

The Ingredients of Inclusion

Based on notes of the presentation given by Philip Sumner during the LACE Conference, 4 May 2002.

Why do so many young black people in Britain feel excluded from society, particularly in the context of schools, which are supposed to be their doorway to participation in society? Clearly, we in Catholic and Christian schools need to give some thought as to why our ideals of inclusion do not always translate into reality. Inclusion is something close to the heart of the gospel message. You could say it is the essence of Jesus' mission as expressed in Luke 4.18-19: "to bring good news to the poor, to proclaim liberty to the captives and to the blind new sight, to set the downtrodden free, to proclaim the Lord's year of favour." This is in effect Jesus' mission statement, and it is a programme of re-inclusion of the excluded and marginalised. If this is the heart of the Christian mission, then Catholic Education at its best will be present in areas of social deprivation, ensuring that the excluded are included, practising healing and forgiveness and providing opportunities for young people to take responsibility. Catholic schools should be particularly good at inclusion, at giving the poor a better deal. Why then do they sometimes appear to be exclusive? Turning ideals into reality is the big challenge that is facing us.

Institutional Racism

Institutional racism is a major negative factor militating against inclusion. As the Report on The Lawrence Inquiry showed, we all need to examine ourselves on this question. Institutional racism is something that thrives in respectable organisations and institutions, even those which publicly denounce racism. It worms its way into the operation of the most respected forces in established society, [rather like a computer virus. Ed.]. It manifests itself in the stereotyping of racial groups and in a refusal to adapt established customs to accommodate differences in people. In the world of education, the Swann Report stated, as long ago as 1985, that racism was a contributory cause to underachievement. More recently, the Ofsted Annual Report of March 1999 blamed institutional racism for the underachievement of pupils from ethnic groups, an assertion which was vigorously rejected by the teachers unions. Denial is often the first reaction to the idea of racism ("We do not have any of that here."), but that is not the way young black people see things.

There are other more subtle ways of avoiding the issue. For example, there is the colour-blind approach, ("I don't see colour."), which pretends that racial differences do not exist. This can be equally damaging. "Studies indicate that preschool black children have a higher movement repertoire than do preschool white children. Asking them to 'be still' while learning could stunt creative and active involvement in the learning process." (Giles Conwill, *Taking down our Harps*, ed. D. Hayes and C Davis, New York, 1998, p.224.) As educators, we need to engage with a particular culture rather than deny its existence.

Every school should have a policy on racism, and from this year such a policy is mandatory. The danger is that this will be seen as another imposition, and people will just go through the motions. Even the policies that do exist already tend to be brief and to lack details about specific action. It is not enough just to be vaguely in favour of integration. The policy must identify how the school is going to deal with the issues. There need to be clear mechanisms for identifying racist incidents and an established process for monitoring results and exclusions according to ethnicity with a view to addressing any disproportion that emerges. Any statement relating to cultures or ethnicities and to strategies for countering institutional racism must be addressed by the whole school. Curriculum ideas and strategies should be promoted in all subject departments to avoid low expectations and stereotyping. All schools should feel challenge by the observation that "an ethnic group could enter school 20 percentage points in advance of the average but leave 21 points behind" (Ofsted, October 27th 2000).

Inculturation

There can be no inclusion without inculturation. This requires a certain ability to stand in other people's shoes, to see with their views, to respond to their modes of expression, to adopt a world perspective that is different from our own. It is the opposite of condemning and blaming the pupils background and trying to "educate" the pupils out of their culture. Teachers in particular must be able "to engage in the complex so-

cial formation of their students and constantly to review their practice." (Tony Sewell, *Black Masculinities in Education*). Seeing things with the student's eyes is especially important in RE: "The nature and purpose of catechesis is to pass on the traditions of the Christ event, the story of God's love as manifested in salvation history, and to do it in such a manner that students and seekers of truth see themselves as participants in that history and as objects of that divine love" (Giles Conwill, op. cit. p.214). Inculturation requires the teacher to enter into the post-modern process of deconstructing traditional images and myths, and to help the students to do likewise.

Identity

The individual's perception of his or her identity is a key element in the process of inclusion, or in the lack of it. All educationists know of the importance that Carl Rogers attached to the individual's 'self-concept', which is the result of countless social interactions triggering a process of evaluation that can be conscious or sub-conscious. Racial identity is an aspect of the self-concept. Who am I? What is my value in society? The problem is that so many young people of ethnic minorities in our schools have a self-concept that is very negative. They are ashamed of their 'self' and of their background and want to be 'white'. The negative view of an ethnic self is often reinforced by financial disadvantages. Social deprivation goes with underachievement, and this aspect of exclusion applies equally to poor white students.

The antidote to the poison of low self-esteem lies partly in programmes of 'racial identity nurturing', which seek to develop a positive self-concept by providing social interactions that speak of value. These have a noticeable effect on student performance, because they help to maintain motivation for learning. Through such programmes, black pupils can be presented with role models in the form of external speakers, although it is important to avoid stereotyping in the selection of such speakers. Alongside these special programmes, the search for role models should influence staff recruitment policy and practice. It is also important to devise ways of delivering the regular curriculum from a black or other ethnic perspective. [A list of suggestions is included in the Resource Section. Ed.]

Inclusion and Change

Change is necessary before inclusion can become the norm. But first it is necessary that people admit that change is both necessary and possible. The disease of negativity marks the inner-city. People, especially the young, are traumatised by life's events. The result is dysfunctional behaviour accompanied by a state of hopelessness and cynicism about any proposals of improvement. Lethargy in black students creates problems for teachers. According to Ofsted, black students are more likely to be excluded than others. They also have a higher degree of conflict with teachers. This is partly due to the fact that for them schools reflect the negative treatment they meet within the wider society, in the form of stop and search, for example. This leads to negative attitude and low expectations, linked to low job prospects. Lack of belief in the possibility of change forms a starting barrier. They require help and an extra push, if they are to get over it. The extra shove can come in the form of short-term initiatives designed to effect change.

In some instances, it is a matter of responding to basic needs such as food, clothing, sleep, personal security, social and financial security. In a school setting, however, the response will be to the social need for a feeling of belonging, of being a valued member of society, contributing, creating. The school is ideally placed to provide esteem, affirmation, recognition, status and respect. In the right school environment, the disadvantaged students can develop self-expression and actualise their potential. For this to happen there must be a clear statement of the rules, and an opportunity to be involved in their formulation or amendment. The rules must be consistently applied, and allowance made for occasional recurring relapses.

The application of school rules must have its proper spiritual basis: Christ died for sinners, but we can all change out of love for Christ. "If you love me you will keep my commandments" (John 14:15). Relationships between people are modelled on the Trinitarian relationships. Each individual is made in the image of God, a Temple of the Holy Spirit, loved as a child of God, revealing the face of God, sharing the burdens of Christ. A school ethos of spirituality is more likely to produce change in people and to develop the degree of their inclusion than is one based on prescriptive morality.

Intention and Intervention

The change to inclusion outlined above will not "just happen". Left to themselves, market forces do not produce equal opportunity. For anything to happen, there is need for intervention such as identification of target groups, planning of action, assistance by monitors, controlled intake clusters, etc. Moreover, the interventions themselves require analysis and monitoring, evaluation and improvement.

Intervention must be guided by a sense of purpose, both individual and shared, which aims to empower the powerless. Students must take responsibility for their individual action plans and record of achievement. Focus Groups are an important means of purposeful intervention. Such groups develop a purpose together and develop strategies to achieve that purpose. They challenge excuses for failure that put the blame on someone else. The whole school must be part of a shared purpose to empower the powerless. Consequently, a key part is played by the expectations of the staff, their desire for change, their determination not to accept the status quo, their willingness to find ways round difficulties. Things may not be right, but they can and will change.