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# Children's Representations of Death:

A Thematic and Visual Discourse Analysis of Children's  
Drawings in a Mexican Primary School

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## A B S T R A C T

This study focuses on analysing Mexican children's representations of death inasmuch as children are perceived as social actors that have an active role in constructing and giving meaning to social reality. The importance of analysing children's representations about death is that it provides an opportunity to know how children give meaning to a notion that intersects with personal experiences, emotions, religious beliefs, and a sociocultural context. Therefore, the aim of this study is to analyse, visually and verbally, the ways in which children - from 8 to 9 years of age - in a Mexican primary school represent their understanding of death through their drawings and their oral descriptions of them, which may unveil their opinions on the subject.

The research material consists of the drawings and interviews of primary school children in Mexico. The girls and boys, who were in third grade, were selected from a school population based on a convenience sampling (Bryman 2016, p.187). The method of analysis is a combination of thematic analysis and Rose's visual discourse analysis I. The main findings are that the participants represented their understanding of death in terms of realistic, fantastic and afterlife narratives according to their experiences. Most of the participants' visions of death were represented with archetypal symbols of death, such as death personified. Contrary, the representations of the few participants who had a personal loss were realistic, except for one of them. In this sense, children's representations of death draw on discourses imbued in visual media, religion, morality, and culture. Children's emotions about death varied according to their experiences, although most participants said that they do not fear death. Regarding life after death, most participants recognize a duality between body and soul. While the body dies, the soul lives and the place where the soul goes was perceived mainly in moralistic terms.

**Keywords:** children's drawings, representations of death, Mexico, thematic analysis, visual discourse analysis

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Death, the finitude of the living being, is a complex notion that is sometimes difficult to comprehend, insofar as the biological cycle that allows a being to be alive can stop functioning, at any time and for various reasons. This may provoke sorrow, fear, anxiety, despair and/or confusion. Therefore, it is understandable that the subject of death is not generally talked about and that, even in some places, it can be taboo. As a result, this delicate and convoluted subject has not been sufficiently researched from the perspective of children in terms of their perceptions, ideas or beliefs. For the most part, researchers have been interested in demonstrating a correlation between children's age and their understanding of different aspects of death, that is, from a developmental approach. However, this research is carried out from a Childhood Studies approach, a field of study that perceives childhood as a social construction and addresses children as social actors instead of social objects, whose development is solely controlled by biological and psychological processes (James & James 2012, p.27). By perceiving children as social actors, it is recognised that children play an active role in the daily construction of their social life (Ibid, p.120). Inasmuch as social actors are constantly and actively producing and reproducing social categories and phenomena through social interaction (Bryman 2016, pp.29-30). Thereby, social constructionism is the ontological position suitable for this research.

Moreover, recognising children as social actors would mean that children's voices – their views on issues that concern them - are heard in order to better understand children's position in society (James & James 2012, p.28). In this regard, discussions on children's competency have produced essentialist arguments. On the one hand, children may be perceived as incompetent, and on the other hand, they may be perceived as competent (Komulainen 2007, p.26). However, it is stated that children can be competent and vulnerable at the same time, which mainly depends on their agency – that is, their capacity to act independently (James & James 2012, p.9) -, and their relationship with adults, institutions, etc. (Komulainen 2007, p.26). In other words, being a social actor does not mean being competent or autonomous but being situated in a society while being "connected through complex systems of social and material relationships" (Sparrman & Sandin 2012, as cited in Sparrman 2013, p.293). In this sense, social scientists are aware that human beings confer meaning to social reality and that these meanings are used as a basis for their actions (Bryman 2016, p.27). Consequently, the social scientist must have access to the way in which

people perceive their social reality in order to interpret their actions and their social world from their perspective (Ibid). In this case, children's perspectives on the subject of death will be interpreted from their descriptions of their drawings. Hence, interpretivism is the adequate epistemological position for this research.

Drawing has been a means increasingly used to access the points of view, perceptions, and thoughts that children have about the world (Tamm & Granqvist 1995, p.207). The importance of children expressing themselves visually resides in the fact that for some children it can be difficult to express themselves verbally (Spyrou 2011, p.153). In this case, children's drawings function as representations of their ideas, forasmuch as a representation is "the linguistic or figurative process by which ideas acquire significance and meaning in society" (James & James 2012, p.107). Hence, the importance of analysing children's representations about death is that it provides an opportunity to know how children give meaning to a notion that intersects with personal experiences, emotions, religious beliefs and the sociocultural context (Bonoti et al. 2013, p.47). Therefore, I consider it important that children can express their views visually through their drawings, and verbally through their descriptions of them, which will unveil their thoughts on the subject of death. Moreover, the reason I addressed Mexican primary school children is that, according to Piñón & Sanchez (2016, p.172), it is in primary school when the cultural traditions, customs, and civic education are mostly transmitted to prepare future Mexican citizens.

In this respect, children are directly or indirectly exposed to the subject of death in many ways, if it is not for personal experiences, it is due to the visual culture that children access. Expressly, death is embedded in the visual culture, for instance, in movies, literature, television programs, art, photographs, internet, etc. Particularly, in children's visual culture, we may find the subject of death in cartoons, video games, children's literature, and so on. In this sense, visual images, which are everywhere, play an important role in defining a cultural identity (Mamur 2012, p.277). In other words, media products function as important learning experiences for children and young people (Ibid, p.278), and these experiences may vary according to the culture to which they are exposed. Thus, it would be interesting to know the viewpoints that Mexican children in primary school have about death given that Mexico has an idiosyncratic sociocultural context that will be referred to in the following chapter.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

In this chapter, I will review a selection of studies pertaining to the field of education, psychology, death studies, and art, among others. In the same way, I will briefly discuss the approaches from which these studies are addressed in order to enrich the discussion in this investigation. To such degree that by contrasting these studies, we will learn that children's individual experiences and context are more relevant to their understanding of death than the aspects that the theories of child development suggest, which are given a universal character. It is important to mention that this research aims to provide knowledge on a sensitive topic that has been little explored from the perspective of child studies and also in Latin America. Therefore, to structure this chapter clearly, I will divide it into the following subsections: children's notions of death, children's drawings, children's drawings about death, and Mexican sociocultural context.

### **2.1 CHILDREN'S NOTIONS OF DEATH**

The idea that children go through universal and standardised developmental stages determined by biological changes comes from Piaget (James et al. 1998, as cited in Tisdall & Punch 2014, p.253), who placed childhood as a stage of maturation to reach adulthood. Piaget (1971, as cited in Lee et al. 2009, p.252) and those who abide by his theory consider that children are not cognitively prepared to understand the concept of death. These researchers distinguish different components of that notion and analyse them in relation to the stage of development in which the participating children are (Kenyon 2001, p.66). The most commonly reviewed components are non-functionality – that is, the cessation of life-sustaining functions -, irreversibility of death, universality, causality, and personal mortality (Speece & Brent 1984, 1992; as cited in Kenyon 2001, p.65). On this subject, Kenyon (2001, p.80) demonstrated that these different components of death are understood at different stages through different processes. However, it was also found that religious instruction, cultural practices, exposure to death stimuli, direct experience, educational opportunities, and anxiety impact children's understandings, abilities and/or desire to learn about death (Ibid, pp.72, 80). Consequently, the comprehension of such a concept cannot be generalized in terms of stages of development, since it may be a complex and individualised appreciation. As argued in social constructionism, which is my ontological position, individuals are not perceived as restricted by the stages described within the theories of development, but as social actors that are actively and continuously creating and giving meaning to social phenomena (Bryman 2016, pp.29-30).

In this manner, Panagiotaki et al. (2018, pp.97, 101) came to a similar conclusion in their study with British children inasmuch as religiosity and spiritual beliefs, and parent's socioeconomic status (level of education, income, and employment) were correlated to children's comprehension of death. However, since their approach was developmental, it was also determined that children understood certain components of death, such as inevitability, universality, and causality in a linear developmental standard (Ibid, p.111). Moreover, in another study, Panagiotaki et al. (2015, p.31) compared the perceptions that rural Pakistani Muslims and urban British counterparts have of death. Their results showed that the influence of cultural experiences, socioeconomic status, education, and the degree of exposure to Western media explained the slight differences between children's explanations of death (Ibid, p.42). Therefore, the implications of the sociocultural context have proved to be an important element to consider. This can be perceived in the study of Gutiérrez et al. (2014, p.110), which focus on the socialization of death for young Mexican American children in comparison to European American children. Their results showed that Mexican American children tend to be more open about the subject of death, to ask more about it and to get straightforward answers from their parents, compared to European American children (Ibid, p.111). Additionally, children's exposure to death as perceived in Mexican culture, in events such as "Day of the Dead", may cause children to attribute psychological and biological properties to the dead, as well as eternal life (Ibid).

In this sense, Slaughter & Griffiths (2007, p.534) in their study on children's fear of death suggested that children who learn biological facts about death might feel less fear of it. Thereupon, in order to overcome the cultural silence about death, Lee et al. (2009, p.251) proposed to study the effects that death education would have on the understanding of death by a group of Korean pre-schoolers. Given that death is a restricted topic for children of Asian cultures, children construct their notion of death from violent or moralistic scenes found in the media, such as television, video games, computer games or fairy tales (Ibid, p.259). Consequently, Lee et al. (2009, p.260) found positive results in terms of a more mature understanding of this notion by providing a death education, which was considered developmentally appropriate. Nonetheless, developmental theories can be rigid with respect to the knowledge that children should learn according to their age. In this regard, I consider that children's personal experiences, as well as their sociocultural context, could be of greater importance. For instance, Coombs (2014, p.287), summoned a group of young people to reflect upon the daily presence of death in household objects, which were

selected by the participants. The selected objects were mostly connected to media sources, such as literature, cinema, and television (Ibid). In other words, "cultural scripts", embedded in media, influenced young people's perceptions and narratives about death. However, Coombs (2014, p.300) realized that young people were not passively receiving these representations but actively and creatively constructing their own approaches to the notion of death. In sum, I have argued, using the literature, that, on the one hand, the sociocultural context, the socioeconomic status, education and media exposure could have an impact on children's notion of death. But, on the other hand, individual experiences could also be relevant and even emerge from the context, to comprehend and construct a certain notion of death.

## 2.2 CHILDREN'S DRAWINGS

Drawing is an art form through which children can express and communicate their emotions, thoughts, feelings, and knowledge (Eisner 2002, pp.108-109). According to Eisner (2002), the manner in which children express themselves visually in art depends on their cognitive abilities, which they have acquired in two ways, biological and learned. In other words, it is attested that human artistic expression depends on the interactive combination of development, cognitive abilities and the situation in which the individual works (Ibid, p.107). On the other hand, in a study in a primary school classroom, Darling-McQuistan (2017, pp.281, 289) exposed that drawing goes beyond its "representational" role, insofar as it supports the collective meaning-making process of the students and of the teacher herself. In this sense, children, when drawing, not only visually represent something but make meaning of that something (Ibid, p.287). In Änggård's study (2005, pp.539-541), children collectively reused and creatively reinterpreted visual and verbal narratives drawn from cultural discourses, which they used as if they were theirs. Moreover, she demonstrates that children interact when they participate in creative processes, which is important for their social inclusion (Ibid, p.552).

For that reason, Malchiodi in her book *Understanding children's drawings* (1998) addresses historical, developmental, emotional, interpersonal, somatic, spiritual and ethical aspects of children's drawings. In this evaluation, she incorporates the importance of the drawing process, which includes the material, the environment, the role of the facilitator, and so on. The results showed that the use of colour or the lack of it in children's drawings might be related to different factors (Ibid, p.114). For instance, it could have emotional connotations, or it could be used to

represent certain objects, or it could be delimited by the number of colours provided by the facilitator (Ibid). In relation to emotions, the meaning of colour usage in children's drawings may be problematic to define (Ibid, p.115). According to Furth (1988, as cited in Malchiodi 1998, p.115), red is considered the most emotional colour expressing danger, aggression, anger, hate, as well as, affection, passion, and expressiveness. As for blue, it expresses peacefulness or depression, and it is also employed to represent the sky and water (Malchiodi 1998, p.115). Yellow indicates positive feelings and it is correlated with light and energy (Ibid). Oppositely, black suggests negative overtones since it symbolizes the unknown, fears, threats and dark thoughts (Furth 1988, as cited in Malchiodi 1998, p.115). However, there is also cultural aspects or personal preferences, or meanings given to colours that should be taken into consideration (Malchiodi 1998, pp.115-116). Size is another structural element in children's drawings that could reflect children's sense of self-esteem or personal competence when drawing a human figure (Buck 1948; Hammer 1958; Koppitz 1968, 1984; Machover 1949; as cited in Malchiodi 1998, p.116). The influence that interpersonal relations have on children, which is reflected in their artistic expressions, is also acknowledged (Ibid, p.161). Thus, depictions of family members may exhibit children's feelings or perceptions about them, as well as the family dynamics symbolically portrayed through size of figures, placement, content, and so on (Burns & Kauffman 1972; Burns 1982; Oster & Gould 1987, Oster & Montgomery 1996; as cited in Malchiodi 1998, p.162).

In the same manner, by observing and analysing children's drawings through a developmental approach, Farokhi & Hashemi (2011, p.2222) gained insights into the meaning of children's drawings. That is, the physical characteristics of the figures or objects drawn, with respect to size, presence or absence and force when drawing, manifest the emotions and moods of the children (Ibid). However, both Malchiodi (1998) and Farokhi & Hashemi (2011) draw upon the developmental stage theory in their studies, which analyses children's drawings in terms of normality and deviation. Thus, children are expected to draw in a certain way according to their age; otherwise, this would imply that the child is not normal. According to Cox (2005, pp.115-116), children do not draw in a developmentally determined way, but they control what they draw because their drawing is intentional. Children's representations are self-directed, constructive and with a purpose, they are not a developing ability to visually evoke objects (Ibid). Cox (2005, p.118) focuses on the analysis of the purposes behind the drawings instead of using drawing as an artefact to demonstrate a correct perception of culturally determined objectives. In this regard, the research

of Einarsdottir et al. (2009, p.229) remarks the importance of drawing as a process in which children not only draw but talk about their drawings, constructing and assigning meaning to them. This demonstrates that children have control over what they draw and the narratives around their drawings (Ibid), which supports what was attested in Cox (2005, pp.115-116) study about intentionality in children's drawings. Furthermore, Einarsdottir's et al. (2009, p.218) mention the importance of context in children's drawings with respect to the discourse of meaning-making, inasmuch as social and cultural elements have an influence, as well as the availability of materials with which children create their drawings. In this respect, Karczmarzyk (2012, p.557) affirms that children learn to look at reality not through their eyes but through signs embedded in culture. In this way, it is concluded that the meaning of children's drawings is subject to patterns dictated by authorities in control of the regime of truth (Ibid, pp.557-558). Given that this terminology alludes to Foucault's conceptions, which underpins Rose's (2001) visual discourse analysis I, it will be interesting to find out if the results of this research confirm, complement or challenge this statement.

### 2.3 CHILDREN'S DRAWINGS ABOUT DEATH

In the previous subsection, it has been shown that children's drawings are beneficial for research insofar as it provides them with one way of communicating. Similarly, interviews can be complementary since only children could explain the thoughts and feelings represented in their drawings. Therefore, it is not unexpected that researchers have addressed the understanding of children's notion of death through their drawings and their comments about them. In the study "The meaning of death for children and adolescents," Tamm & Granqvist (1995, p.203) used children's drawings and comments on their drawings to investigate differences in children's concepts of death and the gender differences in those concepts. In this sense, they discovered that most young children understood death in relation to the concepts of biological death, unlike older children who thought of it in terms of metaphysical death (Ibid, p.220). In addition, gender played an important role, as more boys than girls personified death, as well as violent deaths (Ibid). Although in the study of Tamm & Granqvist (1995, p.221), it seems that a developmental approach is used, they preferred to recommend further studies to examine the relation between age, gender, and children's concepts of death. Correspondingly, in their study with Taiwanese children, Yang & Cheng (2002, p.143) also encountered that younger children referred to biological death ideas, whereas older

children focused on metaphysical death ideas. However, Yang & Cheng (2002) clearly rely on Piaget's developmental model inasmuch as the biological representations of death are said to coincide with the level of preoperational understanding (Tamm & Granqvist 1995, Wenestam & Wass 1987, as cited in Yang & Cheng 2002, p.170), which is when the 2- to 7-year-old child begins to symbolically represent permanent objects (DeWolfe 2013). As for those that represent the nature of death, which is inevitable, irreversible, and universal, they are located at the level of abstract cognitive functioning (Tamm & Granqvist 1995, Wenestam & Wass 1987, cited in Yang & Cheng 2002, p.170), which is when the logical thought is developed, from 7 to 11 years of age (DeWolfe 2013). According to this theory, the understanding of children is conditioned by certain stages defined by their age, however, in my study children are perceived as social actors who understand and construct their notions from their experiences and/or their sociocultural context.

Bonoti et al. (2013), who investigated the understanding of Greek children about death, found comparable results to those of Yang & Cheng (2002) to the extent that older children expressed a more metaphysical and spiritual explanation of death. Nevertheless, they concluded that other factors might influence the evolvement of children's concept of death more than cognitive maturity insofar as the cultural context may influence children's spiritual explanations of death and their belief of life after death (Ibid, p.58). In this regard, Yang & Cheng (2002, p.172), in their study of the meaning of death from a Chinese perspective, do mention the influence of Chinese folk religion that “often apotheosises and demonises the world after death”. Hence, there is a cultural recognition of life after death, although it is also said that the issue of death in China is silenced as a way to control children's expressions of their feelings (Ibid, p.171). Then, again, it is demonstrated that the cultural context is relevant. This supports my epistemological position to the extent that interpretivism may be influenced by phenomenology, which is interested in how individuals comprehend the world that surrounds them (Bryman 2016, p.26). For this reason, the social scientist must find the manner to access people’s way of thinking so that, from people’s perspective, she/he can interpret their actions, expressions, and social worlds (Ibid, p.27). In this sense, Marsal & Dobashi (2011, p.251) compared the drawings of Japanese and German children about death in terms of gender differences and globalized media influence. This comparison resulted in dualistic views on death to the extent that children of both nationalities considered that the soul lives while the body deteriorates (Ibid, p.266). This result shows the cultural similarities inasmuch as in both cultures talking about death is considered a sensitive issue (Ibid. p.266). In

this way, the personal environment does not fulfil the role as the first source for children to learn about death (Ibid, p.255). Therefore, it is possible that these children were more influenced by the globalized media, which may be perceived as a secondary source (Ibid, pp. 255, 266).

As Yang & Park's (2017, p.73) exposed in their research on Korean, Chinese and Chinese American children's cognitive understanding and emotional responses to death and grief, children learn about death mainly through media exposure rather than through their parents or teachers, as it is said that the subject of death is taboo in Korea and China. However, they also encountered that children associate death with negative emotions as a result of cognitive development (Ibid, p .73). On this matter, Yang & Park (2017), who in their study consider cognitive development but also the cultural context, are more in agreement with Vygotsky's developmental theory. Vygotsky's theory, which is used to underpin social constructivism, proposes that knowledge is constructed by means of cognitive ability and social factors (Richardson & Weinfurt 1996/1997, Rosengren et al. 2014, as cited in Yang & Park 2017, p.55). However, this view that children are limited by their cognitive ability, which is related to their age, does not agree with my approach. That is, the biological determinism of development theories is not suitable for my study since I will approach children as competent social actors capable of creating their own knowledge (cf. Darling-McQuistan 2017, p.282).

## 2.4 MEXICAN SOCIOCULTURAL CONTEXT

The sociocultural context becomes relevant insofar as it is where children experience their childhood. And, despite the fact that death is a universal biological fact, cultural discourses and approaches to it are not. In this sense, it is important to give a succinct account of the Mexican sociocultural context in relation to the subject of death.

The beliefs and rituals about death immersed in contemporary Mexican culture come from the syncretism between the pre-Columbian cultures of the Mesoamerican indigenous and the Judeo-Christian culture, which was imposed when the Spaniards arrived in America (Arredondo & Capistran-Lopez 2017, p.297). The culmination of this cultural syncretism is visible in the "Día de Muertos" (Day of the Dead), which is an annual celebration consisting of several days in which families make home altars and visit the cemetery to make offerings to their dead. In the altar, the

indigenous traditions and Catholic beliefs coexist. Similarly, “La Catrina”<sup>1</sup> - a female skeleton - is a syncretic cultural symbol of death that accompanies this celebration. According to Arredondo & Capistran-Lopez (2017, p.298), this celebration spread throughout Mexico since the 1980s when the Secretariat of Public Education (SEP) instructed measures that institutionalized and standardized this practice through official programs and school textbooks. Thus, the symbolic reality of death in Mexico was enforced not only by cultural traditions but also by school pedagogy (Ibid, p.298). However, in the recent analysis of Piñón & Sanchez (2016, p.177) on the pedagogy of death, it was found that, in the official textbooks of the primary school, there were more images and texts related to Halloween and only visual and decorative images of "Day of the Dead".

According to Octavio Paz (2004, p.63), the celebration of the dead reflects the indifference of Mexicans to death, which is nourished by their detachment to life. He wrote, "life and death are inseparable and each time the first loses meaning, the second becomes inconsequential"<sup>2</sup> (Ibid). In this sense, he associated the traditional celebration of the dead with the loss of the meaning of life, which may evoke the normalization of violence in contemporary Mexico. In the last decades, Mexico has experienced times of social violence. The first public data recorded by the Government on homicides go back to the year 1997, with 46 homicides per day (Reina 2018). According to El País, the online version of the Spanish newspaper, in 2017, about 70 people were killed every day in Mexico (Ibid). In total, 25,339 homicides were committed, exceeding the limit of what had been the most lethal year for this country, the year 2011 (Ibid). The origin of this violence is attributable to law enforcement institutions, which are weak and corrupt (Council on Foreign Relations 2018). Also, to one of the largest and most sophisticated drug networks in the world, which expanded in the 1980s after the dismantling of drug cartels in Colombia (Ibid). In this regard, it should be noted that the primary school where the research was conducted is located in Xalapa, in the state of Veracruz. Due to the convenient location of its commercial routes, the state of Veracruz is contested by at least four criminal groups, that is, drug cartels (Morera 2017). From 2016 to 2017, in this state, the number of homicides increased 158%, as well as the percentage of the population that feels unsafe, with a total of 85.1%. This context has led to an increase in the cult of "La Santa Muerte" (Saint Death), the sacred female personification of death, which also originated as a

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<sup>1</sup> "La Catrina", created by José Guadalupe Posada, wears an elegant hat in a European style of the early 20th century as a mockery of the wealthy Mexican ladies of that era (Arredondo & Capistran-Lopez 2017, pp.308-309).

<sup>2</sup> The translation from Spanish into English is mine unless stated otherwise.

cultural syncretism (Torres-Ramos 2017). This cult, which is excluded from religious institutions and part of civil society, is mainly associated with socially marginalized people: criminals - drug dealers - or underprivileged people - the desperate - who seek to feed their faith by other means (Ibid). In sum, in this sociocultural context, tradition, religion, superstition, and violence can be interspersed when death is alluded to.

### **3. RESEARCH AIM AND QUESTION**

Therefore, the main aim of this research is to understand how children in a Mexican primary school express their understanding of death. For that reason, my research questions are:

1. **How do Mexican children in primary school represent their understanding of death?**
  - a) How do they construct their vision of death visually and verbally?
  - b) What discourses are drawn on their drawings and narratives?

### **4. METHODS**

In this chapter, I will discuss the rationale and the process behind the collection and selection of the data, as well as the methods for analysing that data. Additionally, I will comment on the ethical considerations I had to take into account when collecting and analysing the data.

#### **4.1 METHODS OF DATA COLLECTION**

In order to answer the research questions, it was necessary to have both visual and verbal data that may portray the understanding that Mexican children, in a primary school, have of death. As my ontological position is social constructionism, I consider that individuals have an active role in the construction of their social reality (Bryman 2016, p.30). That is, children participated in generating the data material for this research, visually by means of drawings, and verbally through individual open-ended interviews. First of all, I chose drawings because they are theoretically relevant inasmuch as it is “a child-appropriate way of communication” in which children are invited to express their experiences, feelings, thoughts or perceptions (Malchiodi 1998, p.xiii, xv). Furthermore, drawing is a tool that has been used by researchers since there are children who may have problems expressing themselves verbally or in writing and may express themselves more easily by drawing (Spyrou 2011, p.153). However, as Spyrou (2011, p.154) mentions, visual

methods are not sufficient by themselves. Hence, children's explanations about their drawings were necessary to not assume their meaning. This verbal data was obtained from individual open-ended interviews, which were pertinent insofar as death is a sensitive issue and ethical considerations require addressing such issues individually (Silverman 2015, p.166). In this way, participants could feel comfortable maintaining their anonymity and confidentiality (Bryman 2016, p.388). Moreover, the flexibility of the open-ended interview, as well as its implicit active listening, eases the rapport between the interviewer and the interviewee (Silverman 2015, p.166). This is in accordance with my epistemological position, interpretivism, which requires that the social scientist know the subjective and individual significance of social action (Bryman 2016, p.26).

Regarding the selection process, I decided to use a convenience sample to select the age of the students and the school where I could do my study, that is, I selected them for their accessibility (Bryman 2016, p.187). I chose an average primary public school and, after thoroughly explaining all the details of the investigation to the principal, he granted me access to the school with some time restrictions due to the school plan. The principal also decided which group I would work with, depending on the teacher's accessibility and consent to work on the research. At a later date, I was informed that the teacher, who was interested in my study, was from the third grade and the group of children consisted of 23 students. Thus, I introduced myself and explained to the children that I needed their collaboration to know their points of view on a subject. The teacher clarified that my topic of interest was death. The children reacted surprised at first but quickly became enthusiastic about the idea of drawing about death. I explained to them the importance of having their permission but also the permission of their parents. After reading the informed consent and answering all their questions, all agreed to participate. I left the informed consent form for their parents with their teacher so that she would give them to the children at the end of the day. Two days later, I went back to collect the forms and to carry out the drawing process. Of the 23 students, 2 did not get permission from their parents and three forgot to turn in the form. I considered it unnecessary to move the 18 participating children to another room, of which 10 were boys and 8 were girls. In this sense, the environment is relevant since children are invited to feel comfortable and free to create their drawings (Malchiodi 1998, p.30). Thus, when I observed that the group dynamic was very good, I thought that children could create their drawings more comfortable if they did it in the same room at the same time. In this regard, social constructionism suggests that the meanings of the categories that people use to understand the world are social products, which

are constructed “in and through interaction” (Bryman 2016, p.30). The interactive element in the children's drawing process may be reflected when children look at and talk about each other's drawings. Änggård (2005, p.545) mentions that there is a dialogue between children's narratives, especially of the same gender, when they create them at the same time.

Thus, I explained the process of the task, which consisted of creating the drawing first and, once finished, conducting the interviews individually in another room. I told the participants to draw what they think when I say the word death. Then, I gave the material for the participants to draw about death for about an hour. As those who did not participate remained in the drawing process, they also drew but what they wanted. Interestingly, many participants did not want to draw the same as the others and really took their time to think about what to draw. The material used for the drawing was standard white 8.5” x 11” paper, children's coloured pencils, and coloured chalk packs provided by the teacher. Most children preferred to use the latter, even though the colour options were more reduced. The importance of the material provided resides in that it may influence the style and the content of the children's drawings (Malchiodi 1998, p.28). When the creation process was finished, I began to individually interview the participants, with both consent forms signed, in an empty classroom to which I was assigned. The interviews were semi-structured (see appendix for interview guide). I mainly used the questions from the first and second parts of the interview guide, but I also raised other questions that arose spontaneously from the conversation. Sometimes, I asked some questions from the third part of the interview guide. Thus, the duration of the interviews depended on many factors, mainly children's willingness to talk. The longest interview lasted about 25 minutes while the shortest lasted about 4 minutes. All interviews were conducted in two days. All were transcribed but only the used extracts were translated. In sum, as a novice researcher, I followed the observations recommended in Danby et al. (2011) for interviewing children. Before carrying out the research, I made two visits to the school. On my first visit, I talked with the principal and learned about the school, that is, I tried to familiarize myself with the environment. On my second visit, I met the children and the teacher, and I explained the research to them as well as gave them the informed consent form for their parents. Thus, I tried to create and develop a rapport with them (Fontana & Frey 2000, cited in Danby et al. 2011, p.80). Moreover, during this second visit, I also reflected on the context and the suitable “artifact” - drawings - to stimulate a fluid conversation (Danby et al. 2011, p.82). In the sense that I realized that it would be better for the children to draw at the same time in the same room with the same

material, provided mostly by the school. Similarly, I realized that for the interviews I needed an isolated room since school noise was prominent. On this subject, I tried to reduce the power imbalance by playing the “least adult role” throughout the fieldwork (cf. Lange & Mierendorff 2009, p.87). In other words, when the children came to ask me something, I squatted down to look smaller, I also joked with them and, during the break, I played and chatted with them. Similarly, as an “incompetent adult”, the participants explained their drawings to me and allowed me to audio record them due to my poor memory (cf. Ibid, pp.87-88). Lastly, in order to create a “relaxed interactional space”, I started the interviews with “social talk” (Danby et al. 2011, p.76).

## 4.2 METHODS OF DATA ANALYSIS

Regarding the method of data analysis, I decided to use thematic analysis in combination with elements of Gillian Rose’s (2001) visual discourse analysis I. In the following subsections, I will explain them concisely and give a justification of their use.

### *4.2.1 Thematic Analysis*

Thematic analysis is a qualitative analysis method that serves to identify, analyse and report patterns or themes within data (Braun & Clarke 2006, pp.77, 79). It is a flexible technique to organize information that can be used with different theoretical frameworks depending on the researcher’s standpoint, which should be clearly stated (Ibid, p.81). In this sense, thematic analysis is a suitable method to use with my ontological position – social constructionism -, which affirms that social actors continually produce and give meaning to social phenomena (Bryman 2016, p.29). As well as with my epistemological position – interpretivism -, which states that social scientists must find the way to access to people’s perspectives in order to interpret their social worlds (Ibid, p.27). For this reason, I chose a contextualist thematic analysis insofar as it recognizes how individuals give meaning to their experiences and, at the same time, the ways in which the social context affects those meanings (Ibid, pp.81, 83). Thematic analysis consists of six phases that I will briefly describe and that may be implemented in a constant organic process (Ibid, p.87). The first phase implies familiarizing with the data by reading and re-reading the information, transcribing it or taking initial notes (Ibid). The second phase serves to generate the initial codes (Ibid, p.88). The third phase consists of searching for themes that arise from analysing the codes and combining them to create the main theme and, if necessary, sub-themes (Ibid, p.89). The fourth phase requires

reviewing the themes in order to discard, separate or coalesce some of them (Ibid, p.91). In this regard, themes can be identified at two levels, semantic (explicit) or latent (interpretive). I will use the latter to distinguish the underlying ideas that gave the specific form and meaning to the content of the data (Ibid, p.84). Finally, the fifth phase entails defining and naming the themes, and lastly, the sixth phase involves producing the report (Ibid, pp.92-93). I went through all the phases after transcribing the data. However, the initial notes I took during the interviews helped me to a great extent to identify codes and themes, since I observed how some elements were repeated in children's verbal and visual narratives.

#### *4.2.2 Visual Discourse Analysis I*

Gillian Rose's (2001) Visual Discourse Analysis I is a form of discourse analysis that aims at exposing detailed views of the social world by focusing on visual images (p.140). Visuality is conceived as a kind of discourse in which certain things become visible or invisible in determined ways (Ibid, p.137). In this sense, visual discourse analysis I comprises a "compositional" modality that focuses on visual content, and a "social" modality that focuses on visual meaning, which is based on Foucauldian concepts (Ibid, pp.20, 30, 53). The meaning of a text or image depends on the meaning of other texts and images, that is, intertextuality becomes important in order to understand discourses (Ibid, pp.20, 136). A discourse is the set of statements that structure how individuals think about a thing and how they act on account of that thinking (Ibid). Moreover, the way meanings are coupled in a specific discourse refers to a discursive formation (Ibid, p.137). A discourse is powerful since it produces knowledge that claims to be truthful (Foucault 1977 as cited in Rose 2001, p.138). In this way, the specific reasons - on which truth is claimed - establish a regime of truth (Rose 2001, p.138). Visual discourse analysis I can be performed following certain phases that complement that of thematic analysis (Ibid, p.150). The analytical process initiates by looking at the data from a new perspective and continues by immersing oneself in the data to identify key themes (Ibid, pp.150, 154). Afterwards, it is necessary to examine the internal complexities and inconsistencies of the discourses within the data (Ibid, p.155). Finally, it is stressed to take notice not only of the visible but also to the invisible since absences may have powerful consequences (Ibid, pp.157-158). In this sense, I identified key themes based to a large extent on the themes identified with the thematic analysis. However, in a deeper analysis, complexities arose in children's discourses to the extent that there were contradictions and silences,

which I tried to interpret based on their narratives.

#### 4.3 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

This study entails the participation of children, which were recruited using convenience sampling from a school population. Informed consent of children, parents, and school authorities was sought and reaffirmed throughout the whole research (Bryman 2016, pp.129, 131). Transparency was sought to avoid deception and/or harm participants, and protection of anonymity (use of pseudonyms for participants) and confidentiality were guaranteed (Ibid, pp.126, 133). The invasion of privacy was avoided when interviewing the participants; nevertheless, some children did mention private experiences that will not be revealed due to the researcher's ethics (Ibid, p.131). On this subject, researcher's reflexivity was necessary, in the sense of being sensitive and aware of the comfort of the participants and the possible need for additional help, as death may be a difficult subject to address (Ibid, p.388). For the additional help, I informed the school authorities of the need to have support in this regard. To which they responded positively by providing the help of the school psychologist, who would be available if the need would have arisen. In a similar manner, during the fieldwork, I incorporated the "least-adult role" as an approach in order to make participants feel more at ease, but also to become familiar with them and to identify with their perspectives (Warming 2011, p.44).

This study is carried out as part of a master's degree at a Swedish university. Thus, in accordance with the rules and guidelines for research in Sweden (The Swedish Research Council 2018) in relation to the involvement of people, participants should be informed about the general research, as well as the aim, methods, consequences and risks of the research, in addition of the fact that participation is voluntary and can cease at any time participants want. This information must be provided in writing and verbally. In this case, the participants are children, therefore, their informed consent must respect the ethical requirements of UNICEF<sup>3</sup>, followed by obtaining an authorization from their custodian (Ibid). All the above has been followed and carried out in this research. On the other hand, as this study is developed in Mexico, ethical guidelines for social science in Mexico were searched. However, there is not an ethical code or guidelines formally stipulated in a document or website for social researchers to use in a general and consistent manner. Thus, I will refer to the book *Ética de la Investigación, Integridad Científica* (Koepsell & Ruiz de

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. <https://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/pdf/eric-compendium-approved-digital-web.pdf>

Chavez 2015, pp.7-8), which "promote the ethical culture of research and scientific integrity as well as provide tools to support the formation of high-level human resources". There, it is mentioned that the general principles for conducting an investigation consider the following requirements (Ibid, p.156). Firstly, informed consent is required to make sure that participants understand the information provided, as well as to voluntarily give consent to participate in the investigation (Ibid, pp.156-159). In the case of the individuals who are not considered competent to decide, such as "infants, young children, the mentally disabled or terminally ill or comatose", the permission of third parties will be also requested to protect the individuals from damages (Ibid, p.158). Secondly, the risk/benefit assessment serves to evaluate the justification of the research project (Ibid, pp.161-162). And, thirdly, the selection of participants for the research in terms of justice is relevant at two levels: the social and the individual (Ibid, p.162). Individual justice requires that researchers' selection of participants be fair and impartial, and social justice requires distinguishing which people should or should not participate in certain investigations (Ibid). These guidelines are relevant to my study; thus, I incorporated them as part of my work ethic. First, I provided the children, their parents and the school authorities with complete information about the research. Second, I asked permission of the children, parents and school authorities so that all participation was voluntary. Third, I tried to select the participants in a fair and impartial manner.

## 5. ANALYSIS

### 5.1 DISPOSITION OF THE CHAPTER

This chapter is organized according to the themes and subthemes found in the data obtained from the participants' representations of death. The themes identified are three: *death as a reality*, *death as a fantasy* and *death as the afterlife: religiosity and spirituality*. The first theme, *death as a reality*, is divided into three subthemes: *experiences of death*, *sources of knowledge* and *children's feelings and emotions*. The second theme, *death as fantasy*, is divided into the *personification of death*, the *use of colours*, and *symbols*. Lastly, the third theme is *death as the afterlife: religiosity and spirituality*. In each subsection, I will show a drawing and an extract from an interview that is most related to that sub-theme or theme. Participants will have false names to protect their anonymity as mentioned in the ethical considerations. In the interview transcripts, the reactions or

descriptions of the researcher and the participant will be enclosed in brackets [ ]. And the pauses will be indicated in this way (...).

## **5.2 First theme: Death as a reality**

This first theme revolves around the ways in which participating children perceive death in terms of their experiences with the subject. These experiences are also analysed from the sources from which they come, and the feelings or emotions they have caused in the participants.

### *5.2.1 Experiences of death*

All participants reported having knowledge about death. However, only three participants clearly expressed having personally experienced the death of a close relative. The other participants communicated their experiences through references to visual culture, to the parent's beliefs and/or to the Catholic religion. In addition, the participants recognized many ways of dying, most of them in a violent way. These are from a shot, run over, drowned, by a car accident, by a fire, by suicide, kidnapped, murdered, stabbed, in a bomb blast, assaulted, drunk, jumping off a bridge, electrocuted, getting sick or growing old. On this issue, boys were more verbally and visually violent than girls, who were less visually violent than verbally violent. This may denote a certain cultural context. On the other hand, two participants expressed, separately, having seen death personified through a photo, which someone in their family had taken and had shown them. In this regard, Federico, who said that a close member of his family had died, was also one of those who reported seeing death personified in a photo (see Figure 1).

Federico's drawing (see Figure 1) consists of two people, one colourful and the other in black and white tones. The person at the top of the page is standing, has a black dress and what appears to be a scythe in hand. The expression on his face denotes contradictory emotions insofar as the puckered eyebrows make him look angry, but the open mouth is drawn in a way that seems to be smiling. The person, who is at the bottom of the page, has the skin mostly painted in an earth tone and the clothes are in aquamarine. Despite the vivid hues, this face shows a lifeless expression used in cartoons, this is noted by the crosses in the eyes and the mouth drawn in a straight line. It is noteworthy that on the right side of the drawing there is a face, which was erased. According to Federico, he had wanted to draw a man standing and smiling because the person was alive, however, he decided to erase it. In a manner, there is an association between being happy and being alive. Moreover, as the participant expressed that he had attended to the burial of his grandfather,

it could be understood that he relates death to that ceremony. Similarly, the participant identified the figure dressed in black as the death, which was angry and for that reason decided to kill the other person. As aforesaid, the participant explained that he saw a photo of the death wearing black clothes.

Researcher: and how did it look? Did you see the picture?

Federico: [nodding yes]

Researcher: and how did it look?

Federico: he [Death] came with this, with this thing [points to the scythe]

Researcher: uh-huh

Federico: and he came with black clothes



**Figure 1**

Later in the interview, Federico said that he had drawn a scythe because in the movies he had seen that death brings one. In this sense, he is aware of their different experiences with death, from his grandfather's funeral, the photograph that he saw of the death, to the representations in cartoons and what he has seen in the movies. He combines these experiences by representing them visually and verbally, exposing an intertextuality (Rose 2001, p.136). Therefore, he constructs his notion of death by choosing within the multiplicity of discourses that underlie his experiences. In the case of Teresa, who had two experiences in which two relatives died, her representation is more realistic. To the extent that her drawing shows a house, a grave with a name, where a skeleton is buried, some rain and lightning. According to her description, these were some of the elements she remembered from the day she visited her uncle's grave. In this sense, she chose not to add fantastic elements, which could be due to an awareness of the actual process of death. However, to face the loss, she had some religious explanations for the hereafter, which I will address later.

### *5.2.2 Sources of knowledge*

Most of the knowledge that participating children have about death comes from their parents and from the visual culture to which they are exposed, mainly Western. Inasmuch as the names of the films and television series, from which the children said they got their knowledge, were all from

the United States, such as the movies “Ghost” and “Black Panther”, and the T.V. show “A Series of Unfortunate Events”. Some other children also stated that their ideas about death portrayed in their drawings came only from their imagination. On the other hand, there were few who made a direct reference to religion but many who made them indirectly when referring to life after death, which will be discussed later. In the case of Benjamin, he made the most use of different sources of knowledge to describe his drawing and his notion of death. His drawing (see Figure 2) shows two ghosts and two tombs, which are respectively situated on each side of the page. Almost in the middle of the page, a skeleton covered with a black cloak holds a scythe and, above them, there are clouds and a dark blotch in the centre. Each tomb has a drawn skull and the inscription "inri", which is the acronym for the Latin phrase found in the cross of Jesus Christ, whose translation is "Jesus the Nazarene, King of the Jews". In this sense, most Mexicans are Catholics, thus, many graves have a cross on them. Therefore, the participant has removed the cross from the grave and has simply written the inscription on the tombstone. This can denote that the participant is not only associating religious elements with death but also that he has visited or seen a cemetery.

Benjamin: They told me that, that the devil was death and that in the (...) he, he was an angel, the prettiest, but he wanted to rebel against God and that's why death or the devil wants to take them to him, to rebel against God and have his kingdom

Researcher: Ah! That is, death is the devil?

Benjamin: Yes

Researcher: Is it the same?

Benjamin: Yes, but I do not know how the devil looks like.



**Figure 2**

As seen above, sources of knowledge about death are relevant insofar as they have not only a nuance but also a position on the subject, from which the participant may perceive the notion. In other words, “the grounds on which the truth is claimed”, which refers to a regime of truth (Rose 2001, p.138), may influence the perception of a topic. In this case, the discourses behind the religious information that Benjamin is officially learning may differ from the discourses behind the information he finds in his search for knowledge.

Researcher: and where does death take them [ghosts]?

Benjamin: Eh? (...) To the underworld

Researcher: Ah, wow! [Surprised] I had not heard that word. No one had said it. To the underworld! And, where is it, the underworld?

Benjamin: hmmm, I do not know (...) there's only one way to know

Researcher: how? Dying?

Benjamin: no, committing suicide.

Researcher: Oh!! You are kidding! Committing suicide?

Benjamin: [giggles] in this way, you go

Researcher: Well, it is not the only way to die. Or, are there other ways to die?

Benjamin: hmm (...) in the channels of a 1000 ways to die

Researcher: the channels?

Benjamin: Eh? I mean, the channel

In this excerpt, Benjamin refers to suicide as a means of knowing the underworld. Later in the interview, he mentions that one can also go there when dying in mortal sin. Thus, he could consider the underworld as the place where sinful people go. As for the "1000 ways to die", I realized, from an Internet search, that it is a television series about people who die in different ways. Hence, the participant has access to visual culture found on a TV channel or on a YouTube channel, which serves him to learn more about a topic in which he may be interested. He later referred to two other movies to support his visual and verbal narratives. Hence, participants as social actors construct their notion of death through drawing from the available discourses. For that reason, Benjamin's narrative is rich in details because he has constructed his notion of death from the information that he considered credible found in all the sources to which he has been exposed. In this sense, the notion of death will continue to be enriched as more information is found.

### 5.2.3 Children's feelings and emotions

The participants expressed different emotions regarding death. In the same way, they experienced several feelings when evoking it, some of which were recurrent among them. Overall, participants perceived death – personified - as a happy being because it<sup>4</sup> gets its way when killing people, or because it can take the souls to the underworld where death inhabits, or because it simply has all the souls. Conversely, some participants acknowledged that there are sadness and emptiness for the surviving relatives. As for those who die, most children perceive them as being sad, as well as their souls, which they identify separately from the body. However, some said that there are some

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<sup>4</sup> Death in Spanish is a female noun that requires a female article. However, I will refer to death as it, to objectify it and give it gender neutrality, which will contrast once the subtheme *personification of death* is analysed.

people who die and are happy because they wanted to die, or because they go to heaven and rest in peace. In general, the majority of children affirmed that they are not afraid of death because they already know it. That is, they do not find it frightening because they have already seen it in movies, cartoons or in photos. They perceive death as it is portrayed in visual culture, expressly, as a being, which I will discuss in another subsection. In this sense, these participants consider that this knowledge, drawn from different discourses, is true.

Those other participants, who have had a personal loss, were aware of the emotions that surrounded that experience, including the feelings of their family members and theirs. For instance, Sara's drawing (see Figure 3) consists of two people, one who is standing in a black dress and is crying, and other who is lying down, dressed in a black suit. He has his eyes closed and his hands on his chest, and he is apparently inside a coffin. In the lower left corner, there is a small purple head. The elements of this drawing are few, however, they are straightforward. Sara described her drawing as a representation of her aunt in tears over the death of her father, that is, the participant's grandfather.

Researcher: Hmm (...) what, what happens here?

Sara: Is that (...) it is (...) that is, it came out from my feeling and then (...) hmm (...) like many days ago, in 2016 my grandfather died (...) like I had the inspiration to make this drawing as something that symbolizes my grandfather or something like that because he always said "when I'm going to die (...) hmm (...) draw a picture" and like that ... and then I was inspired and I remembered my grandfather and (...) I drew my aunt C because she cried a lot and she was always always crying, so I added her, like tears because (...)

Researcher: (...) she was very sad (...)

Sara: yes (...)

Researcher: (...) And how do you feel?

Sara: Well, sad

Researcher: And have you already talked to your parents?

Sara: Well, yes

Researcher: And what have they told you?

Sara: that they miss him.



**Figure 3**

Sara's visual and verbal representation exposes the impact caused by the loss of her grandfather. It captures not only her aunt's sadness and that of her family but also her own sadness. In itself, her

drawing is a tribute to the memory of her beloved grandfather. Later in the interview, she says that when a person dies, everyone feels sad and, without that person, they feel a void. Thereby, the participant recognizes the emotions that accompany a loss. Afterwards, she finds comfort in her memories with him and tells me that her grandfather should be happy in heaven<sup>5</sup> with her deceased grandmother. Sara relives not only her memories but also the emotions that accompanied her at every moment, but in a distant way. As if she has already overcome emotional mourning. When reconstructing her memories, Sara reaffirms her notion of death, namely, what it means to die and the emotions that accompany it.

### **5.3 Second theme: Death as a fantasy**

The second theme is about how the participants represent death in relation to the unreal. The personification of death, the use of colour and symbols convey a particular visuality, that is, a way in which vision is culturally constructed (Rose 2001, p. 6).

#### *5.3.1 Personification of death*

Most children represented death as a skeleton, wearing a black cloak and holding a scythe. Some children portrayed a figure, a being with indistinct features, also with black clothes and a scythe. In this sense, both in their visual and verbal representations, children personified death to the extent that they confer it human characteristics. In other words, they drew death with an anthropomorphic physique, embodied or just as a human skeleton. Similarly, children described it as if death had emotions, such as anger or happiness. They also described it as having a job or an objective, killing and/or taking human souls to heaven or the underworld, or to an unspecified place. Nonetheless, some children ignored where death lives and the reason for its actions. Contrariwise, children who experienced and witnessed the loss of a relative did not personify death. For instance, Jonathan explained the difference between the personification of death and actual death. Jonathan is aware that the representation of death personified belongs to a discourse alien to reality insofar as his experience with death contradicts such discourse. Interestingly, Federico personified death in his drawing, despite having witnessed the loss of his grandfather. This could respond to the credibility assigned to the source that showed him a picture of death personified.

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<sup>5</sup> Children refer to "El Cielo", which is a word in Spanish that is used to refer to sky and heaven.

On this subject, Emma's drawing (see Figure 4) presents death as a cloaked being, whose only visible facial features are its eyes and mouth. Its white arm and hand are drawn holding a scythe. There are many elements in this drawing, as well as in her verbal description of it. Nonetheless, I will only focus on the personification of death, which stands on the left side of the page. This version of death seems to have a facial expression of surprise; moreover, it also seems to be floating. The dark fog on its right side, near its scythe, looks more like a shadow.



**Figure 4**

Emma explains that death has just killed a woman, for that reason, there is blood dripping from its scythe (see Figure 4). The ghost of the woman's deceased husband got angry at death, so death got afraid of being attacked by him. However, the participant explains that death is more powerful than ghosts. In this regard, given that death can take people's lives at any minute, most children perceive its personification as so powerful that no one can overcome it.

It is worth mentioning that, in Spanish, death [La Muerte] is a feminine gender noun. However, the majority of the children who personified death affirmed that death is male. Few answered that they did not know the sex of death or that it did not matter, and only one girl answered that death was female. Thus, for most of the participants, there may be a perception that powerful beings, such as death, are male. Hence, hegemonic discourses on power and gender are being perpetuated. In this sense, the personification of death is part of the cultural discourses that have permeated throughout history. These representations are known by various names, according to the culture, and they have been disseminated through visual as well as written media. Apparently, most of the participants may have assimilated these representations and made them part of the constructions of their notions of death. In this regard, there has been a human interest in portraying death. The reason is uncertain, but it might be that there is a need to incarnate abstraction, to comprehend it or, particularly in the case of death, to be able to confront and overcome it in human

terms. This is an existential question that has always interested people. Moreover, it is a way of making meaning about life and death.

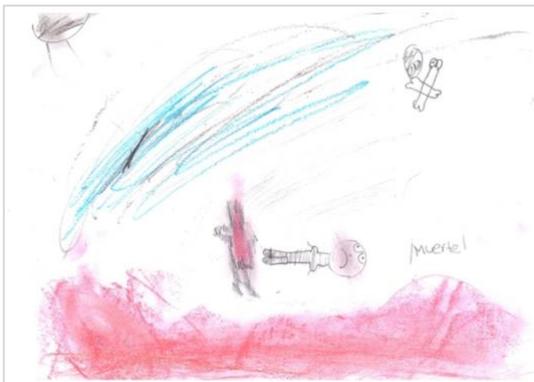
### *5.3.2 Use of colour*

As aforesaid, the material with which one works may limit the use of colour. In this sense, the participating children, who mostly had coloured pencils to draw, preferred to use the chalks that the teacher provided. Chalks had fewer options with respect to colour ranges compared to coloured pencils. In a certain sense for children, chalks may be more fun to work with since when using it they get their hands full of colour. In the same way, by using their hands, children can create certain effects with the dust left by the chalk. For that reason, chalk may be a tool that children do not use as much as it can be untidy to work. On the other hand, most children used colours realistically when they represented things they know, such as the blue of the sky, the red of the blood, the green of the treetops, and so on. However, there were cases in which children coloured these elements differently to create an environment they considered more in agreement with death. In addition, to create this environment, the participating children incorporated unreal elements that were coloured in different ways, such as a soul of aquamarine colour (see Figure 9) and rays, swirls and suns of black colour, etc. That is, the use of colour served to create an atmospheric perspective, which is part of the “compositional” modality (Rose 2001, p.40).

In the case of Nora, in her drawing (see Figure 5), there is a large red blotch in the lower part of the page, an effect obtained by blurring the powdered chalk. In the upper part of this red blotch, there are two figures, one standing, which is blurred, and it has all its body coloured in red. The other one, lying down, has a pink sad face and a body coloured in black. There are also blue, black and grey stripes on the upper part of the sheet. As for the upper left corner of the page, there is a black semicircle with rays of light, as if it were a black sun on the right side of the figure, there is an element written in Spanish, which translated says death. On the top right of the page, there is a skull and two bones crossed under it. Both the Spanish word and the skull and crossed bones were respectively written and drawn in pencil. The use of the pencil was constant in many drawings since it was used to delineate with more precision what was wanted to draw. In this regard, Mateo stated that he only used the pencil in his drawing (see Figure 6) because he was too lazy to use colours. According to Nora, her drawing (see Figure 5) portrays a woman, lying down, who is dead. She explained that death, which is the blurred red figure standing, realized that the woman

was dead, so it came to collect her soul. Nora said that death lives in the red part, which is hell. Nora explained that when dying the soul divides into two, the good things that this woman did go to the blue part and the bad things go to hell with death. Nora also said that death did kill the woman, and once death was gone, she became death personified. She continued saying that the black semicircle in the upper left part of the page is the moon because, for death, it is easier to kill at night while everyone is asleep. In this sense, Nora mentioned that the dead woman is not sad but is only asleep, dreaming.

Altogether, there is a consistent way to use certain colours, which participating children associate with death. That is, black and its tonalities are associated with the unknown, with evil or with mourning, such as death per se, night, the flashes of lightning, the whirlwind from which death comes, evil spirits, tombs, skeletons, clothes or the clouds from where the rain comes. White is also used to draw skeletons, ghosts, and clouds. Most of the time these were left without paint since the sheet was white. As for red, it is also a frequently used colour, which in this case represents hell and fire, but which above all represents blood.



**Figure 5**

Nora: (...) red becausee (...) to me red seems a colour very (...) to me red and black seem a colour (...) for a drawing of death

Researcher: Uh-huh (...) Ah yes! That's why you also told me that it is hell and, how is hell?

Nora: well, according to me as fire

The colour blue is used to represent the sky, which is related to heaven where the good things or beings go, as some participants referred. Similarly, blue is used to represent watery substances, such as rain and the tears of those who are sad. Therefore, there is a discursive formation insofar as there is an order in which children connect the meaning of colours when using them (Rose 2001, p.137). That is, certain colours have a function acknowledged by most of the participating children, which is to represent a specific object, feeling, or the environment.

### 5.3.3 Symbols

Symbols represent objects or ideas, with discursive meanings, which depend on the culture from

which they arise (Merriam-Webster online, n.d.). In this sense, the death symbols found in this study were mostly representations that the participants said they had seen in western movies and cartoons. Hence, there may be a cultural appropriation of which we may not be aware. Thus, these symbolic archetypes, mainly disseminated by visual media, have permeated into other cultures insofar as they may be integrated into many of the narratives about death around the world. Such is the case of the grim reaper, to whom I did not refer to with that term since the children did not use it. However, for most participants the black-cloaked skeleton with a scythe symbolizes death. In the same way, the skull alone is associated with the notion of death. This is especially true since, in the festivities of the Day of the Dead in Mexico, many skulls made of sugar or chocolate or papier-mâché are sold to decorate the altars. Consequently, cultural discourses coexist in children's narratives. Other important symbols of death are those found in the funerary architecture. In the case of some participants, they referred to the crosses found in the tombs, of which I have already said previously they refer to the Mexican catholicity. Some participants have established a symbolic relationship between death and the Christian cross. As well, the participants, in general, found a legitimate correlation between death and the cemetery. In this sense, Benjamin wrote INRI on the tombstones he drew (see Figure 2), which reflects the fusion he made of an element of the Christian cross with the tomb and death itself. Nevertheless, when representing the tombstone, other participant represented it with the inscription R.I.P. (see Figure 6), which means, "Rest in peace". This is not an inscription particularly found on the Mexican tombstone, however, some participants have seen it in films or television programs as Mateo refers.

Researcher: (...) and why did you put this "R.I.P."?  
 Mateo: and (...) I do not know, that's how people put it.  
 Researcher: Do they put it like that?  
 Mateo: Yes  
 Researcher: Uh-huh, and this, where did you see it, in the cemetery or in a movie?  
 Mateo: iinnn the TV.



**Figure 6**

Another important symbol that participants relate to death is blood (see Figure 7). This element,

which is not strictly involved when someone dies, appears in many of the participants' drawings. This can be understood due to the sociocultural context or the visual content to which the participants are exposed, either in a fantastic way as in the movies or in a real way as in the daily news. Other symbols related to death that were represented are the soul, the ghost, the angel, God and the devil.



**Figure 7**

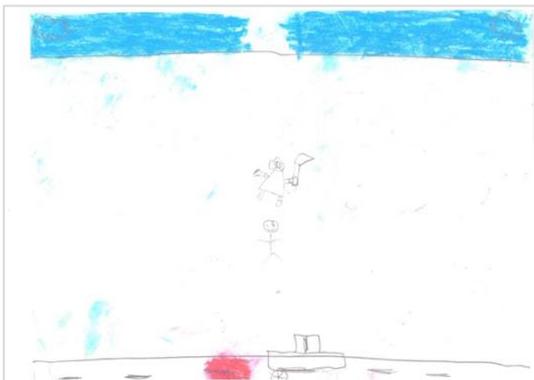
As for the symbols mentioned to a lesser extent, they were the vampires, the witches, the zombies, the mummy and "La Llorona" (the crying woman). The latter belongs to the Mexican social imaginary, in which the ghost of a woman is seen crying at night looking for her children, whom she lost (Harris & Romero 2005, p.137). In this sense, when representing death, its personification is not enough but other symbolic elements are required. Sometimes these elements are meant to create a prone environment for death to appear, as some participants mentioned. Such as the night, or simply the darkness, the rain, the thunder, the grey sky and clouds, the moon and the fog. All these symbols help not only to enrich but also to support the notion of death that the participants constructed.

#### **5.4 Third theme: Death as the afterlife: religiosity and spirituality**

The third theme alludes to the participants' perceptions of death, but in terms of what they believe happens after one dies. The representations of life after death are within the poles of reality and fantasy, both seen from the perspective of religiosity and spirituality. In this regard, I will make a differentiation between religiosity and spirituality insofar as the former involves a defined structure of dogmatic beliefs, practices, and attitudes (Merriam-Webster online, n.d.). As for spirituality, I will consider it as the profane belief that a person has a spirit or a soul, which lives in the body (Taliaferro & Marty 2010, p.220). And, after the body dies, the spirit continues to live independently. This belief is not exclusive since some religions also support it (Ibid). Thereby, the

line between religiousness and spirituality is diluted if specific religious details are not provided, such as the belief in a specific deity or the religious places to which souls go. In most of the participant's verbal representations, the moral undertones on death regarding the goodness or badness of people who were dying, or dead were noteworthy. Moreover, in most cases, this morality was correlated with religiosity. That is, if a person was good, going to heaven was the logical conclusion. On the contrary, it was expected that if a person were bad, she or he would go to hell, to the underworld, where death lives or to an unknown place. In this sense, there was a discursive understanding of moral compensation for a life lived in a certain way. In these statements, which evidence a religious tone, the participants stated that when someone dies they do not revive. Contrarily, their souls go to heaven after their body die. Consequently, they recognized a separation between body and soul insofar as it is the soul that ascends to heaven while the body remains. Then, the body is buried and devoured by worms as one participant said. Another said that it becomes ashes that disperse in the wind. Regarding the religious nuances, Benjamin said that a luminous angel appears to take the good souls to heaven, and the black ghosts take the bad souls to the underworld. Julia said that souls should follow a light that will guide them to Jesus who is in heaven. As for Teresa, she declared that one should pray, so that dead people who are with God can be with us, because by praying, God allows the dead to listen to living people.

For instance, in Roberto's drawing (see Figure 8), there are two figures suspended in the middle of the page. One is a person and the other seems to be death personified. At the bottom of the page, there is a car and a red spot. At the top of the page, there is a long strip of blue colour, which has a blank space at its centre.



**Figure 8**

Roberto: Well, here is death taking a person and here is a car and blood because it ran over him, and death is taking him to heaven.

Researcher: (...) to heaven? And that is why it has, like, this little hole in the sky, because it is in that way?

Roberto: hmm [affirming]

According to Roberto, death is taking a person to heaven, a person who has just been run over. The person looks happy because he is going to rest and be at peace. Here, death is a guide who takes

the souls to heaven irrespectively of how they die. For Roberto, only those people who die in the open can go to heaven, since those who die covered cannot go. This perception, as well as the depiction of a hole in the sky, represents a concrete, spatial, and logistic vision of how to enter heaven. In this sense, other participant said that dead people could not return home because they cannot move since their bodies are buried and their souls are up in heaven. Another said that ghosts return home only at night, but they cannot enter their homes since they cannot open the doors.

As for the six participants who referred to spiritual aspects in their descriptions instead of religious, the souls go elsewhere but they did not know where. Only one participant mentioned that death brings those souls to its heart, that is, death has a heart where the souls are kept. On the other hand, there is an agreement that dead people are buried in the cemetery. For that reason, dead people cannot revive and return home. They stay in the cemetery, and their bodies become skeletons and their heads become skulls. Therefore, souls or ghosts can also live in the cemetery (see Figure 10). In this sense, souls and ghosts are confused in their definition. Both are ethereal but apparently, only ghosts are mentioned as those who can pass through walls.



**Figure 9**



**Figure 10**

In this way, spiritual and religious discourses merge with those found in visual media. There is a discursive intertextuality that appears in almost all the categories analysed. In regard to Mexican cultural belief that the souls of people return to the world of the living on the Day of the Dead to be celebrated with offerings and altars made by their relatives, only two participants mentioned it. This may imply a lower presence of cultural discourses in opposition to a greater presence of other discourses. Interestingly, for Mateo, the souls do return to the world of the living, but they return to reincarnate, not in the same body but in another body. This belief in reincarnation could be included in both spiritual and religious thought, however, not in a Catholic belief, but in one that

may come from an Asian religion (Taliaferro & Marty 2010, p.195). In the participant's view, there would be an idea of an immortal soul that could reincarnate again and again. In this sense, children's representations about death unveil their perceptions that beings are dual (see Figure 9). Namely, there is a symbiotic relationship between the body and the soul as far as the being is alive. Once the body is dead, this relationship may work separately. Expressly, most participants recognised that there is not an immortal body. However, for the most part, there is the idea that souls live forever in heaven or hell or in an unknown place or by reincarnating. Therefore, within this duality of body and soul, there is a veiled perception of the immortality of the ethereal body that is the soul. In sum, although the idea of immortality was not addressed directly, one could say that it is hidden in the discourses drawn from the representations.

## 6. CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

The purpose of this thesis was to analyse the representations of death made by children in the third grade in a primary school in Mexico. Thus, in this chapter, I will summarize the findings of this study, which will serve to answer the research questions. This will be followed by the discussion of the findings in relation to previous research, and the discussion of the methods chosen in terms of their suitability or limitations. Finally, I will comment on some ideas for future research.

### 6.1 SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS

The main findings were organized into three themes with their respective subthemes. The first theme, *death as a reality*, is divided into three subthemes. The results of the first subtheme, *experiences of death*, showed that all participants, who were 8 to 9 years old, have had different experiences related to death. The experiences referred had to do, to a greater extent, with movies, television series, and with the Catholic religion. To a lesser extent, they refer to direct experiences regarding the loss of a family member, and to festivities and/or cultural legends. As for the second theme, *sources of knowledge*, most of the knowledge that the participants have about death comes from the visual culture to which they are exposed, from their parents and from the Catholic religion. In addition, few participants stated that their source of knowledge was, for some, the direct experience and, for others, their imagination. In the third theme, *children's emotions and feelings*, for most children who experienced the loss of a relative, the emotional process of death involves two parts. Those who die are perceived as being at peace in heaven and happy together with other dead relatives. Those who remain alive, including the participants, are saddened by their loss but

seek solace in their memories or in the religious beliefs of the afterlife. The rest of the participants identified 4 parties involved in the emotional process of death, each of them experiencing different feelings. In the first place, personified death is happy when someone dies, on the contrary, it is said that the relatives who are still alive are sad. Thirdly, people who die are perceived as sad for having died. Few participants mentioned that the deceased are happy because they wanted to die or because they would be at peace or with other deceased relatives. Finally, the participants themselves mostly said they were not afraid of death because they already knew it physically and did not fear it.

The second theme, *death as a fantasy*, is also divided into three subthemes. The results of the first subtheme, *personification of death*, revealed that death is mostly represented as a skeleton or an undefined being wearing a black cloak and holding a scythe. Death has an anthropomorphic physique, and it is perceived to be mostly a male. The participants also conferred death with emotions, which are mostly said to be being angry before killing and being happy afterwards. Death has a goal that is to kill people and/or take their souls to heaven or to the underworld or to an unspecified place. Thus, death is mostly thought of as a powerful figure. Exceptionally, most of the children who experienced and witnessed the loss of a close relative did not personify death, except one. As for the second subtheme, *use of colour*, children mostly used colour realistically in their representations, in terms of known objects. However, there were other participants who used colour in an unrealistic way, either to portray unreal beings or because they did not have the shade of colour they needed or because of laziness. Furthermore, there were certain colours that children related more to death, such as black, white, red and blue. As for the use of the pencil, it was mainly used to draw with greater precision or to detail parts of the drawing. The third subtheme, *symbols*, disclosed that for most of the participants, the skeleton or a being with a black cloak and a scythe is the main symbol of death. Other recurring symbols had to do with objects found in the cemetery, such as the cross, the tomb, the gravestone, the sepulchral inscriptions, and a skull. On the other hand, another symbol that denoted that a person was dead was the blood. As for the atmosphere of death, symbols that are said to accompany death are night, darkness, moon, rain, lightning, and fog. Additionally, other symbols that refer to death are the ghosts, the souls, heaven, hell, and the devil. To a much lesser extent, vampires, witches, zombies, a mummy, and "La Llorona" were mentioned as symbols of death.

The third theme, *death as the afterlife: religiosity and spirituality*, disclosed that the participants distinguished a duality existing in terms of body and soul. All the children affirmed

that when a body dies, it is buried and cannot be revived. The soul, on the other hand, lives but its destiny varies since the participants take their opinions of their religiosity or spirituality. In the religious discourses, moral nuances were found since, mostly, the good souls go to heaven and the evil souls go to hell, to the underworld, to the place where death lives or to an unknown place. In this sense, there is a regime of truth about it in terms of the moral compensation of the etheric body in heaven. As for those participants who refer only to spirituality, the souls go to an unknown place. Two participants mentioned that souls return to be with their loved ones during the Mexican festivity of the Day of the Dead. And, only one participant mentioned that souls might return to reincarnate in another body. All in all, the idea of the immortality of the soul remains veiled in the narrations of all the participants.

In sum, the results of these themes and subthemes encompass the answer to the main research question, *how do Mexican children in primary school represent their understanding of death?* The participating children represent their understanding of death based on their experiences, real or fictional. In this sense, their representations were made in terms of realistic, fantastic and afterlife narratives. The participants demonstrated to be exposed to different discourses, mainly, religious, visual, and cultural. Nonetheless, as social actors, they actively chose the elements within those discourses that were most convincing to them to construct their notion of death, which will be enriched or changed according to their experiences. As for the second question, *how do they construct their vision of death visually and verbally?* The visibility of children about death, that is, how children culturally constructed their vision of death (Rose 2001, p.6), were mainly analysed in the subthemes *personification of death, use of colour, symbols, children's emotions and feelings, and experiences of death*. Children's visual and verbal representations were important insofar as they complemented each other to the extent that the drawings had been misinterpreted if the participants had not described them and expressed their views on the subject. Additionally, children's proximity when creating their drawings revealed a mutual influence reflected in their drawings (cf. Änggård 2005). Overall, the personification of death was the symbolic image most used in participants' representations. The third question, what discourses are drawn from in their drawings and narratives? Children's representations of death are drawn mainly on discourses imbued in visual media, religion, morality and culture. The subthemes that can best answer this question are *experiences of death, sources of knowledge, death as the afterlife: religiosity and spirituality, symbols, and use of colour*. In this sense, the archetypal symbolism of death is imbued

in the visual discourses of the media in such a way that they have influenced children's representations of the death. That is, there is a discursive formation (Rose 2001, p.137) about death with respect to its personification and use of colour.

## 6.2 DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

The scientific importance of the results of this study in relation to previous research is that the former favours the perspective of children, who as social actors actively constructed and represented their notion of death, and the latter analysed such representations in terms of rigid stages of child development. The results of my study showed that the participants' experiences were decisive to construct a notion of death (cf. Kenyon 2001, cf. Panagiotaki et al., 2015, 2018), insofar as the participants, who were 8 to 9 years old, actively reflected on their varied experiences related to death, gave meaning to them, and constructed their own notion of death. Nevertheless, there was an influence of the discourses embedded in media and the sociocultural context in terms of the personification of death and religiosity, respectively. That is, being a social actor does not mean being autonomous, but being interconnected through complex structures of social and material relations situated in a society (Sparrman & Sandin 2012, as quoted in Sparrman 2013, p.293). Consequently, even though my study did not focus on a pedagogical perspective on death but on its representation, it was recognized that religious education and cultural practices impact children's understandings, abilities and/or desire to learn about death (cf. Kenyon 2001). On this subject, Lee et al. (2009, p.260) found that a more mature understanding of death was achieved by providing age-appropriate education about death. However, in this research, it was found that education about death was impregnated with religious or cultural beliefs, as some participants referred. In this sense, the direct experiences were more relevant for the children to understand death in a more realistic way. Nonetheless, the impact of religion and spiritual beliefs (Panagiotaki et al. 2018, p.96), as well as the cultural experiences and knowledge of Western media (Panagiotaki et al. 2015, p.42) proved to be important to the participants. In this regard, participants actively and creatively constructed their notion of death by incorporating knowledge of death found in the media (cf. Coombs 2014). According to most participants, their lack of fear of death came from their familiarity with representations of death seen in visual media. Contrary to what Slaughter and Griffiths (2007, p.534) suggest that children feel less afraid of death when they know the biological facts about it. On this subject, the participants in this study expressed a biological and metaphysical

understanding of death in contrast to the presumption that young children understand death in terms of biological death and older children in terms of metaphysical death (cf. Tamm & Granqvist 1995). Inasmuch as all participants were aware that the physical body dies and does not revive, instead, the ethereal body continues to live in different ways. Thus, there is a concordance with Marsal & Dobashi (2011, p.266) regarding the body/soul duality that children have over death. Moreover, this study found that the influence of cultural context on children's explanations about life after death, as mentioned in Bonoti et al. (2013) and Yang & Chen (2002), is important to some extent. Given that Mexico is mostly a Catholic country, religiosity was present in the majority of children's beliefs about an afterlife. However, the typical Mexican beliefs of the Day of the Dead were mentioned to a much lesser extent, which may be because the participants were more drawn to the discourses that are seen in the Western media. In relation to religious and spiritual discourses, most participants turn to them in terms of morality regarding the afterlife. These discourses are embedded in children's formal and informal education, through parents, religious education, and media. As mentioned in the study of Gutiérrez et al. (2014), in Mexico, there is mostly a historical-cultural openness regarding death, which Korean, Chinese and Chinese American children may not experience, as found in Yang & Park's study (2017, p.73).

Regarding the role of gender in representations of death, even though the majority of the participants were boys - 10 boys and 8 girls -, the boys' representations were more verbally and visually violent. In contrast, the girls were less visually violent but more verbally violent in their descriptions. In some way, there is a concordance with Tamm & Granqvist (1995, p.220), in which gender plays an important role, since boys represented death more violently. As for the importance of drawing materials (cf. Malchiodi 1998), children indicated that the range of colours of the chinks provided did reduce their options for colouring a drawing. Thus, on the one hand, children depend on the materiality provided by adults and institutions, but on the other hand, children as social actors decided to use chinks instead of coloured pencils, which had more colour options (cf. Komulainen 2007). Regarding the use of colour, the main colours that the children used in their drawings - black, red, and blue - corresponded to some degree to the emotions associated with them, as participants fortuitously indicated (cf. Malchiodi 1998). In the same way, the representations of the family members connote the feelings and the perception that the children have of them (Ibid), as Sara visually and verbally described. Consequently, drawing, as a social phenomenon, is actively constructed by children, who as social actors also give meaning to it (cf.

Bryman 2016). Thus, their drawings are intentional (cf. Cox 2005), as the participants drew to express their views and perspectives, that is, their voice (James & James 2012, p.28). In this sense, by drawing and expressing their perceptions, the participants created and gave meaning to their construction of the notion of death. As Darling-McQuistan (2017, p.287) and Einarsdottir et al. (2009, p.229) conclude, drawing has attributes of meaning making, which are beyond the visual. Moreover, when analysing children's representations, it is evident that there are discourses intertwined in their narratives. The results show a discursive intertextuality insofar as children construct their notion of death mainly from discourses embedded in visual media and religion since Mexico is a religious country (cf. Karczmarzyk, 2012). Nevertheless, children do not passively accept them but decide which to insert to their representations according to the credibility they confer to the source. Federico's case shows that, despite having a direct experience, he gave credibility to the photo of the personified death that his father showed him. Once again, children's agency - as social actors - is recognized, but also the impact that their relationships with the adults that surround them cause (Komulainen 2007, p.26).

### 6.3. DISCUSSION OF METHODS

Children's representations of death, both visual and verbal, were analysed through thematic analysis and visual discourse analysis I. The former helped to classify and enunciate more easily the visual and verbal information, and the latter helped scrutinize and unveil the underlying discourses in children's representations. The strength of both methods is that they help to understand children's perspectives and the social life of which they are part. Thus, the results of this study may challenge those of developmental theories or, in a more inclusive sense, could complement them. In this sense, the lack of theoretical elements from a literature with a non-developmental perspective was a great difficulty to enrich this study. However, this also meant that this study is relevant due to the ontological and epistemological perspective as well as the field of studies - Childhood studies - through which it is addressed. Due to the fact that it is of interest to the social sciences to try to understand children's perspectives and the social interaction in which they are involved. In this sense, the results of this study show that children's experiences are relevant to understand their constructions of the notion of death. As for the methods of data collection, it has to be mentioned that the emotional and physical proximity between the participants when creating their drawings showed their reciprocal influence, insofar as some

drawings were visually similar to others. However, if it had been done individually, I could not have seen the social interactions, which is a fundamental part of children's worlds and experiences. Moreover, the participants wanted to create more than one drawing, which would have influenced the results inasmuch as the new drawings could have provided other information. However, the scope of the thesis is limited. Thus, in this case, the number of participants would, in fact, have had to be smaller.

#### 6.4 DISCUSSION OF FUTURE RESEARCH

Finally, I would like to propose further research on the subject of children's representations of death from a perspective of children as social actors since many studies have been carried out on this subject but from a perspective in which it is said that children's cognitive capacity is limited by their age. For this reason, by carrying out more studies from a child perspective, this could contribute to generating theoretical elements that would enrich the analysis but also validate children's perceptions as social actors. In this way, there are some variables in this study that, if modified, can give other results. For instance, given that this study was carried out in a public school, it would be interesting to discover if the representations of death would change if children attending a private school made them. In this sense, the impact of socioeconomic status could be visible to a certain extent. Similarly, children's perceptions of death may vary if children come from a rural setting in Mexico rather than from an urban environment. Moreover, another element that could vary is the country itself, since this study could be carried out with children from a country where death is seen differently or where violence is not a social problem, that is, a country with a different sociocultural context from Mexico.

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## 8. A P P E N D I X : Interview Guide

{Social talk}

### I. THE DRAWING – Elements

- 1) Can you tell me about your drawing?
- 2) What is it about?
- 3) What is happening here?
- 4) Which are the different actors?
- 5) What are they doing?
- 6) Why did you choose these colours?

### II. THE DRAWING - Reasons

- 1) Why did you draw this picture?
- 2) What did you think about when you draw it?
- 3) Have you seen any similar pictures?
- 4) Did you have any specific situation in mind?
- 5) What do you think of your drawing now?
- 6) What can you see in it?

### III. DEATH – Trying to relate to something they have said in their previous answers

- 1) Then, for you, is this dead?
- 2) Are there other ways to die? In what ways?
- 3) Do you think that there is a reason to be afraid of dying?
- 4) What do you think happens after we die?
- 5) Do you think that people who die can return to their home?
- 6) Where do think all the people who die are?
- 7) Do you think they are all together?