

A. Excerpt from the project application on a qualitative study - part of the mixed research design (the framework in which the focus group design was built):

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DE4PP wants to demonstrate that it is possible to manage death-related issues with methodologies that safeguard the serenity of the students and motivate them to work in this field. For these reasons students will also be divided into subgroups for experiential workshops consisting in photo-voice technique, arts therapies and psychodrama.

(...) a battery of questionnaires for a longitudinal mixed method (both qualitative and quantitative) study will be prepared and then administrated, involving in each partner country at least 20 target students with a randomized control group of as many students (at least 200 students within these 2 groups).

In addition, each University will deal with randomly finding the 10 students to submit the qualitative interview that will be drafted together in the English language from all partner Universities and translated into each mother tongue.

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The qualitative part will be analyzed with the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) approach to better explore the students' intimate effects produced by the course. (pg. 119)

Following the Terror Management Theory perspective, it is possible to assume that who participates in such death education experience may increase death anxiety and defence strategies. **To reduce this negative effect, we further hypothesize that art-therapies and psychodrama can reduce such effect and students would develop a better sense of control over their death representations and the emotions associated with death-anxiety.**

To confirm how DE4PP methodologies make the death anxiety elicited by the mortality salience more manageable, the analysis of the results of this longitudinal study will be done to demonstrate that: it is possible to have death education experiences and learn concepts inherent to palliative psychology without producing negative effects; the relationships between spirituality/religiosity/representations of death can reduce death anxiety; the verbal and artistic elaborations of the fear of death can reduce alexithymia and improve empathy.

B. General remarks about focus group:

1. A topic guide is necessary in cases when the content, rather than the group interactions, is of particular interest for the study, yet the guide also has to leave the moderator considerable space to improvise fruitful questions and pursue unanticipated directions as the discussion progresses. (Millward, 2006).
2. The group of 10 participants is quite large, so to explore in-depth we had to define as well as possible the area of interest (see the purpose-research questions and objectives of the focus group). They may seem too restrictive, but we need to find a balance between the individual / personal voice of the participants and the group voice. The interactive nature of a group can stimulate the production of personal stories in a different way from what happens in an individual interview. In this context, "the hallmark of focus groups is the explicit use of group interaction to produce data

and perspectives that would be less accessible without the interaction encountered in a group" (Morgan 1997, p. 2).

3. Participants do not have a predetermined order in which to respond; however, the group leader must be careful:
 - The discussion should not be monopolized by some participants
 - Involve everyone in the discussion
 - To consider the formation of a group dynamic
4. Questions that facilitate member interaction and group dynamics:

Examples: what do you say about this, XX? / How did you experience this? / Y, do you agree with what has just been said? / please detail this aspect / how was it for you? / what meaning do you give to this experience?

5. The interview guide is semi-structured (flexible) and phenomenological - direct the questions and answers to their subjective experiences and the meanings they give. Encourage participants to provide as many details/examples as possible.
6. (Not mandatory but) helps a lot if the focus group leader can make some notes during the activity, on the edge of the group dynamics that he observes.

C. *The purpose:* to deeply explore the intimate effects of the course on death education upon students.

D. *Research questions:*

D.1. General question: How did the students perceive the course on death and what was the impact of art therapy and psychodrama techniques upon them ?

D.2. Specific question: (Focus Group): How did the students live the experiences of verbal and artistic elaboration of fear of death through the techniques of art therapy and psychodrama and what was significance did they give to them?

E. *Objectives:*

1. The deep exploration of students' perception regarding the impact of art therapy and psychodramatic methods in the process of death education;
2. Examining the students' experience of verbal and artistic elaboration of death fear and its impact upon them.

F. *Main topics of discussion:*

- Experience of the course (general theme)
- The impact of art therapy and psychodrama techniques
- The experience of verbal and artistic elaboration of death fear
- The meaning of life and death/Representing death and emotions associated to it

Focus Group Protocol/Guidelines

1. Presentation of theme, rules and participants.

a). The purpose of this meeting is to deeply explore the impact of the course in death education upon you. We thank you all for your availability and participation and we are confident that together we will create that special space in which we may share and, why not, discover together new senses and significances for the experience we all had.

b). The focus group will be led by...

c). Working rules for the focus group:

- You are invited to express your own point of view, your own subjective experience.
- There are no wrong or right answers, the importance falls on your experience and its authentic expression. Each piece of experience is valuable, so you will be all invited to speak. There's no pre-established order for speakers, you will take your turn when you think it's time to share-let us know by raising your hand on the screen.
- The entire dialogue is confidential and will be recorded with a view to research data processing. Signing the participation agreement also supposes the informed consent to participate and the recording agreement.
- The amount of time necessary for this focus group is approximately 2 hours.

d). Participants' introduction.

- please name/rename yourself as you would like to be called during this meeting.

e). Introduction: I invite you now to consider the experience you've had during the last 2 months: you covered a course on death education and palliative care. Let the memories come...thoughts, emotions you had at the beginning of the course...experiences you had during the event...thoughts, emotions, feelings at the end of it....

(Around 1-2 minutes will be given). If it were to shortly describe the entire educational experience with this theme, using only three words, which were these words? Hold on to the first three words that come to your mind.

Starting from X, one at a time (by chain rule) complete the sentence: "to me, the experience of the course was....."- the 3 attributes

OBSERVATON: this starting activity aims at "warming" the participants with a view to the theme of the focus group and adjusting them with the act of reflection and self-disclosure.

Theme of discussion and questions addressed to the group:

I. Experience of the course (general theme)

1. Which were the most impacting activities? In what way they had an impact on you?
Helping questions. Can you offer more details? Can you give examples? How was it for you, (name)? (in case the group needs further stimulation)

II. The impact of art therapy and psychodrama techniques

2. How did you experience/perceive the art therapy and psychodramatic techniques?
Alternative question: What can you say about the impact that the art therapy and the psychodramatic techniques had upon you?
Additional questions: what did you think and feel at the time?/What feelings , emotions did they evoke in you? /Do you think they were useful ? In what way?

III. The experience of verbal and artistic elaboration of death fear

3. How was talking about death for you?
4. What can you say about your own death anxiety? Was that worked upon in any way along the course? In what way exactly?
5. What was most difficult for you?
6. Did you have thoughts/emotions that persisted after you studied a certain topic? Which were those? How did they manifest/impact you?
7. Was there anything that helped ? What? In what way?
8. What can you say right now about your personal manner in which you can identify and process your own emotions regarding the theme of death?

IV. The meaning of life and death/Representing death and emotions associated to it

9. What significance can you give now to life and death? Was is influenced by the experience to attend the course? In what way?
10. As a conclusion, thinking of your experience of attending a course on death and palliative care, what do you believe you have learned from your educational and formative experience and how could that be a lesson for others, too?

FINAL: Can you describe the experience of participating to this focus group? Taking turns, and using few words, please express these things in a final message to the group.

We thank you one more time, we really appreciate your participation!