

# “Cosmopolitanism and Education in the World Today”

David T. Hansen, Professor of  
Philosophy and Education

Teachers College, Columbia University

[hansen@tc.edu](mailto:hansen@tc.edu)

# An Ancient *and* Contemporary Idea

- \* Western and Eastern origins
- \* Diogenes (4<sup>th</sup> Century BCE)
  - kosmopolites*: inhabitant of the cosmos
- \* Hellenistic, Roman, Renaissance, Modern
- \* Today a growing field-based as well as philosophical, theoretical, and practical interest

# Why do people care about cosmopolitanism?

- \* To respond to the intensity of globalization with its cultural dislocations, economic disparities and unpredictability, nationalist and fundamentalist conflicts
- \* To respond to sentiments of nihilism and homelessness in the world, and to a spiraling consumerist mentality

\* To move beyond skepticism about the possibility of mutual comprehension across difference

“We can learn from each other’s stories only if we share both human capacities and a single world: relativism about either is a reason not to converse but to fall silent.” [Kwame Anthony Appiah]

\* To support new modes of cooperation made possible by today’s technology, proliferating non-governmental organizations, and alternative globalization movements (in the arts, in environmentalism, in human rights, etc.)

Cosmopolitanism is an *educational orientation* toward the affairs of life. This orientation encompasses aesthetic, moral, reflective and ethical dimensions:

\* *aesthetic*: perceptivity, sensibility, responsiveness

\* *moral*: how persons regard and treat other people

\* *reflective*: the ability to stand back though not apart from situations in order to think and imagine

\* *ethical*: a willingness to cultivate the self to deepen these aesthetic, moral, and reflective dimensions

# Themes in a Cosmopolitan-Minded Education

1. To recognize and heed the conditions of human constraint and possibility today:
  - a. The reality of permeability and porosity to influence from the world
  - b. The unfathomability of human diversity at the level of the individual and community

# (Themes in a cosmopolitan-minded education)

c. The ubiquity of human vulnerability and fallibility

d. The instability of the human and natural world

e. A quest for meaning rather than for mere existence.

2. Cosmopolitanism is an orientation that fuses *reflective openness to the new* and *reflective loyalty to the known*.

*“Homo sum; humani nil a me alienum puto”* – “I am a man; I deem nothing that is human to be foreign to me.” [Terence, 166-160 B.C.E.]

“Interest in learning from all the contacts of life is the essential moral interest.” [John Dewey, 1916]



3. In this orientation, people learn to *hold* and *express* their values in non-violent, non-confrontational, and yet determined ways.

4. In this orientation, persons and communities move *closer and closer apart* and *further and further together*.

## For fuller background and details:

“Chasing butterflies without a net: Interpreting cosmopolitanism.” *Studies in Philosophy of Education*, 29 (2010), 151-166.

“Cosmopolitanism and education: A view from the ground.” *Teachers College Record* 112 (2010), 1-30.

“Values, valuing, and education in cosmopolitan perspective.” *Curriculum Inquiry* 39 (2009), 587-612.

“Curriculum and the idea of a cosmopolitan inheritance.” *Journal of Curriculum Studies* 40 (2008), 289-312.