“Whilst I Learn and Live”: A Comparative Case Study Analysing the Identity Formation of Seventh Grade Turkish and International Students via Self-Narratives in English Class

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A Research & Development Project

Submitted for the MSc in Learning & Teaching 2018

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ABSTRACT

As a seventh grade American teacher at an international school in Ankara, Turkey during the 2017-18 school year, I became increasingly concerned about the growing censorship of my students in relation to their identity development, especially when juxtaposed with outside stresses. While engaging with Figured Worlds (Holland et al., 1998) and Cultural Historical Activity Theory (Engeström, 1987) as my theoretical frameworks, I designed a 17-week self-narrative portfolio project and intervention for my seventh grade students including writing samples, dramatic monologues, and photography to confront the problems of student censorship and bullying. Through practitioner research, I aimed to ensure a safe, guided space that promoted personal growth and agency for my students; further, I aimed to analyse this growth linguistically for thematic differences between my Turkish students and my international students. By creating a case study of two students' portfolios and utilising thematic discourse analysis, I found that international students exemplified more identity development shown through linguistic growth, possibly due to less localised expectations and less performative responses. I also found that this project was successful at bridging the gap between several Figured Worlds within my own classroom and engaging both Turkish and international students.

"When I felt lifeless and numb
You would wrap your palms around my elbow,
Right where you could see my veins,
And tell me that you could feel my heart's rhythm
…
It's craving for something to mold onto."
- Athena (2018), "I Am Rhythm"

INTRODUCTION

In places where student agency is lacking, practitioners can be central to student identity development by helping students to finetune the signs and symbols of language (Germán, 2016; Vygotsky, 1986). This is why in August of 2017, I was eager to begin a practitioner research and development project focused on language and student identity development in Ankara, Turkey.

As a teacher of 12-year-olds, I became increasingly concerned about the intensifying censorship of my students in relation to their identity development, particularly when compounded by out-of-school stresses. I wanted to know how, if my 12-year-old students lacked affordances for exploring themselves fully in communication with their friends or at home, they were going to be able to create appropriate identities as critical thinkers and active, participating citizens. There were a significant amount of problems in the middle school, but the largest concern as a teacher was the lack of safe spaces in which students could explore their identities; students expressed feelings of inundation with expectations from their peers, the media (specifically Youtube), and the government[1].

Beyond this, the school was taking no action to build student agency or critical thought about the ways in which the students interacted with these expectations. Discussions stopped in meetings with the idea that bullying behaviour was simply a natural phase and that

[1] As a teacher who was living in Turkey while writing this assignment, I chose to not expand on the topic of government due to safety concerns.

there was no way to compete with the appeal of the internet. The culture of the school and the surrounding community followed the idea that if problems were ignored, they would be solved. This was how many problems were dealt with, including problems with the national curriculum, censorship, student expression, and home life issues. Especially with a government and national identity in transition, I was concerned that students lacked stable places with which to explore their potential selves.

I designed a 17-week self-narrative portfolio project to confront the problem of constraints on student identity formation. By carrying out practitioner research, I aimed to ensure a safe, guided space that promoted personal growth and agency for my students; further, I aimed to analyse this growth linguistically for thematic differences between my national students, who had been born and raised in the city, and my international students, who joined us from various countries around the world. Finally, I wanted to acknowledge and interrogate my own bias as a practitioner and investigate whether student perceptions of the world around them accorded with my own concerns, or whether these fears derived from my own bias as an American researcher in a new and very different country and culture.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

For my framework, I chose to adopt the concepts of Cultural Historical Activity Theory and Figured Worlds.

Because my research centered around thematic differences between Turkish student and international student self-narratives, and because my research grappled with student/teacher power dynamics, it was vital that I consider socio-historical contexts. Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) functioned as a tool for data analysis while simultaneously acknowledging personal histories, the plurality of individual identities, and the complexity of adolescence. CHAT also operated as a tool with which to analyse student language-use in the context of a classroom culture, vital for the language analysis I aimed to undergo.

Constructed by Vygotsky (1978), Activity Theory was initially presented as a symbolic triangle that represented the paradigm through which subjects perceived active pursuits. The purpose of this theory was to analyse the goals and occurrences that inspire, engage, and deter the completion of any task. Vygotsky proposed three factors that were required to attempt any activity: tools/signs (this includes language, schema, etc. and physical tools), a subject (the person completing the activity), and an object/motive (the reason for engaging in the first place). However, one drawback was Vygotsky's lack of focus on cultural influences.

This is why I utilised Engeström's (1987) Altered Model, which connected the three points of Vygotsky's triangles to new points of cultural significance. Engeström's model argued that the factors of Vygotsky's triangle are inter-connected by the three new elements: rules for the completion of the activity, community influence, and division of labor (e.g. he posited that a community can affect one's tools). This model also renamed "tools" as

"instruments." Adding the additional three factors and then connecting them to the other elements resulted in a more nuanced tool that could analyse the various stimuli that affect the minute-to-minute processes people confront as they complete tasks (e.g. a community can affect the tools available to a person); it also allowed me to incorporate cultural analysis within the web of Activity Theory, producing the ability to analyse power dynamics in a given space. In a complicated space such as a classroom, the ability to connect these fragments was necessary for a complete and proper analysis.

Figured Worlds was a term coined by Holland et al. (1998). Figured Worlds detailed a space of processes that intersected cultural history, positioning of participants, the ability for reproduction, and identities that were gained from participation in this world (pg 41). The concept of Figured Worlds was expanded upon by Bruner (2001) who clarified that identities were composed of three basic worlds: the inner self, an overarching culture, and smaller microcosmic worlds (what Holland et al., 1998, would refer to as 'Figured Worlds'). My students were bombarded with stimuli from their homes, from Turkey, and from the larger technological world of social media; I intended to bear each of these cultural ecosystems in mind as I analysed my students' work in our own microcosmic classroom world, our own Figured World. Living under a government that was growing increasingly engaged, and juxtaposed with the normality of my Figured World (my classroom and the teacher/student power dynamics that it implied), employing Holland et al. (1998) was fundamental for generating sense in such a contrasting landscape.

Holland et al. (1998) placed an emphasis on Bakhtin's (1981) situated voices, or the different languages and registers that people use for each life-role they exhibit, something I aimed to research as students discussed the various characters that they played in the metaphorical opera of life. By "creating an authorial stance" (Bakhtin, quoted in Holland et

al., 1998, pg 182), students could take part in shaping their own identities; by defining their personal voices through writing practice, students would be able to gain the agency to assemble themselves despite any overarching power structures.

Holland et al. (1998) bound Vygotsky's Activity Theory to Bakhtin's (1973) theories of language, a lens that allowed for human improvisation and acknowledgement of oppression. According to Vygotsky's (1978) Zone of Proximal Development, by sitting with other discourses through narratives, students would develop their language, and therefore themselves. However, this needed to be guided by a Leading Activity in order to be productive; the Figured World of school was necessary in order for this struggle to become a purposeful element of identity development. Under the umbrella of Figured Worlds, Holland et al. (1998) juxtaposed Vygotsky's focus on development with Bakhtin's focus on language by taking the cultural elements of a Figured World and analysing their effects on human communication.

By placing Cultural-Historical Activity Theory under the lense of Figured Worlds, I aimed to acknowledge the social structures, boundaries, and rules of my classroom (my own Figured World); the complex web of student language-use; and the 'moments of improvisation' that made Figured Worlds so liberating for those subjects whose words were analysed. I wanted to give a voice and sense of agency to those censored subjects by producing a safe space with which to explore their identities, express themselves, and create their own definitions of morality. CHAT analysis would act as both my theoretical framework and method for analysis.

LITERATURE REVIEW

For my literature review, I aimed to answer four questions in order to guide the scope of my research. I was aiming to gain a general understanding of preconceived adolescent identities as defined by culture, to guide my student narrative prompts as appropriate and purposeful, and to be able to utilise theory in order to advocate my findings both to my school and to a wider audience.

1. What is identity?
2. What are current, normative identity features of both adolescent Turkish students and adolescent international students?
3. How can personal identity and agency in adolescents be altered or changed by education systems?
4. How can personal identity and agency be enhanced or changed by self-narratives?

Literature Review Part 1— What is identity?

Defining Identity

I employed Charles Taylor's (1989) definition of identity due to his focus on subject perception, its holistic nature, and its focus on personal morality outside of religious value. This way, my diverse student population would be equally promoted no matter their religious orientation. He posited that identity was an internal, natural, moral structure composed of three facets:

1. Respect for humankind as a superior species with which survival is merited and important,
2. Awareness of what subjectively composes a meaningful life, and
3. A personal sense of dignity.

All of these facets, he concluded, revolved around the idea of what it meant to be moral. Freeman and Brockmeier (2001) referred to this subjective moral ideal as “the good life” (pg 75).

Taylor’s theory (1989) coincided with Kohlberg (1984), who studied the development of morality as a major locus during identity-building in adolescents. While Kohlberg concentrated primarily on the acquisition of empathy and critical, abstract thoughts about morality as stepping stones for development into adulthood, his themes correlated with Taylor’s (1989) theory that morality centered on respecting other humans because they are human. Kohlberg’s theory suggested that when students became aware of their own identities, they could define and even shape their own identities. By being able to vocalise and question their own moral personhood, specifically within the three facets postulated by Taylor, students could develop and construct personal selves.

Holland et al. (1998) defined identities as “psychohistorical formations” (pg 5) that combined “the personal world with the collective space” (pg 5), formations that were created throughout a person’s life. By doing this, Holland et al. (1998) attributed certain moral mindsets to culture and one’s history and acknowledged that one’s personal experiences within outside worlds can affect him or her internally.

I would like to combine Holland et al.’s (1998) definition with Taylor’s (1989) by viewing one’s culture, history, artefacts, and experiences as a catalyst for a moral identity which can only be purposefully shaped through agency once the theme of identity is consciously explored. By asking students to formulate self-narratives and confront their moral standpoints through written language, as postulated by Kohlberg (1984), they will define their identities in a way that enables growth. Taylor’s theory also constrained me as his

focus on identity assumes a lack of universal right and wrong and is therefore difficult to measure.

Literature Review Part 2— What are current, normative identity features of both adolescent Turkish students and adolescent international students?

Identities of Youth in Turkey

At the time of my research, the Turkish identity was in fluctuation due to a governmental and cultural transition. Atatürk, the founder of the Turkish state, believed that, "If you think you're Turkish, then you are" (quoted by Finkel, 2012, pg 8). In modern times, the national identity of "Turk" is used to describe someone who is of the Muslim faith, who was born in Turkey, and whose native language is Turkish (Finkel, 2012). However, due to the reality of the Kurdish people, who were also born in Turkey and many of whom do not speak Turkish, this definition is debatable.

Anthropologists generally agree that the Turkish identity is composed of three facets (Güngen, 2017):

1. DNA deriving from the Turkic people who came to Turkey from Southern Asia,
2. A liberal muslim identity, and
3. A native language of Turkish.

However, with the current government's focus on nationalism and conservative Islam, even these basic statements are contested (Finkle, 2012).

Young Turks have been brought up in an exceedingly modern society, full of technology, social media, and American music (Finkel, 2012). While Turkish culture has historically favored a collectivist approach towards community involvement, modern Turkish youths exhibit more individualistic paradigms than their older counterparts (Karakitapo

Ğlu-Aygün, 2004; Çileli, 2000). Throughout the childhoods of today's Turkish teenagers, Turkey advanced towards European Union membership, obtaining candidate status in 2004, and even today, many Turkish universities are taught entirely in English (Finkel, 2012). However, the current president of Turkey, President Recep Erdoğan, aims to create a nationalistic state separate from the EU with a focus on more conservative Muslim values (Cookman, 2016), quite the contrast to the Turkey its youth grew up acknowledging. Many Turkish youths respond to this transition by relying on social experiences and relationships for their identity development as opposed to national structures (Karakitapo Ğlu-Aygün, 2004).

This uncertainty and transitionary period was evident in my classroom. As 12-year-olds, my Turkish students experienced turbulent transitions both in life (from childhood to adulthood) and in country (from a European Turkey in the early-2000s to the current governed state of which the conclusion was still uncertain). I was curious as to how these extreme transitions would affect their identity narratives. For instance, a group of three Turkish girls agreed in casual conversation that "[Turkey is]not the Middle East... And it's not Europe... But when I go to Europe, it feels the same." Moreover, when probed as to how they felt the rest of the world perceived Turkey, they shared various encounters of xenophobia when travelling internationally. These students were unsure how to situate their ethnic identities within the world, and yet in their eyes, the world seemed very quick to situate them. Because a majority of the research I found on adolescents in Turkey was accomplished before the current government moved towards a more conservative state, I was curious whether my research would resemble the conclusions from the early-2000s or would conclude with new results entirely.

Gendered differences in Turkey have been found among survey results of university students as young women responded with a less traditional outlook while young men defined themselves through creativity-related definitions (Karakitapo Ğlu-Aygün, 2004). University women perceived themselves as less traditional to confront historic treatment of women within Turkey (Karakitapo Ğlu-Aygün, 2004). However, in surveys focused on personal perspectives of identity, Turkish men considered themselves more focused on personal well-being while Turkish women focused on collectives. However, as these studies were undertaken with university students, they might perceive themselves differently than my own 12-year-olds who were just coming into phases of self-awareness.

Ultimately, the identities of Turkish youths are largely defined by their peer groups and relationships with others (Karakitapo Ğlu-Aygün, 2004). I saw this in my own classroom where my Turkish students obsessed with pleasing each other, shown through in-class social interactions.

Identities of International Students

International students are defined as groups of children who live in countries other than their native countries from which they developed their first language (searchassociates.com, 2017). While they can be defined as immigrants, international students specifically attend international schools where they are surrounded by other students from different countries. When they depart from school, they often live within various degrees of the culture of their parents instead of the culture of the surrounding community. International students are typically described as “good kids” who quickly adapt to new cultures due to constant moving and relocation (searchassociates.com, 2017). Their exposure to other cultures at young ages make them adept at global awareness and empathy (searchassociates.com, 2017).

However, this is a broad brush with which to paint students who come from various places. While my international students agreed that all ten of them shared many characteristics regardless of passport, and while much literature focuses on international students as a general conglomerate of people, generalising an entire international population without accounting for their home cultures can be dangerous and even create false conclusions (Malcolm and Mendoza, 2014).

When discussing international students in literature, there is a large focus on linguistic capabilities, specifically being able to talk like a native speaker. There is also discussion about how language determines the various roles that international students are expected to display when concerning the social groups in which international students associate themselves (Valenzuela, Amiot, and Ryder, 2016; Prabhakar, 2014). Often, one's native language determines which smaller community an international student may associate with due to the cultural tangents of language such as music, television shows, and other pop culture (Valenzuela, Amiot, and Ryder, 2016). Moreover, for international students who are bilingual, a complex identity which never feels fully assimilated can conclude their social development (e.g. not quite fitting in anywhere). While international students tend to assimilate much better and are statistically happier within heterogeneous communities that are globally focused (Valenzuela, Amiot, and Ryder, 2016), other research shows that these students can also often feel excluded, disempowered, and unconnected to the world around them, frequently due to a linguistic barrier (Prabhakar, 2014). The languages my international students engage with directly reflect their social groups, and consequently, their identities.

According to my international students, this lack of fitting in is significant at my school where the international student population, even students who have lived here their

entire lives, do not quite fit in due to feeling foreign due to their accents. This is a significant problem as my school population is 90 percent Turkish leading to a massive linguistic barrier.

Linguistic gaps for international students can have long-standing effects during identity formation (Prabhakar, 2014). For instance, international students, regardless of gender, can respond to the lack of linguistic ability and the inability to assimilate by becoming silent (Prabhakar, 2014). I also saw this as a teacher with many silent international students and many outgoing Turkish students. I was curious how this would be present itself in student narratives.

Literature Review Part 3— How can personal identity and agency be enhanced or changed by proper education systems?

Leading Activities and Writing as Thought

In order to analyse how my Turkish and international students varied in their identity development, I needed to tie this development to classroom activities that I could measure. Literature pointed to writing as a vehicle for this transformation.

Identity and narration are tangled together in the web of what creates and is expressed by a person. “What is apparent… is that self-construction begins very early and is a strikingly systematic process that is deeply enmeshed with the mastery of language itself” (Bruner, 2001, pg 36). This is not only true of grammar rules and vocabulary, although knowledge of these syntactical concepts certainly helps, but of cultural context, rhetoric, and guidelines for narrative construction (Bruner, 2001). Identity growth depends largely upon the “symbolic system” of language, the Figured World in which the language is obtained, and the purposefulness in which it is adopted (Bruner, 2001). This is evident in various Figured Worlds, from the meetings of Alcoholics Anonymous (Holland et al., 1998) to Dostoevsky’s

novels (Bakhtin, 1973) because language allows Figured Worlds to become cyclical and characters to evolve.

This linguistic growth is especially evident when considering the developmental growth processes of teenagers. Developmentally, adolescents undergo three major types of changes: physical, cognitive, and social (Introduction to Psychology, 2015). Connected to these adolescent changes is a metamorphosis in theoretical life-stage. Karpov (2003) and Engeström (1987) both questioned the catalyst of these life stages— why were children transitioning between them? What caused children to move from one stage to the next? Karpov (2003) concluded from Neo-Vygotskian theory that the key was a leading activity, which was built upon by Engeström (1987).

Leading activities are the guided processes that help children to develop into the next stage of identity. Vygotsky (1978) theorised that human activity was mediated by tools. However, these tools could include the likes of linguistics and symbols (Engeström, 1987). These tools were not gained organically (Karpov, 2003). Children were not born with the ability to think critically or ethically; rather, this was a skill endowed upon them by older generations, specifically teachers and parents (Karpov, 2003; Vygotsky, 1978). Vygotsky (1978), and further Karpov (2003), found that changes in social situations led to evolution in the identities of children; this would lead to a new period of development. In order to shepherd children to the next stages, leading activities were required.

This is because learning requires that larger concepts be passed on by those with superior knowledge (Engeström, 1987). When working with teenagers who self-harm, Hill and Dallos (2011) found that a leading activity materialised as guiding questions from psychologists. These questions caused adolescents to gain enough agency to vocalise their experiences and overcome these issues; these conversations minimised the feelings of

aloneness and being misunderstood by the world around them. When working with students with diabetes, this leading activity took the form of autobiographical writing under the guidance of psychological researchers (Piana et al., 2009). While students needed the leading activities and adult feedback in order to gain agency, the leading activities became heuristic, allowing the students to develop themselves in the ways that they most saw fit (Hill and Dallos, 2011; Piana et al., 2009).

For middle childhood, this leading activity is found in school instruction (Vygotsky, 1986). Specifically, children develop with knowledge of "scientific concepts" or a vocabulary with which to vocalise thinking and learning processes. This allows them to gain a "reflective consciousness" (Vygotsky, 1986, pg 171). Summarically, school, specifically English class, begets logic which leads to critical thinking and self-awareness. This can only happen when the children are active learners and when they learn both concepts and procedures. Learning should be a process of becoming, and teachers must be purposeful in creating learning as "active processes of legitimate engagement in collaborative knowledge production" (Vågan, 2011, pg 44).

Adolescence, on the other hand, requires a new type of learning activity, a process that leads to formal-logical thinking which creates self-analysis and personal identity (Vygotsky, 1986). Jung referred to a this ability to connect socially with and internalise the outside world as "the collective unconscious" (Engeström, 1987). This process takes the form of social interaction with peers as well as through reading the narratives of others (Vygotsky, 1986). Because I taught 12-year-olds on both sides of this developmental era— both middle childhood and adolescence— it was important that my project involve both a means for increasing scientific vocabulary and a social pathway for self-awareness.

Identity Growth and Adolescent Development in the Classroom

Facilitating identity growth within a classroom is no easy task. In fact, projects based within schools can limit identity growth by restricting content, restricting the boundaries of cultural expression, or restricting the classroom environment by limiting personal expression (Wilson, Chavez, and Anders, 2012; Vetter, 2010). Scholes (1985) states that a teacher's role is not to simply provide materials for the students to read but to also give students materials for production. However, this student autonomy also can be marred by teachers acting too critically, not allowing for student voice, and prohibiting student freedom (Bloom, 1998).

One way to facilitate student expression is by engaging them through the mediating sign of language. Students express themselves through signs and symbols, including word-use, social media, personal style, cultural norms, and culture as a "mediating instrument… whether the subject is conscious of it or not" (Engeström, 1987, pg 29). Incorporating these signs into a class project is monumental for maintaining identity growth within a school setting and to guarantee that an assignment is successful. This is especially evident within English language learners (Dagenais, Day, and Toohey, 2008; Wilson, Chavez, and Anders, 2012) or with students who display low academic capital and large cultural capital (Zacher, 2008). A student's identity is always braided within a larger culture (Langenhove and Harre, 1993), and students should not be expected to separate their personal identities at home from the role they play as students (Vetter, 2010; Van Langenhove and Harre, 1993). Hinga (2014) notes that culturally-focused units, specifically in Language Arts classrooms, increase classroom engagement, add to community building, increase student grades, and maximise student understanding of English Language Arts. All of these studies were conducted in the United States within high schools, and I was curious how similar concepts of learning would take place with younger children in Turkey. As my students were

used to extremely guided lectures, I was concerned their ability to connect their lives to the classroom.

Language is a cultural marker on a mass cultural level, a personal level, and a textual symbolic level. However, without processes that facilitate the discussion of these symbols or cultural norms, the students will never analyse enough to become self-aware, nor will their interest in the class assignment delve deep enough to create any significant change (Wilson, Chavez, and Anders, 2012). Vetter (2010) referred to this type of student expression as "students [pulling from their own] word universes" (pg 99).

Helping students to create personal meaning is a way that teachers can help students to feel valued and promote an environment of trust (Dagenais, Day, and Toohey, 2008). This would be especially important in a place where Turkish students were worried that international teachers disliked them. For instance, an English teacher who makes small choices such as utilising student names within sentence examples during in-class examples is likely to find that the students are more engaged and willing to submit their identities for review, particularly under the umbrella of language immersion (Dagenais, Day, and Toohey, 2008).

Vetter (2010) detailed a particular class in which students were allowed to interact with texts that directly related to their interests, accenting the experiences of LGBTQ youth through research assignments. Students' identities were directly tied to literature class because "[identities] often shape how students engage in literary practices" (pg 100). Specifically giving marginalised students the ability to explore their own identities was central to creating a positive classroom experience. Vetter (2010) suggested utilising literature that features various intersectional identities for students to use as a model for their own

identity expansion. However, I argue that with many teachers losing the autonomy to choose the literature taught in their classes, an autonomy that I struggled to gain, this can be difficult.

Wilson, Chavez, and Anders (2012) found podcasts to be a successful means for student expression among ESL learners in an eighth grade classroom. They found the themes of family members, popular culture, places, life events, items, and activities resonated among multiple students. However, they also emphasized the importance of utilising multiple media resources when allowing for expression. When students were allowed to express themselves using multiple mediums, they were able to exhibit multiple facets of their personalities with all the complexities and "synergistic effects" that occur within each human (Wilson, Chavez, and Anders, 2012). This inspired me to include multiple mediums within my own class's portfolio: writing samples, photography, and drama. Wilson, Chavez, and Anders (2012) also suggested for future practitioner research that all teachers reflect upon student expression and choose instructional texts related to the themes that emerge from this expression, specifically using texts that employ multiple representations from various media.

Social learning can be tedious to implement without personal meaning. Social differences in students can influence differences in learning in an academic setting, something to note in my own classroom as the social status between the Turkish students, both in level of financial gain and popularity, and international students was notable (Dam, Volman, and Wardekker, 2004). I argue that the negative impact of social learning can be exhibited when less popular students are inhibited when sharing their own stories. This can also be shown when teachers utilise references that are only applicable to students from certain cultures in the classroom.

According to Activity Theory, which operated as both my theoretical framework and tool for analysis, when students had successfully written writing responses for the portfolio

project, the portfolio-writing experience would become another tool which they could reference as they began the next writing assignment (Vygotsky, 1978; Engeström, 1987). This would conclude with linguistic growth between the first essay and the final essay as students experimented with language, read models of other self-narratives, and were asked to vocalise centralities that many students had never thought about.

Literature Review Part 4— How can personal identity and agency be enhanced or changed by self-narratives?

Autobiographies and Self-Narratives

While there are innumerable ways that people choose to express themselves, I opted to focus on the written form of self expression in student creation of self-narrative portfolios as it applied to seventh grade English class. I aim to use the terms written portfolio, autobiography, and self-narrative interchangeably, especially as the namesake of these forms of literature typically utilises the same definition; each of these is an artefact that directly expresses a self (Bloom, 1998). Prior to 1970, an autobiography was defined as a chapter-laden expression of one's internal thoughts, primarily authored by older white men who had found success and wanted to share their moral frameworks with others (Bloom, 1998). From the 1980s onward, the definition began to evolve due to the experimental and experiential structure of new writers and the expansion of communities represented (Bloom, 1998).

I allowed students to create self-narratives to close the developmental gap and to act as a Leading Activity. Narratives acted as a "means through which [this] life comes into being… including scientific knowledge" (Brockmeier and Carbaugh, 2001, pg 8). Narratives had the potential to act as a bridge between middle childhood and adolescence for all 72

students involved. As Vygotsky (1978) proposed that words and communication were a direct expression of the inner human spirit and paradigms, his theory supported my goal to deduce student growth through self-narrative writing.

Narratives succeed as leading activities because they connect internal thought with reasoning. Within narratology, or the study of narratives as a psychology, two arguments exist as to perspectives on pre-verbal thought processes and how they can lead to identity growth via narratives in early childhood. One camp, led by White (1987), argues that because history "structures the unstructured" (quoted in Brockmeier and Carbaugh, 2001, pg 14), narratives are naturally thrust about humans from the moment that they are born thereby forming thinking processes. On the contrary, Carr (1986) explains that because experience and memory are related to time, we can only make sense of the world through inherent memory which takes the form of a narrative. In either debate, narratives are necessary for not only the creation of personal identity, but also for the very existence and our understanding of it.

Bruner (2001) and Bloom (1998) agreed that an autobiography must consist of "a narrator, in the here and now, [who] takes upon himself or herself the task of describing the progress of a protagonist in the there and then, one who happens to share his name" (Bruner, 2001, pg 27). In order to be considered a true autobiography, the protagonist in the written form must evolve into the current narrator. An autobiography can include personal essays, oral stories, collections of letters, self-portraits, family histories, travel narratives, and even blends of fiction (Bloom, 1998). It must simply be assumed that the author is telling their truth (Bloom, 1998). According to Bruner (2001), autobiographies require the answers to two questions:

1. What happened?
2. Why does it matter? (Why is this worth telling?)

A problem within autobiography lays within the mistranslation of memory. Memory is a flawed mechanism (Barlett, 1932 referenced in Bruner, 2010), and memories are often recounted incorrectly. However, what Bruner (2010) and others argue is that memory is insignificant when compared to the translation of the memory by the author. An autobiography tells its readers about the nature through with the author sees the world, and it is always open to interpretation as all written work is. Regardless of the verisimilitude of memory, what the author tells us expands far beyond verifiable facts; every moment of speech, action, and experience is open to individual translation whether remembered correctly or not. In this way, verifiable truth does not exist (Bruner, 2010). This means that even when a student is performative or blatantly lying in his or her autobiography, the interpretation of that data can expand our idea of that child.

Freeman and Brockmeier (2001) referred to the "fusing" of lived experiences with memory in order to create a final autobiographical account (pg 80), stating that the ultimate recounting by the author may act as a way to exhibit one's ultimate truth more so than historical accuracy. Autobiographical analysis focuses far more on respecting the perception of the author in shaping his or her identity by showing us "the best way to live" (Freeman and Brockmeier, 2001, pg 85) than the historical accuracy being recounted. The goal of all autobiographies, whether purposeful or not, is to display and create one's own morality. When this is done successfully, one's identity is both shown and expanded. This expansion of identity does not rely on the reliability of memory nor the historic accuracy of the speaker, but instead on how the author presents his or her text, "the inherent unity of living and narrating a life" (Freeman and Brockmeier, 2001, pg 80). This is especially true as the author learns to place his or her memories into context as his or her identity ebbs and grows throughout time and by viewing one's past in hindsight (Freeman and Brockmeier, 2001).

Autobiographies do not need to be linear and chronological, although history should be taken into account (Freeman and Brockmeier, 2001). As long as conceptions of the self are weaved with "concepts of time and history," an autobiography can be enlightening even through a creative format (Freeman and Brockmeier, 2001) such as poetry or a multi-media platform. In order to utilise this within my own project, I required certain "historical, personal time periods" to be accounted for within student responses.

I should also note that much of the narrative writing that I read lacked a cultural and historical context through which the works were analysed, a problem that I found confronted at the British Educational Research Association Annual Conference 2018 as both a popular topic and a major problem. Unfortunately, due to space constraints, I am unable to unweave the differences between narrative and other similar terms such as life history and ethnography.

Self-Narratives as an Extension of Identity

Historically, some authors have argued that favouring literature in lieu of psychology when studying identity development and narratives is an inferior task (Albright, 1996). They believe that "Literature is a wilderness, psychology is a garden" (Albright, 1996, pg 19). Historically, narratology, or the study of narratives as a psychological endeavour, was limited in scope, making reductionist claims and using "inaccessible vocabulary" (Brockmeier and Carbaugh, 2001, pg 4). However, from 1980 to present day, scholars from both mediums have worked to connect the subjects. These scholars include Bruner (1986, 1990), Bakhtin (1973, 1981), Johnstone (1991), Plummer (1996), and Hinchman (1997). It is no longer controversial to assume that identity is revealed and expanded through "discursive practices" such as writing self-narratives (Van Langenhove and Harre, 1993), and narratives studied may also include dance, music, cultural events, and images (Brockmeier and Carbaugh,

2001). Narrative analysis has evolved to include cultural studies (Brockmeier and Carbaugh, 2001).

Controversy does exist, however, when positing exactly what form of identity is being revealed. Some scholars argue that there is a distinction between "personal identities," or the never fully expressed identity that someone holds within, and a "social identity," or the identity that is perceived by others (Van Langenhove and Harre, 1993). These scholars believe that by examining the various social roles that one plays in life (e.g. teacher, daughter, friend) and by expressing one's social identity through writing, a growth of social identity, which can be expressed, can lead to a growth of personal identity, which cannot be expressed (Van Langenhove and Harre, 1993).

Bruner (2001) disagrees, arguing that the "personal identity," what he refers to as "essential self," is impossible because the very concept is devoid of cultural influences and therefore not related to "moral fortitude," which Taylor (1989) notes as the very definition of identity. Bourdieu (1986) also posited that facets of lives such as names, social security numbers, and degrees only perpetuated the mirage that any part of the self is permanent, referring to this mindset as an "autobiographical illusion." To Bourdieu, the idea of an "essential self" was impossible, created by society to offer the illusion of personal stability.

It can be concluded that all self-narratives present a self-translated identity propped up by systems of morality created by culture and life experience, perpetuated by memory and self-perception (Bruner, 2001; Brockmeier and Carbaugh, 2001; Taylor, 1989). The very creation of narratives is "upon a universal value-logic of presumable 'good reasons' that itself presumes particular beliefs and actions as a condition for its production" (Brockmeier and Carbaugh, 2001, pg 11).

The words humans speak and write are directly correlated with the thoughts that they think and the identities that they create (Feigenbaum, 2008); there is a strong link between identity and narrative/cultural discourse (Brockmeier and Carbaugh, 2001). Speaking and thinking are material processes that demand time, energy, and resources. Feigenbaum (2008) suggested that speaking and thinking complement each other as causes and effects while Vygotsky (1987) found that they were initially independent. However, Vygotsky (1987) also deduced that once a child's first conversation takes place, the child can begin to create meaning with this language. Both speaking and thinking necessitate that a language already exist within a community in order to associate with one's identity (Feigenbaum, 2008), thereby supporting Vygotsky's (1978) focus on the sociality of language and identity. Motivation to master the language (e.g. assimilating into a culture) in order to achieve participation within said community is another requirement for identity development (Feigenbaum, 2008). This connected to my international students who were typically quieter than my Turkish students due to a lack of mastering Turkish.

In both cases, language is a social activity full of connotation and culture that leads to an inner dialogue created by that social experience. After all, narratives as they are expressed "are social actions" (Brockmeier and Barbaugh, 2001, pg 12). Conclusively, the way that students can obtain higher mental processes, including self-awareness, is by entering into a social setting in which they are asked to vocalise and create an inner monologue about their own identities. By obtaining an academic acquisition of language and vocabulary about identity, students can begin to form their own. It is in this way that linguistic growth within a portfolio of self-narratives can exemplify personal, internal growth.

Self-Narratives as a Creation of Self

The writing of narratives is not only affected by the author; the writing of narratives can construct the identity of author himself/herself. For instance, Paul Ricœur (1983) referenced identity as ipseity, or "identity as a project" (quoted by Voneche, 2001). Through the project of narratives, "personal identities and social relationships are constructed simultaneously" (Brockmeier and Carbaugh, 2001, pg 12). Stories establish a structure within the self that help authors not only to make sense of the world but also to construct the world around them (Brockmeier and Carbaugh, 2001; Holland et al., 1998). Narratives can motivate and act as personal, social, and political actions that sociologically allow humans to create a sense of self (Plummer, 1996). When an author narrates his or her life, he or she is defining his or her own discourse. This is because storytelling at its heart is a social act that leads to identity development (Vygotsky, 1986). Narratives usher an increase in agency, social justice, psychological acceptance and overcoming, and the humanising of subjects.

Narratives can lead to an inflation of agency. Storytelling is in itself an "act of resistance" (Hinchmans, 1997, pg xiv) that gives a voice to those who would otherwise be oppressed. Because there is no "authoritarian grand narrative" (Brockmeier and Carbaugh, 2001), authors possess total freedom outside of the societal systems that contain them when narrating their stories. For students to question the plurality of their own tropes and storylines was central to creating a cohesive storyline, or in this case, portfolio. Creating autobiographies also allows people to "locate themselves within the formality of narrative" which allows them to cope with and gain dominance over the life experience (Voneche, 2001). When adolescents who struggled with self-harm created self-narratives, they found an increase in agency and healthy mindsets associated with the writing process because they

were able to vocalise the underlying reasons behind the unhealthy behaviors and parent themselves through the situation (Hill and Dallos, 2011).

Autobiographies are tools of social justice (Bloom, 1998). Bell (2010) notes that approaching autobiographies in research is most suitable when the researcher aims to focus on "intensely personal accounts of human experience" (pg 19) as well as to help others to enhance their voices. In this way, it can be political (Bell, 2010). Narratives give voice to people who previously were unvoiced, and throughout history, narratives have been used by social justice movements to create traction (Bloom, 1998). They are an act of revolution that can "right the balance" in oppressive societies (Bloom, 1998, pg 67). This made them ideal for my purposes of offering a voice to my students within the massive theme of identity development. Bloom (1998) also argues against editors and transcribers acting as "gatekeepers" for what is and is not socially appropriate. Those who transcribed autobiographies of slave narratives, often because the author was illiterate, could leave information out that they deemed unnecessary, stifling the voice of the biographer. As I was acting as the editor for my students, it was important that as a white, American woman in a position of power that I did not act as a "gatekeeper." Beyond expressing heritage, narratives can also create and structure discourse (Brockmeier and Carbaugh, 2001). Because narratives are inherently focused on identity, and because identities imply associations and oppositions, narratives can implicate the in-groups and out-groups of an entire society (Tajfel, 1978). Bruner even goes so far as to tease the concept of "finding one's self" by escaping to another culture (Bruner, 2001, pg 36). He argues that finding a "truth" or "essential self" is actually found when positioning oneself within his or her own culture as opposed to struggling away from one's home (Bruner, 2001).

Self-narratives when used by adolescents can allow for psychological acceptance and overcoming. Self-narratives have been used to study and curb self-harm in teenagers (Hill and Dallos, 2011). A lack of understanding the underlying reasons for self-harm creates a lack of ability to vocalise such (Hill and Dallos, 2011). When adolescents were pressed to converse and write about these reasons, their ability to self-regulate increased (Hill and Dallos, 2011). Self-narratives have similarly been utilised to work with children with diseases, specifically diabetes (Piana et al., 2009). In both cases, the self-narratives were said to create a safe environment and allowed the adolescents to find acceptance with their current and unique situations; self-narratives created a path to help both sets of students find their own version of "the good life" (Freeman and Brockmeier, 2001, pg 75).

Finally, and perhaps most important, self-narratives humanize the subjects (Piana et al., 2009). They allow for people who have little in common to empathise with each other (Piana et al., 2009).

THREE QUESTIONS

While the literature was able to define general ways that English teachers could promote identity development within homogenous populations, there was a large gap when referencing the various cultures and Figured Worlds that can exist within a single classroom. For instance, in my classroom, there was a large divide between the Turkish students and international students academically and in social behaviours.

In attempts to guide my research and help to shape my portfolio project while offering students a safe space which to grapple with their own identities, I formulated three research questions:

- In what ways do my international and Turkish students express their identities through writing self-narrative portfolios in English class?
- What are the themes of identity that develop in these self-narratives, both from international students and Turkish students? How do these themes compare and contrast between the Turkish and international students?
- How do these themes of identity change or evolve as student language changes and evolves through a 17-week period?

METHODOLOGY

Definitions

Since the initial formulation of this project, I have seen the terms autobiography, narrative portfolio, and life history used in various contexts. For the purposes of this project, I use them interchangeably to mean a personal portfolio of narrative writing and other media, often told through a historical and cultural lens, that includes a contextual landscape upon analysis (a landscape often ignored by narrative analysis).

The School

The school was a private international school in Ankara, Turkey and composed of primarily wealthy families with little scholarship support. The student population was 1062. 72 seventh graders were split at random between four classes. Of these 72 students, 10 were considered "international," or of a non-Turkish upbringing. The other 62 were from Turkey and considered themselves Turkish. The school held an International Baccalaureate (IB) and IGCSE-based curriculum in the high school (grades 9-12), as well as a Primary Years Programme (PYP) and Cambridge-based curriculum in the elementary school and kindergarten (grades Kindergarten-4). In the year that I conducted this research, the middle school (grades 5-8) had just begun the process of transitioning to Cambridge curriculum with major consideration towards an International Baccalaureate Middle Years Programme. The middle school juggled these various curricula with the Turkish Ministry of Education requirements, a frustration expressed by many teachers in meetings throughout the year. The year in which this research was implemented was also my first year at the school.

Data Collection

Initial Survey

As a seventh grade class, an initial individual brainstorming activity was completed in lieu of a questionnaire due to age-appropriateness. All 72 students were handed an outline of a pair of glasses on computer paper. I explained that these glasses were a metaphor for the "lens through which you see the world." With a timer on my cell phone, I gave students two minutes to list in the left lens people and organizations (real or fictional) that have influenced who they are. I then offered two more minutes to list in the right lens the various roles that they play in life (Holland et al., 1998). Surrounding the glasses on the paper, they were given two minutes to write a minimum of 10 adjectives describing themselves. From this, I aimed to gather themes about which I could create future writing prompts for the portfolio. This idea was adopted from a course led by Dr. Susan Adams (2010) as well as Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2011) who suggest utilising language and a format that is accessible to the participants. It was completed during class in all four sections of seventh grade English in order to ensure high response rates (Campbell, McNamara, and Gilroy, 2009).

The Self Narrative Portfolio (see Appendix A)

The lotus of my practitioner research consisted of an introductory questionnaire-based activity followed by a 17-week portfolio project completed by all 72 seventh grade students at my school. Because I was working with my students who I aimed to humanise for my audience, and because I aimed to offer my students a voice as participants and subjects, I found that utilising autobiographies would best fit my purposes in both analysing their lives and creating a space that could give them agency in an ever-transitioning world. The portfolios involved a compilation of various media including writing samples, dramatic monologues, and photography. All student work was then compiled into individual decorated,

physical binders. I would focus on the tool of language within Activity Theory in order to deduce student identity growth as the final outcome.

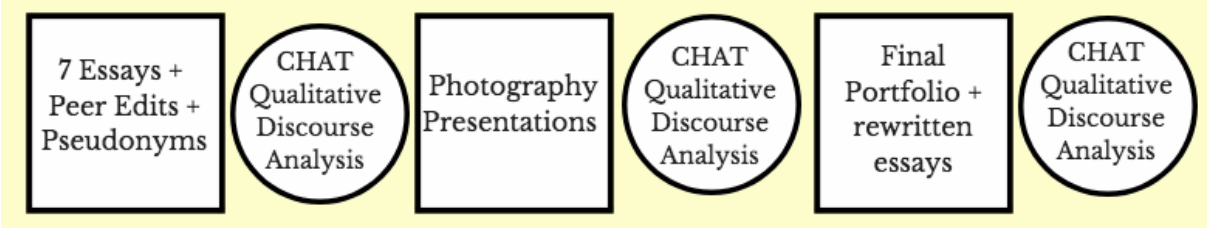


Figure 1: Visualisation of the portfolio creation process. Squares represent student activities, circles represent subsequent analysis.

Voneche (2001) refers to biographical research as "lacy little country roads that allow the traveler to really discover the countryside" (pg 221). In other words, the study of self-narratives is significantly richer and more revealing than the study of brief questionnaires, an example he specifically notes. He also postulates that autobiographical study allows researchers to view concrete, real-life situations in a lens that separates them from their own biases; it keeps practitioners from becoming too abstract and hypothetical. The subjectivity of this research "enriched its authenticity" (Campbell, McNamara, and Gilroy, 2009, pg 94) as I was focused on rich, complex student relationships, positionality, and identities.

Students were given a list of 23 identity-related prompts, and were asked to respond to one prompt of their choice every 10 days in a one-to-two-page (double spaced, Times New Roman, size 12) essay assignment. The first and last essays in addition to this list were in response to the question, "Who are you?" This allowed for students to be more involved in the creation of the themes of this project.

By increasing the individual social meaning present within one's class, I believed that differences in culture and struggles with student engagement could be absolved (Dam,

Volman, and Wardekker, 2004). This is something I planned to do by creating personal prompts with questions about general identity that students could expand on by referencing their own interests regardless of social status outside of the classroom. Students would be allowed to choose the prompts that they felt most comfortable answering from a larger list.

The prompts were detailed to students as follows:

- One story detailing who you were between the ages of 1-5
- One story detailing who you were between the ages of 5-7
- One story detailing who you were between the ages of 7-9
- One story detailing who you were between the ages of 9-12
- Response #1 to a question - Written (see Appendix A for a comprehensive list)
- Response #2 to a question - Written (see Appendix A for a comprehensive list)
- Response #3 to a question - Written (see Appendix A for a comprehensive list)
- Response #4 to a question - Photographed (see Appendix A for a comprehensive list)

The attention to personal history derived from Vygotsky's (1987) fascination with the schema and Holland et al.'s (1998) focus on individual past and its influence on identity. "Autobiographical memory" was central to students reckoning with this plurality (Bruner, 1990) "of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses, a genuine polyphony of fully valid voices" (Bakhtin, 1973). By analysing these historically crafted voices, I would be able to determine how my students perceived their own identities in relation to their childhoods. The prompt questions were formatted with reference to the student themes that were acquired during the initial survey.

The "social learning" Vygotsky refers to as a Leading Activity through adolescence does not necessarily mean that the learning takes place through discussion with other students. Co-operative and collaborative learning can appear when students face discourses

different than their own (Dam, Volman, and Wardekker, 2004), something I planned to do by having students share their own essays with the rest of the class (Piana et al., 2009) and utilising writer workshop editing activities.

Bloom (1998) offered many suggestions that I planned on utilising within my own project. She highlighted the importance of teachers responding to the autobiographical prompts that they give to their students; this can create a classroom community and eliminate hierarchical structures put into place. She also stressed that teachers need to be careful of critique because they can stifle student creativity (Bloom, 1998) and even allowed students to "waive their grade" on this autobiography project. Because my students were from a grade-oriented culture, immediately allowing the option to waive a grade would ultimately hold a negative impact on their performance; I also felt as though my school would not support this approach being that they require teachers to provide at least one graded project-based opportunity per year. However, I decided to let the students utilise Essay 6 for a completion grade as Bloom (1998) argued that this would allow students to feel free to express themselves outside of a classroom hierarchy.

When creating prompts, I attempted to remain simple and concise, using a language that the students would respond to, discussing the prompts with the students in class, and promoting an environment that reinforced concepts of respect towards my students as suggested by Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2011). For instance, by using Times New Roman instead of Comic Sans, I was fostering an environment that suggested the idea that my students were maturing into young adults instead of elementary school classrooms (Cranford Teague, 2013). Prompts were piloted by other middle school English teachers prior to their use in my class, as suggested by Bell (2010). I also responded to and shared a response for each prompt in order to promote a trusting environment. Students completed

these writing responses within their own homes as suggested by Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2011). While I worried this would negatively affect students who came from dysfunctional homes or did not own their own computers, it never became a problem.

Data Analysis

Thematic discourse analysis, deriving from a Cultural Historical Activity Theory perspective, was then undertaken with eight student portfolios: four local students and four international students of varying academic ability. Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2011) state that dual case studies of two different populations can act on a comparative basis as a type of immediate replication tool that help specific facets unique to a population to become apparent. The case study nature of this research — by using student writing samples as data — allowed for the recognition of "social truths and complexity" (Cohen, Manion, and Morrison, 2011, pg 292) while acting as a possible movement for agency within my students. I felt as though qualitative CHAT language analysis would be beneficial as "education involves issues to do with the quality and nature of [interpersonal] relationships" and thereby is perfectly suited for qualitative studies (Campbell, McNamara, and Gilroy, 2009). Because I was curious about identity construction and aiding in creating student agency through an autobiographical process, a 17-week self-narrative project that was followed with language analysis would be ideal as autobiographies are directly correlated with identity construction and commonly accepted forms of practitioner research methods (Campbell, McNamara, and Gilroy, 2009).

Due to word count constraints, of these eight students, two were chosen for closer analysis and focus while the other six were used as representative samples with which to support or contradict my findings in the conclusion. After an initial investigation of all eight portfolios, a full linguistic analysis was undergone with these two specific portfolios due to

the rich linguistic data and the exemplary representative characteristics of the narratives that offered extensive room for examination. All eight students were invited to create their own pseudonyms for the final study in order to grant them agency and as another data point.

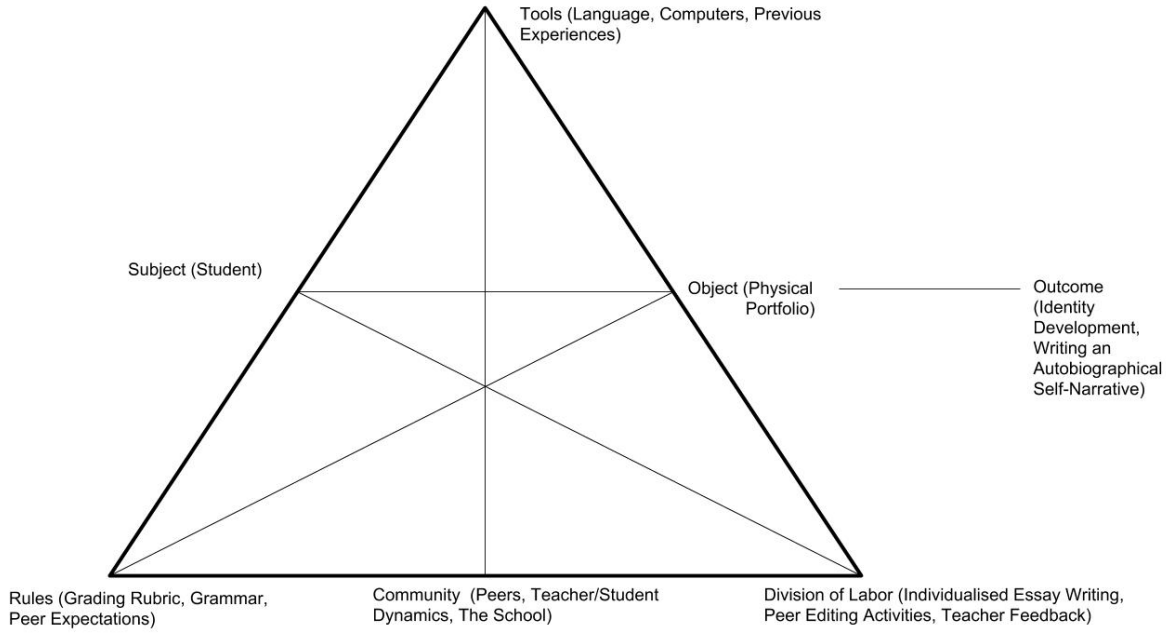


Figure 2: This project inserted into the CHAT Triangle.

Once the students had responded to the writing prompts, I analysed the writing samples, photography, and portfolio covers of Athena and Skylar (pseudonyms chosen by each girl) through qualitative discourse analysis with a focus on identifying themes, patterns, and cultural influences. This was done through a data display by determining student-created categories. By doing this, I determined how students perceived their own identities and measure growth from the first prompt to the last (Cohen, Manion, and Morrison, 2011). I utilised Campbell, McNamara, and Gilroy's (2009) suggestion that practitioners are open to a plurality of conclusions and perspectives, use many methods of discourse (e.g. writing, music making, and photography), and find connections between different participants. Creating

categories allowed me to read specific writing samples while placing them into a larger context (Campbell, McNamara, and Gilroy, 2009). Due to the fact that the purpose of this assignment was to remain qualitative, and because I worried that grades being subjected by me could be construed as bias, the marks for this project were not a data point.

Athena's essays can be found in Appendix D. Skylar's essays can be found in Appendix E.

In other to measure linguistic growth, I pinpointed four categories as they also fit into my school's required Cambridge curriculum: verb choice, descriptive words, specificity of nouns, and figurative language. I aimed to tie each of these constructs to social conventions in regards to CHAT analysis. In order to this, I specifically searched for repeated discourses (e.g. referring to princess regalia, an abundance of action verbs as they relate to sports, etc.), jargon (e.g. colloquial phrases), and unique language (e.g. non-cliche metaphors, surprising verb choices) as recommended by Campbell, McNamara, and Gilroy (2009). I then compared these four syntactic measures from the students' first essays to their last in order to analyse how essay topics and student positionality related to language use and grew from essay one to essay seven.

CHAT analysis acted as both my theoretical framework and method for analysis. I aimed to focus primarily on the instrument of language and how it contextually fit into the web of portfolio creation. Utilising CHAT analysis within English classrooms can lead to enhanced classroom collaboration with students, more collaboration with colleagues, and new skills exhibited by teachers (Wallace, 2007). However, CHAT analysis can also increase pressures on teachers who are already feeling stressed by other requirements (Wallace, 2007). By working with my principals and utilising my free periods appropriately, I felt as though I

could minimise these stress levels while still gaining the personal benefits as a practitioner and researcher.

Initial Concerns and Success Criteria

As a teacher of the students I was researching, I could not eliminate the power variables innate within this project. However, I minimised this power dynamic by:

1. Assigning this project to every student in the grade whether they were being analysed for this research or not,
2. Allowing the subjects to take ownership by creating their own pseudonyms,
3. Expanding upon themes created by students in the initial glasses activity,
4. Vocalising and emphasizing to students my want to empower them by aiding them in an identity formation that they were interested in, and
5. Sharing my own responses to the prompts as suggested by Bloom (1998).

Because the nature of this research revolved around how teachers could affect the identities of students, it was also important that this power dynamic existed as it remains in normative classrooms. Therefore, it did not need to be completely eliminated, simply carefully manipulated so that students felt safe during the analysis process.

Because I taught 10 international students versus 62 Turkish students, and because the culture of these international students was academically strong, it was difficult to find a normative international student who mirrored a normative Turkish student as my Turkish students typically performed significantly lower in English class. This had potential to affect the results as Skylar could be viewed as “unrepresentative” of the whole of the seventh grade Turkish students (Cohen, Manion, and Morrison, 2011, pg 210). However, by choosing a student who directly correlated both in personality and academic rigor with her international

counterpart, I eliminated differentiation due to academic difference in the "low achieving" sector.

I was concerned that by following a case study format, generalizability and replicability would be challenging (Bell, 2010). However, by utilising rich descriptions and in-depth language analysis, I would be able to give a voice to my students who were struggling in their identity development, something that would not be possible with quantitative analysis. I was also concerned with the small sample size of this project and the validity of the results. I would be interested to see the project duplicated with more students in the future.

From the research, I knew that the success of my project lay in the writing prompts. If the prompts were applicable enough to students' lives, the students would be able to respond organically. I would also need to ensure that students connected to the protagonists in the self-narratives that we were reading (Going Solo and The Giver), so they would gain vocabulary and writing style skills from these units to apply to their own portfolios and thereby create linguistic growth. If the prompts allowed for student choice, I would be able to let students guide the research process, thereby giving them agency within my research. This is something that I felt was important as a feminist researcher.

Bell (2010) also notes that practitioner research is unique in that the research process deeply affects students; it was important that I have a clear concept of what I was researching and follow an impeccable set of ethical procedures. Successful narrative analysis requires trust between the researcher and the participants (Bell, 2010), so it was important that my students were able to trust me as their teacher and as someone who would respect their confidentiality despite the power dynamics.

Finally, Bloom (1998) emphasizes the dangers of critical grading when students share such personal details. I decided to focus on a writer's workshop approach in which students could share and collaborate with other students before turning in the final portfolio essays. This would give students the ability to perfect their essays before turning them in. I also aimed to have an extremely clear rubric (see Appendix C); in this way, students would not be hindered by subjective grading, and I would not be taking off points for topics that I found less important due to my own bias.

I would know I was successful if my students began to utilise unique discourses as opposed to cliched terminology, if I perceived a growth towards affirmative language, if engagement in this project improved student morale, and if students were able to confront their identities while struggling with different discourses as specified by Holland et al. (1998).

The Students and Ethical Considerations

While all 72 seventh grade students formulated self-narrative portfolios, two portfolios were appointed for analysis. All students were fluent in English as exemplified by the Cambridge Progression Test and above-average grades in English class. All students, both international and Turkish, were able to speak and understand fluent Turkish. I chose the eight students based on their grades in my class, overall GPA, Cambridge Progression Test scores, and participation in class (a 100-point grade determined by their engagement during in-class discussions, their ability to come to class on time, and the consistency of behaviour). Of these eight, two girls were selected for full analysis due to the wealth of history that they exhibited, their interesting writing styles, their engagement in the project, and the unique perspectives that they exhibited.

Both Athena and Skylar received between cumulative grades of 88 percent and 93 percent in English class upon the conclusion of first semester. They both received a 13 out of 20 on the Cambridge Progression Test. They consistently turned work in on time and came to school consistently. Both girls were exemplary of a larger portion of the class.

After the conclusion of one English 40-minute English class two weeks before the project began, all analysed students were told their work would be reviewed . They were informed as to the nature of the research, the purpose of the research, how their language would be analysed, and their requirements, as well as the fact that they could opt out at any time. (A general script can be found in Appendix F.) They were made aware that this would not affect their grade positively or negatively in any way, that all work would be anonymously recorded, that written documents would be kept in a locked safe to which only I hold the key, that electronic documents would be kept on a password protected hard drive to which only I have the password, and that their anonymity would be assured. As an extra data point and a method for gaining excitement for the project, I allowed students to create their own pseudonyms.

All analysed students vocally confirmed their participation in the study. E-mails were sent to parents within a week of the students' approval in order to inform them of the nature of the study. CUREC approval was gained prior to any activity, and the head of my department signed the modus operandi giving me full consent. (See Appendix G for CUREC modus operandi.) Both middle school principals and the headmaster of the school were made aware of the research and sought to support the project. No students were given any benefits from participating in this study. I followed all BERA practitioner research guidelines. Photographs were to only feature inanimate objects and animals; no people were photographed throughout the duration of this project.

COLLABORATION

Due to the particular nature of my practitioner research, I chose to collaborate in three ways:

With regards to Gardner's (1983) Multiple Intelligences and a want for differentiation between international and national students learning within one classroom, I worked with two colleagues to make the project co-curricular. First, I collaborated with the fifth grade photography teacher. I asked him to offer instruction to my seventh graders before completing photography prompt responses of their own. He offered each seventh grade class a 40-minute lecture on photography with a focus on phone cameras and lighting. He also offered our class a photo box that we could use to take our photos. Second, for similar reasons, I worked with my school's drama teacher who also taught drama for the entire seventh grade. He would work on creating dramatic identity monologues, complete with masks made in art class, using the idea of "the masks we wear in the world" as a theme. The masks were created in art class with the help of the art teacher who also collaborated on this project. I aimed for this monologue to become a part of student's portfolios. However, because drama time is limited for students (one period per week as opposed to six in English class), most students were unable to finish this, and it was an optional addition to the final portfolio and not a final data point. Wilson, Chavez, and Anders (2012) suggest that using a variety of media can help students to make personal connections to curricula. This also allowed for me to include pop culture and technology (e.g. Instagram) in a way that would not have connected with students otherwise.

In the hopes of being culturally sensitive, I worked with the school's middle school English department, eight teachers in total not including myself, in order to ensure that my prompts were appropriate following the culture of the students. I presented my prompts to the

head of the department and brainstormed with her in order to create fluidity. With regards to Holland et al. (1998), I recognised that my ability to fit within the Figured Worlds of my students was central to them applying themselves to the tasks. It was important, especially with this being my first year at the school, that I ask for help from my colleagues who had been at the school significantly longer and understood the cultures of the surrounding community. Unfortunately, each of these teachers was international, so my ability to engage my Turkish students through prompts may have been affected due to the lack of feedback from a national teacher.

Finally, I presented my findings at both an English department meeting in June as well as at three professional conferences: the National Association for the Teaching of English Annual Conference 2018 (22-24 June), the British Educational Research Association Annual Conference 2018 (11-13 September), and the National Council for Teachers of English (15-18 November). As of the submission of this assignment, I have been shortlisted as a contender for the Early Career Researcher Presentation 2018 award at the BERA Conference and will be judged during my presentation at the conference.

DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION



Figure 3: Photographs of (Left) Athena's portfolio and (Right) Skylar's portfolio.

Overview

Athena is an international Bosnian student who has lived in Turkey, Georgia, and Armenia but never lived in Bosnia. She also has spent a majority of her life ashamed of her Bosnian heritage due to the teasing that she faced as a young girl. Athena's essays detail rejecting her parents' culture from a young age in part because she experienced bullying from her Turkish and Georgian peers about her last name and ethnic identity. She began speaking English at home instead of Bosnian because she wanted to disassociate from her homeland. Athena chose to use the pseudonym "Athena" due to its association with both the Percy Jackson series and Greek mythology. In her words, "I never thought of myself highly, but when I read about a Greek GOD that was FEMALE and owned WISDOM and JUSTICE?! She's my role model for life." By choosing this pseudonym, Athena makes clear her affinity for reading. Moreover, by using Athena as a name for herself, Athena is able to connect

herself to her role model, implying that she, too, is a strong woman. She chooses a character from her favorite novel and then authors herself to reflect that character.

Skylar is a Turkish student from Ankara. She has attended the school since kindergarten. She privately informed me that has been diagnosed with social anxiety by a psychiatrist, although because mental illness is severely stigmatized in Turkey, she has not formally reported it to the school. This is because, as colleagues tell me, school records are eventually sent to universities, and parents worry that mental illness will stifle acceptances. Skylar's explanation of her pseudonym is quite short at three sentences. She chose the first name of "Skylar" because she thought it was a nice name that she discovered in a childhood film. She chose "Fitzgerald" because it is her favourite actor's surname. She states that she "thought that they'd be sweet together." Her casual language contrasts with the lengthy amount of time (two weeks) that it took for her to think of this nickname. By giving few details, Skylar may be trying to maintain what she perceives as independence.

Upon analysis, I split data into three categories by formulating three theories:

1. Confronting one's ethnic identity is central in positioning oneself within a Figured World and identity development within that World.
2. Metaphors, specifically metaphors that relate students to the world around them, are a way that students can cope with, confront, and overcome their internal conflicts with the Figured Worlds that surround them, in this case with ethnic identities.
3. Moments of realisation and overcoming occur when students can vocalise their conflicts, identify themselves within that conflict, and shape their identities for themselves, thus creating their own agency.

Vocalising Home and National Ethnic Identity

I found that confronting one's ethnic identity is central in positioning oneself within a Figured World and identity development within that World. Both Athena and Skylar face internal conflicts due to their ethnic identities, a conflict that is central to their procession into the next developmental stage. For Athena, this is because she has fully denied her Bosnian heritage and is unsure which Figured World to follow. For Skylar, this is because she feels extreme opposition between who she wants to be and who she is expected to be due to her Turkish heritage.

One of Athena's central struggles is the lack of a stable Figured World, shown by her constant essay references to various homes and her central identified need to have one. In whatever ecosystem she joins, no matter the country, she finds a lack of stability and a need to define herself. Athena struggles to fit within the World around her because those aspects that make Figured Worlds so cyclical for those born into them (e.g. language that creates community, unspoken rules, etc.) leave her feeling like a constant outsider (Valenzeula, Amiot, and Ryder, 2016). Athena notes in various essays that she has struggled with bullying in Georgia, Armenia, and Turkey. She cannot define herself as an American because she is not American, even though she purposefully positions herself as one with her preference for English, style choices and Midwestern accent. Athena has undergone negative experiences with Figured World after Figured World, experiencing more instability than her peers, and she brings a history of bullying and of otherness, to new Figured Worlds only to perceive herself as disconnected. This disconnect is typical for students in nationally-focused international schools (Prabhakar, 2014) in which international students are in the minority. As her teacher, I was made aware that a group of boys would call her a "bitch" and a "teacher's pet" in Turkish when the international teachers were not paying attention; she could

understand their words, but was too afraid to respond to them. Her internationalness caused her to become disempowered (Prabhakar, 2014). In CHAT terms, her motivation for the activity of speaking was discouraged because the rules of the surrounding community engulfed her, and she seemed to position herself as submissive; her peers became her authoritative discourse.

However, while Athena does not fit into the Turkish paradigm, she also has spent a majority of her life ashamed of her Bosnian heritage due to the extreme teasing that she faced as a young girl. While research generally focuses on how international students respond to their parents' cultures when living in contrasting situations as a family, Athena says in her essays that she rejected her parents' culture from a very young age, even insisting on speaking English at home instead of Bosnian. Athena does not fit within the local culture nor does she have a culture to go home to.

In her photography presentation, Athena draws a metaphorical line between the Bosnian language and her relationship with her parents. Over Spring Break, inspired by this project, Athena found a book published by her mother that presented poetry about the Bosnian genocide. However, when Athena opened this book, she was unable to read it because it was written in Bosnian, a language that she could not read academically. She titled this slide "Mother Tries To Teach Helpless Daughter" and showcases a photograph of this book. For Athena, her inability to speak Bosnian was a wall between herself and her mother. It was a moment in which she faced this idea of not being able to "understand a language that I natively spoke." Fanon (1952) postulates that to speak within a specific register is to "assume a culture, to support the weight of a civilization" (pg 8). By refusing to choose a register, Athena is unable to build upon her identity until she accepts her own linguistic

identity within the Bosnian frame. According to CHAT, this is because Athena's line between community (her Bosnian peers) and her tools (language) is morphed.

Historically, Athena lacks an authorial voice through which to develop (Bakhtin, 1981). Because the language that Athena prefers (English) is neither her native language nor the language of where she lives, she finds herself constantly facing linguistic barriers with the Figured Worlds around her, whether they be at home or at school (Prabhakar, 2014). Athena will not speak Turkish when living in Turkey and will not speak Bosnian when Bosnia is her country of record. She will not speak Turkish without necessity because she believes she sounds too much like a foreigner. At the same time, Athena is striving to overcome common barriers faced by international students, specifically when referring to linguistic differences that cause her to become an outsider. This self-consciousness about speaking the local language is fairly typical for international students (Valenzuela, Amiot, and Ryder, 2016). Because of this, prior to seventh grade, Athena had been silent at school, normative behavior for international students (Prabhakar, 2014). She is still quiet, although with the formation of the portfolio, she has begun to grow in confidence and become more extroverted, shown during casual observations by her increased participation in class and her direct confrontation with her bullies.

Vygotsky (1986) suggested that adolescent growth requires social interaction with peers. However, I was curious as to how this would affect Athena, since she was primarily bullied by her peers. However, through this project, she was able to confront this issue. By disassociating herself with their Turkish culture and by associating with her Bosnian heritage, she is able to constitute this social growth by improving her relationship with her parents, talking to classmates about her personal history, and associating with an ethnic identity in order to form a Figured World. This is shown when she writes about the death of her Bosnian

aunt in her "Who Am I" essay, "My great aunt was always there. Maybe not right next to me, but she was always home." Her aunt represented Bosnian stability, and when her aunt died, Athena began to reassess her relationship with her home country. She begins to refer to the mass of the Bosnian population as a "we," allowing her Bosnian paradigm to affect her social interactions with the world. When her social peer, her aunt, has died, Athena is able to assess and reform her relationship with the Bosnian community, allowing the new bond with her ethnic community to account for peer social interaction. The line between tools and community is resolved.

It is only once Athena accepts Bosnian as her primary ethnic identity through the frame of this project that she is able to develop her own authorial stance and voice (Bakhtin, 1981). Upon reading diary entries over Spring Break, in the midst of the self-narrative portfolio project and her aunt's death, Athena decides that instead of hating her last name and nationality, she wants it to be a "centerpiece of my art wall." She forms a clay piece that presents her last name in the colors of the Bosnian flag. She creates her own artifact in order to determine her own positioning in a Figured World of instability (Holland et al., 1998). Athena has contained many struggling linguistic discourses, including Bosnian, Turkish, and English, but once she embraces her primary discourse, Bosnian, she begins to develop as a person. Her characteristic Bosnian last name "complete with the Z with a little hat" is her first way of confronting this. She even goes a step farther when presenting this piece by formulating complex ideals revolving around a lack of borders, stating that, "people will see me as Athena, not Bosnia." She is purposefully affected by her national identity without being defined by it. Moreover, by presenting it in this way within the public forum of our classroom, she is positioning herself in our Figured World.

Upon the conclusion of this project, Athena pushes for self-actualisation. She confronts her father who found a Bosnian grammar book for her, another picture presented in her final portfolio. She teased to the class that this book was mostly full of touristic phrases, but she is now able to practice her grammar and accent. She now speaks in Bosnian at home with her parents. By embracing her ethnic identity, Athena is able to accept her conflicting discourses and develop them purposefully; in doing this, she gains agency.

Skylar is perpetually concerned with how she is perceived by others, and in her perspective, she is not appreciated. Skylar's central conflict is performance-based between acting like who she feels like she is and acting like who she is supposed to be as dictated by the Figured Worlds around her, a World that aggressively discourages her inner self. She is grappling with plural sites of self (Holland, et. al, 1998) that do not complement each other and that sometimes completely contradict each other. This is due to the clearly defined Turkish ethnic identity that is localised around her. According to CHAT, the unspoken rules of Skylar's Figured World overwhelm her, and because she values a separate set of rules, this causes dischord.

Skylar views her Turkish peers as an authoritative species, often referring to their expectations and allowing them to dictate her behaviors as a Leading Activity. Her daily school life is performative, attempting to please her peers more than any other influence. Her relative social position in the Figured World of our school is central to Skylar's motivations, often reflected in her in-class behaviors and lack of focus. However, she is not fully invested in this World's system. This is because, according to her essays, what Skylar truly wants is a life very different than that which the peers around her expect, a life that she has been conditioned to expect for herself. This conflict between peers, parents, teachers, government, and self is not yet resolved for Skylar. She has not experienced enough artifacts that place her

within this Figured World, what Holland et al. (1998) refer to as “indices of positioning”, to fully identify and position herself within it. For instance, despite the fact that her Turkish peers are her primary influence, Skylar also has a unique home life with a distant mother.

With so many ideal selves being thrown at her, Skylar still has an idea of what she personally wants, an idea that is at odds with the authorities that surround her. This idea is concocted by a love for fine arts, a feminist perspective, and an obsession with Tumblr poetry. This is perhaps most exemplified when analysing future career choices. When detailing who she thinks she will be in 20 years, Skylar explores two options: the poetically-written travel journalist who sits atop a mountain while her soulmate “paint[s] the burning red and pink sunset” — an option that she notes comes from a “messy and confusing” brain — and the shorter, less explicated option in a general “high-paying carrier [sic]” with two children and a husband who live next to her parents’ house. She explains in a separate paragraph the difference between a want and a need. Skylar wants the former, again using prose to detail “Looking at stars, imagining believing,” but she should be a career woman with a family. After all, “the society … has never allowed people to properly achieve their dreams unless they’ve wanted to be at an acceptable job.” This is not uncommon in Turkey where women often find themselves at odds between traditional and modern womanhood (Alemdaroğlu, 2015). Especially in wealthier families, young women are now expected to go to top universities and be successful business women while raising functional, healthy families (Alemdaroğlu, 2015).

The contrast between acting feminine and pushing concepts of femininity away is navigated via various narratives (Alemdaroğlu, 2015). “While young women escape certain forms of femininity, they employ alternative narratives — such as independence, moderation, religiosity, and chastity, to negotiate self-value and respectability in society” (Alemdaroğlu,

2015). Skylar constantly repeats concepts of independence throughout all seven essays as a method for defining herself. This is not only a symbol of her want to be independent but also a cue for her anti-traditional stance. This is not unusual as in Turkey, traditional lifestyles are often associated with mothers (Alemdaroğlu, 2015); because Skylar's mother was unavailable through most of her childhood, Skylar's natural response is to push for a life of modernity. Unfortunately, this also leaves her torn between what she wants and what she feels the rest of the people in her life want for her. Alemdaroğlu (2015) believes that this contrast is actually a model for how Turkish women create agency for themselves. Moderating their lives between modes of femininity and respectability gives young Turkish women a mode for pushing boundaries while "saving face" (pg 9); it offers them a sense of agency within an otherwise authoritative World.

This plurality of self (Bakhtin, 1981) is difficult to express in Skylar's daily life because it is so far removed from the singular Figured World of Turkish national identity in which Skylar finds herself. In order to remain accepted within this Figured World, Skylar hides these facets of her personality from the World around her, only letting these characteristics show in these extremely personal essays. Moreover, she does not want her peers to see them. She asked me to not have her essays peer-edited because she felt they were too personal; she even offered to take a lower grade because of this. In our Figured World, her peers, not the teacher, dictate the rules that precipitate Skylar's behaviours.

The general "society" is never defined, but Skylar continues to refer to the general idea of an outward group or person that discourages her. This concept appears again and again, sometimes as the general "society" and sometimes as a vague group of peers, teachers, and parents. In her Essay 3, Skylar details how school is unfair because creative people never receive the credit they deserve. She postulates that "society" rewards those who excel at math

and science, but creative thought processes are unappreciated despite being more useful in real life. In her words, this "really sucks" because she is a creative person whose brain doesn't fit into the mold of what the World around her expects.

However, it's not just her mind. Skylar also feels pressure to look a certain way until "there are [sic] no self esteem left in any inch of your flesh." She details every way in which she must appear perfect and goes a step farther by saying, "like those models on the magazines your mother reads." This societal expectation is perpetuated at home and mentioned often enough that it may be the primary source of her self-deprecation. Bruner (2001, pg 33) also suggests that identity crises occur when children are faced with the conflict between who they are and "products of a literary/image-making industry," especially in this case when the image-making industry is propagated at home.

Because Skylar's mother is so distant, Skylar feels an unsurprising amount of dissension between what she wants (which she sees as quite modern) and what she feels her mother wants as a good Turkish woman (which she sees as significantly more traditional, including a traditional business career and living nearby). In Turkey, concepts of good citizenry and expected femininity are passed down by the mother of the home (Alemdaroğlu, 2015); Skylar is not sure that she wants to comply with what is normative, especially as her mother has not always been present in her life. In Turkish culture, this difficult contrast between traditionalism and modernity in women is common (Alemdaroğlu, 2015), perhaps moreso for those with difficult mother-daughter relationships.

The performative contrasts shown within Skylar's essays keep her from fully resolving the dilemma. In Essay 3, Skylar writes four paragraphs damning the state of the school and the extensiveness of judgement towards girls. However, she then backtracks in the fifth paragraph, quickly stating, "Although the essay is a bit shady and hateful towards

school, I don't really hate school. The examples I gave are pretty much happening at every middle school…" She minimises the situation and briefly discusses the positive experiences occurring in her life. It is almost as though in the midst of her honesty, Skylar realised that her English teacher would be reading this and found that even I, the teacher, was in an authoritative position and would dictate who she should be. She shifts from being totally honest to entirely performative in the space of one paragraph. Because her "autobiographical memory" (Bruner, 1990) was not entirely authentic, she was unable to grapple with the various discourses fighting within her. This is where Skylar ends the project; recognising the problems and contrasts at hand, but unable to fully face them in front of me or her peers.

Our Figured World, the World of Room 208 English class, is perhaps the only consistent place where Athena is able to excel, the reason that she is so open about her struggles. This is perhaps why Athena is able to become less performative than Skylar and thereby show more growth; she is able to connect all the facets of her CHAT triangle. Whereas Skylar already fits within a Figured World, Athena is desperate to fit into our classroom, to fit in anywhere. Because my classroom is a place that supports exploration of ethnic identity and internal conflict, she is simultaneously able to fit within our classroom's Figured World and to define her own as a Bosnian citizen abroad. This may be why Athena is ultimately able to find resolve within this project and Skylar is not.

Masks as Tools of Positioning and Agency

I found that metaphors, specifically metaphors that relate students to the world around them, are a way that students can cope with, confront, and overcome their internal conflicts with the Figured Worlds that surround them, in this case with ethnic identities.

Both girls consistently discuss metaphorical masks as negative tools that each of them use to cope with their Figured Worlds. Their masks hold different functions depending on

their contexts (e.g. metaphorical masks, physical costumes, etc.), and the girls mention them to position themselves in relation to the rest of the Figured World.

From an extended metaphor about a fairy tale that mocks the simplicity of her childhood to comparing humor to a drug, Athena is able to tell her story through poignant comparisons. This causes her primary theme to emerge: the theme of being accepted within a Figured World by wearing metaphorical masks and costumes, the ability to position herself. Each of her essays revolves around the tools that Athena has used in order to disguise herself within various cultures. Athena's situated voices (Bakhtin, 1981) competed as she grew, trying to fit within a Figured World. Bakhtin (1973) refers to this as "polyphony" and points to conflict that occurs when confronting past voices, supporting Athena's decision to build a mask in order to assimilate into the school community.

Athena later discovers that she needs to disguise herself through overt optimism and extroversion; she shifts from thinking about masks as physical costumes to the abstract. The sparkly outfits she tends to wear aren't enough of a costume to be accepted at our school; she needs to pack up her feelings and put on a mask created by attitude. She uses these metaphors to support her use of mask wearing out of necessity and fear. For instance, in her second essay, Athena uses the extended metaphor of dodgeball to reference how students bully her, which is interesting as Holland et al. (1998) suggest, "Fantasy and game play serve as precursors to participation in an institutional life" (pg 51). It is here that she mentions her choice not to cry; she creates a mask of emotionlessness. Athena has been a victim throughout her life, and she uses metaphor to shift her positioning from victim to empowered young woman.

These abstract mask metaphors are recounted directly in six of the seven essays. When she receives news that she is losing her hearing due to a hereditary disease, news that

will result in a loss of her great love of music, Athena is told to act positively by her mother. She starts to refer to the mask of positivity that she wears as a "border" that others cannot cross. She may not belong to a specific country to call home, but she has built her own borders as a person. After all, "you'd better look the part, or better yet, hide it."

However, by using masks Athena is eventually able to write her way into resolution and conclusion by creating an authorial stance (Bakhtin, 1986). In the final essay, Athena comes to complete self-awareness and states, "I'm a self deprecating mess with a low self esteem who has a tendency to hide behind humor so they can come across as human." Her humor, she states, used to act as a drug that she could hide behind, but now she has decided to make a change. Her humor was her mask, her costume. Now, she is maskless. She analyses her humor not only for the fact that she uses comedy to make friends, but also for its use as a mask (or in her words, a drug) in her daily life .

By writing narratives, these two students gained self-acceptance. By the end of Essay 7, Athena has decided to stop wearing a mask or a costume because she has recognized her worth outside of the acceptance of the cultures around her. She states, "Now, I am whatever the day in front of [me] tells me to be, and I don't entitle myself to anything. I'm okay with that." This is the last essay, the only one which breaches into present tense, implying that the Athena presented here is the Athena that we see in class whereas the Athenas in essays 1-6 were other people, masked actors, a performative discourse.

Bakhtin stated, "This process — experimenting by turning persuasive discourse into speaking persons — becomes especially important in those cases where a struggle against such images has already begun" (quoted by Holland, et. al, 1998, pg 183). She has begun the process of authoring herself instead of letting those around her author her (as noted in essays 2-4). When Athena begins to author herself, she stops embracing her bullies, blaming them

for her current status, or mocking herself. Instead, she starts to use terms that imply her worth and intelligence. For Athena, authoring herself, whether for this class or in her mind, is an act of agency that allows her to stop defining herself by nationality or the torment of her classmates.

In her final essay, Athena uses the metaphor of "a gift box filled with those emotions and tie it up with a pink bow" in order to describe how she has coped with the death of her aunt. She uses metaphor now to describe her dominance over her emotions and her appreciation of them instead of her methods for hiding them.

A defining feature of Skylar's essays is her use of cliche idioms in reference to herself. Each essay is loaded with metaphors and idioms of broken hearts, painting sunsets, and being trapped. Even her self-metacognitive analysis is relayed through metaphors as she calls her creative mind messy, chaotic, and confusing. Because she is utilising media-influenced tropes (Bakhtin, 1986), it is apparent that she lacks the agency to create her own. Skylar is more influenced by the ideal advertisements around her, the cliches, than the construction of her own identity.

Skylar's response to expectations is to wear what she refers to as a mask (metaphorical) in which she appears to be happy all the time. For instance, in second grade, Skylar cried at a school sleepover because she was a child and sleepovers were new to her. She states, "No one knew [that I cried], at least I was strong." It is a point of pride to Skylar that she was able to create a personal sphere and defy the outside World by hiding her crying, a World where no one would know that she wasn't entirely independent. She equates this hiding to independence. She has created a mask.

Skylar is initially focused on the masks that others wear, but this eventually shifts into a focus on her own mask of appearance. Whether it's the idea of "fake friends" or "bad

people," she is a firm believer that the world around her is disguised. Skylar feels pressured to look a certain way in order to combat the people around her. She details every way in which she must appear perfect and even, "like those models on the magazines your mother reads." This societal expectation to wear a mask is perpetuated at home and mentioned often enough that it may be the primary source of her self-deprecation.

Skylar struggles to improve her voice. She uses metaphors, but they continue to be pulled from cliches; she continues to be performative. This could be due to her ethnic identity embedding her significantly farther into the Figured World and a fear of exposing her true self which does not fit in. Because of this, her mask continues to be worn; she is unable to develop linguistically to unveil her real personality because she does not want her essential self to be shown. This may be due to her lack of a mother figure or the disdain of her peers, the localisation of ethnic expectations. Skylar is not able to exist so openly within this project, and because of that, her capability to linguistically develop is minimised and her ability to expand upon the idea of the mask is diminished.

Moments of Realisation

I found that moments of realisation and overcoming occur when students can vocalise their conflicts, identify themselves within that conflict, and shape their identities for themselves, thus creating their own agency.

In her last essay, Athena improvises and moves into present tense for the first time. Athena's agency is self-realized. She gains ownership of her life, makes strong statements about her self-worth, and states that she does not want any more masks or costumes. She decides to create her own authorial stance by utilising strong statements and powerful, unique imagery (Bakhtin, 1981). She is ready to be herself, despite the Figured Worlds (or lack of) with which she associates.

By confronting these issues in front of the class, Athena attempts to make sense of her linguistic capabilities in relation to her identity by vocalizing it for the authoritative and sometimes judgemental World of seventh grade to hear. She firmly states during the presentation that she is Bosnian; she does this through her last slide, an homage to the Mostar Bridge. “I imagine my brain, body, and (the remains of) my soul to be like the Old Bridge. It can collapse, sure, but it doesn’t mean that it can’t be built back up to be twice as strong as it was before.” In this way, Athena is able to connect the bullying the endured through her younger years to her Bosnian heritage. She is able to abandon a victimised stance and rise, much like her ancestors after the genocide. She connects the final strings of her national identity, linking her history to her present state, by showcasing a recent painting that she completed, and combining all plural, clashing senses of self into one final masterpiece. She titles this slide, “A Few Nostalgic Tears.” She states all of these declarations in front of the students who used to bully her as though to say, “No more. Now I am the boss of me.”

Athena’s use of specific words increases dramatically. She shifts from using abstract verbs such as think and know, and she gravitates to trace, admit, and locked. This can also be said for her adjectives, which transform from hard to a challenge. Her vocabulary increases, and her knowledge of the symbolic systems (Bruner, 2001) that surround her subsequently increases. In this way, she gains a “reflective consciousness” (Vygotsky, 1986, pg 171).

Athena also becomes less conversational. In her first essay, she opens with, “What’s it like? Huh, I never really thought about it- until now,” never defining what “it” refers to. She begins her essay process in a state of ‘dialogism,’ of answering an assumed question (Holland et al., 1998). By answering what she perceives as a question of existence, she is attempting to make sense of the stimuli that surround her. In contrast, her “Who Am I” essay closes with, “I will never be able to bullet point who I am as a person.” She does not answer the existential

question with another question but instead with a didactic, assured declaration. When she rewrote her first essay, she rewrote the introductory statement as an interview script, directly playing herself within an acted role. She now builds her own tropes (Bakhtin, 1973) and thereby increases her agency.

Athena's final statement in her last "Who Am I" Essay rings loudly with affirmation. She states, "Pain is a temporary emotion. When it arrives, it makes you believe that you will forever feel pain. It makes you believe that up is down and left is right, and that you burn forever. I have learned that pain is a lie and it will never entitle me. I am strong. I am in control, and it will stay like that until the day I die." With those final words, Athena has decided to author herself.

This newfound contentedness and self-awareness is also shown in her final portfolio in which she responds to a card that she hand wrote to her future self in sixth grade. She states to her sixth grade self, "You finally achieved one more puzzle piece in this mess of life, and although you don't quite see the picture yet, you will. I promise," a powerful statement in response to her sixth grade self who asked her to, "survive for me." She is no longer embarrassed of her personal history, whether ethnic or otherwise. By embracing her ethnic identity, Athena embraces her childhood self and parents her.

Skylar also shows hints of self-awareness and revelation. This is specifically related in her last essay when she begins by saying, "Answering this question ("Who Am I?") is as hard as the questions, 'Mommy or Daddy?' … As time passes on we shape into our personalities. By memories, by failures, by people, by laughters. These do not describe us, these shape us into what we are." Skylar directly draws a line between her parents, their absence, and who she is. This is contrasted in the next paragraph when she says, "I absolutely adore my family for always being so supportive and helpful," followed on the next page by "[When my

mother left] I felt like my mother had passed away." Skylar still has ghosts in her closet to face, ghosts that keep her from full agency and from the independence that she so desperately craves.

Skylar fluidly switches between past, present, and future in the essays. She feels a connection between who she was, who she is, and who she wants to be in 20 years. Her language is not determined by the tense in which she writes. Rather, her language becomes less casual throughout the seven-essay stretch as she slowly moves to express her newfound conclusion of independence. She moves from language such as "Although the essay is shady" and "One thing that really sucks" in Essay 2 to "I know that sounds tough" and "This funny little memory was total chaos" in Essay 7. She stops speaking colloquially and starts to experiment in a new register that balances academic and personal voice. She begins to purposefully choose her words, initially by experimenting in a discourse, an academic register, different than her usual speaking voice.

Skylar continues to exhibit contention between what she wants (to be a travel journalist, a soulmate who "paints the sunrise," to actively be herself without judgemental friends) and what she sees as an inevitable future as a good, Turkish citizen (a house next to her parents, a husband with two children, a business career, conventionally attractive), a concept in Turkey that is typically clarified by the mother of the home (Alemdaroğlu, 2015). As she begins to define her own idea of the "good life" (Freeman and Brockmeier, 2001, pg 75), Skylar can begin to separate herself from this conflict.

The project ends before Skylar can self-author. Skylar, having moved away from cliches and towards a new voice, has just begun the process of creating herself linguistically. The next step is to become self-authored regardless of who surrounds her and who knows, the ability to emote and exist openly.

Despite experiencing their lives in the same classroom and with the same students, Athena and Skylar seem to exist within separate Figured Worlds due to drastically different upbringings, schema, and influences. The pressures on students in the classroom begin outside of the classroom; these authorities are then brought inside by the students in the form of peer pressure, teacher expectations, and parental focus on grades.

Ethnic identity is central to the configuration of this difference and the resolution of the activity via CHAT. Skylar is sensitive to the peer pressure pushing in on all fronts because she is expected to belong, to be one of the Turkish students in the classroom. Because these pressures are supported on a local level for my Turkish students, their ability to feel pressure and to be held accountable to these pressures is intensified. Athena, on the other hand, experiences significantly less pressure from the World around her, likely because she has never had the convenience of relying on her classmates or her national identity for her self-esteem. Due to this difference, Athena develops significantly more, linguistically, from the first essay to the final portfolio; consequently, she presents significantly more evidence of identity development as well.

Athena's linguistic growth also undergoes more development from the beginning to the end of the project than Skylar. She begins to apply grammar (specifically in relation to commas in various sentence types, brackets, sentence variety, and periods) for clarity of thought as her thought process about the self that she wants to express becomes more and more clear. Her metaphors grow in their unique language. For instance, in her first essay, she compares her younger self to a princess, and by her last essay, she implies herself as an addict to the mask of humour. She also begins to step away from colloquial comments and questions, and she speaks with academic assurity, likely because she legitimately feels more

sure about her identity. An increase in vocabulary is a social action that can bring one closer to self-awareness and personal growth (Brockmeier and Barbaugh, 2001).

PRACTITIONER REFLECTION AND CONCERNS

As good teaching needs to be flexible, minor adjustments were made throughout the duration of this research. However, this may have affected final analysis results. The following changes were made:

- upon discovery of domestic abuse two months into the project, one of my student subjects was replaced with another student of similar ability level.
- the collaboration aspect of the project was difficult. In drama class, many students did not finish their dramatic monologues due to time constraints. Because of this, I did not include them in the final portfolio. I would be curious to see this same project attempted in a school that utilises the International Baccalaureate programme due to its focus on subject integration and student-oriented projects.
- offering 72 students substantial feedback every ten days was difficult, especially considering other work requirements (e.g. lesson planning, paperwork, etc.). To combat this, I changed the feedback methods throughout the project.The entire essay was graded for each assignment, but only certain sections of each essay were given feedback. For certain essays, I only gave feedback on the first paragraph. For others I gave feedback on the entire essay. For the last three essays, students were able to specify in which category they would prefer feedback: grammar, language, or interest. This also ensured that students would need to think critically in order to increase their grades for the final portfolio in May. In the future, I would allow more time between each assignment in order to provide more ample feedback.

- students were bit confused about requirements at the beginning of the project, but it did not become apparent until after Essay 4 when students confronted me about this. Consequently, I spent a 40-minute class period detailing a rubric with exact guidelines, and I allowed for a rewrite of Essay 4. The results were immediate, and grades immediately increased. It was important for me to connect the rubric with actual writing techniques. Thereby, the grade was directly associated to writing techniques that lead to identity development.
- juggling so many requirements from the Turkish ministry, the Cambridge exam system, and the school made it difficult to fully integrate the portfolio project in its first year. With some careful pre-planning, I believe that a second attempt would be more useful due to my newfound knowledge of time constraints, expectations, and student ability levels.

In the future, I would begin with the 40-minute detailed instruction instead of waiting for the fourth essay. I would allow the students to work on the integrated components in English class. Finally, I would try to include more narrative examples from which students could model themselves. While Going Solo and The Giver were useful texts, written samples from actual 12-year-olds are much more likely to be beneficial.

Many students were terrified to have their essays peer reviewed, and while a majority of them overcame this, I am concerned in retrospect that while this method allowed me to see how performative students could be and required students to grapple directly and socially with the world around them, it also perpetuated the bullying that I knew was occuring. In the future, I would keep essays anonymous in order to ensure safety for those students who were concerned.

Due to world-length constraints, I was unable to fully expand on each of my eight students' portfolios with a complete analysis. I would be extremely interested in recreating this project with a larger sample size and a larger word-count for validity. I would also be curious to focus on various demographics such as gender differences, wealth disparity, and age to see how these facets would affect the analysis.

Reflection on Collaboration

Collaborating with other teachers was met with mixed success. The collaboration with the drama teacher failed entirely due to the students' lack of class time in drama and the lackluster view that many students held towards non-core classes. Working with the photography teacher was somewhat successful, although due to scheduling issues, students were required to come to the 40-minute lesson during lunch. Because of this, many students were more focused on eating and socialising than paying attention. Ultimately, if I were to complete this project again, I would still aim for it to be co-curricular, but I would ensure that the teachers I was working with were able to complete their instruction during class time, either mine or theirs.

Working with the English department was a positive experience, and many aspects of this project are entirely due to the expertise of my department head. The prompts chosen were a fantastic way for students to be able to choose how in-depth they wanted to be with their autobiographies, and this was primarily due to brainstorming sessions with my department colleagues. However, it should be noted that none of these colleagues was a national teacher, and therefore, the Turkish students may have been less engaged with the prompts due to less Turkish feedback as I was creating them.

Finally, presenting at three conferences was a useful tool for organising my research and receiving professional feedback. Because of these conferences, a shortened version of

this paper is now in peer review with the English in Education journal where I am able to receive substantial feedback.

CONCLUSION

In analysing the writing samples of Athena and Skylar and then framing them under the lens of the other six portfolios, I was able to identify answers to each of the three research questions with varying degrees of success.

In what ways do my international and Turkish students express their identities through writing self-narrative portfolios in English class?

Seventh grade students have potential for poignant self-reflection and expression in self-narrative autobiographies when the guidelines are clear and the feedback is significant. With guidelines that also promoted unique ways with which to think about their lives (e.g. utilising figurative language and vivid verbs), students were able to find my requirement as expansive to their identities instead of confining. Initially, many students responded to prompts by utilising cliches and popular terms (e.g. “fake friends”). However, as the writing process continued, students began to write with unique imagery (e.g. humour as a drug, soulmates painting sunsets) and powerful language. While many of the first essays began with basic stories about what sports students favor and how silly they behaved as children, later essay topics evolved to include major life events like absent parents, insecurities, and a fear of their peers. I believe this is because as students received positive feedback on essays, including small personal portions, they began to realise that the parts of themselves that they most yearned to express were simultaneously the topics that were most appropriate for these essays.

What are the themes of identity that develop in these self-narratives, both from international students and Turkish students? How do these themes compare and contrast between the Turkish and international students?

Themes for both international and Turkish students were often determined from interactions with peers and parents. Specifically, metaphors often related to one's position with their peers and sometimes one's society. The students were often positioned by their ethnic histories; for instance, the Turkish students often felt significantly more pressure to be "popular" because they were surrounded by other students who followed the same community rules of what they found to be aesthetically pleasing or morally acceptable. International students, on the other hand, often felt excluded and related to the World in this way.

It became evident that ethnic identity and the culture surrounding it was central to one's portfolio responses. Specifically, the areas in students' lives (e.g. parents, teachers, media) that exerted the most pressures were typically the topics most expanded upon. Because these pressures are culturally enhanced, ethnic identity played a key role. Because Skylar faced conflict with pressures from her parents and peers due to her ethnic identity, her primary motivator in life is her desire for independence. Because Athena faced conflict with her inner dialogue that promoted an ideal person in order to escape bullying, Athena's primary motivator prior to facing this conflict was finding an ethnic identity with which to associate.

However, both Turkish and international students positioned themselves using masks. The difference is that while the Turkish students simply noted the existence of metaphorical masks with which to hide personal characteristics, the international students aimed to evolve themselves to change this habit.

Acknowledging the use of masks as a response to conflicts within one's ethnic identity and inner self eventually led to the creation of agency. For international students, this agency was more apparent because they have less localised ethnic expectations. As students

were required to face their conflicts, self-revelation could begin. For international students, this often took the form of self-authored statements of affirmation such as, “I will no longer be that person,” or, “I don’t know who I am, but that’s okay.” For Turkish students, this took the form of students recognising the source of their pressures and the beginning of formation of agency to step away from them.

How do these themes of identity change or evolve as student language changes and evolves through a 17-week period?

Almost every student showed substantial improvement in writing ability and engagement from January to May, exemplified by increasingly improved grades. However, the international students offered more points of conclusion and resolve. This may be because they face less pressure from the society that surrounds them (of which they are not actually a part) and feel that self-expression and acceptance by an international teacher is normative. Identity evolution was especially noted through the uses of metaphors (e.g. masks) and the awareness of these facets as negative parts of one’s life.

As specifically Turkish students such as Skylar became more aware of grammar concepts through the duration of the 17 weeks, it became especially evident when they were less vulnerable and honest because during these sections, their grammar would suffer (e.g. comma splices, rushed sentences, etc.). This is evident both in essays and in the photography presentations.

Implications for Research and Practice

While I in part created this project in response to a bullying epidemic at my school, I found that the project did not necessarily have any impact on the bullies nor affect the amount of bullying that occurs. However, the bullied students became empowered not to allow those bullies to affect their identity development or agency, a vital paradigm to gain at 12 years old.

This project made me poignantly aware how central the practice of psychology is for the teaching practice and the importance of developmental psychology training in pre-service teacher education courses at university. Because I completed in-depth analysis of Athena's and Skylar's portfolios, I was able to confront their problems as a teacher by talking to them individually, offering personal support, and helping to make my classroom a bully-free zone. It gave students a space to be vulnerable and receive the emotional support that they needed. However, there were many times in which I felt I was unequipped to respond to my students' emotional needs, and I believe the project would have been more effective had I coordinated with the school psychologist in order to aid the students in exploring their feelings. For teachers to be equipped with the ability to create these projects with student support in mind is vital to the continuation of the profession as a respected sphere of academia.

Along with this, teachers must have the ability to act as curriculum coordinators. I was only able to achieve such wonderful results because I was given the agency to incorporate my own curriculum design. In the United Kingdom, I have heard repeated stories of teachers lacking the affordances for designing their own programs in lieu of accountability and pleasing parent populations. I have found that this makes it quite difficult for teachers to act as researchers, to find passion within their craft, and to gain respect from parents.

Student-oriented projects that aid students in connecting their other Figured Worlds, registers, cultures, and schema help to promote student-teacher relationships, linguistic improvement, and general classroom engagement. Projects such as this one allow for teachers to acquaint with their students. For myself as a teacher, this meant that my student-teacher relationships improved drastically between January and May. Not only did their relationships with me improve, but as a whole, I saw significant linguistic growth in almost all of my students, a growth that I now attribute to identity development. Along these lines, this project

stressed the importance of rubrics being connected to actual writing skills (e.g. creating quality writing) and not simply mundane measurements because they are easy to mark (e.g. “use five vivid verbs”).

Educational researchers need to be careful that their research is tied carefully and purposefully to meaningful and logical means for teachers to implement their concepts. By using a portfolio project, I was able to confront concerns about identity development in a pragmatic was that could be applied to other teachers. Many teachers at my school have voiced concerns that researchers often develop lofty theories with few reasonable methods for implementation outside of a checklist. This project shows that research and teaching can be combined for the betterment of student lives.

Research that focuses on various Figured Worlds within multicultural classrooms can be utilised in order to confront the ongoing problems faced by globalised societies. By understanding the pressures that occur in the daily lives of our young people, researchers can help to build schools that are engaging for all students.

Whilst our students live and learn, we can help to guide their voices and make the world a better place; we simply have to offer them the space to do so. After all, in the words of Athena, “There you have it. It’s complication, long, and strange, but my identity isn’t something that I can find in a year. My identity is going to be figured out whilst I live and learn. I know that, and that is the truth.”

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Appendix A — Portfolio Project Handouts

Portfolio Self-Narrative Project 2018

For this project, you will be presented with a list of writing prompts and co-curricular projects that revolve around themes of identity. Between 3 January and 4 May (14 weeks) you will be asked to:

- Create and decorate a portfolio cover using a binder
- Respond to 7 of the prompts via writing (1-2 pages, double spaced, TNR, size 12)
    - Name and class in the upper left corner
- Respond to a chosen prompt via photography (5 photographs)
- Write a final "Who Am I" paper (3 pages)
- Complete a Drama/Art class mask project reflection slideshow

Between 16 March and 20 April, you will Writer Workshop the written forms of your portfolios in English class and turn in a final, edited version on 4 May.

Note: Unlike previous assignments, these papers MUST be printed prior to the due date. This is because we need to work on them in class on the dates that they are due. If you need for Mrs. Muse to print your paper, you must submit it at least 48 hours (2 days) prior to the due date so that she has time to do so.

TWO COPIES ARE NEEDED ON THE DUE DATES!!!!!! (One for grading, one for editing)

Timeline

Written Project Due Dates (2 printed copies of response due on each date):

17 January, 26 January,
7 February, 16 February, 28 February,
9 March, 16 March

Final Due Date (7 responses both original drafts and edited, clean drafts, 'Who Am I' essay, and photographs):

4 May

Overview

3 January - 16 March:

Work on 1-2 page writing responses for each due date

16 March - 4 May:

1. Edit written responses to the first seven prompts
2. Write "Who Am I" essay (3 pages)
3. Create photography response to one prompt (5 photographs of inanimate objects)
4. Create and decorate binder
5. Mask project (from drama/art)

4 May:

Turn in final binder with:

- 7 Written Responses (original, marked drafts and clean, new drafts)
- "Who Am I" Response (3 pages)
- Drama Response
- Photography Response (5 photographs of inanimate objects)

Writing Guide

Paper 1: Ages 1-5
Paper 2: Ages 5-7
Paper 3: Ages 7-9
Paper 4: Ages 9-12
Paper 5: Prompt 1 (See Next Page)
Paper 6: Prompt 2 (See Next Page)

Paper 7: Prompt 3 (See Next Page)
Final "Who Am I" Essay (not due until 4 May) [You will meet with Mrs. Muse one-on-one to edit this]

For each "Ages ____-____," you must share a story from when you were that age that you feel exemplifies who you were. You may need to talk to your parents to get ideas.
For each "Prompt" response, you must answer a question (of your choice) from the list below.

You should aim to answer two questions in all papers:
1. What happened?
2. Why does it matter?

For PHOTOGRAPHY PROMPT (due 4 May), you must choose one of the prompts and answer using 5 pictures of inanimate objects.

The prompt responses do not need to be submitted in any particular order.

Prompts

Prompts may be combined.
If a student has an idea for a prompt, they simply need to ask me for permission first.

Prompts
What are three events that summarise who you are?
What do you wish your teachers knew about you?
What do you wish other people knew about you?
What is it like to be an adolescent girl/boy in 2018 Turkey?
What is one metaphor that you feel exemplifies you?
What do you think is the kindest thing a person can do for another person?
What is something that you have overcome?
How do you think other people see you?
How does being a Turkish/international student affect who you are?
What is the weirdest thing about your family?
What traditions are important to your family?
Who is a mentor that has most affected your life? What did they do to affect your life? What are they like?
How has your religion (or lack thereof) impacted who you are?
What do you think you will be like in 20 years? (2038)
What is the hardest thing about being a girl/boy at BLIS?
How does the language that you speak affect how you act or are perceived?
What advice would you give to your fifth grade self?

Marking

The initial drafts will be graded out of 20 points total:
5 points- Grammar
5 points- Interest (Adjectives/adverbs, Vivid verbs, Specific Nouns, Figurative Language, varying sentence types)
5 points- Language
5 points- Following Instructions (Proper layout, font, double spaced, etc.)

NOTE: For the initial drafts, you must print your copies or e-mail them to Mrs. Muse at least 48 hours in advance

The final portfolio will be graded out of 200 points:
140 points - Edited essays
20 points - Photographs
20 points - Final "Who Am I" Essay (3 pages)

10 points - Binder (decorative, clean)

****10 points - INCLUDING THE ORIGINAL DRAFTS AND THE CLEAN FINAL COPIES

Photography Response

Mr. Dilnutt is going to come into our classroom on the week of 2 April to show us how we can tell stories through photographs. Your job is to complete as follows:

- Choose one of the portfolio project prompts that you have not answered yet
- Answer the question using 5-8 photographs that you take from your own device (these photographs must be of inanimate objects, no faces allowed)
- Create a Powerpoint using these images and be prepared to share with the class on **Wednesday, April 18**

You will be graded on the following for a total of **20 points**:
- Do your pictures answer the prompt question? (5 points)
- Powerpoint grammar (5 points)
- Powerpoint clarity and aesthetics (5 points)
- Body language and diction (5 points)

This powerpoint will later be printed and placed inside your portfolio binder on 4 May.

Appendix B — Weekly Essay Rubric

	1	2	3	4	5
Grammar	Paper is difficult to read due to extremity of errors.	Multiple types of errors that fully distract the reader. These errors are found often.	Multiple types of errors (e.g. commas in compound sentences and spelling errors) that begin to distract the reader.	A few minor errors that do not distract the reader.	PERFECTION! No errors!
Interest (Fig lang, adj/adv, specific nouns, vivid verbs)	Interest criteria are not evident.	Missing multiple interest criteria in the essay as a whole.	Missing one of the four interest criteria in the essay as a whole (e.g. no figurative language in the essay) OR missing two+ of the interest criteria in a paragraph.	Missing at least one of the four interest criteria in a paragraph. Unclear, could be improved.	All 4 interest criteria evident and amply placed throughout essay (in each paragraph).
Academic Language (dead words, sentence fluency, emotions)	Language is solely casual.	Author uses many dead words OR the paper is difficult to read due to wording problems OR author only describes what they did sans emotion.	Author uses two dead words OR there are many wording problems OR author only describes what they did sans emotion.	Author uses one dead word OR there is a wording problem OR author only describes what they did sans emotion.	Author sounds like a scholar, even when sharing fun or humorous memories.
Following Instructions (double spaced, size 12, TNR, length, name in upper left corner)	No instructions are followed.	3+ major errors or many minor errors.	2 major errors or many minor errors.	1 major error or 2 minor errors.	FANTASTIC! No errors!

TOTAL /20
What you did well:
What you can improve on:

Appendix C — Final Portfolio Rubric

FINAL PORTFOLIO RUBRIC

NAME and CLASS:

TOTAL POINTS: (/200)

Section 1: Completion (Total /80)

MARKED (5 pts each)

- □ Essay 1
- □ Essay 2
- □ Essay 3
- □ Essay 4
- □ Essay 5
- □ Essay 6
- □ Essay 7

FINAL VERSIONS (5 pts each)

- □ Essay 1
- □ Essay 2
- □ Essay 3
- □ Essay 4
- □ Essay 5
- □ Essay 6
- □ Essay 7

PHOTOGRAPHY POWERPOINT (10 pts)

Section 2: Portfolio Cover (/10 pts)

5 Pts Cleanliness and Creativity-
5 Pts Following Instructions-

Section 3: Final Essay Rubric (Total /70 pts)

Essay 1
Made Critical Changes (5 pts)-
Grammar, Interest, and Language (5 pts)-

Essay 2
Made Critical Changes (5 pts)-
Grammar, Interest, and Language (5 pts)-

Essay 3
Made Critical Changes (5 pts)-
Grammar, Interest, and Language (5 pts)-

Essay 4
Made Critical Changes (5 pts)-
Grammar, Interest, and Language (5 pts)-

Essay 5
Made Critical Changes (5 pts)-
Grammar, Interest, and Language (5 pts)-

Essay 6
Made Critical Changes (5 pts)-
Grammar, Interest, and Language (5 pts)-

Essay 7
Made Critical Changes (5 pts)-
Grammar, Interest, and Language (5 pts)-

Section 4: "Who Am I" Essay Rubric (/40 pts)

	2	**4**	**6**	**8**	**10**
Grammar	Paper is difficult to read due to extremity of errors.	Multiple types of errors that fully distract the reader. These errors are found often.	Multiple types of errors (e.g. commas in compound sentences and spelling errors) that begin to distract the reader.	A few minor errors that do not distract the reader.	PERFECTION! No errors!
Interest (Fig lang, adj/adv, specific nouns, vivid verbs)	Interest criteria are not evident.	Missing multiple interest criteria in the essay as a whole.	Missing one of the four interest criteria in the essay as a whole (e.g. no figurative language in the essay) OR missing two+ of the interest criteria in a paragraph.	Missing at least one of the four interest criteria in a paragraph. Unclear, could be improved.	All 4 interest criteria evident and amply placed throughout essay (in each paragraph).
Academic Language (dead words, sentence fluency, emotions)	Language is solely casual.	Author uses many dead words OR the paper is difficult to read due to wording problems OR author only describes what they did sans emotion.	Author uses two dead words OR there are many wording problems OR author only describes what they did sans emotion.	Author uses one dead word OR there is a wording problem OR author only describes what they did sans emotion.	Author sounds like a scholar, even when sharing fun or humorous memories.
Following Instructions (double spaced, size 12, TNR, length, name in upper left corner)	No instructions are followed.	3+ major errors or many minor errors.	2 major errors or many minor errors.	1 major error or 2 minor errors.	FANTASTIC! No errors!

Appendix D — Athena Essays

[redacted]

What is it Like to Be an Adolescent Girl In 2018 Turkey?

What's it like? Huh, I never really thought about it- until now. When you're my age, nobody knows how to treat you. Adults don't know how to treat you, or what you're into so talking to people in my age group is quite impossible. In other words, it can be really hard. Sometimes, you just want to be six again, because you want to relive being excited by toys and candy. Not like being allowed to go out by yourself and have mind of your own is bad, but it's nice thinking about how easy things seemed when I was younger. Or is that just me?

As a kid, I craved to be able to join in on my parents conversations about politics and the news but I knew absolutely nothing, and I found those topics agonizingly boring. If they were talking about 'My Little Pony' then I would have been all in, blabbing on and on about dolls and which character was my favorite. I bet that was how they felt talking about those 'serious adult topics' which I still kind of don't get today. Back then, I was so confused as to why I was being waved off when adults were indulged in their conversations. In my head, I was an adult too. I guess I just wasn't disguised as well as I thought I was.

At around the age of three, we went to Istanbul. Of course, being the stubborn child that I was, I persisted in wearing a baby-pink tutu and thin tights. I wore a plastic, silver crown on my head that had purple fluff lining the edge paired with transparent, plastic heels that were three sizes too big and were covered in glitter.It looked like someone had dumped a whole pot of silver glitter nail polish all over the heels. It was quite a chilli afternoon, and the clouds held heavy over the course of the day, but my spirit was bright and I was ready for adventure.

We kept on walking, admiring the trees and scenery around us. Looking back at it, it seems quite funny. I remember being so fascinated by the trees and the roads when we had the exact same puzzle of roads and shops back home in Georgia. Around the streets, men were dressed up in costume, white suits with golden chain running from shoulder to hip and knee high black boots. All the men were sitting in black carriages. On some of the other carriages, the paint was worn thin and chipped at the edges, but their beauty remained. As roads usually do, a road was lined with white strips which meant that it was meant to be crossed at certain times. I grabbed my father's hands and bobbed around on my toes, the plastic soul noisily clicking against the pavement. The time came to cross, and my family and a bunch of other tourists including one of the costumed men started waddling across the street. Half way across, I let go of my fathers grip, and started skipping happily, the wind blowing my uneven bangs into my eyes, my chapstick becoming suddenly cold. I kept on skipping until I felt a sudden jolt, a sensation of cold, quickly realising that my slipper had fallen off, and was laying two steps away from my previous landing. My small foot hit the uneven cement, and a pang of uncomfort struck my foot. Embarrassment seeped into my cheeks with the colour of red. I stood there for a few seconds, wondering if I should pick it up or keep walking, but before I could do anything, I felt a soft tap on my shoulder. I swerved around, expecting my parent to be there, when instead I was greeted with the costumed man. A polite smile tugged at the corners of his mouth as he knelt down, my plastic shoe placed in his palm. He delicately took my ankle and slipped the slipper on.

I told him thank you in English, and he tapped me on the head. "Be careful", he said, his Turkish accent coming out thick. I felt my mother's hands on my shoulders, maneuvering me out of the way because of the cars. I felt like Cinderella, even if this man who was probably around twenty or so years older than me wasn't my 'knight in shining armor'. He was kind enough to act that part for a little girl

who was trying to act all cool, skipping around roads in tutus and tiaras. He was able to see through the obnoxious child I was, and see that all I wanted was to be the people I dressed up as. Plus, he was already in the appropriate attire, why *wouldn* 't he play the part .

[redacted]

What Is One Metaphor That You Feel Exemplifies You?

(Me and My Bully)

When I was younger, I used to let people toy with me. I would consume myself in all the rude and unnecessary comments little kids were pelting at me. It was an unfair game dodge ball, and it felt like it was the whole world was against me. Seven billion people against one. I was so confused as to why I was being called stingy names unless they were actually true. I didn't realise it then, but the truth was that all these bullies wanted- was a reaction. They fed on my tears and sadness, and enjoyed watching me race to the bathroom. It was all a joke to them.

"Optimism is the faith that leads to achievement. Nothing can be done without hope and confidence."

~Helen Keller

From a young age, I grew very introverted and pessimistic. I was more like my dad in that sense, and it clearly showed. Being bullied and teased from such a young age taught me that the world was mean and hopeless. I thought that people would always act like this towards me and I just naturally detached myself from the people around me, and made my presence unnoticeable. When I turned five, me and my family moved to Armenia. The first few months were fine, and I found our house quite interesting, considering it was ancient and huge, a green roof and burgundy exterior. We had a metal bridge that connected to the house and out onto the driveway. Everything seemed cool and new until I was shoved into a small, crammed white bus, and shipped off to a new place. School. Thus began my new found hatred for it. These old people were making you carry things, and I was forced to memorize where certain rooms were and don't even get me started on French class. The most confusing language in the world, let me tell you. I didn't even try and like it- I immediately boxed my brain, and told it that I

hated the place. Waking up early in the morning wasn't even the worst part. It was the kids that flooded the place. Specifically one boy, who I won't name [redacted]. We were in the same class and he held a natural resent for me just like all the other kids did. I was the only female in the class which I guess made a little sense, as a lot of the boys were friends with him, and I was (somehow) ruining the fun. One day, during P.E (which was held outside), we had been sat down and yelled at, as our class was a small group of brats that never listened to the teachers, and were too stubborn to get their shoes dirty..

We sat on the floor, the teachers voice booming over the field, making some of the passing highschool students jump and glare in our direction. I looked down at the grown, my eyes now facing the vibrant grass that tickled my knees while I sat. My hands drifted to the ground, picking at blades and examining them in further depth. I was drifting off into my own world, the whispers from other children around me molding into one off key choir. It felt as though nothing could have ruined my little bubble of calmness, but little I know- it could easily be disrupted and killed. A sharp sting pierced my ears, as I felt small, frozen hands clamp onto the sides of my face, and pull me up. Tears stung my eyes as I met eye to eye with the boy. I took a shaky breath as he let go of my ears and gave me an intimidating glare. "WOULD *YOU* LIKE TO BE PULLED OUT OF THE GROUND AND KILLED? HUH?" He roared. The teacher didn't even bother to stop him, or to make him quiet down- in fact, he found it quite amusing. That's when I felt my body give up. [redacted] kept on digging and digging at my awful crime of picking at a blade of grass, until I gasped for a breath of air that I had sealed in my chest. The class fell silent as the breeze quietly blew by, as if saying *'don't mind me- im just passing by'*. Finally, the teacher took a step forward and pressed a hand on his shoulder. A side smile crept onto his face, as he whispered for him to sit back down and told him that *'It wasn't worth it- she's just a girl'*. I gulped

down my tears of fear, and let the embarrassment engulf my body. I wanted to become invisible. The teacher gave me a look of pity, and the rest of the class was followed by a game of awkward tag that I gleefully rejected, walking off to the side of the field where no one would see me, disintegrating from the tense atmosphere that pulsed around me and my bully.

At that moment, watching all the kids run around, laughing and enjoying the game- I realised that I had done something justifiable. I had two choices in that situation. Either I could have crumbled to the floor, and let myself cry- or I could stand and look him in the eyes. I had found myself lost in this world of negative comments and snarky remarks that I forgot that *I* am the only one in control of me. *I* have the choice to falter and weaken, and *I* have the choice of looking my bully in the eye and standing strong- even if no words were being shot back at him. Crying will get you nowhere in life. Yes, it may be a light coping mechanism, but just like alcohol or smoking, it'll fade away at some point, and you will have to clear your tears away, and face the problem. Instead, you *have* to pluck up your strength and turn your confidence on, and be optimistic. If you let yourself fall down, then your strength and hope will plummet down with you. It is up to you to support your happiness, because no matter how many people there are to love and care for you, the only person in the end- is *you*.

Thank you,

Goodnight.

[redacted]

How is it Like Being an International Student in [redacted]?

(Things Can Only Go Up From Here)

Dear [redacted]

I have to admit, you turned my world upside down. When I first arrived, you acted bitter towards me. I was confused as to why, seeing as I was just a girl in a rainbow jumper with a gap in between her two front teeth. I walked into your arms with a smile and hope, but you quickly made me realise that I was not welcome even to the slightest. I was greeted with cold people who only saw me as an outsider, and viewed me as the type of person only to exist. The International who would never fit in. Nothing more. Your grin seemed to fade whenever I was near, and if I were to be completely honest- I felt the same way back.

Our first year together was awful. You despised me, and I resented you back. Everyday was difficult for me, but you found it amusing. I hated you for that. The people you seemed to love and except were similar to people in my old school in Armenia. But something sparked in me- it lit up the pathway in my life that you seemed to blow out with one swift motion. I remembered that I was (in fact) not alone. In that small building that seemed to populate only one hundred students, I was not the only one who felt the way I did. I knew that somewhere, among those one hundred people, somebody felt just as hideous and voiceless as I did- they were just good at disguising it. So, I packed up my feelings, and let them bubble in my chest. I rarely expressed myself, and found that it was easier to just disintegrate in the crowd of people, rather than stand out. Needless to say, I stopped wearing my sparkly rainbow jumper.

Second year- where do I begin? Well, I am happy to say that you became kinder. The children that used to be so appalling seemed to disappear from my life, one by one, and the ones that stayed grew used to the fact that I wasn't 'one of them'. I wasn't the popular Turkish girl who was funny and pretty. I'm not gonna say that things got a lot easier, but little by little, day by day, you seemed to open up to me. Thats a major improvement. Some days, I must admit, you were hard to work with. You set rules and boundaries that I tried to respect and live with, but it seemed as though you would toy with them every now and again just to ruin my day. There would be weeks in the month when you had no trouble erasing our progress, and would beat me in the face with harsh comments about my looks, or my annoying, monotone voice. But they were things to get used to. Maybe I was doing something wrong, but I could never tell, seeing as whatever I did, you somehow found it offensive. There was specifically one time. You had decided that this particular week would be the week where you shattered me, and let me falter and collapse. You would not let me out of your clutch, and no matter where I

went, you seemed to be right behind me, breathing down on my neck, reminding me that I would never survive in a place like this.

I remember this week quite clearly. You refused to leave my side, and even on the bus ride home, you draped the warning onto my chest, where I would let myself suffocate under the heartache. This particular failure of mine had strangled me to my core. Quite literally. It was because of a boy. It seemed as though I had a reputation for getting bullied by boys. That stung. It was recess, and the day was quite cold. You let the sky loom over my head, making the grass itself shiver with uncomfort. My coat was zipped up to my chin, shielding me from the bitter cold you unleashed upon the grounds. My hair was tied in two uneven pigtails, and its strange, blonde colour seemed to melt into each other, and give off a muddy brown. I was hanging out my the pine trees, the branches and leaves swerving around me, dancing with the gusts of wind that usually blew by. I stood stagnant in the cold, my wrists bare and exposed, making my arms strike with goosebumps. I closed my eyes, and let the frozen weather consume me. Up until then, my insides couldn't have felt worse. My face turned numb, and the bitter wind turned my tears of winter to ice.

I felt a powerful tug at one of my pigtails. My head was sucked back, far enough for my skull to pang against a tree branch. A sharp cackle escaped a boys mouth, the tone quite familiar. I knew exactly who he was. His grip became tighter as he tugged at my hair, splitting the section of hair in half. My arms flew to the back of my head in search of the boys hands. I let out a strangled shriek, which was muffed out by the stream of laughter that had began to surround around me. The boys hands let go of my hair, but when I tried to run away, a painful stab stopped me. He had tied my hair to the branch- I couldn't escape. Only then did the panic truly settle in. A crowd of kids- watching me- fail. Failing at what, I still don't know, but whatever I felt like a burden at, it made me want to fade away. Eventually, a teacher arrived, a stern look or concern plastered on to her face. She glanced at me, and then at the crowd of kids that quickly began to flee. I whimpered in defeat as the teacher walked towards me, and sighed in exhaustion as she tried to untangle my hair from the pine tree branch.

Around my fourth year with you did I realise how much you did to me. Not just the negatives, but the good hearted things. You introduced me to bitter people, who were selfish and rude at heart, but you led me to great people, who related to me, and made me smile. You have been able to make me grin at the view around me, and you have helped morphe this school into a place I love being (maybe not at eight in the morning, but I think you get what I mean). That boy who had tied my hair to the branch was the boy who made me scared of the world around me. He made me feel unsafe and uncomfortable around people, but with time, he taught me that you must not be submissive to it. He tied my hair to the tree branch, and at some point, I stopped fighting for my freedom, and let him hurt me. I let him physically and emotionally hurt me by forcing me to let him tie my hair to the branch. Though the year could have flown by without him, he helped me realise that fighting for what you deserve is the only way to be free. Thanks, [redacted]

Still, at times, you can be a pain. I can too, and I know that. Though we have had our fights and misunderstandings, you kept me in this loop of people who have helped me make the person I am today. You helped me become open to my nationality and open to the fact that I was *me,* and nothing else. I have to thank you for *that*.I wouldn't trade this experience for the world. I know I still have a year of you left, but I know that once I say my last goodbyes, and get shipped off someplace else, I will always remember you, and the memories you helped me create.

Love,

[redacted]

[redacted]

What is Something That You Have Overcome?

(Personal Silence)

Otosclerosis: A hereditary disorder causing progressive deafness due to overgrowth of bone in the inner ear.

That's what I looked up after my doctor's appointment on January 23rd, 2018. It was the day when I couldn't live the way I was, and decided to deal with the problem I was facing my whole life. I awkwardly dragged my feet into the building I had visited so many times. The hospital, a towering empire filled with rooms and doctors that saved people's lives. The place that I was most afraid of. Everytime that I had been there, I was told bad news. Like when I was eight, and I was told that I had a heart murmur (a strange sound occuring during the heartbeat cycle, like a swooshing sound caused by the turbulent blood near your heart). Or when I was eleven, and felt a throbbing pain in my lungs, and I was reassured that it was because of my heart murmur triggering my difficulty in breathing, and that I was going to get used to it. I didn't enjoy being at the hospital.

I felt the rushing adrenaline and cortisol (hormone that releases stress) rush as I walked in, quickly being crammed into a small room with a man who wore a white lab coat and dark hair streaked with grey. I sat down, staring down at my feet, noticing how filthy my Converses were. He introduced himself to my mother and me. I explained my symptomes, how the world seemed to go silent from a few meters away, and the deep hum that would erupt in my right ear after a loud sound occured. He looked at me with a confused face, fumbling with the test papers in his hands. Then my mother followed by saying that my grandma is hard of hearing, and most of the family from my dads side is aswell. That made sense. My sister had dealt with terrible vision from a young age due to my grandmother from my

mother's side, while I was *born* with a slight deafness from my dads family. I sighed thinking about. The doctor murmured something under his breath which I could not make out to save my life.

"I believe your daughter has…" He twirled his fingers, as if chasing the words he needed in the air. "I believe it is Otosclerosis in English."

I knew exactly what that was. I had studied it on my own just a few weeks back. I think that is it, a slight of deafness that was never going to go away. A permanent issue that could only get worse.

"It seems that she also has minor nervous tissue damage in both ears. Its blocking her from hearing things properly. Thankfully, her left ear is much better than her right ear. As long as she doesnt listen to anything with headphones and isn't exposed to any loud sounds, she should be fine." He said, giving me a side smile which doesn't make me feel any better.

After some bicker between my mom and the doctor, he assigns another appointment three months into the future to determine if I will be getting a hearing aid. That stung to hear. I expected to come and to be told that nothing was wrong. But of all things to find out- a *disorder?* Me and my mother eventually leave with my test scan and a receipt. Tears began to weld up in my eyes, but I blinked them away as I slammed the car door shut, and stared out the window until we got home.

Once we finally arrived back at the apartment, the first thing I did was run off into my sisters room. She was my mentor. The person I trusted the most. [redacted] supported me and never treated me like I was stupid (unless I was acting so) or pathetic. She always gave me her reassuring nod and hug reminding me that everything would be ok. I told her every single detail, from the uncomfortable test to the feeling of wanting to vomit in the doctor's office. She bunched up her lips to one side, her eyes glazed over with a veil of uncertainty. She couldn't figure out what to say to help me this time. She stammers on her words, covering her lips with her palm. She glanced up at my mom, who was leaning

against [redacted] door frame, her lips spread out thin on her pale face. I looked up at her, her posture slumping and tired. She took one more measured breath before exhaling warily, looking at me with pity in her eyes. She didn't know what to say to me either. I knocked my head back, a slight crack popping out from my neck. I let my back fall against her stiff mattress as I stifled a sob, the one I had been keeping in the whole day.

I might seem dramatic. I understand if it seems like that. I told myself that every time I felt the familiar cry of frustration grow in my throat. [redacted] *stop being dramatic. It* really *can't be that bad.* That's what I felt everybody was on the verge of telling me. I assumed that everybody I moaned about it to was thinking about blurting out how dramatic I was being, and how there was no way that not being able to listen to music on the bus or hear from far away could be so miserable. It can. Or at least it seems like that to me. There was this specific day that proved it. It had been a week from the doctor's appointment. It was a foggy Monday, gloomy and boring, the bus shaking and making sharp turns, the fluorescent lights annoying the sleepy students. I sat there, the chatter of little kids buzzing around my head. I groaned, shifting my position in the back seat, forgetting that I didn't have my music to drown out the voices around me. I puffed out a sigh, cupping my face, letting the material of my jumper comfort me. Music used to be part of my personality. I played piano, my family is Bosnian (which means that music is a part of our daily routine) and I lived with music my whole life. Now that it was gone, my life seemed so much more miserable without the constant stream of harmony and instruments and voices. My life became plain and the world around me appeared boring, like it was reset to black and white.

Then I remembered my mom. A woman who took care of me, loved me, encouraged me, comforted me. She always had some sort of saying to get me through the day, and at that moment, I knew that I had to think of something she would say to me.

"Your attitude is the key thing that will determine the way you will deal with a situation."- [redacted]

I smiled thinking about. That was the first thing she told me once we got in the car on our way back home from the hospital. I guess I was wrapped up in my depressing, selfish thoughts that I forgot that she was there. She wasn't mad at me, or disappointed. How could I expect her to understand how and what I'm feeling if she doesn't deal with what I have? I didn't realize it then, but I know now that even though she couldn't quite pinpoint my exact problem, there was one thing that she knew I had to keep in mind. That your attitude is the first step towards healing. Maybe not completely for me, seeing as my disorder is permanent, but my behavior and response to my situation is the first thing that will determine how I live. Even though I can't listen to my depressingly obscure music, or hear the vibrant atmosphere that was hidden in conversation around me, I still can do things with my life that some people can't. I still have my piano and radio which I could make softer in tone. Let me tell you, the rest of that bus ride didn't seem so difficult to get through anymore.

[redacted]

5

How does the language that you speak affect how you act or are perceived?

(*Mi smo nebo sto se plavi*

mi smo sunce sto se sjaji)

"Love your country, not for her power or her wealth,

but for her idealism and selflessness."~ Ronald Reynolds

If any sappy quote could summarize the way I feel about my country, it would be this one. I'm from Bosnia. Growing up, I didn't know much about Bosnia. All I knew was that we had been through a great deal of pain and heartache, and that all though we have suffered through thousands of deaths and poor circumstances, we still exist. We are still in the south of Europe and we still hold culture, love and exceptinse. Never in my life have I been afraid of saying i'm from 'the heart shaped country' because I knew that if anybody were to search up 'Bosnia i Hercegovina', they would see how much pride and respect we own and cherish.

Now, like all countries do, we have a language. It's confusing, a mixture of mainly Latin, Turkish, Persian, Russian, Italian, a bit of Greek and a bunch of other languages that I can keep on listing. I always found it quite beautiful and fascinating how much our language brought our people together. It was a beat we could all dance to, and a song we could all sing. Maybe to other citizens, it didn't mean much. Just a code we used to communicate. To me, it meant so much more. It was an invisible connection that roped me to my countries routes. I spent so much of my life away from home, that one of the only connections that could possibly remind me of it was the language that was so rarely spoken in the places I lived. During summers when I could be in Bosnia, the first couple of days would be a spent blabbing on an on to my parents how strange it felt to hear my mother tongue again, and the

curl of nostalgia it would give me, quickly being waved off and replaced with a smile that reminded me that I was back home.

Nobody thinks I'm from Bosnia. Absolutely nobody. I don't blame them for it. I learned English at such a young age that I completely lost the thick European accent most people achieved. Most of my friends and teachers assume I'm from America, with my muddy blonde hair and obnoxious voice- I could have passed by as the movie screen Californian. I'm not though. That's the point. People would see me as a bubbly person with an optimistic brain yet I'm the exact opposite. I wish I was the extroverted person who loves being social but most of my friends would quickly stop you there. I'm quite pessimistic, depressing and annoying but to compensate, I have a good sense of humor. Or at least I have been told. That's the thing though. You wouldn't know I acted this way or if I was from America or Europe or possibly even Australia, but from my face and accent, people tend to assume your personality and traits on those very qualities without even knowing your name. We humans do that automatically. It's a setting in our brains that never gets switched off. It's not always a bad thing. We judge people from the way they walk to the way that they twiddle with their fingers when they're nervous. It's a quality I guess we all share.

I let people assume who I am. What my identity is. How I act. Who I am as a person. I let them do it, because I am certain that ninety percent of the time, their eyebrows will knit together in confusion, lines creasing up on their foreheads as they ask the obvious "From *where?*". It amuses me. I even expected it when I met my best friend. It was my second year at [redacted] and as first weeks of school go, I was scoping out the hallways nervously as kids flooded the classrooms. I walked into the one I was assigned and sat next a girl who I had never seen before. She had a soft face shape and nervous look on her face. I remember her and another student asking to play with me and my friend in the school field

right outside the building. She turned her head towards me and she gave me a slight smile. Wielding all my confidence, I whipped out my arm, and she shook it.

"I'm [redacted]" I said. Her toothy grin started to spread across her face. Our conversation went off from there, and as most conversations with new people go, she asked where I was from.

"I'm from Bosnia." I replied, expecting the regular startled expression at the response.

"Cool! Where is that?" She asked calmly. There was no knitting of eyebrows or folding of arms which I had grown used to ignoring.

"It's in Europe." I said smoothly, trying to choke down my cry of happiness that she didn't ask me to speak Bosnian in front of her. That's where our friendship built off from. Games on the field to a small conversation which lead to countless sleepovers and watching each other grow up. Here we are three and a half years later, closer every single year. Our friendship was never molded around where we were from, or because of where we were born. It was based off pure interest in each other's hobbies and personalities. She never looked at me in a certain way and didn't look shocked or surprised when I told her where I was from. She wasn't expecting anything from me. That to me is what I call an awesome friend.

I have grown to learn that not all people care about where you are from. Not every single person will see you only because of the country you were born in. Even though there will be countless more people who will ask me more about where I am from, and how they never thought my country existed, I am positive that those people will see me as [redacted], not Bosnia.

Mi smo nebo sto se plavi
mi smo sunce sto se sjaji

Sve od Une pa do Drine

ova pjesma nek' se vine

preko polja, preko gora

sve od Save pa do mora

Nikad sama nisi ti

uvijek s tobom tu smo mi

tvoje kceri i sinovi

[redacted]

Why Do People Wear Masks?

(Humanoid)

"Am I the only one I know that's waging my wars behind my face and above my throat?"

We all wear masks. Some show emotion, others show peoples state of mind. Some masks are flimsy and worn out, torn and frayed. Others are brand new and polished, their smiles and happiness pulsing around them. Mine is somewhere in the middle. Its expression no longer radiates its reassuring happiness and optimism, but looks calm and bored, as if it's been sitting there, useless, for their whole life. In fact, it hasn't been worn in a while. I'm not surprised it's bored. The string that dangled around the back of the mask had snapped last year, once I realized how meaningless it was to me. I had to set it down on my desk, watching its expression fade, and mold into the desks beige background. I never had the urge to fix the string because I found it fascinating how many people wore their masks and how they worked with them. How their frown from underneath was turned into a giggle from somebody else's unneeded comment about a strangers looks.

I don't need a mask anymore, and here's why. Having to act a certain way to prove to others that you're "fine" always made my stomach twist. Forcing my mind to flip my sobs into laughter to insist that I was alright drove me insane, and after I took my mask off, it felt like a brick house was lifted off my shoulders. The world and people around me seemed scarier. I was afraid that once they stopped seeing the happy and extroverted side of me, they would draw attention to the dark bags under my eyes and my tapping feet from the stress and anxiety of classes. I considered putting it back on just to make people approve of my behaviour, but then they wouldn't be seeing me. Nobody would be seeing me.

They would see the outline of my disproportionate body, but they wouldn't see the panic that grew in my eyes when somebody mentioned how weird my legs looked in jeans. The mask (unironically) masked everything about me, and I was tired of having to hide my honest thoughts and opinions and instead having to hide behind this veil of certainty that I was ok. When I wasn't. I was being crushed beneath this thick, suffocatingly perfect curtain of expectations that I couldn't help but wonder why people put up with it. I couldn't help but wonder how they hadn't gone insane yet.

After observing myself without a mask, I realized how much stress was released. I was no longer this moping girl hiding behind a cloned humanoid of perfection, but a person who lived life for the sake of being themselves, and only that. I no longer longed for peoples exceptinse and came to terms with myself. I was not perfect. I did not need a mannequin to live life for me while I sat in the shadows of the image of somebody who I was not. I no longer clawed at my skull for saying stupid comments, such as my honest opinion. I was me, and I no longer wanted to be anybody else. Eventually, people stopped looking awkwardly at me, and accepted the fact that my mask does not define who I am. No object should define who or what a person is.

People wear masks for many reasons. If I were to list all of them, it could go on forever. Everybody has a different reason and a story tied to it. One of the reasons that I wore a mask was so was that I could be accepted by society, so I wouldn't have to deal with the struggles of being different and unique. Living that way kills the soul inside. It destroys the creativity that all humans are gifted. Nobody expresses themselves properly and it's a border that people are constantly afraid to cross. Why, I don't know. I do know now though, that if everybody were to peel off their masks, sure, their insecurities might as well be a buffet, but they leave after a while. When you are exposed to people who wear their masks for the purpose of being perfect, and for the visual pleasure of somebody else, then



your feeding the lie that *this* is what your supposed to feel. That if you're smiling in a photo, then your feeling that smiles effect on the inside. Time heals all wounds, I feel as though people don't trust that phrase enough. We live in a world where people will cry of laughter in photos, to look happy. People will sob in movies to seem heartbroken. Those emotions aren't always felt in real life. We don't always keep that smile plastered on when you're done taking a photo, and you certainly don't weep after the director calls cut. We just live in a world, where if you're devastated. If you are jubilant- then you should look the part. Or even better- hide it.

[redacted]

What Do You Wish Other People Knew About You?

(Slam Poetry At Its Finest)

Throughout these essays, I think I've made an a outline for you to trace of me based on what I told you. I'm a self deprecating mess with a low self esteem who has a tendency to hide behind humor so they can come across as human. Six months ago, I would never admit that. I would wear this cape of confidence and artificial smiles to make people understand that I am in no way that girl from five years ago who used to be tied up to trees and made fun of because of who they were. I'm proud of myself for that. At the beginning of the year, I was locked behind closed lips, swallowing down my thoughts and opinions on political situations and sat silently, swaying to the drumming sound of arguments coming from brave people's mouths. I knew that being this person would be a challenge, but I was willing to accept that risk for a good two months before I felt my mannequin of perfection fall apart.

Teachers saw through my numb face, and I grew tired of having to keep up with peoples drama. There's was one detail though that helped me get through it. Humor. As I hinted earlier on, I love comedy. It was a simple way to give an impression to people that I'm self assured and witty. That's why after years of trying to confidently bring up a joke every now and then, I was able to snap the caution tape around my comfort zone, and make my humor blend in with my deep thoughts or personal opinions. It became a part of me, and it quickly became a factor or what people knew me as. The funny guy. Nobody hated the funny guy. That's what I thought for a solid two years.

In a way, I used humor as a coping mechanism for the lack of everything else that I so desperately craved for. Like the cement that sort of held me together after an earthquake. It made my

problems more tolerable and it felt like a drug that I needed to ingest to keep me motivated to function. It sounds terrible when I say it that way, but it was the truth. Before last year, the only reason I kept up with this image of being "funny" was because I kept drilling it into my head that "nobody hates the funny guy". I felt like that one character in every show that is killed off in the very first episode. I felt minor. Like I was using comedy to compensate and improvise and even mock my lack of intelligence and wit. I felt upset about how I let such "meaningless" aspects of me take over my body, controlling me like a ventriloquist doll, mastering the way I speak to how my hands move.

I appreciate comedy. I truly do give all my respect to the people who spend their lives making people laugh. I still cherish comedy, and I still make myself appear as the funny kid. I try to make my friends laugh and my sarcasm is my root for my jokes. Whenever they laugh at my awkwardness, I feel a sense of accomplishment. In the past, I let it engulf me in a negative way. It felt like an obsessive nature of mine, constantly keeping up with this overly mentioned persona of me. Not anymore. I have learned to not rely on my sense of humor and how I see the world around me, shape who I am because there is so much more to me than I ever thought I was worthy to show. I was driven to find out what place I had in society at a young age with no clue of how. I found that to become quite normal with kids my age and even younger. They're trying to find a way to plant their mark into the ground, but the truth is, i'm twelve and a half, and I still have absolutely no clue, and if I were to be completely honest, I feel like that's the last concern anybody should have our age. I feel as though i've wasted so much time trying to dig myself into this whole of, "If i'm the funny kid now, i'm the funny kid forever". That's just not true! I wish I let myself evolve, and figure out what my interests were and let myself branch out into other hobbies rather than finding one interest and swallowing myself whole into it.

I guess that's what I would want people to know about me. That humor isn't (at first) just "and interest". It felt like my life. To make people laugh. To please people. Now, I am whatever the day in front of my tells me to be, and I don't entitle myself to anything. I'm ok with that.

Appendix E — Skylar Essays

[redacted] Friends Can Break Your Heart Too

It's really hard to write about something that caused you so much pain that still haunts you once in awhile. I know, I know I talk about it a great deal, but sometimes we all talk about events that make us strong, that left the biggest scars in our heart, that messed us up.

This is not some heartbreaking breakup story, because it's not. Just because there is two different genders in this story, it doesn't mean we had something more than friendship involved. Just because society says that different genders can't be friends, it doesn't mean they can't. Maybe I'm a hypocrite, because this is the story of how our friendship faded away...

Let's call him Ethan. Ethan and I met when we were in 6th grade. I already knew him as an acquaintance, but we got to know each other better. Everyday, every second, step by step, we where getting closer and for some reason I couldn't see that. We would do online quizzes just for fun, we would sit together at lunch, and text for hours. Unfortunately our friendship didn't take the right turn.

On 11/11/2016 Friday, there was no school because of the parent teacher conferences. I could've never guessed what would happen. Ethan confessed he had a crush on me, which I respectfully accepted and offered to stay friends. He was always so understanding, and I thought we were good. He seemed fine about it, he seemed okay.

For a few more weeks, we remained friends. We would talk about our problems on the phone and text. We would do interesting group projects together. I thought I'd found my ride or die friend. Well, that didn't turn out to be the case. I don't even know what happened, but for some reason, on 28/11/2016, we drifted apart. Without explanation, he woke up that morning and decided to ignore me, which really caused excruciating pain for me. Yes, of course it was because he left me, but he had also started hanging out with his old friend that he argued with, and I felt concerned for him too.

I never noticed it before but I was deeply attached to Ethan. Don't confuse this with love, it wasn't love. I felt like I lost an organ, a piece of me that helped me breathe, not even my other friends could be my lungs. I've started losing sleep and having sleep paralysis a big amount of the time, also I felt fatigued all the time. The shy 11 year old me just couldn't go and talk,or even text Ethan.

I tried texting him in January 2 times. He would answer me sarcastically and be mean. I heard him talking trash about me behind my back multiple times and I was miserable. I didn't know why he stopped talking to me, I didn't know why he was so rude lately and I was so frustrated.

My head was scrambled up in thoughts and I remember crying my soul out at every single night, but very quietly so no one would hear. One of those nights included my birthday,when I

was getting ready to cut the cake in a few minutes with my family. I remember choking on tears, yet I had to wash my face and put on a fake smile in front of everyone. Some memory that I remember so vividly is when I looked outside of the window, and noticed that I wasn't happy.

Lots of people asked me if I was sick, I would tell them I was just tired, but I lied. I felt pathetic, seeing him happy and clearly better off without me. I thought "Why am I not good enough?" everyday. A year was well spent.

At of the end of the year, in summer camp, I decided to ask him why he did what he did. He didn't quite tell me the reason though, he just told me we should be friends again. We talked for hours, and for the first time in 8 months, I felt truly happy. I told him about how he hurt me and he apologized. We talked our pets and our families and tried to catch up on each other. He had changed, and probably I did too...

That night he said, "Goodnight. I'll talk to you tomorrow." Unfortunately, I over thought everything, I thought he didn't want to talk to me, he was just being nice. So I didn't start the chat, he didn't too. I noticed for the first time in my life, that sometimes, we care about our ego more than the people we love. I knew I was selfish, I knew I was mad. Maybe I should've tried harder,everyday I think of what I could've done to change it.

In September,when school started,Ethan started lying to people and throwing shade at me over social media which caused us to fight a lot. He apologised again,but how can a band-aid cover

such a deep scar. I wouldn't wish this upon my biggest enemy because it was such a painful and tiring year. We're still not good around each other. We can't even make eye contact in the corridor. We would talk on the phone for hours and I don't even remember the sound of his voice anymore.

The lesson I've learned from this is, first of all,people are temporary,and you shouldn't get attached. Secondly, we shouldn't let our egos win us over,they are only trouble. I hope some day Ethan and I can sit at a cafe when we're grown ups and laugh about this...

2

[redacted] Between the Ages of 1-5

The ages between 1-5 are the first start, the first glimpse, the first lesson. You start breathing, you start tasting the world, sweet and sour. You notice that when you fall, you hurt. A purple bruise forms on your knee. Tears run down your cheeks, but when your mom comes and gives the bruise a kiss it's all worth is.

I was the kid that was never scared of the mud getting all over me, the kid that never bothered to care when they ripped apart their skirt. However there was apart of me, so pure, so innocent. I thought even the murderer in the film needed another chance. I thought there was no evils in this cruel life. Everyone loved me, and I loved them. That was always my parents biggest fear.

When I was two years old, my family and I went to a hotel for a vacation. We were staying in a bungalow. However it was a really big bungalow, because even my grandparents stayed in it with us. Unfortunately at the middle of the vacation, my dad was called to another town nearby and had to leave us. Of course we stayed in the bungalow to continue our vacation.

A very sweet habit I had at that age was saying "God help that person." whenever I saw an ambulance. Everyone would laugh and cheer at me for that action. I wouldn't do it for the

appreciation though, I would always worry for the person in the ambulance. As normal, it was a habit and I kept on doing it at Yalova (the place we were having our vacation).

One night we were eating our food in the bungalow with my grandparents and mom. In the middle of the meal, I stood up and told my mom I needed to go to the toilet because I was newly starting to use the toilet instead of the potty. My mom took me to the toilet, and my grandma came too because she was proud to see me using the toilet by myself.

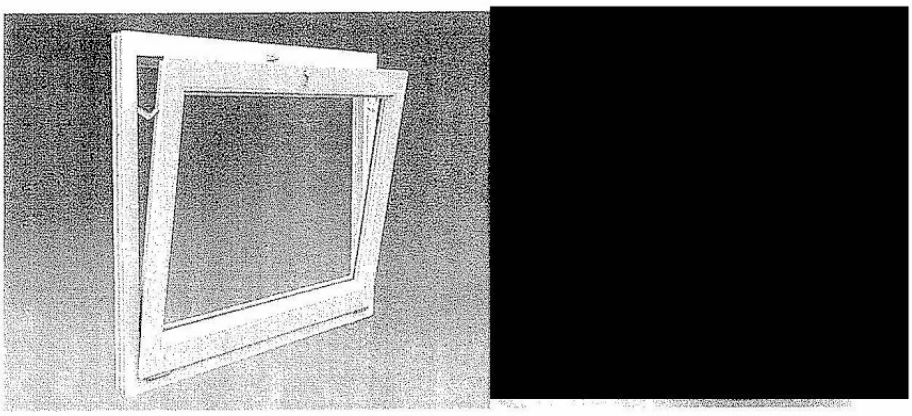
She noticed that the toilet window was open. She was really concerned that I would get a cold by it so she closed it but for my luck, the window didn't close properly, and the windows nails were very weak too so it collapsed and broke on my head. I didn't faint or anything, I just stood there not understanding anything until all of the adults started rushing at me and my grandpa calling the ambulance.

We went outside and my mom called my dad and my grandma was in tears and I remember having blood on my Strawberry-Shortcake pijamas. People outside were rushing at us offering us water and I will never forget that my grandma as nearly about to faint. However something I really clearly remember is that I was so confused and unsure about what was happening, I cried.

At the hospital, I don't even remember how I got the stitches (probably because of the anesthesia),but after the operation a really nice doctor gave me gum, so I was thankful. My dad always says, "When I came to the hospital in a rush, I heard a little kid crying and thought it was

you, but when I came to your room, you were chewing gum and telling me the story while laughing."Which is true and shows my character because even now I'm really chill about big events.

They put a very uncomfortable head net on me which I had to sleep with for one night. The scar of the glass cut is still on my head up to this day. It's not very visible and it doesn't hurt,but the moral of the story is, you shouldn't try to close up things that will cause bigger problems when they can't be closed up.



3

[redacted] Being a Girl in [redacted] and Why it's Hard

Every morning you wake up and go to a cold, grey place. Judging eyes turn around and look at you. You here whisperings, but then the other second they come and hug you. You stay in your small squad, however you still feel the pressure on your shoulders. The only thing that keeps you going through the hallway is the friend holding your hand,but sometimes they leave too. You try to have fun out of creative lessons, but people call you dumb. You are frustrated and mad as you run in to a bathroom stall and start crying. That's just an example of how [redacted] students can make you feel.

Yes, I do agree that there are indeed really beautiful factors of [redacted]. However I'm here to discuss the opposite, Why is being a girl student in [redacted] hard? Let's start off by the uneasiness in your chest when the popular kid looks at you, sorry, let me fix that, I meant "whenever *someone ever* looks at you". Middle school is supposed to be the place where you can still be a potato and not get judged, because you are all so young and everybody is on the same level. Well unfortunately that's not the case. It's just a free trial before high school. Middle school is like a reality show where you pick the best dressed, or the best curled hair. Not to be sexist, but I think that girls in [redacted] are being judged more than the boys. Although girls should stand together and support each other,they mostly talk behind other girls backs and judge them, which causes boys to think judging them is okay. Then there you are no self esteem left in any inch of your flesh. You try to have the best skin, the skinniest body, the flawless hair, the most expensive clothes, the designer bag like those models on the magazines your mother reads. Looking at your reflection is torture and you are so used to your features that you can't see the beauty in yourself.

You become a totally different person for those who wouldn't accept your style, your personality, your beauty springing out of your soul like wild flowers.

Oh! And you'll need start watching out for yourself in 6th grade, you will meet more than needed amounts of fake friends. They will make you feel special, get what they want, leave and talk behind you. You will notice this happening more than once in 6th grade. It's like paranoia, you will miss that friend and wonder where you went wrong even though you know it's not your fault. Your poor eyes will choke on tears and your insides will ache until you can't make up the difference between love and hate. Maybe it's because more people are bad than good. Honestly, it's hard to make friends in [redacted],you want to find somebody that doesn't judge you, shows their real side and is there for you when you need it the most. This is gender neutral,but it is something that I had to come over more than I can count.

One thing that really sucks is that you are seen stupid if you are bad at math or science. Students never give credit to their friends that are good at music or art and automatically assume they are stupid when they are bad at science or math. There is always pressure on you to get a good grade from math and science,and that even leads to high anxiety levels and lack of creativity, which is miserable because you aren't going to need to know how to find the X or what the mitochondria does in the cell in the future. Being good at creative exercises isn't stupidity and I wish more people could understand that. Creative people are forced to have science and math classes for years but when it comes to creative lessons people treat is as it is nothing. Everything has to be known at a certain degree or it gets lame,and schools are teaching

us things that I *know* aren't going to be shown to us not in the future;not ever. Instead I personally think that being better at creative exercises are more useful.

Although the essay is a bit shady and hateful towards school, I don't really hate school. The examples I gave are pretty much happening at every middle school and are a part of life. There are times where I'm comfortable with the way I am, and there are people who keep on standing by my side and being my family no matter what. I really try hard to get good grades from both logical and creative lessons. Creating your own happiness and hope is what counts in this gigantic,magical,weird world.

[redacted] Where I see myself in 20 years

Old scents, old clothes, old pictures.I break apart as I encounter with them. My brain is so focused on the past that I can't seem to look forward. It's like I'm trapped,I don't want to think about the future. My cold hands wrap around an old Polaroid picture, and suddenly I want to go back in time. You know what they say though, "It's the unknown that scares us the most."....

Some people would want to focus on their carrier, or make a family. Everyone is different, and I accept that. I think that individualities make us beautiful, and like everyone else I have my own. Although I'm very young, I know what I want, not maybe what I need,but what I want.

My mind is chaotic,very messy and confusing. Even I have a difficult time understanding and knowing what I feel and what I want. Twenty years later, I see myself on a mountain top with my soulmate beside me. He is painting the burning red and pink sunset, and I am writing a story about it. We are cycling through the rain and the stars are above us. Even though we are successful, we don't care it. We don't want luxury and expensive clothes, we want inspiration and nature…

Then again, I don't know if that's what I want. I also see myself in a high-paying carrier, I have two kids and a husband. My parents' house is the one next to ours. Luxury and expensive clothes are all around us. We are happy and warm together.

I've always wanted to be a writer while traveling. Looking at stars, imagining, believing. Another part of me has always NEEDED to be a carrier woman with a family. The society though, has never allowed people to properly achieve their dreams unless they've wanted to be at an acceptable job. My soul is still not sure what I want for the future, yet not even my brain knows what I need yet. All I know is that the two will combine, and I will be happy, because I was the little kid who always believed in happy endings. That is what I will become…

5

[redacted] Insecurities

Childhood, what a beautiful place to be. No stress or negativity. Most children remember their 7 to 9 ages as cotton candies and teddy bears, but unfortunately for me I can't say the same. Life started playing rough with me at very young age.

The moment I turned 2 years old,I knew my parents were awfully hard workers. In one point of my life I lived with only my dad, since my mom was working in another city.

When I turned 6, I was in a really bad state. It is very tough for such a young child to live without their mother for 3 years only seeing them on the weekends and holidays. I would often quietly cry at night hugging my mother's pillow. In the mornings I'd be so tired that I'd fall asleep in classes. My dad and grandma would try to support me, but how can anyone replace your mother.

I felt like my mother was dead. I would always act like I fell or fake cry just to get attention. Unfortunately that is a traumatic habit that still is stuck with me up to this day. Lately I was so cranky and miserable that my dad sat down to have a serious talk with my mother. My mother told him that she had been invited to a new job in Ankara. This news made us all very excited…

My mom and dad started working a lot more now that my mother was in Ankara,and my paternal aunt took care of me. Awkwardly enough I call her grandma, because my paternal

grandparents died before I was born. My mother also hired a babysitter for me that knew a very few words in Turkish. Everything felt very lame.

My mother tried so hard to be by my side and she was awfully ashamed that she couldn't be with me before, but it was impossible to do that when you traveled to another country every day. My father is an inspector and he started going away for inspections for months now,and I barely ever saw my parents anymore.

Then school started. That is where it all got messed up. I was mentally drowned and I felt as lonely as a wolf. I would cry at school, and the saddest part is everyone(including the teachers) would look at me in the eyes and say absolutely nothing. Nobody would care. I still want to cry remembering those days, my eyes would be a river of blood.

At nights I'd try to do my homework, but I couldn't because I had never did it by my own and no adult would understand English in the house and I always ended up playing with my aunt's granddaughter which is 3 years younger than me. Her mother and father were divorced, and she'd always be sad and puke. People around me would always care for her and force me to always share my toys with her and do whatever she wants like a brat. I wished to puke or faint just so people would care for me. It's so miserable that only now I can understand how the pressure affected me negatively.

Going to school was a nightmare, I'd call my mother at nights and beg her so that I wouldn't go to school. She didn't let me of course. I'd beg my teachers so that I could go to the nurses office for a rest and a peaceful talk with her, but they would never let me. Looking back to all these, I was miserable, I was lonely, I was hopeless. My friends' moms would always tell my friends to be extra nice to me and pity on me whenever they saw me. I wanted to be pitied on, I wanted attention,but they were all faking it.

I had friendship problems at school too. My two "best" friends would always ignore me,exclude me and shout at me for no reason and act like I was the bad guy. I tried everything to make them happy, I even wrote on my shirt with sharpies once,but then I got in trouble.

Being a 7 year old was hard but fast. When I turned 8 it was the real year I started dying inside. Over the year I've gained a bit of weight and formed a habit of eating junk food whenever I was sad, so nearly always. I had an extra 6 kilograms more than my friends and I never would've noticed it if people around me didn't turn it into a joke. My aunt's friends were real trash-talkers and I don't even know half of their names, but old,fat ladies would laugh about my body. An innocent 8 year old's body. Then this "*joke*" spread around our family, and I'd laugh along,but deep down I was very hurt.

My teacher, would shout at me and ground me in front of the whole class just because I got my times tables wrong sometimes. Now I can see that they were the years that triggered my social

anxiety disorder. I felt pressured by everyone and everything. I just didn't understand why knowing your times tables was so important. I was so scared that I'd be asked about it.

I thought I was stupid,ugly and worthless. I felt anxious to talk to people and go to new environments, and I still am trying to cope. My old insecurities and fears keep on haunting me once in awhile. However, I know that's not my personality,and I'm getting better at talking and not being anxious.

My mother has stopped with the busy jobs. She has a better job right now. I know she feels guilty and bad about my childhood,and reading this would break her apart,but this was a big part of my life. It is time the truth is out there. It's time I face the reality about my life...

[redacted]

Masks

Everyone has a different mask that they wear on a daily basis. Whether it is to shut out society or to ruin society. Small,big in all shapes and sizes. Some fit you,some don't. Either way we wear these masks only to attract others, but they won't.

All my life I've dealt with my own mask. I've kept questioning myself "Who am I?", and every morning I still ask myself this question. For I still have no idea who I am,nor sure about the mask I want to show to this world. Am I a dreamer,a worker,an inspirer? These are questions that have ran through my mind more than countless times.

Society is always pressuring us to have basic characteristics or different personalities only the way they want it to be. From a young age people think creating a mask for themselves will be better than putting out your personality and getting judged. Everyone always keeps on asking whether our society is good, and this is one example that it isn't.

I have known people with the prettiest mask,always making sure to hide their deep dark pain. I have always appreciated those kinds of people who wouldn't share their emotions, and still be

able to smile the brightest. They are the most beautiful human beings I've met because they are nice to people around them even though they're hurting. This is a kind of a mask.

Unfortunately I've known people the opposite in that case. The fakers,the kind of people I hate the most. The overreacting,drama creators. The people who have beauty on their face,but ugly dripping out of their soul. I wish I had stayed away from people like this,and knew they would be harmful,for I was pulled in just like a moth is pulled into flame.

Lastly I have also met the insecurity masks. These people are like waves, whenever the society winds hit them, they go another way. They change their opinions, they change themselves. These masks don't have a personality, they are painted by other people,and sadly ruined by other people in the end.

Everyone has different comfort zones around different people. Sometimes it's necessary to wear a mask, sometimes it's not. We all have our own personality under those masks. Sometimes they have tint of your personality in them,but sometimes we mess up, we forget which mask is our real personality,and in the end get really hurt. I just hope that one day, we will stop believing our masks are our personalities, when actually are personalities are our masks…

[redacted]

Independence

Twenty little 7 year old kids, four teachers and camping. I think by now you can see how this funny little memory was a total chaos. This is why you should never take little kids camping without their parents.

It all started in June of second grade. The weather was very nice and summer was here. Our dear teachers at my old school were always about independence and knowing your priorities. So they set up a little camping trip for a day in our school's forest (Yes,the school had a huge forest).

Everyone was so excited and happy about this upcoming trip. We thought it was amazing that we had to leave our parents and and stay in tents all night for the first time. However,there was a little bit of nervousness always resting inside of us.

After school, at 18:00 we had to go back to school. Those 3 hours wouldn't pass,we were all so hyped up! At last my father dropped me off to school. I had my teddy bear, my sleeping bag and my pillow. I was so ready for it that I felt like a boss(bawse). Slowly all my friends started arriving,but unfortunately my best friend couldn't come because she was dealing with her newly diagnosed diabetes.

Some kids came and instantly after their parents left started to cry. By time everyone was starting to enjoy the camping games. We used so many of our effort in playing, and around 20:00 we ate our hotdogs and marshmallows.

The chaos wasn't even starting yet... As we brushed our teeth and settled in our tents with our friends. Some nervousness both from the teachers and the students were being sensed. I tried to quickly fall asleep, ut there was no use. All my life,I'd been a night owl, I couldn't just change it in one night! Luckily my tente-mate [redacted] was a night owl too so we whispered to each other.

The teachers were guarding the area and also looking out for us two by two. I was still not asleep, we kept on talking with [redacted] and when she accidentally opened the flashlight our teacher came and warned us to sleep,yet we all knew that we weren't going to.

That night, people started crying and missing their family. or even puking because they felt sick. I was totally okay, I had [redacted] next to me and a peaceful environment. The only problem was that the sleeping bag was very uncomfortable and I wanted to sleep in my own comfy bed.

As the hours past by, some people did sleep,but the cries of some scared kids were really starting to annoy me. "They are such babies" I thought hypocritically because a few minutes later I

started crying. I couldn't sleep, no one was hugging me and I was really hot. This soft cry only ended about 5 minutes before I fell asleep, and no one knew,at least I was strong. In the early morning, the parents came and picked us up.

To this day I am very independent and I can survive without my parents for a long time. I know that sounds tough,but that is the truth. The moral of the story is, when you teach a kid how to be independent from a young age they will always be intelligent...

Appendix F — Gaining Ethical Approval (Script Outline for Verbal Approval)

- You have been chosen for a research study based on your Cambridge progression tests, attendance records, consistency in homework habits, and interesting personal histories.
- No grade, monetary benefits or otherwise; will not affect your final portfolio grade in the slightest
- Make sure to turn in your portfolios (like you normally would), and I will start analysing in February. Analysis will include pulling out themes, putting them in a larger context.
- Material will be kept in a file cabinet (only I have the key) and on a personal hard drive to which only I hold the password.
- All material will be kept anonymous. You will choose your pseudonyms. It can be any name that you feel exemplifies you.
- You may drop out of the study at any time for any reason. It will not affect our teacher/student relationship. Your health and happiness come first and are more important than this project.
- At the end of the project, I will talk to you one-on-one to discuss what I wrote and to gain approval.
- The purpose of this assignment is to see how the environments that surround you (school, friends, the country of Turkey) affect who you are. I want to see how your identity changes as you start looking at who you are through writing. All you have to do is respond to the prompts of your choice like we talked about in class and be as honest as you feel comfortable being in your prompts.

Appendix G — CUREC Modus Operandi

Note: Signed copy not included in this appendix due to respecting the anonymity of the school and the head teacher.

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Director Professor Jo-Anne Baird

[redacted]

4 September 2017

[redacted]

I am writing to enquire about conducting research in school this academic year. As you know, I am studying for the Master's in Learning and Teaching at Oxford University, supervised by Dr. Gill Boag-Munore. In my final research project, *"A Comparative Case Study Analysing the Identity Formation of Seventh Grade Turkish and International Students via Self-Narratives in English Class,"* I will explore how seventh grade students express themselves through a portfolio project and see how their language evolves.

The research will take place with four Year 7 English classes. I am developing ways of encouraging student self-expression and growth through the use of a semester-long portfolio. My research focus is on students' written self-expression and how teachers can develop this. Daniel Muse, from the music department, has agreed to collaborate with me on this. I will also aim to share the results with our department.

By participating in the research, the school would be contributing to a project that will deepen our understanding of English language and its implications on student learning and self-growth.

I hope to conduct this research between 01 December 2017 and 18 September 2018. Analysis will be completed through Cultural Historical Activity Theory language analysis of student portfolio work with a focus on Figured Worlds.

Oxford University has strict ethical procedures on conducting ethical research, consistent with current British Educational Research Association guidelines. The University also recognises, however, that my study is a piece of practitioner research, and that schools already operate with the highest ethical standards. Therefore only your formal consent as headteacher is necessary, and not that of individual parents or staff. However, throughout the research, students and other teachers will be able to refuse to participate in any research activities at any time.

All participants, including students, teacher and the school, would be made anonymous in all research reports. The data collected would be kept strictly confidential, available only to my supervisor, Dr. Gill Boag-Munroe (gill.boag-munroe@education.ox.ac.uk), and me, and only used for academic purposes. It will be kept for as long as it has academic value.

If you are happy for me to proceed with this study, please confirm that using the attached reply form. If you have any concerns or need more information about what is involved, please contact me or my supervisor. Further, if you have any questions about this ethics process at any time, please contact the chair of the department's research ethics committee, though: research.office@education.ox.ac.uk

I look forward to hearing from you.
Yours sincerely,

[redacted]
University of Oxford, Department of Education

[redacted]