

DOES COLLABORATIVE LEARNING HELP CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL
EDUCATIONAL NEEDS TO UNDERSTAND BASIC ENGLISH VOCABULARY?

by

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to validate the effectiveness of the collaborative learning instruction method implemented in a course of English basic vocabulary with a group of children with special educational needs.

The findings of the study demonstrated that although collaborative learning has not any effect on the understanding and learning of English vocabulary in this population, it is useful in improving the interpersonal relationships and social skills of this kind of learners.

Regarding the outcomes in basic vocabulary understanding, favorable results were found with 83.75% of right answers and 16.25% of incorrect answers in the post-test.

This pre-experimental investigation is relevant because there is not plenty of research about this field and establishes the stage for further research.

RESUMEN

El propósito de este estudio es dar validez a la efectividad del método aprendizaje colaborativo implementado en un curso de vocabulario básico de inglés con un grupo de niños con necesidades educativas especiales.

Los hallazgos del estudio demostraron que, aunque el aprendizaje colaborativo no tiene ningún efecto en la comprensión y el aprendizaje de vocabulario en inglés en esta población, es útil en el mejoramiento de las relaciones interpersonales y las habilidades sociales de este tipo de estudiantes.

Con respecto a los resultados en la comprensión de vocabulario básico se encontró que eran favorables con un 83.75% de respuestas correctas y un 16.25% de respuestas incorrectas en el post-test.

Esta investigación pre-experimental es relevante ya que no hay mucha información sobre este tema y da lugar a nuevas investigaciones al respecto.

I. CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION OF THE STUDY

Introduction to the Problem

Most of foreign language teachers face many problems related to the lack of tools and methods which would make their work an efficient activity and, at the same time, an enjoyable experience for learners. The absence of research that verifies the usefulness or non-usefulness of certain techniques in our setting, as well as the fear of teachers to try new strategies in their field, have become obstacles to the achievement of the demands stated by the current education laws.

English language teaching is a broad field that requires the implementation of new methodologies which may contribute to the students' cognitive development. These methodologies are connected to Educational Psychology, which attempts to apply psychology to education through the use of theories and principles of learning that contribute to lifelong learning. (Kaplan, as quoted in Williams & Burden, 1997).

The teaching-learning problem must be solved through investigative resources in order to select the best solutions in a justified way to facilitate the improvement of quality in this process. Teachers should be familiar with different influences in teaching language methodologies such

as cognitive psychology, humanism and constructivism. Instead of neglecting the individual's thoughts, feelings and emotions, teachers must consider all aspects of the learning process that lead to the total human development. (Williams & Burden, 1997).

A significant factor that teachers ought to consider is the different kinds of audiences they may be in charge of. The differences might be related to age, professional level, gender, expectations, needs and difficulties.

It is important to present some innovations in the teaching of English, taking into account certain audiences whose abilities for learning differ from other groups representing a challenge due to the special attention required by them. This paper will be focused mainly on teaching basic English vocabulary to children with special educational needs, such as learning difficulties, selective mutism and mental retardation.

Problem Statement

Learning English as a foreign language is not too difficult if teachers begin their instruction with the development of comprehension skills through the use of adequate strategies and techniques. However, it is essential to consider that there are many people, especially children, with learning difficulties due to special educational needs.

The problem they have to face is that most of the time they are rejected by their peers, sometimes by their own families and even more by the educative institutions. There are few establishments that incorporate children with learning difficulties, and there are fewer that are really concerned about them. Actually, children with special needs should not be excluded in the learning process, not only in the acquisition of knowledge in their own language but also in the learning of a foreign language. As it is stated in the "Resolución Número 2565", October 24th, 2003, article three, by Ministerio de Educación Nacional:

Cada entidad territorial organizará la oferta educativa para las poblaciones con necesidades educativas especiales por su condición de discapacidad motora, emocional, cognitiva (retardo mental, síndrome down), sensorial (sordera, ceguera, sordoceguera, baja visión), autismo, déficit de atención, hiperactividad, capacidades o talentos excepcionales, y otras que como resultado de un estudio sobre el tema, establezca el Ministerio de Educación Nacional... En este proceso se atenderá al principio de integración social y educativa, establecido en el artículo tercero del decreto 2082 de 1996.

Considering the requirements established by the educational policies in Colombia, children with those learning difficulties should be treated as students with special needs in order to avoid discrimination and underestimation; and encourage instead, the adequate development of cognitive abilities according to their

condition through the improvement of confidence, motivation and self-esteem:

Los niños y jóvenes que por su condición de discapacidad no puedan ser integrados a la educación formal, serán atendidos en instituciones oficiales o privadas, que desarrollen programas que respondan a sus necesidades. (Resolución Número 2565", October 24th, 2003, article three, by Ministerio de Educación Nacional)

Students with learning challenges need an appropriate teacher's response. These challenges may be involved with communication, emotional or behavioral disorders, hyperactivity and mental retardation, just to mention some. Teachers who are in charge of groups with these characteristics need to be creative in order for them to implement methods, techniques and strategies that help children to learn easily in an effective way.

Dr. Carlos Pinzón (2003) affirms that pedagogical models and strategies must be redefined, in mutual aid with people, materials and technology with the purpose of fulfilling the requirements of the population with different types of limitations in order to facilitate the educative processes in academic and social fields. He also says that most of the research that has been carried out in our setting by the Institutes for Deaf and Blind was aimed to make educational advances among groups with sensorial

limitations, but has not been entirely focused on subjects with other kinds of limitations, such as selective mutism, attention deficit and mental retardation.

Taking into account the ideas mentioned before, the conclusion that can be shared is that the problem most remarkable teachers face in this situation is the absence of methodologies which have been proven in our setting and which can help to develop a logical learning process.

These methodologies must be based on verified results that are measured only through their use in a contextualized environment with investigative purposes.

For this reason, it is compulsory to conduct a survey which is focused not only on children with special learning needs, but also on the teaching of a foreign language.

Research Question

What is the effect of Collaborative Learning on the basic English understanding level in children with special educational needs?

Hypothesis

Collaborative Learning does not affect neither positively nor negatively the students basic English vocabulary understanding.

Justification

The role of teachers in society is more than training children to accomplish pedagogical tasks that make them able to find a job. Teachers should be concerned with the different aspects surrounding a human being. Only in the case that both aspects can be combined effectively, teachers can educate their students completely. The success of such a difficult task has its origin in joining pedagogical aspects, which refer to knowledge, and the humanist aspect that is related to behavior, consciousness and values that children should develop in order for them to be useful components of our community.

Besides, it is important to take into account the difficulties that some students have to accomplish or achieve certain academic goals. A teacher has his/her responsibility in helping students for whom learning is really a problem.

Through the implementation of new methods and strategies based on research all the objectives related to teaching and learning will be achieved. The study of Collaborative learning in a particular audience with special educational needs is the first step in order to give new opportunities to children with difficulties to learn a foreign language in our setting. This instruction method

based on collaborative techniques will be adapted according to the students' cognitive levels, and it will be based on making children identify basic English vocabulary through listening and Collaborative tasks.

Concerning the development of this skill as crucial, Pat Wilcox Peterson affirms:

No other type of language input is as easy to process as spoken language, received through listening. At the beginning stages of language study, before students have learned to read well, it is by listening that they can have the most direct connection to meaning in the new language. (p. 87)

Considering that comprehension through listening leads to an improvement in the whole language skills and that this is the initial phase to a clear understanding of a foreign language, students will have their first contact with English only through this skill. They are expected to identify the basic vocabulary they will be given, working at their own rate, with their peers help and the guidance and direction of the instructor involved with this research.

The most important reason why this survey must be carried out is that the Ministerio de Educación Nacional, according to the Decreto número 2082, November 18th 1996, and the Resolución Número 2565", October 24th, 2003 has determined to offer integral attention to the population with special educational needs through the assignment of

several functions to teachers and the whole personnel engaged in the teaching and learning process of this population. Two of these functions as stated in the Resolución Número 2565", October 24th, 2003, are the following:

- To promote the academic and social integration of students with special educational needs.
- To propose and develop research projects about quality and educational innovation and to share their results and improvements.

In order to get involved with these policies and to be part of the national educational system it is necessary to promote the functions mentioned before so that teachers and other professionals involved with special children expand their education horizons and may get to more adequate methodologies for teaching them affectively and effectively. This is an attempt to find new answers in this field and to set the stage for further research.

Objectives

General Objective

To establish the understanding level in basic English vocabulary developed by a group of children with special educational needs through the use of Collaborative Learning.

Specific Objectives

To make students be aware of the existence of English as a foreign language.

To make children identify basic vocabulary words in English, first, in isolation and then, in short sequences, according to their special needs.

To have students identify and recognize words in English which they already know in their mother tongue, by association.

To make children work in groups collaboratively in order to facilitate their learning of English basic vocabulary.

To help students feel comfortable, supported and able to learn, not only the regular topics they are taught in their mother tongue, but also vocabulary from another language, in this case, English.

To foster a sense of companionship among students through the development of face-to-face promotive interactions and positive interdependence.

Limitations

Several attempts to reach the number of subjects expected (10 to 15 students) in order to obtain more reliable results were made. However, the number decreased considerably due to various obstacles presented with some of

the children selected. First, it was found that working in a class with 10 students with different special needs was not appropriate to start a collaborative English course because they were not used to work together; in fact, all lessons and therapies were carried out through individual work. Second, the professionals involved with this specific population advised that, since students with this condition need more support and attention and sometimes may experience aggressive behaviors or seizures, it was impossible to handle more than 4 to 6 students in a regular class successfully, so they argued that it was suitable to have a class with this number of children to carry out the survey. For this reason, in a beginning, 6 children were selected.

The duration of the application of Collaborative Learning was not enough as a result of the short amount of time granted by the Institute, including a three-week period of vacations which was established without warning. Unfortunately, after this time, students lost steadiness and two of them did not return to the Institute, this was a greater limitation because the sample for the study decreased again to 4 students.

The original idea was to work with the students 3 hours per week divided into 3 days (Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays). However, the children selected only attended to

class on Mondays and Wednesdays. The people from the Institute advised that one hour per day was not sufficient for teaching English to children with special needs. The final decision, then, was to work 3 hours per week divided into 2 days.

Definition of Terms

Mental Retardation: "A disability characterized by significant limitations both in intellectual functioning and in adaptive behavior as expressed in conceptual, social, and practical adaptive skills. This disability originates before age 18". ("AAMR", 2005)

Selective Mutism: "A complex childhood anxiety disorder characterized by a child's inability to speak in select social settings, such as school. These children are able to talk normally in settings where they are comfortable, secure and relaxed". ("The Selective Mutism Group", 2005)

Attention-Deficit Hyperactive Disorder: "AD/HD is a diagnosis applied to children and adults who consistently display certain characteristic behaviors over a period of time. The core features include: distractibility (poor sustained attention to tasks), impulsivity (impaired impulse control and delay of gratification) and hyperactivity (excessive activity and physical restlessness)". (Jaksa, 1998)

II. CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Collaborative Learning Theoretical Background: Outline

Collaborative learning theoreticians and practitioners tend to come from the humanities and social sciences. Their work often explores theoretical, political, and philosophical issues such as the nature of knowledge as a social construction and the role of authority in the classroom along with the nature of teamwork and social skills required to accomplish the objectives determined in a course. ("Enhancing Student Thinking through Collaborative Learning", ERIC Digest, n.d)

Collaborative Learning is based on some principles of the existing theories described as cognitive, social constructivism and motivational.

The cognitive approach related to this instruction method affirms that, in a small group setting, learners have more possibilities to practice their understanding with their peers and to be exposed to more conceptual constructs. (Cooper; Slavin, as cited in "Doing CL", n.d)

Social constructivism states that talking is a natural social act in which participants exchange ideas and beliefs; therefore, in order to internalize knowledge a social discourse must take place. (Bruffee, as cited in "Doing CL", n.d)

Motivational theory has established that the intrinsic structure of collaborative learning enables a positive environment which motivates learning. If properly integrated into a course, collaborative learning with these teaching approaches is able to attain improvements in student achievement in several contexts and cultures, race relations, self-esteem issues and it can make academically handicapped special students more integrated and socially accepted by their peers. ("Doing CL", n.d)

As it is seen so far, collaborative learning possesses a theoretical background for foundational knowledge which can be incorporated into any kind of group, in any given setting.

Collaborative Learning

There are many approaches involved with group work such as student team learning, cooperative learning, group investigation and collaborative learning. Although they differ in certain aspects, all of them concur with the fact that the goal of collaborative activities in the classroom must be a way of preparing learners for the kind of team work and critical interchange they will need in a future to be effective participants of society. (Ngeow, 1998)

According to Vygotsky (as cited in Gokhale, 1995) students are capable of performing at higher intellectual

levels when asked to work in collaborative situations than when asked to work individually.

Michael Winer and Karen Ray (1994) define the term collaboration as a "mutually beneficial and well-defined relationship entered into by two or more organizations to achieve results they are more likely to achieve together than alone".

Collaborative learning can be referred to both as an instruction method or a specific type of small group learning in which students with diverse performance levels work together in small groups towards a common goal. The main objective of this method is to make students responsible for their own learning as well as their peers' learning. Therefore, the accomplishments of one person help his/her classmates to be successful. (Gokhale, 1995)

Role of the Instructor

Gokhale (1995) affirms that "for collaborative learning to be effective, the instructor must view teaching as a process of developing and enhancing students' ability to learn". In collaborative learning the role of the instructor is "not to transmit information, but to serve as a facilitator for learning".

The major responsibilities of a teacher who incorporates collaborative strategies are established by

Johnson, Johnson, and Smith (adapted in "Doing CL", n.d).

They are the following:

The instructor must specify the instructional objectives establishing a general description of the academic objectives and the social skills objectives to be reached at the end of the course.

It is the instructor's responsibility to determine the size of the group. It has to be considered that "the shorter the task the smaller the group". Moreover, s/he has to assign students to groups considering that the length of time the groups stay together is dependent on the specific collaborative learning activity. These decisions must be taken before the instruction begins.

Instructional materials with the aim of fostering interdependence must be planned, particularly with inexperienced students or new groups.

The instructor must explain the academic task in a clear way, defining the objectives of the lesson and the relevant concepts that are to be learned during the class, and explaining the procedures learners have to follow to complete the assignment.

It is also important to monitor students' behavior to observe their working processes, both intervening to teach social skills if students are having difficulty working

together and praising good collaborative attitudes when observed.

Finally, the instructor is responsible for the evaluation of learning and interaction processing. S/he must provide closure to the lesson by having students summarize what was learned during the class, so that learners remember the concepts studied.

The Role of the Student

The role of the student in a collaborative learning course structure is basically a shift from being a passive learner to becoming an active member of a class.

Gerlach (1994) highlights the major responsibilities of a student in a collaborative classroom:

A student who belongs to a collaborative group must become an active problem solver, contributor and discussant.

S/he must change her/his silent presence in the classroom with no risks to a public attendance with many risks, not dictated by personal choice but dictated by community or team expectation.

Another aspect in a collaborative setting that a student must consider is to always remember that competition with peers is no longer proper. There must be a shift from responsibilities and self-direction to learning interdependently.

Finally, the notion that teachers and texts are the only sources of authority and knowledge must be removed. A student must realize sooner or later that her/his peers, herself/himself, and the thinking of one's community are additional and essential sources of authority and knowledge.

Characteristics of Collaborative Learning

It is known that collaborative activities include social interaction and negotiation of meaning among group members in order to complete the tasks assigned. However, for collaborative learning to succeed, there are certain factors related to human relationships and interaction that have to be considered as well.

Teamwork and Social Skills

Students involved in collaborative groups must learn to work together as a team by helping each other, being responsible, enhancing communication and creating trust. In order to accomplish teamwork skills they have to develop linguistic, negotiation and social abilities, in addition to "turn-taking, listening, encouraging, disagreeing appropriately and accepting others' opinions and disagreements". (Bennett, Rolheiser-Bennett and Stevahn, as cited in Crandall, 1999)

Group Processing

This is the final stage of a collaborative class when students learn from their mistakes and help others to correct them. Group processing is a set of conclusions regarding the students' participation in the group. The feedback is useful to improve the learners' teamwork skills and helps to preserve the working relationships between the members of a group. It is possible to provide feedback to groups, to individuals and even to the whole class. ("Doing CL", n.d.)

Individual (and Group) Accountability

Even as students' participation in groups may vary depending on the model of collaborative activities, all of them require responsibility from each member to the group so that the completion of a task can be successful. If the individual is held accountable, then the entire team will develop a sense of liability. (Crandall, 1999)

Individual accountability refers also to the responsibility of each student for his/her own learning because all of a student's grade depends on individually completed tests and papers, rather than undifferentiated group grades for team work (Cooper, 1998).

Positive Interdependence

Taking into account that collaborative groups share a common objective which is to complete a given assignment, it is stated that, since each learner has something to share with the group, team members need each other to achieve that goal ("Doing CL", n.d.). "A sense of interconnectedness can help students transcend the gender, racial, cultural, linguistic, and other differences they may sense among themselves. Unfortunately, these differences often are at the root of prejudice and other interpersonal stress that students experience in school". ("Response to Diversity", n.d.)

Face-to-face Promotive Interactions

One of the most important accomplishments related to promotive interactions is that the focus on social skills development may enhance the learners' interpersonal relationships and gives them opportunities to build a framework for their knowledge. Moreover, these kinds of positive interactions allow individuals to be motivated to continue to work on the tasks assigned. ("Doing CL", n.d.)

Johnson and Johnson (1990) affirm that, while students do not know automatically how to interact with other effectively, social skills must be taught and reinforced, in this way they can develop trust and they will be able to

overcome any possible problems the group may have.

("Response to Diversity", n.d.)

Course Structure

Bonwell and Sutherland (as cited in "Doing CL", n.d.) present four components related to the structure of a course with collaborative activities: simple to complex tasks, course objectives, interaction in the classroom and level of student experience.

Simple Tasks are short and less structured activities. They can last a complete lesson or just a couple of minutes. These activities are characterized by having "ill-defined goals or goals defined by the group, less formal feedback, group decides how to work together and what, if any, group roles should exist, group initiates group processing, little or no methodology is given to complete the task".

Complex Tasks are more structured and may last the entire class period or numerous periods. These activities are characterized by having "a defined goal or task, interim evaluation such as quizzes or mid-activity summary, group processing at specified times, and defined methodology on how to complete the task".

Course Objectives range from the acquisition of knowledge to the acquisition of skills or attitudes. Acquisition of knowledge is related to the mastery of

topical information, that is, concepts and facts; whereas acquisition of skills or attitudes refers to the influence of a course in a realistic or practical sense.

Interaction in the Classroom ranges from limited to extensive. This degree of interaction among the students and the instructor depends on the teacher in accordance with his/her preferences, personality, and need for control during the class.

Level of Student Experience: Bonwell and Sutherland (as cited in "Doing CL", n.d.) finally advise that while incorporating collaborative activities with inexperienced students more structured tasks are better to use and less structured activities can be applied when students become experienced.

Considering these aspects, working with special children requires complex tasks adapted to their limited cognitive and social levels in order to accomplish the objectives established previously for this study.

Affective Factors on Teaching

The importance of providing comfortable environments for learning to take place in an effective way must be considered entirely in the application of collaborative learning, even more when teaching to an audience with special educational needs. Affect, according to the Canadian

Association of Second Language Teachers (2000) is "the subjective aspect of an emotion" and they also state that an affective learning environment is related to the emotional aspects of a particular setting.

The intention of creating a supportive atmosphere where comfort levels are high and anxiety levels are low is very appropriate when dealing with a second or foreign language classroom (Kristmanson, 2001). Shrum and Glisan (1993, as quoted in Kristmanson) established that, although competitive groups may have negative repercussions such as feelings of anxiety, inadequacy and fear of failure, cooperative strategies contribute to the building of self-esteem and the increasing of motivation.

Through cooperative learning tasks, learners have the opportunity to promote affective factors in a constructive way by reducing anxiety, hostility, stress and developing positive attitudes towards learning a new language (Crandall, 1999).

So far, it is seen that affective factors play a crucial role on teaching. Learners need to feel safe, secure and relax, not shy or embarrassed. If these aspects influence learning insomuch that encourage or discourage them to continue studying, it is even more important when referring to children with special educational needs. Those

students feel vulnerable and insecure most of the time, so implementing collaborative learning with an emotional climate is a great step to make them feel appreciated and capable of learning whatever they want.

Motivational Influences on Learning

Everything that is learned is influenced by some aspects related mostly to "self-awareness and beliefs about personal control, competence, and ability; personal expectations for success or failure; affect, emotion, and general states of mind; and the resulting motivation to learn". (Marshall, 1995). This means that the connection among beliefs, feelings, and behavior motivate the individuals' psychological ability to learn. Those constructions of reality can foster or hinder positive motivation, learning, and performance.

Regarding the children involved with this survey, who present inner difficulties in learning and substantial limitations it is necessary to share with them positive learning experiences that contribute to constructive motivation to learn, not only in their mother tongue but also in English.

When students with special educational needs feel that they can learn and try new things, they will feel motivated

to learn more and those factors will facilitate their learning processes.

Collaborative Methods for Students with Special Needs

Learners' differences may include ethnicity, race, language, gender, physical or cognitive abilities and socioeconomic status. These factors along with the environment in which an individual is raised affect deeply the learning outcomes. In that case, understanding personal and cultural differences increase the possibilities for creating and implementing learning environments that are optimal for all learners (Ngeow, 1998).

Collaborative and cooperative learning include flexible activities which may provide options to be adapted to any kind of audiences, from diverse language settings or cross-cultural goals to students with special educational needs, according to the teachers' creativity. These activities allow learners to understand each other, learn from their differences and help to work together. ("Response to Diversity", n.d.)

It is necessary for teachers to know and comprehend what the expectations and needs of the students are in order to adapt traditional materials to collaborative tasks which may develop foreign language skills as well as adaptive behavior and conceptual abilities. The learners' differences

will determine the learners' individual and collective needs. Sometimes, those differences may become a way to demonstrate how equal we are.

Learning Challenges: Disabilities

Exceptional learners have difficulties in learning which require special education, techniques and strategies during treatment and in most of the cases, medication.

Children with special educational needs are not only people with obvious learning difficulties, such as those who are physically disabled or blind. They also include individuals whose learning difficulties are less apparent, such as slow learners and emotionally vulnerable children. ("SEN Resources", n.d.)

The terms learning disabilities (LD) contain some parameters: LD are distinct from global intellectual deficiency and result from impairments in one or more processes related to perceiving, thinking, remembering or learning. They range in severity and may affect any or several areas of life, LD are life long and they are neurobiological and/or genetic in origin (Walcot-Gayda, 2004). Examples of learning disabilities are dyslexia, a brain's inability to difference between letters shapes; dyscalculia, the inability to understand and use symbols or functions in mathematics; and dyspraxia, a difficulty with

thinking out, planning and carrying out sensory motor tasks.
("SEN Resources", n.d.)

Disabilities, on the other hand, include physical and sensory challenges such as seizure disorders, epilepsy, cerebral palsy, and sensory impairments; communication disorders such as speech impairments, articulation disorders, stuttering, voicing problems and language disorders; emotional or behavioral disorders such as hyperactivity, attention deficit, anxiety disorders and selective mutism; and cognitive disorders such as autism and Asperger's syndrome (Woolfolk, 1998).

Below, the disabilities that the students involved with this research have are described.

Anxiety Disorder

Anxiety problems are a very difficult condition to deal within a class. This state is part of emotional and behavioral disorders which, according to the dimensions established by Quay and Peterson (as quoted in Woolfolk, 1998) is known as anxiety-withdrawal disorder. Children with this condition cry easily, have low self-esteem, are hypersensitive, depressed, exceptionally anxious, shy and withdrawn.

Gresham (as quoted in Woolfolk, 1998) states that even though these children appear to have no friends and few

social skills, the most successful approaches for teaching them are related to the direct training of social and teamwork skills.

Selective Mutism

Selective mutism is characterized by the existence of three basic problems which are "the child's high level of anxiety in social situations, the limited experience the child has had in speaking with people other than family members [and] the high level of support that is present for nonverbal communication". (Gallagher, 2001)

Selective mutism, being an anxiety disorder has a treatment focused on methods to increase self-esteem, confidence and communication in social settings. At first, expectations for verbalization must be eliminated. When the child's anxiety is lowered and confidence increases, verbalization will usually follow ("The Selective Mutism Group", 2005).

According to Gallagher (2001) one of the techniques to treat this disorder is related to the reduction of anxiety through affective and relaxed environments. Once a child stops feeling pressure or nervousness, he or she is placed in situations to talk, and progressively other people are introduced into that position while talk continues.

Attention-Deficit Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD)

The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (as cited in Jaksa, 1998) affirms that some symptoms of ADHD include failure to pay close attention to details, difficulty sustaining attention to tasks; not listening when spoken to directly, failure to follow instructions completely, losing or forgetting important things, running or climbing excessively, and revealing answers before hearing the whole question.

Children with ADHD need constant rules that they can understand and follow. Treatment for children with this deficit may vary according to the diagnoses. Behavior and cognitive therapy are useful to enhance ADHD children's performance, as well as social skills training where the teacher or therapist represents appropriate behaviors for the development of social relationships, like waiting for a turn, sharing toys, asking for help, or responding to teasing, and then the child is given an opportunity to practice. Social skills training helps learners find better ways to play and work with other children. (Strock, 2004)

Epilepsy

Epilepsy is a condition characterized by recurrent seizures and jerking movements caused by abnormal discharges of energy in the brain. When epilepsy is simple, it is

marked by partial seizures, which begin in a limited area and only involve a small fraction of the brain. When it is complex, it involves a large part of the brain that causes convulsions, followed by a deep sleep or coma.

The main problem for a student with epilepsy is hitting her/himself during a seizure. Hallahan & Kauffman (as quoted in Woolfolk, 1998) advise that during a convulsion, the teacher must lower the student to the floor and move hard objects away. Then, s/he has to loose clothes that may be tight and never put anything in the child's mouth. Seizures last about two to five minutes, but if they continue for more than ten minutes, medical help is crucial. (Woolfolk, 1998)

Mental Retardation

The American Association on Mental Retardation defines Mental retardation as a particular condition characterized by limitation in adaptive skills and intelligence, which refers to the mental ability to "reason, plan, solve problems, think abstractly, comprehend complex ideas, learn quickly, and learn from experience". Individuals' intelligence is commonly defined by Intelligent Quotient (IQ) scores taken from standardized examinations given by a qualified professional. ("AAMR", 2005).

According to Dr. Joseph Smith (2005), children with mental retardation demonstrate impairments in functioning in at least two of the following areas: communication, health, leisure time, safety, school, self-care, social, work. This state of functioning is divided into four categories according to the children's intelligence level:

Mild Mental Retardation is present when the IQ level is 50-55 up to about 70. About 85% of persons that are mental retarded fall into this group.

Moderate Mental Retardation includes individuals with an IQ level 35-40 to 50-55. About 10% of people that are mental retarded fall into this group. Their training is focused on self-care rather than development of intellectual skills. However, they can acquire communication skills in childhood and are able to live and function productively within the community in a supervised environment.

After an intense period of training and practice, they can also carry out work and self-care tasks with reasonable supervision.

Severe Mental Retardation is present in children with an IQ level 20-25 to 35-40. About 3% to 4% of persons that are mental retarded fall into this group.

Profound Mental Retardation is comprised of people with an IQ level below 20 or 25. About 1% to 2% of individuals that are mental retarded fall into this group.

Treatment for children with mental retardation consists mainly of psychotherapy and pharmacotherapy. ("Psychology Web", 2000)

III. CHAPTER 3: METHOD

Design of the study

Since the study was carried out with a single group and considering that this small group did not have any previous knowledge about English, a pre-experimental design was selected in order to determine if the treatment had any effect on the outcome measures: the one-shot case study. The schematic representation of this design is:

X T

Where X represents the treatment, that is, the application of collaborative learning and T represents the post-test.

Subjects

The population to whom this survey was aimed to consisted of four male children with different special educational needs. All of them are assisting Profesa I.P.S. to receive whole treatment. Profesa is an institution that helps children with special needs to study, learn with different teaching approaches and be constantly supported by health and education professionals.

All of the children belong to a low socio-economic status.

The descriptions and diagnoses below concerning the children's condition were offered by Profesa I.P.S.

Occupational Therapy (the subjects' names have been omitted):

Subject 1. 9 years old. Child studying in preschool.

Diagnosis. Attention Deficit/Deficit in Learning Repertoires

Description. Deficient learning repertoires in comprehension and spatial and temporal perception are observed. He identifies some primary colors but presents difficulties in laterality perception. He outlines some letters and numbers. He has difficulties in mental memory processes: comprehension, concentration and problem solving. Low self-esteem is also observed.

Subject 2. 7 years old. Not currently studying.

Diagnosis. Learning Difficulties/Selective Mutism

Description. Difficulties in mental processes of attention, concentration, comprehension, assimilation and problem solving are observed. He presents low expressive language and lacks the production of short and long answers. He has improved fine and gross motor coordination. He is improving perceptions and laterality.

Subject 3. 14 years old. Not currently studying.

Diagnosis. Moderate Mental Retardation

Description. He presents difficulties in attention, comprehension and concentration processes when carrying out

activities related to semi-complex motor and visual coordination. He maintains adequate limitation in coloring big and small figures. He likes painting activities and games. He gets continually distracted. He needs constant support from the therapist.

Subject 4. 14 years old. Not currently studying.

Diagnosis. Moderate Mental Retardation/Anxiety Disorder/Simple Partial Epilepsy

Description. The child copes with simple and semi-complex tasks. Moderate learning processes in basic repertoires such as attention, concentration and memory are observed. He usually forgets number sequences. Sometimes he is shy, quiet and attentive. However, he usually changes his mood harshly and refuses to participate in classroom activities. He gets easily distracted.

Materials

Due to the children's condition it was not possible to use different kinds of materials, that is why all of the six topics were studied with the same pattern. This model consisted of 1/4 of fine cardboard, not too small or too big so that students can work easily together on the tasks. In it, there were illustrations in which students had different things to do such as coloring, matching and drawing.

The materials used by the students during the lessons were colors, pencils, colored construction paper, glue, crayons and water-based paint.

Instruments

The instruments used to gather information in this study were the following:

Observations

Three different observation formats were applied in this study. Each of the observation items were graded into three categories (Always, Sometimes, Never) depending on what was observed in the students. Formats 1 and 2 were applied individually whereas formats 3 and 4 were applied to groups.

Observations 1 and 2 are related to a description of the limitations that special children may have in adaptive behavior. According to the American Association on Mental Retardation, adaptive behavior is "the collection of conceptual, social, and practical skills that people have learned so they can function in their everyday lives" ("AAMR", 2005). When there is a considerable limitation in any of these skills the person's ability to respond to a particular situation or to the environment is affected. In order to establish the children's difficulties and how they may affect learning English these formats were applied

individually. The first format contains three questions related to the students' performance in conceptual skills (receptive and expressive language, self-directions) and three questions related to their performance in practical skills (toilet training, mobility, instrumental activities).

The second format is focused only on social skills, which are directly involved to a successful practice in collaborative learning activities.

These observations of adaptive behavior were aimed to get to know the students' limitations in order to handle possible awkward situations correctly and to teach special children according to those limitations and needs.

Format 3 was a preliminary observation applied in the first week of class to diagnose the current state of collaborative work carried out by the children.

Format 4 was a post-treatment observation applied the last week of class in order to establish the achievement of the students' collaborative skills.

Observations 3 and 4 contain questions related to the groups' performance on teamwork and social skills which include the main characteristics of collaborative learning: positive interdependence, face-to-face promotive interactions, individual (and group) accountability and group processing.

Test

The test carried out after the treatment consisted of 20 questions about six different topics: colors, shapes, animals, animal food, parts of the face and expressions. It is important to remember that these six topics were selected according to the cognitive levels of the students and in accordance to the topics they were studying in the institution in their mother tongue. In this way, the identification, recognition, and association of words that they were learning at that time in Spanish will lead finally to the understanding of basic English vocabulary for preschool children.

The test was divided into five sheets of paper in which students were expected to listen to basic vocabulary words and then identify them by pointing at the drawings of the paper. They had one opportunity to select the right picture from three options. *For a review, see Appendix A*

Since it was a simple and easy-to-answer test, students took about three minutes to complete.

Procedures

Collaborative learning activities were carried out in informal small groups. Sometimes these groups were regrouped throughout the course but most of the time they remained cohesive. This allowed consistency with the collaborative

work observations. The procedures followed during the lesson were the following:

The class started at 9:30am, after students arrived from recess.

The first half hour the topic was introduced with a short story, a question (do you have any pets at home?) or an anecdote. Because of the students' cognitive limitations the classes were developed in Spanish.

Children were expected to learn three new vocabulary words in English every lesson, which made at the end of the treatment a total of 18 vocabulary words learned.

After the introduction students were told what the activity was going to be about and they were divided into two groups of two. When there were only three students, the three worked on the task together.

In each class, children had to complete a part of the activity and when they finished, they were supposed to help their classmates.

When students had difficulties not only in English vocabulary but also in collaborative skills, the teacher was near them for guidance and support and as a facilitator for learning.

At the end of the class, before cleaning the classroom, students were asked for conclusions about the task carried

out. For instance, what did we learn today? How was your behavior during the class? Did you help your classmates? Did you collaborate on group work?

The students were not allowed to do English homework because of the lack of supervision at their homes. Nevertheless, after the first lesson there was always a whole review of the topics learned in the previous classes. *For a review of all the activities carried out during the course, see Appendix B.*

Variables

Independent Variable

The application of the Collaborative Learning instruction method through collaborative techniques.

Dependent Variable

The understanding level in basic English vocabulary developed by a group of children with special educational needs.

Data Analysis

The data analysis of this survey was based on qualitative and quantitative measures of the results.

In order to carry out the qualitative analysis, a series of observations were made, the first two observation formats were checked to obtain a description of the students' capabilities.

With the application of observation 3 formats the level of preliminary collaborative skills was diagnosed.

Then, observation number 4 was useful to obtain results about the improvement of those abilities in the subjects.

The quantitative analysis included the results of the post-test poured in a data matrix in order to obtain and determine the level of basic English vocabulary understanding reached by the students after the treatment. For this purpose, the study also required descriptive statistics.

IV. CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

This survey consisted of implementing Collaborative Learning techniques to a group of four male children with special educational needs so that they can understand basic English vocabulary. The application of the treatment lasted two months and during this time, six topics were studied: colors, shapes, animals, animal food, parts of the face and expressions. At the end of the treatment, a post-test was applied to measure the students' achievements. The study included also the application of a series of observations to establish the current state of the children regarding their whole performance and collaborative skills.

*Qualitative Analysis**Observations*

Since observations 1 and 2 were applied to get to know the students' behavior, the results obtained demonstrated that, in general, although these children possess differences in their limitations, all of them have similar difficulties in the learning process related to cognitive abilities such as concentration, memory, attention, comprehension and problem solving, as well as difficulties in interaction, communication and collaborative work, as shown in observations 3 and 4.

It is important to notice that the first two observation formats were applied with the only aim of getting familiarized with the students' needs and limitations in their whole performance in order to plan lessons and tasks that they were able to complete.

In observation 3, the objective was to diagnose the preliminary level of collaborative skills in the children to finally be compared to post-treatment observation 4 which presents the outcomes of the mentioned skills.

Below, a detailed description of each observation item is presented.

Observation 1 revealed that conceptual skills of receptive and expressive language in the children were limited, whereas self-direction skills were average. This means that the students are able to carry out activities by themselves.

Concerning practical skills, all of them can deal with personal activities of daily living such as mobility and toilet training except for subject 3 who presents more difficulty in motor coordination than usual.

Finally, in terms of instrumental skills subjects 2 and 3 proved to have some problems with the adequate use of materials such as pencils, colors and glue. *To review these*

observations, see Tables 1-4. Observation 1. Adaptive Behavior: Conceptual and Practical Skills.

Observation 2 confirmed that children's interaction in the classroom was scarce apparently because they were used to working alone all the time and the teacher was almost the only person who spoke to them directly.

All of the students proved to be responsible in completing the tasks assigned with exception of subject 3 who seemed not to understand that he should also participate in the activities until they were finished.

Due to the children's limitations and that actually, most of them are aware of their situation, they present self-esteem and self-confidence issues. Despite this fact, students seemed to have the desire to rely on themselves and participate in class as actively as it was possible for them.

The likelihood of being tricked or manipulated (gullibility) is not common among these students, even though their cognitive skills are limited.

In general terms, children follow the teacher's instructions carefully, are respectful and affectionate. This makes the students and the teacher maintain good relationships among them.

Regarding the relationships among peers it can be established that due to the lack of communication, their relationships are based mostly on greeting, discussing about who is doing the best work in class and/or struggling for a color or a toy. *To review these observations see Tables 5-8. Observation 2. Adaptive Behavior: Social Skills.*

As it is established throughout the study, observations 1 and 2 were carried out before the treatment application. Observations 3 and 4 contain the same items, but format 3 was applied during the first week of the treatment and format 4 was applied during the last week of the treatment.

Observation 3, as it was stated before, is a preliminary observation applied to verify the students' performance on teamwork and social skills. This observation showed that children, at the beginning of the treatment, did not have or use any of the collaborative skills. They struggled for the paper, they got angry, they refused to work with their peers, they got angrier and they wanted to do everything by themselves. Collaborative work, in this instance, was an unsuccessful group activity. There were not promotive interactions, positive interdependence or even group accountability. This is logical; since it was the first time they carried out an activity of this kind. *To*

review these observations see Tables 9-10. Observation 3. Collaborative Work.

Observation format 4 was the final observation applied during the study. This post-treatment observation demonstrated that, although collaborative and social skills were not improved to an excellent level, students started to interact among them, helping their classmates to make things better and overcoming the problems they had when the treatment began. The children got used to work together; they did not interfere anymore with their peers' work, and they interacted more not only among peers but also between the groups. *To review these observations see Tables 11-12. Observation 4 Collaborative Work.*

Quantitative Analysis

Post-test

Considering that the group of children selected to participate in this study did not have any knowledge about foreign languages as English, the application of a pre-test was not necessary. Then, when the treatment was over, a 20 questions test was applied in order to verify whether the hypothesis assumed for this work resulted affirmative or negative.

As it was explained on instruments section, students were supposed to point at the pictures of the paper after

listening to the words uttered by the teacher. When they identified the item, the teacher checked if the answer was right or wrong and then marked with an X the answers sheet according the students' responses. *To review the Answers Sheets see Tables 13-16: Post-Treatment Test Results.*

The video recorded during the exam shows that children were nervous and anxious, but it demonstrates also that they always tried to focus on the questions despite their lack of attention and concentration.

The results obtained through the application of the post-test were poured in a data matrix to achieve a better understanding of the results, not only considering each subject individually but also the performance of the whole group in the post-test.

In order to display the outcomes in a data matrix it was necessary to codify the answers given by the children during the test: right answers were codified with the number 1 and incorrect answers were codified with the number zero. In this way the numbers can be added horizontally and vertically to get the final results by subject, by answered question, and the results accomplished by the group. *To review the data matrix, see Table 17. Post-Treatment Test Results: Data Matrix.*

The results obtained from the data matrix were the following: Subject 1 obtained a total score of 16 right answers and 4 incorrect answers. Subject 2 obtained 18 right answers and 2 incorrect answers. Subject 3 obtained a total score of 13 right answers and 7 incorrect answers; and subject 4 accomplished a total score of 20 right answers.

As it is known, the test was comprised of 20 answers, so the data matrix information concludes that out of 80 questions answered by the four children in total, 67 were answered correctly and 13 were answered incorrectly. In terms of percentages, the right answers achieved 83.75% while wrong answers corresponded to 16.25%. *To review the graphs of the results, see Figures 1 and 2. Post-Test Results.*

Table 1.

Observation 1. Adaptive behavior: Conceptual and Practical Skills.

Subject Number 1

Date: June 13th, 15th, 20th, 22nd, 2005

ADAPTIVE BEHAVIOR SKILLS			
	A	S	N
1. Conceptual skills			
a. Is the child able to listen and accept ideas and suggestions?		X	
b. Is the child able to express ideas and suggestions?		X	
c. Is the child able to do activities by himself?	X		
2. Practical skills			
a. Does the child have an adequate use of materials?	X		
b. Is the child able to use the toilet facilities?	X		
c. Is his general mobility appropriate for the child's age?	X		

Based on "What is Adaptive Behavior?"
 American Association on Mental Retardation Official Site
http://www.aamr.org/Policies/faq_mental_retardation.shtml

A= Always

S= Sometimes

N= Never

Comments:

Subject diagnosed with Deficit in Learning Repertoires/ Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder.

The child seems to be able to recognize figures quickly and to remember them. He appears to be interested in learning and trying new things. Most of the time, the child seems concerned about accomplishing a task. However, when he finishes his assignment, he becomes anxious and distracts his classmates.

Table 2.

Observation 1. Adaptive behavior: Conceptual and Practical Skills.

Subject Number 2

Date: June 13th, 15th, 20th, 22nd, 2005

ADAPTIVE BEHAVIOR SKILLS			
	A	S	N
1. Conceptual skills			
a. Is the child able to listen and accept ideas and suggestions?		X	
b. Is the child able to express ideas and suggestions?			X
c. Is the child able to do activities by himself?	X		
2. Practical skills			
a. Does the child have an adequate use of materials?		X	
b. Is the child able to use the toilet facilities?	X		
c. Is his general mobility appropriate for the child's age?	X		

Based on "What is Adaptive Behavior?"
 American Association on Mental Retardation Official Site
http://www.aamr.org/Policies/faq_mental_retardation.shtml

A= Always

S= Sometimes

N= Never

Comments:

Subject diagnosed with Selective Mutism.

He appears to have short periods of concentration. He gets distracted easily. As a student with a selective mutism condition, he never gives long answers or utters complex sentences. He seems to understand everything that is said to him, but most of the time he only answers yes or no, or answers questions using gestures.

Table 3.

Observation 1. Adaptive behavior: Conceptual and Practical Skills.

Subject Number 3

Date: June 13th, 15th, 20th, 22nd, 2005

ADAPTIVE BEHAVIOR SKILLS			
	A	S	N
1. Conceptual skills			
a. Is the child able to listen and accept ideas and suggestions?		X	
b. Is the child able to express ideas and suggestions?			X
c. Is the child able to do activities by himself?		X	
2. Practical skills			
a. Does the child have an adequate use of materials?		X	
b. Is the child able to use the toilet facilities?	X		
c. Is his general mobility appropriate for the child's age?		X	

Based on "What is Adaptive Behavior?"
 American Association on Mental Retardation Official Site
http://www.aamr.org/Policies/faq_mental_retardation.shtml

A= Always

S= Sometimes

N= Never

Comments:

Subject diagnosed with Moderate Mental Retardation.

He seems to have problems with information processing. He does not recognize some shapes or drawings. When he feels confused, afraid or when he can not accomplish an assignment, he just smiles. He does not identify expressions or emotions.

Table 4.

Observation 1. Adaptive behavior: Conceptual and Practical Skills.

Subject Number 4

Date: June 13th, 15th, 20th, 22nd, 2005

ADAPTIVE BEHAVIOR SKILLS			
	A	S	N
1. Conceptual skills			
a. Is the child able to listen and accept ideas and suggestions?		X	
b. Is the child able to express ideas and suggestions?	X		
c. Is the child able to do activities by himself?	X		
2. Practical skills			
a. Does the child have an adequate use of materials?	X		
b. Is the child able to use the toilet facilities?	X		
c. Is his general mobility appropriate for the child's age?	X		

Based on "What is Adaptive Behavior?"
 American Association on Mental Retardation Official Site
http://www.aamr.org/Policies/faq_mental_retardation.shtml

A= Always

S= Sometimes

N= Never

Comments:

Subject diagnosed with Moderate Mental Retardation/Anxiety Disorder.

The child uses to be talkative and nice to the teacher. There are occasions in which he feels unstable and starts to cry. He tends to grab anything that surrounds him and gets easily distracted. However, he is quiet, gentle and likes to participate in the activities.

Table 5.

Observation 2. Adaptive behavior: Social Skills

Subject Number 1

Date: June 13th, 15th, 20th, 22nd, 2005

ADAPTIVE BEHAVIOR SKILLS			
1. Social skills	A	S	N
a. Does the child interact with his peers?		X	
b. Does the child interact with the teacher?	X		
c. Is the child responsible in carrying out academic tasks?	X		
d. Does the child demonstrate self-confidence?		X	
e. Is the child easily manipulated or tricked?			X
f. Does the child follow teachers' instructions?	X		
g. Does the child maintain good relationships with their peers?		X	
i. Does the child maintain good relationships with the teacher?	X		

*Based on "What is Adaptive Behavior?"
American Association on Mental Retardation Official Site
http://www.aamr.org/Policies/faq_mental_retardation.shtml*

A= Always**S=** Sometimes**N=** Never**Comments:**

The child is very affectionate to the teacher. Even though he does not talk much to his classmates, he seems to listen carefully to what they say. The child seems to be shy. When he wants to say something, he does not look into the person's eyes, but he does participate actively in class.

Table 6.

Observation 2. Adaptive behavior: Social Skills

Subject Number 2

Date: June 13th, 15th, 20th, 22nd, 2005

ADAPTIVE BEHAVIOR SKILLS			
1. Social skills	A	S	N
a. Does the child interact with his peers?			X
b. Does the child interact with the teacher?			X
c. Is the child responsible in carrying out academic tasks?	X		
d. Does the child demonstrate self-confidence?		X	
e. Is the child easily manipulated or tricked?			X
f. Does the child follow teachers' instructions?		X	
g. Does the child maintain good relationships with their peers?		X	
i. Does the child maintain good relationships with the teacher?	X		

*Based on "What is Adaptive Behavior?"
American Association on Mental Retardation Official Site
http://www.aamr.org/Policies/faq_mental_retardation.shtml*

A= Always**S=** Sometimes**N=** Never**Comments:**

The child, sometimes, seems to be unnoticed and even rejected by his classmates. Even so, he utters more sentences to them than to the teacher and seems able to maintain certain kind of interaction with them.

Table 7.

Observation 2. Adaptive behavior: Social Skills

Subject Number 3

Date: June 13th, 15th, 20th, 22nd, 2005

ADAPTIVE BEHAVIOR SKILLS			
1. Social skills	A	S	N
a. Does the child interact with his peers?		X	
b. Does the child interact with the teacher?		X	
c. Is the child responsible in carrying out academic tasks?			X
d. Does the child demonstrate self-confidence?		X	
e. Is the child easily manipulated or tricked?			X
f. Does the child follow teachers' instructions?	X		
g. Does the child maintain good relationships with their peers?		X	
i. Does the child maintain good relationships with the teacher?	X		

*Based on "What is Adaptive Behavior?"
American Association on Mental Retardation Official Site
http://www.aamr.org/Policies/faq_mental_retardation.shtml*

A= Always**S=** Sometimes**N=** Never**Comments:**

The child tries to interact with the people around him but he is not clear or coherent about what he wants to express. He uses to ramble a lot. Although his motor coordination is slow, he watches carefully the actions of his classmates and tries to imitate them.

Table 8.

Observation 2. Adaptive behavior: Social Skills

Subject Number 4

Date: June 13th, 15th, 20th, 22nd, 2005

ADAPTIVE BEHAVIOR SKILLS			
1. Social skills	A	S	N
a. Does the child interact with his peers?		X	
b. Does the child interact with the teacher?	X		
c. Is the child responsible in carrying out academic tasks?	X		
d. Does the child demonstrate self-confidence?		X	
e. Is the child easily manipulated or tricked?			X
f. Does the child follow teachers' instructions?	X		
g. Does the child maintain good relationships with their peers?		X	
i. Does the child maintain good relationships with the teacher?	X		

*Based on "What is Adaptive Behavior?"
American Association on Mental Retardation Official Site
http://www.aamr.org/Policies/Faq_mental_retardation.shtml*

A= Always**S=** Sometimes**N=** Never**Comments:**

The child appears to be a normal boy. He is responsible and tender. His classmates usually ask him for help or opinions. He says he likes English very much and that he would love to learn more about the language and the people who speak it.

Table 9.

Observation 3. Collaborative Work (Preliminary Observation)

Group: Subjects 1, 2

Date: June 27th, 29th, 2005

COLLABORATIVE WORK			
Teamwork and Social Skills	A	S	N
a. Do group members interact between them?		X	
b. Do group members interact with other groups?			X
c. Do group members show face-to-face promotive interactions?			X
d. Does the group show positive interdependence?			X
e. Do group members help each other during the task?			X
f. Do students seek help from other group members?			X

A= Always**S=** Sometimes**N=** Never**Comments:**

The students use to fight for who gets the paper for the task. They do not seem to agree with anything. They refuse to work together. Subject number 2 tends to scribble everywhere and his classmate gets even angrier. At the end of the class, they divide the work and finish the task with a lot of difficulty.

Table 10.

Observation 3. Collaborative Work (Preliminary Observation)

Group: Subjects 3, 4

Date: June 27th, 29th, 2005

COLLABORATIVE WORK			
Teamwork and Social Skills	A	S	N
a. Do group members interact between them?		X	
b. Do group members interact with other groups?			X
c. Do group members show face-to-face promotive interactions?			X
d. Does the group show positive interdependence?			X
e. Do group members help each other during the task?			X
f. Do students seek help from other group members?			X

A= Always

S= Sometimes

N= Never

Comments:

Subject 4 wants to do everything by himself. Although subject 3 wants to participate he does not seem to care about the task. He waits until subject 4 finishes a part of the task and tries to do something. Subject 4 gets upset and refuses to work with his classmate.

Table 11.

Observation 4. Collaborative Work (Post-Treatment Observation)

Group: Subjects 1, 2

Date: August 10th, 17th, 2005

COLLABORATIVE WORK			
Teamwork and Social Skills	A	S	N
a. Do group members interact between them?	X		
b. Do group members interact with other groups?	X		
c. Do group members show face-to-face promotive interactions?			X
d. Does the group show positive interdependence?			X
e. Do group members help each other during the task?	X		
f. Do students seek help from other group members?		X	

A= Always**S=** Sometimes**N=** Never**Comments:**

The children improved some teamwork skills throughout the course. They started to get used to work together and they stopped interfering with each other's works. They began to talk a lot, not only about what they were doing but also about other topics such as home, family and friends.

Table 12.

Observation 4. Collaborative Work (Post-Treatment Observation)

Group: Subjects 3, 4

Date: August 10th, 17th, 2005

COLLABORATIVE WORK			
Teamwork and Social Skills	A	S	N
a. Do group members interact between them?		X	
b. Do group members interact with other groups?		X	
c. Do group members show face-to-face promotive interactions?			X
d. Does the group show positive interdependence?			X
e. Do group members help each other during the task?	X		
f. Do students seek help from other group members?			X

A= Always**S=** Sometimes**N=** Never**Comments:**

It was really difficult for subject 3 to work in a group. Given that he rambles, his classmates try not to pay attention to him. However, there were occasions when he interacted with his classmates and contributed to complete the tasks. Subject 4 tried to help him whenever he could and developed a better sense of companionship.

Table 13.

Post-Treatment Test Results: Answers Sheet

Subject 1

Date: August 24th, 2005

Questions	Right Answer	Wrong Answer
1	X	
2	X	
3	X	
4		X
5		X
6		X
7	X	
8	X	
9		X
10	X	
11	X	
12	X	
13	X	
14	X	
15	X	
16	X	
17	X	
18	X	
19	X	
20	X	
TOTAL	16	4

Table 14.

Post-Treatment Test Results: Answers Sheet

Subject 2

Date: August 24th, 2005

Questions	Right Answer	Wrong Answer
1	X	
2	X	
3	X	
4	X	
5	X	
6	X	
7		X
8	X	
9	X	
10	X	
11	X	
12	X	
13	X	
14	X	
15	X	
16		X
17	X	
18	X	
19	X	
20	X	
TOTAL	18	2

Table 15.

Post-Treatment Test Results: Answers Sheet

Subject 3

Date: August 24th, 2005

Questions	Right Answer	Wrong Answer
1	X	
2	X	
3	X	
4	X	
5	X	
6	X	
7	X	
8		X
9		X
10		X
11	X	
12		X
13		X
14		X
15	X	
16	X	
17	X	
18	X	
19		X
20	X	
TOTAL	13	7

Table 16.

Post-Treatment Test Results: Answers Sheet

Subject 4

Date: August 24th, 2005

Questions	Right Answer	Wrong Answer
1	X	
2	X	
3	X	
4	X	
5	X	
6	X	
7	X	
8	X	
9	X	
10	X	
11	X	
12	X	
13	X	
14	X	
15	X	
16	X	
17	X	
18	X	
19	X	
20	X	
TOTAL	20	

Table 17.

Post-Treatment Test Results: Data Matrix

QUESTIONS	SUBJECTS				
	1	2	3	4	Total
1	1	1	1	1	4
2	1	1	1	1	4
3	1	1	1	1	4
4	0	1	1	1	3
5	0	1	1	1	3
6	0	1	1	1	3
7	1	0	1	1	3
8	1	1	0	1	3
9	0	1	0	1	2
10	1	1	0	1	3
11	1	1	1	1	4
12	1	1	0	1	3
13	1	1	0	1	3
14	1	1	0	1	3
15	1	1	1	1	4
16	1	0	1	1	3
17	1	1	1	1	4
18	1	1	1	1	4
19	1	1	0	1	3
20	1	1	1	1	4
Total	16	18	13	20	67

The test was comprised of 20 answers. The data matrix information concludes that out of 80 questions answered by the four children in total, 67 were answered correctly.

Subject 1 obtained a total score of 16 right answers. Subject 2 obtained 18 right answers. Subject 3 obtained a total score of 13 right answers; and subject 4 accomplished a total score of 20 right answers.

Figure 1.

Post-Test Results

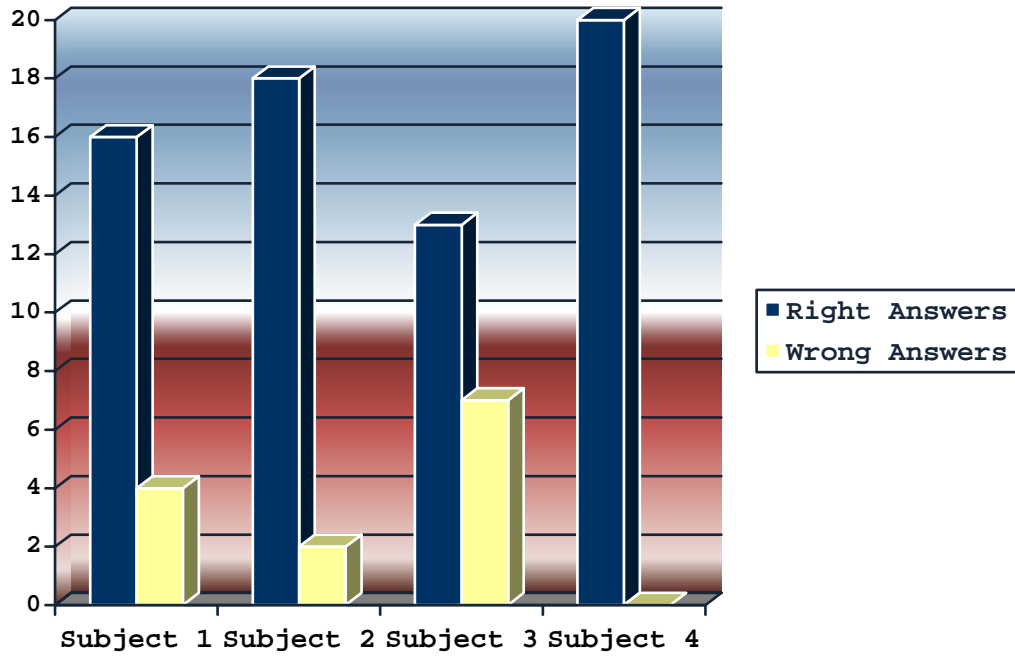


Figure 1. Bar graph showing the post-test outcomes per subject.

This graph presents the differences between right and wrong answers. It is seen clearly that right answers overcame wrong answers.

Figure 2.

Post-Test Results

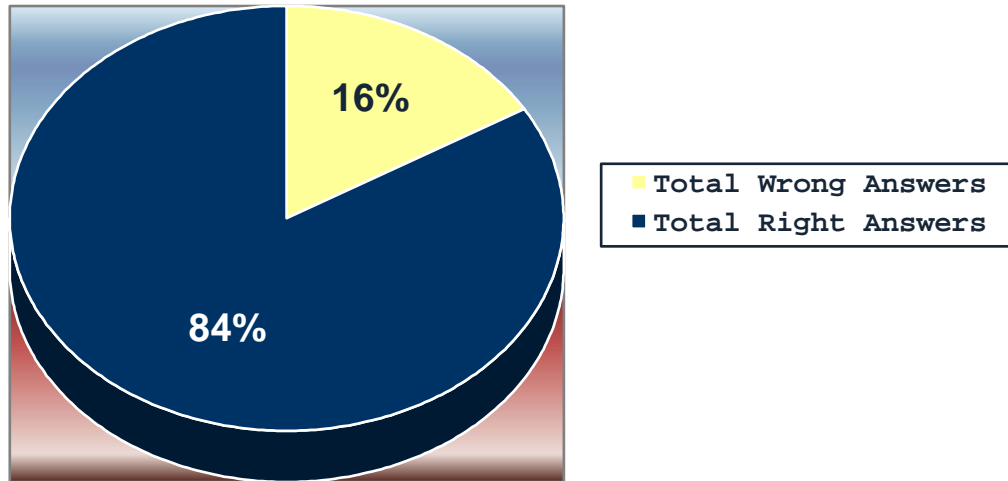


Figure 2. Graph showing the total outcomes of the post-test.

The results shown in this graph indicate that the percentage of right answers (83.75%) is significantly higher than the percentage of wrong answers (16.25%).

V. CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

The results of this survey showed that children with special educational needs unlike most people think, are indeed able to identify, recognize, associate and understand vocabulary from a foreign language, in this case English. It is clearly seen, then, that in the post-test right answers overcame incorrect answers in a significant way, and this is favorable to the investigation.

However, regarding the instruction method of Collaborative Learning which was applied, it is seen that although students accomplished a slight level of companionship, teamwork and social skills were not so successful as it was expected from the beginning.

Collaborative skills were not reached at an excellent level, where every student tries to make things better for her/him and for the group. A considerable negative fact during this process was the difficulty for subject 3 to work successfully in groups. He showed more limitations than his peers in almost every situation. He was very incoherent when speaking and his classmates often tried to push him away. This individual crisis brought problems to the groups he belonged to.

Despite the fact that there was an improvement in some of the collaborative skills, the three-week period of vacations was crucial for students to lose continuity and stability during the next classes; this may explain why there is not a significant progress in collaborative skills such as positive interdependence and promotive interactions.

All of these factors related to the lack of collaborative skills are understandable because it was the first time students worked in groups. It is very difficult for children with limitations to develop appropriate social behaviors and their cognitive abilities are also reduced to comprehend their situation and follow as much instructions as possible.

In general, the objectives established at the beginning of the investigation were reached. Students finally became conscious of the existence of a foreign language as English and they realize that the world is not only the place they live in at the moment, but a small portion of a larger extension of earth, which is inhabited by people of several traditions, cultures and environments with different means of expression.

At first, it was difficult to make students feel comfortable and supported due to the lack of affect and motivational influences in the classroom. Moreover, children

with these special conditions present low self-esteem and it is really complicated to establish supportive relationships from the beginning of the course. However, as the treatment went by, students started to feel secure, relaxed and motivated to learn. Most of all, they improved communicative skills which were not observed originally.

Balkcom (1992) reported that more than 70 studies have confirmed collaborative or cooperative learning effectiveness in several outcomes, such as student achievement, improved relationships among different ethnic groups and mainstreaming students with learning disabilities because of significant improvements in relationships between them and other children in their class through the application of such a learning strategy.

This information is important in several ways. Notwithstanding, there is not a report of collaborative learning applied to a group of academically handicapped special students who do not require acceptance from their classmates. Moreover, there are not reports about the use of this instruction method to teach vocabulary from English and clearly, there is not additional information about teaching vocabulary in English to children with those characteristics.

Based on the results of the observation and the post-test, what can be concluded of this survey is that even though children demonstrated that they could learn words from another language and established better relationships among them through the use of collaborative learning, the method did not prove to have a significant effect neither positive nor negative on those outcomes. Therefore, the hypothesis presented at the beginning of the survey, finally turned affirmative.

In conclusion, this study confirmed that even if collaborative learning did not have any effect on the identification of English basic vocabulary, it did have a positive effect on the development of the children's social and communicative skills. The reason why collaborative learning was not achieved completely can be attributed to the three-week vacation period in which students lost stability and steadiness.

Recommendations

The first issue that has to be considered in order to obtain better results for further research is the limited vocabulary that was studied during the course. It was impossible to carry out an exploratory survey including unlimited vocabulary due to the lack of knowledge of the students about a foreign language and also to their

limitations in cognitive skills; this is why only six topics considered as part of a basic English vocabulary were studied.

In a new investigation it may be adequate to extend the information gathered in this paper by incorporating vocabulary for general communication, vocabulary from predetermined areas of knowledge, or by integrating notions, functions or any other aspects of the language in contextualized situations so that students may achieve higher levels of understanding and competence.

Another crucial issue to take into account is the continuity of the activities. Unfortunately the time granted to carry out the research was insufficient and, as it was mentioned throughout the paper, it was characterized by some periods of interruption. This fact led to the reduction of the topics to be learned and finally, and the loss of constancy in the learners. Children who are having their first contact with English through techniques and strategies that are strange to them need constant attention and practice. Otherwise, their achievement as students will not be as good as expected, not because they are not capable of learning or the method implemented is futile, but for the disruptive conditions in which learning takes place.

In a future survey, it is important also to maintain and improve as much as possible the affective factors on teaching. This is the best way to make students feel motivated, with the desire of learning more. Thus, the implementation of pedagogical strategies and techniques will be opened for people who have additional difficulties to accede to more homogeneous levels of learning.

To conclude, do not be afraid of trying new methods of instruction or strategies or to be in contact with a population which is not accepted or understood completely in our setting. Every person, in a way or another needs people, no matter who they are, where they are from, or what abilities or disabilities they may have. Sometimes the things that we fear the most are the most enriching experiences we may have in our entire lives.

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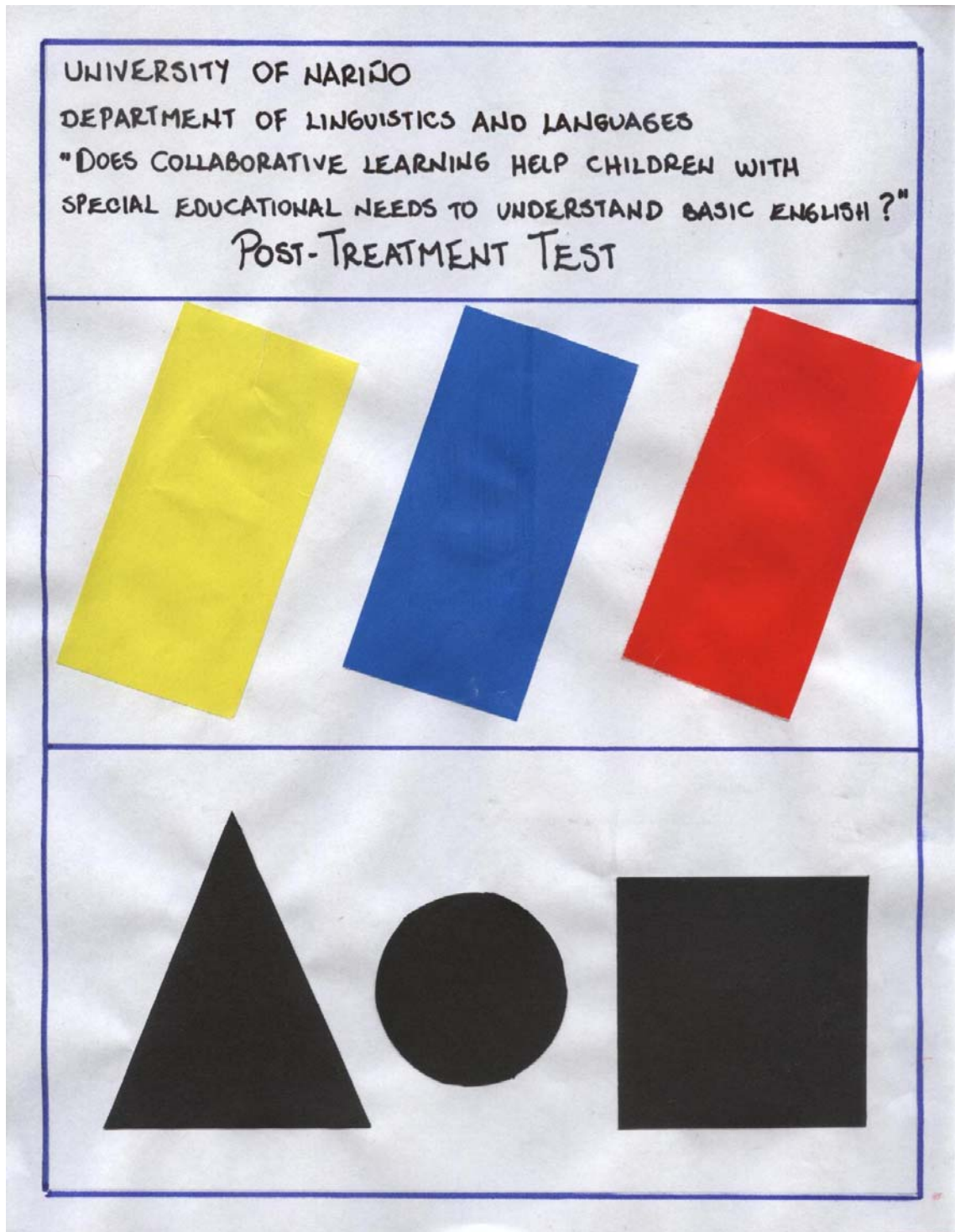
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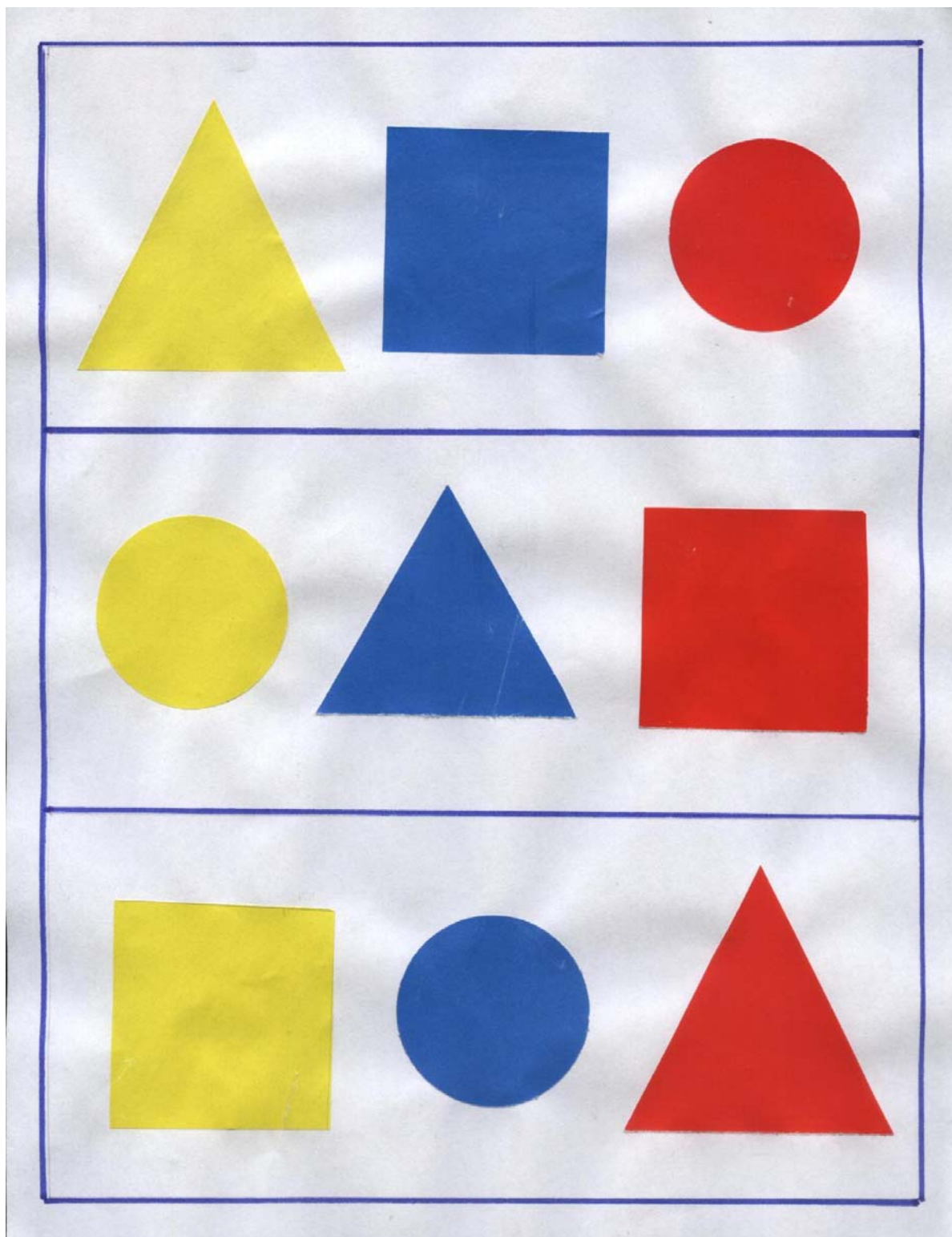
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APPENDIX A

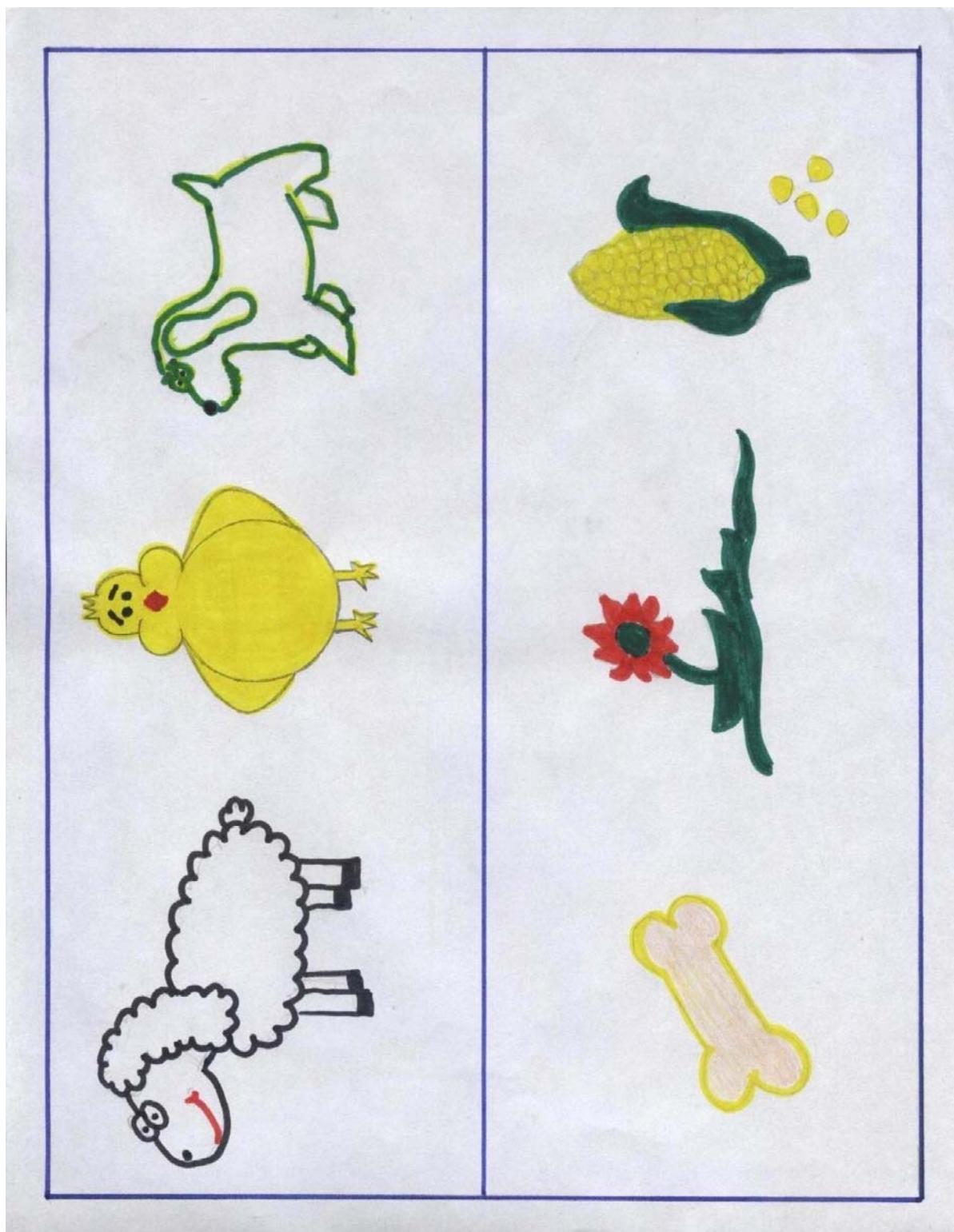
Post-test: Colors/Shapes



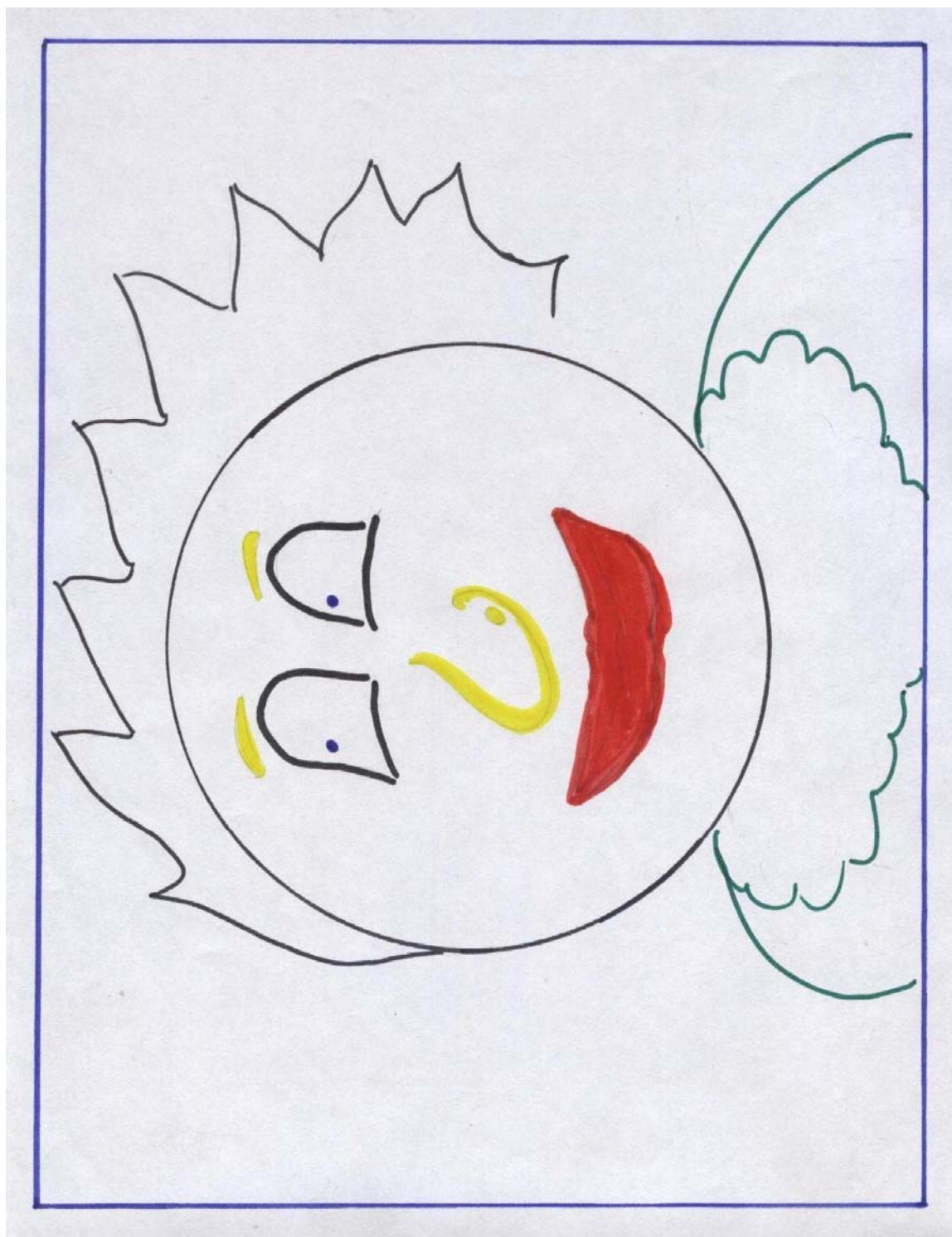
Post-test: Colors and Shapes



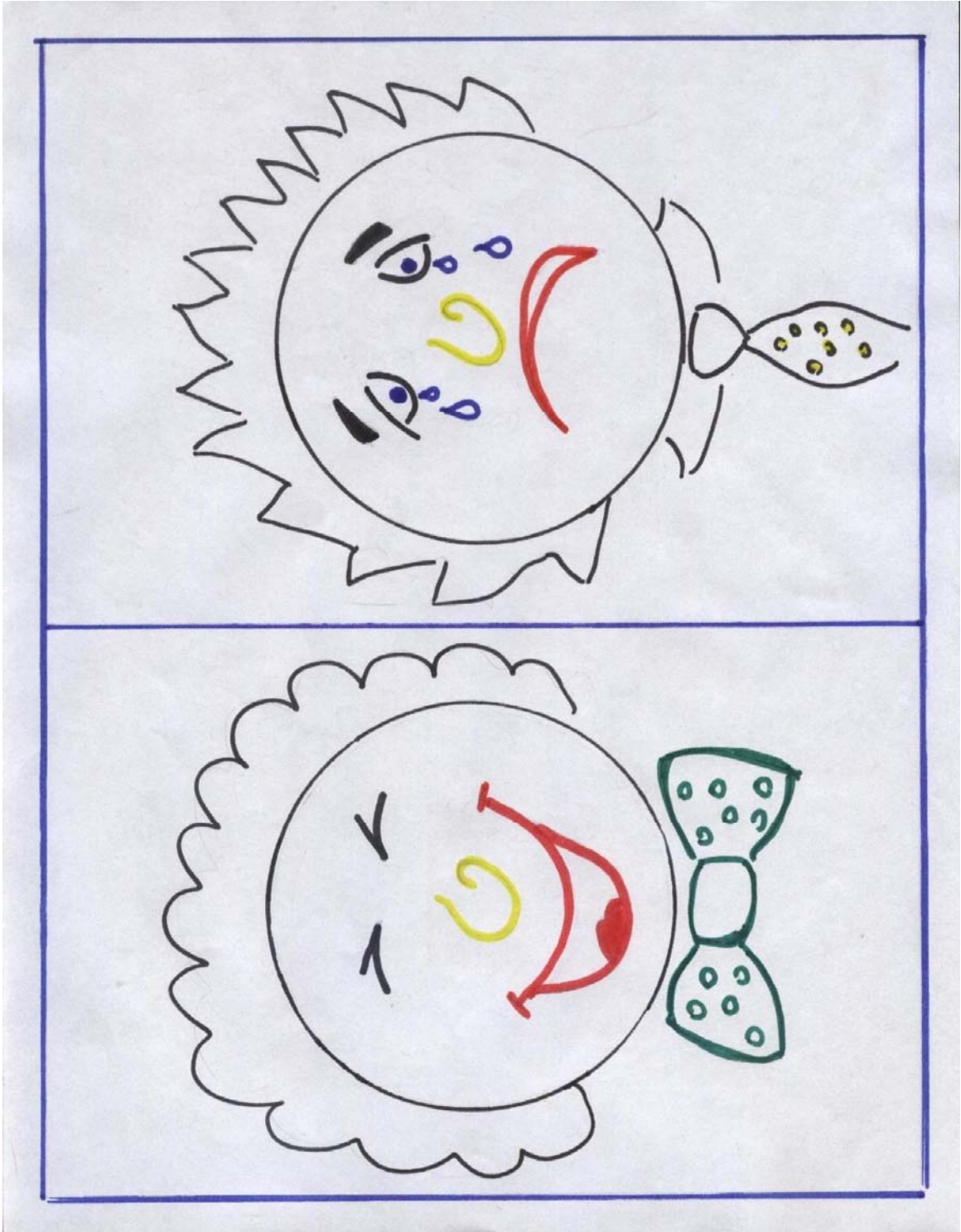
Post-test: Animals and Animal Food



Post-test: Parts of the face

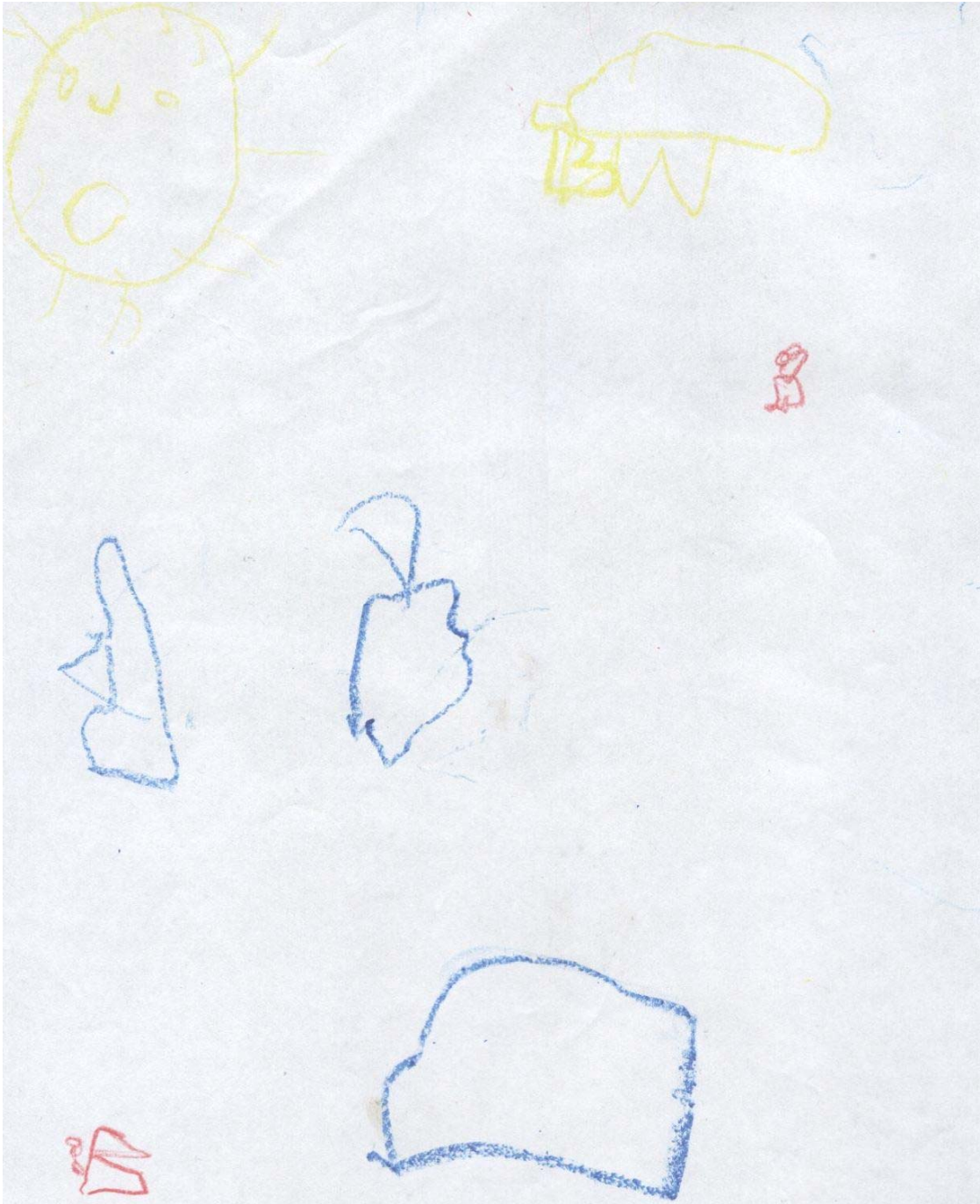


Post-Test: Expressions

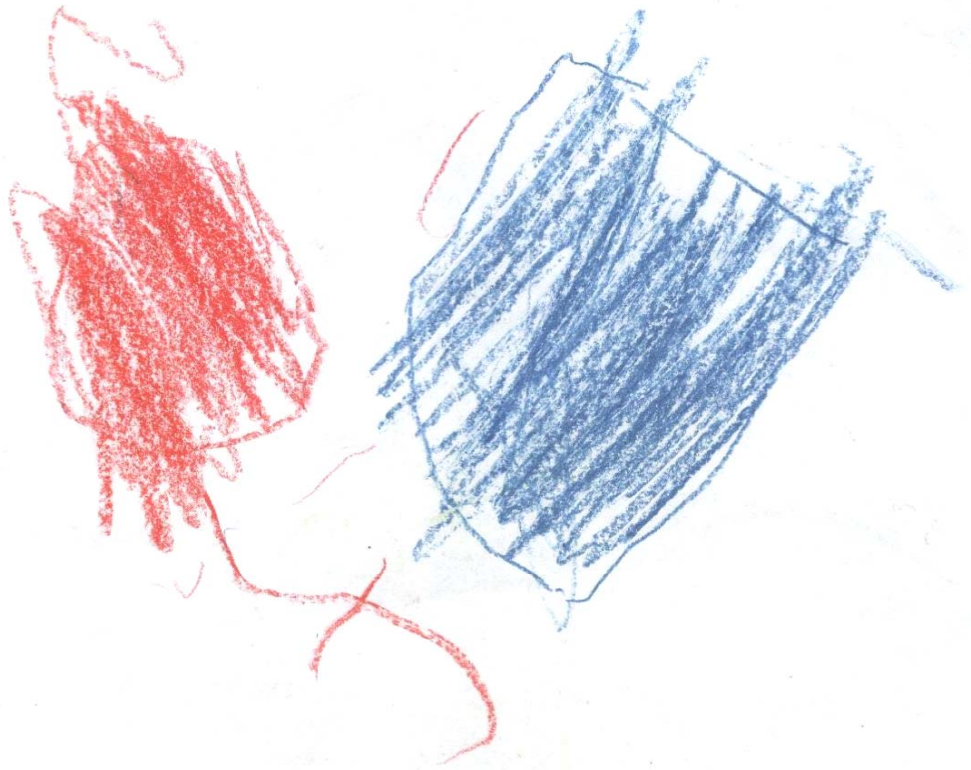


APPENDIX B

First Class. Subject 1.



First Class. Subject 2.



First Class. Subject 3.



First Class. Subject 4.



First Lesson. Greetings.

Subject 1.

Luis Fernando

GREETINGS

GOOD MORNING



GOOD AFTERNOON



*Sally's
Therapia*

GOOD EVENING



First Lesson. Greetings.

Subject 2.

Bryan

GREETINGS

GOOD MORNING



GOOD AFTERNOON

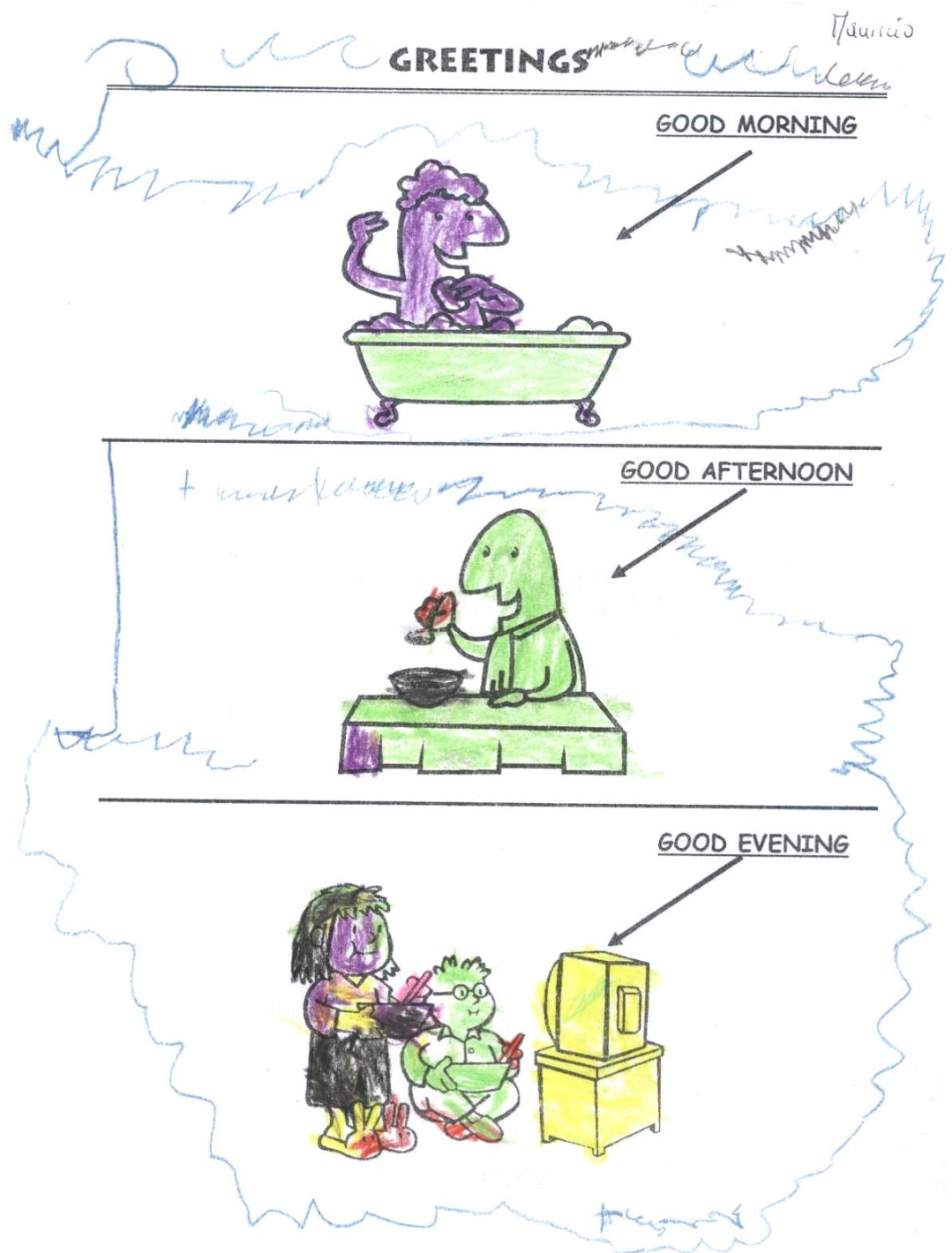


GOOD EVENING



First Lesson. Greetings.

Subject 3.



First Lesson. Greetings.

Subject 4.

Juan Diego

GREETINGS

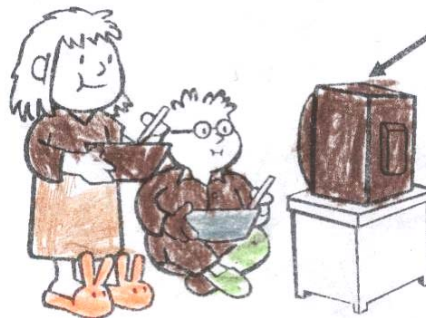
GOOD MORNING



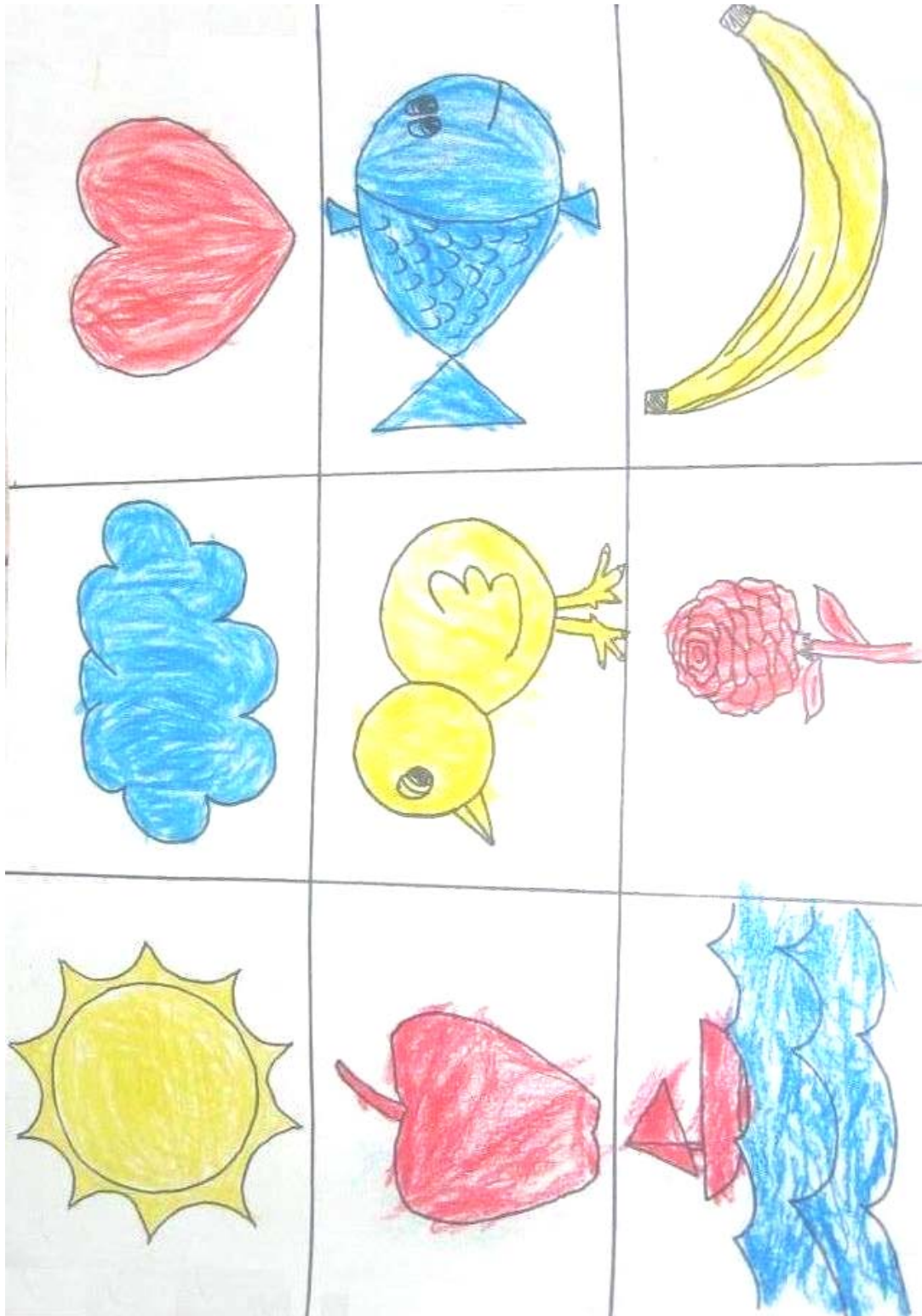
GOOD AFTERNOON



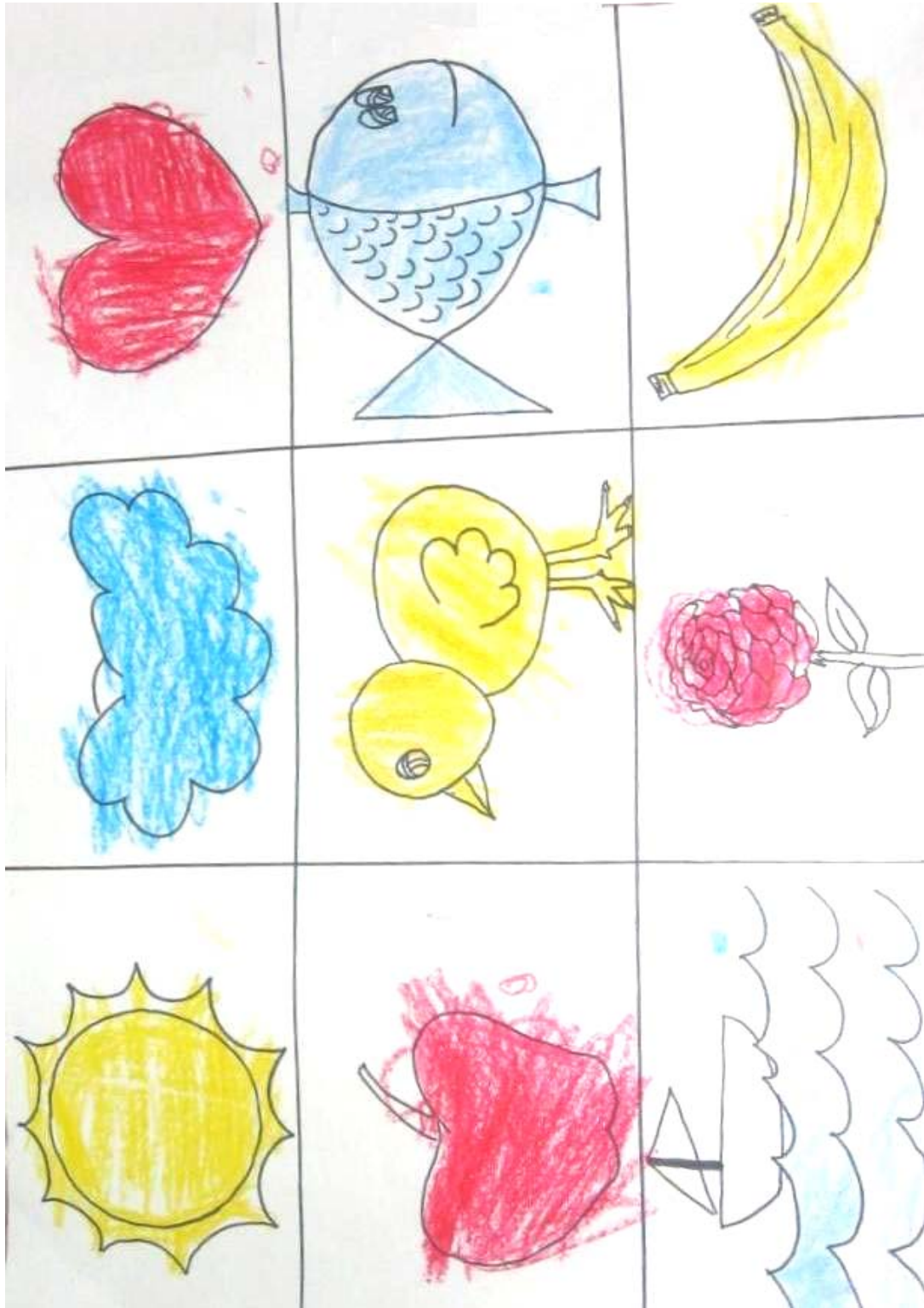
GOOD EVENING



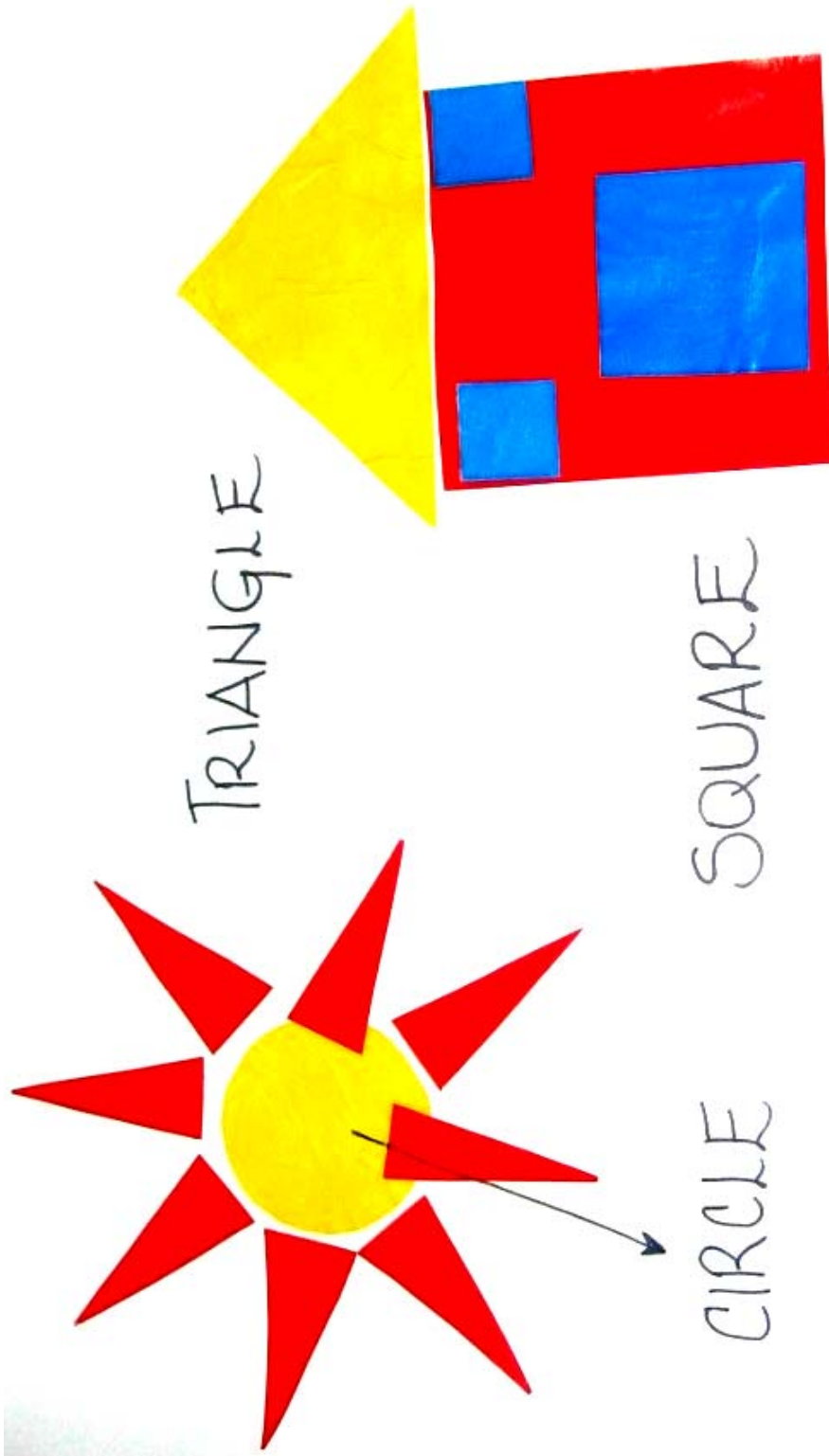
Topic 1. Colors



Topic 1. Colors

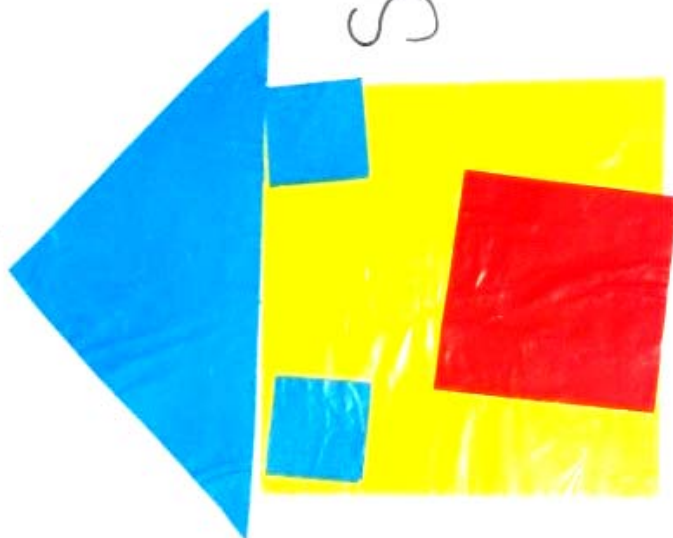


Topic 2. Shapes

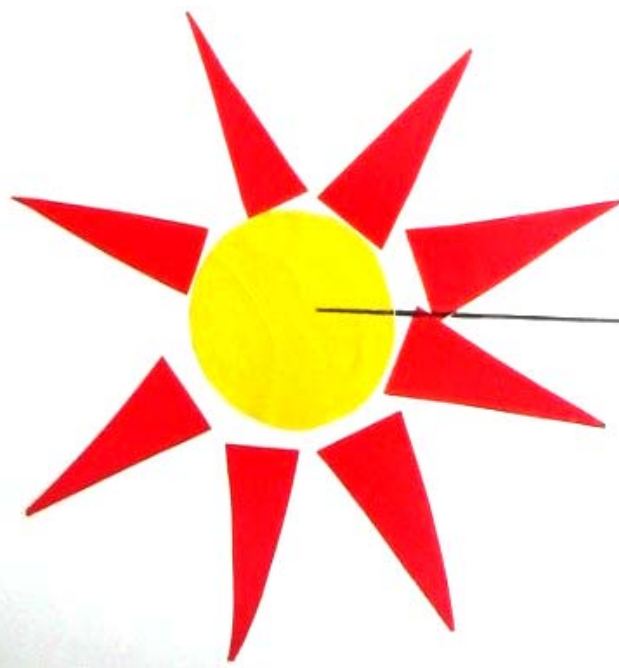


Topic 2. Shapes

TRIANGLE

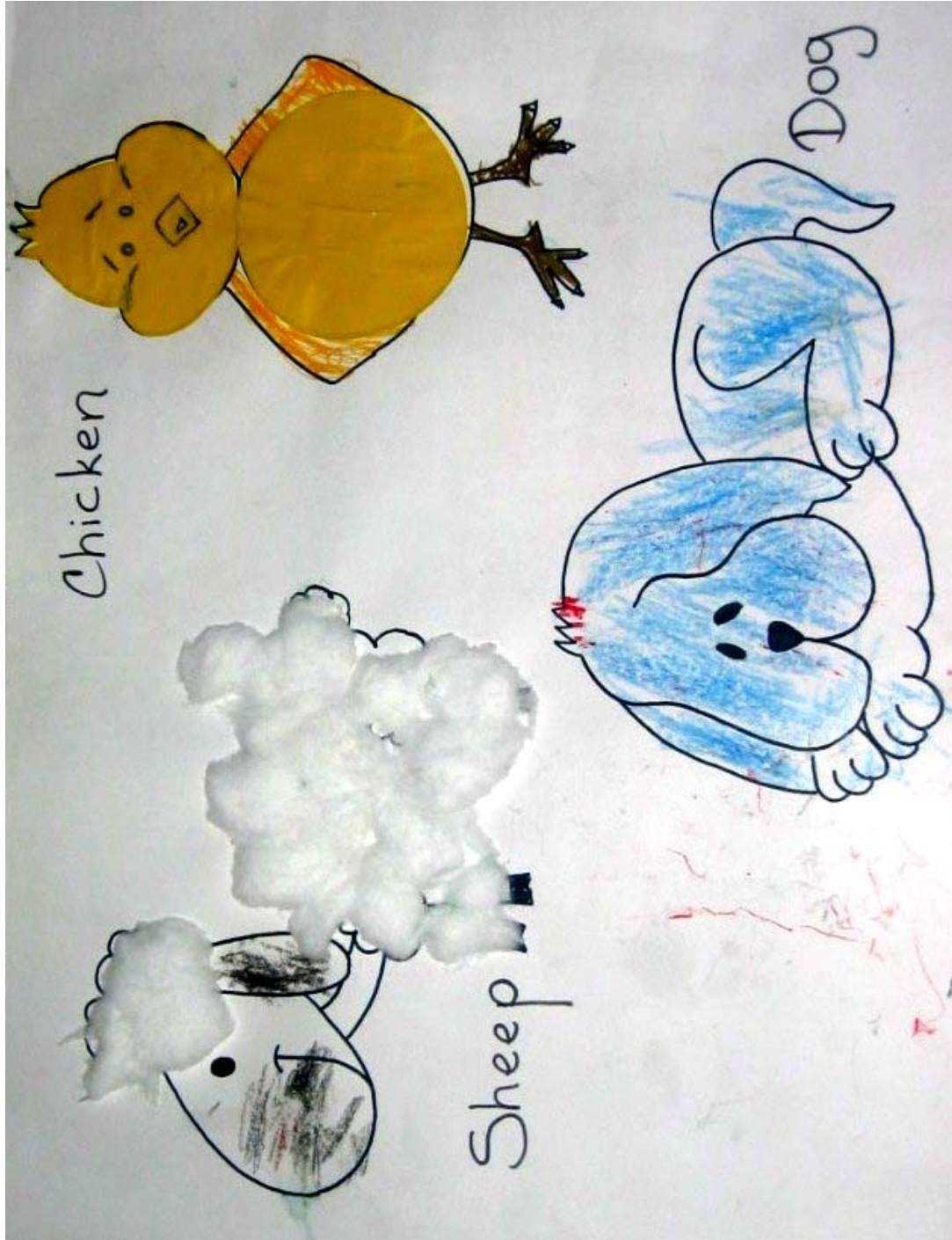


SQUARE



CIRCLE

Topic 3. Animals



Topic 4. Animal Food



Topic 4. Animal Food



Topic 5. Parts of the Face

FACE



Topic 5. Parts of the Face

FACE



Topic 6. Expressions



