

# Establishing a Culture of Intercultural Education



# Establishing a Culture of Intercultural Education:

*Essays and Papers in Honour  
of Jagdish Gundara*

Edited by

Leslie Bash and David Coulby

Cambridge  
Scholars  
Publishing



Establishing a Culture of Intercultural Education:  
Essays and Papers in Honour of Jagdish Gundara

Edited by Leslie Bash and David Coulby

This book first published 2016

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data  
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Copyright © 2016 by Leslie Bash, David Coulby and contributors

All rights for this book reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the copyright owner.

ISBN (10): 1-4438-8827-3

ISBN (13): 978-1-4438-8827-1

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| Introduction .....  | vii |
| <i>Leslie Bash and David Coulby</i>   |     |
| Jagdish Gundara on the State of Intercultural Education: In Interview .....   | 1   |
| <i>Leslie Bash</i>  |     |
| Rethinking Culture in Intercultural Education.....  | 11  |
| <i>Leslie Bash</i>  |     |
| Changing Patterns of Globalisation, Crises Real and Imagined:<br>Some Implications for School and University Curricula.....   | 27  |
| <i>David Coulby</i>   |     |
| Comparative Education and Intercultural Education:<br>What are the Questions? .....   | 41  |
| <i>Robert Cowen</i>   |     |
| From Semantics to Syntax in Intercultural Education:<br>Towards Critical Interculturalism.....  | 61  |
| <i>Gunther Dietz</i>  |     |
| Intercultural Literacy: Reconstructing, Naming, and Reclaiming<br>Our Past Selves.....  | 83  |
| <i>Michele Kahn</i>   |     |
| Intercultural Education as a Public Good: Thoughts about New<br>Directions for the Common School and the Curriculum<br>in Countries which Face Impoverishment ..... | 103 |
| <i>Nektaria Palaiologou</i>   |     |
| Towards Inter-cultural Education in Xinjiang, Northwest China? .....  | 121 |
| <i>Fei Yan and Geoff Whitty</i>   |     |



## INTRODUCTION

The contributions to this volume constitute a diversity of scholarly contributions which reflect the influence and impact, both direct and indirect, of the work and character of Professor Jagdish Gundara. It is perhaps a tribute to him that the volume comprises both empirical and theoretical pieces as well as more reflective and personal accounts. Jagdish Gundara, while being very clear with regard to his own views and orientations within the field of intercultural education, has nonetheless been committed to dialogue and debate, and always demonstrated a willingness to encompass a diversity of perspectives and a readiness to take on board new and challenging ideas. Accordingly, across the globe, many have learnt much as well as having entered into fierce but essentially good-natured argument with him. The institutional context of Gundara's work has itself been diverse over many decades, from youth and community work, through to the establishment of what was to become the International Centre for Intercultural Studies at the Institute of Education, University of London (now part of University College, London) as well as serving as a member of the UK Commission for Racial Equality. Importantly, he was also instrumental in setting up the International Association for Intercultural Education of which he is currently President.

It has been a privilege and personal pleasure to have been closely associated with one of the leading figures in the field of intercultural education and especially one who has been instrumental in defining the field. In honouring Jagdish Gundara, it is intended that this volume will be a significant addition to the literature on education and diversity.

**Leslie Bash,  
David Coulby,  
Editors**





JAGDISH GUNDARA ON THE STATE  
OF INTERCULTURAL EDUCATION:  
IN INTERVIEW  
LESLIE BASH

**On interculturalism and multiculturalism**

This signals one of the major problems affecting this field, partly because interculturalism and multiculturalism are seen differently by English-speaking countries and non-English-speaking countries. In English-speaking countries such as the US, the UK, Canada, Australia and New Zealand, the term “multicultural” is used as a policy term. But it has also been open to criticism by the conservative elements in those societies who tend to suggest that multiculturalism is divisive and, therefore, is not inclusive of cultures, but instead reinforces separateness. This however, is not true because those who work in the field of multiculturalism are not divisive. In any case, another way of working in the field is to use intercultural perspectives in developing policy and practice and multiculturalism as a way of defining a school, a community, an institution and a society, so that you can have a multicultural school because there might be taxonomic features of multiculturalism within that school, community or society. These include linguistic diversity and religious diversity (including secular orientations) as well as social class diversity. Issues pertaining to the relations between settled groups, as opposed to mobile or non-settled groups such as the Travellers, have a long pedigree. So the taxonomic features of religion, language, class and so forth are other kinds of examples of multiculturalism used descriptively. At this moment in time it is important for all those who work in the fields of interculturalism and multiculturalism to establish some common ground and work together to deal with the deep-seated social divides in most of our societies. Neoliberal economics and the shrinking of the state are leading to the rise of Neo-Nazi movements in disadvantaged and deeply divided communities demonstrating that professional collaboration between interculturalism and multiculturalism is essential.

## **On the UNESCO Chair for Intercultural Studies and Teacher Education held at the UCL Institute of Education**

The UNESCO Chair to which I am appointed is in the field of intercultural studies and the term tends to include areas of education, but also, other areas of concern within social sciences, humanities, and the natural and laboratory sciences so we cover interculturality from an inclusive perspective. In terms of the diversity of knowledge and disciplines, it is important that the different aspects of knowledge are taken on board in socially diverse societies. One of the aspects is, then, of course, the pedagogies relevant for Intercultural Studies; as well as theoretical and conceptual issues relating to Intercultural Education and, of course, policy and practice. So in one sense, its focus is on diversity within educational systems and society.

### **On the viability of intercultural educational education in contemporary Europe—and globally**

Well, maybe, the issue should be looked at the other way around. You could say that if there is no intercultural education what kind of education will we have? In Spain, for example, it is not the immigrants which make Spanish society intercultural, it is the “indigenous” diversities within Spanish society that constitute Spain as a historically multicultural country. So, for instance, from the taxonomic features that I mentioned earlier, there is linguistic diversity, as seen in the differences of Catalan, Basque and Castilian linguistic communities, while the latter constitutes national “Spanish” language. Hence, Spain is a thoroughly multilingual society and nation. There are also religious groups of various kinds. Historically, Jewish, Christian and Islamic groups co-existed, especially in the southern regions of Spain, reflected in the architecture of cities such as Granada. Very large numbers of Spanish people are secular and are an important part of Spanish culture and political life. These examples provide some historically-based evidence of the multicultural dimension of Spanish society, as also exists in contemporary Britain. In addition, there is also the class factor where social classes have differential access to education. Furthermore, there are different ways of life between the settled and non-settled peoples who have historically been part of Spanish society, and, again, reflected also in British society. In addition, the Roma Traveller population has been in Europe for a long time (since the sixteenth century). The point is that national state systems are largely governed by dominant cultures and dominant groups—and they tend to

impose a uniformity based on majoritarianism. There may also be the presence of issues of xenophobia and racism based on exclusivist ideologies. The point of saying all this is that if we do not have intercultural education what kind of education would you have to bring those groups together? If we do not have intercultural education we are likely to have intercultural conflicts. So the role of intercultural education is to bring about intercultural understandings, intercultural coherence and cohesion by bringing diverse groups together in societies. It is only by implementing intercultural education in a substantive way that we would be able to remove the barriers of xenophobia, racism and inequalities of various kinds and to ensure that we have peaceable and inclusive communities. Therefore, the actualisation of an intercultural education is a paradigm for all European states. Now, of course, historical diversities within European societies (including Spain and Britain) are also supplemented by the presence of immigrant populations. This adds another dimension of multiculturalism which includes different languages, religions and social differences. They may also confront xenophobia and racism like other minorities with a historical presence in European societies. Thus, all these features of historical and contemporary diverse communities require a soundly based intercultural and inclusive education which applies to everyone, not just to immigrants and minorities, but to dominant groups as well, to ensure that those societies function optimally.

### **On inclusive education as the central issue**

Well, we do have different education systems across European countries and different kinds of schools. There are private schools, public schools, free schools and so forth, but, of course, those kinds of institutions are frequently distinguished from each other on the basis of inequalities and thus tend not to contribute to establishing inclusivity. In fact they reflect exclusions on various indices and it is obvious that in order to have inclusive education, systems need to eliminate features of exclusion and inequality. Inclusion cannot be brought about without taking measures to reduce inequalities, build bridges between diverse value systems and establish a commonly accepted democratic ethos. Values and norms of dominant groups which govern our state systems cannot lead to inclusion. Comprehensive public education is the most important way in which we can have a good intercultural and inclusive education, with young people from all communities going to the same school and learning to live with each other, learning with each other, and learning to resolve conflict with each other. The latter is important because it is obvious that in socially,

and culturally, diverse societies the differences can give rise to conflicts. Where these are of an educational nature, schools and teachers may be able to resolve some but not all of them. As I said earlier, intercultural studies should include social and public policy, since areas such as welfare, housing, employment and citizenship signal other state institutions where, at the same time, there can be engagement with issues of conflict resolution. However, it is important to note that teachers and schools also have an important role to play in actualising intercultural peaceful communities and strengthening intercultural understanding which can form the basis for inclusive education.

### **On the role of teacher education**

Universities in general and teacher education in particular need to play a fundamental role in multicultural societies since schools and teachers, by themselves, are not equipped to resolve all the issues with which they are presented. Teachers as such are not the problem; the problem lies in the way they are trained and educated. Indeed, the emphasis needs to be much more on teacher education rather than teacher training since it is vital that teachers acquire the necessary conceptual and theoretical knowledge, as well as training in pedagogical skills. So, teachers' colleges, universities and other higher education institutions ought to provide the knowledge, skills and understandings relating to multicultural societies. And as I mentioned earlier, the title of the UNESCO chair is "Intercultural Studies", which includes different domains of knowledge and different disciplines, so there is no domain or discipline to which teacher education cannot contribute. So we should not have teacher training within major institutions where intercultural education is confined to a little corner. For me, that is a paradox which doesn't have any place in modern schools. All teachers need to have an understanding of the multiculturalism of societies, and within the broad domains of knowledge and disciplines of what they teach, teachers ought to be educated to teach their subjects in an intercultural manner.

So, for instance, one of the major problems in our world today is the centrism of people's cultures whether Asian-centric, African-centric, Indo-centric, Islamic-centric, or Euro-centric. However, the problem with such centrism is that we cannot live in multicultural societies with a centred basis of values and knowledge; we need to have a more non-centric understanding of human history, of the bases of knowledge and of universal human values. If we examine the European Renaissance, it is

presented as a Christian phenomenon and in fact the realities are very different. It was not only the Catholic Church which took part in the Renaissance. It was also [that] the progressive French Church and scholars, as well as the Arab and Jewish scholars in the Middle Ages, translated written texts into Arabic and then those texts were translated into Latin and, hence, established the kind of global understanding that is required to diminish the centrism of knowledge. Now, in the twenty-first century, we have lost all those intercultural understandings of the Renaissance.

What I have tried to suggest here is that teacher education has a major role in the context of higher education institutions, which should broaden the knowledge of teachers, as well as other people working in schools, to include the basis of inclusive values and knowledge relevant for the twenty-first century and to prepare young people to live in a modern, unequal and complex world. When we talk about globalisation, it is largely [as] an economic phenomenon and is, therefore, only superficial globalisation. As I said, there is a need for greater levels of equality at a global level. For instance, one of the major problems is the inequality between men and women, and in certain societies women have much less access to good education, as well as housing, health and employment—and this is largely a result of discrimination. Women in the twenty-first century have acquired rights as a result of long and hard struggles and these are consequently hard-won rights. It therefore follows that girls and women ought to have equality in all public institutions to ensure that they are respected and that they have parity of access to education and all other social goods. However, it is true that in private people may live differently, but in the public realm there are public rights which all people should have, including women and girls, and this is vital in the field of education. Importantly, we must realise that the actualisation of women's rights is an issue for all of us in the twenty-first century, as well as ensuring equality in general terms for all citizens and residents in our societies.

### **On the role of religion in education**

As I said earlier, there are various kinds of educational institutions in our society. You have, for example, public schools, which are secular. Basically we thought that the religions mostly speak to their adherents so the message would reach those who belong to a particular faith. Therefore, you can have religious instruction in a mosque, in a church and so on and

so forth. However, education is a different kind of phenomenon because it is something which takes place in public institutions, and in that context there are public rights, as I said earlier, which are not drawn only from religions but also from the way people have fought long, hard battles against socio-economic inequality and racism.

For instance, the Holocaust is a major example of suppression of human rights in Europe, but after the Second World War the United Nations promoted human rights as a major task for all modern societies. All modern states have modern constitutions, and these modern constitutions guarantee rights of people, whether they are girls, or poor people, or men and women, or minorities of various kinds. Here, we find that religion is one aspect of social diversity, and religious rights are also guaranteed in modern constitutional states. We do not have rights of difference and diversity or gender equality preserved in religiously-governed states, but in democratic secular societies where religion is one aspect of diversity. And those modern constitutions based on human rights guarantee people the right to believe or not to believe, to go or not to go to church or a mosque. These are constitutional rights, and are guaranteed by public democratic institutions. Here, I think we need to change the nature of the discussion and the paradigm, or else we merely contribute to talk about religion in an isolated way as the only major part of a global construct. There are many other constituent aspects of global social constructs, of social systems, [of] societal systems, which include certain other groups, which have very different types of human belief systems. These can include people who live and function cooperatively, as well as people who choose not to belong and live alternative life styles and under different social systems.

### **On education and linguistic diversity**

Multiculturalism within schools presents potential prospects but also some problems. Multilingualism in society is one of the issues that has both the potential of enhancing linguistic capital as well as bringing different bases of knowledge and understandings of humanity. But, at the same time, for teachers, schools and classrooms, it does present an issue. Here, perhaps, if we look at the way in which the first language of young people can be taught to them so that they feel [themselves] to be secure learners, this can be used as a basis for them to learn the second language or the dominant language. I would suggest that the use of the first language ought to form the basis for learning the second language and that this can be done inside

the school as well as within the community. There is a way multilingualism can be used as an asset rather than treated as a problem.

One of the problems that we have in the field of multiculturalism is the way in which multilingualism and multiculturalism are viewed from a deficit perspective. People who speak, let us say, Spanish or English as the dominant language may look down on people who do not. Whereas what we need to do is to turn that question around and look at linguistic diversity as a way of enriching societies. It is also important that we can systematically ensure that teachers can deal with linguistic diversity by equipping them with skills and knowledge so that they can deal with different languages in the classroom, the school and also the playground. We know that Europe is a rich multilingual continent. If you look at the number of languages that are spoken in the member states of the European Union and if you go to the Council of Europe you see the great number of languages that are officially spoken in the Council and the EU. However, much needs to be done to protect and enhance the usage of the lesser-known languages which form part of Europe's past and present linguistic landscape. Europeans are perhaps one of the most multilingual populations in the world and in many European countries people speak more than one language. This is an enriching aspect of our continent, so I believe linguistic diversity is a positive dimension within our societies. Languages can be used to build bridges between people. But sometimes it is not an easy task and one needs to take on board multilingualism in a systematic way to ensure that this is not seen as a problem or a deficit but as an asset. Consequently, teachers need to have the appropriate skills and knowledge to do the job well.

One issue which needs to be considered is the predominance of English as a global language. At one level we benefit because we can understand each other, but I don't know if it is a good thing if English becomes a dominant and exclusive global language. We should ensure that other languages are not erased with the use of English around the world. So I think other languages have an important role to play. Multiculturalism and interculturalism are aspects of societies which should be perceived of in multilingual terms. Multilingualism, and not only dominant languages, should inform us about issues of diversity, inequalities and interculturality. For instance, Spanish as a language is spoken not just in Spain but also in most of Latin America. However, Latin America's linguistic diversity is represented by indigenous languages which also need safeguarding. So, Spanish is another language that is quite important in other parts of the

world and should enrich our understandings of what multiculturalism and interculturality mean. This discourse should not be dominated solely by [the] English language. I think multilingualism is a feature of our global world and [the] dominance of any one language is, perhaps, not the best thing. There is a need to ensure that other languages are featured within communicative systems. That is why the European Union and the Council of Europe have promoted the use of other languages rather than just English through their linguistic policies.

### **On the future of intercultural education**

I hope that the International Association for Intercultural Education, which was founded in London at the Institute of Education in 1984, has played a not insignificant role in the development of intercultural education. I think the association has partially succeeded in refining research in this field but also has not been very successful in grappling with the “big issues”. We should recall that in Europe, after the Holocaust, racism was apparently defeated. However, in southeast Europe, after the collapse of Yugoslavia, it was revived. On the one hand, we still have major problems of exclusion, of racism and of xenophobia. We have not been able to tackle the roots of these major issues. On the other hand, we have many people living, learning and teaching peacefully and what we need to ensure is that social differences and diversities are systematically taken on board to guarantee intercultural understanding. Our research in this field should be based on a critical understanding of issues and based on good sound evidence. Educators and researchers have a fundamental responsibility to re-visit the Enlightenment and to re-engage with these important ideas: universalise them and also root them in our local, complex and divided communities and educational institutions.

In some senses, since the 1980s, there has been increasingly a better understanding of different groups and different people, but at the same time it is not enough, in the sense that the problems in our society have increased dramatically. So what we need to have is both qualitative and quantitative measures to deal with differences where they indicate social divisiveness and problems. We need to ensure that all areas of society, social and public policies, with education as one aspect of these, can contribute to the development of intercultural understandings between different people. These measures then ought to be institutionalised within the mainstream of our societies, so that they do not remain at the margins and fringes of public life. Education has an important role to play with



improvements in the curriculum by developing and widening knowledge, understanding and skills. This is a very important task of teacher education establishments, because they are multiplier institutions, with each new teacher eventually teaching hundreds of children. In fact, what we need is a more systematic basis for implementing intercultural education in our societies. As an African expression states: “It takes a whole village to educate a child”. However, in our modern and globalising world the whole village may need to engage itself in teaching and learning.



# RETHINKING CULTURE IN INTERCULTURAL EDUCATION

LESLIE BASH

This volume honours a significant figure in the field of intercultural education who, through his writings, presentations and face-to-face engagement, has prompted a re-consideration of the shape and implications of cultural diversity in local, national and global contexts. In addition to being both an activist and significant theorist in the area of intercultural education, Jagdish Gundara has also demonstrated the importance of continually challenging not only the agenda of the reactionary right but also many of the fashionable discourses emanating from academia and what might be called the liberal intelligentsia. He has been passionately concerned with debating intercultural education not only against the backcloth of continuing social injustice and discrimination but also within historical frameworks. Around fourteen years ago, in an eloquent and informative volume, Jagdish Gundara set out his position on intercultural education related both to his academic concerns and to his biographical background (Gundara, 2000). This is borne out in an interview undertaken for this volume and has subsequently had resonance for those whose involvement in intercultural education derives at least in part from their “intercultural” biographies, exemplified by Michele Kahn’s insightful contribution to this book. More lately, these concerns with the dynamic character of human populations, with movement and mobility, and thus with a sense that rigid notions of identity and culture are somewhat problematic, have been discussed against the backdrop of conflict, power and colonialism (Bash and Gundara, 2012).

It follows that much theorisation and pedagogical practice in intercultural education is predicated upon questionable assumptions regarding our very understanding of culture. While noting the distinct but frequently overlapping ways in which the term is employed, we need not be overly concerned with the historical debates with regard to “culture”. The literature is vast: from nineteenth century Western figures such as Arnold (1869) and Tyler (1871), through to anthropologists such as Benedict

(1934) and Boas (1940) and the entire field of cultural and media studies, rooted in the Frankfurt School, spawned in the latter half of the twentieth century. While British figures such as Hoggart (1957) and Williams (1961) highlighted the social class dimension, others such as Hall (1992) laid the basis for a focus on diversity, discrimination and injustice which positioned “culture” in a context of power relations within and between societies. Following an apparent decline in the politics of class conflict, “culture” has come to stand as a proxy for “ethnicity” and “race” in power struggles. As the essentialism of socio-economic categorisation lost favour, so the essentialism of cultural categorisation gained prominence. While disavowing biological definitions of race and ethnicity, proponents of the multiculturalist problematic can find themselves entrapped in the essentialist logic of “culturalism”.

Perhaps this should not surprise us. Our understanding of our own histories, often based upon exclusionary mythologies, shapes a tacit belief in a world characterised by cultural distinctiveness. It is as true of countries such as China, Japan or Korea as it is of European nation-states. Present-day ethnographers, no less than the anthropologists of a century ago, find comfort in being able to identify cultures, subcultures and counter-cultures. There is no doubt that a focus on the apparent integrity of cultures has contributed to a resistance to, and a critique of, diverse forms of imperialism and racism. Movements for national self-determination in the context of post-colonialism actively construct “cultures” which are subject to disputation. Witness the Israel/Palestine situation where, on the one hand, the idea of a Jewish “national” culture has been contested by both non-Jewish and Jewish groups and individuals, while “Palestinian” has been viewed by many as a fiction to disguise a pan-Arab/Islamic rejection of Zionism and Israel. More decisively, the creation of Bangladesh undermined the conception of a territorially-divided Pakistani national culture, while the breakup of the Soviet Union and of Yugoslavia revealed their tentative hold on utopian models of the secular, non-sectarian, multi-national state. More recently, Devji (2013) has sought to add a further dimension through the juxtaposition of Pakistani and Israeli nationalisms as manifestations of an abstract notion of Zion, both invoking modern, newly constructed national identities derived from perceptions of religious “minoritisation” of geographically-scattered communities. Thus, the creation of Pakistan, no less than that of Israel, required a “gathering-in” of dispersed peoples and, by the same token, the outward movement of those deemed to be not “of the nation”—Palestinian Arabs, Hindus, Sikhs, etc.

The de-reification of culture and its repositioning in collective life as a dynamic aspect of human interaction challenges the conventional wisdom of what has generally been called multicultural education. The way in which a culture is characterised invariably betrays a tacit theory of the ways in which a self-defined people habitually conducts itself, the adoption of its collective symbols, its values, etc. Or, it may reflect frames of reference grounded in the classical modelling of societies undertaken by social scientists. Or, finally, it may reflect the policy priorities of governments where, for example, it is deemed to be important to preserve the “cultures” of minority groups. The latter may find expression in the emphasis upon indigenouness, a concept frequently employed to highlight disadvantage and discrimination impacting on “minorities” within a society, conventionally in relation to preserving a traditional way of life in the face of encroachment upon lands, the enforced hegemony of majority languages and, in extremis, genocidal actions.

Much of this, of course, is seen to be justifiable from a perspective based on the importance of increasing social and educational justice. It remains a significant aspect of decolonisation and post-colonialism, with indigenouness often constituting a fundamental dimension of alternative educational discourses. Alternatively, the ideas and actions of those such as Freire (1970) have provided the basis of what would be termed “non-centric” educational practice in the context of the powerless and dispossessed.

A re-evaluation of culture poses some fundamental challenges, not least of which is its deconstruction. This may appear to some a rather curious undertaking given the *raison d'être* of the field, yet there has been a degree of reluctance in problematising culture for fear of being found to be on the “wrong side” in discussions about racism and post-colonialism. A well-known example concerns the phenomenon of female genital mutilation (FGM). Only the profound horror engendered in many of those concerned with the practice has led to a tempering of post-modern relativism. A combination of a concern for children’s rights together with gender politics has arguably trumped “cultural sensitivity”. Significantly, it has called into question any notion of a monolithic “Islamic” culture, given that FGM is not a practice universally accepted in the Islamic world.

More significantly, we find that there are powerful groups and individuals which seek to represent their “cultures” as unchanging, as embodying authenticity, as uncontaminated by external influences, as eternal. Such is the basis of primordialist and irredentist positions in ethno-national conflicts, as well as in struggles for religious supremacy. Thus, for

example, the strife characterising Islamic communities in the Middle East and in parts of Africa is frequently portrayed in terms which signal internal battles for control on the part of those labelling themselves as the authentic representatives of the faith. There are of course similar battles elsewhere within other religious “cultures” which from time to time have overlapped with more temporal considerations of political control. The central point here is that the supposed deep-rooted authenticity expressed through culturalism is frequently employed by diverse groups to disguise territorial ambition and ownership of resources.

From all this, it can be taken as axiomatic that far from being static and unchanging cultures are, by definition, flexible entities. Again, since cultures are obviously human products, created and existing over time, they cannot but be subject to human, historical change. Those, for example, who argue for fundamentalist religious cultural positions frequently find themselves having to defend apparent changes in religious belief and practice by observing that the scholars, rabbis, imams, priests, etc. were merely re-stating—in a different form—what, after all, was held to have existed in eternity. Some of course might argue that in such situations this is merely an exercise in sophistry with the intention of misleading the masses with epistemological manipulation. Of course, there are times when change is in the balance as religious schisms ensue, resulting in conflict, war, excommunication, the burning of heretics and so on. Cultural change in this context is often a combination of evolution and revolution.

Cultural construction, furthermore, is contingent upon not only some kind of definition of the collective self but also upon a definition of the collective other(s). To take a very specific religious example, the label of “orthodox”, as applied to traditional Jewish religious belief and practice, came into existence as a collective response to the rise of the Enlightenment-influenced Reform movement in Judaism. After all, “orthodox” only possesses meaning when held against “heterodox”. Likewise, and even more explicitly, the label of “protestant” (as protest) was reactive to catholic hegemony. In the area of ethno-national politics, culture wars comprise a succession of attempts at de-legitimation through a denial of the other’s collective definition. Thus, “Palestinian” is argued, especially by many strict adherents to Zionist ideology, to be a contemporary reconstruction, partly against the construction of the Israeli “other”.

In rethinking culture, the purpose is clearly not to indulge in an unwise attempt to deny its significance in social relations. Rather, in the context of educational discourse, it is to caution against the ease with which we slip into simplistic, culturalist explanations. Karl Mannheim's (1936) somewhat lofty view of the intellectual freed of ideological influence is often contradicted by the way in which academics, particularly in the social sciences, are prone to construct "isms". Thus it is with culture, which although not explicitly taken up as an explanatory theoretical frame of reference nonetheless in practice constitutes a paradigmatic model. Thus, "culturalism", no less than "structuralism", "behaviourism" or "empiricism", has provided a focal point for academic activity. Often this has meant that social action and social institutions are viewed through the prism of culturalisation, a trap into which writers such as Huntington (1996) have apparently fallen. It has also entrapped the protagonists in wars and conflicts over the centuries with, no doubt, the Crusaders perceiving themselves to be involved in a holy war and "clash of civilisations" with the "barbaric" Saracens, while understating the more prosaic question of who controls the trade routes in the Middle East. In the current context, both Islamists (e.g. Hamas) and religious Zionists have culturalised the conflict in relation to the Israeli occupied territories. Moreover, in previous conflicts, the culturalisation of war has sometimes taken on a bizarre character, as witnessed in the 1914-18 War when the British royal family changed its German name (Saxe Coburg Gotha) to the more "British" (if not English) sounding "Windsor". More unpleasantly, this was also accompanied by the widespread smashing of the windows of shops in the UK which had Germanic-sounding names.

The argument here, in contemplating an alternative to a culturalist paradigm, constitutes an attempt to explore "culture" as a tool and resource in order to enable greater access to knowledge and sets of meanings which could conceivably comprise the basis for a non-centric, common and, arguably, more universalistic educational endeavour. Lest this be thought unduly utopian, perhaps we ought to reflect briefly on what many would accept as the central purpose of education. Without reference to the many philosophers, sociologists and comparative education scholars who might enlighten us from their respective disciplinary citadels, ordinary folk across national divides may be seen to be generally in agreement on this. Essentially, it is that formal school education exists to enable children eventually to operate in an effective manner in the social milieux they inhabit or aspire to inhabit. Except for small minorities, the majority might conclude that their children's futures are located in social

contexts which are not of their own making or even of their own choosing. A culturally specific education dominated by particularistic forms of belief and knowledge does not bode well for such futures, whether in terms of achieving social, economic or individual well-being.

Let us pursue this further. If it is accepted that school curricula are shaped by prevailing national histories and that curricular content is necessarily a selection from the extant knowledge considered as significant by educational decision-makers, it follows that subordinate histories, together with those considered the authors of, and participants in, those histories, will be marginalised or excluded. It might therefore be thought that this is an inevitable outcome of a “culture war” where, eventually, the winner takes all. Alternatively, it is the outcome of cultural reification, invention and reinvention. Furthermore, the reality is somewhat more complex, where “cultures” themselves are internal battlegrounds where there are continual struggles for voices to be heard, stories to be told, knowledge to be articulated.

A cardinal error would appear to be the presumption that individuals are little more than receptacles for cultures: the notion dubbed by some (e.g. Wrong, 1961) as the over-socialised model of the individual. In schools, liberal-minded educators have conventionally considered that they supported interculturality if the apparent cultural diversity of their classrooms figured significantly in their educational practice. Here, there may be a focus simply on the “cultural” dimensions of skin colour differences and the socio-historical construction of racial distinctions. Or, cultural categorisation based on perceptions of linguistic diversity, ethnic and religious difference is showcased in the context of pedagogical practice to advance an intercultural agenda. More frequently, the “intercultural classroom” has been adorned with pictorial representations of ethnic/national “cultures”, religions and linguistic expressions. Artefacts, music and video may all be employed to demonstrate the educational legitimacy of cultural diversity and children may be involved in collaborative and individual project work to investigate “cultures”. The question remains, however, as to whether such representations and investigations are in the context of a diverse “us” or a diverse “other”. A tendency towards orientalisation of culturalist narratives is seldom far from the surface.

While, at first glance, such approaches in intercultural education might be expected to impact positively on children’s learning and understanding, by



themselves they would also appear to reinforce stereotypes and present cultures as distinct, unchanging and possibly exotic. In short, they may do little other than to reinforce orientalism, ignore the structural conditions of inequality and injustice, and generally confirm the status quo. To take this further, it is doubtful that multiculturalism, let alone interculturalism, would have surfaced as a policy direction in education had it not been for the presence of populations which looked and sounded different from the majority. In the UK, previous generations of those belonging to minority “cultures” might have been viewed as temporarily problematic but because of their “European” appearance it was thought, optimistically, their differences would either disappear within a generation or two, or at the very least diminish so as to be barely noticeable. While, for example, anti-Semitism has had a fairly long history in the UK, surfacing from time to time in overt acts of discrimination and occasional violence, for the most part it has remained hidden (The Runnymede Trust, 1994), often for the simple reason, especially with second generation immigrants onwards, that in everyday social interaction Jewish “culture” was often not perceived to be entirely distinct from the majority “culture”. Much the same might have been observed in the case of anti-Irish behaviour. It could be argued that this was a consequence of forced or voluntary assimilation, or it is possible that we are in error in ascribing such cultural distinctiveness in the first place.

What we may perceive as cultural difference may be some way from the truth. More often it has been a means by which other differences are identified and justified in the context of social practice. In classical antiquity, especially in Greece, the institution of slavery was accepted, not as in the case of British and American gang slavery where slaves were seen as belonging to inferior races (i.e. “culturally” distinct), but more often because the enslaved people were simply those defeated in war. In other words, it was rather convenient that the source of cheap labour for the plantations in the US and the Caribbean happened to be identified on the basis of a skin colour difference, making it a good deal simpler to ascribe other—often hierarchical—“cultural” differences such as intellect and emotional character. As Adam Smith (1776) observed, it is the requirement for a societal division of labour which determines a need to view people in terms of ability and intelligence differentials. The socially and hierarchically divisive character of many education systems in turn determines the manner in which young people enter—or do not enter—the labour market. Thus, a vicious cycle of privilege, discrimination and

disadvantage is perpetuated, with policy-makers, the media, and not a few educators, being drawn to culturalist explanations for educational failure.

This is surely the central issue. Rightly, there was a general condemnation by progressive educators of the kind of thinking and “research” of a couple of generations ago which focused on “cultural” deficit as a major factor in school underachievement. As a reaction, minority and immigrant “cultures” were praised for their integrity, and multiculturalism and antiracism were invoked to counter the hegemony of Western epistemological modalities. Yet, the same underlying assumptions about cultures remained untouched. With little evidential basis, firm boundaries between cultures were established. Given that much of the concern regarding minorities and immigrant groups, especially in the UK, appeared to be an outcome of a colonial past, there was a failure to consider the intercultural dimension of empire and the ensuing cultural deconstruction. Granted that such interculturalism was, for the most part, distorted by imperialist domination, the consequent reality was one of dynamic interchange.

However, well before the advent of modern imperialism, population movement, forced and unforced migration, the creation and destruction of various kingdoms and principalities, the development of languages and dialects, the supplantation of the dominance of one religion by another, all combined to undermine the notion of static culture. At the heart of the matter is the implication for identity construction since the reification of culture allows for stable identities. As a case in point, France has conventionally pursued the idea of an all-embracing French national culture and identity while subordinating other cultural references and ethnic differences. In the first place, it was employed as an instrument of the post-1789 centralising, revolutionary state to eliminate the regional distinctions of Brittany, Catalonia, Provence, and so on. Secondly, it was seen as a simple way of engaging with the consequences of French colonialism but one which, of course, appeared to come to an end with Algerian independence and which, in later years, was mired in the consequences of North African immigration. Identity is then raised as a binary question of loyalty, as an “either/or”, prompting a process of “othering”. Either an individual identifies as “French” (or British, or American or Spanish, or whatever) or is a foreigner, an alien, someone who would fail Norman Tebbit’s cricket test (*Los Angeles Times*, 1990).<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> This would see as suspect the loyalty of those UK citizens with, say, Indian heritage who might cheer for India in a cricket match against England.

What does not appear to be available is the idea of a flexible, hybridised identity, subject to diverse “cultural” inputs and manifested in different ways in different places, with different people and at different times.

In rethinking culture in intercultural education, there is an opportunity to consider educational possibilities in a much more open context. It enables us to confront the obstacles imposed through the prison of cultural constraint and instead explore intercultural engagement through the prism of what we might call a dynamic cosmopolitanism. In stripping cosmopolitanism of its privileged status to be enjoyed by the relative few, we reinterpret it in relation to a critical reading of those writers such as Martha Nussbaum (1994). One version of cosmopolitanism would appear to transcend localised cultural considerations in moving towards a universalistic, rationalist position on social action. This would seem to be extremely limited since it negates a defining feature of human existence. At the same time it offers up a somewhat jaded view of culture, suggesting that only by keeping it in check can there be the possibility of unfettered human interaction. If the generation of knowledge in late modernity is guided by rationalism, scepticism and scientific methods with universalistic appeal, that does necessarily mean that cultural localism has no relevance and must be suppressed.

A more nuanced view suggests that cultural localism should be viewed within a broader context of intercultural exchange and as a means of accessing knowledge resources. Cultural localism indicates what Habermas (1984, 1987) has termed “lifeworlds”, or those contexts where there are taken-for-granted allegiances. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the area of mythology and story-telling. What may, at first glance, seem to be culturally specific turns out to have cultural connections elsewhere. The power of classical Greek myths, despite their localised origin, lies in a capacity to use them to connect more globally with the experiences and imaginations of others. In addition, those who hold allegiance to local cultures may not always be aware that the boundaries between such cultures were breached in the course of their history. One minor illustration relates to a folk hero, Mullah Nasruddin (see Shah, 1983), prevalent in stories told to children from diverse backgrounds living in the Caucasus, including those from Christian families and from Jewish families (the so-called “Mountain Jews”). Nasruddin is variously a fool, a wise man and a comedian, depending on the story. What is of relevance here is that while the character derives from the folklore of the Muslim populations of the region, being especially popular in the Sufi

tradition, Nasruddin appears to transcend the particularistic religious orientations of those who live in the mountainous area between the Caspian and Black Seas. At the same time, it may also signal an aspect of the nature of religious “culture” in the region, with traditional Islamic religiosity, in the largely Shia population of Azerbaijan for example, being at a notably low level, and thus allowing for relatively easy everyday social contact between different groups (Cornell 2006).<sup>2</sup>

In essence, what is being suggested here is a de-culturalisation of difference. The reason for this lies in the conservative character of culturalistic explanations of differential power and exclusionary action. In its place it would be more helpful to propose a secularisation of intercultural relations where cultures are viewed as resources for empowerment in societies characterised by varying degrees of diversity, hierarchy, privilege, tension and powerlessness. The process of secularisation is especially relevant in the case of conflict in the religious arena. The culturalisation of Christianity, Islam, Judaism and other belief systems leaves little room for dialogic exchange and for the conduct of life in societal contexts of diversity. Compromise is viewed as a betrayal of fundamental religious tenets leading to an apparent undermining of the very existence of those “communities” grounded in orthodoxy and tradition.

Interestingly, the often derided post-war structural-functionalist school of sociology lends further support to the process of secularisation where the focus is on increasing functional differentiation in the context of modernisation. Insofar as cultural localism defines all aspects of public (and sometimes private) life, institutional structures are closely bound up with each other, allowing for little in the way of specialisation. Thus, Durkheim’s (1964) model of mechanical solidarity might suggest that in this context education, the arts, law and order, etc. must all embody the fundamental characteristics of the “culture”, whether it is religious or secular. It is not surprising, therefore, that postmodernist narratives have re-emphasised—even reinvented—culturalism in a quest to critique modernist social science. There is more than a hint of orientalism in the postmodern problematic which seeks to extol an all-embracing cultural

---

<sup>2</sup> In this context, one piece of children’s folklore handed down to the author’s mother through her Dutch-Jewish family was a rhyme requesting Sinterklaas - Santa Claus - to bring presents. In Dutch folklore Sinterklaas does not discriminate between children of different religious backgrounds.

localism in “far-off” lands while defending secularisation closer to home. This may be the case where cultural localism is wedded to a critical stance towards Western hegemony, possibly reflected in the curious alliance between some secular, left-liberal thinkers and various Islamist movements.

There is little doubt that one obstacle to re-thinking culture in intercultural education is the reaction in the West to the legacy of colonialism and imperialism. The central issues in intercultural education—social justice, equity, racism, minorities, human rights, etc.—are conventionally framed within an agenda grounded in assumptions about the historical marginalisation and oppression of those who are perceived to have been subordinated to European and American hegemony. A consequence has been a process of orientalist reification such that commentators have failed to recognise the fractures, tensions and contradictions which exist within those “cultures” under examination.

Intercultural education must indeed take cognizance of this if it is to make progress with respect to its fundamental aims. The first point to be made here is that the experience of children in diverse societies gives the lie to conventional thinking about culture. It may be thought uncontroversial, indeed obvious, that on the one hand, they are recipients of sets of norms and values which reflect the particularistic aspects of their backgrounds while, on the other hand, this does not completely determine their behaviour. As active constructors of their own realities, children, while “recipients” of cultural norms and values, do not on the whole perceive themselves as transmitters of their “cultures”; rather, they generally act and interact in ways which make sense to them, drawing upon diverse cultural resources to provide meaning. At the same time, children present behaviours which are reflective of the internal tensions and contradictions characteristic of complex intercultural engagement.

Consequently, rather than viewing individuals as defined by “culture” membership, it may be more appropriate to see them as actively negotiating their way through a myriad of experiences grounded in diverse histories, some of which may be more salient and powerful than others. Language provides an obvious example, with bilingualism and multilingualism frequently the norm in many societies, reflected in differential employment of languages and dialects, depending on circumstance, together with code switching and the development of creoles. In this context, the movement for the preservation of minority

languages, especially those of what would be termed indigenous communities in countries such as Mexico, raises some interesting questions. An area of sensitivity, coupled with issues of empowerment and disempowerment, may lead to the temptation to adopt a culturalist posture in which language preservation (or revival) may have the consequence of marginalising and even excluding communities from broader participation in the wider society. The quality of children's education in such situations is pivotal in the quest for social inclusion, and unless bilingualism, or even trilingualism, is pursued as a fundamental intercultural policy, it may be all too easy to remain exclusively focused on minority languages and the preservation of the rights of indigenous peoples, to the detriment of social integration and the pursuit of overall equity and social justice.

If cultures are historically constructed then so is the conceptualisation of culture. We have witnessed the shifting of ideas concerning "race" over the last hundred years or so. The nineteenth century saw a burgeoning of anthropological theorisation concerning the biological categorisation of peoples, culminating in "scientific" racism. More recently, work undertaken in the field of DNA has put paid to many of the assumptions previously held in this field of investigation. Genetically-based studies have yielded data demonstrating what appear to be the most unlikely connections between seemingly distinct and geographically separated human groups. If race now requires a thorough re-conceptualisation then culture presents even more challenges.

This re-conceptualisation of culture demands the slaughter, or at least the dismemberment, of a socio-historical sacred cow: the polar distinction between tradition and modernity. This has already been hinted at with reference to Habermas. The process of demarcation and periodisation enshrined in the ring-fencing of tradition and modernity is difficult to justify since modalities of human action, whether individual or collective, cannot but be shaped by traditions i.e. habits of thought and behavioural propensities acquired during the course of socialisation and which, to a greater or lesser extent, are transmitted through the generations, memorialised, codified, documented, etc. Those societal features characterised as modern are not immaculately conceived, neither are they the result of some pure moment of epiphany. Marx, as theorist of revolution par excellence, of course understood that grand social change was rooted in the past, even if his neo-Hegelian dialectical model appears somewhat mechanistic and lacking any real predictive value.