

# Response to Philip Sumner on Inclusion

by Bella Harding

Inclusion Philip Sumner began with the mission of Jesus in the Isaiah quote in Luke chapter 4. This suggests to us that Catholic Education should particularly include the excluded. However, often on the basis of moral behaviour or other means, the schools can operate selectively and may not include the excluded. Jesus' mission is a one of reconciliation, which means for us of helping the difficult kids to be better treated, for all to be empowered, not disempowered or undermined.

Inclusion is a term that it is impossible to self-evaluate, since the only way we know success is if our client group tells us. We all know that racialism, person to person hatred and derision, is wrong and we tell our pupils so. However, just because we declare ourselves against this does not mean that we are inclusive. The gap may be what is called institutional racism, and this is a difficult one for us to spot. Those of us on the weekend had to acknowledge our own shortcomings in this, as we had never thought about it in quite this way before, which is why the weekend was such a valuable insight into the issue.

Institutional racism involves the colour-blind approach -I just don't see colour. We may feel this is non racist, but actually we are failing to take account of the uniqueness of the child in front of us, their interests, background, abilities etc. Everyone is not 'like me', so I cannot afford not to see colour. We need to have and to implement policies in our schools that help us to celebrate diversity, and to see different strengths in different groups. We need to ask the relevant communities what it is they need, and to listen to their expression of how they feel.

The second strand of institutional racism is stereotyping: we acknowledge people are different, but we think we know what they need. The Gospel celebrates the uniqueness of each individual, and we cannot assume we know their needs. We need to educate ourselves to know the kinds of needs there are. Different communities may well be suited to different teaching and learning styles, and we need to know what will be effective with different groups. This is fundamental to differentiation, but may be essentially more the case with different groupings.

The third strand is established practice: because the entrenched groups have always done things a certain way, they see no need to change. Perhaps in our schools things have always worked well the way we have done them in the past, so why change anything? But this recognises neither the gifts nor the diversity of those who are new. A new member of staff would not appreciate their contribution being ignored like this. In contrast with this we were invited to look at inculturation, which might be defined as 'an organic synthesis of wholistic systems'. It is the job of theology, constantly to recast the truths of Jesus in ways that are understood by the mind of people today. It must be 'a new song' and we must enable people to sing it. Everyone's worldview is respected and every one is involved.

In many ways this raised the question of what education is for. Perhaps it is only to produce conformity, to given social ideals or to fulfil social needs. But in Lasallian education, we have always embraced a broader view, where education is for the fulfilment of the whole person. It involves a deconstruction of the myths of our society, which blame and imprison people in their circumstances instead of giving them the tools to overcome them. We have to look at how we help people to have a sense of identity. Is it just social deprivation, or do we look at the many things all races have to celebrate?

We looked at cross-curricular themes and how they could be introduced in every part of the curriculum. During the weekend, some worked on developing these and each school will be different. Students need to feel they belong, and that they can be creative, in order to achieve their highest potential. They do need rules, but these have to be clear, and allow for the Gospel value of forgiveness. We only touched the surface of how difficult this is to live out in practice. How many recurrences of an offence is too many, and how

let down will the victims feel if no action is taken? These are difficult issues for any school to face, but we cannot simply resort to exclusion if we are a Catholic school. We have to wrestle with them.

Seemingly for the first time, I really dwelt on the phrase, 'if you love me, you will keep my commandments'. Subconsciously I had always read this as 'if you do not keep my commandments, then you prove you do not love me', which is a 'morality first' approach. But Christ died for us while we were yet sinners, and it is the love of Christ which results in my transformed behaviour. So it should be read as 'love me, and then your behaviour cannot help but change'. It recalls Augustine's 'Love God and do what you ~ will'. This is a 'spirituality first' approach. If this informs our attitudes to discipline in schools our practice will be different to what is often seems to be the case. It is also a Gospel that young people can accept, where they cannot accept a Gospel that primarily requires keeping the rules.

The idea of role models was also important. We had to look at our adults in the community and see how their racial mix mirrors that of the pupils, or not. If it did not, we have to ask ourselves why were are we not getting the teachers from ethnic minorities as represented among the pupils? Would we get the applications if we were better known for encouraging good interracial relations? Would we not get them anyway? What steps could we take towards implementing a mentoring programme? These could and should be individuals from the community, who have been successful in their field, and it is essential that there be a variety of achievable fields represented. This should be for every group that feels it may no be able to overcome the obstacles that it faces, which may mean white groups just as much as black. Our images around school are also important for whatthey are saying, even those asking us to help those worse off than ourselves. Do we stereotype them as needy ethnic minorities and not as people proud ii of their own culture?

Our aim must be to bring our students into a Trinitarian relationship with God the Father, source of all that is, with Jesus, bearer and transformer of the burdens of injustice throughout the world, with whom we ask how we can bring about the kingdom; and with the Holy Spirit, in whose image we are made, whose breath breathes in us. More and more through the weekend it became clear that this issue was not only one that affects every area of school life - curriculum, discipline, methods of teaching, policies - but also everyone with any responsibility in the school - governors, management, staff teaching and non-teaching. Also it is not an issue we can allow to simply happen of itself. This attitude requires implementing, monitoring and evaluating. It is something that we cannot achieve on our own, but must do as a group, must own as a group, students included.

I really cannot begin to do justice to the ideas and challenges of the weekend. It was sad that such an important topic, especially with the political scene as it is, was not discussed with more people, although there was a good number. Perhaps we can all, reading about it in various ways, think about what it means for us in our own situation, and take heart from what other people have shared. It certainly began to give me answers to situations and events that have troubled me, and I began to see a better way forward.