Minda Morren López & Kristina Kramer

Me siento como un héroe: Fostering Global Citizenry Through an Integrated Unit of Study on Water

Abstract

In this article, we uphold diversity and 21st century skills as central to literacy pedagogy and use a cosmopolitan lens to present the integrated curriculum of a fourth grade bilingual teacher and the experiences of her students. We describe a unit built around language arts, science, and social studies with a focus on social justice and global connectedness for Latina/o students, many of whom were immigrants and transnationals themselves. We also analyze student responses to the unit in relation to cosmopolitanism and global citizenship. Students made connections to their own transnational experiences and were empowered to seek additional ways to engage in social justice.

Keywords: globalization, cosmopolitanism, bilingual, English Language Learners, integrated units of study

Minda Morren López is an assistant professor of literacy at Texas State University. Her research interests include biliteracy development and multiliteracies. She is passionate about global learning, has lived on five continents, and travels every chance she gets. She can be reached at minda.lopez@txstate.edu.

Kristina Kramer is a bilingual teacher in Austin, Texas. She teaches children to explore the world through projects. She enjoys traveling to new places and learning about new cultures. She can be reached at kmkramer79@gmail.com.

In this era of increasing diversity and global connectedness, two of the most discussed issues in literacy research and teaching are diversity and 21st century literacies. These two concepts are often discussed in disparate ways, yet they intersect, leading to potentially transformative literacy experiences. Typically, the topic of diversity in education has focused on various forms of ethnic, cultural, and linguistic diversity within the United States, including immigrants, transnationals, students of color, and English Language Learners (ELLs). While this focus relates to diversity, when the term "globalization" is used, such historically marginalized students in the United States are often left out. Thus, we see a need to reframe diversity to include international and cross-cultural understanding. Herrera (2012) and her colleagues propose expanding our notions of diversity to include that of globalization and in doing so, to include diverse learners in the United States in discussions of globalization. This expanded view encompasses diversity through the examination of interconnectedness of peoples across the globe by distinct cultural, racial, and linguistic narratives (Scholte, 2002). In this way, globalization represents the current demographic and sociocultural reality as well as the way in which notions of diversity may continue to evolve and be defined in the future (Herrera, 2012).

Currently, increased globalization has an impact on all areas of life, including education, culture, health, and the environment. In literacy education, the emphasis on 21st century literacies acknowledges new technologies and literacy tools in addition to the importance of global interconnectedness (Allington & McGill-

The collective knowledge and skills gained in this unit helped the students envision themselves as contributing members of a more just society, both by their increased knowledge they were determined to share with others and the money they raised to fund clean water in Burundi.

Franzen, 2000). The National Council of Teachers of English (2013) suggests that 21st century readers and writers must be able to "build intentional cross-cultural connections and relationships with others to pose and solve problems collaboratively" (para. 1), design and share information globally for a variety of purposes, and attend to the ethical responsibilities and issues that arise from such complexities.

For this article, we uphold diversity and 21st century skills as central to literacy pedagogy and use a cosmopolitan lens to present the integrated curriculum of a fourth grade bilingual teacher and the experiences of her students. We describe a unit of study on water built around language arts, science, and social studies with a focus on social justice and global connectedness for Latina/o students, many of whom were immigrants and transnationals themselves. We also analyze student responses to the unit in relation to cosmopolitanism and global citizenship.

Cosmopolitanism

A philosophy rooted in classic and Enlightenment philosophy (Kleingeld & Brown, 2006), cosmopolitanism is an old viewpoint gaining new traction in discussions of globalization and new pedagogies because of its focus on difference, identity, and connectedness (Hull & Stornaiuolo, 2010). Where globalization describes an increase in contact and interest of peoples globally, cosmopolitanism recognizes these issues and also raises important questions about how students negotiate their place in the world (Hansen, 2010). Cosmopolitanism is viewed as a way to reconcile tensions present in an interconnected yet divided world (Appiah, 2006) because it focuses not only on increased global communications and understandings, but also on balancing local commitments and identities with broader issues (Hansen, 2010). This focus allows us to work with students to increase their understandings of self and local contexts along with responsibilities towards others and the interconnectedness of the world.

To illustrate our work, we use a cosmopolitan lens with Damico and Baildon's (2011) concept of *relational cosmopolitanism*. Relational cosmopolitanism extends thinking in the humanities by Appiah (2006) and in education by Hull and Stornaiuolo (2010). The cosmopolitan point of view incorporates the local as well as the global and asserts that people can uphold local standards and customs while taking into consideration larger areas of concern. This is not a new idea but one that has been revisited with enthusiasm. In the early 1900s, Makiguchi (1903/2002) outlined three levels of the identity of global citizens: the local, national, and global. Makiguchi recognized the importance of understanding self as well as other in order to foster global citizenship, central to relational cosmopolitanism.

Through relational cosmopolitanism, Damico and Baildon (2011) show how a curriculum can be interconnected to larger issues across the globe while remaining rooted in a particular context. The challenges of living globally can be explored critically and creatively through six dimensions of their framework:

1. Resources of participants
2. Relational knowing
3. Rigorous content and curricula
4. Facility with key tools and resources
5. Dialogic, problem-solving pedagogies
6. Transformative goals and outcomes.

We apply these six dimensions to Kristina's unit in teaching language arts to show how literacy educators can take complex, multifaceted, and interdisciplinary topics and create an integrated curriculum responsive to both local and global issues. The dimension of *resources of participants* includes ways teachers acknowledge and explore the perspectives, knowledge, experiences, and beliefs their students bring. For this unit, Kristina tapped into her students' background knowledge and experiences through questioning and inquiry. Students also kept a log of their own water use for a week and discussed the results in class. *Relational knowing* situates issues related to water as one that impacts all of humanity. The emphasis here is on collective learning and problem solving. Not only did students work in collaborative groups in the classroom to understand issues surrounding water worldwide through textual analysis, science experiments, and Internet searches, but students in Kristina's class also had the opportunity to interact with adults, in person and via technology, who have made a difference in the world through their efforts to provide clean water in Burundi. A *rigorous curriculum* is also key to cosmopolitanism and units of study. This unit was based on state standards across multiple subject areas and academic subject matter was consistently presented as interrelated and deeply connected to students' lives. The dimension of *facility with key tools and resources* was especially important as subject matter was often above the English proficiency level of some of the students in the bilingual class. Yet Kristina consistently encouraged students to use all of their linguistic repertoires in engaging with the material and understanding the issues. Students used materials in Spanish and English, with a focus on developing academic language and using texts and technology to understand the complex issues around water and water scarcity. The ability to use all of their linguistic resources helped facilitate open dialogue, an important component of the *dialogic, problem-solving* dimension. Students in this classroom were encouraged to present their ideas and engage with multiple perspectives in a variety of ways—including various languages, genres, and texts. Finally, the *transformative goals and outcomes* dimension helps maintain a focus on social justice and action. The collective knowledge and skills gained in this unit helped the students envision themselves as contributing members of a more just society, both by their increased knowledge they were determined to share with others and the money they raised to fund clean water in Burundi. For example, one student, Cristina (all student names are pseudonyms) wrote that as a result of this unit, "I will tell people not to waste water. Just because they

have water doesn't mean everyone else does, too." The dimensions and descriptions by Damico and Baildon (2011) are depicted in Table 1 along with a short description of selected curricular choices and resources Kristina used throughout the unit.

We have worked together collaboratively for the past two years when Kristina came to the elementary school where I teach a field-based internship with my undergraduate preservice teachers. Kristina has over a decade of experience teaching bilingual students. She is committed to social justice and believes it can be at the forefront of the language arts curriculum while simultaneously following the mandated curricula and teaching important literacy skills. Throughout the school year, Kristina and her colleague built their curriculum around social justice, integrating bilingual language arts instruction with social studies and science. This article describes a unit Kristina implemented in her fourth grade bilingual class after one of her students approached her with an interest in water conservation and Africa. We describe the unit and how student responses focus on the dimensions related most directly to pedagogy—relational knowing and dialogic, problem-solving

Table 1
Dimensions of Relational Cosmopolitanism and the Water Unit of Study

Dimension of *relational cosmopolitanism* (Damico & Baildon, 2011)	How Damico and Baildon (2011) define the dimension	Examples of the dimension in Kristina's unit of study
Resources of participants	Teachers acknowledge the beliefs, stances, perspectives, and knowledge that they and their students bring.	Student connections were fostered in various ways. Questions included "What were students' experiences with water? Water scarcity?" Students kept a water usage log for a week.
Relational knowing	Teachers situate the topic/problem/issue as a shared problem that affects all of humanity. Encourages students to cultivate connections and forge alliances to grapple with the social, political, economic, psychological and historical facets of the issue.	Kristina gave students access to understanding the economic (for example, as part of their water usage logs, students calculated cost in dollars as well as in environmental impact), and sociopolitical (readings covered different countries and how conflict can lead to disparities in resource allocation) facets of water scarcity.
Rigorous content and curricula	Participants engage with knowledge and resources across, in and outside of academic disciples to adequately understand the issue.	A range of resources were used for the standards-based and rigorous curriculum (TEKS). For example, guest speakers from the Gazelle Foundation were brought in and/or Skyped with students.
Facility with key tools and resources	Teachers encourage students to use a variety of resources, from traditional tools to state-of-the-art technologies.	Students read a variety of genres (short stories, chapter books, picture books, magazine articles), consulted websites for social studies knowledge (e.g., completed a Burundi webquest), and conducted scientific experiments regarding properties of water as well as pollution.
Dialogic, problem-solving pedagogies	Teachers maintain a commitment to dialogue to ensure the creation of "communities of reason" as students question, challenge, debate, and deliberate a range of perspectives and alternative views of the issue in order to take informed action.	There were spaces in the curriculum for dialogue through class discussions, literature responses, and projects. In addition, students blogged and exchanged ideas with students in other classes, gaining an even wider range of perspectives and views.
Transformative goals and outcomes	Participants maintain focus on the larger picture or higher purpose—the cultivation of knowledge and skills to shape a more just and humane world. This moves away from the traditional focus on mastery of content and towards deeper understandings of how to respond to current issues in order to enact change.	Students reported how powerful this unit was for them in various ways. One of the most salient ways students cited its impact was the experiential nature of their learning. Kristina consistently incorporated experiences into the curriculum. Students reported feeling the way children in Burundi must feel when carting water six miles (because the students simulated the experience with help from volunteers from the Gazelle Foundation during the culminating walkathon).

pedagogies. These dimensions encourage students to grapple with multiple aspects and perspectives surrounding an issue (in this case water scarcity) and approach action from a place of informed and global understanding.

The Unit of Study

Units of study are comprehensive learning opportunities that include reading and writing and often one or more content areas. Typically, units of study are carried out for a sustained period of time to allow deeper exploration of a topic. Also called integrated or thematic units, units of study have been shown to enrich students' literacy experiences and can boost personal connections with the subject matter, increase independent reading abilities, and add to student interest (Hickman, 1981; Moss, 1984; Roser, Hoffman, & Farest, 1990).

This unit of study grew out of a student's interest in learning more about how she could help children in Africa. She approached Kristina one day after reading some literature in the mail about children in Africa who did not have access to clean water or adequate nutrition. She said she saw "sad pictures" and the letter was requesting help for Africa. This student wanted to do something and asked Kristina what they could do as a class. From this informal exchange, an idea was started.

Kristina was in a training program with a local running coach, Gilbert Tuhabonye, from Burundi. Gilbert has a dramatic story of escape from the genocide in Burundi that is detailed in his autobiography (Tuhabonye, 2006). He founded the Gazelle Foundation (www.gazellefoundation.com), a nonprofit organization with a mission to provide clean drinking water to people throughout Burundi. Kristina decided to incorporate some resources from Gilbert's foundation into the curriculum and to focus on water issues around the world, including Burundi. She discussed her plan with school administrators who fully supported her work. Kristina also approached her class with the ideas and they were thrilled, particularly because the origins of the idea were from a classmate. Next, Kristina and her fourth grade colleagues worked to create an integrated unit of study that covered language arts, social studies, and science, was built on the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS), and emphasized social justice.

The unit of study extended approximately six weeks in the spring semester. The steps of the unit are shown in Figure 1. Kristina deliberately began the unit with helping her students understand their own lives and cultures, specifically related to water. For instance, she asked her students to log their own water consumption for a week. She also asked students to read about local water sources and issues. Large areas of Austin are situated directly on top of an important water source for Central Texas, the Edwards Aquifer. Together they studied the aquifer and how it has been an important water source for generations.

After spending time exploring local water issues and their own consumption, students learned more about water resources worldwide. They read and discussed various newspaper articles, short stories, and nonfiction picture books and texts related to water. They also read excerpts from *A Long Walk to Water* (Park, 2010), a young adult novel that describes not only water scarcity in Africa but sociohistorical issues also. (It is important to note that Kristina carefully chose excerpts from this book because some graphic content regarding the conflict in Sudan was inappropriate for her students.) Kristina asked students to respond to these texts in various ways including multiple choice questions (the format of the state assessment), open-ended questions, discussions, and student projects. As a culminating activity, all fourth grade classes participated in a Walk for Water walkathon.

The Gazelle Foundation has encouraged local elementary schools to engage in walkathons to raise awareness, and this was one of approximately 30 events for school children across the city. The fourth graders walked multiple times around the track, with the option of carrying different amounts of water (1-gallon jugs, 4-gallon, 6-gallon, etc.). Representatives from the Gazelle Foundation were on hand to help with the event, in addition to dozens of parent volunteers and community members.

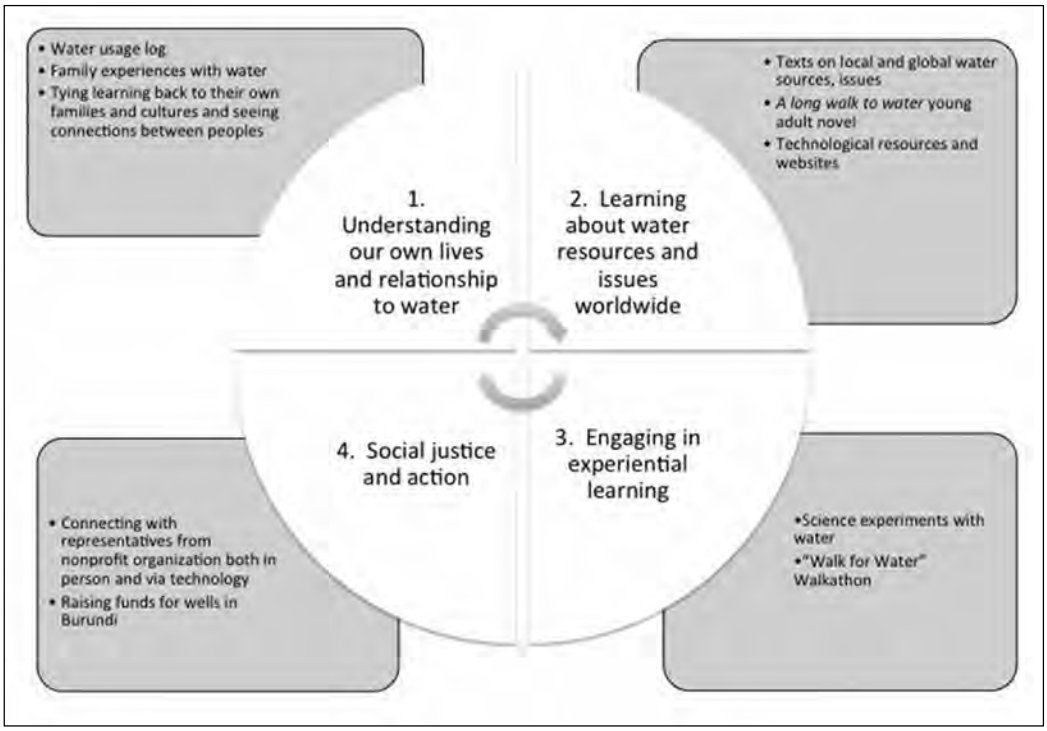

Figure 1. Important components of Kristina's Water Unit of Study.

Students used words such as "worried," "scared," "shocked," and "sad" when commenting on how they felt to learn that children their age were living in areas without access to clean water. They also used words such as "love" and "compassion," "care," "proud," "happy," and "good" when they wrote about how their actions could positively impact people in other parts of the world.

Student Responses to the Unit

While it was evident from the community response and students' enthusiasm that this unit was a success, we were interested in understanding the ways the students made sense of the material presented in the unit, particularly in relation to global connections. Student responses were collected through various class discussions and written assignments during the unit of study as well as through written reflections and student interviews conducted by a graduate student research assistant at the end of the unit. We wanted to find out the answers to these questions: Did students see themselves in any of these curricular materials? Did students understand the complex and interrelated societal issues that impact peoples across the globe? How did the fourth graders view themselves as global citizens? We worked together in documenting and analyzing some of the students' responses to the unit. Below we describe what we discovered.

First, we asked students if they had made any connections to the ideas presented in the unit. Almost half (9 of 20) discussed their personal connection to the children of Burundi and the water unit because either they themselves or their parents had experienced a lack of access to water at some point in their lives. This resulted in the need to conserve and/or to find water through various means and students listed these such as bathing in a river or walking to bring water back to their home. Some students (5 of 20) discussed the recent drought in Texas and the need to conserve water here in the area where we live. They referenced the aquifer and media reports of the dwindling water resources here in Texas. One student, Clarena, wrote, "I used to waste a lot of water but when I started to learn about Burundi and how they didn't have clean water, I knew I needed to start saving it."

In addition to connections to local water issues, students in Kristina's class also reported connections to their families' experiences with water scarcity in Mexico, primarily in rural areas. Almost half of the students (8 of 20) described how their own parents and family members had relied on water sources outside the home for drinking, cooking, and bathing back in Mexico. For example, student responses included, "I am making a connection that my mom also had to walk to get water" and "Back home in Mexico my parents had to walk miles to get water for food and for themselves." One student, Juan, told us how he went home and asked his parents if they had experienced anything like this and was surprised with what he learned. He wrote, "I remember that my mom told me she had to walk 10 to 15 miles to get dirty, disgusting water from a swamp."

Students made personal connections to the issue of water and water access and expressed empathy for others. A majority of the students (16 of 20) expressed a feeling of care and empathy for the people in Burundi and elsewhere who did not have access to clean water. One student said, "The one thing I will remember [about this unit of study] for the rest of my life is that we helped Burundi because I care about Burundi and want them to have access to clean water." Students used words such as "worried," "scared," "shocked," and "sad" when commenting on how they felt to learn that children their age were living in areas without access to clean water. They also used words such as "love" and "compassion," "care," "proud," "happy," and "good" when they wrote about how their actions could positively impact people in other parts of the world.

Perhaps some of the students' empathy was brought on by studying and experiencing what people all over the globe experience. Kristina deliberately included real experiences that would enable her students to feel what it was like to walk for water and to not have clean drinking water readily available. A majority of her students (16 out of 20) wrote that their favorite and most meaningful learning throughout the unit was the Walkathon where they carried gallons of water to simulate what it was like for the people in Burundi. Ximena wrote, "What I liked most of all was carrying the gallon jugs because I got to experience what the girls in Burundi [experience] and not just in Burundi, but all over Africa. To think that they have to walk for hours to get water!" And Carlos wrote, "Cuando caminé sentí lo que sienten los niños en Burundi (When we walked [with the jugs of water] I felt what the children of Burundi feel)." Most students indicated that this kind of experience helped them understand what people were experiencing in various parts of the world. They used language like "fun" and "challenging" to describe what it felt like to carry the water, even at shorter distances than those the children of Burundi were required to carry water.

Students also felt empowered by the ways they were able to help the people of Burundi. Through their efforts, students raised funds to build wells and improve the quality of life in rural Burundi. The money collected at this school was donated to the Gazelle Foundation. Miguel stated, "Me siento como un héroe porque nunca habia hecho algo así. [I feel like a hero because I have never done anything like this]."

This kind of empowerment extended beyond the unit, exemplifying the final dimension of relational cosmopolitanism, *transformative goals and outcomes*. All of the students indicated that this unit of study inspired them to help elsewhere. Of the 20 students, seven

indicated they wanted to help in Mexico. Vivian said, "I want to help Mexico because in Mexico, they do not have food and I want to help them get food and water." Moreover, students shared stories of their parents' struggles for food and water and of seeing children who did not have access to clean water. Leti wrote, "I went to a place far away and we couldn't drink water because there were no stores and I felt desperate." In addition, 12 students named Burundi, Malawi, Tanzania, Kenya, and Egypt as countries in which they were interested in providing aid.

Cosmopolitanism in the Classroom

Kristina fostered a sense of understanding and empowerment in her classroom community. Although neither of us knew about the concept of relational cosmopolitanism at the time, she created her integrated unit based on state and national standards, and the pedagogical practices she engaged in with her students align with Damico and Baildon's (2011) concept and the dimensions they outline for creating a learning environment that is aware of self and others in a thoughtful way.

Her unit begins with students' understanding of themselves, their culture and the local context, and moves outward to incorporate a variety of perspectives, resources and tools. While studying about water scarcity, students engaged in problem-solving and experiences that moved beyond merely telling students what to do but instead engaged them in finding solutions and experiencing firsthand what others endured. Additionally, students worked together to raise money to build wells and gain access to clean water for a community in Burundi. This represents the final dimension of relational cosmopolitanism—*transformative goals and outcomes*. Through this experience, Kristina aided her students in cultivating knowledge and skills for a more just and humane world.

While similar outcomes may have occurred in a monolingual English classroom, it is important to note that the students in this setting participated in a transitional bilingual education program. Many of these students were born outside of the United States and had experiences living elsewhere. Some of the students were from rural areas where they or their parents experienced similar living conditions as described in the book *A Long Walk to Water.* These factors contributed to students' interest, engagement, and background knowledge regarding water and water conservation worldwide. Moreover, students completed their work in two languages; at times, it was up to the student to choose which language to read, write, or respond in. At other times, Kristina challenged students to work primarily in English. And sometimes resources were available only in English (e.g., guest speakers from the Gazelle Foundation). These factors might have discouraged some teachers from taking on an integrated unit of study such as this, but Kristina was determined to provide her students with challenging and engaging curricula. She often translated or created materials herself or had to scaffold materials available only in English.

Despite some of these challenges, student responses to the integrated unit of study show that students made deep connections with the material. They felt empowered and motivated to engage in social change. They also understood the local context and culture related to water, water use, and water scarcity, while also making connections to their own transnational and immigrant experiences. Student responses point to the importance and relevance of issues such as globalization and cosmopolitanism to English Language Learners and other diverse students who often are left out of such rigorous, relevant, and engaging curricula.

Additional ways to nurture global citizens:

- Define human rights and child rights, including access to clean water. Video and additional resources available from_http://www.unicef.org.au/discover/Educational-Resources.aspx.
- Create a class blog that depicts your classroom community and local context. Reach out to other classes around the world and share experiences, perspectives, and ideas around specific global issues (such as water and water scarcity).
- Read a children's book about other children who have made a difference. Some include:
    - *Aani & the Tree Huggers* by Jeannine Atkins
    - *Bella's Chocolate Surprise* by Adam Guillain and Elke Steiner
    - *The Carpet Boy's Gift* by Pegi Deitz Shea
    - *The Librarian of Basra: A True Story from Iraq* by Jeannette Winter
    - *Ryan and Jimmy and the Well in Africa That Brought Them Together* by Herb Shoveller.

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