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Master Thesis

Bibliotherapy: Supporting Children´s Mental Health During the Covid-19 Pandemic Through Picture Books

To Reach the Degree Master of Education

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Table of Contents

List of abbreviations

CLIL   Content and Language Integrated Learning

Covid-19   Coronavirus Disease 2019

WHO   World Health Organization

List of Figures

1.   Introduction

> To deprive children of the opportunity to read about confusing or painful matters like those they might actually be experiencing will either make literature irrelevant to them or else leave them feeling they are alone in their thoughts or experience (Nodelman & Reimer 2003:102–103 quoted in: Evans 2015, 8).

When Covid-19 arrived, the disease quickly spread fear, confusion, and panic, resulting in a lockdown which affected many countries around the globe. Children's routines were abruptly changed, and a lot of contrasting information was spread about the virus. During this time, people had to reach out for mental, emotional and physical help more than ever. On the one hand, having to stay alone at home as well as social distancing brought loneliness, boredom and fatigue. On the other hand, being confined with others increased the stress on relationships. The pandemic increased children's exposure to domestic and sexual violence, and greatly reduced their contact to other important people in their lives (cf. Imran, Zeshan, and Pervaiz 2020, 3-5; Anders 2020; Cowie and Myers 2021; Forgan 2002, 76).

For children, effective intervention measures were crucial to assist them throughout the pandemic so that they gained a better understanding of how to handle situations effectively. Systematic reading for therapeutic purposes can improve coping strategies and help make more informed decisions. Reading stories with children can open a safe space, teach them that they are not alone, provide insight into what is happening around them and offer information that can help them overcome their circumstances. Numerous approaches can be used to assist children in dealing with difficult situations. One of these can be bibliotherapy, a valuable intervention that can help by coping with the effects of a lockdown and paying specific attention to the changed situation. It can allow children to face the uncertainty produced by school lockdowns and the inability to see friends and family. Bibliotherapy can provide guidance in identifying problems, discussing feelings, and exploring possible solutions. Books have been a tool of change and can assist in making decisions and coping with difficult situations (cf. Monroy-Fraustro et al. 2021, 2).

This thesis investigates the process of bibliotherapy and conducts a content analysis on how children's mental health was supported and improved during the Covid-19 pandemic through picture books. The results of this research can provide information for parents, teachers and caregivers on choosing appropriate picture books for bibliotherapy.

The thesis is divided in two parts and eleven chapters. The first part covers the theoretical framework of the research. After the introduction, chapter two explores (children's) picture books; including a brief history and a definition of picture books. It continues with how tender topics can be discussed and how critical thinking can be shaped through books. Moreover, it also focuses on mental health and how it was affected during the Covid-19 pandemic in the years between 2020-2022. Chapter 3 shows the valuable benefits bibliotherapy can offer and

presents its history and development. The last chapter of the theoretical framework, Chapter four, highlights Covid-19 and its consequences and effects on children. The chapter ends by describing the unusual fast-paced publishing process that took place during the pandemic and refers to several examples of different Covid-19 related books.

Part II deals with the analysis of the picture books and attempts to find an answer to the posed research question. In doing so, the procedure and results of the content analysis will be the central part. Chapter five starts with an excursion on the ontology of reality and postmodern picture books. The sixth chapter, describes the chosen research method and procedure of the analysis. Chapter seven introduces the selected (children's) picture books and gives more detailed information about their characteristics. Chapter eight describes how the coding sheet for the analysis was created. The results are presented in Chapter nine. Chapter ten evaluates the findings and discusses them while also presenting the limitations of this thesis. Chapter eleven follows with a conclusion. To substantiate the main research question the researcher is going to answer the following subquestions:

- *How can the pandemic and the changes that come with it be explained through picture books?*
- *Which books provide emotional comfort?*
- *How can bibliotherapy be used as an approach in that matter?*
- *What are the main features and characteristics of picture books covering mental health topics?*

These subquestions help finding an answer to the main research question: **How can children's mental health be supported through picture books to feel well in crisis?**

Part I: Theoretical Framework

In order to conduct the analysis in Part II, important basic concepts of children's picture books and bibliotherapy must first be clarified and the relevance of the current study must be presented.

2. (Children's) Picture Books

Experts in (children's) literature have found it difficult to agree on one definition in what qualifies as picture books. It has proven to be more complicated than it appears to decide on a single definition for picture books. Barbara Bader (1976) brought forward one of the most cited and valued definitions:

> A picturebook is text, illustrations, total design; an item of manufacture and a commercial product; a social, cultural, historic document; and foremost, an experience for a child. As an art form it hinges on the interdependence of pictures and words, on the simultaneous display of two facing pages, and on the drama of the turning of the page. On its own terms its possibilities are limitless. (Bader 1976 in: Matulka 2008, 1)

According to Billmann (2002, 48, quoted in: Oittinen 2008, 17), a picture book typically has 32 pages. The following figure shows the many perspectives one can employ when looking at picture books and how they can be categorised. The features that can together help define what qualifies as a picture book look at them from six different angles. These angles are as words and images, as a type of book, as art, as sequence and as performance for an audience and what effect it has on them (cf. Bosch Andreu 2007, quoted in Oittinen 2008, 16). If one of the categories is missing, the book is no longer regarded as a picture book.
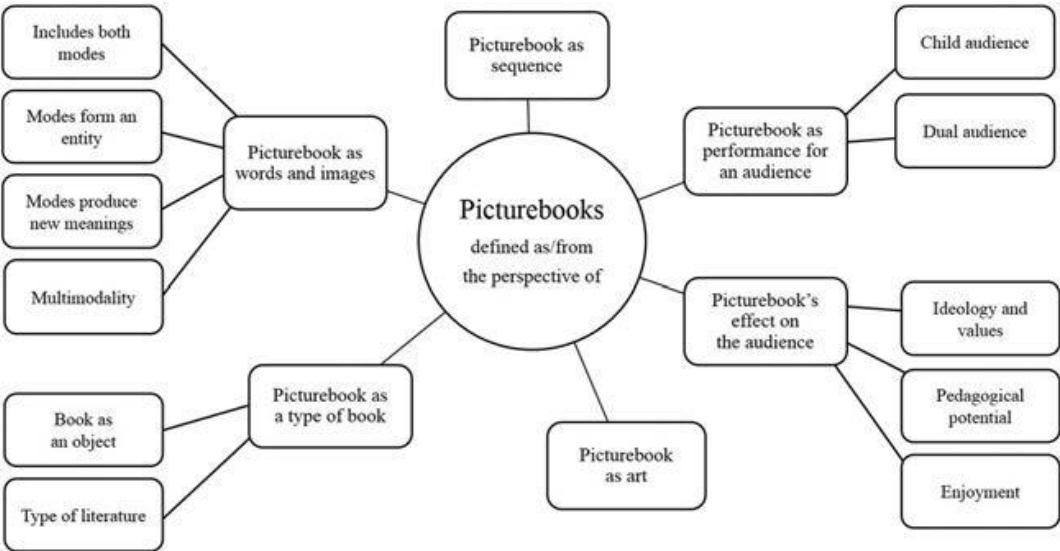
Figure 1: Categories of picture books (Oittinen 2008, 16)

One of the most important factors is that picture books have a verbal and visual level, and they typically combine many pictures with comparatively little text (cf. Matulka 2008, 2).

The unique combination of 'two levels of communication, the visual and verbal' (Nikolajeva and Scott 2006, 1) makes picture books special. The picture's purpose is to describe the story, while the words are used to tell the story. It is important is to understand how these two systems work together (cf. Nikolajeva and Scott 2006, 1). The research on picture-text interactions by Nikolajeva and Scott shows the complexity of the picture book format. They identified five different connections between images and text: *symmetry* (words and pictures carry similar meanings), *complementarity* (words and images provide different but complementary information), *enhancement* (words and images extend each other's meaning), *counterpoint* (words and images tell different stories), and *contradiction* (words and images seem to contradict one another) (cf. Nikolajeva and Scott 2006, 7).

The first picture book for children, *The Visible Word in Pictures* by Johann Amos Comenius, was created in 1658. It was illustrated with woodcuts, and its purpose was to teach Latin and English. Leading authors in the 19th century were Randolph Caldecott (1846-1886), who took inspiration from English caricaturists, and Walter Crane (1845-1915), who was influenced by the arts and crafts movement and Japanese prints (cf. Matulka 2008, 9–12). Two of the most well-known books from the 19th century is *Der Struwwelpeter* by Heinrich Hoffman and Beatrix Potter's *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* from 1902. During the Great Depression in the 1930s, wordless picture books made their first appearance. There was a severe shortage of books in the 1940s after World War II, and the post-war baby boom increased the demand for picture books. In the 1960s, graphic designers Leo Lionni and Eric Carle published *Frederick* and *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*, which became a classic. Over time, the format of picture books got closer to its current form. In the 1970s, children of colour were represented in the books as well. However, this was done mostly in an unauthentic way paired with stereotypes. This changed towards the 1980s when more authors of colour published books themselves. During the Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS) epidemic, themes that were initially disapproved were tackled. In the 1990s, the time of postmodern picture books began, with over 4000 children's books being published annually (cf. Matulka 2008, 12–16).

2.1 E-Books

Since the 1970s, digital book creation has evolved to a great extent following computer technology. This technology paved the way for the invention of e-books, which are the digital or electronic versions of printed books. An educational theorist, Bill Cope, states that books do not have to be printed or exist in physical form (cf. Sargeant 2015, 454–55). Some digital picture books give readers the chance to interact with the text through the use of animation, sound, music, and narration. Through this the reader is allowed to actively take part in the story (cf. Matulka 2008, 91).

Thanks to the advancements in printing technology, printing books takes considerably less time than before, which is another improvement in the industry. Besides, the breakthrough of e-books and other digital formats gave illustrators a whole new platform to create, push the limitations instilled in the industry with the old ways and explore while offering readers new ways to experience stories. Children can now connect with the literature by reading e-books on digital gadgets. Therefore, they might become more invested in books because of such features that are now available and easy to access. The easy accessibility of such documents comes from the fact that no special e-book application is required to be able to read them, and the primary purpose is to have the book in a digitalized version. The original 'basic text and picture documents' primarily created for e-reading devices are relevant for this thesis (cf. Sargeant 2015, 458). The visual pictures in picture e-books and picture book applications may appear similar to those in printed books, especially if the picture book is a digital recreation of a printed picture book. However, graphics from analogue picture books must be adjusted to fit on a digital screen. For example, a double-page spread in a print picture book must be reduced or scaled to fit on a tablet's screen. Such selections can impact the arrangement of an image or a design feature, as well as the colour and image quality when the image is moved from paper to screen (cf. Serafini, Kachorsky, and Aguilera 2016, 509–10). This is an important feature to keep in mind when talking about e-books. E-books gained overnight popularity as libraries shut down at the beginning of the pandemic. Following this, Sarles, who is a Library Operations and Instructional Coordinator in New York City, generated a webpage called 'Free Ebooks about the Coronavirus/COVID-19' that served as a selected bibliography of online books about the pandemic (cf. Sarles 2020, 6).

Throughout time, it was not only the way books were published that changed; the topics also followed this change. The themes that were once not openly discussed with children are now available in literature. These topics that no one used to talk about have been regarded as tender or critical.

2.2   Tender Topics in (Children's) Picture Books

Tender topics are…

> …everything that belongs to a more accurate description of the world shared by children and adults. A world many adults feel we should spare our children - at least in books. A pleasant thought. And somewhat mendacious, when one considers the things that children encounter every day - on television, films and on the Internet (Evans 2015, 3).

Tender topics are often challenging to explain to or to discuss with children. They can include themes like bullying, family diversity, homelessness, disabilities or race. It is essential to talk about these issues with children and to provide them with an understanding of the fact that these topics should not merely be looked at as problems but understood as a part of life. When

discussing tender topics, books can serve as bibliotherapy (chapter 3) and are often used to explain specifically challenging issues (cf. Mankiw, Sue and Strasser, Janis March, 85–86). Recent events made life very difficult for children and required practical assistance in understanding and coping with those disruptive changes. Well-chosen picture books can help navigate through uncertain challenges as a guide to deal with these realities. They can provide knowledge and credible information when children feel overwhelmed by these topics (cf. Crawford, Roberts, and Zygouris-Coe 2019, 45–46).

Several things should be considered when using tender topic literature, especially in the classroom. Children's perceptions of complex topics can be very different. Some may find it easy to deal with tender themes, while others need more time to adapt to the issue. This also means teachers need to provide opportunities to create different possibilities to react to literature in terms of giving the chance to respond orally but also in writing, movement or art. Every child has to find a way that suits them best to respond. For this feedback, it is also essential to be open and to value every opinion because they will probably differ from each other. Reaction response can mainly happen when children develop critical thinking. They are motivated to search for answers and consider their own interpretations (cf. Roberts and Crawford 2008, 4).

2.3.   Critical Thinking Through (Children's) Picture Books

Finding sense and purpose in life requires critical thinking, and it is also fundamental for critical literacy. Critical thinking is the opposite of receiving information passively, which happens in classrooms too often. It means that instead of one correct answer, there can be several (cf. Roche 2015, 11, 15). Over seven years, Evans, the author and editor of *Challenging and Controversial Picturebooks* (2015), worked with 30 different primary school children and discussed numerous picture books that were challenging. They read, shared and discussed different picture books, over a period of five to six years, until the children were in their final year at primary school. At the end of that time, the children were interviewed. One of the questions was about their understanding of what a challenging picture book was: Their answers varied from 'you have to think out-of-the-box' to 'these books invite you for discussion and scrutiny so you can understand it' (Evans 2015, xxvii). The study revealed that children are not afraid of challenging and controversial picture books, it is rather the adults who are not open to or capable of providing relevant, mature responses and dealing with challenging themes (cf. Evans 2015, xxvii).

In this same study, a small group of six children looked for alternative expressions for the word 'challenging' and described its meaning in their own words. Charlotte, one of the six children, answered:

'I think challenging means hard and difficult. I also think it means a task, like something you have been asked to do. Challenging is something that one person may find difficult or confusing that other people may find easy. I also think to challenge somebody is to ask them to do something they may not like' (Evans 2015, xxvi).

Figure 2: Mindmap 'Challenging' (Evans 2015, 27)

As Charlotte states, a topic one child considers challenging may be easy to talk about for another. In a classroom, different opinions and experiences can come together and all of them must be valued and discussed in the right way (cf. Evans 2015, xxvii). Discussing difficult topics can be challenging but when they are freely discussed with the help of picture books, it can strengthen (children's) coping mechanisms, which is one of the pillars of mental health (cf. Evans 2015, xxvii).

2.4   (Children's) Mental Health

In recent years, the concern of mental health issues amongst children and young people has been widely documented in different studies and from different perspectives. According to the World Health Organization (WHO) (2022), mental health is a state of mental well-being that helps people deal with life's difficulties and strengthen the ones around them and their communities (cf. Osborn, Wasanga, and Ndetei 2022, xiv). Mental health is a fundamental human right, and most importantly, it is not a disorder; its meaning is positive and reflects a state of health (cf. United Nations Children's Fund 2021, 30). In 2019, 970 million people lived with mental disorders, making up 13 percent of the global population. 31 percent were suffering from anxiety while 28 percent were coping with depression. In 2020, these numbers increased to a great extent, resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic (chapter 2.3.1) (cf. Osborn, Wasanga, and Ndetei 2022, 40).

According to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, every child has the right to be in an environment without violence and the right to sustain the best possible level of mental health. This level can be achieved through emotional, social and functioning well-being. Similar

commitments are made through the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which obliges preventing all forms of violence and reaching a state of well-being (cf. Maalla M'jid 2020, 2–3).

2.4.1 (Children's) Mental Health and Covid-19

The Covid-19 pandemic has greatly impacted many people's mental health and well-being, whether they had prior issues or not (cf. Osborn, Wasanga, and Ndetei 2022, 6). The world population suffered under the circumstances of this pandemic, including those who were social distancing at home for some time and essential workers who had to continue their work every day despite significant risks. During this extraordinary period, many people developed various psychological symptoms such as sleep disorders, depression, anxiety and burnout (cf. Monroy-Fraustro et al. 2021, 2). Initial projections revealed an increase of 246 million in the number of people suffering from depressive disorders, and 347 million in the number of people with anxiety caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. This indicates an overall increase of 28 percent. The countries most affected by the pandemic are also the ones that experienced the most significant rise in mental health issues. Women in general were more affected than men, and younger people experienced a bigger change compared to the old, which was possibly triggered by school closures and social restrictions (cf. Osborn, Wasanga, and Ndetei 2022, 42).

According to UNICEF, at least one in every seven children was forced to be in lockdown, and more than 1.6 billion children had to study online (cf. United Nations Children's Fund 2021, 100). Children are especially vulnerable to these changes because they have limited knowledge and coping strategies available. They might not be able to express their emotions as well as adults. Additionally, school closures and isolation from peers can induce stress and anxiety. It can be sensed by the children very well when adults find it challenging to cope with the stressors, which can lead to misbehaviour and unknown temper (cf. Imran, Zeshan, and Pervaiz 2020).

The pandemic came at a time when many adults were already concerned about the rising levels of stress being projected on children and young people. There were also growing signs on the negative health consequences arising from acts of bullying, heightening levels of anxiety, depression and social isolation. According to data from international studies, pandemics have a negative influence on mental health, with children and young people being particularly vulnerable because of their lack of knowledge about the situation (cf. Cowie and Myers 2021, 63). These unknown situations can even, after months and years, result in post-traumatic stress disorder (cf. Imran, Zeshan, and Pervaiz 2020, 3). Consequently, the health crisis will greatly influence the future in terms of increases in mental health problems (cf. United Nations Children's Fund 2021, 101).

Child protection authorities also surveilled is that the possibility of detecting child abuse during the Covid-19 crisis is lower (cf. Cowie and Myers 2021, 64). Studies show that mental health issues are closely connected to low financial resources. There is a dangerous connection between these two factors, often resulting from alcohol and drug abuse, poor educational attainment levels, poor parenting, and domestic and interpersonal violence. Children in quarantine, especially those from low-income homes are more likely to suffer from mental health issues such as anxiety and acute stress. A person's access to high-quality social protection and health services can have an impact on experiencing mental health issues or staying in poverty. Supporting a way out of this cycle can only take place when everyone can access the mental health services they require without suffering financial costs (cf. Osborn, Wasanga, and Ndetei 2022, 22).

In addition to family life, school and education play a big role in the life of children, which is why they have a significant part in promoting mental well-being. The focus of everyday lessons should not merely be on the overloaded curriculum but also on strengthening student-teacher relations. It should lead to the outcome that children request help when needed, communicate their opinions, and feel safe in their surroundings (cf. United Nations Children's Fund, 148). Health literacy, as proposed by the WHO, should be introduced into school curricula to secure a healthy classroom environment in order to give future generations practical information about how to live a healthy life. Schools have a responsibility to talk openly about health-related topics that improve children's well-being and academic performance (cf. Pulimeno, Piscitelli, and Colazzo 2020, 14).

Being proactive in maintaining children's mental health is important, and mechanisms like routines can be helpful. During the pandemic, a loss of routine was one of the main problems. These routines were activities equipping young people with coping mechanisms, and prolonged stay-at-home policies had a negative impact on many young people's mental health. While being home, they had more time to fixate on their personal issues. Moreover, missing social connections with friends was a big issue because interactions that were only happening online sometimes even intensified the feeling of loneliness. On the other hand, some suggestions have helped children go through the pandemic: Social interaction with friends, either via video or phone calls; physical activity; music or play; spending time outside in the nature; spending time with pets; writing and journaling have all proved valuable (cf. Imran, Zeshan, and Pervaiz 2020, 3–5; Anders 2020; Cowie and Myers 2021).

It is well known that stories give children a sense of comfort and safety in challenging situations by creating fictional situations that correspond to their real issues. This ensures emotional security and provide children with healthier ways to cope with conflicts and real-life struggles

(cf. Pulimeno, Piscitelli, and Colazzo 2020, 13). Stories are important tools for helping children comprehend life's most difficult situations and they provide support in overcoming these challenges. Regardless of the severity of the trauma, children can find comfort and learn from the book's characters that enable them to address what they are going through. Furthermore, typical trauma processing includes mental reliving of the situation (cf. Golding 2006, 3).

There are several possibilities of cost-effective interventions to improve mental health. One of these is the practice of bibliotherapy, which can help create a more open space to let the children think freely and express their opinions.

3.   Bibliotherapy

Bibliotherapy is one of the most popular non-pharmacological therapies known in psychological literature. Specialists have recently explored it as a technique distinct from typical therapies that improve mental well-being. In several studies, bibliotherapy has demonstrated valuable benefits for treating various mental illnesses, which provided justification for this technique to be rendered reasonable. It could have the power to be extended to a broader population, if it would be known more (cf. Monroy-Fraustro et al. 2021, 2). The results of a study conducted by Monroy-Fraustro et al. (2021) concludes that there is so much more to discover to broaden bibliotherapy to a wider range, especially regarding health issues. What is clear is that the idea of it must be taken into consideration when establishing public policies regarding mental health (13-14).

In 1916, Samuel Crothers used the term 'bibliotherapy' for the first time. According to Briggs and Pehrsson (2008 quoted in: Tielsch Goddard 2011, 57), librarians in the 1930s created book lists to aid customers with issues, comparable to the bibliotherapy lists used today (cf. ibid). The concept was also used before by ancient Greeks, who saw the power of therapy in theatre to express emotions by reaching catharsis (cf. Suvilehto, Pirjo, Kerry-Moran, Kelli Jo, and Aerila, Juli-Anna 2019). According to the cathartic view of literature, it can impact children through 'mechanisms including engagement, imitation, identification, insight, and universalism' (Pulimeno, Piscitelli, and Colazzo 2020, 16). Bibliotherapy is derived from two Greek words: *biblion* (book) and *therapeia* (healing) (McCulliss 2021 quoted in: Vries et al. 2017, 49).

> The main purposes of bibliotherapy are to share information, provide insight, promote the discussion of feelings, demonstrate new attitudes and values, show that others have similar problems, and to offer solutions to problems. (Kanewischer, 2013, 70 quoted in: Vries et al. 2017, 49)

Aiex (1993, quoted in: Forgan 2002, 76) gives several reasons to why students' use of bibliotherapy would be beneficial. Some of those are that children could be shown that they are not the only ones who have to deal with the same issue and it can be demonstrated that there are multiple solutions to a problem. Bibliotherapy can also strengthen a person's sense

of self and help them express their feelings and thoughts to free themselves of the burden or stress they are experiencing. It can assist in developing a useful plan to address the challenges and to learn how to cope with them (cf. Forgan 2002, 76). Stories also offer emotional support in difficult life conditions. Tales encourage children to overcome their fears and internal conflicts, positively impacting their social behaviour (cf. Pulimeno, Piscitelli, and Colazzo 2020, 16). Another positive feature of bibliotherapy is that it is an inexpensive option that may reach individuals unable to receive support during the pandemic. It has the power to be used by healthcare professionals as well as at home (cf. Monroy-Fraustro et al. 2021, 14).

However, there is not much research on when bibliotherapy was first used on children. Regardless, social and emotional growth education should be implemented in the curriculum as children's mental health issues increase worldwide. The role of teachers in promoting children's social and emotional development is very imporant. Many literacy techniques already used in school are natural actions of developmental bibliotherapy, which is the focus of this thesis (cf. Suvilehto, Pirjo, Kerry-Moran, Kelli Jo, and Aerila, Juli-Anna 2019, 302). It is used by teachers, librarians, school counsellors, social workers and family members to promote healthy growth and to sustain mental health (cf. Suvilehto, Pirjo, Kerry-Moran, Kelli Jo, and Aerila, Juli-Anna 2019, 300). In the classroom, it can be applied with the whole class as well as in smaller groups. The steps of this process also include selecting and presenting materials to use with students. The students can identify with the characters from the books in developmental bibliotherapy and experience catharsis and emotional release (cf. Forgan 2002, 76).

Bibliotherapy follows a four-step concept according to McCarty and Hynes-Berry (1994, quoted in: cf. Suvilehto, Pirjo, Kerry-Moran, Kelli Jo, and Aerila, Juli-Anna 2019, 304). These steps are (1) recognition, (2) examination, and (3) juxtaposition and (4) application to self. The first step, recognition, is when the child wants to participate because of having an interest in the story. The concept then focuses on the plot and the characters in step two, examination. Children may relate to the feelings and thoughts of specific characters in the story because of some features they might have in common with them and try to handle the same difficulties. Through these feelings, they associate their thoughts and emotions and link their own behaviour and that of the characters in the third step, juxtaposition. The final phase, application, signifies that the bibliotherapy session has impacted the children, and it will affect their behaviour because solutions were presented in the text (cf. Suvilehto, Pirjo, Kerry-Moran, Kelli Jo, and Aerila, Juli-Anna 2019, 305)

These four steps can be adapted for families and teachers. This is very important considering how much bibliotherapy can improve the communication between children, parents and

teachers (cf. Tielsch Goddard 2011, 58). These steps consist of (1) choosing a text, (2) sharing the text, (3) discussion and exploration, and (4) evaluation. In step 1, the text's quality and suitability are evaluated. Not every book is appropriate for bibliotherapy or every child. The evaluation of a story is essential, and the following criteria can guide the selection. Similar characters, positive portrayal of diversity and adversity, emotions, and situational and cultural relevance are criteria that need to be considered in the first step. The process of sharing text can be either in a large or small group or applied to individual children. Before introducing young children to critical books, it is best to discuss it in advance with the families. After reading the text, well-planned questions can assist in processing and making connections between them and the characters. Activities and techniques to discuss the book can be useful post-reading activities (cf. Suvilehto, Pirjo, Kerry-Moran, Kelli Jo, and Aerila, Juli-Anna 2019, 305–09).

Before using a book, there are general aspects to consider. These involve thinking about the plot, how the author deals with conflicts, how the characters are portrayed, and what thoughts and ideas they express. One has to look for a book, not necessarily recent or well-known that will elicit a reaction from the child's emotions and ideas. Some novels that adults dislike can be loved by children and the other way around. People who choose books should be mindful of their preconceptions and views, as well as the impact they have on their choices (cf. Berg, Devlin, and Duff 1980, 44).

However, the benefits of bibliotherapy on children are clearly pointed out and using children's literature can have a great influence on emotional experiences. It can be regarded as a valuable teaching tool the effects of which can be enhanced with the use of books to communicate health information and to comfort at the same time (cf. Pulimeno, Piscitelli, and Colazzo 2020, 20). There is research on the effectiveness of bibliotherapy in the treatment of a variety of disorders. The following topics (loss, anger and anxiety) are highlighted as they can result from the pandemic situation and will also be discussed later in the picture book analysis.

The way children experience loss is affected by their level of cognitive and emotional development (cf. Berg, Devlin, and Duff 1980, 37). Their capacities to express feelings are not fully developed yet, so they struggle to express their grief verbally. Sadness, loneliness, rage, guilt, shock, and numbness or disbelief are all common reactions for children following a loss. Their behaviour may shift, with children occasionally behaving in immature or furious, explosive ways. Sharing grief is a vital coping mechanism that supports individual healing and a sense of connection with people going through the same loss (cf. Golding 2006, 256). When using bibliotherapy in this specific situation, the child's situation does not have to be the same

as the protagonist's. Something that could help is when the books suggest some methods to overcome problems that may be similar to the readers', which could be used to offer a resolution (cf. Berg, Devlin, and Duff 1980, 40–42).

As mentioned, grief can also result in anger but in general it is a vital emotion and many children struggle with it. The ability to choose between destructive and constructive behavior must be taught to children. Out-of-control rage can lead to harmful behavior, which makes children feel helpless, anxious, and guilty if they have wounded someone. However, when children manage their anger well, they feel safer and less powerless over it. It is crucial that they understand that their caretakers can support them in controlling their rage by accepting them, engaging in conversation, and resolving disputes (cf. Golding 2006, 47).

Anxiety can be experienced in different ways and happens often in every day life. Signs like a fast heartbeat and feeling uneasy are common. It can also be triggered when people fixate on things and imagine all the outcomes that could happen. If it becomes a continuous condition, it can also be called generalised anxiety disorder or panic disorder. These can cause the symptoms mentioned before as well as sweating and chest pain. The steps of McCarty and Hynes-Berry can offer to provide people with better tools. When it comes to anxiety and panic, especially the step of catharsis is important, as it relieves physiological and/or psychological discomfort (cf. The Book Habit 2019).

4.   Covid-19 and Its Consequences

December 2019 marks the beginning of one of the deadliest pandemics in modern times: the outbreak of the coronavirus disease. The virus, also called SARS-CoV-2, was first found in Wuhan, Hubei Province of China. Typical symptoms of this disease are fever, body aches, running nose, sore throat and a wide range of other signs (cf. Madabhavi, Sarkar, and Kadakol 2020, 252)

The first death was recorded on January 11, 2020 in Wuhan, reportedly from an unknown disease. Rapidly after that, the virus spread not only in China but worldwide. The WHO published a report summarising the outbreak's progress outline from December 31, 2019 to January 20, 2020. The first case detected outside China was recorded in Thailand on January 13, 2020. Japan made its first case announcement on January 15, 2020. On January 20, 2020, South Korea announced the first case in the country, while China updated its numbers with 278 cases and 6 deaths (cf. World Health Organization 2020, 9)

The WHO officially declared this outbreak a pandemic on March 11, 2020, 3 months after the first cluster was detected (World Health Organization Regional Office for Europe., 2021). The WHO recommended different measures to keep the contagion levels low, from wearing masks

and being more careful with general hygiene to home isolation or even quarantine (cf. Madabhavi, Sarkar, and Kadakol 2020, 255). With its rapid spread and lethal effects on humans, the new coronavirus caused difficulties worldwide. It also had an effect on the publication of books and created a demand for books that address person hygiene, the spreading of germs and living in isolation.

4.1   Publishing During a Pandemic

In March 2020, it was becoming increasingly evident that not all the books that were planned to be published met readers' needs anymore. There was a desire for books that dealt with the crisis we were living in. These books aimed to offer information and explain the new virus in a way that children could understand. What made publishing books during the pandemic in 2020 so special was that there were many more ways to deal with the crisis compared to, for example, 20 years ago when another unexpected event happened: 9/11. This time publishers and authors could act faster in dealing with this unknown situation (cf. Bird 2020; Anders 2020)

In crises, people gather resources to provide aid where it is needed the most. During this uncertain period, libraries throughout the world worked to help adults and children by creating virtual programs and booklists. Books were published daily and came from all different backgrounds and from all around the world. It is notable how quickly picture books were produced in this global health crisis. These publications showed how adults recognised the grave role that children's books could play in the fight to stop the transmission of the virus (cf. Moruzi, Chen, and Venzo 2022, 98). It was essential to provide resources that explained Covid-19's different aspects, such as how the virus is transmitted, and how and why social distance and other themes are important. The newly published books also tackled anxiety, boredom, worry and fear as well as solid emotions like kindness, love, compassion, gratitude and staying positive and healthy. The new books talk about helping others, handwashing, being in the hospital and not being able to embrace our loved ones (cf. Sarles 2020, 5).

4.2   Covid-19 Topics Affecting Children

The following books that are presented deal with different manifestations of the Covid-19 topic. Different topics are explained in the picture books and examples are given in this chapter. As the routine and normalcy of everyday life had changed, children needed to be able to adapt to the new 'normal'. It was important to include children in conversations about the pandemic and to explain to them the reason for all the changes in their lives in an age-appropriate way. As mentioned before, picture books are great sources to help explain a new situation. Most of the following books were published in 2020, when the virus started to spread. Some of them had already been published before but gained relevance in themes like general hygiene or dealing

with anxiety. The following parts will introduce the books shortly. In chapter five, books on mental health will be presented and analysed more thoroughly.

Covid-19 Explanation Books

Covid-19 explanation books deal with various aspects of the pandemic, such as explaining what a virus is, the reasons why schools are closed, and why we cannot visit our friends. The first book is called *Coronavirus: A book for children*. It is written with the help of an infectious diseases specialist and illustrated by Axel Scheffler, who also illustrated the popular book *the Gruffalo*. This non-fiction picture book informs children about transmission, symptoms and the possibility of a cure. Readers are comforted with the fact that researchers and medical professionals are striving to create a vaccine. (cf. Jenner, Wilson, and Roberts 2020).

The book *Why We Stay Home,* published on 1st of June 2020, is written by Harris and Scott, medical students from Loma Linda University School of Medicine in Southern California. The story, illustrated by Harriet Rodis, is about a child named Suzie, who is excited to be able to stay home with her mother, father and her older sister Millie. When Suzie expresses this to Millie, she explains to Suzie why they have been staying home with a quick lesson on the coronavirus (cf. Harris and Scott 2020).

General hygiene and wearing masks

The two following books discuss health hygiene practices and why it is essential to wear masks. Tony Ross's book *I Don't Want to Wash My Hands!* was first published 20 years ago, but in the current situation, it gained popularity again. In the book, the Little Princess wants to know why everyone is telling her to always wash her hands and one of the characters, the maid, tells the Little Princess all about the germs that can make her sick. The book explains the importance of hand washing (cf. Ross 2020b).

Similarly, *Heroes Wear Masks - Elmo's Super Adventure* was published by Sesame Street. Elmo attends school and wants to be a school superhero. Elmo and his mother can help children with anxiety go back to school and understand new experiences like wearing masks, washing hands frequently and social distancing. School Superhero reminds readers how important it is to help everyone stay healthy (cf. Sesame Workshop 2020).

Heroes and helpers

Many people contributed to the fight against this new disease, and children may ask themselves how they can be supportive. Some books set their focus on answering these questions and express their appreciation for all the heroes and helpers that work hard in these difficult times. Helen Patuck's book *My Hero Is You* follows Sara and her magical dragon Ario

as they fly around the world, teaching others about the coronavirus. This book is the result of a global survey conducted in five different languages and on 1,700 children, parents, and caregivers, assessing children's mental health responses to the outbreak (cf. Patuck 2020).

Thank You, Helpers by Patricia Hegarty helps make our new reality a little less scary for children. It reassures children by encouraging them to see all the unique ways in which people keep each other safe. Through books like this, children can learn about the heroes in our communities taking care of all of us (cf. Hegarty and Emmerson 2020).

Staying home

Several books focus on the difficulties of staying home. *Rainbow in Windows* by Arianna Schioldager is a book about big imaginations, feelings and sheltering in a place during a pandemic. The main character of the book is a child named Amos who loves going to school. One day, his mother tells him that they have to stay home that day. The news makes him anxious and he worries about the situation and that he cannot see his friends, so his mother decides to create a rainbow in their window so everyone can see it. The idea behind that is to feel less alone and to explain that everyone feels a little bit stuck and sad at the moment and that it is fine to feel that way (cf. Schioldager 2020).

And the People Stayed Home by Kitty O'Meara is a poem published in March on her Facebook page and quickly went viral. It was later published as a picture book with illustrations. The poem suggests that we can find meaning in the pandemic and delivers a positive message about people finding rest and the earth's healing (cf. O'Meara 2020).

Dealing with emotions / Grief & loss

The three books mentioned in this part can be supportive when it comes to talking about feelings and emotions. *I Love You* by Michael Ross helps children handle the emotional impact of not being able to visit their grandparents. The book can help kids understand that this situation concerns everyone all over the world regardless of their age, where they come from or their language. The publisher NABU has the mission to solve the inequality in children's book creation and distribution, so all children are able to read and rise to their full potential (cf. Ross 2020a).

Windows by Patrick Guest and Jonathan Bentley shows different children around the world looking out of their windows and depicts the difficulties of isolation - specifically for children - but in the most positive way possible. The book serves as a reminder for the children that they will be able to be together with their loved ones again (cf. Guest and Bentley 2021).

The Color Monster - this story by Anna Llenas is about common emotions such as happiness, sadness, anger and fear. These emotions are illustrated through colourful monsters in this sensitive book and want to gently encourage young children to open up to parents and teachers about their thoughts and feelings. It was published in 2018 but can ideally be used to talk about children's feelings in these uncertain times (cf. Llenas 2018).

<u>Online learning</u>

Books that help children prepare for online learning like *My New Home School* by Cloe Drulis deals with the transition to remote education**.** It assists children in changing their routines and gives parents strategies to juggle parenting, work and homeschooling (cf. Drulis 2020).

Good Morning Zoom written by Lindsay Rechler and illustrated by June Park is based on Margaret Wise Brown's 'Goodnight Moon'. It's a parody that substitutes subjects from the original story with an iPad and an entire classroom with a Zoom meeting (cf. Rechler 2020).

<u>Back to school</u>

Returning to school after the lockdown was a challenge for the children, but there are some books that helped and guided the way to show how to deal with these worries. *Kelly Goes Back to School* by Lauren & Adam Block, aims to show families the transition back to school during a pandemic (cf. Block and Block 2020).

In It Together by Twinkl Original also focuses on preparing for school life after the lockdown and returning to school**.** These stories can encourage children to open up about their anxieties, hopes and thoughts about the transition from remote learning to being back in the classroom (cf. *In It Together* 2020).

4.3   Covid-19 and CLIL

As Covid-19 is a global health crisis, it concerns the whole world. This is a topic that can also be picked up in the classroom and it is fitting for Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) lessons. CLIL is a 'dual-focused educational approach in which an additional language is used for the learning and teaching of both content and language' (Coyle, Hood, and Marsh 2010, 1). CLIL teaching promotes blended learning, which aims to equip students with the best possible knowledge and skills to navigate an increasingly globalised world (cf. Mehisto, Marsh, and Frigols 2008, 10–11f). Within this concept, preparing for an international society or teaching tolerance and respect for other cultures are important elements (cf. Massler 2013, 8).

Through discussions, differences between lockdowns, going back to school and online learning in other parts of the world could be evaluated. Since picture books generally include different characters with different backgrounds, they can be helpful in teaching children about

the concept of a globalised world from a young age and prepare them for interaction with other cultures. By mentioning how people all over the world suffered during the pandemic and the similarities as well as the differences between the rules and preventive measures enforced in other countries, picture books can provide knowledge and guidance in a world more connected than ever.

Part II: Analysis of Selected (Children's) Picture Books

The purpose of the second part is to find an answer to the posed research question:

How can children's mental health be supported to feel well in crisis?

The following questions help and support to find an answer to the main research question:

- *How can the pandemic and the changes that come with it be explained through picture books?*
- *Which books provide emotional comfort?*
- *How can bibliotherapy be used as an approach in that matter?*
- *What are the main features and characteristics of picture books covering mental health topics?*

The content analysis results will serve as a guide for bibliotherapy. This categorized information can assist parents, educators, and mental health professionals identify appropriate books to guide children in crisis more selectively. The following chapters are going to explain which research method is used and why it was chosen. The analysis part first lists which books were selected, and the corpus is presented by providing a short introduction to each selected picture book. The coding process is explained and the results are shown in tables. In the end the author conducts a discussion and shows the limitations of the analysis and suggest further research possibilities.

5.   Excursion: Ontology of Reality and Postmodern Picture Books

Discourse and content analysis, the two leading social science research methods, both explore social reality from two distinctively different perspectives. The difference is that discourse analysis considers reality as a social construct, while content analysis presumes the existence of an independent reality (cf. Hardy, Phillips, and Harley 2004, 19-20). These assumptions are also called 'Ontology' - 'the study of being', a compound word derived from the ancient Greek words 'onto' – which means 'to exist', and 'logia' - 'logical discourse' (Luminoso 2018). Ontology can also be understood as the nature of the knowable or reality.

Content Analysis is seen as 'positivist, objective, and quantitative' (Hardy, Phillips, and Harley 2004, 21) in this application and Discourse Analysis as 'interpretivist, intersubjective and qualitative' (Hardy, Phillips, and Harley 2004, 21). The Epistemology of Content Analysis states that meaning cannot be changed and that reality can be verified through scientific methods. This is one of the striking reasons why Content Analysis was chosen for this thesis because counting and coding the text is possible. The textual content compared to other texts is looked at with a quantitative approach (cf. Hardy, Phillips, and Harley 2004, 21). Therefore, using content analysis as a research method and not considering the philosophical insights would be wrong.

The philosophical perspective is especially important regarding children's literature, as they portray a form of real life that pictures the truth. Postmodern books are challenging this view as, according to Derrida (1976), language is neither a transparent medium nor a window into the outside world; it can never present reality.

> The challenging of certainty, the asking of questions, the revealing of fiction-making where we might have once accepted the existence of some absolute 'truth' - this is the project of postmodernism (Hutcheon 1988, 48, quoted in: Allan 2012, 79).

To challenge the traditional belief that narratives depict the 'real' world, Hutcheon (1988) states that postmodern picture books question this assumption by concentrating on the 'fictional world as construct, and the text as artefact' (Allan 2012, 80). This is also based on Butlers' (2002) assumption, who says that all texts are formed using language but that language's link to reality is not a given because all language systems are cultural creations and are, as a result, deceptive (cf. Allan 2012, 79-80).

The unique ontology of literary texts has to be considered, which means that in contrast to non-fiction texts, fictional texts are not referential. Their truth cannot be verified in reality, and additionally, they possess an aesthetic character. This means that the form of a literary work has just as much expressive character as the content and that the author deliberately chooses stylistic means to express something specific. The formal characteristics are thus as much a carrier of meaning as the content itself and must be transmitted accordingly (cf. Greiner 2004, 15-17).

This approach is important to be able to define quality criteria, because they always refer to 'world views'. For this reason, quality criteria can be revaluated since validity of knowledge cannot be certainly determined but only be judged by plausibility and credibility. For content analysis, it means that the criteria of internal study quality are particularly important (cf. Kuckartz 2018, 202–03).

6.   Method and Procedure

In this thesis, a content analysis is conducted to investigate if and how mental health in times of the Covid-19 pandemic can be improved through picture books. This research method can be used to analyse and dissect text-based data, which can exist in the form of written transcripts or documents. As the goal of this research is not to determine how individuals understand the meaning of the chosen picture books or what they think or feel about them, discourse analysis was not appropriate. In the excursion, this is also stated and explained. Within this method, parts of the text are labelled and grouped based on their similarities. This process is called 'coding'. Coding is done by the researcher spotting common key points in different texts and grouping them together based on self-determined codes. During this process, a continuous influx of new information can alter the list of codes initially established by the researcher (cf. Vears and Gillam 2022, 112–13). The targeted outcome is establishing concepts or categories to sum up and define the research subject. It is a method of analysing the meaning behind the stories. According to Bekkedal (1973, 110), content analysis allows the researcher's subjective opinions to go to an objective point of view and describe texts in a systematic approach. When there is no study conducted by others on a given subject matter, researchers can lean towards inductive content analysis (cf. Elo and Kyngäs 2008, 108–10). Therefore, the inductive method was chosen to explore the picture books published during the Covid-19 pandemic in this thesis due to a lack of prior research.

Content analysis consists of five steps. According to Morse (1994, quoted in: Vears and Gillam 2022, 117), the first step entails reading all of the chosen data thoroughly and getting acquainted with them. In the second step, parts of the text that have a connection to the research questions are identified. This is the first round of coding where big picture meaning units are selected. After that, in step 3, a closer look is taken at the unit categories which can then be labelled precisely by dividing broad concepts into subcategories. The process of open coding involves writing comments and headings in the book while reading it. In the fourth step, the codes are compared and filtered to see whether they are too similar and then they can be sorted out if they are. This is how a coding strategy is developed. In the last step, the gathered information is studied to see what message the data attempts to convey and subsequently, the research questions can be responded to (cf. Vears and Gillam 2022, 117–24).

Content analysis can also be computer-based or assisted. Using a software for the analysis can make the process easier and more efficient. There are certain Qualitative Data Analysis (QDA) tools that can be used for evaluation purposes. A QDA-software-based analysis varies from a manual analysis in terms of not requiring a specific assessment technique and its applicability to a wide range of data types and methods (cf. Kuckartz 2018, 163).

Such a software can be very useful in such cases when the researcher aims to make the frequency of certain words a part of their research by counting how many times each word was repeated in the analysed text (cf. Kuckartz 2018, 197). When dealing with big amounts of data, this technique can be very time-efficient. In addition to this benefit, it can diminish the need for seeking different coders to ensure intercoder-reliability by removing the human factor from the process (cf. Kuckartz 2018, 207–09). However, due to several reasons like the complex nature of the text being analysed, the need to read between the lines or to take the visual content that supports the stories into consideration, and the selected data not being in a very big amount; the research was carried out manually.

Content analysis regarding picture books has been used many times before, and previous research has been done on all kinds of different topics such as race, gender and illnesses. The research method was often used for what the researcher describes as tender topics in chapter 2.2 (cf. Bekkedal 1973, 110–21). As mentioned above, there is no prior research encompassing the pandemic, picture books and bibliotherapy using the content analysis approach. Monroy-Fraustro et al. (2021), who conducted a mixed-methods systematic review and bioethical meta-analysis on bibliotherapy, review articles on the effectiveness of bibliotherapy on different mental health problems. *Exploring Wellbeing in Picture Books for Children with Cancer: A Content Analysis by Sahar Fazeli* (cf. Fazeli 2021) and *Content Analysis of Picture Books about Bulling by Kelsey Daniel* (cf. Daniel 2014) are among the other works using Content Analysis with tender topic picture books. Some of the topics highlighted in this thesis can be found in other works either individually or together in one research, however this specific combination of all selected components was not found by the researcher.

The idea behind this thesis first emerged during the Module 1 seminar, 'Picture Books, Storytelling, Digital Storytelling' followed by the Module 1 exam. The exam required the attendees to give a presentation on a picture book-related topic. The scope of this thesis is a narrowed-down version of the presentation given by the researcher during the module, titled 'Covid-19 in recent picture books: An exploration', which covered the general pandemic period and how it was reflected in picture books but did not specifically focus on the mental health aspect. As noted in the theoretical part of this thesis, mental health problems increased, and so has the intervention. This is the reason why the focus is not only on Covid-19 picture books but especially on the books that are related to mental health.

Based on these criteria, the search for suiting picture books started. The chosen ones were found through a Google search, using terms like *Covid-19 picture books, mental health picture books, Covid-19 and mental health picture books, anxiety picture books, pandemic picture books*. One of the other primary sources were library blogs such as *School Library Journal* and

Association for Library Service, but also smaller individual blogs operated by teachers and librarians.

The sorting out process started with looking for picture books, mainly dealing with the topic of Covid-19. Many picture books focusing on pandemic-related information were found but there were not too many that deal with tackling a mental health topic simultaneously. Books often explain what the virus is about and how children can protect themselves from it. This is also why one of the five books analysed in this thesis was not published during the Covid-19 pandemic. One main criterion was that all of them would have to be published in the last four years, which means from 2018 to 2022. Due to the ever-changing nature of mental health topics, keeping the books as up-to-date as possible was crucial for the scope and the purpose of this research. While choosing the books, the main focus was on the authenticity, the story line and the psychosocial aspects. Language, illustrations and methodological implications were not as crucial as the abovementioned factors. As mentioned in the bibliotherapy chapter, the chosen books had to be appropriate for the students regarding the stage of development and their underlying messages.

Prior to the the analysis process, each book was read several times, concentrating on the text, then the illustrations and eventually both of them with each read. This was done to reach a good level of familiarity with the material to ensure a complete analysis of the contents. After coding the five selected books, the researcher trained one volunteer. They coded all of the five books independently. For each disagreement in coding, a third coder assisted in the process. In the end, the coders concluded that the categories were accurate. Required credibility in the analysis procedure is explained in Chapter 8.

7.   Introduction of Selected (Children's) Picture Books

The purpose of this analysis is to examine the essential characteristics of picture books, including their general details, key features and the demographics of the protagonists and the supportive characters. It is also aimed to explore how the protagonists deal with the range of challenges and which coping mechanisms and emotions they entail.

The Rabbit Listened

The 40-page picture book written by Cori Doerrfeld, published by Dial Books in February 2018, is about a child named Taylor, who does not know how to deal with his emotions when something sad happens. He builds a castle-like structure from blocks only to see it come crashing down when a flock of birds flies through it. Some animals see Taylor sitting down next to the pieces of his broken-down castle in sadness. They appear one by one with different suggestions. The first to arrive is a chicken that suggests talking about it, but then it leaves

when Taylor does not want to talk. The bear suggests that Taylor should get angry about what happened, the ostrich intends to hide and pretend that nothing happened, and the kangaroo just wants to throw it all away. However, Taylor does not like any of these ideas, so eventually all animals leave and Taylor still sits alone. The last one to arrive is the rabbit who does not suggest or offer anything. He just sits with Taylor and listens to him, which is all Taylor wants at that moment. This shows that being comforted sometimes can mean only listening to the other person and giving them the assurance that they are not alone (cf. Doerrfeld 2018).

The main topic of this book is a touching reflection on loss. It can serve as a tool to help children understand their emotions. The author gave an interview to the Blog BookTrust, during which she said, 'Sometimes being a person is hard', describing the book's process. She talks about losing someone in her friend group and remembers an old friend, expressing how she felt the same way about her loss as Taylor: wishing someone would just listen to her. It was these experiences that encouraged Doerrfeld to write a book about loss and grief (cf. Doerrfeld 2019). She says:

> Picture Books offer such a unique opportunity to present an idea or topic to someone in a safe, clear way - a way that is often repeated as stories are read again and again. Ultimately, Picture Books can help kids to connect everything they see, read, and hear to the real life situations they encounter every day (Doerrfeld 2019).

What Color Is Today?

Author and illustrator Alison Stephen works with the colours from the rainbow to show a different range of emotions people can feel during the pandemic. Blue represents fear related to the possibility of further spreading of the virus. Red shows rage about everything being cancelled from school to recreational activities. However, certain colours have more uplifting meanings. Good days spent in the sun are illustrated in yellow, and the green-painted masks show that grocery shopping can be entertaining. Most days are a combination of different colours to show the coming together of all emotions, which are a result of different things happening in the plot. The family is taking safety measures while also trying to stay in contact with their neighbours and friends and maintaining routines. At the end of the book, the family sends thank you notes and paintings to the people that keep the world running (cf. Stephen 2020a).

This book can help children deal with their emotions such as being confused about the future and feeling angry about their social interactions being restricted. On the one hand, it can give the parents an opportunity to face difficulties, such as losing a job or financial issues and make room for dialogue about how children and adults can feel frustrated. On the other hand, it can give hope and inspiration that not everything that happened during the pandemic is bad.

Henrietta's Thistleberry Boots

Laura Anderson Kirby wrote this 32-page book about change, endurance, courage and resilience in May 2021. The main character is Henrietta, who is a very happy hedgehog. The book starts by showing her routine every night before going to bed. She dances, packs her school bag for the next day and brushes her teeth. When toxic thistleberries begin to fall from the sky, her routine is interrupted, and Henrietta cannot go to school anymore. She has to learn to wear boots to protect herself from the poisonous berries. One of the hardest changes for the main character is to adapt to the loss of her routine. Even though Covid-19 is not mentioned, the connection is very clear, and the book was published at the perfect time (cf. Anderson Kirby 2021).

The Extraordinary Pause

The memento of the pandemic by Sara Sadik was published in September 2021 and contains illustrations by Karine Jabe. When the virus arrives, the world hits pause and life slows down for most people, streets become empty, cafes and shops have to close down. The book does not give particular information about the sickness or the deaths on a global scale, but communicates directly to young readers about the various life changes that occurred as a result of Covid-19 in ways that they will understand. It analyses the physical, mental, and emotional consequences of this exceptional event, reflecting on both what was lost and gained. It ends on a positive note and focuses on the need to take a moment to appreciate the small things in life (cf. Sadik 2021).

The last page of the book includes guided questions like 'What changed during the pandemic in your family?', 'What good thing happened that was unexpected?' and 'What did you miss the most?' The book itself shows the positive and negative aspects of the pandemic and gives the chance to reflect on this *extraordinary* period. Next to the questions, there is a QR-Code that can be scanned to access additional materials that explain the book in greater detail and are also used by the researcher for the results later. On the back of the book, there is some personal information about Sadik and how the pandemic was challenging for her due to homeschooling three children between the ages of three and six.

Outside, Inside

Published in 2021, LeUyen Pham's *Outside, Inside* is a picture book that talks about the hardships and the massive worldwide change that followed the pandemic, without actually naming the phenomenon. Pham delivers her message from a wider angle by comparing the life people had 'outside' before the pandemic and the life they had to experience 'inside' their homes during the lockdown period. The book portrays the world as a big and diverse neighbourhood where everyone coexists and lives in harmony until one day, they all have to

go inside and spend all their time at home cooking, working, studying and doing fun activities with their loved ones to pass the time, which is a hint to the pandemic's early stages. Pham does not forget to mention that some people like essential workers had to stay 'outside' to work and protect the others while the rest of the society had to deal with the pandemic 'inside' and the sadness this brought in their own ways. The book eventually ends with the message that all the hardship and uncertainty would one day pass as long as people did the right thing and acted responsibly, just like the first flowers that signal the spring, those difficult days would also come to an end (cf. Pham 2021). The author gave several interviews on YouTube explaining that the books was written how she and her family experienced life during the pandemic.

The chosen picture books were all published between 2018 and 2021. *What Color Is Today?*, *Henrietta's Thistleberry Boots*, *Outside, Inside* and *The Extraordinary Pause* are books published in response to the Covid-19 crisis. *The Rabbit Listened* was not published during the pandemic but can be used to support children's mental health during difficult times like a pandemic. The books have 32 to 48 pages, with an average of 40 pages[1]. All the selected books have coloured illustrations. Some of them are illustrated by the author, while others are done by illustrators. The language and the tone of the books can be clearly understood despite the fact that they are written on some difficult topics that would usually involve a specific terminology. It is crucial for the flow and the comprehensibility of the stories that the language chosen is taking into consideration the target audience's age and level of education.

In four out of the five books, humans are depicted as the main characters. Only in *Henrietta's Thistleberry Boots,* the main character is a hedgehog. In three out of five books, the main characters are female. In *What Color Is Today?* and *The Rabbit Listened*, the main characters are male. The ages of characters are never mentioned. However, with the researcher taking the liberty of interpreting the school-related content, they can be assumed to be between four and ten years old. In all of the books, the ethnicity of the main characters is also left unspecified. In many books, supportive characters have different nationalities, which is possibly due to the international context of the pandemic.

8.   Analysis

A coding sheet (Appendix A) was created to structure a systematic exploration of the content of each book. The coding captured four general types of data containing 21 subcategories in total.

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[1] The page count mentioned here is taken from the e-books: the printed versions can have different page counts.

- The **Response variables** are Worries/Anxiety, Anger, Grief, Sadness, Frustration, Excitement and Psychosomatic.
- The **Mental Health variables** include Coping strategies, Supportive characters, Self-care and Progress.
- Informational Setting, Social-distance / lockdown, Change of routines, Uncertainty, Sense of responsibility, Worldwide practices and Role of school/education are the subcategories of **Pandemic variables.**
- **Messages** cover Positive resolution, Implication and Recommendation.

An example for each code from every book can be found in the results. The books in which each category was coded are listed and comparisons are drawn between the differences that deal with similar topics (chapter 9). The results only include the written text as the pictures in the picture books will not be analysed. This is due to the fact that the text and pictures are symmetrical, which creates redundancy (cf. Matulka 2008, 7). The visual text is expected to confirm the meanings of the written part as everything shown through the pictures is already portrayed in the text. In this case, the graphical part has more of a decorative purpose while the sentences could virtually stand alone. These kinds of books only require a basic understanding of critical visual literacy from the reader (cf. Nikolajeva and Scott 2006, 65–66).

Some examples from four of the books chosen for this thesis can be found below to make it clear that the analysis of the pictures is redundant and would not provide more information than the text already does. This applies to all of the books except for *Outside, Inside*, where the verbal and visual parts does not tell the same story.

Figure 3: Grocery Shopping (Stephen 2020b, 15)
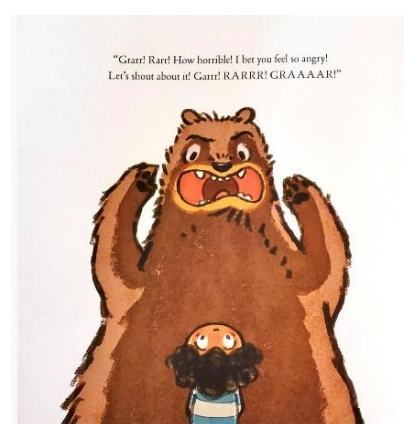
Figure 4: Bear is shouting (Doerrfeld 2018, 12)

Figure 5: Henrietta's routines (Anderson Kirby 2021, 2–3)
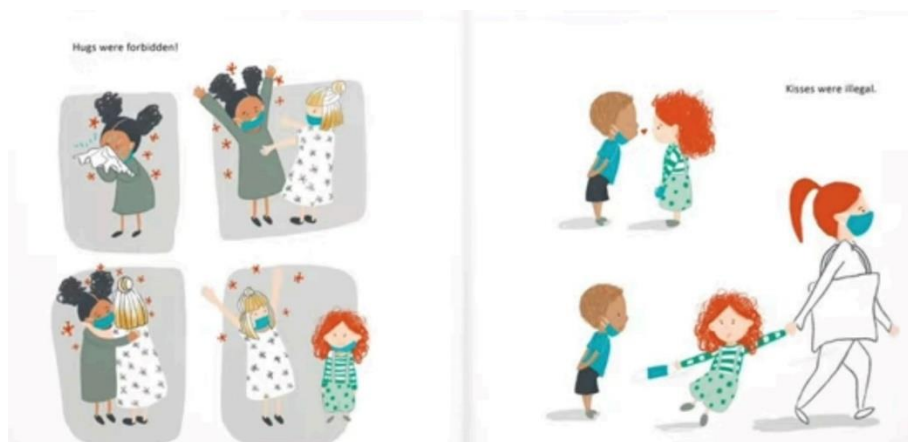
Figure 6: Hugs and Kisses (Sadik 2021, 19–20)

The text and the pictures in the book *Outside, Inside* are not mutually redundant because the text at certain pages gives the reader a vague idea of what is displayed in a more specific way in the corresponding pictures or the other way around, which makes the relationship between these two elements complementary (cf.Nikolajeva and Scott 2006, 12). The very symbolic nature of many parts of the book would leave the reader with different impressions if the pictures and the text were looked at separately. However, some other examples can be found where the pictures and the text make the same point.

As seen in the image below, the text talks about some people being where they needed to be. This is a very vague message that would leave the point behind it to the reader's own imagination had it not been for the pictures that portrait essential workers who kept working and businesses like grocery stores or delivery services which had to stay operational even when the world was in lockdown.

Figure 7: Complementary relationship (Pham 2021, 5–6)

However, this second image shows a more symmetrical relationship between the text and the pictures (cf. Nikolajeva and Scott 2006, 12). While the text describes people cooking, playing games or working; the pictures show the same actions. The fact that symmetrical and complementary interactions are present together in the book can be seen on the very same page, in the part where the text talks about everyone feeling different, and the picture shows an image of a family around the kitchen table, which does not necessarily convey that meaning.

Figure 8: Symmetrical relationship (Pham 2021, 15–16)

Therefore; *Outside, Inside* cannot be put in the same category as the other four books in terms of text-picture relationship.

The procedure of the two coders can be traced through the following examples, and explanations can show the required credibility and the changes that were made in the coding process. One example from each book is given to demonstrate such changes. To sum up the results: most codes were added with the suggestion of Coder 2 which were agreed upon by Coder 1. The codes were rarely changed completely. There was no disagreement on *The Rabbit Listened* between Coders 1 and 2.

28

In *What Color Is Today?,* the first coder coded Uncertainty, and the second coder added Anxiety. Upon discussing this coding difference, the coders agreed that uncertainty can lead to anxiety and decided to use both codes for this particular part.

Figure 9: Intercoder Reliability 1 (Stephen 2020b, 20)

In *Henrietta's Thistleberry Boots:* Coder 1 coded pages 1-3 as Change of Routines, to which Coder 2 agreed but also wanted to add Coping Strategies. After talking about it, Coder 2 understood that Coping Strategies are not equal to Change of Routines and there were no changes made.

Figure 10: Intercoder Reliability 2 (Anderson Kirby 2021, 2–3)

In *The Extraordinary Pause*, Coder 1 coded the parts below as Informational Setting. Coder 2 added Implication, and Coder 1 agreed with it as the theme of the book is that modern life slowed down. Since Implication means tackling a topic not directly but by implying it, the lines shown below are a good example of how the theme of taking a pause was supported.

Figure 11: Intercoder Reliability 3 (Sadik 2021, 3–4)

In *Outside, Inside,* Coder 1 was unsure about pages 29-32 and after discussing it with Coder 2, they agreed on the code Implication. Through discussion, it became easier to define the code that was needed.

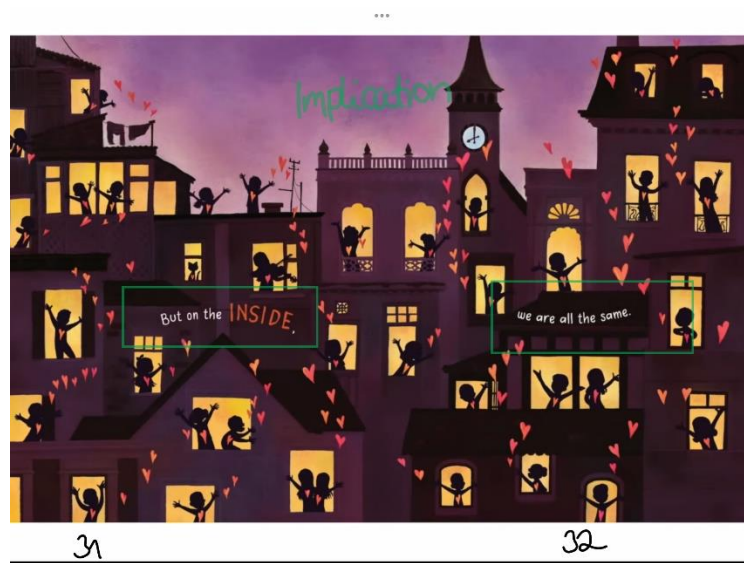*Figure 12: Intercoder Reliability 4 (Pham 2021, 31–32)*

9. Results

In this chapter, the coding data is presented. The following tables show the results grouped based on book titles, frequency of the occurrence and a quoted example of each code.

9.1 Response - Results

<u>Worries and Anxiety:</u> Responses such as Worries and Anxiety are experienced when unexpected situations take place.

The characters worry about the virus, what it looks like and how it will affect them. It was coded in all of the books while it appears most often in *The Rabbit Listened* and *Henrietta's Thistleberry Boots* and least often in *The Extraordinary Pause.* [2]

The Rabbit Listened (5)	*'"Gulp! Let's hide and pretend nothing happened!"'* (page 16)
What Color Is Today? (5)	*'Some would say today is blue. Scary blue.'* (page 1)
Henrietta's Thistleberry Boots (5)	*'What did they look like?', 'Would she and her family get sick?'* (page 9).
The Extraordinary Pause (1)	*'The virus felt like a big old bully - mean, scary, and unfair.'* (page 22)
Outside, Inside (2)	*'Swings sat still, and slides were lonely.'* (page 17)

<u>Anger:</u> The characters in *The Rabbit Listened* experience anger the most, while in *Henrietta's Thistleberry Boots*, it is coded only once. The emotional response Anger, which was found in three out of five books, is coded when routines like going to school or pursuing hobbies are changed.

The Rabbit Listened (4)	*'"Grarr! Rarr! How horrible! I bet you feel so angry! Let's shout about it! Garrr! RARRR! GRAAAAR!"'* (page 12)
What Color Is Today? (4)	*'No reason to get out of bed! Everything is cancelled! No soccer! No school! No baseball! No ballet! No lessons on French bread baking in a beret!'* (page 4)
Henrietta's Thistleberry Boots (1)	*'First, she couldn't go to school, and now she couldn't even run around in the yard'* (page 11)

<u>Grief:</u> Even though the main topic in *The Rabbit Listened* is grief, it is only coded once during the process. In *What Color Is Today?* it can be seen only once when one of the supportive characters experiences it through death in their family. Grief is coded in two out of five books.

The Rabbit Listened (1)	*'remembered'* (page 24)
What Color Is Today? (1)	*'She passed away and today they are celebrating her in every way.'* (page 10)

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[2] As the chosen picture books do not include pagination, the provided numbers refer to the double spreads numbered by the researcher.

<u>Sadness:</u> Through the change and losses the characters are going through, they experience sadness. It is coded most often in *The Rabbit Listened*, whereas found only once in *What Color Is Today?*. Sadness was identified in four of the selected books.

The Rabbit Listened (5)	*'[…] Taylor didn't feel like doing anything with anybody.'* (page 18)
What Color Is Today? (1)	*'With lots of […] and crying'* (page 10)
Henrietta's Thistleberry Boots (2)	*'Henrietta sat sadly on the couch.'* (page 13)
Outside, Inside (2)	*'and we cried'* (page 19)

<u>Frustration:</u> *What Color Is Today?* deals with frustration the most, while the response is only coded once in *The Extraordinary Pause*. Reasons for feeling frustrated include not knowing how to handle a new situation, not entirely understanding it and or not being happy about the new rules. Frustration is covered in four of the five books.

The Rabbit Listened (2)	*'ruining things for someone else'* (page 25)
What Color Is Today? (5)	*'I don't know what to do…', 'I don't know how to help…'.* (page 11)
Henrietta's Thistleberry Boots (1)	*'But I will never wear thistleberry boots'* (page 18)
The Extraordinary Pause (1)	*'The virus felt like a big old bully - mean, scary, and unfair.'* (page 22)

<u>Excitement:</u> In *The Rabbit Listened*, Excitement is on top of the list being of coded the most, while in the other books, it is coded because of 'small things' such as sunshine and seeing friends from a distance or through smiling and laughter. The response is coded one time in *Henrietta's Thistleberry Boots.* This response can be seen in all the books.

The Rabbit Listened (7)	*'Something new.', 'Something special.', 'Something amazing.'* (pages 2-3)
What Color Is Today? (2)	*'Today is YIPPEE YELLOW! Because the sun is shining and there is a kite flying! I see my friend dancing in her yard and I wave really, really hard!'* (page 12)
Henrietta's Thistleberry Boots (1)	*'"I'm ready to go outside today,"'* (page 23)

The Extraordinary Pause (2)	*'People felt and found things they had forgotten. And when their masks hid their faces, they smiled with their eyes.'* (page 25)
Outside, Inside (1)	*'we laughed.'* (page 19)

Psychosomatic: Symptoms caused by mental or emotional disturbance are coded in two of the five books.

The Rabbit Listened (2)	*'But Taylor didn't feel like remembering.'* (page 15)
Henrietta's Thistleberry Boots (3)	*'It made her stomach feel heavy and her body feel jittery.'* (page 9)

9.2   Mental Health - Results

Coping Strategies: These were coded very frequently throughout *The Rabbit Listened* and *Outside, Inside*, also two times in *Henrietta's Thistleberry Boots*. Coping Strategies give suggestions about making the characters feel better or offer activities to better handle the difficult situation and were spotted in three of the books.

The Rabbit Listened (8)	*'Let's laugh about it'* (page 16)
Henrietta's Thistleberry Boots (3)	*'"I'm going out into the yard", Henrietta said. The feel of the moss tickling her paws already helped her calm down.'* (page 10)
Outside, Inside (6)	*'Inside, we baked and cooked, made music and watched TV.' 'We read and played games.'* (page 15)

Supportive Characters: There is a multitude of Supportive Characters in *The Rabbit Listened* and only a few in *The Extraordinary Pause*. Supportive Characters help the characters go through difficult situations and do not leave their sides. They can be found in all of the five books.

The Rabbit Listened (12)	*'Through it all, the rabbit never left.'* (page 26)
What Color Is Today? (3)	*'I called my best friend'* (page 9)
Henrietta's Thistleberry Boots (6)	*'"Family meeting!"'* (page 4)
The Extraordinary Pause (2)	*'Mommies taught math. Daddies taught reading.'* (page 26)
Outside, Inside (6)	*'We made things together'* (page 20)

<u>Self-Care:</u> Only in one of the books, *The Extraordinary Pause,* the code Self-Care was detected which was shown through people slowing down their lives. Only 20% of the books contain this subcategory.

The Extraordinary Pause (1)	*'For some, life s-l-o-w-e-d down.'* (page 23)

<u>Progress:</u> The main characters overcome difficulties during the stories, resulting in a positive outcome. Progress was coded in four of the five books.

The Rabbit Listened (1)	*'And when the time was right, the rabbit listened to Taylor's plan to build again.'* (page 27)
Henrietta's Thistleberry Boots (1)	*'Looking at her new boots, Henrietta smiled. She still remembered the first time she put on her purple felt boots. It had been so scary. The thistleberries had been scary. Changing her routines had been the scariest thing of all.'*
The Extraordinary Pause (2)	*'it takes a pause to bring it all back'* (page 30)
Outside, Inside (2)	*'And we remembered that soon spring would come.'* (page 33)

9.3   Pandemic - Results

As *The Rabbit Listened* is a pre-pandemic book, it was only coded in the subcategory 'Uncertainty'.

<u>Informational Setting:</u> The pandemic's informational setting is described. Helpful information about what the world looked like before the virus arrived is shared with the book characters watching television, following the news and adapting to the rules. The books that deal with the pandemic were all coded with this category.

What Color Is Today? (3)	*'She watches the news closely as we wash our hands over and over again.'* (page 7)
Henrietta's Thistleberry Boots (1)	*'"I know. But it's not safe right now. Something called thistleberries have begun falling on the ground near your school. If you step on one, it can make you very sick. Worse yet, you can pass on that sickness to others. The berries should be gone soon, but until then, we have to be extra safe."'* (page 6)
The Extraordinary Pause (8)	*'Not long ago in a land we all know, things were moving fast'* (page 1), *'So fast that everyone stopped noticing the smell*

	of fresh pancakes, and the color green, and even each other' (page 2-4)
Outside, Inside (1)	*'Something strange happened on an unremarkable day just before the season changed.'* (page 2)

Social-distance and lockdown: This subcategory is coded the most in *The Extraordinary Pause* and the least in *Henrietta's Thistleberry Boots.* Everyone stays home and closes their doors to keep the virus away, and this happens in all of the chosen pandemic books.

What Color Is Today? (2)	*'Everyone MUST stay home. It's one way they say to keep the disease away.'* (page 5)
Henrietta's Thistleberry Boots (1)	*'"That's why we've decided to stay home."'* (page 6)
The Extraordinary Pause (10)	*'and people quickly shut their doors.' 'and stayed home.'* (page 11-12)
Outside, Inside (2)	*'Everyone just went inside, shut their doors,'* (page 7)

Change of routines: In *Henrietta's Thistleberry Boots*, Change of Routines was coded frequently. The subcategory is spotted two times in *What Color Is Today?*. In all of the books, the idea behind it seems to be the same: everything changes very fast and all the normal things like going to school and outdoor activities are cancelled. This category was also coded in all of the four virus-related books.

What Color Is Today? (2)	*'Everything is cancelled!'* (page 4)
Henrietta's Thistleberry Boots (7)	*'"But I-I-I always go to school on Mondays"'* (page 6)
The Extraordinary Pause (4)	*'The world changed overnight.'* (page 13)
Outside, Inside (4)	*'Bells didn't ring, and halls were empty.' 'The world was changing a tiny bit outside.'* (pages 17-18)

Uncertainty: As mentioned above, the Uncertainty subcategory is coded once in *The Rabbit Listened* following Taylor's loss. In the other books, no one knows what to do about the disease and how to act throughout the flow of events, and there is a lot of uncertainty, especially in *What Color Is Today?*. Uncertainty was coded in all of the books.

The Rabbit Listened (1)	*'things came crashing down.'* (page 6)

What Color Is Today? (7)	*'Today my mom is pink. Puzzled Pink. She doesn't really know what to think. Where did this begin and when will it end?'* (page 6)
Henrietta's Thistleberry Boots (2)	*'"I hope so, but I just don't know."'* (page 9)
The Extraordinary Pause (5)	*'And because it was so unexpected and unknown, the world hit pause.'* (page 10)
Outside, Inside (3)	*'Something strange happened on an unremarkable day just before the season changed.'* (page 2)

<u>Sense of responsibility:</u> The characters feel moral or legal accountability towards the rules and social-distancing. Sense of responsibility is coded often in *What Color Is Today?*, *The Extraordinary Pause* and *Outside, Inside*. Again, all pandemic-themed books were coded with this subcategory.

What Color Is Today? (5)	*'With unwashed hands, there's no telling where it may land! From the grocery store to your neighbor's front door!'* (page 3)
Henrietta's Thistleberry Boots (1)	*'Your father and I think it would be better if we all stay inside today…'.* (page 10)
The Extraordinary Pause (6)	*'Hugs were forbidden!' 'Kisses were illegal.' 'And holding hands and high-fives? A HUGE no-no!'* (page 19-21)
Outside, Inside (5)	*'Some people needed to be…where they needed to be.'* (pages 10-11), *'it was the right thing to do.'* (page 28)

<u>Worldwide practices:</u> *The Extraordinary Pause* shows the scale of the pandemic the most, while *What Color Is Today?* does so only once. The codes make it clear that the pandemic is in every country, all over the world and that everyone must stay home. In 60% of the books, worldwide practices were identified.

What Color Is Today? (1)	*'Everyone MUST stay home. It's one way they say, to keep the disease away.'* (page 5)
The Extraordinary Pause (7)	*'of every country'* (page 8)
Outside, Inside (2)	*'Everyone. Everywhere. All over the world.'* (page 5)

Role of school/education: In all of the books, the codes show that school is cancelled indefinitely. It was possible to code this subcategory in all of the pandemic books.

What Color Is Today? (1)	*'No school!'* (page 4)
Henrietta's Thistleberry Boots (2)	*'"Will we get to go back to school tomorrow?"'* (page 9)
The Extraordinary Pause (2)	*'And teachers and classmates all waved from a screen.'* (page 27)

9.4   Messages - Results

Positive resolution: This subcategory is coded often in *Outside, Inside*, whereas in *The Rabbit Listened*, it is coded once with Taylor finding new hope. It is also coded for all the helpers for being brave and facing difficulties they thought they could not. All five books have a positive resolution.

The Rabbit Listened (1)	*'It's going to be amazing'* (page 28)
What Color Is Today? (4)	*'A lot of people are feeling a lot of colors these days, in a lot of different ways…and they should know that's okay.'* (page 16)
Henrietta's Thistleberry Boots (3)	*'whatever came, she could face it'* (page 29)
The Extraordinary Pause (2)	*'it takes a pause to bring it all back'* (page 30)
Outside, Inside (11)	*'Outside, the world kept growing.', 'Inside, we kept growing too.'* (pages 21-23)

Implication: In two of the five books, a specific topic is addressed without naming the issue directly. Both books have deeper meanings to think and reflect about.

| *The Extraordinary Pause* (5) | *'and the moments where we really notice each other.'* (page 33) |
| *Outside, Inside* (3) | *'On the outside, we are all different.' 'But on the inside, we are all the same.'* (pages 29-32) |

Recommendation: An action is suggested only in one of the books. At the end of *The Extraordinary Pause*, there are some guided questions to reflect on the time of the pandemic. However, these are not part of the story.

The Extraordinary Pause (1)	*'What changed during the pandemic in your family?', 'What good thing happened that was unexpected?'* (page 35)

10.   Evaluation

The completed form of the analysis meets the initial research goals set by the researcher by providing the grounds to answer the research questions. The decision to pursue the method chosen for this thesis proved very effective in highlighting the main contents of particular books by counting codes. Even though this thesis was a first for the researcher to try this process, the analysis was only started after extensive reading on the topic and many peer works were reviewed, primarily to avoid the risk of not having maintained an objective point of view throughout the analysis. As it was mentioned in the methodology section, the material was processed by an external coder who was provided with picture books along with a coding sheet to code as they saw fit, as well as by the researcher. The material was reviewed numerous times before being considered fit for coding. The coding process was carried out directly on an iPad in each respective e-book since it is easier to make changes in a digital environment compared to physical books. The finished products of both coders were compared and reviewed by a third person. The differences between the two were discussed and the categories were adjusted to bring both works together. This method led to eliminating discrepancies and only additions were made.

The categories of codes were selected diligently by the researcher prior to starting the analysis and each respective definition was provided in relevant sections. The selection can also be justified and supported by the visual illustrations in corresponding books and exemplary passages they are taken from. Concrete examples (quotations) and illustrations help convey the meaning of the codes, and make it more comprehensible for the reader to allow for a smoother reading experience. The researcher's own point of view could influence the outcome. Although human error seems inevitable in separating oneself from one's point of view while reviewing literature, the author has been careful and diligent throughout the research. Had the researcher opted for an automatized computer-based method after loading the data to the system, the results might have turned out very different but this method would be more applicable when working with larger sums of data.

Some particular parts of the books ended up not being included within the scope of any of the codes because they did not fit the target categories, which is also discussed in the Limitations chapter.

Since the codes were decided upon to ensure the broadest framework that would encompass similar components and group them together, it is a negligible outcome that some particular parts did not make any of the groups. No new codes were added to the thesis to include these residual sections, which supports the applicability of the coding sheet in similar works.

As stated above, throughout the whole analysis and coding process, one of the main goals was to ensure the list of codes was not exclusive to a given book but rather transferable to any other material. With this in mind, the researcher aimed to put forward a coding sheet that would reflect an all-inclusive set of criteria. Whether that very list is indeed applicable to other materials or not is not easy to be determined without actually conducting the work. However, regardless of the answer to this question, aiming for that type of applicability has been one of the main priorities.

10.1 Findings and Discussion

In the previous chapter, examples were given on how often and in what way the different codes could be identified. This chapter gives a more detailed understanding of the findings of the study and the main messages that are delivered in the analysed picture books.

10.1.1 Response - Findings

Each book has a different take on the matter of **Worries and Anxiety**. While the characters in some may be more worried about the virus and the disease themselves, the characters in other books express their concern about how it will affect their families, their personal lives and the implications of the preventive measures taken in the whole world. Although *The Rabbit Listened* is not about the pandemic, the way loss is dealt with in the book makes it applicable to be covered in this thesis. Denial is one of the responses that are covered in the book, which is reflected with an animal that is falsely known for burying its head in the ground to avoid danger. This is an example of how animals are used in books to talk about real phenomena. The particular phenomenon in this case is the ostrich effect, which is reluctance to recognize the truth and to acknowledge negative outcomes (cf. Newcomb 2019).
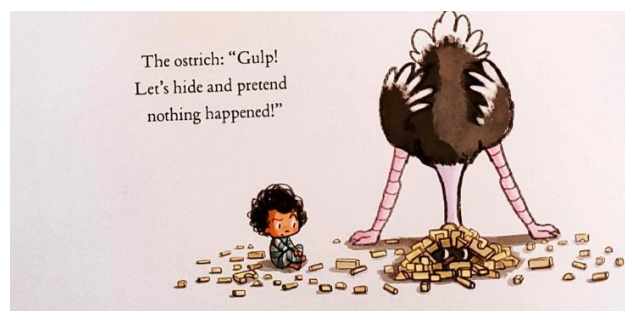

Figure 13: Taylor and the ostrich (Doerrfeld 2018, 16)

Each animal's response is associated with a different feeling that mostly fits the traits of each respective animal. Animal characters are frequently used as characteristics such as age and race do not need to be determined, allowing the focus to be solely on the story's content (cf. Berg, Devlin, and Duff 1980, 43). That is the reason for coding it as Worries/Anxiety.

In *What Color Is Today?*, colours are used to address feelings and emotions in a subjective way. In this part, the code Worries and Anxiety is connected with the colour blue, which is associated with being scary even though it is usually considered as clean, strong and cool (cf. Morton n.d).

Figure 14: Scary Blue (Stephen 2020b, 1)

Through this, the author hints that every person can have different feelings about a certain situation, and supports the book's theme. In *Henrietta's Thistleberry Boots*, the coronavirus is reflected in the image of toxic plants that are to be avoided. The author holds a mirror to the way a child might think and how they can focus on different aspects of a crisis that adults do not worry about, such as what a virus might look like. The way Henrietta is worried about herself and her family getting sick is almost a direct reference to Covid-19 without clearly mentioning the background and the scale of the fictional disease.

The Extraordinary Pause uses personification when talking about the pandemic. Feeling anxious and limited because of the virus, the book attributes human traits to it, calling it "mean, scary and unfair". The worries about the virus are strong because it is scary that something invisible can make such a difference in people's lives.
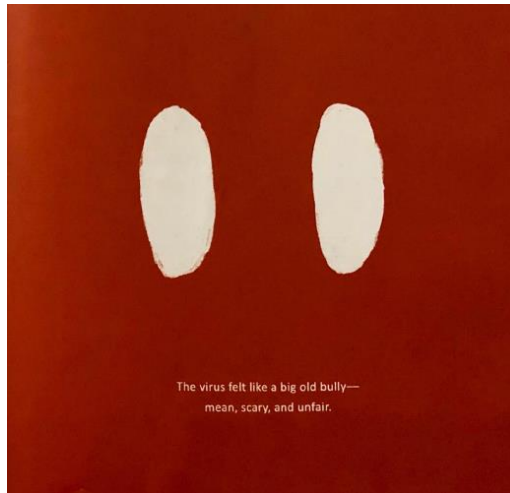
Figure 15: Mean, scary and unfair virus (Sadik 2021, 22)

In *The Rabbit Listened*, it can be seen that **Ange**r as a response is portrayed by an animal which is often associated with the characteristics of being big and strong and what can be considered similar to the human trait of having a short temper: a bear. This is another example of anthropomorphism, which is a technique commonly used in fables and stories for children (cf. Dunn 2011, 3).

Figure 16: Taylor and the bear (Doerrfeld 2018, 12)

What Color Is Today? covers the anger shared by many during the pandemic due to lockdown measures and event cancellations. When responses that may not be considered positive are reflected in stories, it shines a light on how natural it is to struggle with certain incidents before finding a way to make internal peace with it. *Henrietta's Thistleberry Boots*, though it does not directly talk about the Covid-19 pandemic, may be the one that reflects the reality of the life after the emergence of the virus most accurately with small details through a different outbreak in the world of hedgehogs.

Figure 17: Henrietta on the couch (Anderson Kirby 2021, 13)

In the example shown above, the way Henrietta feels is a reference to a response shared by many people in the real-world risk groups.

As mentioned earlier, the central theme of *The Rabbit Listened* is **Grief**, but this is the response that can be seen the least. This shows that the topic is not addressed directly; nevertheless, all the other feelings that can be felt in a loss are treated. Taylor, having gone through different responses after all the animals leave him alone except for the rabbit, calmly remembers his loss, which is no more than a broken-down castle made of blocks in the story but can be a loved one or a childhood home in real life. The story nods at the very natural side of grieving that even in the end, after feeling the sorrow and figuring out how to feel about what happened and coming back to a calm state of mind, what was lost can still be remembered but not all types of reminiscence are negative.

What Color Is Today? has a similar method to *The Rabbit Listened* in terms of experiencing grief. It is not the main character that is grieving in this story but one of his friends who lost their grandmother. This small part of the story shows that grief does not only bring sadness, but also that people who pass away can be celebrated for the good memories and the impact they made in their life.
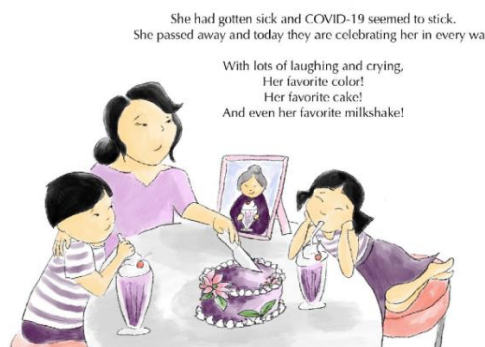

Figure 18: A family after losing their grandmother (Stephen 2020b, 10)

Sadness is coded in different ways. In *The Rabbit Listened*, Taylor's refusal to do as the animals suggest while dealing with his loss is a depiction of reluctance to take any deliberate action to feel better when feeling sad, and just taking the time to digest it. The other examples coded with Sadness depict sadness at different stages of handling different kinds of bad news. In *What Color Is Today?*, there are people crying after losing a loved one to Covid-19 (picture above) while in *Outside, Inside* sadness is shown as an inevitable part of life through crying not just for some people but for everyone. Therefore, the choice to use "we" as the subject of the sentence is important to support this message. Meanwhile in *Henrietta's Thistleberry Boots*, the sadness Henrietta feels comes from having just heard some bad news about her liberties being taken away from her for the good of herself and her family.

The Rabbit Listened shows **Frustration** in the form of wanting to make others go through a similar bad experience to feel better while *Henrietta's Thistleberry Boots* reflects the stubbornness of a child not to accept the limitations forced on her. Even though these two stories have different setups and themes, the response shown by the characters are similar in a way that it is not the final product of their thought mechanism but it is a part of it for them to reach internal peace and acceptance in the end. Unlike the other two stories, *What Color Is Today?* and *The Extraordinary Pause* depict the frustration felt because of the pandemic as a side effect of feeling deprived. While in one story, the main character is having a difficult time grasping the whole reality of the new order of the world and what to do in it, the other story calls the virus scary and unfair, putting all the blame on it for the changes the world had to go through not to facilitate the further spread of the disease.

In *Henrietta's Thistleberry Boots*, the code **Excitement** comes at the end of the story to show the possibility of great things happening again with an open-ended positive message. Henrietta's boots symbolize face masks that most people in many countries needed to wear to go outside in the real world. She does not like the idea of wearing the boots but she decides to finally start wearing them after she eventually understands their importance.
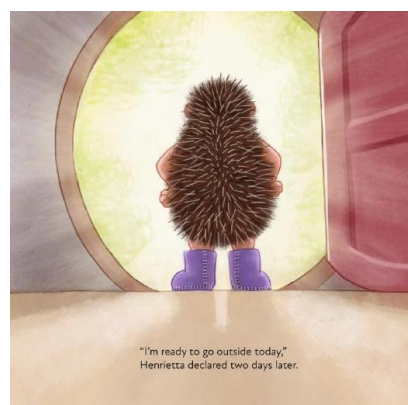

Figure 19: Henrietta is ready to go outside (Anderson Kirby 2021, 23)

In *What Color Is Today?*, *The Extraordinary Pause* and *Outside, Inside*, excitement is shown to be found at rather small things, reminding people that life is still going on and this new way of living is also a part of it. The sun still shines, people still fly kites, dance, smile and laugh during the pandemic and these collectively show that nothing is entirely bad and that there can still be some joy in dark times.

Figure 20: Yippee Yellow (Stephen 2020b, 12)

In *Henrietta's Thistleberry Boots*, Henrietta's stomach feels heavy and her body jittery, which shows that the new way of life and not knowing what to do with it make Henrietta feel the weight of the whole situation physically as well, which is a **psychosomatic** symptom. In *The Rabbit Listened,* Taylor does not feel something physically as he decides against it. He does not want to 'talk' (page 10) about, to 'remember' (page 18) or 'do anything with anybody' (page 18).

10.1.2 Mental Health - Findings

Even though a lot of **Coping Strategies** are coded in *The Rabbit Listened*, it does not particularly mean that they can help cope with the issue.

They are coded very often because there are a lot of suggestions coming from the different animals but actually none of them seem to really fit Taylor's needs at that moment. Regardless, each one might be helpful for others. In *The Rabbit Listened*, another example of anthropomorphism can be seen with the hyena's suggestion. The animal's idea to make Taylor feel better about his loss is to laugh about it, which is a coping strategy.
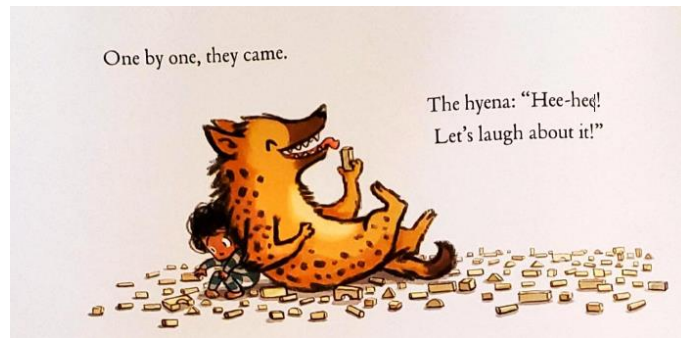
Figure 21: Taylor and the hyena (Doerrfeld 2018, 16)

Henrietta's coping strategy is different than the hyena's. She prefers to do something that will calm her down when she feels stressed out, which could be a healthier approach.

Figure 22: Henrietta's coping strategy (Anderson Kirby 2021, 10)

In *Outside, Inside*; the family in the center of the story does activities together to pass the time and to bond, which is their strategy to cope with the lockdown measures. It can be a helpful suggestion to the children reading the book that no matter how long or boring the lockdown period is, it can still be made entertaining by doing things at home with family members.

Figure 23: Family activities (Pham 2021, 15)

In the other books, the **Supportive Characters** are family members or friends, helping the characters through their crises. The rabbit that goes to the aid of Taylor turns out to be the most helpful among all animals that approach him with their own suggestions, because it does not make any. Support can come in many different forms. And in this case, just listening to someone who is grieving and not making any suggestions to nudge them in a path to get over their loss turns out to be the most effective and most needed form of it. *What Color Is Today?* shows another way of support, which is talking. The main character of the story calls his best friend to talk on the phone when neither can go out and meet in person. Communication about a shared trauma or talking about sad news can have a calming effect too. In the other three stories, the support comes from family members through both informing the children about what is happening in the world and helping them through the pandemic period by doing fun or educational activities together.

The category **Self-Care** was only coded once in *The Extraordinary Pause*. This could have something to do with being too similar to the subcategory Coping Strategies. They are mostly used to feel better and require skills to deal with one's own mental health state, which is also the goal of Self-Care (cf. World Health Organization 2022, 143).

As shown in *The Extraordinary Pause*, taking a break from the rhythm of urban life can be healing and important in terms of self-care. Despite being disruptive to the very system urban life is built upon, the lockdowns and social distancing measures also created new ways for people in terms of alternative modes of working, schooling and entertainment. While life on the outside seemed to have slowed down, there was an excess amount of time saved thanks to the absence of commuting and running errands outside that people could take advantage of. It was difficult to tell whether the days passed quickly or slowly, but it was certain that time felt different during normal times.

Figure 24: Life slowed down (Sadik 2021, 23)

Progress is not a finished arc in terms of healing or coming to terms with an experience and much like support, it can happen in many different levels and ways. For Taylor, his plan to build another castle, having gone through different feelings and responses following his loss, shows his progress while it is the acceptance of the new reality of the world in *The Extraordinary Pause* that brings peace of mind, which shows patience being rewarded with being able to go back to a normal life again. Henrietta's progress is shown with the change in her attitude towards the protective measures against the fictional disease of the story, which she does not readily accept in the beginning.

Figure 25: Henrietta and her boots (Anderson Kirby 2021, 26–27)

In *Outside, Inside*; when it is remembered that spring would soon come, it signals that life will soon get better again and hard days will stay in the past. The symbolism of seasons is used very commonly in literature, and spring is most frequently used to symbolise hope and recovery after a cold and dark period (cf. Symbolism & Metaphor 2021).

Figure 26: Spring will come (Pham 2021, 34)

10.1.3 Pandemic - Findings

One of the things all pandemic-time picture books had in common was providing information about life in general on the outside and the way things changed, and the code **Informational Setting**. In *What Color Is Today?*, when the main characters follow the news and wash their hands, it can be seen that the author directly took a certain part of this period of real life and adapted it to the book. In *Henrietta's Thistleberry Boots*, Henrietta's mother warns her against the danger of a fictional disease and how contagious it can be.

Figure 27: Henrietta's mother explains the thistleberries (Anderson Kirby 2021)

Fictionalizing a real-life phenomenon in a book can be helpful to teach children because the book serves the purpose of setting precedence, making the characters relatable. *The Extraordinary Pause* provides information about how modern life was before the pandemic. It offers to speak about if there was more or less going on in life and if the smells and colours around were noticed.

Figure 28: Modern life before the pandemic (Sadik 2021, 2)

The author talks about a fast-paced urban life where people do not have time to appreciate small things in life. This part can be considered more of a criticism of a modern and hectic lifestyle from an adult's point of view than an educational element. Albeit subjective, it still builds the narrative for the main theme of the story: taking a pause.

Outside, Inside, by saying that 'something strange' happened just before the season changed, gives information about when the pandemic started with a small detail. By weighing on the timing of the pandemic, the story later focuses on the contrast that compelled people to stay inside, during a season in which they would normally spend more time outside.

Figure 29: Something strange happened (Pham 2021, 2)

Although pandemic information is given in all books, none explicitly states where the virus came from and how dangerous it is. Instead, information is given about what the world looked like before the virus arrived and which hygiene measures need to be followed now.

The **Social Distance and Lockdown** categories are not coded as frequently as the researcher originally estimated. This is probably due to the fact that the focus lies on changed routines, which are highlighted. Changing routines is much easier for some protagonists than for others. While some have more negative feelings, others see their chance to take time off from a hectic life, spend time with their family without having to go to work or school. This shows a realistic picture. However, the social distance category implies several times to not hug and kiss other people. Preventive measures can be commonly found in all of the pandemic-time books. In all four of the books in which this subcategory is coded, the characters stay home to protect themselves and others, setting an example to show children that it is something that needs to be done despite how they might feel about this obligation. In *What Color Is Today?*, the main character, who is not given a name, seems to represent how a child in real life would be affected by the limitations and restrictions that followed the outbreak of Covid-19.

Having to change a routine can mean being forced out of a comfort zone and therefore high levels of stress while trying to adapt to certain changes. For instance, Henrietta from *Henrietta's Thistleberry Boots* reacts to the **change of her routine** a little differently compared to the main character in *What Color Is Today?*. In the book, when the parents of the hedgehog siblings tell them that they will not go to school the next day, it can be seen that Henrietta's siblings are really happy about it, which is a commonly expected response from a child, while Henrietta gets visibly sad because she loves school. Instead of having all young hedgehogs react the same way to this news, the author goes the extra mile to also represent the children who love going to school and does not brush that possibility off. It is a small yet important detail in a children's book that all children can relate with the characters, one way or another. *The Extraordinary Pause* and *Outside, Inside* introduce the changes that followed the pandemic in a more dramatic way to describe the general mood during this period in the world.

Pham mentions empty halls and bells going silent while talking about school closures, which creates a more vivid image compared to simply saying that in-person education was suspended. The bells in question might also be a reference to church bells since there is a church right next to a school building on page 17, which could add to the story that even religious functions were on hold in many parts of the world.

Figure 31: Bells and halls (Pham 2021, 17)

In *The Rabbit Listened,* even though the book is not directly about the pandemic, the way Taylor feels after losing something he loves can be coded under **Uncertainty**. While this uncertainty is not associated with worldwide practices and not knowing how to adapt to a new way of life, it is about Taylor's own world where things 'come crashing down' (Doerrfeld 2018, 6) unexpectedly and he needs time to process it.

Figure 32: Taylor's loss (Doerrfeld 2018, 6)

Henrietta's Thistleberry Boots includes another example of uncertainty. When Henrietta asks her mother whether she'll be able to go to school the next day, the way she answers is a representation of how most parents might have felt when they were asked such questions by their own children. The book not only makes the child figures relatable, but also aims to do the same with parents and give a broader point of view to readers.

"Mom!" Henrietta called into the other room. "Will we get to go back to school tomorrow?"

"I'm not sure, sweetie. I hope so, but I just don't know."

Figure 33: Uncertainty about school (Anderson Kirby 2021, 9)

The uncertainty in *The Extraordinary Pause* is shown in way that suggests when what lies ahead is not known, it may be safer to 'hit pause' (Sadik 2021):

And because it was so unexpected and unknown, the world hit pause.

Figure 34: The world hits pause (Sadik 2021, 10)

What Color Is Today? warns the readers about how contagious Covid-19 is and talks about the importance of personal hygiene to prevent its spread. The book therefore aims to instill a **sense of responsibility** by serving the purpose of a reminder to always be wary of the danger we may pose to people around us unless we are careful. The parents in *Henrietta's Thistleberry Boots* decide to ask their children to stay home during the fictional disease in the book. Since there is no mention of such a practice or by-law to stay indoors, this is a decision taken by the parents as the responsible thing to do in order for both the children to stay safe and also to prevent the spread of 'toxic thistleberries' (Anderson Kirby 2021, 6). *The Extraordinary Pause*, seemingly partially told from a childlike perspective, lists all of the precautions that were taken

very seriously. Despite the tone between the lines, the book does not fail to show that these measures were brought to ensure the safety of people if heeded with a sense of responsibility.

Figure 35: Measurements (Sadik 2021, 19–20)

Outside, Inside summarises the pandemic period by picturing the key points of its initial phase. By mentioning that essential workers still had to take risks by 'being where they needed to be' (page 11) in order to make sure life carried on for everybody else, the author shifts the focus from people who had to and were able to stay home, to those whose selfless acts helped many others. The answer to 'So why did we all go inside?' (Pham 2021, 25) can be answered by the picture below, showing people from various groups and ages being responsible.

Figure 36: Reason to stay inside (Pham 2021, 28)

What Color Is Today? shows readers that lockdown measures were taken globally **(Worldwide Practices)** as one of the most effective ways of protection from the disease.

The Extraordinary Pause also talks about the scale at which Covid-19 impacted people and countries by using anthropomorphism to make the virus look like an evil being that traveled to every part of the world without an invitation. *Outside, Inside* proceeds to show how everyone in every country had to take shelter and wait out the pandemic to describe how this unprecedented period shook the very core of modern life without favouring one country over another.

Figure 37: All over the world (Pham 2021, 5)

What Color Is Today? and *Henrietta's Thistleberry Boots* show that school **(Role of School)** was cancelled during the pandemic and both books describe how children were affected by this since school is one of the biggest parts of a child's life and plays a very important role for children to socialize and make friends besides getting education. While the character in *What Color Is Today?* is angry about school and other events being cancelled, Henrietta seems very sad instead. *The Extraordinary Pause* goes the extra mile and adds remote learning to its plot as well while talking about how the pandemic 'paused' the life on earth. The book illustrates that social interactions and education are both moved to an online setting and everyone now has to make do with waving from and speaking to a screen in the absence of physical interactions.

Figure 38: Online education (Sadik 2021, 27)

54

10.1.4   Messages - Findings

Positive Resolution was coded in all of the books because each of them ends with a positive message. Ending on a positive resolution is crucial for the closure of a children's book to create a sense of positivity in their minds, especially in books about hard topics and sensitive issues. At the end of *The Rabbit Listened*, when Taylor eventually finds it within himself to overcome the loss he experienced in the beginning of the book and to move on, the idea of hope is reflected as the ending of his character arc. *What Color Is Today?* has a positive resolution of its own. The book comes to an end with the message that having mixed feelings or going through several different feelings that might even contradict each other is only natural and human. This message targets children who might be having such mixed feelings as happiness about not having to go to school but sadness about not seeing friends, or excitement about spending more time with family but stress about not being able to go out freely.

Figure 39: A pause (Sadik 2021, 30)

Henrietta's Thistleberry Boots reflects a strong arc in Henrietta's character through which her sadness and stubbornness to acknowledge something negative that happened to her and everyone else turns into a strength to adjust to a new way of living and readiness to overcome more. *The Extraordinary Pause* and *Outside, Inside* have a similar positive resolution that conclude the stories. The authors of the two books stress the importance of staying home and taking a pause, using this pause period as an opportunity for self-growth, and point out that life will eventually go back to normal at the end of this period.
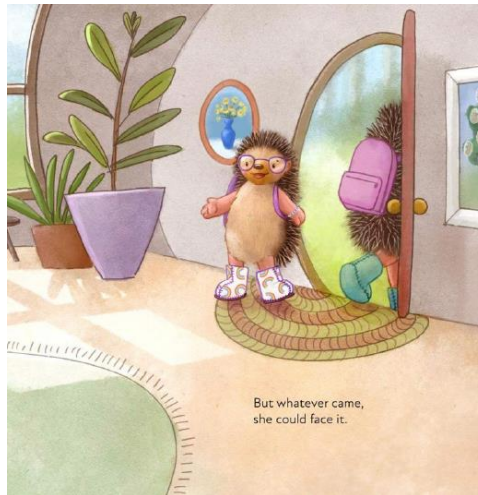
Figure 40: Henrietta can face everything (Anderson Kirby 2021, 29)

Since the condition to code **Implication** in the books is having an issue directly addressed without hinting at it through a similar story, this subcategory was not coded in *The Rabbit Listened*. *The Rabbit Listened* talks about grief and loss through a metaphor, using toy blocks that Taylor builds a castle with, only to lose it unexpectedly. *The Extraordinary Pause* and *Outside, Inside* differ from that book in terms of the way of addressing the main theme of the story. *The Extraordinary Pause* openly talks about people trying to keep up with the high-paced urban life and not paying attention to other people or other small things in life. On the other hand, *Outside, Inside* gives a very clear message to the reader that regardless of physical differences, everyone had to go through the same challenges.

Figure 41: On the Outside (Pham 2021, 29–30)

Figure 42: On the Inside (Pham 2021, 31–32)

There are guided questions in *The Extraordinary Pause*, which were coded as **Recommendation** to reflect on the time of the pandemic. These questions can be used as a resource to help create a conversation at home or in the classroom. In none of the other books, a course of action was suggested at the end of or throughout the story to engage in the story more actively compared to simply reading it.
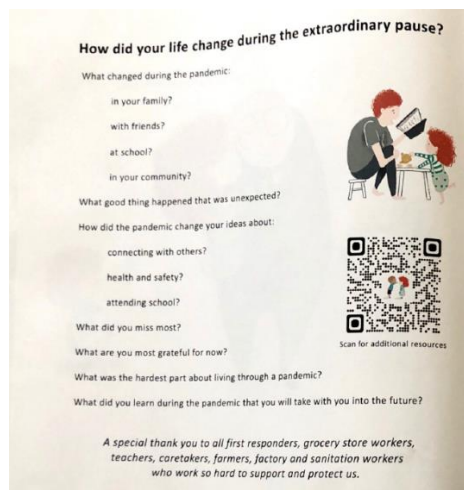
Figure 43: Guided Questions (Sadik 2021, 35)

10.2 Limitations

Despite the numerous benefits of content analysis, such as decoding the message behind the story and its low cost, this approach, like any other research method, has its limitations. The selection of books used to address the research questions was not large. Compared to other researches with a wide range of different books, this thesis includes five books in total, which makes its scope limited. However, this narrow scope is also an advantage in terms of being able to delve deeper into each topic than other analyses. Future research could analyse a broader corpus of picture books and focus on different genres to see whether the results would still be the same. The coding sheet could be used for different materials and texts to see if it is consistent in bringing results.

Further research is needed regarding this topic as the consequences of the pandemic can still not be measured in its entirety with a broader perspective.

While one of the targeted outcomes of this research was to deliver objective interpretations of the books, making inferences from the content is still a very central part of this type of content analysis. The nature of the selected books being a form of art rather than scientific works makes subjectivity an inevitable component of analysis. Therefore, other research conducted on the same topic with the same sources could draw different conclusions in the hands of other researchers.

Although they were only mentioned in the results, illustrations in the books could also have been a significant source of data in this study. A separate coding sheet could have been drafted for the pictures to analyse the messages in the form of a visual content supporting the texts. The decision to exclude the pictures from this framework was made to keep subjectivity at a minimum level since pictures can be even more subjective than texts to draw conclusions from. However, they were still reviewed together with the text in the Findings and Discussions (chapter 10.1) because the juxtaposition of these two elements completed the authors' message to support each book's theme. In this light, this was not an entirely multimodal analysis that looked at the colour, shape, line, composition, or placement of illustrations.

Some of the codes, such as Self-Care in the Mental Health category, were rarely coded during the coding process. Another example that can only be seen once in one of the books is the subcategory Recommendation in the Messages category. Despite not being coded as frequently as some other codes, they are still just as important to the results in terms of having a full overview within each theme.

10.3   Research questions

Given the findings of this analysis, it can be stated that all the selected picture books provide information about Covid-19 / a pandemic situation and the changes that come with it.

These key findings aim to answer the research questions which were put forward in the Introduction:

1) How can the pandemic and the changes that came with it be explained through the selected picture books?

In most of the selected picture nooks, there is an informational setting where details about the pandemic are provided. It is mostly done through a main character that offers this information, including social distancing and staying home. Most books also include such inconvenient

factors as being unable to go out, play with friends or go to school. As the story continues, it is shown that there are in fact some solutions and coping strategies to deal with the obligations to stay home by spending time with family, video-calling friends, playing music and games, and dancing. The restrictions are mostly converted into something positive, like taking a pause from the stress of everyday life and finding time to calm down. It describes the facts that the world is moving too fast and people are forgetting about the small things in life. The books reflect on how people felt separated from each other and experienced a lack of physical contact because of the virus. Children can relate to the characters, as they are also in lockdown, having been stuck at home and unable to go to school.

Since these books are picture books, illustrations are among the most important features and tools to convey the message behind each story. Many coronavirus illustrations are personified, giving the virus a face and making it easier for children to comprehend it. One of the most challenging things about the virus was to understand that something invisible could change people's lives to such a great extent. These books, however, aim to show that it is fine to be scared or worried, and that going through many emotions is normal. By humanising the virus, the fear of infection is minimised. According to research, anthropomorphising illnesses in health communication materials increases the chances of people listening to health advice and following protective measures (cf. Moruzi, Chen, and Venzo 2022, 105).

In some of the books, the reader can spot rainbows that are meant to be a symbol of both hope and perseverance (cf. Symbolism & Metaphor 2020). Additionally, they may also be connected to medical helpers who treated Covid-19 patients. Another symbol that appears several times in different books is the globe, which can be interpreted as a reflection of the broad scale of the pandemic in some stories. It also serves as a symbol of optimism to represent the international community and solidarity.

2) Which books provide emotional comfort?

All of the analysed books in this thesis can be considered fitting to provide emotional comfort. It is, of course, not the books by themselves but also how they are delivered and discussed with their target audience by others who read the books to or with them. All of these books do tackle a mental health topic. Especially the supportive characters can show children that the people around them can be there for them if or when they feel like talking or also not talking about their problems. Like in *The Rabbit Listened*, for example, the rabbit offers Taylor the right amount of empathy and comfort and makes him feel safe by not pushing him to talk about his loss unless he feels ready to do so. The authors try to explain through supportive characters the changes the main characters have to go through in uncertain situations by providing information.

As many different feelings are approached in the books, it can help children see that every emotion is valid and that one person may feel sad while another person can be happy about the same situation.

The books also point to the direction that not all the changes that the pandemic led to were bad. It is shown directly or between the lines through characters being able to spend more time with their family or appreciating small things in life that taking advantage of something negative and turning it into a positive thing is possible.

Animals are used in all of the books as main or supportive characters, creating a comfortable bond with the story and characters without risking any limitations through human characters that can come in the form of gender, age, race or other physical attributes. The topic of loss is also portrayed in a positive light. Feeling sad about the loss of a loved one but also celebrating the memories of those people is shown as an alternative way to go through the process of grief.

3) How can bibliotherapy be used as an approach in that matter?

Carefully picking a certain bibliography to explain pandemic-related topics to children is important since not all books on the market will suit or appeal to every child. Some children will accept and absorb the message in the book if it is conveyed through a tale while others may find that fictional stories obscure the message. Books that are chosen based on the child's needs and learning preferences can be used for bibliotherapy purposes. This can create a safe environment for children to express their thoughts, develop an understanding and face their concerns.

Bibliotherapy is being used as an alternative approach to treat children's emotional and behavioral difficulties. During the lockdown, many children were dealing with a variety of concerns, including recognising the unique circumstances of a world with a dangerous disease, the medical challenges around and the difficulty to learn how to distinguish myth from reality regarding the virus. The selected books can help reassure children that they are not alone in any of their concerns and they can overcome the emotional and psychological effects of the lockdown. They can also help raise awareness and educate children about the virus.

4) What are the main features and characteristics of picture books covering mental health topics?

Topics related to children's mental health are mostly not addressed by talking about the topic directly but they are hinted at instead. The images in picture books support the text and show the supportive characters. Supportive characters are a crucial part of picture books who help the main characters go through the certain feelings they experience. There are usually different

characters who guide the main character and nudge them in the right way to a solution not by pushing them but through advices. It is important for the development of main characters and the children who read the books and relate to them that they still have enough room to decide on their own so that they actually take lessons and gain confidence from having overcome a difficulty at the same time.

Another common feature of these books is that there are different coping strategies embedded in the story adopted by main characters to deal with their trauma or emotions. Such coping strategies are usually displayed in a consecutive order to show the readers the character development the protagonists go through. Faced with a challenging situation, they first seek ways to move on past their difficulties by resorting to several coping strategies, which do not initially help but later point the character in the right direction for healing. They are not necessarily a means to get over past trauma entirely, but progress is shown with small improvements in either appreciating small things that usually go unnoticed or by the character finding it within themselves to want to do something that would lead them down the path of self-care.

Humour can often be found in such picture books thanks to its calming effects when struggling with anxiety, worry or fear. Laughter has a therapeutic impact under those circumstances and sometimes it is triggered generously throughout stories that tackle tender topics (cf. Evans 2015, 18). These topics can be, but are not limited to grief, loss, anxiety or a pandemic. When the theme of a book is one of the first three, it is seen that the focus is strongly on maintaining mental health. There is also an addition of preventive and protective measures such as social distancing or personal hygiene in books that were published during and for the Covid-19 pandemic period.

Concluding the story with a positive resolution is also among the common traits of the selected picture books to instill hope and strength to withstand mental burdens. It is also a powerful tool to complete a plot about mental health when the ending shows the characters progress and have a better stance against such difficulties. There can also be recommendations at the end of a book that the author makes in order to guide the readers through their struggles. These recommendations may appear in the form of questions to make the reader think and answer for themselves to reflect freely on their emotions.

11.   Conclusion (incl. recommendation)

The purpose of this thesis was to answer the following research question: **How can children's mental health be supported through picture books to feel well in crisis?** Before answering the main question, there were four subquestions that had to be answered to pave the way

ahead of the main objective of the research. The answers are displayed in the previous chapter (10.3).

As discussed in the theoretical framework, bibliotherapy can work better if it is brought into classrooms where teachers can discuss difficult topics with the help of carefully selected bibliotherapy lists. Making this technique available to all who could benefit from it would support mental health awareness to a great extent by normalising having such conversations in the classroom. However, in order for the successful implementation of this practice to come to life, teachers should be given certain trainings which would equip them with the required knowledge and skills to manage the bibliotherapy process. Having achieved this qualification prior to taking on such a task is crucial in terms of making actual progress with the children and minimising the risk of deterioration.

This could be made possible through a change in educational policies, which mainly lack such practices that not only recognise and acknowledge the importance of children's mental health but also urge taking necessary steps to actively and proactively support it. Such policies could be enforced on a local or national level with the support of detailed surveys to keep track of the most common mental health struggles in each group and professional trainings that enable tackling them.

The aforementioned practices should not only include teaching professionals in the educational field how to discuss tender topics but also weigh in just as much on providing them with a conceptual framework that can enable them to determine what books to use for different areas of need. Although it may seem intuitive at first, not all books can be equally helpful to every child with similar mental health problems and the flexibility to adjust the materials for bibliotherapy for each individual or group need be acquired before the process is started. Although children's picture books have common traits like ending with a positive message or facilitating difficult conversations on sensitive topics, there can still be the need to choose one book over another since each individual child can require different paths to reach the same desired outcome. This process, carried out by properly trained professionals with the assistance of a wide selection of source materials and the acquired agility to choose between them based on the needs of the target group, can be very effective in developing critical thinking and coping mechanisms for children and therefore set precedent for them going forward in their young adulthood.

To sum up, it can be noticed that books have always provided support in troubling times. They tackle many obstacles and difficulties and can make it easier for people to understand these difficulties. Books invite children and adults to talk about their emotions and help feel less alone. They often help find the words when people are struggling to express their feelings and

give comfort in doing so. Bibliotherapy, using books to assist people who are struggling with mental health problems, is one of the most effective tools to achieve this objective. Having been based on the benefits of bibliotherapy, this thesis can provide guidance for caretakers, teachers and mental health specialists to support children's mental health not only due to its extensive scope but also thanks to the specific books selected and analysed in its framework that can be helpful in tackling certain topics. Regardless of the time period the books are published in, whether before or after the pandemic, they can still play a decisive and significant role in children's lives and help shape their future.

12.   Appendix

A: Coding Sheet - Content Analysis

Category and Subcategory	Description	The Rabbit Listened	What Color Is Today?	Henrietta's Thistleberry Boots	The Extraordinary Pause	Outside, Inside
Response		*The Rabbit Listened*	*What Color Is Today?*	*Henrietta's Thistleberry Boots*	*The Extraordinary Pause*	*Outside, Inside*
Worries/Anxiety	*Apprehensive uneasiness or nervousness*	IIIII (5)	IIIII (5)	IIIII I (6)	I (1)	II (2)
Anger	*A strong feeling of displeasure*	IIII (4)	IIII (4)	I (1)		
Grief	*Distress caused by bereavement*	I (1)	I (1)			
Sadness	*Causing or associated with grief or unhappiness*	IIIII (5)	I (1)	II (2)		II (2)
Frustration	*Dissatisfaction, resulting from unfulfilled needs or unresolved problems*	II (2)	IIIII (5)	I (1)	I (1)	
Excitement	*A feeling full of activity, joy or exhilaration*	IIIII II (7)	II (2)	I (1)	II (2)	I (1)
Psychosomatic	*Symptoms caused by mental or emotional disturbance*	II (2)		III (3)		

Category and Subcategory	Description	The Rabbit Listened	What Color Is Today?	Henrietta's Thistleberry Boots	The Extraordinary Pause	Outside, Inside
Mental health						
Coping Strategies	*Main character(s) use(s) tactics to manage crisis*	IIIII III (8)		III (3)		IIIII I (6)
Supportive characters	*Main character(s) get(s) support from family, friends or teachers*	IIIII IIIII II (12)	III (3)	IIIII I (6)	II (2)	IIIII I (6)
Self-Care	*The act of attending to one's physical or mental health*				I (1)	
Progress	*Main character(s) grows or develops in a positive direction*	I (1)		I (1)	II (2)	II (2)

Category and Subcategory	Description	The Rabbit Listened	What Color Is Today?	Henrietta's Thistleberry Boots	The Extraordinary Pause	Outside, Inside
Pandemic						
Informational Setting	*Information about the pandemic is provided*		III (3)	I (1)	IIIII III (8)	I (1)
Social-distance and lockdown	*Main character(s) have to keep a distance or stay at home*		II (2)	I (1)	IIIII IIIII (10)	II (2)
Change of routines	*Main character(s) change(s) routines*		II (2)	IIIII III (8)	IIII (4)	IIIII (4)
Uncertainty	*Main character(s) feel(s) lack of sureness*	I (1)	IIIII II (7)	II (2)	IIIII (5)	III (3)
Sense of responsibility	*Main character(s) feel(s) moral or legal accountability*		IIIII (5)	I (1)	IIIII I (6)	IIIII (5)
Worldwide practices	*The scale of the pandemic is shown*		I (1)		IIIII II (7)	II (2)
Role of school/education	*The book addresses school/education*		I (1)	II (2)	II (2)	

Category and Subcategory	Description	The Rabbit Listened	What Color Is Today?	Henrietta's Thistleberry Boots	The Extraordinary Pause	Outside, Inside
Messages						
Positive resolution	*The book ends with a positive message*	I (1)	IIII (4)	III (3)	II (2)	IIIII IIIII I (11)
Implication	*A specific topic is addressed*				IIIII (5)	III (3)
Recommendation	*The course of action is suggested*				I (1)	

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