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Same Sky, Different Losses: A P4C Action Research with Refugee Children about Death, and War in Gaza

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Abstract:

In the twenty-first century, death, loss, and displacement have become daily realities for millions of children affected by war and ecological crises. Gazan children live within chronic political violence where fear, mourning, and survival shape everyday life. This study positions young refugee children as philosophical agents capable of ethical and imaginative meaning-making beyond trauma-based interpretations. Using a qualitative action research design grounded in Philosophy for Children (P4C), fifteen six-year-old second-generation Palestinian refugee children engaged in ten sessions of dialogue, drawing, and symbolic play. Findings show shifts from fear to solidarity and from grief to hope, revealing ecological and relational understandings of death and peace.

Keywords: Philosophy for Children (P4C), Gaza, Refugee childhood, Death, War.

INTRODUCTION

In the twenty-first century, children's experiences of death, loss, and displacement are no longer abstract or distant phenomena; they have become lived realities shaped by wars, climate crises, and collective mourning. Globally, one in six children approximately 473 million live in conflict zones (UN, 2024; Save the Children, 2021), and nearly 28 million have been forcibly displaced (UNICEF, 2016). Armed conflicts, environmental disasters, and mass migration have, as the Global Humanitarian Overview (2023) notes, resulted in the emergence of a "generation deprived of security and continuity." This situation renders childhood a fragile existential sphere intertwined with death and loss.

In regions such as Gaza, where siege and violence have persisted for decades, childhood is shaped by chronic political violence, deprivation, and trauma. Rabaia, Saleh, and Giacaman (2014) describe this as "conditions of chronic political violence," emphasising that fear,

mourning, and resistance have become part of everyday life for Palestinian children. El-Khodary and Samara (2020) and Mougrabi-Large and Zhou (2020) observe that Palestinians have endured five major wars in the past two decades, leaving lasting psychological scars on children. Gazan children live under intermittent bombardment, collapsed infrastructure, scarce resources, and disrupted schooling (Farajallah, 2022). Masten (2017) characterises this as "the imprint of war on the bodies and minds of its victims."

Layne, Kaplow and Oosterhoff (2025) demonstrate that the effects of war on children constitute not a single traumatic event but a persistent condition that shapes their emotional regulation, identity, and moral development. Almost all children in Gaza have directly or indirectly witnessed scenes of death or violence, leading to chronic grief, anxiety, and attachment disturbances. Yet most research frames these experiences pathologicallythrough post-traumatic stress, depression, or prolonged grief disorder while overlooking children's philosophical, ethical, and creative modes of making sense of death, loss, and hope.

Dangmann, Dybdahl, and Solberg (2022) and Fazel and Stein (2002) underline that while war and displacement inflict profound psychological harm, they may also strengthen children's resilience and capacity for meaning-making. Thus, children are not merely victims of trauma but active agents in moral reflection and reconstruction. UNICEF (2009) similarly asserts that young people should be seen "not only as victims but as active participants generating solutions." Myers and Bourdillon (2012) argue that policies concerning children cannot be effective without centring their perspectives.

Children growing up in war zones face not only physical danger but also uncertainty, exile, and the loss of belonging. Macková and Preissová-Krejčí (2023) classify the narratives of Ukrainian refugee children around the themes of "war," "exile," and "hope." Likewise, Hollo (2020) shows that even young refugees who have not personally experienced war internalise traumatic memories through their parents' stories. Mahamid (2020) terms this phenomenon "third-generation trauma transmission," highlighting war as a transgenerational identity experience rather than a past event.

These conditions profoundly shape how children conceptualise death and violence. Kanatlı and Schreglmann (2017) found that children describe war through metaphors of "injustice, darkness, pain, and lovelessness," whereas Deguara (2024) reported that children perceive peace as "the end of sorrow." Analysing Ukrainian children's drawings, Zhou (2024) revealed

the coexistence of fear, anger, pain, and hope within the same composition. Slone and Mann (2016) and Žikić et al. (2015) noted that war, when combined with the loss of family members and displacement, heightens aggression, depression, and regressive behaviours in children.

However, children's reflections on death are not purely cognitive but also emotional and ethical. Ahmadi et al. (2019), Gutiérrez et al. (2014), and Renaud et al. (2015) show that children's questionssuch as "Why do people die?" or "Will I die?"represent efforts to grasp the moral rather than the biological meaning of death. Traditional research, by contrast, has tended to assume that children understand death only as a biological event, focusing on developmental stages (Cotton and Range, 1990; Slaughter and Lyons, 2003). Beyond human conflicts, children's encounters with death are also shaped by environmental losses-dying rivers, disappearing trees, and extinct animals. These multispecies forms of dying reveal that grief for many children extends beyond human kinship and into the ecological world (Taylor & Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2015; Haraway, 2016). Recognising such ecological deaths as part of children's lived reality situates their philosophical reflections within planetary vulnerability and what Tsing (2015) calls the "arts of living on a damaged planet." This posthuman understanding aligns with Rautio and Jokinen's (2015) view that children's moral imagination evolves through relational encounters with both human and more-than-human others. Building on Taylor and Pacini-Ketchabaw's (2015) notion of multispecies vulnerability, children's reflections on clouds, soil, and stars can thus be read as gestures toward ecological continuity.

This study transcends reductionist perspectives by treating children's reflections on death, loss, and hope as ethical and philosophical experiences. As Layne et al. (2025) note, the impact of war on children is not a "single trauma" but a continuous emotional and moral wound. Malkki (2010) likewise contends that children, in the aftermath of destruction, become "symbols of new beginnings and peace"; their stories carry an ethical hope for renewal.

Accordingly, this research adopts the *Philosophy for Children* (P4C) approach not merely as a pedagogical method but as an ethical practice of witnessing (Zembylas, 2009). Under conditions of war and displacementwhere children are typically represented by adultsP4C enables them to discuss death, loss, and hope as philosophical questions. As Haynes and Murris (2012) and Murris (2016) argue, philosophical dialogue positions children not as "little thinkers" but as "co-ethical subjects." In this sense, philosophy becomes not only an act of thought but also a practice of relational repair and collective resistance.

From a posthumanist perspective (Hackett and Somerville, 2017; Gregory, Haynes and Murris, 2017), the present study views children as beings who feel, sense, and think with the worldnot merely as speaking subjectsand seeks to bear philosophical witness to their lived experiences of war, death, and peace. It interprets children's emotional, moral, and creative expressions not as "symptoms" but as acts of meaning-making and ethical subjectivation (Zembylas, 2009; Haynes and Murris, 2012).

Research Aim

This study explores how six-year-old refugee children, indirectly affected by war and displacement, philosophically engage with themes of death, loss, and peace.

Reframing P4C as an ethical space of witnessing and solidarity, the research examines how children make sense of existential issues through dialogue, play, and drawing, and how these processes foster empathy, cooperation, and hope.

Using a five-week cyclical action-research design structured around five picturebooksFriendship, Home, Loss, Death, and Peacethe study identified a moral–emotional transformation from fear to solidarity, emptiness to creativity, and loss to peace.

Research Questions

1. How do refugee children philosophically interpret the concepts of death, loss, and peace within the context of war and displacement?
2. How do P4C-based philosophical dialogue, drawing, and symbolic-play activities transform children's emotional and ethical awareness?
3. How do children's creative productions (artworks, play, metaphors) re-interpret the themes of war, death, and peace?

Original Contribution

This study provides theoretical, methodological, and ethical contributions:

- **Theoretical**: It shifts the relationship between childhood, war, and death from a clinical discourse to a philosophical-ethical framework, conceptualising death not merely as trauma but as a space for meaning-making and resistance. This study also contributes to

rethinking death and dying as relational ethics across species and worlds, addressing the multispecies dimension of children's lived experiences.

- **Methodological**: It represents the first multimodal action-research application of P4C with refugee children, integrating dialogue, drawing, play, and silence as interrelated modes of expression.
- **Ethical**: It positions children not as "spoken-about objects" but as thinking, feeling, and witnessing subjects.
- **Practical**: It proposes a meaning-centred alternative to trauma-focused interventions, aiming to strengthen children's capacities for empathy, solidarity, and hope through philosophical inquiry.

In conclusion, this study interprets children's intellectual expressions arising from experiences of war and loss as "silent philosophies of resistance," contributing to an ethical re-imagining of childhood in the shadow of war.

METHODS

This study adopted a qualitative action research design grounded in Philosophy for Children (P4C) methodology. The aim was to explore how six-year-old refugee children engage with experiences of death, war, and hope through philosophical dialogue and creative expression. The research design reflects a commitment to participatory, ethical, and dialogic approaches to inquiry with young children, aligned with principles of critical childhood studies (Spyrou, 2018; Gallagher, 2008).

Philosophy for Children (P4C) was used not only as a pedagogical tool but as an ethical and epistemological stance. Rooted in the work of Lipman, and reimagined through feminist and posthumanist adaptations (Haynes and Murris, 2012; Gregory et al., 2017), P4C positions children as capable philosophical agents. In this study, philosophical inquiry occurred through structured yet open-ended sessions where children co-constructed meaning around existential themes introduced via picturebooks. The method prioritized children's own questions, their aesthetic and ethical responses, and their capacity for critical, creative, and caring thinking.

Importantly, P4C was not confined to verbal dialogue. The study embraced a multimodal approach in which drawing, symbolic play, and embodied storytelling were treated as equally valid philosophical expressions (Murris, 2016). These alternative forms of participation allowed

children to explore grief, justice, and hope beyond linguistic limits, highlighting the speculative and metaphorical dimensions of their reasoning. The integration of P4C within a context of displacement added an additional layer of ethical sensitivity: dialogue served not as therapy, but as a shared space for witnessing, wondering, and imagining otherwise (Zembylas, 2009).

Action research supported this flexible and relational structure, enabling the facilitator to adapt in real time to children's emergent interests, emotions, and questions (Kemmis, McTaggart and Nixon, 2014). This cyclical design aligned with the principles of responsiveness and co-agency central to both P4C and critical childhood studies. Together, these frameworks supported an inquiry process that was emotionally attuned, philosophically rigorous, and deeply respectful of children's lived realities.

Participants

The research was conducted at a Child Support and Education Centre providing assistance to children of families who had migrated from Palestine due to war. The centre offers psychosocial, educational, and creative activities for refugee children in the preschool age group.

A total of 15 children participated in the study, including 8 girls and 7 boys. The participants were second-generation refugee children of Palestinian familieschildren who had not directly experienced war themselves but were indirectly affected by their parents' experiences of forced displacement and trauma. The participants were aged between five and six years and were selected from among regularly attending children at the centre using purposive sampling to ensure consistent participation and developmental suitability.

Procedure

The research was carried out over five weeks, consisting of ten structured sessions, each lasting approximately 60 minutes. The sessions were designed within the *Philosophy for Children (P4C)* framework, which emphasises open-ended inquiry, shared dialogue, and relational meaning-making through literature and reflection (Gregory et al., 2017; Haynes and Murris, 2012). Each session centred on a picturebook addressing the themes of war, loss, grief, hope, and peace in developmentally and emotionally sensitive ways.

Books were selected for their emotional depth, philosophical richness, and multimodal potential: *Hello, I'm Your Friend from Palestine* (Nabila Adani), *Op de Vlucht* (Pimm Van Hest), *The Emptiness* (Anna Llenas), *Where Do We Disappear?*, and *Peace is an Offering* (Annette LeBox). The sessions were facilitated by the researcher, who also acted as the practitioner, reading the stories aloud and creating moments for emotional responses, clarification, and spontaneous associations.

Each session followed a three-part structure:

1. **Book Sharing:** The picturebook was read aloud, encouraging visual engagement and emotional expression.
2. **Philosophical Dialogue:** Group discussions were guided by P4C principles of co-inquiry, active listening, and mutual respect, allowing children to generate and explore their own questions.
3. **Creative Expression:** Children expressed their ideas and emotions through drawing, storytelling, and symbolic play, which provided multimodal avenues for philosophical reflection.

Throughout the sessions, trauma-sensitive and affective strategies were embedded, including emotion cards, drawing prompts (e.g., *"What does peace look like?"*), and simple body awareness exercises. These tools supported emotional regulation and offered non-verbal entry points into philosophical inquiry.

The researcher–practitioner maintained a reflexive stance, taking field notes and audio-recording the sessions to capture both verbal and non-verbal interactions. The process remained flexible and responsive to the children's emerging emotional and cognitive needs, ensuring that each session evolved through a balance of structure and spontaneity.

Data Collection

A multimodal data collection strategy was employed to capture the relational, embodied, and symbolic nature of children's meaning-making. The data set consisted of:

- **Video recordings** of five P4C sessions, documenting verbal and non-verbal communication, group dynamics, and embodied interactions;
- **Audio recordings** of children's philosophical dialogues, later transcribed for thematic analysis;
- **Creative artefacts**, including drawings, play-based constructions, and symbolic representations;
- **Field notes and researcher reflections**, addressing contextual observations, emotional tone, and the facilitator's positioning.

These tools were integrated naturally within the session flow, ensuring a child-centred and relationally ethical research process.

Video data enabled close attention to subtle forms of expressionsuch as gestures, silence, posture, and shared gazethat often remain unseen in text-based analysis. Creative outputs were treated not as illustrative supplements but as philosophical texts in their own right**,** revealing children's moral reasoning, emotional worlds, and imaginative thought.

All materials were digitised, anonymised, and securely stored in accordance with institutional ethical protocols.

The practitioner-researcher maintained structured field notes and a reflexive journal throughout the study. These records documented children's emotional responses, group interactions, and shifts in facilitation, supporting critical awareness and interpretive credibility across the action research cycle.

Analytical Framework

Data were analysed through reflexive thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006, 2019), following six iterative phases of familiarisation, coding, theme development, review, naming, and interpretation.

Both inductive and theory-informed strategies guided the process, drawing on Philosophy for Children (P4C), posthumanist perspectives, and critical childhood studies.

Children's drawings, symbolic play, and gestures were analysed as philosophical expressions revealing their ethical and imaginative reasoning.

Using visual thematic analysis (Rose, 2016), features such as colour, form, and metaphor were examinedimages of cracked hearts, bridges, and birds signified reflections on loss, care, and hope.

Analytic memos and a reflexive journal enhanced interpretive credibility. The aim was not to assess understanding by adult standards but to illuminate children as ethical and sensorial agents engaging deeply with existential and moral themes.

Analytical Reliability

Methodological rigour was ensured through triangulation, reflexivity, and analytic transparency. Data from dialogues, drawings, play, and field notes were cross-checked to confirm emerging themes. A reflexive journal and detailed codebook supported consistency and credibility. Peer co-coding with two external researchers strengthened interpretive reliability, with discrepancies resolved through discussion.

Ethics approval and consent to participate

This study was reviewed and approved by the Fatih Sultan Mehmet Vakıf University Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Committee, affiliated with Fatih Sultan Mehmet Vakıf University, Türkiye (Decision No: 2025-51/08, dated 02 October 2025; Document No: 823, dated 08 October 2025).

Written informed consent was obtained from the parents or legal guardians of all participating children prior to data collection. Age-appropriate assent was also obtained from the children. Participation was entirely voluntary, and confidentiality and anonymity were maintained throughout the research process. All research procedures were conducted in accordance with applicable ethical guidelines and principles.

FİNDİNGS

The findings of this study illustrate how six-year-old refugee children, through Philosophy for Children (P4C) sessions, engaged in ethical and philosophical sense-making around the themes of war, death, and peace.

As they encountered five picturebooks over five weeks, their reflections revealed a gradual transformation from fear and displacement toward empathy, creativity, and communal hope.

Table 1 presents an integrated synthesis of the thematic patterns that emerged across all sessions, combining children's philosophical dialogues.

Table 1. Integrated Thematic Synthesis of P4C Dialogues Across Five Picturebooks

Associated Book(s)	**Meta Theme**	**Philosophical Focus**	**Typical Child Statement**	**Ethical–Philosophical Interpretation**
Hello, I'm Your Friend from Palestine	Friendship as Protection	Trust, solidarity, shared safety	"When bombs come, friends hide together."	Friendship becomes an ethical refuge, turning fear into mutual care.
Op de Vlucht (Pimm Van Hest)	Home and Sensory Belonging	Memory, smell, language, embodied continuity	"Home is inside my shoesthey remember the sand."	Home is reconstructed through the senses; belonging persists through memory and touch.
The Emptiness (Anna Llenas)	Transforming Emptiness	Sharing, creation, love, spirituality	"When you share toys, emptiness gets smaller."	Grief is transformed through collective creativity and empathy.
Where Do We Disappear?	Death and Continuity with Nature	Return to earth, clouds, stars, moral endurance	"They go to the soil to tell stories."	Death is seen as natural continuity and moral transformation within

				ecological cycles.
Peace is an Offering (Annette LeBox)	Peace and Hope	Sharing, silence, empathy, reconstruction	“Peace is a pencil, not a bomb.”	Peace emerges as an embodied ethic of care, imagination, and collective hope.

As summarised in Table 1, the integrated thematic synthesis of the five P4C sessions revealed a progressive ethical–emotional transformation in refugee children’s philosophical reasoning.

Across the picturebooksHello, I’m Your Friend from Palestine, Op de Vlucht, The Emptiness, Where Do We Disappear?, and Peace is an Offeringchildren reconstructed meaning from fear and loss toward hope and solidarity.

Each story acted as a philosophical anchor, enabling distinct yet interconnected domains of reflection: friendship, home, emptiness, death, and peace.

In Friendship as Protection, fear evolved into solidarity as friendship became an ethical act of care (“When bombs come, friends hide together”).

Home and Sensory Belonging showed how home was redefined as embodied memory rather than geography (“Home is inside my shoesthey remember the sand”).

Through Transforming Emptiness, grief turned into creative repair (“When you share toys, emptiness gets smaller”), reflecting the moral potential of vulnerability.

In Death and Continuity with Nature, metaphors of soil, stars, and clouds expressed an ecological understanding of mortality, while Peace and Hope culminated in multisensory images“Peace is a pencil, not a bomb”where cooperation and imagination redefined peace as lived ethics.

Together, these findings show that P4C enabled children to engage with death, loss, and displacement not as trauma but as ethical and philosophical inquiry.

Through dialogue, art, and play, they co-constructed meanings that were emotional, ecological, and relationaltracing a moral path from fear → care → continuity → hope and revealing early ethical imagination.

This sequence mirrored the action–reflection logic of the research cycles (see Table 5). As illustrated in Table 2, children's drawings further visualised this transformation.

Through colour, form, and composition, they externalised fear, loss, and hope, turning abstract ethics into embodied, sensory, and aesthetic expressions.

Table 2. Thematic Coding Map of Children's Drawings: Cross-Session Visual Motifs and Philosophical Reflections

Thematic Code	**Interpretive Category (Sub-theme)**	**Meta Theme**	**Visual Element / Motif**	**Colour and Form Features**	**Philosophical –Emotional Meaning**
From Fear to Solidarity	Shared protection, building trust	Vulnerability and Ethical Solidarity	Shelters, enclosed spaces, figures standing together	Grey, blue tones; inward-focused compositions	A space where fear is shared and solidarity begins.
Portable Home / Memory Object	Belonging through smell, touch, and memory	Memory, Home, and Sensory Belonging	House, window, door, shoes, bag	Brown, yellow, pastel tones	Home and identity become portable, sensory memories.
Transformation of Emptiness	Creative repair,	Grief and Creative	Broken hearts,	Black, grey, dark tones;	Repair of loss, emptiness, and

	sharing, empathy	Transformation	empty circles, black shadows	gradually becoming colourful	grief through sharing.
Continuity in Nature	Cyclical existence of the soul	Nature, Continuity, and Ethical Imagination	Stars, clouds, trees, upward-moving figures	White, light blue; upward drawing movements	Perceiving death as a continuous process within nature.
Collective Hope / Reconstruction of Peace	Ethical and aesthetic integration	Peace, Hope, and Reconstruction	Rainbow, people holding hands, birds, pencils, peace symbols	Vivid colours, open composition; group drawings	Rebuilding peace through sharing, cooperation, and hope.

As summarised in Table 2, the children's drawings served as visual narratives of philosophical reasoning, tracing a movement from fear to solidarity, loss to creation, and grief to hope.

Images of shelters in grey and blue tones illustrated collective protection, while soft brown and yellow depictions of bags, windows, and shoes symbolised *home as a sensory memory of belonging.*

Broken hearts and dark circles gradually filled with colour, representing emotional repair and the *transformation of emptiness through creation.*

Stars, clouds, and upward-moving figures expressed an ethical imagination of continuity, while bright rainbows and joined hands redefined peace as a collective act of moral reconstruction. These ecological metaphors-clouds, trees, soil-suggest that children's imagination of death transcends human mortality, extending their moral concern into the living world. Their visual and verbal expressions reveal an intuitive understanding of interdependence between humans

and the more-than-human, where life and death are not opposites but parts of the same regenerative cycle. In this way, children's drawings and dialogues embody a multispecies ethics of care, portraying death as transformation and continuity within the shared material and spiritual fabric of the earth.

As shown in Table 3, symbolic play further embodied these philosophical ideas through movement and shared imagination.

Games like *"The bombs are coming"* and *"Protect your friend"* enacted solidarity within fear, while *"Fixing the broken toy"* and *"Building the house of peace"* transformed trauma into cooperation and creativity.

Across the sessions, play became a *lived philosophy*a performative process through which abstract ethics of care, belonging, and peace were enacted as bodily, relational, and collective experiences.

Table 3. Thematic Coding of Symbolic Play Scenarios Across P4C Sessions: Behavioral Patterns and Ethical–Emotional Insights

Meta Theme	**Interpretive Category (Sub-theme)**	**Behavioral Code**	**Play Behavior / Symbolic Scene**	**Philosophical–Emotional Meaning**
Vulnerability and Ethical Solidarity	Shared protection ritual	Bodily protection reflex, eye contact, shared breathing	In the game 'Bombs are coming', children hug each other and hide together.	Solidarity within fear bodily expression of ethical responsibility.
	Inclusive circle	Creating safe space, environmental security	In the game 'Protect your friend', children form a circle with their hands.	Transformation of fear into relational trust and collective safety.

Memory, Home, and Sensory Belonging	Somatic memory	Sensory memory, identification with object	In the game 'Carrying your home', a child smells the bag and places it on their head.	Embodied belonging carrying home and identity within the body.
	Sharing emotional space	Turn-taking, narrative identity	In the game 'Home puzzle', each child takes turns describing their home.	Collectivisation of identity narratives.
Grief and Creative Transformation	Creative compensation	Repair activity, collective production	In the game 'Repairing the broken toy', children use tape and paint to fix toys.	Transformation of trauma into cooperative creation.
	Aesthetic integration	Adding colour, organising space	In the game 'Filling the emptiness', children fill a circle on the floor with coloured stones.	Healing transformation of emptiness into an aesthetic representation.
Nature, Continuity, and Ethical Imagination	Spiritual continuity	Farewell rhythm, upward gestures	In the game 'Waving to the sky', all children raise their hands together.	Acceptance of death within the natural cycle.

	Dialogue with nature	Symbolic communication, silent sharing	In the game 'Talking to the tree', children take turns touching and whispering to the tree.	Spiritual connection between humans and nature.
Peace, Hope, and Reconstruction	Reconstruction through cooperation	Building collectively, planning together	In the game 'Building the peace house', children construct a house with blocks and colour it inside.	Materialisation of sharing ethical cooperation in action.
	Tranquility in silence	Rhythmic breathing, bodily awareness	In the game 'Breathing with birdsong', everyone breathes in and opens their hands.	Embodied and sensory experience of peace.

As summarised in Table 3, symbolic play revealed how children enacted philosophical inquiry through gesture, movement, and shared imagination.

Across sessions, play became a lived philosophy transforming abstract ethics such as care, belonging, and peace into embodied and relational practices.

In Vulnerability and Ethical Solidarity, games like “The bombs are coming” and “Protect your friend” expressed collective protection, turning fear into trust through bodily synchrony and mutual awareness.

Memory, Home, and Sensory Belonging appeared in acts such as “Carrying your home” and “Home puzzle,” where touching and smelling objects reconstructed identity as sensory memory.

Through Grief and Creative Transformation, games like “Fixing the broken toy” turned trauma into cooperative repair and creative healing.

In Nature, Continuity, and Ethical Imagination, reflective plays “Waving to the sky,” “Talking to a tree” embodied acceptance of mortality and interspecies empathy.

Finally, Peace, Hope, and Reconstruction culminated in scenes like “Building the house of peace” and “Breathing with birdsong,” where stillness and cooperation symbolised ethical renewal.

Complementary parent and educator observations (see Table 4) confirmed that these transformations extended beyond the sessions.

Children’s ethical understanding continued in everyday life rebuilding trust, belonging, and hope through shared actions and relationships demonstrating that philosophy became both embodied and lived beyond the classroom.

Table 4. Supplementary Data from Parent and Educator Observations: Triangulation of Behavioral and Emotional Change

Observation Source	**Observation Focus**	**Thematic Area (Book / Cycle)**	**Thematic Code**	**Illustrative Quote**	**Interpretive Note**
Educator	Children began to show physical closeness within the group.	Friendship as Protection	Search for trust	“Previously, she wouldn’t let anyone sit beside her; now she says ‘let’s	Transition from social distance to collective interaction marks the first sign of trust development.

				draw together.’”	
Parent (Mother)	The child continued the play at home saying, ‘My home is in my bag.’	Home as Memory	Sensory memory	“She carries her small bag and says, ‘I found my home.’”	The theme of belonging initiated at school has been sustained within the home environment.
Educator	Children extended the ‘repairing broken toys’ play into free time activities.	Loss and Repair	Act of repairing	“Now, instead of throwing toys away, they say ‘let’s heal this.’”	Creative problem-solving behaviour has developed; traumatic symbols have turned into cooperation.
Parent (Father)	The child now speaks about deceased family members without fear.	Death and Continuity	Acceptance of grief	“Now he smiles and says, ‘My grandpa became a star.’”	The meaning of death is now expressed more as transformation than as loss.
Educator	‘Peace house’ drawings in class have turned into group projects.	Peace and Reconstruction	Collaboration and hope	“They draw birds on the walls and write ‘peace’ underneath.”	Collective creation reflects ethical and aesthetic reconstruction.

As summarised in Table 4, auxiliary observations from educators and parents confirmed the continuity of children's philosophical growth beyond the structured sessions. These reflections triangulated the visual and play-based data, reinforcing the emotional and behavioural transformation across the five action cycles.

Friendship as Protection, educators noted an increase in physical proximity and mutual engagement *"He used to sit alone; now he says, 'let's draw together'"* indicating the embodiment of trust and social safety.

Home as Memory, parental reports such as *"He carries his bag saying 'my home is inside it'"* showed how symbolic play extended into domestic contexts, demonstrating *the transfer of belonging and identity beyond the classroom*.

Loss and Repair, revealed a shift from avoidance to active restoration: teachers observed children repairing broken toys collaboratively, reflecting *creative problem-solving and emotional resilience*.

Death and Continuity, parents described children discussing deceased family members without fear *"He says 'Grandpa became a star' and smiles"* marking *acceptance and transformation of grief*.

Peace and Reconstruction, evidenced collective creation and shared hope: *"They draw birds on the wall and write 'peace' below,"* illustrating *ethical reconstruction through aesthetic collaboration*.

The cyclical structure of the action research design enabled a continuous process of ethical reflection and emotional transformation across the five P4C sessions.

Each cycle integrated planning, action, observation, and reflection, allowing philosophical inquiry to evolve organically in response to children's affective experiences.

As summarised in Table 5, the research unfolded as an iterative movement from fear toward ethical imagination and hope.

Table 5. Action Research Cycles: Emergent Themes and Affective Transformations Across P4C Sessions

Cycle No	Session	Planning	Action	Observation	Reflection
1. Friendship and Solidarity	• Hello, I'm Your Friend from Palestine	To discuss friendship, trust, and ethical solidarity within the context of war.	P4C question: 'Can friendship exist during war?'; drawing, symbolic play, dialogue.	Transformation from fear → solidarity; whispering, smiling, and sharing behaviours observed.	Fear was observed to evolve into a state of 'being together'; friendship became an ethical form of protection.
2. Home, Memory, and Belonging	• Op de Vlucht	To reinterpret the concept of 'home' on a sensory level within the experience of displacement.	P4C question: 'If we lose our home, do we lose ourselves?'; drawing, story completion.	Home was described through smell, language, and objects; imagery of mother, wind, and soil emerged.	Home was redefined not as a physical space but as an emotional and sensory memory.
3. Grief and Healing	• The Emptiness	To transform the emotional dimension of loss through art.	P4C question: 'Where does emptiness live?'; shadow painting, heart drawings.	A shift from somatic expressions (e.g., stomach ache) to sharing and laughter was observed.	Grief was transformed into a generative process; children coloured the emptiness.

4. Death and Continuity	• Where Do We Disappear?	To discuss death as a natural transformation.	P4C question: 'Where do people go when they die?'; nature drawings, symbolic play.	Abstract and metaphorical explanations (cloud, star, tree, sleep) were developed.	Death was understood as part of the life cycle; ethical imagination was strengthened.
5. Peace and Hope	• Peace is an Offering	To concretise the concept of peace and generate hope.	P4C question: 'What does peace look like?'; colourful drawings, cooperative games.	Smiles, silence, and birdsong metaphors stood out.	Peace was redefined as a sensory, relational, and ethical experience.

As summarised in Table 5, the five action–reflection cycles revealed a recursive transformation in children's ethical and emotional understanding. Across the sessions, philosophy, art, and play intertwined as modes of meaning-making and healing, forming a spiral of growth from fear to hope.

In Cycle 1 (Friendship and Solidarity), fear gave way to shared protection and care. Friendship emerged as an ethical act rather than a social skill.

Cycle 2 (Home, Memory, and Belonging) showed that children reimagined home through sensory metaphors of smell, touch, and sound, redefining belonging as embodied memory.

Through Cycle 3 (Grief and Healing), bodily discomfort transformed into creative repairdrawing hearts, colouring emptinessrevealing the generative potential of grief.

In Cycle 4 (Death and Continuity), metaphors of clouds, stars, and trees reflected an ecological understanding of death as continuity within life's cycles.

Finally, Cycle 5 (Peace and Hope) culminated in relational calmness and collective imagination; peace became a sensory and ethical experience grounded in cooperation and empathy.

Together, these cycles constituted a spiral of ethical imagination and communal hope, where reflection and action continuously nurtured one another.
Researcher reflections showed parallel transformation: silence evolved from fear into shared listening, and symbolic playmending toys, building peace housesbecame embodied forms of philosophical action. Objects and drawings served as mediators of meaning, marking the children's emotional journey from fragmentation to ethical coherence. The process thus transcended pedagogy, becoming a shared ethical and aesthetic practice of learning and repair.

To integrate the findings presented across Tables 1–5, Figure I conceptualises the cyclical progression of ethical and emotional growth observed throughout the P4C sessions, illustrating how each action–reflection cycle contributed to the development of *Ethical Imagination and Communal Hope*.

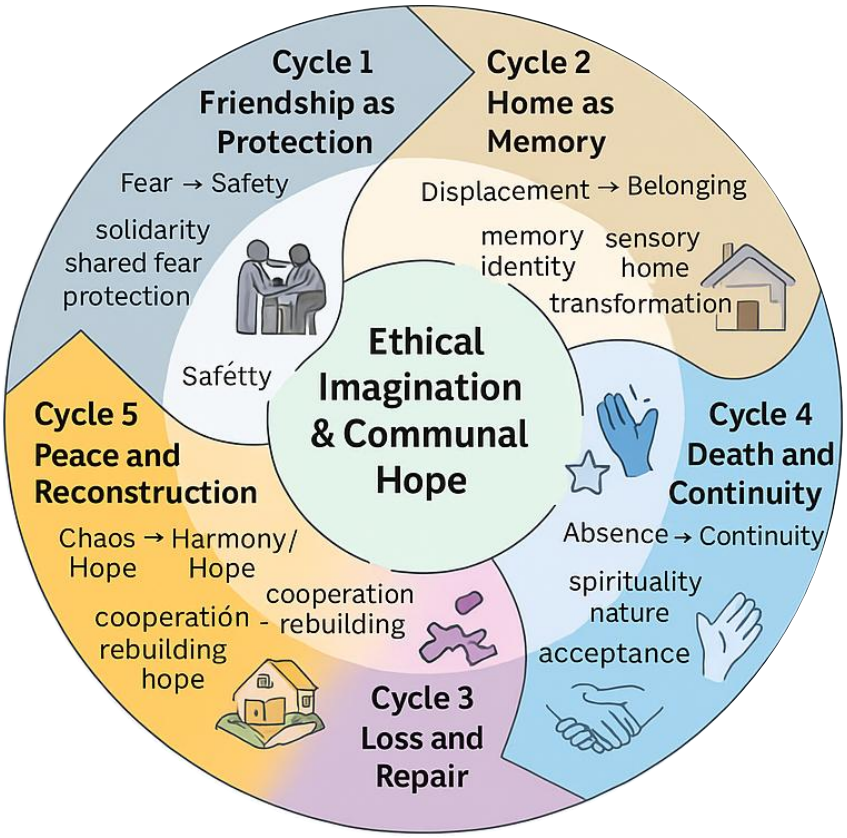


Figure I. Action–Reflection Cycles of Ethical Growth Across P4C Sessions

Figure I depicts the five interconnected action–reflection cycles observed throughout the P4C sessions, each representing a distinct phase in the children's ethical and emotional development. The spiral form symbolises movement, continuity, and deepening understanding — expanding outward from individual awareness toward collective ethical imagination.

The first cycle, Friendship as Protection, captures how children redefined friendship as a moral shield against fear and loneliness. In the second cycle, Home as Memory, they began to reconstruct belonging through sensory and narrative memories, linking emotional safety to shared remembrance. The third, Loss and Repair, visualises their transition from grief to creative restoration, where drawing and storytelling acted as ethical tools of repair. The fourth cycle, Death and Continuity, represents the emergence of ecological metaphors — soil, clouds, and stars — through which death was understood as transformation rather than absence. Finally, Peace and Reconstruction signifies the consolidation of hope, as children envisioned peace not as the end of conflict but as an ongoing communal practice of care.

The spiral thus illustrates a cumulative and relational process: each cycle feeding into the next, generating a broader constellation of moral insight. At its centre lies the integrative construct of Ethical Imagination and Communal Hope, suggesting that philosophical participation enabled children to embody ethics as lived relation — thinking, feeling, and creating together in response to loss and displacement.

DİSCUSSİON

This study demonstrates that young children growing up under the shadow of war and displacement are not merely passive recipients of trauma but philosophical agents capable of constructing ethical and aesthetic meanings. Throughout the Philosophy for Children (P4C) sessions, children reinterpreted the themes of death, peace, and war through their own lived experiences, enacting a transformation from fear to solidarity, from emptiness to creative repair, and from loss to hope. These findings align with Masten's (2017) argument that meaning-making lies at the core of adaptation under adversity, suggesting that philosophical participation can serve as a form of ethical resilience in early childhood.

Research on children's representations of war and peace (Tephly, 1985; Rodd, 1985; McLernon & Cairns, 2006; Aktaş, 2015; Çengelci Köse & Bayır Gürdoğan, 2016) has shown that children are capable of conceiving peace as an abstract idea and expressing it through symbolic forms.

The present study extends this literature by revealing how children, through philosophical dialogue and art, make sense of the violence of war and reconstruct the moral foundations of peace. The statement “When bombs come, friends hide together” goes beyond Rodd’s (1985) findingswhere war was associated with killing and weaponsby showing that even within violent contexts, an ethical sense of responsibility can emerge. Similarly, expressions such as “Peace is a pencil, not a bomb” and “Peace is the bread we share” concretise the symbolic representations found in Çengelci Köse and Bayır Gürdoğan’s (2016) drawings, where doves, butterflies, and family figures represented harmony and empathy.

As Miljević-Ridjički and Lugomerarmano (1994) observed, children often approach the concept of war with a more mature understanding than adults expect. In this research, the six-year-olds’ reflections“War is hiding together from fear” and “My home is inside my bag”illustrate that emotional experience can be transformed into philosophical reasoning. Responding to Oppenheimer et al.’s (1999) and Walker et al.’s (2003) call for cross-cultural comparative studies on children’s concepts of peace and war, this study offers a distinctive contribution by foregrounding voices from a non-Western context of displacement.

Children’s understanding of death also lay at the centre of this ethical transformation. Importantly, the children’s metaphors of transformation-becoming soil, clouds, or stars-invite us to expand the human frame of death research. Their perspectives echo posthumanist approaches to multispecies dying, where loss is distributed across species, environments, and material worlds. Statements such as “They go to the soil to tell stories” and “They become clouds that rain love” resonate with Taylor and Pacini-Ketchabaw’s (2015) notion of *object pedagogy* work on *multispecies vulnerability*. Here, death is not perceived as an end but as a moral continuum within life. Echoing Paul’s (2019) framework of *death ambivalence*, the children’s philosophical dialogues oscillated between silence and speech, revealing an ethical–emotional rhythm of reflection. Silence, rather than avoidance, functioned as a form of witnessingan embodied act of ethical attentionaligning with Zembylas’s (2009) concept of *ethical witnessing*.

Children’s artistic and symbolic expressions deepen earlier trauma-informed art studies (Morison, 2022; Heiderscheit, et al. 2022) by demonstrating that art can act not only as a therapeutic outlet but as a form of ethical repair. The statement “When I draw hearts, the emptiness becomes smaller” illustrates how emotional voids were transformed through collective creativity. Thus, art became more than an aesthetic activityit evolved into part of a

social reconstruction process (Rabaia, Saleh & Giacaman, 2014). Shared drawings of rainbows, birds, and homes symbolised the emergence of *ethical learning ecologies* (Germein and McGavock, 2024), where cooperation, care, and imagination intertwined.

CONCLUSİON AND RECOMMENDATİONS

This study concludes that young refugee children, through dialogic, artistic, and play-based participation in P4C, were able to transform experiences of war, displacement, and death into processes of ethical meaning-making. The findings reveal that children actively reinterpreted war not merely as destruction but as a space where moral solidarity and care could emergeillustrated in expressions such as “When bombs come, friends hide together.” Home, rather than being tied to a fixed location, became an embodied and sensory memory (“Home is inside my shoesthey remember the sand”), demonstrating that belonging persists beyond displacement.

Children’s encounters with emptiness and loss evolved into creative repair (“When I draw hearts, the emptiness becomes small”), showing that aesthetic expression can act as a medium of emotional healing and moral reconstruction. Moreover, their ecological metaphors of continuity-soil, rain, wind, stars-reveal that even in war, children sustain a relational awareness that transcends the human. In this sense, their reflections contribute to a planetary ethic of care that acknowledges both human and more-than-human forms of loss. Their reflections on death (“They go to the soil to tell stories,” “They become clouds that rain love”) signified a shift from fear to philosophical acceptance, viewing death as part of an ecological and ethical continuum. Finally, representations of peace (“Peace is a pencil, not a bomb”) revealed an embodied, relational, and sensory understanding of harmony grounded in empathy and cooperation.

Together, these results demonstrate that philosophical engagement enables childreneven in the context of war and lossto think, feel, and act as ethical agents. Through the integration of dialogue, art, and play, P4C became a transformative space where fear gave way to solidarity, grief to creativity, and death to moral continuity. The study thus establishes that young children’s reflections on war and death are not deficits of understanding but profound forms of ethical imagination that contribute to rebuilding communal hope.

The primary limitation of this study lies in its small-scale and context-specific nature. The findings are based on a particular group of refugee children indirectly exposed to war and

displacement; therefore, generalisations should be made with caution. Moreover, the researcher's dual role as both facilitator and observer may have influenced some of the children's verbal and nonverbal responses. This interactional dynamic, however, is inherent to qualitative and participatory research with young children and was approached with ethical sensitivity and transparency.

From a reflexive standpoint, the researcher maintained continuous awareness of her positionality, emotional involvement, and interpretive stance throughout the study. Reflexive journal entries were systematically used to document moments of uncertainty, affective resonance, and shifts in understanding during the data collection and analysis processes. Interpretations of silence, drawings, and metaphors were made with careful attention to the relational and ethical dimensions of meaning-making. The researcher positioned herself not as an "instructor" but as a "co-thinking witness," ensuring that children's philosophical voices and original expressions remained central.

P4C-based, art- and play-integrated approaches should be incorporated into early childhood education, particularly in contexts of war, loss, and displacement, to foster children's ethical awareness and emotional resilience. Teacher education programmes need to include training on how to engage children in sensitive philosophical discussions about death, peace, and coexistence with empathy and ethical care. Future research should adopt cross-cultural and longitudinal designs that explore how children from diverse settings represent war and death through philosophical dialogue and creative expression. At the policy level, inclusive educational frameworks must ensure children's right to think, question, and express themselves about existential issues as part of holistic and peace-oriented learning environments.

Declarations

Statement Regarding Informed Consent

Informed consent was obtained from the parents and themselves of all individual participants included in the study.

Statement Regarding Ethical Approval

The study protocol has been approved by XXX XXXX unit of Scientific Research and Ethical Review Board (Decision No: 5X/0X, 02 October 2025). Written informed consent was

obtained from the parents or legal guardians of all participating children prior to data collection. Age-appropriate assent was also obtained from the children. Participation was voluntary, and confidentiality and anonymity were maintained throughout the research process. All procedures were conducted in accordance with applicable ethical guidelines and principles.

Consent for Publication

Not applicable.

Statement Regarding Research Involving Human Participants and/or Animals

The study was performed in accordance with the ethical standards laid down in the 1964 Declaration of Helsinki and its following updates.

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Author's Contribution

The authors were equally involved and contributed to the research processes.

Competing Interests

No competing of interest exists for this manuscript for any of the authors.

Availability of Data and Materials

The data used in this study were collected from children at risk. Due to ethical considerations and confidentiality requirements, the dataset is not publicly available. However, the data can be accessed upon reasonable request by contacting the corresponding author, provided that proper ethical approval is obtained.

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