



Brief

Young Children's Possibilities to Practice Grieving in their Everyday Life in the Kindergarten. A Socio-Cultural Analysis of the Challenging Tasks of Understanding and Encountering Kindergarten Children's Grief

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This article concerns understanding young children's grief (1–6 years old). More specifically, it turns attention to how kindergarten teachers anticipate and encounter young children's grieving. Its conceptual and methodological challenge is how to understand and do research on young children's grief. The empirical material we engage with, is drawn from qualitative interviews with a sample of 18 kindergarten teachers. In the interviews, the kindergarten teachers contributed with accounts about encountering children in their everyday life in the kindergarten that experienced parental life-limiting chronic illness and the following death of a parent. Departing from a social constructionist perspective and a theoretical understanding of bereavement as a continuing contextual, interpretative, communicative activity, we argue that children's possibilities to grieve and to be grieving, is constructed through participation in social, cultural practices. This implies that kindergarten teachers and other dialogue partners to the grieving child are actively co-constructing children's grief. Hence, they are not passive observers of 'preconceived' feelings of grief carried 'inside' the child. Being involved in, and participating in, communities of grief, either through rituals like funerals, viewing the dead body, or through conversations where knowledge and memories about the dead person is shared, seems to be central in what may be called *bereavement practices*: how to *do bereavement*. Related to this we find it problematic that it among the kindergarten teachers in our sample seem to dominate what we call

a “qualification criteria” for participation: that the kindergarten teacher anticipates the child to be expressing grief in a culturally appropriate manner to be qualified to be considered a *grieving* individual, and then at first, being involved in conversations about bereavement and the dead parent. Showing culturally appropriate expressions of grief presupposes cultural, emotional, cognitive, and communicative competence that the kindergarten teachers are aware that the children in this age normally have not yet developed, something that they also express explicitly in the interviews. The article discusses methodological challenges in researching young children’s grief: how child development is difficult to discern from being grieving, and how the observer’s expectations contribute to constructing the phenomena under investigation.

Keywords: *bereavement; developmental psychology; dual process model; social construction*