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Global mobilities and the possibilities of a cosmopolitan curriculum

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ABSTRACT

This paper is aimed at exploring the possibilities that the notion of everyday cosmopolitanism can open up for pedagogic practices and, at the same time, the opportunities that pedagogy can provide for the construction of a cosmopolitan global ethics. Our argument is that students (and teachers) are involved in everyday experiences of cosmopolitan encounters and that these can and should be used as a starting point for the development of a cosmopolitan curriculum aimed at steering the cosmopolitan outlook of students towards morally open but productive directions.

KEYWORDS

Student and teacher experiences; cosmopolitanism and education; curriculum development; globalization and education

We live in a world in which global mobilities are increasingly transforming the social spaces in which we now live, work and learn. It is a world in which despite great distances and notwithstanding the continuing presence and significance of national borders, certain kinds of relationships across these borders have become intensified. The idea of transnationalism has widely been used to understand the nature and scope of such relationships, problematizing the traditional nation-centric notions of identity and citizenship (Thiel & Friedman, 2016; Vertovec, 2009), public spaces and public cultures and even migration (Nail, 2015; Shortell, 2016). Global mobilities, these authors suggest, have changed the sense people have of their locality. While these changes are particularly evident among migrant groups, they nonetheless affect entire communities, not least because they bring diverse cultural traditions and practices into contact with each other as never before, both within and across national borders. Such contact of course creates a range of new challenges for living together, giving rise to a new politics of difference that is often globally stretched.

At the core of this politics are contrasting views about how to interpret and respond to global mobilities. On the one hand, the idea of the global flows of people has been celebrated. It has been argued that a globally integrated knowledge economy needs flows not only of capital and ideas but also of people. Not surprisingly, therefore most advanced economies have developed programmes designed to recruit skilled migrants, enabling business to be conducted across borders more easily. Given the choice, a growing number of people desire mobility and the lives associated with it. Yet, there are also a growing number of people across the world who fear its various economic and cultural

consequences. In response, various political movements have cropped up promising to put up barriers to the global mobility of people, even threatening to build walls. Regimes of border protection are, for example, emerging throughout the world to prevent refugees from entering sovereign spaces. Opposition to immigration has become common in many countries, often around the reassertion of fixed categories of national, cultural and religious identity. A politics of fear of others is once again raising its ugly head, often exploited by expedient politicians. Increasingly, they promise to restrict the terms of global mobility – of who is allowed to move and how.

What is clear then is that we live in a world in which discourses that celebrate and promote fluidity of movement sit uncomfortably alongside discourses of political fixity and closure. Appadurai (1996b) wrote about this contradictory phenomenon as disjunctures across various scapes. He noted, for example, that technoscapes, ideoscapes and ethnoscapescapes are “disjunctive” and “chaotic” in character and supersede traditional geographical thinking. In his subsequent monograph, *Fear of Small Numbers*, Appadurai (2006) argues that the capacity of people, images and objects to move rapidly across local and global geographical space has given rise to high levels of anxiety, creating a space in which xenophobic and nativist politics potentially thrive.

Educational settings are not unaffected by the empirical realities of global mobilities and the political debates that surround them. For educators, this raises the normative question of how the curriculum should address the challenges forged by a contradictory space in which mobilities of various kinds have become more possible to occur on a larger scale, and have become more desirable by many, but are also feared. In other words, how should schools approach the task of helping students to interpret the nature and scope of global mobilities and understand the complex politics to which they have given rise? How can schools help them develop a normative sensibility towards the kinds of cultural exchange that has become an inevitable outcome of the processes of globalization?

In addressing such challenges, we want to argue, the notion of cosmopolitanism retains contemporary relevance, but not in its traditional philosophical sense. It needs to be re-thought. We suggest that cosmopolitanism be viewed both as a social fact and a political value. In our view, education has a major role to play in connecting the *facts* of cosmopolitan encounters and the *values* that cosmopolitanism espouses. What is needed, we suggest, is “cosmopolitan learning,” which denies the abstractionism of the traditional theories of cosmopolitanism but underlines the realities and challenges associated with global mobilities (Rizvi, 2009). Thus, the educational challenge we face is how to help students move from an understanding of *empirical* cosmopolitan encounters to a set of *normative* ideas about how to live with cultural difference in a world in which mobilities are both valued and also characterized by their uneven and unequal consequences.

If we think of education as the process through which young people develop the means of orientation (Elías, 1994) that will help them interpret and act upon the world, then global mobilities need to be considered as part of the demands of any contemporary curriculum. Yet, it also needs to be acknowledged that the ways in which different groups and individuals interpret and respond to the contradictions of global mobilities are locally specific. Thus, totalizing universal educational solutions to this challenge are neither desirable nor possible (Todd, 2009). On the contrary, we want to argue that in the most optimistic scenario what we might aspire to is a series of context-specific and particular pedagogic practices. In that sense, our aim in this essay is to discuss the possibility of a

curricular approach that can provide an overarching framework to address the challenges posed by global mobilities to education, but that is open enough to allow for spatially contingent interpretations and enactments that take the plurality of human experience as a starting point.

Abstract Normative Cosmopolitanism

The idea of cosmopolitanism has traditionally been linked to notions of social solidarity, cohesion and a global sense of belonging (Nussbaum, 2002). What cosmopolitanism challenges is the spatial reference for social solidarity. So if communitarianism is based on the idea of solidarity across a given community (Etzioni, 2004), and nationalism implies developing a sense of belonging to a nation (Smith, 2010), cosmopolitanism appeals to solidarity and belonging along the whole cosmos or the universe. As morally appealing as this notion might appear, a number of scholars have pointed out that this association between cosmopolitanism and the universal has contributed to the development of a highly abstract understanding of cosmopolitanism that overlooks issues of historical difference (Fine, 2007; Malcomson, 1998; Robbins, 1998). The cosmos or the universe is moreover difficult to grasp in practical and experiential terms, and consequently it is quite challenging to develop and promote a sense of belonging to such an abstract formation. Many attempts, coming from different political and philosophical perspectives, have thus been made to construct a narrative of cosmopolitanism that promotes intercultural understanding at the global level but does not assume its abstractionism (Holton, 2009).

We agree that abstract normative approaches to cosmopolitanism have conceptual, political and practical limitations, especially when they are used as foundation for the development of pedagogic strategies. Conceptually, one of the problems of these approaches is the way in which they associate cosmopolitanism to the idea of the universal and the search for universal values. In these accounts “the universal” is rendered as equivalent to the global on the basis of a binary distinction between universal/particular and global/local. In this perspective, the global and the universal are linked to the ubiquitous, the abstract, the amorphous and porous. They have no borders or confinement. The local, on the other hand, is seen as the locus of our everyday experience, linked to attachment and a feeling of security (Larsen & Beech, 2014). This binary spatial conception contributes to the construction of cosmopolitanism as an ideal of detachment (Robbins, 1998).

There are also a number of moral and political limitations to the abstract normative approaches to cosmopolitanism. The association of cosmopolitanism with the cosmos and the universe tends to promote a singular view of cosmopolitanism (Robbins, 1998). But even if we accept that there might be only one world in physical terms, there clearly can be many ways of engaging with that world and, consequently, many types of cosmopolitanisms. Actually, at different times and in different places, there have been distinctive conceptions of cosmopolitanism. The notion of a singular cosmopolitanism can quite often fall into ethnocentrism and an imperialist logic. The search for universal values tends toward global homogeneity and uniformity. But as Appiah (2006) argues, it is possible to imagine a type of cosmopolitan ideal that operates on a pragmatic belief that different cultures and ways of living can exist side by side harmoniously, without assuming a set of

moral universals. Rejection of universalism does not imply rejecting the possibility of negotiating values across differences in an ongoing manner.

Finally, abstract normative views of cosmopolitanism are also faced with important limitations in practical terms. If we accept that most people are involved in cosmopolitan encounters on a day-to-day basis, and that these encounters might require certain ethical decisions, it becomes evident that it is quite difficult that abstract allegedly universal norms could provide a clear and unequivocal guide to these decisions. In real life, moral principles conflict with each other, and it is in the arena of competing principles that ethical decisions have to be made, deciding to privilege certain principles over others. In this sense, idealized moral constructions become impractical, since it is impossible for an individual to always respect all of the moral principles that are included within the theoretical construction of the perfect cosmopolitan. Accordingly, abstract normative views of cosmopolitanism tend to favour top-down pedagogical practices in which students are considered passive receptors of a list of “good cosmopolitan behaviours” that tend to be disconnected from their everyday experiences, and do not necessarily help them in their day-to-day decision-making.

This analysis suggests the need to consider alternatives to abstract universal normative views, bringing cosmopolitanism down from the pedestal at which Kant (1991) and more recently Nussbaum (2002) and others have placed it. Malcomson (1998) refers to the “long history of arrogance” (p. 241) of cosmopolitanism and calls for a more humble cosmopolitan ethos. In other words, the challenge is to locate cosmopolitanism and understand it as being related to everyday practices; scaling down, pluralizing and particularizing cosmopolitanism (Malcomson, 1998; Robbins, 1998).

In what follows, we want to argue that it is possible to view cosmopolitanism as an everyday practice that is unstable, complex and open to very different interpretations and enactments. Once we interpret cosmopolitanism in terms of actually existing practices, it becomes possible to suggest a plurality of cosmopolitanisms. A cosmopolitan project, as we understand it, should not be aimed at flattening those differences in the search for some kind of universal ethic, but rather promote conversations across difference. The starting point for such a project is not an approach from above, but from understanding actually existing everyday cosmopolitan experiences, keeping unstable the relationship between and across them. Such a project suggests modalities that go beyond interculturalism, focusing on the ways in which the local and national encounters are shaped by global forces and connections.

Everyday Cosmopolitanism

The concept of “everyday cosmopolitanism” points to the realization that most people are engaged in cosmopolitan encounters in their everyday life and are already developing an incipient organic sense of cosmopolitanism with which to engage the world of cultural difference (Skrbis & Woodward, 2013). Skrbis and Woodward (2013) use the term everyday cosmopolitanism to refer to those practices of cosmopolitanism that are now routine, becoming part of an emerging global consciousness. This consciousness suggests a broad sense of openness towards other people, cultures and ways of life. To assert the need to take instances of everyday cosmopolitanism more seriously is to be alert to their profound consequences for the social constitution of our discourses, relations and institutions. In

this sense, everyday cosmopolitanism underlines the importance of an empirical openness to the ways in which everyday cosmopolitan encounters produce social meaning and increasingly affect many of our dispositions, experiences and aspirations.

In the current condition of ubiquitous global mobilities, cosmopolitan encounters are nothing unusual, nothing extraordinary. Rather, they are often routine ways of engaging with the contemporary realities of everyday life: they produce meaning and have deep impact on human practices, dispositions and experiences. They shape us even when we do not know how. Although most people are unable to travel extensively, no community is entirely unaffected by global shifts produced by increasing levels of international travel, social imaginaries circulating across transnational social media (Appadurai, 1996a) and the globalizing nature of economic exchange and work.

The notion of everyday cosmopolitanism can be relevant as an analytic foundation for the development of a cosmopolitan pedagogic approach. Cosmopolitan learning should be situated within the lives of young people, highlighting how their lives are part of wider social, political and economic relations. If cosmopolitan learning is seen as a learning process that has to do with individuals in context (Biesta & Lawy, 2006), it can be more meaningful for students than the discussion of abstract normative principles. A pedagogic approach that starts from everyday experiences can open up the possibility for multiple engagements with cosmopolitanism, and to a cosmopolitan approach that is situated and specific to the different contexts in which different students live and learn. It is through interaction with specific experiences, desires and expectations that abstract normative principles can be contextualized and made meaningful and relevant to the lives of students.

The point of departure could be the family histories of students and teachers, or an event in the daily news, or even a simple experience of consumption. From a simple reconstruction of the flows of people, objects and cultural artefacts that affect that experience, it is possible to go deeper into analysing the wider cultural, social, political and economic context of these encounters and exchanges. How are family histories of mobility linked to colonialism and global inequalities? How do our consumption practices affect distant people and global justice? Embedding these kinds of issues in real concrete experiences can potentially make learning more meaningful for students and contribute to contextualized conversations on moral issues, dispositions and attitudes towards difference. Furthermore, in this way it becomes visible for students how our everyday practices potentially have cosmopolitan dimensions and are affected by and affect relations of power on a global scale.

In order to move from experiences to the ways in which they are interpreted, it is useful to make an analytic differentiation between cosmopolitanism as an empirical reality and the way in which that reality is interpreted. Based on a sociological approach to understanding cosmopolitanism, Fine (2007) distinguishes between a cosmopolitan condition and a cosmopolitan outlook. Similarly, Beck (2006) refers to a process of latent cosmopolitanization differentiating it from a cosmopolitan outlook.

The cosmopolitan condition (using Fine's vocabulary) refers to the intensification of mobility and encounters with difference in the current world of globalization, and to the awareness of this "forced mixing" (Beck, 2006). In addition, the increasing global nature of social issues such as equity, justice, security and sustainability imply a degree of global interdependence in which the dangers and challenges of civilization become

detrterritorialized, reinforcing the cosmopolitan condition as a ubiquitous reality. Thus, global mobilities and interdependences have created an empirical cosmopolitan reality in which human experiences and references have been spatially stretched.

One of the ethical issues that are debated in the literature is the link between cosmopolitanism and socio-economic inequalities. Calhoun (2002) associates actual existing cosmopolitanism with those in the higher ends of the social economic scale who have opportunities to travel, of engaging in exotic consumption and, therefore, for cosmopolitan encounters. However, for a large number of the world population, cosmopolitan encounters are not a choice, but rather a strategy of survival (Malcomson, 1998). Thus, the notion that cosmopolitan encounters mostly take place between the privileged is questionable in the current spatial context in which diversity, mobilities and connectivities have become ubiquitous. From this perspective, cosmopolitan encounters are not the result of conscious and voluntary choices of an elite, but rather part of the effects of processes of globalization.

The cosmopolitan condition as an empirical reality has been widely documented and discussed in the social sciences. It is much more difficult to empirically identify and analytically make sense of the cosmopolitan outlook. The cosmopolitan outlook is the way in which the cosmopolitan condition is interpreted. It is constituted by attitudes, dispositions, imaginaries and beliefs. There is no inherent virtue in the cosmopolitan outlook. It does not necessarily “herald the first rays of universal brotherly love among peoples, or the dawn of the world republic, or a free floating global outlook, or compulsory xenophilia” (Beck, 2006, p. 13). It implies analytically considering the need to re-think political and cultural borders and differentiations such as internal/external and national/international or global. Awareness of the empirical realities of the cosmopolitan condition can trigger reactionary and xenophobic reactions as much as it can spark openness to diversity and the presence of the other. In other words, the cosmopolitan outlook is a domain of contested politics (Robbins, 1998, p. 12).

What is of major importance for our argument is that the cosmopolitan condition is a reality that is part of the lives of most (if not all) young people, and that young people have to interpret this cosmopolitan reality to make sense of and act upon the world in which they live. Their cosmopolitan attitudes, dispositions, imaginaries and beliefs are rarely organized in a coherent explicit narrative. On the contrary, the bargain of people with the cosmopolitan condition is messy, complex, sometimes contradictory and not necessarily explicit and organized. Consequently, we suggest that the way in which young people interpret the increasing cosmopolitanization of reality should be made explicit, understood and be the object of reflexive pedagogic practices. In this way, by working pedagogically with the cosmopolitan outlook of students, it is possible to think of transformative pedagogic practices that can steer the interpretations of cosmopolitan reality towards morally productive cosmopolitan values. In turn, this transformation could have an impact on the cosmopolitan condition itself and contribute to the development of a more ethical global reality.

When we emphasize the need to steer the cosmopolitan outlook of students towards morally productive directions, we are not thinking of a predefined set of values that demarcate a closed position to which the students have to be forced. Neither are we promoting some kind of moral relativism. We rather suggest that the definition of a morally productive cosmopolitan outlook is a collective task, that it is dynamic and always in the

process of becoming and that its greatest significance is not so much in the conclusions to which a group can arrive, but rather in the process of learning itself.

Towards a Cosmopolitan Curriculum

Our view of cosmopolitanism is in line with what Appiah (1997) calls “rooted cosmopolitanism.” From this perspective, cosmopolitanism does not contradict patriotism or other allegiances; neither does it need to be equated with universalism. Instead of seeing cosmopolitanism as linked to a logic of detachment, we see it as a reality of multiple attachment (Robbins, 1998). We promote a kind of cosmopolitanism that is not positioned as being in superiority to particularisms and “provincialisms,” but rather a cosmopolitanism that promotes bridges among particularisms, as a move away from ethnocentrism. Rethinking cosmopolitanism requires reconceptualizing space, borders and belongings, and overcoming the simple binary of universal and particular (Robbins, 1998). Embracing the notion of multiple and overlapping belongings involves a significant shift in the ways in which the social sciences have tended to conceptualize the construction of collective identities. The either/or logic in which the demarcation of symbolic borders is a precondition for identity formation is replaced by the both/and logic of “inclusive differentiation” (Beck, 2006). From this perspective, the strong opposition between cosmopolitanism (as detachment) and national identities (as attachment) has been overstated.

We see cosmopolitanism as performative. It is messy, complex and put into play in everyday decisions. It is not an outcome; it is not an individual attribute, but rather a practice, a disposition that is always in process of changing as people interact across different contexts. As such, “cosmopolitan” is not something you are or you are not, or as Skrbis and Woodward (2013) put it, there is no such thing as an “end point” in cosmopolitanism. It is an ongoing project, both at the social and the individual level.

For Appiah (2006), the cosmopolitan project is about developing the capacity to participate in open-ended conversations with others without necessarily reaching an agreement or defining universal maxims. He uses the notion of conversation, both in its habitual meaning, and also as “as a metaphor for engagement with the experience and the ideas of others” (p. 85). From this perspective, a reflexive cosmopolitanism is about developing awareness of the complexity of life decisions, the value of considering other points of view and the consequences of our everyday decisions and actions for those that are close, but also for those that are far away in space and time.

The analytic distinction offered by Beck and Fine, between a cosmopolitan condition and cosmopolitan outlooks is a useful way to start thinking about a cosmopolitan pedagogic agenda. Such an agenda should take the everyday cosmopolitan experiences of students as a starting point, and through processes of discussion and conversation influence their cosmopolitan outlooks. If we can access and affect the cosmopolitan outlook of students, this can potentially have an effect on their ongoing cosmopolitan encounters that can then inform further classroom conversations. Hopefully, this kind of pedagogical work can then have an influence on cosmopolitan conditions, contribute to a more ethical approach to globalization and in this way move toward the more ambitious expectations for cosmopolitanism from below.

While students are experiencing a cosmopolitan reality that is contradictory, messy, and in many ways, dominated by consumer cultures and market narratives, schools

provide them with abstract and allegedly universal values as a way of promoting their moral engagement with cosmopolitan reality. The problem is that these two narratives seem to be located in parallel planes that have no contact with each other.

An alternative view is to take seriously the possibility of forging cosmopolitan values from below, based on distributive and transformational practices embedded in everyday experiences. The challenge is to steer everyday experiences towards a critical and reflexive cosmopolitanism, as part of a broader pedagogical project that works in between the messiness of the actual social, political and cultural life of students and cosmopolitan aspirations that institutions often profess. The focus should be on cosmopolitan learning (Rizvi, 2009).

We do not however regard cosmopolitan learning as the acquisition of a fixed set of values and dispositions. Experience is a transaction between the self and the environment or context (Biesta & Burbules, 2003). Thus, cosmopolitanism should not be understood as an attribute of the individual, but has to do with individuals in context. When thinking about cosmopolitan experiences, we need to move into a notion of context (and thus experience) that considers space as relational, since mobilities, connectivities and diversity are distinctive characteristics of the context that is in transaction with the individual. The emphasis on context-specific cosmopolitan experiences as a pedagogic point of departure reinforces the impossibility of providing in this essay a detailed recipe for pedagogic action. It is the specificity of the context, the experiences of students and teachers, the resources that are available and the particular positions from which they live the contradictions of global mobility that should inform the ways in which the empirical is combined with the normative (Wahlstrom, 2014).

This demands making everyday cosmopolitan experiences – including its banal, consumerist and elitist forms – visible, open to scrutiny and competing interpretations. Once cosmopolitan experiences are made visible, the next step is to promote a critical and reflexive practice, avoiding binary thinking associated with an ethical good/bad approach, and getting deep into the messiness and complexities of moral everyday decisions in which different values and the rights of different groups are in conflict and overlap, both within and across national borders. This exchange should take the form of an open-ended collective conversation that provides an opportunity to discuss cosmopolitanism in relation to lived experiences of the participants, reflecting on the complexities that are inherent to every decision, no matter how trivial or profound. Conversations, Todd (2013) argues, are not about making decisions or reaching agreements, but rather about confronting each other, and providing an opportunity for “facing the particularly human face of disruption, resistance, outsideness, in all its messiness and mundaneness” (p. 2).

These types of conversations should be aimed at overcoming purely individualistic notions of global responsibility, in which global problems are “couched in individualistic, psychological and moralistic terms – the result of a lack of individual responsibility, rather than an outcome of more structural causes” (Biesta & Lawy, 2006, p. 69). On the contrary, global problems, inequalities, risks and challenges should be historicized and politicized.

We argue that by identifying everyday cosmopolitan experiences, it is possible to steer these experiences towards a morally productive cosmopolitanism, where such a moral is itself something that is negotiated rather than imposed from above as a moral technology. Instead of learning about cultures in an abstract manner, a critical approach must

help students to explore the crisscrossing of transnational circuits of communication, the flows of global capital and the cross-cutting of local, transnational social practices and their differential consequences for different people and communities. We believe that a pedagogically productive cosmopolitan conversation should not necessarily be aimed at reaching consensus and unanimous agreement. On the contrary, the value of having a profound discussion and listening to different positions with respect and an open mind should be promoted as a virtue in itself. If students learn, through their formal education, to participate in debates with those that have different positions, priorities and values, without the need for agreement, but with the need to understand other people's perspectives, this could potentially contribute to develop the ability to master the kind of cosmopolitan conversations that we are advocating.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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Fazal Rizvi is a professor in education at the University of Melbourne, as well as an emeritus professor at the University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign. He is a board member of the Asia Education Foundation and a fellow of the Australian Academy of the Social Sciences and Australia India Institute. He has written extensively on globalization and education policy, issues of identity, difference and culture in transnational contexts, Indian higher education and Australia–Asia relations. His most recent books include: *Globalising Education Policy* (Routledge 2010) and *Encountering Education in a Global Era* (Routledge 2014).

Jason Beech teaches comparative education and sociology of education in the School of Education, Universidad de San Andrés in Buenos Aires. He is a researcher of the National Council for Scientific and Technical Research of Argentina (CONICET), and associate editor of *Education Policy Analysis Archives*. He is a member of the Board of Directors of the Comparative and International Education Society (CIES), and visiting scholar at the Graduate School of Education, University of Melbourne (2015). He is currently interested in the use of spatial theories in educational research and in exploring the link between cosmopolitanism and education.

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