

The Concepts of Japanese and German Primary School Children Relating to the Topic of Death in the Context of Values Education and the Ethics of Care – A German-Japanese Comparison with Gender Analysis

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Our contribute compares the concepts of Japanese and German primary school children relating to the topic of death, healing in the context of values education and the ethics of care. This is a project of the German-Japanese Research Initiative on Philosophizing with Children (DJFPK), cialis 40mg which aims to facilitate individual autonomy by enhancing philosophical-ethical judgment. It encourages the application and appropriate transfer of values based on philosophical-ethical knowledge and acquired through independent reflection to the situations of daily life.

Children encounter death as a primary experience in their personal environment and as a secondary experience in the media. Starting from the hypothesis that globalization promotes the exchange of information between differing cultures, this our research project, a cultural comparison that also considers gender, investigates how and to what extent the concepts of Japanese and German children differ with regard to (cf. Dobashi 2009):

1. a metaphysical life after death,
2. a genetic life after death, and
3. a social life after death.

To ensure that the children's concepts cover the entire philosophical spectrum, the recorded lessons have been reconstructed as a philosophical dialogue, following the five-finger method of Ekkehard Martens (2003). That is to say, classroom materials (photographs and stories) provide the necessary prompts to encourage phenomenological, hermeneutical, analytical, dialectical and speculative thinking, in both the critical and creative senses. These two modes of thinking are accompanied throughout by 'caring thinking.' With this technique of providing prompts we take up the chain questions of the philosophical riddle game, in which fundamental life questions are derived from one another. According to Huizinga, this primal play was the foundation of culture. We understand philosophizing with children as primal play (Marsal, Dobashi, 2005) and primal knowledge (Dobashi, 2008), since in this process the children reconstruct images of themselves and their world within a given culture, and then construct them anew (Marsal, 2007). The lessons were recorded and transcribed so that we could carry out a content-analytical appraisal of the children's views and their arguments (Marsal, Dobashi, 2009).

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

In Japan, ideas about death are influenced by an amalgamation of *Shintoism*, a nature religion, with Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism. Buddhism presumes that humans are reborn into new, finite lives in accordance with their karma, until they finally succeed in fulfilling the 'sacred truths,' living according to the 'eightfold path,' and thus reaching Nirvana, the entrance into 'a realm that differs radically from the world?' (Küng, Bechert, 1998). *Shintoists*, by contrast, believe that the soul migrates into its world of origin or another world (Satō, 1992), or else, alternatively, it remains in a dark border region of this world. Because the latter is always located in visible places such as in the mountains, at the seaside, on the banks of a river, or at the market, there are points of contact with the everyday world. Thus the first ancestor's soul, which slowly evolves into an anonymous god of being, or even into an *Ujigami* (guardian of the lineage), can be brought along to the Buddhist death celebration, the Bon festival. Another possibility is that souls are reborn into their descendents (Terasawa, 2002).

2. A psychological survey of Japanese children's ideas about death

The most recent study on this topic was carried out by Yoshinobu Hattori in 2001. Hattori surveyed 372 subjects in two primary schools. We cite several of the items here (Nakamura, 2003):

Question 5: Do you think that that a person who dies will be born again?

Yes, N = 126 (33.9%)

No, N = 126 (33.9%)

Not sure, N = 117 (31.5%)

Question 7: Where are people after they die?

Most of the children answered: 'They go to heaven or to hell.'

The relevant percentages are not given. Also, it is not clear from the reported results whether the Christian heaven is being referred to here, or a Japanese idea of the hereafter: *Ne no Kuni* (realm of origin), *Yomi no Kuni* (realm of night), or the Buddhist ideas of heaven (*Meido-Jôdo-Higan*, *Gokuraku*) or hell (*Jigoku*). (Satô, 1992, p. 22)

Question 9: Do you think the soul and the world of souls can be found in this world?

Yes, N = 164 (44.1%)

No, N = 122 (32.8%)

Not sure, N = 21 (5.6 %)

Contrary to the researchers' expectations, about one-third of the children believed in reincarnation, approximately half affirmed the presence of the soul in their world, and almost all felt that the soul goes to heaven or hell, at least for a time. The study's authors attributed the connection between the idea of reincarnation and the Buddhist migration of souls not so much to the knowledge and adaptation of Japanese tradition as to the correlation with virtual reality, encountered by the children in computer games and media. It is unclear whether the 126 children who did not subscribe to the idea of reincarnation were guided by the idea that the soul keeps watch over the family as a protective divinity. Children who had already experienced death, in the loss of a pet, for example, had a more realistic conception of death.

Since we possess only quantitative data, it is not possible to determine whether the Japanese children were merely reproducing ideas present in their environment, or whether they had transposed them into their own child's world, then developed them further and independently arrived at their own ideas on the topic of death. So in order to present a more complete picture, we will describe a practical teaching unit in which Japanese children philosophized about an afterlife.

3. Toshiaki Ôse philosophizes with Japanese children on the question: ?Does everything end with death??¹

Two factors guided Toshiaki Ôse² in his lesson ?Death-Education / Caring-Education?: one was a social situation that was distinguished by escalating death statistics, and the other was his personal situation as a cancer patient who wished to prepare his students for his approaching death. And so, in 2002 he investigated with the fifth-grade children the question: ?Is life (*Inochi*) finite and irrevocably finished when one dies, or does it continue in another form?? The lesson was intended to give the children hope that not everything comes to an end when an individual dies. To illustrate, a short excerpt from the conversation follows (Ôse, 2004):

Ôse: What is *Inochi*?

Shôji (B): It means that one is alive.

Ôse: That one is alive, and what comes at the end of life, do you think?

Eri (G): Dying.

Ôse: Yes, death, right? *Inochi*, my *Inochi*, for example, your *Inochi* ... From what point do we have *Inochi*?

Kiyokazu (B): I've had my *Inochi* since I was born.

Ichirô (G): My *Inochi* will last until I die.

Ôse: So your *Inochi* lasts from birth to death?

Akihiko (B): Between (birth and death)

Ôse: So should one call the ?between? *Inochi*, then? ?One is alive? ? that is an aspect of *Inochi*. But is that all *Inochi* means, only the present life? (...) And I also want to ask you: Does *Inochi* end when I die, is *Inochi* finished than? I would like to ask you this.

Shôji (B): After one dies the soul (*Tamashii*) separates from the body.

Ôse: Then is this soul still alive?

Ichirô (B): This soul still lives.

Ôse: Yes. So, when I have died, my soul is still alive.

Shigehiko (B): And your body?

Ôse: The body is dead, has died. Now one more time: ?soul? (*Tamashii*) also means *Inochi*, that is the other aspect. Do you think so too?

In working on *Inochi*, the children develop two aspects of the concept life: the first is the individual life extending from birth to death, and the second is life associated with the immortal soul. Before Ôse develops this aspect further, he brings up the continuation of earthly life through the linking of individual lives in the sequence of generations; and together with the children he works through the life cycle of the praying mantis, which lays its eggs and then dies. He then asks the children whether this means the end of the mantis's life. The children now grasp the connection: they indicate that life goes on in the offspring, and they transfer this thought to humans (Ôse, 2004, p. 131ff.).

Yoshiko (G): The grasshopper lays eggs and then new ones are born again, and they get bigger again.

Taichi (B): The grasshopper produces young ones.

Takuro (B): If I would die, my descendants will remain.

Kôichi (B): Because the egg was left, the process repeats itself, life comes again and in this way it goes on.

Ôse: So it repeats itself, right? This is what we call *Inochi*, isn't it?

(the children speak softly)

Shigehiko (B): I agree with this way of saying it. You could call it that.

Tomokazu (B): It's the same way with people, too. They have children and the children also reproduce.

Ôse: *Inochi* is connected with the sequence, like with the grasshoppers.

Yuko (G): The descendants are connected with each other, and so, when people continue to reproduce over time *Inochi* continues.

Yoshiko (G): *Inochi* means both things.

Ôse: Then could we call *Inochi* a relay race?

Kôichi (B): Yes, we could call it that.

The second aspect addresses the idea that an individual's life is not extinguished, because it is passed on within the family.

As a third aspect, Ôse refers to life continuing through society, and reads his students the picture book "Badger's Parting Gifts" (Varley, 1984). As Badger feels death approaching, he bids farewell to each animal with a gift. Mole, who then misses him very much, goes for a walk on a warm spring day to the hill where he first saw Badger. He wanted to thank his friend for the parting gift. "Thank you, Badger," he said softly, and felt that Badger would hear him. And Badger did indeed? (Ôse, 2004, p. 133f.).

Inspired by this story, the children philosophize about how *Inochi* connects people who are not blood relatives. Kôichi (B) thinks that one "remains in the hearts of friends forever." Other children say "It is the *Inochi* that lives on in remembering," "It is the helping-each-other *Inochi*?" and "it is the eternal *Inochi*." Hideki (B) adds, "Through the everlasting *Inochi* a person could stay attached after death to the people who remain behind.

The children evaluated the lesson very positively. From the many responses we have chosen two (Ôse, 2004, p. 45ff.):

Maho Wada (G): If I hadn't learned about *Inochi* in this lesson, I'd not have thought that we are connected with others in a succession through *Inochi*.

Misato Ôyama (G): Eternal *Inochi* is a treasure for a person more important than one's own body. When the body of the teacher-director has disappeared it will live on in our souls, I think.

Because Ôse became a Christian and was baptized shortly before he died, he did not bring up the reincarnation idea.

4. Metaphysical, genetic, and social life after death: German children philosophize, based on a replication and continuation of Ôse's *Inochi*-concept

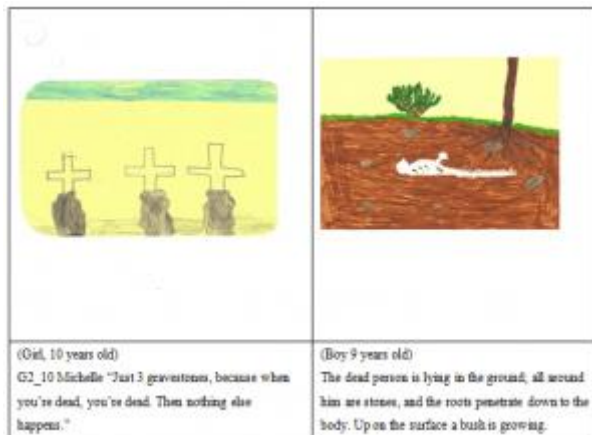
Introduction to the topic was phenomenological: the primary school children were allowed to choose a favorite picture from a multicultural array of cemetery scenes, ranging from cheerful to somber. This was to illustrate the fact that each culture has formed its own unique metaphysical beliefs about death, which appear in different religious symbols such as, for example, an angel watching over a grave or a prayer carved into gravestones. A story, in which children sitting by their grandmother's grave

ask her whether she can hear them, encouraged thinking about whether death is the end of everything. Along with reflective verbalizations, the children made a sensory-aesthetic record of their ideas in drawings, which they then explained to the others.

We made the ?relay race of *Inochi*? (passing life on within the family) concrete by using the question of heredity. Here we presented the story of a girl who had inherited her artistic talents from her grandfather. The children explored the idea of life continuing genetically through inherited physical traits, capabilities, and qualities.

The theme of a social continuation of life was introduced on the personal level by the story of a group of children celebrating the birthday of a friend who had died, and then on the cultural level through the Japanese ritual of the Bon-Festival, where the souls of the ancestors are welcomed for three days and celebrate with their descendants.

Most of the children in the two fourth grade classes of the Peter Hebel School were convinced that individual life goes on in some form even after death; only 5% believed that death represented an ultimate end, as for example in the case of Michelle (G2_10): ?When you're dead, you're dead. Then nothing else happens.? Or Tim (B1_334): ?Well, maybe death is like an empty room in the dark. Without anything, no sound, not a soul there any more, just everything dark.?



The statement of Sophia (GG 8), in contrast, is a good example of the prevailing opinion: ?A person...I mean life, it goes on and on and never stops; when you die, you still live on.? Like the Japanese primary school children, the German children assume that there is a dual system. They suppose that humans are a union of body and soul that is prone to come apart after death, a thought expressed by Elvira (GG 33): ?With people, here's how it is: after they are buried they turn to dust and their spirit goes upward.? On the basis of this duality the children develop different forms of life after death, both immaterial and material gestalt types. In addition, they also distinguish between the individual fate of a given soul (which might live on as a soul, with God or elsewhere, or else be reborn or resurrected) and the continued social life of the complete body-soul union in the memory of the living, as well as the inter-individual transmission of genes to descendants.

In the following, we present the children's ideas using category systems and conversation protocols. Each argument was quantified; that is, the sum of the units ?N? indicates the number of times each argument was used.

4.1. The individual's metaphysical afterlife: Is the soul immortal?

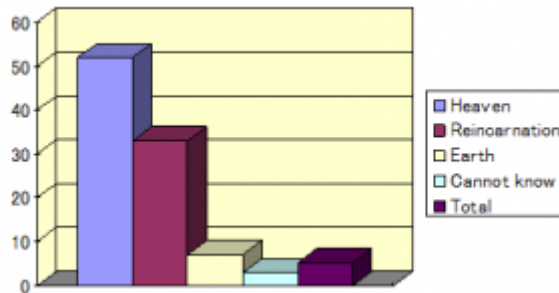
First we present the outlook of the German children with regard to a continued life of the soul. At the study's outset, 3% of participating children stated that they could not comment on this because it was epistemically impossible to do so. For example, Norbert (K1_290) stated: ?Jonas said that if you read the Bible you'll know it, but the people who wrote the Bible weren't even dead yet.? Or Larissa (M1_27) wishes: ?I would really like to know what happens when you are dead, whether you go to heaven or are born again or are just dead and nothing else happens?. I'd like to know that, because the stupid thing is, when you're dead and you know it, you can't tell anyone about it any more.? But this epistemic impossibility of determining the truth does not prevent the children from developing and testing their own subjective theories within the classroom *community of inquiry*.

Category System: Metaphysical Afterlife
Raw Data and Percentages

German Primary School Children: GB= German Boys / GG = German Girls (N=104)

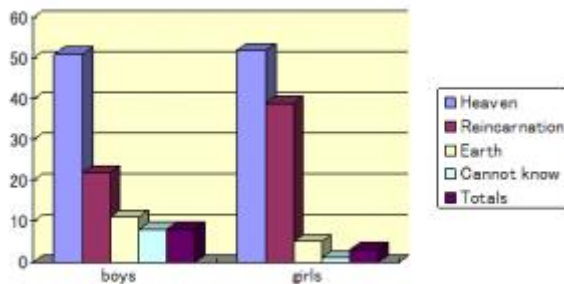
	GB (Items)	GB (Percents)	GG (Items)	GG (Percents)	Totals (Items)	Totals (Percents)
Life goes on in heaven	19	18	35	34	54	52
Reincarnation as human / animal	8	7	26	25	34	33
Life goes on as (part of the)	4	4	3	3	7	7
Cannot know	3	3	1	1	4	3
Death as final end	3	3	2	2	5	5
Total	37		67		104	100%

Diagram of Arguments in Percentages, German Primary School Children (N= 104)



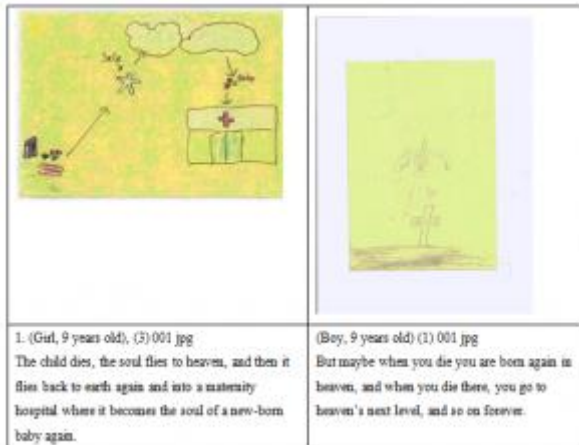
Most striking is the number in the 2nd category, reincarnation. One-third of the children presume that the soul will be reborn. This unusually high number for Germany results from the fact that 25% of the girls think there may be a transmigration of souls.

Diagram of German Primary School Children's Arguments by Gender.
Response Profile for each Gender in Percentages. (N= 104)



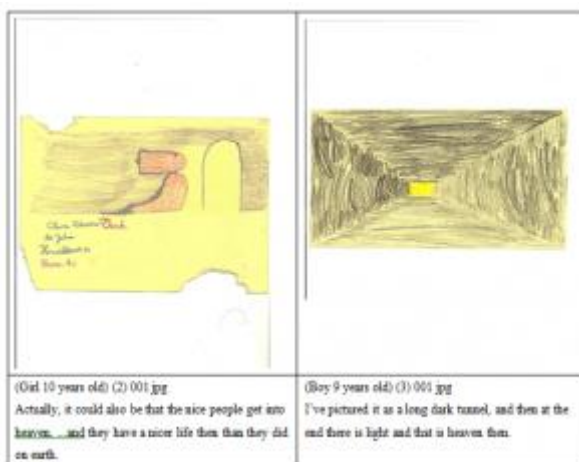
Although one-third of the Japanese children also share this value, the responses of the German children reflect not so much a familiarity with Buddhist religion as wishful thinking. Lea (GG 277), for example, tells this story: "Back when I was younger, I kept on thinking that maybe my great grandfather was an animal or something, so then I always said "Hello" to animals." Or Sophia (GG 280) says: "I got cats, and (...) then I used to always think that it was my great grandfather, my cat, and then I always said his name."

Nina (G2_20) offers another form of the reincarnation idea: "Well, I think about it some, when a person dies, that (...) my soul goes on to the next child. I mean, ... at the exact moment when I die, that maybe somewhere, like in a hospital or in someone's home, a new child is born and it gets my soul." According to Norbert (B1_344), rebirth can also take place in heaven and be repeated there indefinitely.



Slightly more than half of the German children have the opinion, like Anna, that people live on in heaven. Anna (G2_130) says: ?But I think?I guess that the people who are dead, they go to heaven, because heaven is really huge; it has no end.?

The boys have the same response profile as the girls. That is, the boys are very interested in the question of the soul's fate after its separation from the body, because they expect to face the consequences of their actions at that time. They assume, in other words, that the moral conduct of their lives will have an effect on the continued existence of their souls. In this sense Oskar (GB 2) states: ?I think that you...that the people who did good in their lives will get into paradise, and those who did bad things will go to hell.? Especially important to the boys is the idea that they can no longer make ethical mistakes in heaven. Thus Oskar (GB 118) says: ?You don't think about bad things and so on any more.? Dennis (GB 119) expresses the hope: ?Maybe it's as if life started again from the beginning in heaven.? Jan (GB 120) summarizes: ?You are released from everything.? Sophia (GG 126) points out how this alters the time dimension: ?In heaven you are immortal, so to speak. You get older and older there, and at some point you are 200 and you still haven't died.?



The dialogue then brings up the question of whether there is enough room for everyone in heaven:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

G2_114, **Viktoria:** Well, what Anna said, that maybe the ghosts then just keep living on earth?but the ghosts, it could be that they can feel each other's presence; but then at some point the whole earth, and the ghosts, would be crowded together.

B2_120, **Moritz:** Then people couldn't run any more, because they wouldn't have any more room. Because you can't go through ghosts, because somehow they also take up space, otherwise.....

G2_134, **Viktoria:** It could be that if several people die, then there would be just too many guardian angels.

Another question that greatly preoccupied the German children was the actionistic one, asking what the souls do for such a long time in heaven. A condition that never changes for all eternity does not seem to them worth having, and so they talk about various metamorphoses, such as the transformation into a star or an angel.

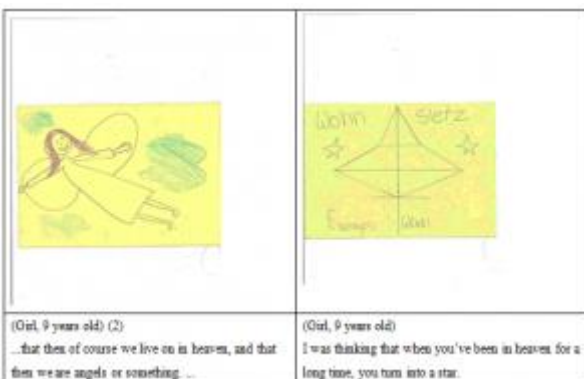
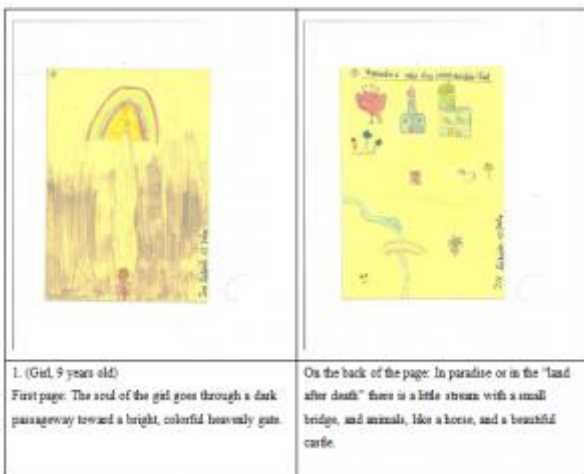
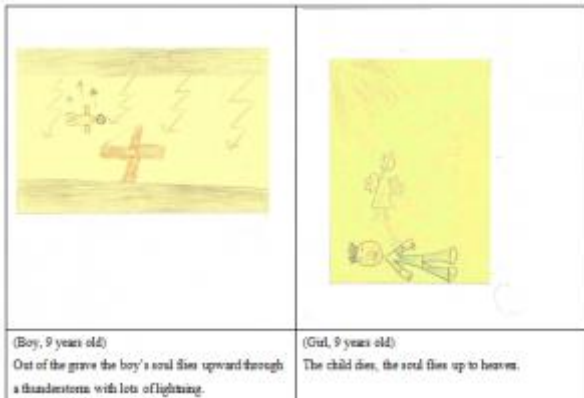
G2_30, **Rashida:** I was thinking that when you've been in heaven for a long time, you turn into a star.

B2_48, **Norbert:** Maybe the souls get trained there and then they come down again as angel assistants.

B2_50, **Moritz:** Um, who gives them the training?

B2_52, **Patrick:** God.

G2_56, **Michelle:** Probably an angel who's in heaven.



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

4.2. Linking individual lives within the generational sequence: genetic continuation of life

The philosophical conversation about genetic continuation of life was introduced by Lea through the idea of family lineage (GG 44) ?I just wanted to say [...] if a father?s daughter, say, has children, then [...] the family line also is carried on, and then they die again and then they have children again.? In dialogue, the children arrive at the idea that genes are passed along through the generations. They approach this phenomenon by noting resemblances to earlier generations, similarities in appearance, temperament, traits of character, and capabilities.

Category System ? Genetic Life after Death

Raw Data and Percentages

German Primary School Children: GB = German Boys / GG = German Girls (N=153)

Living on in Descendants	GB (Items)	GB (Percent)	GG (Items)	GG (Percent)	Total (Items)	Total (percent)
Physical body	12	8	39	25	51	34
Capabilities	15	10	28	18	43	28
Character traits	10	7	35	23	45	29
General	3	2	11	7	14	9

Diagram of the arguments in percentages, German primary school children (N= 153)

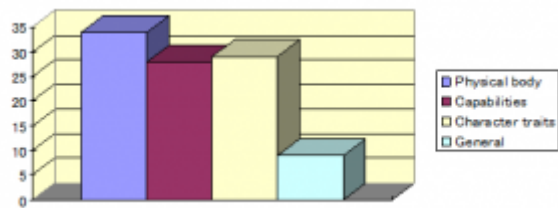
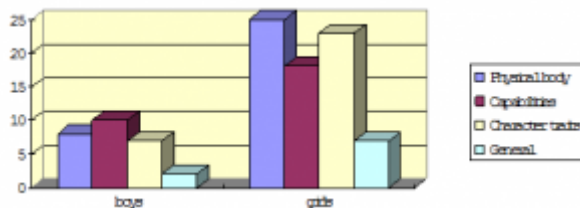


Diagram of the arguments of boys vs. girls in percentages, German primary school children (N= 153)



The category ?physical body? scores highest. This ranking derives from the beauty-conscious girls who primarily presumed that their physical characteristics were inherited. Boys, for example Balduin (B2_202), mainly defined their place in the generational relay in terms of their competencies: ?My Papa said once that his Papa was an engineer and calculated sluices and things, and he said I got it from him that I?m so good in math, I got that from him.?

During their discussion the children encounter two problems:

1. Isn?t it true that there really is an end, for example if someone has no children? Their solution is the theory of genetic distribution: ?And if both of them don?t get married, then, um, the grandpa has probably... then mostly there are also relatives, you know, that you?ve never even met.? (Miro GB 56)
2. What is the significance of unique traits, qualities, or capabilities? Do they interrupt the family bond, the relay race of Inochi? In this sense Miro (GB 78) asks: ?But then what happens if I have, say, something that no one else in our family has?? Sophia (GG 80) responds by pointing out, ?Sometimes it can happen, like with twins, [...] that in some way, like in their hair, they don?t look alike.? In other words, in spite of the genetic correspondences there can be differences; individual singularity does not mean that the link with the ancestors has been broken.

4.3. The perpetuation of the individual?s life in memory: social life after death

For the children, good memories are very meaningful. Balduin sums up their meaning for a social life after death in the words of his mother (J2_265): ?My Mama once said that people who are dead live as long as we keep thinking of them.? The children talk about what they miss most, as when Jennifer (GG 192) says: ?Um, well, my great-grandma died, and before that it was still so nice, because she always baked such good things.?

Category System ? *Inochi* ? Living on through the others

Raw Data and Percentages

German Primary School Children: GB = German Boys / GG= German Girls (N=204)

Living on in memory	GB (Items)	GB (Percent)	GG (Items)	GG (Percent)	Total (Items)	Total (Percent)
Rites of remembrance (Place/Time)	62	30	82	40	144	71
Personal recollection	6	3	9	5	15	7
General	19	9	26	13	45	22

German Primary School Children (N= 204)				German Boys / German Girls (N=204)			

Official aids to remembrance in the form of rites and customs are in first place (70%). Anna (G3_168) sees a relationship between place and time: ?Many people go somewhere at special times, to the Rhine, for example, or to a place where they celebrated a birthday or something else that made it an especially nice day.?

Personal recollection is also an emotional bridge, as for example with Anne (G3_82): ?My uncle who died two years ago, he gave me a radio, and he was a very special person for me. Whenever I turn on the radio, it makes me sad.? Like Toshiaki Ôse, the children feel that life itself connects them with those who went before.

GG 258: **Sophia:** For my grandma, I?m her treasure. A part of her. The life part.

GG 261: **Lea:** The family part.

GB 263: **Tschiau:** Maybe that?s....deep in grandma?s heart.

Many draw the same conclusion from this as Elvira (GG 278): ?People don?t need to be sad any more. They can also think about the good times they had with the person who died.?

5. Evaluation of the approach through the children?s self-assessments

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

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

This feeling can be attributed first of all to the fact that, for most of the children, death was affirmed to be ?not final? and was associated with hopes for various forms of living on after death. The information about the Bon Festival was also important to the children, because here a customary practice prevented the dead from being forgotten. They found the cheerful character of this festival very appealing.

Second, the children felt liberated by their long conversation about the process of dying itself, and they were consoled to learn that not every death involves pain or represents a release from pain. It was also liberating for them to exchange their fantasies and anxiously guarded speculations, which had been rejected by adults: for example, their belief that grandparents lived on in family pets and were thus still present for them. Because their assertions were neither ridiculed nor treated with scorn in the classroom *community of inquiry*, but were instead received with interest and developed further in a respectful discussion, they experienced the conversation about this tabooed topic as a relief. This is evident as the ?dam bursts? at the end of the inquiry

process. An above-average number of children gave detailed reports at this point about their own experiences with death or their fears related to it, as in the case of Sapri (B3_184): ?I almost died, too. I fell from the 5th floor. That was last year.? The children?s feedback surveys, derived from American self-evaluation questionnaires (Maughn, 2004), also revealed that they assessed this inquiry process with all its problematic aspects as positive.

Analysis of Feedback Questionnaires

Sorted by Gender, Assessments in Percentages G = Girl, B= Boy

Statement 1: "I did my best."

Self-assessment in %	10 – 49%		50 – 79%		80 – 100%	
	G	B	G	B	G	B
	10%	0%	10%	62.5%	89%	37.5%

Statement 2: "I treated others with respect."

Self-assessment in %	10 – 49%		50 – 79%		80 – 100%	
	G	B	G	B	G	B
	0%	0%	30%	62.5%	70%	37.5%

Statement 3: "I paid attention to the arguments of others."

Self-evaluation in %	10 – 49%		50 – 79%		80 – 100%	
	G	B	G	B	G	B
	0%	0%	20%	62.5%	89%	37.5%

Most of the girls are found in the top range (80?100 %) on all three self-evaluations: ?I did my best?; ?I treated the others with respect?; and ?I paid attention to the arguments of others.? Most of the boys were in the middle field (50?79%). This self-perception generally accords with the outside observations and transcripts.

6. The intercultural perspective

The intercultural perspective of this lesson enabled the children to develop comprehensive concepts related to the themes *death*, the *finite nature of life*, and the *various forms of living on after death*. Although the German children?s statements also showed the influence of their culture and the media, they still had a much greater opportunity than did the Japanese children to develop their own ideas in group exploration supported by the classroom *community of inquiry*. Ôse was not so much interested in using his prompts to culturally enrich the children as he was in using them to console the children by sharing his concept of *Inochi*. Quantitative research in the schools, on the other hand, inquires only about conditions as they are, with no possibility for offering enhancements to knowledge or understanding. In our study we were able to show that the *community of inquiry* promotes not only the transfer of culture but also the development of autonomous, reflective, and age-appropriate pictures of the world.

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1. Cf. Dobashi, 2007. ([context](#))
2. Ôse Toshiaki (1946 ? 2004): born in Ky?sh?, graduated in the Education Faculty, University of Nagasaki; was the longtime instructional supervisor, etc. in the Education Committee of the city Chigasaki, and was founder and director of the reformist Municipal Primary School Hamanogō. In 2002, he taught the Inochi lesson on the question ?What is Inochi, the Finite Nature of Life?? with the 5th grade in the Municipal Primary School Hamanogō in Chigasaki. ([context](#))