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Research article

## Jagdish Gundara: broadening the field of intercultural studies at the Institute of Education (London)

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## Abstract

This article discusses three (among many) contributions made by Jagdish S. Gundara (1938–2016) to the IOE (Institute of Education), UCL's Faculty of Education and Society (University College London, UK). First, in his capacity as a professor and UNESCO Chair, and as the director of the International Centre for Intercultural Education since its inception in 1979, Gundara was instrumental in making the IOE a national and global space for discussions related to topics such as multiculturalism and diversity in education. Second, Gundara's own research and scholarly work made the IOE an attractive place for colleagues and students interested in broadening the field of intercultural studies. Finally, the article considers Gundara's third contribution to the IOE: those who knew him closely would agree that his friendly disposition has enhanced the culture of the institution as a vibrant community of local-global scholars. This article reflects on such aspects of Gundara's work and legacy. In doing so it attempts to provide a glimpse into his

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personal and professional journeys, and the three phases of his intercultural experiences – his childhood in Nairobi, Kenya, as the son of immigrants from India; his studies at universities across North America and the UK; and, finally, his career as an educator at the IOE in London.

**Keywords** Jagdish Gundara; intercultural education; intercultural studies; multicultural education; inclusive education; global education; citizenship education; international education; non-centric curriculum; UNESCO

## Introduction

The contributions of Jagdish S. Gundara (1938–2016) to the field of intercultural studies might be best known within the United Kingdom and Europe, although his influence, whether directly or indirectly, has broadened the field internationally. As a professor, and as the director of (what was to become) the International Centre for Intercultural Education since its inception in 1979, Gundara was instrumental in making the IOE (Institute of Education), UCL's Faculty of Education and Society (University College London, UK) a national and global space for discussions related to topics such as interculturalism, multiculturalism and diversity in education. One of the outcomes of Gundara's pioneering work in this field was the establishment of the International Association for Intercultural Education (IAIE, n.d.), based in The Hague, the Netherlands, which hosts the *Intercultural Education* journal. Since 2013, the IAIE headquarters has been in the International Centre for Intercultural Education (ICIS, 2022) at the IOE.

This research article does not attempt to locate all of Gundara's many contributions. The discussions are limited to a brief description of his personal and professional background, while exploring at some length one of his key research agendas, that is, the promotion of a 'non-centric curriculum' that represents not just the knowledge of the dominant groups, but also the subordinate and minority groups across communities worldwide. As argued, the relevance of this contribution deserves more critical attention not only within the field of intercultural studies, but also within the broader debates and discussions related to offering education for a more global content across nation states. In undertaking this task, this article attempts to provide a glimpse into Gundara's personal and professional journeys and the three phases of his intercultural experiences – his childhood in Nairobi, Kenya, as the son of immigrants from India; his studies at universities across North America and the UK; and, finally, his career as an educator at the IOE, University of London (now part of UCL). (For a detailed and impressive list of his accomplishments, see his biographical note in Gundara, 2015: vii–viii.)

## Personal history

Gundara's (2000) *Interculturalism, Education and Inclusion* begins with an intriguing description of the sense of racism and exclusion he faced while growing up in colonial Kenya as the son of immigrant parents. His father, Darbar Singh, and his mother, Jagir Kaur Gundara, were Sikh. His father was a forester by profession at Ngong, on the outskirts of Nairobi. Being close to the forest was integral to his childhood, as he vividly recounts in his memoir, 'the overwhelming sounds and aromatic smells of the woods at Ngong' (Gundara, 2000: 1). His intercultural experiences consisted of conversing in several languages across his home, school and community. For example, at home, his family spoke Punjabi; his siblings and he picked up Kikuyu and Swahili while playing with the African children in their neighbourhood; and, at the Duke of Gloucester, an Indian grammar school in Nairobi, he was taught in English and Urdu.

At an early age, Jagdish realised how divorced the education he received at school was from his daily life, while at the same time much of what he learned about the forest and its immediate environment had relevance to their life and living (Gundara, 2000). Since his parents were from India, he was sent to an Asian school 10 miles away, rather than attending an African school in his neighbourhood or a European school which was only one mile from home. The disconnect he felt at times to the various communities that surrounded him was intensified by their family accommodation, which was a thatched

house with no electricity. As he recalls, 'the power lines which stood barely four hundred yards away from our home, supplied electricity to the neighbouring European residential area' (Gundara, 2000: 2). This made him self-conscious and shy in inviting his friends to his home, particularly those living in the European community. Questioning his identity while being a spectator to myriad such contradictions in his childhood must have fuelled his later professional work in the field of intercultural studies, as well as his efforts as a member of the UK Commission for Racial Equality. It should also be mentioned that interspersed with memories of struggles and disconnect, his autobiographical notes suggest his deep-rooted sense of belonging to his family, as well as to the community in which he grew up.

The second phase of his intercultural experiences consisted of his studies at universities across North America and the UK – an undergraduate degree from Bowdoin College, Maine, USA; a master's degree from McGill University, Montreal, Canada; and a doctorate at the University of Edinburgh, Scotland, UK. His journeys during his further studies, and his experiences of being immersed in different cultures, gave him the opportunity to introspect and reflect on his sense of identity, belief and place in the world. For example, observing the Gandhara sculptures in the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, which he described as a 'syncretism of Graeco-Roman and Indian cultures in North-West India' (Gundara, 2000: 8), helped him to identify with his Asian roots. Witnessing these sculptures also made him reflect on the fact that dominant cultures often reduce the influence of, or even eliminate, subordinate cultures across communities. As he notes:

I became conscious of the general problem of how dominant cultures wiped out the histories and identities of dominated groups. The predicament of the African Americans came into prominence in the 1960s and I gave some thought to their problems as one group which had been forced to lose their African identity. I felt that the dominant American society had done a disservice not only to the native Americans and the African Americans, but also to themselves in denying a real possibility of becoming genuinely American. They had, it seems to me, in fact imposed a fragment of a certain period of Europe on a North American society and were destined to remain a Euro-centered paranoiac community which had imposed itself on but not allowed itself to take root in this new, varied and fertile landscape. (Gundara, 2000: 8–9)

Here one can trace the start of his scholarly inquiry into the dominance of certain cultures over others. His extensive knowledge about art and art history contributed to making his academic arguments and writings replete with rich historical examples that showcase the need for intercultural dialogue and cooperation, for example, during the Umayyad Caliphate in the eleventh century or the legacy of the early Renaissance period (Gundara, 2000). It can be pointed out that at times Gundara's selection of the constructive examples of people and communities coming together in history to create new forms of art and knowledge can be distant and remote from his audience, who are often teachers working through their own set of complex issues within multicultural classrooms in democratic societies. However, as argued in this article, overall, the relevance of his proposals for a more intercultural approach to education merits further discussion, with a recognition of the various intercultural dialogues he facilitated across institutions and centres.

## Professional legacy

The subjective intercultural experience of growing up in colonial Kenya, and the subsequent distance and reflexivity nurtured through his journeys away from home, gave Gundara the necessary insights, both personal and professional, into the deep divides that exist within societies across the world. The repertoire of skills and knowledge gained through his encounters with diverse communities across different continents was useful to help navigate through the third phase of his intercultural experiences as an educator and professor in intercultural studies.

In 1979, after a short period of teaching in London schools and adult and further education institutions, Gundara was appointed as the first head of the pioneering institute-wide multidisciplinary International Centre for Intercultural Education (ICIS) at the IOE, a position he held until his retirement in 2006. From 2000, he also held the UNESCO Chair in International Studies and Teacher Education at the School of Culture and Lifelong Learning, and in this capacity he was appointed as the director of the re-established ICIS at the IOE in March 2012. He was instrumental as one of the founding members of the Friends of UNESCO Committee and, after the UK rejoined UNESCO, he was a member of the

Education Committee of the UK UNESCO Commission from 2004 to 2011. During these years, his research interests ranged from curriculum studies, sustainable development, comparative education, citizenship education and human rights education, to multilingualism, asylum and refugee issues. Bash (2016) captures some of the main themes in his work, as articulated by Gundara in an earlier interview with Cortina-Pérez (2012). These include the need for inclusive education and linguistic diversity, and the role of religion in education. During his career, Gundara was instrumental in pushing the boundaries of intercultural studies, exploring intercultural issues related to cooperative learning (Gundara, 2015: Chapter 4; Gundara and Sharma, 2013), multicultural education (Gundara, 2015: Chapter 3, Chapter 7), comparative education (Gundara and Bash, 2012); citizenship education (Gundara, 2015: Chapter 1, Chapter 2, Chapter 7), sustainable development (Gundara and Sharma, 2009) and art education (Gundara, 1999), among others.

This article explores Gundara's contribution to the field of intercultural studies, in particular his proposals to develop 'non-centric' knowledge and an inclusive curriculum, elaborated across several publications (Gundara, 2006, 2015; Gundara and Sharma, 2010, 2013), which he regarded as 'one of the greatest challenges to actualising the development of an intercultural education' (Gundara, 2015: 134). Making a distinction between interculturalism and multiculturalism, Gundara (2015: 89) explains:

At the outset it is important to highlight the essence of the terms 'multicultural' and 'intercultural'. (i) The meaning attributed to the term 'multicultural' is that it is used as a descriptive term of a society inhabited by different sociocultural groups. These include those based on linguistic, social class, religious, ethnic, territorial and non-territorial nomadic peoples like the Roma and Traveler groups. Nicholas Hans the comparative educationalist stated that these were the historical basis of the nation states. (ii) The term 'intercultural' is the basis of social interactions; developmental dialogues as well as policies and practices which enable interactions and can help reduce social inequalities. Hence, the term 'multicultural' is a descriptive term and 'intercultural' is about dynamic activities which include a broad vision of knowledge.

Explaining this further, he suggests elsewhere that: 'Intercultural education as such is not a discrete area of study which is appended to the process of mainstream education. It is part and parcel of the educational process. In fact, the assumption here is that educators need to create a culture of intercultural education to be effective' (Gundara, 2000: viii). This, he argued, was necessary so as to remove the barriers of xenophobia, racism or inequalities of various kinds, and to ensure peaceable and inclusive communities (Cortina-Pérez, 2012: 156). His hope was that colleagues working in the fields of interculturalism and multiculturalism would be able to establish some common ground and work together to deal with the deep-seated social divisions that have been widened by the onslaught of neoliberal economics across societies. Implementing intercultural education in a substantive way within multicultural societies includes the need to revisit the curriculum, which across nation states is often narrowly framed and excludes the knowledge of the 'other'. As suggested in an article:

At the most basic level, this contribution would like to stress that the emphasis is on an intercultural focus of the curriculum. It is also argued that knowledge within the curriculum needs to be non-centric. Such a perspective within the formal education system cannot be excluding of subjective languages and knowledge systems, of the minorities, the rural, the poor and the fourth world peoples who are non-territorially based; or in fact also those from the poorer sections of dominant groups and the majority populations. (Gundara and Sharma, 2013: 239)

Drawing from these discussions, his key research inquiry can be best summarised by the poignant question posed by Postman and Weingartner (1969: 59–81) to curriculum studies, that is, 'what's worth knowing'? A significant endeavour across Gundara's academic work was to promote 'a non-centric curriculum' that best represents knowledge that is 'worth knowing'. First, this would form the basis of a more global cosmopolitanism. As Gundara (2012: n.p.) mentioned in a keynote address delivered at the Fedactio Education Conference in Brussels:

If we look at a transnational memory or establishing transnational basis of knowledge, we can have a notion of knowledge which is not centred on any group, dominant or majority group, but cuts across group divides so the pedagogical issues of curricula which are not centric

are of paramount importance. And that then has fundamental basis for the ways in which democracies would work, so that we do not see communities just as having biological affinities, the ethnic basis of communities, but what is called by Bookchin (1992) as social affinities. So here what we need to look at are the ways in which we can look to establish confederal values which cut across community divides, group divides, specificities, ethnicities, and so on and so forth. And here (in Europe) there are ancient values of this continent like the German value of *Bildung* or the Greek value of *Paideia*. Can we look at those values of *Paideia* and *Bildung* and make them into intercultural *Paideia* and intercultural *Bildung*?

It can be argued that what Gundara suggests here is not just to 'learn' about these concepts, but that the inclusion of an 'intercultural *Bildung*' and an 'intercultural *Paideia*' would find a space for discussion across national curricula in Europe based on the acknowledgement that cultures and values emerge not in isolation, but in dialogue with other cultures and values. One of the lessons from this, he suggests, is that: 'the political context of where and how social inclusions or exclusions take place is important. Education as a process does not take place in absence of the decisions of policy makers and the actions which flow from these decisions' (Gundara, 2015: 89). His concern was that the hard-won establishment of democracies across modern nation states should not be overruled by the rise of narrow nationalism and its influence on education. His proposals for the curriculum to be non-centric was an exercise for students, teachers, teacher educators and policymakers to enhance critical understandings of knowledge construction, and, as he declares, of the 'deeper and longer-term legacy of the exclusions of knowledge in historical terms at the universal level. For instance, the divided and divisive notions of curricula centred on European, Asian, African or Islamic identities' (Gundara, 2015: 62). As an example, he states:

In the European context, non-centric curricula at the school and higher education level are essential to ensure that students also have non-Eurocentric knowledge and skills. Research done by Samir Amin (1989) and Martin Bernal (1987, 1991), for instance, has made important historiographic analyses of the reconstruction of European history in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. These have shown that with the rise of racism and anti-Semitism, the learning and understanding that the ancient Greeks acquired from the Egyptians (perceived to be Africans) and Phoenicians (seen as forebears of the Jewish faith) was excluded from the canon of history. (Gundara, 2015: 62)

The second merit of his proposals aimed at developing a more inclusive curriculum is that if the curriculum remains exclusive and largely represents the knowledge of the dominant groups in society, it will not be seen to be relevant by those people who come from subordinated and minority groups. It would also deny them access to education and continue to lower educational performances of children from these communities. As argued in Gundara and Sharma (2010), one of the important questions that arises from this is: what can be done about the linguistic and curricular issues in complex and unequal communities so that all groups can feel that they have a stake in society?

The third aspect in relation to his proposals aimed at developing a non-centric and inclusive curriculum is that it must represent the culture and values of the learner. His proposal resonates with those of the British sociologist Basil Bernstein (1924–2000), who was Gundara's predecessor at the IOE. Bernstein (1970) suggests that it is inadequate to 'politically' educate the learner within the closed brick walls of schools where, in most cases, the learner is expected to drop their identity, way of life, and its symbolic representations at the school gate. This is something to which Gundara could relate through his own schooling experience in Kenya, and that to fully engage the learner, it was necessary to engage with their values and identity. It should be mentioned here that Bernstein was instrumental in setting up the ICIS at the IOE, headed by Gundara. In subsequent years, the ICIS became a space at the IOE for various interdisciplinary work with national and international agencies, and it continues to be at the forefront of discussions and work related to intercultural education, diversity, equity and social justice (ICIS, 2022).

## UNESCO Chair

As UNESCO Chair, Gundara worked on several projects on teacher education, intercultural education and human rights in countries across Europe, in Mauritius and in other countries. His focus was not just to bring about partnerships between the North and South, but between countries located in the South,

for example, his institute collaborated with colleagues across Brazil, India and South Africa (UNESCO, 2009). He also helped to frame the *UNESCO Guidelines on Intercultural Education* (UNESCO, 2006). Commenting on these guidelines in a subsequent paper published by UNESCO, he explores some of the complexities and ideas that helped to develop the field of intercultural education, and he expresses his hopes for UNESCO as follows:

an entitlement to a non-centric or inclusive curriculum is perhaps one of the greatest challenges to actualising the development of an intercultural education. This exercise would entail a major intellectual challenge, as was the case when UNESCO undertook to write the History of Africa in an eight-volume series. Yet, overall, the series has not been integrated within the main body of universal historical knowledge. There are also other important UNESCO projects on the Slave Trade, The Silk Route, The Culture of Peace and Education for International Understanding which have implications for developing intercultural education within the mainstream of national educational systems.

It is important that UNESCO proposes over the next biennium to:

- Contribute to the improvement of curricula and textbooks for the teaching of history.
- Promote dialogue on the role of language and culture as key factors in the development through education of understanding among people within and between Member States.
- Support the educational activities of the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People.
- Disseminate new approaches to language education.
- Support the production of guidelines on mother tongue and multilingual education.
- Encourage the preparation of culturally appropriate materials in local languages and cultures. (Gundara, 2006: 10)

In subsequent years, he continued to express his support for the UNESCO agenda to develop more inclusive curricula that would enable countries to address issues of social diversity through intercultural education policies. He viewed it as being necessary to maintain safety and security within their diverse polities, and that 'a non-centric curriculum would enable teachers, students and other leaders to develop the inclusive and shared value systems which are necessary for the development of democratic societies' (Gundara, 2015: 134). His key goal, as suggested by Montero-Sieburth (2018: 448) through a study and application of Gundara's proposals, was that 'intercultural policies are not only implemented, but internalised by all social actors and put into practice to enhance opportunities that make a difference for future generations of youth'. At the same time, Gundara was aware of the institutional barriers and the limitations of international bodies. As he notes, 'Organisations like UNESCO have developed agendas for Education for All, the Convention for Cultural Rights and for providing Universal Primary Education, yet the issues of equality do not feature very prominently within them or their schools' (Gundara, 2010: 54).

However, he continued to be actively involved in opening new frontiers, in spite of his long-standing battle with cancer, which ultimately led to his demise in 2016. Under the auspices of the Korean UNESCO Commission, for example, he conducted a Feasibility Study which led to the establishment of the Asia-Pacific Centre for Education for International Understanding (APCEIU) based in Seoul, Korea, which now serves as one of the leading global agencies promoting education for international understanding and global citizenship towards a culture of peace.

Moving ahead, it is argued that Gundara's proposals and efforts to broaden the field of intercultural studies can help scholars and educational agencies such as APCEIU and those working across diverse fields to infuse intercultural understanding within their efforts. For example, within the discourse and practice of education for global citizenship, there has been an increasing interest in offering education for a more global content across nation states. What is still lacking, however, is scholarly work that brings into focus issues of social justice related to framing curricula so that they represent the knowledge not just of dominant groups, but also of subordinate and minority groups across communities (see Bourn, 2020; Sharma, 2018). Here, further research studies on Gundara's proposals in light of his work as UNESCO Chair can help address issues of social justice within policies and programmes related to teaching for global citizenship, such as within scholarly discussions on the need to go beyond the underlying Western world view within the UNESCO-led initiative for global citizenship. The discourse can expand to further integrate issues related to human rights, peace and reconciliation. This includes examples of some attempts to make the history curriculum more inclusive of minority communities, as well as the impact of

slavery and colonialism. Although Gundara (2015: 200) acknowledged that this was a challenging task, it was something he was committed to raising awareness of as a scholar and UNESCO Chair:

At the core of all these issues are ways in which the academe needs to universalize knowledge and shift away from dominant and 'centric' knowledge systems which have continued to provide singular and dominant versions of humanity and its histories. During this period of global transitions these separate realities and developments need to acquire multiple as well as universal legitimacies so that cohesive futures are based on more inclusive and realistic understandings of humanity.

## Conclusions

This article has reflected on some aspects of Gundara's work and legacy, while providing a glimpse into his personal and professional journeys and the three phases of his intercultural experiences – his childhood in Nairobi, Kenya, as the son of immigrants from India; his studies at universities across North America and the UK; and, finally, his career as an educator at the Institute in London.

It has discussed three contributions made by Gundara to the IOE as he broadened the field of intercultural education, both locally and globally. First, in his capacity as a professor, UNESCO Chair, and director of ICIS since its inception in 1979, he was instrumental in making the IOE a national and global space for discussions related to topics such as multiculturalism and diversity in education. Second, Gundara's own research and scholarly work made the IOE an attractive place for colleagues and students interested in broadening the field of intercultural studies. As mentioned, one of the outcomes of Gundara's pioneering work in this field has been the establishment of the IAIE with colleagues in Europe.

As discussed in this article, one of his main research agendas was the promotion of a 'non-centric curriculum' that represents intercultural perspectives and the knowledge of a varied group of people. Gundara's work has undoubtedly influenced several younger scholars, including the author of this article, who was mentored by him as a doctoral candidate at the IOE (2001–6). Her ongoing studies focus on bringing marginalised perspectives and communities into the mainstream discourse on education for sustainable development and global citizenship (Gundara and Sharma, 2020), and offering a pedagogical approach developed from a study of less widely known perspectives that can be used for formal, non-formal and informal learning across educational institutions that aim to foster responsible citizens of the world (Sharma, 2018, 2020). Gundara's influence also appears in several scholarly publications and discussions (Bash, 2014; Bash et al., 2016; Bourne, 2016; Montero-Sieburth, 2018; Sharma, 2008), including at a memorial symposium held in 2018 at the IOE (Baker, 2018).

Using an analogy, Gundara's aspirations and contributions can be likened to threads within the social tapestry of values and ideologies that appear and fade away depending on how and where we shed light on them. If we turn our focus on people and institutions on which he had a direct impact, such as in his capacity as the Chairman of the Board of Trustees of The Scarman Trust, his values and impact are clearly noticeable within its grass-roots and community-led activities, using community assets to reduce inequalities and bridge group divides. If we shift our attention to the other agendas that govern national and international bodies within democratic societies, these threads become hazier and, at some point, we can completely lose sight of them – for example, within the debates around issues such as immigration that were central to Brexit (the withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the European Union in 2020). The impact of Gundara and his ideas may vary in these contexts, but certainly his influence lies undiminished as a pioneer in the field of intercultural studies, and through his intellectual legacy and the impact on scholarly works such as those cited above. Future research studies could focus on the use and relevance of Gundara's proposals to build intercultural competencies within learning and teaching across multicultural societies. Such efforts can equip learners with the necessary knowledge, skills and values to engage with the complexities of an increasingly globalised world. Future studies could also explore the direct or indirect impact of Gundara's ideas and the impact of his contributions to the ICIS at the Institute, as well as within organisations such as the Council of Europe and UNESCO.

Finally, it should be mentioned that Gundara's third contribution to the IOE was his friendly disposition, caring attitude and respect for diversity, which have enhanced the culture of the institution as a vibrant community of local-global scholars. As Bourne (2016: n.p.) fondly describes in Gundara's obituary, 'Convivial and mischievous, he was never happier than when fulminating against reactionary

idiocy with friends over lunch in Bloomsbury.’ Overall, Gundara’s legacy to enhance intercultural understandings and more inclusive societies can be best summarised through his often-mentioned reference to Putnam (2000), who suggests that we bowl better when we bowl together (Gundara, 2012, 2015).

## Declarations and conflicts of interest

### Research ethics statement

Not applicable to this article.

### Consent for publication statement

Not applicable to this article.

### Conflicts of interest statement

The author declares no conflicts of interest with this work. All efforts to sufficiently anonymise the author during peer review of this article have been made. The author declares no further conflicts with this article.

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