

Second Graders' Concepts of Death Using Literature and Drawing

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ABSTRACT

This study examine Filipino second-grade students' conceptualizations of death through the integration of a locally published storybook in an educational context. Using an exploratory qualitative design, ten children aged 7–8 from a laboratory school in the National Capital Region, Philippines, participated in a death concept questionnaire, individual interviews, and post-reading drawings. Data from interviews and drawings were analyzed through Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic framework, with validation by five child development experts. Six themes emerged: death's finality, inevitability, unpredictability, causes (e.g., old age, illness, violence), personification, and beliefs in non-corporeal continuation.

Findings highlight the cultural salience of death concepts among Filipino children, shaped by familial narratives, religious traditions, and moral frameworks. Frequent references to the afterlife, a supreme being, and ethical consequences reveal how cultural and spiritual beliefs inform children's meaning-making. Drawings reflected biological, metaphysical, and psychological representations of death, extending established developmental frameworks through culturally embedded perspectives. The study underscores the need for age-appropriate, culturally sensitive discussions of death in classrooms and children's literature, while calling for improved tools and participatory approaches in future research.

Keywords: death, children's literature, art, culture, beliefs

Introduction

Death is often considered a taboo subject for children and adults alike. The COVID-19 pandemic magnified this reality as many families experienced the loss of loved ones. In the Philippine context, children's understanding of death has been found to align with Speece and Brent's (1992) theory of death's irreversibility, universality, and causality (Rungduin et al., 2020). Yet, limited research exists on children's concepts of death, reflecting cultural norms where death is rarely discussed openly (Fadul, 2008; Dimaano & Estrella, 2022). In the Filipino context, parents are often reluctant to address the topic due to concerns about emotional distress, with many perceiving death as a curse or an untimely subject for children (Siao & Sta. Maria, 2015; Damiano & Estrella, 2022).

Large-scale studies on Filipino children (aged 3–16) highlight significant shifts in perceptions of death around ages 6–10, distinguishing them from adults. For instance, children often believe in the possibility of people returning to life or retaining bodily functions like hearing and feeling after death. Beyond age, a child's social environment plays a critical role in shaping their understanding of death (Fadul, 2008). Despite these insights, few studies have explored children's understanding of death within an educational setting, particularly through the use of literature and drawings.

As both an art teacher and an early grades educator, I was drawn to this study because of my professional interest in how children express abstract and sensitive concepts through creative and classroom-based activities. Grade 2 was deliberately chosen as the focal point because research suggests that children at this age often hold limited and fragmented views of death, making it a critical stage for examining how cultural, familial, and spiritual influences shape their meaning-making. By situating the study in this developmental window, the aim was to provide empirical data that bridges gaps in the literature and expands existing studies on children's death concepts.

This study, therefore, sought to shed new light on how Filipino second graders understand death in an educational setting by using a locally published storybook as a springboard for discussion. Visual art, specifically drawing, was integrated to allow children to elaborate on their perspectives in ways that transcend verbal explanation.

The study specifically aimed to answer the question: How do second graders conceptualize death as reflected in their drawings, post-reading, and questionnaire responses?

Relevant Theory and Research

Nature of Young Children

Second graders (ages 7–8) typically demonstrate improved fine motor, language, and cognitive skills. At this stage, they can express emotions, articulate opinions, and understand moral concepts. Emotionally, they begin to manage feelings such as sadness and fear, while cognitively they enter Piaget’s concrete operational stage, where logical thinking, including cause-and-effect reasoning and reversibility, becomes evident. Alongside these developments, creativity emerges as an important avenue for self-expression and exploration (Beaty, 2010; Morin, n.d.; Spanaki et al., 2014).

Children’s Literature

Children’s literature, particularly storytelling, enhances imagination, language development, and emotional growth. Storybooks that address death provide children with opportunities to process complex emotions, recognize death as a universal experience, and engage with culturally sensitive explanations of difficult questions. However, locally published storybooks often rely on euphemisms, which may confuse children about the true nature of death (Philips, 2000; Lowe, 2009; De La Cruz & Colendrino, 2018).

Children’s Storybooks on Death

Literature addressing death began to emerge in the 1940s and 1950s, primarily depicting the loss of close family members or pets. These early narratives often relied on comforting imagery, such as portrayals of heaven, to provide reassurance and mitigate children’s anxieties about mortality (Malcolm, 2011). Picture books are considered one of the most accessible tools for introducing death to young readers (Delisle & Woods McNamee, 1981), serving as cultural mirrors that reflect societal values and beliefs (Malcolm, 2011). In classroom settings, such books help children recognize death as a universal experience and support open discussions (McGuire et al., 2013). Parents also use storybooks to explain death symbolically, believing they make the topic easier to understand (Siao & Sta. Maria, 2015). However, some Filipino children’s books continue to

rely on euphemisms, which may obscure children's grasp of death's reality (Siao & Sta. Maria, 2015).

Children's Drawings on Death

Drawings have long been recognized as a powerful tool for understanding children's perceptions of death, with early studies dating back to 1934 (Wenestam, 1984). This method provides insight into children's emotional and cognitive development concerning a complex and often taboo subject. Research shows that children's concepts of death evolve with age, shaped by developmental stage, cultural context, and personal experiences. Drawings reveal cognitive stages of understanding death and reflect the influence of culture, religion, and family (Wenestam, 1984; Tamm & Granqvist, 1995; Bonoti et al., 2012; Macabulos et al., 2015; Vázquez-Sánchez et al., 2018).

Children's Concept of Death

Understanding death is particularly challenging for children (Bonoti et al., 2012), especially when compared to adults, who are better able to process and manage it (Ferrow, 2019). Children's perceptions are crucial because they influence how grief and loss are processed (Ferrow, 2019). Research suggests that children may grieve more intensely than adults, yet their grief is often overlooked (Standard, 1999).

Speece and Brent's Concept of Death

Speece and Brent (1992) identified five key concepts of death (Poling & Hupp, 2008):

- **Inevitability** – all living things must eventually die.
- **Universality** – death applies to all living things.
- **Irreversibility/Finality** – once dead, living things cannot return to life.
- **Cessation/Non-functionality** – bodily functions such as breathing and eating stop at death.
- **Causation** – death results from the breakdown of bodily functions or external causes.

Children's understanding of death is often framed around three core concepts: universality, irreversibility, and non-functionality. Speece and Brent (1992) argued that these concepts are acquired sequentially, typically developing fully by age ten. Universality is usually grasped first, followed by irreversibility and then non-functionality. This developmental sequence has been widely referenced in both international and local research. Poling and Hupp (2008) note that while studies may adjust components of how children understand death, the sequence remains consistent for ages 5–10.

Cultural and Local Studies

In the Philippines, Macabulos, Adona, and Sedilla (2015) explored children's concepts of death through semi-structured interviews and drawings, grounding their study in Piaget's cognitive development theory and Speece's framework. Their findings revealed that children aged 7–11 demonstrated varying levels of understanding of irreversibility, universality, inevitability, and cessation. Age was identified as a key factor influencing whether children's perceptions were more abstract or concrete. Themes such as old age and divine providence frequently emerged, highlighting the cultural and spiritual dimensions of Filipino children's interpretations of death.

Similarly, Rungduin, Rungduin, and Acopio (2020) examined children aged 6–8 who had experienced a recent death within the previous six months. Using adapted interviews based on Speece and Brent's (1984) framework, the study categorized children's perceptions into three orientations: cognitive (e.g., understanding of bodily functions ceasing, biological causes, and time perspective), cultural (e.g., beliefs in heaven, hell, purgatory, and divine judgment), and social (e.g., moral interpretations of death as punishment or escape). Findings revealed that while children's cognitive orientation aligned with established developmental patterns, their cultural and social interpretations were significantly shaped by caregiver interactions and personal experiences of loss.

Factors Influencing a Child's Understanding of Death

Krepia et al. (2017) emphasized that multiple factors—including age, cognitive development, personal experiences with death, gender, family dynamics, cultural values, societal attitudes, school environment, religious beliefs, technology, and mass media—significantly influence how children perceive and understand death. Social influences, such as peer interactions and familial discussions, also play a role in shaping children's conceptualizations (Vázquez-Sánchez et al., 2018).

Despite these insights, gaps remain in understanding whether children's conceptions of death are shaped more by personal experiences or by external cultural, familial, and societal influences (Siao & Sta. Maria, 2015).

Method

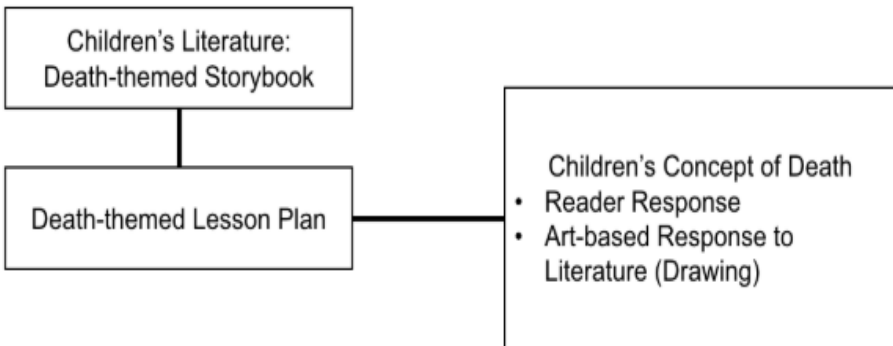
Research Design

This study adopted a qualitative exploratory design to investigate how second graders conceptualize death. Data sources included death-themed children's literature, a lesson plan derived from the selected storybook, and participants' responses through questionnaires, drawings, and verbal explanations. A qualitative approach was considered most appropriate for examining a sensitive and abstract concept resistant to quantitative methods (Siao & Sta. Maria, 2015; Dimaano & Estrella, 2022).

The framework (Figure 1) depicts the relationship among storybooks, lesson plan activities, and children's responses. Storybooks introduced death through narrative and symbolism, while guided questions and drawings elicited reader- and art-based expressions. Together, these elements revealed how children form concepts of death through both indirect (literature) and direct (artistic expression) engagement.

Figure 1

Children's Concept of Death through Storybooks and Drawing



Research Locale and Participants

The study was conducted in a laboratory school located in the National Capital Region (NCR), Philippines. This setting was selected for its unique attributes that provide an ideal environment for educational research. The

participants consisted of ten Grade 2 students, aged seven to eight years. This sample size was considered manageable for qualitative exploration while offering insights into how varied experiences with death—whether direct or vicarious—may shape children’s understanding of this sensitive topic.

Instruments

The study utilized three primary instruments:

1. **Post-reading prompts.** These were part of the death-themed lesson plan and served as a springboard for eliciting responses. The prompts consisted of seven questions: one assessed the participants’ ability to note details, while the remaining six probed their understanding of story events, their ability to infer characters’ feelings, and their skill in predicting outcomes.
2. **Death Concept Questionnaire.** Adapted from Rungduin, Rungduin, and Acopio (2020), this instrument consisted of four questions addressing different aspects of death. Completion took approximately 10–15 minutes, and participants were interviewed individually.
3. **Interview Guide.** Adopted from Sanchez et al. (2018), this guide included three questions prompting participants to explain their drawings and symbols. It also asked students to share their feelings after the activity and any additional thoughts they wished to express.

Although the death-themed lesson plan was not a primary instrument, it played a crucial role in eliciting responses. The plan consisted of three phases: pre-reading, during-reading, and post-reading. Pre-reading activities included rapport-building, introducing the story’s theme, and unlocking relevant vocabulary. Key terms related to death were introduced using visual aids (realia) and simple sentences to ensure comprehension. These materials were reviewed and approved by child development experts for age-appropriate clarity. Pre-reading questions activated prior knowledge and encouraged reflection on death before reading. The teacher then read *Ang mga Lambing ni Lolo Ding* (“Lolo Ding’s Tender Loving Care”) aloud. During-reading activities encouraged attentive listening and engagement, followed by post-reading prompts and a drawing activity in which students illustrated and explained their understanding of death. The 30–40

minute sessions were recorded, and updates were provided to the school guidance counselor.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis, following Braun and Clarke's (2006) framework, as well as the drawings, was used to analyze participant responses in the discussion. The process involved familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing and refining themes, and producing the final report. This approach provided insights into how children's concepts of death were shaped and represented through their drawings and discussions, allowing for a deeper understanding of their interpretations.

Results and Discussion

Concepts on the death of Filipino Second Graders

The findings reveal how Filipino second graders begin to articulate their concepts of death in ways that reflect both cognitive development and cultural influences. Emerging themes highlight children's recognition of death: death's finality, inevitability, unpredictability, causes (e.g., old age, illness, violence), personification, and beliefs in non-corporeal continuation.

Death is final

From the post-reading discussion, five out of ten participants affirmed that death is irreversible; once a person dies, they cannot return to life. Similarly, three participants emphasized that reunion after death is not possible, with one noting that once a person is buried, they cannot live again. This finding is particularly significant for second graders (ages seven to eight), as it reflects their emerging ability to grasp the permanence of death—a developmental milestone in children's cognitive and emotional growth. At this stage, children begin to move beyond magical thinking and develop more concrete reasoning, allowing them to distinguish between fantasy and reality. Their recognition of death's irreversibility demonstrates not only cognitive maturity but also an evolving moral and existential awareness. By articulating that reunion after death is impossible, these children show an early capacity to confront abstract concepts such as finality, loss, and continuity of life. This developmental

progression is crucial, as it lays the foundation for how they will later process grief, empathy, and cultural or religious beliefs about mortality.

Table 1
Excerpts of responses on the finality of death

<p>Death-concept question: Can a dead person become a live person again? Is there anything that could make a dead person come back to life?</p> <p>C2M8: no; only if somehow magic can happen; maybe if magic was real; definitely magic is not real so it's not gonna happen</p> <p>C4F8: no; because they are already dead (<i>kasi dead na sila</i>)</p> <p>C5F8: no, because they already died (<i>hindi po; kasi namatay na sila po</i>)</p> <p>C10M8: Not anymore, they cannot do anything to live again (<i>hindi na po eh; wala na po eh</i>)</p> <p>C13M8:...no one can make a person alive again</p>	<p>Post-Reading Question: <i>Magkikita pa ba si Lolo Ding at ang kanyang apo? Paano? Bakit?</i> (Do you think Lolo Ding and his grandson will eventually meet? If yes, how and why? If no, why not?)</p> <p>C2M8: No, he passed away</p> <p>C10M8: <i>Hindi na po, kasi nasa libingan na po si Lolo Ding</i> (Not anymore, because Lolo Ding has been buried already)</p> <p>C12M8: No, Lolo Ding is dead</p>
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Cessation of bodily functions. Based on the responses to the death-concept questionnaire, all participants (10 out of 10) agreed that death entails the complete cessation of motor and bodily functions. This finding is particularly meaningful for second graders, as it reflects their growing ability to comprehend the biological finality of death. At ages seven to eight, children begin to move beyond magical or reversible notions of mortality and instead recognize that physical processes—such as movement, breathing, and bodily activity—irreversibly stop when a person dies. This understanding marks an important cognitive milestone, showing that they are beginning to integrate concrete biological knowledge with broader emotional and cultural perspectives. Such recognition not only demonstrates their developing logical reasoning but also lays the groundwork for how they will later process grief, empathy, and spiritual beliefs surrounding death.

Table 2

Excerpts on cessation of bodily functions

Death-concept questionnaire: Can a dead person move? Get hungry? Speak?

C2M8: not even if you become a ghost. ghosts don't get hungry

C4F8, C5F8: no*

C6M8, C8M8: not anymore*

C13M8: I don't think so

(* repeated answers/responses)

Death is inevitable. Inevitability signifies the recognition that all living beings such as people, animals, plants, and other organisms must eventually die.


Death is a natural process. Using the death-concept questionnaire, three out of ten participants described what naturally happens to the body after death. One participant explained death as part of an ecological cycle, noting that organisms feed on decaying bodies in a continuous process, and, as his father had told him, all living beings eventually die. Two participants observed that a dead body may appear to move when intentionally manipulated or due to post-mortem twitches, which they recognized as natural physiological responses. Another participant shared a dual perspective, stating that after death the soul ascends to heaven while the body decomposes, leaving only the skeleton.

The drawings reinforced these ideas. One participant depicted skulls and referenced bodily deformation and decay, echoing another's verbal explanation. Another illustrated insects consuming the body, highlighting the natural processes of decomposition. These responses and drawings reveal that even at ages seven to eight, children begin to integrate biological, ecological, and spiritual perspectives into their understanding of death. Their recognition of decomposition and ecological cycles demonstrates emerging scientific reasoning, while references to the soul and heaven reflect cultural and religious influences. This duality—balancing concrete biological processes with abstract spiritual beliefs—illustrates how second graders navigate complex concepts by combining knowledge from family, culture, and observation. Such insights are significant

because they show how children at this stage are developing the ability to reconcile physical realities with metaphysical ideas, laying the foundation for more nuanced understandings of mortality, continuity, and meaning in later years.

Table 3

Excerpts of responses on inevitability; natural process

<p>Death-concept questionnaire: Can a dead person move? Get hungry? Speak?</p> <p>C3F8: ...I think of them (death) a loop in the ecosystem - mushroom because they eat dead things, creature eats mushroom, when we die it loops again and cycle in the ecosystem</p> <p>C11M7: They can only move when they twitch and then they stop</p> <p>C12M8: Maybe, if you move them and no, they cannot get hungry and speak (<i>pwede naman pag ginalaw mo; no</i>)</p> <p>Death-concept questionnaire: Can a dead person become a live person again? Is there anything that could make a dead person come back to life?</p> <p>C8M8: Not anymore because their soul left their body already. The soul can go to heaven or hell and their skin melt leaving the skeleton (<i>hindi na po; kasi po nakaalis na po yung soul sa kanilang body; yung soul pwede sa heaven pwede sa hell; yung katawan po nila, skin nila natutunaw, skeleton nalang po natitira</i>)</p>	<p>Drawings:</p>  <p>C11M7: skull kasi kapag namatay he deforms and becomes a skull - funeral because when someone dies, they have a funeral for him; <i>naisip ko yung funeral kasi kapag namatay gagawa silang funeral para sa kanya tapos kapag nag-deform siya magtuturn siya into a skull tapos magiging rotten whole body niya.</i></p>
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Death-concept questionnaire:
Does everyone die at some time? Why?

C4F8: yes, life is like that (*kasi ganon lang talaga eh*)

C3F8: *tatay (father) said all living organisms die someday*

C6M8: everyone dies and not everyone will live in this world forever



C2M8: ...sometimes when people die insects eat them

Death is caused by old age, sickness, and violence


The findings of this study suggest that Filipino second graders primarily associate old age, sickness, and violence as causes of death. In the death-concept questionnaire, eight out of ten participants acknowledged that everyone will eventually die and identified multiple causes, including aging, illness, and violent acts. Two participants, however, emphasized old age as the main cause, reflecting a perception that death occurs only after a person grows old. One respondent explained that aging leads to the cessation of cellular function, ultimately resulting in death, while another suggested that death could be avoided in the absence of illness.

During the post-reading discussion, all ten participants reiterated that death can result from sickness (e.g., heart attack) and aging. One participant illustrated death as being caused by food, illness, or a sphere representing blood, highlighting their developing grasp of causality. Two boys identified violence (e.g., gunshot, being struck by a sphere) as a cause of death, a theme that appeared consistently across both questionnaire responses and drawings. Interestingly, one participant also attributed death to divine providence, describing it as the will of God (Macabulos et al., 2015). These findings reveal how children at ages seven to eight begin to integrate biological, social, and spiritual explanations into their understanding of death. Their emphasis on sickness and aging reflects a growing awareness of biological processes, while references to violence suggest sensitivity to social realities and cultural narratives. The attribution of death to divine providence demonstrates the influence of religious teachings and family beliefs. Together, these perspectives illustrate how second graders construct

meaning by blending concrete observations (illness, aging, violence) with abstract ideas (divine will), marking an important stage in their cognitive and moral development. This developmental progression is critical, as it shapes how children interpret mortality, causality, and the broader human experience.

Table 4

Excerpts of responses on causality of death (age, sickness, violence)

<p>Death-concept questionnaire: Does everyone die at some time? Why?</p> <p>C8M8, C10M8, C11M7, C12M8, C13M8: yes (opo)</p> <p>C2M8: yes; age matters - kids are fine when they get old - at 100, you're not supposed to exist anymore</p> <p>C3F8:...because you're too old, some of your cells become to get tired and not work then you will die</p> <p>C6M8: everyone dies and not everyone will live in this world forever. you can die anytime - later, today, tomorrow, you never know when will you die (<i>lahat ng tao mamamatay dahil di naman forever ka mabuhay sa mundo - pwede mamatay mamaya, ngayon, bukas, di mo alam kelan ka mamamatay</i>)</p> <p>C5F8: not really, you don't die if you do not have problems like heart attack (<i>hindi po; kasi po walang problema at heart attack</i>)</p>	<p>Post-reading discussion:</p> <p><i>Ano ang nangyari kay Lolo Ding? Bakit kaya ito nangyari? (What happened to Lolo Ding? Why did it happen?)</i></p> <p>C2M8: passed away, heart attack or something</p> <p>C3F8: he died because of an illness I don't know, close to heart attack</p> <p>C4F8: <i>nagkasakit, dinala sa ospital, namatay—baka kasi masyadong bad yung sakit</i></p> <p>C5F8: <i>namatay si lolo Ding; kasi naghihilo siya</i></p> <p>C6M8: <i>namatay, dahil matanda na rin siya</i></p> <p>C8M8: <i>sa tingin ko po nagkasakit siya dahil po matanda na rin po siya</i></p> <p>C10M8: <i>eh kasi po matanda na po siya</i></p> <p>C11M7: <i>nahilo at di makahinga pumunta siya sa hospital po; kasi heart niya di na kaya at nung brain</i></p> <p>C12M8: <i>na-sick</i></p> <p>C13M8: got sick and died because he was already old</p>	<p>Drawing:</p>  <p>C2M8: I learned from dr binocs that there as such thing as food getting stuck that makes you go to the hospital something will happen in your body that will make you infected; blood - hit by a sphere or something</p>
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<p>Death-concept questionnaire: Are you scared to die?</p> <p>C8M8: I want to die when I reach senior age like the one in the story</p> <p>C11M7: If you die or get shot, you will feel a sensation of a burning thing (get shot) it feels very bad and painful that why people don't want to die, I'll call 911 and see them die</p>		
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Death is unpredictable

Two participants consistently expressed fear and uncertainty about what occurs after death, while one specifically highlighted the unpredictability of its timing. These findings suggest that children already hold a notion of uncertainty surrounding death. Although they acknowledge the continuation of life beyond the cessation of bodily functions, they remain unsure about where this continuation takes place or when it unfolds. This uncertainty reflects the developmental stage of second graders, who are beginning to grapple with abstract concepts but still rely heavily on concrete reasoning. At ages seven to eight, children often oscillate between biological explanations (e.g., the body stops functioning) and spiritual or cultural narratives (e.g., life after death). Their expressed fear and uncertainty reveal both cognitive limitations and emotional sensitivity: they recognize death's inevitability yet struggle to conceptualize its timing and aftermath. This tension is significant because it demonstrates how children at this age are actively negotiating between observable realities and intangible beliefs. Such insights highlight the importance of guided discussions, as they help children process existential questions in ways that foster emotional resilience, moral reasoning, and cultural understanding.

Table 5

Excerpts of responses on the unpredictability of death

Death-concept question: Where do dead people go? Where do you go when you die

C10M8: ...*kasi po di ko alam po kung saan po sila napunta eh* (...because I don't know where they will go)

C5F8: we don't know what will happen when we die

Death-concept question: Can a dead person become a live person again? Is there anything that could make a dead person come back to life?

C6M8: *lahat ng tao mamamatay dahil di naman forever ka mabuhay sa mundo—pwede mamatay mamaya, ngayon, bukas, di mo alam kelan ka mamamatay* (everyone dies, no one lives forever in this world, you can die later, today, tomorrow, you don't know when you will die) Death-concept question: Are you scared to die?

C3F8: we don't know what will happen when we die

C10M8: Yes, because I don't know where will I go when I die

Personification of death

Three out of ten participants reflected the personification of death in their responses, regardless of gender. One participant provided particularly strong evidence of this by using symbols such as the grim reaper and angels. While skulls are typically associated with the natural process of death and bodily decay, one participant described the skull in his drawing as a symbolic representation of death itself, rather than a depiction of decomposition.

The personification of death has been identified as a common feature across several studies, where children often portray death as an anthropomorphic figure—such as a skeleton, ghost, or other recognizable character (Tamm & Granqvist, 1995; Vasquez-Sanchez et al., 2018; Macabulos et al., 2015). This tendency may reflect children's struggle to grasp the abstract nature of death and their attempt to make it more concrete by giving it a familiar, human-like form. For children in the second grade, personifying death serves as a developmental bridge between abstract concepts and concrete imagery. At ages seven to eight, children are beginning to move into Piaget's concrete operational stage, where they can think logically about tangible events but still find purely abstract ideas difficult to process. By depicting death as a figure, whether a grim reaper,

angel, or skull, they transform an intangible concept into something recognizable and relatable. This strategy not only reflects their cognitive limitations but also demonstrates their creativity in reconciling cultural, religious, and emotional influences. Such symbolic personification highlights how children at this age actively construct meaning, using imagination and cultural narratives to navigate existential questions that remain beyond their full cognitive grasp.

Table 6

Excerpts of responses on the unpredictability of death

Death-concept question: Where do dead people go? Where do you go when you die

C10M8: ...*kasi po di ko alam po kung saan po sila napunta eh* (...because I don't know where they will go)

C5F8: we don't know what will happen when we die

Death-concept question: Can a dead person become a live person again? Is there anything that could make a dead person come back to life?

C6M8: *lahat ng tao mamamatay dahil di naman forever ka mabuhay sa mundo - pwede mamatay mamaya, ngayon, bukas, di mo alam kelan ka mamamatay* (everyone dies, no one lives forever in this world, you can die later, today, tomorrow, you don't know when you will die)

Death-concept question: Are you scared to die?

C3F8: we don't know what will happen when we die

C10M8: Yes, because I don't know where will I go when I die

Beliefs in the Afterlife


Non-corporeal continuity is reported to be common among children (Speece, 1995). Non-corporeal continuation refers to the belief that life continues in another plane after the physical body ceases (Speece, 1995; Macabulos et al., 2015).

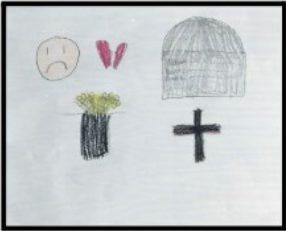
Heaven, hell, and purgatory. Two participants expressed the belief that a person could live again if they entered heaven or hell and accepted Christ as their savior. This suggests that while they acknowledged the finality of death, they also held faith in the possibility of life beyond it. Similarly, one participant emphasized that although everyone eventually dies, those who live virtuously

will go to heaven. Overall, nine out of ten participants conveyed the view that a person's ultimate destination—whether heaven, hell, or purgatory—depends on their actions during life. These findings highlight how children at ages seven to eight begin to integrate spiritual and moral frameworks into their understanding of death. Their responses reveal an emerging awareness that death is not only a biological event but also a moral and religious one, shaped by cultural teachings and family beliefs. By linking life after death to virtuous behavior or divine judgment, second graders demonstrate early moral reasoning, connecting abstract spiritual concepts with concrete ideas of right and wrong. This developmental stage is significant because it shows how children use religious narratives to make sense of mortality, reinforcing both their cultural identity and their growing capacity to interpret complex existential questions.

Table 7

Excerpts of responses on non-corporeal continuity (heaven, hell, purgatory)


Death concept questionnaire:	Post-reading discussion:	Drawings:
<p>Can a dead person become a live person again? Is there anything that could make a dead person come back to life?</p> <p>C6M8: yes, in heaven. his soul will go to heaven and there he will live again accept Christ in his life as his savior (<i>sa langit; soul niya aakyat sa langit tapos dun na siya mabubuhay ulit; accept Christ as life and savior</i>)</p> <p>C8M8: Not anymore because their soul left their body already. The soul can go to heaven or hell and their skin melt leaving the skeleton (<i>hindi na po; kasi po nakaalis na po yung soul sakanilang body; yung soul pwede sa heaven pwede sa hell</i>)</p>	<p><i>Magkikita pa ba sila? Paano? Bakit? (Will they still see each other? How and why?)</i></p> <p>C3F8: when they die when they meet each other in heaven if its real</p> <p>C4F8: <i>baka sa heaven; pag namatay rin yung bata paglaki niya (in heaven, if the child grows up and dies too)</i></p> <p>C5F8: <i>opo sa heaven po</i></p> <p>C6M8: <i>baka pag nasa langit na rin siya (maybe if he's in heaven also)</i></p>	<p>Drawings:</p>  <p>C6M6: <i>dito po yung malaman mo yung kabahan ng hell and heaven (Here you will know the difference of heaven and hell)</i></p>

<p>Death-concept questionnaire: Does everyone die at some time? Why?</p> <p>C13M8: yeah it's because they live a good life they will go to heaven</p> <p>Death concept questionnaire: Where do dead people go? Where do you go when you die</p> <p>C3F8: in heaven</p> <p>C4F8: in heaven, everyone that dies goes to heaven, when i die, i will go to heaven</p> <p>C5F8: in heaven</p> <p>C6M8: 2 places—heaven if you are good and hell if you are bad</p> <p>C11M7, C12M8: heaven or hell</p> <p>C13M8: usually to heaven if they're good; and hell, if they're not good and a bit good they go to purgatory</p>	<p>C8M8: <i>opo pag parehas sila ngpupuntahan sa heaven or sa hell—pero sa tinign ko naman po sa heaven sila pupunta</i> (yes, if they both will go to heaven or hell - but I think both of them (Lolo Ding and his grandson) will go to heaven)</p> <p>C13M8: maybe when they both die and go to heaven</p>	 <p>C7F8: <i>...yung cross po kasi si Jesus ay—kung namatay po ikaw, pupunta sa heaven at si Hesus ay nasa heaven</i> (The cross symbolizes Jesus; if you die, you will see Jesus in heaven)</p>
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Divine Providence. Filipino children are often raised in religious households, where a deep faith in God is instilled from an early age (Macabulos et al., 2015; Rungduin et al., 2020). Within this context, the belief that death occurs according to God's will and divine plan reflects their understanding of providence. It also suggests that children at this stage are beginning to recognize the moral dimension of their actions, perceiving that the way they live may influence their fate when the time comes to face death. For children in the second grade, this belief system demonstrates how cultural and religious upbringings shape their developing concepts of mortality. At ages seven to eight, children are transitioning into more concrete reasoning but still rely heavily on narratives provided by

family and faith communities. Their view that actions in life affect one's destiny after death reveals an emerging moral awareness, where notions of right and wrong are tied not only to social consequences but also to spiritual outcomes. This integration of religious teachings with their understanding of death highlights how Filipino children construct meaning by blending cultural identity, moral reasoning, and existential questions, laying the foundation for how they will later process both faith and mortality.

Table 8
Excerpts of responses on divine providence

<p>Death-concept questionnaire: Can a dead person become a live person again? Is there anything that could make a dead person come back to life?</p> <p>C11M7: ...if you are in hell or in heaven, God decides if you are a dog or human; but if you are bad, you will be a fly or a crocodile; <i>di ko po alam</i> but they should be good or bad or both or be kind</p> <p>C12M8: by the power of God, you can (<i>pwede naman</i>)</p> <p>Death-concept questionnaire: Does everyone die at some time? Why</p> <p>C11M7: (opo) yes, because God decides or sacrifice just like Jesus did; we need to make sacrifices too</p> <p>Death-concept questionnaire: Where do dead people go? Where do you go when you die?</p> <p>C10M8:...Jesus and God decide when you will die he's the only one who know</p>	<p>Drawing:</p>  <p>C6M6: <i>yan lang din dahil dun ka talaga mapupunta pag jinudge ka ni Jesus kung anong deeds ginawa nila</i> (this is where you will go when you day on the judgment day depending on the deeds you did while on Earth)</p>
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Existence of souls. The concept of the soul as a separate entity from the physical body was evident in participants' responses to the death concept questionnaire and post-reading discussions. Two participants described how the soul separates from the body after death, leaving the physical form behind. They explained that the soul transitions to either heaven or hell, reflecting a belief in the

continuation of life in another form. Additionally, one participant further supported this idea, stating that the soul continues to exist in this world, reinforcing the belief that death does not mark the absolute end of life.

Table 9

Excerpts of responses on the existence of souls

<p>Death-concept questionnaire: Can a dead person become a live person again? Is there anything that could make a dead person come back to life?</p> <p>C6M8: his soul will go to heaven and there he will live again accept Christ in his life as his savior (<i>sa langit; soul niya aakyat sa langit tapos dun na siya mabubuhay ulit; accept Christ as life and savior</i>)</p> <p>C8M8: The soul can go to heaven or hell and their skin melt leaving the skeleton (<i>hindi na po; kasi po nakaalis na po yung soul sakanilang body; yung soul pwede sa heaven pwede sa hell; yung katawan po nila skin nila natutunaw, skeleton nalang po natitira</i>)</p>	<p>Post-reading discussion: <i>Ano ang mga puwede nating gawin para hindi makalimutan ang mga mahal nating nawala o namatay na? Bakit mahalagang gawin ang mga ito?</i> (What are the things that we can do so we won't forget our loved ones who passed on? Why is it important to do these things?)</p> <p>C8M8: <i>...nasa world pa rin po sila, soul po nila nasa world po, di pa po end of the world</i></p>
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Reincarnation into another form. Two participants expressed beliefs in life after death, suggesting that it could involve reincarnation, as indicated in the death-concept questionnaire. This reflects an understanding of existence beyond physical death and the possibility of being reborn in another form. While their responses acknowledge the finality and universality of death, they also reveal that some Filipino second graders perceive the possibility of returning to life in another way. These findings highlight how children at ages seven to eight navigate the tension between biological finality and spiritual continuity. Their openness to reincarnation demonstrates both imaginative thinking and the influence of cultural or familial narratives that extend beyond traditional Christian teachings. At this developmental stage, children are beginning to reconcile concrete biological knowledge (that the body ceases to function) with abstract spiritual ideas (that life may continue in another form). This blending of perspectives illustrates their cognitive flexibility and their reliance on symbolic frameworks to make sense of mortality. Such beliefs are significant because they show how

second graders construct meaning by integrating diverse cultural, religious, and imaginative influences, laying the groundwork for more complex understandings of death and the afterlife as they mature.

Table 10

Excerpts of responses on reincarnation in another form

Death-concept questionnaire:

Where do dead people go? Where do you go when you die?

C5F8: depends on what you believe in - if you are a witchy person, you think that you could but if you are a zombie you'd probably; I don't think it's possible but I think depends on what they think - demons or on the top of the star that fits the person bringing the dead person—plants, if a person loves nature... I think I just get reborn into something—I'll be reborn or turn into compost

Death-concept question:

Can a dead person become a live person again? Is there anything that could make a dead person come back to life?

C11M7: yes, they can come back alive; if you are in hell or heaven god decides if you are a dog, or human, but if you are bad, you will be a fly or a crocodile; *di ko po alam but they should be good or bad or both or be kind*

Death as an emotional experience

This theme explains death as an emotional experience where it brings sadness, exhibits fear of separation from loved ones, and commemoration of loved ones through rituals.

Death brings sadness. Death, as an unfortunate event, brings sadness to children. Three participants expressed fear of dying and associated sadness with death on the death-concept questionnaire. Sadness is more prevalent than feeling scared. In the post-reading discussion, 10 out of 10 participants answered that the passing of the grandfather in the story made the grandchild sad. It shows how the participants understood the story and inferred that death brings sadness. Furthermore, in the drawings, an image of a person crying was depicted by one participant. Another participant also drew two people, including herself, with sad faces because of the passing of a relative.


Death, as an unfortunate event, often evokes sadness among children. In the death-concept questionnaire, three participants expressed fear of dying and associated death with sadness, emerging as the more prevalent emotion compared to

fear. During the post-reading discussion, all 10 participants stated that the passing of the grandfather in the story made the grandchild sad, demonstrating their ability to infer emotional consequences and empathize with the characters.

The drawings further reinforced this theme. One participant depicted a crying figure, while another illustrated two people—including herself—showing sad expressions in response to the death of a relative. These visual representations highlight how children externalize their emotional understanding of death through symbolic imagery. For children in the second grade, sadness as a dominant response to death reflects their growing emotional awareness and capacity for empathy. At ages seven to eight, children begin to recognize that death not only involves biological finality but also carries emotional consequences for those left behind. Their consistent association of death with sadness—whether through verbal responses or drawings—demonstrates an emerging ability to connect narrative events with personal feelings. This developmental progression is significant because it shows how children use both language and art to process grief, articulate emotions, and understand the social impact of loss. Such insights underscore the importance of guided discussions and supportive environments that help children navigate complex emotions surrounding mortality.

Table 11

Excerpts of responses on death brings sadness

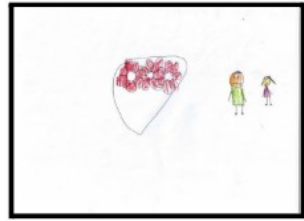
<p>Death-concept questionnaire: Are you scared to die?</p> <p>C4F8: yes because I'll miss my friends, we can't play anymore</p> <p>C6M8: all of us will die so there's nothing to be afraid of - it just makes me sad thinking about it.</p> <p>C8M8: ...it also makes me sad when someone I know dies</p> <p>C12M8: it's not scary to die, it is sad to think about death</p>	<p>Post-reading discussion: <i>Ano kaya ang naramdaman ng bata dito?</i> (What do you think did the child feel?)</p> <p>C2M8: sad—he loved his lolo</p> <p>C3F8: very sad and bad at the virus</p> <p>C4F8: <i>nalungkot at namiss siya</i> [sad and he will miss him (lolo)]</p> <p>C5F8, C6M8: <i>malungkot</i> (sad)</p>	<p>Drawings:</p>  <p>C2M8: ...crying; for the person who passed away</p>
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Personal Sharing:
 C8M8: *meron po akong friend nung 5 po kami, nagkaron po siya ng cancer, kaya po siya namatay. Dun po ako na-sad umiyak po ako; tapos may ka-batch po kami sa school na gumawa po kami ng card, naiyak po ako; noon po nagmessage po yung friend ni mama na may sakit tapos after 1 month, nung nagbreakfast po kami tapos sinabi po sa amin na nawala na po siya—biglaan po nagpunta po kami sa kanila sa burol—naunawaan ko naman na po nung 7 years old na po ako—dun po ako nakaranas ng sobrang lungkot kasi di ko na po siya nakikita kasi sobrang bata niya po, naaawa po ako sa kanyang magulang mayroon po siyang kapatid na mas bata, wala na po siyang makakalaro, sa aunt ko di naman po ako masyado nalungkot, sa friend ko lang po.*

C8M8: *sa tingin ko po sobrang nalungkot po siya kasi yung lolo niya po yung lagi niyang kasama* (I think he got really sad because he is always with his lolo)

C10M8, C11M7, C12M8: *malungkot na po siya, kasi wala na po si lolo Ding eh* (he is sad because his lolo Ding is gone)

C13M8: *bad, very—because I felt the same way when my lolo died; sad in after a few days past it felt like it was a dream then I suddenly got used to it he died this year*



Fear of separation from loved ones. This emotional aspect of death underscores children’s understanding of death as a profound personal loss. Eight out of ten participants shared that they are afraid of dying, while two explained that they are not fearful but feel sadness when thinking about it. This supports earlier findings that sadness is the dominant emotional response to death.

Participants expressed fear primarily because of the separation death causes from family members, friends, and loved ones. For them, death represents an end marked by uncertainty and abandonment. At this age, children often perceive death as a separation from their closest relationships, which is closely tied to their socio-emotional development. Since second graders remain heavily

dependent on their parents and caregivers, the thought of losing them can feel particularly frightening and destabilizing.

These responses highlight how children at ages seven to eight are beginning to grasp death not only as a biological event but also as an emotional and relational rupture. Their fear of separation reflects their developmental stage, where attachment to caregivers remains central to their sense of security. The sadness they associate with death demonstrates their growing capacity for empathy and emotional awareness, as they recognize the impact of loss on themselves and others. This developmental progression is significant because it shows how children's understanding of death is deeply intertwined with their socio-emotional growth, shaping how they process grief, dependency, and the meaning of relationships.

Table 12

Excerpts of responses on death brings sadness

Death-concept questionnaire:

Are you scared to die?

C2M8: a bit; because I want my mom to live

C3F8: both - well I don't want to die, I want to spend more time with my friends and besties; I don't want any of them to die because how will we ever play again; we don't know what will happen when we die

C4F8: yes, because I'll miss my friends, we can't play anymore

C5F8: yes, because I will be alone

C6M8: all of us will die so there's nothing to be afraid of—it just makes me sad thinking about it. You also have to think about the things you do or have done before you die

C8M8: I'm afraid to die

C10M8: Yes, because I don't know where will I go when I die

C11M7: yes

C12M8: it's not scary to die, it is sad to think about death

C12M8: scary when you think about it; because I'm not ready to die; sometimes I'm scared I'm going to die when someone close to me dies like family or friends

Personal Sharing:

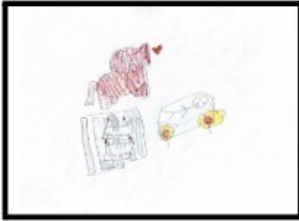
C8M8: meron po akong friend nung 5 po kami, nagkaron po siya ng cancer, kaya po siya namatay. Dun po ako na-sad umiyak po ako; tapos may ka-batch po kami sa school na gumawa po kami ng card, naiyak po ako; noon po nagmessage po yung friend ni mama na may sakit tapos after 1 month, nung nagbreakfast po kami tapos sinabi po sa amin na nawala na po siya—biglaan po nagpunta po kami sa kanila sa burol—naunawaan ko naman na po nung 7 years old na po ako—dun po ako nakaranas ng sobrang lungkot kasi di ko na po siya nakikita kasi sobrang bata niya po, naaawa po ako sa kanyang magulang mayroon po siyang kapatid na mas bata, wala na po siyang makakalaro, sa aunt ko di naman po ako masyado nalungkot, sa friend ko lang po.

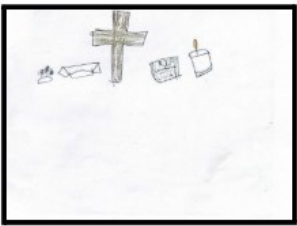

Commemoration of the dead through rituals and traditions. One participant explained that their drawing of a ghost reflected how they see their mother praying to deceased loved ones, asking them to watch over the family. Similarly, another participant illustrated that bringing flowers to a grave symbolizes the love and affection felt for those who have passed away. In response to post-reading questions, participants also shared that continuing the teachings and traditions of the deceased is a meaningful way to honor and remember them. While one participant depicted the loss of a pet dog, most focused on the death of relatives, particularly grandparents. Many drawings included highly personal details such as the color of a deceased pet's fur, the candles and flowers placed at the grave, the name of the deceased, and even the weather conditions during cemetery visits. These depictions reflect Filipino cultural practices of honoring and remembering loved ones through rituals and traditions.

For children at this age, these drawings and responses reveal how cultural practices and family rituals shape their understanding of death. By portraying prayer, offerings, and cemetery visits, second graders demonstrate an emerging awareness that death is not only a biological event but also a social and spiritual experience. Their inclusion of personal details shows how memory, affection, and cultural identity are intertwined in their meaning-making process. This developmental stage is significant because it highlights how children use both symbolic imagery and lived cultural practices to process loss, reinforcing their emotional bonds and sense of belonging within family and community.

Table 13

Excerpts of responses on commemoration of the dead through rituals and traditions

Personal Sharing:	Post-reading discussion:	Drawings:
<p>C8M8: <i>meron po akong friend nung 5 po kami, nagkaron po siya ng cancer, kaya po siya namatay. Dun po ako na-sad umiyak po ako; tapos may ka-batch po kami sa school na gumawa po kami ng card, naiyak po ako; noon po nagmessage po yung friend ni mama na may sakit tapos after 1 month, nung nagbreakfast po kami tapos sinabi po sa amin na nawala na po siya—biglaan po nagpunta po kami sa kanila sa burol—naunawaan ko naman na po nung 7 years old na po ako—dun po ako nakaranas ng sobrang lungkot kasi di ko na po siya nakikita kasi sobrang bata niya po, naaawa po ako sa kanyang magulang mayroon po siyang kapatid na mas bata, wala na po siyang makakalaro, sa aunt ko di naman po ako masyado nalungkot, sa friend ko lang po.</i></p>	<p><i>Ano ang mga puwede nating gawin para hindi makalimutan ang mga mahal nating nawala o namatay na? Bakit mahalagang gawin ang mga ito?</i></p> <p>C2M8: try to remember them, do what they tell us, and wish them to come back; family is important</p> <p>C3F8: we want them close to us, well maybe not physically probably; the flower is what we give to the dead and the grave is where we put the dead bodies</p> <p>C4F8: <i>laging makipaglaro sa kanila</i> or talk with them or be with them</p> <p>C5F8: <i>magtulong ng mga chores</i></p> <p>C6M8: <i>lagi silang alalahanin</i></p> <p>C8M8: <i>maglagay ng pumpon ng bulaklak at tirik ng kandila pag birthday at araw ng namatay sila; kasi po kahit po wala na sila inaalala pa rin po nila tayo, nasa world pa rin po sila, soul po nila nasa world po, di pa po end of the world</i></p> <p>C10M8: <i>kailangan po ipagdasal po natin sila, maging magalang po sa ibang tao po.</i></p>	<p>Drawings:</p>  <p>C4F8: <i>Ito yung dog ko na namatay—si Jet ; he died Feb. 2 this year, ito nung last na vinisit namin nanay at tatay ng lolo ko tapos ni-light namin candles, ito nung one time na sinabi ng kaibigan ng nanay ko na pumunta dun sa isang burol tapos naandun siya tapos yun yung tatay ng kaibigan ng nanay ko (this is my dog that died, jet. he died on February 2 of this year. this (grave) was when we last visited the mother and father of my grandfather and we lighted candles on his grave; this drawing (grave with a person) was when one time a friend of my mom said that we would visit the father of my mom’s friend who passed away. he is inside the casket.</i></p>

<p>C11M7: <i>mag take ng many pictures at mag lagay ng picture frame tapos ilagay sa table next sa bedroom</i></p>	
<p>C12M8: do all the things that they usually tell you</p>	
<p>C13M8: I look at their pictures</p>	<p>C8M8: <i>kandila— nilalagay po namin siya sa puntod</i> (candles are what I see when we go to the cemetery)</p>
<p><i>Gagawin pa kaya ng bata ang mga lambing sa kanya ni Lolo Ding? Bakit?</i></p>	
<p>C2M8: yeah—because he loves him</p>	
<p>C3F8: <i>opo</i> to remember his lolo</p>	
<p>C4F8: <i>gagawin pa rin kasi miss niya ang kanyang loloat saka yun ang sinabi ng kanyang lolo</i></p>	<p>C10M8: <i>puntod po, kapag meron pong namatay ilalagay po nila sa puntod, mga bulaklak, kandila at apat po na clouds, saka po isa pong sun—gusto ko lang po, binibisita ko po yung lola ko po sa Loyola.</i> (I drew a grave. When someone dies, you offer flowers and candles. I drew clouds and sun too just because I like it. I remember visiting my grandmother at the Loyola cemetery.)</p>
<p>C6M8: <i>gagawin—dahil naalala niya si lolo Ding may purpose mga pina-pagawa sa kanya sa paglaki niya</i></p>	
<p>C8M8: <i>opo, kasi sabi ng lolo lagi siya aalalahanin</i></p>	
<p>C10M8: <i>opo, kasi mahal na mahal niya po si lolo Ding</i></p>	
<p>C11M7: <i>yeah, kasi namimiss niya siya</i></p>	
<p>C13M8: yes, because the dishes will run away</p>	

Unintended Findings

This study revealed several influences on Filipino second graders' understanding of death; death experiences, age, gender, family, culture, religion, media, and art. While not anticipated, these factors emerged consistently, underscoring the exploratory nature of the research.

Death Experiences. Eight of ten participants had experienced the death of a pet or relative, shaping vivid and personal portrayals. Surprisingly, even those without direct experiences conveyed realistic concepts of death, drawing from memory, observation, or imagination.

Age and Gender. Most participants were eight years old. Although statistical comparisons were not possible, religious and spiritual beliefs appeared across genders.

Family and Religion. Parents strongly influenced children's views, often through shared teachings. Belief in a Supreme Being, heaven, and rituals was deeply embedded in responses and drawings.

Cultural Practices. Traditions such as lighting candles, visiting graves, and *Pista ng Patay* shaped children's concepts, reflecting strong family bonds and remembrance.

Media. Television and other media introduced ideas about violent or unusual causes of death, especially for children without personal experiences. One Filipino-Thai child blended cultural, familial, and media influences in their belief on death.

Drawings and Symbolism. Children's artwork mirrored their beliefs, incorporating funeral elements and spiritual imagery. Despite their young age, they demonstrated symbolic understanding aligned with biological, metaphysical, and psychological themes.

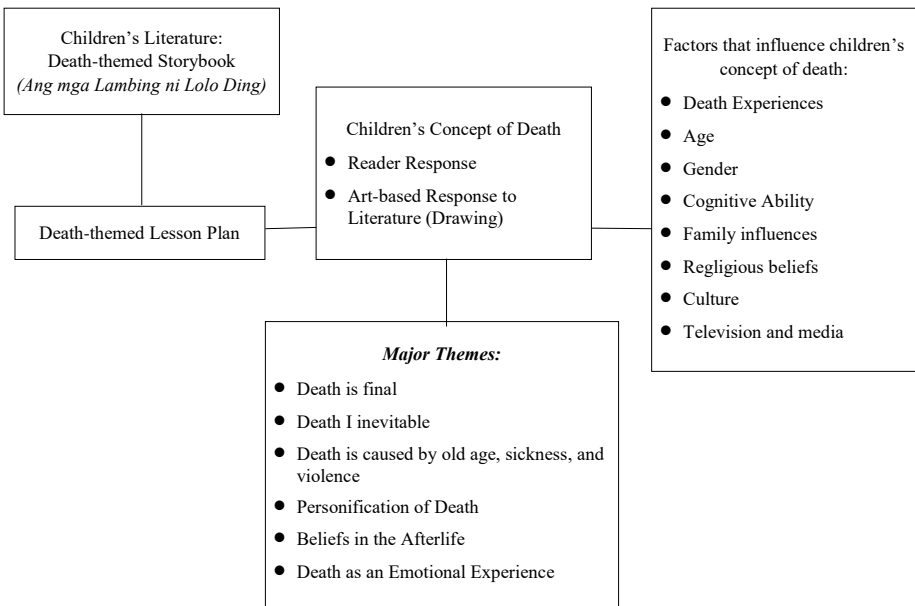
These unintended findings highlight that Filipino second graders' concepts of death are not solely tied to cognitive maturation, as suggested by prior studies. Instead, cultural, familial, and relational contexts play a central role. Children exhibited core death concepts such as irreversibility, non-functionality, and inevitability while also integrating spiritual and cultural dimensions. Their drawings and narratives revealed advanced symbolic reasoning, empathy, and

moral awareness, showing that death is understood both as a biological event and a social-spiritual experience. This underscores the importance of considering culture, family, and environment in children’s meaning-making. For educators and caregivers, tools such as literature, art, and guided discussions can help children process complex emotions surrounding death in developmentally supportive ways.

Emerging Conceptual Framework

The data obtained from the participants' responses revealed several emergent concepts that expanded beyond the original conceptual framework.

Figure 2
Emerging Framework on Children’s Concept of Death through Literature and Drawings



Various factors that influence a child’s concept of death include the child’s cognitive development, personal experiences, external influences such as family, media, religious beliefs, and vicarious experiences. These factors interact with one another and are represented in the children's responses on the death concept questionnaire, post-reading discussions, and drawings, ultimately shaping their understanding of death.

Conclusion

This study revealed that selected Grade Two Filipino children conceptualize death in diverse ways, shaped by cognitive development, personal experiences, and external influences such as family, religion, culture, and media. Participants understood death as the cessation of bodily functions, characterized by its finality, inevitability, and potential causes (e.g., old age, illness, or acts of violence). For these children, death also carried a relational dimension, often expressed as fear of separation and abandonment from loved ones.

A belief in life after death emerged as a common theme, underscoring the strong role of religious and cultural traditions in shaping children's views. Notably, Filipino second graders demonstrated concepts of death that extend beyond what is typically expected for their age, including irreversibility, universality, and causality. Their drawings and narratives consistently depicted death as a negative event associated with sadness, while also integrating symbolic and spiritual elements such as heaven, hell, angels, and continued emotional bonds with the deceased.

The relevance of this study lies in its demonstration that children's understanding of death is not solely a product of cognitive maturation, as suggested by developmental theories, but is deeply intertwined with cultural practices, familial influences, and spiritual beliefs. By highlighting how imagination, rituals, and social interactions shape meaning-making, this research provides valuable insights for educators, parents, and caregivers. It emphasizes the importance of culturally responsive approaches—such as the use of literature, art, and guided discussions—in helping children process complex emotions surrounding death. Ultimately, the findings contribute to a broader understanding of how Filipino children navigate existential questions, blending concrete reasoning with abstract and symbolic thought, and affirm the need to consider cultural and relational contexts in supporting children's socio-emotional development.

Recommendations

Future Researchers

Future studies should employ diverse methods—such as storytelling, interviews, and creative writing alongside drawings—to capture richer insights

into children's concepts of death. Refining open-ended questions in the death-concept questionnaire can elicit more nuanced responses without imposing assumptions. Researchers are also encouraged to validate emerging themes by engaging participants in reflective discussions, ensuring alignment with children's lived experiences.

Classroom Practitioners

Teachers and school counselors play a central role in supporting children's understanding of death and grief. Schools should cultivate safe, supportive spaces for discussing death, complemented by age-appropriate literature and art activities (Krepia et al., 2017). Such practices foster emotional growth, empathy, and resilience. Educators must be prepared to address sensitive topics using carefully selected storybooks that present death in developmentally appropriate ways, while creating inclusive environments that acknowledge and support grieving students.

Collaborative interventions should also incorporate creative arts, such as drawing and storytelling, as effective tools for emotional expression. Embedding discussions of death within classroom and guidance sessions assists grieving children process their emotions and fosters peer empathy and accurate understandings of death. These practices reinforce the CASEL competencies of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. Artistic expression, in particular, provides children with a medium to communicate feelings beyond words and reflects their cognitive and emotional grasp of death (Koster, 2008; Fox & Schirmacher, 2012).

By adopting these strategies, schools can establish informed, culturally responsive environments that enable children to navigate grief with clarity and resilience.

Children's Book Authors and Illustrators

Authors and illustrators should create realistic, age-appropriate depictions of death and grief, using culturally resonant imagery and truthful narratives. By aligning with children's developmental understanding, literature can provide accessible language and visuals that help children articulate their thoughts and emotions about death.

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