

Tharp's Funnel: A Conceptual Framework for Teaching about Religious Pluralism in Potok's *My Name is Asher Lev* and Zakiyyah's *If I Should Speak*

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If teachers are to transcend mono-cultural borders and advocate for social justice in liberatory, critical pedagogical practice, then they must understand the relational and causative ethnogenetic layers of experience for students in the global community. Specifically, accommodating religious pluralism is a challenge facing educators today. Immersing themselves and their students in the lives of others through literary narratives provides one immediate and accessible strategy for exploring ethnogenetic experiences and crossing monocultural borders.

History runs thick in all of us.¹

Tharp's Ethnogenetic Funnel as Framework to Pluralism

Today's educational process is challenged by one of the most unique conditions ever faced—preparing future generations for active, meaningful engagement in a world that is instantly and in myriad ways contingently connected, interrelated, and ever changing. The diversity in today's classrooms is not what is new, for classrooms in this nation have always introduced strangers to strangers. A unique factor in the 21st century is that schools no longer collect students from a local, segregated, community funnel, but from an integrated, world-wide funnel. Languages, customs, histories, religions, styles, and perceptions are *literally* world's apart. How do we avoid the failure Nikki Giovanni (1993) warns against?

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¹Carroll, R. (1997). *Sugar in the raw: Voices of young black girls in America*. New York: Crown.

America may not be the best nation on earth, but it has conceived loftier ideals and dreamed higher dreams than any other nation. . . . Should this experiment go forth and prosper, we will have offered humans a new way to look at life; should it fail, we will simply go the way of all failed civilizations. (Mazel, 1998, p. 147)

How can teachers maximize global interconnection while balancing globalization's challenges to building community? Roland Tharp's (1994) theory of Ethnogenetic Levels of Causation considers the sociocultural roots of cognitive functioning and development and causative influences, both historical and contemporary, including evolutionary, historical, biographical, and acquisitional time spans. Tharp labels the historical time period as "*ethnogenetic*, meaning by this term the process whereby a people (i.e., an ethnic group) comes into and modifies the terms of its existence" (p. 89) and contends that the historical explanatory level has been "peculiarly absent in major theoretical systems of Western psychology" (p. 89), but that considering the ethnogenetic level regarding cognitive and educational dimensions may discover the filters and forces in individual life history, learning experiences, and current conditions (p. 89). Thus, the funnel model abolishes stereotypes in recognizing the unique richness of experiences and differences in accommodation characteristic of members of different ethnic groups.

A Relational Model of Ethical Referents

A particular distinction of Tharp's model is the focus on "simultaneously potent" (p. 88) levels of causation in the ethnogenetic level of the funnel of development—time periods between millennia and centuries. As Tharp contends, and these co-authors support: "Conditions of human life, present in every significant transaction, flow

from historical processes—processes that have matured for hundreds of years and that operate causatively in present time” (p. 89). Understanding Tharp’s funnel model of cognitive functioning and development and exploring specific applications empowers educators committed to achieving social justice as transformative world leaders in a global community. Crouch et al. (2004) argue that “simply exposing students to basic access and equity paradigms in the name of instilling a basic consciousness of social justice is insufficient” (p. 84). Necessary to the development of critical pedagogical practice is the establishment of a relational model using theory to understand specific contexts as lived relations of power (p. 84).

Understanding Tharp’s funnel model of cognitive functioning and development and exploring specific applications empowers educators committed to achieving social justice as transformative world leaders in a global community.

This paper explores how culturally responsible pedagogy, internationally recognized as Paulo Freire’s (1970, 1973) *liberatory pedagogy*, can counter the “five centuries of European expansion and domination and over a century of similarly exploitative North American domination [that] have shaped the contemporary world” (Hickling-Hudson et al., 2004, p. 3). An important aspect of this culturally inclusive approach is application of Tharp’s theory of ethnogenetic levels of causation and the historically layered factors that help create a student’s identity. Specifically, insensitivity to religious beliefs and offenses to religious freedom can be countered through application of Tharp’s model and the studied focus on the historical evolution of the cultural aspects of religion. Ignoring, or failing to understand these ethnogenetic levels of experience promulgates stereotypes and bolsters divisions and misunderstandings.

Moral Stories

One educational application of Tharp’s theory is the exploration of the cultural narratives, or moral stories, of religions other than those with which we are familiar. Through literature and stories, we can emotionally and intellectually connect to religious and other cultural

experiences different from our own. Empathy, self-understanding by understanding others, requires being with other people in the course of everyday living or recognizing others, and ourselves, in storytelling. As Barry Lopez (1990) tells the reader in his novella *Crow and Weasel*, “Sometimes a person needs a story more than food to stay alive.” The empathetic goal of storytelling resonates with Clifford Geertz’s “hope for ethnographic texts which engender awareness ‘between people quite different from one another in interest, outlook, wealth, and power’” (in Barone & Blumenfield-Jones, 1998, p. 143).

To understand others requires we move beyond our own developmental/cultural scripts (Greenfield & Cocking, 1994) to question our inherited scripts, what Barone and Blumenfield-Jones (1998) identify as Kerby’s “strong evaluation” (p. 144). Weak evaluation, as defined by Kerby, is the unreflective life of habit. Moral stories, as opposed to “the moral to the story is . . .” stories, engage the reader more authentically in the process of creating values, challenging and redefining inherited scripts, and promoting greater degrees of “integrity, responsibility, and morality in a curriculum worker’s platform” (p. 145).

Moral stories problematize inherited scripts through socially committed narratives and narratives of struggle. Socially committed narratives consist of stories told by privileged writers on behalf of oppressed people largely unable to speak for themselves, a narrative tradition identified by Sartre as engaged literature, and typically intended for privileged audiences to encourage rebuttal of status quo. Moral stories engender understandings even as they “pose a threat to our equilibrium in their capacity to persuade us to choose a life course (sometimes dramatically) different from the one down which we have been traveling (Barone & Blumenfield-Jones, 1998, p. 147). We engage in others’ stories as we explore the varied ethnogenetic layers of their funnels.

Layers of Religious Pluralism in the Funnel

Being of a culture different than that of the mainstream European heritage Protestant majority, students in today’s classrooms may face intense culture shock and identity crisis. How can our teachers adequately address such a scenario when, as educator Kenneth Cushner (2004) laments, they are “a relatively homogenous group, nearly 90 percent European American and . . . are, by and large, cross-culturally inexperienced and have limited knowledge and experience living or working with other cultures” (p. 100)? Cushner suggests that teachers develop intercultural competence. In a 2000 study, M. M. Merryfield found that educators who identify with a marginalized culture possessed an unparalleled

perspective that helped them develop an *ethno-relative*, as opposed to *ethnocentric*, orientation (p. 440). Teachers of color experienced this minority status in everyday American life, whereas white teachers had to spend a significant amount of time in another culture to gain such awareness. Though cross-cultural immersion is ideal, an initial step for culturally inexperienced teachers is to adopt a multicultural curriculum with an inclusion of religious pluralism (e.g., Gollnick & Chinn, 2004).

The profound effects of religion on culture and the human perspective must be considered. Education has traditionally reinforced mainstream Protestant Christian values through its curriculum, formally or otherwise. Colonial-era schools included Biblical study and 20th century schools often required worship and prayer until the Supreme Court decisions of the early 1960s deemed such activities unconstitutional (Gollnick & Chinn, 2004, p. 227). Today, religious expression in school is limited by stricter enforcement of the First Amendment of the Constitution, which establishes the separation of religion and government. However, school culture continues to reflect Protestant values, often revealed in the hidden curriculum of celebrating Christian holidays and not accommodating dietary and dress code requirements that may be fundamentally important in the life of a student who is not Protestant. Given the global diversity of students now attending U.S. schools, how will public education accommodate religious pluralism without violating the First Amendment or discriminating against religious students? To illustrate this dilemma, the experiences of Jewish and Muslim youth, highlighted by the literature of Chaim Potok and Umm Zakiyyah, will be examined.

Potok's *Asher Lev*

The fictional novel *My Name is Asher Lev* by Chaim Potok (1972) illustrates the challenges facing members of religious communities outside of the dominant Protestant culture. Asher Lev, a brilliant young artist, must struggle with the fact that his Orthodox Jewish family, living in 1950s Brooklyn, will not allow him to be both an expressive painter and a devout Jew. Fighting against cultural and religious assimilation and discrimination, Asher's family and community wish him to focus on religious study. As Aryeh, Asher's father, laments, "Asher, you have a gift. . . . If it is from the Other Side, then it is foolishness, dangerous foolishness, for it will take you away from the Torah and from your people and lead you to think only of yourself" (p. 106).

The concern of Asher's father stems not only from his own struggles with anti-Semitism, but also from the struggles of Jews for hundreds, if not thousands, of years—clear application of Tharp's *ethnogenetic levels of*

causation. In Aryeh's case, the persecution of his Jewish ancestors throughout history to his own experience escaping the deadly pogroms in turn-of-the-twentieth century Russia (Potok, p. 11) impacts his determination for his son to dedicate his life to Judaism.

Though the characters of Aryeh and Asher are fictitious, they represent true sentiments of Jewish Americans. The risk of assimilation into American culture is not to be taken lightly for non-Protestant immigrants.

Though the characters of Aryeh and Asher are fictitious, they represent true sentiments of Jewish Americans. The risk of assimilation into American culture is not to be taken lightly for non-Protestant immigrants. As Julia Braun Kessler (2004), a Hungarian-Jewish immigrant recalls thinking in the 1930s: "Just stay inconspicuous and you'll slip smoothly into the mainstream. . . . Dress like them, talk like them, move like them, dance like them, cheer like them, think like them, but over all else, look like them!" (p. 32). With the massive influx of Eastern European Jewish immigrants from the 1880s to the 1920s, the significance of religious freedom in the U.S. was immeasurable (Spector, 1956, p. 207). Throughout most of their history and Diaspora, Jews, unlike many other ethnic groups, have never been a majority and have learned to live as cultural outsiders (Hurvitz, 1958, p.123). This historical experience has led to a strong tradition of Jewish solidarity, despite the pressures of assimilation and anti-Semitic discrimination.

Jewish Students in Schools Strongly Influenced by Protestant Culture

In today's classrooms, most Jewish students are now acculturated into many components of mainstream culture. However, students' backgrounds affect them in ways that may not be obvious to educators. A student's religion must be respected and historical factors must be taken into account. For example, a Christmas party in class may seem innocent enough to a Christian teacher, but this experience for a Jewish child can be alienating, adding to thousands of years of Jewish marginalization and perpetuating hundreds of years of Protestant cultural dominance in U.S. schools. Jewish students continue to face overt anti-Semitism, as well. The Anti-Defamation

League (ADL) reported in their annual Audit of Anti-Semitic Incidents that 2004 witnessed the most hate acts in nine years, many of them in public schools (see ADL website).

Despite the fact that many Jewish students face religious isolation in public schools, many are now second- or third-generation American and do not have to face the culture shock that many recent immigrants or first-generation Americans might. As the Muslim student experience is explored, it is important to note that many Muslims are recent immigrants from various parts of the world. The Muslim population in the U.S. is growing and is now estimated to be over six million (Ahmad & Szpara, 2003, p. 295). Islam is not only a religion, it is a way of life: Students cannot be "part-time Muslims" (p. 299). Umm Zakiyyah's (2000) spiritual novel *If I Should Speak* demonstrates realistic struggles and strengths of young Muslim women in the U.S.

Zakiyyah's Tamika

Zakiyyah's novel follows the Islamic conversion of Tamika, a Protestant African-American college student, which reveals many of the stereotypes and prejudices that non-Muslim youth direct towards Muslims. In several instances, Tamika reveals her ignorance of Islam, as when she addresses gender roles, "I can't accept any religion where the men can oppress the women" (p. 109), and at her first visit to an Atlanta mosque, "Tamika felt as if she was in another country" (p. 127). However, the toughest challenge for Tamika is accepting the notion of "otherness" from her family and friends. Similarly, her Muslim friend, Aminah, expressed this religious marginalization as "she felt uncomfortable in the public school environment, dreading each day of school" (p. 159).

Muslim Students in Schools Strongly Influenced by Protestant Culture

Like Aminah, many Muslim students feel alienated in school. Ahmad and Szpara (2003) found that young Muslims do not expect their peers to understand their faith and culture and that prejudice and negative stereotyping are common (p. 298). Recent events such as the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks in the United States and the March 2004 French ban on religious dress in schools have brought Muslims into the scrutiny of the U.S. public eye. Muslim students, especially females wearing the hijab, continue to face discrimination and prejudice. One female Muslim student confessed: "I did think about taking it [hijab] off, but I wasn't really serious. It's just that even before, everywhere I went, people would look at me

strangely. After 9/11, I just really didn't feel comfortable walking in public" (Handwerk & Habboo, 2002).

To avoid infringement upon Islamic religious beliefs, Muslim students must be allowed to cleanse and pray during the school day, follow obligatory dress codes such as the wearing of the hijab by females, eat pork-free meals, fast during the holy month of Ramadan, and attend religious services on holidays.

Such current issues facing Muslim students must also take into account historical processes of ethnogenetic levels of causation. For Muslims, the Koran is the ancient holy text that clearly determines a code of moral living; according to Jonathan Bloom and Sheila Blair (2000), however, "there never really has been any single Islam" (p. 15). It is important for educators to be mindful of the diversity of cultural identifications and ethnicities amongst Muslim students. After Islam emerged from Arabia in the 7th century C.E., the religion spread to modern-day countries as distinct as Indonesia, Nigeria, and Iran (p. 12). According to a recent study, the current U.S. Muslim population is about 32% Arabic, 29% American (mostly African American), 29% South Asian, 5% Turks, 2% Iranian and Bosnian, and 3% other (Ba-Yunus & Kone, 2004, p. 317). It is also important for teachers to be mindful of the harmful stereotypes and slurs of Muslims as being anti-Western terrorists (Gollnick & Chinn, 2004, p. 213). Arab-American students are especially vulnerable to discrimination and intolerance due to the 9/11 attacks and U.S. wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Thus, educators should be aware of the Islamic traditions and codes for living, but also be sensitive to cultural differences among their Muslim students. To avoid infringement upon Islamic religious beliefs, Muslim students must be allowed to cleanse and pray during the school day, follow obligatory dress codes such as the wearing of the hijab by females, eat pork-free meals, fast during the holy month of Ramadan, and attend religious services on holidays. Iftikhar Ahmad and Michelle Szpara's (2003) research from Muslim student interviews, however, reveals that teachers and administrators in their secular schools do not often meet knowledge of their cultures and sensitivity to their needs.

A recent study following September 11th attacks found that elementary schools largely avoided any meaningful teaching or conversation of the events with their students (Carroll, 2004). Many lessons involved patriotism or emotional expression but, due to the violent nature and the religious association of the event, few teachers focused on understanding concepts such as terrorism, Islam, or U.S. foreign policy. Though September 11th would logically be the most important time to incorporate Islamic religion and culture into the curriculum in order to clarify misconceptions and stereotypes relating to terrorism, the failure of U.S. schools to adequately address such issues explains the pervasive ignorance of school staff reported by Muslim students.

Pluralism in the Ethnogenetic Layers of the Funnel

Experiences for Jewish and Muslim youth, as explored through *My Name is Asher Lev* and *If I Should Speak*, can be marginalizing and hurtful in the Protestant mainstream education system. This is especially tragic because education and academic study have traditionally been integral components of both Judaism (Gollnick & Chinn, 2004, p. 210) and Islam (Bloom & Blair, 2000, p. 11). In response, the challenge facing public schools is to embrace the religious pluralism of the student community without favoring or discriminating against any particular faith. According to the tenets of multicultural education, teachers should help bridge the differences between a student's home and school culture (Gollnick & Chinn, p. 5; Huber, 2002, p. 9). Schools can then help contribute to a socially just and democratic society. Jewish and Muslim students should not be forced to fully assimilate into mainstream U.S. society and lose their religious and cultural identities; rather, it is the schools that should promote understanding and sensitivity towards their students' cultures. Practical applications to education would be to include appropriate and accurate curriculum regarding Judaism and Islam and to improve intercultural competence training in teacher education.

An ever-growing resource base for learning about Judaic and Islamic cultures exists. For example, the ADL offers lesson plans for dealing with anti-Semitism, bias, and holiday observance in public schools (see www.adl.org/education/default_advocacy.doc). The Arab-American Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC) has a program for educators with useful information such as lesson plans and resource lists (see www.adc.org). The novels examined in this paper might offer teachers a creative way to explore the perspectives of Jewish and Muslim students, with a word of caution: The use of excerpts may be more appropriate as the content in these novels might be too religious, mature, or offensive to be

thoroughly studied in a public school curriculum. Another meaningful activity might be to invite a Jewish or Muslim parent to speak with the class or visit a synagogue or mosque (see suggestions for Muslim activities in Ahmad & Szpara, 2003, p. 300).

Culturally responsible educators must be careful, however, not to overstep the laws on religious expression. The Anti-Defamation League suggests using the "Lemon test," the legal conditions put forth by the Supreme Court's 1971 case *Lemon v. Kurtzman* (see www.adl.org/religion_ps_2004/background.asp). Any practice by a public school must (a) have a secular purpose, (b) have a primary effect that neither advances nor inhibits religion, and (c) avoid entangling government and religion

In conclusion, it is imperative that Jewish, Muslim, and other non-Protestant students are not denied academic and affective needs because of their religious beliefs. An awareness of Tharp's model can help educators develop intercultural sensitivity and promote inclusion of students' backgrounds into the curriculum. It is equally imperative that students who study in largely monocultural religious settings should be introduced to the religions and cultures surrounding them nationally and globally, if not locally. Though care must be taken not to violate the First Amendment, more likely, care must be taken to insure that students are not being unfairly discriminated against by a Protestant value-oriented public education system.

Summary

How do we counter the philosophical, sociocultural, intellectual, economic, and political processes that work together to subjugate and dominate—processes that allow inequality and oppression to operate in the teaching-learning process? A deeper, layered analysis of the multiple ethnogenetic experiences of America's ethnic groups can be considered in history, literature, and film.

We need to offer our students multiple narratives and viewpoints about imperialism in history as well as today—from dominant as well as subordinate points of view... to imagine the possibility of forging new relationships based on mutuality rather than control. (Sleeter, 2004, p. 29)

If teachers are to transcend mono-cultural borders and advocate for social justice in liberatory, critical pedagogical practice, then they must understand the relational and causative ethnogenetic layers of experience for students in the global community. "We cannot help our students overcome the negative repercussions of past and present racial dominance if we have not unraveled the remnants of dominance that still linger in our minds,

hearts, and habits” (Howard, 1999, p. 4). Teachers must gain a level of culturally sensitive consciousness to the ethnogenetic experiences of *all* peoples.

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