The teacher and the world: A study of cosmopolitanism as education

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education. This confrontational aspect of teaching can be difficult and go over the line quickly. But I now believe that the risks are necessary if our students are to be armed with the skills and confidence needed to become good participating citizens.

The editors, Deborah Mower and Wade Robison, have given the term ‘civility’ depth and precision. Civility is about each individual and how we collectively operate in the world of others, and needs to be understood and developed deliberately and comprehensively. This book is a good first step for that to happen, especially in higher education. I highly recommend it.

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In this book, David Hansen makes a case for giving a cosmopolitan orientation to the work of teachers at all levels of the educational system. What seems to motivate this proposal is the fact that we are living in an increasingly globalized world, which unavoidably affects the present and future lives of students. This does not mean that Hansen believes that we should uncritically accept every aspect of the complex phenomenon known as globalization. Rather, he thinks that acquiring the set of capacities, beliefs and attitudes that he describes as ‘the cosmopolitan orientation’ will allow both teachers and students to respond to this phenomenon in appropriate ways, endorsing some aspects, criticizing others and creatively adapting to new circumstances.

Hansen presents his cosmopolitan account as part of an ongoing tradition that began in ancient Greece—though it has representatives in other societies, such as ancient China. He spends part of the book presenting the ideas of earlier advocates of cosmopolitanism, including Diogenes, Socrates, Confucius, Marcus Aurelius, Montaigne, Kant and Tagore, among others. He also surveys empirical research from the social sciences that shows how people from very different societies and economic backgrounds can display cosmopolitan attitudes, supporting his view that these attitudes are neither exclusively western nor elitist. Hansen’s own positive proposal centres on a defence of a cosmopolitan philosophy that focuses on ‘the art of living’. This philosophy consists of a set of exercises and practices that allow people to cultivate their intellectual,
moral and aesthetic capacities, as well as to learn how to respond fairly and humanely to others. Hansen believes that the kind of reflection facilitated by the art of living promises to yield many benefits. Among other things, it will allow teachers and their students to respond effectively to the constant changes of the modern world, and to maintain a sense of stability despite those changes. It will also equip them to appreciate the diversity of values and customs, facilitating mutual understanding. After describing the art of living in these ways, and explaining its potential benefits, Hansen offers some useful suggestions as to how to incorporate the cosmopolitan orientation into the curriculum—or, better, deepen it, since it is already present to some extent. One of his proposals is the side-by-side study of local heritage and tradition with those of another society. The goal here is not simply to learn about some descriptive facts, but to come to appreciate the variety of ways in which people can inhabit the world. Another proposal is to study how cultural practices—such as music or art—arise when different groups and traditions mix, generating something new. According to Hansen, the purpose of these activities is to cultivate ‘reflective openness’ to new ideas and values while at the same time maintaining ‘reflective loyalty’ to what is known.

One of the strengths of the book is that Hansen is sensitive to the criticisms that cosmopolitan theorizing has received, with one of these criticisms being that the use of the term ‘cosmopolitan’ is so indeterminate. I sympathize with this criticism. The bewildering variety of cosmopolitan positions can partially be explained by the fact that cosmopolitanism began with the metaphor—attributed to Diogenes the Cynic—of being ‘a citizen of the world’. This is a metaphor that can be fleshed out in many ways: for example, that human beings belong to one single moral community, that there should be global political and legal institutions that protect the rights of human beings, or that cultural phenomena are the shared heritage of mankind. Diogenes himself seems to have used the metaphor to challenge the conventions of his city state, and to deny the importance of identification with a local political community and its particular citizens. Because of this, I am somewhat puzzled by Hansen’s emphasis on reflective loyalty and rootedness as central characteristics of the cosmopolitan orientation. Although I would say that openness to new ideas and values is a typical cosmopolitan attitude, I would add that criticism of existing local traditions and policies is just as common. It is true that some people manage to combine genuine cosmopolitan commitments with deep attachments to a particular place and people, or with a sense of patriotic loyalty. But thinking of oneself as a citizen of the world very often leads one to regard the demands of particular loyalties as morally suspicious.

Overall, Hansen has clearly done his homework on the history of cosmopolitanism, as well as on the enormous variety of contemporary research on the topic, both in philosophy and in the social sciences. His book is a welcome contribution to the literature on moral and cultural cosmopolitanism and its educational implications. Not only is it well informed about the diversity of the-
ories that fall under the cosmopolitan umbrella, but it also provides an original account of cosmopolitanism: one that emerges from his critical discussion of this diversity.

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High schools, race, and America’s future: What students can teach us about morality, diversity and community


272 pp., $29.95 (softback)

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This book chronicles Larry Blum’s experiences teaching a course on race and racism to a group of teenage public high school students in Cambridge, Massachusetts. This course is Blum’s practical attempt to enhance moral and civic education among American teenagers. The book generally focuses on his experiences over one particular semester, while also drawing on incidents and challenges he faced with earlier cohorts. Blum aims to promote the teaching and interrogation of issues around race and racism in Northern America through the critical examination of different perspectives on race and racism while promoting integrated education. To facilitate teachers in meeting these aims he helpfully provides an appendix of learning resources, which includes his syllabus and his assignments to offer support to tutors taking up his challenge.

The book is a series of ‘snap-shots’ from his classroom, and over the 12 chapters Blum transports the reader into his classroom and walks them through the course and classroom discussions from the first day to the last. Blum is very open and reflects deeply and critically on the whole experience. In particular, his depiction of the first day is an excellent example of this honest portrayal of the classroom dynamics and challenges he faces as he picks is way through the minefield of discussing race and racism with a mixed ability group of multi-racial and multi-ethnic teenagers growing up in modern America. This open reflection also charts how and why Professor Blum journeyed from the privileged position of university philosophy professor to become a temporary teacher in a public high school and the impact this journey has had on his own development.

The book chapters are generally themed around incidents that happen during the classes or topics taught during the semester-long course. In discussing and evaluating these incidents and topics, Blum’s academic analysis draws on a