

**Cosmopolitanism**

*This emphasis on patriotic pride is both morally dangerous and, ultimately, subversive of some of the worthy goals patriotism sets out to serve -- for example, the goal of national unity in devotion to worthy moral ideals of justice and equality.*

-- Martha Nussbaum, from "Patriotism and Cosmopolitanism"

One problem is that the concept of global citizenship assumes there is a universal set of values accepted worldwide, which of course is nonsense... Another problem is that the American experience is now to be treated as just another story, to be "integrated" into the larger human story.

-- J. Martin Rochester, from "The Training of Idiots: Civics education in America's schools"

As the two contradictory quotes above suggest, cosmopolitanism, and particularly education for it, is very controversial. Martha Nussbaum defines a cosmopolitan as "the person whose primary allegiance is to the community of human beings in the entire world" (Nussbaum). Held and McGrew (2000) define cosmopolitanism as a "moral frame of reference for specifying principles that can be universally shared," implying that "the particular boundaries between states and other communities have no deep (over-riding) moral significance" (p. 401-401).

The notion of cosmopolitanism is linked directly to the notion of the nation state, and so it should be no surprise that, at this moment in history when the nation state is being "undermined by transnational actors" through the processes of globalization (Beck, 2000, p. 101), we should see policy conflict around whether to educate for national or for cosmopolitan values.

For example, Nussbaum asks whether students in the United States, should be taught that they are above all citizens of the United States, or should they instead be taught that they are above all citizens of a world of human beings, and that, while they themselves happen to be situated in the United States, they have to share this world of human beings with the citizens of other countries?

What, specifically, might these U.S. students be taught? Among Nussbaum's "four arguments for making world citizenship . . . education's central focus," she suggests a education on:

The pollution of third-world nations who are attempting to attain our high standard of living will, in some cases, end up in our air. No matter what account of these
matters we will finally adopt, any intelligent deliberation about ecology -- as, also, about the food supply and population -- requires global planning, global knowledge, and the recognition of a shared future.

Strong advocates for a more cosmopolitan approach to education might see value in Held's argument for a "cosmopolitan democracy" that seeks to reinforce democracy within nations by "elaborating and reinforcing democracy from 'outside' through a network of regional and international agencies and assemblies that cut across spatially delimited locales" (McGrew, 2000, p. 414).

Among the prominent critics of Held's perspective is Chester Finn, who is scathing in his critique of the "troubling ideological agenda . . . driving" what he calls 'global education," an agenda whose "ideology needs to be identified and examined if an otherwise worthy education project is not to become merely another vehicle for politicizing the curriculum" (Finn). Finn grants that some global education is warranted, but recent events should warn us about taking it too far. Our "tightly integrated" world system has not yet found a way to overcome deep religious, political, and cultural divisions. Nor does it appear to have found a way to dispense with nation-states as the preeminent players on the world stage or as the most important protectors-and violators-of constitutional government and liberty. Downplaying the nation-state's role in history is not yet justified by evidence either from the past or the present. It is an expression of ideology, not historical scholarship. (Finn)

The tension between cosmopolitan versus nationalist values in educational policy is nothing new; it dates back to the nineteenth century when educational policies were directly linked nation-building, particularly in Germany, whose nationalistic education was "the most important single human component of Germany's rise to industrial and military pre-eminence in Europe by 1914" (Eksteins, 1989, p. 71). Dewey in 1916, analyzing education in Europe and the United States, discussed those features of life "largely international in quality," such as "science, commerce, and art" as well as a general sense of "human welfare and progress" that "involve interdependencies and cooperation among the peoples inhabiting different countries" (Dewey, 1944, pp. 96-97). For Dewey, the nation states arrogated to themselves the power to set educational policies that subordinated these cosmopolitan and "social aim[s] of education" to the "national aim" in which The "state" was substituted for humanity; cosmopolitanism gave way to nationalism. To form the citizen, not the "man," became the aim of education. (p. 93).

And thus, "the result was a marked obscuring of the meaning of the social aim" of education (p. 97). Nussbaum, Held, and others would clarify this social aim, re-inscribing Dewey's global "human welfare and progress" into education as a
mutually-reinforcing means to develop democracy at the local, national, and international levels. Finn, Rochester, and others find this a troubling and troubled ideology, one best countered with an educational focus on civics and U.S. history.

Cosmopolitanism is also a feature of the "global city," urban centers that "contain the disparate elements moving from place to place" such as "travel, tourism, business links, and the labour market" which become increasingly "organized on a global scale" (Cohen & Kennedy, 2000, p. 352).

Here are a few interesting websites discussing the cosmopolitanism/nationalism debate:

- Go here for Martha Nussbaum's article "Patriotism and Cosmopolitanism." You will see her argue forcefully for cosmopolitanism in education, and there is no shortage of support for her thesis. [http://sun.soci.niu.edu/~phildept/Kapitan/nussbaum1.html](http://sun.soci.niu.edu/~phildept/Kapitan/nussbaum1.html)

- This is an interesting essay critiquing the emphasis of cosmopolitanism and globalization in the context of rural American life by Craig Howley, titled "Studying the Rural in Education: Nation-Building, "Globalization," and School Improvement": [http://epaa.asu.edu/epaa/v5n12.html#bio](http://epaa.asu.edu/epaa/v5n12.html#bio). Another related text Howley contributes to is "The Possible Good Gifted Programs in Rural Schools and Communities Might Do": [http://oak.cats.ohiou.edu/~howleyc/RGC.htm](http://oak.cats.ohiou.edu/~howleyc/RGC.htm)

- See some U.S. Dept. of Education initiatives aimed at teaching U.S. history and national values:
  

References


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