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# Cosmopolitanism, Globalization and The Field of Adolescent Literacy

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## Abstract

In this article we discuss the current nature and circumstances of cosmopolitanism and what it means to the field of adolescent literacy. Drawing on contemporary scholarship, cosmopolitanism is understood as: 1) the local *experience or condition* of globalization, what has been called ‘internal globalization,’ and, 2) as a *disposition* or sensibility that ensures productive and peaceful relations in light of globalization or any circumstance that creates dynamic and culturally diverse contexts. From a critical review of the key documents in the field, we argue that for many adolescents their lives and literacies now, and especially in the future, will be lived out in the interface of the local and global. In what might be described as a cosmopolitan age we discuss what that means for the field of adolescent literacy. In critical review of the work done under the rubric of adolescent literacy, it was evident the field has been carefully documenting the terrain of adolescent literacies, and leading the charge for reform in policy and practice. However, there is a need to reconfigure and expand the concepts, precepts and practices that have come to name adolescent literacy in order to ensure that students are well served by the field and by their literacy education.

## Résumé

Cet article discute la nature et les circonstances du concept de cosmopolitisme et ce qu’il signifie dans le domaine de la littératie des adolescents. Du point de vue du savoir actuel, ce concept définit (1) l’expérience ou la condition locale de globalisation, ce qui est connu sous le terme de « globalisation interne » et (2) la disposition ou sensibilité qui assure des relations productives et pacifiques dans un contexte global ou toutes circonstances qui créent des contextes culturellement dynamiques et différents. En nous basant sur une révision critique des documents clés, nous argumentons que les vies et les littératies actuelles et futures de beaucoup d’adolescents seront vécues dans une interface entre un monde tout aussi local que global. Nous discuterons ce que ce monde peut représenter dans le domaine de la littératie adolescente dans l’ère cosmopolite. En révisant cette littératie de façon critique, il est facile de s’apercevoir du nombre croissant de publications et de son importance dans la réforme de politiques et de pratiques de terrain. Il est cependant tout à fait nécessaire de reconfigurer et de développer ces concepts, préceptes et pratiques afin d’assurer leur adéquation dans le domaine et l’éducation en littératie des adolescents.

## INTRODUCTION

In 1998 Allen Luke and John Elkins suggested that the era in which we are living is unique in history, unprecedented in the nature and speed of economic, social and technological change. They argued that in these “New Times” the nature of literacy is changing dramatically, and therefore a new vision for literacy education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is needed (Luke & Elkins, 1998, p. 4). This new vision, according to Luke and Elkins, must be informed by the new and emerging communication technologies and the challenges these technologies pose to

traditional print-based literacies. They pointed to the fact that much of what we understand and value about literacy education was formulated in the early and middle part of the 20th century and the industrial age. We would add that what much of what is understood and valued about literacy and public education was strongly connected with the development of the nation state and with particular forms and ideas of democratic citizenship prominent in the eighteenth century (Shannon, 2001).

Certainly many researchers and scholars, before and after Luke and Elkins' comments, have sought to reconfigure what is done in 21<sup>st</sup> century literacy classrooms. There is for example a substantial body of research devoted to the "new literacies" or "digital literacies" that have become ubiquitous in the lives of many 21<sup>st</sup> century students. Much of this research points to the widening gap between the new literacies and the print-based literacies that remain firmly entrenched, indeed re-entrenched, in educational policy and practice at both local and national levels (Coiro, Knobel, Lankshear, & Leu, 2008; Hull & Stornaiuolo, 2010). The technological advances continue, and, notwithstanding the efforts of teachers, administrators, and researchers to address the digital literacies, the English Language Arts classroom seems mired in its print history (Bean & Harper, 2011; Luke, 2004).

Indeed, many schools have remained static enterprises rooted in an older Fordist factory model. Hull and Stornaiuolo (2010) note:

Gaps, disconnects, and contradictions—these largely characterized the relationship between the digital, mobile, and radically interconnected social, economic, and cultural worlds that we increasingly inhabit, and the print-centric, stationary, traditional school day, still organized for the most part by tools, space-time relationships, and participant structures that belong to a previous age. (p. 85)

Making school literacy curriculum more relevant to the needs of 21<sup>st</sup> century students will necessitate more profound change. The new communication technologies have dramatically increased the flow of information, ideas and images across time and place, all instantly available. To varying degrees, the Internet has replaced the teacher and print texts as the key repository of information. Indeed, some scholars claim that the screen is or soon will be replacing the page (Johnson & Kress, 2003; Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2001; Coiro, Knobel, Lankshear, & Leu, 2008). These fast moving changes necessitate new or certainly expanded sets of literacy skills.

Central to the argument of this paper, the new communication technologies also secure a growing, more instantly accessible national and international audience. Indeed with the Internet, cell phones, and other communication technologies (e.g. Skype, FaceBook, MySpace), virtual border crossing is easy and immediate. Access to the world, or at least to those who have the technology, is ever possible and adolescents slip into these transliteracy global flows with relative ease. We will highlight a few of the projects that illustrate a cosmopolitan turn in literacy a bit later in the article (Hull & Stornaiuolo, 2010; Jimenez, Smith, & Teague, 2009; McClean, 2010).

In this era of globalization contact with a large, diverse and expanding global audience is also secured by face-to-face contact with the increasing numbers of migrating and immigrating groups that comprise the Canadian and American populations. For, along with technological advances, have come economic shifts and the development of global capitalism that has increased not only the flow of goods, and capital, but of people. As noted by Gibson and Rojas (2006), globalization and the rapid social changes it has engendered “is as much about deterritorialization and the displacement of a large and growing number of peoples, as it is about the free movement of capital, information and services (p.69).

The effects of this accelerated movement of people, images and information, are competing and contradictory, sometimes, eroding borders with multiplying and diversifying local and global affiliations, identifications and interdependencies, at other times deepening national divisions and intensifying nationalist and patriotic discourses in the face of instability, change, the seeming loss of the local, with the ever increasing presence of the ‘stranger’. Whatever the effect, the “other” virtually or in person has never been closer as the world becomes ever more connected and ever more interdependent. Sociologists, Beck and Sznaider (2010) note:

Cosmopolitanization thus includes the proliferation of multiple cultures (as with cuisines from around the world), the growth of many transnational forms of life, the emergence of various non-state political actors (from Amnesty International to the World Trade Organization), the paradoxical emergence of global protest movements, the hesitant formation of multi-national states (like the European Union) etc. There is simply no way of turning the clock back to a world of sovereign nation-states and national societies. (p. 390)

Because of this, many argue that transnationalism and cosmopolitanism rather than nationalism is becoming a defining characteristic of social, economic

and political life in the 21st century (Apple, Kenway, & Singh, 2005). Beck (2002) suggests that increasingly the local and the global are not experienced as polarities but more often as combined and/or mutually implicating phenomena (p.17). Thus it is possible to be a local resident and a transnational or global worker; a national, and multi-national citizen; a local consumer/producer and a global consumer/producer; a community member fluent in the local literacy practices, but also a global worker/citizen/consumer who has or needs multiliterate, multilingual, multimodal skills and abilities. At the very least, the movement of information, ideas, images, capital and people insures that community-based members' lives are lived out and affected by diverse global forces, whether they are conscious of it or not.

Students now and in the future will require an education and a literacy education in particular that will serve them well in a complex global/local/“glocal” world. As will be discussed later in this article, knowledge of, and skills with, the new literacies will continue to be critical but perhaps even more critical will be the knowledges, skills, and dispositions necessary to live life productively in and with difference in an ever more connected and interdependent world. In light of these needs and conditions, Luke (2004) has renewed his call for reform, arguing now for a “vision of teaching as cosmopolitan work and [as a] profession in critical and contingent relation to the flows, contexts and consequences of cultural and economic globalization” (p.1429). He asks, “what could teaching beyond but within the nation be?” (p.1429) and elaborates, stating: “What if we envisioned as part of our rethinking of democratic education a reconstruction of teachers and students as world citizens, thinkers, intellectuals and critics and within this context as national and community-based subjects?” (2004, p. 1430). In this ‘what if’, Luke privileges the notion of “cosmopolitanism” as the overarching frame in contemporary lives and to pick up on his earlier call, the literacy practices of students and teachers.

In this paper we take up Allan Luke’s call for reform in the context of our own field: Adolescent Literacy. We do so by highlighting some examples of scholarship in Adolescent Literacy and consider what it would mean if indeed we were to take Luke’s call, and more importantly, the cosmopolitan life and literacies of our students more seriously. More specifically we consider how the commonplace concepts, assumptions, and practices that underlie the field are affirmed, remade or undone by the cosmopolitanism of our students now and in the future, and look to how the field may better serve 21<sup>st</sup> century students and teachers.

## COSMOPOLITANISM AND ADOLESCENTS

Cosmopolitanism may sound very modern, perhaps very fashionable, but it is neither. It is a term with a long, rich and conflicted history dating back to the ancient Greeks. The word ‘Cosmopolitan’ derives from the Greek *kosmopolites* or ‘citizen of the world’, a term used by Diogenes, a Greek philosopher, in the 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE to declare his political allegiance to the world. Since that time the term has repeatedly emerged as an appeal to a larger political sphere, whenever unassailable differences and diversity threaten local or national interests. For example, in response to volatile local and religious sectarianism of their times, Enlightenment philosophers wrote in some detail about the possibilities of what they called world citizenship and its potential to secure “Perpetual Peace” (Kant, 1795/1991, 2003; see also Hayden, 2005). With globalization and the aggressive nationalism of these times, cosmopolitanism is again emerging in philosophical, sociological, and educational discourse (Benhabib, 2004; Appiah, 2006; Hayden, 2005; Beck, 2006, 2002, 2000; Derrida, 2001; Appadurai, 2000; Nussbaum, 1996). In the field of education a small but expanding area of scholarship has focused on cosmopolitanism (See Todd, 2009, 2007; Burns, 2008; Hansen, 2010, 2008; Hull & Stornaiuolo, 2010; Popkewitz, 2008; Tierney, 2006; Rizvi, 2005; Papastephanou, 2005; Luke 2004, 2002).

There are various definitions of and approaches to cosmopolitanism in this literature; however, most agree that in this age of globalization, the local and the global are no longer separate spheres but interface through various processes with differing and at times contradictory effects. In this context, cosmopolitanism is used to reference, as Ulrich Beck (2002) specifies, the local *experience or condition* of living in a time of globalization: in short, what might be termed “internal globalization” ( p. 17). Others might use the term “globalization from below” (Singh, Kenway, & Apple, 2007) to signify the personal and localized response to globalization. Thus, in this definition cosmopolitanism is an effect of globalization and speaks to the local experience of life lived out, for better or worse, in the accelerated movement of people, ideas, images, information, goods and capital. Some suggest that even at the local level: “21st century forms of life and identities are ethically and culturally simultaneously global and local” (Beck, 2002, p. 36; see also Apple, Kenway & Singh, 2005).

Cosmopolitanism as a condition or experience of internal globalization seems particularly useful in considering the circumstances of 21<sup>st</sup> century adolescents. The technologically savvy, multi-affiliated adolescents who travel virtually in highly social and nearly borderless communities, often of their own making, as well as traveling with the various populations that confront them directly and indirectly in their local lives and school classrooms, seem to

epitomize the cosmopolitan life lived at the nexus of the local/global. We know that adolescents as an international group are avid users of technology (Hull et al., 2009). Demographically, wired adolescents in Canada, the United States and elsewhere are a diverse group including those who are indigenous, and many more whose families migrated or immigrated from elsewhere. Jimenez, Smith and Teague (2009) note: "Many immigrants participate in transnational [literacy] activities, for example, through raising funds for their sending communities, staying in touch with family members and friends living in their countries of origin, taking part in events migrant communities have organized in their host countries and conducting business across national borders" (p.17).

But all are impacted by globalization and the possible contact across national borders, even youth with limited knowledge and access to travel or, the internet, or those whose families are not caught in global travel, migration or displacement. Those students disadvantaged in rich and in poor countries by poverty, military strife, and various forms of social oppression are the most vulnerable to the most negative consequences of globalization, in particular economic globalization: separated families, financial instability, increased violence, an expanded sex trade industry, and child labor.

Although there remains a dynamic energy and interest in globalization, since 9/11 there is also considerable fear and risk. Moreover, the growing inequalities and dangers to marginalized youth, and indeed to all youth who now or in the future face a world with social, economic and ecological crisis suggests a need for an older and more common definition of cosmopolitanism: that is, as a ***disposition or sensibility*** or philosophy that promotes peaceful co-existence, harmony, cultural exchange and social progress through an enlarged sense of obligation and responsibility to those within but particularly outside of local and national boundaries. Among others, Nussbaum (1996) suggests this disposition names a responsibility or duty to the human race over and above those owed to national compatriots. In general such a cosmopolitan disposition insists on the question: *What do we owe to others as members of the human race?*

In the case of youth, the question concerns our obligations and responsibilities to disadvantaged youth living within and beyond our borders (Hull et. al., 2009). Such talk is often guided by references to universal human rights, laws, and moral standards, and appeals to formal international governing bodies and institutions: The World Court, United Nations (and its agencies: UNESCO, UNICEF), the International Monetary Fund (World Bank) and to global but non-governmental organizations like The Red Cross/Crescent. What is particularly important later in this paper are appeals for "universally agreed

upon standards of communication” to guide interactions within and beyond national borders (Todd, 2009, p.2).

However what is and is not named as “universal” is highly contested within and outside of the discourse on cosmopolitanism. In education and elsewhere attention is increasingly focused on the development of world or global citizenship framed within the context of universal human rights (Nussbaum, 1996). A human rights based approach situates education in a geopolitical framework that claims literacy as indivisible from other universal human rights including the social, cultural, civil and political (UNESCO/UNICEF, 2007). “The human rights movement exemplifies both the yearning for, and progress toward, the establishment of fundamental rights for all persons” (Bennett & Hart, 2001, p. 193). But there is at the same time a central and conflicting acknowledgement of cultural pluralism, and social and cultural difference, and on the legal rights of local and national groups to define themselves and their cultural practices within a paradigm of universal human rights, especially as it pertains to literacy and educative practices.

A more robust notion of the cosmopolitan citizen has been suggested, and would appear to be necessary for those creating/engaging in supranational identities and relationships. Implied in Luke’s call for students to be both world citizens *and* national/community-based individuals is a dual sense of identity and citizenry that is not only an ideal but an imperative. For educational philosophers such as Hansen and Todd, a more powerful and potentially more useful understanding of cosmopolitanism rests in the acknowledgement of its inherent contradictions or tensions. Todd (2007) notes the ambiguous core of cosmopolitanism lies, “in the defense of and obligation to universal moral standards *and* to local, particular systems of meanings” (p. 66).

Speaking more generally, Hansen (2003) names a cosmopolitan sensibility as “a sustained readiness to learn from the new and different while being heedful of the known and familiar” (p. 289). For Hansen, cosmopolitanism names a sensibility that promotes an open and creative mind. Thus for a literacy researcher/educator to adopt a cosmopolitan disposition or sensibility requires an openness and indeed, a desire to expand awareness of what and who lies within and beyond the circle of the local and familiar. It requires the learner to listen and engage creatively and productively with such knowledge, to be formed not only informed by this new knowledge, but to remain ever mindful of one’s knowledge and loyalties to local knowledges. Translating these dispositions to adolescent literacy as a social practice suggests paying attention to how local literacy practices include global elements (e.g. advertisements in native languages, text



messages in native dialects) that could become integral to constructing literacy lessons (e.g. see Jimenez et al., 2009, Karanja, 2010).

Hansen acknowledges the difficulty of being receptive to learning from what is new: “The willingness to learn from every encounter does not mean that such learning will be easy or always possible. Understanding self and other is seldom guaranteed and is, in any case, always incomplete” (2010, p. 7). It is a difficult position as well in that cosmopolitanism is defined against internationalism, pluralism, multiculturalism, therefore it is not an amalgamation or collection or assimilation of cultural, political social pre-given individual or state identities or differences. It requires living within a tension that is difficult. As Benhabib (2004) succinctly states “we have to learn to live with the otherness of others whose ways of being may be deeply threatening to our own” (p.196).

This complex notion of cosmopolitanism advanced by Todd, Hansen, and implied by Luke and others, recognizes the acknowledgement of the complexity and necessary creativity of life lived with others in a global-local interface. It would seem most appropriate to consider cosmopolitanism in relation to the education of students, and for the purposes of this paper the global/local lives and literacies of adolescents. For students and their teachers living with and traveling across the interface of local, national and international knowledges, interests, affiliations, identities and identifications in virtual and material lives, a complex notion of cosmopolitanism would indeed seem necessary.

In light of these needs what does the field of Adolescent Literacy offer 21<sup>st</sup> century students and their teachers? Indeed, what happens to the configuration of the field in the context of cosmopolitan lives and literacies? We begin to answer these questions by alluding to some of the central tenets that now and in the past have constituted Adolescent Literacy, as well as highlighting some specific examples of cosmopolitan projects (Hull & Stornaiuolo, 2010; Jimenez, Smith, & Teague, 2009; McClean, 2010).

## **THE FIELD OF ADOLESCENT LITERACY**

Although interest and study in the reading skills and practices of teenagers goes back to the early part of the twentieth century, Adolescent Literacy as a field is relatively new. To a large extent, it was the International Reading Association (IRA) and its Commission on Adolescent Literacy in the mid 1990s that began or certainly formalized the field. The Commission was established in response to the growing awareness that the reading skills and literacy needs of adolescents had been largely neglected by school and government officials. In addition, there was a focus on the need for instruction in

the complex reading skills required in content area reading and writing assignments (Moore, Bean, Birdyshaw & Rycik, 1999). As well, there was an expanded sense of what constituted reading practices and thus a move away from “reading” to the much broader term “literacy.” This switch was evident in 1995 when the IRA sponsored *Journal of Reading* was renamed the *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*.

The various policies, position statements, grant initiatives and research perspectives are wide-ranging encompassing socio-cultural research on literacy, content-area literacy, and the “new” literacies along with psychological and cognitive perspectives on reading. Key to the field has been its conceptualization of “adolescents,” “literacy,” and “text.” Supporting the research has been a mission to address the educational/literacy needs of youth and the deficiencies in their literacy education in efforts to support and extend understated but important democratic and humanistic goals (Harper & Bean 2006; 2007). The field finds a sense of urgency and a largely deficit view of adolescents fueled by an underlying fear that youth will not attain the necessary 21<sup>st</sup> century literacy practices necessary for a productive and peaceful life. Notwithstanding the work of some scholars on out of school literacy educational sites (Hull et al., 2010; Jimenez, et al., 2009; McClean, 2010), the focus has been on what should happen in schools and in literacy classrooms more specifically to alleviate this fear.

By and large the field has not focused on global contexts; as Hull (2009) comments: “One gap in this research is its overall inattention to global or even international issues...On the whole, it remains relatively Westernized: a USA, U.K., and Australian endeavor” (p. 127). Cosmopolitanism does not redirect attention exclusively to the global or international context but may go some way in addressing Hull’s criticism with its focus on the local-global interface—the world in our classroom and the classroom in the world. Certainly such an acknowledgement draws attention to what has configured the field beginning with the notion of the adolescent.

The adolescent is a key to the field and has been named in a particular way (Bean & Harper, 2011). Initially, the focus was on adolescents who are illiterate or struggling readers, that is youth who have yet to attain basic literacy. This deficit view marginalizes youth and denies competencies they may well possess outside of school related to literacy. Youth were seen as not attaining the complex literacy skills and practices in the disciplines necessary for advanced study. Most importantly for the argument in the present cosmopolitan analysis, the diversity of youth and their local/global worlds were not fully acknowledged by schools. With these thoughts in mind, we move to a brief examination of three key projects that embody cosmopolitan theory and dispositions.

## **KEY ADOLESCENT LITERACY PROJECTS: A COSMOPOLITAN VIEW**

Three contemporary research projects offer a cosmopolitan perspective on what is possible in the world of adolescent literacy. Work by Hull and her colleagues on the “Space2Cre8” project involves adolescents in grades 7-11 in South Africa, India, the United States, and Norway. These students collaborate across sites to create and exchange digital artifacts using an online multinational and multilingual network (Hull et al., 2010). They create and share digital stories, art, and critical conversations about concerns in their lives and respective home areas including poverty and discrimination. Most importantly, they must become self-reflective as they interact across diverse communities and mores. Hull and Stornaiuolo (2010) note: “A critical component in developing a cosmopolitan disposition involves a self-reflexivity that is both inward and outward looking, balancing one’s position in the world with a consideration of others and our obligations to them” (p. 91).

In an effort to engage adolescents in capitalizing on community literacy resources that have transnational elements, Jimenez, Smith, and Teague (2009) collected a broad range of “texts” that included instrumental print ads showing how to transmit funds to Mexico, China, and Nigeria, as well as other Spanish language texts aimed at applying for scholarships and immigration documents. These community-based documents can then be used as texts to critique and translate into a target language. Students can create and produce their own texts using digital media. Jimenez and colleagues note: “We believe that instruction that incorporates transnational literacies makes sense because it can help teachers better understand ELLs and foster meaningful relationships with and among students from linguistically and culturally diverse backgrounds” (p. 25).

Cheryl McClean’s case study of Zeek, a 10<sup>th</sup> grade student from Trinidad who moved to the south in the United States, nicely captures the cosmopolitan global flows that characterize contemporary adolescent culture (McClean, 2010). “For Zeek, the digital world is her virtual home” (McClean, p. 13). Indeed, in order to maintain her sense of self as a Caribbean “Trini” dialect speaker, Zeek used social media to converse with her Trinidad Tobago friends, easily code-shifting into her native dialect. In school, her accent had been reshaped to fit a standard English dominant style but her fluid use of social media helped Zeek to maintain a strong cosmopolitan sense of self, now embodying a Caribbean American identity. The Internet offered Zeek a vehicle that kept her connected to her roots while she continued to expand her code shifting skills in the more hegemonic American school setting. McClean found that Zeek saw her social

networking as an alternate space. “This home is a safe space where she can actively exercise agency in controlling and performing her multiple identities and literacies” (p. 17).

These are a few of the ongoing research projects that move in a cosmopolitan direction, embracing difference and helping contemporary adolescents become world citizens.

## Conclusion

Our preliminary results suggest that the specific discourses that do not well serve, support or further the literacy skills and sensibilities needed for cosmopolitan contexts are, as expected, those that validate a literacy securely and permanently bounded by national/local place and time. The most obvious of these name and support literacy and literacy learning as bounded by national identities, identifications and affiliations; (e.g. an exclusive focus on the national canon read from a national perspective), on the privileging of national monolingualism and on the exclusive development of print-based English literacy. Less obvious are those practices and policies that more subtly normalize adolescents, their families and their literacies practice according to local or national standards, and assumptions of stability rather than mobility in their lives and literacies, (e.g. singular and definitive readings of text and teens).

As we continue to work on this inquiry we are deploying a heuristic that organizes the data as a discursive clash between the assumed local adolescent and the emerging cosmopolitan adolescent. From our analysis, we argue that cosmopolitanism means more than the addition of an international perspective to adolescent literacy research and teaching. It means more than supporting pluralism and multiculturalism in literacy practices. More fully, it means acknowledging and integrating into our literacy lessons, and our literacy research the highly dynamic interface of local and global; and the movement among identities, affiliations and identifications that defines cosmopolitan life. Most importantly for literacy educators it means refiguring the literacy skills and sensibilities needed by such a life.

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