

Building Peace through Interfaith Dialogue Classroom Experiences from an American University

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Introduction

There is a growing trend around the world to pursue interfaith dialogue within education as a means for building peace and reducing religious conflict. While there are various motivating factors in this trend, in large part it is a response to the increased religious diversity in schools that has resulted from globalization. In many countries, higher education is becoming particularly impacted by national and regional efforts to internationalize curriculum, programming, and student recruitment – making university campuses a prime location for interfaith interaction. For this reason, more and more higher education institutions are taking steps towards promoting positive interfaith relations among their students, staff, and faculty. This article describes one such interfaith initiative at an American university. Based on in-depth observational research, findings show that interfaith dialogue has many challenges and, in some cases, can lead students to become even more angry towards, or distrustful of, their peers from other religious backgrounds than they were before their interfaith dialogue experience. Lessons from this research can point to both practical and pedagogical recommendations for how to pursue interfaith dialogue that avoids the pitfalls identified and is successful in building interfaith peace.

Context and Research Approach

Indeed, the goals and processes for any interfaith dialogue are determined by the specific needs or types of interfaith conflict that exist in a given society. In some places, conflict between religious groups takes the form of war, genocide, or other forms of direct violence. In others, interfaith conflict is more about a lack of understanding between different religious groups which can lead to feelings of suspicion, resentment, or isolation. For that reason, it is important to understand various contextual factors for any interfaith program before attempting to glean lessons or determine transferable implications.

The research described in this article takes place in the United States of America (USA). According to the USA's constitution, all citizens are guaranteed the freedom of religion and the government is not permitted to favor one religion over another. However, the dominant religion in the country is Christianity –over 70% of the population labels themselves as Christian (Pew Research Center, 2015), not including those who are culturally Christian without affiliating with the Christian church –and non-Christian religions are typically considered “abnormal” to those from the dominant group. Thus, despite this rhetorically pluralistic ideology, religious minorities in the USA often feel they are misunderstood or unfairly stereotyped based on their religion. As a result, the type of interfaith dialogue that is needed in this context is one that can help participants empathize with one another's experiences and feelings. Promoting empathy and compassion between religiously diverse individuals is an important step towards interfaith peace and harmony, both in the USA and around the world.

The present study examines three separate sections of a credit-bearing interfaith dialogue course at a large, religiously diverse university in a metropolitan and cosmopolitan city in the USA. Each course section had 12-14 students and was comprised of half Christians and half non-Christians, which was a purposeful endeavor by enrollment coordinators (the idea behind this was to create a balance dominant and non-dominant groups). There were also two instructors in each course, one Christian and one non-Christian (also, an effort to create balance). The course met once each week for two hours, for seven consecutive weeks. Students were graded on a standard A-F scale, and were given one academic credit to fulfill

their general education diversity requirement.

The goal of the project was to learn about the students experiences in the course, to better understand the benefits and challenges of interfaith dialogue in a university setting, and to use this knowledge to help improve interfaith dialogue initiatives in the future. In order to achieve these goals, I pursued a three-pronged approach to data collection : participant-observation, analysis of students' weekly reflection journals, and in-depth individual interviews with students after their course was complete. In total, there were 39 student participants across the three sections of the course.

Religion	Christian	Jewish	Muslim	Hindu	Buddhist	Total
Course 1	8	4	1	1	0	14
Course 2	6	4	2	1	0	13
Course 3	6	3	1	1	1	12
Total	20	11	4	3	1	39

As a researcher (participant-observer, interviewer, document reviewer), I did my best to remain neutral and interpret the data as much as possible from the perspective of the students themselves. However, as the constructivist methodology emphasizes, I cannot deny the way my own background and life experiences influences what I notice, what I consider important, or even why I chose to research this topic in the first place. As a religious minority in the USA, for instance, I am drawn to stories about other religious minorities, as I have learned in my own life how uncommon it is to hear these stories in American education research and literature. Moreover, given my particular religious background (my mother is Buddhist and my father is Hindu) I am especially sensitive to the experiences of those from the Dharmic traditions (Buddhism, Hinduism, and Jainism). In other words, my interest in understanding interfaith dialogue is not only academic, but also personal.

Pedagogical Model: Intergroup Dialogue

The courses examined for this research followed a specific pedagogical model known as Intergroup Dialogue (IGD), which has three stated goals: (1) to raise awareness of social inequity, (2) to build cross-group communication skills and

relationships, and (3) to increase intergroup cooperation for working toward social justice (Zúñiga, Nagda, Chesler, & Cytron-Walker, 2007). To achieve these goals, IGD courses use a four-stage process: (1) creating a safe space for sharing and vulnerability among the group, (2) exploring students' differences and commonalities of experience, and analyzing those experiences within a socio-historical context; (3) using student-selected topics to dialogue about inequity and multiple perspectives; and (4) building alliances among all students and planning for social action. In contrast to other forms of dialogue that embrace a democratic model (in which students have complete control over dialogue topics, and facilitators do not attempt to change the direction of the conversation), the IGD model is designed such that facilitators purposefully raise issues of fairness and equality even if students are uncomfortable doing so. Literature on social justice education has shown that inequity and oppression are often unseen and difficult to talk about (McIntosh, 1998). Thus, in a democratic dialogue, it is possible that students either will not recognize or will not want to deal with the way religious minority students are unfairly treated. For that reason, IGD's approach attempts to ensure that these important issues are not ignored.

IGD has received a great deal of positive attention as an effective form of engaging students in peace building dialogue. Numerous empirical studies (e.g.: Gurin, Nagda, & Sorensen, 2011; Gurin-Sands, Gurin, Osuna, & Nagda, 2012) have shown that IGD is successful in producing positive student outcomes consistent with its stated goals. However, the vast majority of this research has analyzed data from IGD classes about race and gender. Therefore, examining what happens when this model for dialogue is applied to courses about religion is an important step in our endeavor to pursue effective, peace building interfaith dialogue. If IGD can produce positive impacts for inter-racial or inter-gender dialogue, it may be able to provide important lessons for how to engage in inter-religious dialogue that is equally as effective and positive. This paper, then, shares the lessons learned from in-depth analysis of three such courses.

Findings

While the findings of the research show that not all the outcomes of these interfaith dialogues were positive, there are important lessons to be learned from the negative outcomes as well. Identifying problems that occurred in

these courses, and possible ways for overcoming them, is similarly valuable for the overall effort to understand how best to pursue interfaith dialogue that is successful in building peace between religiously diverse participants. Below, I present a brief summary of each of the three courses included in this research. After that, I highlight both the negative and positive outcomes I observed, and discuss the implications of these outcomes for future practitioners of interfaith dialogue.

Course One

In the first class, there were 14 students: eight Christians, four Jews, one Muslim, and one Hindu. Both facilitators of this course were raised in Christian families, but only one was still affiliated with Christianity and the other described herself as agnostic. Throughout the course, the students seemed reluctant to talk about religion, and preferred to talk about race and gender instead. The facilitators made a few subtle attempts to steer the conversation back to the topic of religion (and the IGD model suggests they should), but were not strict about it and, as a result, were not very successful. When the students did discuss religion, the topics they covered mostly pertained to the Christian and Jewish students; for example, the way they celebrated Christmas on campus compared with the way they celebrated (or, didn't celebrate) the Jewish holiday of Hanukah on campus. As a result, the one Muslim student and the one Hindu student remained quiet for a majority of the class. The Muslim student explained that despite not participating in much of the dialogue, he felt a connection with the Christian and Jewish students due to their shared spiritual lineage to Abraham (a patriarchal figure to whom Jews, Christians, and Muslims all trace their lineage). Several times throughout the course, the students appeared upset with each other while sharing about their different perspectives. Some students felt that these heated moments were valuable for helping them understand the others; most of these students were Christian. On the other hand, some students felt hurt and perceived that their peers did not care about them; most of these students were non-Christian. One Jewish student, for example, shared that,

“[My Christian classmates] consider their tradition of saying “merry Christmas” more important than including other people ... I was sad that they couldn't comprehend larger issues like inclusion and respect, and even more sad that they didn't seem to want to ... [From now on] If I want to

learn about other religions, I would prefer to read about them on my own rather than listen to other people. I just don't think [interfaith dialogue] is that productive."

The Hindu student felt particularly overlooked, as if his classmates did not remember that he was there.

"Having more Hindu students would have helped me to explain better, because I noticed in dialogue a lot of the conversation revolved around [Jews and Christians] and sometimes I couldn't really say much because there was a good chunk of Jewish students. I mean, what if there was only one Jewish student and four Hindu or five Hindu kids? The Jewish kid would probably feel the same way that I was feeling."

Unfortunately, many of the non-Christian students reported that they were discouraged from participating in future interfaith dialogue as a result of their experience in this course.

Course Two

In the second class, there were 13 students: six Christians, four Jews, two Muslims, and one Hindu. One of the facilitators was Christian, the other Buddhist. For a majority of the course, the facilitators asked the students to share information about their own religious traditions with the rest of the group, as a way of teaching each other about different religions. Since there were more Christians in the class than any other religious group, more time was spent discussing Christianity than any other religion. The Hindu student, as the only person who represented her religion by herself with no other Hindu classmate, was given the least amount of time to discuss Hinduism. She struggled a great deal with this since most of her classmates knew nothing about her religion, and she was holding back tears as she spoke because she was so nervous.

"[Having to teach my classmates about my religion] was really hard. I felt kind of singled out. In the beginning I told everyone that I don't know much about my religion and then the next class they were like, "oh, tell us about your religion" ... I just felt it was kind of a little contradictory to what they said in the beginning about how they don't want to put people on the spot

and make them feel bad or try to belittle anyone's religions, but I feel like during that class they may have done that ... I just think it ended up being like, who knows more about their religion?"

Additionally, there were a few times when students spoke about Buddhism in a negative and inaccurate way. For example, one Christian student said, "Like, Buddhism, I don't even call that a religion, it's a lifestyle." Then, a Jewish student said,

"One aspect [about my visit to a Buddhist ritual] that unnerved me was the multitude of statues and figurines both in the gompā (the sanctuary) and the lobby area. [My Muslim partner] and I both come from traditions that do not permit images of people in areas where we worship, so we both were wary of the Buddhas and bodhisattvas."

The Buddhist facilitator in this course was inexperienced (as opposed to the highly experienced Christian facilitator who took the lead throughout the class) and she did not step in to correct these students. Moreover, since there were no Buddhist students in the class, no one else was there to speak up on behalf of Buddhists. As a result, the students in this class were only exposed to an outsider perspective on Buddhism, rather than an insider perspective. In the end, many of the students explained that they enjoyed the course, except for the Hindu student who said she very much felt targeted and ridiculed by the group.

Course Three

In the final class, there were 12 students: six Christians, three Jews, one Muslim, one Hindu, and one Buddhist. Interestingly, out of the 12 students, seven students (two Christians, two Jews, one Muslim, and both the Hindu and the Buddhist) described themselves as either atheist or agnostic. As a result, none of the minority religious traditions represented in the room (other than an occasional mention of Judaism) were ever discussed, and the students who had minority religious backgrounds were not recognized by their peers or the facilitators as religious minorities. The two facilitators in this course were both Christian (although one was also agnostic, which is why he was selected to fill the "non-dominant" facilitator role). Differently from the first two courses, the students in this course dedicated most of their discussion to philosophical questions. In

particular, they spent a great deal of time debating whether or not the teachings of Christianity (and, in some cases Judaism and Islam as well) were true or not. Due to this, the Hindu student and the Buddhist student (who both have religious cultures distinctly different from Judeo-Christian-Islamic framework) felt that the conversation did not apply to them. The Hindu student, for example, chose to stay silent for most of the class because,

“Hinduism is totally different from the Judeo-Christian idea [of what religion is]. I just didn’t want to have to deal with explaining it all by myself.”

Additionally, because the framework for religion and religiosity used by most of the students in the class was Judeo-Christian-Islamic the Buddhist student determined that he was not religious.

“I mean I share the same beliefs as my [Buddhist] parents, but I wouldn’t consider myself a Buddhist [because] I’m not religious, I don’t pray when I want something specific to happen, I don’t regularly go to church or read any religious texts such as the Bible.”

Throughout the course, there were a number of times when the students became argumentative, defending their own beliefs, and accusing those who believed differently of being wrong. Moreover, because the facilitators chose not to intervene, these philosophical debate continued throughout the course. By the last class of the term, however, the group, with the help of the facilitators, came to the conclusion that they had common ground in the unknown – for the believers, the unknown fueled their faith; for the non-believers, the unknown fueled their skepticism.

Positive Outcomes

At the outset of this research, I sought to understand how to pursue interfaith dialogue that was successful at building peace among religiously diverse students. While there were, indeed, many surprises during the course of my research – meaning, there were many negative outcomes that I did not anticipate – there were also a number of positive outcomes. Of course, there are lessons to be learned

in either case.

Increased Understanding of Peers From Other Religious Backgrounds

Several of the students I interviewed for this study explained that after participating in their interfaith dialogue course they gained an increased understanding of their peers from religious backgrounds other than their own. The topic of religion, for many of these students, was taboo among their friends, which meant they rarely spoke about religion to other people their age who were not from their same religious tradition. As a result, at the start of the class, not only did they not know much about the basic tenets of religions other than their own, but they did not understand the perspectives of those from other traditions. After speaking about religion in a group of religiously diverse peers, they were able to better understand what others believe and why they do so. A Hindu student, for example, shared that,

“I learned from the Jewish students. I got to understand where they’re coming from and things they believe.”

The interfaith dialogue course gave them a dedicated time and space to talk about religion – a topic they typically avoided talking about in their everyday lives. In that way, participating in this course provided an opportunity to learn about religion that they may not have otherwise gotten. This was helpful both for raising their overall level of religious literacy and for opening their minds to the possibility for different perspectives on matters related to religion and spirituality.

Seeing Others Learn

Another consequence of not feeling free to talk about religion with their peers in their daily lives, is that many of my research participants entered the class believing inaccurate and demeaning stereotypes about people from other religious groups that. Many of the Christian participants, for instance, believed that all of their Jewish peers came from wealthy families and were spoiled by them. The Jewish participants, on the other hand, explained that they felt upset when people made untrue assumptions about them based on their religious identity. During the course, when prompted by the facilitators to talk about stereotypes, these divergent perspectives came to light. When this happened, the religious minority students (who, more so than the Christian students, were the ones being

stereotyped) were able to witness the Christian students learning the falsity in their assumptions. In one case, a Christian student explained that she was thankful to the Jewish students for teaching her that the stereotypes she believed about them were wrong, and apologized to them for hurting their feelings. Witnessing this was very therapeutic for several of the Jewish students – as one explained,

“I really appreciated that [my Christian classmate] admitted that she had never thought about how a stereotype about being rich can actually hurt someone. I’m glad that I was able to give a new perspective and hopefully change the way that people feel about Jews”

When, as a religious minority, this Jewish student felt misunderstood by most of the people around her – not only in this interfaith dialogue, but in her other classes and elsewhere in her life – she found comfort in being able to change someone else’s opinion of her and her religious group. This, for her, and for several other students who had similar experiences in the course, made the interfaith dialogue experience a positive one.

Finding Common Ground with Religiously Diverse Peers

Being able to understand others better and witnessing classmates become more sensitive to others’ feelings may also be related to another positive outcome I observed during this research: students finding common ground with peers from different religious groups. While understanding someone else’s perspective or correcting your inaccurate assumptions about them does not necessarily equate to finding a way to connect over a shared experience, it certainly helps; and that is exactly what happened for several of the students in the interfaith dialogue courses I observed. As one Christian student shared,

“I feel like I have more of a common ground. I feel like I don’t separate myself from [people from other religious traditions] as much. I have a lot of Jewish friends, and I always feel that talking about religion is uncomfortable because we don’t share that common ground, but now I feel like I would be able to reach that common ground, or make there be a common ground.”

For some students, their common ground was in their shared belief in a higher power (whether it be God in the Christian sense, or a plurality of gods and goddesses that exist in Hinduism). Other students, from a range of religious backgrounds, shared a common feeling of uncertainty in the existence of God or life after death. In other cases, students shared that while they are certain they believe in God, they are uncertain about the meaning of life or their ultimate destiny, which allowed them to find common ground in the “unknown” with those students who claimed they did not believe in a divine being. Regardless of what commonality they found with their peers, the ability to feel connected to someone from a different religious tradition allowed these students to feel more willing and confident in engaging in further interfaith dialogue in the future.

Increased Clarity on Personal Spirituality

The most common response I heard when I asked my research participants what they gained from their interfaith dialogue experience was that they developed an increased sense of clarity regarding their own religion, spirituality, and/or personal beliefs. The ability to speak openly about religion and spiritual beliefs, along with the experience of having to formulate responses to others’ inquiries on this topic, helped many of these students feel more confident in their beliefs and their ability to articulate them to others. As one Christian student shared,

“It is a very helpful growing experience to be questioned about why you believe what you do; most of the time it has been reassuring to me and my faith.”

For many of these students, they began their interfaith dialogues feeling unsure and defensive about their religion, and were hesitant about opening up about their personal beliefs. Once the students gained some confidence in their beliefs, the dialogue among the group became more conversational (less like a debate) and more respectful. Again, simply providing them with the time and space to talk about something that they usually feel is socially inappropriate to talk about with their peers allowed them to engage in such a way that facilitated their own spiritual development.

Negative Outcomes and Recommendations for Preventing Them

In addition to the many positive outcomes I observed in this study, there were, unfortunately, several negative outcomes as well. Through sharing these, my goal is to warn future interfaith dialogue practitioners about the potential pitfalls of this process. Moreover, I offer my suggestions for how to prevent or overcome these negative occurrences in hopes of inspiring my fellow educators to think about how to improve both theory and practice surrounding interfaith dialogue.

Democratic Dialogue Suppressed Shy Students

The interfaith dialogue courses I followed were not designed to be democratic in nature – meaning, facilitators were trained to intervene and redirect conversation when it became unbalanced. However, for two out of the three courses I observed, the facilitators did take a more democratic approach by allowing the students to control the topics, direction, and speed of the discussion. Unfortunately, this meant that students who were more vocal and aggressive controlled the dialogue, and religious groups with greater representation in the class were discussed more frequently. Students who had shy and quiet natures were not given much of a chance to contribute to the group's conversations, and those who were the only person to represent their religious group were often overlooked. In particular, this burdened the Buddhist and the Muslim student in course three and the Hindu students in all of three courses.

While a democratic dialogue sounds fair in theory, the outcomes in my research show that this may not always be the case. In fact, democratic dialogue can actually be quite damaging to the spirit of those students who are the most marginalized. For this reason, it is important to consider adopting a more structured, facilitated approach to interfaith dialogue, instead of a democratic approach. What this means is that facilitators should be trained to interrupt students if they are dominating the discussion too much or are belittling their peers. It also means that facilitators should use their authority to reject a topic of discussion even if the majority of the students want to talk about it. For instance, in both the first and second course of this study, students often chose to talk about race and gender instead of religion. In a structured interfaith dialogue, this would be deemed inappropriate, and the facilitators would redirect the conversation to

the topic of religion. In this way, a structured approach to interfaith dialogue may be better at building peace between religious groups – after all, if religion is not discussed, tension and misunderstanding between religious groups will not be resolved.

Emic Perspective Missing for Some Religions

Another negative outcome that I observed in my research was the way an inaccurate and (in my opinion) offensive portrayal of Buddhism and Hinduism went unchallenged among the group. A number of times throughout all of the courses in this study, students made comments about a religion other than their own (in other words, they made remarks from an etic perspective) that came across as insensitive to those from the religious tradition they were speaking of. Most of the time, however, someone from that religious tradition spoke up to either defend their religion or to offer an insider (emic) perspective that sounded more reasoned and less bizarre. Yet, when this happened for Buddhism and Hinduism (an example of which I described in my summary of course two) no one responded with clarifying remarks, which meant that the group never got to hear an emic perspective on those traditions. The Hindu students explained to me that they felt powerless to defend their tradition by themselves since there was no one else they could rely on for understanding or support. Similarly, the Buddhist student from course three explained that he did not know enough about Buddhism to adequately explain it to his peers. While many of the students described their interfaith dialogue experience as helpful in learning about other religions and finding common ground with people from other religions, unfortunately, I do not think this happened for Buddhism and Hinduism. If there had been more Buddhist and Hindu students in the courses, perhaps those students would have felt more confident speaking up in these instances and correcting those who spoke negatively about their religion.

It is for this reason that I think it is important to have more balanced representation across all religious groups involved in the interfaith dialogue. Indeed, organizing an interfaith dialogue program where all religions of the world are equally represented would be impossible, and that is not what I am suggesting. However, for those religions included in the dialogue, organizers should strive to include an equal number of participants from each tradition. Then, students should be encouraged not to comment on the religions that are

not represented in the group. Striving for greater inter-religious understanding typically means allowing emic perspectives to be the focus of the conversation. Thus, if there is no one that can share an emic perspective, it may not be fair to discuss those traditions at all.

Decreased Interest in Future Interfaith Dialogue

For some of the student participants I spoke to in my research, their experience in the interfaith dialogue course caused them to be less interested or willing to engage in more interfaith dialogue in the future. Their reason for this sentiment was that they did not like the insensitive opinions some of their peers expressed or the aggressive behavior they demonstrated; that they would avoid future interfaith dialogue opportunities in order to avoid those kinds of insensitive and aggressive interactions. Naturally, if students have a negative experience in interfaith dialogue (as with anything else), they are less likely to want to participate in such a course or program again – especially if this is their first experience with interfaith dialogue and they have no other positive experiences to compare it to. As such, knowing that religion is often a topic students do not feel comfortable talking about with their peers, it is all the more imperative that the interfaith dialogue opportunities available for students on university campuses help facilitate positive experiences and outcomes. Of course, ultimate peace and harmony among diverse religious peers will not be the outcome of every interfaith dialogue. However, at the very least, we can hope to inspire students to continue participating in this type of dialogue, with the goal of moving closer to interfaith peace with each new experience.

Preventing students from feeling discouraged and deterred from interfaith dialogue may mean being more purposeful about recruiting participants and organizing the program itself – in other words, ensuring balanced representation from all religious groups participating in the interfaith dialogue. It may also mean eschewing a democratic approach in favor of a more structured approach whereby facilitators exert more control over the process. Whatever strategies are put in place for attempting to create a positive interfaith dialogue experience for students, it is critical for facilitators to be able to recognize when students are feeling hurt or ignored – even when they do not vocalize these feelings.

Summary and Conclusion

Around the world, higher education is increasingly becoming an integral site for inter-religious and inter-cultural contact, and the practice of interfaith dialogue. Indeed, building harmony between diverse cultures and religious groups is a strong priority for many higher education partnerships at the regional and global levels (ASEAN Plus Three, 2007). Thus, as universities pursue interfaith dialogue more and more, it is important to strengthen our theoretical and practical knowledge around how to best conduct these types of initiatives. The research I present in this paper demonstrates how, even with good intentions, interfaith dialogue can still have some negative outcomes. Therefore, I offer my findings as a learning tool for educators interested in interfaith dialogue; as a warning for what may happen and how to possibly prevent such pitfalls.

While there are, undoubtedly, many strategies for organizing and facilitating successful interfaith dialogue, the findings of my research point to some issues that are not yet sufficiently discussed in the current body of literature surrounding interfaith dialogue. Notably, it points to the idea that democratic dialogue may not be equitable as a more structured approach to interfaith dialogue, and that a great deal of attention should be paid to creating a balanced breakdown of participants' religious identities. Most importantly, however, it raises the point that facilitators must be able to recognize when students are feeling hurt or ignored, and then must take the responsibility for redirecting the conversation to ensure that all participants are treated fairly and with respect. Failure to do so can lead to students being discouraged from participating in future interfaith dialogue opportunities, and may, in some cases, make their dislike of other religious groups even stronger.

Facilitating interfaith dialogue is not a simple task. It requires a great deal of knowledge about interpersonal and intergroup communication, and a great deal of pedagogical skill in guiding students toward topics that are most appropriate for reaching the goals of the interfaith dialogue. Above all, it requires strong emotional and spiritual intelligence and the ability to sense when students are feeling overlooked. Certainly, interfaith dialogue is a noble and worthy effort to pursue. However, what my research indicates is that pursuing such a task without

careful construction of the process and in-depth training in group facilitation has the potential to produce unintended negative consequences. I share my research with the hope that I can help future interfaith dialogue practitioners avoid some of these pitfalls and find greater success in building interfaith peace in their classrooms, on their campuses, in their communities, and in the world.

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「信仰間の対話」による平和の構築：

アメリカ合衆国のある大学における教室の経験

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要 約

現在、世界中の高等教育において、「信仰間の対話」プログラムが数多く採用されるようになっているが、それはまさに、信仰間での葛藤や緊張関係が、グローバルな規模で広がっていることが、その大きな要因となっている。本論文は、アメリカ合衆国のある大学でおこなわれた「信仰間の対話」のための先進的プログラムについての研究成果にもとづくものである。徹底した参与観察法による研究によって、次の点が明らかになった。すなわち、「信仰間の対話」には多くの克服すべき課題があり、ある場合には、学生たちを、他の信仰を持つ学友たちに対して、「信仰間の対話」プログラムを受講する以前よりもさらに、不信感を抱いたり腹を立てたりする可能性があることである。どうすれば、このような陥穽を回避しつつ信仰間の平和を築くための「信仰間の対話」を促進しうなのか——この研究からえられた知見は、実践という点でも教育方法という点でも、いくつもの勧告を示しうと思われる。

Abstract

Interfaith dialogue programs are becoming more widely used in higher education around the world, due in large part to increased interfaith conflict and tension globally. This paper shares findings from research on an interfaith dialogue initiative at an American university. Based on in-depth observational research, findings show that interfaith dialogue has many challenges and, in some cases, can lead students to become even more angry towards, or distrustful

of, their peers from other religious backgrounds than they were before their interfaith dialogue experience. Lessons from this research can point to both practical and pedagogical recommendations for how to pursue interfaith dialogue that avoids the pitfalls identified and is successful in building interfaith peace.