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# Opening doors, opening minds: A cosmopolitan pedagogical framework to assess learning for global competency in Chicago's underserved communities



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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research and report is to utilize a cosmopolitan pedagogical framework to qualitatively assess education for global competency in underserved communities. Using qualitative methods such as participant-observation and interviewing, a nine-month long participatory action research study is described that includes three educational programs facilitated through Hostelling International-Chicago and Chicago Public Schools. The results demonstrate that a cosmopolitanism pedagogical framework can teach global competencies that reflect hope, memory, and dialog as well as other cosmopolitan values to students who may not have the opportunity for more traditional international/intercultural education.

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## 1. Introduction

Gibson, Rimmington, and Landwher-Brown (2008) emphasize the necessity of preparing future world citizens (i.e., the children of globalization) for the challenges they will face through the interconnectedness and diversity of a more intercultural world. As a non-profit organization, Hostelling International-USA (HI-USA) works to bring education for global competency and mindful intercultural interactions to individuals who might not ordinarily have the opportunity for traditional intercultural exchanges or training. Through experiential and project-based learning (Gibson et al., 2008, p. 12), HI-USA creates global-learning opportunities for high school students who often have not left the four-block radius of their home communities. The current research focuses on three such educational opportunities offered by the Chicago branch of HI-USA. The first, Cultural Kitchen (CK), is a program where students spend ten sessions learning about cultural awareness, norms, and respect by studying a culture different from their own, then cook a meal that represents that culture and create a presentation to share with guests at the hostel. A second program, Community Walls (CW), has students create original artwork to express what life in their communities is like, and then exhibit that artwork at the hostel. A third program, Exchange Neighborhoods (ENS), “pairs two high schools to host the other school in an exploration of each other’s cultures”, and through this, teaches high school students in inner city schools to “build pride around their own culture, while opening their minds to learn about a new neighborhood and culture of their peers” ([http://www.hichicago.org/community\\_ens.shtml](http://www.hichicago.org/community_ens.shtml)). All three programs culminate with an event and overnight stay at the hostel.

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To help HI-USA in their endeavor of providing such programming, we use a cosmopolitan educational framework (Hansen, Burdick-Shepherd, Cammarano, & Obelliero, 2009) to examine and assess the teachers and volunteers, educational programming, and student outcomes for programming at Hostelling International Chicago (HI-Chicago). We hope the findings will improve both the programming itself and create other opportunities for enhancing global competency through education in underserved communities.

We begin by addressing vernacular cosmopolitanism, intercultural communication pedagogy, intercultural communication competence, and urban communities. We then describe a year-long, qualitative study of HI-Chicago and present the inductive themes that emerged from qualitative coding of the data generated. Finally, we discuss what these findings tell us about what works/does not work about the programming according to the students, teachers, and other participants; what we can learn about pedagogy for cosmopolitan citizenship from this research; and what future implications this work brings to consideration. We conclude with recommendations for both Hostelling International USA and intercultural communication scholars and pedagogues on tackling the complex relationships between cosmopolitanism and pedagogy.

## 2. Theory in review

Much of the education for global citizenship revolves around the idea of intercultural communication competence. Beamer (1992) defines intercultural communication competence as having the motivation, knowledge, mindfulness, and skills to communicate appropriately and effectively across cultures. However, much of this intercultural competence training is often limited to populations who are privileged enough to engage in some sort of international education, either through studying or traveling abroad, or through college courses or training programs for international business, diplomacy, military, or similar endeavors (Bennett & Bennett, 2004; Kim, 2001). In this respect, then, we feel that education for global competency through communication competence does not adequately account for pedagogy that seeks to transcend traditional cultural boundaries and lines. We suggest instead a focus on cosmopolitanism, particularly vernacular cosmopolitanism, and how it intersects with intercultural communication pedagogy, both of which we outline below.

### 2.1. *Cosmopolitanism*

Cosmopolitan theory (Appiah, 2006) provides one useful framework for improving intercultural communication competence at a more grass-roots and less privileged level. This perspective lays out the criteria to create citizens of the world, through recognizing that “previously isolated groups now live in close proximity, and this new reality gives rise to significant new opportunities as well as new challenges to be confronted and overcome” (Waks, 2009, p. 590). Hansen (2011) notes that “cosmopolitanism invites a reconstruction of the idea of culture itself” (p. 66), from the kind of mutual exclusivity expressed by Triandis (obvious, external, and created or objective culture vs. hidden, internal, and implicit or subjective culture), toward a more merged and porous duality of individuals and communities alike. Specifically, Hansen (2011) describes culture as working on three levels: that of the sociolinguistic community; communities of art or discipline; and the individual process of learning defining individual cultural identity through didactic, experiential and reflective learning and community/group membership and influence. This is culture at the level of cosmopolitan pedagogy, focusing less on the objective/subjective and more on the layers and levels through which culture can be taught, learned, embodied, engaged, and changed. Thus, cosmopolitanism also provides an agenda for education that involves an orientation toward self, others, and the world, through the creation of meaningful intercultural interactions that lead to a sense of empathy and an ethic of care, acknowledging “the ubiquity of change and the presence of difference, but it also perceives these conditions as promising rather than merely problematic” (Hansen et al., 2009, p. 590).

#### 2.1.1. *Cosmopolitan (re)turn and vernacular cosmopolitanism*

Renewed scholarly interest in cosmopolitanism as an analytic tool for understanding engagements across difference in our era of globalization has necessitated that the term be reclaimed from its colonial and elitist contemporary origins. Werbner (2008), arguing that cosmopolitan ideals must be reinterpreted by local actors, follows Bhabha (1994) in calling for a vernacular or situated cosmopolitanism as a means recouping the utility of the concept while responding to critiques that the concept is inherently elitist, Western, and masculinist. Vernacular cosmopolitanism reflects an “attempt to come to terms with the conjunctural elements of postcolonial and pre-colonial forms of cosmopolitanism and travel, while probing the conceptual boundaries of cosmopolitanism and its usefulness as an analytic concept” (Werbner, 2008, p. 496). This works as an analytic tool for understanding the ways that “individual and collective actors in the postcolonial world make that world by engaging with each other and cosmopolitan ideas and movements beyond their immediate locals” (p. 8). Implicit in these conjunctions is the simple idea that local, ethnic, national, or religious “rootedness” does not negate the possibility of openness to Otherness or the ability to have a universalist civic consciousness and sense of responsibility beyond the local. In other words, people have the ability to, and often do, maintain allegiances to multiple localities.

When embodied (e.g., Delanty, 2009; Hansen et al., 2009; Werbner, 2008), cosmopolitanism is understood as a perspective and orientation where the social actors juxtapose reflective openness toward difference and new (cultural) influences with a reflective loyalty to and appreciation of their “home” culture. Such a stance is one that is responsive, not reactive, to the ever-changing socio-cultural environment. In other words, a cosmopolitan orientation actively seeks to productively engage difference in a manner that affirms and transforms self and other—and defines individuals as simultaneously both self and

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