



## Cross-Cultural Collaborative Inquiry: A Collective Case Study with Students from China and the US



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### ABSTRACT

As our world becomes more connected, globalized education becomes increasingly important. Drawing from educational cosmopolitanism and disciplinary inquiry, this collective case study focused on Chinese and US students' demonstrations of the four capacities of Wahlström's (2014) educational cosmopolitanism, i.e., hospitality, self-reflexivity, intercultural dialogue, and transactions of perspectives, throughout the phases of a cross-cultural collaborative inquiry project referred to as Project-Based Inquiry (PBI) Global. Data sources included (a) semi-structured student focus groups (post-PBI Global), (b) our observations and interactions with students throughout the process, (c) the students' posts and uploads in their shared writing space, Quip, and (d) the students' PBI Global products. Results shed light on how cross-cultural collaborative disciplinary inquiry fosters students' demonstration and development of educational cosmopolitan capacities.

### 1. Introduction

As our world becomes more connected, globalized education becomes increasingly more important (Banks, 2017). According to the New London Group (1996), students must be technologically and globally competent in order to interact and work with diverse people from around the world. In 2010, Hull and Stornaiuolo indicated the significance of instructing students to utilize digital tools to communicate and collaborate cross-culturally in educational spaces. The US Department of Education has also recognized the importance of global education and emphasized its inclusion in the curriculum so that all students are globally-minded upon high school graduation. Across the world, the Chinese Ministry of Education (2011) has called for educational reforms with the aim of producing creative and innovative lifelong learners who can think critically to solve the problems and meet the demands of the 21st century global economy.

With the increasing calls to engage in global education, research is emerging that explores this new area. Hull and Stornaiuolo (2010) first noted how our globalized society enabled a cosmopolitan educational practice in which students recognize the importance of both local and global issues, as well as how they interconnect. Through intercultural dialogue, students can navigate the tensions of these juxtaposing demands and learn about historical, cultural, and ideological differences. Such a cosmopolitan educational practice requires students and teachers to explore ideas in fields such as new literacies, disciplinary literacy, and civic literacy. Hull and Stornaiuolo (2014) have studied how students converse and create across digital tools and social media, as well as how teachers partner and work across cultures (Stornaiuolo, 2016).

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In 2015, Bean and Dunkerly-Bean continued to expand cosmopolitan education to the literacy field. Though they highlighted research that had begun to explore the intersection of adolescent literacy and cosmopolitanism (e.g., Damico & Baidon, 2011; Skerrett, 2012), they noted that “the time is ripe to move inquiry into the authentic problem-based curriculum” (p. 53) that Allan Luke (2013) described in his “second wave” curriculum. In this “second wave,” Luke proposed that students research relevant issues in order to develop solutions to local and global issues.

In working towards Luke (2013) proposed second-wave curriculum, the first author engaged students in cross-cultural, inquiry-based learning that focused on local and global issues. Most recently, PBI was expanded into the PBI Global Initiative, in which global cosmopolitanism is explored through a partnership between a U.S. university and two secondary schools, East High School in the U.S. and Shirong High School in China (Spires, Himes, & Wang, 2018). Through this partnership, we have utilized the PBI Global model—discussed in the next section—to explore cosmopolitan education through seven collaborative, authentic inquiry-based projects. In answer to Bean and Dunkerly-Bean’s (2015) call for more research that intersects inquiry-based learning, cosmopolitan education, and literacy education, we designed this research to explore how students navigated disciplinary literacy practices through cosmopolitan interactions within the space of collaborative, authentic inquiry-based learning projects conducted with two high schools, one from the U.S. and one from China.

## 2. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study builds upon educational cosmopolitanism, project-based learning, and disciplinary literacy. Cosmopolitanism refers to one being a citizen of the world. In recent years, researchers have explored cosmopolitanism in a variety of areas, including the moral, cultural, political, and economic (Kleingeld, 1999). More recently, Hansen (2008) applied cosmopolitanism to education, coining the term *educational cosmopolitanism*. Hansen proposed that curriculum could generate a “cosmopolitan sensibility,” which he explained as “an outlook that regards life experience as universally educational” (p. 289).

Wahlström (2014) conceptualized *educational cosmopolitanism* as having four dimensions: hospitality, self-reflexivity, intercultural dialogue, and transactions of perspectives. The dimension of hospitality requires one to be open to the Other—both new people and perspectives. Self-reflexivity involves learning about one’s self and the Other through encountering the unfamiliar. Through intercultural dialogue, people of different cultures share ideas. Lastly, transactions of perspectives involves creating a “third culture” in which perspectives can be shared and examined through dialogue.

Educational cosmopolitanism teaches global citizenship (Wahlström, 2014). Inquiry-based learning is grounded in educational cosmopolitanism, and the instructional method can be used to address issues of significance at both the local and global levels (Bean & Dunkerly-Bean, 2015; Wahlström, 2014).

### 2.1. Project-Based Learning, Disciplinary Literacy, and Educational Cosmopolitanism

A well-known pedagogical approach that facilitates inquiry (Dewey, 1927) and student engagement is project-based learning (PBL) (Boss & Krauss, 2007; Larmer, Ross, & Mergendoller, 2009). According to research sponsored by the Buck Institute, PBL students perform as well or better than traditionally taught students (Parker et al., 2011); PBL students demonstrate improved critical thinking (Beckett & Miller, 2006); and PBL can work in different types of schools with diverse learners (Hixson, Ravitz, & Whisman, 2012). Schneider, Krajcik, Marx, and Soloway (2002) also found that students who participate in PBL in science are better prepared for standardized testing, such as the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) science test. In addition, their study (Schneider et al., 2002) indicates that PBL supports students’ construction of knowledge through inquiry.

We use a specific type of project-based learning that incorporates the principles of disciplinary literacy (Spires, Kerkhoff, Graham, & Lee, 2014; Spires, Kerkhoff, & Graham, 2016; Spires, Kerkhoff, Graham, Thompson, & Lee, 2018; see Fig. 1). These principles include Moje’s (2015) Four E Heuristic: engage, elicit, examine, and evaluate, which serves as a guide for teachers to capitalize on the sociocultural nature of disciplinary work (Moje, Overby, Tysvaer, & Morris, 2008). Through disciplinary literacy, students engage and apprentice into dispositions and literacy practices that are specific to a particular disciplinary community.

We refer to our specific type of PBL as Project-Based Inquiry (PBI) Global, which creates a shared language and process for teachers and students to use as they engage in inquiry across cultures. The PBI Global approach consists of five phases, which begin with posing a compelling question rooted in the disciplines and end with an opportunity for students to share, publish, and act on the answer to their question (see Fig. 1). The aim of PBI Global is for students to engage in deeper learning (Huberman, Bitter, Anthony, & O’Day, 2014) within the discipline they are studying.

The PBI Global process is grounded in educational cosmopolitanism. As a cross-cultural, collaborative inquiry process, PBI Global encourages students to research, report, and take collective action on prominent, cross-cutting global issues identified by the United Nations (UN) (see <http://www.un.org/en/sections/issues-depth/global-issues-overview/>). Over 275 students from East and Shirong High Schools have participated in six PBI Global projects since the spring semester of 2015 on various topics (Spires, Himes, & Lyjak, 2016; Spires, Himes, & Wang, 2016). This paper focuses on the PBI Global project conducted on water ecology.

For this particular PBI Global iteration, a biology and an English teacher at each school worked together to facilitate the project with their students. Prior to discussing potential research topics in cross-cultural teams, students in the U.S. and China studied the properties of water and diverse forms of water pollutants in their respective biology classes. In English courses, students analyzed the features and structures of informative versus persuasive writing. These instructional opportunities developed students’ background knowledge and prepared them to engage in cross-cultural conversations on water ecology.

We carefully selected technology resources that students could use collaboratively and simultaneously in both countries. Due to

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