IF DEATH WAS TOLD TO ME

UDS Université de Sherbrooke





Youth Literature as a Creative Means to Discussing Death

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BACKGROUND

Throughout their development, children will experience various losses, such as the death of a pet or of a grandparent. However, the acquisition of the concept of death varies according to factors such as developmental stage, experiences of death in the family and upbringing, and family, school, religious, and cultural influences. Even if between the ages of 9 to 11, the concept of death is generally understood and integrated (D'Antonio, 2011), many parents and caregivers of school-age children do not know how to appropriately approach this potentially delicate subject with them.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology we used for this study can be separated in three distinct phases: 1) literature review, 2) adaptation of the novel, and 3) validation using two rounds of Delphi.

We first conducted a comprehensive literature review which confirmed that Slaughter and Griffiths (2007)'s five major dimensions of death understanding for school-age children should be included in our chosen novel. Then, research assistants independently read the novel to assess the presence of the five aspects of death within the novel and the adequacy of this representation. The third and final phase of our research closely followed the Delphi method, of which we conducted two rounds online with three separate categories of experts: parents of children aged 5 to 12 (n=10), scholars (n=7), and youth psychosocial workers (n=6).

	EXPERTS CHARACTERISTICS	1ST DELPHI ROUND (N=20)	2ND DELPHI ROUND (N=23)
GENDER	Woman	18 (90%)	21 (91%)
	Man	2 (10%)	2 (9%)
EXPERT CATEGORY	Parents of children aged 5 to 12	6 (30%)	10 (44%)
	Scholars (child development, grief, suicide, psychology)	7 (35%)	7 (30%)
	Youth psychosocial workers (youth centers, Local community services centers)	7 (35%)	6 (26%)
COMFORT LEVEL IN TALKING ABOUT DEATH	Slightly uncomfortable	1 (5%)	0
	Neither comfortable nor uncomfortable (Neutral)	5 (25%)	3 (13%)
	Fairly comfortable	6 (30%)	11 (48%)
	Very comfortable	8 (30%)	9 (39%)

REFERENCES

D'Antonio, A. (2011). Telling children about death. *Pediatric Nursing*, *37*(4), 184-188. https://doi.org/10.3928/02793695-20110802-03.

Keeney, S., McKenna, H. A., & Hasson, F. (2011). The Delphi technique in nursing and health research. John Wiley & Sons.

Slaughter, V., & Griffiths, M. (2007). Death understanding and fear of ceath in young children. Clinical Child Psychology and Psychiatry, 12(4), 525-535. https://doi.org/10.1177/1359104507080980.



OBJECTIVES

The purpose of this pilot study is to obtain expert consensus on the content and the form of the French novel titled "**Grandpa Mario's death**", written by Anne-Marie Lebrun, as a psychoeducational tool to facilitate discussions of the topic of death with children aged 5 to 12.

THE FIVE DIMENSIONS OF DEATH

(Slaughter & Griffiths, 2007)



INEVITABILITY

UNIVERSALITY

CESSATION

CAUSATION

CONTEXT

Studies have icentified five major concepts of death understanding in school-age children. It is through this conceptual framework that we analyzed "**Grandpa Mario's Death**". We wished to assess the use of storybooks as psychoeducational tools to facilitate parents' and youth center workers' discussions of death with children aged 5 to 12.

RESULTS: 1ST DELPHI ROUND

In this first rourd, we asked experts whether they found the metaphor "Grisou was his cat when he was little. He went to heaven." suitable for children aged 5 to 12. The main critiques focused on concerns about religious language and the need to clarify the finality of death

Participants were then asked if they believed the author's portrayal of events following death was appropriate for this age group. Key critiques included the potential anxiety caused by the phrase "but no one knows what happens after death" particularly without further explanation. Results indicated that younger children may view some explanations as too abstract, while older children (9 to 12) could benefit from more concrete information and context.

2ND DELPHI ROUND

In this second round, we presented participants with three excerpts and asked for their views on the appropriateness of the author's metaphors, vocabulary, and questions regarding what comes after death. A key critique was that some vocabulary might be too advanced for younger children (5 to 7). Additionally, younger children may need adult guidance to grasp more complex concepts, and certain story elements might make parents or adult readers uncomfortable. We also noted a lack of cultural and conceptual sensitivity in these excerpts.

We also assessed the relevance of statements related to Slaughter and Griffiths (2007)'s five major dimensions of death understanding, which yielded results from 86 to 100%.

CONCLUSION

- The five dimensions of death offer a useful framework for helping school-age children understand death.
- A storybook with appropriate content constitutes a valuable tool for supporting adults in discussing death with children.
- Further adaptation could be made to ensure that the content is culturally and religiously sensitive, presenting different beliefs.
- Adaptations may be needed for younger children (5 to 7) and across age groups.
- Adult readers should be prepared to answer challenging or uncomfortable questions.
- It is crucial to balance the level of detail in the book, providing enough information without overwhelming or upsetting children.

