

Faculty Work Comprehensive List

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Words and Walls

Timothy Van Soelen

Dordt University, timothy.vansoelen@dordt.edu

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Words and Walls

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Online access: <https://cace.org/words-and-walls/>

Words and Walls

Language and choice of words matter. We realize this truth with painstaking awareness. Words motivate or deflate. They have the power to comfort, frighten, inspire, anger, open gates, or construct walls.

The word *diversity* is one of those loaded words. If we allow it to be socially constructed, we allow it to divide. As followers of Christ, saved by His death and life, seated, and now sent (Ephesians 2), we have the capacity to think higher and to transcend such division.

Learning from the Bloggers

I have deeply appreciated CACE's recent blog series *Diversity in the Christian School* for how these authors have helped me transcend my own thinking. This powerful sequence of posts has caused me, and hopefully you also, to ask hard questions and to prompt deep conversations with colleagues at all levels of leadership. Hopefully, these conversations have occurred within the spirit of **The Words Matter Movement**, which encourages us to be practitioners of "careful, thoughtful, and deliberate positive communication."

Each author's post has prompted me to stop and think—to mentally test the expressions of diversity and inclusivity at my school and the schools CACE has the privilege to walk alongside. I will share a couple personal promptings from the posts, but please read the entire series on our blog site or the short ebook emerging soon.

Nathan Wagner's thoughts on the dangers of "in-out" learning that focuses simply on information versus formative learning experiences and **David Robinson's** encouragement to "embrace and appreciate the beautiful things that make us unique" made me ask, "Are we providing those formative experiences that allow our students to embrace the uniqueness that is all around us?"

I also heard Cindy DeLeon's call to examine my curriculum to see if "both the authors and the content reflect the beautiful diversity sitting in your classroom." Do we ask questions and make observations about our nonverbal communication (e.g. the walls of our classroom) and our practices (e.g. bell-

ringers) to ensure students see themselves as people of God's story? And did you hear Myia Sims's story about how life-changing programs like G.R.A.C.E. can be?

Do we want diverse and inclusive schools? Absolutely. All of us who teach, lead, or chose faith-based schools for our children have good work to do in this space. Getting there is going to be a process, or as described by Eugene Peterson's book title, *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction*. It is challenging to do difficult work in a society obsessed with the immediate. Let us not grow weary.

Biblical Unity

And let us allow the word unity, the biblical concept of this word, to be part of these conversations. The Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20) unifies our work, embraces diversity, and mandates inclusivity. As Kenneth Chapman reminded us in his blog post, this call connects directly to the mission of Christian schools: "Christian schools exist to promote the gospel of Jesus Christ and to execute the great commission."

We do not engage in this work of diversity for diversity's sake; we engage because inclusivity is part of the gospel we proclaim: "For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups into one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall" (Ephesians 2:14). This city wall, which divided those who lived in the city (citizens) from those outside (foreigners), has been broken down through the work of Christ. There should be, in the words of Cheryl Webb, a centered set versus a bounded set to our schools. What brings us together is where we find that unity—in peace with God, through the person and work of Christ, His Word, and our shared love for one another. Our schools need to continually engage in expressions that demonstrate this unity.

These efforts toward diversity, inclusivity, and unity will always involve some give and take. Taking this long obedience in the right direction will require examination and probable changes to our admissions and hiring processes and our governance models. Faculty will need to take a deep dive into what we teach, who we teach, and how we teach. This series of blogs, by a group of unified Christian educators, has demonstrated that it can and is being done in schools around the nation. May our schools, made up of every tongue, tribe, and nation, be places where words build up and walls come down.