

Integrating death education in mainstream learning: the lightsout curriculum approach

Integración de la educación sobre la muerte en el aprendizaje convencional: el enfoque curricular de lightsout

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LÍNEA TEMÁTICA: Innovación, práctica y transferencia social y educativa, relacionadas con la Pedagogía de la muerte, en centros educativos y cambio curricular

KEYWORDS: Education model, Death Education, Lived Experience, Grief Curriculum Reflective Practice, Professional Development.

RESUMEN: LightsOut aims to empower individuals through death education.

LightsOut is a not- for- profit organization, committed to laying the groundwork for formal curricula in schools, higher education, and workplaces. Established with Lived Experience at its core – an integrated universal education model is proposed.

Our Grief Education Program aims to equip individuals with resources with the necessary tools to navigate the grief journey, leveraging evidence-based tools centred around personal death awareness and positive thinking (Chin K., 2016; Sadowsky M., 2016).

Grief is a public health issue affecting everyone. We live in a society that is grief denying; the enduring stigma and generational misconceptions obstruct natural and healthy responses to death and loss (King-McKenzie E., 2011). This has an impact on how individuals develop skills to manage grief. Furthermore, death education approaches for professionals are not yet embedded in undergraduate curriculum, affecting how professionals feel about encountering grief in their work.

Death education in schools helps young people discuss grief and contributes to positive wellbeing (Dawson et al., 2023).

A grief education curriculum for higher education will build confidence for teachers and other professionals, bridging the current gap in curriculum development (Minty R. et al., 2023; Ramos R et al., 2022).

LightsOut has developed curriculum approaches that incorporate death education:

Senior School Curriculum (10 flexible lesson plans, supported peer discussions)

Undergraduate Program (reflective practice, peer discussion)

Workforce Programs

Our programs align with public health strategies such as the Ottawa Charter (1986), universal School curricula standards for Personal and Social Capability, and Tertiary curricula standards for Grief Education, Grief Counselling, and Higher Learning Action Theory for Employment Readiness[1].

By integrating our Grief Education Program into schools and higher education, we provide consistent and supportive guidance for young people, their teachers and undergraduate students. Further, resources including key discussion points for teachers, ensures confident instruction.

The LightsOut pedagogy emphasizes learning skills, positive self-reflection, and critical thinking. Activities encourage diversity and inclusion, focusing on rituals and memorial practices that emphasize societal differences and commonalities (Atkinson J. 2013; Rivart et al., 2021). By reviewing and discussing resources provided by teachers and community engagement, students will cultivate a healthy understanding of the uniqueness of grief.

By participating in curriculum, individuals are likely to develop essential grief skills like adaptability, mindfulness, and fostering connections. Higher education students will learn to integrate their knowledge of grief into practical applications. Clinical students will gain the ability to critically assess grief in counselling or assessment practice and use grief skills as a practical skill to support client agency. The curriculum expands knowledge in clinical and forensic therapy, emphasizes trauma-informed care, and underscores the importance of professional reflectivity for better client outcomes.

Integrating a Grief Education Program such as LightsOut into mainstream education, significantly enhances personal development and professional practice.

Our presentation will define the evidence -based approach for the education model put forward, demonstrating the curriculum overview, citing examples of its implementation. We will also demonstrate how lived experience shapes the understanding of grief as a skill, transforming it into practical knowledge.

[1] https://www.adec.org/page/handbook_of_thanatology; AIPC 2024, <https://www.aipc.net.au/courses/diploma-of-counselling>; <https://psychology.org.au/for-the-public/psychology-topics/grief/tips-to-help-with-grief-and-loss>; Learning Styles- <https://federation.edu.au/staff/learning-and-teaching/teaching-practice/learning/principles-of-learning>