



## What does it mean to be an inclusive community?

Paul Flanders

*This article presents some of my reflections on the idea of inclusive communities that were the basis of a discussion with staff at Albert Park Flexible Learning Centre. The focus question was: What does it mean to be an inclusive community? The notion of inclusive communities is considered through sharing stories from life experience and practice. In particular, the community development model drawing on the work of Dave Andrews in West End, Brisbane, and the gospel stories of how Jesus was the ultimate 'includer' of outsiders, are considered. Questions are explored such as:*

- *What is community development?*
- *What should our community be?*
- *What does working with the four principles mean in Youth+ FLCs?*
- *What is our approach to the concept of "time in" as opposed to "time out"?*

### What is Community Development?

I have lived in, worked in, and reflected on communities all my life but have no formal qualifications in the area of "community development". I have had the opportunity to take a short (3 day) course in Community Development and I have also had the privilege of visiting, eating with, talking with and hanging out in West End with Dave Andrews in his community. This experience provided me with an example of what I see as an authentic 'inclusive community' and what real community development is.

In my work as a Deputy Principal over many years in mainstream education and in my life in general, if I was ever stuck with a difficult moral dilemma I would always ask myself, "What would Jesus do?" (I am the product of a classic 1950's Catholic Family.) This is probably why I like Dave Andrews. He lives by and acts on the radical Jesus model. This man Jesus challenged injustice, and was the archetypal socialist/communist/community development worker. Aboriginal songwriter Kev Carmody captures this powerfully in his poem *Comrade Jesus Christ* (1989).

### Dave Andrews

(born 20 May 1951) is an [Australian Christian anarchist author, speaker, social activist](#), community worker, and a key figure in the Waiter's Union, an inner city Christian community network working with Aboriginals, refugees and people with disabilities in Brisbane, Australia (*The Spirit of Things*, ABC Radio National, 2007). Andrews is also an educator at large for TEAR Australia, a Christian international aid and development agency; a teacher for Christian Heritage College; and a trainer for the Community Praxis Cooperative. He is the author of fourteen non-fiction books including *Christi-Anarchy*, in which he calls for a total deconstruction and reconstruction of Christianity, community and society.

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dave\\_Andrews](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dave_Andrews)

### Reflections on Communities that have influenced Dave Andrews

*Community (is) essentially a sentiment which people have about themselves in relation to themselves: a sentiment expressed in action, but still basically a feeling. People have many feelings, but there are two essentials for the existence of community: a sense of significance and sense of solidarity. The strength of community within any given group is determined by the degree to which its members experience both a sense of solidarity and a sense of significance within it.*

David Clark (1975, p.4-5)

*If we are going to use the word meaningfully we must restrict it to a group of individuals who have learned to communicate honestly with each other, whose relationships go deeper than their masks of composure, and who have developed some significant commitment to "rejoice together, mourn together", "delight in each other, make other's conditions our own".*

Scott Peck (1988, p.59)

*The primary indicator of communal well-being is that members feel their fellowship approximates the qualities of a caring family. Hardship and failures will be the occasion for creative solutions and increased resolve. They do not break the spirit of a community. But loss of mutual respect and steadfast caring strikes a deathblow at the very heart of a community.*

Luther Smith (1994, pp.98-100)

Dave Andrews is a Christian but does not operate on an exclusive Church model. He operates on an inclusive Jesus model.

## Working with the Principles

Albert Park was established independently of Edmund Rice Education Australia (EREA) and started not long after Centre Education Programme, the first Flexible Learning Centre in Queensland. Albert Park adopted the Four Rs as guiding principles. These include: Relationships, Respect, Rights and Responsibility. Whether we use the 4Rs or the Four Principles of Respect, Safe and Legal, Honesty and Participation, these guiding principles simply provide a framework to operate in without a 'rules based' structure. The concept of 'common ground' is critical. We (adults and young people) are equals. We accept each other for who we are and where we are in our life journey. We aspire to be non-judgemental, welcoming, compassionate and inclusive.

One thing that I interpret about the concept of working with principles is that they are principles of inclusion not of exclusion. Many of the young people we work with have complex life experiences that are painful and sad. They do not always participate, may not be honest, are probably not always safe and legal and may not act in respectful ways (using our interpretation of respect). However, this should not be grounds for us to exclude them from our community. The young people also show great resilience and courage. We, as a community, are challenged to try to develop these principles with each of the young people in our community to the point where we may be able to collectively say that they now "get it". Saying that they are not operating within the principles and sending them away from our community would seem, to me, to be failing them. We should be working with them or liaising with partner organisations or other support agencies to work with them to develop the capacity to be self-directed and work within the operation by principle framework.

## What is (should be) our approach to "Time In" versus "Time Out"?

If we reflect on the Community Development model espoused by Dave Andrews and West End Waiters Union or interpret the principles as inclusive rather than exclusive or even take the approach of "what would Jesus do?", I would find it hard to exclude young people from our community. I understand that this could be a challenging concept but I really struggle with excluding people who really desperately want and need to be included. We need to find ways of including them in safe and legal, respectful and participatory ways.

## Trauma Informed practice

When adults understand that many of our young people have experienced some kind of trauma in their lives, appropriate responses that support young people to reconnect through relationship can become the norm. Downey (2009) identifies that young people who have experienced trauma require adults who are prepared to build relationships, provide safety, enable young people to tell their story to make sense of their experiences, in order to feel connection and empowerment. This process takes time and patience and requires workers to be aware of and take care of themselves through reflection, self-awareness, self-regulation and self-care.

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## Valuing Community

Research on educator identity and development in practice in flexi schools identified community as a value espoused by educators (Morgan, 2013). Along with caring and operation by principles, community was perceived as a vital part of work with young people in flexible learning settings.

## Comrade Jesus Christ

by Kev Carmody

He was born in Asia Minor  
A colonized Jewish man  
His father the village carpenter  
Worked wood in his occupied land  
He was apprenticed to his father's trade  
His country paid it's dues  
To the colonial Roman conquerors  
He was a working-class Jew

Though conceived three months out of  
wedlock  
The stigma never stuck  
He began a three year public life  
But he never made a buck  
Because he spoke out against injustice  
Saw that capitalism bled the poor  
He attacked self-righteous hypocrites  
And he condemned the lawyers' law

But they've commercialised his birthday now  
The very people he defied  
And they've sanctified their system  
And claim he's on their side!  
But if he appeared tomorrow  
He'd still pay the highest cost  
Being a 'radical agitator'  
They'd still nail him to a cross

You see  
He'd stand with the down trodden masses  
Identify with the weak and oppressed  
He'd condemn the hypocrites in church pews  
And the affluent, arrogant West  
He'd oppose Stalinist totalitarianism  
The exploitation of millions by one  
And 'peace' through mutual terror  
And diplomacy from the barrel of a gun

He'd fight with Joe Hill and Waleca  
Mandala and Friere  
Try to free the third world's millions  
From hunger and despair  
He'd stand with the peasants  
At the pock-marked walls  
They'd haul him in on bail  
He'd condemn all forms of apartheid  
And he'd rot in their stinking jails.

He'd denounce all dictatorships  
And Mammon's greed  
And the exploitation of others for gain  
He'd oppose the nuclear madness  
And the waging of wars in his name  
He'd mix with prostitutes and sinners  
Challenge all to cast the first stone  
A compassionate agitator  
One of the greatest the world has known

He'd condemn all corrupt law and order  
Tear man made hierarchies down  
He'd see status and titles as dominance  
And the politics of greed he'd hound  
He'd fight against  
The leagues of the Ku Klux Klan  
And the radical, racist right  
One of the greatest humanitarian socialists  
Was comrade,  
Jesus Christ.

<http://kevcarmody.com.au/recordings/reviews/lyrics-messages>

Also on Youtube:  
Kev Carmody

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wbaeTDbM4DY>

The Herd

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pSiy2qvGVyM>

## Index for Inclusion: Developing learning and inclusion in schools

(Booth and Ainscow, 2002)

<http://www.resource-package-on-disability.org/1-one-inclusive-educ-disability/1.3-operat-sup-materials/163-csie-index-incl-school.pdf>

Inclusion in education involves:

- Valuing all students and staff equally
  - Increasing the participation of students in, and reducing their exclusion from, the cultures, curricula and communities of local schools.
  - Restructuring the cultures, policies and practices in schools so that they respond to the diversity of students in the locality.
  - Reducing barriers to learning and participation for all students, not only those with impairments or those who are categorized as 'having special educational needs'.
  - Learning from attempts to overcome barriers to the access and participation of particular students to make changes for the benefit of students more widely.
  - Viewing the difference between students as resources to support learning, rather than problems to be overcome.
  - Acknowledging the right of students to an education in their locality.
  - Improving schools for staff as well as students.
  - Emphasising the roles of schools in building community and developing values, as well as increasing achievement.
- Fostering mutually sustaining relationships between schools and communities.
  - Recognising that inclusion in education is one aspect of inclusion in society.

## References

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