

A Whole New World

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As an ethnic staff person with Cru and now full time with Destino, I get asked a lot about my experiences in both contexts. The questions I get bridge multiple topics and various levels of complexity. “Why did you make the switch?” “What is the main difference between ethnic field ministry and Cru?” “Do you partner with Cru on campus?” “How’s your Spanish?”

Below are five observations I have made in moving from a Cru movement to working with ethnic students in Destino. So now, when people ask me any of the above questions, I can just refer them to this blog entry.

As a multiethnic staff person (half Mexican & half Chinese) I have been able to identify significant areas that go unengaged or under-engaged when we talk about ethnic ministry and exploring culture. One of the difficulties about discussing culture and ethnicity is the confusion it can bring a person. When I first started to explore my culture and ethnicity in the context of ministry, I had a very hard time. I was uncomfortable with the emotion that would be evoked while talking about deep and personal issues. For many people who are in the majority culture, conversations about ethnicity bring them into the unknown. This unknown causes fear and anxiety that results in new paradigms of thinking. I hope that these insights help you take some next steps to explore your own ethnic identity and understand the need for ethnic-specific ministries.

#1. Becoming a spokesperson for two worlds has expanded my leadership.

As a full time Destino staff person, I have moved into a new role but yet not fully left my old one. While working in Cru, I only had to consider my hub or my scope as a staff person. If I was working with an ethnic movement, it was referred to as a missional team or an extension of what I

A whole new world—What one staff member has learned since crossing from CFM into EFM.

was doing with Cru. Now that I am with Destino, I am fully engaged with working with Latinos students and I am working along side or in the midst of Cru on campus. As I introduce Destino to students on campus, I must also include that we are a ministry of Cru. When I talk with Cru students or staff about Destino, I have to explain how we are part of Cru. There is this unseen connection between our organizations that is bonded through our staff family.

As a leader, this dynamic has greatly increased my capacity to be a spokesperson for Cru. On the flip side, it is exhausting to defend, explain, and represent Destino and my connection with Cru. We believe that God has called ethnic field staff

to proclaim the Gospel to lost students who have different cultural values. The unfortunate thing is that we do not have 60 plus years of experience to work from. Destino and many of the ethnic ministries in Cru are relatively new and therefore in process of developing strategy. So when I am asked to work with Cru on campus, my heart answer is “yes” but my reality has been, I need to figure out what we are doing first. I guess it comes with the territory that, as an ethnic field ministry staff person with Cru, I must understand how both groups operate and function together.

#2. My ethnic identity has turned from burden to blessing.

There is so much that I could write about my personal journey and self discovery of my ethnic identity that I can't begin to scratch the surface here. In my transition to Destino, I can say that I have experienced a lot of freedom in my ethnic identity by being immersed in it. For example, when I realized that the reason why I do certain things is because of my culture or upbringing (and not just because it's something everyone does) it really turned my world upside down. In working with Latino students, I have found that my upbringing, family influence, and cultural lens have been huge assets. That seems obvious: yeah, being Latino helps me relate to Latinos. But many people don't understand that to embrace your ethnic identity is a very long and difficult process. When I saw my cultural experiences clash with the typical evangelical Anglo culture, it caused a lot of conflict and internal struggle in ministry. These past few years, my process of becoming engaged and living out of Latino values has helped me see how much God has blessed me with my Latino culture. In addition, working with Destino has helped me see that other cultures can help speak into majority culture and help Cru. One big example is in the Natural Mode of evangelism.

For many years on staff this mode seemed to me to be a phantom. The forgotten mode if you will. With Ministry Mode we can develop and do. In Body Mode, we have venues to bring non believers in. With Natural... well, we will get to that next week. With Destino, Latinos have a huge advantage of providing opportunities to be more effective in natural mode. Why? Often times the Latino community on campus is much smaller, therefore more connected. I am constantly amazed of how connected the students are with each other. If you really want to influence the Latino community on campus, you have to do it through building trust, finding common ground and having multiple interactions. Again and again, we see growth in our movement, not because we have amazing models, but because our students invite their friends.

#3. Language matters.

The blessing of being from the United States is that in most cases, when you travel, you don't have to know the language of the country you visit. You can probably find someone who speaks English. This is also a handicap because learning a new language has many benefits. If you want to be sure that you are heard and understood, it is always a good idea to learn the language of the people you want to reach. In working with Destino, I had to learn and discover the language of the Latino and Hispanic community. I'm not talking about Spanish (although that makes sense if you thought it was). For ethnic field ministry, there are words, concepts, and realities that I just did not think about while I worked with Cru. Essentially, I had to learn a new vocabulary.

Even as a Latino staff person, when I came into Destino, I had to take the time to understand what cultural differences existed between Latinos and Majority culture. In some ways, my process of learning about contextualization was to figure out

how my leadership reflected my Latino identity and my assimilation in majority culture. It was almost as if I had to dissect myself and figure out what to keep and what to remove. This was a very confusing and painful process.

When it came to figure out what language the Latino community was speaking, I only had to go as far as the closest Latino organization on campus. If I wanted to know what would draw Latinos to Destino, I had to embrace what the other groups on campus were talking about. For the Latino college student, what they are most likely to hear about are Family, Academic Achievement, Leadership Development, Community Service and Mentoring Programs. This was their language on campus.

So what did I do with this information? I had my team tweak our language to connect with the hearts and minds of students. In our process of contextualizing, we call our small groups “Familias” or family groups. We refer to discipleship as mentoring. We have academic programs like “How to Get Better Grades and Have More Fun.” We do service projects in the community and help students develop in Christ-like leadership. These are just a few examples of how my team has tweaked our presentation of who we are to the campus. I really believe we are still holding true to the core DNA of who we are, but becoming all things to all people.

Now, this is just the tip of the iceberg of learning the language of ethnic students. We don't have time to look at the cultural realities that exist: power distance, religious background, racism, and undocumented students. In all honesty, I think this

area is the hardest for many people to enter into and understand. When I reflect on how I have been hurt most by friends or others, it has been from a lack of understanding of my culture and using the wrong language. Default posture is for other people to learn your language, the challenge is to be willing to learn the language of other people.

#4. I've transitioned from a Cru expert to a campus entrepreneur.

To be honest, the move from Cru to Destino was a big challenge. It was hard. I moved from feeling like an expert in campus ministry to clueless. Sure, a lot of things were the same, but there were enough new challenges that it made me feel like I was over my head instantly. However, I've noticed that as the clouds of confusion have started to clear, I have been exposed to new opportunities. Those of you who have pioneered or launched new movements know what that is like. Things that I saw as a liability have become opportunities. The pioneering spirit causes you to become entrepreneurial, finding excitement in the unknown or unfamiliar.

In working with Destino, I have been able to try things I just would not have had the opportunity to do in Cru. Many of our endeavors include a lot of trial and error, but are the result of observation and research. We learned very quickly that because students have a strong family relationship, the likelihood that they go home on the weekends is high. Another example is in the area of academics: when students communicate their need to study, we do not discourage it

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because we know how important academic achievement is to them and their families.

Crossing into a new ministry, it can feel as if I am not an expert anymore. But I have seen that my experiences are not invalid; they just need to be recalibrated to fit my new context.

#5. My influence is broader than I realize.

Our vision statement in Destino is to raise up a generation of Latino and Hispanic students to change the world for Christ. That phrase gets me so amped every time I say it or read it. You know why? Because it is exactly what I get to see every week on campus.

Dr. Bright talked about the powerful percent - the significance of college students because of their influence on the world. In the case of the Latino community, historically many who start college don't finish: those who do are truly a powerful percent. Last spring, I sat with a student

graduating from USC and asked him what his dream was. His answer. "I want to be the mayor of Los Angeles." No joke. I believed him. He could be. Not because he thinks it or I do. But he believes that he can change the world.

I was underprepared by the influence that Latino students had on their campus, their families, and their city. So now when I sit in front of a group of freshmen and ask them about their dreams, I'm ready for some mind-blowing responses. As I take the initiative to share the Gospel with Latino students on campus, I know that they have the opportunity to bring that Gospel message to their circle of influence. When a Latino student trusts Christ, it is so natural to share that with everyone. I see that Destino has an opportunity to embrace and harness the passion and power of the Latino and Hispanic community in Los Angeles and beyond.