Title: Developing cosmopolitan habits through dispositional routines
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Developing Cosmopolitan Habits through Dispositional Routines

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Today, the intensification of global interconnectedness has led to a greater recognition of education's role in equipping students with critical global literacies to mitigate forms of cultural intolerance. Bogum Yoon et al. propose a critical global literacies framework grounded in the ideas of critical and rooted cosmopolitanism (208). They suggest a range of activities teachers can employ such as conducting projects on current world issues or forming book clubs to raise awareness about social justice and global issues.

Aside from these projects, teachers need to attend to classroom routines and how they can contribute to deepening global consciousness in students. As a teacher educator and researcher, I have worked with literature teachers from Australia, Singapore, and the United States to design innovative curricula that cultivate cosmopolitan dispositions. In this column, I draw attention to the daily routines of classroom practice based on my observations of English literature teachers in Singapore. Instead of focusing only on large-scale projects, attention to everyday routines can develop cosmopolitan habits of mind.

COSMOPOLITAN DISPOSITIONS AND ROUTINES

The philosophical ideals of cosmopolitanism, translated from the Greek as “citizen of the world,” is typically traced to cynic and stoic philosophers who conceived of a person's identity as extending beyond the nation to the human fraternity. Recently, scholars have also sought to theorize cosmopolitan thought in Eastern philosophy, particularly the ideas of Confucius.

Indeed, cosmopolitanism is integral to Confucianism and encompasses one of its key tenets, ren, which is closely akin to cosmopolitan love. No other subject preoccupied Confucius as much as ren, which he argued is demonstrated when children learn to put the family's interests above their own through filial piety. The family is viewed as the first community one is born into and thus provides the guidance for learning to love others. Ren reaches its highest virtue when one can extend love for family to the community and the world at large (Ivanhoe 38). Because the practicing of ren requires one to overcome egoism that goes against our natural human propensity, one essential catalyst is li, which refers to ritual.

Rituals are part and parcel of everyday social interactions, but Confucius was not concerned about people acting in appropriate ways alone; rather, he was concerned that they act out of altruistic dispositions (Tu 190). In performing a ritual, participants learn to engage, reciprocate, and empathize with the other. In the process, the walls between self and other break down, and greater concern for another is fostered. As one gains maturity in ethical reasoning, there is less reliance on rituals and expressions of cosmopolitan love become habitual.

CLASSROOM EXAMPLES OF COSMOPOLITAN DISPOSITIONAL ROUTINES

Today, visible thinking routines conceptualized by Project Zero at Harvard University have gained
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worldwide popularity. Less discussed is what I term dispositional routines—these are routines that occur in almost every lesson and that make cosmopolitan dispositions both visible and habitual. These are some examples I have observed in English classrooms:

1. Social routines facilitate cosmopolitan dispositions such as respecting others and learning to suspend judgment to accommodate different viewpoints. For example, in a tenth-grade class, students took notes each time another student shared a point. The routine reinforced the practice of students learning to listen to their peers and taking their opinions as seriously as the teacher’s, especially when the opinions may conflict with their own.

2. Cultural routines catalyze curiosity about world cultures and an appreciation for cultural diversity. For example, in a twelfth-grade class, this occurred through developing a habit of wide-reading. The beginning fifteen minutes was dedicated to silent reading of a book that students selected on their own from a classroom-based library of literary and nonliterary books from all over the world. The routine was further supported by regular teacher-student conferencing, peer book sharing, and book festivals. In the process, the routine ignited students’ curiosity about other cultures around the world.

3. Critical routines encourage more in-depth examinations of cultural representation by interrupting singular interpretations of culture. For example, a regular feature of an eleventh-grade class involved the teacher interrupting the study of one text with several other cultural texts. The students practiced comparing alternative cultural perspectives as part of literary discussions, which reinforced the habit of constantly seeking to challenge accepted norms while expanding one’s understandings of world communities.

4. Ethical routines foster engaged encounters with others by finding ethical openings into and beyond texts. For example, aside from appreciating stylistic techniques employed by authors, a consistent routine in a tenth-grade class involved inviting students to consider ethical invitations into moral dilemmas in texts and connecting them to global issues. Students shared artifacts and examples to link the text to real-world injustices. The routine was substantiated by activist projects allowing students to promote forms of social justice in their school community.

The range of dispositional routines is not exhaustive and can be contextualized to fit existing school culture. In my research, I have found that everyday classroom routines can effectively enculturate students to disrupt parochial points of view and to be open to difference. As Confucius wisely said, “Restrain the self and return to the rites. This is the way to be humane” (178). In an increasingly intolerant world, the development of cosmopolitan dispositions is fundamental to enabling students to become more invested in the flourishing of others in the world.

Work Cited

Suzanne S. Choo is an associate professor at the National Institute of Education, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore. Her book Reading the World, the Globe, and the Cosmos: Approaches to Teaching Literature for the Twenty-First Century was awarded the 2014 Critics’ Choice Book Award by the American Educational Studies Association. Her website is thirdspaces.wixsite.com/literature.