Making Space for Dialogue:

Cosmopolitan FYE as a Model for College First-Year Experiences

Katina Fontes

For many young adults, college is a time of exploration and new experiences. It is often the first extended separation from family and community and period of exposure to the unfamiliar. In meeting new people, college students must confront views and perspectives different from their own and this creates both a challenge and opportunity for colleges. The challenge is obvious – colleges have to accommodate and acclimate students from a variety of backgrounds. The opportunity, however, is often overshadowed by institutional goals such as career preparation or student retention. It is an opportunity to stimulate dialogue and the exchange of ideas with the purpose of developing understanding about the changing world. Today's students will be tomorrow's leaders and as such need adequate preparation to take on this responsibility.

Cosmopolitan FYE (CFYE) is a rethinking of the college First-Year Experience (FYE). Rooted in the philosophy of cosmopolitanism, CFYE is a three-pronged approach of faculty-led seminars, student-constructed service learning, and co-curricular activities and support programs. Furthermore, it is part of an overarching 21st century higher education *paideia* and a means to a bigger end—that of preparing students for entry into an increasingly connected and diverse world and their future roles as citizens. After providing historical background on *paideia*, cosmopolitanism, and FYE, this paper introduces CFYE and its three components (seminars, service learning, and co-curriculars) with *dialogue* as the connecting thread. This connection is presented through a discussion of formal and informal tools for developing dialogue skills, such as maieutic (Socratic) instruction, experiential community opportunities, and salon style mixers.

Paideia: Historical Roots and 21st Century Applications in Higher Education

The roots of *paideia* date back to the fifth century B.C.E. when it had "the narrow meaning of 'child rearing'" (Jaeger, 1945, p. 5). But as Greece moved from a period of aristocracy to

democracy in the fourth century, the word came to be more closely associated with education and culture, and to the Greek concept of *arete* (excellence) whereby *paideia* was a means to forming ideal citizens. As a result, *paideia* in the Hellenistic world also came to be associated with participatory democracy and citizenship. *Paideia* evolved and soon came to include a variety of subjects and practices meant to train the body and mind, including: rhetoric, grammar, philosophy, science, gymnastics and wrestling, and the arts (primarily music and poetry).

While *paideia* inspired later educational philosophies, such as its Latin counter-part *humanitas* (humanities) during the Roman and Renaissance periods and the 18th century concept of German *bildung* (education through self-cultivation and philosophy), little mention of *paideia* as a large scale educational movement is made again until the 1982 release of *The Paideia Proposal: An Educational Manifesto* (Adler & Paideia Group, 1982). In this book Mortimer Adler and the Paideia Group challenged educators to rethink and redesign public education. The long-term result was not as revolutionary as its members would have liked.[1] However, after its publication the book sparked a conversation about the assumption at the heart of the book – the connection between education and democracy. I myself read *The Paideia Proposal* as a graduate student in 1990 at the University of Chicago. The skinny book (only 84 pages) has remained with me since, as have many of the ideas within it. Just as Adler and the Paideia Group reinvigorated the concept of *paideia* within the confines of a 20th century reality, I want to rethink *paideia* – which I define as *a broad system of education that cultivates the general knowledge needed by all human beings to actively engage as citizens* – through a 21st century lens and within the context of the American university.

[1] Remnants of the *Paideia Proposal* and the work of the Paideia Group are today visible only in a scattering of K-12 schools, such as those trained by or affiliated with the National Paideia Center (https://www.paideia.org/) or the Coalition of Essential Schools (http://essentialschools.org/).

The creation of a 21st century higher education *paideia* requires one to think about both the ends and means of a college education. Today the end of a college education is often viewed in terms of the conferral of a degree. And while this is important given the realities of today's economy, in any *paideia* the end must be an engaged and capable citizenry, irrespective of the economic benefits of a college degree. There are many means to this end and potential options within the realm of "means" possibilities. CFYE is offered as a component of my envisioned means to that end.

Cosmopolitanism as Philosophy and Education

The philosophy of cosmopolitanism has ancient roots dating back to the 4th century B.C.E. Cynics.[2] In academic circles today it is most associated with the scholarly work of Kwame Anthony Appiah (2006). It is a rejection of the idea that people belong to only one community with a common culture and a mutually agreed upon view of ethics and morality—an idea that is typically espoused by many conservative contemporary political, social, and cultural pundits. Appiah argues that a new way of thinking is essential because we now live in a global and connected world, a world in which contact with people unlike ourselves is a given. Technology and a rapidly growing population force us to think beyond our community. Appiah's cosmopolitanism has two philosophical strands: 1) We have obligations to others beyond members of our family and community; and 2) "we take seriously the value not just of human life but of particular human lives, which means taking an interest in the practices and beliefs that lend them significance" (p. xv). Dialogue and discourse are essential in achieving the latter

[2] The Cynics, while most associated with an extreme commitment to virtue above all else (wealth, power, fame, sex, and other pleasures) are also credited with inventing the concept of cosmopolitanism. This credit comes from Diogenes (c.390-323 BCE) declaring himself a citizen of the world "rather than from a particular culture or polity" (Hansen, 2011, p. 7).

because, Appiah points out, the goal is not consensus—he is not advocating for one perspective or worldview—but rather a better understanding of differing views through conversation.

In *The Teacher and the World: A Study of Cosmopolitanism as Education* David Hansen (2011) takes cosmopolitanism into the realm of education. The specificity of language used in the title and throughout his book is important to note here as Hansen uses the term "as" instead of "in." He is advocating for cosmopolitanism in and of itself as the foundation for education rather than as an addition to a particular curriculum or pedagogy, something he calls "curriculum as cosmopolitan inheritance" (pp. 95-96). Inheritance requires responsibility on the part of the inheritors—they become trustees of that which they inherit. Inheritance must be cared for, used in the here and now, and passed along to the next generation. For this reason, an inheritor may choose to not accept an inheritance. When one views education as inheritance, it is something in which students participate rather than acquire. As an educational practice it is distinct from socialization. Hansen notes that while socialization is a necessary human activity, it is rehearsed and practiced. Education as inheritance is ever changing and constantly in motion. The values, practices, and ideas students inherit are constantly being adjusted in light of new ideas and evidence.

It is important to note that in advocating for education as inheritance Hansen is reacting against the concept of "cultural literacy" popular in the late 20th century and coineded by E. D. Hirsch (1987), and which Hansen sees as socialization and not education. Hansen is not alone in his criticisms of Hirsch and others advocating for education as cultural commonality. Maxine Greene (1996) likewise reacts against the assumptions of Hirsch's work, characterizing *Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know* (Hirsch, 1987) as a book written out of "a conservative dread of fragmentation…Hirsch offers a kind of reassurance to those troubled by

the profound changes in our culture" (Greene, 1996, p. 310). Greene and Hansen view cultural literacy as a means of cultural imposition by the majority wishing to hold on to power.

Hirsch's ideas, like many other deficit models, fall into the category of the "banking concept of education" introduced by Paolo Freire (2005) in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Freire criticizes banking in education because it assumes the student knows nothing and is disconnected from praxis, i.e. the human practice of action and reflection. "In the banking concept of education, knowledge is a gift bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable upon those whom they consider to know nothing" (p. 72). Freire instead focuses on the "unfinished" nature of humans and views this as a key component of education. "Women and men are capable of being educated only to the extent that they are capable of recognizing themselves as unfinished. Education does not make us educable. It is our awareness of being unfinished that makes us educable" (Freire, 1998, p. 58). By calling for schooling around a common core of cultural knowledge, Hirsch is assuming a lack of cultural knowledge by those not in the majority group (despite being immersed in it through media and daily interactions) and a level of cultural "illiteracy" that needs to be remedied. Cultural literacy also ignores the value gained from an exchange of cultural knowledge.

Cosmopolitanism as education stands in sharp contrast to educational banking and socialization models because it does not assume a common cannon of cultural knowledge as a key component of human understanding. On this issue Hansen (2011) points to the changing nature of the human condition and the inevitability of change. "Humanity cannot predict its own next steps any more than it can anticipate nature's sure-to-come evolutionary steps. Humanity cannot stop itself from changing and transforming, since the very endeavor to do that would

itself constitute a mode of change" (p. 48). Cosmopolitanism as education accepts this unpredictability and willingly takes on the challenges of education within this view.

The ongoing debates about the roles of culture, heritage, and history in education is predicated on disagreements. However, assuming those of us in higher education could agree on the benefits of cosmopolitanism as an overarching goal in college, I believe that three daunting questions must immediately follow: 1) How does one create a system of cosmopolitanism as education? 2) What does such a thing look like in higher education? 3) Where, in the typical college curriculum, might it be possible to infuse these ideas?

Evolution of the First-Year Experience

References

Adler, M. J., & Paideia Group. (1982). *The Paideia proposal: An educational manifesto* (1st paperback ed.). New York, NY: Macmillan.

Appiah, K. A. (2006). *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a world of strangers*. New York, NY: W. W. Norton.

Bigger, J. (2005). Improving odds for freshman success. Manhattan, KS: Kansas State University, NACADA Clearinghouse Retrieved from http://www.nacada.ksu.edu/Resources/Clearinghouse/View-Articles/Advising-first-year-students.aspx

Black's law dictionary. (1991) (Abridged 6th ed.). St. Paul, MN: West.

Carey, K. (2015). *The end of college: Creating the future of learning and the university of everywhere*. New York, NY: Riverhead Books.

Cohen, L. H. (2013). *I don't know: In praise of admitting ignorance (except when you shouldn't)*. New York, NY: Riverhead Books.

Copeland, M. (2005). *Socratic circles: Fostering critical and creative chinking in middle and high school*. Portland, ME: Stenhouse.

Dewey, J. (1900). *The school and society* (3d ed.). Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Dewey, J. (1938). *Experience and education*. New York, NY: Macmillan.

Freire, P. (1998). *Pedagogy of freedom : Ethics, democracy, and civic courage* (P. Clarke, Trans.). Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

Freire, P. (2005). *Pedagogy of the oppressed* (30th anniversary ed.). New York, NY: Continuum.

Greene, M. (1996). Education visions: What are schools for and what should we be doing in the name of education? In J. L. Kincheloe & S. R. Steinberg (Eds.), *Thirteen questions: Reframing education's conversation* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Lang.

Hansen, D. T. (2011). *The teacher and the world: A study of cosmopolitanism as education* (1st ed.). New York, NY: Routledge.

Hirsch, E. D. (1985). "Cultural Literacy" Doesn't Mean "Core Curriculum". *The English Journal, 74*(6), 47-49. doi: 10.2307/816894

Hirsch, E. D. (1987). *Cultural literacy: What every American needs to know*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin.

Hunter, M. S. (2006). Fostering student learning and success through first-year programs. *Peer Review, 8*(3), 4-7.

Jaeger, W. (1945). *Paideia: The ideals of Greek culture* (G. Highet, Trans. 2nd ed. Vol. 1). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Kuh, G. D., & O'Donnell, K. (2013). Ensuring quality and taking high-impact practices to scale. Washington, DC: Association of American Colleges and Universities

Reuben, J. A. (1996). *The making of the modern university: Intellectual transformation and the marginalization of morality*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Rutter, M. P., & Mintz, S. The curricular and the co-curricular: The importance of what takes place outside the classroom. Retrieved from https://www.insidehighered.com/blogs/higher-ed-gamma/curricular-and-co-curricular

Ryle, G. (2015). *The concept of mind*. Philadelphia, PA: R. P. Pryne.

Skipper, T. L. (2017). What makes the first-year seminar high impact? An exploration of effective educational practices. Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina, National Resource Center for The First Year Experience & Students in Transition

Webster's ninth new collegiate dictionary. (1988) (9th ed.). Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster.

Wegener, C. (1978). *Liberal education and the modern university*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Westheimer, J., & Kahne, J. (2004). What kind of citizen? The politics of educating for democracy. *American Educational Research Journal*(2), 237.