

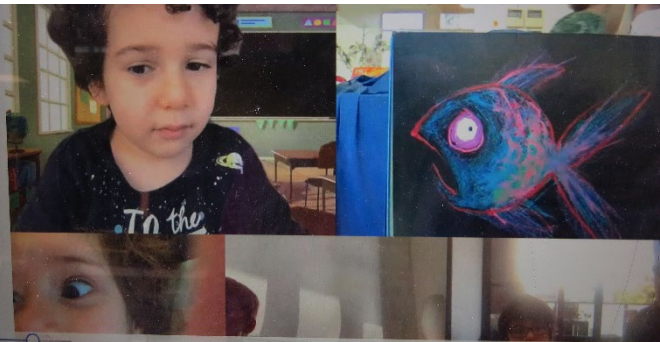
Children at preschool age are in an exciting developmental period in their social-emotional learning. For today's Teams session we used literacy to help open up a discussion on recognising and expressing feelings, and dealing with emotions. This is a topic that is particularly important to address right now as, in addition to being a crucial part of their development, preschoolers are not immune to the life changes that lockdown has brought.



As the children were still joining, we looked through a book by Mies Van Hout called *Heute Bin Ich*, which depicts varying emotions in brilliant colour. Youssef correctly interpreted that the first fish felt angry ('boese') and said he feels angry about "breaking toys."



Thomas correctly identified that the next fish looked confused. Thomas: "He looks a bit crazy...because he has a wobbly mouth," ('verwirrt') and Axelle identified the next fish was feeling "happy... because he has his eyes closed" ('zufrieden') and the next "excited because his eyes are really big" ('erschrocken'). "No, he's scared," said Youssef.



The next fish was bored ('gelangweilt'), which Youssef interpreted as "sad" and Thomas as "tired."

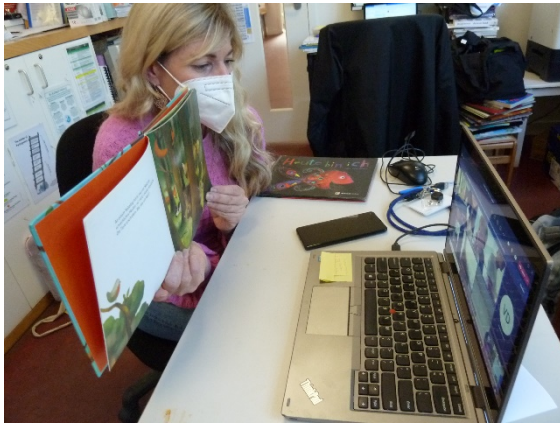
We asked the children what they might do when they are bored.

Thomas: "Sit down and laugh."



K. said he likes to play practical jokes to produce laughter. We asked the children if they knew any songs that make them feel happy and they suggested we sing, "If you're happy and you know it", expressing happiness, anger and sadness in turn through song. Gudrun and the blue dinosaur joined in as well.

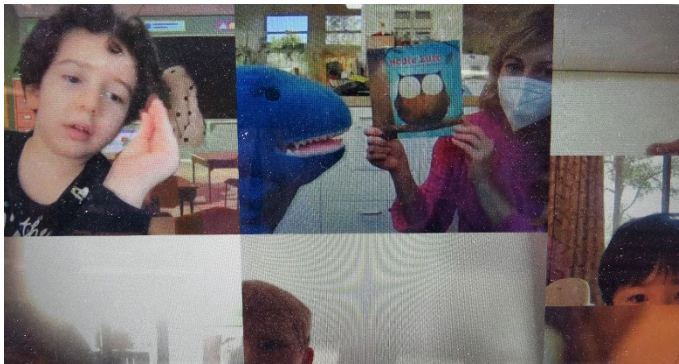




We then read a book about an owl, *Heule Eule*, who is not feeling very happy, as demonstrated by her crying loudly. Youssef: "Stop crying!" All the animals in the forest try different strategies to make the little owl stop crying. The crow offers colourful stones, which Thomas thought was kind. The squirrel offers a nut, which the little owl spits out. "She wants a banana," O. suggested. The mole says he will offer him a present if he stops crying. O.: "He thinks he wants an apple."

The next animal offers the owl a necklace made with beautiful wild flowers. Axelle: "Yeah...that would make me happy."

We asked the children to think about what makes them happy when they are sad and how they can help others if they feel sad. They agreed that (as the next animal in the book does) joking about pinching the owl on the bottom is not the right approach to make someone feel better when they are crying. At the end of the story, the little owl stops crying when she lands in the tree where mum is sitting. Axelle: "She missed her mum and dad." In the story, the little owl then admits she has forgotten why she was crying in the first place. The story demonstrates that we all need to work out what soothes us when we are upset and, while others can offer help, we ultimately often find our own solution.



We moved on to playing a guessing game where an emoji was held up and the children had to give clues so that I could guess what feeling it is. We started with a happy face and, to provide an example of a clue, I asked the children if they would feel like this if someone stepped on my toe, or if I hurt myself, or if I missed my mum.

As the children were finding it challenging to offer clues, the blue dinosaur offered one.

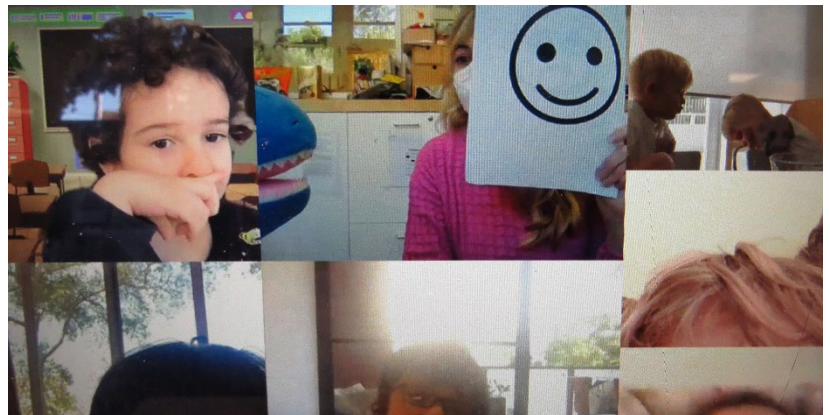
"Your mouth is going up when you feel like this."

Axelle: "You're happy!"

We prompted the children to again offer some clues rather than the answer, asking them if we would feel like the next emoji (sad) when eating ice-cream.

O.: "You would feel like that eating a banana."

Blue dinosaur: "When you fall down and hurt your knee." We asked the children to suggest how they could make someone who feels sad feel better, and one child suggested giving a hug.



At the end of the session we moved on to discussing things we are thankful for today. Discussing gratitude is important now more than ever as, by focusing on what we are thankful for even in lockdown, we shift our focus, which has a run-on affect to our attitude. Research shows that feeling grateful is closely aligned with sustained wellbeing, reduced stress and negativity, improved resilience and stronger relationships. While lockdown has changed the children's lives dramatically, research dictates that it is also a wonderful opportunity to support your child in developing resilience.



“Resilience is the ability to grow and thrive in the face of challenges and bounce back from adversity. Resilience enables you to take calculated risks and capitalise on opportunities ... Resilient people are able to derive meaning from failure and they use the knowledge to climb higher than they otherwise would.” (Shatté & Reivich, *The Resilience Factor*, 2002)

By acknowledging what is good in their lives, the children were actively practising appreciation – like a muscle, the more they practise, the bigger this will grow.

According to a study published in the *European Journal of Psychotraumatology* (Stefanie J. Schmidt, Lara P. Barblan, Irina Lory & Markus A. Landolt (2021), *Age-related effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on mental health of children and adolescents*), showed that the reaction to stressors is developmentally determined, so preschoolers were less likely to feel worried (because this requires the ability to anticipate, mentally represent and reason about events) than older children.

Children aged under 6 years were also the age group most influenced by their parent's reaction to the pandemic situation. Focusing on the positive is not only important for your own wellbeing, it's also a practical way to support your child in their own emotional development. Something as simple as integrating the gratitude game (discussing what you are thankful for) into the everyday is a useful way to redirect the focus to what is positive in your lives.

OUTCOME 3: CHILDREN HAVE A STRONG SENSE OF WELLBEING

FROM EYLF: *Becoming* includes children building and shaping their identity through their evolving experiences and relationships which include change and transitions. Children are always learning about the impact of their personal beliefs and values. Children's agency, as well as guidance, care and teaching by families and educators shape children's experiences of *becoming*.