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SHORT COMMUNICATION

Affecting the Pedagogy of Death by COVID-19

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Introduction

Death is one of the most prevailing social and pedagogical taboos in our western society [1-6]. Taking this context into account, we are committed to the application of a preventive pedagogy on death -understood as the teaching of death prior to the tragic event- as a transversal and radical axis in schools in order to promote its normalisation [7-10], to promote the comprehensive education of students and avoid possible pathological grief [11-14].

As education professionals, we often forget that pedagogy must be based on authenticity and loss, and death enables the rediscovery of values such as serenity, patience, humility, silence, etc. The opportunities offered by the school space to educate for finitude must be taken into account; education professionals can offer approaches and strategies to students to become aware of death in order to find a unique meaning in life.

Children are not preparing for life, they are already living it [15], and for them, as part of human existence, encountering the death of a loved one is inevitable. Moreover, the ability to understand death, to go through the stages of mourning and to continue living effectively is essential to ensure the well-being of creatures. In other words, we must accept that death is a reality of every living being, and we must therefore carry out a pedagogy of human finitude. In our role as education professionals, we must bear in mind that there is a didactic bifurcation in the teaching and pedagogical approach to death [16]:

- Prior to a tragic event. This is developed permanently through cross-cutting themes or areas of knowledge in the curriculum
- Post or palliative. However, both perceptions have continuity within the educational process on death. We firmly believe that it is not necessary for a loved one to die in order for its content and all that it entails (social, emotional, biological, etc.) to be taught.

Along these lines, [17] add that death should be anticipated and children should be given answers so that they can be prepared when such events occur. As we have already mentioned, there are other cross-cutting themes, such as recycling, road safety education, peace education, etc., which are taught without any previous tragic event, such as a traffic accident or a war. From our point of view, we believe that teaching the content of death as part of the human life cycle will enable pupils to gradually find meaning in their lives.

For all these reasons, the aim of this study is to analyse the current state of the question of education for death in times of COVID-19.

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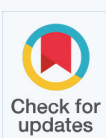
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Methodology

The methodology used was qualitative [18,19], in which various In-depth interviews were conducted and analysed. The in-depth interviews consisted mainly of three questions:

- Have you had any training in the pedagogy of death during your apprenticeship as a teacher?
- If yes, what kind of training?
- If no, why do you think this happens, especially in a pandemic situation?

In addition, a case study [20-23] was carried out in Catalonia (Spain) in order to approach a first contextualised reality in relation to the pedagogy of death in the COVID-19 period.

In this case, it was carried out a case study and the sample consisted of 26 interviews:

- Students in the 4th year of the degree in Primary Education at the University of Lleida.
- Teachers working in Primary Education schools in the city of Lleida.

The sample was recruited via institutional e-mail to both students and practising teachers.

The data were analysed using Atlas.ti software. The themes of analysis were:

- Realisation of training in the pedagogy of death.
- Type of training on pedagogy of dying
- Causes of the pedagogical taboo in initial teacher training.

Results

70% of the informants have not undertaken any training in relation to death education, neither in initial nor in continuing education:

"There are not enough educational experiences in training on death education." (MA4).

"During the whole degree course, only one part of a class was devoted to explaining to us that we should be educated in relation to death." (EGEP9).

Discussion

In this context of pandemic and taking into account that there is hardly an educational centre in which there is not a bereaved person, Education for Death is more necessary than ever [24-26]. Not only in the palliative sphere (when the loved one has died and their environment is in the process of mourning), but also in the preventive or previous sphere (working on death from a social and pedagogical normality). The results of this study demonstrate the social and pedagogical taboo in Western society. Although the pandemic situation highlights this research gap, few studies

have been carried out on the subject, as pointed out by [27-29].

Conclusion

It is imperative to address the pedagogy of death in initial teacher training. If future teachers do not become aware of the need to address it in the classroom, it is unlikely that they will deal with it in their professional development.

Recommendations

It is recommended to rethink initial teacher training in order to interrelate as much content as possible from the university career with death.

In addition, both future and current teachers are also encouraged to undertake continuous training on the subject in question.

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