

Cosmopolitan conceits: how rich kids strut the global stage enacting inter-class incompetencies

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Elite schools around the world offer various programs and activities which aim and claim to instil, in their students, cosmopolitan sensibilities. These programs are regarded as a testimony to the schools' and the students' elevated virtues. The ethical imperative is to dialogically engage with the 'differences' that exist beyond the parochial. Such cross-border experiences, it is claimed, assist students to understand the wider world and encourage them to try to change it for the better. These schools are very wealthy, their students are mostly the offspring of the rich and very rich and enjoy numerous class privileges. So, in this paper I explore the nexus between elite schools' cosmopolitanism and social class. I note the ways that such programs are shot through with class suppositions, but my focus is on the students. I ask if the students' cosmopolitan sensibilities are classed and, if so, in what ways? More specifically, how does the students' class privilege influence the manner in which they engage in these programs and activities? How are difference, dialogue, change-for- the better and virtue understood and enacted. To address these questions, I focus on the student cohort of our Elite schools in Globalising Circumstances study. Seventy students (10 from each school in England, Australia, Singapore, Hong Kong, India, Barbados and South Africa) were interviewed in their last two years at school and in their second year out of school. I draw from this broad data-base, while also focussing on some indicative cases. I elaborate on the various ways that these students artfully mobilise their class entitlements all the while laying claim to cosmopolitan ethics and identities.