

Religious and worldview education as an existential resource in grieving more-than-human

This paper conceptually explores eco-crises as the existential and educational crises, which has to do with grieving of the loss of the more-than-human world. Humans grieve not only the loss of people, but also many other things like the climate-related losses (Cunsolo & Ellis, 2018). In the recent literature there is a recognition of anticipatory, intangible grief, and grief that concerns the abstract, and immaterial loss (Pihkala, 2024; Ratcliffe & Richardson, 2023). Furthermore, the concept of disenfranchised grief refers to various kinds of dynamics where the loss is not socially acknowledged, or publicly mourned (Doka, 2020). People can also internalize societal grieving rules and, thus, self-initiate disenfranchised grief (Attig, 2004) or strengthen the disenfranchisement started by others, which is often the case with children (Poulter et al, manuscript).

There is a theoretical and empirical gap in the current literature concerning the relevance of worldview matters in children's grief. Different worldview and spiritual traditions are intertwined with the current hegemonic Western lifestyle and worldview is the source of ecological and existential crises of our time. Similarly, education replicates the destructive way of life and educators feel powerless in aiming for a change. Children are socialized into visions and ways for life that do not give them tools for investigating those ontological, epistemological and ethical roots that are in the heart of eco-crises. Religions are sometimes seen as passive or insignificant actors in searching for solutions in this situation. On the other hand, spiritual traditions are crucial actors in decolonizing views, in helping human beings to find alternative views for tackling with 'the wicked problems of our time'.

According to Pihkala (2020), existential resilience is a sufficient competence to live with questions of existence during the ecological crisis. This relates to an individual's sense of meaning in life, and the way one relates to the questions of being and mortality. These are often questions with a spiritual dimension through which individuals search for meaning and hope. The recent study (Pursi et al., in press) illustrates how children can benefit from cultural sources related to religious narratives and spiritual ideas in their sense-making in grief. The power of worldview traditions can provide children meaningful support even if the adults close to a child do not relate to the religious vocabulary or rituals. The question is, however, are educators willing to share the questions of existence, loss and spirituality with children. Are grieving children put at risk socially and spiritually if no support or guidance is available?

As argued by Rosenblatt (2017), the grief literature often uses a universalizing language that is inconsistent with anthropological and cross-cultural research, which is able to show that there is a wide variation how people grieve in different cultural contexts. In religious education research tradition, death has always been a central area of study and thus, to give children tools for embracing different ‘languages of suffering’ (Brinkmann, 2014) and thus, to extend the vocabulary of grief and to discuss the importance of collective grieving in education.

Bibliography

- Attig, T. (2024) Disenfranchised Grief Revisited: Discounting Hope and Love. *Omega J. Death Dying*, 49, 197–215.
- Brinkmann, S. (2014). Languages of suffering. *Theory & Psychology*, 24(5), 630–648. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0959354314531523>
- Cunsolo, A., & Ellis, N.R. (2018). Ecological grief as a mental health response to climate change-related loss. *Nature Clim Change*, 8, 275–281. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41558-018-0092-2>
- Doka, K. (2020) Disenfranchised Grief and Non-Death Losses. In Harris, D.L., Ed.; *Non-Death Loss and Grief: Context and Clinical Implications*; Routledge: New York, pp. 25–35.
- Pihkala, P. (2020) Ympäristöahdistus ja eksistentiaalinen resilienssi [Eco-anxiety and existential resilience]. *Katsomukset*. <https://katsomukset.fi/2020/02/17/ymparistoahdistus-ja-eksistentiaalinen-resilienssi/>
- Pihkala, P. (2024)9 Ecological Sorrow: Types of Grief and Loss in Ecological Grief. *Sustainability*, 16, 849. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su16020849>
- Poulter, S., Lipponen, L. & Pursi, A. (Manuscript) To be given something that you did not ask for: Existential perspective to children’s grief.
- Pursi, A., Lipponen, L., Poulter, S., & Kurenlahti, E. A. (in press). Emotional Configurations of Grief: Narratives from Childhood. *Culture & Psychology*.
- Ratcliffe, M.; Richardson, L. (2023) Grief over Non-Death Losses: A Phenomenological Perspective. *Passion*, 1, 50–67.
- Rosenblatt, P. C. (2017). Researching grief: Cultural, relational, and individual possibilities. *Journal of Loss and Trauma*, 22(8), 617–630. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15325024.2017.1388347>