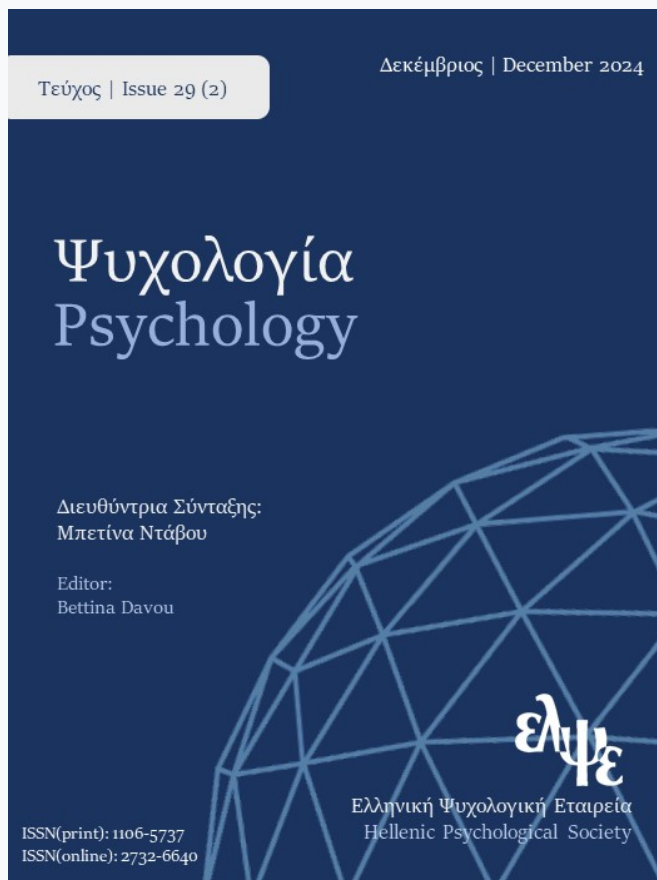


Psychology: the Journal of the Hellenic Psychological Society

Vol 29, No 2 (2024)

December 2024



Preschool teachers' views about preschool death education: The role of perceived self-efficacy, perceived competence and death experiences

Vasiliki Brouskeli, Ioanna- Konstantina Piperkou

doi: [10.12681/psy_hps.36371](https://doi.org/10.12681/psy_hps.36371)

Copyright © 2024, Vasiliki Brouskeli, Ioanna-Konstantina Piperkou



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/).

To cite this article:

Brouskeli, V., & Piperkou, I.- K. (2024). Preschool teachers' views about preschool death education: The role of perceived self-efficacy, perceived competence and death experiences . *Psychology: The Journal of the Hellenic Psychological Society*, 29(2), 24–36. https://doi.org/10.12681/psy_hps.36371

ΕΜΠΕΙΡΙΚΗ ΕΡΓΑΣΙΑ | RESEARCH PAPER

Preschool teachers' views about preschool death education: The role of perceived self-efficacy, perceived competence and death experiences

Vasiliki BROUSKELI¹, Ioanna-Konstantina PIPERKOU¹¹ Department of Education Sciences in Early Childhood, Democritus University of Thrace

KEYWORDS

Preschool
Death education
Self-efficacy
Competence
Experiences

ABSTRACT

Preschool educators' views about preschool death education is researched in this paper. Specifically, we examined preschool educators' personal perspectives on providing death education in relation to: a) their intra-personal characteristics, such as perceived self-efficacy and perceived professional competence to provide this kind of education, and b) their death experiences in the school environment. The sample consisted of 164 preschool teachers in Greek public schools. Perceived self-efficacy was found to be related to teachers' perceived competence in dealing with death issues. However, no significant relationship was found between self-efficacy and teachers' actual dealing with the topic. Death experiences in the school environment were found to relate positively to teachers' perceived competence in providing death education. However, no significant relationship was found between these experiences and the level of dealing with the topic. The results indicate that preschool teachers realize the need for death education. However, this is difficult to become actual behavior, since they lack proper preparation. Educators need not only theoretical knowledge but a holistic preparation program that would ensure that they will be able to stand in front of preschoolers with sufficient knowledge, continuous training, increased self-efficacy, and perceived competence in order to be able to provide developmentally appropriate education.

CORRESPONDENCE

Vasiliki Brouskeli
Democritus University of
Thrace
Department of Education
Sciences in Early Childhood,
Nea Chili, 68100
Alexandroupolis, Greece
vbrouske@psed.duth.gr

Introduction

The interest in education for death is relatively recent. In 1959 Herman Feifel published "The Meaning of Death" presenting the topic to an incredulous reading audience (Feifel, 1959). Some years later, the widespread popularity of "On Death and Dying" (Kübler-Ross, 1969) contributed greatly to accepting the need for death education. Although death is an important aspect of life, historically death education has been treated as a taboo topic for inclusion in the school curriculum.

Decades ago, it was admitted that school educators could teach death as a part of life, as long as they took into account children's age, maturity, readiness, and receptivity, as well as teachers' and families' willingness and preparation (Aute, 1982). Schonfeld and Kappelman (1990, October) studied the possible gains in "death concept" score of a three-week school-based relevant educational program for four to eight-year-old children. They found that the gain was equivalent to the amount of conceptual development that is seen in one year without intervention. Furthermore, in the early century, Morgan (2001) claimed that death education is for everyone because it relates to our feelings about ourselves, the nature, and the universe we live in. Higgins (1999) also claimed that teaching about death and loss is a topic to be taught in primary school and it contributes to the

primary aims of schools. Specifically, teaching about death, among others, develops children's spirituality, and enables moral, social, cultural, and mental development. It could improve self-esteem and self-confidence, and reduce racist attitudes since death is universal. In addition, a developmentally appropriate death education may develop abstract thinking and logical reasoning. Finally, he claimed that it could eliminate the fear of the unknown, it could provide the child with the language to talk about death, and prove the school's priority to the emotional needs of children (Higgins, 1999).

As far as preschool death education is concerned, in a study conducted in the late 70's (Cruse & Cruse, 1979), early childhood educators seemed convinced of the need for self-development and understanding of death education. The educators disagreed with the possibility of incorporating death education in their curriculum as a form of isolated instruction, but the majority of them agreed with the need to introduce children to accurate concepts of death through carefully selected activities. In the middle of the 80's, Pratt and her colleagues (1985) underlined the importance of training for preschool teachers. The research respondents were preschool educators and future preschool educators. Ninety percent of the respondents believed it was important to be able to discuss death with young children but only thirty-two percent felt prepared to do so. Death anxiety was positively related to comfort in dealing with the issue. Death anxiety, as well as comfort in dealing with death, were higher for subjects with the greatest academic and personal experiences in death and dying.

Although death is not a myth but a reality of life, this topic is hardly ever mentioned in schools except when it emerges in the context of a national trauma or a disaster (King-McKenzie, 2011). Even in our days, many adults believe that death education is an inappropriate topic for the school curriculum. For instance, Corr (2015, p.216) noted that some commentators have even described death education as "morbid". Nowadays, more than ever, it is admitted that children are more aware of death than most people realize. Movies, television news, and fairy tales as well as their direct contact with the everyday dying nature indicate the reality of death. However, death and its didactics are still neglected topics in education curricula and an ignored idea and education students seem to be unprepared to deal with the topic (Brouskeli, 2014), although school-based educational programs are considered to be effective. For instance, we now know that educating children about death can prepare them for loss and further assist them in developing coping strategies through the process of adjustment (Lee et al., 2014). Over the last decades, researchers (Engarhos et al., 2013) who studied teachers' attitudes and experiences regarding death education found that teachers consider it a good idea to discuss death issues with their students, regardless of their age- four to eighteen years old. Additionally, they find it natural to be asked by their students about death. Finally, they recognized the need for further training and guidance on the topic to approach it effectively. Thus, in a study conducted in Spain (Galande, 2015), the researcher claimed that death education should be included in all teachers' training so that they stop avoiding this topic due to their lack of proper preparation.

A recent study in Spain on teachers' attitudes and opinions about death education revealed moderately positive attitudes toward death education and showed that variables such as gender, age, type of teacher, and religious beliefs, all influenced results (Herrero et al., 2020). Also recently, in Sweden, preschool teachers declared that it is important to teach about death in early childhood education. However, they avoided teaching about biological death. Instead, they used practices intended to calm and comfort the children. As a consequence, children's biological conceptions of death coexist with the teachers' own beliefs in an afterlife (Puskás, et al., 2021). In addition, researchers in Sweden (Puskás et al., 2023) presented an alternative preschool practitioners' teaching model about death. Specifically, practitioners and preschool children visited cemeteries, shared ideas about the causality of death, and considered alternative viewpoints about what happens after death.

Regarding Greece, the aim of primary as well as secondary education is to contribute to a comprehensive, balanced, and equal development of pupils' cognitive, psychological, and physical capabilities and provide the opportunity to become integrated personalities and live creatively (Greek Official Gazette, 1985). However, death,

a cognitive and psychological challenge for the pupils, is an almost restricted area of teaching. This has been shown both in 2002 (Papadatou et al., 2002) and in 2014 (Brouskeli, 2014), where researchers found that Greek teachers -or future teachers- recognized the importance of their role in introducing this kind of life events but felt inadequately prepared for death education. Recently, Grigoropoulos (2022) claimed that early childhood educators' self-perceived ability to approach the topic of death in the classroom is affected by gender - more female teachers than males feel comfortable discussing the subject- and personal attitudes towards death, such as death avoidance and fear of death.

Overall, it seems that preschool death education is an important but sensitive topic in terms of community and religious values on what is the appropriate role for educators. However, the educators' role seems to be one of the most important parameters in providing death education in schools. The vast majority of studies investigate their attitude towards death education, as well as their academic preparation. Limited information is available about preschool teachers' view of their intra-personal characteristics which may provide them competence to deal with death education. More limited is the information about the relationship between preschool teachers' self-efficacy, their perceived competence, and their personal experiences of death in their school environment with their attitude and their actual providing death education. To our knowledge, there is no research available about the relationship between their personal characteristics such as perceived self-efficacy and their competence to deal with the topic, or between their perceived self-efficacy and actually dealing with the topic.

Perceived self-efficacy

“Perceived self-efficacy refers to beliefs in one’s capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to manage prospective situations” (Bandura, 1995, p.2). Of all the human mechanisms of personal agency, self-efficacy is considered the most central and pervasive, the one mechanism that defines psychosocial functioning, a predictor of human motivation, and one of the most important factors affecting how people feel, think, and act (Bandura, 1977, 1995).

Teachers' efficacy has been found to be positively related to their attitudes toward the implementation of new instructional practices, even decades ago (Guskey, 1988). Teachers' self-efficacy has been widely studied during the last years, mostly as a factor related to the quality of supplied education as well as to the school climate. Specifically, teachers' self-efficacy and their job satisfaction have been both found to be related to school climate dimensions and also teacher self-efficacy is supposed to be related to job satisfaction (Aldridge & Fraser, 2015). High self-efficacy is related to teachers' acceptability of school reform. Namely, it contributes to teachers' positive perceptions of reform and amenability to change (Donnell & Gettinger, 2015).

As far as preschool education is concerned, children's engagement in class activities is considered to be positively related to teachers' self-efficacy when teachers work in preschool with high levels of staff collaboration (Guo et al., 2011). Furthermore, preschool teachers' self-efficacy seems to be a significant and positive predictor of children's gains in print awareness over the academic year. In addition, it is a positive and significant predictor of children's vocabulary gains only within the context of high-quality, emotionally supportive classrooms (Guo et al., 2010).

Recent findings indicate the role of teachers' self-efficacy in developing positive attitudes toward novel programs such as career education in kindergarten teachers (Habayib & Cinamon, 2022), as well as the importance of teaching readiness and instructional motivation, along with self-efficacy in building positive teacher-preschool child relationships (Li et al., 2023). It seems that perceived self-efficacy could be related to teachers' view about death education.

Perceived competence

Self-efficacy is a key element in Bandura’s social learning theory (1977). In a recent analysis (Poluektova et al., 2023), the following issue emerged: Although Bandura originally referred to a personal judgment of one’s ability to execute an action required to attain a desired outcome (Bandura, 1977, as cited by Poluektova et al., 2023), consequently as a highly situation-specific judgment, many authors have used the concept to refer to relatively stable, and global beliefs, using relevant instruments. Therefore, the need to measure specific, for example professional, competence, meaning the level of competence in executing a specific professional role, occurred (De Miguel et al., 2023; Grau et al., 2001). Researchers highlight that the construction of emotional “competence” and “self-efficacy” are two important factors for preschool teachers’ commitment (Kan et al., 2022). It seems that perceived professional competence (competence) could be related to teachers’ view about death education.

Death experiences in the school environment

Dealing with a death in a school environment might also be related to teachers’ views about death education. Traumatic events and crises might also occur in schools, for various reasons, and they can have significant impacts on the entire school environment (Adamson & Peacock, 2007). As far as death in the school is concerned, this tragic event has been used as a learning opportunity within the school curriculum (Bennett & Dyehouse, 2005). However, teachers may themselves need support through the time of grief after one of their students dies (Hart & Garza, 2013). Their perceived ability to help their grieving students is predicted by their ability to handle death, their death anxiety, their perception of their role as well as their ability to feel comfortable in counseling their grieving students (Cullinan, 1990).

In this study, accepting the need of preschool children for developmentally appropriate and culturally differentiated death education as well as the necessity for fully prepared educators, we aimed to investigate early childhood educators’ personal perspectives of providing death education in relation to: a) their intra-personal characteristics, such as perceived self-efficacy and perceived competence to provide this kind of education and b) their death experiences in school environment.

Methodology

Participants

A convenience sample was used in this study which consisted of 163 preschool teachers in public schools in Northern Greece. One hundred fifty-seven of them were women (95.7%) and seven of them were men (4.3%), with a mean age of 39.6 (S.D.= 8.5) and an age range of 22-56. Most of the respondents (72.6%) were working in schools located in cities and 24.4% were working in a non-urban area. Table 1 presents the distribution of the sample according to their age and professional experience.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of the sample

	Age		Experience (in years)		
	N	%	N	%	
22-25	6	3.7	0-5	30	18.3
25-30	28	17.1	5-10	43	26.2
30-35	26	15.9	10-15	30	18.3
35-40	21	12.8	15-20	27	16.5
40-45	28	17.1	20-25	21	12.8
45-50	39	23.8	25-30	13	7.9
50-55	15	9.1			

Instruments

Perceived Self-efficacy was assessed with the 10-item General Perceived Self-Efficacy Scale of Glynou, Schwarzer and Jerusalem (1994), as adapted and validated for the Greek population. The original German version of the instrument was developed by Schwarzer and Jerusalem and it was subsequently adapted to 33 languages. It is a 10-item scale that is designed to assess optimistic self-beliefs to cope with a variety of difficult demands in life (Schwarzer, 1992, 2012; Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 1995). It consists of statements such as: “I can always manage to solve difficult problems if I try hard enough” and “If someone opposes me, I can find the means and ways to get what I want”. The scale was scored on a four-point Likert-type scale where “0” means “not true at all” and “3” means “absolutely true” and the total score of the answers was used as the final score. The Cronbach alpha internal consistency index for the total score is 0.878.

The instrument also included a 9-item questionnaire we developed to assess the respondents’ beliefs about teaching death education in their schools. Specifically, it included two questions- answered in a 5-point Likert scale- about detected relevant concerns by the pupils. It also included five questions about their personal stance on death education. Specifically, it included two questions -answered on a 5-point Likert scale- about their personal actions and attitudes, two questions -answered on a dichotomous scale- about their preparedness, and one more question -answered on a 5-point Likert scale- about their perceived professional competence to deal with the topic. Finally, this sub-questionnaire included two questions about the perceived barriers to working in this field properly and the best practices they suggest to be applied.

The total instrument also included three questions about educators’ death experiences from their school environment (if they had ever faced the death of a colleague/ of a student in their class/ of a student in their school) as well as demographic information about subjects’ age, gender, years of practicing their profession and the geographical situation of their school- urban or non-urban area. The instrument was pilot-tested for clarity and ease of completion by students of a Department of Education Sciences in Early Childhood and minor adjustments were made before it was distributed to the survey’s sample. To establish content validity it was sent to five research experts on the topic at hand for review and their suggestions were taken into account before delivering to the participants.

Procedure

The survey took place in Northern Greece. Participants, a convenience sample, were preschool teachers who volunteered after they were informed in writing about the aims of the study and were kindly asked to fill in the questionnaire only if they gave consent. It was a face-to-face procedure that lasted about 15-20 minutes. They were instructed to stop filling in the questionnaire if they felt uncomfortable and were informed about the way they could have access to the study results. The study was performed in accordance with the ethical standards as laid down in the 1964 Declaration of Helsinki and its later amendments.

Results

Teachers’ views and practices on death education

Participants’ beliefs on students’ concerns about death issues were initially studied. The distributions of their answers to the questions “To what extent do you think that preschool children have concerns relevant to death issues?” and “To what extent do your pupils submit questions or concerns about death?” are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. *Relevant concerns of the pupils*

		Not at all	Slightly	Moderately	Much	Very much
To what extent do you think that preschool children have concerns relevant to death issues?	<i>N</i>	25	72	50	13	1
	%	15.2%	43.9%	30.5%	7.9%	0.6%
To what extent do your pupils submit questions or concerns about death?	<i>N</i>	33	93	36	2	0
	%	20.1%	56.7%	22.0%	1.2%	0.0%

Overall, 82.9% answered that death concerns preschool children at some level, and 79.9% declared that their pupils submit questions or concerns to some extent. Chi-square analyses showed no significant effect of the educators' age, experience, or the urbanity of the school on their answers.

Participants were also asked about their personal attitudes and perceived readiness to provide death education. Specifically, they were asked to what extent they elaborate on the issue of death, either directly or indirectly. The majority of them (79.3%) answered that they deal with it either at a low level (43.3%) or at a medium level (36.0%) while 17.1% answered that they don't do it at all. No significant effect of the educators' age, experience, or the urbanity of the school was detected in their answers.

When participants were asked "How much competent do you feel to cover this issue?" almost half of them (47%) feel moderately competent, 35.4% feel much competent and 4.9% feel very much competent. A chi-square analysis revealed a significant effect of the degree of urbanity of the schools ($\chi^2 4, 159 = 13.79, p < .01$) and of the educators' age ($\chi^2 4, 159 = 47.85, p < .05$) on their perceived competence, with educators living in bigger cities and older educators feeling more competent. No effect of their teaching experience was detected.

As far as their relevant scientific training, respondents were asked "Do you think that you have received the proper education to cope with the death topic in your class?" Most of them answered negatively (73.2%). At the question "Do you think that you have received the proper training to cope with the death topic?" the equivalent percentage was 62.8%. Concerning their attitude about familiarizing preschool children with the death subject, 3.7% stated that it is not good at all, 17.1% that it is slightly good, 43.9% good, 27.4% very good, and 6.1% extremely good. No significant effect of the educators' age, experience or the urbanity of the school was detected in their answers.

In another group of questions, participants expressed their personal opinions on the possible barriers that complicate providing death education and on the best practices they suggest for future application. Regarding the barriers, they were offered four possible choices and they were kindly asked to add any other factor they considered as a barrier. Considering the fact that they could pick none, one or more of the four choices, the participants answered as follows: 66.5% find their insufficient education as a barrier, 46.3% believe that death education is still a taboo, 39.9% believe that preschoolers are not adequately developed to receive that kind of education and 18.9% that preschoolers are not interested in this topic. Participants also added the following extra factors as possible barriers: teachers' lack of interest ($N=5$), parents' denial ($N=2$), government's lack of interest in health education issues ($N=1$), limited offer of relevant educational seminars ($N=1$), educator's fear ($N=1$), the

fact that the issue is unpleasant ($N=1$), the fact that it might cause stress to the children ($N=1$), and teachers' tendency to avoid the topic ($N=1$).

Respondents were also asked to suggest "best practices" regarding the future of death education. Considering the fact that they could pick none, one or more of the four suggested choices, the participants answered as follows: 65.9% suggested as "best practice" to include relevant courses in their University Educational Programs, 79.3% proposed relevant educational seminars, 57.3% relevant experiential workshops, and 36.6% suggested a personal search in the bibliography. Furthermore, one of the respondents suggested that educators should cooperate with professional advisors for mental health.

Finally, respondents were asked about having or not a death experience in their school environment, during their career. The results revealed that 22% confronted a colleague's death, 9.8% dealt with a school's pupil death, and 7.9% with a class's pupil death.

In a subsequent group of analyses, the relationships among the above-mentioned variables (perception of students' concerns, death education training, competence to provide death education, actual dealing with the subject, death experiences in the school environment) were investigated.

Respondents who stated that they had received sufficient education or training about death topics tended to feel more competent in dealing with death issues. Specifically, participants who stated that they had sufficient education tended to feel more competent to provide death education ($\chi^2 = 38,842$, $df = 4$, $p < .001$). Furthermore, when participants stated that they had sufficient training, they also tended to feel more competent to provide death education ($\chi^2 = 36,315$, $df = 4$, $p < .001$).

Respondents who felt more competent to provide death education were more likely to deal with death topic at school ($\chi^2 = 21,725$, $df = 12$, $p = .041 < .05$). As far as respondents' death experiences in the school environment are concerned, these were found to relate positively with their perceived competence to provide death education ($\chi^2 = 15,367$, $df = 4$, $p = .004 < .05$). However, no significant association was found between these experiences and the level of dealing with the topic in school ($\chi^2 = 1,121$, $df = 3$, $p = .772$), their attitude about familiarizing them with death issues ($\chi^2 = .765$, $df = 4$, $p = 0,943$), their perception about children's level of wondering about death ($\chi^2 = 4,414$, $df = 4$, $p = .353$) as well as with noted children's queries and concerns ($\chi^2 = .827$, $df = 3$, $p = 0,843$). Statistics concerning significant relationships with death experience in the school environment are presented in Table 2.

Teachers' Self-efficacy and competence

The mean total score in the Self-efficacy scale for the entire sample was 31.05 (S.D.=4.24, min. 19.00, max. 40.00). An analysis of variance (ANOVA) detected no significant effect of teachers' experience and urbanity of the school. Nonetheless, the participants's age seemed to affect significantly their self-efficacy ($F(7, 153) = 2.91$, $p < .01$). Table 3 presents the mean score of the participants in the Self-efficacy scale per age.

Table 3. Mean score in the Self-efficacy scale per age

Mean		
Age	Self-efficacy	SD
22-25	30.33	2.50
25-30	29.43	4.08
30-35	30.35	4.65
35-40	32.14	4.30
40-45	32.50	4.11
45-50	31.92	3.48
50-55	32.83	4.06

One-way ANOVA was used to explore the effects of respondents' self-efficacy on their perceived competence regarding dealing with this topic as well as on their actual dealing with the topic in their classes. No significant effect of self-efficacy was found on the respondents' dealing with the topic ($F(19,144) = 1.10, p > .05$). However, self-efficacy was found to affect their perceived competence in dealing with death topic ($F(19,144) = 3.75, p < .001$). Multiple comparison tests revealed that the difference was significant only between teachers who reported 'much' or 'very much' on the question on perceived competence and those who reported 'moderate', 'slight' or 'no competence'.

Discussion

Four preschool teachers out of five believed that preschool children do have concerns and queries about death issues at some level and only 3.1% of them had a straight negative attitude about familiarizing preschoolers with death issues. Furthermore, the vast majority of the preschool teachers who participated stated that they deal with the death issue at some level. It seems that preschool teachers realize the need for our education system to include a preschool death education program. However, about 70% of the participants admitted the lack of proper education and training. Insufficient preparation is the first barrier that educators underline; additionally, their usually suggested practices for future application are their proper education and training. Finally, the ones who stated competent to deal with the issue tended to be those who claimed that they had received proper preparation. These findings support previously presented research about the lack of preschool teachers' educational preparation to deal with these issues (Ramos-Pla et al., 2023; Munson & Hunt, 2005) and underline the necessity to enrich future preschool educators' University Educational Programs with death-related courses, seminars and workshops. However, research has also highlighted the role of teachers' death anxiety: teachers' avoidance of getting involved may be rationalization for the underlying fear of death (Cullinan, 1990). It is also noteworthy that more than one-third of the educators addressed as a barrier the developmental immaturity of preschoolers to receive this kind of education. This is a finding that endorses educators' lack of knowledge, as the properly prepared death educator provides developmentally proper education and uses developmentally proper techniques, tools, language, and schedules.

One of the primary purposes of this study was to investigate the role of self-efficacy in teachers' stance on preschool death education. Self-efficacy was found to be related to teachers' perceived professional competence regarding dealing with death issues. However, no significant relationship was found between self-efficacy and teachers' actual dealing with the topic. It seems that self-efficacy may support teachers' perceived competence but this is not enough to actually deal with death issues. According to Bandura (1977) who developed the Self-Efficacy Theory, efficacy expectations, and outcomes are differentiated, "because individuals can believe that a particular course of action will produce certain outcomes, but if they entertain serious doubts about whether they can perform the necessary activities such information does not influence behavior" (p.193). Considering that teachers admit lack of proper preparation, their inability to proceed to the actual behavior might be considered as expected or even recommended. Besides, "Efficacy expectations determine how much effort people will expend and how long they will persist in the face of obstacles and aversive experiences. The stronger the perceived self-efficacy, the more active the efforts" (Bandura, 1977, p.194). Consequently, only a combination of proper educational programs for preschool educators and programs to strengthen their efficacy expectations and confidence may contribute importantly to their future attitudes and actions related to providing death education.

School experiences of death were found to relate positively to teachers' perceived competence to provide death education. However, no significant correlation was found between these experiences and the level of actual dealing with the topic in school and their attitude about familiarizing them with death issues. Teachers are bereaved for their loss as well and may be unable to move soon to such practices, but they tend to give support

to the other students or to the family of the deceased child (Lazenby, 2006). It seems that a death in school daily routine may be a motive to re-think, re-assess the necessity of this kind of health programs and even to come closer to their students. However, a death incidence is not enough –and probably should not be to enable poorly prepared educators to teach about death issues.

Implications and limitations

Overall this study supports previous research conclusions that preschool teachers realize the need for death education. However, this is difficult to become actual behavior, since the most crucial factor, the proper preparation, does not exist. Future interventions should take into account teachers' need not only for theoretical knowledge but their need for a holistic preparation model which would ensure that future educators will stand in front of preschoolers with sufficient knowledge, continuous training, increased self-efficacy and perceived competence in order to be able to provide developmentally proper education. Provided that, further guidance should be available so teachers will be able to handle school tragedies and, consequently, have the competency to turn it into a springboard to a whole death education program. Furthermore, self-efficacy's role needs to be further investigated, especially in relation to educators' unrealistic optimism and their death anxiety, in order to understand the profile of teachers who could effectively organize, guide, or even inspire their colleagues.

The findings of the present study should be interpreted cautiously for the next critical reasons. Firstly, the generalizability of the findings needs to be considered, as the sample is a small proportion of North Greek teachers and the extent to which they represent the views of a wider population could be questioned. Secondly, "Death education's place in preschool" consisted of 13 questions. A standardized attitude scale would permit more valid results. However, due to the lack of similar research projects for preschool teachers and the lack of a standardized scale to measure these specific factors, this kind of methodological handling was preferred. However, the development of a reliable and valid measure of the salient dimensions underlying educators' beliefs about death education would be useful. Furthermore, qualitative studies could be used additionally, in order to research in detail all these topics regarding preschool death education.

Conclusion

The present study provides insight into the personal views of preschool teachers about delivering preschool death education. Unfortunately, death is going to touch every child's life. Although it is a sensitive topic in terms of religion and community values, the secure and caring school environment is a safe place to prepare them for all aspects of life, without disrespecting communities' values. Properly qualified teachers implementing modern educational – religiously neutral- programs could be, once more, children's guides in their life's exploration.

References

- Adamson, A. D., & Peacock, G. G. (2007). Crisis response in the public schools: a survey of school psychologists' experiences and perceptions. *Psychology in the Schools*, 44(8), 749-764. <https://doi.org/10.1002/pits.20263>
- Aldridge, J. M., & Fraser B. J. (2015). Teachers' views of school climate and its relationship with teacher self-efficacy and job satisfaction. *Learning Environments Research*, 1-17. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10984-015-9198-x>
- Aute, A. (1982). Why teach death education? *Journal of Reading*, 25(6), 602-605. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40029130>
- Bandura, A. (1977). Self-efficacy: Toward a unifying theory of behavioral change. *Psychological Review*, 84(2), 191-215. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-295X.84.2.191>

- Bandura, A. (1995). Exercise of personal and collective efficacy in changing societies. In A. Bandura (Ed.), *Self-efficacy in changing societies* (pp. 1-45). Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511527692.003>
- Bennett, P. L., & Dyehouse, C. (2005). Responding to the death of a pupil- reflections on one school's experience. *British Journal of Special Education*, 32(1), 21-28. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0952-3383.2005.00365.x>
- Brouskeli, V. (2014). Introducing life events in preschool education: future educators' attitudes and perceptions. *Journal of Education for Teaching*, 40(4), 431-433. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02607476.2014.924648>
- Corr, C. A. (2015). Death education at the College and University level in North America. In J. Stillion & T. Attig (Eds), *Death, dying and bereavement, contemporary perspectives, institutions and practices* (pp. 207-220). Springer Publishing Company. <https://doi.org/10.1891/9780826171429.0015>
- Cruse, D. R., & Cruse, D. (1979). Attitudes toward death education for young children. *Death Education*, 3(1), 31-40. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07481187908253329>
- De Miguel, M. S., de Elguea, J. O., Gómez-Gastiasoro, A., Urcola, F., Cid-Expósito, M. G., Torres-Enamorado, D., & Orkaizagirre-Gomara, A. (2023). Patient safety and its relationship with specific self-efficacy, competence, and resilience among nursing students: A quantitative study. *Nurse Education Today*, 121, 105701. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.nedt.2022.105701>
- Donnell, L. A., & Gettinger, M. (2015). Elementary school teachers' acceptability of school reform: contribution of belief congruence, self-efficacy, and professional development. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 51, 47-57. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2015.06.003>
- Engarhos, P., Talwar, V., Schleifer, M., & Renaud, S. (2013). Teachers' attitudes and experiences regarding death education in the classroom. *Alberta Journal of Educational Research*, 59(1), 126-128. <https://doi.org/10.11575/ajer.v59i1.55691>
- Feifel, H. (Ed.). (1959). *The meaning of death*. McGraw-Hill.
- Galande, N. (2015). Death and its didactics in pre-school and primary school. *Procedia- Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 185, 91-97. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2015.03.403>
- Glynou, E., Schwarzer, R., & Jerusalem, M. (1994). *Greek Adaptation of the General Self-Efficacy Scale*. Retrieved December 10, 2023, from <http://userpage.fu-berlin.de/~health/greek.htm>
- Grau, R., Salanova, M., & Peiró, J. M. (2001). Moderator effects of self-efficacy on occupational stress. *Psychology in Spain*, 5(1), 63-74.
- Greek Official Gazette (1985). No 167/ a/1985, Law No 1566/1985. Retrieved December 2, 2023, from http://www.et.gr/idocsnpf/search/pdfViewerForm.html?args=5C7QrtC22wHO1H1f3wMBQHdtvSoClrL8tP7J3eAjA7x5MXDoLzQTLWPU9yLzB8V68knBzLCmTXKaO6fpVZ6Lx3UnKl3nP8NxdnJ5r9cmWyJWelDvWS_18kAEhATUkjbox1LIdQ163nV9K--td6SIuWDKZHuGKko8JTddFrK3r3GgMm8yJZ8cJUfgjx_8DoyC
- Grigoropoulos, I. (2022). Can We Talk About Life Without Taking Death Into Account? Early Childhood Educators' Self-Perceived Ability to Approach the Topic of Death With Children. *OMEGA - Journal of Death and Dying*, 0(0). <https://doi.org/10.1177/00302228211057733>
- Guo, Y., Justice, L.M., Sawyer, B., & Tompkins, V. (2011). Exploring factors related to preschool teachers' self-efficacy. *Teacher and teaching education*, 27, 961-968. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2011.03.008>
- Guo, Y., Piasta, S.B., Justice, L.M., & Kaderavek, J.N. (2010). Relations among preschool teachers' self-efficacy, classroom quality, and children's language and literacy gains. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 26, 1094-1103. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2009.11.005>
- Guskey, T. R. (1988). Teacher efficacy, self-concept, and attitudes toward the implementation of instructional innovation. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 4(1), 63-69. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0742-051x\(88\)90025-x](https://doi.org/10.1016/0742-051x(88)90025-x)

- Habayib, H., & Cinamon, R. G. (2022). Preschool teachers' attitudes toward career education: the role of cultural context and teaching self-efficacy. *International Journal for Educational and Vocational Guidance*, 23(2), 399-419. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10775-021-09519-7>
- Hart, L., & Garza, Y. (2013). Teachers Perceptions of Effects of a Student's Death: A Phenomenological Study. *OMEGA - Journal of Death and Dying*, 66(4), 301-311. <https://doi.org/10.2190/om.66.4.b>
- Herrero, R. P., Gascón, H.A., Pérez-Bonet, G., & Sánchez-Huete, J. C. (2020). What do teachers think of death education? *Death Studies*, 46(6), 1-11. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07481187.2020.1817176>
- Higgins, S. (1999). Death education in the primary school. *International Journal of children's spirituality*, 4(1), 77-90. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1364436990040107>
- Kübler-Ross, E. (1969). *On death and dying*. MacMillan.
- Kan, I. P., Hutagalung, F. D., & Chew, F. P. (2022). Understanding The Relationship Between Emotional Competence and Self-Efficacy with Preschool Teacher Commitment: An Analysis of PLS-Predict & IPMA (Importance-Performance Matrix Analysis). *Pacific Early Childhood Education Research Association*, 16(3), 71-98. <https://doi.org/10.17206/apjrece.2022.16.3.71>
- King-McKenzie, E.L. (2011). Death and dying in the curriculum of public schools: Is there a place? *Journal of Emerging Knowledge on Emerging Markets*, 3(29), 511-520. <https://doi.org/10.7885/1946-651X.1061>
- Lazenby, R. B. (2006). Teachers Dealing With the Death of Students. *Journal of Hospice & Palliative Nursing*, 8(1), 50-56. <https://doi.org/10.1097/00129191-200601000-00015>
- Lee, J. S., Kim, E. Y., Choi, & Koo, Y. (2014). Cultural variances in composition of biological and supernatural concepts of death: a content analysis of children's literature. *Death Studies*, 38, 538-545. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07481187.2014.899653>
- Li, H., Wei, C., He, H., & Luo, W. (2023). Chinese Private Preschool Teachers' Teaching Readiness and Teacher-Child Relationships: The Chain Mediation Effects of Motivation to Teach and Self-Efficacy. *Behavioral Sciences*, 13(11), 900-900. <https://doi.org/10.3390/bs13110900>
- Morgan, E. (2001). *Dealing creatively with Death. A manual of death education and simple burial*, 14th ed. Upper Access.
- Munson, L. J., & Hunt, N. (2005). Teachers Grieve! What can We Do for Our Colleagues and Ourselves When a Student Dies? *Teaching Exceptional Children*, 37(4), 48-51. <https://doi.org/10.1177/004005990503700407>
- Papadatou, D., Metallinou, O., Chatzixristou, C., & Pavlidi, L. (2002). Supporting the bereaved child: teachers perceptions and experiences in Greece. *Mortality*, 7(3), 324-338. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1357627021000025478>
- Poluektova, O., Kappas, A., & Smith, C. A. (2023). Using Bandura's Self-Efficacy Theory to Explain Individual Differences in the Appraisal of Problem-Focused Coping Potential. *Emotion Review*, 15(4), 302-312. <https://doi.org/10.1177/17540739231164367>
- Puskás, T., Jeppsson, F., & Andersson, A. (2021). 'There is no right or wrong answer': Swedish preschool teachers' reflections on the didactics of death. *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood*, 24(4), 438-452. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14639491211049480>
- Puskás, T., Andersson, A., Jeppsson, F., & Slaughter, V. (2023). Living in heaven and buried in the earth? Teaching young children about death. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, 31(6) 3 900-913, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1350293X.2023.2221002>
- Pratt, C. C., Hare, J., & Wright, C. (1985). Death anxiety and comfort in teaching about death among preschool teachers. *Death Studies*, 9(5-6), 417-425. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07481188508252534>
- Ramos-Pla, A., Arco, I. del, & Espart, A. (2023). Pedagogy of death within the framework of health education: The need and why teachers and students should be trained in primary education. *Heliyon*, 9(4), Article e15050. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2023.e15050>

- Schonfeld, D. J., & Kappelman, M. (1990, October). The impact of school-based education on the young child's understanding of death [Abstract]. *Journal of Developmental and Behavioral Pediatrics*, 11(5), 247-252. <https://doi.org/10.1097/00004703-199010000-00005>
- Schwarzer, R. (Ed.) (1992). *Self-efficacy: Thought control of action*. Hemisphere.
- Schwarzer, R. (2012). General self-efficacy scale (GSE). Retrieved September 6, 2023, from <http://userpage.fu-berlin.de/~health/selfscal.htm>
- Schwarzer, R., & Jerusalem, M. (1995). Generalized self-efficacy scale. In J. Weimman, S. Wright, & M. Johnston, *Measures in health psychology: A user's portfolio. Causal and control beliefs* (pp.35-37). NFER-NELSON. <https://doi.org/10.1037/t00393-000>

ΕΜΠΕΙΡΙΚΗ ΕΡΓΑΣΙΑ | RESEARCH PAPER

Η άποψη των δασκάλων προσχολικής ηλικίας για την προσχολική περιθανάτια αγωγή: Η αντιληπτή αυτοαποτελεσματικότητα, η αντιληπτή επάρκεια και εμπειρίες θανάτου

Βασιλική ΜΠΡΟΥΣΚΕΛΗ¹, Ιωάννα-Κωνσταντίνα ΠΙΠΕΡΚΟΥ¹¹ Τμήμα Επιστημών της Εκπαίδευσης στην Προσχολική Ηλικία, Δημοκρίτειο Πανεπιστήμιο Θράκης

ΛΕΞΕΙΣ-ΚΛΕΙΔΙΑ

Προσχολική
Περιθανάτια αγωγή
Αυτό-αποτελεσματικότητα
Επάρκεια
Εμπειρίες

ΠΕΡΙΛΗΨΗ

Σε αυτό το άρθρο διερευνάται η άποψη των παιδαγωγών προσχολικής ηλικίας σχετικά με την περιθανάτια αγωγή. Συγκεκριμένα, εξετάσαμε τις προσωπικές απόψεις των παιδαγωγών προσχολικής ηλικίας σχετικά με την παροχή περιθανάτιας αγωγής σε σχέση με: α) τα ενδοπροσωπικά χαρακτηριστικά τους, όπως η αντιληπτή αυτοαποτελεσματικότητα και η αντιληπτή επάρκεια για την παροχή αυτού του είδους της αγωγής και β) τις εμπειρίες τους από το θάνατο στο σχολικό περιβάλλον. Το δείγμα αποτέλεσαν 164 εκπαιδευτικοί προσχολικής εκπαίδευσης σε ελληνικά δημόσια σχολεία. Η αντιληπτή αυτοαποτελεσματικότητα βρέθηκε να σχετίζεται με την αντιληπτή επάρκεια των εκπαιδευτικών όσον αφορά την αντιμετώπιση θεμάτων θανάτου. Ωστόσο, δε βρέθηκε σημαντική σχέση μεταξύ της αυτοαποτελεσματικότητας και της πραγματικής αντιμετώπισης του θέματος από τους εκπαιδευτικούς. Οι εμπειρίες θανάτου στο σχολικό περιβάλλον βρέθηκαν να σχετίζονται θετικά με την αντιληπτή επάρκεια των εκπαιδευτικών σχετικά με την παροχή περιθανάτιας αγωγής. Ωστόσο, δε βρέθηκε σημαντική σχέση μεταξύ αυτών των εμπειριών και του επιπέδου διαχείρισης του θέματος. Τα αποτελέσματα δείχνουν ότι οι εκπαιδευτικοί προσχολικής ηλικίας αντιλαμβάνονται την ανάγκη της περιθανάτιας αγωγής. Ωστόσο, αυτό είναι δύσκολο να εξελιχθεί σε πραγματική συμπεριφορά, καθώς δεν υπάρχει η κατάλληλη προετοιμασία. Οι παιδαγωγοί δε χρειάζονται μόνο θεωρητικές γνώσεις αλλά ένα ολιστικό πρόγραμμα προετοιμασίας που θα διασφαλίζει ότι θα είναι σε θέση να σταθούν μπροστά στα παιδιά προσχολικής ηλικίας με επαρκείς γνώσεις, συνεχή κατάρτιση, αυξημένη αυτοαποτελεσματικότητα και αντιληπτή επάρκεια, ώστε να είναι σε θέση να παρέχουν αναπτυξιακώς κατάλληλη εκπαίδευση.

ΣΤΟΙΧΕΙΑ ΕΠΙΚΟΙΝΩΝΙΑΣ

Βασιλική Μπρουσκέλη
Δημοκρίτειο Πανεπιστήμιο
Θράκης, Τμήμα Επιστημών της
Εκπαίδευσης στην Προσχολική
Ηλικία, Νέα Χηλή, 68100,
Αλεξανδρούπολη
vbrouske@psed.duth.gr