to work with primary school students, and a board game was designed for secondary school.

METHODOLOGY

This article reports two qualitative studies developed in the context of the research agenda on Education for death that has been carried out in the Faculty of Education of the Catholic University of Chile since 2017.

Education for Death research privileges in-depth access to understandings, experiences, and practices related to dying and death (Pfeiffer, 2003; Eyzaguirre, 2006). Since we seek to access the 'personal voice', open instruments with oral components are preferred so that participants can connect in depth with their personal stories (Bolkan et al., 2015).

The studies presented are situated in this approach, prioritizing depth and work with limited samples, as well as oral instruments, such as conversations and focus groups, which are complemented with the analysis of pencil and paper questionnaires and the creation of texts. The purpose is to invite participants to think about a complex topic that they have probably not thought about before or have not thought about on a regular basis. Some researchers postulate the mobilizing nature of this type of study to the extent that they highlight an unexpected topic, even leading to attitudinal changes (Pfeiffer, 2003; Neimeyer et al., 2014).

Both works are carried out in educational contexts of high cultural diversity in Chile and Chad. This diversity is expressed in the cohabitation of religious beliefs, culture, and ethnic origin.

All the instruments used were designed especially for these studies and were subjected to expert judgment (Galicia, Balderrama, & Edel, 2017).

The written productions and the focus group were transcribed and analyzed thematically (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The posters from the first study were further analyzed using categories of multimodal discourse. The results and themes identified were triangulated and discussed within the research team, ensuring their relevance and consistency (MacPhail, Khoza, Abler, & Ranganathan, 2016).

	Study 1 Reader responses	Study 2 Board game
Methodological design	• Qualitative study • Analysis of reading responses to Picture books	• Qualitative study • Evaluative research • CIPP model
Teaching device	• Reading response task to the book Toad and Blackbird's Song	• Collaborative board game to talk about death
Sample	• Primary Education • 5 to 10 years • 6 students • Santiago, Chile	• Secondary education • 14 to 18 years old • 18 students • Santiago de Chile, Abéché-Chad
Information collection instruments	• Posters created by the schoolchildren • Recordings of literary conversations	• Contextual questionnaire • Usability questionnaire • Focus group

Table 1. Methodological characteristics of studies 1 and 2

STUDY 1: READING RESPONSES TO PICTURE BOOKS

Methodological design: This study adopts the perspective of reading response analysis. It focuses on the strategies that readers use to construct the meaning of the text (Margallo, 2014).

Device or task: The applied task included two stages: in the first, the students had to read the assigned picture book individually; In the case of kindergarten students, the mediator read the work. The selected texts were: ``*El Vuelo de Francisca*`` by Brenda Ríos, which addresses the theme of death from the experience of a child who loses his grandmother, and Vivo by Andrea Franco, which treats death as part of the life cycle (Ow et al., 2017). Subsequently, they were asked to put themselves in the situation that the book they read would be transformed into a movie and that it was necessary to build a poster to promote it. The children built their poster considering the characters, place, or illustration of their choice, using colors and words that related to the story read. In addition, they gave a different title than the book.

In the second stage, the readers were grouped by level to tell their partner about the book they had read and present the poster, mentioning what aspects they considered when creating it. Finally, the students participated in a literary conversation about their readings, with questions such as what the book made them think about and what elements of the book they liked.

Sample and application of instruments: The sample was intentional and responded to the following selection criteria: primary education students, educational institutions with cultural diversity of students, voluntary participation, and support from families and educational authorities. A sample of six boys and girls from a private subsidized school in Santiago de Chile was formed. The ages of the participants ranged between 5 and 10 years

since three school levels were considered: Kindergarten (5 years), 2nd (7-8 years), and 4th grade (9-10 years). Three students in the sample were of Haitian origin, and three were of Chilean origin. Before the study, ethical consents from parents and educational authorities were processed.

The task was applied in the school context, in a room separate from the rest of the classrooms. It was developed by a professional from the same educational center with the support of one of the researchers.

STUDY 2: COLLABORATIVE BOARD GAME

Methodological design: The study is a qualitative research paradigm that seeks an in situ understanding of school reality. Its design responds to evaluative research that understands intervention as a critical action that contributes to improving school practices. An adaptation of Stufflebeam's (2002) CIPP (Context, Input, Process, and Product) model was used to design, apply, and evaluate a teaching device that would allow addressing the topic of death with Secondary Education students. This model has been used in evaluative research in different school subjects (Zapatero Ayuso et al. 2017; Gómez-Carrasco et al. 2018; Prats et al. 2019).

Device or task: A collaborative board game was designed to discuss death. Two versions were developed, Spanish and French, ensuring relevance for the participants in terms of the language in use in their schools (Spanish in Chile, French in Chad) and in specific content associated with their culture (Christian and Muslim).

Under the dynamic of private investigators, the team had to formulate cases—explanatory narratives—to respond to a client who wanted to know who died and how. The game was applied on three occasions. Previously, there was awareness work with teachers and students on the topic of the game. To protect their well-being, there was a protocol for adverse events, which was not necessary to use.

At the beginning of the study, a contextual questionnaire was used to collect information related to experiences linked to death, games, and schoolwork. After the three rounds of play, a new instrument was used to collect evaluations about its use and the experiences that it triggered. In one of the contexts in which the game was applied, a focus group was also held with the participants.

Instrument display and application: The sample is intentional and according to previously defined criteria. It comprised students from two very different cultural and religious contexts: Santiago de Chile, with Christian beliefs, and Abéché in Chad, with a strong presence of Islam. In Chile, a mixed and secular educational establishment was selected, and in Chad, a woman private Catholic one. The sample selection criteria were secondary education students, voluntary participation, and support from school authorities and families. The selection of both contexts obeys a feasibility criterion given that they are schools with links through the networks maintained by the university where the team is researching.

Given that voluntariness was a key criterion in the selection of participants, the sample was gradually reduced in this study. This way, of the 27 Chilean participants who answered the contextual questionnaire, only 5 answered the usability questionnaire. In the case of Chad, of the initial 14 students who answered the first instrument, only 13 answered the second. Considering the volatility of the sample and its small size, the analyses will be presented in a grouped manner.

The development of the research was in phases. In the first instance, the project was presented to the community, and ethical permissions were obtained. Subsequently,

the contextual questionnaire was applied. There were two sessions of application of the game, with three rounds; In the last session, the contextual questionnaires were applied and, subsequently, the focus group was held in the case of Chad. The entire process lasted between 3 (Chad) to 6 weeks (Chile).

The activities were developed in the school context at a time agreed upon with the educational authorities.

ANALYSIS

STUDY 1: CONVERSING WHILE READING A PICTURE BOOK

Firstly, the multimodal analysis of the posters produced is presented. Secondly, the literary conversations are analyzed to focus on the students' understanding of death.

MULTIMODAL ANALYSIS OF THE POSTERS

From the students' creations, it can be determined that they all have chosen specific moments in the works to build their posters, adding or removing characters or places. In general terms, the posters reflect that the theme of death is detected by all students; this can be observed both in the drawings and in the interviews carried out later. When analyzing the creations, uses of visual elements enhance the message they wanted to deliver and give clues about how they understand the text and the theme of death.

Firstly, posters that refer to the work Vivo (Franco, 2012) allow us to observe how the student's understanding of the text is progressing. For example, a kindergarten child focuses his poster on the friendship relationship, on the characters who, despite being in a moment of sadness, reflected in the expression on the main character's face, are involved with each other through the use of color that the student used.

The production of a second-grade student reflects a more complex understanding. Two important moments are observed to conceptualize death as part of the life cycle. On the one hand, the moment in which the protagonist carries out the ritual of burying the animal that has died, where death is characterized by the animal's cross-shaped eyes. On the other hand, the scene where the main character observes that life returns is reflected in a bird that feeds its young.

Figure 1. Poster from the book ``Vivo``. 2nd grade student.

It is interesting to observe the textual composition of the poster, which is divided into two moments. The scene in the upper space could reflect the ideal around the understanding of death as part of a vital process, where life recovers, is reborn, and continues its cycle. And the bottom, the real thing. Death is a sad process but one that is common and natural to living beings. Maturana mentions, "The model of the Ideal and the Real is also based on the division of information into two contrastable poles" (2023, p.56), which can be clearly observed in this poster. The author proposes that the composition will present two meanings. At the top is that which is idealized, and at the bottom is information with a generalized nature.

Secondly, when observing the poster creations associated with the work "El vuelo de Francisca "(Ríos & Pérez, 2011), it can be

determined that the three students perceive that the story tells of a change in the lives of the characters, and death is the event that allows that change.

The students focused their attention on the company that a person who has experienced the death of a loved one requires and drew visual elements in the constructions of their posters that allow this aspect to be highlighted. For example, in the case of the kindergarten student, one can infer the importance of the company that the characters provide to the protagonist: calm and protection.

By observing the creation of the second-grade student, it can be determined that there is greater complexity in the creation of the poster and, at the same time, progress in the specificity with which the child recreates significant elements of the narrative. The poster focuses on the company and the protection provided by the family. It is interesting to observe the composition of the poster created. At the top is the grandmother, who is probably flying over the city, representing an ideal place for someone who has died. At the bottom of the image, Carlitos is with his mother, accompanied by a cat and a white butterfly. Once again, we see a composition structured around the ideal and the real.

The student in the literary interview mentions that this butterfly chases him and also that his grandmother is close to him, relating the role of the butterfly to the company of the protagonist's grandmother.

The image focuses on the family structure reflected in the work, which is enhanced by the incorporated phrase "We are all a family."

The poster of the fourth-grade student is different, presenting a different understanding of the topic addressed in the text since the poster's focus is rather associated with friendship and the relevance of bonds when a loved one is lost. The student tries to recreate the moment when Carlitos' friends accompany him in a tree house. It can be seen that the butterfly is represented on the roof of the house, and in turn, inside the ceiling, the phrase "the love that my friends have for me" is written, giving importance and prominence to the friendship relationship. On the other hand, the house functions as a protective element of the clouds drawn around the house, which have the word written inside: sadness.
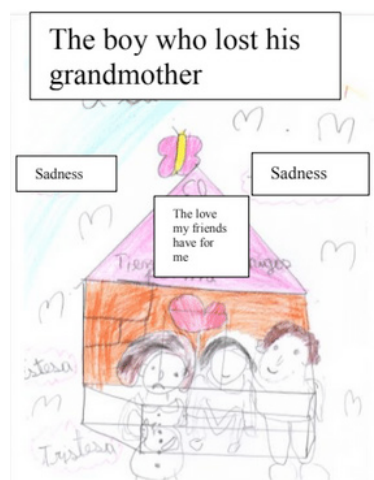

Figure 3. Poster from the book: ``*El Vuelo de Francisca*``, 4th grade student.

Figure 2. Poster from the book: ``*El Vuelo de Francisca*``, 2nd grade student.

ANALYSIS OF LITERARY CONVERSATIONS

The thematic analysis of the conversations is carried out based on concepts that account for the students' understanding of death. Subsequently, the analysis is presented that makes visible the presence of personal responses in the conversations and their relationship with religious beliefs.

Finally, some general appreciations and recommendations given by the participants are addressed.

Understanding death: During much of the 20th century, understanding death was an evolutionary and progressive process. The studies came, especially, from pediatrics, education, and psychology (Childers and Wimmer, 1971; Melear, 1973). In this context of inquiry, M. Speece and S. Brent (1984) proposed a progressive development to build a mature understanding of death. In these phases, concepts such as "irreversibility," "cessation of bodily functions," and "universality" come into play. Other components, such as "causation" and "old age," were added to these three concepts (Smilansky, 1987). In the literary conversations analyzed, some of these concepts were confirmed.

- **Irreversibility:** The irreversible nature of death is evident in different ways in the selected works. The picture book: ``*El Vuelo de Francisca*`` explicitly explains the irreversible nature of death, for example, when the protagonist asks his mother if Francisca will return, and she answers no. In the work *Vivo*, however, there is no evidence of any element that refers to this category.

In relation to the above, the analysis of the literary conversations shows that the students who read the book: ``*El vuelo de Francisca*`` refer to the understanding of death as an irreversible phenomenon compared to those who read the book: ``*Vivo*``, who have

responses associated with reversibility. For example, a kindergarten student points out that the dead bird has returned: "The bird rose up"/"Because he buried the bird, and when it rose up, they were friends forever" (Student 1, Kindergarten).

- **Universality:** Although the universal nature of death is explicitly expressed in none of the works, the analysis of literary conversations shows that readers at all three levels understand that death is inevitable and universal. However, an evolution of the concept of universality can be seen in the answers given by readers to the question, "Will what happened to the character happen to all of us?"

  - "Yes, but when we are old," Student 1, Kindergarten.

  - "Everyone leaves and comes back," Student 2, 2nd grade.

  - "Yes, if a young man approaches and we are walking and we run over them, or some young women are sick or have an attack." Student 1, 4th grade.

In the fragments, you can see how the students move from the belief that all people die when they are grandparents to the understanding that death can happen to anyone, whether young or old.

- **Cessation of biological functions:** Only one of the works expresses the idea that with death, living beings stop breathing, moving, or feeling. Despite this, the two fourth grade readers pointed out that the body stops functioning with death. This coincides with what has been pointed out in research that studies the understanding of death (Poling and Hupp, 2008; Zañartu et al., 2008; Wiseman, 2013; Comellas, 2014; Kübler-Ross, 2014; Quiles & Quiles, 2016), it is believed that it may be influenced by the experience of one of the readers, who

mentions that her mother is a nurse and that she tells her what happens in the hospital where she works.

> "Because they don't have a pulse" / "You can't feel their heartbeat" / "Or sometimes they turn pale and start to get cold." Student 1, 4th grade.

> "If the person is asleep, they forget everything." Student 2, 4th grade.

Personal responses: Another relevant aspect to mention in the analysis of the reading responses is that the fourth-grade students were able to establish greater relationships between the works and their own experiences or with the experiences of close people, compared to the younger students, who did not establish any link.

> "My mother spends time in the hospitals, so... when patients die in her sleep, she puts them down on the stretchers... it just happens that they are already so bad that they don't want to, for example, the other day they didn't want to connect to the mechanical ventilator, and he died there on the stretcher." Student 1, 4th grade.

> "I thought that my grandmother is a little mean to me, I said that I wish I loved her as much as that girl, I loved my grandmother as much as that girl loves hers." Student 2, 4th grade.

The establishment of these relationships accounts for a type of reading response of a personal nature; that is, the construction of meanings is mediated by experience in the world, evidencing a deeper understanding on the reader's part. As Lawrence Sipe (1998; 2002) points out, in this type of response, reading comprehension is appreciated, and the extension of the content of the works to one's own life, creating connections that go "from text to life."

Religious beliefs: Given that the application was carried out in a Catholic school, all students would be expected to express some link with religion in their answers. However,

this only occurs in kindergarten participants who mention concepts associated with "Heaven" and "God" and in a fourth-grade participant who expresses a belief about death associated with her membership in the Jehovah's Witnesses:

> - "I am a Jehovah's Witness and my aunt tells me that the dead are asleep... that the dead do not open their eyes, they do not know anything about what is happening in the world" / "the soul leaves and the body remains, That is why the heart no longer beats, because your heart is there, but it is only like a sponge, because the true heart has already left with body, I mean with soul." Student 2, 4th grade.

Preferences and recommendations: Of the six children who participated in the study, four indicated that they liked the work. However, only two of them would recommend them because the theme can hurt sensitive people. The above could be explained as an effect of school and adult practices since, as previously mentioned, some adults' resistance to talking about this topic with children is clear. Either because adults want to protect children (Aldridge, 2017), because it is difficult for them to talk about it openly (Goldman 1993; Cataudella 2012), or because they feel that they do not have the expressive and emotional resources to do so (Kreicbergs et al., 2004); Kübler-Ross, 2014; Van der Geest et al., 2015). In this sense, it is common for death to be experienced as a narrative of silence (Book, 1996; Mascarenhas & Testoni, 2012).

STUDY 2: MORITURI, BOARD GAME TO TALK ABOUT DEATH

The analysis of the data collected through three sources of information is presented: contextual questionnaire, usability questionnaire and focus group.

CONTEXTUAL QUESTIONNAIRE

Before the implementation of the game, a questionnaire consisting of 27 multiple choice and short answer questions was applied. The purpose of this instrument was to have prior information that would allow the design and adjustment of the board game, making it not only attractive to students but also socioculturally relevant. The questions were organized into three dimensions: understanding and emotions around death, personal experiences linked to death, and consumption of games and video games. It was answered by 41 students.

Below is the analysis of a subset of questions linked to conversations about death at school.

In relation to the **Understanding and emotions around death**, the students indicated that they think about death regularly (85.2%) and that they are not afraid of it (77.8%). When asked how they would describe death, in their answers, they allude to concepts that denote their understanding. For example, they point out that it is **universal**: "as something that will happen to all of us"; that it is a natural process: "It is part of nature"; what is **irreversible**: "Like a path with no turning back"; and what is **inevitable**: "I describe it as a sad, but obligatory stage, something that will always happen." These responses express a more complete understanding of death, which confirms research that indicates that around the age of 10 or 11, a deeper understanding is achieved. It must be remembered that the students who participated in the game application were between 14 and 18 years old.

Three questions investigated the emotions and appreciation surrounding conversations about death. Students considered that in their closest environment (home, school, friends), there is little or no talk about death (53.9%).

However, there is no unanimity as to whether they would like more to be said; only 33.3% consider that they would like it to be discussed more. Regarding the question of whether they would feel comfortable talking about death with their teachers and classmates, 65.9% indicated that they would be comfortable.

Regarding their own experiences linked to death, 92.3% indicate that they have had death experiences of close people (grandparents, great-grandparents, uncles, friends) and pets; 69.2% indicate that these deaths have occurred during the last year. It is important to remember that this study was carried out in the post-pandemic context (2022-2023).

When asked, Do you currently feel sorrow or pain for the death of a loved one? 69.2% indicate that they do. When asked about experiences of conversations about these deaths or emotions, 50% indicate that they have discussed the death of loved ones with someone close to them. These results allow us to affirm that in this sample of young people, the findings of research are confirmed that indicate that students are exposed to death experiences, that these are not distant to them, that they affect them emotionally, and that only half of them have had the opportunity to talk about what the death of a loved one provokes or awakens them.

USABILITY QUESTIONNAIRE

After the three rounds of application of the Morituri game, a questionnaire was applied that had two objectives: "Evaluate the usability of the game in terms of clarity, contribution, and use of its different components" and "Evaluate the quality of the game to talk about death, the aspects of it that facilitate or hinder it."

The instrument had 10 multiple-choice and short-answer questions. Four questions pointed directly to conversations about death, and the rest to the quality of the game. 18 students answered the questionnaire.

The dynamics of the Morituri Game involve the participants collaborating to 'solve' a death

case. It begins with an anonymous client who requests that the players investigate the cause and circumstances of a person's death. Players must collect investigation cards that coherently explain who, how, and why the person died. Each player constructs an explanatory story that he shares with the others. Finally, players decide which story is more convincing, who tells it to the client, and how.

The game seeks to position conversations about death in the school context through a playful approach, cooperation, creativity, and expressiveness. There are no right and wrong answers, and there is no competition.

The usability questionnaire investigated the degree to which the game 'allows dialogue about death.' Thirteen of the 18 students indicated that the game allows 'A lot' and 'Quite a bit' of talking about death. No student considered that the game failed in this aspect.

When asked about the game's strengths to talk about death at school, the opinions highlighted the collaborative nature, the use of cards, and the possibility of creating stories and interpreting images (those on the cards). In the students' words, the game creates "a space where you can talk freely about death and explain it in another way" (Chadiana student). "Talking about death is something that strengthens the game since it is not a topic that is commonly talked about" (Chilean student). In relation to the weaknesses of the game, these responded to aspects of the mechanics themselves, such as the quantity, variety, and use of the cards or the little time they were given to build their stories. One of the responses pointed to the emotional component as a weakness: "The weaknesses we identified are that while we tell the stories we get emotional" (Chadian student). In this same critical line, a student pointed out: "According to me, this game was very entertaining for me, but also very moving because some causes of death such as malaria, murder, are very

dangerous" (Chadian student).

It was also asked if the game allowed us to 'address the topic of death with ease,' which was responded positively with statements such as:

- "Yeah. Since some have problems addressing the topic of death, but playing is easier" (Chilean student).

- "Yes, this game allows me to address the topic of death, since I can even face fear and talk about death" (Chadian student).

- "Yes, since they talk about different cases of death which are likely to happen in our daily lives" (Chadiana student).

- "It serves as an introduction to a talk about death, by introducing you to this topic" (Chilean student).

Other aspects that are valued positively are that it helps explain the death of a loved one, it is at an adequate level of understanding, making it easy to play; and develop knowledge about death.

FOCUS GROUP

Conducting the focus group was only feasible to carry out in the educational establishment of Abéché, Chad; Therefore, the speeches analyzed are those of the African participants.

The analysis of the focus group on the Morituri game reveals that it has been an effective tool to transform the perception and dialogue about death among adolescent girls. Once considered a taboo and feared topic, the game facilitated an atmosphere where talking about death became a normalized and less emotionally charged activity. The collaborative nature of the game fostered a sense of community and mutual support, allowing the students to express themselves freely and manage their emotions constructively. The physical elements of the game, such as boards and cards, played a key role in stimulating imagination and reflection on various aspects of death. Despite the limitations to its use during regular class times, the game was seen

as a valuable educational tool during free hours. Overall, Morituri was presented as an effective means of addressing a sensitive topic, promoting an open and destigmatized discussion about death in a cultural context where it is usually an avoided topic.

Some aspects that stand out in this positive assessment point to:

- **Theme Normalization**: The Morituri game served as a tool to normalize the topic of death among female students. It is noted that before the game, talking about death was a taboo or feared topic: "Before, sometimes, we didn't like to talk about death... But this game allowed us to talk openly about death" (Student 2).

- **Fear Reduction**: The game helped the students face and reduce their fear of death: "This can help me face the fear and then talk about death to a person with clear ideas" (Student 3).

- **Destigmatization**: The focus group stated that the topic was destigmatized, allowing the students to talk about death in a more uninhibited and playful way. For example, "talking about death was difficult, very difficult even for some, especially. But according to this game, we talk as if it were just a game; we have fun and everything even" (Student 1).

- **Collaborative and Social Aspects of the Game:** The collaborative nature of the game fostered a sense of community and mutual support: "With many people at the same table, one talking about death and all that, you imagine the others, what the others talk about, what they say and that, That brings collaboration between all of us, perhaps we have the same ideas that come sometimes, and that is a collaboration I think" (Student 2)

- **Emotion Management**: Although it is noted that the game evoked various emotions, it is also indicated that it fostered an environment where these emotions could be managed and controlled: "Sometimes, when the stories are narrated or imagined, when they are told. Sometimes it is a little real like that. And then... that's exciting, but you try to hide that. So as not to have the intention of... you try to hide that. And in the end, we share that it's just a game so it's not serious" (Student 2).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The studies presented in this work confirm previous research on education for death and challenge the educational institution to take charge of this important training challenge: preparing and preparing for death.

Both studies coincide in addressing the topic from the unavoidable consideration of the students' voices and the validation of their interpretations and points of view. This is always crucial, but it is even more so when the topic is closely linked to personal beliefs and experiences. For these reasons, information collection instruments were built that not only give them a voice but also allow this voice to communicate through instances and expressive resources that are comfortable for them, such as drawing or sharing experiences in a game of table.

As it has been presented in the analyses, talking about death develops empathy and positions an unavoidable life experience in personal space. In turn, it contributes to constructing a language that addresses it. For example, after the experience of the board game Morituri, the topic of death was normalized and destigmatized; it was approached with less fear, and the participants took the floor to share their ideas. In the case of the experience with Picture books, the younger participants were able to construct interpretations and link

the theme of death with their personal worlds.

Both investigations show that the understanding of death is mediated by culture and deepens over the years. Working with children's books that represent death can contribute to consolidating this understanding and making it more complex. For example, the first study revealed how the youngest participants still do not attribute irreversibility to the concept of death and interpret that the characters can come back to life. This quality of death is difficult to understand (Ow et al., 2021), and schools can contribute to developing it. In the second study, the initial instrument investigated the understanding and emotions associated with death, making it evident that high school students already have acquired a complex understanding of death and that educational challenges are more linked to the emotions associated with this. Even though the topic may be emotionally challenging, 65.9% of students said they felt comfortable if they had to talk about death with their teachers and classmates.

Placing death in the fictional space of another's life, be it a literary character or a client who asks to investigate the death of a person in a board game, allows us to distance ourselves and initially objectify it. Fictionalization and objectification are two processes that function as mechanisms to mitigate the complexity and harshness of the experience of dying and death. Talking about death without this mediation of teaching devices, such as books or a game, can be even more complex and even inappropriate in the school context. Teachers, as mediators of student learning and development, can constructively and positively address the topic of death if they become familiar with and use these resources with a pedagogical nature.

These devices also allow connections in conversations with the world and with personal experiences. In literary conversations based on

picture books, for example, personal responses could be detected in which students brought 'the text into their lives' to comment on their family relationships, previous experiences, and concerns. In the case of the board game, it was also detected that the conversations it triggered, even about hypothetical situations, were related to death experiences in the school and personal context.

The conversations in both studies were collaborative; that is, they occurred in exchanges in which the voices of others were essential. The little ones had to present the book they read to a classmate who read another book through a poster to discuss the works later. And the high school students chatted in groups of 4 to 6 people on the board game. Socialization and collaboration strategies were put into play in both studies, which allowed the topic of death to be presented as a community, social, and interpersonal issue and not as an intimate and private issue. Without a doubt, talking about death at school can be more appropriate and constructive if it occurs collaboratively.

Finally, from the perspective of childhood and adolescence, it was possible to see how these are highly mediated by the discourse of adults, their censorship, and precautions. Students want to talk about death, and they do it more naturally and easily when they are little. Schooling and socialization must resume and deepen this initial preference, not inhibit it or 'infect' it with the fears and censures of adults. The children and adolescents' conversations in both studies allowed us to observe deep reflections and genuine interest in death. When asked about the convenience or not of addressing the topic at school, the students pointed out its convenience and necessity. However, at an older age, precautions, doubts, and censures emerge. For example, not all of their peers are prepared since some are very sensitive, and others do not take it seriously.

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