

Being at home: Global citizenship in Norwegian schools. A study of children's poems

Susan Erdmann, Barbara Gawronska

University of Agder, Norway

Abstract

The paper addresses the question of self-perceived identity in children attending international schools in Norway. In this population, the distinction between “home culture” and “host culture” is no longer relevant, since most of the children represent “hyphenated” (e.g. Asian-British or American-Scandinavian) or merged nationalities and cultures. The goal of the study is to investigate how these pupils define themselves and the notion of “home”. To achieve at least a preliminary picture of the children's self-perception, the authors have analysed poems on two topics: *Me* and *Home*, written by pupils of an international school and a Norwegian school, both informant groups aged 11-13. A semantic analysis of the poems indicates that the international school children present strong assertions of individual identity as defined against societal roles, while the Norwegian school pupils do not conceptualize identity formation as a struggle and their poems reflect a high degree of social, familial and national integration.

Keywords: identity, international schooling, self-perception, multicultural network, children's poems, semantic associations

1. Introduction

During the last three decades, the issue of children growing up in multicultural environment has attracted researchers' attention in several scientific fields: sociology, psychology, intercultural studies and linguistics, just to mention the most prominent areas. Even if globalization is by no means a modern (20th and 21st century) phenomenon, we are confronted today with an unprecedented acceleration of ethnic migration and intercultural contacts. Both are enhanced by technological and economic development, including the accessibility of cheap travel, the increasing internalisation of commercial companies, and the widespread use of electronic media.

All these factors contribute to the fact that the issue of cultural identity has become much more intricate than it was in the midst of the 20th century. Methods focusing on differences between “home culture” and “host culture” are no longer relevant, if the subjects of the study have grown up in a multilayer and multidimensional cultural network. Joerchel (2006: 1),

following Hall, Held and McGrew (1992), emphasises the need for research involving “hyphenated individuals”, for example Asian-British, African-American, Turkish-German. Research from Norway (Østberg 2003) indicates that this work is well under way, with young people embracing both hyphenated and merged identities. Some evidence (Block 2007, Darwin and Norton 2015) suggests that the very notion of an identity integral to self-representations may be interrogated among some multilingual and multi-cultural populations.

2. Background: International schooling

While schools for expatriate children have their roots in the 19th century, the accelerating pace of globalisation and mass migration has led to a dramatic rise in the numbers of such schools. In addition, international schooling is in the process of transforming its scope. Changes in structure, goals, curriculum, students and teachers have transformed international schools from institutions designed to teach the children of diplomats, international business people and other expatriates to institutions serving not only this clientele but, increasingly, local children and young people from families preferring an internationally-oriented education for their children. Thirty years ago, 80% of the children and young people attending international schools were foreign passport holders. Today, 80% of those attending international schools carry host country passport (Brummit and Keeling 2013). International schools have thus been transformed from establishments dedicated to teaching foreign children living abroad to institutions providing an international education to locals. This shift in mission has broadened and changed the philosophies governing many of these schools, leading to a greater focus on English language skills, intercultural communication, and some sense of global understanding or responsibility.

There is no consensus as to what characterises an international education. Most international schools self-identify as such and many – but not all – are associated with the European Council of International Schools, and/or with curricular plans like those associated with the International Baccalaureate program (IB), International Primary Curriculum or the Cambridge International Examinations¹ (Clark 2014). Most teach primarily in English and their relationships with the governing educational authorities vary from location to location. Some schools are entirely private and charge large fees, while some are public and represent magnet programs available to all residents in a given municipality. Many, like the international school involved in our study, are joint private/public enterprises. Given these differences and the changing character of international education, international schools have been forced to articulate their own philosophies, the nature of their relationships with their host countries, and their language policies to a greater extent than when they simply functioned as English-language schools for expat children. No longer simply English-medium schools, international schools now possess mission statements reflecting the kinds of global realities that have led to parents choosing these sorts of educational experiences for their

¹ The International Baccalaureate website reports that between 2011 and 2016 the number of registered IB schools increased by over 46%.

children. Recently, some of the most influential international curricular programs like the International Baccalaureate have begun using terms like ‘international-minded’ or ‘international perspective’ to define the kind of education they provide and to distinguish these offerings from those provided by the host country education system (Roberts 2003). These curricular organisations believe that what they increasingly offer is a kind of education that emphasises a global outlook or which contextualises subject learning within a global framework.

The extent to, and manner in which these global commitments are implemented in the running of the school and in class activities, however, have been a matter of discussion and certainly vary from institution to institution. At least at the rhetorical level, many international schools claim to develop their pupils’ sense of self in relation to global realities and even to encourage pupils to think of themselves as global citizens. This orientation contrasts starkly, however, with a global outlook that increasingly sees the movement of people as, if not threatening, problematic and where national policies restrict much of the world populations’ ability to attain the kind of trans- or supra-national identities encouraged by many international schools, at least as expressed in their literature and mission statements.

Pupils enrolled in international schools are often acutely aware of the tension between the commitments of their schools and their parents to an expansive sense of world community, and political rhetoric surrounding the restriction of personal mobility. In its broadest scope the project hopes to investigate how children at an international school and at a normal public school in Norway conceptualise home and its attributes in the service of studying how influential the rhetoric of global citizenship found within International schools is in impacting the pupils’ ideas about their place in the world.

3. Research questions and method

Our study aims at investigating how international school pupils in Norway see themselves in relation to their countries of origin (or their parents’ home countries), as well as to the kinds of global identities being encouraged by their learning environments. We were also interested in finding an answer to the question whether there would be any difference in self-perception between the pupils of an international school and children attending a public school with Norwegian as the main instruction language.

As a rapidly diversifying country, Norway has invested in a number of government funded programs investigating the education offered to migrant pupils in the country’s schools. Even schools that are not overtly defined as “international” display a considerable degree of ethnic multitude;² the differences lay, however, not only in the main instruction language, but also in the educational policy. Migrant children enrolled in purely public Norwegian schools are eligible for special Norwegian language instruction, and in some cases, a limited amount of instructional support in their home languages until they are able to

² The most recent (2014) statistics from the Ministry of Education report that 82,830 pupils from immigrant backgrounds attend primary school in Norway.

follow Norwegian medium instruction. Care is taken to introduce migrant children to traditional Norwegian cultural touchstones and sporting traditions.

3.1. *The Participants*

For the purpose of our investigation, we chose two schools in Kristiansand (southern Norway): Kristiansand International School and Aasen Elementary School (this school name has been fictionalised). Kristiansand International School is a fee-free joint public school founded in 2008. It currently has slightly over 100 students in grades 1 to 10.

The International School is an IB school, which receives many pupils and some funding from the large multinational oil drilling companies located in the Southern Norway region. The school itself negotiates between the international idealism embodied in the IB, the corporate parents' desires for a complete education in English, and the local pupils' parents' investments in high quality English-medium education from a global perspective. An IB diploma program is offered by the neighbouring upper-secondary school to allow International School pupils to complete an entire education both in English and within the IB system.

Aasen Elementary School is a public primary school located in suburban Kristiansand enrolling approximately 250 students at the same grade level as the International School. Like all public Norwegian schools, Aasen School is charged by the government with providing an education to all pupils according to the curricular guidelines established by the Norwegian Directorate of Education and Training. This means that the school is obliged to provide Norwegian-language assistance to immigrant pupils, and to help immigrant pupils integrate into Norwegian culture as soon as possible. Integration is seen by and large as a process whereby the immigrant pupils become more like Norwegian children in terms of interests, language, and worldview. The International School resists the model of integration encouraged by the government and encourages their pupils to develop identities in dialogue with a multitude of cultural impulses and, while they offer the pupils Norwegian language instruction, Norwegian is not a curricular focus area and Norwegian cultural assimilation is not an educational goal.

3.2. *Method and procedure*

After an initial observation period at the International School, we identified two classes at the 5th and 6th grade levels to act as informant classes in order to investigate their perceptions of themselves in an international context. As with most international schools, English is the language of instruction and the pupils also have obligatory Norwegian language tuition. Bilingualism is both an outcome of the instructional program, and an every day reality for the students, but is not a large feature of the philosophy of the school. The school itself strives to offer an education program aimed at encouraging pupils to develop a sense of themselves within global perspectives and does not take the Norwegian national curriculum as a starting point. Although many of the pupils have at least one foreign parent, however, their own

international experiences are often limited. Both the municipality and the school itself are eager to discourage local parents with no international ties from enrolling their children in the school, although as a part of the public school systems it is not possible to prevent them from doing so against institutional advice. The classes we observed were mainly made up of pupils with some international experience gained either from living abroad or from having at least one foreign-born parent. This classroom environment contrasts with that at the public school, Aasen, where the class was mainly composed of Norwegian children from the local neighbourhood.

An investigation of children's feelings about migration, identity and belonging could be performed by different methods. One could employ a written questionnaire or oral interviews (open, semi-structured or structured); the pupils could also be asked to write an essay on the given topic. However, all those methods resemble traditional school tests and assignments. Thus, they imply the danger of not getting sincere answers, reflecting the pupils' true feelings, but rather "politically correct" task solutions, following the school's policy. Furthermore, in the situation of a face-to-face-interview conducted by a stranger, children often feel shy and uncomfortable, and they avoid extensive spontaneous utterances (Labov 1973).

Another method for discovering the respondents' emotions and connections between concepts in their minds would be a classic association test (Aitchison 1994), i.e. elicitation of words that occur in the informant's mind as the first response to a stimulus word. However, researchers disagree as to whether the results of psycholinguistic association tests reflect cognitive relations between concepts, or rather linguistic connections between lexical items (Aitchison 1994: 41, Miller and Johnson-Laird 1976: 12, Johnson-Laird 1983, Murphy 1991). Another shortcoming of this method lies in the fact that the researcher may be (more or less consciously) biased when choosing the prompting stimuli, and the respondents may be affected by the spatiotemporal setting of the experiment (for example, if the test is performed shortly before Christmas, the thoughts of the informants may be occupied by concepts related to Christmas celebration). Furthermore, although a correctly conducted association test eliminates the risk of getting deliberate, non-spontaneous responses, it often results in a complicated, quite blurry and fragmentary picture; to discover recurrent association patterns, very extensive studies involving hundreds of informants are needed. Since our study contains a limited number of informants, we investigated other means of approach.

Having considered advantages and shortcomings of several methods, we decided to employ a procedure that should differ both from conventional school tasks and from regular association tests. The method might be called "semi-structured text elicitation": the respondents were presented a short poem written by a child approximately their age, and then asked to produce their own poems on a similar topic. Our hope was that this method would encourage the children to reveal their emotions and associations without too much self-censorship, yet with a certain degree of self-reflection.

In both schools, we conducted a lesson where we discussed the global journey of Maryam Sathat Sobhani, a 12 year-old refugee from Iran who won a national Australian poetry prize. Maryam came to Australia through the asylum system and had in fact lived in the notorious offshore detention center Christmas Island before being allowed to settle in Melbourne. Maryam thus embodies the limitations of the kinds of globalised identities encouraged by

international, particularly IB schools. Approximately the same age as our informant pupils, Maryam presented both a figure they could identify with – a child of their own age – and simultaneously the kind of migrant child they do not encounter in their educational lives. We introduced both groups to Maryam and her journey before displaying her prize-winning poem. Her poem, *Me* is a reflection on the difficulties a migrant young person encounters when attempting to find or develop an identity that functions and make sense in several geographic and linguistic contexts. Below, we quote the stimulus poem.

Me

*I wonder who I am?
Or where I am meant
to be?
Or where I could be?
Or how to leave?
Or how to be a true person?
I wonder!
I wonder how I can fit in this world
Or how to be right?
But no one can answer my questions.*

After the presentation of Maryam's story and her poem, we had a brief discussion concerning poetry as a genre. It turned out that the children had previously written short poems in their language class, and they were reasonably aware of the distinctions between prose and poetry. They mentioned some formal exponents of poetry (*You can have short lines, You don't have to write sentences that are correct all over, In a poem, words often start or end in similar letters*) as well as functional features (*You write about your feelings, A poem cannot be right or wrong, what matters is that it says how you feel about things*).

Those and similar utterances indicated that the chosen method would – with a quite high degree of probability – reveal some reliable data regarding the informant pupils' self-perception and their attitudes to both Norway and the multicultural society of today.

The children were given approximately 25 minutes in class to compose their poems. During this time, Maryam's poem was not available to them. The *Me* poem was intended to function as an association stimulus, directing the minds of the informants towards concepts like "I", "true person", "being", "leaving", "where", "how", "world". It was not thought to be used as a facit for a "good poem".

The poems we collected were anonymous; the children were only asked to provide them with information about their first language and countries they come from or countries of origin of their parents. All of the children but one International School pupil (not included in this study) willingly wrote a poem and many of the children also decorated their work with pictures of their homes, with objects mentioned in their text or, in the case of Aasen pupils, with drawings of stylised hearts.

The qualitative and quantitative analysis of the responses focused on semantic fields most frequently associated with the concepts ME and HOME.

4. Analysis and results

Our experiment resulted in elicitation of 46 children's poems: 21 from Kristiansand International School and 25 from Aasen Elementary School.

As the main topic of their writing efforts, the pupils mostly chose the concept of HOME: it occurs as the poem title in 34 responses, although this particular word is not explicitly present in Maryam's text.

It was rather striking that the minority of respondents who decided to entitle their poems *Me* instead of *Home* were the oldest of the informant children, aged 13-14. This confirms earlier psychological and psycholinguistic findings (Hurford 1991, Miller and Gildea 1987, Snow and Hoefnagel-Höhle 1978), according to which the capability of abstract and meta-thinking rapidly increases beyond the threshold of adolescence.

4.1. The International School

In Table 1 and Table 2, we show the results of the analysis of the poems written by Kristiansand International School pupils. The results are ranked by frequency and examples of student language presented.

The differences in association patterns seem to be partially due to the pupils' age. In absolute numbers, the age discrepancy was not big (the youngest informants were 11, the oldest 14), but it clearly has an impact on the children's social and cognitive development level. This is reflected in the choice of the main topic of the poems: the younger groups preferred the HOME-topic, while the older group focused on the more abstract issue of identity (ME). Another significant difference between the two age groups is the prominence of the concepts FAMILY and FRIENDS in the poems. In the texts produced by the 13-14-year old respondents, friends are mentioned most frequently as a crucial factor in identity development, more important than family (rank 1 and 5, respectively), while in the younger International School informant group, the ranking of these two concepts is opposite.

Table 1: Recurrent concepts in the poems by International School pupils, ME-topic

Concept	% poems	Sample linguistic exponents (spelling and grammar preserved)
Friends	80	"Free with my friends" "I love my friends/when they make me laugh and cheer me up" "The comfort of my friends/provide fuel for my fire"
Individuality, freedom	70	"Create the person I want/to be" "Me is good enough" "Forever striving to be different" "My friends, my family, the language I speak"
Country/ethnicity	40	"Yes, I'm Norwegian/and in Norway I live/But inside me I know/that I'm half Indonesian"
Language	30	"I speak fluently English and Norwegian" "My languages are now/Much more than one"
Favourite things/ activities	30	"I love diving into the water" "I love the hot tea/and melty chocolate on cold winter days"
Family	20	"My friends, my family, the language I speak"

Table 2: Recurrent concepts in the poems by International School pupils, HOME-topic

Concept	% poems	Sample linguistic exponents (spelling and grammar preserved)
Family	100	“I am at home/when I am with my family/with my mother and father and me myself” “You have family/ You eat food/You have siblings”
Individuality, freedom	50	“I feel at home when I can be who I truly am” “I am free and my creativity runs wild” “I feel at home when I can do as I want” “When there is the privacy I need”
Safety	40	“What is home?/ Is it where I feel safe?” “When everything is peaceful and calm and undisturbed”
Language	20	“Talking with your family/in mother tongue” “When I talk my language/It can be Telugu or Tamil/it is so easy”
Favourite things/ activities	20	“When I am in my room/with my origami and some origami papers/I am at home” “Playing minecraft”
Pet animals	20	“When I am with my cat”
Physical elements of a home (room, bed...)	20	“When the bed is ready to sleep in!” “When my room is messy” “When I see goosey sitting on my table/ It is a very perfect toy...”
Friends	10	“Home is where there are family, friends and animals I know”

Sample poem A below, written by a 12-year-old boy, demonstrates association to several semantic fields that occur frequently in the younger informant group (FAMILY, SAFETY, FREEDOM):

Poem A

Home

*I feel at home when
the warm
comfortable feeling hits me
When everything is peaceful and calm
and undisturbed
I feel at home when
I am free
and my creativity runs wild
When the brave
encouraging feeling follows me
I feel at home when
my family is with me*

The following poem (B) is very representative for the ME-topic: as many texts produced by the older International School pupils, it focuses on the question of individual freedom and the issue of discovering one's true personality.

Poem B**Me**

*I have been told to be
as still as water
as sharp as ice
as balanced as a scale
I have been told to believe
I have been told how to look
I have been told how to think
I have been told to fit in
I have been told where my place is*

*But I have met some people
who taught me to love
they helped me believe in whatever I want and
stand up for it
through them I know that
it doesn't matter how I look
or what I believe
but the important thing is for
me to be me, for me to
create the person I want
to be and most importantly
that me is good enough.*

The issue of developing one's true identity, of personal freedom, the right to make one's own decisions is very prominent in the poems written by both age groups.

Several International School children formulate reflections on ethnicity and nationality, and language. They stress the fact that different ethnicities are part of their identity:

*Yes, I'm Norwegian
and in Norway I live,
but inside me I know/
that I'm half Indonesian*

but a recurrent thought is that there exists a part of one's personality that is independent both of the parent's culture and the Norwegian culture: *a part of me that/I still have to discover*, as one of the International School pupils puts it.

Words and phrases referring to country/ethnicity and language are never associated with conflicts or clashes; they are frequently linked to the concepts of ME and HOME through FRIENDS or FAMILY, for example:

*My friends are from Canada
England, Peru,
I also have friends
from France, and then you*

or

*Talking with your family
in mother tongue
When I talk my language
It can be telugu or tamil
it is so easy*

The pupils' texts often describe an easy movement between national identities:

*Wherever I am
Whatever I see
I will always be me.
Different,
That is what I strive to be.*

*Whether I'm in the United States,
or in the forests of Norway
I will strive to be
Different.*

A common feature of the pupils' reflections on language is perceiving multilinguality as something natural:

*My languages are now
Much more than one
I can also speak English
And of course Indonesian.*

International School children are nevertheless preoccupied with the question which language is their main, "home" language:

*What do I speak then?
Norwegian I'd say...*

However, the different languages and ethnic backgrounds are not presented as competing; they coexist without clashes. Individuality is generally perceived as more important than nationality/ethnicity. If the children make reflections of conflicts, the conflicts and clashes do not concern nationalities or cultures, but the tension between individual vs. collective, authority vs. personal freedom. Phrases like *clash*, *border*, *two worlds* occur not in relation to ethnic differences or country borders, but to the individual vs. collective distinction:

*Two worlds, clashing, the social
and individual.
(...)
My home is on the
border
between these two worlds.*

The concept of collective (larger than one's family and/or close friends) is sometimes associated with fear and unwanted pressure:

*Surrounded by loud individuals
Hiding within the crowd
Scared of others' opinions
Only comfortable around known things...*

Being different, unique, not entirely defined by the collective is generally regarded as a positive value, as illustrated by the quotations below, taken from several poems:

- *Forever striving to be/Different*
- *Being myself and not someone else*
- *Create the person I want to be/and most importantly/that me is good enough*
- *Home (...) Somewhere I can be my true self*
- *Who am I? (...) A person!*

Children from both age groups are interested in the notion of identity, and demonstrate considerable interest in developing and asserting their own identities as authors, young people, and language users in highly individualistic ways. Several pupils in the international group openly discuss their hybrid identities in linguistic terms but the major conflict noted in both informant groups is between the individual and the society he/she inhabits. Friendship across languages and cultures is the best way to overcome the individual-collective clash:

*My friends (...) inspire me to be who I am
Being myself and someone else.
Lovely they are...*

4.2. Aasen School

The poems written by our informants from Aasen School were analysed with respect to recurrent association patterns in the same manner as the texts produced by International School children. Table 3 shows the results with topics ranked and representative examples listed.

FAMILY in Aasen texts was the most frequent association to HOME, as it was the case in the poems written by the younger International School children. A striking difference between the two younger informant groups lies in the low ranking of the concept of FREEDOM/INDIVIDUALITY in the Norwegian pupils' texts. The importance of making own choices, of being a free and unique person, is explicitly formulated only in one poem out of 25.

Aasen pupils do not reflect on language, which is certainly connected to the fact that they identify themselves with Norway, their home city and region; No nations or countries other than Norway are mentioned. An interesting feature of this group's texts is frequent associations to outdoor sports and activities, some of them deeply rooted in the Norwegian culture (as boat trips and fishing lobsters).

Table 3: Recurrent concepts in the poems by Aasen School pupils, HOME-topic

Concept	% poems	Sample linguistic exponents (spelling and grammar preserved)
Family	80	“My family is home” “I am home when I am with my family” “Home is where my sisters is” “I feel home with my family,/my dog, my sister, my brother,/ my mum and my dad./They are my home!”
Sports/outdoor activities	48	“I feel home when I am with my father/When we play football together” “But home can too be when I am playing tennis and handball” “Home for me/ is on the football court” “Home is with the sea and in the boat with the lobsters” “I feel home when I am/ sitting in the saddle”
Friends	47	“Home can be when I am playing with my friends” “Home for me is with my friends”
Pet animals	36	“I feel home with my family,/my dog, my sister, my brother” “My home is with my cat” “I feel home where/my family and/my cute dog are” “I love my cats!”
IT-devices (PC, Ipad, wi-fi, ...)	20	“I feel me home on WiFi” “Home is in my sofa with my Ipad” “I feel home where ever my i-pad is./” “I feel home where ever my PC is”
Physical elements of a home (room, bed...)	20	“Home is in my house” “my room is home/ my bed is home”
Country(Norway)/ Region/City/ restaurants and stores	20	“I feel home when I am in Norway” “Home is Norway” “Kristiansand is where I live” “I feel me home on MCDonald’s and burger king/ and on Unisport store”
Safety	20	“Home for me is safe!” “Home is a safe place to stay”
Freedom/ Individuality	< 10	“Home for me are a place everyone be herself, and a place I could be myself”

Below, we quote two poems (C and D) written by children from Aasen School that are quite prototypical for this group of informants, since they contain associations to several semantic fields that are prominent in Aasen School pupils’ texts: FAMILY, PET ANIMALS, FRIENDS, SPORTS, PHYSICAL ELEMENTS OF A HOME.

Poem C**Home**

*my family is home
my cat is home
my room is home
my bed is home
football is life*

Poem D**My Home**

*I love my home.
Home is fun.
I have cats in my home.
I love my cats!

My home is where my family is.
My friends come to my home sometimes.
I draw in my home.
I love my home.*

Poem D (*My Home*) displays another characteristic feature of the texts produced by Aasen children, namely a quite high frequency of the word *love* (both verb and noun). *Love* occurs in 7 Aasen poems (out of 25), while in the poems by International School pupils the concept of love is explicitly mentioned in 4 texts out of 20. The statistical distinction is not very large, but it is worth noting that *love* is the only abstract noun (apart from the abstract aspects of *home*) that occurs in the poems by Aasen pupils. In the next section, we take a closer look at linguistic and stylistic characteristics of the children's texts.

4.3. Linguistic and stylistic variation

As expected, the poems written by our International School informants displayed a higher degree of lexical and stylistic variation and grammatical complexity than those by Aasen School children, due to the difference in main instructional languages. In Table 4, we summarise the most distinct analysis results.

Table 4: Formal features of the poems

Formal text features	International School	Aasen School
Abstract nouns and noun phrases	+	- (the only abstract noun is <i>love</i>)
Similes and metaphors	+	-
Noun phrases with adjective modifiers	High frequency (16)	Low frequency (4)
Alliteration	+	+
Rhyme	+	-
Sentence type variation	declarative/interrogative/ exclamatory	declarative/exclamatory

International School pupils (both age groups) produced longer noun phrases, often with adjective modifiers, while prenominal adjectives were extremely sparse in Aasen texts. Aasen children produced almost entirely short noun phrases structured in accordance with the simplest pattern possible for English NPs with common nouns: article/possessive pronoun + noun (*my family, my room, a place*). The extremely few adjectives that occurred as noun modifiers were limited to general evaluative attributes (*good, safe, cute*). Also, the use of abstract nouns in Aasen poems was very limited compared to the frequency of abstract words and phrases in International School informants' production.

Although the poems written by the younger international group contained more concrete associations than the older children's poems, abstract nouns and complex noun phrases were not infrequent, e.g.:

the warm comfortable feeling
the brave encouraging feeling
my creativity
the privacy I need
'trust' combined with 'love'
no more happiness

All children employed such formal exponents of poetry as short lines and, to some extent, alliteration, but the International School pupils, especially the older group, made even use of rhyme, deliberate similes and metaphors, and even combined the means of expression, for example:

Free as the wind
I'm a scale,
My thoughts as big as a whale
The touch of the sun light
as still as water
as sharp as ice
as balanced as a scale

We found no evidence of calques or attempts to import Norwegian figurative language into the English texts.

The relatively high frequency of interrogative sentences in the poems by international pupils may indicate that those children became more impressed by the stimulus poem (Maryam's *Me*), both with respect to its form and its content, and that they regarded the issue of constructing own identities across and beyond cultures, languages and nationalities as an interesting, yet demanding task. Our Aasen informants expressed their feeling of being home in and belonging to a given culture (national and regional) in a more affirmative manner, marked by exclamatory sentences, mostly constructed around the verbs *love* and *like*.

5. Conclusions

Table 5 (below) brings together the topic tallies for both Aasen and the two International School groups. It presents a frequency ranking for the semantic fields most frequently associated with ME and HOME.

Table 5: *Ranking of concepts associated to ME and HOME*

Prominent associations	International School, older group – rank	International School, younger group – rank	Aasen School – rank
Family	5	1	1
Friends	1	5	3
Individuality/freedom	2	2	7
Safety	-	2	5
Country/region/ethnicity	3	-	5 *)
Language	4	3	-
Favourite activities	4	3	2 **)
Physical elements of a home (room, bed...)	-	4	5

*) only Norway and Norwegian regions and cities are mentioned

***) all favourite activities mentioned in the poems by Aasen pupils are sports and outdoor activities, often conducted together with family members

As mentioned in Section 5.1, some differences in association patterns seem to be partially due to the pupils' age (the preference for the ME-topic in older children and the HOME-topic in younger respondents, the different ranking of the concepts of FAMILY and FRIENDS). Generally, the poems written by the older group display most signs of abstract thinking (metaphors, many interrogative sentences, no references to physical elements of a home). Another striking fact is the absence of expressions referring to SAFETY in the poems by older pupils, while phrases like feel safe and a safe place are quite frequent in the younger children's texts.

There are, however, certain characteristics of the association patterns in our respondents' poems that cannot be attributed to the age difference and that seem to be related to the multiethnic and multicultural background and environment of the International School pupils and its curricular focus.

In Aasen children's poems, the notion of language is never mentioned, while several International School respondents make the question of language a central topic (2 poems in the older group, 3 poems in the younger).

The notion of ethnic, national and regional identity occurs both in the texts written by International School pupils and Aasen pupils, but reflections on ethnic and geographic belonging differ clearly between informant children from the two schools. Aasen children define themselves as Norwegian (Norway is home) and identify themselves with their home city and/or region.

Individual freedom, personal integrity, the right to choose own values, to create/discover own personality constitute a very prominent topic in the poems by international pupils; these concepts are highly associated both with the notion of HOME and the one of ME. The difference between the Aasen pupils and the International School pupils is striking on this point. The International School children present strong assertions of individual identity as defined against societal roles (*two worlds, clashing, the social and individual*). The Aasen children do not conceptualise identity formation as a struggle and their poems reflect a high degree of social, familial and national integration.

One limitation of the study is the lack of a corresponding informant group from migrant children who are enrolled in public Norwegian primary schools. These children are often divided between different schools and thus studying a class containing all migrant children would be difficult. Such a study is, however, important and presents a future opportunity for research.

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