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Promoting Differences: A Kindergarten Curriculum

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Introduction

There is a lack of education about ethnic diversity within the Kindergarten curriculum. When Kindergarteners do not learn about diversity, they can be susceptible to taking part in bullying or being targets themselves. Adding diversity content to children's learning can help them become more inclusive, appreciative of differences in others and, perhaps, see their ethnic background represented, potentially raising self-esteem. To address the lack of diversity content in the Kindergarten curriculum, I created a three-day curriculum for Mrs. Bellue's Kindergarten at Valencia Elementary School in Aptos, California.

Needs Statement

According to Adam (2021), there is a lack of diversity in the Kindergarten education system from the books available to the toys with which the children interact. Schools and classrooms represent the local neighborhoods they serve, which are often segregated by race and social class (Schreurs & Rundgren, 2021). The negative effects of bias are well documented for children who are a part of minority groups, (Adam, 2021) and racial preference starts as early as four or five years old (Kinzler & Spelke, 2011).

There is also research to support the notion that diversity education decreases bullying of minority groups in older children (Eisenberg et al., 2022). These findings combine to make a compelling case for extending culturally inclusive education to young children, who are still forming their ideas about who is and is not like them. The lack of diversity education may affect how children see themselves and their ideas of self-identity and how they can include people in activities who appear different from them. My project aims to use art and other tools to introduce an awareness and appreciation for diversity in a kindergarten classroom.

Children's self perception plays a role in nearly every aspect of their success. Killen and

Hitti noted “peer rejection in childhood results in increased levels of depression, withdrawal, and a lack of motivation to achieve” (2013, p. 772). Representation of minority groups in a culturally authentic context leads to “promotion of young children’s positive sense of inclusivity and belonging” (Nutbrown & Clough, 2009). Teaching children that we all look different and that these variations are normal helps them put those differences into a positive context when they encounter them. To authentically include students, they need to be represented in their classroom through their ideas, interests and experiences (Nutbrown & Clough, 2009). Being excluded and experiencing feelings of exclusion because one perceives oneself to differ from peers are both things that can be “contributing factor(s) in lower educational attainment” (Nutbrown & Clough, 2009, p. 194). Avoiding curriculum that represents every student results in “a practice of ‘othering’ those from minority group backgrounds” and “leads to a ‘color blind’ environment in which the unique histories, cultures, values and experiences of minorities are ignored” (Adam, 2021, p. 3). Using a curriculum that represents each student and allows children space to insert themselves into the projects they work on shows them they are valid parts of the classroom and community.

One strategy in diversity education that has had some success is teaching children to see the finer details of their physicality. This strategy has been carried out through art supported by picture books that give children the language to describe themselves as more than just ‘white’ or ‘black’ (Strasser, 2000). Absorbing the art in these books and using the language the authors chose as inspiration gives kids the space to really explore what they look like in ways that don’t include ideas of what’s right or wrong with them. This will let children observe their different physical features as variations of who they are as individuals instead of negative deviations from what’s ‘normal’. Using art and expanded vocabulary, as described by Strasser, is a great example

of scaffolding, and the success of this method with older children suggests that a similar approach could be a significant starting point for younger children.

The lack of diversity education in schools may stem from teachers being under trained or uncomfortable discussing such content. In many places that have adopted diversity and anti-bias curriculum, research shows that instructors are hesitant in their delivery of the material (Adam, 2021). Given that diversity education can protect against bias-based bullying (Eisenberg et al., 2022), I developed a three-part lesson for Kindergarteners at Valencia Elementary in Aptos, California.

Theory

Psychologist Lev Vygotsky's sociocultural theory is the idea that development requires a social aspect in order for individuals to have a place to share their values and ideas and learn from one another. This shared cultural exposure matters to development, according to Vygotsky, because assessing an individual without taking culture into account gives an incomplete picture of the whole person (Berger, 2018). This focus on the importance of learning through a social context is important and teaching and mentorship are key to the learning process.

One important concept from his theory is that adults and children can help other children learn through scaffolding. Scaffolding is a system of supports made for children to reach their next step. By creating this structure through mentoring and teaching, a child can be assisted to process a new idea or help achieve an outcome in a way that allows them to learn a skill that would otherwise be beyond their ability to master. Think-aloud discussions, descriptions of concepts, reading aloud, and tying thoughts together based on what children already know are all great examples of scaffolding.

When scaffolding, it is important to focus on teaching within a child's zone of proximal development (Berger, 2018) to help ensure they are prepared to absorb the knowledge. The idea behind the zone of proximal development, also part of Vygotsky's theory, is that a child has or is learning some skills on their own, but that with some additional help or instruction, they can reach a little further in that zone. If the instructor pushes children too far or too quickly to learn something outside of their zone, they will not only struggle but are likely to fail because it is outside of their developmental capacity. This is why, when teaching, the focus should be on expanding children's pre-existing knowledge to take them to the next idea.

In my curriculum presentation, I will provide scaffolding through discussions, worksheets, activities, and the reading of books that celebrate the individual beauty of different people's features using colorful, positive language. The books I've chosen are picture books that use familiar language and make the concepts easy for the kindergarteners to understand, but expand upon ideas of physical difference and diversity in a positive way. At this age, Kindergarteners notice that there are differences between one another and are looking for ideas on how to categorize and group one another based on those ideas and how they compare to the world around them. I intend to acknowledge and talk about those differences so that they can be accepted as normal instead of exotic.

I will also give the students art supplies and ask them to create self-portraits that represent them in their own similarities or differences to their peers. This activity falls easily into the children's zone of proximal development, as they are already familiar with the art supplies and some of the language I will use, so that I will have a base to expand on. The scaffolding of the books and discussions, alongside their own naturally developing curiosity, should help apply these ideas meaningfully to their portraits and overall understanding of the concepts.

Consideration of Diversity

I will present my project at Valencia Elementary School, in the Kindergarten classroom. My participants, pulled from the School Accountability Report Card (SARC, 2022), are assumed to represent the rest of Valencia Elementary School. According to SARC, the Elementary School is 59.6% White, 33.1% Hispanic or Latino, 1.1% Asian, 0.2% Black, 0.4% Filipino, and 0.2% American Indian or Alaskan Native. Because 10.5% of the students are English Learners, some students may struggle with some of the vocabulary in my lesson, which will be taught entirely in the English Language.

Although Valencia Elementary has a population with 11.8% of students having disabilities, my curriculum, which relies on visual and verbal cues, would need to be modified for visual and/or hearing impaired learners. The curriculum is created for and geared towards Kindergarten students and focuses on where they are developmentally in what they are noticing about one another, so if it is used for other age groups, it will need to be adjusted. Adjustments would need to include more in-depth discussions about physical differences and even more sophisticated books about cultural differences in addition to physical features.

The content I am primarily focusing on is diversity, but only addresses a minute part of ethnic diversity. I am only focusing on the physical traits, and only a small portion of what is most obvious because I feel it is developmentally appropriate for this age. With so few aspects of diversity addressed, the content would need to be tailored to the background of participants to fully address the many differences that make our community and others diverse, from sexual orientation to cultural background and more.

Learning Outcomes

I intend to provide three, 30-minute lessons to Kindergarten students enrolled in Valencia Elementary School.

By the end of the project, participants will:

1. identify one thing that makes people different or one thing that makes people the same.
2. depict themselves using accurate characteristics.
3. identify one way they can include others.

Method

I created a three-day lesson on diversity for 23 first graders at Valencia Elementary School in Aptos, California.

Day 1

My first day of my curriculum was Friday, March 10th. As I have been volunteering in this classroom for the last seven months, I did not need to introduce myself, but the teacher let the students know I had something to share with them. There were 17 students in class on this day. I moved to the front of the classroom and let the children know I was going to talk to them about what it means to be both different and the same. I held up the book *We're Different, We're the Same* (Kates & Mathieu, 1992) and explained that I would use this book to explain it. First, I asked them if they had any ideas on what it means to be different and the same. They shook their heads and said no. I asked: "For example, you're all in Kindergarten, right?" They said yes and nodded. I paused, then said "Are you all exactly the same Kindergarteners?" There was a lot of laughter and head shaking. I read the book. I explained that being diverse was another way of saying we were all different, but that in a lot of ways we were the same, just like the book

showed us. Then I opened a discussion up with them to see if they had any new ideas. There were so many shouts and hands raised, I asked them one at a time, giving the option to pass. 15 of the students answered and 2 passed. All of this took 40 minutes.

Day 2

On Monday, March 14th, I worked with the children in small groups, taking between 4 and 6 of them to my table at a time. I reminded them of the book *We're Different, We're the Same* (Kates & Mathieu, 1992) and explained I would read a book called *Honeysmoke* (Fields, 2019) that talked about a girl who was trying to figure out how to put a name to her skin color after she noticed it wasn't like anyone else's. At the end of the book, I gave them a worksheet I made. See Appendix A. I asked them to draw a portrait of themselves without specifically addressing skin color. I provided all colors of markers, including the Crayola "Colors of the World" Multicultural crayons and markers with 40 different skin hues. I also provided them with small mirrors. I led a discussion as questions came up, most of them around figuring out their hair, skin and eye colors. 19 children participated overall. This took 20 minutes per group times 4 groups, for a total of 80 minutes.

Day 3

On Wednesday, March 15th, I split the children into small groups once again, ranging from 4-6 children per group. There were 21 children present, but 1 did not participate. I started by reminding the children about how we had been talking about the ways we were different and the same and briefly explained it to children who had not been present for the other days. I read them the book *The Big Umbrella* (Bates & Bates, 2018). I asked them at the end what kinds of individuals the umbrella allowed to be underneath it. I asked if they thought the Big Umbrella character would leave anybody out of its shelter. I explained that the umbrella was being

inclusive when it included everybody, no matter who they were or what they looked like. I gave each group a set of laminated raindrops, a cloud, and a sun with words on them. See Appendix B. I asked them to group the raindrops on the side they thought was appropriate for the words that were on the page. I explained that I had heard some of the words on the playground that they had told me the umbrella wouldn't say. I then asked them if they thought they could be inclusive to everyone by using the kinds of words the umbrella would say. I told them words were very important, and asked if they would try their best to remember and remind others to use inclusive words instead of words that could be hurtful. They agreed, so I gave them inclusivity stickers and pencils with affirmations to remind them of their lesson and to thank them for listening. This took 20 minutes per group for a total of 80 minutes.

Results

According to Learning Outcome 1, children would be able to identify one thing that makes people different or one thing that makes people the same. To assess what the children already knew, I asked them on day 1 if they knew what I meant when I told them we were all different, but that we could also all be the same. They did not. After reading a book, I asked them again "Now do you know what it means when I say people can be different, but that we are also the same?" Of the 17 participants, 15 gave an answer of a way people could be different or the same and 2 stated that they understood, but that they did not want to give an answer. See Table 1. I believe this Learning Outcome was met.

For Learning Outcome 2, children were to depict themselves using accurate characteristics. I reminded the children of the previous book, and how I was talking about things that make us different and things that make us the same. After I read them another book, I asked

them to draw a portrait of themselves. I provided them with markers and mirrors. Twelve of the children were able to draw themselves with accurate characteristics. Four of the children drew themselves with some accurate characteristics, but added additional characteristics. Three children did not finish. See Table 2 for detail. This Learning Outcome was partially met.

Finally, Learning Outcome 3 was for children to identify one way they can include others. After re-explaining what I had discussed in the two previous days of curriculum, I let the children know it was important that we talked about these things because I wanted them to understand how important it was to include everyone. After reading a book on day 3, I gave the children in small groups cut-out raindrops to sort into things the big umbrella would say (to be inclusive) and things the big umbrella would not say (See Appendix B). Of the four groups, all four groups could sort the raindrops. Of the 21 total participants, 18 could sort correctly, two did not understand and needed further explanation of what the words on the raindrops meant, and one child did not want to participate at all. Based on my results, I believe this Learning Outcome was met.

Discussion

I believe that this project was successful because participants met the outcomes I was hoping to reach. The children were engaged and responsive to my discussions and my worksheets. They talked about the colors of their eyes, hair, and skin, and how they were the same but different shades. I heard them out at the playground telling other children that they were not talking in ways that were kind when they heard words like: “You can’t play with us.” A grandmother came in and told the teacher in my classroom that she had hosted a sleepover and that the girls had been looking in the mirror talking about their difference in skin color. She said she was thrilled that they were so interested in the topic.

With my books, vocabulary words, and discussions, I was able to scaffold the children's understanding, building upon what they already knew. I felt that using Vygotsky's ideas of learning socially and culturally, the children were moving further in their Zone of Proximal Development with my help and the help of their peers. I brought new words to them and new ideas, and they were able to reflect them back to me and explain how they understood what I was telling them. They could pledge in their own words that they would be more inclusive of other children, regardless of what those children looked like.

That said, I do not believe that this project worked, in my opinion, because the few children who were not understanding or choosing not to participate were the English Language Learners in my class. In a class of 23 children, I did not consider that 5 of them were learning English as a second language and that they were going to struggle with my curriculum and its new concepts. Given that this was more than 21% of my class overall, this tells me that my curriculum did not reach vital participants. In terms of diversity, I did not include everyone I intended to include. Because all of the children spoke English when I was working with them before I developed my curriculum, I thought they would understand all of the new ideas I was presenting to them. Instead, I had to keep explaining and re-explaining the ideas to the children who were English Language Learners and, in some cases, a couple did not participate at all. In the end, while I felt those who participated were enjoying it, I thought that some of them were still confused by the sorting project and the reasons we were doing what we were doing.

If I were to do this differently, I would bring the languages to the classroom that all of the children need. I would know how to translate the important words I was trying to get across in languages that the children spoke. In the case of this particular group, I would have brought some understanding of Arabic and Spanish with me instead of assuming the children would understand

all of the language I was presenting to them just because they understood basic English.

Additionally, if I were to do this again, I would do the portrait project as a painting project. I would have additional colors that were easier to blend, so that the child who felt his color did not exist could come closer to what he was looking for. I had brought 24 skin colors, but I was not providing the children with anything they could blend or merge to create the types of colors I had talked about in the book *Honeysmoke*. Even though my project did not work in the way I wanted it to, I believe that I learned more about how to be inclusive myself and that the children learned more about diversity and an appreciation of how different we all are from one another.

Appendix A

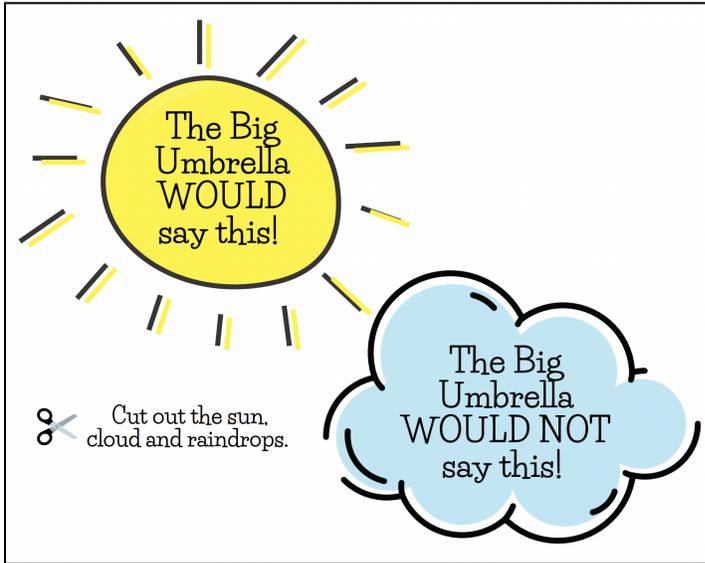
Method Day 2 Worksheet for Portrait Drawing

This is Me!

Name _____

Appendix B

Method Day 3 Materials for Inclusivity Activity



Appendix C

Capstone Presentation

An illustration showing several hands of different skin tones (brown, tan, light skin) reaching up to hold a globe of the Earth. The globe is blue and green with white clouds. The hands are wearing various colorful sleeves and bracelets. The background is a light beige color with small decorative icons of hearts and plus signs scattered around.

♡ +

+ Promoting Differences: A Kindergarten Curriculum

Gina Blanchard ♡

Needs

- + Racial preference starts young
- + Diversity education decreases bullying
- + Representation matters

♡ +

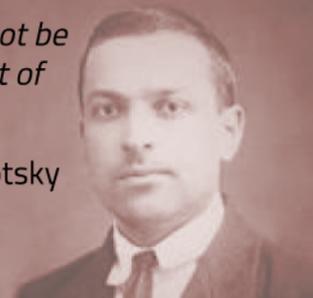
♡ +

Sociocultural Learning Theory

- + Zone of Proximal Development
- + Scaffolding

"A mind cannot be independent of culture."

- Lev Vygotsky



Participants and Location

- + Valencia Elementary in Aptos, California
- + Kindergarten Classroom of 23 students
- + 5 English Language Learners



♡ ✦

Learning Outcomes

✦ By the end of this project, participants will:

1. Identify one thing that makes people different or one thing that makes people the same.
2. Depict themselves using accurate characteristics.
3. Identify one way they can include others.

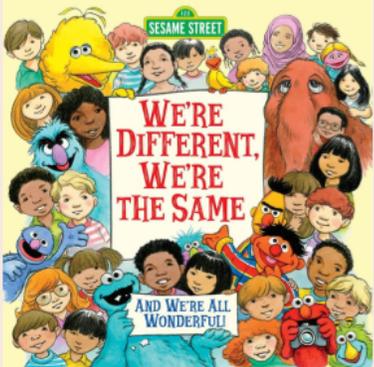
✦ **Method: Procedures and Materials** ✦

<p>Day</p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;">01</div>	<p>Day</p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;">02</div>	<p>Day</p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;">03</div>
Read a book. Lead a discussion.	Read a book. Have children draw portraits. Answer questions.	Read a book. Lead a discussion. Sorting activity.

♡ ✦

Method: Outcome 1

Identify one thing that makes people different or one thing that makes people the same.



Question:

Do you know what I mean when I say that we are all different, but that we are the same?

Results: Outcome 1

What the child said:	Met?
Everyone is different in their own way	♥
Our skin is different colors.	♥
Our mouths and eyes are different.	♥
Our noses are different.	♥
Our eyes look different.	♥
Our clothes are all different.	♥

Results: Outcome 1

What the child said:	Met?
We have different heads.	
We have different hair.	
Our skin is different.	
Our noses are different.	
Our arms are different.	
Our hands are different.	

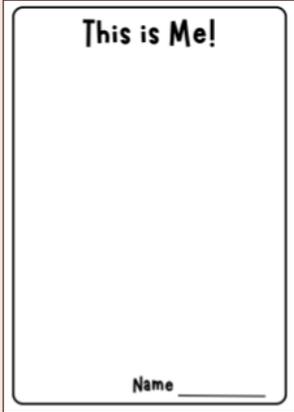
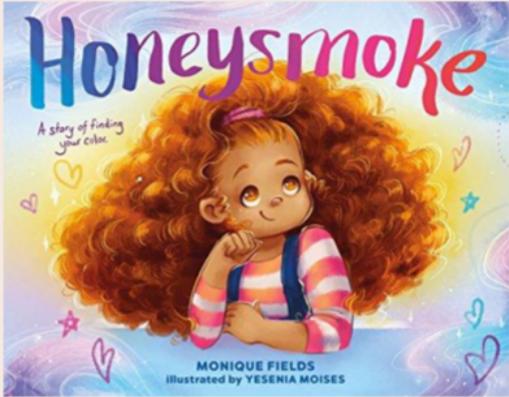
Results: Outcome 1

What the child said:	Met?
Our feelings are different.	
Our heads are different.	
We all have different teeth.	
Child chose not to answer.	
Child chose not to answer.	

Learning Outcome Met

Method: Outcome 2

Depict themselves using accurate characteristics.



Method: Outcome 2



Results: Outcome 2



This is Me!

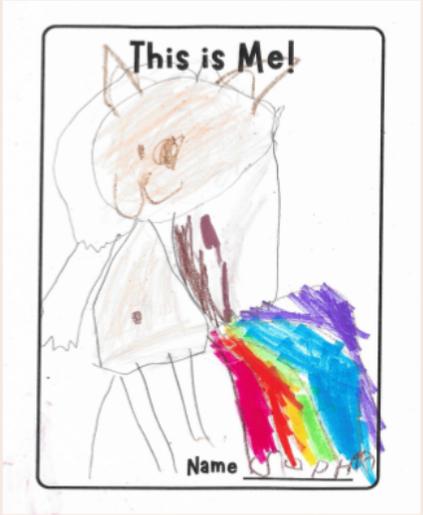
Name DAGMAR



This is Me!

Name Ross

Results: Outcome 2



This is Me!

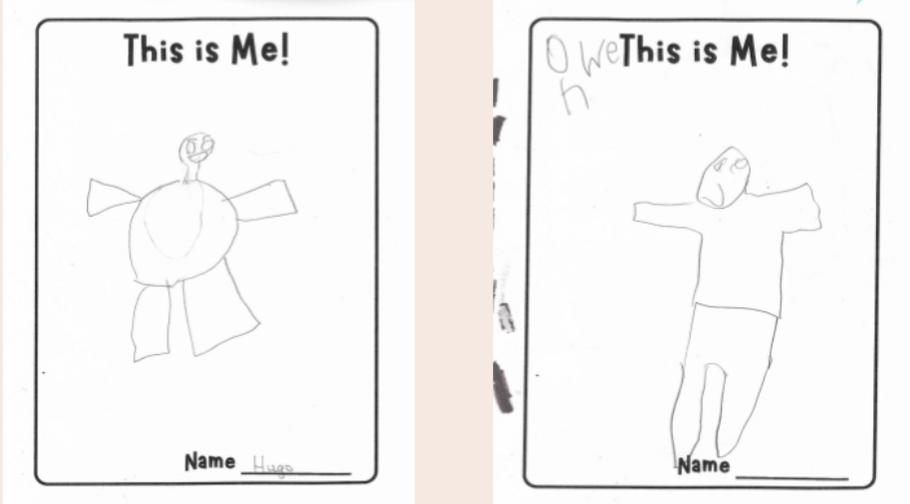
Name STEPH



This is Me!

Name Lillab

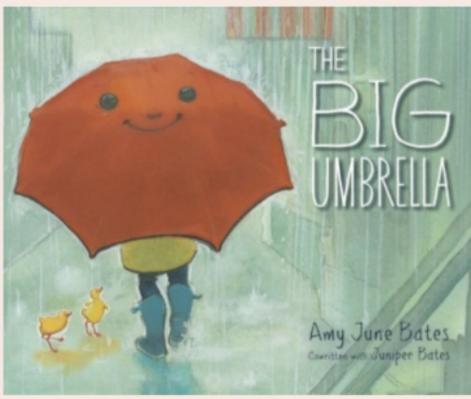
Results: Outcome 2



Learning Outcome Partially Met

Method: Outcome 3

Identify one way they can include others.



Question:
Do you know what it means to be inclusive?

Method: Outcome 3

Do you want to play with us?

The Big Umbrella WOULD say this!

The Big Umbrella WOULD NOT say this!

Cut out the sun, cloud and raindrops.

Do you think the Big Umbrella would say this or not?

You can't play with us.

Come sit with us!

You can't sit here.

Results: Outcome 3

The Big Umbrella WOULD NOT say this!

The Big Umbrella WOULD say this!

You can't sit here.

You are not my friend.

I don't like you.

Come sit with us!

I can help you!

You are a great friend.

Do you want to work together?

You can't play with us.

Go away.

Do you want to play with us?

Learning Outcome Met



Discussion and Conclusion

+ What worked?

+ What didn't?



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Thank you!



Any Questions?

Table 1 from Results- Learning Outcome 1 Discussion

Child	Named Difference	Named Similarity	Declined to Answer
Ava	X		
Owen	X		
Lillian		X	
Lincoln	X		
Joshua	X		
Amelia	X		
Ross	X		
Coral	X		
Edwin	X		
Dagmar	X		
Asher	X		
Hamza	X		
Jaxon	X		
Anya	X		
Sophia	X		
Michael			X
Ursula			X

Table 2 From Results- Learning Outcome 2 Portrait Activity

Child	Accurate Characteristics	Some Accurate Characteristics + Other Characteristics	Did Not Do Accurate Characteristics
Ava	X		
Ross	X		
Dagmar	X		
Sophie	X		
Ursula	X		
Jax	X		
Anya	X		
Hamza	X		
Edwin	X		
Michael	X		
Lincoln	X		
Joshua	X		
Asher	X		
Amelia		X "My hair is dyed."	
Lillian		X "I am a cat."	
Sophia		X "I am a cat with a rainbow dyed tail."	
Coral			X "This is my sad face. I am sad. I don't like working with boys."
Owen			X "I tried them all. My color does not exist."
Hugo			X - This child fell asleep while drawing.

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