

CHILDREN'S DRAWINGS AS EXPRESSIONS OF "NARRATIVE PHILOSOPHIZING"
CONCEPTS OF DEATH
A COMPARISON OF GERMAN AND JAPANESE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL CHILDREN

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Abstract:

One of Kant's famous questions about being human asks, "What may I hope?" This question places individual life within an encompassing horizon of human history and speculates on the possibility of perspectives beyond death. In our time mortality is generally repressed, though the development of personal consciousness is closely linked to realization of one's finitude. This raises especially urgent questions for children, and they are left to deal with them alone. From the time awareness begins, knowledge that death can occur at any moment is one of the a priori determinants of being alive; that is, life is structured in advance by its *future pastness*. (Scheler, Heidegger, Fink, Simmel). According to Max Scheler, death reveals itself as a necessary and manifest constituent of all possible inner experiences in the life process. The cultural and individual interpretations of death's meaning and consequences derived from this insight opened up an ample space for imagined possibilities of "continued existence," which affected approaches to life. In our research project "Inochi - The Concept of Life after Death in Children's Construction of the World. A German-Japanese Comparison," carried out with German and Japanese research support, we examine concepts developed within the community of inquiry concerning "the individual's afterlife" as soul, angel, animal, star, etc. In this we want to examine whether a globalized media environment leads to a cultural convergence in children's ideas, and whether there are differences between views of girls and boys. Relevance of ideas about death is seen in the example of Japanese children who, believing in reincarnation chose "killing oneself" with relative frequency as a problem-solving strategy. Our contribution will present children's imaginings using the drawings they created within this framework, since these can be interpreted as expressions of "narrative philosophizing," especially for the Japanese children. Here we follow Mark Johnson who says "Human beings are imaginative synthesizing animals" (1993 p.152). These imaginations make up a large part of our *understanding*, not just our beliefs, but rather our socially constructed way of being in and inhabiting a world.

Key words: comparative education; childhood; drawings; death; narrative

Os desenhos de crianças como expressões de uma "narrativa filosofante". Conceitos de morte. Uma comparação entre as crianças de escolas de ensino fundamental na Alemanha e no Japão.

Resumo:

Uma das famosas perguntas de Kant a respeito de ser humano interroga: "O que posso esperar?" Esta questão coloca a vida individual em um horizonte abrangente de história humana e especula sobre a possibilidade de perspectivas além da morte. Em nossa época a mortalidade é geralmente reprimida, embora o desenvolvimento da consciência pessoal seja estreitamente ligado à realização da finitude de cada um. Isso torna especialmente urgente as perguntas para as crianças, e elas são deixadas para lidar com elas sozinhas. Desde o tempo em que o despertar começa, a sabedoria de que a morte pode ocorrer a qualquer momento é um dos a priori determinantes do estar vivo; ou seja, a vida é estruturada anteci-

children's drawings as expressions of "narrative philosophizing". concepts of death. a comparison of german and japanese elementary school children

padamente pela sua *futura dimensão do passado*. (Scheler, Heidegger, Fink, Simmel). Segundo Max Scheler, a morte se revela como um constituinte necessário e manifesto de toda experiência interna possível no processo da vida. As interpretações culturais e individuais do significado e consequências da morte derivadas dessa visão abriram um amplo espaço para as possibilidades imaginadas de uma "existência continuada", que afetou as abordagens da vida. No nosso projeto de pesquisa "Inochi - O conceito da Vida após a Morte na construção do Mundo das Crianças. Uma comparação Alemã-Japonesa", levada com o apoio para a pesquisa da Alemanha e do Japão, nós examinamos conceitos desenvolvidos na comunidade de investigação relativos à "Vida após a morte do indivíduo" como alma, anjo, animal, estrela, etc. Nisso queremos examinar se um meio ambiente de mídia globalizado leva a uma convergência cultural nas ideias das crianças, e se existem diferenças entre as visões dos meninos e das meninas. A relevância das ideias sobre a morte é vista no exemplo das crianças japonesas que, acreditando na reencarnação escolhem "se suicidar" com certa frequência como uma estratégia para resolver problemas. Nossa contribuição vai apresentar as imaginações das crianças usando os desenhos que eles criaram nesse quadro, pois esses podem ser interpretados como expressões de uma "narrativa filosofante", particularmente para as crianças japonesas. Aqui nós seguimos Mark Johnson que diz "*Os seres humanos são animais imaginativos sintetizantes*" (1993, p. 152). Essas imaginações fazem uma boa parte de nossa *compreensão*, não somente de nossas crenças, mas principalmente nossa maneira socialmente construída de ser e habitar o mundo.

Palavras chave: educação comparativa; infância; desenhos; morte; narrativa.

Los dibujos de niños como expresiones de una "narrativa filosofante". Conceptos de muerte. Una comparación entre niños de escuelas de enseñanza fundamental de Alemania y Japón.

Resumen:

Una de las famosas preguntas de Kant sobre el ser humano interroga: "¿Qué puedo esperar?" Esta pregunta sitúa la vida individual dentro de un amplio horizonte de la historia de la humanidad y especula sobre la posibilidad de perspectivas más allá de la muerte. En nuestro tiempo la mortalidad es generalmente reprimida, aunque el desarrollo de la conciencia personal está estrechamente vinculado a la realización de la propia finitud. Esto plantea cuestiones de especial urgencia para los niños, y se los deja tratar con ellas a solas. Desde el tiempo en que comienza la conciencia, el conocimiento de que la muerte puede ocurrir en cualquier momento es uno de los determinantes, a priori, de estar vivo, es decir, la vida está estructurada de antemano por su futura dimensión pasada. (Scheler, Heidegger, Fink, Simmel). Según Max Scheler, la muerte se revela como un componente necesario y manifiesto de todas las posibles experiencias internas en el proceso de la vida. Las interpretaciones individuales y culturales del significado de la muerte y las consecuencias derivadas de esta visión abrieron un amplio espacio para posibilidades imaginadas de "existencia continuada", que afectó enfoques sobre la vida. En nuestro proyecto de investigación "Inochi - El concepto de vida después de la muerte en la construcción del mundo por parte de niños. Una comparación Alemania-Japón", llevado a cabo con el apoyo de investigación alemana y japonesa, examinamos conceptos desarrollados en la comunidad de investigación sobre "el individuo más allá de la vida", como alma, ángel, animal, estrella, etc. Con ello, queremos examinar si un entorno globalizado por los medios de comunicación lleva a una convergencia cultural en las ideas de los niños, y si hay diferencias entre las opiniones de las niñas y los niños. Relevancia de las ideas acerca de la muerte se ve en el ejemplo de niños japoneses quienes, creyendo en la reencarnación eligieron "matarse a sí mismo" con relativa frecuencia como una estrategia de resolución de problemas. Nuestra contribución presenta las fantasías de los niños con dibujos que crearon en este marco, ya que estos pueden ser interpretados como expresiones de "narrativa filosofante", especialmente para los niños japoneses.



Aquí seguimos Mark Johnson, que dice: "Los seres humanos son animales que hacen síntesis imaginativas." (1993, p. 152). Estas imaginaciones forman una gran parte de nuestra *comprensión*, no sólo nuestras creencias, sino más bien nuestra socialmente construida manera de estar y habitar un mundo.

Palabras clave: educación comparada, infancia, dibujos, muerte, narrativa

Kinderzeichnungen als Ausdrucksformen des „Narrativen Philosophierens“. Konzepte zum Tod.
Ein Vergleich von deutschen und japanischen Grundschulkindern.

Zusammenfassung:

Eine der berühmtesten Fragen Kants, mit denen er das Menschsein umreißt, lautet: „Was darf ich hoffen“? Diese Frage bettet das individuelle Leben in einen weiten vertikalen und horizontalen Zusammenhang und intendiert durch ihre transzendente Ausrichtung die Anfrage, ob ich auf eine meine Existenz überschreitende Erscheinungsform hoffen darf. Nach Georg Simmel gerät mit dieser Einsicht in die eigene Sterblichkeit der Tod in das Blickfeld der Reflexion und führt zur Erkenntnis: „In jedem einzelnen Moment des Lebens sind wir solche, die sterben werden“ (1922, S. 98). Dass der Tod sich jederzeit ereignen kann, gehört seit diesem Bewusstseinsakt zu den apriorischen Bestimmungen des Lebens, d.h. das Leben ist von vorneherein durch seine *künftige Gewesenheit* (Scheler, Heidegger, Fink) strukturiert. Für Max Scheler ist dieser Bewusstseinsakt nicht von der Beobachtung des Sterbens anderer abhängig, sondern ist als Todesgewissheit schlechthin intuitiv in jedes Leben eingeschrieben (Max Scheler, *Tod und Fortleben*, X, 18). Der Tod stellt sich s. E. damit als ein notwendiger und evidenter Bestandteil in jeder möglichen inneren Erfahrung des Lebensprozesses dar (X, 24). Die daraus abgeleiteten kulturellen und individuellen Interpretationen der Bedeutung und der Folgen dieses Todes eröffneten einen weiten Raum an imaginativen Vorstellungen über mögliche Formen einer „Weiterexistenz“, die sich nicht nur auf den rituellen Umgang mit dem Tod auswirkten, sondern auch auf den Umgang mit dem Leben. In unserem Forschungsprojekt „Der Tod in der Weltkonstruktion von Kindern. Ein deutsch-japanischer Vergleich“ vergleichen wir die Vorstellungen japanischer und deutscher Kinder zum „individuellen Weiterleben“ nach dem Tod als Seele, Engel, Tier etc. sowie zum „genetischen Weiterleben in der Familie“ und zum „sozialen Weiterleben in der Erinnerung der anderen“, die sie im Rahmen des „Philosophierens mit Kindern“ in der *community of inquiry* reflektieren. Hat hierbei die globalisierte Medienwelt zu einer kulturellen Annäherung der kindlichen Vorstellungen geführt? Gibt es Unterschiede zwischen der Sichtweise von Mädchen und Jungen? Die Relevanz der Todeskonzepte wird z.B. an den japanischen Kindern deutlich, die wegen ihres Glaubens an die Wiedergeburt vergleichsweise häufig „Selbsttötung“ als Problemlösestrategie wählen. Für deutsche Kinder ist die Auseinandersetzung mit dem tabuisierten Thema „Tod“ eine Bewältigungsstrategie unausgesprochener Ängste. In diesem Beitrag stellen wir vorwiegend die in diesem Rahmen erstellten Kinderzeichnungen vor, die wir als eine Form des „narrativen Philosophierens“ interpretieren, vor allem bei den japanischen Kindern, da diese ihre Gedanken eher in ästhetischer Form als in verbaler ausdrückten. Hier folgen wir der Auffassung von Mark Johnson „*Human beings are imaginative synthesizing animals*“ (1993 p. 152). Diese Imaginationen beeinflussen die Konzepte, die wir von uns, den sozialen Bezügen und der Sicht auf die Welt bilden.

Schlüsselworte: Vergleichende Erziehung, Kindheit, Kinderzeichnung, Narration, Tod

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Dedicated to Matthew Lipman

Introduction

One of Kant's famous questions about being human asks, "What may I hope?" This question places individual life within an encompassing horizon of human history and speculates on the possibility of perspectives beyond death. In our time mortality is generally repressed, though the development of personal consciousness is closely linked to realization of one's finitude. This raises especially urgent questions for children, and they are left to deal with them alone.

From the time awareness begins, knowledge that death can occur at any moment is one of the a priori determinants of being alive; that is, life is structured in advance by its *future pastness*. (Scheler, Heidegger, Fink, Simmel). According to Max Scheler, death reveals itself as a necessary and manifest constituent of all possible inner experiences in the life process. The cultural and individual interpretations of death's meaning and consequences derived from this insight opened up an ample space for imagined possibilities of "continued existence," which affected approaches to life. In our research project "Inochi - The Concept of Life after Death in Children's Construction of the World. A German-Japanese Comparison," carried out with German and Japanese research support, we examine concepts developed within the community of inquiry concerning "the individual's afterlife" as soul, angel, animal, star, etc. In this project we wanted to examine whether a globalized media environment leads to cultural convergence in children's ideas, and whether there are differences between views of girls and boys. The relevance of ideas about death is seen in the example of Japanese children who, believing in reincarnation chose "killing oneself" with relative frequency as a problem-solving strategy.

Our paper presents children's imaginings through drawings they created within this framework, since these can be interpreted as expressions of "narrative philosophizing," especially for the Japanese children. Here we follow Mark Johnson in "The Narrative Context of Self and Action", (in *Moral Imagination: Implications of Cognitive Science for Ethics*, University of Chicago Press, London, 1993) who says "Human beings are imaginative synthesizing animals" (p.152). These imaginations make up a large part of our *understanding*, not just our beliefs, but our socially constructed way of being in and inhabiting a world. Children are often not yet in a position to verbalize these ideas, but their drawings reveal that they are aware of them. According to Johnson, these, like other *nonlinguistic* forms of communication and expression, also count as



text, as narration. This is not the prototypical use of the term “narrative” as a linguistic story we tell to others and sometimes write down in words—a spoken or written text. Johnson metaphorically extends the notion of narrative from explicit linguistic texts down to the level of broad narrative synthesizing structures within our very experience itself. In this he refers to MacIntyre, who describes the narrative context of our self-understanding and our actions as follows: „Man is in his actions and practice, as well as in his fictions, essentially a story-telling animal. He is not essentially, but becomes through his history, a teller of stories that aspire to truth.”

Most educators, whether parents or teachers, want to protect children, so they hesitate to approach the difficult topic of death themselves or permit others to do it. For this reason it was not easy to find school directors willing to allow their classes to philosophize about death. In Japan, especially, there were strong reservations about both the topic and the method “philosophizing with children.” As a result we have very limited data here. Another problem was the fact that free expression of opinion is not a normal practice in Japanese classrooms. The discussion circle also was a novel experience for the Japanese children, and they very much enjoyed it. The value of the *community of inquiry* as an emotional resource creating more space for thought was not so evident in the verbal argumentation of the Japanese children, but more so as they represented their constructs in drawings. The physical proximity to others, which was not customary, since Japanese children, unlike German children, sit isolated at their individual tables, visibly encouraged them.

Children encounter death as a primary experience in their personal environment and as a secondary experience in the media. Starting from the hypothesis that globalization promotes the exchange of information between differing cultures, our research project, a cultural comparison that also considered gender, investigated how and to what extent the concepts of Japanese and German children differ with regard to: 1. a metaphysical life after death, 2. a genetic life after death, and 3. a social life after death.¹ Due to time constraints we will limit our presentation to the first point: metaphysical life after death. As an impulse for philosophizing, Marion Parsch developed a story for us in which children sitting by their grandmother’s grave ask her whether she can hear them which encouraged thoughts about whether death is the end of everything. Along with reflective verbalizations, the children made a sensory-aesthetic record of their ideas in drawings, which they then explained to the others.

Between 2006 and 2009 we were able to philosophize in Germany with various primary school classes in Karlsruhe (Peter Hebel School) and Graben-Neudorf (Kussmaul School) as well as with individual groups of fourth-graders. In Hiroshima, Japan, in September 2009, we were only able to visit the fourth-grade children of the Noboricho Primary School and the children in classes 4a and 4b of Hankawa Elementary School, where we philosophized with them using the same stories, but culturally adapted with Japanese names and foods, etc. Since we were not allowed to show pictures of imagery from the cemeteries and grave monuments of various nations to demonstrate the cultural variety of death conceptions, we instead used the German children’s drawings of their ideas about life after death. Due to the limited quantity of data we did not attempt a statistical evaluation of the Japanese children’s statements.

In Germany I philosophized with the children; Takara Dobashi philosophized with them in Japan.

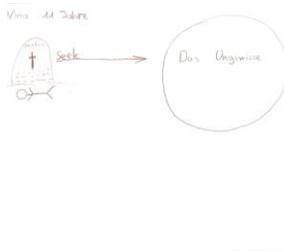
children's drawings as expressions of "narrative philosophizing". concepts of death. a comparison of german and japanese elementary school children

1. A background sketch of traditional ideas about death in Japanese culture

In Japan, ideas about death are influenced by an amalgamation of *Shintoism*, a nature religion, with Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism. Buddhism presumes that humans are reborn into new finite lives in accordance with their karma, until they reach Nirvana. *Shintoists*, by contrast, believe that the soul migrates into its world of origin or another world,² or else, alternatively, it remains in a dark border region of this world.

2. Metaphysical life after death: The German children

First we present the outlook of the German children with regard to a continued life of the soul. At the study's outset, 3% of participating children stated that they could not comment on this because it was epistemically impossible to do so. For example, Norbert (K1_290) stated: "Jonas said that if you read the Bible you'll know it, but the people who wrote the Bible weren't even dead yet." Or Larissa (M1_27) wishes: "I would really like to know what happens when you are dead, whether you go to heaven or are born again or are just dead and nothing else happens.... I'd like to know that, because the stupid thing is, when you're dead and you know it, you can't tell anyone about it any more." For this reason Nina draws an arrow pointing to "uncertainty" (image 1), Denis 2 question marks (image 2).



(image 1) Nina, German girl, 11 years old



(image 2) Denis, German boy, 11 years old

The Japanese children also presume an epistemic impossibility of determining the truth:

Dobashi: Do you think it can be proved that there is a *tamashi* (soul) after death?

Children: Impossible.

Megumi M_Hb: It's hard to prove it, but in Juicho's heart his grandmother lives as *tamashi*. That's how it seems to me.

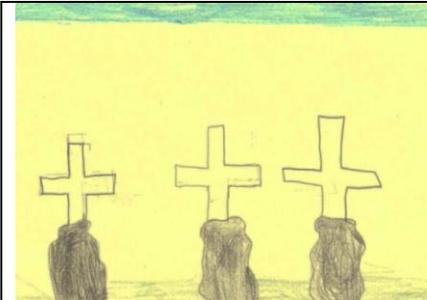
Taro B_N: I still don't have a clear idea on this subject.

But this epistemic impossibility of determining the truth does not prevent the children from developing and testing their own subjective theories within the classroom *community of inquiry*. Most of the children in the two fourth grade classes of the Peter Hebel School were convinced that individual life goes on in some form even after death; only 5% believed that death represented an ultimate end, as for example in the case of Michelle (G2_10): "When you're



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dead, you're dead. Then nothing else happens," or Tim (B1_334): "Well, maybe death is like an empty room in the dark. Without anything, no sound, not a soul there any more, just everything dark."



"Just 3 gravestones, because when you're dead, you're dead. Then nothing else happens."

(image 3) Michelle, German girl, 10 years old years old



"The dead person is lying in the ground; all around him are stones, and the roots penetrate down to the body. Up on the surface a bush is growing."

(image 4) Paul, German boy, 9

The statement of Sophia (GG 8), in contrast, is a good example of the prevailing opinion: "A person...I mean life, it goes on and on and never stops; when you die, you still live on." Like the Japanese primary school children, these German children assume that there is a dual system. They suppose that humans are a union of body and soul that is prone to come apart after death, a thought expressed by Elvira (GG 33): "With people, here's how it is: after they are buried they turn to dust and their spirit goes upward."

Unlike the German children, Japanese children, for example Ikuhei Nobuoka (J_N), (image 5), believe that the dead remain among the living in invisible form:



(image 5) Ikuhei Nobuoka , Japanese boy, 10 years old

Ikuhei Nobuoka: (boy) "The way I see it, the person is dressed in a white suit after he dies. The insignia is the proof that the person who comes out from the gravestone is someone who has died. This apparition can only be seen by the dead, but not by the living."

children's drawings as expressions of "narrative philosophizing". concepts of death. a comparison of german and japanese elementary school children

The path upward takes a variety of forms. Most children paint pictures in which the soul separates from the body and flies upward (images 6 and 7).



(image 6) Daiki, Japanese boy, 9 years old

(image 7) Hiroshi, Japanese boy, 9 years old

Whereas for many boys the soul has a simple, transparent physical structure that can be reduced to the shape of a drop (image 8), the girls embellish their souls. The Japanese girl Noa Yatate, for example, paints a scene in which the departed is enchanted by a goddess and reborn as a NYMPH and lives happily in heaven (image 9).



(image 8) Rudi, German boy, 9 years old

(image 9) Noa Yatate, Japanese girl, 9 years old

Emre, age 8

The 8-year-old Turkish-German boy Emre (image 10) draws the moment in the story when the soul has not yet separated but is still connected with his head. He himself is still standing upright, but must keep his balance with his arms and his broad stance. His colorful red and blue clothing and the yellow sun still reveal his connection with life. With older children the body is lying down or represented only by a gravestone. The face shows the beginning of a separation from life, however: the eyes are crossed out, and the eyebrows and mouth are only narrow, downturned lines. The high spirits emanating from the picture are justified by the continuation of the story: the soul signalizes that it is going to a place where it will feel at home, first by being crowned with a gleaming sun-colored halo, and second in its joyous striving motion with laughing eyes and mouth, cheerful nose and raised arms. Thus Emre's story is shaped by a



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happy end. The moment captured here draws its tension from the still unresolved opposition between „heading downward“ and „heading upward,“ „sadness and good cheer,“ „loss of awareness“ and enhanced perception“ „matter and spirit,“ and above all the awareness that in the next moment this connection will be broken as life’s previous form succumbs to decay while its new form ascends expectantly into a new structure of space and time.



(image 10) Emre, Turkish-German boy, 8 years old

The Japanese girl Kaede writes below her picture (image 11) „I drew the scene where the girl who died flies to heaven with butterfly wings.“ Unlike the dead girl, who is buried in a simple pink dress, the figure that lives on is iridescent in all the colors of the rainbow. Her dress is also decorated with a red bow and her cheerful face with a crown and halo. The transformation into a more complete and beautiful form indicates that the future life has higher value and is more meaningful and perfect.



(image 11) Kaede, Japanese girl, 10 years old

For Kouki, (image 12) the soul flies to flower heaven. Some Japanese children have quite independent ideas about the path upward: according to the Japanese boy Kazutaka (image 13) the happily laughing soul is propelled by the wind and has wings upon arrival; according to Ryo (Japanese boy) (image 14) in the evening the deceased climbs up to heaven through the evening

children's drawings as expressions of "narrative philosophizing". concepts of death. a comparison of german and japanese elementary school children

light. The Japanese girl Chsato (image 15) draws the scene in which the dead girl with wings and halo climbs the stairs to heaven. For the Japanese girl Ayako the dead girl requires help from an angel (image 16).



(image 12) Kouki, 10 years old



(image 13) Kazutaka, Japanese boy, 10 years old



(image 14) Ryo, Japanese boy, 9 years old

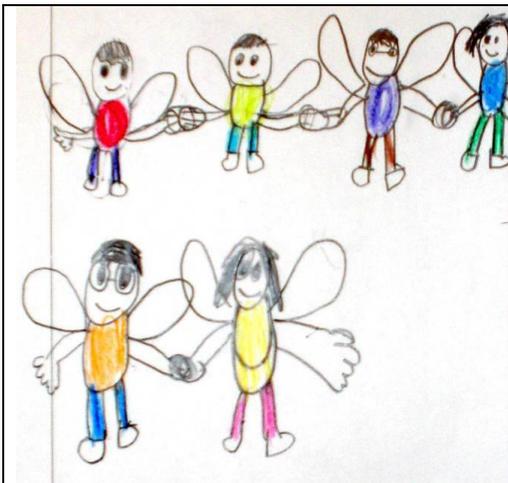


(image 15) Chsato, Japanese girl, 10 years old



(image 16) Ayako, Japanese girl, 10 years old

The drawings reveal that the children have problems imagining the soul as immaterial, as attempted by the Japanese boy Naoto and the German girl Sophia (images 17 and 18). Sophia tries to express the immaterial status through lack of color.



(images 17) Naoto, Japanese boy, 9 years old



(images 17 and 18) Sophia, German girl, 9 years old

For most of the children the soul appears to be more material (images 19 and 20).

children's drawings as expressions of "narrative philosophizing". concepts of death. a comparison of german and japanese elementary school children



(image 19) Kazumi, Japanese girl, 9 years old
9 years old



(image 20) Tomoko, Japanese girl,
9 years old

In the dialogue of the German children, this brings up the question of whether there is enough room for everyone in heaven:

B1_296 *Balduin*: But if all dead people go to heaven, there wouldn't be enough room, would there?

B1_298 *Jonas*: Heaven is actually infinite, isn't it?

G1_302 *Viktoria*: But if there's enough room for all the people on earth, why shouldn't there be enough room in heaven?

G1_304 *Iva*: But on earth people die, and then they go away again, and then there is room for everyone. If people didn't die, then there wouldn't be enough room.

G1_308 *Rashida*: When I was at a cemetery, someone told me that only the most important part goes upward, because you might not necessarily need your legs and so on, only the most important things go with.

F1_309 *Mh*, mh. What is the most important?

G1_310 *Rashida*: ... for example, the soul, the heart, things like that.

As a tentative solution, Rashida suggests that the soul is not physical and thus does not take up space. But apparently the concept of a being without a physical body is quite difficult for the children to grasp, since the same space problem arose in their discussion of the proposition that souls remain on earth or else return to it as ghosts or guardian angels:

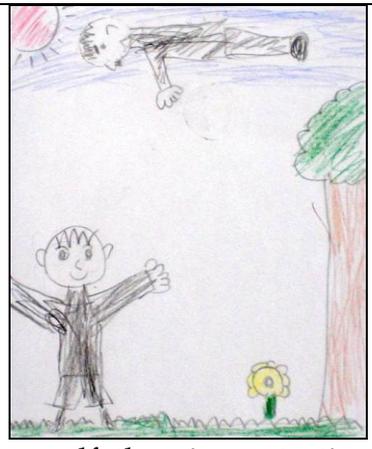
Another question that greatly preoccupied the German children was the actionistic one, asking what the souls do for such a long time in heaven.



Here the Japanese children differentiate according to age of death. Old people who are grandparents watch over their grandchildren from heaven (images 21 and 22):



grandmother is protecting us



grandfather is protecting us

(image 21) Saijaka, Japanese girl, 10 years old

(image 22) Kiichi, Japanese boy, 9 years old

For example Saijaka and Mariko from Hankawa also believe that:

Saijaka G_Ha: I think the grandmother is looking down from heaven and watching the figures of her grandchildren.

Mariko G_Ha: Because it's necessary, our grandmother watches us from heaven with protecting eyes, I think.

But many children also project the things they wish for onto heaven, such as "playing forever" (image 23) or reconciling again with a friend (image 24).



(image 23) Umeko, Japanese girl, 10 years old



(image 24) Aiko, Japanese girl, 10 years old

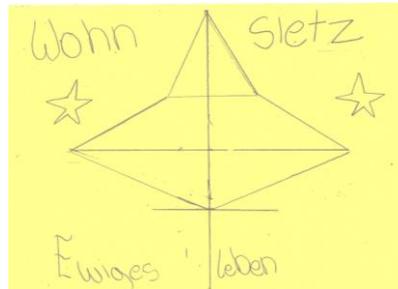
children's drawings as expressions of "narrative philosophizing". concepts of death. a comparison of german and japanese elementary school children

For the German children, a condition that never changes for all eternity does not seem to be worth having, and so they talk about various metamorphoses, such as the transformation into a star (image 25) or an angel (image 26).

- G2_30 *Rashida:* I was thinking that when you've been in heaven for a long time, you turn into a star.
- B2_48 *Norbert:* Maybe the souls get trained there and then they come down again as angel assistants.
- B2_50 *Moritz:* Um, who gives them the training?
- B2_52 *Patrick:* God.
- G2_56 *Michelle:* Probably an angel who's in heaven.



(image 25) Michelle, German girl, 9 years old



(image 26) Rashida, German girl, 9 years old

Another theory represented in both cultures is rebirth.

One-third of the children presume that the soul will be reborn. This unusually high number for Germany results from the fact that 25% of the girls think there may be a transmigration of souls. Although one-third of the Japanese children also share this value, the responses of the German children reflect not so much a familiarity with Buddhist religion as wishful thinking. Lea (GG 277), for example, tells this story: "Back when I was younger, I kept on thinking that maybe my great grandfather was an animal or something, so then I always said 'Hello' to animals." Or Sophia (GG 280) says: "I got cats, and (...) then I used to always think that it was my great grandfather, my cat, and then I always said his name."

At that point it became clear that Johannes (DJ 284), who had previously only operated with the Christian theory of soul, also had his own quite private notion: "Sometimes I also think that my fish... is my gra..., I mean my great grandmother, my grandpa, um, my great grandmother and great grandfather, and then I always say goodbye to them when I leave." Since parents reject such ideas, normally the children did not speak about them. The experience of expressing these views openly in the *community of inquiry* and finding other children with similar ideas was a great relief to them. German children also believe that they are reborn as animals, preferentially as their beloved pets (images 27 and 28)



(image 27) Corinna, German girl, 11 years old years old

(image 28) Katharina, German girl, 10

Here also Japanese children like the girl Keiko have more creative ideas (image 29).

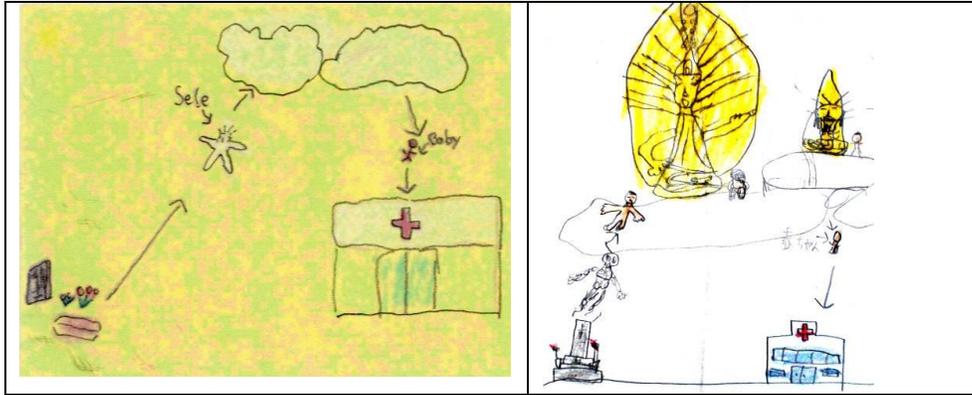


(image 29) Keiko, Japanese girl, 10 years old

The German Girl Nina offers another form of the reincarnation idea (image 30): “Well, I think about it some, when a person dies, that (...) my soul goes on to the next child. I mean, ... at the exact moment when I die, that maybe somewhere, like in a hospital or in someone’s home, a new child is born and it gets my soul.”

The Japanese boy Ueno makes what happens after death dependent on moral status (image 31): „The dead boy first becomes a skeleton, but then gets skin and flesh again. The person who does good deeds is changed by Buddha into an infant like before. The one who has done bad things is not changed.”

children's drawings as expressions of "narrative philosophizing". concepts of death. a comparison of german and japanese elementary school children



(image 30), German girl Nina, 10 years old

(image 31) Japanese boy Ueno, 10 years old

Exactly like most of the German children, most Japanese children have a dualistic worldview: the body decays and the soul lives on.

After the *community of inquiry* had thus cleared up the fate of the soul in what the members found to be a satisfactory process of argumentation, it moved on to the second component of its dual theory. There is soon agreement about the material development of the body. The children agree on a biological nature concept. As an example we cite here Sophia (GG 28): "When they die they live in the earth, that is, then they turn into earth...." and also Johannes (GB 30): "and then they live on as earth."

4. Evaluation of the approach through the children's self-assessments

At the conclusion of our research process, we wanted to know how the children assessed reflecting about death through group conversation in the classroom. After all, talking about death is a taboo not only in Japan, but also in Germany. This makes it especially burdensome for children to come to terms with this difficult existential topic.

While Nina reports positive feelings about remembering her grandfather again during the discussion of the death theme ("it was also nice...because talking about this made me remember my Grandpa again"), Somäa and Rashida exemplify ambivalent attitudes. On the one hand, they find thinking about the topic "death" quite difficult and become anxious. Somäa (G3_174) emphasizes: "It could also happen that some children talking about a topic like this might be afraid that now maybe they will die too." On the other hand, they find the treatment of the topic liberating, as Rashida (G3_172) points out: "It's like this: it's true that this is hard for children to learn about, but when they know it, in the end, then they feel freer, for sure."

The Japanese children saw it as positive that they could discuss the topic of death, since they "talked about a subject" as Kiichi from Noboricho says, "that we don't learn about in school. That's why it was very good for me." The others also found it "a good experience" like Taro. Teruka from Hankawa added: "If you think by yourself about *inochi*, it stays unclear, but when I thought about it together with other children it became quite understandable." Seiko went still further: "Today I experienced good learning. I am very grateful." Only Yasunai found it "difficult to think about the topic *inochi*, because we have no experience with it."



This feeling can be attributed first of all to the fact that, for most of the children, death was affirmed to be “not final” and was associated with hopes for various forms of living on after death.

Second, the children felt liberated by their long conversation about the process of dying itself. Because their assertions were neither ridiculed nor treated with scorn in the classroom *community of inquiry*, but were instead received with interest and developed further in a respectful discussion, they experienced the conversation about this tabooed topic as a relief.

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