

Dilemmas in Education: A Casebook for Ethical Reasoning

Volume 1 | Issue 2

Article 2

2018

Lost in Translation

Kara M. Kavanagh
James Madison University

Follow this and additional works at: <http://commons.lib.jmu.edu/ethicalcasebook>

 Part of the [Bilingual, Multilingual, and Multicultural Education Commons](#), and the [Elementary Education and Teaching Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Kavanagh, K. M. (2018). Lost in Translation. *Dilemmas in Education: A Casebook for Ethical Reasoning*, 1 (2). Retrieved from <http://commons.lib.jmu.edu/ethicalcasebook/vol1/iss2/2>

Available at: <http://commons.lib.jmu.edu/ethicalcasebook/vol1/iss2/2>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by JMU Scholarly Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in *Dilemmas in Education: A Casebook for Ethical Reasoning* by an authorized editor of JMU Scholarly Commons. For more information, please contact dc_admin@jmu.edu.

Case Title: Lost in Translation

Case Keywords: English Language Learners, religious symbols, language, diversity, language and cultural barriers

Education Level: 3rd-5th, 6-8, 9-12, Higher Education,

Applicable Topics: Teacher Education, Cultural Diversity, Religious Diversity, English Language Learners, Linguistic Diversity, Religion, Neo-Nazis, Symbols

Abstract

The majority of teachers in America would expect to and be prepared to teach the swastika symbol in relation to Nazi Germany, Hitler, the Holocaust, and as a symbol of white supremacy groups. What would happen then, if a student doodled the Hindu svastika for fun or as an art project not related to the history or social studies curriculum?

Case Narrative

Hi, my name is Tarun. I am from Thailand. I moved here with my sister Jyoti and my parents. I am 9 years old, and Jyoti is 12 years old. America is *definitely* different from Thailand. WOW! I miss my home, but I am excited about my new life in America. My dad says I will be happy here. I hope he's right.

It's Tuesday, my first day at my new school. I'm in Ms. Pringle's third grade class at Park View Elementary. She is pretty, but so far, I don't think she likes me. She hasn't said so, but she avoids me. Maybe it's because I don't speak English yet, and she doesn't speak Thai. Maybe it's because I spilled juice on her skirt this morning. I just don't know.

Everyone keeps looking at me, but I just smile and nod my head. I have a paper on my desk with lots of words and blanks on it. The teacher is talking, but it just sounds like "Blah, blah, blah, blah, blah..." The teacher stops talking and the other kids start writing busily. I'm confused. What should I do? Do I raise my hand? Do I just sit here? I can't think of how to tell the teacher I can't read this. I wish I could explain to her that I was the smartest kid in my second-grade class back in Thailand. There I would be the first one done. My teacher would ask *me* to help the other students. But not here. Now *I* need help.

No one seems to care that I can't read my assignment. Will my whole year be like this? Will I keep getting work that I can't do? I blink back the tears of frustration that have welled up. This is awful! I loved school in Thailand! I never missed a day. I always made my parents proud with excellent grades and perfect behavior. Now I can't even do my first assignment!

The teacher is walking around the room putting stickers on everyone's paper. She stops at my desk, looks at my blank paper, says something, and walks away. No sticker for me. She doesn't

look mad, more annoyed or disappointed. Before I can think more about this, everyone is getting in a line.

I walk to the end, but quickly realize that is not where I am supposed to be. Two of the kids move me aside and say something. I don't know what. I step to the side and look at the teacher. She says something. I don't know what. I stand there wishing I could slip into a hole because everyone is staring at me. Finally, the pretty dark haired girl who sits next to me takes me by the shoulder and puts me in line between two girls. I look at her and whisper, "Thank you." She smiles and returns to her place in line.

We walk down the hall and enter a large open room with several long tables, a wall of windows, and pretty music playing softly. I glance around and see trays of chalk, paint, crayons, and colored pencils. I breathe a sigh of relief. Art class! I love art! I'm a very good artist! At least here, English won't be a problem. An hour of relief is here. I smile to myself as I get my large piece of paper and colored pencils.

The art teacher turns the music up louder. I see the other children close their eyes. I close mine, too. I feel the music wash over me. It sounds beautiful, peaceful, and free. I hear movement, so I open one eye to see what is going on. Some of the children still have their eyes closed, but others have begun to draw. One by one, the students open their eyes and begin adding forms and bands of color to their paper. Everyone's paper is different.

I close my eyes again and let the music fill me up. It feels beautiful. It reminds me of meditating with my family in the bamboo forest by Sangklaburi Lake. The memory and music make me smile. I look around at the other kids' drawings and decide we must be able to draw what we want or whatever the music makes us feel.

I choose my first colored pencil and carefully draw soft blades of grass that look like they are blowing in the wind. Then I take a yellow pencil and color a bright gold ball of sun whose rays reach down to the grass. The art teacher walks by, smiles and says something. I don't know what. But she smiled! I think she likes my picture. I begin to draw the canopy of bamboo trees that rise up to the sky. I close my eyes and picture the lake by which we would sit. I draw the lake off to the side. Next I draw my family and me sitting down in the lotus position for meditating. I take my time, so it will look *really* good.

The girl next to me says something. I don't know what. But she smiles and looks at my drawing. I think she likes it. The art teacher comes by again and smiles and says something. I don't know what. That's ok for right now.

I like art! I hope it lasts all day!

As I finish coloring, I look at my picture with satisfaction. That day, my father had taught us about the pratik, so I drew a pratik in the center and little svastikas above the heads of my family. I try to make it look like they are flowing from our bodies and minds. This is the best drawing I've ever done. I am so pleased I can't help grinning. I think the art teacher will like it, too because I saw the star part of the pratik on her necklace. I'm so excited. I can't wait to show her.

I have to show someone, so I slide my paper over to the pretty girl with dark hair and wait for her smile. Instead, her eyes get wide and she takes in a loud, sharp breath. She gasps loudly again and stares at me with a look of surprise and horror. Suddenly the proud feeling is gone and my face feels hot. Something is not right. Why isn't she smiling? Why is my picture making her mad? I thought it was beautiful, now I want to tear it up, but I don't know why.

She grabs my drawing and shows it to the boy across the table. He looks at me as if to say, "How could you?" He shakes his head back and forth. The other children crowd around my picture. No one smiles. Some look mad; some shake their heads at me. They keep saying things, but I don't know what.

I want to grab my drawing and run and hide.

The art teacher walks over to see what is going on. She stops and looks at my drawing and says something. I don't know what. All of the children point at me. Gone is the smile of approval from earlier, replaced with a worried and disappointed look. She bites her lip and looks at all of the children and then at me. No one is saying anything. Why is everyone so upset with my beautiful picture?

My perfect hour has quickly turned into another part of a long, horrible day. Half of me wants to tear up my picture because it is making people mad, but half of me wants to take it back, smooth it out, and bring it to my parents. They will love it.

The art teacher begins to talk sternly to me. This is a long, horrible day.

Ethical Considerations

KQ Empathy- If Mrs. Pringle and the art teacher really cared about Tarun, what actions would you expect from each of them throughout this case? If you really cared about the Art Teacher how would you handle the situation? If you deeply cared about the other students in the classroom, what would you do in this case?

KQ Rights- What rights should be considered for Tarun, the art teacher, other students, and Tarun's family? What role does Freedom of Speech play? What role does Freedom of Religion play? How do the rights of the art teacher align with or juxtapose with Tarun's rights?

KQ Responsibilities- What responsibilities should be considered for Mrs. Pringle and the art teacher? Does Tarun or his family have any responsibilities in this case? Does the school administration or district have any responsibilities in this case?

KQ Character – If you wanted to be a teacher who was caring and aware of cultural diversity, how would you live up to that ideal through your decisions in this case?

KQ Outcomes-What would you do if you were the art teacher? Tarun’s parents? The principal? Students’? Students’ parents? What are the possible short and long term outcomes for your decisions? How does each decision you could make apply to each stakeholder in the case?

Possible questions: How might different interpretations and understanding of the pratik and swastika and svastika cause conflict between individuals? What are other examples of cultural or religious symbols that are misinterpreted or have varying meanings between cultures or groups of individuals? When symbols are on clothing or jewelry in schools or on cars on school property, what are the roles, responsibilities, rights, and liberty we must consider? What roles do teachers and schools have in mitigating cultural symbols, their use and understanding for themselves and their students? What training do teachers need to handle religious diversity of students in the classroom?

Instructor Insights

This is written from the perspective of a young English Language Learner who has just moved to America. This is a **real** situation that happened in a 4th grade classroom in Northern Virginia.

The word *swastika* comes from the Sanskrit *svastika*, which means “good fortune” or “well-being” (Campion, 2014; United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, n.d.). The hooked cross symbol was used in architecture, pottery, art, textiles, and religious and cultural celebrations more than 5,000 years before Adolf Hitler designed the Nazi flag (Campion, 2014; United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, n.d.). It was used in Ancient Greece, India, Indonesia, and even 20th century United States marketing fads (eg. Coca Cola) (Campion, 2014). After World War I, the swastika was adopted by far-right nationalist groups to symbolize a pure Arayan state, and then Adolf Hitler adapted it for Nazi propaganda shortly after (Campion, 2014; United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, n.d.). Because of its use by Hitler in Nazi Germany, the swastika now symbolizes for Westerners, the hate and white supremacy ideology of people who believe that white people are better or superior to other races and religions and should be eliminated or separated (Campion, 2014; United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, n.d.). It has become taboo in Western countries since Hitler’s branding of the symbol. Importantly, it is still a sacred religious and cultural symbol used in marriages, celebrations, and festivals, especially in Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, n.d.).

The pratik is a yoga symbol with deep spiritual meaning that has been used by the spiritual movement, Ananda Marga, since 1955 (Ananda Marga, n.d.; Ananda Marga Pracaraka Samgha

New York, 2010). The triangle pointing downwards symbolizes meditation or internal development. The triangle pointing upwards symbolizes the energy of action and service to the external world. The two triangles balance each other perfectly—that means a person must balance his/her life with the wisdom that comes from meditation and service-filled action in the world. The rising sun shows progress as a result of a balanced way of life. Therefore, the spiritual hopeful person is moving towards the cherished goal of self-realization or spiritual victory which is showed by the swastika. The pratik is a symbol that expresses the ideas of realization of self and service to humanity (Ananda Marga Pracaraka Samgha New York, 2010).

References

- Ananda Marga. (2015). *Ananda Marga History*. Retrieved from <https://www.anandamarga.org/about/history/>
- Ananda Marga Pracaraka Samgha New York Chapter Website. (2010, March 29). *Pratiika (The Emblem)*. Retrieved from <http://www.ampsnys.org/ananda%20marga%20emblem>
- Campion, M. J. (2014, October 23). How the world loved the swastika-until Hitler stole it. *BBC Magazine*. Retrieved from <http://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-29644591>
- Kurk, T. (Photographer). (2004, October 15). *Pratik0201wh* [digital image]. Retrieved from <https://www.flickr.com/photos/39948048@N00/27131443/in/album-72157606880969679/>
Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International(CC BY-SA 4.0)
<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>
- premasagar. (Photographer). (2005, June 6). *Orange Pratik* [digital image]. Retrieved from <https://www.flickr.com/photos/dharmasphere/17858785>
Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International (CC BY-NC 2.0):
<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>
- premasagar. (Photographer). (2005, December 29). *Pratik on the Door* [digital image]. Retrieved from <https://www.flickr.com/photos/dharmasphere/93955412/in/photolist-3p4ex-4QVvz-3p4ey-5YeGD-8nfwq-2zwN6-5HwRwT-bFcWN-9aRNV-9ixEU-8nfKQ-4wbaF-9aP3E-jy94z-3p4ev/>
Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International (CC BY-NC 2.0):
<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>
- premasagar. (Photographer). (2006, March 13). *Symbolic* [digital image]. Retrieved from <https://www.flickr.com/photos/dharmasphere/120814510/in/photolist-3p4ex-4QVvz-3p4ey-5YeGD-8nfwq-2zwN6-5HwRwT-bFcWN-9aRNV-9ixEU-8nfKQ-4wbaF-9aP3E-jy94z-3p4ev>

Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International (CC BY-NC 2.0):
<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. (n. d.). History of the Swastika. In *Holocaust Encyclopedia*. Retrieved from
<https://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10007453>.

Appendix A Figures, Attribution, and Licensing



Figure 1. Orange Pratik by premasagar, 2005. Used under Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International (CC BY-NC 2.0): <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/> unedited

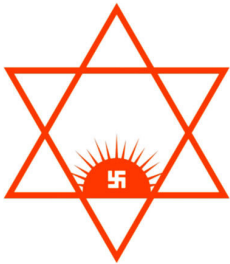


Figure 2. [Pratik0201wh](#) by Toby Kurk, 2004. Used under Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International (CC BY-SA 4.0)
<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/> unedited



Figure 3. [Pratik on the Door](#) by premasagar. 2005. Used under Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International (CC BY-NC 2.0): <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/> unedited



Figure 4. [Symbolic](#) by premasagar. 2006. Used under Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International (CC BY-NC 2.0): <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/> unedited