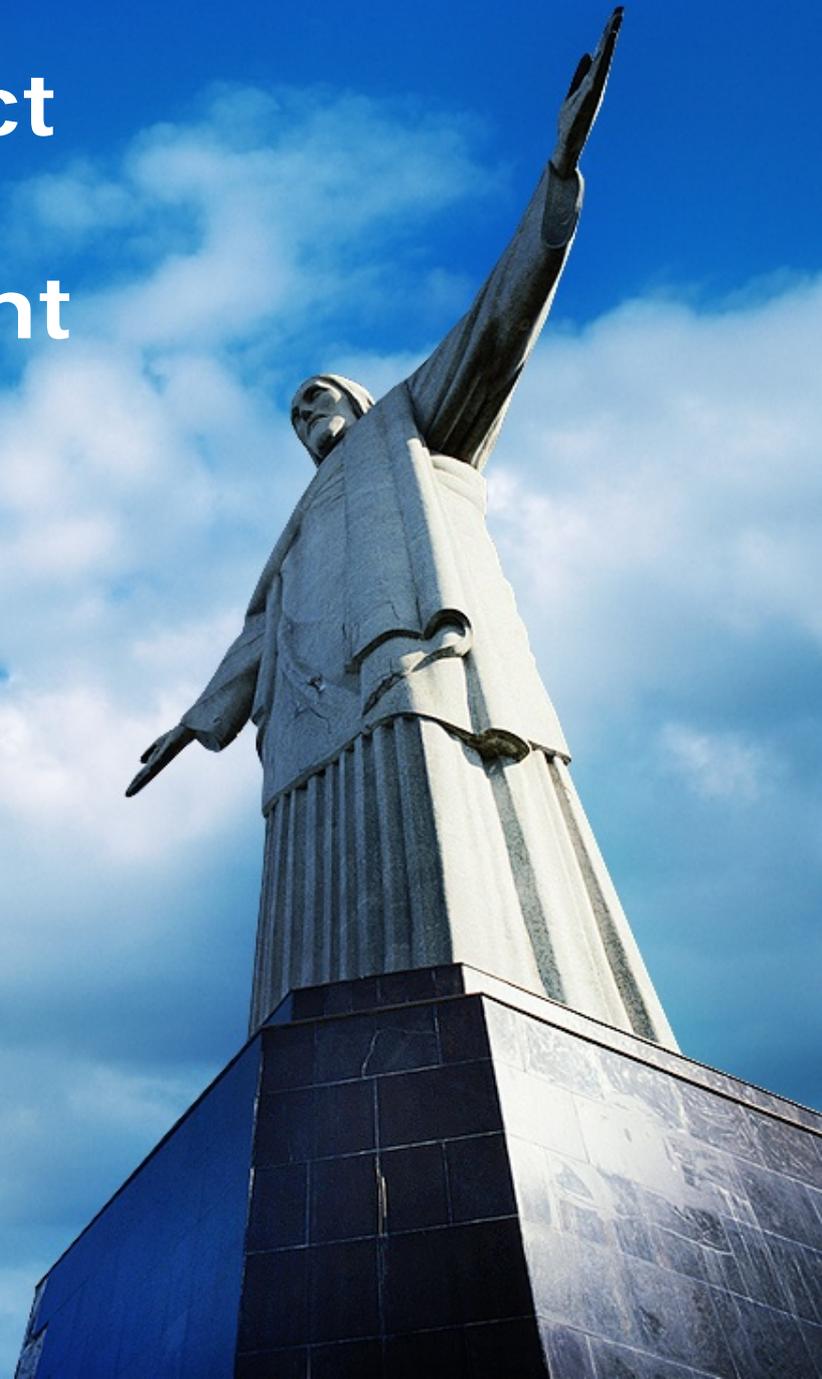


Exploring the Impact of Engaging Otherness on Student Faith Development within Evangelical Higher Education

Bruce R. Norquist, Ph.D.
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About the Presenter

Bruce Norquist, Ph.D.

Associate Dean of Residence Life

Moody Bible Institute

bruce.norquist@moody.edu

Ph.D., Higher Education, Loyola University

M.A., College Student Personnel, Ball State University

B.A., Business/Economics, Wheaton College



Questions to Consider

- In general, what would lead you identify another as having a faith that is different than yours?
- Think of a positive interaction that you have had with someone of a different faith. What made it positive?
- Think of a negative interaction that you have had with someone of a different faith. What made it negative?
- What students at your institution would you suppose feel marginalized in your campus culture because of their faith?



Key Terms

- Otherness: Those outside of one's faith "tribe"
- Faith: Three active components – cognitive, affective, and relational
- Faith Development: Change and growth in faith that occur over the life-cycle
- Evangelical Higher Education: member institutions of the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities



Engagement with Otherness

Two types of engagement

- Constructive:
 - **Respectful**
 - **Willingness to learn**
 - **Forms an empathic bond**
 - **Breaks down negative stereotypes**
- Superficial:
 - **Unwillingness to take on another's perspective**
 - **Strengthens barriers**
 - **Reinforces negative stereotypes**

(Parks, 2000)



Impetus for Study

- Personal identification with the evangelical faith
- Twelve years of professional experience at evangelical institutions of higher education
- Interest in student faith development
- Interest in the role of challenge in student faith development



Significance of Study

- Complements and extends understanding of the culture found on Evangelical campuses
- Increases understanding of the role of a specific challenge to student faith development



Literature Streams

- College Student Faith Development
- The Role of Engagement with Otherness in Student Faith Development
- The Evangelical Campus Context



Fowler's Faith Development Theory

The potential of Student Faith Development

During the College Years:

Stage 3

Conventional
Faith



Stage 4

Individuated
Faith

(Fowler, 1981)



McMinn's 'Enclave Mentality'

- Defines Evangelical Colleges and Universities as Enclaves
- Enclave Mentality: A defensive posture which protects group identity
- The Negative Effect of an Enclave Mentality on Multicultural sensitivity
- (McMinn, 1995)



Research Methodology

- A Qualitative Phenomenological Approach
- A Two-Site Case Study Design:
 - **Jonathan Edwards University (JEU)**
 - **Dietrich Bonhoeffer University (DBU)**
- Purpose: To provide a rich and holistic narrative of the phenomenon



Similarities of Two Sites

- Member institutions of the CCCU
- Mission Statements that are Christ-centered
- A strong relationship with founding evangelical denomination
- Profession of a Christian faith required of faculty, administrators, and staff
- Students obligated to take Bible courses
- Strong commitment to a chapel program
- Vital co-curricular outreach program that allows students to express their faith



Jonathan Edwards University (JEU)

- Suburban
- Location restricts accessibility to local community
- Motto uses explicit Christian language
- Statement of Faith REQUIRED for administrators, faculty, and staff
- Behavioral code standards obligated for students
- Chapel attendance required
- Approx. 97% of student body identifies with evangelical Christian faith



Dietrich Bonhoeffer University (DBU)

- Urban
- Location provides easy accessibility to local community
- Motto uses equivocal language
- Statement of Faith NOT REQUIRED for faculty, administrators, and staff
- No formal behavioral code for students
- Voluntary chapel program
- Approx 60% of student population identifies with evangelical Christianity



Research Questions

1. To what extent do students attending these institutions interact with otherness and what is the nature of these interactions?
2. How do students, faculty, and administrators perceive these interactions to impact student faith development?
3. To what degree are constructive engagements with other faiths valued?



Data Collection

- Interview Participants at each site: 5 students, 2 faculty members and 2 administrators:
14 evangelical Christians, 3 Christian, 1 agnostic;
10 Caucasians, 3 African Americans, 2 Asians, 2 Greek, 1 Hispanic; 11 men, 7 women
- Direct Observation: Interview with liaison, informal visits, student led worship services, events involving otherness
- Document Analysis: Web sites, academic catalogs, student newspapers, recruitment materials
- Field Log



Barriers to Engagement with Otherness

Research Question 1

JEU

- Homogenous faith culture
- Pressure to conform to the same Christian perspective

DBU

- Social Segregation of Diversity
- Conflict with different perspectives

Common Barriers

- An enclave to which students could retreat
- Ambivalent student attitudes
- Fear of engaging the 'other'
- Hostile attitudes toward the 'other'



Nature of engagements

Research Question 1

Constructive Engagements

"It's completely opposite of what we think. We think [Muslims] are just angry people... But [this trip] challenged me because these people understood what it means to love others better than I do."

(Isabel, JEU Student)

"You know my response to a [Muslim] is completely different now than it was prior to the trip. Afterward, when I saw this woman get onto our plane in Muslim head covering, I immediately thought, that's a friendly person."

(JEU Chaplain)

"And we talked about stuff that helped me understand where she's coming from. Even though when she says, 'I feel like someone was pushing me down a certain path,' I don't understand that at all. I think it's really interesting the differences between us two. But I do like talking about it with her and I think it's good for both of us."

(Olivia, DBU student)



Nature of Engagements

Research Question 1

Superficial Engagements

"It wasn't a give or take at all. It was rather like the overwhelming majority of our group said 'No,' to the difference. There was definitely a sense of, 'These people are crazy. I don't see how they can believe this. We need to save them, somehow.'"

(Luke, JEU student)

"I can't say that I go and talk to them about their discomfort with praying, or talking about faith. So I don't step up and lead maybe the way I should. I suppose I just let people stew in their discomfort until they get used to it and are able to accept that this is something that we do before every game."

(Justin, DBU Student)



Perspectives of the 'other'

Research Question 1

"If I were to talk about my favorite issues, it feels to me as if I'd be on the outs. People would look at me differently."

(JEU professor)

"I know a lot of times that my opinion is not going to be heard. [Other students] are like 'Well, you're not a Christian, so therefore you mean something else completely.'"

(Olivia, DBU student)

"The people who I thought would accept me were the people that rejected me. It wasn't the Christians on this campus – I'm sad to say – that accepted me wholeheartedly. It was the people who felt like they had no religion or the Muslims or Hindus. They're the ones who loved me. Even though they're of a different religion, they're the ones who showed me Christ."

(Rosa, DBU student)



Perceived Impact on Student Faith

Research Question 2

- Powerful Effects on Faith Development
 - Causes students to critically examine faith
 - Develops greater empathy for the 'other'
 - Increases ability to engage others in more complex ways
 - Develops a greater sense of confidence in interacting with people of other faiths
- Superficial engagements produced negative outcomes



Ambiguous Value at JEU and DBU

Research Question 3

Evidence of high value

- The presence of people who highly value constructive engagements with otherness

Evidence of low value

- An insular mindset that perceived engagements as a threat to institutional or individual Christian identity
- Absence of institutional leadership



Conclusions

- The importance of constructive engagement with otherness to evangelical higher education
- Constructive engagement with otherness as null curriculum?
- A complex milieu of postures towards otherness at both universities
- Maintaining faith identity while engaging other faiths
- The negative effect of an enclave mentality
- The significance of institutional leaders' posture towards people of other faiths



Recommendations for practice

- Practical questions to consider
- Constructive engagement with otherness as explicit curriculum
- Valuing individuation of faith over strengthening faith commitment
- Encourage engagement with otherness among institutional leaders
- Supporting the 'other' at evangelical institutions
- Assessing faith development qualitatively



Suggestions for future research

- Similar studies at other CCCU institutions
- Similar studies at non-evangelical faith-based universities
- Curricular study at CCCU institutions: Is engagement with otherness null curriculum?
- Explore experiences of the 'other'
- Explore what cultural attributes at CCCU institutions encourage conformity





Hasidic Parable

A great celebration occurred in heaven after the Israelites were delivered from the Egyptians at the Red Sea and the Egyptian armies were drowned. The angels were cheering and dancing. Everyone in heaven was full of joy.

Then one of the angels asked the archangel Michael, "Where is God? Why isn't He celebrating?" And Michael answered, "God is not here because He is off by Himself weeping. You see, many of His children were drowned today."