Death Education: the case of a group of adolescents

Educación para la Muerte: el caso de un grupo de adolescentes

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Summary

This article attempts to explore and clarify the theme of death from an educational perspective, through a group intervention and a study conducted on 100 high school students.

Death education is conducted through one experiential group, where youth can discuss mourning, loss, separation, death, and life in their own experiences. Participants of this study struggled with ambivalent emotions when facing the polarity of death and life: for instance, they mentioned both hate and love when freely associating with the word 'life'. Adults often share the erroneous idea that death is not part of the adolescent experience. On the contrary, 89% of the boys and girls stated they experienced a mournful event, even in spheres such as friendship and family. Specifically, 24% of them have had to deal with the death of a friend.

This article suggests the necessity of working with small psychodynamic groups when addressing silence and denial which surround the ideas of separation, end, loss, and death working with teen groups.

Keywords
Death, Education, Youth, Group

Resumen

Este artículo intenta explorar y esclarecer el tema de la muerte desde una perspectiva educativa, a través de una intervención grupal y de un estudio realizado en 100 estudiantes de Educación Secundaria. La formación sobre el tema de la muerte se lleva a cabo a través de un grupo experiencial, donde los jóvenes pueden hablar sobre el duelo, la pérdida, la separación, la muerte y la vida a través de sus propias experiencias. Los participantes de este estudio, al enfrentarse a la polaridad de vida y muerte, tuvieron que lidiar con emociones ambivalentes: Ilustrando esto, cuando se realizó libre asociación con la palabra vida mencionaron las palabras odio y amor. Los adultos suelen compartir la idea errónea de que la muerte no forma parte de la experiencia adolescente. Muy al contrario, el 89% de los chicos y chicas declararon haber vivido un acontecimiento luctuoso, incluso en ámbitos como la amistad y la familia. Más específicamente, el 24% de ellos tuvo que hacer frente a la muerte de un amigo. Este artículo sugiere la necesidad de trabajar con pequeños grupos psicodinámicos para abordar el silencio y la negación que rodean a las ideas de separación, finitud, pérdida y muerte cuando se trabaja con grupos de adolescentes.

Palabras clave
Muerte, Educación, Juventud, Grupo

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INTRODUCING CONCEPTS OF DEATH

When working with teenagers, it is paramount to set a foundation matrix by offering some knowledge on the development of the concept of death through history. Not only in the three monotheistic religions, but digging deeper in the past, showing how death has accompanied all the stages of humankind's development. The study of funeral rituals in prehistoric times shows that there is an ancestral link between the development of civilization and the way humans have dealt with their dead. Recent studies, for instance, show that Neanderthals were already burying their dead: the corpses were laid in a pit dug by members of their group and covered up. These discoveries attest to the practice of burial in the Neanderthal civilization, although it is not possible to understand and explain whether there were also complex rituals or a more complex idea of the afterlife behind these practices (Rendu et al., 2013).

When it comes to modern times, it is important to note that in the first two decades of this millennium the concept of death has been strongly influenced by intensively spectacularizing war and terrorism (Mantegazza, 2004). On the other end, present times are also defined by a focus on scientific developments, including in medicine. This progress inevitably ended up conditioning the collective view of the concept of death (Manucci, 2004).

In this paper, we shall give for granted the readers knowledge of the cornerstones of psychoanalytic theory: therefore, we shall not focus on how Freud and Lacan discussed death with their respective concepts of 'death drive' and 'death or pure desire', (Freud, 1915; Miller & Lacan, 1986). Instead, we would like to frame our group work in the studies of Kübler-Ross and Kessler (Kübler-Ross & Kessler, 2014), who focused on bereavement and loss. Specifically on their theorization of the five stages of mourning: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and finally acceptance.

The first phase concerns the initial refusal, the dynamic of denying the distressing news of the diagnosis of an illness or someone's death. This defense mechanism has the function of parrying the blow of the tragic announcement, initially allowing the person to regain the courage to face the disease or the loss, and with time, to manage to activate new defense measures. The state of shock that occurs in this first phase is very high. This is because we discover that our unconscious idea of immortality cannot be realized; therefore, the answer generally becomes 'no, it cannot be me', or 'it cannot be him/her': one is never the 'right' one to face the news of a terminal disease or a death.

Secondly, rejection becomes anger and resentment. Envy towards healthy people grows, or towards those who have no experience of loss; the statement "no, it's not true" turns into a question, why me? This phase is much more difficult for caregivers to cope with, as it does not have a precise target sometimes, but is projected in various directions without sometimes a precise logic.

The condition that follows is aimed at finding an agreement, or a compromise; a give to receive in practice. Some agreements are sought silently with God, not mentioned to others: it is an attempt to stipulate pacts, whereby the sick person through 'good conduct' asks the divine for concessions, such as prolonging life or being free for a few days from the pain that the illness brings. Or where the possibility to trade a life for another is indulged upon ("I would give my life for that of my beloved one").

In the fourth phase of depression, one no longer has the strength to fight in anger but when all seems lost, there are no right words to define one's pain. This phase might correspond to when the patient is forced to undergo various operations and hospitalizations, and the signs of the disease show up in the body; for example, with thinness and weakness, or the loss of the work one did before the hospitalizations. It is a way of preparing oneself for the loss, for the encounter with one's limit. Or it is when we face the ineluctability of the loss of a significant person. People, sometimes, tend to mistakenly try to encourage and reassure a person going through this phase, but how do you force a sufferer to look on the bright and positive side? The risk is to delay if not avoid the complete contemplation of death; accepting one's pain, being in this condition and not denying it is useful for the patient's well-being.

Finally, there is the stage of acceptance, where anger and depression fade away: it is not a defensive evasion but almost an emptiness of feelings, where there is no pain but only peace. The relationship with the family, which is usually behind the patient who has reached this stage, in this phase is particularly delicate. This fifth and final phase is nothing more than 'I can't fight any more'; the person tends to desire only peace, accepts its limits or the mortality of the beloved one who has died.

Although well delineated, these five stages of grief may follow one another, but they may also coexist at the same time, even though some of these reactions to the tragic news are in contrast (Kübler-Ross, 1969).

Nowadays, there is an attempt to confine death to places that are designed to contain (and isolate) all the aspects related to loss, from the practical ones to the most symbolic. Hospices, in fact, not only aim to take care of the patient, but also of his or her family, and propose themselves as a response to these needs and fears. The Hospice Movement is strongly linked to palliative care and was born around the '60s in England, where the first facilities were set up. The characteristics are based on the typical features of homes (furnishings which can sometimes be personalized with personal items, privacy, kitchen, the possibility of not having a timetable for spending time with loved ones, etc.) and on those of hospitals (care and assistance). The palliative approach is a bio-psycho-social orientation that deals with the person in all his or her facets, since it pays attention not only to controlling pain and symptoms related to the disease but to all other needs of psychological, socio-relational, and spiritual nature. These vary from person to person, and this is why palliative care provides personalized care paths. Lastly, palliative care concerns not only the sick person, but also his or her family and/or caregivers,

and aims to improve the quality of life of the terminally ill person and his or her network of crucial relationships (Capozza & Testoni, 2012; Sozzi, 2009).

EDUCATING ADOLESCENTS TO DEATH THEMES

The transition to adolescence brings with it a character of transient discomfort, as boys and girls find themselves in a period of transition between childhood and adulthood. Approximately, in this period of life, there is a tendency to violate boundaries, challenge rules, and overstep limits. The major manifestations may have either a dimension of melancholy and unhappiness or conversely manifest themselves in violent acts. Thus, two very contrasting responses arise, one intrinsic and one extrinsic. In the first case, one runs the risk of emphasizing suicide or self-harming behavior, while in the second case one can lead to real acts of bullying, which correspond to the behavior of both physical and psychological violence, for example, directed against one's classmates.

Death education includes a range of strategies and tools concerning death, the meanings attributed to it and the emotions it releases. This education relates to people's developmental stages, without causing trauma. An example could be through violence and suicide prevention courses aimed at adolescents and others. Another example concerns awareness of how one wants to die and how to be accompanied to death. Death education courses with children and youth have been designed to normalize the concept of dying, as this subject is completely censored by adults and parents. Thanks to death education, it is now possible to deal with these issues, to normalize the fact that everything ends, counteracting the taboo of naming death.

Death education was born in 1966 with the launch of the first university courses at Wayne University by Robert Kastenbaum, a gerontologist who was later very critical about the 5-stages model of Kübler-Ross and Kessler (Kastenbaum, 1998). While Europe lagged behind for some years, today, there are some important research centers on death: in France the Société de Thanatologie; in England the Centre for Death and Life Studies at the University of Durham, and the Death and Society at the University of Bath; in Italy, the Institute of Thanatology and Psychological Medicine, the Fabretti Foundation with its "Thanatological studies" inaugurated by Marina Sozzi, and finally the Master in Death Studies and End of Life at the University of Padua directed by Ines Testoni.

To promote this education in youth, it is necessary to create a space (both physical and mental) capable of accommodating the fragilities of each subject, able to

respect the contents that each one transmits, and make their emotional load accessible and processable. Thus, it is about constructing an educational experience that considers both the didactic and the relational levels. In previous studies (Cramer Azima & Richmond, 1989) the analytic group performed with adolescents showed the possibility to overcome the peer-pressure in the making of the dynamic matrix. This matrix also works as a safe base and safe harbour, as highlighted by the attachment paradigm applied to groups (Lorito & Di Maria, 2015).

To build such a safe space, we could use the group-analytic concept of set(ting). This notion can be broken down into two concepts: the set and the setting, deeply intertwined and interdependent (Lo Verso in Di Maria & Formica, 2009). The first concerns the visible part; frequency of sessions, characteristics of the room, duration, rules, etc. The setting, on the other hand, concerns the mental field and the relationships, hence the invisible elements, such as motivations, anxieties, emotions, models, sex, age, etc. The advantage of such a group-analytical concept is that it pays attention to both visible and invisible parts, allowing a complex relationship with the theme of death within a group.

THE STUDY

The study we conducted was a survey to pinpoint emotions and attitudes developed by the youth around the theme of death, plus a group intervention in a small setting of five adolescents. The assumption was that adolescents are not immune to death and the problems of separation. Usually, people think that death themes can be understood only at a later age. But the public discourse and all kinds of media expose children and youth to death at very early stages. So educational settings can allow youth an experience of reflection and sharing that can put the pain and hardships of death in a matrix of elaboration among peers.

Our innovation was to pair an educator with a psycho-dynamically trained researcher, and put both under the supervision of a figure trained and specialized in group analysis: the experiential group allowed participants, starting from the macro-theme of death and mourning, to eventually unveil themes such as separation, detachment, and end of life.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The main aim of the research was to explore the need for death education in adolescence. Specifically:

1. How easy was it for adolescents to talk about the topic of death?

2. Is there a need for education on death in adolescence?
3. If and in which areas had the respondents, despite their young age, experienced mournful events?
4. What are the contents of the dynamic matrix in the group intervention?
5. What representations and emotions do adolescents have towards death itself?

Moreover, the study wanted to shed light on how psychodynamic group conduction, within an educational setting, could help enhance research on death representations and support adolescents to deal with loss and separation.

METHODOLOGY

In the wider frame of the research designed in collaboration with the local Hospice, a team from the University of Modena and Reggio Emilia (Unimore) ran a survey on death themes and a small group of teenagers to investigate the psychological representations of death.

In the early stages of the research, which are not presented in this article, the Hospice of Reggio Emilia had conducted training groups in high schools dealing with topics such as palliative care, end of life, and ethical issues connected to dying. Such training used 'circle time' in classes with adolescents but was lacking a psychodynamic approach to group matrices: it became clear, in fact, that circle time is a technique also used in class to discuss themes that can lead to the evaluation of the pupils, therefore maintaining the level of discussion to a purely rational level, exchanging knowledge and conceptualizing feelings. The part of the study that we present in this article, therefore, stems from the idea of exploring those matrices and improving the cognitive references.

The Hospice asked the research team of the Department of Education of Unimore to design a study in two phases; the first one a quantitative survey and the second one a group intervention.

In the survey, an anonymous questionnaire was administered to 100 boys and girls between 15 and 20 years old. The research team asked the 100 participants to join the second phase of the research. However, only 5 agreed to join in the second phase, as school was over and most students simply stopped any school-related activity. Thus, we moved on to the intervention through an experiential group consisting of the five adolescents who voluntarily joined the second phase of the research.

The collected data were analysed through frequencies charts and word clouds. The focus was put on the production of verbal exchanges that could help the researchers explore the nature of the psychic representation of death in adolescents.
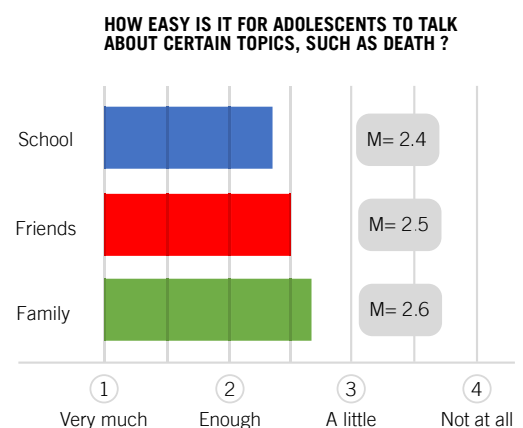
PHASE 1

Tool

For the quantitative research, informed consent was first collected from the parents of all students (them being minors). An anonymous questionnaire was then submitted to boys and girls from Italian schools in the cities of Reggio Emilia and Modena and two catholic scout groups in the city of Modena. There were 100 participants, 79 girls, and 21 boys, aged between 15 and 20 years. The questionnaire consisted of ten items with open and close-ended questions, six of which were Likert scales with four points (very much, quite a lot, a little, not at all) and two with five points (strongly disagree, disagree, neither agree nor disagree, agree, fully agree). In one of the ten items, the participants had to write down the first three words that they immediately associated with the word death. And in one item the questionnaire asked if the teenager had experienced the loss of someone significant.

Results

When answering the first research question, about how easy it was to talk about death (in the family, at school, or with a friend), the participants did not take sides. They tended to place themselves in the middle and central points of the Likert scale. Such an attitude could indicate in this case incertitude but also ambiguity and precariousness in the answers (see Tab. 1).
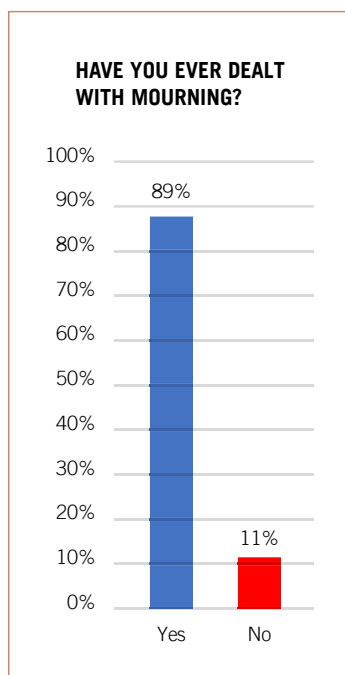

HOW EASY IS IT FOR ADOLESCENTS TO TALK ABOUT CERTAIN TOPICS, SUCH AS DEATH ?

School — M= 2.4
Friends — M= 2.5
Family — M= 2.6

1 Very much   2 Enough   3 A little   4 Not at all

Tab 1. How easy it was to talk about death in the family, at school, or with a friend.

A wide range of words emerged from the responses to the question on naming three words related to death (research questions n.2 and 5). However, 25% of the participants associated death with the word fear, which was the most frequently mentioned word. Other words that were used several times were sadness and pain (see Tab. 2).

Almost 90% of the participants stated that they had faced at least one mournful event in their lifetime (research questions 2 and 3) (see Tab. 3).


THE FIRST WORDS ASSOCIATED WITH THE WORD "DEATH"
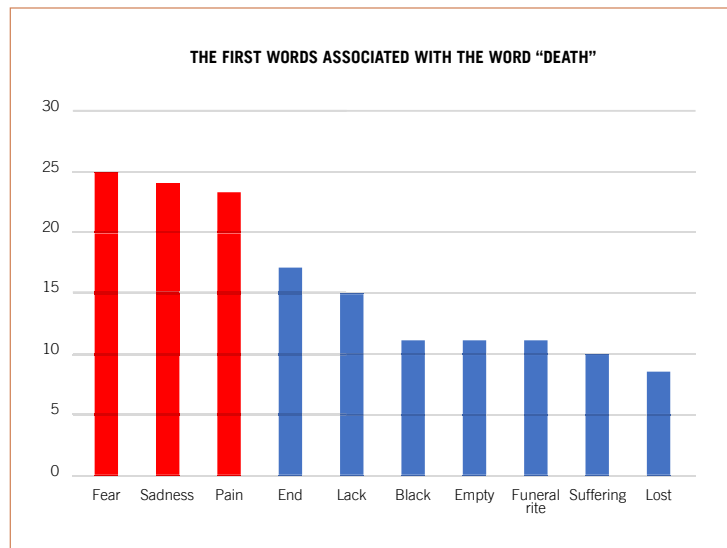
Tab. 2 Words associated to death

Moreover, the participants who had faced mournful events (research question n.3) indicated the context in which the mourning took place (see Tab. 4). Specifically, 81% of the subjects declared that the mourning was in a family context, 42% involved an acquaintance, 40% involved pets, while 24% (that is almost one-fourth of the subjects) stated that at least one mourning event involved a friend. (see Tab. 4)

HAVE YOU EVER DEALT WITH MOURNING?

Tab. 3 Direct experience of loss

FOR WHOM DID YOU MOURN FOR?
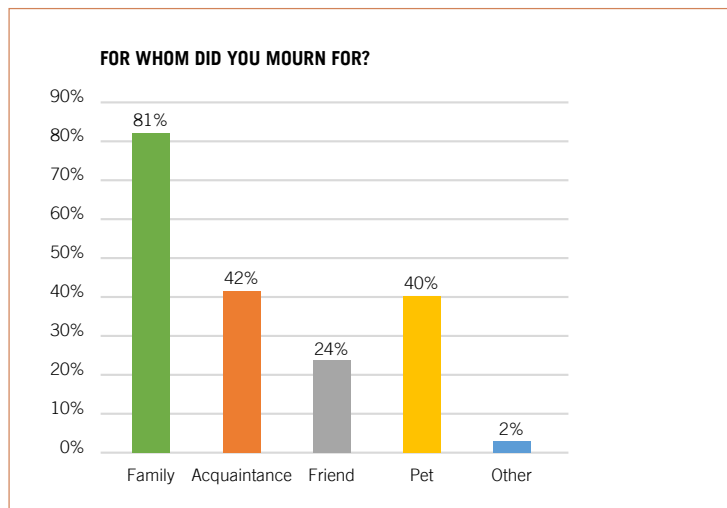
Tab. 4 Closeness of the death experience

Discussion

It is incorrect to assume that death and mourning are not part of the adolescent experience. In fact, 89% of both boys and girls said they had experienced a bereavement event, and even in areas as close to them as friends and family. Even if one might think that there is a different perception of the concept of family among the respondents, it is still relevant to think that 24% of the subjects who answered yes to the question on the experience of mourning, had to face the death of a friend or at least a person considered as such.

One of the conclusions that can be drawn from the questionnaire is the tendency of the participants to look for a mid-point. However, since there was no "I do not know" point in the Likert scale, it is difficult to see a tendency towards neutrality of opinion in the questionnaire. To be sure that the central points sought by the participants are forms of uncertainty and disorientation, it would be necessary to reconsider a reformulation of the points and items present in the Likert scales, perhaps also inserting a separate item expressing neutrality or not wanting to express oneself on the subject.

In any case, it seems that when placed in front of an individual quantitative measure of research, teenagers tend to flee from the task, looking for a comforting non-position.

PHASE 2

Tool

In the second phase of the research, the conductors were both working on the group process and the investigation task, recording the verbal exchanges. The aim was: a) to allow the emergence of the quality and nature of the group matrix, made of thoughts, emotions and metaphors concerning death and life, (research question n.4); and b) to answer and explore representations of death (research question n.5). Personal matrices, derived from the individual experience of each of the participants, and the dynamic matrix from the group in the session were experienced, participated, and observed. The research team, after each session, analysed the transcribed text to check if the same words collected in the questionnaire had emerged in the group's exchanges, and what kind of discussions they would trigger among the participants.

A group of five participants was formed. All participants volunteered to take part in this second stage of the research, after submitting their questionnaires. The duration of each session was one hour and thirty minutes. There were five sessions in total. The first session was dedicated to the word *life*; the second session to the word *death*; the third session to the metaphors of *death*; the fourth to the metaphors of *life*. The fifth and last session was to wrap up the whole process and to prepare for the separation as a metaphor of death.

The first sessions started with a brainstorming in which the participants were asked to associate thoughts/words, and then emotions with the two topics of 'death' or 'life'. In the following sessions, each participant was asked to produce metaphors, individually, and then to work collectively to choose the one metaphor that could speak for the whole group. The group exchanges on the various metaphors involved personal stories, insights, funny anecdotes, and touching memories, and made the underlying themes of the matrix surface.

Results

Many of the words that were reported in the questionnaire were also chosen and discussed in the experiential group. The word fear was reported among the words linked to the term life but not to the emotions linked to it (see Tab. 5). Both the word pain and joy were reported in the emotions linked to the term life. Other opposite emotions linked to the word life that emerged from the brainstorming were hate and love. When this ambivalence of emotions was pointed out to the participants, they linked the term love to a positive dimension

and the birth of a new form of life, and hate to a sense of injustice and to those who obstruct someone else's life.

CONCEPTS		EMOTIONS
CREATION		JOY
FEAR		LOVE
FREEDOM		LIGHTHEARTEDNESS
CARPE DIEM	**LIFE**	PAIN
COURAGE		HATE
POWER		HOPE (2X)
TIME		FUN
DIFFICULTY		AMAZEMENT
GIFT		IIGHT
OBSTACLES		SATISFACTION
SWING		
TEST		

Tab. 5 Concepts and emotions related to the word life

Fear, which had been the most frequently reported word in the questionnaire, was repeated both in the words' and in the emotions' brainstorming (repeated three times) when associated with the word death. Several ambivalent emotions emerged as linked to the word death: e.g. happiness and sadness; serenity and disappointment; pain and joy (see Tab. 6). When challenged on this ambivalence, the group participants highlighted that the concept of death is "very complex and sometimes also fuzzy". Moreover, together with the words happiness and serenity, pain and joy were explained as the different faces of the elaboration of a loss.

Finally, a concept that was very present in this group was that of injustice. This was expressed three times in the emotions associated with death, and it was linked to other words and emotions, such as anger (that we find in the emotions linked to the word death). The injustice was related to the killing of the innocents and to the many wars around the globe. What causes anger in the participants was the fact of a human being killed by another.

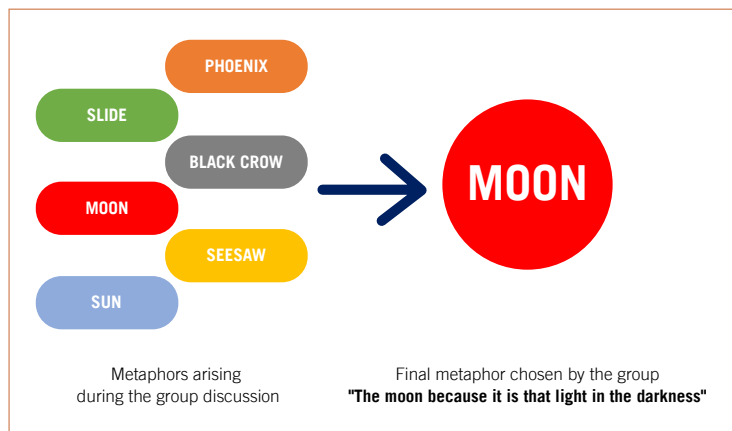| CONCEPTS		EMOTIONS
OBLIVIO		ANGER
FEAR		DISSAPOINTMENT(2X)
ANXIETY		SADNESS
DISTRESS		FEAR (3X)
CERTAINTY	**DEATH**	PAIN
LIBERATION		A
RANCOR		HAPPINESS
WEIGHT		JOY
SUICIDE		SERENITY
LIFE		REPENTANCE
LIVE		INJUSTICE(3X)
RELIEF		
START		

Tab. 6 Concepts and emotions related to the word death

The quality of the dynamic matrix of the death education group was examined from the use of metaphors that the group discovered to address the theme of death and life (research question n.4). When exploring the matrix underlying the educational group on death (see Tab.7), the group came up with six metaphors: the phoenix, slide, black crow, moon, seesaw, and sun. At the end of the session, the group chose the moon as the one metaphor that could contain and explain all the previous ones: the group in fact agreed that the moon shed light into the darkness.
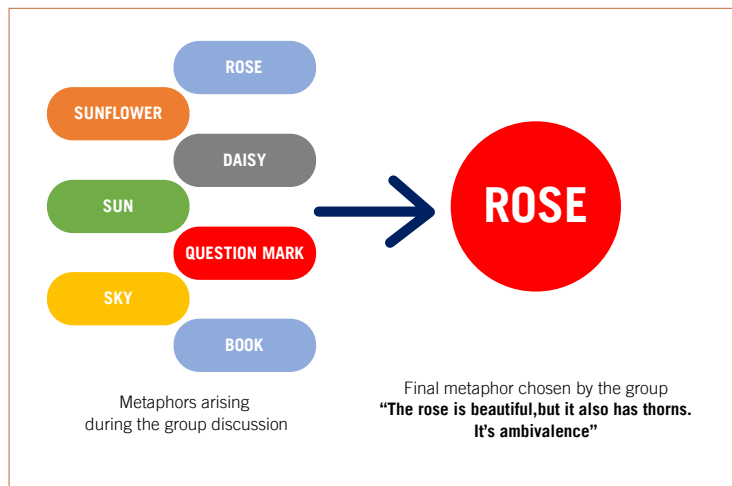
The same criteria were used to outline the metaphors for the word life and the following words came up: rose, sunflower, daisy, sun, sky, question mark, book (see Tab. 8).

At the end of the dedicated session the idea of the rose was selected as the metaphor for life, because of its beauty but also its thorns. Indeed, as explained by one of the participants, life is seen as a sequence of events "oscillating between periods in which you feel good and others in which you feel bad".
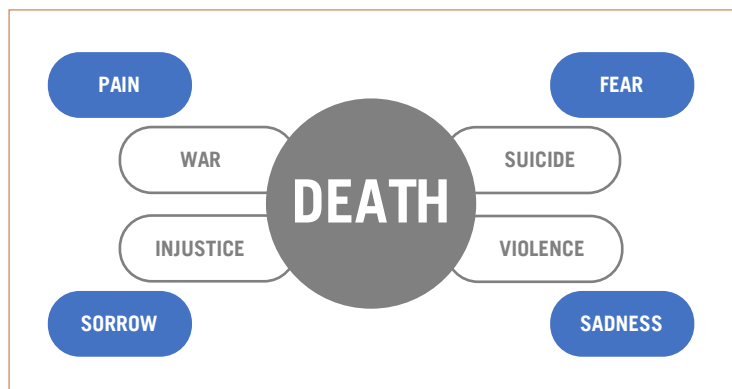
In the media representation of death, participants felt that only negative emotions are expressed: sadness, fear, pain and sorrow. And the same negativity is registered when it comes to the ideas that media seem to represent around the theme of death: war, suicide, injustice and violence. The ambivalence that the group felt about death, both emotionally and in their reflections, seemed to not be paired by an equivalent complexity in the media that only highlighted a negative narrative. On the contrary, the group unveiled a certain sense of liberation, conceived by one of the participants in association with the terms weight and suicide.

Metaphors arising
during the group discussion

Final metaphor chosen by the group
"The moon because it is that light in the darkness"

Tab.7 Metaphors for the word death

Metaphors arising
during the group discussion

Final metaphor chosen by the group
**"The rose is beautiful, but it also has thorns.
It's ambivalence"**

Tab.8 Metaphors for the word life

Tab 9. Media representation of death

Discussion

During the working group, we have focused on the representations of death (question n.4), also taking into account the other research questions. The concept of life as 'ambivalence', which also emerged in the metaphor of the swing, became visible again. The most ambivalent group metaphor for the word life was the image of the rose because "the rose is beautiful, but it also has thorns, it is an ambivalence". With regards to the word death, the participants chose the metaphor of the moon because "it is that bit of light amid darkness". Unfortunately, this image of death as the moon was not explored in depth during the group work due to time constraints. It would have been appropriate to ask for more details about the meaning given by the participants to this last metaphor. In general, in the group discussions, darkness tends to be linked to death (see also some of the terms in the questionnaire: black and dark) and light to life (see in the group discussion: light in the words linked to the term life). It is not clear however if death is "the pinch of light" amid the darkness of an unjust life or if life (understood as light) is maybe that "pinch of light" amid death. In both cases, it seems that a form of ambivalence is still present. It should be noted that both the moon (later voted as a group metaphor) and the sun were thought of as metaphors for the word death. It is important to show that representations of death among adolescents are influenced by the media (Testoni et al., 2005).

During this second phase the participants, when discussing complex and touching topics such as death, strived towards the use of the group as a support for the elaboration of losses and separations. The group participants were able to translate thoughts into metaphors and vice versa, or even transform mental images into streams of thoughts. This helped the young participants to relate and to address the issues that arose spontaneously in the group itself. The research team noticed a growing awareness among the participants of their need to get in touch with the theme of death and their desire to talk about it.

The issue of social and media censorship around the themes of death did not go unnoticed during the group. To not collude with the silence and censorship that the group felt around death and mourning, the conductors spent quite some time facing the theme of adolescent suicide with the boys and girls of the group.

Finally, it was noted that the peer group created a reciprocal and active listening atmosphere. This led to the unveiling of emotions, positive and negative, anxieties, as well as being useful for experiencing a contact with the theme of dying.

CONCLUSIONS AND LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The results, without any ambition to be generalized nor universal, show that a group analytic perspective applied to educational groups allows participants to overcome peer pressure and the drive to anonymity (Zimmerman, 2012; Guyer et al., 2016) and help unveil authentic feelings, emotions, and thoughts.

The conductors of the group created a safe place where pain, frustration and anger could co-exist and where it was possible to become aware of the presence of death and the transience of things. Talking about death also meant giving voice to the idea that things have a beginning and an end.

One can never really be ready for death, but this kind of education could bring results from the point of view of how to deal with a separation, an end, a loss, plus knowing how to respect boundaries and limits. In short, it would lead not only to a greater awareness of the presence of death in our lives but also to the ability to cope with small daily deaths, which are the bereavements with which we must still come to terms (Testoni et al., 2018).

Further investigation should be made on the levels of satisfaction of the group participants, to verify the perceived effectiveness of the group process in the young participants (Yalom, 2008). Future research could focus on how adolescents deal with potentially traumatic events, whether they have sought support, whether they have been helped in any way, or simply whether they feel the need to have a space of reflection with other peers. More in-depth studies could also verify whether the sense of injustice, that the study detected, is a concept that is so close to the heart of adolescents, and if so, it could be useful to address the dynamics of what can be done to change or activate a change.

There was a great complexity of themes that emerged in the study, both in its quantitative phase and in its group experience. The use of a group analytic device to run the qualitative phase of the research turned out to be of great importance for the exploration of sensitive constructs like death. Researchers with any psychodynamic background, we believe, would highly benefit from group analytic training, when addressing complex issues and vulnerable subjects. Also, in schools, it would be important to create and plan specific curricula of prevention and elaboration of traumatic events. Therefore, to work pre, post, and during the traumatic event (always to be understood as the end and/or separation from something or a small/big failure). However, too often, people and even more so young people are left alone in their suffering, not

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adequately helped, nor prepared to withstand the impact of a traumatic event that can lead to tragic consequences, such as suicide.

It would therefore be important for educators and group professionals to consider these issues to propose valid alternatives to the media, perhaps even using them as aids but not as the only educational resource. Being able to respond to adolescents' need to talk and be heard when traumatic events occur is a goal that educators should pursue. Boys and girls should not be left alone to face a traumatic event, such as death, bereavement, or separation. The knowledge gained from this research will provide a better understanding of the various representations of adolescents, which are strongly conditioned by the media. All this could be useful for future interventions in high schools.

The major limitation of the study was on the sample size used in the study. As mentioned earlier, the group intervention was conducted too close to the end of the school year and only a few students agreed to proceed to the second phase. Yet, in this phase 4-5 different groups would have been more appropriate. Finally, only verbal exchanges were considered to highlight the representation of death and its matrix. Future research could better analyse and focus on interactions in groups and their possible therapeutic purposes. The possibility of failures throughout life could also be seen as an additional area of future research.

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