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Students' Pathways Across Local, National and Supra-National Borders: Representations of a Globalized World in a Francophone Minority School in Ontario, Canada

Informed by anthropology of childhood and youth, this paper examines how elementary students make sense of their diverse trajectories in an expanding culture of spatial, virtual and linguistic mobility (Farmer, 2012). Drawing on data collected in one francophone minority school in Ontario, Canada, we discuss students' representations of a "globalized world" as they co-construct with peers and teachers the multiple meanings associated with mobility, citizenship and nationhood.

1 Introduction

Much literature in the area of citizenship education delves into the preparation of students for their civic and political responsibility as citizens in a democratic state (see Hahn, 1998; Parker, 1996). The assumption that students are in need of such preparation and formal schooling, as constituting the designated site to acquire this type of learning appears by and large to be untroubled. Some scholars, however, are questioning the limits of using the bounded form of national membership to describe citizenship education (Fischman, Haas, 2012, p. 173). Fishmann and Hass (2012) describe citizenship education as an

"educationally unfinished project, an unresolvable tension, that cannot be learned and understood through conscious rationality alone and thus not "solved" through the delivery of explicit instruction on what democracy is and how a good citizen should act" (174).

Fischman and Hass (2012) do not discount the close connection of education and citizenship but assert that citizenship education is deeply connected to meta-phorical and prototypical ways of thinking about and understandings of the role of the "nation as family". A different perspective examines the economic outlook of students. One such example is Mitchell's (2003) work

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which contributes to a critique of citizenship education practices in the US, England, and Canada. She advances the claim that formerly these nations approached multi-culturalism for ethical reasons (i.e. teaching students to relate to and have respect for difference) although in widely different ways, yet now the general trend is toward promoting "individual patriotism and strategic entrepreneurialism" (Mitchell, 2003, p. 399). While this indicates a trend across nations related to changing student dispositions it also indicates changes in the direction of education systems to adopt policies that involve teaching students to act for themselves and value their ability to participate in the global economy. The analysis provided by Fischman and Hass (2012) as well as by Mitchell (2003) illustrate a shifting focus (or need of) in citizenship education, a blurring of categories associated with global movements and an emphasis toward a transnational character of citizenship education.

Developments in the area of childhood social studies over the past 20 years have challenged notions of childhood and youth as merely a transition stage. Scholars advocate that children are embedded in social relations and in being so, are constituted as social actors. Two consequences derive from this statement for this paper. First, children are well positioned to inform on their world and overall on the complexities of the social world. This begs the question: what can we learn from children, from their standpoint, on their world and on the social world? What can we learn, more specifically on/from their representations on citizenship? Second, the con-cepttion of childhood (and youth) is being largely defined by adults within particular settings, who deli-berate on privileges, restrictions and particular ages associated with this status. Therefore, children and youth are consti-tuted as a minority within societies (Holland et al. 2007; Leonard, 2005). Furthermore, the underlying social con-struct by which this population is positioned as a mino-rity in relation to other structural forms of oppression has rarely been examined (Qvortrup, 1994; James, Jenks, & Prout, 1998). What is implied then, more specifically, on their status as citizens within citizenship education? In the context of this research, such an entry point on students as legitimate social actors, allows us to cha-llenge the idea of young people as 'not yet citizens' (Biesta, Lawy, & Kelly, 2009).

Informed by anthropology of childhood and youth, the findings presented here stem from an ethnographic study that looks at how schooling practices are shaped by experiences of globalization and examines how

students make sense of their diverse pathways at the heart of an expanding culture of spatial, virtual and linguistic mobility (Farmer, 2012). The research was conducted in the province of Ontario, Canada. Canada's multiculturalism and official bilingualism (English and French) have been part of the policy landscape for more than 40 years. The country has two official languages, which are differently distributed across the regions, Québec being mostly French and the remainder of Canada, mostly English. But the recognition of French and English as national languages has led to the development of Minority Language Rights, which are protected by the Canadian government. This provision has served as the basis in the development of Minority Language Schools across Canada. However, since education in Canada falls under provincial jurisdiction the history and trajectory of minority language schools has not been homogeneous across the nation. In Ontario, for example, there are some 450 French language schools across the province. Although public schools have developed language curriculum in English and French, each system operates in one official language. The model developed is not one of bilingual education where students are gradually transiting from a (linguistic minority) setting to the national language public system. In francophone minority schools, citizenship has historically been linked to the preservation of a homogenous language and culture. Today, these schools are characterized by high levels of diversity and mobility, which challenge both the national (francophone) project and the school as a homogeneous space. This paper draws on data collected in one francophone minority public school in southern Ontario[i]. Our aim is to discuss elementary students' representations of a "globalized world" as they co-construct with peers and teachers the multiple meanings associated with mobility, citizenship and nationhood. Although specific to the Canadian context, this ethnographic study exemplifies the blurring of categories through the fluid movements of mobile families as well as the increasingly diversified contexts of schooling. It offers a view of students' experiences in picking up senses of belonging as they move or are in close contact with peers who have complex geographical trajectories. The research project relied, in part, on creative visual methods as constitutive of the methodological framework. Although this is not the focal point of the paper, methodological considerations in doing research along *with* rather than *on* children and youth *is key* in understanding how students define citizenship. In this paper, we first discuss how citizenship has been constructed in recent language management policy within the context of Ontario's francophone minority schools, and second, present a case study on students' representations of a globalized world as they are constituted throughout the students' life-long trajectories and transposed within the learning space of the classroom. This paper contributes to scholarship that problematizes the notion of children and youth as "not yet citizens" through making explicit some children's understandings of their local, national and transnational connections.

2 Ontario language policies and the imagined francophone student

The school is a key site for the production and reproduction of dominant societal discourses, one that imposes certain ways of thinking and doing on its student (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). In Ontario (and elsewhere in Canada), education has also constituted an institutional space for the advocacy of minority language rights within the broader Canadian national context of Official Languages Policies. Historical developments originating from the late 19th Century until the early 21st century have led progressively to the consolidation of a French Language educational network in Ontario from Junior Kindergarten to the senior years of High School. The 2004 *Politique d'Aménagement Linguistique (PAL)*, in continuity with earlier versions of policy documents written in the mid 1990s (Farmer & Bélanger 2012), is Ontario's primary official policy for French language public schools in the province. As a formal representation legitimated through a series of historical developments, it holds francophone schools responsible for the "transmission of the French language and culture" (p.3). In order to broaden and support the access to French language minority schooling, which is only available to official minority language rights holders, a second policy was drafted in 2009 the *Policy Statement and Guidelines on the Admission, Welcoming, and Support of Students in French-language Schools.*

The first policy, the *PAL,* refers ultimately to language planning in minority francophone settings and states that students must gain "an increased capacity to acquire oral communication skills to maximize learning and *identity* building" (emphasis added, p. 4). Various scholars have suggested that the discourse framing the *PAL* policy presents an important limitation in how it constructs the Franco-Ontarian community as unilingual and culturally homogenous (Farmer & Bélanger, 2012; Labrie, 2007; Prasad, 2009, 2012). Indeed, there is a strong overarching focus on the minority status of French in Ontario to provide a space to (re)assert the claim that linguistic and cultural preservation is necessary. The policy explicitly states that French language schools are not only to foster language skills but also "a profound sense of the cultural and universal values shared by francophone communities here and elsewhere" (p. 5). Given the demographic changes in Ontario's francophone population towards increased international migration, as well as in recognition of the expansion of neo-liberal discourses on the knowledge economy and subsequent reforms in education, starting in the 1990s policy makers have been under pressure to review insular representations of *la francophonie* (Farmer, Chambon, & Labrie, 2003; Houle & Corbeil, 2010). Hence, in the 2004 language policy, there seems to be a discourse of 'global linkages', tying French Canadian schools to a broader international francophone community. It thus becomes possible to envision the school as a space to jump geographic scales since the local practice of education can surpass national discourses and shift toward a supranational imagined language community. However, while

this is possible, there is still a tension within the school space where students are envisioned by different interlocutors as "native" or "migrant".

The *Policy Statement and Guidelines on the Admission, Welcoming, and Support of Students in French-language Schools* (2009) provides a framework based on the principles of inclusive education to address the increasingly diverse student population attending francophone minority schools in Ontario. As it contends, "this policy statement promotes a dynamic, open, and inclusive modern French-speaking community" and endorses an "inclusive spirit...for learning to live together in a multilingual and multicultural society" (p. 7). The policy is however quick to rationalize that the students' diverse needs must be met "while transmitting the French language and francophone culture" (p. 8). The policy undoubtedly "marks a potentially powerful shift in opening access to French-language education" (p. 70). The national agenda, while recognizing a diverse student body, remains limited in scope as described in the above policy provisions.

These two policies indicate adjustments to the level of inclusion in francophone minority schools have been made, however, these changes did not significantly alter the official discourse from which francophone students are formally represented in their *'francophone-ness'*. Such policy frameworks, although seemingly remote from the everyday activities in the classroom, has a significant impact on the manner in which students are being constructed in schools (either as "francophone" or "migrant"). Developing different ways of naming students is revealing of a differential access to citizenship as a social construct.

3 Students and representations of citizenship

In presenting the following case study, we aim to identify the ways that students in francophone minority settings imagine themselves. More specifically, we were interested to see whether students operate according to this paradigm, or whether they made use of other concepts to represent their local and sometimes global linkages.

The population of *l'École du Monde*, the school where the study took place, was linguistically diverse. In addition to French and English, Arabic was a predominant language amongst students and also spoken by several of the teachers. The school was labeled locally as an inner-city school (from a socio-economic as well as a religious perspective), and was discursively understood within the community as "the Arab school". It was geographically located at proximity to a busy US border crossing, many of the young participants having family on both sides of the border. The school was also located at the margins, both geographically and symbolically, from Ottawa, the dominant centre where decision are made about Ontario's *francophonie*. This setting thus provided an excellent opportunity to unveil alternative ways in which citizenship takes shape in the everyday life of *mobile* students. The overall research consisted of a multi-site study involving some 125 participants in three

schools (five classrooms), the majority of whom were children and youth (n=67). Findings discussed in this paper have been drawn from two classrooms from *L'École du Monde*, a Grade 4/5 (students aged 9 and 10 years old) and a Grade 5/6 (students aged 10 and 11). In total, 42 students, six parents and six adults from the school (principal, teachers and a social worker) participated in this site of the study. The research design incorporated both more conventional techniques including prolonged observation, individual and small group interviews and creative visual methods of inquiry, using (visual language portraits) and photography. In doing so, we developed a scaffolding approach to participation in which students were gradually trained to use the research tools designed for the study and were provided several opportunities to discuss their ideas about their own experiences of mobility and migration (Farmer & Prasad, 2014). In terms of a scaffolding approach to research, and experimenting with research tools, young participants were invited, for example, to take pictures of each other in school, which were digitally reworked into a colouring book style body outline and used as individualized templates for the drawing of language portraits. Students were given time in class to create their language portrait. They knew where, when and by whom the pictures had been taken and now saw the purpose for it. They were also given digital cameras and had the opportunity to practice in school the research task associated with taking pictures. This prepared them for a follow-up activity at home. Students were interviewed in small groups (three to four students) on three occasions where again they could discuss their ideas and stories.

This paper focuses on the data collected using reflexive drawing (Molinié, 2009), more specifically. Reflexive creative research techniques are helpful in supporting youth self-inquiry, which was an important goal of the research. It allows youth to position themselves as authors who appropriate and make sense of their drawing (Castoletti & Moore, 2009, p. 45-46). Molinié (2009, 2014) emphasizes amongst many attributes the dia-logue generated between the researcher and the participants in a common meaning-making process. This approach was adapted in the project by having students involved as co-interviewers amongst peers. As indicated above, we invited students to do draw their language portrait. This technique has been developed by socio-linguists, Busch (2010), Busch, Jardine, and Tjoutuku, (2006) Krumm (2008) and is being used in various studies pertaining to language, multilingualism and society. We used Busch's (2010) exploration of visual body mapping and utilized it as a biographical tool. In the project we asked participants to draw languages portraits, in response to the following statement: "I draw languages and culture that connect me". This led participants to develop complex narratives. We draw from these narratives to reflect on the question of youth as 'not yet citizens'. Visual methods are particularly fruitful when interested in the multiplicity of meanings (Leavy, 2008) and, as illustrated in the next section, visual language

portraits engaged students in deep reflections on their individual pathways. In using creative methods, we also sought to support students' participation in a way that was not contingent on their proficiency in the school language (Castoletti & Moore, 2009) or on their competency with traditional academic skills. The research questions guiding this analysis include: How do students navigate their own complex conceptions of identity, belonging, and mobility? What types of relational ties do they form, with whom, and on what scale (local, national, supra-national)? How might students' diverse representtations contribute to redefining francophone minority public school space? Students expressed their mobility stories using reflexive drawing, interviews, and focus groups to elicit the plurality of meanings embedded in francophone youth self-representations. Language portraits formed an important piece of data for this project since it enabled students to represent their multiple identities by means of mapping them onto a drawn silhouette of themselves (Busch, Jardine, & Tjoutuku, 2006; Krumm, 2008).

4 Findings

Despite the institutional context supporting homogenous discursive French space in francophone schools, our data reveals that teachers, students and staff seemed to construct spaces where students' multilingual language abilities and multiple identity belongings are accepted. A preliminary analysis of the data reveals that students demonstrate a strong awareness of the many languages, cultures and national ties influencing their identity constructions, often positioning themselves in multiple and contradictory ways with respect to dominant discourses advanced in the francophone minority institutional space of the school.

Students described their diverse array of networks that exist within and across spaces that are local, national, and transnational. This is evidenced in the inference to nation-states, in the idea of French as a global language and in building the reference to a 'globalized world' through family and community connections.

4.1 Nationalism as social category

Although the activity instructions for the language portraits did not make explicit reference to concepts like "countries" or "nations", students frequently turned to the nation-state paradigm to represent themselves (see Appendix A Bahir). National symbols, including the colours and designs featured on national flags were prominent in nearly all of the student self-portraits. For instance, Jasmeen[ii] says "I will talk about MY culture, MY country… I put multiculturalism on my hand because in Canada, it's everybody together…as opposed to in France where everybody is French" (p. 3). National symbols appear to be endorsed yet somewhat nuanced as they are reflected upon by the student in this example (the student drew comparisons on the different contexts she gained knowledge of through experiences of citizenship in multiple countries).

Given the extent of the transnational movements of

the families who attended the school, it was common for students to identify with not one but several nations (Bahir, Gretta, language portraits). For example, Bahir used his face to show where he was born and other body parts in descending order to show other places where he lived. This raises the question of whether students had limited ways of making sense of their multiple linguistic and cultural connections, which may be why they gravitated to nationalistic associations.

During group interviews, students' conceptions of belonging to a particular identity were, at times, challenged by their peers. One such example of this type of contestation occurred as follows:

Sana: *I choose brown for Albanian because there is an Albanian in my class*
Mike: *I am not Albanian, I'm Canadian*
Sana: *yeah, but you were born there* (see Appendix B).

Interestingly, nearly every student also included Albanian as an identity descriptor. Yet the Albanian student they all drew this linkage from described herself as Canadian. Nation-states for some of the children interviewed were too rigid and fixed as categories and so it seems that students re-appropriated more fluid terms to suit their identity needs. In essence, Sana and many other students were indicating their familiarity with, and concurrently producing, a "cosmopolitan sense of belonging" (Singh, Rizvi, & Shrestha 2000, p. 198).

4.2 French as global language

Students repeatedly referenced what being a student in a French language school was like. During a first visit to the school by the research team, for example, a student who had arrived to this new school a week before, was quick to bring our attention to the Franco-Ontarian flag hung outside. However, students seemed to resist French as a homogenous linguistic category. As Madeleine asserts, "me, I don't like French, but everywhere I go, there are francophones, all the schools that I have been to, it's all French". Instead, all students represented themselves as multilingual selves in their language portraits (see Appendix C Madeleine). We noticed students drawing from their linguistic repertoires and making use of their multiple languages in particular contexts. Carmina explains, "I speak Arabic at home, I speak French at school, and I speak English with my friends". Lastly, in addition to the multiple languages that students could speak, some made reference to their "French" nations of origins such as Lebanon or Cameroon, "I've lived my whole life in French, I come from a French country" (Sadia). French thus seemed to be understood as a global language by the students, who often related to francophone networks that surpassed national territorial borders. We took into consideration student's relationship with virtual mobility to gain more insight into how the processes of migration and movement might include points of juncture or fluidity in relation to students self-representations. In the next section we shed light on the way technology contributes

to fostering a strong sense of normalcy toward trans-national ties.

4.3 Enhanced connections between local and transnational communities

Student solidified connections between their local and transnational communities through physical travel, and Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs). ICTs were used to connect with people both locally and transnationally. For example Alim moved to Canada at 6 years old, to Lebanon at 7 and back to Canada at 10. He maintained close relationships with family through Skype. In this particular setting, most students defined family as an extended family. Students also described actively maintaining family connections (personally or through their parents) with family members located in many parts of the world. Interestingly, one interviewer asked a student how it feels to communicate with family members abroad and after a long pause, she replied, "just normal". Thus it is possible to envision through the experiences of children and youth how complex techno-logies and transnational ties are important to the lives and connections of mobile students. Students and their families traveled whenever possible and maintained connections through social media. The few students whose families lived locally and who did not travel extensively expressed being part of this globetrotting movement *through* their mobile peers.

5 Discussion and conclusions

Although it has been documented that French in Canada embodies important principles related to particular social and political values (Heller, 1999), our data reveals that students did not seem to show concern for this ideology. Despite the discursive construction of traditional and even nationalist sentiments found within the aforemen-tioned French language educational policies, students instead found other ways to orient themselves toward language and identity. Language portraits and interviews suggest that students often conceived of themselves in local, (trans)national and global terms. Through their high degree of spatial, virtual, linguistic and cultural mobilities, students may have acquired what Kelly and Lusis (2006) have coined a 'transnational habitus'. The term transnational habitus as Kelly and Lusis (2006) describe it is meant to acknowledge that a habitus is not concept that is bound by the parameters of place. Furthermore, they say "Economic, social, and cultural capital do not simply transfer to a new setting in which they are evaluated within a new habitus: instead, a process of valuation and exchange continues through transnational social fields well after settlement has occurred" (p. 837). The students interviewed by author of study in 2010 articulated an awareness of different "common sense" practices in various transnational settings they moved between and also discussed the new practices that have become common place for them to stay connected with places, people and ways of life abroad. This study reveals that students in francophone minority schools navigate the constraints of francophone

education policy in ways that reflect their mobile subjectivities. The students represented themselves as national, transnational and cosmopolite subjects. Franco-Ontarian minority language schools are no longer catering solely to a fictitious homogenous and authentic people. Instead, we contend that the school's diverse student and teacher population contributed to the redefinition of French minority language schools as hubs for various types of mobility. Students, teachers and staff redefined the school space as one that opens its doors to the multiplicity of identities that populate it. That these processes are so local, in one francophone school in southern Ontario, provides us with significant insight on how people are beginning to redefine and reimagine themselves in a global and mobile world. This research highlights from children's insights that they are far from "not yet citizens" and that citizenship, too, is a dynamic process that is always in the making.

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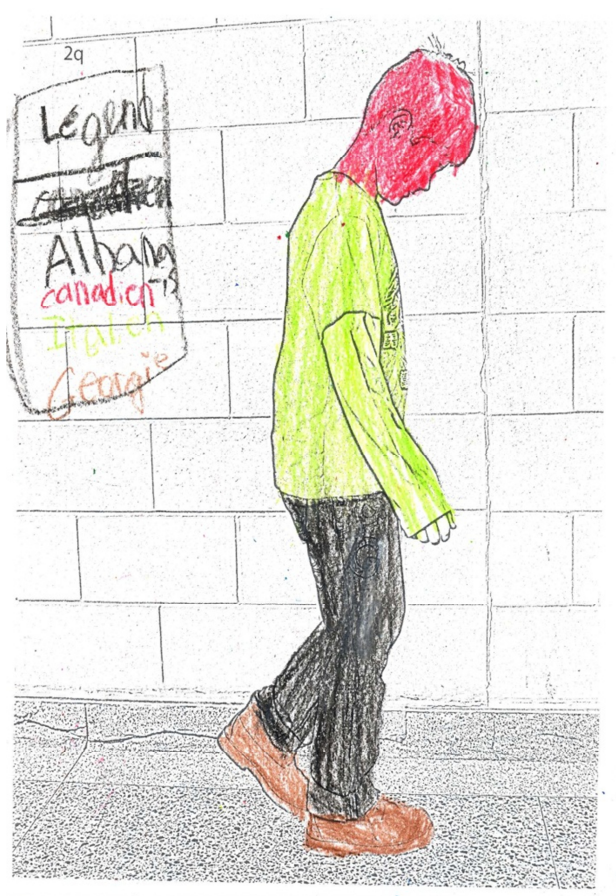
Endnotes

[ii] All names have been changed to pseudonyms.

Appendix A Bahir Language Portrait
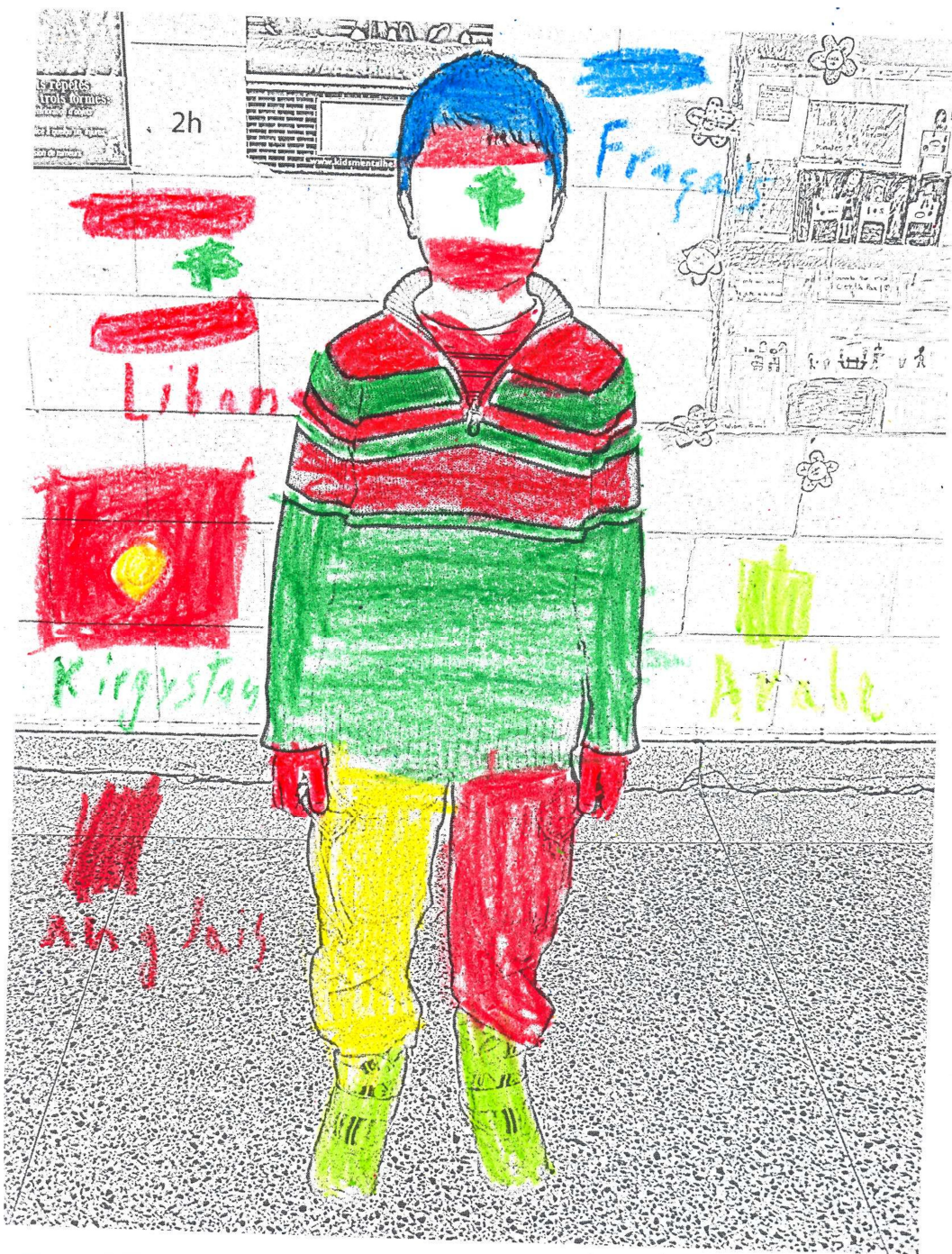
Appendix B Sana and Mike Language Portraits

Appendix C Madeleine Language Portrait