



Why Is Grief Not Addressed in Schools? Curricular and Professional Barriers in Primary Education

¿Por qué no se trabaja el duelo en la escuela? Barreras curriculares y profesionales en Educación Primaria

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Abstract

In recent years, marked by extreme circumstances in which grief has become a shared experience, death education has gained prominence as an area of educational interest. However, it has yet to be systematically integrated into schools. This study examines the barriers to addressing grief in primary education from the perspectives of recently graduated and practicing teachers and explores their relationship with the current curricular regulations. A qualitative case study design with a phenomenological perspective was adopted. The participants were 44 teachers from the province of Huelva, who took part in seven focus groups. The analysis combined the examination of trends and evidence through a category system validated by expert judgement with a terminological analysis of the regulatory framework and participants' discourse, including the LOMLOE, Royal Decree 157/2022, and the Order of 30 May 2023. The findings reveal a structural absence of grief, loss, and resilience from the official curriculum, in which broader terms

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such as life and emotions predominate. At the same time, teachers recognize grief as a frequent educational reality, although their response remains largely intuitive and fragmented. This response is constrained by sociocultural taboos, personal beliefs, limited initial and continuing professional development, low perceived self-efficacy, the absence of formal protocols, and the fragility of the family-school-support network. Overall, the findings reveal a persistent gap between recognizing grief and effectively integrating it into educational practice, highlighting the need for structural, teacher training, and curricular conditions that enable a deliberate and sustained educational response.

Keywords: educational grief; Primary Education; Death Education; educational curriculum.

Resumen

En los últimos años, marcados por situaciones extremas en las que el duelo ha sido una experiencia compartida, la Pedagogía de la Muerte ha comenzado a consolidarse como un ámbito de interés educativo, aunque sigue sin integrarse de forma sistemática en la escuela. Este estudio analiza las barreras para el abordaje educativo del duelo en Educación Primaria desde la percepción del profesorado egresado y en servicio, así como su relación con la normativa curricular vigente. Se adopta un enfoque cualitativo de estudio de casos con perspectiva fenomenológica. Participaron 44 docentes de la provincia de Huelva y se realizaron siete grupos focales. El análisis combinó el estudio de tendencias y evidencias mediante un sistema categorial validado por juicio de expertos, junto con un análisis terminológico de la normativa y del discurso participante (LOMLOE, RD 157/2022 y Orden de 30 de mayo de 2023). Los resultados muestran una ausencia estructural del duelo, la pérdida y la resiliencia en el currículo oficial, con predominio de términos generales como vida y emociones. Paralelamente, el profesorado reconoce el duelo como una realidad educativa frecuente, pero su abordaje es intuitivo y fragmentado, condicionado por el tabú sociocultural, las creencias personales, la escasa formación, la baja autoeficacia percibida, la ausencia de protocolos y la fragilidad de la tríada familia-escuela-apoyos. Los hallazgos evidencian una brecha persistente entre el reconocimiento del duelo y su integración educativa efectiva, subrayando la necesidad de condiciones estructurales, formativas y curriculares que permitan su abordaje consciente y sostenido.

Palabras clave: duelo educativo; Educación Primaria; Pedagogía de la Muerte; currículo educativo.

Introduction

In recent years, the Pedagogy of Death – understood as a phenomenon that goes beyond grief, loss, life and death – has become a topic of growing interest in the field of education (De la Herrán Gascón et al., 2024), particularly due to its impact on an emotional and relational level (Fornons-Casol & Ramos-Pla, 2025; Morgan, 1977). Its aim is to provide pupils with a holistic view of life and to equip them with the tools to come to terms with death as a natural phenomenon (Wu, 2020). It also creates an environment

that encourages the expression of fears, beliefs and experiences related to death (Rodríguez Herrero et al., 2020), helping to eliminate stigma (Caulfield et al., 2020; Molina-Fernández & Moreno-Vilches, 2022) and a deeper understanding of the meaning of existence (Clark et al., 2021; Rodríguez Munar et al., 2020; Sánchez Aguilar et al., 2021).

This is a topic that offers numerous benefits in the school context, such as reducing anxiety about death by normalising it from an early age, raising awareness of life losses, fostering personal and spiritual growth, promoting empathy, and providing support throughout the various life processes. Similarly, it promotes emotional regulation and the development of personal, social and civic skills (De la Herrán Gascón et al., 2024; Ramos-Pla et al., 2023; Rodríguez Herrero et al., 2019).

In this context, the role of teachers takes on particular significance, as they are responsible for the holistic development of pupils and exert a direct influence on teaching and learning processes (Colomo et al., 2024). The scarcity of training in the Pedagogy of Death could be explained by its limited presence in national (De la Herrán Gascón et al., 2019) and regional (Rodríguez Herrero et al., 2020) educational regulations. Although references to death appear in the curricula, they are presented in a vague manner and without explicit planning within the syllabuses for the Bachelor's degree in Primary Education (Colomo et al., 2021a, 2021b; Colomo et al., 2024; Morell-Velasco et al., 2020), reinforcing the need for further teacher training (Serrano Manzano et al., 2024).

Cross-curricular themes such as bereavement and death are sidelined, with their treatment depending on the personal initiative of teaching staff (Colomo et al., 2022), who do not usually have specific training or resources (Riera-Negre et al., 2024). As a result, most schools lack protocols or defined roles for supporting pupils experiencing bereavement, despite this being an inevitable experience (Adams et al., 2024), with its implementation being left to the discretion of individual teachers (Colomo et al., 2022).

Added to these barriers is the perception of death and bereavement as taboos. In the context of 'liquid modernity', values associated with enjoyment are prioritised over those linked to finitude (Bauman, 2007), a perspective also present in the educational sphere, where the belief persists that addressing these issues may be harmful to pupils (Donaldson, 2024). Furthermore, teachers' lack of confidence and a lack of family and community support hinder the provision of adequate support during processes of loss (Crooks et al., 2024; De la Herrán Gascón et al., 2024; Riera-Negre et al., 2024).

The literature highlights a persistent contradiction. The Pedagogy of Death is recognised as part of a holistic education and promotes an understanding of loss, emotional expression and resilience (De la Herrán Gascón et al., 2024; Ramos-Pla et al., 2023). However, as noted in the studies by De la Herrán Gascón et al. (2024) and Rodríguez Herrero et al. (2020), its integration into the curriculum is implicit, fragmented and dependent on teachers' initiative due to regulatory constraints (Sánchez Aguilar et al., 2021).

These tensions also manifest themselves in teachers' professional trajectories. Through the professional development of newly qualified teachers, it is possible to analyse their shortcomings, insecurities and initial predispositions (Colomo et al., 2024; Rubio Machuca et al., 2025a); studies of in-service teachers demonstrate how these barriers operate in practice, bring support measures to life, and assess transformations (Puskás et al., 2024; Riera-Negre et al., 2024). Both perspectives, alongside the curriculum, are analysed to assess whether these barriers vary with experience or are perpetuated by gaps in the curriculum and within institutional frameworks.

Based on these premises, the overall aim of the study is to analyse the barriers to addressing grief in primary education from the perspective of newly qualified and practising teachers. The specific objectives are: (1) to identify the sociocultural, training-related, curricular and relational barriers that hinder the inclusion of the Pedagogy of Death in the educational context; (2) to examine the presence of grief and the Pedagogy of Death in current primary school curriculum regulations and their relationship with teachers' discourse; (3) to compare the views of newly qualified and practising teachers regarding the educational approach to grief in the school context.

Methodology

Method

Using an interpretative paradigm (García-Bellido, 2024), we undertook a collective case study with a phenomenological orientation (McMillan and Schumacher, 2005; Taylor and Bogdan, 1987). Two case groups were defined: newly qualified teachers and in-service teachers. Both groups represent distinct collective units, defined by their professional stage, geographical context, time period and the study of a common phenomenon: the barriers to addressing educational grief. The design enabled us to study each group within its own context and to compare similarities and differences, taking into account the relationship between training and professional experience (Stake, 1995). The phenomenological approach was realised through the inclusion of open lines of discussion on lived experiences, their verbatim transcription, and the identification and interpretation of units of meaning, directing the analysis towards the meanings attributed by the participants themselves. In addition, the LOMLOE, Royal Decree 157/2022 and the Order of 30 May 2023 were analysed using the terms proposed by De la Herrán Gascón et al. (2019) and Rodríguez Herrero et al. (2020), expanded upon due to their relevance in the participants' discourse and in the authors' previous work. The results were compared with both cases.

Participants

Non-probabilistic and purposive sampling was employed. Firstly, participants were selected from graduates of the Bachelor's Degree in Primary Education: postgraduate students at the University of Huelva with more than two years' teaching practice in schools.

For the ' ' (Teachers in Service) study, three primary schools (CEIPs) in the province of Huelva were selected: one with challenging conditions, one well-established, and one newly established. The inclusion criteria were as follows: having experienced personal or professional bereavement with an impact on their teaching identity, pedagogical practice and support for pupils. The research team verified compliance with these criteria and participants' willingness to take part using a qualitative questionnaire distributed via the school management teams. Those who did not meet the criteria or were not interested in participating were excluded.

Twenty-one recent graduates aged between 23 and 55 (11 men and 10 women) and 23 practising teachers aged between 28 and 55 (5 men and 18 women) took part, organised into four groups of recent graduates (6, 5, 5 and 5) and three groups of practising teachers (8, 9 and 6). The higher proportion of women amongst serving teachers is consistent with the gender distribution in primary education, where 82.3 per cent of active teachers are women. This approach encouraged the participation of teachers with a particular sensitivity to the subject matter; consequently, the openness observed is interpreted in relation to the characteristics of the sample.

Strategies

Focus groups were used as the main method, moderated by a researcher specialising in the Pedagogy of Death, who organised the sessions and facilitated the discussion (Puskás et al., 2024; Rubio Machuca and Delgado García, 2024; Rubio Machuca et al., 2025; Serrano Manzano et al., 2024). The first instrument was the discussion guide, developed on the basis of five lines of discussion relating to barriers to the inclusion of the pedagogy of death. It was reviewed by three experts, selected on the basis of the following criteria: a) experience in the pedagogy of death, teacher training and qualitative methodology; b) publications relevant to the subject; c) participation in competitive projects on the subject. Each line of discussion was assessed for clarity, relevance and appropriateness using a Likert scale of 1 to 5. The mean and standard deviation were calculated for each line and criterion, with a mean of 4 or above being set as the threshold for acceptance. The quantitative assessments were supplemented by open-ended comments on ethical sensitivity, coherence and the absence of overlap between the lines. Those that did not reach this threshold were reformulated in light of the qualitative observations.

- Concepts and experiences relating to adult and child bereavement, as well as to social and emotional taboos (sociocultural and representational dimension).
- The influence of personal and religious beliefs on the understanding and educational approach to grief (sociocultural and representational dimension).
- Experiences of initial and continuing professional development, and perceptions of the capacity to support those grieving (training and professional dimension).
- The inclusion of grief in the curriculum, and knowledge of or use of educational resources and strategies (curricular and didactic dimension).

- Relationships with families and coordination with other professional roles and services (relational and community dimension).

The second instrument was a categorisation system comprising four macro-dimensions (sociocultural and representational, training and professional, didactic and curricular, and relational and community-based), defined deductively on the basis of the literature; the subcategories and indicators were generated inductively through repeated analysis of the data. The system was validated through expert judgement (3 experts) in the pedagogy of death, teacher training and qualitative methodology; their contributions enabled us to redefine categories and adjust subcategories and indicators to avoid overlaps. Furthermore, the internal consistency of the levels (I–II–III) was reviewed, ensuring a progression in complexity in line with the approaches of Alonzo and Steedle (2009), Jin and Anderson (2012), and Morin (1990): 1) absence of the pedagogy of death or simple, descriptive positions; 2) an alternative model lacking reflective complexity; and 3) a complex and holistic vision of the present and a desirable future, focused on interrelationships and on providing solutions to the issues addressed (Table 1).

Table 1

System of categories

Category	Subcategory	Observable indicators	Levels of achievement
1. Sociocultural and representational	Representations of adult grief. Social and emotional taboos.	Conceptions of adult grief and the degree of openness or avoidance regarding discussions about death.	I: Avoids the subject and considers it inappropriate. II: Recognises its relevance and perceives it as a holistic loss. III: Makes grief visible and normalises it in a holistic way. Promotes dialogue naturally and sensitively.
	Personal and religious beliefs	The influence of personal beliefs on the educational approach to death.	I: Personal beliefs and perceptions limit the approach. II: A personal awareness of grief develops. III: Integrates personal learning and beliefs and transforms them into an educational normalisation of grief.
	Representations of children's grief	Conceptions regarding the experience and expression of children's grief.	I: Denies or downplays children's grief. II: Identifies common patterns in children's grief. III: Recognises the difference

			between children's grief and adult grief .
2. Educational and professional	Initial training	Presence or absence of university-level training on grief.	I: Has not received any training and does not consider it necessary. II: Possesses basic theoretical knowledge. III: Applies this training in their educational practice.
	Continuing professional development	Access to and participation in training programmes on grief.	I: Has not received any training and is unaware of any resources. II: Seeks out or participates occasionally in training. III: Actively undertakes training and shares best practice.
	Teaching self-efficacy	Confidence in addressing grief in the classroom.	I: Feels unable to cope and avoids taking action. II: Intervenes in specific situations involving grief. III: Feels competent and acts with confidence.
3. Curriculum and teaching methods	Official curriculum	Presence or absence of grief in curriculum content.	I: No inclusion in the curriculum is proposed. II: General, cross-curricular terminology associated with grief is covered. III: It is integrated in a cross-curricular and reflective manner.
	Teaching resources	Availability and use of teaching materials.	I: No teaching resources are known to exist. II: Some sporadic materials are used. III: Specific, adapted materials are available, or the teacher creates their own.
	Methodological strategies	Integration of the topic into active teaching methods.	I: Active methodologies are not known. II: The topic is addressed using simple methodologies in specific activities. III: Complex and inclusive

			methodologies are proposed to address the issue.
4. Relational and community-	Relationship with families' .	Communication and collaborative in situations of bereavement.	I: Avoids involving families and II: Maintains a tactful dialogue. III: Promote open and joint communication.
	Interprofessional support.	Coordination with other professional roles or services.	I: Does not coordinate with others. II: Collaborates on an ad hoc basis. III: Works within an interdisciplinary network.

Procedure

Data collection took place over nine months, with dates tailored to suit both groups. Graduates were invited via a trusted contact, whilst serving teachers were invited through the management teams at each school. All participants were provided with information on the study’s objectives, duration and ethical considerations; anonymity, confidentiality and informed consent were guaranteed.

Seven focus groups were formed: four comprising graduates and three comprising serving teachers. The sessions took place in venues provided by the institutions, lasted between 60 and 90 minutes, and were moderated by a researcher specialising in qualitative techniques, with support from external observers who recorded analytical notes on the audiovisual observations after reviewing the recordings. All sessions were video-recorded, verbatim transcribed and returned to the participants to ensure the accuracy of the discourse.

The documentary analysis included the LOMLOE, Royal Decree 157/2022 and the Order of 30 May 2023, as the national, basic and regional frameworks for primary education. The 18 keywords were drawn from De la Herrán Gascón et al. (2019) and Rodríguez Herrero et al. (2020), and expanded upon due to their relevance in the participants’ discourse and the authors’ previous work. The unit of analysis was each occurrence, classified by document, subject and curricular element. Variants were counted separately and reviewed in context.

Data analysis

Two researchers independently analysed trends and evidence using MAXQDA 24. The unit of analysis was the meaningful discourse segment associated with a subcategory. Each fragment was assessed for relevance, coherence and appropriateness using a Likert

scale; those scoring above a mean of 3.5 were reviewed to confirm their categorisation. Codings and levels were compared, and discrepancies were resolved by consensus, taking into account definitions, indicators and evidence. Levels I–III were assigned according to their descriptors; the coexistence of evidence from two adjacent levels was recorded as a mixed classification. The frequencies refer to segments, not participants, and provide descriptive support for the qualitative interpretation.

Each piece of evidence was accompanied by a code constructed as follows: (GE (graduates) – GS (in-service), S (subject), (initial of the subcategory). The analysis was supplemented by a study of participant discourse and current legislation (LOMLOE, RD 157/2022 and the Order of 30 May 2023), using heatmaps to identify patterns and relationships between the two samples. The qualitative analysis of trends and evidence was combined with the analysis of participants' discourse and current legislation, which enabled the identification of barriers from different perspectives.

Results

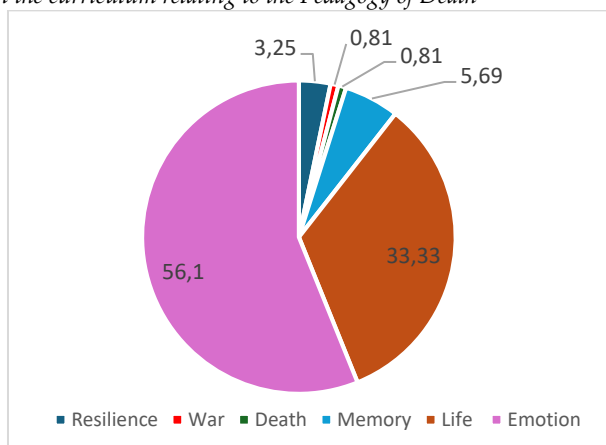
Legislative analysis

Currently, formal education in Spain has a core curriculum designed by the Government, developed by the autonomous communities and adapted by schools, in accordance with the LOE (2006) and the LOMLOE (2020), the latter of which amends the former. This serves as one of the starting points for this research, as it regulates all curricular elements of the various teaching and learning processes: objectives, competences (key and specific), basic knowledge, pedagogical or methodological principles, assessment criteria, and learning situations.

The 18 keywords analysed (death, grief, emotion, emotions, spirituality, passing away, death, finitude, genocide, war, memory, loss, remembrance, resilience, ritual, suicide, life) within the context of the pedagogy of death ($n=123$) are not represented in their entirety in the educational curriculum; only 6 (35.29 per cent) appear (Figure 1). The terms used most frequently ($n \geq 5$) fall outside the main triangulation of our study (grief–loss–resilience); and only one of these is present in the curriculum: *resilience* ($4=3.25$ per cent). The remaining terms are *war* ($1 = 0.81$ per cent), *death* ($1 = 0.81$ per cent), *memory* ($7 = 5.69$ per cent), *life* ($41 = 33.33$ per cent) and *emotions* ($69 = 56.10$ per cent). In short, of these six words, two feature far more prominently than the rest: they refer to generic events and topics with a multitude of meanings (Figure 1).

Figure 1

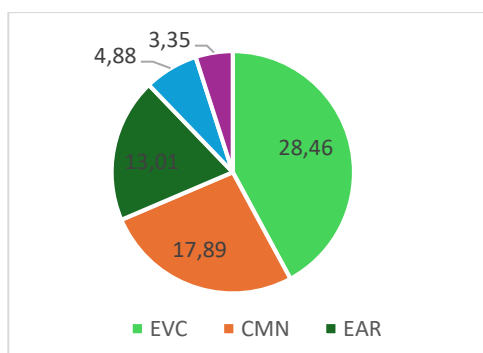
Percentage of terms in the curriculum relating to the Pedagogy of Death



We note the presence of these terms in the subjects of Civic and Ethical Values Education / VCE (35=28.46 per cent), Knowledge of the Natural, Social and Cultural Environment / CMN (22=17.89 per cent), Art Education / EAR (16=13.01 per cent), Spanish Language and Literature / LCL (6=4.88 per cent), and Mathematics / MAT (4=3.25 per cent) (Figure 2); on introductory aspects of the LOMLOE / INTROD (19=15.45 per cent); and on the section covering key competences and the learning outcomes for pupils at the end of compulsory education / COMP (21=17.07 per cent) (Figure 2).

Figure 2

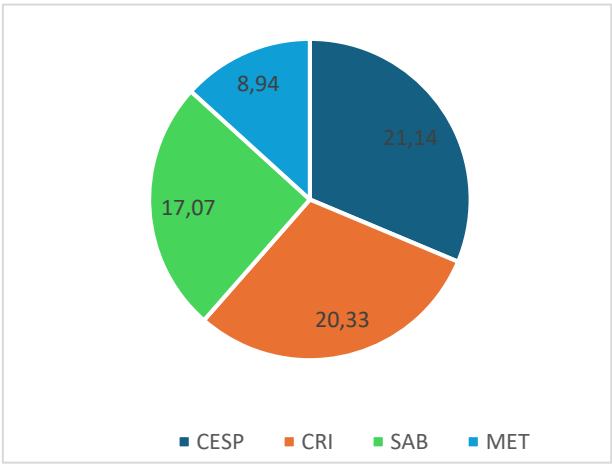
Percentages of terms relating to the Pedagogy of Death in subjects within the primary school curriculum



By specific curricular elements within the different subjects, the analysed terms are predominantly found in specific competences / CESP (26=21.14 per cent) and criteria / CRIT (25=20.33 per cent); both of which have virtually identical percentages, as the assessment of competence-based performance is essential in the current Spanish

education system, in accordance with the guidelines established by Royal Decree 157/2022. The remaining elements are basic knowledge / SAB (21=17.07 per cent), and, finally, methodological aspects / METOD (11=8.94 per cent) (Figure 3).

Figure 3
Percentage of occurrence of terms in the various curricular elements



The regulations examined show a limited and scattered explicit integration of the Pedagogy of Death. Although they incorporate general terms related to life and emotions, they do not include grief, loss, memory, emotion, suicide or genocide, which restricts their specific planning without preventing a cross-curricular approach.

Terminological analysis of the discourse

To contrast the normative analysis, the frequency of the same terms was examined in the discourse segments of both groups. 'Life', 'grief' and 'loss' were the most frequent terms, which demonstrates their lexical centrality, although this does not, on its own, allow us to infer the meaning attributed to them. Among graduate teachers, 'grief' accounted for approximately 32 per cent of mentions, 'life' for 17 per cent and 'loss' for 13 per cent. Among practising teachers, 'grief' accounted for 23 per cent, 'loss' for 21 per cent and 'life' for 15 per cent. Table 2 presents the absolute frequencies and shows the complete distribution of the terms within each group.

Table 2

Heatmap of terms based on their frequency in participants' discourse

Term	Graduate teachers	Practising teachers
Grief	195	89
Loss	80	81
Resilience	29	12
Memory	19	27
Memory	5	4
Excitement	47	25
Emotions	34	13
Death	23	34
To die	39	28
Death	1	2
Death	0	0
Finitude	9	0
Ritual	0	2
Suicide	3	2
Genocide	0	0
War	3	0
Life	106	59
Spirituality	8	5

With regard to the differences between the two groups, analysed not only on the basis of terminological frequency but also in terms of their context within the discourse, we can see how graduate teachers use the term 'grief' with greater relative weight, linking it to resilience, finitude or life, and incorporating relevant, emotional and spiritual terms, thereby shaping a more open, holistic and theoretical discourse, closer to the lexicon of academic literature. In-service teachers strike a balance between the terms 'grief' and 'loss', referring more frequently to 'death' and 'life', and drawing on situations typical of life's later stages that are relevant to the classroom. The scarcity of terms such as 'suicide', 'war' and 'genocide' suggests a certain lexical avoidance, given that the curricular elements were worked through in detail with the participants; this reinforces the idea of a taboo associated with the hidden curriculum, where loss is addressed holistically, whilst the social and political dimensions remain unnoticed and take a back seat.

Analysis of trends and evidence

Frequencies are presented for descriptive purposes, to identify the distribution of segments across levels and subcategories, without attributing inferential value to them or replacing the contextual analysis of textual evidence; rather, it serves as a complement to this analysis.

Sociocultural and representational dimension

Table 3
Trends in the sociocultural and representational dimension

Subcategories	Graduated teachers				Teachers in post			Frequency of terms by level		
	GE1	GE2	GE3	GE4	GS1	GS2	GS3	NI	NII	N III
Representations of adult grief and emotional taboo (TS)	II–III	II	III	III	II	II	II–III	4	17	35
Personal and religious beliefs (PRB)	II	I	II	II	II	I	II	39	26	14
Representations of childhood grief (RI)	II	II	III	III	II	III	III	12	9	38

Table 4
Evidence relating to the sociocultural and representational dimension

Textual evidence		
	Graduated teachers	Teachers in post
Representations of adult grief.	“It is possible to go through a grieving process without someone actually dying” (GE1S3_TS) “Losing one’s job” (GE2S6_TS) “Your own expectations” (GE4S18_TS) .	“The death of a loved one” (GS1S7_TS), “having to move to another school” (GS3S18_TS), “separations” (GS2S13_TS), “I find it hard to express my emotions” (GS1S4_TS)
Personal and religious beliefs	“I cope very badly with grief” (GE1S2_CP) “It helped me enjoy life more” (GES8_CP), “It’s a very difficult subject”	“It’s as taboo as sex education” (GS2S10_CP), “we must take religious beliefs into account” (GS1S3_CP). “It’s essential to

Representations of children's grief	(GE4S17_CP), "We must talk amongst ourselves and with the children" (GE313_CP)	normalise" (GS3S22_CP)
	"Children go through the grieving process too" (GE1S15_RI); "We invalidate their feelings" (GE3S12_RI); "We withhold the truth from them" (GES4S17_RI); "At a young age, death is not internalised" (GE1S6_RI)	"I don't talk about death with young children; I'm not capable of it" (GS2S14_RI); "Children tell you about it very naturally" (GS3S23_RI); "They realise everything that's going on" (GS3S19_RI)

The overall pattern shows progress towards the normalisation of adult grief and its integration into education. Level III predominates, particularly amongst qualified teachers, whose responses reflect an inclusive outlook and greater openness to dialogue. Teachers currently in post fall between levels II and III, with differences between schools and a more cautious stance, linked to the complexity of situations experienced in the classroom. In both groups, personal and religious beliefs act as determining factors; newly qualified teachers adopt a more holistic and individualistic perspective, whilst teachers currently in post take into account the complexity of the classroom. Perceptions of childhood grief are situated at Level III, reflecting recognition of the experience of grief in childhood and a favourable predisposition towards its pedagogical treatment. Newly qualified teachers highlight the omission of information and emotional invalidation, whilst serving teachers emphasise children's naturalness and their ability to express emotions.

Educational and professional dimension

Table 5

Trends in the educational and professional dimension

Subcategory	Graduates				Practising teachers			Frequency of terms by level		
	GE1	GE2	GE3	GE4	GS1	GS2	GS3	NI	NII	NIII
Initial training (FI)	I	I	I	I	I	I	I	33	2	0
Continuing professional development (CPD)	I	I	I	I	I	II	I	10	11	0
Teaching self-efficacy (TSE)	I	I	I	I	II	II	II	24	31	9

Table 6
Evidence relating to the educational and professional dimension

	Textual evidence	
	Graduated teachers	In-service teachers
Initial teacher training (ITT)	"I haven't seen it covered in my degree programme at any point (GE1S9_FI)"	"Never at university (GS3S18_FI)"
Continuing professional development (CPD)	"I haven't attended any courses since completing my degree (GE1S4_FC)"	"We haven't had any training (GF3S23_FI); "An organisation came to train us (GS2S12_FC); "A psychologist came to help us (GS1S1_FC)"
Teaching self-efficacy (AD)	"I wouldn't even know how to react (GE1S6_AD); "We can't help if we're not well ourselves (GE3S12_AD); "I'd seek support from the counsellor (GE3S16_AD); "or from the PT" (GE2S11_AD); "I don't even know how to deal with my own issues (GE1S5_AD).	"We help as best we can" (GS1S4_AD) "we listen and offer support (GS2S13_AD)" "I focus on the personal aspect rather than the academic one when there are serious situations (GS3S18_AD); "I became their point of reference and support during the grieving process (GS1S5_AD)."

The training dimensions are clearly lacking in both undergraduate and continuing professional development, which highlights an almost total absence of systematic content on grief in the curricula. Teachers' self-efficacy is at Level I amongst graduate teachers and at Level II amongst practising teachers. This difference, interpreted alongside the textual evidence, shows that operational efficacy is not yet established. In-service teachers are beginning to support and address grief according to the needs of each individual case; however, they describe their responses as intuitive and lacking in planning. Newly qualified teachers, for their part, perceive a lack of skills and anticipate the need to seek guidance from counsellors or other professionals. Experience appears to favour practical responses, but it does not replace specific training, nor does it guarantee a systematic approach.

Curricular and pedagogical dimension

Table 7

Trends in the curricular and didactic dimension

	Graduated teachers				Teachers in post			Frequency of terms by level		
Subcategory	GE1	GE2	GE3	GE4	GS1	GS2	GS3	NI	NII	NIII
Official Curriculum (CO)	I	I	I	I	I	I	I	12	0	0
Teaching resources (TR)	II	II	II	II	II	III	II	0	16	10
Methodological strategies (MS)	II	II	II–III	II–III	II–III	II	II	5	24	15

Table 8

Evidence relating to the curricular and pedagogical dimension

Textual evidence		
	Graduated teachers	In-service teachers
Official curriculum (CO)	<p>“It isn’t in the curriculum, but there are things more important than the subject matter” (GE4S17_CO)</p> <p>“It would have many emotional benefits to include it in the curriculum” (GE4S20_CO); “working with concepts related to grief and emotional stability is essential because it helps develop problem-solving mechanisms” (GE2S9_CO).</p>	<p>“The curriculum doesn’t mention it as such” (GS2S13_CO); “Nor does it mention many other important topics” (GS1S7_CO); “but it does mention emotional work” (GS3S23_CO).</p>
Teaching resources (RC)	<p>“I would look for resources to explain grief arising from personal relationships, such as a story” (GE1S1_RC); “The Colour Monster is useful from a young age for working on emotions” (GE2S7_RC); “I would</p>	<p>“The story of ‘Vacío’” (GS1S8_RC); “Stories for exploring emotions in class” (GS2S14_RC); “We don’t have a story for specific moments, but we should have one for family memories” (GS2S15_RC); “I have a letter regarding the</p>

	look for videos or films, but sadly I am not currently aware of any specific ones" (GE1S4_RC). "I really like the short film *Cuerdas* (GE4S17_RC); "the short film *Kitbull* for topics relating to abandonment" (GE2S10_RC)"	acceptance of educational needs" (GS2S9_RC); "Many stories to help them come to terms with the cycle of life" (GS3S22_RC).
Methodological strategies (EM)	"The teacher's constant support is essential; asking how they are and whether they need help" (GE1S1_EM); "Working together with the whole teaching team and with the families (GE1S4_EM); "We must address the subject of death naturally, encouraging children to share experiences they have had (GE4S20_EM). "Peer mentoring, as children experience similar situations" (GE2S9_EM); "Creating a sense of security in the classroom" (GE2S11_EM); "Coordination with parents" (GE3S14_EM);	"Be their point of reference and support them" (GS1S7_EM); "talk to them a lot" (GS2S11_EM); "There must be clear support" (GS1S2_EM); "I use videos about grief as needed to reassure families, and I support them too (GS2S9_EM); "hugging and reassuring" (GS3S19_EM); "talking to them and asking questions when necessary (GS1S4_EM); "we have no strategies (GS3S23_EM); "we need to be given strategies to help us cope" (GS2S12_EM); "there are no school-wide plans (GS3S18_EM)".

The results reveal a complete absence of any explicit reference to grief, loss and death in the official curriculum from the perspective of both newly qualified and practising teachers. In contrast to this, teaching practice does mobilise resources and strategies. Both groups of teachers resort to stories, short films and the creation of ad hoc materials. The frequency distribution of segments places both groups at level II, showing clear interest, but without a record of deliberate resources; instead, they rely on each teacher's intuition. In terms of methodological strategies, newly qualified teachers demonstrate greater mastery of various strategies that could be useful, whilst in-service teachers maintain specific interventions focused on emotional support. This highlights a clear gap between the curriculum framework, which renders grief invisible, and the individual initiative of teachers.

Relational and community dimension

Table 9

Trends in the relational and community dimension

	Newly qualified teachers				Serving teachers			Frequency of terms by level		
Subcategory	GE1	GE2	GE3	GE4	GS1	GS2	GS3	NI	NII	NIII
Relationships with families (RF)	I	I	I	I	I	I	I	15	4	2
Interprofessional support (AI)	I–II	II	II–III	II–III	II	II	II	9	15	7

Table 10

Evidence relating to the relational and community dimension

Textual evidence		
	Graduated teachers	In-service teachers
Relationship with families (RF)	“It is up to the family to break the news (GE4S17_RF); “the family is the main point of reference; we need to coordinate with them (GE4S19_RF).” It is not solely the family’s responsibility (GE2S13_AI); “families sometimes do not cooperate (GE1S7_RF).	“The family lied to them about the situation, but they saw other children on the street or in class who knew about it (GS1S5_RF); “We must support families and advise them (GS1S8_RF); “I didn’t know how to help the family (GS1S7_RF); “I’m not capable of doing it; the family has to do it (GS2S12_RC); “it was a time of mourning for the family and the whole school community (GS2S10_RF); “the family doesn’t want to discuss this issue with him (GS2S14_RF); “I’m afraid – I don’t know how families want their children to view death (GS3S21_RF).
Interprofessional support (AI)	“We need psychologists or other specialists to advise us (GE3S16_AI); “and the families too (GE2S12_AI); “counsellors present at the school, not just once a week (GE4S21_AI); “educationalists to help us	“We have the counsellor, but they’re still just a colleague (GS1S7_AI); “sometimes they turn to me as a teaching assistant, or to the counsellor” (GS2S9_AI); “we asked the school counsellor for help (GS3S18_AI); “a

plan (GE1S2_AI).	strategies	volunteer psychologist came (GS1S8_AI); “We need psychologists and nurses to support mums and dads” (GS3S21_AI); “Association X came to train the teachers on this specific case” (GS3S19_AI).
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In the relational and community dimension, there is no fluid dialogue with families; the view is that children’s grief, the communication of news and the primary support should be provided at family level, but there is little evidence of coordination with families, and this is more evident amongst serving teaching staff. Interprofessional support is based on ad hoc collaboration between serving teachers and guidance and psychology professionals, as well as external organisations. Teachers recognise the family as the primary point of reference in dealing with grief, but they point to reluctance, silence and a lack of clear coordination, which creates uncertainty when carrying out interventions. Similarly, the support network is structured more as a reactive and occasional response than as a consolidated interdisciplinary framework, placing the approach to grief on a fragile footing that is dependent on the context of each school.

Discussion

Educating for life requires confronting the limits of human experience, including grief and death, which are still considered taboo in Western society. The Pedagogy of Death takes this paradox as its starting point: a universal, inevitable and educational reality that remains outside formal discourse. The findings aim to question the extent to which the education system is prepared to integrate grief into pupils’ personal, social and emotional development.

In relation to the overall objective, the findings show that grief is recognised as a significant educational reality, although the approach to it remains intuitive, fragmented and largely unsystematic. This recognition is consistent with approaches that integrate finitude, loss and the meaning of existence into a holistic education (Adams et al., 2024; Colomo et al., 2022; De la Herrán Gascón et al., 2024; Wu, 2020), although it does not indicate a widespread favourable attitude amongst teaching staff. The tension lies in the difficulty of turning this into a planned practice. The proposals developed within the current curriculum show that its incorporation is possible when there are guidelines, resources and pedagogical continuity (Ramos-Pla et al., 2023; Sánchez Aguilar et al., 2021).

With regard to specific objective I, sociocultural barriers do not appear as a denial of grief, but rather as an incomplete normalisation, linked to its association with death and its perception as a taboo (Colomo et al., 2021a). Both groups recognise that childhood grief can stem from various losses, in line with a broad understanding of loss that encompasses

material, symbolic and emotional dimensions (Rodríguez Herrero et al., 2020; Rubio Machuca et al., 2025b; Wu, 2020). The literature on stigma reduction and free expression allows for an interpretation of this stance, although the findings do not translate into established educational practices (Caulfield et al., 2020; Clark et al., 2021).

Personal and religious beliefs act as heterogeneous mediators, with the taboo surrounding grief situated within Bauman's (2007) 'liquid modernity', where reflections on finitude are sidelined. Some evidence points to difficulties in addressing death and discomfort in the face of it, which could be linked to low perceived self-efficacy; although the study design does not allow for a statistical causal relationship between these elements, it corroborates the findings of Colomo et al. (2024) and Molina-Fernández and Moreno-Vilches (2022). In contrast to this interpretation of a deficit, practising teachers state that they accompany and support their pupils based on the ethics of care, revealing a tension between professional insecurity and moral commitment (Rubio Machuca et al., 2025a).

In terms of training, the findings are consistent with those of Colomo et al. (2021a) and Morell-Velasco et al. (2020), pointing to a persistent lack of initial and continuing training on bereavement (Rubio Machuca & Delgado García, 2024), which may lead to intuitive, loosely structured but empathetic responses (Riera-Negre et al., 2024; Rubio Machuca et al., 2025b). Nevertheless, practising teachers describe acts of listening, providing support, and seeking resources and assistance, despite not having received such training. This finding qualifies the central importance attributed to specific training (Colomo et al., 2021b) and highlights the need to consider personal and professional experience in the development of support skills (Rubio Machuca et al., 2025a, 2025b).

From a relational and community perspective, the central role of the family is recognised, but mutual reluctance persists, alongside a cautious stance on the part of teachers for fear of causing harm and a lack of established interprofessional networks; this results in the approach to bereavement being a one-off response that depends on the context (Adams et al., 2024; Crooks et al., 2024; De la Herrán Gascón et al., 2024; Donaldson, 2024). Therefore, caution on the part of families or teachers should not be interpreted as a lack of collaboration, but rather as a response to uncertainty or the fear of causing harm, since, under favourable conditions, the studies by Lytje and Dyregrov (2023) demonstrate effective coordinated actions between families and schools.

With regard to specific objective II, De la Herrán Gascón et al. (2019) and Rodríguez Herrero et al. (2020) have already demonstrated that the Pedagogy of Death features only peripherally and unevenly in the curriculum. Our findings call into question the notion that the mere appearance of terms such as 'life', 'emotions' or 'memory' constitutes genuine integration, as their generic nature may dilute the experience of grief and shift the responsibility for making it visible onto teaching staff. The proposals by Ramos-Pla et al. (2023) and Sánchez Aguilar et al. (2021) outline curricular approaches to addressing this, although in the cases analysed, the treatment remains indirect, reactive and dependent on teachers' own initiative.

With regard to specific objective III, qualified teachers employ a discourse linked to a holistic conceptualisation of grief and emotional validation (Clark et al., 2021; Rodríguez Munar et al., 2020; Rubio Machuca & Delgado García, 2024; Rubio Machuca et al., 2025a). In-service teachers perceive themselves as lacking formal skills, but provide support drawing on personal experience and the ethics of care (Adams et al., 2024; Rubio Machuca et al., 2025a, 2025b). These findings are consistent with those of Puskás et al. (2024), who observe that shared reflection amongst teachers enables a shift from reactive responses towards proactive education. Experience shapes the way in which teachers provide support, but specific spaces for training and reflection are required (Colomo et al., 2024; Rubio Machuca & Delgado García, 2024).

Conclusions

In conclusion, this study provides an exploratory answer to the question of why grief is not addressed in the educational setting, by questioning the symbolic, professional, curricular and pedagogical boundaries of the school. Although teachers recognise grief as a vital and educational experience, its treatment remains, in the cases analysed, on the margins of the school system due to sociocultural, training-related, curricular and relational barriers. The discourses analysed suggest that support is provided in a palliative manner and depends on the teacher's initiative, without being established as a planned educational practice.

The study's main contribution is to demonstrate that the teaching of death and bereavement does not fail due to a lack of sensitivity on the part of teachers, but rather due to the absence of structural conditions that would transform this awareness into a conscious, shared and sustained educational practice. The findings show that teachers' willingness is insufficient when it is not accompanied by specific training, resources, inter-professional coordination and curricular support. Until grief and resilience are integrated from a school-based and educational perspective, the approach to them will continue to rely on improvised and inconsistent responses, limiting the school's ability to provide preventive, pedagogical and community-based support. These conclusions must be interpreted in light of the qualitative nature of this study, the sample selection and the descriptive value of the terminological frequencies.

Finally, the study's limitations are confined to a qualitative design and a specific context, which restricts the generalisability of the results. Furthermore, the analysis is based on teachers' accounts and curriculum guidelines, without incorporating the perspectives of pupils and families, nor direct observation of educational practices. Looking ahead, it is proposed that future research be extended to other contexts and educational stakeholders, as well as delving deeper into training and curriculum proposals that explicitly integrate bereavement, on the basis that a holistic education should not exclude this human experience.

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