

Our Bodies Are Cool!

Alexis Snyder, M.A. & Vanessa Shrontz, M.S., M.S.W. – *Preschool Teachers*

INTRODUCTION

At the start of the school year when younger children joined the classroom, children were very observant of each other's sizes and were concerned some children were "too small" to be in preschool; teachers discussed that people are all different sizes. Children were very confused by this at first, but the more teachers talked and normalized the idea, children accepted it into their working knowledge. These conversations continued over many weeks during varying times of the day as children noticed differences in their bodies, skin, and other features.



When a new topic or issue emerges in the room, teachers go to the library and get books for children to explore. Adults can help children increase their awareness and understanding of their individual and social identity and its aspects (race, ethnicity, gender, ability) by inviting them to explore their characteristics and finding the words that best describe those characteristics. While reading literature on positive racial identities, children could engage with and relate to the content. When they chose words to describe themselves and people, some children gravitated to the words black, white, boy, girl. Others preferred to develop their terms to describe people and themselves, such as brown, pink, person with glasses, person with a dress. Teachers also compared ethnicities, and children realized the coexisting similarities in skin color and physical appearance compared to the differences in languages and culture.

Bodies are Cool

Bodies are Cool by Tyler Feeder became a standout favorite. The class started to discuss what makes each child different. They considered skin color, hair color, eye color, shape, size, and many other ideas. They started an art exploration by looking at their hands and finding a multi-Cultural crayon color or marker that matched their skin tones. They traced their hands and added details. Some children added moles and freckles or scrapes and cuts. In the end, there were 18 unique hands. The children quickly discovered that the markers and crayons were not exact portrayals of their skin tones which lead to mixing their own paint to get the perfect match. Children used varying amounts of brown, white, black, red, yellow, and blue to make the perfect shade.



SELF-PORTRAITS

After making individualized shades, children wanted to use the paint to create self-portraits.

- Children studied their appearances in mirrors before using pencil to draw out their features
- Children viewed photos of themselves to create a second image of their faces
- Teachers provided the children with both pieces of art, discussed which they liked better (and why), and then chose one to paint
- Children outlined their pencil marks in black marker and painted in their face using the custom skin tone
- After the skin color dried, they went back in and added different colors for hair, eyes and other details



FINAL PROJECT

Body collages:

- Self-portraits
- Photos
- Hand tracings
- Customs skin tone paint swatches
- Name

Teachers asked children to detail their collage however they felt represented them. This led to vastly different collages that represented each unique child. Teachers and children had many discussions about similarities and differences; children were supported to formulate their own words to describe their own self-identify and who they feel they are as individuals.



CONNECTION TO OHIO's EARLY LEARNING STANDARDS

Social & Emotional, Self, Self-Concept:

- Identify the diversity in human characteristics and how people are similar and different.
- Compare own characteristics to those of others.

Cognitive & General Knowledge, Social Studies, Geography, Human Systems:

- Identify similarities and differences of personal, family and cultural characteristics, and those of others.

Approaches Towards Learning, Initiative, Planning Action & Reflection:

- Develop, initiate and carry out simple plans to obtain goal.

SOURCES

- 1 Cole, K., & Verwayne, D. (2018). Becoming Upended: Teaching and Learning about Race and Racism with Young Children and Their Families. *YC Young Children*, 73(2), 34–43. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26558916>
- 2 J Iruka, I., Curenton, S., Durden, T. & Escayg, K-A. (2020). Don't look away: Embracing anti-bias classrooms. Gryphon House.