

How Grief Camp Reinforces the Need for Death Education in Elementary Schools

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Abstract: Established to help normalize the grieving process (Schuurman & Decristofaro, 2010), grief camps are traditionally for children and adolescents who have experienced a death-related loss. These camps take children and adolescents out of their daily environment, inviting them to express their grief in innovative and developmentally appropriate ways (Christ, 2000; Koocher, 1973; Laing & Moules, 2015; Neimeyer & Currier, 2009; O'Connor, 2002-2003; Schuurman & Decristofaro, 2010; Tonkins & Lambert, 1996). I am a volunteer at two grief camps in Manitoba and it is apparent that these camps not only fill a gap in the bereavement experiences of children and adolescents, but also highlight the need for more preparation in terms of dying, death, and loss. Pupils in Ontario spend almost 6,000 hours in elementary school (OECD, 2014), yet there is no curriculum that directly addresses death. As a microcosm, grief camp reinforces the need for death education on a macro level in elementary schools.

Keywords: Grief Camp, Children, Adolescents, Death Education, Elementary School, Communication, Applied Theatre

Introduction

Dying, death, and loss touch the lives of children and adolescents far more frequently and with greater impact than we are apt to admit (Hollingshaus & Smith, 2015; Koocher, 1975; Stevenson, 1995). As we live in what is primarily a death-denying and death-defying society (Kastenbaum, 1981), where issues of mortality, for myriad reasons, are skirted, ignored, and even banished (Lundgren & Houseman, 2010), support of the bereaved young person has never been more necessary. However, this support is often insufficient and frequently subject to oppressive forces to conform to societal norms surrounding grief (Harris, 2009-2010). Not immune to issues surrounding dying, death, and loss, young people are being done a great disservice by our embraced ignorance of inevitable life events. This also does not bode well for healthy adult relationships with death, and may culminate in long-term psychiatric disorders if adults do not learn as children how to interact and ultimately accept situations of bereavement (Culpit, 2013; Doka, 1995; Kirwin & Hamrin, 2005). It is time to reclaim our dying (Kortes-Miller, 2018) by moving towards healthy and appropriate modes of lifelong learning regarding death and the life that precedes it.

In this paper, I examine why grief camp as both concept and practical experience answers Kortes-Miller's (2014) clarion call for a more formalized death education to be included in elementary school curricula. Kortes-Miller (2014) stated, "no death education is still death education" (p. 42), which emphasizes how experiences through media, religion, culture, and the arts provide the current exposure to dying, death, and loss education. Informal death education also occurs in the vein of "teachable moments," which may be defined as opportunities that arise organically where adults or older peers may choose to proffer guidance (Culpit, 2013; Furman, 1978). However, the majority of death-related pedagogical resources remain untapped (Gould, 1994; Klass, 1993; Koocher, 1975; Talwar, 2011). This is expanded upon in the section regarding challenges. Consequently, children are learning about dying and death as much from our inaction as our action (Grollman, 1995; Kortes-Miller, 2018) in what Koocher (1975) called a "conspiracy of silence" that arises from three roots: the adult's own emotional anxiety, general uncertainty about what to say to a child, and when a death does occur and an anxious adult is faced with confronting a child (p. 18). This silence, alongside influences from media, religion, culture, and the arts, creates a confused landscape through which children and adolescents are expected to traverse, reinforcing a message that dying and death are events to be feared and ignored (Kortes-Miller, 2013).

Death education can be defined as a developmental process in which dying, death, and loss-related life experiences transmit knowledge, and have profound personal implications for those who experience them (Dennis, 2009). As a result, one way in which educators may appropriate control is through the application of the tenets of grief camp. As such, I argue that grief camp may be understood as an informal educational setting in which children and adolescents receive death education, suggesting that while it is a necessary and positive intervention, it provides only a small portion of a much-needed learning experience. I explore the grief camp experience in terms of peer and community support; activities designed to bring acknowledgement, acceptance, and accommodation of the grieving

process (Piaget, 1975, as cited in Silverman & Klass, 1996; Silverman, 2000; Silverman & Klass, 1996; Stroebe & Schut, 1999); and how grief camp offers a tool kit of activities that are applicable in a classroom environment (Furman, 1978; Gould, 1994; Koocher, 1975; Stanford, 1977). This culminates in an argument for a more proactive elementary school-based approach to death education. This would maximize both the benefits of grief camp as an acute intervention as well as the realization of other important goals of death education – primary prevention (specifically the preparation of individuals for dying and death) and rehabilitation (learning from death-related crises; Dennis, 2009). These ideally parallel the six overarching goals of education in thanatology (the study of death): personal enrichment, plans for the future, participation in society, professional and vocational training, communication, and understanding of the continuing effects of bereavement (Hadad, 2009, p. 9). This approach will be most effective if it is both interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary, as “the teaching of death and dying has always demanded a certain degree of creativity from instructors (Culpit, 2013, p. 352). It will also be dependent upon a focus and emphasis on a pedagogy that relies on what is known as *evidence-based practice* (Culpit, 2013, p. 355). Balk (2007) stated that evidence-based practice is a mutual interaction between researchers and practitioners to inform one another, and that the “call for evidence-based practice in the classroom is now being heard” (as cited in Culpit, 2013, p. 355). As both researcher and practitioner, I need look no further than grief camp for the necessary evidence.

Personal and Theoretical Positionality

I have taught pupils from Kindergarten to A-level College, first in England and then Ontario, for over three decades, most often in theatre arts. My theatre education practice embraces the work of Brazilian theatre practitioner Augusto Boal (2000) whose belief was that theatre as a tool can affect social, cultural, and political change. Thus, theatre becomes a tool to counter oppression, not simply a spectacle for viewing. As a reflective practitioner (Schön, 1984) in and outside the classroom, I have long been interested in what are conversationally known as gaps in the curriculum. I understand these as curricular areas in need of reinforcement, revision, and, in some instances, eradication. Gaps are also evident where little or no scholarship exists; one particularly important void is the lack of structured, and for the most part spontaneous, education around dying, death, and loss.

My career to date includes myriad instances where death, to some degree, touched the school community in which I was a member. I have borne witness to pupils and colleagues grieving a beloved teacher, staff anxious and feeling inept about pupils returning after a loss at home, and adolescents saying goodbye to a peer. A school or classroom “can be turned upside down by the physical and emotional demands of the grief process” (Stevenson, 1995, p. 107). In every instance, it was clear that staff and students were searching for compassionate, respectful, and helpful ways to support one another, and themselves, including making meaning of the loss (Neimeyer, 2000; O’Connor, 2002-2003), telling stories (Bosticco & Thompson, 2005), and commemorating the deceased (Hadad, 2009; Klass, 1993, Silverman & Klass, 1996; Worden, 1996). However, the lack of preparedness regarding coping with issues surrounding dying, death, and loss appeared to prevent healthy grieving from being realized and I observed questions remaining unacknowledged and conversations shut down. When outside supports were introduced, such as post-loss Tragic Events Team interventions (Sakiyama, 1996), the school community was responsive and grateful for guidance provided; however, it struck me that these interventions, while perhaps adequate for acute grief, could be bolstered prior to and post event.

The Tragic Events Team is a voluntary group consisting of educators employed within the school board, sent in to help the students and teachers cope with the loss (Sakiyama, 1996). While these teams are acting with the best intentions, they lack the ability to help normalize how children observe and understand death processes because they reinforce passivity until action is apparently required. In addition, often team members enter into an environment in which there is no inherent trustworthiness; many responders are not from the school in crisis and therefore do not have established relationships with the pupils and staff. Finally, the term *crisis* is used throughout manuals regarding death processes in schools (Sakiyama, 1996; Talwar, 2011), but again this implies the problematic belief that death really only need be addressed when it has already happened, or in the event of an unexpected death. As children and adolescents often seek regularity and structure after a loss (Hadad, 2009; Tremblay & Israel, 1998), there is a reasonable argument to be made for more prevention-orientated support from within the school community in order to create a more balanced approach.

This position paper stems from my experience in secular education only; thus, I am unsure about what might constitute death education in separate school systems in Ontario. Speece and Brent (1984) and Stevenson (1995)

suggested that there are three essential components of death all young people should know, regardless of religious belief or cultural difference: nonfunctionality (that a dead body no longer experiences anything), irreversibility (that this physical reality of death lasts forever), and universality (all living things die). A cursory look at the curricular document for religious instruction in Ontario elementary schools (Institute for Catholic Education for the Assembly of Catholic Bishops of Ontario, 2012) suggests this curriculum is not exemplary of practical death pedagogy for 21st century learners, and that the argument for death education could be made in both public and separate school boards.

In addition, this paper is not a treatise on how death education could be feasibly implemented in elementary schools - although I do explore some practical applicability on how to do so (Furman, 1978; Gould, 1994; Koocher, 1975; Stanford, 1977). Instead, this paper is about how grief camp reinforces the necessity for death education. The logistical challenges of change in policy documents to include formal death education alone are not lost on me; I do not presume to have anything other than suggestions regarding what it would look like in practice.

Death education is a public health issue (Kellehear, 2015), one that ideally remains on the life trajectory of individuals until their own demise. It seems more than pertinent to consider its inception at the elementary school level—especially because children conceive their ideas about death early in their development (Christ, 2000; Furman, 1978; Kenyon, 2001; Koocher, 1973; Kortess-Miller, 2018; Silverman, 2000; Silverman & Nickman, 1996). It also speaks to the issue that experiences surrounding dying, death, and loss change as children develop, cognitively and socially (Silverman, 2000; Worden, 1996). As such, educators need to prepare children not just for life, but for death as well (Ratner & Song, 2009). This preparation includes the more concrete facts regarding dying, death, and loss, but also forays into the more illusory aspects, such as magical thinking (Didion, 2005; Gould, 1994) and continued bonds with the deceased (Klass, 1993; Silverman & Klass, 1996; Silverman & Nickman, 1996). Grief camp, situating mourning children and adolescents in a space for healthy processing of death-related loss, does just that. The wider community, however, also has a role in this public health issue; elementary schools, too, could provide such a space.

Grief Camps

Grief camps afford children and adolescents who have experienced a death-related loss opportunities for healthy grieving alongside peers, healthcare professionals, and trained volunteers (Brown & Kimball, 2012; Clute, 2017; Clute & Kobayashi, 2013; Creed, Ruffin, & Ward, 2001; Marabella, 2014; Nabors et al., 2004). As a volunteer cabin leader and drama facilitator, I attend two residential camps that are held over the course of a weekend at the end of each school year. We invite a maximum of 60 campers, ranging in age from six to 17. The majority of our campers have lost either a parent or a sibling in the last two years. Campers are invited to bring a photo of their loved one who has died as well as an article of that person's clothing. They are also given a journal at registration that can be written in over the course of the weekend and taken home.

My two grief camps are provided to the family of the child free-of-charge, and the only stipulation is that the camper must know how their loved one died¹ (Furman, 1978) as the inability to respond when questioned by peers reinforces the issue of disenfranchisement (Doka, 1995) and can contribute to complicated grief (Boelen, van den Hout, & van den Bout, 2006). Grief campers participate in traditional camp activities (such as horseback riding, zip lining, canoeing, etc.) and grief-related activities (including memorial picture frames, balloon and butterfly releases, and candlelight services; Schuurman & Decristofaro, 2010). As with most residential camps, campers are assigned to age- and sex-appropriate cabins, with at least two staff members in each. Volunteers attend a mandatory training session that emphatically supports responding to campers' questions and concerns directly, insisting upon frankness and correct terminology. This is in keeping with the suggestion that euphemisms and inaccuracies only serve to further confuse children and could contribute to isolation (Bluebond-Langner, 1978; Furman, 1978). I recall one camper, a boy of 10, who looked me in the eye and told me he would punch out the next person who told him his mum was "in a better place," adamant that if she *were* in a better place, it would be still on Earth taking care of him. Accurate terminology and candor are also used in an effort to ensure that campers feel that they are adequately heard, promoting ongoing dialogue throughout the weekend. In this sense, communication becomes inter- as well as intrapersonal, as the camper has the opportunity to bond with the living about the dead, and with the deceased through introspection (Klass, 1993; Silverman & Klass, 1996; Silverman & Nickman, 1996; Stroebe & Schut, 1999).

¹While this is the case for many grief camps, this is not a requirement for the grief camps at which I volunteer and I apologise for any misunderstandings as a result.

Grieving children and adolescents are, in the majority of cases, a part of grieving families, but are at risk of isolation and often feel unable to share their experiences of loss at home (Doka, 1995; Zucker, 2009). There exists an erroneous assumption that they either cannot experience grief or need to be protected from it (Creed et al., 2001; Doka, 1995). As a result, I hear stories from children and teens expressing frustration about being left out of the family conversations, rituals, and planning surrounding a loved one's death. In addition, families who are grieving are often unable to adequately support one another (Nabors et al., 2004), further complicating the process and setting a trend, including incremental grief (Cook & Oltjenbruns, 1989, 1998, as cited in Stroebe & Schut, 1999) and life-long problems (Doka, 1995; Furman, 1978; Marabella, 2004; Schreiber & O'Brien, 2015). For example, parents grieving the loss of a child might have difficulty reaching out to their other children (Clute & Kobayashi, 2013; Creed et al., 2001), which in turn means surviving children might shield or repress their grief in order to not contribute to the emotional distress (Nabors et al., 2004). These unhealthy grief responses contribute to disenfranchised grief. As Doka (1995) rightly suggests, the very nature of disenfranchised grief precludes social support; this is where the community at large could play an important role. Many grief camp staff share that some campers acknowledge that the weekend is the first time they have allowed themselves to share their feelings regarding their loss (Sorensen & King, 1999). Subsequently, in an effort to reinforce the validity of their grief, campers are made aware of several important points throughout the weekend: that they are not alone; that whatever their feelings, they are perfectly normal (Schuurman & Decristofaro, 2010); that grief is expressed in ways that are unique to the individual (Creed et al., 2011; Laing & Moules, 2015); and that children grieve differently from adults (Marabella, 2014; Schuurman & Decristofaro, 2010; Silverman, 2000).

At grief camp, there are compassionate and interested adults, many of whom have firsthand grief experience, to guide, support, and actively listen (Hadad, 2009). Additionally, campers find similarities while sharing stories with staff and peers, creating a comradeship that "fosters a sense of connection, validation of experiences, communication, and mutual support" (Steinberg, 2004, p. 43). These factors appear to contribute to an atmosphere of intimacy and trust that is established from the very beginning of the weekend.

The overarching aims and objectives of grief camps are: afford community and peer support (Clute & Kobayashi, 2013); provide a safe space in which to grieve (Sorensen & King, 1999); and offer access to dying, death, and loss-related activities that focus on acute grief experiences as well as set in motion coping strategies for post-camp (Nabors et al., 2004). Each day is scheduled to include activities that allow open dialogue about grief and help normalize subsequent feelings (Brown & Kimball, 2012). However, it is important to note that grief camp ensures that not every activity is grief-orientated—which keeps with Stroebe & Schut's (1999) dual process model that speaks of an oscillation between loss- and restoration-oriented coping (p. 216). At grief camp, I observe most frequently the oscillation between the experience of the pain of grief (Worden, 1991, as cited in Stroebe & Schut, 1999) and taking time off from the pain of grief (Stroebe & Schut, 1999).

As life moves forward, campers ask if it is permissible to play (or step away from their grieving), reassured by staff that this is perfectly healthy behaviour. I have also observed this oscillation in an elementary school setting. Again, I suggest that an elementary school-based approach to death education would only serve to maximize and elongate this and many other benefits of grief camp, and vice versa. This forms a cycle of healthy death education that is the antithesis of the current one: Kortes-Miller (2018) reminded us that we neglect our death education at the peril of subsequently lacking the emotional and practical skills to navigate our way through normative life events. I agree with Kortes-Miller (2018) that it is time to break this cycle. One method of moving away from this pattern is to explore the efficacy of the tools used during grief camp and their transferability to an elementary school classroom.

The Weekend as a Tool Kit

Friday night has campers creating memorial picture frames to surround a photo of their loved one. These frames are then hung in the main hall so that campers and staff can visit the pictorial wall, sharing details about the people who have died. The wall is up all weekend, purposefully visible during the candlelit memorial service. Parents and guardians are invited to visit it during the end of camp pick-up session Sunday afternoon. Very often, there are tears Friday night; the memorial frame-making activity might trigger an emotional response, or a camper may be regretting their decision to spend the weekend at grief camp. These responses, as long as they are not inappropriate or cause for concern, are never discouraged; it is important that campers know that any emotional outpouring is cathartic and that they are in a safe, non-judgmental environment (Marabella, 2014; Schreiber & O'Brien, 2014).

While the picture frame and how it is weaved throughout the weekend's activities is an important product, there is also the process involved in the making of it to consider. As with many arts-based activities, I have observed children and adolescents talk with one another and with staff as they create, speaking openly about the memorial frame itself as well as its motivation. Framing the object in both a literal and figurative sense contributes to inter- and intrapersonal dialogue that reinforces who is important in the life of that person, and why that matters. Potentially, this kind of activity could circumvent the issue of holiday observance in the elementary school classroom. For example, card-making for a mother or guardian on Mother's Day, whether living or not, might prevent further disenfranchisement by reinforcing the continuing bond (Klass, 1993; Silverman & Klass, 1996; Silverman & Nickman, 1996) with the deceased in a normative way.

Saturday's schedule affords cabin mates and their counselors intra- and interpersonal activities that both directly and indirectly contribute to healthy grieving. Again, activities such as horseback riding and rock climbing surreptitiously contribute to open dialogue as the cabin mates and staff encourage and rely on one another, tightening the interpersonal bonds and trust required of each of them. This atmosphere is even more tangible during grief-related activities. At the Comfort Pillow Station, campers are invited to choose complementary fabric swatches to combine with their loved one's article of clothing, which is then amassed to make a small pillow. As Furman (1978) suggests, while adults often find it healthier to purge objects belonging to the deceased, for children the opposite usually holds true.

Here we see the fabric of the loved one, most often a favourite shirt, transformed into an object, understood as a transitional object (Worden, 1991, as cited in Stroebe & Schut, 1999), to be used and cherished in a new version of life in which the deceased is no longer a corporal presence. I appreciate this station for many reasons, but for two reasons in particular. Firstly, that the conversational exchange as the child sits with the seamstress is a wonderful example of intergenerational learning and mentorship possible in death education, again reinforcing the value of both product and process. Secondly, because the activity highlights the need to adjust to an environment in which the deceased is no longer present (Stroebe & Schut, 1999) as well as bringing grief to the surface while being physically and emotionally nurtured (LoCicero, Burkhart, & Gray, 1998).

The Comfort Pillow Station activity could be modified in a classroom environment. This transformation of a loved one's item into a new object reinforces the connectivity between the wearer and the pillow crafter, and a pupil has the option to select any family member or friend who is important in their lives. Again, while this process not only results in an object, it more importantly stresses the important exchange of dialogue that occurs in the contemplation of who is important to them: the requesting of the item, the explanation to peers at school regarding its significance, and the sharing of stories. Also, the resulting object can potentially be a transitional object (Worden, 1991, as cited in Stroebe & Schut, 1999) in a proactive sense, useful in losses of many types as a tool to reconnect with the missing (e.g., deceased, divorced parent, family member/friend who relocates). Essentially, as with all of the activities explored here, the vehicle that drives both connectivity and education is communication, and again the possibilities for this in the classroom are innumerable.

During times of repose or inclement weather, campers are invited to write in their journals. For children up to the age of 11, the journal is presented in a picture-essay format, so that they may draw and doodle, writing their feelings and observations in a more secondary fashion. For adolescents, the journal is writing-based, comprising more self-reflective information-sharing opportunities that are about the relationships with deceased person as well as to one's self (Parga, 2008). I usually have campers in the older range – 12 and above – and often find them curled up under a tree, alone or in small groups, writing in their journals. I am pleased that the response to journaling is usually positive as adolescents often find striving for continuing bonds to the deceased as positive and meaningful (Andriessen, Mowl, Lobb, Draper, Dudley, & Mitchell, 2018).

In my experience, journaling has been both a direct and indirect journey to self-discovery for the pupil. As an educator, I endeavour to scaffold the learner's experience, in an attempt to provide meaningful building blocks for informative and lifelong learning practices. Journals in numerous formats could be used to explore important connections in students' lives during times of grief or otherwise, providing extension activities such as autobiographical writing, character studies, and storybook creation in the classroom. If a classroom is experiencing a loss, I would suggest that the teacher models active listening and empathy for the bereaved classmate, in order to help the children learn appropriate grief responses (Furman, 1978; Gould, 1994; Koocher, 1975). An instance where this is applicable is in the event of the death of a classroom pet. In addition, journaling techniques can also be

applied in areas such as social studies or language arts in order to better understand a character or event. Again, these activities reinforce communication as pupils ask questions and attempt to make meaning (Neimeyer, 2000; Neimeyer & Currier, 2009; O'Connor, 2002-2003) of the losses and the people affected by them.

I facilitate two theatre workshops at grief camp – one for campers aged six-10, and another for those aged 11 and above. Campers and staff are invited to participate in empowering themselves through theatre, but there is no set agenda. I am guided by the work of Boal (2000), who introduced the notion that there is no divide between actors and spectators. They are separated in simplest terms as those actively onstage and those passively in the audience. As such, everyone actively participates in what is called applied theatre (theatre as tool; Boal, 2000), and is thereby a *spectator*, myself included. This immediately levels the playing field, allowing empowerment to come to fruition for three reasons: firstly, grief is and remains a highly individualized process that is ongoing and long-term (Brown & Kimball, 2012; Creed et al., 2001; Hubert, 2007), so personal empowerment is key; secondly, the content is generated by the *spectators* in a spontaneous, unscripted format, allowing for whatever is at the surface to create and sustain interactive verbal and corporal dialogue; and, thirdly, because applied theatre requires a risk that surpasses other types of theatre, campers and staff embark on a journey that requires empathic responses on more than one level. For instance, in general theatrical terms, I as actor take a risk making myself vulnerable onstage, across from other actors and an audience. Grief camp *spectators* realize a risk that is two-fold: on the one hand, the aforementioned risk of creative vulnerability; and, on the other, the risk of exposing one's self to whatever raw dialogue and action may result. This trust in the people and environment, as mentioned earlier, stems from the intimacy that grief camp appears to enjoy from the outset. However, this also recognizes that not all environments will be as welcoming and gentle to those who are grieving. Thus, empowerment in the face of "societal norms that constrict the experience of grief rather than support it" (Harris, 2009-2010, p. 241) ideally helps the bereaved person move forward.

I have also observed this phenomenon of communal support in theatre workshops in elementary classrooms. I attest that children desire to feel a part of a classroom dynamic after a loss (Hadad, 2009; Tremblay & Israel, 1998) and that theatre is capable of reinforcing that dynamic. Although grief camp affords an environment of shared experience, many parents report that their children's regular peer group was also a strong source of support and that their children were playing as often with friends as before the death (Nabors et al., 2004). This suggests that while the weekend at camp is sometimes the catalyst that brings grief to the surface (Brown & Kimball, 2012), children and adolescents appreciate the value of learning to adjust to a new life, one in which the deceased is missing (Klass, 1993; LoCicero et al., 1998; Stroebe & Schut, 1999), that includes components of life before.

Applied theatre practice in the classroom falls into the category of creative, interdisciplinary, and multidisciplinary approaches (Culpit, 2013) to death education. In simplest terms, because it is empowering—and, on a grander scale, because it easily crosses curricular lines—applied theatre practice utilizes the input of educators from a variety of subject areas, often acting as the starting point to other lines of inquiry. For example, my dissertation—an applied theatre approach to exploring children's perceptions of dying, death, and loss—will produce a playscript. This playscript is the culminating project of the process during which pupils and their classroom teachers generate the data through their questions and concerns about death. Participants *spectact* in workshops based upon that accumulated data, and then I, as playwright, create the final script using the data and my *in situ* field notes. Again, there is value in both process and the resulting object with its own agency, able to be applied in new and diverse ways after the research period concludes. This is in keeping with the dependence upon evidence-based practice for pedagogies that are supportive and respectful of 21st century learners. But it does not mean that it takes a dissertation to introduce applied theatre practices in a classroom in order to implement spontaneous or structured discussions about dying, death, and loss. What it does rely on, however, is pedagogical creativity as well as other factors I address in the following section.

Challenges

The implementation of death education into the elementary school curriculum not only entails a revamping of the existing curriculum, it also asks that a paradigm shift in thinking about the educational and pastoral needs of children and adolescents occur. These are no small feats at an administrative as well as classroom teacher level. Current headlines in Ontario cry of a return to a sexual health education document written at the end of the 20th century. For this recent concern and many other issues, much discussion in my educational circles involves what should be taught in the elementary classroom and what should be taught at home. The implementation of death

education in elementary classrooms is subject to the comfort level of the teacher (Gould, 1994; Koocher, 1975), the time it occupies in an already overburdened schedule, and begs the inevitable question of whether or not schools are the appropriate venue from a cultural or religious viewpoint.

Grief camp, as a designated space for death education, circumvents many of these issues as it involves a trained staff already prepared to tackle sensitive issues; supports open, raw, and emotionally charged dialogue; and appears to cross cultural and religious lines with aplomb. This latter issue resolves itself in many ways as arguably no family unable to discuss death would opt to send their child to grief camp, and the only religious undertones I have experienced have been in the Judeo-Christian tradition and within a child's understanding (i.e., Mommy lives in Heaven now). However, as death education occurs whether or not we approve of it (Kortes-Miller, 2014), the argument for having some control over its implementation seems a strong, albeit difficult, one. Koocher (1975) reminded us that "talking about death is more necessary and potentially beneficial than not talking about it" (p. 36); again, having some control over what and how we learn does seem more than desirable.

Conclusion

Death education in schools does not eradicate the need for grief camps. Grief camps serve a valuable purpose and are an appropriate acute intervention. In addition, death education in schools would not replace the use of other interventions, such as the aforementioned Tragic Events Teams (Sakiyama, 1996). Ideally, this pedagogy would use a tool kit that comprises items similar to those of grief camp, but would also be reflective of the primary preventative and rehabilitative objectives of death education (Dennis, 2009) as well as foundation for lifelong thanatological learning (Hadad, 2009). There would be creative, interdisciplinary, and multidisciplinary approaches to schemes of work put into effect that follow the pattern of the equally valuable process and resulting product (object), and its ability to promote storytelling, to emphasize the ongoing need for support for dying, death, and loss. Thus, the emphasis would consistently be upon communication through the educative processes – and an elementary school classroom ideally has the necessary components within which to begin these conversations. As such, death education in elementary schools brackets the acute mourning period so that issues reinforcing dying, death, and loss within the school community would enhance the experience of grief camp, and vice versa. Thus, my answer to the clarion call has been sounded.

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